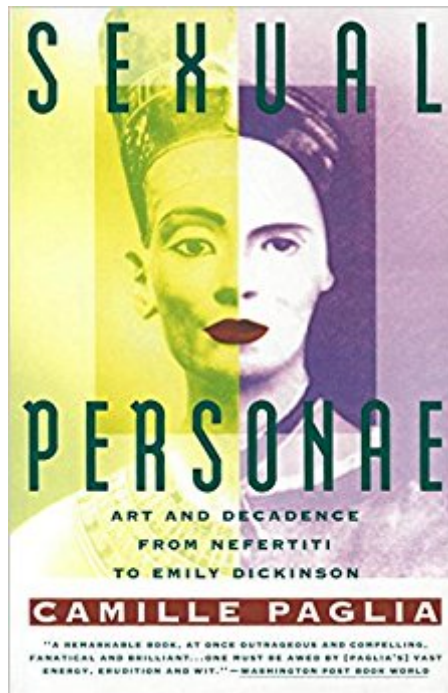




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# Sexual Personae: Art And Decadence From Nefertiti To Emily Dickinson



## Synopsis

Here is the fiery, provocative, and unparalleled work of feminist art criticism that launched Camille Paglia's exceptional career as one of our most important public intellectuals. Is Emily Dickinson "the female Sade"? Is Donatello's David a bit of pedophile pornography? What is the secret kinship between Byron and Elvis Presley, between Medusa and Madonna? How do liberals and feminists as well as conservatives fatally misread human nature? This audacious and omnivorously learned work of guerrilla scholarship offers nothing less than a unified-field theory of Western culture, high and low, since Egyptians invented beauty—making a persuasive case for all art as a pagan battleground between male and female, form and chaos, civilization and daemonic nature. 47 photographs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A remarkable book, at once outrageous and compelling, fanatical and brilliant. . . . One must be awed by [Paglia's] vast energy, erudition and wit." —The Washington Post "Sexual Personae [is] an enormous sensation of a book, in all the better senses of the word. There is no book comparable in scope, stance, design or insight." —Harold Bloom "The ability to infuriate both antagonists in an ideological struggle is often a sign of a first-rate book. . . . [Paglia] is a conspicuously gifted writer . . . and an admirably close reader with a hard core of common sense." —The New York

Times Book Review "Paglia marshals a vast array of . . . cultural materials with an authorial voice derived from sixties acid-rock lead guitar. . . . Close to poetry." • Greil Marcus, author of *Lipstick Traces* "This book is a red comet in a smog-filled sky. . . . Brilliant." • The Nation

"A remarkable book, at once outrageous and compelling, fanatical and brilliant....One must be awed by [Paglia's] vast energy, erudition and wit"--Washington Post Book World

The title captures the essence, the different personae (persona: social role, one's appearance displayed to the outside world) and the sexual element in these. The first chapter, *Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art* presents the essence of her, at times extreme, argument. She then goes through an overview of Western culture with an emphasis on the Renaissance and Romanticism (where her work ends), Rousseau being regarded as a major and unfortunate influence. There is a concentration in her discussion of the Renaissance on the visual and in Romanticism on the literary. Her written style is a somewhat slowed-down version of her verbal style, infused with much quickness and wit. Why in a 700 page volume she didn't add a concluding chapter I do not know; perhaps after a long discussion on 'Amherst's Madame de Sade' she could endure no more. Still, abruptly ending with Emily Dickinson and her psychopathologies almost gives the impression that this is a collection of essays first published elsewhere. The various dualities Dionysian / Apollonian, pagan / Judeo-Christian, female / male, nature / nurture and within nature (of which she has a dark view) itself as malevolent / benevolent are well portrayed and give rise to thought. Her discussion of the androgynous nature of different characters in literary works (e.g. those in Goethe) as well as the 'enormous power' of the mother/woman is well carried. In her analysis of various writers her argument is often repeated; perhaps to have taken fewer examples from each would have been adequate, then again she is presenting a view of various (mainly English) writers which is perhaps quite different from the standard literary critique and therefore worthy of explication. Her discussions of Western decadence such as seen in later Romanticism are as relevant to America in 2016 as when first written (and most probably, too, her critique of the prevailing ideological climate of 'leading' American universities).

Very detail analysis of a vast and diverse art forms. Excellent reading. Different perspective. Amazing the way the Camille see all forms of art and the connection to sexual behaviour.

A bit drawn out. For a better appreciation of Camelia Paglia, read instead her Sex, Art, and American Culture.

Camille Paglia is a brilliant professor of culture who in this groundbreaking work looks with original insight into cultural art and literary works from the dawn of civilization to the poetry of Emily Dickinson who she labels the "Sade of America". Paglia sets us a paradigm of conflict between the sexes throughout history in realms as diverse as politics, art and literature. Paglia sees the conflict as based on the Apollo instinct in male artists to overcome the dark, watery, earth-centered female. Through a detailed look at such literary giants as Shakespeare, the Romantic poets, Emily Bronte, Whitman, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and the late nineteenth century decadents such as Oscar Wilde, Baudelaire, Gautier, Huysmans and others she makes original and until now unnoticed observations on the work of each master artist. The book should be read through to understand her point but students could also use the book to examine the chapters dealing with the particular author or literary/artistic movement they are studying. Paglia's work is so important it is absurd to expect a short review such as this one to do justice to Dr. Paglia's groundbreaking work which will wake up the academy and complacent feminists! As a disciple of Dr. Harold Bloom this bisexual Italian-American academic is someone the student of the arts should read and savor. Paglia is controversial but essential reading. I recommend her work and have enjoyed the week I spent with this book! Highly recommended!

Paglia is one of our most important thinkers, a cultural critic who writes with insight, clarity, control and the occasional Molotov cocktail. Brilliant.

The most interesting book I've ever read. Thank you, Camille.

The first part of the book is interesting and stimulating. Kind of a Cliff Notes for Nietzsche and Freud.

For those who are searching a good resource to write about feminism and female art it's a great book. Paglia provides you her point of view about women and her position in the western society, comparing to primarily and eastern ones.

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