



Love and Its Expressions in Atwood's Poem "[You Fit into Me]"

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Korbyn Peebles unearths the subtext of Margaret Atwood's short poem "[You Fit into Me]" to analyze how its jarring, two-stanza structure reveals a dualistic perspective on human love. Peebles's essay was written for Writing II with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye

– *Margaret Atwood*

MARGARET ATWOOD'S UNTITLED POEM, within a few words, profoundly expresses what it means to be in love. The poem, commonly designated "[You Fit into Me]," comforts the reader first with cozy images of buttons in button holes and sewing hooks in eyes, before shifting, in the next stanza, to the horrid mutilation of the narrator's own eye with a barbed fish hook. Atwood offers these two contrasting images to show two extremes of love: the planned, collected, and somewhat unexciting love like that of a sewing hook sliding timidly into its eye, just as it was supposed

to be; and the one where intensity, pain, and surprise all culminate into a tumultuous explosion of emotions.

Although ambiguous at first glance, the poem's first line and assumed title maliciously sets the flavor of the poem for its reader. The phrase "you fit into me" only gains connotation when our reader presupposes the nature of the speaker and that of the poem's addressee. Fitting into something seems nothing but mechanical at first, like a gear locking into another, but in defining the gears as "you" and "me" the verb shifts toward something much more human. Something that fits is often something that is supposed to be there; the two pieces are designed to be paired. In the context of people, the pairing almost hints at a Calvinistic view of love, the classic "we're meant to be" mentality. This leads the audience to view the poem with such notions in mind—and to fall prey for the sudden turn that occurs in the second stanza.

Atwood's first lines are akin to most romantic love poetry in that it expresses a couple's love through symbolism: "you fit into me / like a hook into an eye" (1-2). The reader must assume that the relationship between the speaker and her/his implied audience is very intimate. The sexual innuendo highlighting the penetration of the sewing hook into the eye also suggests to the reader that the relationship is between lovers rather than friends or family. This is the first definition of love that Atwood presents. It is a love that is simple and modest. A sewing hook is intended to go into its eye; however, nothing about it is truly astonishing. No extensive feelings are felt; rather, more often than not, one hardly thinks about hooks and eyes, even while sewing. Nevertheless, this foundational and steadfast love is something admirable. Atwood seems to be praising this love for its maturity, for its stoic durability.

Starkly contrasting the first two lines are Atwood's definition of another type of love, "a fish hook / an open eye" (3-4). Although this has been interpreted as a response to betrayal, it seems to be overgrown with romantic ideas at its root. Atwood uses this metaphor as a means to evoke the same response from the reader that a couple

who “fell in love” would experience. The sudden rush of emotions and surprise that comes from imagining those last lines is comparable to the young fiery love Atwood is describing. Fear, adrenaline, and overwhelming sensations spill out of the final stanza, out of the love this metaphor conveys. This love is not designed like its counterpart; it is experienced. A fish hook was never intended to gouge out the eye of a person, just like this love was never fitted for two people.

The definition of love is an enigma. Although science, religion, and literature—such as Atwood’s poem—try to distinguish and characterize love, it still remains perpetually just out of reach of explanation. Atwood, instead of trying to define love through wordy paragraphs and irrelevant charts, approaches her analysis of love through minimalism. She leaves breath in between her words, and it is through this space that she allows the reader to feel her analysis rather than read it. Atwood is not attempting to define all aspects of love in two scenarios, but, alternatively, is contributing to the ever-expanding knowledge of this perplexity. Rumi’s Hindu poem “Elephant in the Dark” provides an illustration to understand this sort of collective knowledge. Although many people go into the dark room to grope at the strange object, all come out with equally valid yet comically different descriptions of what it was. It’s not until the final three stanzas that Rumi states a solution:

Each of us touches one place
and understands the whole that way.

The palm and the fingers feeling in the dark are
how the senses explore the reality of the elephant.

If each of us held a candle there,
and if we went in together,
we could see it. (17-23)

Love, like the elephant, cannot be explained through a single poem, or through any one field of knowledge alone. Love's immensity demands cooperation from every perspective. Atwood has lit her candle and raised it for us to see just a sliver of what love is, and as the reader, we are implored to do the same. ►►

►► WORKS CITED

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