

Children's Classics: A Retrospect on Sexual Violence

By Taima

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Guru: A Greek chorus of sorts.

The Director: A troubled director trying to lead rehearsals

Actor: A male actor

Acttle-dee: A unisex actor

Acttle-dumb: A unisex actor

Actress: A female actress

Setting

TIME: Regardless

PLACE: Theatre

Children's Classics: A Retrospect on Sexual Violence

ACT ONE

Scene One

AT RISE: ACTRESS is lying on a table as Snow White she is dead.

ACTOR [Prince Charming]: (Enters stage left, wandering in as though lost) I could have sworn I saw a cottage though these woods. I had hoped someone there could point me back on my way to the castle. (Notices Snow White) Hark! A sleeping maiden! Skin as pale as ivory, hair like ebony, and lips like rubies, but... she draws no breath... I wonder... If I should kiss her... (He bends over her when suddenly...)

GURU: Wait!! Stop! (The ACTOR freezes as the Guru enters up left) What is going on here?! You find a random girl asleep in the woods and decide "Hey, I'll just put my lips on that!"?! (He storms over to the scene and pokes the actor until he stands up straight)

ACTOR: Wha-what?!

GURU: You see this!?! (He gestures at actress) Now look at yourself! This is date rape- minus the date!!

ACTOR: Uh... b-but... she wasn't breathing... I was giving her mouth to mouth!

GURU: Even first-aiders ask for consent!

DIRECTOR: (Enters up right) Ex-squeeze-me?! Who are you- and what are you doing marching your big butt across my stage like a

Macy's day Christmas parade!?

GURU: Stage? You mean- this is...? (He turns and looks over the audience) Ohhhh... So... this... this is entertainment? The theatre? I see... so... what about perpetual rape is entertaining?

DIRECTOR: Rape? It's Snow White! It's a classic where the prince kisses the slumbering maiden and she leaps into his arms, and they're married and they live happily forever! (She swoons)

GURU: Well then, it's at least sexual assault.

DIRECTOR: But... how could you say that? After living in fear for years she's finally found a man who can support her in all her whims and needs! A handsome prince who can carry her away on his white horse!

GURU: So... neither of them have personalities that the other cares for- but he's got money, and neither of 'em look that bad...? **LOOK AT YOUR AUDIENCE! THEY'RE IMPRESSIONABLE CHILDREN!**

DIRECTOR: Knock it off you dunderhead! (She strikes him) They're sitting right there!

GURU: OW! Assaults all round!

DIRECTOR: Okay- just stop! How about we figure out a new play... one that suits your delicate sensibilities Mr...?

GURU: I am the great Guru of Anti-Sexual Violence! I have stood up against the world on all issues of rape, hypersexualization, relationships, predatory drugs, body image, and consent!

DIRECTOR: Oh great... a know-it-all. Why don't you go climb a mountain, Mr. Guru, and give your wisdom to whoever is actually willing to climb it?

GURU: Why would I do that? I have a whole ROOM full of people here who are just ripe to receive my wisdom! Now- I hereby cancel this play!

DIRECTOR AND ACTORS: WHAT?!

DIRECTOR: We all worked hard on this- and all these people came to see a play!

GURU: You must do a new play! Something FAR more appropriate!

DIRECTOR: What...? I mean- how are we going to- pulling a play- it isn't-

GURU: (Guides the ACTORS and DIRECTOR off the stage) Now now, move along deary! You've got a lot of work to do! Heh heh heh!

(Lights go down)

ACT ONE
Scene 2

(Lights go up, GURU is center stage looking at a watch)

GURU: It's time for the show, so where- I say where- are the actors!?

DIRECTOR: (Enters up right) Okay! This time I've got it!

GURU: Do you?

DIRECTOR: We will perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

GURU: Wait... isn't that the one with-

DIRECTOR: Two couples who lose themselves in a forest, searching for an escape from a forced marriage find themselves under an enchantment from which true love prevails!

GURU: That's not what I was going to say, I was going to say that it's the one with a man who refuses to listen to his child when she speaks, who's only concerned with making sure his daughter gets with a proper *wealthy* man.

A daughter who defies her father's will and runs off into the woods with a man who only wants to marry her so he can consummate- as he repeatedly says, albeit he accepts her right to say no.

Meanwhile, her father's man of choice has broken the heart of another young lady- she follows him- following them into the woods, then the fairies decide to mess with their lives- BUT you call that true love?!

DIRECTOR: Yep. It's very romantic.

GURU: (Sighing) This just goes to show how media messes with

your heads... What's that play they always show around here? The one that's all about teen sex?

DIRECTOR: I have no clue what you're talking about.

GURU: I bet your actors know!

(ACTOR and ACTRESS enter dressed as the leading characters of Grease, they proceed to sing "Summer Nights", with the other actors, as well as GURU (male) and DIRECTOR (female) singing background vocals)

[ACTOR]

Summer lovin' had me a blast

[ACTRESS]

Summer lovin' happened so fast

[ACTOR]

I met a girl crazy for me

[ACTRESS]

Met a boy cute as can be

[ACTOR and ACTRESS]

Summer days driftin' away, to uh-oh those summer nights

[Everyone]

Uh Well-a well-a well-a huh

[BOYS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[GURU]

Did you get very far?

[GIRLS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[DIRECTOR]

Like does he have a car?

[Everyone]

Uh-huh uh-huh uh-huh uh-huh

[ACTOR]

She swam by me, she got a cramp

[ACTRESS]

He ran by me, got my suit damp

[ACTOR]

I saved her life, she nearly drowned

[ACTRESS]

He showed off, splashing around

[ACTOR AND ACTRESS]

Summer sun, something's begun, but uh-oh those summer nights

[Everyone]

Uh well-a well-a well-a huh

[GIRLS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[ACTTLE-DUMB]

Was it love at first sight?

[BOYS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[ACTTLE-DEE]

Did she put up a fight?

[Everyone]

Uh-huh-uh-huh-uh-huh-uh-huh

[ACTOR]

Took her bowling in the arcade

[ACTRESS]

We went strolling, drank lemonade

[ACTOR]

We made out under the dock

[ACTRESS]

We stayed out 'till ten o'clock

[ACTOR and ACTRESS]

Summer fling, don't mean a thing, but uh-oh those summer nights

[Everyone]

Uh well-a well-a well-a huh

[BOYS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[GURU]

But you don't gotta brag

[GIRLS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[DIRECTOR]

Cos he sounds like a drag

[Everyone]

shoo-bop bop, shoo-bop bop, shoo-bop bop,shoo-bop bop, shoo-bop bop, shoo-bop bop, shoo-bop bop, YEH

[ACTRESS]

He got friendly, holding my hand

[ACTOR]

We got friendly down in the sand

[ACTRESS]

He was sweet, just turned eighteen

[ACTOR]

Well she was good you know what I mean

[ACTOR and ACTRESS]

Summer heat, boy and girl meet, but uh-oh those summer nights

[GIRLS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[ACTTLE-DUMB]

How much dough did he spend?

[BOYS]

Tell me more, tell me more

[ACTTLE-DEE]

Could she get me a friend?

[ACTRESS]

It turned colder - that's where it ends

[ACTOR]

So I told her we'd still be friends

[ACTRESS]

Then we made our true love vow

[ACTOR]

Wonder what she's doing now

[ACTOR and ACTRESS]

Summer dreams ripped at the seams,
bu-ut oh, those su-ummer nights....

(ALL CHARACTERS except DIRECTOR and GURU freeze. DIRECTOR and GURU move in front of the frozen scene)

DIRECTOR: I don't see what's wrong with that.

GURU: But they're just teenagers!

DIRECTOR: They're about 16, the legal age of consent in Canada.

GURU: (impressed) You've been learning, I see... but there's still some problems.

DIRECTOR: Nuh-uh.

GURU: Their entire relationship is based on sex. The friends want all the details about the sex and money too. That's not a healthy relationship for anyone- especially not a teenager.

DIRECTOR: (sighs) I guess.... Back to the drawing board?

GURU nods and the lights go down.

Scene 3

Lights come up with the GURU sitting on the edge of the stage left, gaily kicking his feet.

DIRECTOR: (Enters stage right) I think you're really going to like this one!

GURU: I doubt it!

The DIRECTOR shows obvious contempt toward the GURU and then the play begins. ACTOR and ACTRESS enter center stage they look out over the audience, they are dressed as princesses.

ACTRESS: My name is Aurora, I was the only child to a king and queen. A party was thrown to celebrate my birth, and in attendance were three fairies- they each gave me a gift. The first was the gift of beauty-

GURU: WAIT! Is this Sleeping Beauty!?

DIRECTOR: Yes! Isn't it wonderful. Now, please let her finish her line.

ACTRESS: Um... the first gift was of beauty-

GURU: Because the little fairy was shallow, and objectifies women into believing they must be beautiful to fulfill their worldly duties!

DIRECTOR: (at Guru) KNOCK IT OFF! (at Actress) Go on, sweetie.

ACTRESS: The second was the gift of song-

GURU: Because that's REALLY practical! Heaven forbid she have a voice like an ogre.

ACTRESS: WELL EXCUSE ME! I didn't write the character! (She storms off)

DIRECTOR: (sighing) Here we go again.

LIGHTS GO DOWN

Scene Four

(Lights come up on Director, sitting alone looking out over the audience)

DIRECTOR: I wonder where that dunderhead is... He's going to be late for the show.

GURU: (Enters a moment later, stage left) Hi! Sorry I'm late, I was talking to your cast. Cinderella, eh?

DIRECTOR: Um... yeah... is that a problem?

GURU: Possibly. I hope you don't mind, but I asked your cast to start with the scene right after the apex of the plot. I'm hoping that will cut back on time, before I tear your play to sexual shreds.

DIRECTOR: Kinky.

(The play begins)

ACTLE-DEE: (Narrator) After the ball, Cinderella was forced back into servitude by her step-mother once more. She had to work twice as hard, clean twice as often, and scrub everything twice over everyday. Each day she became more and more exhausted, until, one day...

ACTOR: (Enters stage left dressed as Cinderella, speaking in a falsetto voice) Oh, my! I am so tired... I clean all day and barely have time to sleep. I don't know why my step-mother has been so wretched as of late, it's almost as if she knew about the ball. (wistful) Oh, the ball. How amazing it was- and the prince!

ACTRESS: (Jumps in dressed as the prince) Did somebody say "Prince?!"

ACTOR: Oh my!

ACTRESS: I thought I heard somebody in here! Why on earth, are you hiding from me, fair maiden?

ACTOR: Oh- I am but a lowly servant. It isn't my place to meet one such as yourself.

ACTRESS: I've been searching across my kingdom, for a beautiful princess, I'll know her foot size, and her infinite loveliness. If her foot fits within this glass slipper. (Holds it aloft)

ACTOR: Oh, your highness.

ACTRESS: (kneels, SCENE FREEZES)

GURU: (bursts into hysterical laughter) What do you think of THAT one?

DIRECTOR: Wha-what happened? Why are they... they...?

GURU: Because, Cinderella is a clear example of how men and women are expected to portray certain roles.

DIRECTOR: Of course.

GURU: A nice girl is expected to clean and cook, without saying a word before she can get her rewards in life.

Males are supposed to be valiant, and captivated by good looks. Stories like this, help support ideas that wealth and power should be the instigating factor in a relationship.

DIRECTOR: So why did you make my actors, switch roles?

GURU: Because there are plenty of people who were born outside of these cookie-cutter images of what men and women should act like. Seeing them in reverse roles can help your audience question what they are seeing.

DIRECTOR: I take it you don't want us to do Cinderella?

GURU: That's right!

(LIGHTS GO DOWN)

Scene Five

(Lights come up on GURU sitting on the left edge of stage, behind them ACTRESS Sleeps on the table as DESDEMONA)

GURU: LADIES and GENTLEMEN! Let me introduce to you, Othello, it's our own modern take!!

ACTOR-DUMB: (Narrator) With the guidance of cunning Iago, Othello was lead to believe that Desdemona has betrayed him. He follows her to bed.

ACTOR: (As OTHELLO he enters stage left)
I cannot believe... I don't want to believe. --
She is sweet and gentle as the stars, yet in my mind all I can see...
Her skin torn and frayed. Her body lying immobile.
I don't want to harm her...
But she must die, or else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light:
Desdemona's glowing life, the light of her vitality must be quenched.

It hurts my heart to say as such... She wakes.

ACTRESS: (as DESDEMONA) Who's there? Othello?

ACTOR: (Coldly) Yeah, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA: Come to bed, my love.

OTHELLO: You need to pray. To set yourself straight under the eyes of heaven.

DESDEMONA: What? I don't understand, what do you mean by that?

OTHELLO: I don't want you to die, without making peace with the Lord, fair Desdemona.

DESDEMONA: Die? (He nods) Have mercy!

OTHELLO: I can't!

DESDEMONA: Then don't! (She pauses) I- I'm afraid of you. I did nothing wrong, why are you acting like this?

OTHELLO: Think about how you've sinned, wretch!

DESDEMONA: My only sin is my love for you!

OTHELLO: You feel like that. It's true. That is why you die.

DESDEMONA

Othello! You need not kill for love. You're scaring me. Please...

OTHELLO: Peace, and be still!

DESDEMONA

I have! J-Just tell me what I've done!

OTHELLO: You gave my sweater, the one I gave to you on our first date, to Cassio.

DESDEMONA: I didn't! I wouldn't! Go ask Cassio! I swear!

OTHELLO: Oh, my sweet... you're lying on your death bed and you don't even know me!

DESDEMONA: You can't kill me!

OTHELLO: (Yelling at this point) Yes I can! I will! Confess! Or I will strangle the last lying breath from you!

DESDEMONA: (Shrieking) Mercy! Mercy! I do not love Cassio! I did not give him the sweater! I wouldn't- I'm yours! Stop!

OTHELLO: I saw him! He wears it! You injure me with your lies! I am not murdering you! I'm killing you for the good of all!

DESDEMONA: He must've just found it! Picked it up! I swear, find him and ask!!

OTHELLO: He's admitted to sleeping you, wretched trash!

DESDEMONA: H-he didn't say that!

OTHELLO: No! Iago told me of your betrayal! Cassio is dead!

DESDEMONA: (She cries) Oh... Cassio... you have been betrayed, and now I will be killed as well...

OTHELLO: You confess! You cry for Cassio! You cry for your other love, you wretch!

DESDEMONA: I'll move out! I'll leave town, but please! Don't kill me!

OTHELLO: Down! (He pushes her)

DESDEMONA: No! No! Wait!!

OTHELLO: NO! If you-

DESDEMONA: Another half an hour!

OTHELLO: No! It must now be done!

DESDEMONA: No! My love no! Let me pray, let me- let me...

OTHELLO: It is too late.

(ACTOR descends upon ACTRESS and violently strangles her, Lights change to focus on GURU and DIRECTOR)

GURU: WHAT WAS THAT!?

DIRECTOR: A classic! The perfect death scene! Bravo, bravo!

GURU: It's a perfect example of how couples argue! BADLY!

DIRECTOR: What do you mean?

GURU: There's this concept called "Fair fighting". That wasn't it.

DIRECTOR: Fair fighting? I've heard of that... isn't it all commonsense, simple stuff though... like listen, and talk respectfully?

GURU: Mostly, but often when people are in relationships they let emotions run away with them, and then they end up screaming back and forth, acting inappropriately, throwing things, or intimidating their partner, and none of that is good.

DIRECTOR: So we can't do this play either.

GURU: I'm afraid not.

DIRECTOR sighs exasperatedly, then the lights go down.

Scene 6

Lights come up on empty stage.

DIRECTOR: (Narrator) Long ago, when the world was young, gods and their awesome powers ruled over the world. Most gods, lived on the sparkling surface of Mt. Olympus, high above the mortal realm. One god, however, lived beneath the land, in the dark wretched realm of the Underworld where he ruled over the dead mortals who populated the kingdom. This god was called Hades. One day, the God Hades grew tired of the cold and lonely underworld. This is where our story begins, as Hades had decided to find someone who would make his kingdom a happier place.

ENTER ACTRESS, dressed as PERSEPHONE

ACTRESS: (Picks apples as the narrator talks, humming to herself)

DIRECTOR: Persephone was a beautiful goddess who brought happiness and mirth wherever she went. She ruled over Spring time, the flowers blossomed, sun shone and grass grew wherever she walked.

ACTTLE-DEE: (Enters dressed as Demeter, moving to hug and dance with ACTRESS)

DIRECTOR: Her mother was Demeter, goddess of the harvest. Demeter doted upon her daughter.

ACTOR: (Enters as HADES, spying the women)

DIRECTOR: However, one day Hades saw the goddesses, he knew at once that he wanted Persephone to be his bride, so he came up with a cunning plan to lure her away from her mother, then he stole her away.

(ACTRESS and ACTOR end up leaving together)

DIRECTOR: Demeter became very sad, as she searched across the Earth she could not find her daughter, because of her sadness, a harvest could not grow on earth.

Months passed, and Persephone could not make her new home more bearable. No life was meant to live in the underworld.

One day Demeter was told by the god of the sun where her daughter had gone, and upon learning where she must travel to regain Persephone, Demeter knew she needed help. Demeter had to climb Mt. Olympus to find the mighty Zeus.

(Demeter leaves, Zeus appears, Demeter approaches him.)

DIRECTOR: Meanwhile in the underworld Persephone begged Hades to leave, and sensing that he may lose his queen, made a plan. He asked her to eat a pomegranate.

Persephone only ate six seeds of that pomegranate, however when Zeus appeared to save the barren earth by returning Persephone to her mother, Hades smirked.

ACTOR: She has eaten the food of the underworld! She must stay here forever!

ACTTLE-DUMB: It is true that anyone who has eaten the food of

the dead must stay. Is what this god says true, Persephone?

ACTOR: (ACTRESS shakes her head) Lies! You have swallowed six seeds of a pomegranate!

ACTTLE-DUMB: It is true then. Persephone, I cannot fully return you to the mortal world. However, I can grant you this- you will only have to remain in the Underworld for six months, one for each seed you foolishly consumed.

GURU: (Bursts into the scene stage left) What!? This is like... victim blaming on a massive scale!

DIRECTOR: (Bursts into the scene stage right) Victim blaming? What in the world are you talking about!?

(The actors sigh, exasperated and leave)

GURU: Often women who have been victims of sexual assault are made to feel they are to blame because of their clothes, their hair, who they are hanging out with, or what they are doing. Often times men are let off completely because of these factors, just like Hades was this time! HE kidnapped her! HE made her eat them! Why is SHE being punished?!

DIRECTOR: Geeze! It's just an old Greek myth... it's not like anyone actually cares!

GURU: That's the problem! Nobody cares! Sexual violence and discrimination is everywhere! It's in the shows we watch, the books we read- even the games we play

(Mario brothers theme begins to play, ACTOR bounces across

stage dressed as Mario)

GURU: Mario will always find his princess needs to be saved.

DIRECTOR: We'll get it right eventually...

GURU: Maybe... maybe not... (He exits discouraged)

LIGHTS GO DOWN

SCENE SIX

LIGHTS COME UP on ACTOR as MACBETH, GURU sits on the edge of stage left, DIRECTOR sits on stage right.

DIRECTOR: Ladies and gentlemen, Macbeth

GURU: It's bad luck to say the name of the Scottish Play, before a production.

DIRECTOR: Oh, can it!

ACTOR: If he were to die.... If we should kill him... We would be punished on this Earth... unless we were to not be caught.... But is it fair that we won't be caught?;

Will I be able to live with myself?

A poisoned cup will be his death... yet...

He trusts me, as his friend and loyal subject... I am also his host, who should protect him from harm, not bring it to him.

Duncan is a great man. He's a good king. As though he were an angel he fights injustices in the kingdom.

I wish his ambition did not need to be destroyed by mine.

(ACTRESS ENTERS as LADY MACBETH)

ACTOR: What's the news?

ACTRESS: He's eating dinner. Why aren't you with him?

ACTOR: Was he looking for me?

ACTRESS: You know that he was.

ACTOR: We can't go through with this. He's brought me- us- so much honour from so many people. We can't forget that, can we?

ACTRESS: Did you decide that this morning? While you prepared yourself? Did you dream of it? You look pale and wretched from guilt. Such a coward you are, that you will forget about your passions, and live in a world where you are a failure. Where you give up so easily.

You don't dare because of this.

ACTOR: I just want peace. I am daring to be a man, I promise.

ACTRESS: But what devil possesses you to break this promise? When you said you'd do it, you were such a man.

If you were to be more than that, you would be even more of a man. Yet now, the others reign supreme. Behold them as real men, and you as nothing.

I am much more a woman than you are a man. Your babe sucked my breasts, and though I'd have rather seen it die, but I swore to serve you as a woman does. Yet you do not keep your oaths as a man does.

ACTOR: What if we fail?

ACTRESS: Ha! Us? Fail? If you have the courage, we won't fail. We shall have our chamberlains take Duncan to his room. Outside the door his guards, I will tempt with wine (she rubs her breasts) and wiles. They will fall into a stupor, and as they sleep we can do anything as the guards will take the blame. Such a great deception.

ACTOR: As long as no women know, and that the guards do not recall.

Then we will do the deed and smear the guards with blood, but what if they do remember you?

ACTOR: No one would believe them, as we will make our grief well known as we "discover" his death. We cry and roar at such grave injustice, who would dare not believe?

ACTOR: Well then. Let us begin. (He marches off stage)

GURU: Whoahoho! This time it wasn't the man who did anything wrong, it was the woman. She manipulated him with her wiles, and completely emasculated him.

Scene Seven

Lights come up on DIRECTOR and GURU chatting. Director looks frustrated.

GURU: So, any idea what you should do next?

DIRECTOR: Only two.

GURU: Hmm... well why don't you tell me one, and then if I have a problem with that you can put on the other!

DIRECTOR: Oh... okay... The first one I was thinking of doing is the Wizard of Oz

GURU: (shaking head) That won't do. We have to promote healthy communication between parents and teens. Dorothy gets upset with Auntie Em, and they begin a screaming match. Both parties are to blame.

DIRECTOR: Darn. Then you won't like the other one I picked either.

GURU: What is it?

DIRECTOR: The Little Mermaid.

GURU: Whoa... there's a lot of problems with that one! Not only does King Trident seriously shelter his daughter, but his daughter Ariel obviously craves attention from a male suitor to the point of her death in the original tale.

DIRECTOR: Really?

GURU: Yes. She's willing to do anything to get the attention of her prince, but no one ever considers that this is unhealthy.

DIRECTOR: I suppose it's true. She gives up her voice first, her family next, and then her life.

GURU: Exactly. If you're okay with someone acting like that, you'll end up with an entire generation that acts like this.

(ACTOR enters stage right Sparkling, as EDWARD CULLEN, angrily storms away as ACTRESS as BELLA SWAN follows)

BELLA: Edward! Nooooo! Don't leave me Edward! (She falls to her knees and sobs)

DIRECTOR: Oh no! That was my last idea! (starts crying)

GURU: No no no no! Don't cry. (he pats her back) You seem like a smart girl, with good ideas.

(DIRECTOR grumbles unintelligible words between sobs)

GURU: It's not your fault. You're extremely talented. You've got a good head on your shoulders. Certainly we can think of something?

DIRECTOR: (She looks up at him accusingly, calming slightly) But there are no stories out there that have a perfect couple.

GURU: Well... certainly there must be something...

BOTH OF THEM THINK

GURU: Or... maybe there isn't.... huh....

DIRECTOR: Yeah, after-all; plot equals conflict.

GURU: True. The real point is that we need to realize that these things are out there...

DIRECTOR: And that we need to start making stories that don't add to these stereotypes and problems...

GURU: Exactly. Y'know... I like the way you think.

DIRECTOR: I like the way you listen.

BOTH DIRECTOR and GURU blush and look away shyly

GURU: So, uh... what you were saying... about writing new stories?

DIRECTOR: Yeah?

GURU: How about I take you out for dinner, sometime, eh? We could discuss this some more?

DIRECTOR: That sounds lovely, but how about I take you out for a movie first?

GURU: Alright. How about you and I blow this popsicle stand?

DIRECTOR: Sounds good to me.

GURU: Would you mind if I took your arm?

DIRECTOR: I wouldn't mind that at all.

THEY TAKE EACHOTHERS ARMS AND LEAVE
LIGHTS GO DOWN