

# the rules of attraction by bret easton ellis

**The Rules of Attraction** by Bret Easton Ellis is a captivating novel that explores the lives of a group of affluent college students in the 1980s. Set against the backdrop of a prestigious liberal arts college, the book delves into the complexities of relationships, identity, and the often superficial nature of youth. This article will discuss the themes, characters, and impact of the novel, while also examining why it continues to resonate with readers today.

## Overview of The Rules of Attraction

Bret Easton Ellis published *The Rules of Attraction* in 1987, and it quickly garnered attention for its unflinching portrayal of modern youth. The narrative unfolds through a series of interconnected stories, primarily told from the perspectives of three main characters: Sean Bateman, Lauren Hynde, and Victor Ward. Each character grapples with their own insecurities, desires, and the complexities of love and relationships in a world driven by materialism and hedonism.

## The Setting: A Reflection of the 1980s

The novel is set in a liberal arts college in New England during the 1980s, a decade characterized by excess, consumerism, and a burgeoning sense of disillusionment. The location serves not only as a backdrop but also as a character in its own right, shaping the experiences of the protagonists. The college environment reflects the privilege and entitlement of the characters, highlighting themes of superficiality and moral ambiguity.

## Main Characters and Their Relationships

The characters in *The Rules of Attraction* are emblematic of the disaffected youth of their time. Their relationships are often fraught with confusion and emotional detachment, which sheds light on the struggles of finding genuine connection in a world dominated by appearances.

### Sean Bateman

Sean Bateman, the novel's anti-hero, is a troubled young man navigating the complexities of love and addiction. He is characterized by his cynicism and emotional detachment, often using sarcasm as a defense mechanism. Sean's relationships are tumultuous and frequently end in disappointment, reflecting his inability to form meaningful connections.

### Lauren Hynde

Lauren Hynde is a wealthy and beautiful student who is caught in a love triangle between Sean and Victor. Her character embodies the struggles of maintaining a facade of perfection while grappling with her own insecurities and desires. Through Lauren, Ellis explores the theme of identity and the pressure to conform to societal expectations.

## **Victor Ward**

Victor Ward is an openly gay classmate who is also entangled in the lives of Sean and Lauren. His character provides a different perspective on love and relationships, as he navigates the complexities of his sexuality in a predominantly heteronormative environment. Victor's struggles highlight the challenges of self-acceptance and the search for intimate connection.

## **Themes Explored in The Rules of Attraction**

Bret Easton Ellis expertly weaves multiple themes throughout *The Rules of Attraction*, creating a rich tapestry that reflects the experiences of his characters.

### **Superficiality and Materialism**

One of the central themes of the novel is the superficial nature of relationships among the affluent youth. The characters are often preoccupied with appearances, leading to shallow interactions that lack emotional depth. This theme is particularly relevant in today's society, where social media often exacerbates the pressure to present a curated version of oneself.

### **Identity and Self-Discovery**

The search for identity is another prominent theme in the novel. Each character grapples with who they are and who they want to be, often leading to conflicts and confusion. This theme resonates with readers, particularly young adults who are navigating their own paths of self-discovery.

### **Love and Loneliness**

Ellis poignantly captures the paradox of love and loneliness, illustrating how the characters' attempts to connect often result in isolation. Their experiences highlight the complexities of love in a world where genuine connection is increasingly rare.

## **The Impact of The Rules of Attraction**

Since its publication, *The Rules of Attraction* has had a lasting impact on literature and popular

culture. The novel's candid portrayal of youth and relationships has inspired a generation of readers and writers alike.

## Cultural Influence

The Rules of Attraction has been referenced in various films, television shows, and other literary works, demonstrating its cultural significance. The novel was adapted into a film in 2002, further solidifying its place in popular culture. The film, although differing in some aspects from the book, captures the essence of Ellis's exploration of youth and relationships.

## Literary Significance

Ellis's writing style, characterized by sharp dialogue and an unflinching narrative voice, has influenced numerous authors. His ability to convey the disaffection and ennui of his characters has paved the way for a new wave of literary realism that focuses on the darker aspects of human experience.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, **The Rules of Attraction** by Bret Easton Ellis remains a vital work that delves into the complexities of youth, love, and identity. Through the lives of Sean, Lauren, and Victor, Ellis paints a portrait of a generation grappling with the superficiality of their existence. The novel's exploration of themes such as materialism, self-discovery, and the paradox of love continues to resonate with readers today. As we navigate our own relationships in an increasingly complex world, The Rules of Attraction serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles we face in our quest for connection and meaning.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are the main themes explored in 'The Rules of Attraction'?

The main themes include the superficiality of relationships, the existential crisis of youth, and the impact of drug culture in the 1980s. The novel delves into the complexities of love, identity, and the emptiness of hedonism.

### How does Bret Easton Ellis use narrative style in 'The Rules of Attraction'?

Ellis employs a fragmented narrative style, utilizing multiple perspectives and nonlinear storytelling. This approach reflects the chaotic lives of the characters and emphasizes the disconnection and confusion they experience.

## **What role does setting play in 'The Rules of Attraction'?**

The setting, primarily in a liberal arts college in the Northeast, serves as a microcosm of 1980s American society. It highlights themes of privilege, disillusionment, and the search for meaning amidst a backdrop of excess and moral ambiguity.

## **How does 'The Rules of Attraction' portray relationships among its characters?**

The novel depicts relationships as shallow and often transactional, showcasing a cycle of unreciprocated love, infidelity, and emotional detachment. This portrayal underscores the characters' struggles with intimacy and commitment.

## **What is the significance of the title 'The Rules of Attraction'?**

The title reflects the complex dynamics of attraction between characters, suggesting that relationships are governed by unspoken 'rules' that are often superficial and influenced by societal expectations. It also highlights the irony of seeking deep connections in a culture of superficiality.

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