

Margaret atwood



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Summary and Analysis? PrintPDFCite. “ This Is a Photograph of Me,” by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, presents a speaker who begins by promising to show us a photograph of herself. Later, however, we learn that the speaker has died from having drowned in the lake the photograph depicts. The poem begins with a title that is a crucial part of the text. Unlike many poems, where the title has little effect on the work’s meaning, here the title is essential to a total understanding of the whole piece. The title, in fact, sets the tone of the poem in numerous ways.

Like the rest of the poem, the title is apparently simple, clear, and straightforward, both in syntax (that is, sentence structure) and in diction (that is, word choice). The simple title implies (falsely, as it turns out) that the poem itself will be simple. Not until much later in this lyric do we discover two of its essential paradoxes: that the speaker who seems so alive is actually dead, and that the clear visual depiction of the speaker, which the title seems to promise, is never actually presented.

The poem is written as if the speaker is directly addressing the reader and is, perhaps, showing either the reader or another person a picture of herself (or himself). The speaker not only shows the photo but explains how it should be viewed and interpreted. In short, the speaker tells us how to make sense of a photograph we never really see, and she does so as part of a poem that seems to defy rational explanations in various other ways.

In both of these senses, then, the poem is additionally paradoxical. Further paradox results from the fact that the speaker describes, with great precision, the details of a photograph we cannot actually view. She shows,

then, the power of words to create images in our minds even when no actual images appear before our eyes. She implies and demonstrates the power of poetry to be both precise and suggestive, both accurate and full of mysterious implications.

The poem implies that photographs allow us to see things clearly, and yet her description of the photograph shows the limits of mere photographic realism. As the speaker describes, detail by detail, the features of the photograph (lines 6-14), she creates a tone of comforting familiarity. All of us have seen photos of the sort she makes us imagine. Although we have no exact knowledge of the specific place she is describing, we are all familiar with places such as this. In... (The entire section is 897 words. )