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Patti Smith

*Just Kids*

Talking Notes

This excerpt of Patti Smith’s *Just Kids* revolves around two lovers who cope with poverty amidst their young, pure love. Patti, a booklover, and Robert, a starving artist, depend on each other’s company to struggle through their difficulties and hardships: they had no money but they were happy. Their union rids them of loneliness, which they both previously suffered through. The two draw, read, eat, play (games), and travel together. However, as Patti and Robert mature through time, they lose their young, carefree selves. Patti gets a well-paid, honorable job at Scribner’s, while Robert loses his job, but continues to do his art. Through Patti’s references to Robert’s failing ideas (Garden of Eden), his frequent uses of LSD, and his incorporation of the Devil into his art, Patti prepares the reader for Robert’s downfall and death – perhaps when they are not “just kids” anymore.

Discussion Questions:

How does the title of the story – *Just Kids* – relate to the text?

Patti and Robert meet and fall in love when they are just young “kids” – Patti thought of Robert as her “knight” (42), which is a very innocent – and almost childish – perception. She also felt that they were “too young”(47) to care about money. When the two lovers walk through Washington Square, an old man says, “they’re just kids” when his wife remarks that they are artists. Perhaps this contributes to Robert’s thirst for artistic recognition. In addition, the two – especially Robert – are attracted to songs and books about youth and innocence. As the two mature and have to face reality, Robert goes through a change: he takes down the Indian cloths from the walls and dyes them black and violet, and paints the face of the Devil with an extended tongue (62). He becomes more silent and creates “visual spells” so that “Satan would grant him fame and fortune”(63). Patti begins to reference Robert’s death and downfall when they are becoming less of the “kids” they were.

What is the role of poverty throughout the text?

When there is poverty, there is always a hunger for something else. For example, in the beginning, when Patti worked at Bretano’s bookstore, she was always very hungry and “had nowhere to go”(37). Her hunger parallels her hunger for love and companionship as she suffered through loneliness. Another example is when Robert starts creating spells for Satan – although he was suffering through actual poverty, it is also symbolic of his deprivation of fame, fortune, and recognition.