

## Navigating through Time and Space: Deixis in Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me"

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### ABSTRACT

This stylistics analysis of Margaret Atwood's poem examines the persona as a paradoxical element whose interpretation was derived by applying the deictic shift theory. The use of the theory demonstrates how meaning was derived from the literary work that allows anchor-points in time and space to position the reader. While Atwood's poem has always been interpreted along the sphere of feminism whereby women are perceived as being marginalized and relegated to the domestic fold and are unworthy to express their identity and rise above the surface of a sea of domestic responsibilities, by using a more formalist approach, the process enabled an analysis of the theme, effects and meaning based on the language of the poem as evidentiary support. Deixis, as a linguistic feature, was employed as a tool of analysis, deriving meaning from verb tense and aspect, personal pronouns, and adverbs of time and place. These linguistic features were viewed and interpreted on the context of their utterance. Additionally, the concurrent use of the text-world theory facilitates the reader's capacity to build the world of the text. Hence, the formalist approach employed in the analysis enabled recourse to the language of the poem that allowed the persona to be revealed.

**Keywords:** deixis; deictic shift theory; text-worlds; text-world theory; linguistic analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Language is crucial to the production of literature and discourse. Todorov (1977) maintains this view when he defined literature as a verbal work of art. This implies that to fully grasp the meaning and aesthetics of a literary text, one needs to make recourse to language at all levels of linguistic description because it is the only mode of its expression. Dada (2004) explains that a literary work holds so many codes, including sound patterns and semantic relations that must be decoded, in order to fully understand what it means.

Lyons (1977) echoes a similar viewpoint when he averred that language function appears to be reflected in its grammatical and lexical structure. It is this same notion that underpins this study with the goal of investigating the stylistic value of lexico-grammatical encoding in reinforcing aspects of meaning and aesthetics in the poem under study. The aim is to show that lexico-grammatical patterns of language use combine with other elements of language to convey textual message and likewise achieve artistic effect. Specifically, with deictic shift, text-world theories, and deixis categories adapted from Stockwell (2002) as the analytical platform, the study demonstrates that the deployment of deictics: personal pronouns, locative adverbs and temporal adverbs helps the poet to relate her experiences and propositions within specific spatial or temporal frameworks, and equally paves the way for the reader to navigate their way through the text worlds (Werth, 1999) of the poem.

### DEIXIS IN FACE TO FACE INTERACTION

*Deixis* comes from the Greek word for pointing or indicating. It refers to the features of language, including verb tense and aspect, personal pronouns, and adverbs of time and place,

that depend for their full interpretation on the context of their utterance. Linguistic expressions that possess this property of context dependence were first termed *indexical symbols* by Peirce (cited in Bennet, 2005). The concept was further extended and distinction was made between *token* and *type* to help distinguish indexical symbols, (such as *this*,) from the non-indexicals, (such as *blue*) thus, every use of a particular word in context is a token; the class of all tokens of that word is a type. A general linguistic rule applies to all tokens, and the tokens of both indexical and non-indexical symbols have symbolic meanings. But whereas the full meaning of a non-indexical symbol token (e.g., *blue* in the utterance *the bag is blue*) is contained in this symbolic meaning, the full meaning of an indexical symbol token (e.g., *this* in the utterance *this is the bag*) also contains the contextual information of that token. The combination of symbolic meaning and relevant situational information is called the *indexical meaning*.

The anchoring of situational information is crucial to the interpretation of deictic expressions and the sentences that contain them, hence, there must exist a subjective orienting point for context-embedded discourse. Bühler (1982) called this orienting point the *origo*; others termed it the *center* (Fillmore, 1971; Lyons, 1968 cited in Semino, 1995) or, more specifically, the *center of orientation* (Rauh, 1983 cited in Semino, 1995) or the *deictic center* (Levinson, 1983 cited in Semino, 1995). In the primary deictic categories of person, place, and time deixis, the personal pronoun first person, *I*, is understood to be the speaker's self, the locative, *here*, is understood to be the speaker's current location, and the adverbial, *now*, is understood to be the speaker's present time. The *I*, *here* and *now* taken altogether are considered the *zero point*, and it is in relation to this zero point that other personal, spatial, and temporal deictic expressions in the same speaker's speech are constructed and comprehended.

The deictic center is not constant; it shifts, even in the course of a single conversation, as different participants adopt the role of speaker. It is the participants' orientation to the deictic center of the speaker's utterances, combined with their knowledge of the symbolic meanings of deictic expressions, that allows them to construct a shared indexical meaning of each deictic expression used in that particular context, thus enabling communication. Lyons (1977) describes this face to face interaction as the *canonical situation of utterance*.

## DEIXIS IN TEXT

Deixis implicates a subjective distinction between what is perceived as *proximal* to the deictic centre and what is perceived as *non-proximal or distal*. The most prototypical dimension of deixis, namely space deixis, involves references to locations in terms of their perceived position in relation to the deictic centre. The difference between proximal and distal has something to do with locations that are perceived to be close to the deictic center (proximal) and locations that are perceived to be far from it (distal). The perception of proximity (near and far) to the deictic center is subjective and context-dependent, however. Space deixis also include the use of the motion verbs *come* and *go* to indicate, respectively, movement towards the deictic centre and movement away from the deictic centre.

Temporal or time deixis involves the expression of a contrast between *now* and *not-now* or *then*, and includes expressions such as *now*, *then*, *today*, *later*, *yesterday*, *ago*. Tense contrasts are also deictic, as they grammaticalize the relationship between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context (Lyons, 1977).

Person deixis, on the other hand, involves references to the roles of addresser and addressee in communication, and includes, in English, the first and second person pronouns *I*, *we* and *you*. The pronoun *I* is one of the most prototypical cases of deictic expressions, as it

normally refers to whoever is currently speaking or writing, so that its referent changes with every change of speaker/writer. Space, time, and person deixis are normally described as the main types of deictic phenomena (Levinson, 1983 cited in Semino, 1995).

### DEICTIC PROJECTION

While the speaker's or writer's here-and-now constitutes the unmarked deictic centre, there are many instances and forms of communication where a different position in space and time is adopted as the zero-point for the use of deictic expressions. Thus in the question *Are you coming to the concert tonight?*, which may be uttered over the phone between two people currently in their respective homes, the use of *come*, in this case, indicates movement towards the location in which the speaker expects to be in later that day, and towards which s/he is hoping the addressee will also travel. This phenomenon is known as deictic projection (Semino, 1995). The notion of deictic projection is particularly relevant for the study of deixis in fiction where the deictic centre typically corresponds to the position of a narrator or character within an imaginary situational context. Bühler (1982) introduced the notion of *deixis at phantasma* to capture the use of deictic expressions to refer to elements of a situational context that is different from the current communicative situation, and not directly perceivable by the listener or reader. Bühler (1982) says that in such cases the narrator takes the listener into the realm of constructive imagination, treating him there to the same deictic words that he may see and hear what is there to be seen and heard, or even more (touch, taste, smell). In other words, in fiction as well as in many other cases of deictic projection, the use of deictic expressions does not rely on the addressee's awareness of the speaker's position and perspective, but rather provides clues for the construction of a subjective position within an imagined situational context in reference to which the deictic expressions used in the text make sense. Deixis plays a central role in accounts of the textual projection of point of view, as well in models of narrative comprehension that attempt to account for how readers imagine text worlds (Werth, 1999) by navigating through changes of time and place. Deictics are among the linguistic expressions that may be used to indicate shifts from one mental space or text-world to another.

### TEXT WORLDS AND THE TEXT WORLD THEORY

Werth (1999) defined text worlds as conceptual scenarios containing just enough information to make sense of the particular utterance they correspond to. By creating these mental constructs, readers and hearers make sense of complex utterances when received. This is the basis of the text world theory, which makes the distinction between the discourse world and the text world. The discourse world is the immediate real-world situation where the writer communicates with the reader; while the text world is what is constructed by the reader to make sense of discourse in context. The context includes all the schematic knowledge of all participants in the discourse, as well as all surrounding physical objects and entities. Text worlds are composed of world-building elements and function-advancing propositions, both of which are recovered from the text (Jeffries & MacIntyre, 2010). World-building elements consist of *time*, realized through the use of tense and aspect of verb phrases; *location*, realized through adverbials and noun phrases specifying place; *characters*, realized through proper nouns and pronouns; and *objects*, realized through nouns and pronouns. Function-advancing propositions work to develop and advance events within the text world and are realized in verb phrases.

## DEICTIC SHIFT THEORY

Deictic shift theory was developed to account for the way in which readers can come to feel deeply involved in what they are reading, ultimately forgetting about their position within the real world, the discourse world, and begin to interpret events in the text as if from a position within the text world (Jeffries & MacIntyre, 2010). Text world theory provides the explanation of the means by which readers make sense of a text; deictic shift theory provides a means of explaining the sense of involvement that readers often have as they navigate their way through the text. According to Segal (1995), the reader takes a cognitive stance within the world of the narrative and interprets the text from that perspective. The essence of the theory, as the name suggests, is the concept of deixis. Deictic shift theory suggests that readers assume the spatial, temporal and social coordinates of deictic fields not to be centered on the self and related to the discourse world but to be anchored within the text world itself. Suspending the normal assumptions about deictic reference involves making a *deictic shift* into the text world, which, as Segal (1995) explains, results in a feeling of involvement in the narrative. When we suspend our egocentric conception of deixis, we are capable of projecting a deictic center that is not our own. This concept, *deictic projection*, which suggests that readers are able to feel involved in a narrative by vicariously experiencing events from a point of view other than their own, is at the heart of deictic shift theory.

### A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A POEM USING TEXT-WORLD AND DEICTIC SHIFT THEORIES

A number of studies on deixis have been conducted in the field and it was generally found that the use of the device allowed several possibilities besides its regular function of pointing. In an analysis of Wordsworth's *Ode*, Ben Zid (2013) found that deixis enabled the poet to create and authenticate two voices in the poem, namely: the poetic and the human. Wordsworth was able to blend his discourse world with the persona's text-world, shifting between two modes of description: the experiential, perceptive and natural on one hand, and the poetic, conceptual, and visionary on the other.

In a study of text-deixis in narrative sequences, Ribera (2007) showed that demonstrative noun phrases have the ability to express textual and emotional distance, or both, and are therefore related to the speaker's subjectivity. Yeibo (2012) has shown the stylistic value of deictics in the poetry of J.P Clark Bekederemo that deictic words run through the entire texts and that the poet's prolific use of this device enables him to relate his propositions to specific persons, time and place which not only makes the texts experiential and realistic, but also enhances the reader's understanding and interpretation of his poetry.

Bockting (1995) has discussed deixis in relation to the textual projection of characters' minds and personalities arguing that in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the impression of Benjy's (a character in the narrative) limited cognitive abilities is reinforced by the fact that he does not seem able to engage in deictic projection, or, in other words, to understand others' perspectives and points of view. In contrast, the attribution of schizophrenia to Quentin (another character) is in part based on stretches of text in which there is no stability of deictic centre, resulting in what Bockting (1995) calls a *breakdown of the deictic system*.

In order to demonstrate how it is possible for a reader to toggle into text-worlds by projecting a deictic center other than her/his own, and how this process creates meaning and effect, the poem, "This is a photograph of me", by Margaret Atwood shall be analysed culling linguistic evidence from the said poem that allowed the reader to vicariously experience the events as s/he makes a deictic shift into the text world.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study provides an integrative, top-down stylistic analysis of the poem. It attempts to investigate the style and language of the poem by focusing on the linguistic device of deixis and to illustrate that deictic configuration facilitates the construction of text worlds that the reader navigates, thus allowing for an interpretation of the poem from within that perspective.

### FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The study is informed by Deictic Shift Theory, adapting Stockwell's (2002) deixis categories; and Werth's Text World Theory. The following is a summary of the categories to be used in the analysis.

**Perceptual deixis:** personal pronouns, demonstratives, definite articles, mental states;

**Spatial deixis:** pointing expressions locating the deictic center in place, spatial adverbs, locatives, demonstratives, verbs of motion;

**Temporal deixis:** expressions that locate the deictic center in time, temporal adverbs, locatives, tense and aspect.

Stockwell (2002) suggests paying attention to even single words as these too, can display all facets of deixis. However, the suggestion hinges on the condition that only a reader perceives the deixis, when they are seen as underpinning several entity-roles since deictic expressions are dependent on context. Additionally, Stockwell (2002) recommends that the reading of a literary text involves context-creation to trace the anchor points of all deictic expressions.

The present study presents an analysis that tracks categories with the context-creation that ensues, in order to chart the anchor points of the deictic expressions and ultimately derive the theme, effect and meaning of the poem.

### ANALYSIS OF “THIS IS A PHOTOGRAPH OF ME”

Margaret Atwood's poem “This is a photograph of me” first appeared in 1966. Literary critics lend an interpretation to the poem that is mostly reliant on literary devices such as symbolism to obtain its general interpretation. As one of the leading writers of the feminist movement in the 1930's, Atwood has always been associated with poetry that advances the plight of women in society. This being so, Atwood's poem has always been interpreted along the sphere of feminism, most notably that women are marginalized and relegated to the domestic fold unworthy to express their identity above the surface of a sea of domestic responsibilities. This is the theme of Atwood's poem as interpreted through the lens of literary analysis: the domination of men over women in society (Abbasi & Amani, 2012).

The present study aims to provide a more formalist approach as an alternative to obtain the theme, effects and meaning based on the language of the poem. Language shall be the evidentiary support for any and all derived meanings and perceived effects found in the poem. The poem is reproduced in full below:

#### **This is a Photograph of Me**

*Margaret Atwood*

- 1 It was taken some time ago.
- 2 At first it seems to be
- 3 a smeared

4 print: blurred lines and grey flecks  
5 blended with the paper;  
6 then, as you scan  
7 it, you see in the left-hand corner  
8 a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree  
9 (balsam or spruce) emerging  
10 and, to the right, halfway up  
11 what ought to be a gentle  
12 slope, a small frame house.  
13 In the background there is a lake,  
14 And beyond that, some low hills.  
15 (The photograph was taken  
16 the day after I drowned.  
17 I am in the lake, in the center  
18 of the picture, just under the surface.  
19 It is difficult to say where  
20 precisely, or to say  
21 how large or small I am:  
22 the effect of water  
23 on light is a distortion  
24 but if you look long enough,  
25 eventually  
26 you will be able to see me.)

#### **THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEM**

The poem is written in highly irregular free verse of 26 lines divided into five stanzas. There is no regularity in line lengths, no discernible metrical pattern, no rhyme scheme and contains many instances of enjambment (lines 3-4, 6-7, 11-12, 17-18, 22-23). With the words spilling over to the next line, the enjambments created the effect of driving the reader to read more to make sense of the lines. The strategic dropping of the word to start the next line of poetry forces the reader to continue reading which is equivalent to looking further, and investigating and, maybe in doing so, find something extraordinary.

Punctuation is used sparingly, and mostly consisted of colons, semi-colons and commas. Apart from the end-punctuation, the period, a parenthesis that separates the first part of the poem from the second is foregrounded (line 15 to 26). The interpretation of the effect of this foregrounding will be discussed in the succeeding sections. There is a total of 143 words, six sentences in all: with the shortest sentence having only six words and the longest, 61. The grammatical structure is consistently fragmented throughout the poem, so that it would not be possible to simply insert punctuation and capital letters to produce a series of well-formed sentences (e.g. lines 8-9: “a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree (balsam or spruce) emerging”). The fragmented nature of the structure creates an effect of uncertainty or inexactness even, wherein there seems to be a struggle or a tension between being able to portray the image (the photograph) clearly with the use of language; and, the real image (reality) that lies beneath the surface of the lake and which the persona directs the readers to see.

#### **THE DEICTIC CONFIGURATION**

Deictic elements in the poem serve to position the persona and the reader so that the anchor points are established. This process is valuable to be able to locate the deictic center that

shall allow the reader to navigate the text-world and thereby conjure meaning that is fully supported by the language of the poem. The deictics are tracked and categorized into perceptual, spatial and temporal categories. A summary of the token and type of deictic device as used in the poem is shown in table 1 and the specific examples per type is shown in table 2 below:

TABLE 1. *Distribution of deictics as to type and token*

Type	Token	%
perceptual	9	19
spatial	18	38
temporal	20	43

TABLE 2. *Classification of deictic words as to type*

Type	Deictic
perceptual	me, you, I, the
spatial	it, in the left-hand corner, emerging, to the right, halfway up, in the background, there, beyond that, in the lake, in the center, just under the surface
temporal	is, was taken, some time ago, seems, blended, then, scan, see, the day after, drowned, am, look, will be able

The poem has 143 words and out of these, 47 are deictical. The deictic expressions make up 33% of the language used. There are 20 tokens of time deixis, which accounts for 43% of the total deictic expressions, 18 tokens of space deixis, which accounts for 38%, and 9 tokens of perceptual deixis, which accounts for 19%.

The perceptual deixis are mostly personal pronouns that represent the persona (*I, me*), and the reader (*you*). The temporal deixis which accounts for the most number is worthy of note in the sense that the temporal deictic adverbs denote indefiniteness ( e.g. *then, some time ago, the day after*), as do the tense, which shifts from passive construction (e.g. *was taken*) to active (e.g. *seems, look, is, scan, see, blended, will be*) to the simple present (e.g. *seems, look, is, scan, see*) to the simple past (e.g. *blended*) to the simple future (e.g. *will be*). The rather irregular temporal zones give the reader a clue that the text world is a highly volatile dimension; and deictic shifts are inevitable with the changes in verb tense and aspect.

The use of spatial deixis is remarkable in the sense that, though the meanings of the locative adverbs are distal (e.g. *there, beyond that, half-way up, in the lake*), the context that elicited their indexical meanings points to a proximal interpretation (the pointing to the photograph, with reference to the deictic center of the persona). For example, the use of ‘there.’

An initial impression of the poem suggests a morbid theme: that the persona speaking is the ghost of the dead body in the lake. There is a clash between conceptions of reality and those that are surreal, as the poem seems to propose. The poet uses very ordinary words (i.e. *left-hand corner, to the right, in the background*) that instead of being dismissed made it all the more appealing because the language invited the reader to look closer and find something in the ordinary to discover the extra-ordinary.

## DISCUSSION

From as early as the title, the deictic device is already apparent and the reader is invited to be part of the action *in medias res* (in the middle of things). Clearly, the deictic *this* is a marked choice; it establishes the deictic field wherein the persona is the *origo*/deictic center. *This* in

the title is uncanny, when there is yet no text preceding it. Furthermore, its use serves to explicate the function of *this* as a pure deixis as opposed to an anaphor: the reference origin of a deictic expression is the situational context, whereas an anaphor obtains its reference from a co-text. The absence of a co-text upwards of the title facilitated the entry of the reader in the text-world. *This* created an effect whereby the addressor's position in relation to the reference, a photograph, is proximal; *this* serving the situational context that brought in the reader into the lyric; like the use of *this* in the following utterance (in the context where two people are in a face-to-face encounter and one is showing another something):

*This is a gift from Santa.*

Meaning is inferred from the preceding line giving the impression that the person spoken to is obliged to *look* since the person speaking is *showing* him/her something.

Atwood, however, plays with ambiguity right from the title itself, when a reading of the title prompts the reader to think whether *this* is referring to a tangible photograph held by the persona, or whether it points to the poem itself, the photograph being a metaphor for the poem. The first person deictic, *me*, establishes the point-of-view and aligns with the proximal zone. The temporal deictic *is* in the title establishes the time frame, *now*, which pushes the reader to enter the text world with the persona as the deictic center.

**1        It was taken some time ago.**

*It* in line 1 is anaphoric which prompts the reader to obtain its reference from the previous line, if it is available. In this instance, there is none. Thus, the use of *it* is deviant in the sense that for anaphora to operate, there must be a co-text to derive its referential power. The distance between the first line and the title from where the anaphor *it* obtains its reference is not contiguous, it is disfluent; unlike in the following example where continuity is evidently constructed:

I have one thousand pesos. *It* was given to me by my grandfather.

*It* derives reference from the sentence immediately preceding and shows an effect of continuity. In the poem, the distance from the title to the first line breaks the continuity, a gap that mirrors an interrupted temporal and spatial zone. Paradoxically, this same distance forces the reader to merge the title with the first line, because the linguistic tactic of anaphora, a form of deixis, is cleverly executed. The opposing forces of merging and distancing create the effect of a tension between what is, (reality) and what is being shown (photograph).

With the introduction of the temporal deictic *some time ago* the reader pops out of the *now* where the title positioned her/him to be and a push is made towards the indefinite past. The deictic shift from the *now* to *then* (the past) which is, in this case, the abrupt temporal shift serves an effect that makes the reader become unsure of the temporal order or dimension of the text world where they are placed, from *now* in the title, to *then* in line 1: the events in the text world seem to all happen in a blur. This blurring contributed to the ambiguity that is already established in the title.

**2        At first it seems to be**  
**3        a smeared**  
**4        print: blurred lines and grey flecks**  
**5        blended with the paper;**

Deictic shift is evident in line 2, when the passive construction in line 1 denoted by the verb phrase *was taken*, shifts to the active *seems*. With the shift, the reader is impelled to take a more involved role in the text world: being invited to take a look at the photograph because of the commentary by the persona describing the quality of the print and sounding

like a museum tour guide describing a painting. The picture was *taken some time ago and at first it seems to be/ a smeared/ print: blurred lines and grey flecks/ blended with the paper*. The reader reaches over for order, and tries to make sense of the image being portrayed with the language used, and this description imposes on the mind discernable images in an aesthetic manner, however disconnected.

- 6      **then, as you scan**
- 7      **it, you see in the left-hand corner**
- 8      **a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree**
- 9      **(balsam or spruce) emerging**
- 10     **and, to the right, halfway up**
- 11     **what ought to be a gentle**
- 12     **slope, a small frame house.**

The precision with which entities are located in the photograph is enabled with the use of such deictics as *in the left-hand corner, to the right, halfway up*, and serves to locate the deictic field in which the reader momentarily lingers. The precise directions, however, are juxtaposed with vague and ambiguous descriptions of the entities: *a thing, that is like a branch, what ought to be a gentle slope*. The ambiguous descriptions suggest a detachment from the task at hand, as if the persona lacks the motivation to represent the visual image with accurate words, yet, the clever use of deixis forced the reader to imagine a visual image to some extent. This is brought about by the cognition that when an image is portrayed no matter how ambiguous, the mind is activated to construct a mental picture to approximate such portrayal.

- 13     **In the background there is a lake,**
- 14     **And beyond that, some low hills.**
- 15     **(The photograph was taken**
- 16     **the day after I drowned.**

Deictic projection is again in operation in lines 13-14, when the reader is still maintained in the same spatial zone as in lines 7-12. The ordinariness of such lines as, *In the background there is a lake, / and beyond that, some low hills*, make the photograph unremarkable: it is all too easy to envision the grey country scene. It is however, in the poem's parenthesized latter half (lines 15-26) that the disturbing reality that exists beneath the visual surface described by the first half is revealed. It is underneath this surface that the speaker's ethereal *I* finally emerges. The effect of the parenthesized verses act like a text caption to the photograph, contextualizing it. It would seem that the first three stanzas only describe a plain and ordinary-looking exterior, while the parenthesized portion of the poem reveals a dark reality that the visual image only insinuates but never truly expresses. Here, again, the tension between the photographic image and reality becomes all the more imminent because as the poem proceeds, in the next two lines, Atwood immediately asserts a deeper level of reality, the truth that the photograph was taken the day after the persona drowned: that she cannot be seen, not because of the poor quality of the print but because she is dead. In the text world, the reader is jolted to a realization that a closer scrutiny of the photograph is warranted.

- 17     **I am in the lake, in the center**
- 18     **of the picture, just under the surface.**

All the words in lines 17 and 18 are deictically crafted and as a result the reader is thus thrust into the middle of a phenomenological paradox, in which the landscape of the text world reveals two mutually exclusive events: the photograph contains the persona, but the

temporal dimension, when the photograph *was taken / some time ago / the day after I drowned* necessarily obscures her presence. And yet, she *is* in the lake: this line has the effect of suspending the reader's normal assumption about the spatial, temporal and social coordinates of the deictic field as provided in lines 17-18. For a moment, these coordinates are warped. This is illustrated by the following interpolations:

The photograph was taken some time ago; it was taken after the persona drowned, yet, the persona is in the lake, just under the surface.

It would seem that in these lines, there is a breakdown of the deictic center and the reader, in the text world is plunged into a dimension devoid of time and space (not necessarily a vacuum). Additionally, these lines (17-18) have the effect of the vision of the lake being foregrounded, much like being zoomed into focus, when before it was just in the background (line 13).

**19     It is difficult to say where**  
**20     precisely, or to say**  
**21     how large or small I am:**  
**22     the effect of water**  
**23     on light is a distortion**

The temporal, spatial, and social coordinates are still warped in lines 19-26, as they were, previously, in lines 17-18. The persona allowed the reader to enter into a deictic field of which she herself is not so sure about, saying, *It is difficult to say where / precisely, or to say how large or small I am*; cluing the reader that s/he has to observe closely for the image is but an effect of water on light, a distortion that hides the speaker. Here, the tension between reality and the image conjured by the persona through the efficient use of deixis has finally reached a pitch. It is thus for the reader to decide whether the drowned subject is speaking from underneath the surface or beyond the image. The ethereal persona is slowly coming into focus, when she said that *it is difficult to say where / precisely, or to say how large or small I am*, making the reader consider that the reality is, she drowned in the lake and that nobody seemed to know that she did. Paradoxically, it is the ghostly persona speaking from an inexact location in time and space that begins to stabilize the deictic center.

**24     but if you look long enough,**  
**25     eventually**  
**26     you will be able to see me.)**

The reality that the persona is dead and in fact does not figure in the photograph is augmented by line 24 *but if you look long enough*. If the intention is to draw the reader's attention to the photograph by asking him/her to concentrate or to focus, the expression would have been, *look hard*, yet, the language of the poetry under study used, *look long*, implying that her discovery in the lake would only be possible by the appropriation of a time element in the scrutiny. The reader is prodded to think long enough and in doing so, quite possibly, a realization would dawn that, while the persona is dead and is in the lake (she drowned) at the time the photograph was captured; she cannot be seen by the observer of the image, as a visual is oftentimes unreliable. Yet, her death does not negate her presence in the photograph. Time thus works, curiously, in this poem in two ways: the photograph *taken some time ago*, is, by time, too old, *smearred, blurred*. The photographic technology which has the supposed ability to preserve an instance of time has been ravaged by time itself: the photograph transformed into an inexplicable mass of dark and light shadows. However, time also provided an optimistic tone, for the empty photograph does not deny the presence of the speaker – it denies only her discernibility at the time the picture was taken.

## CONCLUSION

Unlike the analysis of the poem by Abbasi and Amani (2012), who suggest the poem as being open to aggressive feminist interpretations and political readings, and by rendering the relationship between “I” and “you” in the poem as defensive, the current analysis relied on the more formalist approach of relying on the language of the poem as evidentiary support to derive its meaning and unravel the mystery of the poem’s persona. Abbasi and Amani (2012) interpret that the use of the personal pronouns refers not only to the cruelty of men but also the reaction of the “I” through the verbal enactment of a sense of splintered consciousness, echoing Draper’s (1999) contention. To them, the poem reflects the issue of women being marginalized. This kind of analysis looks at authors as playing an integral role in addressing the plight of women by restoring their rights through fiction as a platform for further public discussion and social reformation based on the fact that “some fictions, and even sub-genres of fiction, have an aim to make truth-claims” (Mikkonen, 2009, p. 146; cited in Zabihzadeh, Hashim & Chua Chen Wei, 2015). The last stanza, specifically, is interpreted as a situation when women, being out of sight of men, need a careful look to be perceived and that the persona tries to persuade men to see her (woman). However, the syntactic and lexical analysis of a poem provides a more objective and profound comprehension of the underlying multiple meanings of the poem (Dita, 2010). Hence, the current analysis considers the use of deixis as having instigated time and space and even the social environment to be intentionally confusing or paradoxical.

Atwood appears to challenge the observer of the photograph, or the reader of the poem, into questioning what is seen. The deployment of deictic elements located the deictic center and ultimately, the deictic field wherein the reader sporadically obtains the coordinates for time, person and space in the text world, projecting the deictic field that allowed him/her to construct and build the cognitive space that allowed for an interpretation of the poem from that perspective.

The paradoxical element, the persona who seemed existent and yet dead, was derived by the application of the deictic shift theory whereby anchor-points in time and space positioned the reader (deictic projection); and, by the application of the text-world theory, which facilitates the reader’s capacity to build the ‘world’ of the text. The process of analysis demonstrated has bearing to what Fludernik (1996) has proposed that the essential characteristic of narrative (here, the lyric poem) is not the presence of a plot, but the presence of the consciousness of an anthropomorphic protagonist (the persona in this case who projected the deictic center to the reader) through which actions and events are filtered.

The tension between the visual representation offered by the photograph and the power of language to do the same was elicited by the empirical process of configuring the deictic field. This process enabled a reading of the theme, effects and meaning of the poem as recovered from the text. Ultimately, this recourse to the language of the poem allowed the persona to be revealed, dead and ethereal, when a visual representation could not.

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