**KID by Simon Armitage**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToYbdNC9fck>

**Kid**

Batman, big shot, when you gave the order

to grow up, then let me loose to wander

leeward, freely through the wild blue yonder

as you liked to say, or ditched me, rather,

in the gutter ... well, I turned the corner.

Now I've scotched that 'he was like a father

to me' rumour, sacked it, blown the cover

on that 'he was like an elder brother'

story, let the cat out on that caper

with the married woman, how you took her

downtown on expenses in the motor.

Holy robin-redbreast-nest-egg-shocker!

Holy roll-me-over-in the-clover,

I'm not playing ball boy any longer

Batman, now I've doffed that off-the-shoulder

Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number

for a pair of jeans and crew-neck jumper;

now I'm taller, harder, stronger, older.

Batman, it makes a marvellous picture:

you without a shadow, stewing over

chicken giblets in the pressure cooker,

next to nothing in the walk-in larder,

punching the palm of your hand all winter,

you baby, now I'm the real boy wonder.



The poem is a dramatic *monologue* by Robin the Boy Wonder, the loyal sidekick to Batman in the comic strips, television programmes and films. Robin talks about how he has separated from Batman and is learning to lead his own, independent life. In the process he publicises some of Batman's secrets so that we see the 'superhero' in a new light. Robin ends up stronger and more mature. The poem is often humorous but has a serious message too.

**Structure and Language**

**Structure**

The poem consists of a single *stanza* of 24 lines. The lines are pentameters (they have 10 syllables each).

**Language**

Think about how the language the poet uses helps to convey his ideas. Here are some points to consider:

* Think about the title. It does not tell us anything about Batman and Robin - it's only when we begin to read the poem that the identity of the 'kid' becomes clear. However, if we go back to the title having read the poem, it may remind us of other young people who are caught up in the shadow (line 20) of someone they admire, and their need to forge their own identity.
* Batman is at first presented as a real superhero: he is described at the start in the alliterative phrase Batman, big shot, as someone who gives orders to Robin. Yet as we read on, his status is diminished. We hear that he “"ditched"” (line 4) Robin and had an affair with a married woman (line 10). We see him at the end all alone, cooking an unappealing meal for himself (“"chicken giblets in the pressure cooker"” (line 21), with next to nothing (line 22) in the house to eat. Can it be that he cannot manage by himself, without Robin around? He is shown as anxious to get going, “"punching the palm of [his] hand"” (line 23) with boredom, but unable to do anything.
* This poem contains various examples of slang, for example naval slang - “"wander leeward"” (line 2), British slang - the ordinary word motor (line 11) for the amazing Batmobile, and American slang - “"baby"” (line 24). The mixture of styles adds humour and perhaps helps to illustrate the growing-up process: Robin is trying out a mixture of things.

 There is a serious message behind the comedy - we are encouraged to consider whether heroes and hero-worship can really sustain young people growing up. However marvellous the admired person may be, a young person has to learn to be independent - “"taller, harder, stronger, older"” (line 18) and to live their own life.

**Imagery and Sound**



Kid

**Imagery**

The *imagery* in the opening lines shows the *contrast* between the way Batman saw his separation with Robin, when he 'generously' let him free to explore the wild blue yonder (line 3), to Robin's more down to earth view of events - ditched me... in the gutter (line 5). We wonder what really happened between them...

Robin uses various cliched phrases as he tells us that he has scotched that... rumour, sacked it, blown the cover... let the cat out (lines 6-9), perhaps because he is boasting of the power that releasing these secrets has given him over Batman. The casual language makes it sound as if he is showing off to his mates. The casual use of motor for the Batmobile also suggests he is trying to impress us.

* The word caper (line 9) is a pun, reminding us of the capes that Batman and Robin always wore.
* Lines 12 and 13 are spoofs of tabloid headlines. Holy is an adjective that Robin used a lot when exclaiming, such as 'Holy smoke!' Here, Armitage has exaggerated it for comic effect. The 'new' Robin seems to be making fun of his 'old' self.
* Robin becomes scornful when he uses the *metaphor*“"I'm not playing ball boy any longer"” (line 14). He's fed up of the 'game' and doesn't want to serve anyone any more.

He makes fun of his superhero outfit, again sounding scornful by describing it as a fashion writer might - that off-the-shoulder Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number (lines 15-16). He prefers the more ordinary jeans and jumper, now that he is an ordinary kid.

It is ironic that he calls Batman baby in the final line, because although it is a term of endearment, he uses it to belittle Batman. Robin the kid has grown up while Batman, the superhero, has diminished to a baby. The phrase boy wonder had a new meaning, because Robin has managed to break free of his idol.

**Sound**

* You will have noticed that every line ends with -er (order, wander, yonder). Think about the famous Batman theme tune: Er er er er, er er er er, er er er er, er er er er, Batman! Armitage is mimicking the theme tune through his rhyme scheme.
* This effect is intensified through the internal *rhyme*, as many words within the lines also end with -er or -our (gutter, rumour, elder)
* The very last words of the poem, announcing that Robin now is the real boy wonder (line 24), create the climax of the rhyme scheme.

 Armitage uses very long sentences: there are only 5 in the whole poem. This adds pace to the reading, as we are only allowed short pauses for breath, and helps to convey the energy that Robin has now he is free of Batman.

**Attitude, Tone and Ideas**

Much of the meaning of a poem is conveyed by the attitude it expresses toward its subject matter. 'Attitude' can be thought of as a combination of the poet's tone of voice, and the ideas he or she is trying to get across to the reader.

To decide on the *tone*, you need to think about the ideas and attitudes in the poem, and then decide how you would read it aloud.

The poem could be read:

* in a bitter way, suggesting Robin is angry that Batman prevented him from growing up for so long
* in a thoughtful way, suggesting that Robin is reflecting on his experiences with Batman
* triumphantly, showing Robin's delight that he is free of Batman at last.

Most readers will probably feel that the tone should be mainly triumphantly, showing Robin's delight that he is free of Batman at last, yet it could be read thoughtfully.

**Ideas**

**Key phrases in** *Kid*

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| --- | --- |
| **Key phrase** | **Commentary** |
| “"Holy roll-me-over in-the-clover"” | Robin is mocking the fact that the 'good' Batman had an affair with a married woman and exclaims about it in an over-exaggerated way, using a comically inappropriate phrase for sex. |
| “"you without a shadow"” | Batman always had Robin close by him, like a shadow, but Robin also felt as insignificant as a shadow. Now that the shadow is gone, Batman seems almost unreal - only ghosts leave no shadows... |
| “"Batman, big shot"” | This phrase suggests respect for Batman's skills. |

From the first word of the poem we know that there is a connection here with Batman, and reading on we discover that the narrator here is his sidekick, Robin, now grown up and brimming with confidence.

This is a terrifically fast-paced poem, conveying a sense of the energy and exuberance of youth. The repetition of words ending in -er at the end of each of the twenty-four lines adds to the feeling of speed, with one line rushing into the next.

The poem is packed with witty, self-assured language, plays on words that leave us in no doubt that Robin is taking over the major role from Batman. Abandoned by the 'father figure' that he no longer needs, Robin tells us that he has now 'turned the corner'. He doesn't need to play second fiddle any more, as he tells us in line fourteen 'I'm not playing ball boy any longer'. He has cast off his garish green and red clothes and made his own choice of 'jeans and crew-neck jumper'. He paints a sad picture of Batman, now alone or 'without a shadow', with Robin taking over the role of hero: he triumphantly ends the poem with 'now I'm the real boy wonder.' In spite of the title, Robin is no longer a kid.

Taking a closer look at the language, Armitage has made skilful, witty use of imagery in this poem. There is the alliteration of 'let me loose to wander leeward' overlapping the assonance of 'leeward, freely' in lines 2 to 3 and the idiomatic 'let the cat out on that caper' in line 9. The twelfth and thirteenth lines present us with whole strings of hyphenated phrases that seem to rush along at breakneck speed: 'Holy robin-redbreast-nest-egg-shocker!' to describe Robin's reaction to Batman's brief affair with a married woman where he claimed expenses for dating her. The irony here too is the reference to 'robin-redbreast', as it appears that it was Robin himself who exposed Batman's behaviour in this incident.

In lines 20 to 21 we are presented with the image of Batman 'stewing over chicken giblets' a clever metaphorical play on words, as Robin builds up a pitiful picture of Batman, now a fallen figure, not even having enough to eat, 'punching the palm of your hand all winter'. In the last line he audaciously refers to the formerly revered hero as 'baby' before making his final 'boy wonder' statement.

Armitage shows us here that even a superhero does not prevail for ever; the trusty sidekick grows up, builds up strength and confidence, and is soon ready to take over the leading role. It's a poem that any younger brother or downtrodden son with a domineering father can take inspiration from. Perhaps any hero-worshipping teenager, aspiring to be famous in one way or another, will find a theme to relate to here. As for the heroes themselves, be warned one day, someone else is going to take over!

**Kid**

This is a comical monologue, spoken by Robin the Boy Wonder, sidekick to Batman, the Caped Crusader of Gotham city, in the comic strip, TV series and various feature films.

The form of the poem matches its humour - every line ends with the unstressed “-er” syllable, leading naturally in the final line to “the real boy wonder”. (Where the lines rhyme, as most of them do, either with half or full rhyme, it is called a double or feminine rhyme.) As the similar line endings accumulate, the reader wonders how the poet will keep it up. On the page, we can see this, but the poem is ideal for spoken performance, as the listener tries to guess what is coming next. Perhaps, when we finally hear “boy wonder”, we will not be totally surprised, since mention of “Batman” may have put it into our heads. The rhythm (basically trochaic with occasional dactyls - this is the metre used famously by H.W. Longfellow, in his American epic Hiawatha) accentuates the final word. It places a heavy stress on the last-but-one syllable: “order”, “wander”, “yonder” and so on, so we cannot miss the effect.

Armitage imagines that Batman has separated from Robin, who has succeeded without him, and now gives away some of the hero's secrets - “scotched” the “rumour”, “blown the cover” and “let the cat out”. Having spent his earlier years as Batman's “shadow”, Robin has succeeded on his own, while Batman is bored and barely able to fend for himself (no food in his outsize “larder”).

As a poem that sends up Batman, this is a light-hearted and amusing piece. Perhaps Armitage is making a slightly more serious comment about heroes and icons generally - that they do not live up to their reputations, while they depend on others for their continued success. Among humorous features of the poem we find:

* Scandal or bad taste - the report of Batman's adventure with a married woman
* Punning - for example “caper” (which suggests Batman's and Robin's capes, and Batman's nickname of the Caped Crusader) or the word association of “robin-redbreast-nest-egg”
* Parody - using Batman's favourite adjective “holy” in extravagant noun phrases
* Incongruity - Robin's using British slang (“motor” for the Batmobile), naval jargon (“wander leeward”) and referring to “jeans” and a “crew-neck jumper”
* Self-ridicule - mocking the superhero outfit, the “off-the-shoulder/Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number”
* Bathos - Batman's near-empty larder - showing how he used to rely on Robin to shop for food (not something mentioned in the original stories)

In thinking about this poem, you might like to consider

* whether it is about Batman specifically or all heroes (and heroines)
* what other icons might deserve this kind of ridicule

Alternatively, you could write your own comic monologue by a sidekick dishing the dirt on a more famous hero (Tonto on the Lone Ranger, say or Little John on Robin Hood).