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The Fiction of Bret Easton Ellis in Light of Ovid’s
Narcissus and Echo”

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DEDICATION

To my brother Michael, whose zest for life and courage in his battle against cancer have been an inspiration to me.

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1. Introduction

In his autobiography, the French philosopher Roland Barthes famously defines texts as ‘echo chambers’, claiming that there is no such thing as an original text and each text is a reaction to prior ones (*Roland*, 74). This ubiquity of intertextual relations is particularly apparent when considering the persistent influence of myths, which not only continue to be retold but have also been woven into popular culture. The present paper, titled “Disappear Here/Reappear There: The Fiction of Bret Easton Ellis in Light of Ovid’s Narcissus and Echo”, will be concerned with one such interweaving of mythology on the one hand and popular culture on the other hand, taking the novels and short stories by the contemporary American writer Bret Easton Ellis as a starting point and claiming that they are ‘echo chambers’ loaded with intertextual references to a specific myth, namely the tale of Narcissus and Echo as recorded in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

The parallels linking Ellis’ fiction to the mythological figures of the handsome and self-absorbed youth and the oppressed nymph become apparent when reading, for instance, Daniel Mendelsohn’s description of *American Psycho* as “a bloated, stultifyingly repetitive, overhyped novel about a fabulously good-looking and expensively dressed Wall Street sociopath who tortures and dismembers beautiful young women”. This dismissal, however, fails to acknowledge the meanings encoded in the representation of *American Psycho*’s well-groomed and economically successful protagonist and his mutilated, predominantly female victims. It is the objective of the present paper to dispel such misconceptions of Ellis’ fiction by reading the works of the American author in light of Ovid’s mythological pre-text and addressing the following questions: What meanings are generated and foregrounded by the intertextual relation to the myth? How does the intertextual evocation of Narcissus and Echo affect the reading of Ellis’ characters in particular? How are constructions of gender and power relations in Ellis’ works informed by Ovid’s tale?

The primary material analyzed in the paper will include all novels written by Bret Easton Ellis as well as his collection of short stories, *The Informers*.¹ These works will be submitted to a close reading in order to reveal the intertextual links to Ovid’s pre-

¹ For the sake of clarity, in-text citations of Ellis’ novels and short stories shall only include abbreviations of the work’s title, dispensing with the author’s last name, which is usually required according to MLA formatting guidelines.

text. The analysis will further be based on an eclectic approach combining theories and ideas associated with different strands of literary and cultural criticism. Psychoanalysis and feminist criticism will, however, be the two central tenets guiding the interpretation of characters intertextually related to Narcissus on the one hand and characters reminiscent of Echo on the other hand.

The analysis of Ellis' work will first be divided into two sections based on the two opposing types of characters related to the protagonists of Ovid's tale: The first section, titled 'Disappear here', will be dedicated to the mythological nymph who pines away for love of Narcissus until nothing is left of her but her voice. The second section, which carries the heading 'Reappear there', will focus on the vain youth who falls in love with his own mirror image. The analysis will then be concluded by a chapter in which the findings of the previous two sections are examined in conjunction. Before turning to the actual analysis, the paper shall establish its contextual and theoretical frameworks by providing an outline of Bret Easton Ellis' career and fiction, Ovid's tale and its reception in later fictional and critical works, and the studies of intertextuality.

2. Bret Easton Ellis

The primary literature to be analyzed in the present paper is written by the contemporary American author Bret Easton Ellis, whose fiction has become famous for its graphic portrayal of traditional taboo subjects, ranging from rampant promiscuity and drug abuse to rape and cannibalism, which are typically explored in an affectless tone, or with "an anti-emotional detachment" (Finke 3), as it is aptly phrased in an article of the *Los Angeles Times*. Ellis' career as a literary writer began in 1985 with the publication of the novel *Less Than Zero*, which follows a student called Clay as he returns to his hometown, Los Angeles, during the winter break and meets with his nihilistic and amoral friends. The second novel, *The Rules of Attraction*, was published in 1987, and deals with the college life of three sexually promiscuous and self-absorbed students. *American Psycho*, which was published in 1991, is possibly Ellis' most famous novel as well as his most controversial due to its violent and misogynist content. It centres on a character called Patrick Bateman who recounts his life as a Wall Street broker and serial killer from a delusional point of view. In 1994, Ellis released *The Informers*, a collection of short stories, which largely revolve around disaffected and morally ambivalent characters. Ellis' *Glamorama* from 1998 is, like most of his

previous work, concerned with the world of the young, the rich, and the beautiful. It is the tale of an aspiring male model and club manager who becomes unwillingly involved in a terrorist group composed entirely of other fashion models. The fifth novel by Bret Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park*, may be described as a faux memoir, following a fictionalized version of the author himself, whose suburban home is haunted by the spirits of his past. Ellis' latest novel, *Imperial Bedrooms*, was published in 2010, and it is a sequel to *Less Than Zero*, which is set twenty-five years after the events in the American writer's debut novel. Clay, who has established himself as a New York-based screenwriter, once again returns to Los Angeles, and becomes embroiled in a plot surrounding a young actress and involving several of his friends who already appeared in *Less Than Zero*.

Bret Easton Ellis, alongside Jay McInerney and Tama Janowitz, is considered as a member of the so-called brat pack, a literary movement that emerged in the 1980s (Annesley 1-3; Schiel 4-5). These authors exhibit many similarities in terms of their literary style and the subject material covered in their novels and short stories. Their fiction places emphasis on controversial topics, such as drug abuse, violent sexual practices, and murder, and it is marked by consumer and celebrity culture, which manifests itself in frequent occurrences of brand- and name-dropping. The stories are typically narrated with a sense of indifference and often also superiority, capturing the characters' corruption. As Annesley observes, the work of the brat pack has had a significant impact on the contemporary literary scene:

[S]tories of indolence, extremism and marginality have become staple elements in recent American fiction. Writers like Donna Tartt, Susanne Moore, Douglas Coupland, Sapphire, Katherine Texier, Mark Leyner, Ray Shell and Evelyn Lau have emerged behind the original bratpack to create a kind of writing that has been described in different terms, as the 'fiction of insurgency', 'new narrative', 'blank generation fiction', 'downtown writing', 'punk fiction' and [...] 'blank fiction'. (2)

In addition to the term 'blank fiction', which foregrounds the characters' indifference – their emotional 'blankness', so to speak – the generic label 'transgressive fiction' is also commonly applied to Ellis' novels and short stories. The term was coined by the *Los Angeles Times* critic Michael Silverblatt, who traces its origins back to the writings of the Marquis de Sade and describes it as "ha[ving] violation at its core: violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body" (1). Transgressive fiction may, thus, be defined as a genre of literature in which characters challenge socially established norms and values, and this is frequently done in illicit ways. That is, exponents of this genre, which

include William S. Burrough's *Naked Lunch*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, do not shy away from exploring taboos and portraying forbidden acts, such as incest, paedophilia, and other crimes. Hence, the reaction that literature of transgression typically elicits is one of shock and controversy, and many works linked to the genre, including Ellis' *American Psycho*, have been the subjects of debate, protests, and bans (Silverblatt 3).

Further distinguishing features of Ellis' fiction, besides its emphasis on controversial topics, the representation of transgressive characters and acts, and its dispassionate tone, include the linking of his novels and short stories by means of recurring characters. Clay, for instance, is not only the protagonist of *Less Than Zero* and *Imperial Bedrooms*, but he also narrates a chapter in Ellis' second novel, *The Rules of Attraction*, and references to the character are found in *Lunar Park*. Victor Ward, who is the protagonist of *Glamorama*, is already featured as a minor character in *The Rules of Attraction*. This recurrence of characters as well as their affiliation with one another – Sean Bateman, one of the protagonists of *The Rules of Attraction*, is the brother of Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, in which Sean appears in one chapter – creates the illusion of a shared universe, which allows observations derived from one of Ellis' work to be applied to another.

The works by Bret Easton Ellis are further characterized by the exclusive use of first-person narrative from the point of view of one or multiple characters in the story. While *Less Than Zero*, *American Psycho*, *Glamorama*, *Lunar Park*, and *Imperial Bedrooms* are narrated solely by their respective protagonists, *The Rules of Attraction* and the short stories collected in *The Informers* recount events from the perspective of different characters. Moreover, there tend to be several hints suggesting that Ellis' narrators, particularly *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman and *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward, should not be deemed reliable and that their credibility is affected by inattentiveness, bias, or mental instability. This abandonment of an authorial voice in favour of a first-person perspective stands in opposition to the numerous parallels that can be drawn between the characters and Ellis himself – a phenomenon that comes to a climax in *Lunar Park*, a mock autobiography the protagonist of which is one Bret Easton Ellis whose rise to fame after the publication of a book called *Less Than Zero* closely resembles that of the author.

However, it is not only by means of his literary work that light is shed on Bret Easton Ellis' personality. Like his fellow brat-pack members, Ellis and his flamboyant lifestyle have regularly been covered by the media (Spillman), turning the writer into a brand of his own marked by scandal and controversy,² which both responds to and shapes dominant expectations of his literary writing. So, as noted in an article of *The Guardian* following the publication of Ellis' *Imperial Bedrooms*, "we have the paradox of a writer whose voice is absent from his novels – even though they're all about him – yet whose personality is a literary sensation, arguably even more of a phenomenon than anything he's ever written" (Aitkenhead). This observation may be related to the present paper's analysis of Ellis' novels and short stories in light of Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo, because in a manner reminiscent of Echo's punishment, the work of Ellis' is deprived of an authorial voice, which is replaced by the voices of characters, but the author's image is, similar to that of Narcissus, repeatedly mirrored in his body of novels and short stories.

This connection between Ellis and the myth of Narcissus and Echo leads to the topic of the next chapter, which will be concerned with Ovid and his tale of the punished nymph who is rejected by the handsome, self-absorbed youth. It is this mythological tale which serves as a kind of looking glass through which the primary literature outlined in the present chapter is examined in order to generate new readings of Ellis' text or place emphasis on already existing ones.

3. Contextual and theoretical frameworks

3.1. Ovid's Narcissus and Echo

Publius Ovidius Naso, commonly known and hereinafter referred to as Ovid, was a Roman poet born on 20 March 43 BC (Kenney Historical, ix-xi). His earliest work, *Amores*, is a collection of erotic poetry consisting of five books, and it was published as early as 25 BC. It was followed by the publication of three further books of elegies centred on the theme of love, the *Heroides*, *Remedia Amoris*, and *Ars Amatoria*, for

² Bret Easton Ellis himself has consistently contributed to this discourse, particularly through the social network Twitter, which he has used as a vehicle of his provocative public persona. More than once, his tweets have been sources of public outrage, such as his recent criticism of Kathryn Bigelow as being overrated as a film director because of her sex and her physical attractiveness (Ellis "Kathryn"), which has attracted media accusations of misogyny and sexism (Child; Feinberg).

which Ovid was banished from Rome and exiled to Tomis, a town at the coast of the Black Sea where he spent the rest of his life and died in AD 17 without ever returning to Rome. Further works by the poet include *Fasti*, an elegiac poem about the Roman calendar, its festive days and associated customs, as well as two collections of poems written during his exile on the Black Sea, which are called *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* and in which Ovid complains about his fate and pleads for a reprieve from his banishment. Not all texts by Ovid have survived to the present day. The Roman writer is known to have composed, for instance, a tragedy called *Medea*, which is no longer extant.

To contemporary readers, Ovid is possibly best known as the author of the so-called *Metamorphoses*, an epic poem, which was completed shortly before his exile to Tomis in AD 8 and consists of fifteen books (Kenney Historical, x). The lyrical work, which is written in dactylic hexameter, deals with transformations found in Greek and Roman mythology, starting with an account of the creation of the world and ending with the deification of Julius Caesar (Kenney Introduction, ix-xxix). Kenney (Introduction, xxvi) divides the collection of mythological tales into three parts, based on its main characters: The first part (Ovid 1.452-6.420) deals with transformations related to gods, the second part (6.421-11.193) is concerned with heroic figures, and the third part (11.194-15.744) follows different historical figures.

The myth of Narcissus and Echo (Ovid 3.339-510), which will be read as a pre-text informing the present paper's analysis of Ellis' novels and short stories, forms part of Book III, and though neither Narcissus nor Echo are deities, the gods of Greek and Roman mythology feature prominently in the mythological tale. The episode starts with an account of the birth of Narcissus, a beautiful young man who was born as the son of Liriope, a water nymph, and Cephissus, a river god, and was renowned for his physical attraction among boys and girls alike. Following his birth, Liriope asks an oracle about the future of her son, and is told that Narcissus will live to grow old "[i]f he shall himself not know" (3.347) – a prophecy foreshadowing the youth's death due to his refusal to tear himself away from his own reflection in a lake. The next section introduces Echo, a mountain nymph who frequently distracts Juno, the wife of Jove, by incessantly talking to her in order to allow her fellow nymphs to meet Jove, the goddess' adulterous husband, and escape. When Juno discovers the deception, she takes vengeance on the talkative nymph by robbing her of the ability to speak unless she is

spoken to, and even then, Echo is forced to repeat the last words of the previous utterance. One day, Echo stealthily follows Narcissus, with whom she has fallen in love, into the woods and is finally able to reveal herself when the male protagonist addresses her upon hearing her footsteps. Yet, Narcissus, repelled by the inept advances of the nymph, who only utters truncated repetitions of the young man's previous utterances, spurns Echo, causing her to become a recluse and gradually waste away until all that is left is her voice. To teach the vain youth, who haughtily mocks Echo and other lovers, a lesson, Nemesis, the goddess of divine retribution and vengeance, punishes Narcissus by making him fall in love with himself. Thus, when the male protagonist beholds his reflection in a lake, he is so mesmerized by the beauty of his own specular image that he is unable to leave. As miserable as Echo with unrequited love, Narcissus pines away and eventually dies from hunger and thirst, leaving a flower in his place. So, two metamorphoses occur in this episode of Ovid's mythological epic: Echo's decay into an insubstantial voice and Narcissus' transformation into a flower.

The figures of Narcissus and Echo are also encountered in other works from classical antiquity, though Ovid was possibly the first to combine the hitherto distinct stories of the self-absorbed man and the lovelorn nymph into one tale (Kenney Introduction, xxiii-xxiv; Ovid 392, note 3.339-510). The ancient myth of Narcissus also appears in an earlier text which was recently found among the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, a collection of papyrus manuscripts discovered at an archaeological site in Egypt and housed at Oxford University (Hutchinson). This version of the myth, which is commonly attributed to the Greek poet Parthenius of Nicaea,³ is thought to have served as a basis for the episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but the end of the Parthenian myth differs from Ovid's in that Narcissus eventually commits suicide rather than wasting away until he dies from hunger and thirst. The same fate befalls Narcissus in a version of the myth recorded by Konon, a Greek mythographer and contemporary of Ovid, in his *Diegeseis* (Brown 172-178), in which it is suggested that the youth's suicide may not only be attributed to his lovesickness but also to his guilt over the admirers which he has spurned. Deviations from Ovid's tale can also be found in other versions of Echo's myth. In the *Homeric Hymns*, for instance, Echo is described as a musical nymph who sings and plays instruments in the woods, along with her fellow nymphs, and scorns the love of all men,

³ In an article published by *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Hans Bernsdorff contests Parthenius' authorship of the tale in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri and suggests a later date of composition.

both humans and gods, because she cherishes her virginity (Hollander 7-8). Infuriated by Echo's rejection, Pan, a lecherous god who has fallen in love with the nymph, spreads such a madness, or 'panic', among a group of shepherds that they tear Echo to pieces, which are scattered all over the earth. These remains still breathe out Echo's voice, repeating the last words of others. Hence, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are by no means the only source of information on the mythological figures of Narcissus and Echo. Yet, the present paper will focus on the tale recorded by the Roman poet because, as opposed to the other texts, this version of the myth recounts not only the punishments of the two protagonists, but also their failed erotic encounter. It is this encounter of Narcissus and Echo and the underlying power struggle which has become emblematic of gender conflicts and unequal power distributions and which, through its intertextual connections to Ellis' novels and short stories, offers new readings of the representation of gender relations in the work of the contemporary American author.

Worthwhile mentioning are not only the numerous occurrences of Narcissus and Echo in ancient Greek and Roman mythology, but also their reception in more recent works, both factual and fictional. The figure of Narcissus has inspired artists from different fields through the ages. The youth is depicted, for instance, in the works of famous painters such as Caravaggio, Nicolas Poussin, J.M.W. Turner, Gyula Benczúr, John William Waterhouse, and Salvador Dalí. In a Renaissance treatise on painting, Leon Battista Alberti explains Narcissus' appeal to painters as owing to the fact that the self-absorbed man may be regarded as the inventor of painting. Alberti writes, "What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?" (64), alluding to the mythological figure's unsuccessful attempt at embracing his own reflection in the lake. A current art exhibition titled "The Mirror of Narcissus: From Mythological Demigod to Mass Phenomenon", which is held from December 1, 2012 to February 10, 2013 at the Galerie im Taxispalais in Innsbruck,⁴ is also indicative of the continuing fascination with Narcissus and his visual representations. In literature, Narcissus has also been intertextually evoked in different forms. Explicit and implicit references to the myth of Narcissus are found, for instance, in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, John

⁴ For further information on the exhibition, which includes both contemporary artists' works as well as historical illustrations based on the ancient myth of Narcissus, see <http://www.galerieimtaxispalais.at/en/programm/archiv/archiv-detail/id/54/> (12 January 2013).

Keats' "I Stood Tip-toe upon a Little Hill", Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*.

In non-fictional discourse, the figure of Narcissus has been particularly prominent in psychology, where a pathological condition which is characterized by excessive love of oneself is known as narcissism, based on the mythological youth's admiration of his own mirror image (Campbell & Miller 4-5). In 1898, the phenomenon was first introduced to the field of psychology by the British sexologist Havelock Ellis, who used the term "narcissus-like" with regard to auto-eroticism. A year later, Paul Näcke coined the word *narcissism* in a psychological study of sexual perversions. Nonetheless, narcissism is more frequently associated with Sigmund Freud, who developed the concept further in an essay titled "On Narcissism: An Introduction",⁵ which was solely dedicated to the subject and was first published in 1914. Since then, narcissism has been studied and applied widely in psychological literature. Examples of psychological works dealing with narcissism include Kohut (1971), Ronningstam (2005), and Northrop (2012), which relates the concept to cosmetic surgery. However, in its analysis of Ellis' fiction and its intertextual relations to the figure of Narcissus, the present study will focus on Freud's conceptualization of narcissism as well as further psychoanalytical approaches to the phenomenon which are largely based on Freud, such as Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and Laura Mulvey's notion of the gaze. These scholars have developed theories with regard to narcissism, its symptoms, and its self-destructive nature, which will be of use in the analysis of self-centred characters such as *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman and *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward, whose excessive self-love occasionally turns to be to their own detriment.

Narcissus' female counterpart, Echo, has also received considerable attention both in fictional and non-fictional works. In his book *The Figure of Echo*, John Hollander outlines different forms in which Ovid's mythological nymph is intertextually evoked in literary texts, ranging from the use of repetitive figures of speech imitating the natural phenomenon personified by Echo, such as reduplication, alliteration, and rhyme, to more specific allusions to the nymph and her suffering stemming from Juno's punishment and Narcissus' rejection. Hollander (25-31) also discusses the so-called 'echo-device', a term which was introduced by Elbridge Colby in his book *The Echo-Device in Literature* (1920) and relates to a dialogue in which the response is a

⁵ Further citations will be to the German original, "Zur Einführung des Narzissmus".

truncated repetition of the previous utterance. According to Hollander (11-21), the critical reception of Echo has often been negatively connotated, with scholars such as Sir Francis Bacon, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche conceptualizing the nymph as a flatterer, mocker, and deceiver. While not arguing against these ways of perceiving the mythological figure, the present paper adopts a different approach to Echo, reading the nymph as a woman whose proper voice has been silenced, who gradually loses her substantial value, who is restricted in her freedom in that she is forced to repeat the words uttered around her, and who is spurned in her love.

In theoretical discourse, the figure of Echo is often explored in connection with the dichotomy of voice and silence. There has been an increasing amount of literature dedicated to the concepts of voice and silence, such as Luhmann and Fuchs (1989), Göttert (1998), Benthien (*Barockes* 2006), and a collection of essays published by Kolesch and Krämer in 2006, which sheds light on the phenomenon of voice as well as the lack thereof from different disciplinary perspectives. Some of these essays will be useful in the analysis of Ellis' intertextual links to Echo as they also discuss, to a greater or lesser extent, the mythological nymph and the punishment imposed by Juno. Another work which will serve as a theoretical lens informing the analysis of characters in Ellis' fiction is Tillie Olsen's *Silences*. Since its publication in 1978, the book, which is based on a series of lectures held by Olsen and is concerned with the voices of women writers and their silencing through discrimination, has figured prominently in feminist criticism – a claim supported by the release of a collection of essays based on Olsen's heritage, which was edited by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin and is titled *Listening to Silences: New Essays on Feminist Criticism*.

The next chapter shall briefly outline a third strand of theory, alongside psychoanalysis and feminist criticism, which will guide the analysis of Ellis' fiction and its relation to the myth of Narcissus and Echo, namely the studies of intertextuality.

3.2. Intertextuality

The term 'intertextuality' was coined in 1966 by Julia Kristeva in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel", and it refers to the way in which texts can interact with each other. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is based on Michael Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which denotes the presence of multiple voices in a text (Pfister 1-5). As opposed to Bakhtin, who distinguishes between monologic and dialogic works of

literature, Kristeva argues that intertextuality encompasses all literary texts because no text can ever be completely free of traces of other texts (6). She claims that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, “Word” 66).

One can, thus, distinguish two different conceptions of intertextuality (Pfister 11-15): The first considers intertextuality as a universal phenomenon inherent in all texts. It is associated with post-structuralism and deconstructivism, and is advocated by theorists such as Kristeva, Jonathan Culler and Roland Barthes, whose notion of text as an echo chamber has already been discussed in the present paper’s introduction. The second view conceives of intertextuality as an intentional writing strategy which is consciously used in individual texts. The present paper refrains from making the claim that the intertextual connection between Ellis’ novels and short stories on the one hand and Ovid’s mythological tale on the other hand has been intentionally forged by the contemporary American author, embracing a postmodern conception, which not only regards each textual construct as intrinsically intertextual, be it explicitly or implicitly, but also holds that meaning resides primarily in the reader. That is to say, the analysis endorses the postmodern idea that every reader constructs his or her own meaning within their situational context, abolishing, as propagated by Barthes (*Image*, 142-148), the idea of the author as a textual authority who is able to construct a unified meaning which is true for every reader. Thus, it is possible to consider the tale of Narcissus and Echo as a possible pre-text of Ellis’ fiction that shapes the reading of these pieces of contemporary American literature regardless of the lack of explicit intertextual references signalling the author’s intention.

Before proceeding to the actual analysis, it is necessary to clarify terminology. The terms ‘intertext’ and ‘pre-text’ must be defined, as well as the kinds of texts that are implied in these terms. In his *Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, Jeremy Hawthorn defines ‘intertext’ as “the text within which other texts reside or echo their presence” (99). However, the term has also been used to refer to those texts to which intertextual reference is made. Nevertheless, the present paper opts for Hawthorn’s definition of ‘intertext’, using the term ‘pre-text’ to refer to Ovid’s myth as it is the text upon which Ellis’ novels and short stories draw.

Opinions also differ as to what kinds of texts are implied in the term ‘pre-text’. Postmodern theorists such as Kristeva and Barthes (Pfister 8-13) use the term to

describe any sign systems which precede and stand in relation to a particular text. Hence, their definition of ‘pre-text’ is not confined to literary texts or other types of verbal discourse, but it also includes texts involving other media than print. However, there are also critics who consider intertextuality a purely literary phenomenon. Such critics tend to make a distinction between intertextuality and intermediality, with the latter term referring to the various kinds of relations that exist between texts belonging to different media (Zander 178-179). The present paper acknowledges the distinction between intertextual and intermedial references, but since both Ellis’ intertexts and Ovid’s pre-text belong to the realm of literature, the focus will be on the phenomenon of intertextuality.

Finally, attention shall be drawn to functions and effects generated by intertextual references. In her article “Intertextualität als Sinnkonstitution”, Renate Lachmann outlines two major functions of intertextuality: the imposition of meanings onto intertexts and the re-interpretation of pre-texts (68). That is, intertexts do not necessarily affirm the dominant meaning that is attached to a pre-text, but they may also reject this meaning and assign new meanings to the previously published text. While embracing the notion of intertextuality as a meaning-making device that may affect both the intertext and the pre-text, the present paper is primarily concerned with how intertextual links to Ovid’s tale of Narcissus and Echo generate new interpretations of the intertext, that is, the body of novels and short stories written by Ellis.

4. Ellis’ fiction in light of Ovid’s Narcissus and Echo

4.1. Disappear here: Echo

4.1.1. Silencing

After having outlined the contextual and theoretical frameworks, the present paper will turn to the analysis of Bret Easton Ellis’ fiction. It will analyze the intertextual relations to Ovid’s myth of Narcissus and Echo, and discuss how these instances of intertextuality may shape our interpretation of Ellis’ novels and short stories. The first section of the analysis will focus on Echo, and the meanings that are generated and foregrounded by reading Ellis’ characters in light of the mythological nymph.

The first chapter will deal with the phenomenon of silence, which may seem out of place at first, given that Echo's punishment does not result in a loss of speech. On the contrary, it is Echo's inability to refrain from talking by involuntarily repeating other people's words that eventually proves her undoing. Even after she vanishes, heartbroken by Narcissus rejection, the only thing that remains is her voice, which continues to repeat the last words of others. Hence, it is not silence in its literal sense that afflicts Echo but rather involuntary talking. Yet, in her talking, she is reduced to repeating the words that other people have uttered and is no longer able to voice what is on her mind. Thus, as Gehring (85-106) points out in her analysis of Echo's punishment, the nymph may not have lost the ability of speaking, but she has been deprived of the ability to express herself. It is this loss of self-expression which may well be interpreted as a kind of silence.

So, in addition to characters that are silenced, in the narrow sense of the word, through mutilation or death, the present analysis will examine characters in Ellis' fiction who still possess the ability of speaking, but who are, like Echo, silenced in a metaphorical sense in that they are not able to voice their own thoughts and feelings, have words put into their mouths by other people or even by society at large, or are not listened to so that their words amount to silence. The chapter will discuss these different forms of silences as they appear in the work of Ellis, and will look closely at passages foregrounding the disempowerment that is associated with silence, whether by cause or effect.

Readers of Ellis' fiction will encounter not only different forms of silences, which may range from the loss of a character's acoustic voice to the repression of one's identity, but also different methods of silencing literal or metaphorical voices. The analysis will focus on four of such methods, which are particularly prominent in the novels and short stories to be examined, namely indifference, social conditioning, substance abuse, and violence.

To begin with, silences caused by indifference, both as an unconscious process and as a deliberate withholding of attention, will be discussed in more detail, and the first character in Ellis' fiction to be explored is Sean's admirer in *The Rules of Attraction*, who resembles Echo in several aspects. As opposed to the other characters in the book, who retell their experiences at Camden College as regular first-person narrators, the girl's entries consist almost exclusively of anonymous love letters addressed to Sean

Bateman, one of the novel's protagonists. While Sean admits to being curious about the anonymous author of the letter, his curiosity stems not so much from a genuine interest in the other person as from his narcissistic enjoyment of the attention being paid to him:

I get another note in my box after dinner tonight. They don't say anything really except, like, 'I love you' or 'You're sexy', stuff like that. I used to think they were jokes that Tony or Getch were putting in my box, but there's been too many of them to take as a joke. Someone is *seriously* interested in me. My interest has *definitely* been aroused. (*Rules* 75)

As the narrative progresses, Sean becomes convinced that the notes are written by fellow student Lauren Hynde, and to the end of the novel, this misunderstanding is not resolved. Thus, in a manner reminiscent of Ovid's Echo, Sean's admirer is deprived of her own voice. Her letters, like Echo's utterances, become the words of another person, and all that is left to the unnamed student is silence. This silence becomes more evident when the girl decides to reveal herself at a party which is also attended by Sean.

[S]he follows you to the light at the door and says... 'Hello'... and never has a second hurt and ruptured, blistered so harshly because the music's too loud and you can't hear, don't even notice, and you take [Lauren's] hand instead and you are both leaving. (181)

In the chapter from which the quote is taken, the girl's insecurity as she watches Sean from a distance is illustrated by her continual reference to herself in the third person, which provides a striking contrast to the self-centredness of the other characters, who keep referring to themselves in the first person. The grim peak of the girl's disempowerment, "a second [that] hurt and ruptured, blistered so harshly", is reached when she finally musters enough courage to approach Sean, but her words are drowned by the music so that she is, once again, condemned to lasting silence, as captured by the final sentences of the chapter: "There won't be any more notes. It's last call" (181).

Over the course of the story, Sean's admirer suffers different forms of silence reflecting her loss of power due to the indifference shown by her love interest and peers. The cultural historian Claudia Benthien (237-252) observes that, while in the past silence used to be positively connotated as a spiritual practice to achieve a state of spiritual purity, it was not until relatively recently that the same phenomenon became negatively associated with isolation and disempowerment. This shift in connotations becomes evident in depictions of death as a silencer that began to appear in the Baroque period. In Ellis' *The Rules of Attraction*, death also occurs as one of the most potent forms of silencing. Broken-hearted like Echo, Sean's admirer, who has already been subjected to

silence as a result of the false attribution of her love letters and her failed attempt at revealing herself at the party, commits suicide by cutting her wrists. Her last words, “God Jesus Christ our my nothing savior” (*Rules* 195), are not only significant of the girl’s sense of despair and abandonment by her immediate environment as well as by God, the “nothing savior”. The unfinished prayer also denotes the girl’s ultimate silencing, which becomes a punishment as irrevocable as that of Ovid’s mythological nymph.

Another moment of disconcerting silence that is linked to death and that is not caused but certainly reinforced by people’s indifference can be found in Ellis’ first novel, *Less Than Zero*. In the novel, the protagonist, Clay, and his friends drive to a deserted alley, in order to see the dead body of a young man for the sake of their own entertainment:

He’s lying against the back wall, propped up. The face is bloated and pale and the eyes are shut, mouth open and the face belongs to some young, eighteen-, nineteen-year-old boy, dried blood, crusted, above the upper lip.

‘Jesus,’ Rip says.

Spin’s eyes are wide.

Trent just stands there and says something like ‘Wild.’

Rip jabs the boy in the stomach with his foot.

‘Sure he’s dead?’

‘See him moving?’ Ross giggles.

‘Christ, man. Where did you find this?’ Spin asks.

‘Word gets around.’

[...]

‘Let’s get out of here,’ Ross says.

‘Wait.’ Rip motions for him to stay and then sticks a cigarette in the boy’s mouth. We stand there for five more minutes. Then Spin stands up and shakes his head, scratches at Gumby, and says, ‘Man, I need a cigarette.’
(*Less* 174-175)

The deceased boy’s silence is not merely a consequence that must be assumed as a result of his death, but it is foregrounded in more than one way and becomes, thus, loaded with meaning. In the description of the corpse, for instance, Clay notes that the boy’s “mouth [is] open”. The image of an open mouth, which is traditionally associated with talking, stands in stark contrast with the dead person’s loss of speech. Hence, common expectations of what an open mouth does are defied in this passage, and it is this play with expectations that places emphasis on the deceased boy’s silence.

Readers' expectations are again thwarted when it comes to the characters' reaction upon finding the corpse. In Western cultures, the death of another person is traditionally acknowledged with silence, either in stunned shock or as a mark of respect to the recently deceased. In her analysis of silence in rituals and the arts, Benthien (260-264) has examined the traditional practice of observing a moment of silence, in which participants recreate and thus partake in the muteness that afflicts the dead. In *Less Than Zero*, however, the anonymous dead boy is not granted such a gesture of respect. Clay and his friends comment on the corpse in a manner that is nothing short of disrespect. This refusal to partake in the dead boy's loss of voice is tantamount to a refusal to partake in his loss of power and face him as equals. The liveliness of their conversation, which strikingly opposes the corpse's silence, reinforces the disempowerment of the dead boy, whose mouth is open as if to say something in response to their rude comments. Yet, his inability to defend himself becomes all the more evident when one of the boys places a cigarette in the corpses' mouth, eliminating all associations with the act of talking that the open mouth previously carried and turning an already dysfunctional instrument of self-defence and power into an object of ridicule.

Not yet dead but terminally ill and just as silenced by a selfish lack of consideration for her feelings is the narrator's girlfriend in Ellis' "On the Beach", which is included in his short story collection *The Informers*. At the beginning of the short story, the narrator remembers attending a prom at which his girlfriend first told him about her illness:

It was later, at the party after the prom, on Michael Landon's yacht, after the coke had run out, while we were making out in the cabin below, that she broke away, said there was this problem. We walked up to the top deck and I lit a clove cigarette and she didn't say anything else and I didn't ask because I really didn't want to know. The morning was cold and everything looked gray and bleak and I went home horny, tired, had a dry mouth. (*Informers* 247)

In this scene, the woman struggles to tell her boyfriend about the serious illness from which she is suffering, confining herself to saying that there is a problem. Instead of prompting her to elaborate on her ominous announcement, the narrator does not respond to his girlfriend and prefers to leave the issue open, saying that he "didn't really want to know". His self-centred attitude and indifference to the problem of his partner is further emphasised by his concluding remarks, in which he casually describes the morning after the prom and complains about going home "horny, tired, [having] a dry mouth". One may argue now that this exchange between the narrator and his girlfriend is marked by silence on both sides. However, two different types of silences need to be distinguished

here, because while the narrator chooses to be silent, the girlfriend's silence is triggered by her hesitance to confide her personal problems to a man who obviously does not care about her.

There is more than one occasion in this short story in which the narrator's lack of sympathy and affection reduces the dying woman to silence. The following quote is another example of her silencing as a result of his indifference:

She started smoking when she found out. [...] She couldn't stand it, the smell, the first inhale, the lighting of it, but she wanted to smoke. Reservations made at Trumps or the Ivy or Morton's would inevitably end with me asking, "Smoking section, please," and she'd say it didn't make any difference now, looking over at me, like hoping that I'd say it would but I'd just say yeah, cool, I guess. [...] Sometimes she'd sit there for two hours and watch cigarettes turn to ash and then she'd light another one and she told me that sooner or later she would get it right, and it would all kind of bum met out and I'd just watch her open a new pack and Mona would watch too and sometimes she would wear her sunglasses so that nobody could see that she had been crying [...]. (*Informers* 249)

In the above quote, as in the one discussed before, the narrator makes no secret of his indifference towards the suffering of his dying girlfriend. He is well aware of her distaste for smoking and that she merely partakes in the unhealthy habit as an attempt at eliciting some sympathy from him, but the narrator does not show any concern as he watches her opening one pack of cigarette after another. He keeps making reservations in the smoking section of restaurants, and even the sight of her tears, does not arouse any feelings of pity in him. The dying woman is obviously affected by this lack of affection on behalf of her boyfriend. Yet, similar to the mythological figure of Echo, she is not capable of voicing what is on her mind. Hence, instead of standing up for herself, the narrator's girlfriend remains silent in her suffering, and hides her emotions behind sunglasses or a cynical remark about her own failing health. So, once again, the narrator's silence, which is based on an active withholding of affection, is opposed to the silencing of his girlfriend, which stems from her insecurity as she grapples with her unrequited love.

In Ovid's myth, gender relations are structured in such a way that the man wields power through his charms, which attract people's attention in his favour, while the woman, who is enchanted by the male but rendered insignificant by his self-sufficient indulgence in his own physical appearance, is stripped from any such power. It has already been shown that male characters in Ellis' fiction are not exempt from being

silenced and relegated to a position of powerlessness like Echo. Yet, up to this point, it was only male characters rather than female ones who, like Narcissus, derive power not only from their personal advantages – be it in terms of their physical appearance, their financial success, or their social ties – but also from their excessive preoccupation with themselves. In Ellis’ *American Psycho*, however, the gender relations as outlined in Ovid’s tale of Narcissus and Echo are occasionally completely subverted, privileging a female over a male. Patrick Bateman, the protagonist of *American Psycho*, is one of the characters in Ellis’ fiction which is most likely to be identified with vain and self-absorbed Narcissus. Yet, there are a few scenes in which Patrick is forced into a silenced and disempowered role akin to that of Narcissus’ oppressed female counterpart, and this silencing and exclusion from power is sometimes suffered at the hands of women. In the following quote, the intertextual link between Patrick and Ovid’s Echo may not be readily apparent, but it will be revealed in a close analysis of the passage, which takes place in a business meeting that Patrick attends with his business associate Luis Carruthers:

I think about Courtney’s legs, spread and wrapped around my face, and when I look over at Luis in one brief flashing moment his head looks like a talking vagina and it scares the bejesus out of me, moves me to say something while mopping the sweat off my brow. “That’s a nice... suit, Luis.” The farthest thing from my mind. (*American* 104)

During the meeting, Patrick hallucinates about a talking vagina in place of Luis’ head, and he admits being scared by the sight – a confession bolstered by the beads of sweat that he wipes off his brow. The hallucination of a talking vagina is preceded by the thought of Courtney’s legs as they wrap around Patrick’s face, silencing him, one may be invited to think, like a muzzle strapped over somebody’s mouth. The talking vagina, thus, becomes a symbol of power for women, who are able not only to do the talking, but also to silence men. According to Patrick, his hallucination does not actually silence him, but “moves [him] to say something”. Yet, his words, like Echo’s, bear no relation to his beliefs. The passage, thus, expresses Patrick’s fear of the disempowering threat that women like Courtney pose to him.

There is another noteworthy instance in *American Psycho* which is indicative of Patrick’s disempowerment when confronted with a woman who denies him her attention, just as Narcissus did with Echo. In this scene, it is not Courtney, but the protagonist’s girlfriend, Evelyn Richards, who showcases her ability to wield power

over Patrick and to silence him. In many aspects of her personality, Evelyn bears a striking resemblance to Patrick: She is superficial, utterly self-satisfied, and usually too self-absorbed in her own pleasures and, less frequently, worries to pay much attention to her surroundings. Not even Patrick is exempted from Evelyn's indifference, as becomes evident in the following scene:

"All I can think about is this poster I saw in the subway station the other night before I killed those black kids – a photo of a baby calf, its head turned toward the camera, its eyes caught wide and staring by the flash, and its body seemed like it was boxed into some kind of crate, and in big, black letters below the photo it read, 'Question: Why Can't This Veal Calf Walk?' Then, 'Answer: Because It Only Has Two Leg.' But then I saw another one, the same exact photo, the same exact calf, yet beneath it, this one read, 'Stay Out of Publishing.'" I pause, still fingering the breadstick, then ask, "Is any of this registering with you or would I get more of a response from, oh, an ice bucket?" I say all of this staring straight at Evelyn, enunciating precisely, trying to explain myself, and she opens her mouth and I finally expect her to acknowledge my character. And for the first time since I've known her she is straining to say something interesting and I pay very close attention and she asks, "Is that..."

"Yes?" This is the only moment of the evening where I feel any genuine interest toward what she has to say, and I urge her to go on. "Yes? Is that...?"

"Is that... Ivana Trump?" she asks, peering over my shoulder.
(*American* 116-117)

Throughout the novel, one will encounter several scenes in which the protagonist freely admits to one of his victims' murder or alludes in some other way to his criminal nature, and yet, the person to whom he is talking is seemingly unaffected by his words. This indifference to Patrick's confessions on behalf of his conversational partners hints at the possibility that Patrick is an unreliable narrator and that the crimes depicted in the novel, as well as his confessions, are merely products of his delusional fantasy. In *Lunar Park*, the protagonist, a fictionalized version of Ellis whose life mirrors to a large extent that of the author himself, actually states that Patrick is "a notoriously unreliable narrator" (*Lunar* 161) and that "[t]he murders and tortures were in fact fantasies fuelled by his rage and fury about how life in America was structured" (161). Yet, regardless of whether or not the protagonist of *American Psycho* actually "killed those black kids" (*American* 116) and confesses to having done so, the passage quoted above is indicative of Patrick's disempowerment at the hands of Evelyn, because she withdraws her attention from his words, whatever they may be, in order to cater selfishly to her own interest in celebrities. Thus, Patrick's explicitly expressed wish to give his girlfriend insight into his true personality, to make her "acknowledge [his] character" (116), is not

granted. So, in a manner reminiscent of Echo's punishment and subsequent rejection by Narcissus, Patrick's words are reduced to silence due to Evelyn's indifference to her boyfriend's problems, and as a further consequence of the woman's narcissistic self-centredness, the narrator as a person with his own identity, which he wishes to be acknowledged, fades into insignificance.

At a later point in the narrative, the protagonist of *American Psycho* is once again, like spurned Echo, silenced as he is denied the attention of his narcissistic partner. This scene, in which Patrick suggests that he and Evelyn should break up, is another example of a gender reversal that subverts the traditional power relations between male and female as they are also enacted in Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Echo while demonstrating that power is still reserved to those who exhibit narcissistic tendencies. It is in this scene that the protagonist notices for the first time that Evelyn "has been eyeing [him] for the last two years not with adoration but with something closer to greed" (*American* 325) – a realization already suggesting that the power struggle to which their relationship has boiled down may just as well be resolved in favour of Evelyn, who apparently regards her boyfriend as an object to possess rather than as a person to cherish. The following quote is an excerpt of the subsequent conversation between Evelyn and Patrick, which takes place in a restaurant:

"I think, Evelyn, that..." I start, stall, start again. "... that we've lost touch."

"Why? What's wrong?" She's waving to a couple – Lawrence Montgomery and Geena Webster, I think – and from across the room Geena (?) holds up her hand, which has a bracelet on it. Evelyn nods approvingly.

"My... my *need* to engage in... homicidal behavior on a massive scale cannot be, um, corrected," I tell her, measuring each word carefully. "But I... have no other way to express my blocked... needs." I'm surprised at how emotional this admission makes me, and it wears me down; I feel light-headed. As usual, Evelyn misses the essence of what I'm saying, and I wonder how long it will take to finally rid myself of her. (325)

The frequent use of ellipses and other hesitation marks illustrate Patrick's difficulties in expressing himself. Similar to the mythological nymph, he struggles to voice the thoughts and feelings in his mind, and the disempowerment that ties in with this struggle for words is further highlighted by Patrick's declaration, "this admission [...] wears me down; I feel light-headed". Evelyn, on the other hand, is not affected by Patrick's words, and as in the scene previously discussed, she is more concerned with acknowledging somebody else's presence than devoting her full attention to her

boyfriend. As Patrick himself aptly phrases it, “Evelyn misses the essence of what [he is] saying”, and in the further course of their conversation, she interprets his intention to break up as an attempt to persuade her to undergo breast augmentation surgery. Patrick’s words are further belittled when Evelyn responds with a sneering “Touchy, touchy” (325) and unperturbedly “motion[s] to the waiter for more water” (325). At one point, it seems that

maybe *someone* is actually comprehending what I’m trying to get through to them, but then she says, “Let’s just avoid the issue, all right? I’m sorry I said anything. Now, are we having coffee?” Again she waves the waiter over. (325)

Evelyn’s evasive reaction is further emphasizes that she attaches little significance to what Patrick says. This refusal to take him seriously and her usual withdrawal of attention diminish the value of Patrick’s words, turning them practically into silence. The analysis has thus shown that in Ellis’ fiction traditional gender relations may be subverted in such a way that a woman wields power over a man by adopting a narcissistic role and forcing the man through their indifference into an oppressed position of silence and insignificance, as the one held by Echo in Ovid’s myth. Yet, while characters subjected to male indifference, such as Sean’s admirer in *The Rules of Attraction*, the dying girlfriend in “On the Beach”, and the dead boy in *Less Than Zero*, tend to exhibit this intertextual link to Echo throughout the respective work of fiction, Patrick Bateman’s disempowerment suffered at the hands of women is only temporary. As will be illustrated at a later point in this chapter, there are, in fact, numerous scenes in which the protagonist of *American Psycho* adopts the role of Narcissus to the detriment of women, restoring traditional gender relations.

The reversal of gender relations in *American Psycho*, which is evident in the silencing of Patrick by empowered women such as Evelyn and Courtney, may only be a temporary phenomenon, but there is, in fact, a force that is able to subject Patrick to a form of silencing that is more prevalent than the one the protagonist encounters in his interaction with certain women, and that force is society at large. The analysis will now turn to a second method of silencing, namely social conditioning, which exercises pressure over the individual into conforming to established beliefs and values. In this regard, attention shall first be drawn to a line in *American Psycho* in which Patrick describes his life as “a blank canvas, a cliché, a soap opera” (*American* 268). The expression “blank canvas” not only refers to the lack of aims and aspirations that is common among the characters of Ellis’ fiction in general, but it may also be interpreted

as referring to the decline of individualism in a culture of mass consumption. Western society traditionally prides itself on individualism and uses it as a means of justifying consumerism, promoting the desire to identify and distinguish oneself with the things possessed. However, its members who are continually exposed to socially dictated standards of appearance and behaviour – to the trends and fads, so to speak – are merely offered mass-produced illusions of individualism.⁶ Patrick's equation of life to "a cliché, a soap opera" also refers to this conflicting approach to individualism, because choices of dress, lifestyle, and the like, which are promoted as expressions of individualism, tend to be as widely popular as the words and phrases denoted by the term *cliché*. Hence, Western society's pervasive notion of individualism may be perceived as a kind of fiction that is, like the content of a soap opera, determined by external forces. In *American Psycho*, this loss of individualism in Patrick's life becomes evident at several points in the narration, as when he notices that Donald Kimball, a detective investigating the disappearance of Patrick's business rival Paul Owen, is "wearing the same damn Armani linen suit" (*American* 264). Equally insightful is the following passage in which Patrick, after being mistaken for another person, says that

for some reason it really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the same exact thing I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear prescription glasses and we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable; it doesn't irk me. (86)

Coming back to the present chapter's topic of silencing, one may conclude that Patrick's individual voice is silenced as he adheres in his sartorial choices and consumptive behaviour to social expectations projected onto the "blank canvas" (268) of his life. How such social conditioning relates to Ovid's Echo and methods of silencing becomes clearer when considering a quote by Tillie Olsen, who describes the pressures exerted by society as "falsifying one's own reality, range, vision, truth, voice" (44). The use of the word "voice" highlights that by conforming to social ideals, members of a society are often robbed of their own voices as individuals, because their own beliefs and values are suppressed in order to meet those established by society. So, like Echo's truncated repetitions, an individual's words in particular, and their

⁶ For a more detailed discussion on this false sense of individualism in a capitalist society, see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" as well as the more Jack Zipes' "Lion Kings and the Culture Industry", which explores the arguments set out by Adorno and Horkheimer in the 1940s in light of more recent development.

behaviour in general, is shaped by other people, and thus, they fail to serve as a means of self-expression. Patrick's frustration at these external influences is illustrated in the following passage:

And later my macabre joy sours and I'm weeping for myself, unable to find solace in any of this, crying out, sobbing "I just want to be loved," cursing the earth and everything I have been taught: principles, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, prayer – all of it was wrong, without any final purpose. All it came down to was: die or adapt. I imagine my vacant face, the disembodied voice coming from its mouth: *These are terrible times*. (American 312)

Giving up one's individuality and adapting to values propagated by Western society, which comprise materialistic desires and a ruthless lust for power, on the one hand and dying on the other hand – these are the "principles", "choices", and, in a twisted sense, even "morals" governing the society in which Patrick finds himself. It is a world that has robbed him, like Ovid's nymph, of his individual voice – a voice, which acknowledges that "*These are terrible times*", but "disembodied" as it is, its words, printed in italics to mark their failure to be expressed acoustically, cannot be heard.

In her work *Silences*, which sheds light on the exclusion and silencing of women writers, Olsen (149) mentions another silencer which frequently causes the loss of one's individual voice, just as the one suffered by Echo, namely substance abuse. This abuse of alcohol and drugs, which is common among the characters of Ellis' novels and short stories, shall be explored as another method of silencing in the paragraphs to follow. At first sight, many characters in Ellis fiction who like to indulge in drugs and alcohol seem to be closely linked to the self-absorbed figure of Narcissus and bear little resemblance to Echo. Yet, closer inspection reveals that these characters often resort to substance abuse as a means of escaping their fears, pain, and frustrations, and it is this numbing of one's feelings and emotions which may, like the suppression of one's beliefs due to social conditioning, be considered as a metaphorical silencing of a character's individual voices. In the short story "In the Islands", for instance, Les Price has a habit of overindulging in alcohol and Valium whereas his estranged son, Tim, likes to smoke marijuana in order to overcome the nervousness and tension during their awkward encounters (*Informers* 52-73). Despite being short-spoken in their conversations and further circumstances suggesting the contrary, both characters do not seem indifferent towards one another. Tim's remark about remembering the fights his now divorced parents had during past summer vacations (58) suggests that their failed

marriage has emotionally affected him, and his upset reaction when Les flirts with a girl he invites to dinner (71-74) casts further doubt on his supposed indifference towards his father. Les, on the other hand, observes during their vacation in Hawaii that

[i]t is impossible to know what he wants: Looking at Tim, one cannot help feeling great waves of uncertainty, an absence of aim, of purpose as if he is a person who simply doesn't matter. Trying not to worry about it, I concentrate on the calm sea instead, the air. (64-65)

Later in the story, while relaxing with his son on the beach, he imagines that

when I close my eyes I pretend that when I open them, when I look up, Tim will be standing in front of me, motioning me to join him in the water where we will talk about minor things but he's spoiled and I don't care and ignore him and to ask forgiveness is pretending. (66)

While the first quote is indicative of Les' fear for his son's future, the latter expresses his desire for more intimacy with his estranged child. In both excerpts, Les quickly brushes away his worries and pretends not to care about Tim, but his frequent attempts at relating with his estranged son and his continuing preoccupation with Tim's emotional state suggest that his attitude of indifference is, like that of his son, merely a façade intended to hide his insecure and vulnerable self. Alcohol and drugs are then means to an end, helping Les and Tim to erect this protective façade by numbing the feelings and emotions that draw out their vulnerability.

Further characters in Ellis' fiction who indulge in alcohol and drugs to suppress their emotions and feelings for fear of their disempowering potential include *The Informers'* Bryan Metro. Bryan, the protagonist and narrator of the short story "Discovering Japan", is a rock musician who, in his drug- and alcohol-induced haze, frequently engages in physically and sexually abusive behaviour towards groupies, some of them even underage. Yet, as the story progresses, it turns out that the dissolute rock star with his disdainful demeanour and penchant for sadism is merely one side of a coin covering another plagued by grief over the estrangement from his family as well as the death of a friend. In the course of the narrative, it is revealed that Bryan's former band mate, Ed, committed suicide. During a telephone conversation with another member of the band, the subject of their deceased colleague is briefly touched upon, with Bryan saying "I don't care, man" (*Informers* 134). Yet, despite these claims to indifference, the musician's difficulties in coping with Ed's death become evident when he abruptly ends the conversation and subsequently suffers a breakdown: "I hang up, pass out" (134) In

addition to being troubled by Ed's suicide, Bryan struggles to reconcile with his family. His ex-wife, Nina, attempted suicide during their marriage, and his son does not want to talk to Bryan on the telephone, because, according to Nina, he is scared of his own father (140-141). References to Ed, Nina, and Bryan's son are sporadic, and they noticeably disappear as soon as the narrator lapses back into his substance-induced stupor. This supports not only the assumption that Bryan turns to drugs and alcohol as a means of escaping his problems and the pain associated with them but also the conception of substance abuse as a silencer, which, in a manner reminiscent of Echo's punishment, mutes his genuine voice as an individual determined by his subjective feelings and substitutes it for the callous voice of a rock star.

Hence, Bryan's substance abuse, as well as Les and Tim's indulgence in alcohol and marijuana, constitutes methods of silencing their inner selves, which are ultimately symptomatic of a disempowerment that the characters wish to counteract. In the fictional society shared by Ellis' novels and short stories, emotions are commonly regarded as sources of vulnerability, and their open display is eschewed and condemned as a sign of weakness. So, when Clay, the protagonist of *Less Than Zero* and its sequel *Imperial Bedrooms*, attends the premiere of a film, his "pale fear" (*Imperial* 17) is concealed by "[his] mask [which is] an expressionless smile" (*Imperial* 16). The protagonist of *Lunar Park* suffers an emotional breakdown while talking to an exorcist, but "[s]hame suddenly caused the crying to stop" (*Lunar* 337), disrupting this undesired display of emotions. *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward likewise attempts to throttle his emotions when he searches his pockets for a tranquilizer as soon as he feels his anger and frustration welling up:

[G]reen words on a blank screen tell me that there is no cash left in this account (a balance of minus \$143) and so therefore it won't give me any money and I blew my last cash on a glass-door refrigerator because Elle Décor did a piece on my place that never ran so I slam my fist against the machine, moan "Spare me" and since it's totally useless to try this again I rustle through my pockets for a Xanax until someone pushes me away and I roll the moped back outside, bummed. (*Glamorama* 16)

In a society like Victor's, which is dominated by materialism and celebrity culture, having no money and not being featured in a magazine are unmistakable signs of disempowerment, but members of this society may still fare well as long as they do not allow themselves to be carried away by their emotions, which would set the seal on

their loss of power. Victor's description of the first encounters with his college friend, Jamie Fields, is also revealing of these power dynamics:

At first she was so inexpressive and indifferent that I wanted to know more about her. I envied that blankness – it was the opposite of helplessness or damage or craving or suffering or shame” (182)

These lines illustrate once again that in the society depicted in Ellis' fiction, empowerment is derived from withholding emotions, as it is this emotional “blankness” which sparks Victor's interest as well as his envy.

This distrust of emotions and their silencing by means of substance abuse is particularly prominent in Ellis' *Lunar Park*, in which the narrator, Bret, describes how in the suburban area where he lives, parents have their children medicated on Ritalin and similar mind-bending drugs:

The whole thing seemed harmless – just another graciously whimsical upscale birthday party – until I started noticing that all the kids were on meds (Zoloft, Luvox, Celexa, Paxil) that caused them to move lethargically and speak in effortless monotones. (*Lunar* 142-143)

From an early age, children are thus conditioned to feel and cater the need to control their emotions. Despite the narrator's claim at being “appalled by what [he] was witnessing” (142), his own eleven-year-old son, Robby, is not exempt from such disciplinary measures, which drain his emotions and, due to their tranquilizing effects, literally lead to his silencing:

Robby had recently switched antidepressants. Luvox had now been added for the anxiety attacks that had plagued him since he was six, and which had increased in intensity since I arrived [...]. (116)

The increased severity of Robby's anxiety attacks once Bret becomes involved in his son's life is indicative of the boy's troubled relationship with his father. Like Les Price in the short story “In the Islands”, the narrator of *Lunar Park* has become estranged from Robby, whom he refused to acknowledge as his son for many years. After reconciling with Robby's mother and moving to the family home in suburban Midland, the narrator makes some attempts at “getting to know this worried, sad, alert boy who gave evasive answers to questions [he] felt demanded clarity and precision” (37). Nevertheless, he struggles to bond with his son, as evidenced by the following conversation in which the narrator tries to cheer up Robby when the latter is forbidden to dress up as Eminem for Halloween:

“So, Mom wouldn’t let you go as the rap star, huh?” I said.

He whirled around and gasped. And then he regained his composure.

“No,” he said sullenly. He looked shameful, handcuffed.

Something in me broke. I swallowed another mouthful of wine and walked into the room.

“Well, you need platinum blond hair and a wife to beat, and since you don’t have either...” I had no idea what my point was; all I wanted to do was make him feel better, but every time I tried, it just seemed to add to his general confusion. (118)

Robby’s “shameful” and “handcuffed” reaction, which leaves the narrator disheartened, as if “[s]omething in [him] broke”, shows that the relation between father and son continues to be strained despite Bret’s effort. The quote further points out that, while Robby, who is described as “passive and enervated” (116) at one point, numbs his pain with prescription drugs, his father, who “swallow[s] another mouthful of wine” (116), turns to alcohol in order to escape his insecurity. While he accompanies Robby and his half-sister at Halloween night as they walk from house to house, the narrator “suddenly crave[s] another drink badly” (122) and returns home early to “pour[...] [himself] a large glass of vodka” (124), “feel[ing] Robby’s relief when [he] stumbled away” (124). The abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs, hence, relates to the fate of Ovid’s Echo in that, on the one hand, it endows these characters with voices drained of their emotions and thus lacking in traces of their identity, and on the other hand, it is symptomatic of an already-present disempowerment, which, in the case of Bret and Robby, results from their incapability to bond with a person dear to them.

Substance abuse abounds in the novels and short stories by Bret Easton Ellis, and so do dead bodies, which points to violence as the last method of silencing discussed in the present chapter. In this regard, attention shall, once again, be directed to Ellis’ *American Psycho*, in which the silencing force of violence is particularly prevalent. As well as being a successful Wall Street broker, Patrick Bateman imagines himself to be a cold-blooded murderer who derives great pleasure from obscene and sadistic ways of torturing and killing his victims. What is noticeable about the murders and is worth mentioning in a chapter dedicated to silencing is Patrick’s tendency to mutilate his victim’s mouth or subjecting them to some other procedure that renders them unable to speak. The protagonist describes, for instance, how one of his victim’s “face [is] covered with blood because I’ve cut her lips off with a pair of nail scissors” (*American Psycho* 292). While torturing his ex-girlfriend Bethany, Patrick sprays mace into her mouth and

cuts out her tongue. Bethany's silence as a result of Patrick's violence is foregrounded when he encourages her to scream for help, but

the mouth opens and not even screams come out anymore, just horrible, guttural, animal-like noises, sometimes interrupted by retching sounds. "Scream, honey," I urge, "keep screaming." I lean down, even closer, brushing her hair back. "No one cares. No one will help you..." She tries to cry out again but she's losing consciousness and she's capable of only a weak moan. (236)

Patrick eventually forces himself into Bethany's tongue-less mouth, releasing her only after he ejaculates. There are several other victims fallen into the hands of Patrick who suffer a similar fate. The mouth of an anonymous girl, whom Patrick picks up at a club and "plan[s] to torture and film" (313), is mutilated with a knife and a power drill before Patrick once again forces himself into the dying girl's mouth (315-316). Similar to Echo, Bethany and the anonymous girl are, thus, not only robbed of their ability to speak, but as the mythological nymph's mouth is filled with the words of others, their mouths are turned into tools serving another person's interests.

This appropriation of a victim's body parts, which is reminiscent of Echo's punishment, can be found in several other instances throughout the story. The remains of Christie, a prostitute whom Patrick employs on multiple occasions before he eventually tortures and kills her, are used as decorative objects for the protagonist's apartment:

My apartment reeks of rotten fruit, though actually the smell is caused by what I scooped out of Christie's head and poured into a Marco glass bowl that sits on a counter near the entranceway. The head itself lies covered with brain pulp, hollow and eyeless, in the corner of the living room beneath the piano and I plan to use it as a jack-o'-lantern on Halloween. (*American* 289)

So, by turning her hollow, disfigured head into a lantern and placing its content in a bowl as if it were a potpourri, Patrick usurps what is left of Christie. The same applies to another anonymous girl whose severed breasts "[s]urrounded by dried black blood, [...] lie, rather delicately, on a china plate [he] bought at the Pottery Barn on top of the Wurlitzer jukebox" (331), and "[a] few of her intestines [...] are mashed up into balls that lie strewn across the glass-top coffee table like long blue snakes, mutant worms" (331). At one point, Patrick describes how he created a Halloween costume which is supposed to represent a mass murderer by using body parts of his victims:

[T]he suit was also covered with blood, some of it fake, most of it real. In one fist I clenched a hank of Victoria Bell's hair, and pinned next to my boutonniere (a smile white rose) was a finger bone I'd boiled the flesh off. (317)

By being reduced to decorative objects and accessories for a Halloween costume, Christie and the other victims are objectified in a very literal sense of the word. The objectification of women typically goes hand in hand with their silencing, for the voice is, as Kolesch and Krämer describe it, “a phenomenon that bears unmistakable testimony to human presence” (“ein Phänomen, das so untrüglich Zeugnis ablegt von menschlicher Anwesenheit”; 7). From this it follows that if these women are stripped from their human nature, they are simultaneously deprived of the human condition that is their voice. One may argue now that the killing of a person necessarily leads to their silencing regardless of whether or not they are objectified, but Patrick’s objectification of his already dead victims may be regarded as a symbolic act that is supposed to silence the dead’s voices in his mind and thus obliterates their hold on him. In addition to being objectified, Patrick’s victims are also turned into possessions of another person. Hence, they resemble Echo, who is as a result of Juno’s punishment dispossessed of her tongue (Gehring 88), in that they are also robbed of what rightfully belongs to them, and these body parts become, like the tongue of the nymph, tools for someone else’s purposes. Thus, the objectifying silencing of these women is not so much emblematic of their disempowerment as it is a sign of Patrick’s analogous empowerment at the expense of his victims.

The discussion of Patrick’s murders already points to the next chapter, which deals with the vanishing of people – a phenomenon that, especially in Ellis’ fiction, is frequently based on the killing and maiming of human bodies.

4.1.2. Vanishing

While the first chapter in the section dealing with intertextual relations to Echo examined the silencing of characters in Ellis’ fiction, the second chapter is based on another aspect of the mythological nymph’s punishment, namely her isolation following Narcissus’ rejection and her eventual disappearance as a visibly present being.

The previous chapter ended with an analysis of Patrick Bateman’s murders, whereby he not only silences his victims, but also eliminates their physical existence. This loss of one’s physical presence is particularly explicit in the killing of Patrick’s ex-girlfriend Bethany, which, amongst other forms of mutilations, involves cannibalistic activities: “The fingers I haven’t nailed I try to bite off, almost succeeding on her left thumb which I manage to chew all flesh off of, leaving the bone exposed” (*American* 236). When he examines Bethany’s mutilated body on the following day, he notices that “her lower

teeth look as if they're jutting out since her lips have been torn – actually bitten – off” (242). Earlier that day, Patrick rents a film with the tagline “Some clowns make you laugh, but Bobo will make you die and then he'll eat your body” (239), which emphasises the protagonist's penchant for cannibalistic murder. Bethany is, in fact, not the only victim of Patrick who is subjected to cannibalism: The protagonist bites off and swallows one of Elizabeth's nipples (279), has a “cold, tense brunch with Christie's corpse” (280), sinks his teeth into Tiffany's vagina so that when he pulls away from her, “meat and pubic hair hang[...] from [his] mouth” (292), and he tries “to make meat loaf out of [another] girl but it becomes too frustrating a task and instead [he] spend[s] the afternoon smearing her meat all over the walls, chewing on strips of skin [he] ripped from her body” (332). The skinning of Torri, “making incisions with a steak knife and ripping bits of flesh from her legs and stomach” (292), also triggers association with the preparation and eating of food. By cooking and eating body parts of the people he has murdered, Patrick strips these women of their physical presence altogether in a way which further emphasises his empowerment, as he internalizes what formerly belonged to his victims.

Patrick's crimes, which include mutilating, dismembering, and dissolving human bodies with acid, as well as other methods of torture which eventually result in the vanishing of his victims, are strikingly reminiscent of Echo's violent disappearance as it is depicted in another version of the myth recorded in the *Homeric Hymns*. According to this tale, the nymph is cruelly ripped apart by a group of shepherds:

[Echo] danced with the Nymphs and sung in consort with the Muses, but fled from all males, whether men or Gods, because she loved virginity. Pan sees that and takes occasion to be angry at the maid, and to envy her music because he could not come at her beauty. Therefore he sends a madness among the shepherds... and they tore her all to pieces and flung about them all over the earth her yet singing limbs [...]. (Hine qtd. in Hollander 7-8)

The description of Pan in this myth provides some clues to the motifs underlying Patrick's violence. As well as being symptomatic of his sexual frustration with women, the protagonist's acts of violence possibly stem, like Pan's fatal plot against Echo, from a feeling of envy. In this regard, Patrick's relations to two of his murder victims are worth to be discussed in more detail. The first victim is Paul Owen, who works, like Patrick, as an investment banker at Pierce & Pierce. Given their being peers working for the same company and the competitive environment that generally surrounds Patrick's circle of acquaintances, the rivalry between Patrick and Paul seems inevitable. The

following passage shows that Paul is also a rival to Patrick when it comes to sartorial choices:

Paul Owen walks in wearing a cashmere one-button sports jacket, tropical wool flannel slacks, a button-down tab-collared shirt by Ronaldus Shanmask, but it's really the tie – blue and black and red and yellow bold stripes from Andrew Fezza by Zanzarra – that impresses me. (*American* 106)

Patrick further admits to “admiring the way he’s styled and slicked back his hair, with a part so even and sharp it... devastates me” (107). The use of the negatively connotated verb ‘devastate’ to describe his emotional reaction to Paul’s hairstyle supports the claim that the protagonist’s admiration is tinted with envy. There are several other instances which clearly illustrate Patrick’s envy, such as the following conversation which takes place during a concert:

“Are you still handling the Fisher account?” I shout back.

“Yeah,” he screams. “Lucked out, huh, Marcus?”

“You sure did,” I scream. “How did you get it?”

“Well, I had the Ransom account and things just fell into place.” He shrugs helplessly, the smooth bastard. “You know?”

“Wow,” I shout.

“Yeah,” he shouts back [...].

“I want it,” I shout, staring at his perfect, even part; even his scalp is tan.

“You want *what*?” he shouts back. “Marijuana?”

“No. Nothing,” I scream, my throat raw, and I slump back into my seat, stare emptily at the stage, biting my thumbnail, ruining yesterday’s manicure. (141-142)

If it was not for Patrick’s explicit admission that he would like to handle the Fisher account, with which Paul Owen was trusted, his calling Paul a “smooth bastard” (142) and biting his thumbnail are proof enough of Patrick’s intimidation through his firm colleague, who keeps mistaking Patrick for another person called Marcus Halberstram. The rivalry continues even after Paul’s assassination, when Patrick takes a group of escort girls to his victim’s apartment, which they think is Patrick’s:

“You live in a palace, mister,” one of the girls, Torri, says in a baby’s voice, awed by Owen’s ridiculous-looking condo. “It’s a real palace.”

Annoyed, I shoot her a glance. “It’s not *that* nice.” (*American* 290-291)

Patrick may not be able to remove the threat that “Owen’s ridiculous-looking condo” (290) poses to his own apartment, but he is able to eliminate Paul Owen himself by

hacking him to death with an axe and then disposing of his dead body. Thus, Paul is robbed of something more essential than his materialist riches, namely the life of his physical body, which is a considerable loss, if only because of the value ascribed to Owen's handsome appearance. Making somebody vanish, thus, turns into an effective means of triumphing over a rival and securing power.

Bethany is introduced into the narration by Patrick as "a girl I dated at Harvard and who I was subsequently dumped by" (*American* 202). In addition to holding a grudge against Bethany for breaking up with him, as the use of the expression 'dumped' in this quote and his "becoming angry, remembering the lunch in Cambridge, at Quarters, where Bethany, her arm in a sling, a faint bruise above her cheek, ended it all" (202-203) suggest, Patrick still seems to harbour romantic feelings for his ex-girlfriend. Upon meeting Bethany outside of a restaurant, Patrick is "stunned" (202) and noticeably nervous, "stutter[ing], after an awkward byte of silence" (202) before he ends their conversation abruptly. When Patrick and Bethany meet for lunch at a later point of the story, the protagonist's reflections and behaviour are again indicative of his inability to come to terms with their break-up: He seems particularly bent on looking good, working out and trying out a new hair mousse; he buys a collection of short stories as to avoid running out of conversation topics; and he writes poems for Bethany, remembering that he "used to write her poems, long dark ones, quite often when we were both at Harvard, before we broke up" (221). At the restaurant, Patrick, who usually distinguishes himself with his lack of tenderness and affections for his girlfriend and other women in his life, is smitten with Bethany's beauty and seems on the verge of abandoning his usual indifference towards romance:

[T]hough I try to ignore her for as long as etiquette allows, I can't. Bethany looks absolutely stunning, *just like a model*. Everything's murky. I'm on edge. Feverish, romantic notions – (222)

However, once again, Patrick's admiration of Bethany is tinged with negative sentiment. He describes himself as being "on edge" and "feverish", thus triggering associations to disease. The narrator's account, hence, conveys the impression that Bethany is the one holding power whereas Patrick is susceptible to nervousness and anxiety. Yet, this distribution of power is eventually subverted as Patrick brutally tortures and kills his ex-girlfriend. So, while it is initially the male protagonist who nervously struggles for words, Bethany is eventually, through his atrocious torture and murder, not only barred from uttering any words ever again but altogether eliminated as

a visibly present subject, who was once able to enchant Patrick with her “absolutely stunning” appearance.

Thus, both Paul Owen and Bethany vanish by being killed at the hands of Patrick Bateman, but their vanishing through death is not symptomatic of an already experienced disempowerment, as it is the case, for instance, with Sean’s admirer in *The Rules of Attraction*. The elimination of their physical presence is a means rather than an end, leading to a loss of the power which they previously held in their positions as the ex-girlfriend who dumped Patrick and the rival Wall Street broker respectively. Hence, by assimilating characters to the mythical figure of Echo, it is possible to degrade people even if they are, like Paul Owen, of a disposition reminiscent of Echo’s self-absorbed male counterpart, and in this manner, power relations initially leaning in favour of one person can be altered in favour of another.

Yet, this need to deprive a person of their power is also revealing of someone else’s fear and weaknesses. It has already been noted in the chapter dealing with silencing that *American Psycho*’s Patrick Bateman, who appears to be the personification of narcissism par excellence, occasionally allows for parallels to be drawn to Echo, the punished nymph. Following her rejection by Narcissus, Echo gradually vanishes until she is no longer substantial. In their introduction to a volume dealing with the concept of voice from the perspective of different disciplines, Kolesch and Krämer (11-12) comment on the link between a person’s voice and their individual personality, describing the human voice as “index of a person’s singularity” (“Index der Singularität einer Person”; 11) and as “a person’s unmistakable stamp” (“unverwechselbares Indiz der Person”; 12). From this it follows that the vanishing of Echo’s body may be equated with an elimination of all traces of her identity, as all that remains is a voice that solely repeats other people’s words and thus has lost its function as an unmistakable stamp of the nymph’s self. Patrick’s loss of individualism under the capitalist and consumerist pressures has already been discussed as a form of silencing his inner voice. This silencing, like the one suffered by Echo, ties in with a vanishing of his individual identity, which is illustrated by the numerous instances in which Patrick is mistaken for another person: His former university colleague and business associate Christopher Armstrong addresses him by the name “Taylor” (*American* 132); Christie, the prostitute whom he frequently employs, calls him “Paul” (165); another colleague working with Patrick at P&P greets him as “Davis” (171); a stranger in a restaurant believes him to be

a person named “Ted Owens” (251), and someone else mistakes him for an investment banker called “Saul” and congratulates Patrick on an account which he does not handle (251-252). Moreover, it has already been mentioned that Paul Owen keeps confusing Patrick with another investment banker named Marcus Halberstam (86, 107, 137, 141, 206-208). The undermining of Patrick’s identity becomes most obvious when the protagonist actually decides to adopt Halberstam’s identity while attending a concert with Paul (137-142). For this purpose, Patrick even asks Halberstam’s girlfriend, Cecilia, to accompany him to the concert, and when she declines, he simply resorts to calling Evelyn by the name of Cecilia. All these mistaken or assumed identities are indicative of how Patrick, in a manner not unlike Echo’s, becomes indistinguishable from his surroundings, vanishing in a mass of similarly handsome, successful and wealthy Wall Street brokers. The protagonist himself refers to this phenomenon towards the end of the novel:

[T]here is an idea of Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. (362)

As Patrick points out, by adopting the ideals purported by his society, he becomes “an entity” along many others whose “lifestyles are probably comparable”. What remains is a shell perceptible to the senses, consisting of “flesh gripping yours”, but the “real me” vanishes, which prompts Patrick to a disconcerting conclusion: “*I simply am not there*”. Blazer aptly defines the dilemma of *American Psycho*’s protagonist:

Bateman is an idea and an image, but empty and void of deep identity. As a walking billboard for elite, conspicuous consumption and high-end product placement, he lacks inner resources and glosses over an emotionally sterile existence. (Blazer)

The quote captures the character’s duality of being present and yet absent. That is, Patrick is visibly present as a well-groomed, well-dressed, and well-equipped Wall Street yuppie, but his individual personality disappears behind this façade of conspicuous consumption.

In her article on Echo, Gehring (101-107) states that as a result of being deprived of the ability to express herself and thus to communicate with other people, the nymph suffers a “social” death. The strings of words that Echo is forced to repeat as soon as she hears somebody talking in her immediate surroundings may be meaningful. Yet, these words

still fail as means of communication and socialization, because they do not extend the nymph's mind to her social environment, which will cease to perceive her as a "communicative body" ("kommunikativen Leib"; Gehring 106). Hence, Echo's "communicative body" dies in consequence of Juno's punishment, and since communication constitutes an integral part of a human being's existence, her physical body is bound to follow suit.

Sean's admirer in *The Rules of Attraction* is possibly the most striking example of a character in Ellis' fiction suffering a "social" death which precedes her actual death. There is little information about the anonymous girl, whose name remains unknown to the reader, because aside from her love letters to Sean, there are only a few chapters narrated from her point of view and scarcely any references to her in other characters' narrations. It is, in fact, only after her suicide that she is mentioned in any form by other characters. The girl's absence before her tragic demise is indicative of her isolation, which is reminiscent of Echo's "social" death in that the girl's social environment does not perceive her as a subject to communicate with or even talk about.⁷ As has already been mentioned, Sean even fails to acknowledge her as the "communicative body" responsible for the love letters which he has been receiving. That is to say, in her love letters, the girl is, similar to the punished nymph, reduced to a voice disassociated from its source, and there is hardly any evidence of her bodily existence until she eventually disappears with her suicide.

The death of Sean's admirer is passed on among the other characters as a piece of gossip, but they show no genuine interest in the person being talked about, who is merely identified as a "girl". Sean, for instance, acknowledges the incident as a side note lacking all sympathy for the victim's misery: "Lauren said some girl offed herself last night. Frank and I laughed and said it was probably because she didn't get screwed" (*Rules* 203). Consider also Roxanne's account of her discovery of the dead body, which is likewise revealing with regard to the anonymous girl's position among her peers:

I found the girl when I woke up the next morning...
[...]
... I wanted to take a shower so I...

⁷ The girl's social exclusion is visually captured in Roger Avary's filmic adaptation by means of a sequence that is shown after the girl's suicide and consists of flashbacks to previous scenes in which the girl appeared and is likely to have gone unnoticed by the audience.

When I opened the stall door I had to pull back the...

The girl was (it's hard to describe) very blue... (198)

In this passage, Sean's admirer is described in terms of her physical condition as a dead body, but she is stripped of any biographical details such as her name, her regular outward appearance or any other aspect that define her as a distinct person.

Lauren Hynde is one of the protagonists in *The Rules of Attraction*, and as opposed to the anonymous girl who commits suicide, she is prominently featured in the entries narrated by the other two protagonists, which consist of Lauren's ex-boyfriend Paul Denton and Sean Bateman, who becomes romantically involved with her. Despite starting a relationship with Sean, Lauren is still in love with a boy called Victor Johnson, whom she dated before he travelled to Europe. The intensity of her emotional attachment to him is reflected throughout her narration: "I just think about Victor and lay there. Victor" (*Rules* 16), "Touch myself. Think of Victor" (39), "I picture poor handsome Victor in Rome or Paris" (57), "I can't stop thinking about you Victor. Dear, dear Victor" (90-91), and "I'm dreaming about Victor" (145) represent a small selection of quotes capturing Lauren's obsession with Victor. Even insignificant occurrences and trivial activities, such as listening to music, may trigger long streams of thoughts centred on Victor in Lauren's mind:

I [...] think of memories the song brings me. Of Victor. Victor's hands. Victor's leopard-skin pants. Ripped army boots and... his pubic hair? His arms. Watching him shave. At the Palladium, how handsome he looked in a tuxedo. Making love in his apartment. Brown eyes. (39-40)

While Victor Johnson, who later becomes the protagonist of Ellis' *Glamorama* under the name Victor Ward, is ubiquitous in Lauren's mind, Lauren is noticeably absent in most of his narration, being mentioned only once:

Suddenly this girl I sort of saw a little bit last summer walks up to me crying softly – the last thing I need. She looks at me and says, 'You don't know what a drag it is to see you.' Then she throws herself on me, hugging tightly. I just say, 'Hey, wait a minute.' It was just some rich girl from Park and 80th who I kind of screwed around with last term who's kind of pretty, who's good in bed, who has a nice body. (320)

Victor's description of his encounter with Lauren after his trip to Europe stands in striking opposition to Lauren's constant enamoured references to him. Not only are Victor's words utterly devoid of romantic feelings, but they also suggest that Lauren, who is merely identified as "some rich girl", has largely vanished from the memory of

her love interest. This assumption is supported by the fact that in *Glamorama*, which is set several years after *The Rules of Attraction*, Victor does not remember a girl named Lauren Hynde, let alone having dated her (*Glamorama* 34).

Ellis' *The Rules of Attraction* also features a male character that bears some resemblance to the mythological nymph spurned by her lover, namely Paul Denton. Over the course of the story, Paul falls in love with Sean and becomes involved in a sexual relationship with him. Yet, while Paul thoroughly describes their sexual encounters, these accounts are entirely absent in the chapters narrated by Sean, who scarcely makes reference to Paul, and if he does, he describes him merely as a friend. At one point, Paul tells Sean that his best friend has died as a ploy to elicit pity and have sex with him. Paul details their intimate moments over several pages, whereas Sean summarizes the same encounter as follows, omitting any references to sexual activities:

Go to Denton's room. We drink some cold ones and smoke some pot and talk but I can't deal with the friend's death story and the Duran Duran music and his weirdo stares so we talk a little while longer and I get wasted. Then I leave and wander around campus. (*Rules* 89)

These omissions in Sean's narration may be interpreted in a way that harks back to the previous chapter on silences. In her discussion of different types of silences to which women writers are subjected, Olsen (44) also refers to a particular kind of silencing, namely censorship and, more specifically, self-censorship. The lack of references to any sexual incidents between Paul and Sean in the latter's narration may be considered as a case of self-censorship imposed by hetero-normative ideals that can still be found in Western societies. Seen from this angle, it is Sean rather than Paul who is placed in the position of Echo, because while Paul is able to talk openly about his homosexual desires and relationships, Sean is silenced by a society that privileges one sexual orientation over another.⁸

The phrase 'disappear here', which is featured in the present paper's title as well as in the heading of the section dealing with Echo, is first found in Ellis' debut novel *Less Than Zero*, as Clay, the protagonist, drives aimlessly around Los Angeles and a billboard catches his attention:

⁸ The interpretation of Sean's silence about his homosexual affair with Paul as an act of self-censorship is further supported by a paratextual comment that was posted by Bret Easton Ellis on his twitter account and explicitly identifies Sean Bateman as "gay" (Ellis "Yes").

I turn the radio up, loud. The streets are totally empty and I drive fast. I come to a red light, tempted to go through it, then stop once I see a billboard that I don't remember seeing and I look up at it. All it says is 'Disappear Here' and even though it's probably an ad for some resort, it still freaks me out a little and I step on the gas really hard and the car screeches as I leave the light. (*Less* 30)

Clay's upset reaction upon seeing the billboard indicates that rather than evoking escapist associations with holiday resorts, the words on the sign assume a meaning closer to 'vanishing' or 'ceasing to exist'. There is another instance in *Less Than Zero* featuring the phrase 'disappear here' which is revealing of its significance in the novel:

I get to the club before anyone else does and while the attendant parks my car, I sit on a bench and wait for them, staring out at the expanse of sand that meets the water, where the land ends. Disappear here (64)

As in the first quotation, the phrase 'disappear here' is found in connection with descriptions of Clay's spatial surroundings: In the first passage, Clay finds himself on empty streets, driving past billboards, whereas in the second scene, his attention is directed to the sand and water by a beach club. This link between space on the one hand and the words 'disappear here' on the other hand suggests that the ominous phrase may be read as a comment on the novel's geographical setting.

The following discussion of this link and its implications is, to a large extent, based on Delschen's (20-22) analysis of the representation of Los Angeles in Ellis' *Less Than Zero*. In her analysis, Delschen notes that Clay frequently provides descriptions of his home town that are loaded with negative connotations. To begin with, Los Angeles is continually depicted as a city affected by adverse weather conditions. At one point, Clay notices, for instance, "the remains of palm trees that have fallen during the winds" (*Less* 2), and he describes his unease as he hears the wind roaring outside his family home: "From my bed, later that night, I can hear the windows throughout the house rattling, and I get really freaked out and keep thinking that they're going to crack and shatter" (54). Moreover, the protagonist makes occasional reference to the burning sun, which is dauntingly described as "huge and burning, an orange monster" (160) and as "gigantic, a ball of fire" (183).

Yet, it is not only nature with its strong winds, heat waves, and even earthquakes (*Less* 130) that devastates Los Angeles. Social problems, such as drug trafficking, violence, and other crimes, which also occur within Clay's close circle of acquaintances, similarly shed a negative light on the so-called City of Angels. For instance, Julian, the

protagonist's best friend from high school, who has become addicted to heroin, turns to prostitution in order to cover the debts to his drug dealer (160-165). Trent invites Clay and some other friends over to his house in order to show them a snuff film in which an underage girl is cruelly tortured and violated (141-143). Rip, who deals drugs to Julian, holds a twelve-year old girl as a sex slave, keeping her drugged and tied up in his bedroom (175-178). The following passage, which is taken from a flashback to Clay's childhood, extends this atmosphere of crime to other parts of the United States:

And I remember that at that time I started collecting all these newspaper clippings; one about some twelve-year-old kid who accidentally shot his brother in Chino; another about a guy in Indio who nailed his kid to a wall, or a door, and one about a fire at a home for the elderly that killed twenty and one about a housewife who while driving her children home from school flew off this eighty-foot embankment near San Diego, instantly killing herself and the three kids and one about a man who calmly and purposefully ran over his ex-wife somewhere near Reno, paralyzing her below the neck. I collected a lot of clippings during that time because, I guess, there were a lot to be collected. (68)

According to Delschen, this portrayal of the United States as a place marked by violence and corruption creates "a nightmarish version of the *American dream*" ("eine Alptraumvariante des *American dream*"; 21). The celebrated land of freedom, prosperity and promise is thus turned into a site of slavery, oppression, and dismal prospects. It is particularly this lack of prospects and ambitions, which the words 'disappear here' evoke, that is explored in *Less Than Zero*, as well as in other works by Ellis,⁹ and that is also connected to Echo, whose disappearance as a visibly perceivable subject ties in with the vanishing of all her hopes and perspectives following Juno's punishment and the rejection by Narcissus.

In *Less Than Zero*, there are two further occurrences of the phrase 'disappear here' in addition to those previously discussed, and both relate to Clay's heroin-addicted friend, Julian. First, Clay uses the words while he is forced to watch Julian prostituting himself:

I light a cigarette.

The man rolls Julian over.

Wonder if he's for sale.

⁹ Consider, for instance, Les' description of his son as exhibiting "great waves of uncertainty, an absence of aim, of purpose as if he is a person who simply doesn't matter" (*Informers* 64), which was already discussed on p. 24.

I don't close my eyes.

You can disappear here without knowing. (*Less* 164-165)

The words come again to the narrator's mind as he observes Julian being given a heroin injection:

Disappear here.

The syringe fills with blood.

You're a beautiful boy and that's all that matters.

Wonder if he's for sale.

People are afraid to merge. To merge. (171)

Both excerpts are rendered in stream-of-consciousness, capturing Clay's thoughts as he witnesses Julian's downfall. The short sentences, each of which is given in a separate line, convey a sense of stress and unease. Yet, instead of averting the gaze by closing his eyes, which would give away his disempowering emotions, Clay copes with the disturbing prostitution of his friend in a different manner, telling himself that "[y]ou can disappear here without knowing" (165). When discussing the billboard that catches Clay's attention as he drives by, it has been noted that the words on the sign may be interpreted in two different ways: On the one hand, the phrase 'disappear here' is intended to denote a sense of escapism, alluding to the recreational benefits of holiday resorts. Accordingly, Clay's thought may be interpreted as an appeal to himself to escape to the sanctity of his mind and drift into his own thoughts. Yet, more importantly in this context, the words 'disappear here' on the billboard may be associated with the effects of isolation and indifference, which cause people to disappear in other people's minds. Viewed in this light, the sentence "You can disappear here without knowing" (165) turns into a suggestion by Clay to dismiss any concern for his former best friend. In the second passage, the imperative "Disappear here" (171) implies the same renunciation of any thoughts and concerns for the heroin addict. Hence, Julian may be defined as a tragic poster child for this phrase because, as a drug-addicted prostitute, he is not only left with bleak prospects for his future but, like Echo, he also falls prey to other people's indifference or wilful ignorance and thus vanishes from their minds. Julian's ostracism is made more explicit by the fact that he does not appear in person until fairly late in the story (81). Clay's acquaintances make occasional references to Julian, but they either choose to be ignorant of his misery or are indifferent to it. For this reason, it takes Clay some time to uncover his friend's heroin addiction and work as a prostitute. Yet, when he becomes privy to Julian's problems, he adopts the same

deliberate indifference that also empowers Narcissus in Ovid's tale and contributes to Echo's undoing.

The phrase 'disappear here' can also be found in other works by Ellis, pointing to the vanishing of characters, who, like Echo, suffer the loss of their identity or sometimes even that of their physical existence altogether. Asked about recurring characters and motifs in his novels and short stories during an interview, Ellis said the following:

There are [...] a lot of signifiers that refer to my earlier work. Near the end of *Glamorama*, Victor comes across the words "Disappear Here" painted on a bedroom wall. My point being that the worlds of *Less Than Zero* and *Glamorama* aren't really that much different. After fourteen years I've changed in some ways, but the fictive universe I'm creating really hasn't. The concerns are the same, the themes are the same, the tonality of the writing is the same. (Clarke 91)

Thus, the words 'disappear here' reverberate, like an echo, through Ellis' novels and short stories, and they set a mood defined by aimlessness, alienation, and violence, in which people gradually disappear. In the quote, Ellis points out one scene in *Glamorama* in which Victor Ward sees the words 'disappear here' scribbled on the wall of his bedroom (*Glamorama* 416). The novel's protagonist is again confronted with the ominous mantra when he finds the battered body of Jamie Fields, a model-cum-actress whom Victor knows from Camden College and who has joined a terrorist group comprised of famous fashion models:

And in a corner a vague shape is slumped over and when I freeze, noticing it, the courtyard suddenly becomes quiet, which is my cue to slowly move closer.

Above Jamie's head, another sloppy pentagram and in streaky red letters the words:

DiSAp pEarr

HERe

[...] Her eyes are closed and when she opens them she recognizes me but shows no particular interest and we just stare at each other uncertainly, both with dead eyes. She's wearing a white Gucci pantsuit, the collar lightly spattered with blood, but I can't see any wounds because someone has wrapped her in plastic. (421)

At this point of the narration, both Victor and Jamie have distanced themselves from the terrorist group and have thus turned themselves into targets of the group's leader, Bobby Hughes. They have realized that the terrorist group is based on no mutual respect or solidarity and that its members are merely pawns at the disposal of Bobby. In *Glamorama*, the phrase 'disappear here', which haunts the protagonist, points not so

much to Bobby's indifference towards his colleagues as to the little value which he generally assigns to other people's life and his ruthlessness in making them disappear. In the passage quoted above, Jamie and Victor, whose horror upon reading Bobby's intimidating message in his bedroom is illustrated by his "sag[ging] against the wall and [...] gripping the gun so tightly [he] can barely feel it" (416), are described as "star[ing] at each other [...] with dead eyes" (421). Jamie is reduced to "a vague shape slumped over" (421) with "the voice of a ghost" (421). The narrator's description of the model as being "just a shell" (425) and "wrapped in plastic" (421), which obstructs the view to her body and the wounds inflicted to her, further highlights how she is drained of life after being drained of her personality and her free will due to Bobby's manipulation, but more on the latter in the following chapter.

Redding (108) notes that there are several other aspects in Ellis' *Glamorama* that hint at the unstable nature of Victor's existence as an individual of his own. As in *American Psycho*, where Patrick is repeatedly mistaken for another person, Victor's own agent confuses the protagonist with someone named Dagby, and even after the misunderstanding is resolved, the agent fails to recognize his client:

"It's *me*. Victor Ward. I'm opening like the biggest club in New York tomorrow night."

Pause, then, "No..."

"I modelled for Paul Smith. I did a Calvin Kleid ad."

Pause, then, "No..." I can hear him slouching, repositioning himself.

"I'm the guy who everyone thought David Geffen was dating but wasn't."

"That's really not enough."

"I date Chloe Byrnes," I'm shouting. "Chloe Byrnes, like, the supermodel?"

"I've heard of *her* but not *you*, Dagby." (*Glamorama* 30)

In this telephone conversation, Victor's identity is not only mistaken for that of another person, but his existence altogether is called into question. Yet, as Redding points out, it is Victor's own image that poses the biggest threat to his identity. Victor strives to be part of celebrity culture, which tends to transform people into images of themselves. The power of these images becomes apparent when both Victor's career as a manager of a club in Manhattan and his relationship to Chloe are ruined by the publication of a photograph showing Victor kissing his boss' girlfriend. After forcibly joining Bobby's terrorist organization in Europe, Victor is repeatedly blackmailed by Bobby and his

companions who threaten to publish forged pictures of Victor killing the son of a South Korean ambassador. So, Victor is continually at risk of being undone by his own image. At one point, he even discovers that while he is held captive in Europe, a doppelganger has been leading his life in Manhattan, dating Chloe Bynes, who even expects the impostor's child, and meeting up with Victor's sister, Sally:

"Sally, it's really me, please-" I gasp.

"It's for you," I hear her say.

The sound of the phone being passed to someone else.

"Hello?" a voice asks.

I don't say anything, just listen intently.

"Hello?" the voice asks again. "This is Victor Johnson," the voice says. "Who is this?"

Silence.

"It'd be really cool if you stopped bothering my sister," the voice says. "Okay?"

Silence.

"Goodbye," the voice says.

A click.

I'm disconnected. (476)

In the course of the dialogue, Victor's doppelganger not only silences the original, but also eliminates the protagonist's identity as indicated by his being "disconnected". Thus, in a manner reminiscent of Baudrillard's claim that the real is displaced by the simulacrum so that there are only simulations without any original referents (Barry 87-89; Connor 55-56; Woods 25-27), the original Victor vanishes as he is being usurped by a double. This displacement of the real by a simulation may again be linked to Ovid's Echo, who is, like Victor, haunted by repetition, namely the vocal repetition to which she is condemned. Thereby, Echo's original voice is replaced by a simulation that, apart from its sound, bears no relation to the original as it is only capable of uttering other people's words rather than those of the nymph.

The chapter shall be concluded with a final example of a character's vanishing in Ellis' fiction. The short story "Sitting Still" is narrated by a young girl called Susan, who travels by train in order to attend her father's wedding. Susan does not approve of her father's new wife-to-be, Cheryl, but she finds herself unable to express her objection to Cheryl, even when specifically asked by her father:

“Don’t you like [Cheryl]?”

“How’s Cheryl?”

He smiles, looks down, then at me. “I think we’re getting married.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“That’s, um, so, congratulations,” I say. “Great.”

He looks at me quizzically, then asks, “Do you really think that’s great?”

I lift the glass to my mouth and tap the side to get the ice at the bottom.

“Well, it’s, um, slowly dawning on me that you might be serious.”

(*Informers* 80)

In this flashback to a conversation with her father during which he first told her about the wedding, Susan refrains from answering her father’s questions and voicing her doubts because she wishes to please him and is afraid of hurting his feelings, as evasive remarks such as “I’m not marrying Cheryl. You are” (80) or “You don’t need [my approval]” (81) suggest. When Susan calls her brother, Graham, asking him, “on the verge of tears” (85) and then “sobbing quietly” (85), to talk their father out of the wedding, her inability to take action is again demonstrated and symbolically emphasized by her “biting [her] fist” (85). Yet, Graham shows himself indifferent to Susan’s pleas, and her mother also fails to offer her any comfort, talking “tiredly” (86) with a “voice disembodied, a monotone” (85) and taking no apparent delight in hearing the news of her daughter’s coming home. Upon her arrival at the train station in Los Angeles, Susan decides to stay on the train and continue her journey with no specific destination (92-93). Susan’s flight from the wedding, which, due to its lack of destination, may be considered as a kind vanishing, illustrates the character’s disempowerment in that it is not only emblematic of the abandonment by her family, but it is also prompted by her inability to confront her problems, which is further emphasized by the short story’s title, “Sitting Still”.

Different manifestations of vanishing among the characters of Ellis’ fiction have been discussed in this section, and the reasons for their vanishing are just as manifold. A common cause of disappearance is the indifference that character encounter among their social environment. Some characters suffer, like Ovid’s lovelorn nymph, from being ignored by their loved ones, such as Lauren and Paul in *The Rules of Attraction* or Susan in the short story “Sitting Still”. Others, including Julian in *Less Than Zero* and Sean’s unnamed admirer in *The Rules of Attraction*, are subjected to social ostracism on

a larger scale, as they are not acknowledged by their peers or their acquaintances choose to be ignorant to their problems. Other characters, such as Patrick in *American Psycho* and the members of Bobby Hughes' terrorist organization in *Glamorama*, vanish as they are robbed of their identity and forced to conform to beliefs and values that are not their own. The disappearance of *Glamorama*'s protagonist is triggered by celebrity culture and media pervasiveness as he is gradually replaced by an image of himself. Finally, violence has been discussed as a cause of characters' disappearance found in *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*, with cannibalistic murder constituting one of the most explicit forms of stripping a character from their physical existence. The following chapter will turn to a topic that has already been touched upon on a few occasions and that will be examined now in thorough detail, namely the loss of free will.

4.1.3. Loss of free will

According Gehring (92-97), Juno's punishment of Echo, who is introduced into Ovid's mythological tale as "strange-voiced nymph [...] who must speak / If any other speak and cannot speak / Unless another speak" (Ovid iii.357-359), may be divided into three kinds: the compulsion to speak upon hearing somebody talking, the compulsion to repeat the words uttered by the other person, and the compulsion to truncate the previous utterance. The word 'compulsion' is of crucial importance in this context because it emphasizes the loss of Echo's free will. Upon hearing a person talking in her immediate surroundings, she has no choice over whether to talk or to remain silent. As if that weren't enough, the nymph is denied the possibility to choose her words freely. Such loss of free will is also thematized in the novels and short stories by Bret Easton Ellis, and like silencing and vanishing, this infringement of a character's freedom may take various forms in the American author's fiction.

To begin with, Ellis' characters may be limited in their ability to make choices free from constraints in that they are manipulated to suit other people's interests. A character who generally exhibits many parallels to Ovid's Echo and who is worth being analyzed with regard to manipulation is Patrick Bateman's secretary, Jean, who is, in a manner reminiscent of the mythological nymph, in love with her narcissistic superior. Patrick is well aware of Jean's romantic feelings, making continuous references to her attraction to him and even introducing her into the narration as "[m]y secretary, Jean, who is in love with me" (*American* 61). Yet, in his utter self-absorption, he is unable to reciprocate Jean's love, and merely toys with her feelings in order to skew her for his

own purposes. There is a scene, for instance, in which Patrick comments on how Jean naively believes some of the lies he tells and how she is willing to adopt his outrageous opinions for the mere sake of pleasing him:

[W]hen she asks where the restaurant got its name, I tell her, and I don't make anything ridiculous up – though I'm tempted, just to see if she'd believe it anyway. Sitting across from Jean right now in the darkness of Arcadia, it's very easy to believe that she would swallow any kind of misinformation I push her way – the crush she has on me rendering her powerless – and I find this lack of defense oddly unerotic. I could even explain my pro-apartheid stance and have her find reasons why she too should share it and invest large sums of money in racist corporations tha- [sic]. (253)

The passage quoted above illustrates Patrick's awareness of how Jean's thoughts and words can be easily manipulated according to his own whims. So, like Echo, who as a response to Narcissus' "I'll die before I yield to you" (Ovid 3.391) replies "I yield to you" (3.392), Jean is so overwhelmed by her feelings for Patrick that she allows him to wield power over her and control her will.

It is not only Jean's opinions on apartheid that are susceptible to manipulation. The following quote reveals that Jean's sartorial choices are, in fact, also motivated by the wish to please Patrick:

[T]his morning, to get my attention as usual, [Jean] is wearing something improbably expensive and completely inappropriate: a Chanel cashmere cardigan, a cashmere crewneck and a cashmere scarf, faux-pearl earrings, wool-crepe pants from Barney's. (*American* 61)

Patrick provides further demonstration of his control over Jean when he criticizes her outfit and tells her to wear a dress or a skirt and high heels instead. Although Jean responds to his words with reluctance, Patrick is confident of his hold over her: "'Thanks Patrick,' she says sarcastically, though I bet tomorrow she'll be wearing a dress" (64). The protagonist is finally proven right in his confident self-assessment because, at later points in the narrative, Jean is described as wearing "a crocheted rayon-ribbon skirt" (102) with "red suede pumps" (102) in one scene and "a flannel dress by Calvin Klein" (249) in another. Jean readily transforms herself into "a doll" (63), as the protagonist refers to her at one point, and as such, she does not act according to her own will but "just stands there waiting for instructions" (62). Even when asked for her own opinion, Jean puts Patrick's wishes before her own:

"Listen, where should we go?" I lean back and pull my Zagat from the desk's top drawer.

She pauses, afraid of what to say, taking my question as a test she needs to pass, and then, unsure she's chosen the right answer, "Anywhere you want?" (247-248)

Well aware of Jean's "total devotion" (64), Patrick sends her on ludicrous personal errands, such as looking for a tanning bed (63), "sign[ing], stamp[ing] and mail[ing] three hundred designer Christmas cards" (169), and typing a hateful note addressed to Evelyn after breaking up with her (368). Without any protest, in spite of being occasionally astonished by his demands, Jean always follows Patrick's orders dutifully and thus allows the novel's protagonist to skew her for his own ends.

The fictional universe shared by Ellis' novels and short stories also features characters that forcibly lose their free will at the hands of others. In the previous chapter, some references have already been made to the manipulation of *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward at the hands of Bobby Hughes. Bobby is a retired fashion model who is portrayed as being charismatic and charming. The power that Bobby wields over Victor becomes immediately apparent when the protagonist meets him for the first time (*Glamorama* 266-270). During this meeting, Victor, who tends to be very self-assured and boastful, is "distressed" (270), and he talks "hesitantly" (270) and "nervously" (268) with "a shy smile" (266) and a "voice totally strained" (270). He continuously agrees with Bobby, saying repeatedly that he is "so with [him]" (269), and contrary to his arrogant nature, he compliments the former model on his physical appearance as well as his being an inspiration for other male models. Thus, it takes Victor some time to "finally ease[...] into a more comfortable vibe" (268), but he continues to be taken by Bobby's charisma and charms, the effects of which are captured in the following passage:

[S]ince I'm not really used to being around guys who are so much better-looking than Victor Ward, it's all kind of nerve-racking and I'm listening more intently to him than to any man I've ever met because the unavoidable fact is: he's too good-looking to resist. He can't help but lure. (267)

So, Bobby is, like Narcissus, endowed with physical advantages with which he not only managed to become a supermodel but is also capable to "lure" people. Victor, on the other hand, resembles Echo in that he is enchanted by the beauty of the supermodel, which captivates his attention and renders him vulnerable to manipulation. In the course of the narrative, Victor becomes even more constrained in his actions and opinions as he discovers the other side of Bobby Hughes. In addition to being a charismatic retired model, Bobby is the domineering leader of a terrorist organization that consists solely of

fashion models. Initially unaware of the models' terrorist scheming, Victor is forced to join the group after walking in on Bobby and his companions as they torture and murder Sam Ho, the son of a South Korean ambassador. Similar to Ovid's nymph who is deprived of the choice whether or not to talk, Victor is not allowed to decide whether or not to engage in the organization's activities. As is made explicit in several scenes, he is no longer able to act according to his own inner guidance, but he must follow Bobby's instructions: Victor is ordered to mingle with celebrities at parties which Bobby and his colleagues attend (289, 299), he is told what to wear on different occasions (287, 312), and he is given assignments that contribute to the group's terrorist activities (316). Victor's loss of free will is probably most evident when he is instructed to place a bag in a train without being informed about the bag's content, a bomb that will kill and injure numerous people (318-319). Without his consent and even his knowing, Victor is turned into a pawn serving the terrorists' interests, and – as highlighted by Bobby's question addressed to Victor, "[W]hat if one day you become whatever you're not?" (287) – the protagonist's will is ultimately substituted for that of another person.

As has already been discussed in the chapter on silences, characters in Ellis' fiction frequently resort to substance abuse as a means of numbing their own emotions and feelings, which are commonly perceived as sources of vulnerability. In *Glamorama*, the empowering effect of drugs is subverted when Victor no longer takes Xanax of his own accord but is obliged to do so by others – more precisely, by Bobby and his companions, who use the prescription drug as a means of weakening Victor's will power. Victor is forcibly administered drugs for the first time when he suffers a nervous breakdown upon witnessing the torture and murder of Sam Ho. While Bobby keeps feeding Victor Xanax, the model tells him to be calm and silent about what he saw and to stay with the terrorist group in Europe, forbidding him to return to the United States. All the while, Bobby talks – in striking opposition to Victor, who is crying hysterically – in a composed manner, "nodding slowly, his eyes radiating patience, as if he were talking to a little kid" (285), which highlights the imbalanced power relation between the two characters. Entirely subsumed to the whims of others, Victor finally tells Bobby and his companions that he is "exhausted" and "fading" (366), which, in a manner reminiscent of Echo's disappearance, is indicative of his disempowerment and the loss of his personality as a result of being robbed of his freedom.

Victor's subordination to external powers is further emphasized by continual references to film crews which allegedly follow the narrator and film the terrorist group's activities as if they were merely fictional events in a film. The first of these references is found after Victor's affair with Lauren Hynde is exposed and his life as a minor celebrity in Manhattan starts to fall apart. From this point onward, members of film crews follow Victor with a camera and give him directions on how to act, telling him, for instance, that he does "not look[...] worried enough" (*Glamorama* 168) or that he need to "[l]ook anguished" (175). In the latter instance, the protagonist's emotions are further manipulated by "drop[ping] a couple glycerine tears onto [his] face" (174). At one point, Victor, who fears that his girlfriend Chloe, a recovering drug addict, may suffer a relapse due to his exposed affair with Lauren, tries to run to her apartment, but he is stopped by the director of a crew, who reminds him that his character is not supposed to act in such a sympathetic manner (178-179). There are several aspects hinting at the imaginary nature of these film crews, such as the following passage in which Victor outlines the life of Bruce, a member of Bobby's terrorist organization:

The actor playing Bruce had a promising career as a basketball player at Duke and then followed Danny Ferry to Italy where Bruce immediately got modelling jobs and in Milan he met Bobby who was dating Tammy Devol at the time and things just flew from there. (293)

In the sentence quoted above, Victor shifts from talking about "[t]he actor playing Bruce" to referring to the same person as merely "Bruce". Since there are no further references to an actor playing Bruce aside from this quote, it is likely that the film, including its crew and cast members, is merely a hallucination of Victor, in whose mind the line between the real and the imaginary is increasingly blurred as he faces the tumultuous events in his life. The continuous presence of imaginary film crews can be interpreted in different ways. In an interview, Ellis suggests that it may be read as a comment on the rise of mass surveillance in Western societies (Clarke 90-91). In addition, Victor's hallucinations represent ways of coming to terms with the trouble and horrors in which he has become involved. By fictionalizing the terrorist attacks carried out by Bobby's organization and likening the fatally wounded victims to "dead-body dumm[ies]" (*Glamorama* 354), the gravity of the crimes is diminished. Victor himself is not exempt from this form of fictionalization. In the scene in which Victor unknowingly partakes in a terrorist attack by placing a bomb in a train, the protagonist makes reference, for instance, to "[t]his shot [...] of [him] taking a shower" (318), "[a] quick

montage of [his] character dressing” (318), and “[a] shot of Victor forcing a smile” (318). Transforming himself into a fictional character referred to in the third person allows Victor to distance himself from the terrorist attack and thus shed responsibility. Finally, and to return to the topic of the present chapter, the imaginary film crews, which repeatedly give Victor instructions on what to do, emphasize the character’s loss of freedom in that it suggests that his actions are as determined by external forces as an actor’s performance, which is set out by a film script. Accordingly, the film crews may be considered as metaphors for social pressures dictating people’s behaviour. When Victor intends to be more loving and caring towards Chloe and save her from lapsing back into her drug addiction, he is hindered not so much by actual members of a film crew as by social values and beliefs which promote a disdain of emotions and feelings and consider their display as symptomatic of a loss of power.

References to the medium of film and cinematic conventions are also found in Ellis’ *American Psycho*. For instance, when Patrick breaks up with Evelyn, he states that “footage from the film in [his] head is endless shots of stones” (330), thus emphasizing the bleak and callous nature of their relationship. Patrick’s first kiss with Jean, on the other hand, is described as follows:

And though it has been in no way a romantic evening, she embraces me and this time emanates a warmth I’m not familiar with. I am so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies, visualizing things falling somehow into the shape of events on a screen, that I almost hear the swelling of an orchestra, can almost hallucinate the camera panning low around us, fireworks bursting in slow motion overhead, the seventy-millimeter image of her lips parting and the subsequent murmur of “I want you” in Dolby sound. But my embrace is frozen and I realize, at first distantly and then with greater clarity, that the havoc raging inside me is gradually subsiding and she is kissing me on the mouth and this jars me back into some kind of reality and I lightly push her away. (*American* 254-255)

In this passage, Patrick describes himself as being baffled by the “warmth” of Jean’s kiss because he can only think of romance in terms of the superficial effects that accompany its cinematic representation and do not capture its full nature. His admission that he is “so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies” ties in with the previously made observation that Patrick’s actions are not initiated by free will but are determined by outside influences. According to Blazer, it is this sense of determination which may be accounted for Patrick’s subdued emotional response to

Jean's kiss, which he returns with a "frozen" embrace, in particular and to any other form of intimacy:

He has no sensation, no sensuality, no sexuality; instead, sex is a narcissistic, masturbatory hall of mirrors which yields no intersubjective feeling . . . no feeling at all for it must be performed according to script and routine, that is according to someone else's fantasy. (Blazer)

So, just as his conception of romance is shaped by Hollywood conventions, the values and beliefs guiding his behaviour in general are dictated by an external force, namely a society that values competition and consumerism over human bonding.

It is not only the capitalist and materialist ideologies of Western society that govern the behaviour of *American Psycho*'s protagonist. There are several aspects suggesting that Patrick Bateman is in the grip of another force, namely his own madness. Patrick's propensity for hallucination has already been discussed, and his penchant for sadism is likewise indication that all is not well with regard to the character's psychological state. The present paragraph, however, will shed light on another aspect illustrating Patrick's loss of control over himself which has not been discussed so far, namely his occasional shifts from first-person to third-person narration (Clark 28-29), as in the following scene in which Patrick is chased by the police after shooting a street musician:

[R]acing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli, next to a karaoke restaurant called Lotus Blossom I've been to with Japanese clients, the cab rolling over fruit stands, smashing through a wall of glass, the body of a cashier thudding across the hood, Patrick tries to put the cab in reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab leaning against it [...]. (*American* 335-336)

The change of narrative perspective occurs at a moment of great distress, which is rhetorically emphasized in this passage by the series of short clauses demarcated by commas rather than full stops, which are traditionally used to mark longer pauses. Patrick himself admits that he "lose[s] control entirely", which relates not only to the car chase with the police but also to himself. As Clark notes, Patrick's "authority as the narrating 'I' grows increasingly unstable as the narrative unfolds" (28). During a date with Jeans, a similar shift from first-person to third-person pronouns occurs: "'You shouldn't fawn over him...' I pause before correcting myself. 'I mean... *me*. Okay?'" (*American* 358). In this quote, it is not Patrick's narrative voice but his voice as a diegetic character that is affected by such a slip. The protagonist seems increasingly

under the influence of an external power, which is even explicitly addressed at one point:

I'm having a sort of hard time paying attention because my automated teller has started *speaking* to me, sometimes actually leaving weird messages on the screen, in green lettering, like "Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby's" or "Kill the President or "Feed Me a Stray Cat" [...]. (380)

Thus, in a manner reminiscent of Ovid's Echo, Patrick is no longer in possession of his own will. As the above quote suggests, both his actions and his words are determined by an "automated teller", which triggers associations with schizophrenic hallucinations of hearing voices. These symptoms of mental disorder may well be interpreted as an expression of the protagonist's frustration over the control that social values and pressures exert.

A loss of freedom of a different kind may be observed in Ellis' short story "At the Zoo with Bruce", which follows an unnamed female protagonist as she visits the zoo with her married lover, Bruce. The protagonist has already made several attempts at ending her affair with Bruce, who not only keeps making false promises of leaving his wife but is also using her for her money, as several clues in the text suggest. Yet, all her attempts have been in vain because she cannot resist his pleas not to leave him. Even when she is offered the opportunity to work for a renowned fashion magazine, the protagonist relents to Bruce's begging:

This is what he said when British *Vogue* offered me a ridiculously well-paying job that I was not capable of doing and that my stepmother arranged and that, in retrospect, I should have taken and he said it again before he left me that weekend for Florida, he said "Don't leave me" and if he hadn't made the request I would have left but since he did, I stayed, both times. (*Informers* 258-259)

Bruce's request clearly interferes with the protagonist's plans for life, but, as if she were no longer the master of her own will, she disregards her own wishes as soon as Bruce tells her to stay with him. During their trip to the zoo, the protagonist confronts Bruce about his wife, but he evades her questions, telling her instead that he is an extra-terrestrial who has been sent to Earth in order to arrange the planet's destruction by gathering data about human behaviour. The narrating protagonist does not comment on Bruce's fanciful anecdote and merely concludes the short story by saying that regardless of all the odds mounting against her relationship with Bruce, she still has "faith in this man" (262). As Flory (268-268) notes in her analysis of Ellis' short story, the woman's final resignation to Bruce's will, as well as her silent acceptance of his convoluted story,

makes more sense when considered in light of the setting in which the story takes place – the zoo. While Bruce enjoys the trip to the zoo, convinced that the animals “like to be here” (258), the protagonist is rather appalled by the sight of the zoo’s inhabitants. Her continuous references to the animal’s agony – polar bears avoiding “the piss-yellow water” (256) in their compound, a rhinoceros “that lies immobile” (258), and an elephant “that looks as if it has been beaten” (260) – encourage to draw parallels between the captive animals and the female protagonist, who is ensnared in her illicit affair with Bruce. Similar to the animals whose behaviour is unsympathetically observed by the zoo’s visitors, she is unable to free herself from the hold of a superior power that subjects her to his assessing gaze and eventually brings about her destruction. It is not least the protagonist’s remarks on the baboons, which “strut around, acting macho, scratching themselves brazenly” (260), and their females, which “pick pathetically at the males’ fur, cleaning them” (260), that highlight the frequent occurrence of such inequities between the two genders, whereby men are typically empowered at the expense of women.

The previous contemplations on unequal gender relations tie in well with the following chapter, which will be centred on the topic of unrequited love as it is presented in Ovid’s myth of Narcissus and Echo and more recently incorporated in the fiction by Bret Easton Ellis.

4.1.4. Unrequited love

The central episode of Ovid’s myth of Narcissus and Echo is the brief encounter that the two characters share and that ends with the nymph’s rejection by the beloved boy. The present chapter will examine characters in novels and short stories by Ellis that resemble the mythological Echo in that their love is not required, being either unrecognized or spurned.

Perhaps the most striking example of a female character in Ellis’ fiction whose love is spurned by a narcissistic male is Blair, who plays a prominent role in both *Less Than Zero* and its sequel, *Imperial Bedrooms*. Blair used to date Clay, the protagonist of both novels, who ended their relationship after he was accepted at Camden College. In *Less Than Zero*, Clay returns from Camden College to spend the winter break in his hometown, where he meets Blair, and the behaviour of his former girlfriends during his stay in Los Angeles indicates that she still harbours romantic feelings for him: Blair reproaches Clay at one point for not calling her during his absence at college (*Less* 15),

kisses him on several occasions, gives him a present for Christmas (22-23). Blair's continuing attraction to Clay is also apparent to other characters in the novel. During a Christmas party, for instance, a boy called Griffin points out to Clay that Blair talks a lot about him (29-31). Clay, on the other hand, does not respond to Griffin's observation, and even has sex with him after the party, forgetting Blair's Christmas present at his place. Further indication of Clay's lack of love for Blair, aside from his numerous affairs with other characters throughout the novel, is the little effort that he invests in bonding with his former girlfriend, which stands in striking opposition to Blair's commitment, as well as his reluctance to return her affectionate gestures. The following scene is perhaps most emblematic of the discrepancy in their feelings for each other:

An hour passes, Blair keeps talking, tells me that she still likes me and that we should get together again and that just because we haven't seen each other for four months is no reason to break up. I tell her we have been together, I mention last night. (63)

While Blair confesses her on-going love for Clay, the novel's protagonist merely alludes to their sexual encounter on the day before, revealing that his attraction to Blair is primarily driven by lust rather than love. During their last meeting before Clay leaves for Camden College, Blair confronts the protagonist about their past by asking him if he ever loved her, and when Clay, after some initial attempts at dodging an answer to her question, replies that he "never did" (191), it is ultimately confirmed that Blair, similar to Echo, has dedicated herself to a man who is too self-absorbed to return her love, valuing her only for the superficial pleasures that he derives from her.

Blair's unrequited love for Clay is also a central theme throughout *Less Than Zero's* sequel, *Imperial Bedrooms*, which is set twenty-five years later. Blair is by then married to Clay's friend Trent, but her interaction with Clay already in the early pages of the novel provides ground for the assumption that she still suffers from her unreciprocated feelings for Clay, just as Echo's "love endures and grows on grief" (Ovid 3.395). Blair's frustration manifests itself, for instance, in her bitter remarks towards Clay upon meeting him at a party held in her home, where she points out that he was not invited and asks him why he has come to the party (*Imperial* 20-21). Julian makes explicit reference to Blair's undying love for Clay when he tells the novel's protagonist that he had an affair with Blair. He says that he hurt Blair because he left her for a younger girl, but adds that Clay will always be the one who hurts her the most, because she continues

to be in love with him (34-35). Yet, as in Ellis' first novel, Clay distinguishes himself through his self-centredness, which renders him indifferent to the feelings of his girlfriend from childhood days. During an argument with Blair, in which she accuses him for not "try[ing] hard enough" (30), the protagonist even lets his thoughts wander from the subject of their conversation to another woman whom he has met at Blair's party: "I'm thinking about the blond girl on the veranda and I imagine Blair's thinking about the last time I made love to her. This disparity should scar [sic] me but doesn't" (30-31). These lines are not only indicative of the little significance he attaches to his past relationship with Blair, but they also highlight that Blair's feelings, as opposed to his, have been based on love, as the use of the phrase *make love* rather than *have sex* suggests. Clay explicitly addresses the discrepancy in their attitudes towards each other, which has already been outlined in relation to Ellis' *Less Than Zero* and places Blair once again in a disempowered position akin to that of Ovid's lovelorn Echo. This discrepancy is only resolved towards the end of the novel when Blair forces Clay to stay with her in exchange for an alibi clearing him from any involvement in the murder of Julian (176-178). That is to say, by adopting the same self-centred indifference that Clay displays towards her feelings, Blair eventually manages to subvert power relations so that they are equal if not even in favour of the spurned lover, who, with her selfishness, has brought herself closer to the role of Narcissus.

A close examination of further characters whose feelings are not reciprocated reveals that they allow for some parallels to be drawn to the so-called angel in the house, a Victorian ideal according to which a woman is supposed to be submissive and devoted to the service of her husband and family. The term 'angel in the house' was coined in a poem of the same name which was written by Coventry Patmore in the mid-nineteenth century and shaped a generation of women (Anstruther 1-8). This domestic conception of women's role in society continued to be influential well into the twentieth century, and aspects of it can still be observed in present-day society. Tillie Olsen also refers to the concept in her discussion of women writer's discrimination. She draws attention to Virginia Woolf's critical stance towards this ideal of femininity, saying that "Woolf recognized in the angel an artist-being having to be expressed for and through others" (Olsen 213). Ellis' novels and short stories also involve artistically or otherwise professionally engaged female characters who are, similar to the punished nymph who can no longer speak for herself, "expressed for or through others". These females may

have managed to escape from the confines of domestic space, but their participation in the public sphere still caters to the wishes of their male partners.

Jean's self-sacrificial devotion to Patrick, who secretly spurns her love and describes her feelings for him as "unerotic" (*American* 253), has already been discussed in great detail. For this reason, the analysis will turn to another example, which is no less striking, namely Victor's girlfriend Chloe Byrnes in *Glamorama*. Chloe is a supermodel, and at first glance, she seems to occupy a superior position in her relationship with Victor, as she towers over her ambitious boyfriend in terms of fame and success. Yet, closer inspection reveals that the power relations between Chloe and Victor are not as clear and asymmetrical as one is initially tempted to think, because while Chloe is genuinely in love with Victor and "really want[s] things to work out" (*Glamorama* 144), as she herself says to him, Victor's lack of affection for Chloe is foregrounded by his sexual affairs with other women and the little concern he expresses for Chloe's nervous breakdowns in the past. When he introduces Chloe to the narration, he describes her in terms of her outward appearance and her career as a model, but he scarcely mentions any details about her personality (32). In the course of the narrative, it becomes evident that Victor is only interested in the supermodel as a vehicle for his own career as a fashion model and club manager in Manhattan. For instance, when his agent fails to recognize him as a celebrity, Victor tells him that he is dating "Chloe Byrnes, like, the supermodel" (30), and before an interview with a VJ from *MTV News*, he insists that his relationship with Chloe be mentioned during the television show in order to attract the viewers' attention and thus boost his own fame (140). At one point, the protagonist of *Glamorama* is even angered by a magazine article about Chloe that omits any mention of him (70). Chloe is well aware of Victor's exploitive intentions, repeatedly reproaching him for his self-absorption and telling him at one point that "[a] mirror's [his] ideal mate" (180). Nonetheless, and despite her frustration over the pressures of the modelling business, which has found its expression in her drug addiction and other forms of self-destructive behaviour, Chloe does not turn her back on the tumultuous celebrity lifestyle, catering to the wishes of her narcissistic boyfriend at the expense of her own happiness. It is only after Victor's affair with Lauren becomes public that the model finally ends the relationship. Chloe is, thus, evocative of Ovid's Echo because she is consumed by a self-destructive love that is not returned and merely enhances the narcissistic individual's self-esteem. As Kimmel notes, "[f]or every Narcissus there is, somewhere, a masochistically bound Echo" (109), and in

Glamorama, it is Chloe who masochistically allows Victor to use her as a stepping stone to satisfy his narcissistic needs.

In *Lunar Park*, the reader will also encounter a female character that intertextually draws on Ovid's Echo in a way that is simultaneously reminiscent of the Victorian angel in the house. Jayne Dennis is the girlfriend, and later wife, of Bret, and while she is deeply devoted to the novel's protagonist, Bret either spurns or, at best, appreciates her love for superficial and opportunistic reasons. The description of their first meetings is already indicative of the one-sidedness of Jayne's romantic attraction to Bret:

Our paths had crossed at various celebrity functions, and she had always been extremely flirtatious – but since everyone was flirting with me at that point in my life, her interest barely registered until she arrived at a Christmas party I threw in 1988 and basically hurled herself at me (I was that irresistible). (*Lunar* 14)

If the narrator's words are revealing of any sort of attraction on Bret's part, then it is his narcissistic love of himself. Yet, he expresses no special regard for Jayne, considering her as one out of many admirers. The account of the beginning of their relationship, which starts with the sentence, "When I returned to New York we officially became a high-profile couple," (14) and is followed by an enumeration of celebrity events that Bret and Jayne attended together, is likewise lacking in romantic affection. Instead, it hints at Bret's desire for fame, which his relationship to Jayne, a famous model and actress, promises to satisfy. The liaison ends after only a few months, because, as Bret himself explains, "[t]hough Jayne had fallen in love with me and wanted to get married, I was simply too preoccupied with myself" (14). Just as Echo is anguished by her unreciprocated love for Narcissus following his rejection, Jayne does not cease to love Bret despite their break-up, but the "continuing wistfulness on her part" (15) is merely countered by "a high level of sexual interest" (15) on behalf of the protagonist. Jayne's devotion to Bret to the point of disregarding her own personal interest becomes most evident after the birth of their son, Robby, whom Bret initially refuses to acknowledge as his son. Jayne and Bret become involved in a legal battle that even continues after Bret's paternity is proven due to his reluctance to pay child support, but Jayne eventually gives up on her claims. The disparity of feelings towards each other is once again expressed in Bret's concluding remarks on the aforementioned events: "We amiably kept in touch. She was still in love with me. I moved on" (21). It is only when Bret suffers a career setback due to his excessive drug use and financial problems that

he approaches Jayne, asking her for help. Even though he marries the actress and moves into her suburban home, many aspects, such as his affair with a college student and his continuing alcoholism, make it clear that Bret is not reformed from his rakish and narcissistic ways and that he merely takes advantage of Jayne's commitment. Jayne is, thus, caught in an asymmetric relationship in which the female sacrifices and the male suckles, as she, like Echo, has fallen in love with a narcissistic man who is too self-obsessed to love anyone else other than him. The connection to the Victorian angel in the house is more readily apparent than it is with *Glamorama*'s Chloe, as Jayne is for the most part of the novel busy with her role as a mother and wife, eager to raise her family rather than pursuing her career as an actress and model. This subordination of her own career for the benefit of others relates back to Echo in that the mythological nymph, very much like the angel in the house, "is unable to express anything of her own; what she says must be identical to the expressed needs of others" (Kimmel 109). Likewise, Jayne's activities cease to be an expression of her own personal wishes, and are primarily geared towards the needs of others.

4.2. Reappear there: Narcissus

4.2.1. Self-love

While the first section of the analysis is based on Echo, the nymph who is first silenced and limited in her freedom as a result of Juno's punishment and eventually vanishes due to her grief over her unrequited love, the second section will turn its attention to Narcissus and how the male protagonist of Ovid's myth is intertextually evoked in the novels and short stories by Bret Easton Ellis. As in the previous section, the analysis will be subdivided into four chapters covering different aspects related to Narcissus as well as to the psychological condition named after the mythological figure. The first chapter will be dedicated to the different forms of self-love encountered among the narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction. The analysis continues with a discussion of the narcissists' reluctance to develop emotional ties with other characters before progressing to their indifference to or even delight in other people's suffering. Finally, the section concludes with an examination of the self-destructive tendencies of Ellis' narcissistic characters.

The focus of the present chapter will, thus, lie on what is primarily associated with the term 'narcissism' and with its mythological namesake, namely on an excessive

preoccupation with oneself and fascination with one's own image. As is indicated by the heading of the present chapter and noted by Freud, who devoted an essay to narcissism and defines it as an investment of the libido in the self rather than in external love objects (Freud, "Einführung" 155-157),¹⁰ this preoccupation with oneself tends to be fraught with sexual overtones. In Ovid's tale, the sexual implications of Narcissus' self-absorption are most evident in the passage in which he gazes at his own reflection in the lake:

Spellbound he saw himself, and motionless
Lay like a marble statue staring down.
He gazes at his eyes, twin constellation,
His hair worthy of Bacchus or Apollo,
His face so fine, his ivory neck, his cheeks
Smooth, and the snowy pallor and the blush; (Ovid 3.418-423)

As in the blazons common in Renaissance love poetry, which consist of "a poetic catalogue of a woman's admirable physical features" ("Blazon"), Narcissus is objectified in terms of his sexual attractiveness as different parts of his body are singled out and described in flattering terms. In Ellis' fiction, a character's narcissistic fascination with their own image is also frequently captured by passages in which their physical appearance is detailed by being broken up into its individual parts:

Shirtless, I scrutinize my image in the mirror above the sinks in the locker room at Xclusive. My arm muscles burn, my stomach is as taut as possible, my chest steel, pectorals granite hard, my eyes white as ice. (*American* 356)

This quote taken from *American Psycho* is particularly revealing of the narcissistic nature of Patrick Bateman, who marvels at his mirror image just as Narcissus gazed at his reflection in the water. Another character in Ellis' fiction who likes to revel in the spectacle of his own outward appearance is Victor Ward, the protagonist of *Glamorama*:

[W]hile waiting I have a look at my reflection in the panel of steel mirrors lining the columns above the automated teller: high cheekbones, ivory skin, jet-black hair, semi-Asian eyes, a perfect nose, huge lips, defined jawline, ripped knees in

¹⁰ Freud draws a distinction between primary narcissism, which constitutes a natural stage of childhood development, and secondary narcissism, which is a pathological condition developed at a later stage in life (Freud, "Einführung" 170-171). While the present paper does not refute this distinction, it is only concerned with secondary narcissism, which will be simply referred to as 'narcissism'.

jeans, T-shirt under a long-collar shirt, red vest, velvet jacket, and I'm slouching, Rollerblades slung over my shoulder [...]. (*Glamorama* 16)

In these lines, Victor as the narrator catalogues his own physical features – some of them, such as his “perfect nose” and “ivory skin”, modified with flattering adjectives – before he turns to a description of the clothes that adorn his body. Once again, an intertextual link to Narcissus is established by Victor's extended gaze at his own specular image, thus mirroring the actions of the male protagonist in Ovid's tale.

As has been noted before, the characters in Ellis' literary work inhabit a society driven by consumerism, and thus, it is not surprising that a character's self-love is reflected not only in their attraction to their own outward appearance but also in their preoccupation with their material merits. Accordingly, there are several passages in *American Psycho* that are dedicated to the protagonist's sartorial choices and other material possessions. There is, for instance, a chapter spanning over five pages in which Patrick meticulously describes the furniture, gadgets, and cosmetics in his apartment as well as the clothes which he is wearing (*American* 23-29). In another chapter, the protagonist elaborates on the electronic devices which he has recently purchased, enumerating the outstanding functions and features of each device just as he catalogues the individual parts of his toned body in the passage quoted above (*American* 294-296). In both chapters, Patrick does not stop short of naming the brands of his possessions in order to prove his affluence

Equally revealing of the narcissistic pride that Patrick Bateman takes in his wealth are the numerous instances in which he wishes to show off with his platinum American Express card, such as during his date with Bethany (*American* 232) or in the following scene in which he has lunch with his business associate Christopher Armstrong, who has just returned from his vacation to the Caribbean islands:

Fuck... yourself... Armstrong, I'm thinking while staring out the window at the gridlock and pacing bums on Church Street. Appetizers arrive: sun-dried tomato brioche for Armstrong. Poblano chilies with an oniony orange-purple marmalade on the side for me. I hope Armstrong doesn't want to pay because I need to show the dim-witted bastard that I in fact *do* own a platinum American Express card. (134)

Like his clothes and the furniture in his apartment, the platinum American Express card is an item from which he derives narcissistic pleasure as it is evidence of his economic power. In addition to expressing his satisfaction with himself, the passage quoted above,

which is preceded by Armstrong's boastful description of his trip to the Caribbean, is also indicative of the competitive nature that characterizes many narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction, especially Patrick Bateman, whose envy of his colleague is further foregrounded by his swearing and his reference to Armstrong as "the dim-witted bastard". While Ovid's Narcissus remains unchallenged in his fascination with his own beauty, Ellis' characters live in a capitalist society driven by competition so that, in their quest for superlative beauty and power, these characters are bound to face competitors who threaten to undermine their narcissistic admiration of themselves. So, as opposed to the mythological tale which centres on the power relations between self-absorbed Narcissus and lovelorn Echo, Ellis' novels and short stories are also concerned with the power struggle that ensues upon the encounter of multiple narcissistic figures.

In the previous section dealing with Echo, it has already been established that certain characters in Ellis' fiction are disempowered by their love for a person who is too self-absorbed to be able to return those feelings. In his essay on narcissism, Freud ("Einführung" 182-184) notes that love for another man or woman necessarily produces disempowerment, as it creates a sense of dependency on the beloved person. This disempowerment is reinforced if those feelings, like Echo's love for Narcissus, remain unrequited. Narcissus' self-love, on the other hand, implies a perfect reciprocity of feelings, which is captured in the phrase "desiring is desired" (Ovid 3.426). So, the narcissistic individual is not only exempt from the disempowerment caused by the dependency on another person, but the inevitable requital of their love enhances their self-esteem and thus consolidates their power (Freud, "Einführung" 182-184). This empowerment that narcissists derive from their self-love as well as from their independence is also illustrated in Ellis' fiction, in which such characters tend to pursue professions that are associated with fame, wealth, and social status: *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman is an investment banker on Wall Street, and Victor Ward in *Glamorama* starts out as an at least mildly famous model and manager of a club that is about to open in Manhattan. Further narcissistic characters holding jobs that emphasize their power include Bryan Metro in the short story "Discovering Japan", who is a famous rock musician; Les Price, who is the narrator of "In the Islands" and works as a real estate agent; Clay, who is still a college student in *Less Than Zero* but has already established himself as a successful screenwriter in *Imperial Bedrooms*; and Cheryl Laine, who is featured in both "Sitting Still" and "Water from the Sun" and is a news anchor. The way in which Cheryl Laine's job as a news anchor ties in with her

narcissistic nature is also highlighted by her insistence that her boyfriend record the newscasts in which she appears so that they can re-watch them (*Informers* 94; 102-103). The video-taped newscasts may, thus, be equated with the lake in which Narcissus gazes at his own reflection, as they give Cheryl the opportunity to marvel at her own image.

These narcissistic characters, who revel in their being looked at by themselves as well as by other people, raise questions as to the significance of being looked at in terms of power relations. Laura Mulvey wrote a seminal essay called “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, which examines the traditional power dynamic of the gaze in Hollywood Cinema and constitutes a significant contribution to gaze theory in general. In her essay, Mulvey argues that being the bearer of the gaze, a role traditionally occupied by men, is empowering, whereas being the object of the gaze, a role that tends to be allotted to women, is considered as a state of disempowerment. These observations seem to suggest that the power that narcissists derives from looking is relativized by the disempowerment that stems from their being consumed by the gaze, be it by their own gaze or that of other people. Yet, this claim is not supported by the sense of empowerment that is experienced by narcissist characters in Ellis’ fiction. Scholars have, in fact, challenged Mulvey’s arguments by stating that being looked at may also be regarded as a form of empowerment:

[V]isual power flows in multiple directions and [...] the position of the spectacle isn’t entirely one of weakness. Because public power is predicated largely on visibility, men have traditionally understood the need to secure their power not only by looking but by being seen—or rather, by fashioning, as author, a spectacle of themselves. Already bound in a web of visual power, women might begin to renegotiate its terms. (Rowe 11)

The empowering potential of fashioning oneself into the object of the gaze is also supported by Ellis’ novels and short stories. In *Less Than Zero*, for instance, the protagonist meets a girl called Lene who brags about having appeared in a television programme called MV3 (*Less* 88-89). However, Clay and the two girls who accompany him pretend that they have not seen the programme, and once they are no longer in the company of Lene, they badmouth her stint on television, “talk[ing] about how bad Lene looked on MV3 today” (89). The character’s refusal to acknowledge Lene’s appearance in MV3 is evidence of their envy and thus of the power inherent in attracting the gaze on television. In *Imperial Bedrooms*, Julian, who is usually excluded from positions of power, is given “some kind of focus that bordered on hope” (*Imperial* 6) when *Less*

Than Zero is turned into a film, as the adaptation transforms his fictionalized image into an object of the empowering gaze. Even the inanimate representation of Bruce, a fashion model in *Glamorama*, is ascribed with power as his cover picture on a magazine is being gazed at: “I jealously studied Bruce Rhinebeck’s face smirking at me from the cover of a magazine” (*Glamorama* 480). In this sentence, the description of Bruce’s image as “smirking” at the person holding the magazine imbues it with a sense of superiority over the gazing subject, who is overcome with jealousy.

In *Glamorama*, the importance of being looked at, from which narcissistic characters in Ellis’ fiction derive their power, is particularly apparent. The novel’s protagonist, Victor Ward, works as a model, and as such, he readily fashions himself into an object of the gaze. At more than one point, Victor explicitly states his intention of attracting the gaze by means of his modelling:

I’ve also snuck my modeling portfolio in and I spot this cute Oriental girl [...] and I “accidentally” drop the portfolio, bathing suit shots scattering around her feet. I pause before I bend down to pick them up, pretending to be mortified, hoping that she’ll check it out [...]. (*Glamorama* 82-83)

In this passage, the roles of the bearer of the gaze and its object as they are outlined by Mulvey are reversed in terms of gender, as it is the male protagonist who wishes to be subjected to the female gaze of the Oriental girl. Like the examples given in the previous paragraph, the scene in *Glamorama* further deviates from Mulvey’s model in that being looked at is not presented as placing the character in a position of disempowerment. It is only when the girl “gives [Victor] a why-bother? look and walks away” (83) that the balance of power is clearly shifted in her favour. The narcissistic pleasure which is derived from being looked at is also foregrounded in the following lines in which Victor marvels at the cover of a magazine on which he is featured:

Passing a newsstand by the new Gap, I notice I’m still on the cover of the current issues of *YouthQuake*, looking pretty cool – the headline 27 AND HP in bold purple letters above my smiling expressionless face, and I’ve just got to buy another copy, but since I don’t have any cash there’s no way (19).

The cover picture of *YouthQuake* is supposed to attract not only his own gaze but also that of other people in order to confirm his narcissistic self-image and to increase his power in a society dominated by celebrity culture, in which being looked at has developed into a status symbol. For this reason, Victor draws attention to the cover picture on several occasions, mentioning it as he talks to his lover Alison (24), the

interior designer of his club in Manhattan (52), and even the police inspector who investigates the disappearance of his college friend Jamie Fields (117). At one point, he once again “scan[s] the magazine rack for the new issue of *YouthQuake* to see if there are any letters about the article on [him]” (82), assuring himself that his cover picture has drawn people’s attention. In line with the empowering effect of being looked at, it follows that a failure to attract people’s gaze equals disempowerment. With regard to *Less Than Zero*, it has already been noted that Clay and his friends do not grant Lene the satisfaction of knowing that she has been the object of their gaze during her appearance on television. The disempowering impact of not being looked at is more apparent in *Glamorama* when Victor’s lover Alison tells him, “Victor, you auditioned for all three ‘Real World’s and MTV rejected you *all three times*. [...] What does that tell you?” (24). Victor’s bitter reaction to the words of the interior designer of his Manhattan club as she mentions the same reality television programme in passing is equally revealing:

“Felix used to work at the Gap,” Waverly says, inhaling, exhaling. “Then he designed sets for ‘The Real World’ in Bali.”

“Don’t mention that show to me,” I say, gritting my teeth.

“Sorry, darling, it’s so *early*. But please be nice to Felix – he’s just out of rehab.” (52)

Both quotes are indicative of the disempowerment that Victor has suffered due to his repeated failure to appear in a reality television show, which would have garnered him more admiring gazes and thus supported his narcissistic investment in himself.

Another psychoanalytic theorist who, besides Freud, has significantly contributed to the study of narcissism is Jacques Lacan, whose work is to a large extent based on Freud’s. Yet, as Evans points out, Lacan’s conception of narcissism is more closely linked to the figure of Narcissus in Ovid’s myth, because he “defines narcissism as the erotic attraction to the specular image” (Evans 120). How Lacanian narcissism as an attraction to one’s own mirror image differs from and does not necessarily imply Freud’s definition of the same phenomenon as an erotic attraction to the self becomes clear when looking at Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage. The mirror stage, which draws on Freud’s notion of primary narcissism and is described in the essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”, is a stage in childhood development which initiates the on-going process of identification. In this developmental stage, which occurs between the ages of six to eighteen months, the

infant first recognizes themselves in the mirror, perceiving themselves for the first time as a whole identity. Yet, this complete vision stands in opposition to the fragmented sense of the self that the infant experiences due to their still undeveloped motor control. The disruption between the specular image and the self results in an admiration of the wholeness of the specular image on the one hand and in a rivalry with the image, which is perceived as threatening to the fragmented body, on the other hand. While the latter will be further explored in the chapter dealing with narcissistic self-destruction, the remainder of the present chapter is concerned with the admiration of the mirror image and how this admiration, which also overwhelms Ovid's Narcissus, who initially even fails to identify the gestalt before him as his own reflection, is apparent among the narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction.

Several examples of narcissism in Ellis' fiction that have been discussed up to this point have also involved characters looking into a mirror, capturing their fascination with their own specular image. Both *American Psycho*'s Patrick and *Glamorama*'s Victor, who is twice reproached by his girlfriend for having a mirror as his best friend (*Glamorama* 103; 178), have been described as marvelling at their reflections, and it has been noted that the videotapes of Cheryl's newscast may be equated with mirrors which enable the narcissistic woman to gaze at her own image. It is noticeable that, in Ellis' fiction, mirrors are often included in scenes in which a narcissistic character exhibits his or her power. In *Glamorama*, for instance, Alison, with whom Victor has an affair and who is his boss' fiancée, is looking into a mirror, rubbing coconut oil into her hair, while she tells the protagonist that she will ruin his career if he decides to dump her (*Glamorama* 25-26). The empowerment of Patrick Bateman's equally narcissistic girlfriend, Evelyn, has already been discussed in the section dedicated to Echo with regard to her ability to silence the novel's protagonist. In a scene, in which she also demonstrates her power by openly flirting with Patrick's business associate in front of her boyfriend, Evelyn is described as "gazing at her reflection in the vanity mirror [...] lost in her own beauty" (*American* 17). Analogously, disempowerment is often signalled by the incapability of looking at one's own image. For instance, following a sexual encounter with Bobby, in which the terrorist leader assumes a dominant position, Victor says, "[s]tepping out of the shower, I dry off, avoiding my reflection in a giant mirror, afraid of what I might see in it" (*Glamorama* 340). The character's reluctance to look at his specular image is symptomatic of his loss of power as he becomes a pawn for Bobby Hughes' terrorist plans. The breaking of mirrors that accompanies the fight in

which Victor shoots Bobby is likewise emblematic of the ultimate disempowerment that follows from the narcissistic terrorist leader's death (432-436). Patrick Bateman's blinding of a homeless person may also be considered as an act enforcing the disempowerment of the protagonist's victim, who is deprived of the ability to engage in a narcissistic admiration of his own mirror image (*American* 370).

In *Lunar Park*, the protagonist's narcissistic nature is reflected by the inclusion of mirror images on several different levels. The protagonist himself, who is called Bret, is a fictionalized version of Bret Easton Ellis, mirroring many details of the author's biography. Both the fictional Bret and the real Ellis are literary writers who have launched their careers with the publication of *Less Than Zero*, which was followed by *The Rules of Attraction*, *American Psycho*, *The Informers*, and *Glamorama*, and in the course, they have moved from their hometown, Los Angeles, to New York City. Thus, the protagonist of the novel may already be regarded as a mirror image of the author, whose preoccupation with himself is then also conferred upon his fictional pendant. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the fictional Bret's life is in many ways reflected in the characters of his literary work: For instance, Bret resembles the protagonist of *Less Than Zero* in that he had a high-school girlfriend called Blair, with whom he broke up after he was accepted for college (*Lunar* 105; 263). Like many of his characters in *Less Than Zero* and *The Rules of Attraction*, he was a student at fictional Camden College (5), and when he returns to the university to work as a professor, he mirrors the actions of these characters by attending campus parties where he drinks beer from a keg and snorts lines of cocaine in student bathrooms (44). In one scene, he mentions a former university colleague who had an affair with a boy called Paul Denton (170), which points to the homosexual protagonist of *The Rules of Attraction*. Both Patrick Bateman and *Lunar Park*'s protagonist live in the same building in New York City as Tom Cruise (*American* 68; *Lunar* 10). When Bret remembers the celebratory dinner for his high-school graduation, which he left early because his father drunkenly flirted with his girlfriend, as well as an unpleasant trip to Cabo San Lucas, during which he constantly fought with his father (*Lunar* 233), the reader is reminded of Les Prices' strained relationship with his son and their trip to Hawaii in the short story "In the Islands". Towards the end of *Lunar Park*, Ellis' *The Rules of Attraction* is once again evoked when Bret uses Sean Bateman's catchphrase "deal with it, rock'n'roll" (279) as he talks to his stepdaughter, Sarah, who mourns the loss of her Terby doll. Thus, the fictional Bret, who unabashedly describes himself as "America's greatest writer under

forty” (63) at one point and is diagnosed with “acquired situational narcissism” (31), transforms the body of his fictional work into a mirror featuring numerous specular images of himself. Bret himself draws attention to the self-referential nature of his fiction, which highlights his narcissistic devotion to himself, when he says, “I could never be as honest about myself in a piece of nonfiction as I could in any of my novels” (32). Yet, like Narcissus’s reflection in the mirror, Bret’s specular image will eventually prove his undoing when a character from his fiction develops a life of its own, haunting *Lunar Park*’s protagonist in the diegetic reality of the novel, but more on that in the chapter dealing with self-destruction.

4.2.2. Reluctance towards interpersonal bonding

According to Freud (“Einführung” 156), the definition of narcissism as an investment of the libido in the self rather than in external objects implies two defining characteristics of the narcissist individual: On the one hand, narcissists distinguish themselves with their excessive admiration for their own self, which finds its expression, for instance, in a sense of grandiosity and a preoccupation with their own physical and social image. On the other hand, they are characterized by an alienation from their environment, including the people that immediately surround them. While the first aspect has already been thematized at the beginning of this section, the present chapter will be concerned with the latter, examining how narcissistic characters in Ellis’ fiction struggle, like their mythological namesake, to establish intimate ties with other people.

The analysis will continue where it has stopped in the first chapter, by looking at the protagonist of *Lunar Park* and examining his failure to bond with members of his family. It will hark back to the previous topic of narcissistic admiration for one’s mirror image, but by doing so, it will also provide insight into the troubled relationship between Bret and his father on the one hand and Bret and his son on the other hand. Bret’s estrangement from his son, Robby, which already started prior to his birth when Bret refused to acknowledge him as his son (*Lunar* 19-21), has also been discussed in the section focusing on Echo, with regard to silencing and substance abuse. Even after Bret marries Robby’s mother and moves to their suburban family home, he struggles to bond with Robby because he is not used to prioritizing the needs of others over his own: “It was all about what he wanted. It was all about what he needed. Everything I desired was overridden, and I had to accept this. I had to rise up to it” (37). At one point, Bret enters his son’s room to cheer him up after his mother has forbidden him to dress as

Eminem for Halloween, and Robby asks his father whether he did something wrong, as if this were the only reason for Bret to approach his son (118-119). Robby even locks the door as soon as their conversation has ended and Bret has left his room (120). In another scene emblematic of their estrangement, Robby introduces the narrator to a group of friends as “Bret”, and he appears embarrassed when Bret reveals that he is his father (149). So, Bret’s interaction with his son continues to be awkward throughout the narration, illustrating his difficulties in establishing an intimate relationship with other people.

These difficulties in bonding with his immediate surroundings are also apparent in Bret’s description of the relationship with his late father, Robert. As has previously been noted, the narrator recounts his memories of an unpleasant trip with his father to Cabo San Lucas as well as of a dinner party during which Robert flirted with Bret’s girlfriend (*Lunar* 233). Bret’s troubled relationship with his father is further detailed in the following excerpt from the early pages of the novel:

But my father had always been a problem – careless, abusive, alcoholic, vain, angry, paranoid – and even after my parents divorced when I was a teenager (my mother’s demand) his power and control continued to loom over the family (which also included two younger sisters) in ways that were all monetary (endless arguments between lawyers about alimony and child support). It was a mission of his, a crusade, to weaken us, to make us intently aware of how we – not his behaviour – were to blame for the fact that he was no longer wanted in our lives. (6-7)

The behaviour of the narrator’s father, which, like Bret’s, exhibits narcissistic tendencies, has a lasting negative impact on the relationship between father and son. Yet, it is also established that Bret likewise contributed to their estrangement, especially when he points out that the photographs in his father’s home “served as some kind of reminder that [Bret] had abandoned him” (233). Bret’s hatred towards Robert is also illustrated by his plan to base the figure of Patrick Bateman, a sociopath who, in his delusional fantasies, engages in sadistic crimes, on his father. Yet, more than once, Bret becomes aware of his own close connection to *American Psycho*’s protagonist (16-17; 109; 161) and thus also to his father, who has served as an inspiration for Patrick Bateman. On his affinity with the latter, Bret notes,

My father had blackened my perception of the world, and his sneering sarcastic attitude toward everything latched on to me. As much as I wanted to escape his influence, I couldn’t. It had soaked into me, shaped me into the man I was becoming. (7)

In these lines, Bret acknowledges that, despite their troubled relationship, Robert “soaked into [him]” and “shaped [him]” into a mirror image reflecting many of his father’s personal qualities and also his outward appearance, as is later revealed: “My sister marvelled at how much I had begun resembling our father as I moved toward middle age” (362). This mirroring is further emphasized by the fact that while Bret’s late father died at two-forty in the morning, Bret was born at two-forty in the afternoon (339-340). Hence, like a mirror image, which creates a reversed duplication of the original, Bret and his father are linked by sameness and opposition in that the first’s life starts and the latter’s life ends at the same time, though one before noon and the other past noon.

Bret’s son, Robby, also exhibits parallels to his late grandfather, after whom he was named, and especially to his estranged father. Both Bret and Robby are characterized by their self-absorbed manners, their lack of emotional display, and their attitude of indifference towards their surroundings, as is pointed out in the following conversation between Bret and his friend, the writer Jay McInerney, who is not oblivious to the similarities between father and son:

“What happened to the Ducati?”

“Had to sell it. Jayne thought it was giving Robby bad ideas. And my argument that the kid doesn’t care about anything proved totally useless.”

“Like father, like – “ (*Lunar* 58)

As the narrative progresses, the parallels between Bret and Robby become more pronounced, which is not least illustrated by the gradual transformation of Robby’s suburban home into Bret’s parental home in Sherman Oaks (222-223). In this duplication of the house in which Bret grew up, it is Robby’s room that increasingly mirrors the protagonist’s room when he was a child (209-210). So, it is not only Bret’s dysfunctional relationship with his father that is mirrored in his relationship with his estranged son – a mirroring that also includes a reversal, with Bret and the person called Robert swapping the roles of father and son – but also the individual characters involved in this triangle are mirror images of one another:

I was now my father. Robby was now me. I saw my own features mirrored in his – my world was mirrored there: the brownish auburn hair, the high and frowning forehead, the thick lips pursed together always in thought and anticipation, the hazel eyes swirling with barely contained bewilderment. (210)

This mirroring, which is also foregrounded when Bret remembers how Robby as a young child took his hand to show him a lizard just as Bret had taken his own father's hand at one point in his childhood to show him the same animal (194), points to a phenomenon that provides further explanation for the failure of these three characters, who all exhibit narcissistic tendencies, to bond with one another, namely narcissistic parenting. In his essay on narcissism, Freud ("Einführung" 173) notes that an investment of love in an external object instead of the self can also be observed among narcissists following the birth of a child, as they regard the child as an extension of themselves. Such parents expect their children to acquire the same qualities, values, and behaviour and to be representative of them for their own selfish reasons (Rappoport 2-3; Vaknin 484): For one thing, this homage of a child as a mirror image of themselves confirms them in their narcissistic infatuation. For another, narcissistic parents may wish to forego the constraints of morality, which threatens to destroy their selves, by perpetuating themselves in their children (Freud 175). While recounting a dinner party at their neighbour's, during which the conversation is centred on their children, *Lunar Park's* Bret also comments upon such selfish motives of parenting, which are presented as being generally embraced by his social environment:

[T]here was something off about the obsession with their children that bordered on the fanatical. It wasn't that they weren't concerned about their kids, but they wanted something back, they wanted a return on their investment – this need was almost religious. (*Lunar* 175)

The results of narcissistic parenting tend to be twofold: On the one hand, this form of parenting results in children growing up to be narcissists themselves as they identify with and adapt to their parents (Rappoport 3-4; Vaknin 484), or as Vaknin simplifies it, "narcissism tends to breed narcissism" (484). On the other hand, narcissistic parenting leads to estrangement, as the child often resents their parent's self-absorption and neglect of their individual needs and wishes (Rappoport 2-4). Both results, which are based again on the combination of sameness and opposition that is distinct of mirror images, can be observed in Bret's relationship with his late father and son in *Lunar Park*, which highlights how these characters' narcissistic tendencies impede their interpersonal bonding.

Narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction not only struggle to establish intimate relationships with members of their family, but, like Narcissus, they also fail to develop romantic affections for people other than themselves. The chapter dealing with

unrequited love has revealed that there are, in fact, several examples of relationships in Ellis' fiction that involve a narcissistic male who do not reciprocate the romantic feelings harboured by their partners. It has already been noted that narcissists typically shy away from such feelings because the investment of love in another person always implies disempowerment, if only due to the resultant dependency on the other person (Freud, "Einführung" 182-184). Yet, several narcissistic characters in Ellis' novels and short stories allow themselves to become involved in a romantic relationship because, as Freud ("Einführung" 171-172) observes, such persons derive pleasure not so much from loving as from being loved. Both Bret in *Lunar Park* (14-15; 21) and Victor in *Glamorama* (144) make self-conscious reference to the love and commitment displayed by their partners, who are, on the other hand, denied such affections. Clay is no longer in a relationship with his high-school girlfriend Blair, but both in *Less Than Zero* (46; 63) and in *Imperial Bedrooms* (30-31; 75-77), he flatters himself with the lasting feelings that Blair harbours for him.

In *Imperial Bedrooms*, however, Clay is given a taste of his own medicine when he meets an aspiring actress called Rain, who is, like him, driven by narcissistic needs, and he becomes involved in a relationship where the roles outlined in Ovid's myth are reversed in terms of gender. There are several allusions to Rain's narcissistic preoccupation with herself throughout the novel. During a casting with Clay, Rain is described as repeatedly touching her hair and as wearing makeup so that "[a] napkin becomes faintly stained after she wipes her lips with it" (*Imperial* 26). This description is indicative of Rain's concern with her own physical image, and so is the following passage:

This is someone trying to stay young because she knows that what matters most to you is the youthful surface. This is supposed to be part of the appeal: keep everything young and soft, keep everything on the surface, even with the knowledge that the surface fades and can't be held together forever – take advantage before the expiration date appears in the nearing distance. The surface Rain presents is really all she's about [...]. (54)

These words reveal that both Clay and Rain, who strives to preserve her youthful physical appearance, are aware of the power that underlies the beauty of the actress, which is, as the narrator states at one point, "her currency in this world" (40). As is typical of narcissists, Rain relies on this currency to establish herself both as the bearer of the gaze and as its object, which is indicated by the following quote: "Her stare is a gaze, and my gaze back is the beginning of it" (40). In addition, the actress consciously

uses her beauty as a “lure” (52) that enables her to fulfil further needs related to her narcissistic nature. She engages in a sexual relationship with Clay, who is immediately smitten by her physical attractiveness (19-20), for the repeatedly declared purpose of gaining a role in a film for which he has written the screenplay (28; 42; 56). Clay’s interest in Rain is initially as selfish and superficial as her own: “[I]t’s really about the look, the idea of a girl like this, the promise of sex” (51). Yet, as the narrative progresses, Clay falls in love with the actress, and sheds some of his affinities with Narcissus for traits that are closer to Echo. The discrepancy between the two character’s feelings is noticeable in the following exchange:

“What do you want for Christmas?” she asks.

“This. You.” I smile. “What do you want?”

“I want a part in your movie,” she says. “You know that.” (56)

In this scene, Clay’s desire to be with Rain stands in striking opposition to her selfish wish to play a role in his film. Clay himself expresses some qualms about his love for another person, the disempowering implications of which have already been discussed, when he says, “I make the mistake of starting to care” (59). Yet, his feelings grow stronger with the progression of the narrative, as evidenced, for instance, by his yearning for Rain when she leaves for San Diego and fails to return his calls or messages (65-83). Clay is also upset when he finds out that Rain had an affair with his friend Rip, of whose wealth she took advantage (88-90), and that she is actually in a relationship with Julian (76-78). However, doubt is cast on Rain’s emotional attachment to her boyfriend when she relents to Clay’s request to break up with Julian in return for a part in his film (96). Clay’s threats to deny her a role in the film unless she stays with him become increasingly adamant and lacking in consideration for Rain’s feelings and emotions (121-125; 137-138). Towards the end of the novel, he even turns to violence and drugs as a means of controlling her and manipulating her to his own ends (162-163). Hence, Clay’s power is finally re-established as he selfishly places his desires over those of Rain and thus moves closer again to Narcissus. So, as with the gender reversal in *American Psycho*, where female figures are occasionally portrayed as being superior to Patrick, the disempowerment of Clay at the hands of Rain is only of a temporary nature. In Ellis’ fiction, there are several examples of narcissistic women competing with equally narcissistic male, but female characters, as opposed to male, are not granted the power to relegate men lastingly to a subordinate position akin to that of oppressed Echo.

After exploring the distrust of romantic partnerships and family relations that is common among narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction, the analysis will focus on relationships that appear to be friendships at first but are rather alliances of convenience. It will thus elaborate further on how narcissistic characters tend to be solitary loners who are so immersed in their own interests that others are excluded, just as it is the case with Narcissus who, throughout Ovid's tale, only interacts with the enamoured nymph, whom he eventually spurns, and with his own mirror image. A striking example of this lack of commitment is the terrorist group in *Glamorama*, which is led by the retired supermodel Bobby Hughes. The power that Bobby exerts by means of his well-groomed and toned looks has already been discussed with regard to his manipulation of the novel's protagonist. The remaining members of the terrorist cell – Jamie, Tammy, Bruce, and Bentley – are also fashion models who, like the male protagonist of Ovid's myth, distinguish themselves by their physical attractiveness:

Voices outside in the yard. A gate opens, then closes. Four gorgeous people dressed in black, wearing sunglasses and carrying chic grocery bags, move through the darkening garden and toward the house. Bobby and I watch them from behind the glass door. (*Glamorama* 270)

The models are initially amicable with one another and also towards Victor, who newly joins the group, but this harmonious image begins to crumble after the novel's protagonist discovers the group's terrorist scheming. Thenceforward, Bobby's narcissistic tendencies, which are first hinted at by a Calvin Klein poster showing "another beach scene, another shot of Bobby proudly baring his abdominals, another beautiful girl ignored behind him" (282), become increasingly apparent as he controls Victor for his own agenda by blackmailing him and drugging him with Xanax and shows no sympathy for the character's emotional pain and fear. The terrorist leader's selfish interest in Victor is particularly evident in the following exchange:

"Why me Bobby?" I ask. "Why do you trust me?"

"Because you think the Gaza Strip is a particularly lascivious move an erotic dancer makes," Bobby says. "Because you think the PLO recorded the singles 'Don't Bring Me Down' and 'Evil Woman.'" (315)

Bobby's sneering words imply that he is merely drawn to Victor because he considers him stupid enough to fall for manipulation. As the narrative progresses, Bobby's lack of commitment for the other members of his organization is also revealed. These models are not so much his friends as his allies, whom Bobby, in his superior position as the most famous model and leader of the group, uses as pawns and disposes once they are

no longer useful to his plans. When Bruce dies in the course of a terrorist attack, both Bobby and Bentley are indifferent to the demise of their colleague as well as to the grief of Tammy, who suffers an emotional breakdown upon receiving news of her boyfriend's death (368). The retired supermodel is equally unaffected by Tammy's death, which is staged as a suicide, but it is revealed that she was probably murdered by Bobby himself (383-384). Jamie and Bentley eventually also suffer violent deaths at the hands of Bobby (416-426). So, like Narcissus, who spurns the nymph who loves him, Bobby repels those who admire and want to be close to him until the supermodel, who is in the last scene in which he appears meaningfully described as "inspecting his face in a mirror" (432), is left alone with his specular image at which he likes to marvel.

4.2.3. Indifference to or delight in other people's suffering

Narcissists' indifference towards their surroundings, which is listed by Freud ("Einführung" 156) as one out of two features distinguishing this type of personality disorder, expresses itself not only in their struggle or reluctance to establish intimacy with friends, lovers, and family, but also in their lack of sympathy for human suffering. This indifference to or even delight in the emotional pain of another person is also exhibited by Narcissus, whose sadistic attitude towards Echo, the lovelorn nymph, and other people is captured in the following lines:

Thus had Narcissus mocked her; others too,
Hill-nymphs and water-nymphs and many a man
He mocked; (Ovid 3.402-404)

The word "mocked", as well as "luserat" (3.403) in the Latin original, which is the pluperfect of the verb 'play', foregrounds the pleasure that Narcissus derives from other people's misery as well as a sense of superiority that usually underlies the disrespectful act of mocking and that ties in with the young man's presumptuous nature.

Similar reactions to human suffering, which range from indifference to malicious delight and which are indicative of narcissistic characters' preoccupation with themselves and their selfish strive for power, can be encountered in Ellis' novels and short stories. Clay's turning his back towards Julian's drug addiction, which forces him into prostitution as a means of paying his debts, has previously been discussed. The self-centredness of the protagonist of *Less Than Zero* and *Imperial Bedrooms*, which is also commented upon by his friends on several occasions (*Imperial* 116; 124; 143), is further emphasized by his callousness towards a friend suffering from anorexia:

On the way home from lunch, I stop by Cedars-Sinai to visit Muriel, since Blair told me that she really wanted to see me. She's really pale and so totally thin that I can make out the veins in her neck too clearly. She also has dark circles under her eyes and the pink lipstick she'd put on clashes badly with the pale white skin on her face. (*Less* 36)

The indifferent attitude of Clay, whose general lack of emotional response is alluded to by the novel's title *Less Than Zero*, is already exemplified by his reluctance to visit Muriel, which is only overcome when Blair urges him to see the anorexic girl. His description of Muriel's battered outward appearance and unflattering makeup is marked by disgust and devoid of pity. In *Imperial Bedrooms*, the temporary departure of his lover, Rain, elicits a stronger emotional response than the disappearance of his friend, Kelly, who is later found dead after having been brutally murdered (*Imperial* 19; 61-62). The release of a video showing the assassination of Kelly sparks some interest in Clay, but when he is unable to find the video on the internet, this voyeuristic interest quickly subsides in favour of his obsession with Rain: "But I don't care. After searching for the links I simply fall back into the habit of looking at all the pics Rain sent me [...]" (67). Just as unaffected by the death of a friend are Dirk, Tim, and Graham in the short story "At the Still Point". Their friend, Jamie, died in a car accident in which Dirk was also involved:

Dirk never spoke about it a lot, just little details he gave us the week after it happened: the way the BMW tumbled, rolled across sand, a smashed cactus, how the upper part of Jamie's body burst through the windshield, the way Dirk pulled him out, laid him down, looked through Jamie's pockets for another joint. (*Informers* 11)

Dirk's account of the accident, which focuses on action-packed details aimed at creating suspense, is just as revealing of his lack of grief as his rummaging through the pockets of his dead friend's clothes in order to find a joint. A similar lack of respect can be observed on behalf of Tim, the narrator of the short story, who wishes to see the site of the accident in Palm Springs for the sake of curiosity. In the end, Tim does not even make the effort of going to Palm Springs because "whenever I'm there I feel very wasted and it's a drag" (11). In the short story "Letters from L.A.", Anne writes Sean Bateman, the protagonist of *The Rules of Attraction*, letters about her stay in Los Angeles, and in one of her letters, she describes the death of a friend named Randy:

Randy OD's a week ago (I think it was a week ago). Well, at least that's what they say he died of. They all told me that Randy OD'd, but Sean, I saw the room where they found him and there was so much blood. It was everywhere. There

was blood on the ceiling, Sean. How can blood get on the ceiling if you OD? How can it get there anyway? (Scotty says only if you explode.) Well, I went to the beach with Lance (this really gorgeous punker who works at Poseur on Melrose) and Lance gave me some Seconal, which helped a lot. I feel much better now. I really do. (172-173)

As in “At the Still Point”, the demise of a friend does not have a significant emotional impact on Anne, who mentions it as a minor incident in passing and does not even remember exactly when it happened. She seems primarily intrigued by the cause of the death, from which she seems to derive an exciting thrill as if it were a crime story, rather than grieving the loss of the person.

Occasionally, the narcissists in Ellis’ fiction are not just indifferent or delighted witnesses of another person’s misery, but they themselves are the ones who bring about people’s suffering. For instance, while in *Less Than Zero* Clay chooses to be ignorant to Julian’s downfall as a result of his drug addiction and prostitution, in *Imperial Bedrooms* he actively contributes to it by conspiring with Rip to have Julian murdered. Freud discusses such sadistic tendencies in relation with narcissism in a study of instinctual drives, in which he distinguishes two opposing drives: the death drive and the life drive. The death drive, which is commonly referred to as ‘Thanatos’ though the term is not found in Freud’s written work, is defined as an urge of all organic life towards an earlier state of things, namely death, as, according to Freud, inanimate matter existed before life (Freud, “Jenseits” 226-228). Like the death drive, the life death seeks to re-create an earlier state of organic life, but it does so by producing new life rather than destroying it (230-233). Freud (242) observes that the self-destructive instinct of Thanatos is typically directed towards oneself, whereas the sexual instinct of Eros tends to bind us to other people. Yet, in case of narcissism, which has already been defined as an investment of the libido in the self rather than the other, these relations are subverted, and under the influence of the narcissistic libido, the death drive is redirected from the self to external objects, which manifests itself in sadistic behavioural patterns (243-246). In his essay on narcissism, Freud (“Einführung” 172) also notes that these sadistic tendencies serve the purpose of eliminating anything that mitigates the narcissistic ego. This observation ties in with Clay’s aforementioned betrayal against his former best friend, which is based on his selfish wish to have Rain, who is in a relationship with Julian, for himself.

Previous chapters have already examined Patrick Bateman's sadistic torture and murder of victims such as his business associate Paul Owen and his ex-girlfriend Bethany, which serve the narcissistic purpose of eliminating persons who threaten his power and self-esteem. The connection between power and the pleasure derived from inflicting pain is also established in the work of Freud (*Abhandlungen* 30-31), who describes the cultural-anthropological origin of sadism as another means, besides courting, of overpowering the resistance of the sexual object. Hence, it is possibly no coincidence that Patrick's sadistic crimes are frequently preceded by or occur combined with sexual practices (*American* 235-237; 276-279; 291-293; 314-317). In these sexual murders, the protagonist derives sadistic pleasure not only from eliminate people posing a threat to his narcissistic ego, but also from conquering sexual objects. Freud (*Abhandlungen* 32) further notes that the sadistic component of the sexual drive constitutes a relic of cannibalistic cravings, which are also based on a desire for appropriation. This observation may also be related to Patrick's crimes, which often involve acts of cannibalism, as has already been noted in the chapter dealing with characters disappearing like Ovid's Echo. Tanner states that the notoriously gruesome descriptions in *American Psycho*, which detail not only the narrator's perspective as he tortures and murders people but also the suffering of his victims, emphasize this empowerment of Patrick, because "[w]hat appears to be an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the victim [...] is actually an opportunity for the psycho to appropriate his victims – especially the female ones – in consciousness as well as body" (106).

There are also instances in *American Psycho* in which Patrick Bateman's sadistic tendencies are focused on people who do not pose a threat to his ego and are often already disempowered or disadvantaged in some way. For instance, while watching the *Patty Winters Show*, the protagonist revels in the grief of parents mourning the loss of a child (*American* 133). As he walks on the streets one night, he kills an old, lisping man, mocking his victim's speech disorder, which is also indicative of his inability to show sympathy for the problems of other people (157-159). Noteworthy are also Patrick's numerous encounters with poor and homeless people, or "member[s] of the genetic underclass" (255), as he calls them, whom he likes to harass and humiliate with explicit allusions to their misery (78-79; 90; 109; 124-125; 255; 370-371) and who are subjected to his sadistic pleasure of inflicting physical pain as well (126-127; 334; 370). In one chapter, Patrick stabs a five-year-old child in the zoo and pushes his dying body behind a trash can (286-288). He also pretends to be a doctor in order to prevent other people

from calling a real physician and saving the child. His ruthlessness is further highlighted when he comments on the outward appearance of the distraught mother, who is described as “homely, Jewish-looking, overweight, pitifully trying to appear stylish in designer jeans and an unsightly leaf-patterned black wool sweater” (287). He then adds that killing child is less significant and “pleasurable” (288) than

taking the life of someone who has hit his or her prime, who has the beginnings of a full history, a spouse, a network of friends, a career, whose death will upset far more people whose capacity for grief is limitless than a child’s would, perhaps ruin many more lives than just the meaningless, puny death of this boy. (288)

Patrick’s words reveal that he regards murder as a sort of accomplishment which, depending on the victim’s social status, is evidence of his power. This passage and the crimes previously outlined reflect notions of Social Darwinism, which, in analogy to Darwin’s theory of survival of the fittest, states that those who exert power in society will survive and those who are deprived of power are destined for extinction (Bannister 3-13). According to this Darwinian scenario, Patrick’s murders, especially the killing of people who hold a certain amount of power, are evidence of his ability to compete with others and assert his authority, and they thus confirm him in his narcissistic sense of supremacy.

In more than one occasion throughout *American Psycho*, Patrick himself reflects on his sadistic behaviour and the underlying cause. Consider, for instance, the following lines, which are narrated shortly before he drowns his girlfriend’s dog:

There wasn’t a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being – flesh, blood, skin, hair – but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure. (*American* 271)

At a later point in the narrative, Patrick notes, “My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist” (326). In both passages, Patrick makes reference to the lack of compassion that underlies his gruesome crimes. The ability to feel compassion for others is also identified by Freud (*Abhandlungen* 67) as one of the primary restraints on engaging in sadistic practices. The psychoanalytic scholar states that children are prone to sadism because the ability for compassion is not acquired until a later stage of childhood development. In Ellis’ fiction, this lack of empathy for the suffering of others is commonly observed among

adult characters, stemming from their narcissistic preoccupation with themselves. For example, the fashion models of Bobby Hughes' terrorist organization in *Glamorama* are just as indifferent to the suffering of their victims as Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*:

“Do you know how many people died at the Ritz yesterday?” I ask.

“I didn't keep track,” [Jamie] says, and then, “Don't be so corny.” (*Glamorama* 361)

In his discussion of sadism, Freud (*Abhandlungen* 52) mentions further restraints that are supposed to prevent people from engaging in sadism, such as disgust, shame, and morality, and although he considers the development of these restraints to be organically determined, he acknowledges that they can be reinforced by means of educational and socializing influences. The prominence of sadistic practices in Ellis' fiction, thus, conveys a picture of a society in which such restraints on immoral and violent behaviour are undermined in favour of other values, such as greed and the desire for power. Patrick himself raises these issues from an individual to a social dimension when he writes the following review of Whitney Houston's song “The Greatest Love of All”:

But Whitney's talent is restored with the overwhelming “The Greatest Love of All,” one of the best, most powerful songs ever written about self-preservation and dignity. From the first line [...] to the last, it's a state-of-the-art ballad about believing in yourself. [...] Its universal message crosses all boundaries and instills with the hope that it's not too late for us to better ourselves, to act kinder. Since it's impossible in the world we live in to empathize with others, we can empathize with ourselves. (244)

In these lines, Patrick describes the emphasis on self-love in this “state-of-the-art ballad” as a “universal message” that arises from “the world we live in”, which is, according to him, a society in which “it's impossible [...] to empathize with others”. The same deterioration of morals in society is foregrounded when Patrick complains, “Justice is dead. Fear recrimination, innocence, sympathy, guilt, waste failure, grief, [sic] were things, emotions, that no one really felt anymore” (360). Hence, narcissism and its manifestations are once again presented as phenomena that have their roots not so much in the individual as in beliefs and values of the society in which this individual is raised.

4.2.4. Self-destruction

The final chapter of the section dealing with Narcissus will be based on the tragic turn in the fate of the mythological figure, whose fascination with his reflection in the lake eventually proves to be lethal as he is unable to tear himself away from his own image and dies. The chapter will examine characters in Ellis' work whose excessive self-love likewise contributes to their own destruction. Such self-destructive tendencies of narcissistically-minded people have already been hinted at in the discussion of Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, according to which the child's perception of their specular image as a coordinated whole which stands in striking opposition to their sense of a fragmented self results in an admiration of the mirror image on the one hand and in aggression towards the image, which is considered to be a threat to the self, on the other hand (Lacan 78). This rivalry between the image and the self, as well as the sense of frustration with one's own body, is also apparent in Ovid's myth when Narcissus makes the following exclamation upon realizing that he has fallen in love with his own image: "Would I might leave my body! I could wish / (Strange lover's wish) my love were not so near!" (Ovid 3.468-469). So, as Evans points out, narcissism as it is defined by Lacan and as it is also presented in the myth "has both an erotic character and an aggressive character" (12). While the first chapters of the section were concerned with narcissism's erotic character, that is, the attraction to the self and one's own image to the detriment of the others, the analysis focusing on Narcissus will be concluded with a discussion of the phenomenon's auto-aggressive character as it is found in the novels and short stories by Ellis.

The fact that characters such as *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman and *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward have also been discussed in relation to Echo, the oppressed nymph, already hints at the disempowerment that narcissistic figures in Ellis' fiction may experience. Patrick Bateman, for instance, is silenced and restricted in his freedom, and his individual identity disappears as he adapts to the beliefs and values propagated by the society in which he lives. It has already been noted that these beliefs and values, including capitalism and materialism, tie in with a narcissistic sense of self-worth. Patrick's self-destruction may, thus, be said to be driven by his own narcissism. In addition to his silencing, vanishing, and loss of free will, this self-destruction takes other forms which are more reminiscent of Narcissus than of Echo. Consider, for instance, the following passage which is revealing of the protagonist's mental deterioration towards the end of the novel:

There's no use in denying it: this has been a bad week. I've started drinking my own urine. I laugh spontaneously at nothing. Sometimes I sleep under my futon. I'm flossing my teeth constantly until my gums are aching and my mouth tastes like blood. (*American* 368)

The activities described in these lines illustrate Patrick's mental instability, or "[d]isintegration" (380), as he himself refers to his mental condition after recounting an incident in which he has hallucinations of a park bench following him. Moreover, some of these activities, such as the flossing of teeth until he starts bleeding, also involve self-mutilation. Patrick's aggression towards his own body points to Lacan's definition of narcissism as having an aggressive character in addition to its erotic one, and it is also reminiscent of Narcissus' actions in Ovid's myth, in which he is at one point described as beating his own chest: "Then in his grief he tore his robe and beat / His pale cold fists upon his naked breast, / And on his breast a blushing redness spread" (Ovid 3.482-484). Narcissus' grief is due to the futility of his love as he cannot unite with his specular image. In a similar vein, the frustration of Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* stems from the pressure exerted by society, which ignites him into pursuing an idealized self-image which is as difficult to attain as the conquest of Narcissus' reflection in the lake.

Another narcissistic character in Ellis's fiction which exhibits parallels to Echo and shall now be examined in light of narcissistic self-destruction is Victor Ward, the protagonist of *Glamorama*. It is often Bobby Hughes and his fellow terrorists who silence and manipulate Victor, relegating him to a position akin to that of Echo, but there are also scenes in which Victor's disempowerment arises from his own person. In the course of the narrative, Victor is haunted by his own image as forged pictures of him threaten to ruin his life, and towards the end of the novel, his identity is gradually usurped by a doppelganger, who leads his life in Manhattan while Victor is held captive in Europe. As has previously been noted, Victor's elimination at the hands of his own image can be related to Echo's punishment, which substitutes her individual voice for the words of others, as both are based on a form of repetition in which the original is replaced by a simulation. Yet, as Culler notes with regard to Ovid's myth, "there are two punishments, Echo's and Narcissus', two forms of repetition, the vocal repetition of Echo's speech and the visual repetition of Narcissus's reflection" (253), and Victor's fate may likewise be read as an intertextual reference to Narcissus' punishment.

Victor's development in the course of the narrative generally exhibits many parallels to that of Narcissus in the myth. At the beginning of the novel, the aspiring model is

primarily concerned with his own person and image, which he continuously admires in mirrors or on the cover of a magazine. Victor's infatuation with himself is also apparent in his interaction with other characters, as when he tells Jamie that she has "a hard time dealing with [his] hypermasculine vibe" (*Glamorama* 254), and also in his disregard of problems affecting people other than himself, such as homelessness, racism, and AIDS (57; 142; 171). His downfall is then triggered by his very own image when a picture showing Victor kissing his bosses' girlfriend is published, and it is his image that keeps robbing Victor of the power which he once held as the terrorists led by Bobby Hughes blackmail him with forged photographs and videos that frame him for crimes which he has not committed. This disempowerment manifests itself in Victor's increasingly frequent crying or being on the verge of tears (*Glamorama* 372; 376-378; 382-383; 386-387; 396; 407; 469). Such outbursts of emotion, which Victor scarcely displays at the beginning of the novel, allow again for parallels to be drawn to Narcissus, who loses his nonchalant attitude upon falling in love with his reflection in the lake and "weep[s]" (Ovid 3.459) while gazing at his image so that "his tears ripple[...] the pool" (Ovid 3.476). At one point, Victor laments that he is "exhausted" (*Glamorama* 366) and "fading" (366), which is not only reminiscent of Echo's disappearance, but also of the death of Narcissus, who wastes away, pining over his futile love for himself:

He drooped his weary head, and those bright eyes
That loved their master's beauty closed in death.
[...]
And then the brandished torches, bier and pyre
Were ready – but no body anywhere; (Ovid 3.502-511)

So, while Echo fades into a voice without body, Narcissus resigns himself for an image without body (Weigel 30). Similarly, *Glamorama*'s Victor eventually loses his self to his own image, which, like the reflection of the mythological youth, both "fools and fuels his delight" (Ovid 3.432), when he is kidnapped to Europe and replaced by a doppelganger who leads his life in Manhattan.

Another instance of vanishing that relates both to Victor Ward's narcissistic nature and to his self-destruction can be found in a flashback scene which is set shortly before Victor's rise to fame as a model and boyfriend of Chloe Byrnes. In this passage, Victor remembers spending time with friends in Los Angeles who were all busy "talking into a cell phone" (*Glamorama* 479) and "checking various gossip columns to see if they had

made it” (480). In the course of the flashback, the protagonist reflects on his relationship to these people, which, he realizes, is solely based on superficial values:

At first I was confused by what passed for love in this world: people were discarded because they were too old or too fat or too poor or they had too much hair or not enough, they were wrinkled, they had no muscles, no definition, no tone, they weren’t hip, they weren’t remotely famous. This was how you chose lovers. This was what decided friends. And I had to accept this if I wanted to get anywhere. (480-481)

As the character’s narcissistic demeanour in the first part of the novel suggests, Victor accepted the beliefs and values that are promoted in his social environment. Yet, the self-destructive consequences that arise from this narcissism are also hinted at in the flashback:

On the verge of tears – because I was dealing with the fact that we lived in a world where beauty was considered an accomplishment – I turned away and made a promise to myself: to be harder, to not care, to be cool. The future started mapping itself out and I focused on it. In that moment I felt as if I was disappearing from poolside in the villa on Ocean Drive and I was floating above the palm trees, growing smaller in the wide blank sky until I no longer existed [...]. (481)

In these lines, Victor describes himself as “disappearing” until he “no longer existed” following his acceptance of the fact that “beauty was considered an accomplishment” and his decision “to be harder, to not care, to be cool” in order to adapt to social ideals. This disappearance, which echoes Narcissus’s fate in Ovid’s myth, implies that since ideals of beauty and behaviour are socially determined rather than individually, narcissistic aspirations come at a price, namely, the individual’s impact at shaping and controlling his or her own identity. Thus, narcissism is presented in Ellis’ *Glamorama* as being inherently self-destructive as it is based on social influence and thus undermines individuality. Hence, the final chapter of *Glamorama*, in which Victor is described as becoming immersed in the landscape of a mural at which he gazes, just as Narcissus transforms into a part of his surrounding environment when his body vanishes and a flower grows in its place (Ovid 3.511-512), may be read as emphasizing this loss of self as a result of becoming absorbed by one’s surroundings with its system of beliefs and values.

Another character in Ellis’ fiction whose narcissism entails his own downfall is Bret, the protagonist of *Lunar Park*. In the chapter on self-love, it has already been noted that Bret’s narcissism is reflected, amongst other things, by the characters in his fictional

work, which are closely modelled on his own life and personality. This creation of mirror images, which is revealing of his narcissistic preoccupation with himself, becomes detrimental to Bret when he meets a person called Clayton, who exhibits several parallels to *Less Than Zero*'s Clay, aside from the similarity of their names (*Lunar* 102-104). Like the protagonist of Bret's debut novel, Clayton is a student at Camden College. Clay's subject of study is not revealed in *Less Than Zero*, but in the sequel, *Imperial Bedrooms*, he has already established himself as a successful screenwriter, which ties in with Clayton's stated wish of becoming a writer. Yet, *Less Than Zero*'s Clay is not the only character from Bret's fiction with which Clayton is related. The character in *Lunar Park* also strikingly resembles *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman in various aspects. Not only does Clayton disguise himself for Bret's Halloween party as Patrick Bateman, wearing a "bloodstained (and dated) Armani suit" (49) and "inspecting the guests as if they were prey" (49), but Aimee Light, a student and love affair of Bret, notes that he looks like Christian Bale, who played the role of *American Psycho*'s protagonist in the novel's filmic adaptation (109). Finally, Clayton may be regarded as a mirror image of Bret himself, not only because he is closely linked to two characters in the latter's fiction, but they share further similarities which are revealed throughout the novel: Aimee, in fact, claims that Clayton resembles not only Christian Bale but also Bret, "[g]ive or take twenty years" (109). This resemblance even leads Bret to mistake Clayton for a doppelganger of his own at one point of the story (148-150). Parallels between Bret and Clayton can also be found in terms of their professions because both characters pursue a literary career despite their fathers' wishes for them to attend business school (8; 103). Moreover, Clayton's manuscript for his first, unpublished novel, "Minus Number", not only mirrors Bret's debut novel when it comes to the title, but the protagonist realizes that it is actually an exact replica of his own manuscript for *Less Than Zero*, containing the same typographical and spelling mistakes (389). From their first encounter at the Halloween party, Bret finds Clayton's resemblance to the protagonist of his novel *American Psycho* uncanny (49; 66), and his fear increases as Clayton, who, it is revealed, has committed crimes almost identical to those of Patrick (156-160), haunts Bret and triggers supernatural incidents that endanger him and his family. So, like Narcissus' reflection in the lake, the description of which as "a phantom of a mirrored shape" (Ovid 3.437) also carries supernatural connotations and which Narcissus misrecognizes as a separate person endowed with his own agency (3.431-462), Bret's mirror image manages to emancipate itself and gain power over its

original. This disempowerment which Bret suffers at the hands of Clayton, as well as their close connection, is captured in the following lines:

Because Clayton was – and had always been – someone I had known.

He was somebody who had always known me.

He was somebody who had always known *us*.

Because Clayton and I were always the same person.

The writer whispered. *Go to sleep.*

Clayton and the writer whispered. *Disappear here.* (*Lunar* 383)

Once again, the mantra ‘disappear here’, which recurs in several work written by Ellis, becomes an emblem signalling a character’s loss of power. In the novel’s next chapter, Bret wakes up in hospital after his final battle against Clayton, and finds out that he has not only been physically injured during the fight, but his son, Robby, has also gone missing (384). In the further course, Bret loses the rest of his family when his marriage to Jayne, which has already been strained due to Bret’s continuing substance abuse, breaks up as the couple struggles to cope with Robby’s disappearance. Ellis’ *Lunar Park*, thus, allegorically illustrates the self-destructive nature of narcissism, with Clayton personifying Bret’s narcissistic nature and also bringing about his downfall, just as the mythological figure of Narcissus is eventually undone by his own reflection in the lake.

4.3. When Narcissus meets Echo

Up to this point, the analysis of characters in Ellis’ fiction in light of their intertextual relation to Ovid’s Narcissus and Echo has been divided into two strands which have focused on the self-absorbed youth and the lovelorn nymph respectively. The present chapter will conclude the analysis by examining these two strands in conjunction. As has already been apparent in previous chapters, the novels and short stories by Ellis do not portray Echo-like characters on the one hand and Narcissus-like characters on the other hand in isolation from one another, but like Ovid’s tale from his mythological epic, *Metamorphoses*, they are concerned with the encounter of these two opposing types of characters and the power relations involved in their interactions. Ellis’ work further conforms to the myth by Ovid in that this power struggle is typically resolved in favour of those characters that intertextually draw on Narcissus. These characters manage to seize and consolidate their power by dedicating themselves to their own needs and desires exclusively and disregarding other people’s interests as well as the

pain which they inflict on their surroundings through their narcissistic behaviour. For instance, Clay, the protagonist of *Less Than Zero* and *Imperial Bedrooms*, has no qualms about shunning and later plotting the murder of his former best friend, Julian, in order to achieve his selfish aims. In *Glamorama*, the distress and pressure to which Chloe is subjected in her modelling career is a sacrifice that her narcissistic boyfriend, Victor, is willing to take in order to satisfy his own lust for fame. So, characters like Chloe are reminiscent of Ovid's Echo not only when it comes to the forms of suffering to which they are subjected but also in that this suffering is caused by their narcissistic counterparts. A striking example of such a character is the anonymous admirer of Sean in *The Rules of Attraction*, whose silencing and eventual death are the results of Sean's indifference towards her, which is in turn based on his narcissistic preoccupation with himself.

However, in its intertextual evocation of the tale of Narcissus and Echo, Ellis' fiction also shows some deviations from the mythological text. Occasionally, the roles of Narcissus and Echo are reversed in terms of gender so that a female character is empowered by means of her narcissistic investment in herself whereas a male character is relegated to a position marked by silence, rejection, and other losses suffered by Echo in the myth. *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman, for instance, has met his match in his equally narcissistic girlfriend, Evelyn, who in some scenes even manages to establish herself as his superior and strips Patrick from the power which he usually holds by being utterly absorbed in herself and her own interests and denying him any attention. Another example of gender reversal that has been previously discussed is found in *Imperial Bedrooms*, in which the aspiring actress Rain takes advantage of Clay's romantic feelings for her in order to boost her career. Yet, towards the end, the novel reverts back to traditional gender relations when Clay forces Rain to stay in a relationship with him by means of drugs and violence, choosing to be as ignorant of her feelings as she has been of his. Hence, the gender reversal in *Imperial Bedrooms* is only temporary, as is the one in *American Psycho*, where Patrick steps into the role of Narcissus more often than he is thrust by a narcissistic woman into a position akin to that of Echo. The ephemeral nature of female narcissists' supremacy in Ellis' work is also apparent in the short story "Water from the Sun", which follows Cheryl Laine, a successful news anchor who orders her boyfriend to videotape her appearances on television. In the course of the narrative, Cheryl's power is mitigated as it is revealed that the recordings of her newscasts not only cater to her narcissistic fascination with

herself but are also supposed to attract the attention of her callous boyfriend: "Once the news begins I stare straight into the camera and hope that Danny is watching since it's really the only time he ever looks at me" (*Informers* 101). This withdrawal of her boyfriend's attention, from which Cheryl suffers, is also emphasized in the following lines: "Danny sits back and I'm feeling self-conscious, so I roll over onto my stomach, but it's uncomfortable and I roll over onto my side and then onto my back but he's not looking at me anyway. His eyes are closed" (105). So, once again, the gender relations, which initially appear to be in favour of the female character, are eventually altered to suit traditional patterns, with Cheryl being reduced to occupy a disempowered and dependent position as she craves for the attention of her boyfriend, who, in the end, dumps her via a note which he leaves in her apartment. Not only are women in Ellis' fiction who resemble Ovid's Narcissus in their behaviour and desires not granted any lasting power over men, but while there are several female characters who maintain their connection to Echo throughout the narrative and are not able to liberate themselves from their oppressed and demeaned state, such as Jayne in *Lunar Park* and the fatally ill girlfriend in the short story "On the Beach," the male characters in the novels and short stories by Ellis are typically exempt from such continuing disempowerment.

As can be gathered from the previous paragraph and has also been established in the chapters before, Ellis' narcissistic characters tend to face competition in their pursuit of power and superiority. Thus, the work of Ellis further differs from the myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in that narcissism is presented not so much as an individual phenomenon but as a problem that affects society at large. As a result of this collective narcissism, which is reinforced by beliefs and values promoted by Western society, narcissists encountered in Ellis' work are often in danger of being reduced to intertextual repetitions of Echo as others try to outlive and weaken them in ways that are reminiscent of the nymph's punishments through Juno and Narcissus. Hence, it is not surprising that narcissistic characters such as *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman and *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward are also prominently featured in the present paper's section examining characters which exhibit parallels to Echo. Patrick is time and again intimidated by people such as Evelyn and his business associate Paul Owen, who are both focused solely on their own interests, and the downfall of Victor can be attributed to Bobby Hughes, a rivalling narcissist who strips *Glamorama*'s protagonist of his freedom and skews him for his own ends. As has already been discussed, Victor's loss of power is signalled, amongst other things, by his reluctance to look into the mirror and

his increasingly frequent emotional breakdowns towards the end of the novel. The following statement is likewise indicative of his transition from Narcissus to Echo: “I start masturbating a dozen times but always stop when I realize that it’s getting me nowhere” (*Glamorama* 367). In this scene, as opposed to the beginning of the novel, Victor is no longer able to derive any erotic pleasure from his self, which suggests that his narcissistic self-love has vanished together with his power. Hence, the title of the present chapter not only refers to the encounter of characters reminiscent of Echo on the one hand and characters based on Narcissus on the other hand, but also to the transformation that many Narcissus-like characters undergo and that relates them more closely to the oppressed nymph.

So, in Ellis’ work, characters exhibiting narcissistic tendencies are by no means static, but they may be forced into the role of Echo and shed off their excessive self-admiration in the course of the narrative. This observation raises the question whether the transformation from Narcissus to Echo is only expressed in terms of disempowerment as it is experienced by the mythological nymph or whether it may also imply a reformation whereby the initially narcissistic characters experience some moral growth. The protagonist of *Glamorama*, in fact, undergoes substantial character development, becoming more attentive to the needs of others, both in his immediate environment and in society as a whole. The changes in Victor’s character are most apparent after his return to the United States, following Bobby Hughes’ death and the breakup of the terrorist organization (*Glamorama* 445-463). Back in his home country, Victor has re-established contact with his estranged father, and engages in a relationship with Alison, with whom he initially had a sexual affair and for whom he now genuinely cares. Instead of pursuing his modelling career and consolidating his reputation as a celebrity, as he used to do, Victor goes to law school, declining a role in a film in order to concentrate on his studies. His diminished preoccupation with himself and his outward appearance is further emphasized when Damien, his former boss, compliments his outward appearance and Victor replies, “You’re just looking at the surface” (453). Yet, despite his change for the better, Victor is not granted a happy ending, being instead abducted to Europe and replaced by a doppelganger. This final turn of events in *Glamorama* suggests that, in the society depicted in Ellis’ fiction, narcissistic characters may reform in such a way that they shift the focus of their attention from themselves to their surroundings and take moral responsibility, but power continues to be solely accessible to those who adhere to narcissistic patterns of behaviour.

It has also been shown that, in Ellis' fiction, it is not only fellow narcissists who bring about the downfall of characters that are intertextually related to Ovid's Narcissus. As illustrated in *Glamorama*, in which Victor is eventually undone by his double, that is, the very image which he narcissistically admires, these self-absorbed characters often turn into their own worst enemies. In *American Psycho*, Patrick also engages in self-destructive behaviour which stems from his narcissism, or more specifically, from the pressure which his pursuit of power and perfection places on him, as well as from the undermining of his individuality as the ideals that guide narcissistic striving are socially dictated rather than individually defined. Society's role in the narcissist's slide towards self-destruction has also been thematized in previous chapters. In Ellis' fiction, one may encounter scenes in which narcissistic characters are being more self-reflexive and critically think about the society in which they live and its impact on their behaviour. The analysis has already examined some socially critical monologues narrated by *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman and *Glamorama*'s Victor Ward respectively. The short story "Discovering Japan", which follows the rock musician Bryan Metro, who indulges in substance abuse and frequently engages in violent and abusive behaviour that is detrimental to others' as well as his own well-being, ends with the following lines:

On the plane leaving Tokyo I'm sitting alone [...], things changing, falling apart, fading, another year, a few more moves, a hard person who doesn't give a fuck, a boredom so monumental it humbles, arrangements so fleeting made by people you don't even know that it requires you to lose any sense of reality you might have once acquired, expectations so unreasonable you become superstitious about ever matching them. [...] I stare out the window and I relax for a moment when the lights of Tokyo [...] vanish from view but this feeling only lasts a moment because Roger is telling me that other lights in other cities, in other countries, on other planets, are coming into view soon. (*Informers* 149)

To begin with, the passage quoted above illustrates the narcissist's loneliness as Bryan Metro is "sitting alone" on the airplane. This sense of isolation is also conveyed in the mythological figure of Narcissus, who in Ovid's tale is scarcely depicted as interacting with other characters other than his own image. In addition to this loneliness, which, as becomes evident from the phone calls to his estranged ex-wife and former band colleague, affects the rock musician, the external control exercised by "people you don't even know" to which the character is submitted and society's expectations, which cause frustration as they are "so unreasonable you become superstitious about ever matching them" and they require one to become "a hard person who doesn't give a fuck", are

mentioned as aspects contributing to the self-destruction of the arrogant musician. Thus, Ellis' short stories and novel make a point of emphasizing the self-destructive side of narcissism and showing that their hold on power tends to be ephemeral. In the end, many narcissistic characters in Ellis' fiction are just as lonely and deprived of their power as their former victims, which intertextually recalls the events in Ovid's myth, in which Narcissus's isolation and eventual disappearance mirrors the fate of the nymph whom he repelled.

So, by reading the novels and short stories written by Bret Easton Ellis in light of the myth of Narcissus and Echo as it is recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the texts may not only be described as pieces of transgressive fiction, which feature characters violating socially established norms and expectations, but they may also be regarded as subversive in that these transgressions are traced back to the very society that openly condemns them and critical light is shed on dominant structures, values, and ideals that reify and support narcissistic behaviour and practices of oppressions similar to those to which Ovid's Echo is subjected.

5. Conclusion

The analysis, which has examined the novels and short stories by Bret Easton Ellis as an intertext evoking Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo, has shown that characters in Ellis' work may generally be divided into two groups corresponding to the two protagonists of the ancient myth. On the one hand, there are those characters whose concern and love for others renders them, like Echo, vulnerable to oppression and discrimination. These characters are opposed by the ones who intertextually relate to Narcissus in that they derive their power from their excessive preoccupation with themselves and indifference to the needs and plights of others. It is this self-centredness and ruthlessness which facilitates the narcissist's selfish pursuit of grandiosity. The headings 'Disappear here' and 'Reappear there' are, thus, two imperatives illustrating the continuous power struggle that characters in the society of Ellis' fiction, which corresponds to contemporary Western society, have to face: People extending their concern towards others are running risk of disappearing by fading into oblivion or, at worst, by being robbed of their physical existence by those who do not refrain from acts of violence as a means of achieving a competitive advantage. Hence, it is not until a person assumes

narcissistic patterns of behaviour that he or she may appear in the limelight of other people's attention and consolidate his or her power.

However, this approach to Ellis' work also foregrounds the self-destructive nature of narcissistic beliefs and values propagated by society. As a result of these self-destructive tendencies, characters commonly associated with Narcissus, such as Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* and Victor Ward in *Glamorama*, have also been discussed in relation to Echo. The pressure stemming coming from their selfish pursuit of power and the undermining of their individuality, which is substituted for socially established ideals, fills them with a sense of frustration that may also affect their mental health and subjects them to forms of disempowerment that are reminiscent of Echo's suffering following her punishment by Juno and her rejection by Narcissus.

In addition to the promotion of narcissistically inflected concepts such as capitalism, consumerism, materialism, and celebrity culture, the reading of Ellis' work in light of Ovid's myth has illustrated the persistence of traditional gender relations in Western society as it is represented in the novels and short stories of the contemporary American author. It is usually male characters who resemble Narcissus in that they are empowered by their self-love, whereas female characters tend to exhibit parallels to the disempowered and oppressed nymph whose love is spurned. There are occasional instances of gender reversals in the intertextual evocation of Narcissus and Echo in works such as *American Psycho* and *Imperial Bedrooms*, but this female supremacy is only of a temporary nature, as it is usually reverted towards the end of the narrative or the disempowered male finds another female victim over whom he can exercise his power.

In conclusion, the present paper has not only revealed that the novels and short stories by Ellis may be interpreted as texts that are densely encoded with meanings of society, power, and gender relations, but it has also highlighted intertextuality's role as a prolific process of creating meaning in general.

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Appendix

Abstract (English)

The fictional work of the American author Bret Easton Ellis has often been condemned as shallow and pointless by critics and readers alike. In an article in *The New York Times*, the literary critic Daniel Mendelsohn, for example, describes Ellis' *American Psycho* as "a bloated, stultifyingly repetitive, overhyped novel about a fabulously good-looking and expensively dressed Wall Street sociopath who tortures and dismembers beautiful young women".¹¹ The paper outlined in the present abstract aims at dispelling such misconceptions of Ellis' fiction, which are notable for their portrayal of callous, selfish characters and the oppression of women or other disadvantaged groups, by reading the works of the novels and short stories in light of Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Echo, which is similarly concerned with a self-absorbed youth and the suffering of a spurned and punished nymph. The analysis of Ellis' work by means of its intertextual relations to the mythological tale shall uncover its potential to generate meanings which are not only transgressive but also subversive in that the transgression of social norms and taboos sheds a critical light on dominant Western beliefs and values.

Taking the myth's emphasis on gender dynamics, which is also a prominent theme in much of Ellis' work, as its focal point, the paper will address the following questions: What meanings are generated and foregrounded by the intertextual relation to the myth? How does the intertextual evocation of Narcissus and Echo affect the reading of Ellis' characters in particular? And finally, how are constructions of gender and power relations in Ellis' works informed by Ovid's tale? In order to address these questions, the paper draws on psychoanalytic theory, feminist criticism, and theories of intertextuality, embracing a postmodern conception of intertextuality, which not only regards each textual construct as intrinsically intertextual but also holds that meaning resides primarily in the reader rather than the author.

Submitting Ellis' novels and short stories to a close reading, the analysis will be divided into two sections dealing with characters related to Narcissus and characters evoking Echo respectively. The findings of these two sections are finally examined in

¹¹ Mendelsohn, Daniel. "Lesser Than Zero. Bret Easton Ellis's Characters Are Still Obsessed with Appearance, Even More So." Rev. of *Glamorama*, by Bret Easton Ellis. *New York Times* 24 January 1999. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/24/books/lesser-than-zero.html>>.

conjunction, which allows to draw conclusions on the representation of gender dynamics in the fiction of Bret Easton Ellis.

Abstract (Deutsch)

In der Vergangenheit wurden die fiktiven Werke des amerikanischen Schriftstellers Bret Easton Ellis sowohl von Kritikern als auch Lesern häufig als oberflächlich und trivial verworfen. Der *New York Times* Kritiker Daniel Mendelsohn bezeichnet Ellis *American Psycho* beispielsweise als „einen aufgeblähten, verblödend repetitiven, hochgejubelten Roman über einen fabelhaft gutaussehenden und teuer gekleideten Wall Street Soziopathen, der schöne junge Frauen foltert und verstümmelt“ („a bloated, stultifyingly repetitive, overhyped novel about a fabulously good-looking and expensively dressed Wall Street sociopath who tortures and dismembers beautiful young women“).¹² Die in dem vorliegenden Abstract vorgestellte Arbeit hat es sich zum Ziel gesetzt, solche Auffassungen zu widerlegen, indem Ellis Romane und Kurzgeschichten, die, vor allem, für ihre Darstellung von gefühlskalten, selbstsüchtigen Charakteren und der Unterdrückung von Frauen oder anderen Personen mit einer sozial benachteiligten Stellung bekannt sind, im Lichte von Ovids Mythos von Narziss und Echo, der sich auf ähnliche Weise mit einem von sich selbst eingenommenen Jüngling und dem Leiden einer gestraften und verschmähten Nymphe auseinandersetzt, analysiert werden. Die Analyse von Ellis Werken anhand ihrer intertextuellen Bezüge zum Mythos soll aufzeigen, dass es sich dabei keineswegs lediglich um triviale Literatur handelt, sondern um Literatur reich an tieferen Bedeutungen, die nicht nur soziale Normen und Tabus brechen, sondern auch ein kritisches Licht auf dominante Wertvorstellungen und Strukturen in der westlichen Gesellschaft werfen.

Die Arbeit, die den sowohl im Mythos als auch in Ellis Werken gesetzten Themenschwerpunkt auf Geschlechterverhältnisse als Ausgangspunkt nimmt, widmet sich der Beantwortung folgender Fragen: Welche Bedeutungen werden durch die intertextuellen Bezüge zu Ovids Mythos geschaffen und hervorgehoben? Wie beeinflussen die Parallelen zu den Figuren des Narziss und der Echo die Interpretation von Ellis Charakteren? Wie lässt sich die Darstellung von Geschlechter- und Machtverhältnissen in Ellis Romanen und Kurzgeschichten anhand des Mythos auslegen? Zur Untersuchung dieser Fragen werden psychoanalytische Überlegungen zum Narzissmus, feministische Theorien und Studien zur Intertextualität herangezogen,

¹² Mendelsohn, Daniel. "Lesser Than Zero. Bret Easton Ellis's Characters Are Still Obsessed with Appearance, Even More So." Rev. of *Glamorama*, by Bret Easton Ellis. *New York Times* 24 Jänner 1999. 22 Jänner 2013 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/24/books/lesser-than-zero.html>>.

wobei eine postmoderne Auffassung von Intertextualität, die sämtliche Literatur als das Resultat intertextueller Verknüpfungen betrachtet und der zufolge der Autor nicht mehr als absolute bedeutungsgebende Instanz anzusehen ist, vertreten wird.

Die Analyse von Ellis Romanen und Kurzgeschichten, die einem *close reading* unterzogen werden, ist zunächst in zwei Teile gegliedert, die jeweils den Charakteren, die auf Narziss basieren, und denen, die intertextuelle Bezüge zu Echo aufweisen, gewidmet sind. Abschließend werden die Ergebnisse dieser beiden Teile zusammengetragen und in Verbindung reflektiert, um Schlüsse über die Dynamik von Geschlechterkonstellationen in der Literatur von Bret Easton Ellis zu ziehen.

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