

- ▢ [Home](#)
- ▢ [Reading notes](#)
- ▢ [Good Poems](#)
- ▢ [Media Diary](#)
- ▢ [Photos](#)
- ▢ [Live Blogs](#)
- ▢ [Links](#)

Gillian Clarke - Cold Knap Lake

We once watched a crowd
pull a drowned child from the lake.
Blue lipped and dressed in water's long green silk
she lay for dead.

Then kneeling on the earth,
a heroine, her red head bowed,
her wartime cotton frock soaked,
my mother gave a stranger's child her breath.
The crowd stood silent,
drawn by the dread of it.

The child breathed, bleating
and rosy in my mother's hands.
My father took her home to a poor house
and watched her thrashed for almost drowning.

Was I there?
Or is that troubled surface something else
shadowy under the dipped fingers of willows
where satiny mud blooms in cloudiness
after the treading, heavy webs of swans
as their wings beat and whistle on the air?

All lost things lie under closing water
in that lake with the poor man's daughter.

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