



GCSE

English Literature

Catrin (Gillian Clarke)

The poet (contextual information about the poet relevant to the poem) (AO3)

- Gillian Clarke is a Welsh poet born in Cardiff in 1937 and now lives in West Wales.
- She is known as a poet, playwright, broadcaster and lecturer.
- She was appointed as the National Poet for Wales from 2008–2016.
- She is considered to be one of the most respected and influential writers in Wales.
- Many of her poems are based in Wales.
- Her poems cover topics such as industrialisation and nature.
- However, her poems also deal with more personal issues such as the complexity of womanhood and relationships, childhood and the fragility of life.

Structure and form (AO2)

- It is an autobiographical poem written in the first person.
- Stanza one describes labour and childbirth.
- Stanza two is shorter and deals with the present and another confrontation between the mother and the daughter who is pushing the boundaries of her mother's authority.
- The poem is written free-verse in order to make the emotions sound authentic and almost conversational.
- The irregular rhyme scheme might stress the emotional complexity of the relationship and how unpredictable relationships can be.

Language and imagery (AO2)

- The metaphor 'red rope of love' suggests the poet considers the labour of childbirth to be a battle – like a tug of war contest.
- The adjective 'red' has connotations of blood and pain but also love, reflecting the complexities of their relationship and the constant struggle of motherhood.
- The use of direct address 'I can remember you, child,' creates a sense of nostalgia.
- The oxymoron of 'wild, tender cries' indicates the complex feelings during childbirth.
- The repetition of the plural personal pronoun 'we want, we shouted' implies the unity and connection between mother and daughter at this point.
- Enjambment is used to suggest the on-going emotions she feels during labour.

The poem (content and context)

What is the poem about? (AO1)

- The poem is about the birth of her daughter, Catrin.
- The poet describes how she remembers the birth of her daughter and the struggles of labour as they both strove to break free of each other.
- The first stanza describes the poet's experience in the labour room as she gazes out of the window and notices people going about their everyday routines.
- She describes the labour as being painful and a struggle.
- The second stanza is set when Catrin is growing up and shows the teenage confrontations and rebellions as she pushes the boundaries set by her mother.

Deeper meaning (AO1)

- The poet writes about the transformative effect motherhood can have and the complex bond she shares with her daughter.
- It shows the changing relationship between mothers and daughters.
- Even when the daughter is older and rebelling against the restrictions she has imposed, the poet still struggles to let go of her growing daughter because of her intense attachment.

Context of the poem (AO3)

- *Catrin* was written in 1978.
- It is an autobiographical account of the birth of her daughter, Catrin, and their relationship as the daughter grows up.
- It is quite a feminist poem as Clarke wanted to show women voicing their experiences – a move away from the way women were once presented as just homemakers.



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Key Quotations (AO1)

- 'I can remember you, child'
- 'Our first/Fierce confrontation'
- 'The tight/Red rope of love'
- 'I wrote/All over the walls with my/ Words'
- 'Tender circles/Of our struggle to become/ Separate'
- 'To be two, to be ourselves'
- 'Neither won nor lost the struggle'
- 'In the glass tank clouded with feelings/Which changed us both'
- 'And your rosy/Defiant glare'
- 'That old rope/Tightening about my life'
- 'Trailing love and conflict'

Key Questions to ask (10 Key Questions)

1. Who do you think the poem is addressed to and why? (AO1)
2. What is the emotional state of the poet in stanza one? (AO1)
3. Why do you think the poem is written in the first person and what effect is created? (AO2)
4. What is the effect of the enjambment in stanza one? (AO2)
5. What do you think the 'red rope of love' is? (AO1)
6. How does the use of free-verse contribute to the meaning of the poem? (AO2)
7. What is the effect of the image 'wild tender circles'? (AO2)
8. Why has the poet organised the poem into two stanzas? (AO2)
9. What tone is created by 'your rosy defiant glare'? (AO2)
10. What do you think the poem tells us about motherhood? (AO3)

Connections and Contrasts (AO3).

'Cousin Kate' by Christina Rossetti:

Both poems deal with the themes of motherhood, love, family relationships and conflict

'Sonnet 29' by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning:

Both poems deal with types of love and relationships

'Kamikaze' by Beatrice Garland:

Both poems are about love, family relationships and conflict

'Dusting the Phone' by Jackie Kay:

Both poems look at love and relationships.

'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' By William Wordsworth:

Both poems are about memories

'Decomposition' by Zulfikar Ghose:

Both poems are about identity

'Blackberry Picking' by Seamus Heaney:

Both poems are about the passing of time, growing up and memories

'Remains' by Simon Armitage:

Both poems are about memories and conflict

'Origin Story' by Eve L Ewing:

Both poems are about the theme of identity

Links for Further Research

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGh-yMWpDMg>
- <https://www.gillianclarke.co.uk/gc2017/catrin/>

