

How Rossetti narrates the story of Cousin Kate

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



In Cousin Kate the poet presents the reader with the idea that women have many expectations in life and are governed by men, giving them no real freedom, and that to become truly happy one must break away from social expectations. Personally I believe this poem presents Rossetti with a stage where she can speak of her resentment at the power men have and the weaknesses and few liberties that women have in the Victorian period; as in the end she takes sympathy for Cousin Kate who appears to have everything, because she must live under the order of her husband.

Rossetti chooses a first person narrative in this poem so the narrator can address her questions, laments and moans to Kate. She begins the third verse, ' O Lady Kate, my cousin Kate' and the fifth, ' O cousin Kate'. Throughout, she employs a tone of accusation, repeatedly using the word ' you' as she compares Kate to herself. In the last four lines, the speaker draws her attention away from her bitterness at Kate and addresses her son. She calls him ' my shame, my pride' (line 45).

By using this narrative perspective and thus allowing the narrator to express her anger followed by sympathy to cousin Kate we are immediately taken into the world of the storyteller and feel sympathy for both the women which is what I believe Rossetti intended. Furthermore, due to the structure of the poem we are taken through an emotion journey with the speaker, where we are told about her history what happened to her which explains her initial anger at cousin Kate, then anger at her own former naivety and sympathy for Kate.

The narrator's questions in the first stanza express her anger and confusion at the experiences she has had to endure: ' Why did a great lord find me out,

<https://assignbuster.com/how-rossetti-narrates-the-story-of-cousin-kate/>

and praise my flaxen hair? Why did a great lord find me out, and fill my heart with care? ' (lines 5-8). She suggests that before the arrival of the ' great lord', she was happy and ' contented' (line 3). She was not looking for a new situation in life. It came unexpectedly.

The idea that the lord filled her heart with care suggests that she had less to worry about previously. She is angry that he made her anxious instead of happy and took her away from her friends, her ' cottage mates' (line 3). The speaker later expresses her anger when she declares that, if she had been in her cousin's place as the marriage choice of the lord, she would ' have spit into his face and not have taken his hand' (lines 39-40). Her emotions are incredibly strong and the violence of her anger is expressed through her imagination. The first two stanzas in the poem offer an insight into the narrator's past, showing the loss of her innocence the impact of the actions of the ' great lord' and an inner anger at her past actions, in the third and fourth stanzas the anger is directed at Kate for stealing the lord and sending her to her ruin, however in the fifth paragraph the direction of her anger is changed again and this time is directed at the lord himself.

However the last stanza shows the narrator's anger to be resolved for although she may have suffered an immense loss of reputation she can be happy now as she's expressed her anger and knows within her heart that she has something neither the lord and lady Kate have: real love. This suggests that Rossetti doesn't agree with confinement of the labels given by society, Kate is seen as ' lovely and pure' and she as ' outcast' but by presenting her as the one who is ultimately happy and proud it's expressing

that society values the wrong virtues, and has unrealistic views on life and love.

The significance of the setting is very influential in the poem. By presenting the narrator as a simple 'cottage maiden hardened by sun and air' the villainous aspects of the lord is increased as it's quite clear that he with his expansive wealth and power took advantage of her and tossed her aside. Also for a modern reader the time which is it set has great implications on our interpretation of the poem, as all the supposed sins she has committed aren't considered sins in our society, it's important for us to realise that she became 'an outcast thing' because of the restraints and expectations of women in Victorian society.

The language Rossetti uses helps the story to unfold and the shift of attention to show the powerlessness of women in the Victorian period. Throughout the poem the poet uses verbs to describe the lord as always taking control, and the women as passive inferring that men always make the decisions 'great lord find me out'; 'he lured me'; 'he changed me'; 'cast me by'; 'he wore me. These are harsh actions, which become more ominous with regard to Kate. Like a stalker, the lord: 'Chose you' 'lifted you' 'saw you' 'he bound you.' By portraying the actions of the women as against their control and suggesting that their fates were determined by the 'Great Lord' Rossetti is vividly expressing the small freedoms women had in a supposedly free country.

Moreover, Rossetti uses many alternative language features throughout to help tell the story; the repetition used in: 'Why did a great lord find me out', conveys the anger and bewilderment of the speaker at her change of

<https://assignbuster.com/how-rossetti-narrates-the-story-of-cousin-kate/>

circumstances, whilst the phrase: 'good and pure' has a hollow ring by its second occurrence. Whilst the echoed structure in the final stanza - that Kate has 'not got' and is 'not like to get' the gift of a child - emphasises the speaker's sense of triumph.

The poet uses many poetic techniques to improve the rhythm of the poem thus allowing the story to unfold, the poem is written in many short lines of 6 to 8 syllables this allows the poem to be read at speed and enables a more pronounced rhythm to develop that would be impossible in a poem consisting of longer lines. The entire poem is written within an unrelenting rhyme scheme, within each verse, the final word of even lines all rhyme with one another, which allows the poem to flow very fluently and the ballad-like qualities of the rhythm reflect the ideas that her speaker wishes her tale to convey.

Rossetti carefully selects words throughout to heighten the impact and drama such as when the speaker claims that she was led to the lord's house to lead a 'shameless shameful life', the sibilance in this line reinforces the joining together of oxymorons that these words perform. It also reflects the hushed manner in which the speaker was ensnared by the lord, taken in, then later cast aside. In the final stanza, the speaker emphasises the close bond she shares with her son when she asks that he 'Cling closer, closer yet' (line 46).

The emphasis here highlights her fear and together with the repetition of the word 'closer', suggests that it is for her own comfort, as well as her son's, that they remain together. Overall Rossetti successfully tells the story by using an effective first person narrative which strongly captures a scene in <https://assignbuster.com/how-rossetti-narrates-the-story-of-cousin-kate/>

Victorian society and the life of a humble woman in love, expressing the unfair realities and ultimately the true values in life.