

# Cousin kate by christina rossetti and the seduction by eileen mcauley

[Literature](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

" The Seduction" and " Cousin Kate" were written a century apart, but both explore the theme of false love. " Cousin Kate" is about a cottage maiden who is 'lured' by the great lord and falls pregnant. She loves the lord, but he does not love her. In " The Seduction", a teenage girl attends a party, gets very drunk and believes she is in love with the male in this poem, but it is really the influence of the alcohol making her think this. " Cousin Kate" was set in the nineteenth century and " The Seduction" was set in the twentieth; the difference in time is made clear in each poem.

Firstly with the language used; " Cousin Kate" was written in correct, formal English, and " The Seduction" was written in everyday language. During the nineteenth century, becoming pregnant before marriage would have been frowned upon because it would have been thought that the woman should provide a family and be a mother, whilst the male went out to work to earn a living. While in the twentieth century, it was more common to become pregnant before marriage or at a young age, though people still did not think it was right.

In both poems, it tells us about the neighbours of the two main characters and how they did not agree with them becoming pregnant. In the nineteenth century, if you were an unmarried mother, you would be thought to be living a 'life of sin', and were condemned and frowned upon by everyone. In the twentieth century it was not thought to be as bad as in the nineteenth, but people would still look at you and whisper as it says in the poem " Than to have the neighbours whisper that 'you always looked the type. " Both male figures seem to have power over the females.

In "The Seduction", the love of the girl is alcohol induced. The male gets her drunk and commits adultery, resulting in her becoming pregnant. In "Cousin Kate", the cottage maiden falls in love with the lord by him luring her to his home as it says in the second verse of the poem "He lured me to his palace home--" meaning he enticed her there by complimenting her. He then uses her for what he wants, and then gets discards her like an object he no longer wants or needs "He wore me like a silken knot, He changed me like a glove;". "Cousin Kate" is a narrative poem and is written in the first person.

This works well because this allows the writer to ask questions to make the reader wonder what has happened or will happen next. Before the great lord seduces the cottage maiden, her main role in life is to work in the fields. She was content with her life until the lord came along and made things difficult for her. The use of the first person allows the reader to sympathize with the character. You feel pity towards her, and where it says in the fourth verse "Even so I sit and howl in dust," shows how much she also pities herself as the writer uses emotive language in this line.

Her self-pity is also shown in verse three where it says "O Lady Kate, my cousin Kate, You grew more fair than I:" this creates an atmosphere of pining over what her cousin has done to her. "The Seduction" is written in the third person. This allows the reader to understand the girl's actions and feelings but in a way that it is more difficult to empathize with her. Before becoming pregnant, the teenage girl is at school and about to take her O-Levels in June which could mean she enjoys school.

The writer has not included much dialogue in this poem so it does not give a clear message of how the girl feels about herself. It says in the fourth verse of the poem " As he brought her more drinks, so she fell in love" which tells us as the reader that she was easily lead by the boy. In " Cousin Kate", in the first verse it says " Why did a great lord find me out To fill my heart with care? " which shows us the cottage maiden loved the lord, but was not pleased about it. The great lord seduced the cottage maiden by complimenting by praising her " flaxen hair".

She may have been easily lead by the lord because as we can see from the opening of the poem she says " Not mindful I was fair. " showing that she does not realise she is attractive. She is also a cottage maiden, which makes the reader think her life is simple and she is a stereotypical country worker who is not clever but is easily pleased. In my opinion, the great lord is unworthy of the cottage maiden's love. His love is not true like hers; the cottage maiden is just an accessory of desire to him.

He uses her for one thing, and once he gets that, he no longer wants her, I know this because in the third stanza it says " He wore me like a silken knot, He changed me like a glove". The use of the first person narrative works well in this poem. It makes it easier for the reader to sympathize with the character. The cottage maiden in " Cousin Kate" feels betrayed by her cousin Kate. In the fifth stanza of the poem it tells us " If he had fooled not me but you, if you stood where I stand, he'd not have won me with his love, nor bought me with his land; I would have spit into his face and not have taken his hand.

This shows us the cottage maiden loves her cousin, but feels if the situation was reversed, she would not have married the lord knowing how her cousin felt. I think Kate was easily taken in by the things the lord had to offer. I believe she loved her cousin, the cottage maiden, but did not care about hurting anyone as long as she had what she wanted. I agree to an extent that Kate betrayed her cousin, but I think she betrayed her without realising she had done so. In the fifth stanza, it says " Nor bought me with his land", which implies that the lord bought Kate's love with his riches, so this love was false.

The cottage maiden describes her son as " My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride," Even though she is ashamed of having sex outside of marriage and her son is proof that she did, she loves him and is proud of him. The cottage maiden's attitude towards Kate's lack of children is quite smug. She states " Yet I've a gift you have not got, and seem like not to get:" This makes us think Kate cannot have children and shows that the cottage maiden is saying Kate cannot have everything from her.

The final lines of the poem say " Your father would give lands for one To wear his coronet. This shows that the lord will not admit that the child is his, but if he would, then he would not have to worry about having an heir. My opinion of the cottage maiden has become less sympathetic than at the beginning because she says to her son at the end of the poem " Cling closer, closer yet: Your father would give lands for one To wear his coronet. " Meaning her son is the heir to the lord's wealth; so when the lord dies, her

son shall inherit all his riches and the cottage maiden will be able to live the life of luxury.

A few lines from the poem I find effective are: " The neighbours call you good and pure, Call me an outcast thing. Even so I sit and howl in dust, You sit in gold and sing:" I think these lines are effective because the writer is using emotive language with the words 'outcast' and 'howl' which makes the reader feel more sympathetic towards the narrator than if the writer were to use words with less impact. The main characters in each poem both feel self-pity and betrayed.

Although neither feel betrayed by the one they fell in love with, which says to us as the reader that even though they have been rejected they still have feelings towards them. In " The Seduction", the teenage girls self-pity is shown when the writer says " For where, now, was the summer of her sixteenth year? " which shows that she can no longer have a normal teenage life as she will now have a baby to care for. These feelings are shown again later on in the poem where it says " But, then again, better to be smoking scented drugs Or festering, invisibly unemployed.

Better to destroy your life in modern man-made ways Than to fall into this despicable, feminine void. " This tells the reader the girl feels she has destroyed her life in the worst way possible. She feels betrayed not by the boy she fell in love with, but the stories in magazines she has read. She feels they have lied to her by telling her about how her life would be in her sixteenth year, " Full of glitzy fashion features, and stories of romance" When

this has not come true for her, she feels " Cheated by the promise of it all. " The cottage maiden in 'Cousin Kate' feels betrayed by her cousin.

It tells us in the fifth stanza how the cottage maiden feels Kate should have acted, it says " If he had fooled not me but you, If you stood where I stand, He'd not have won me with his love Nor bought me with his land;". The maiden, just like the girl in 'The Seduction' is extremely self-pitying. The emotive language used throughout the poem shows this. The words such as 'howl' and 'moan' are used to describe what the maiden is doing; to be acting like this she must feel miserable.

The line " The neighbours call you good and pure, Call me an outcast thing. Is also another example of her self-pity as it shows us she is jealous of how the neighbours are acting kindly towards Kate and just casting the maiden off as she is unwanted. From the beginning of 'The Seduction', the teenage girl's naivety can be seen with the words " He led her... " this is later shown again in stanza six, where it says " She followed him there... ". The uncertainty of what to do is later shown in stanza eight, as the line " She stifled a giggle... " makes the reader feel she is uncomfortable with what is happening.

The narrator wants the reader to feel the girl is not in control of the situation and that she is innocent. I think this because in stanza three it says " He'd danced with her all night," which implies it is his decision, not hers. Her white high heel shoes symbolize her innocence, and white is often the symbol of purity. Her innocence is also symbolized with the 'My Guy' and 'Jackie' comics. Later in the poem, it tells us how the boy goes to the river when he

<https://assignbuster.com/cousin-kate-by-christina-rossetti-and-the-seduction-by-eileen-mcauley/>

should be at school whereas she talks about how she'd be sitting her O-Levels in June.

This makes us think she is a naive girl, who maybe does not realise what the boy wants to do, (perhaps because she is so drunk). She is also obviously interested in school as she is taking her O-Levels in the summer. The girl's mood changes in the second half of the poem when she realises she is pregnant. In the ninth and tenth stanzas it tells us " She ripped up all her My Guy and Jackie photo-comics," and " She broke her heels of her high white shoes," which shows she is no longer innocent or naive and wants to be rid of everything that reminds her of her innocence and naivety.

In the last two verses of the poem the narrator says to the girl how it would be " better to be smoking scented drugs or festering, invisibly unemployed Better to destroy your life in modern man-made ways than to fall into this despicable, feminine void. " Meaning anything would've been better than to fall pregnant as a result of a drunken one night stand. The narrator then goes on to say " Better than to starve yourself, like a sick precocious child Than to walk through town with a belly huge and ripe.

And better, now, to turn away, move away, fade away, than to have the neighbours whisper that " you always looked the type. " This once again means how it was a stupid mistake to fall pregnant at such a young age. I don't think the narrator means this literally, but means how it was a bad mistake to get drunk and have sex with the boy who was only out for one thing. I think the narrator is trying to say how this is an irreversible mistake, whereas the ones listed are not. In the second stanza, it tells us how the boy  
<https://assignbuster.com/cousin-kate-by-christina-rossetti-and-the-seduction-by-eileen-mcauley/>



called her a " little slag" which shows he is not in it for love, but just a one night stand.

This gives the impression that he does not care about her at all, and does not want a relationship with her. When she discovers she is pregnant, there is no mention of the boy for the rest of the poem; I think this is because he has had his way with her and now he has left without a word. He does not need her and will possibly now move onto his next fling. Eileen McAuley may have written this poem for one of two reasons; the first being the girl in this poem is her, and the names have been left out so no one would find out.

The second being it could be a warning to other teenagers of the same age so they do not make the mistake, if it was this reason there would not really have been any need to write the names of the boy and girl as it does not really make a difference. I think McAuley is criticizing the twentieth century society by saying how girls are more innocent and naive when it comes to males because the female usually gets very emotionally involved, whereas the male can sometimes have no problems with the relationship being purely physical; for example where in the second verse it says " He spat in the river, fumbled in a bag.

He handed her the vodka," it shows how he is being quite rude by spitting into the river, and also shows how he is giving her vodka to get her drunk. In the third verse it says " He told her about football; Sammy Lee and Ian Rush, She had nodded, quite enchanted, and her eyes were wide and bright" showing he is not getting into a deep conversation but just sticking to 'male conversation' instead; whereas in the fourth verse it tells us how " She fell in

<https://assignbuster.com/cousin-kate-by-christina-rossetti-and-the-seduction-by-eileen-mcauley/>

love with his eyes as blue as iodine, with the fingers that stroked her neck and thighs" shows she is thinking on a deeper level than he is.

I agree with McAuley criticizing how twentieth century society was making girls more naïve because the males have become less about love and more about the physical side of relationships. I think each teenager is somewhat to blame as one thing would not happen without the other being there to let it do so. I think in this case the boy is not a victim at all as he brought it on himself by getting her drunk so he could do as he wished with her.

I think there are similarities between the cottage maiden and the teenage girl in 'The Seduction' such as, they both do not blame the ones they fell in love with for the position they are left in; but other people instead. Another similarity is that they are both self-pitying at some point in each poem. The differences between the lives the two females lead is quite different because the cottage maiden's life is filled by working in the fields all day, everyday, whereas the teenage girl's life is easier, but still complex as she is a teenager living in the twentieth century with the worries of exams, friends and boyfriends.

I think there are a few similarities in the males in each poem such as the way they both lead the girl on so they can get their kicks and they both do not get emotionally involved with the females. The differences would be how they lead each girl on. The male in 'Cousin Kate' lead her on by complimenting her and using his charm to win her over, whereas in 'The Seduction' the boy used alcohol to get what he wanted.

<https://assignbuster.com/cousin-kate-by-christina-rossetti-and-the-seduction-by-eileen-mcauley/>

I would prefer to live in the twentieth century because it would have been much easier as girls did not have to work in the fields like in the nineteenth; also, girls were treated as equals in the twentieth century, whereas in the nineteenth they were made to stay at home and look after their children if they had any. In my opinion, 'The Seduction' is the better poem as I feel it is easier for teenagers in this century to relate to, as it is more like these days than the nineteenth century would have been.

I think the way it is written in everyday language makes it a lot easier to understand than 'Cousin Kate', because that was written in formal English. The two writers are very different in the way they have each written in a different person. In 'Cousin Kate' the writer has written in the first person, making it somewhat easier to relate to the main character, but in 'The Seduction' the writer has written in the third person, and the poem comes off as more of a short story than a poem, which to me, makes it easier to read.