

Margaret atwood's
"this is a photograph
of me" and "morning
in the burned
house" ...

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Margaret Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me" and "Morning in the Burned House" Essay Sample

Illusion is often mistaken for reality. Poet Margaret Atwood's poems, "This is a Photograph of Me" and "Morning in the Burned House" can be compared in terms of writing style, and theme. In "This is a Photograph of Me" Atwood writes using a combination of contrasting, irony, and symbolism, while in the poem "Morning in the Burned House" she uses irony, and symbolism in order to enhance the writing style and the exploration of the line dividing illusion and reality.

Atwood uses many descriptive words near the beginning of the poem to describe the scenery in order to create a calm, peaceful mood.

Consequently, just as the reader becomes comfortable with the setting and mood they experience a sudden shift in mood near the end, revealing a dead body lying beneath the surface of the lake. The use of contrasting effectively portrays the dead body in the lake by suddenly shifting the reader's emotion, but, more importantly, it effectively demonstrates the theme illusion versus reality because contrasting is used to show or emphasize differences between the two.

Atwood has incorporated many examples of irony into this poem even in the title. Ironically, the title of the poem is "This is a Photograph of Me" however, the photograph is not of her, it is merely a photograph of a beautiful landscape. The poet writes, "I am in the lake, in the centre of the picture, just under the surface," which is ironic because although the narrator is in the photo she is concealed under the lake difficult to be seen

which also contributes to the theme because if one were to look at this photo they must look closely at the lake to notice the dead body, even then they wouldn't know if it were an illusion or not. It is also ironic that the narrator talks about her death without feeling, with a "matter of fact" tone. Effective symbolism is used in order to create a close comparison between the surface of the water, and the photograph itself.

Atwood employs the use of symbolism when she writes, "It is difficult to say where precisely, or to say how large or small I am." The narrator drowning is symbolic because one must look below the surface of the lake in order to know what is real and what is an illusion, which is similar to the photograph itself because the photo does not show what is truly taking place. Lakes are often referred to as being very calm, and relaxing, in the poem the water is symbolic of this. However, it ironically becomes evident to the reader that beneath the serene water lays a disturbing image. The use of such connotation contributes considerably to the writing styles and theme of the poem.

On the other hand, "Morning in the Burned House" can also be compared through similar techniques as described in "This is a Photograph of Me". The burnt house itself is a symbolic figure of the dead child's life because since the house is burnt, it can no longer remain the same as it once was, similar to how the child moved on to another state, and will never be the same again. The reality of the child's death is represented by the house which burnt down, while the illusion of it is the child telling the reader about her life after death. Atwood also demonstrates symbolism with the burning house

which represents the "burnt" or lost memory of the child's experiences in the house prior to the fire's remains. The fact that the entire poem takes place indoors is symbolic in the way that the child will never age again, and that he or she has already become all that they can be and is trapped that way forever.

Similarly, where the poem takes place is symbolic of the theme. The fire is representative of reality, while the life of the child is an illusion. Irony is used throughout the tone of the narrator's voice as Atwood writes, "In the burned house I am eating breakfast. You understand: there is no house, there is no breakfast, yet here I am." The voice of the narrator has a calm and relaxed tone; ironically, it is not the type of tone that is expected from a person who passed away. A house is meant to support a family and bring protection to those who reside in it, however, in this poem, that proved to be ironic because it was this piece of security that took the lives of the family. Therefore, the poet employs the use of such literary devices that are successful in demonstrating the theme and writing styles of the poem.

To conclude, the theme and writing styles of the poems "This is a Photograph of Me" and "Morning in the Burned House" are similar in Margaret Atwood's use of contrasting, irony, and symbolism. The similarities that exist between the two poems are, the use of the same techniques to enhance the theme which is done by using irony, the narrators speak about their deaths without emotion, symbolism, the causes of death are both symbols in which they relate back to the theme. The styles that Atwood uses

in both poems can be analyzed in a similar fashion, which is the key to determining where the line is drawn between illusion and reality.