

# [Capitalism, violence, and sexuality ‘american psycho’ by bret easton ellis and ‘d...](https://assignbuster.com/capitalism-violence-and-sexuality-american-psycho-by-bret-easton-ellis-and-dracula-by-bram-stoker/)

“ It has been said in literature, excessive sexual behaviour always leads to corruption”

To present the significance of sexual behaviour in both novels is to link the psychological power of sexual impulses over the individual’s moral principles, and hence associates all corrupted motives and human destruction to their sexual desires. Both Stoker and Easton Ellis in Dracula and American Psycho have modernised the concept of associating sexual desires with capitalism and align sexual consumption with materialistic values; ultimately playing a role in the act of murder. Easton Ellis portrays Patrick Bateman’s narcissistic personality in relation to his compulsive demand for superiority; which links his sexual impulses to the same sensation as murder. Whereas Stoker’s destruction of women’s sexuality during the act of vampirism shows the empowerment of masculinity among a Victorian society pursuing perverted sexual desires. Despite the differences in eras between the two novels, both perspectives, a typical Victorian society and a 1980s New York society, share a capitalist-driven superlatively moral system; demanding men to survive by means of vice and not virtue, thus creating their sexual desires as symbols of capitalism, materialism and loss of moral standards.

Throughout American Psycho, Easton Ellis explores the notion of desire in contemporary dark gothic literature; leading the character Bateman to become entirely desensitised to life, and the spiral of violence to begin. The importance of the prostitute Christine, abused sexually on multiple occasions before her murder is eventually carried out; labelled with a false name and bought with money, further objectifies and dehumanises her existence or individuality as a woman. Bateman is portrayed to be in complete control the entire time, dominating the encounter; demanding to change her presentation “ don’t wear that outfit again” to the point he controls women’s mortality, “ I just remind myself that this thing, this girl, this meat, is nothing, is shit” Although, feminist critic Loorie Moore considers Bateman’s unrestrained psychotic murderous tendencies as “ a meaningful outlet for his desires and emotions, he is frailer than those he rapes, abuses, murders and sadistically tortures.” This take on Easton Ellis’s way to attain Bateman’s self-esteem, value and place in society, rather than to buy it, draws insight on Bateman’s own humanity and his ability to value others as anything other than flesh to be used. However, Ellis engages through Bateman, not as an individual portrayal of the character, but rather to amplify New York society’s obsession with materiality and abandonment of all values other than wealth to extreme degrees: “ I’m hoping she realises that this would have happened to her no matter what […] I would have still found her. This is the way to earthworks.” Here suggesting women have no worth, thus persuading the reader their lack of wealth, possessions and status gives Bateman superiority. Additionally, Ellis suggests Bateman’s sociopathic appetite for violence, sexual desires and no disregard for the humanity of others is the ultimate end point of a capitalist, consumer culture that values only wealth and materialism. The reoccurring motif of “ Les Miserables” is continually brought up through measures of sex; “ The Broadway cast recording of Les Miserables is playing on CD on the stereo […] I place her on the couch.” This music was associated with the elite, and so creates the uncomfortable contrast between the low class prostitutes consumed by an atmosphere of capitalism and highlights the distinction of classes and the inequality between Bateman and the prostitute. The music represents women’s struggle for equality and humanity against their oppressors. Later, this symbol divides genders and classes and shows that it is the women’s lack of superficiality and wealth that is what ultimately threatens their mortality.

This correspondingly links with Stoker’s application of the subject of vampirism as a metaphor for capitalism throughout Dracula, highlighting the underlying exploration of ‘ Marxism’. Similar to Bateman taking possession of prostitutes in American Psycho, Dracula fiercely demands “ This man belongs to me!” as Stoker objectifies mankind and asserts ownership to a symbol of capitalism and corruption. Dracula, therefore represents Victorian society’s sexual oppression of woman, who are helpless and not complicit with their rape. Contextually, Stoker shows how every aspect of Dracula’s existence conflicts with Victorian Society; the extreme sexual oppression of women and the extent of men’s animalistic sexual traits. Therefore, the fear of Dracula is not because of the physical threat he poses but the fear of social change, highlighted through the metaphor of becoming vampires themselves (lascivious humans). This further projects society’s fear of the exploration of Marxism; their capitalist system being superseded by a socialist order and a ‘ class-less’ society. This would have made Dracula extremely controversial to Victorian readers of the time, similar to Otto Friedrich’s opinion on American Psycho: ‘ I think that this repulsive novel will contribute to the violence that afflicts our society’.

Therefore, both authors display human destruction as the product of sexual consumption; in American Psycho Easton-Ellis demonstrates psychological and physical sexual impulses as a form of ‘ vice’, blurring the boundaries between sexual pleasure and violence with the use of allusions. Similarly, throughout Dracula, Stoker orchestrates the fundamental concept of female sexual desires to allude to evilness and danger.

Through the novel of American Psycho, Ellis creates an environment in which the reader becomes desensitised by intense and physical violence by Bateman, and subsequently, the reader is slowly and psychologically reduced to Bateman’s disposition. Ellis expresses the disturbed mentality of Bateman; “ There wasn’t a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. […] my depersonalisation was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure.” Ellis refers to Bateman’s materialistic lifestyle patterns and demonstrates the insignificance of the details and allowing the reader to become desensitised to the high volume of irrelevant details of experiences. The numbness of the monotony of Bateman’s life that Ellis creates for the reader is joined by an identical numbness to Bateman’s violent acts. Although the novel’s vivid and graphic depictions of sex, torture, and murder can be initially unsettling, the sheer volume and detail of these descriptions allows the reader to experience a desensitisation to the upsetting material. For example, “ I suddenly imagine Evelyn’s skeleton, twisted and crumbling, and this fills me with glee.” The parallel between the inappropriate repetition of Bateman’s life contributing to his appetite for violence can be supported by professor Brian Smith who argues “ His desire for murder stems from his psychotic state and nothing he does is rational or meaningful.” This illustrates Bateman’s all-consuming sexual thirst which dominates his senses throughout his extensive violence; showing clearly the contrasting sensations between sex and crime beginning to blur together-especially during the intense murder scene of the prostitutes.

In comparison to American Psycho, in Dracula sexual impulses allude to the sensations of murder as opposed to the act of murder which alludes to the sensations of sex. Stoker illustrates the deeply ambiguous attitudes of Victorian society towards the female sexual appetite and gender roles, critiquing the hegemonic beliefs of socially constructed sexual identity, exploring sex, gender and desire. During a sexually repressed Victorian age, Stoker uses the act of vampirism to show a convenient metaphor of sex; “ I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I close my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited-waited with beating heart.” Here, the vampiric tradition of blood-sucking is symbolic of the exchange of bodily fluids during sex. This is supported by Nilufer Akin who argues; “ as blood connotes semen, another life-giving bodily liquid, Dracula reflects upon fears of sexuality and other problems related to it.” The incident of seduction is remarkable for the reversal of traditional gender roles. Stoker’s representation of Dracula as a sexually aggressive predator, suggests his vampire fangs as a symbol of a destructive phallic instrument; and his bites, a form of rape; combined with his overt sexual energy to form his appeal. Moreover, the theme of vampirism through Dracula represents a combination of unwilling rape and sexual desire. This amplifies Dracula as a satyromaniacal serial rapist, combined with the concept of masochism, a form of sexual pleasure derived from inflicting or receiving pain. This is supported by Stoker’s significant link between blood and Dracula’s pleasure as he states “ The blood is the life!”. Here, the motif of blood is essentially as important to Dracula as the undertaking the act of rape or murder itself, acting as a materialistic human trophy of possessing the body in its most extreme format.

The significance of the appearance juxtaposed against the reality of gender expectations lies very closely to sexual actions and motives between the two that appear in both texts, however in much-contrasting perspectives of the male.

Easton Ellis presents another way in which an individual’s sexual desirability leads to the demoralization of sexual attraction, with the idea of labelling and objectifying women to fuel the importance of physical appearance to Bateman’s hyper-sexual personality. “ All it comes down to is this: I feel like shit but look great” The body is placed on par with the other aspects that comprise his appearance and identity, for instance, he defines women by derogatory phrases such as “ big tits” and “ high heels”. These signs, which are required to certify someone’s sexual desirability, demonstrates the obsession with bodies, perfected images and fabricated appearances which emphasises the predominance of ‘ signifiers’ over personality in a postmodern culture. Strongly mirroring this, Bateman’s sexual actions and violence may “ feel great” but appear horrific when perceived on the surface of morality. Applying the ‘ iceberg theory’, as a way of explaining the greater unseen influence of the subconscious human mind over the rest of the brain suggests that ultimately Bateman’s superficial reasons for murdering the lower class of society is actually deeply related to his sexual frustrations and the confusion of consumption, desire and destruction over women. However, Easton Ellis argues Bateman only acknowledges appearance as: “ surface became the only thing”, disregarding any sense of feeling or emotion to the relevance of Bateman’s actions, whether pleasurable or corrupted. The only drive for purpose is the ‘ image’ and how it is perceived. This is specifically rooted in the materialism accompanying Ellis’s frustration with the capitalism of the 1980s, and that is reflected throughout the lifestyle and personality of Patrick Bateman and the immoral social system set in American Psycho.

In relation to significance of sexual appearance, the authority with which Stoker presents women’s appearance over the principles of the traditional feminine sexuality, further demonstrates the horror of Dracula; not only the “ vampire” power of beautiful pure women but also the fear and threat of female sexual expression and aggression in a conservative Victorian society. Stoker questions the perspective of women’s vulnerability by embodying the highest qualities of both sexes; “ ah that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man’s brain- a brain that a man should have been the much gifted- and woman’s heart.” This reflects the traditional Victorian stereotypes of both men and woman; the absence but appearance of the masculine principle of objective rationality, combined with feminine principles of empathy, love and compassion which remains within and subconsciously defends themselves from becoming a sexually dominant predator. However, Stoker shows how the female mindset of ‘ Mina’ is subjected to the Barbarian and ‘ dark’ sexuality associated with a ‘ man’s brain’; contradicting the stereotypical notion of women in the novel as ‘ victims’, but illustrating that losing control of your sexual series will lead to inevitable consequences. A feminist reading implies the ownership of a ‘ man’s brain’ in addition to a ‘ woman’s heart’ is establishing and defending equal sexuality for women; establishing the importance of retaining both gender characteristics, results in the empowerment of the feminine nature. In addition to the overpowering feminist element of the novel, Nilufer Akin reads the acts of rape and murder as more of gender political view: “ the reason, Dracula attacks women is to overpower the men of Britain, to take control of the capitalist system and to restore the old aristocratic paradigm” Contradicting the concept of sexual desire used as part of the motive for female destruction but as a violent protest of change to the female sexuality and no longer models of virtue and purity; shown through “ she actually licked her lips like an animal”. Establishing the vital link between vampirism and sex that pervades the novel, Stoker also presents this undead woman as voluptuous, aggressive, and insatiable. The position that the vampire assumes over Harker’s body suggests a sexual act, and this display of female sexual aggression both attracts and repulses Harker.

Both novels display sexual desire as a motif of capitalism, materialism and violence in the dehumanising moral system, and holding similar consequences to woman’s mortality, sexuality but also their individual identity. With the absence of any moral principles, the sensations of desire and consumption, defines both antagonists: Dracula and Bateman undertake their tirade of sexual aggression and violence towards symbols of capitalism of their society. Easton Ellis presents women as sexually abused, dehumanising their sexual body to fulfil society’s materialistic obsession. Woman’s experience of sex inflicts the equivalent pain as their murder, whilst Bateman is sexual stimulated by murder and his sexual performance enhanced by murderous thoughts. Similarly, Stoker alludes to the pain of murder creating the same sensations of sex for Dracula, however again elevating the act of rape of a woman to the same level of corruption as murder. Therefore, the signs of excessive sexual behaviour through both Dracula and American Psycho are demonstrated as the primary origin of mental and physical disturbance.

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