

Cousin kate and the seduction

Literature



In this essay I am going to compare "Cousin Kate," written by Christina Rossetti in 1860 and "The Seduction," written by Eileen Mc Auley in 1980. "Cousin Kate" and "The Seduction" are two poems involving the loss of a woman's virginity. Although the subject of the poems is the same, the poets have approached the subject in two very different ways. After the women have been seduced they both get pregnant. The Girl in "Cousin Kate," feels that her "fair haired son" is her "shame" and "pride"; the Girl in "The Seduction," however, feels that it is,

Better to destroy life in life's modern, man made ways
Than to fall into this despicable, feminine void.
This is powerful metaphorical language that has been used by the poet in the last line of the penultimate stanza of "The Seduction." The tenor of this metaphor is the Girl getting pregnant, which she feels is the same as falling into a "despicable, feminine void," which is the vehicle. The ground between the girl's situation and a "void" is that she feels that she is in an emptiness and is alone, as she has been rejected by society.

There is a sense that she had no control of what happened and has no control of what is happening, as when you fall you have no idea of when you are going to stop falling. Also a "void" reflects an image of being made into nothing, which is what she feels like. The women in "Cousin Kate" and "The Seduction," both are rejected by society because in the first, the neighbours call her an, "outcast thing," and in the second, "the neighbours whisper that, you always looked the type. This shows us that even though the poems have a gap of a century, society still thought that it was despicable to have sex before marriage. The fact that both women are seen as virgins and

immature, who surrender their virginity, add to the intensity and power of the poems.

The men in "Cousin Kate" and "The Seduction" are very different as seducers: the Lord in the first is a rich respectable, "great lord;" the Boy in the second, however, is a juvenile, solvent abuser, "truant," who "should be at school. Even though the men are different they have the same effect on the women who fall in with them. So she followed him there, all high white shoes, All wide blue eyes, and bottles of vodka. This tells us that the Girl in "The Seduction" is infatuated by the Boy because of, "the bottles of vodka." The "high white shoes," represent the Girl's vulnerability, purity, and virginity and suggest to the reader, that she is making a false appearance of a more mature and sophisticated person.

The, "All wide blue eyes," tell us that the Girl is babyish and amazed, as she has never experienced this before. In "Cousin Kate," the Girl is "lured" into having sex and she is infatuated by the Lord's, "palace home." Christina Rossetti uses a lot of paradoxes in the second stanza of "Cousin Kate." This shows that the Girl was unsure of what she meant to the Lord. She was "His plaything and his love." There is an interesting simile in the seventh stanza of, "The Seduction," where the narrator says that, The Mersey, green as a septic wound.

When we look at this metaphor we see that the tenor is the Mersey, the vehicle is the septic wound and the ground between these two is the idea of pollution. I think that this is a very strong and striking image because it works really well, because not only the river is polluted and makes it vivid,

but also it makes us think about what is going to happen to the Girl and how she is going to get wounded. We see that in both poems that after the women have been seduced their seducers do not see them again. The Lord dumps the women for Cousin Kate; the Boy never sees the Girl again.

In both poems, the seducers and women are anonymous. This adds to the intensity of both poems as the poems can be related to anybody. As both women are anonymous it also suggests to the reader that the women have somehow lost their honour, shame and are just a "plaything" and a "slag" because they have lost their virginity. "Cousin Kate," is written in the first person narrative, which makes the Girl's feelings more directed and it therefore creates intensity for the reader, as the reader feels empathetic. Also there is a sense of a real person talking that suggests that the poem is true. "The Seduction," on the other hand is written in the first person narrative that makes the poem more balanced and the poem tells us both the boy's thoughts and actions and the girl's thoughts and actions and gives the reader a documentary feeling.

"Cousin Kate," and "The Seduction," are both poems that are quite regularly composed. "Cousin Kate" has six, eight line stanzas; "The Seduction" has fourteen, four line stanzas and 1, 8 line stanzas. "Cousin Kate" is fairly tightly structured with each stanza structured as AB CB DB EB, and it has a strong rhyme. "The Seduction" does not have a regular structure, but Eileen McAuley uses rhyme to create different effects and emphasis. As "Cousin Kate" has a regular rhyme structure it makes the poem flow evenly and create emphasis on various lines in the stanzas. In the second stanza Eileen

McAuley uses "slag" and "bag" as ABCB, which rhyme really closely and powerfully as both end in a harsh, "g," sound and have one syllable.

This is very emphatically rhymed as the reader can hear the Boy's contempt, abuse and spitefulness and it is hateful to the reader that the Boy thinks of the Girl in this manner. "The Seduction" consists of an eight line stanza in the poem as it shows how the Girl felt like, "When she discovered she was six months gone." The reader sees that she is distraught as, she ripped up all her My Guy and her Jackie photo-comics until they were just bright paper, like confetti, strewn on the carpet. And on that day she broke the heels of her high white shoes (as she flung them at the wall).

We can see that the Girl is from a higher, social class than the Boy because of her, "photo-comics." The Girl breaks her shoes when she finds that she is pregnant because she wants to be innocent, naive and an ordinary Girl again by breaking her shoes that represent her being sophisticated. The Girl rips up her unreal, romantic, idealistic magazines, which she feels are no use to her now and this represents her ripping up her childhood. Also she feels, "cheated by the promise of it all." I think that the simile that compares the Girl ripping up her comics, until they were bright paper, like confetti is a very powerful comparison that the author employs. The, "confetti," represents her life, childhood, and future that she has ripped up.

The, "confetti," also represents her torn up hope of getting married to, "the boy next door," because confetti is used in weddings and parties. This works really well because it draws in the reader and makes the reader feel empathetic towards the Girl. Both poems consist of very powerful

metaphorical language and similes, which the poets employ to explore the theme of seduction. Both poems use rhyme to create emphasis on particular words and situations. In conclusion, I think that, " The Seduction," is better than, " Cousin Kate," because it really makes the reader feel empathetic towards the Girl.