

"this is a photograph of me" by margaret atwood essay sample

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“ This Is a Photograph of Me” by Margaret Atwood Essay Sample

In the poem “ This Is a Photograph of Me”, Margaret Atwood attempts to depict the parallels between a picture slowly developing and the narrators realization of her death. This poem is divided into two parts with the second half separated by brackets. The elements of the picture begin to emerge reflecting the narrator’s awareness of her death.

In the first stanza it is as if the speaker is trying to remember fuzzy memories of her past and maybe as far back as her youth. This half is very lyrical, with repetition of similar sounds lulling the reader into false sense of peace. The poem begins with a “ smeared print...” (1047) of a photograph. The photograph is described as grey; blurred and blended, therefore at this point the picture is fairly undeveloped. She is very unsure where she is destined to go. As the narrator surfaces more and more she begins to describe things in greater detail. For example, “ you see in the left-hand corner a thing is like a branch: part of a tree (balsam or spruce) emerging.”(1047) This signifies that not only the picture is becoming clearer, but also her self-awareness is becoming clearer.

She is becoming to understand between life and death. We see the narrator has been dead for quite awhile when she writes “ what ought to be a gentle slope, a small frame house.”(1048) This shows that it has taken her quite some time to start coming into focus with her existence, as she did not believe the house “ ought”(1048) to be there, therefore, the house was built after she died. The first half of the poem describes the physical and natural

elements in the picture. For example, " there is a lake, and beyond that, some low hills."(1048) Atwood is attempting to emphasize the actual landscape of the picture in order to surprise the reader with respect to announcing the death of the narrator.

The images in the second half become distorted and muddled; the lake which is first seen " in the background"(1048), is now " in the center of the picture"(1048). The poem takes a drastic turn when the narrator reveals that the photograph was taken the day after she drowned. The poem seemed to be all about describing a beautiful picture until this point. She says that she is " just under the surface."(1048) Literally, she is physically drowned under the surface of the water, and she is emotionally under the surface, meaning she has not crossed over to her final destination of peace. She is very unsure of her location in the water. We can see this in her description about where she is and how " large or small"(1048) she is. One line, " the effect of water on light is a distortion"(1048) symbolizes her haziness in where she is to head. She has to head towards the light, but since she is under water, the direction of light and her vision is distorted. In the final line " but if you look long enough, eventually, you will be able to see me,"(1048) the narrator knows where she has to go but is still unsure of when she will reach that destination.

In the end of the poem, as the picture slowly develops, so do the narrator's realizations of her own death. She describes the scenery in her mind on past memories, which is very different than how it is depicted in the photograph. We are asked to search long and hard, so we may see past our distorted

vision, to discover what actually lies below the surface. " This Is a Photograph of Me" becomes a desperate search for identity.

Works Cited

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