

By the end of studying the poem 'Catrin' by Gillian Clarke I need to know:

**Meaning:** The poem explores Clarke's relationship with her daughter and explores the physical and emotional separation of a mother and child. Remember there may be multiple interpretations to the meaning of each poem. You must remember justify your interpretations.

**Ideas: Autobiographical poem** -Exploring individual experiences, memory, identity, internal conflict.

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Vocabulary</b>           | <p><b>Umbilical cord</b><br/> <b>Disinfected</b><br/> <b>Confrontation</b><br/> <b>Conflicted</b><br/> <b>Autobiographical</b><br/> <b>Multiple interpretation</b></p>  |
| <b>Context</b>              | <p>Gillian Clarke was born in 1937, in Cardiff. Many of her poems reflect cultural identity and family relationships. 'Catrin' was published in 1997. Gillian Clarke. Gillian is proud of her cultural heritage and was awarded National Poet of Wales 2008 - 2016. See attached letter to students from the webpage below.</p> <p><a href="http://www.gillianclarke.co.uk/gc2017/dear-students/">http://www.gillianclarke.co.uk/gc2017/dear-students/</a></p> <p><b>Quasi-autobiographical-</b> Clarke is reflecting on the birth of her daughter; she also reflects upon the relationship between herself and Catrin- as they both long for independence but are also kept close by the love they have for one another.</p> <p><b>Views of motherhood-</b> Clarke is writing in a society no longer reliant entirely upon gender norms- a greater number of women in the workplace meant that women were no longer defined by the role of 'mother'. This is evident in the poem through the persona's [Clarke] desire for independence. She also expresses her pride in Catrin- who, too, is growing up as independent. This increasing independence is worth contrasting with 'Cousin Kate', where roles and expectations of women are far more concrete.</p> <p><b>Parental conflict-</b>Clarke is also demonstrating the more adversarial conflicts between parent and child, reflecting the changing views of society/ less strict or heavy-handed parenting in comparison to earlier time periods.</p> |
| <b>Themes</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal conflict</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• Tension</li> <li>• Change</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Loss of innocence, childhood, parental physical bond.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Deeper understanding</b> | <p>A mother (Clarke) remembers in vivid detail when her daughter 'Catrin' was born. The 'violent struggle' of the birth to the conflict she later experiences with her daughter, who now a teenager wants her independence. In both memories there is a sense that the mother and daughter want to be separate. Despite this, the mother knows their bond is too strong for them to ever be completely separated. Tension is created through their conflicted feelings the warmth of a mother's love in conflict with the pain of giving birth. Clarke is writing about the emotions associated with motherhood, and how mothers react as their children grow up and struggle for independence.</p> <p><b>Independence and identity-</b> Throughout the poem, Clarke expresses the conflict between the neverendingly love she has for her daughter and her desire for independence; as well as the desire for an identity not shaped by the role of a mother.</p>  |

### Reading

Multiple interpretations explained

See attached letter - extract below

How can you read more than a poet intended in a poem? Easily!

Language is layered with meaning. When we choose a word, we know what we want to say, but we don't know what the reader's own experience brings to the word. Language is not frozen. It's alive and it changes and grows with every generation of readers and writers and speakers. A poem is not carved in stone. It speaks. We listen.

We respond.

Gillian Clarke

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Quotes</b>      | <p>'first fierce confrontation'<br/> 'Red rope of love'<br/> 'Wild, tender circles '<br/> 'I wrote all over the walls with my words' - physical pain of childbirth<br/> 'our struggle to become separate'<br/> 'still I am fighting you off'<br/> 'hearts pool'<br/> 'trailing love and conflict'<br/> 'May you skate in the dark...'</p>   |
| <b>Terminology</b> | <p><b>Form</b> - Free verse. No regular rhyming scheme as though the speaker is working through her thoughts and memories as they occur. However in stanza two 'Strong, long' 'hair glare' demonstrate a use of aggressive sounds in 'strong' and 'long,' - and later 'hair' and 'glare.' The rhyming of these aggressive sounds indicates 'Catrin's' strength and desire for independence.</p> <p><b>Enjambment</b> - Allows the flow of thoughts as most lines run on without being end - stopped.</p> <p><b>Structure</b> - Two stanzas. The break between the two representing time passing and the daughter growing up.</p> <p><b>Semantic field</b> - Language about conflict - Challenging, Fierce confrontation, fighting, struggle. Language about love 'Red rope of love'</p> <p><b>Metaphorical language</b> - 'Red rope of love' physical attachment of the umbilical cord. 'hearts pool' - suggests a reservoir of love that the daughter could draw from</p> <p><b>Alliteration</b> - First sentence 'window watching' 'first fierce confrontation'</p> <p><b>Oxymoron</b> - 'wild, tender'</p> <p><b>Juxtaposition</b> of 'love' and 'conflict' highlights the tension between the poems two key feelings.</p> <p><b>Symbolism</b> - Red is symbolic of love and passion but also blood and danger . Symbolic of their relationship. Loving but potentially destructive.</p> <p><b>Use of personal pronouns</b> - Although autobiographical the use of personal pronouns makes it relatable to any mother child relationship.</p> <p>The second stanza is written in the <b>present tense</b> and deals with an incident in which 'Catrin' has asked to stay out skating 'in the dark', oblivious to the dangers her mother anticipates.</p> |

**Links to other poems:**

This poem may be compared with fractured family relationships in Christina Rossetti's 'Cousin Kate' or Jane Weir's 'Poppies'

Treatment of women-growing independence of Catrin in direct contrast to the constraints placed upon the persona in 'Cousin Kate'.