

## Narcissus didn't play golf

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Apr. 7, 2010 | Bulletins from the Human Side

Tiger Woods's imminent return to golf outranks the Johnny Carson show wedding of Tiny Tim or Madonna's to Sean Penn at Michael Jackson's Neverland ranch as an event whose anticipation so outweighs its moral significance. Speculation on how he will perform, on the course that is, will be followed by more pundit comments than any night on Cable News.



Tiger, like any other human being, deserves better for if we do not find here the

stuff of Shakespearean tragedy his tortured journey since last Thanksgiving is that of a man fulfilling, as we all do in one way or other, his mythic destiny.

He is re-enacting the myth of Narcissus. Myths are not falsehoods but the stories we tell about the human condition that preserve the deep truths about us against their being constantly revised, as the facts in almanacs are, by the forces of time and chance even before they show up on Amazon.com.

The tale of Narcissus is linked to that of Echo and contains all the elements of the sad story of the self-absorbed golfer and his beautiful blond wife. Echo, according the Oxford Book of World Mythology, was a nymph whose constant chattering made it impossible for Hera to discover her husband Zeus's infidelities with other nymphs. Hera condemned Echo to speak only when she heard others speak only to repeat the last few words uttered.

In this state, she fell in love with the beautiful but self-absorbed boy Narcissus but frustrated by being unable to communicate with or attract him, she gradually became no more than an echo and it is said that her remains cause echoes everywhere.

Narcissus, as we know, had no room for love or real relationships with others in his life. Enamored of himself he was insensitive to the feelings of others and stared, transfixed, at his image in the still waters of a pool. So entranced was he by his reflection that he lost his balance and tumbled into the water, shattering his image, scattering its bits irretrievably by his plunge into himself.

Tiger Woods tumbled into his own self-absorption on Thanksgiving night, his wife's voice echoing in his ears as, substituting his beautiful Cadillac for himself, he crushed his image against a neighbor's wall, substituting for the pool, grinding it into dust particles carried away on the night air.

Among the functions of Myth, according to Joseph Campbell, is to carry out "an essentially religious function" the discovery and recognition of "the mystery of being." Myths also "reinforce the moral order by shaping a person to the demands of a specific" social group." This keeps the person's experience in harmony with the ethical codes of his time. Myth also assists a person "grasp the unfolding of life with integrity."

It is striking that Tiger Woods, living out the myth of Narcissus without any apparent awareness of it, has been a product, in many ways, of the pseudo-myth making process of our time, that of the public relations that generates images rather than insights and clouds rather than reveals the moral and mystical aspirations of human beings.

Tiger is the victim of the process that abetted his narcissism as he now invokes it in arranged interviews and appearances in an attempt to reassemble the shards of his once sparkling reflection. All this is occurring, fittingly enough, at the substitute Easter of the Masters Golf Tournament in which a superficial liturgy, conducted in whispers and including the investiture with green robes, separates people from the awesome mystery of the Resurrection and the returning of the light.

In short, the slick make-over world that promoted Tiger's narcissism, made into a strange purity of soul by the alchemists of public relations, now promises to redeem him. It is profoundly sad that those who made Tiger and are now trying to remake him do not understand the relationship between myth and destiny. Nor do they understand that once the reflecting waters have been parted they can never be joined together again.

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