[you fit into me]

SUMMARY

You and I fit together like the hook-and-eye clasp on a piece of clothing.

We fit together like a fish hook fits into an eyeball.

THEMES

ROMANCE AND VIOLENCE

Atwood's compact, razor-sharp poem suggests the horror that may lie just beneath the surface of romance. The first two lines might lead readers to expect a typical love poem—one that celebrates the sense of unity and connection between two people—but the second stanza demolishes that expectation with its queasy violence. Romantic love in the poem easily slips from passion to pain. Even more specifically, the poem can be taken as a reflection of the way cultural ideas of blissful heterosexual love cover a dark, complex reality, in which romance between men and women is complicated by patriarchal power dynamics and the ever-present threat of violence.

The speaker begins with an image of what seems like a perfect match: the speaker and the poem's addressee fit together like a "hook and eye," a kind of fastening often used on clothing. This image raises a number of associations that prime readers for a poem about love and romance.

What's more, a hook and eye, in which two differently-shaped things meet to perfectly serve a purpose, suggest not just romance and sexuality, but a traditional *heterosexual* romance in which, literally and metaphorically, differently-shaped pieces come together. The association of "you" with the "hook" and "me" with the "eye" also gives the reader a sense that the speaker is likely a woman in a relationship with a man: the hook can be read as a phallic symbol, an image of a penis, and the eye as a vaginal symbol.

The function of a hook and eye is to fasten, secure, and hold together, suggesting that this matched partnership is stabilizing and whole: a relationship in which each party lovingly supports the other. In suggesting clothing, the image of the hook and eye also raises images not just of dressing but of *undressing*: hook-and-eye fasteners are most often used as closures on bras. This underlines the image's sexual connotations.

But having raised these images of sexuality and romance, Atwood at once undoes them with double-edged images. The "hook" is revealed to be grotesquely violent, and the "eye" helpless, vulnerable—and perhaps coming to some unpleasant realizations. The "hook" becomes a "fish hook," which is not just barbed and threatening, but also carries connotations of deceit. Where a hook fastener holds securely, a fish hook lures, traps, and kills.

The "eye," meanwhile, becomes "an open eye," juxtaposed without warning with the fish hook. That the eye is "open" makes it feel both vulnerable and perceptive. In this last line, the "eye" is threatened, but it's also seeing the truth of the hook's violence.

The reader might also spot a pun on "eye" and "I" here: the "open I," the vulnerable speaker, cruelly shocked not just by the violence of her relationship but by its difference from what she has taught to expect from romance. However, as the poem makes horribly clear, that new perspective might not last long: the fish hook will blind the eye, making it even more helpless.

The poem keeps two distinct feelings in uneasy tension. The first stanza's feeling of perfect fit is not destroyed by the violent revelation of the second stanza. Rather, there's the understanding that, in a patriarchy—a society in which men wield broad structural power over women—even a loving relationship between a man and woman always carries an implicit threat. The man's power, the poem implies, is always a presence, even when it isn't enacted violently.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINE 1

you fit into me

The first line of does a lot of heavy lifting in just four words. This line implies a sexual context, tells readers something about the speaker and the person she's addressing, and prepares the reader for a poem rather different from the poem they'll end up getting.

At first blush, this seems likely to be a love poem. There's a "me" addressing a "you," and the listener "fits into" the speaker. Even before the poem provides more information, there's clearly something sexual going on: right here at the beginning, there's an image of penetration, and even if it's a more metaphorical "fitting," the literal sense—of heterosexual intercourse—isn't far beneath the surface.

The word "fit" demands some attention. Besides the sexual image, there are also connotations of matching or a sense of rightness in the word; "fit" as in the adjective "fitting," meaning

appropriate, correct for the occasion. The assonance of "fit into" underlines this impression. This poem, the reader is immediately led to expect, is going to be the brief story of two people who match each other, physically and emotionally. They belong together. Typical love poem stuff, for now at least.

The enjambment between this line and the next contributes to these initial impressions by slowing the reader down, separating out this idea of fitting from the simile that follows in the second line. (See the "Poetic Devices" section for more on how enjambment works here!)

LINE 2

like a hook into an eye

The second line provides a simile that supports all the expectations the first line has raised. The speaker's lover, the reader learns, fits into her "like a hook" fits "into an eye."

This hook and eye image reaffirms the reader's initial impression of what's going on: that there's a female speaker addressing her male lover. The reader can gather this from the kind of fastening mentioned here: a hook and eye consists of a receptive piece and a penetrating piece, which are differently-shaped but fit together to secure a piece of clothing. (Here's more on what this kind of garment closure looks like if you're having trouble picturing it.)

Further, the "hook and eye" specifically calls to mind images of *women's* clothing. You're most likely to find this kind of closure at the neck of a dress or on the closure of a bra. Dressing and undressing, male and female: so far, so traditionally romantic.

The construction of a hook and eye keeps this image from being purely sexual too. There's also something more spiritual going on in the poem here. A hook and eye are two parts of a whole, and made of the same material, yet differently shaped. In the hook and eye, the speaker seems to have found an image of romantic wholeness, of completion. Think of when people call their partners their "other half." A hook and eye both *complete* each other and are useless *without* each other.

All in all, then, this first couplet prepares an impression of a sexually and romantically fulfilling partnership—one so perfect it seems designed. Of course, all this is about to unravel in the second couplet. The lack of punctuation or traditional sentence capitalization, meanwhile, helps to keep readers on edge, creating the sense that the speaker isn't finished with this image yet.

LINE 3

a fish hook

The blissful romantic dream of the first stanza begins to unravel with the introduction of a new image in the poem's third line. The "hook" that readers have been led to imagine as a useful little twist of wire reveals itself as something else altogether.

A "fish hook" is not only considerably sharper and more threatening than an innocent little hook fastening, but also dangerous in underhanded ways. Fish hooks are weapons disguised as food, waiting to impale the unwary fish that takes the bait. What's more, fish are usually caught in order to be eaten, consumed.

The connotations here are thus deeply menacing: if the speaker's lover is a fish hook, he's not only able to cause pain, he also threatens to lead to the speaker's total consumption! There's a doubling-back here: a fish hook presents itself as nourishment, then turns the thing it catches into food. The relationship that the speaker went to for fulfillment seems to be in danger of using her, selfishly, for its own. This idea of double or hidden meaning is reflected by the poem's use of repetition, of the words "hook" and "eye." That extra word, "fish," is all it takes to transform readers' initial assumptions.

The revelation of the hook here as a fish hook thus creates layers of menace even before the reader reaches the final line. This sinister new knowledge is emphasized by the percussive rhythm of the line. While this poem uses free verse and doesn't have a particular meter, it does make visceral use of rhythm. Here, "fish hook" gets two stresses in a row:

a **fish hook**

That double-punch of emphasis drives home the shock of the revelation. Also note how the entire line is made up of just three, one-syllable words, allowing it to feel striking and sharp, a quick gut punch. The continued lack of capitalization and punctuation, meanwhile, keep things feel tense and unresolved.

LINE 4

an open eye

The last line of the poem compounds the shock of the previous line. Not only is the "hook" revealed to be a dangerous and underhanded weapon, it's being used in a way considerably more sadistic than plain old fishing. It has become an instrument of torture, and it's being lowered into an "open eye"—an image to make the unsuspecting reader wince. This second transformation—from the "eye" that fits a hook perfectly, to an "**open** eye" that shouldn't have any kind of hook anywhere near it—shocks both the speaker and the reader out of romantic complacency for good.

This "open eye" is positioned at the bottom of the poem, looking up into everything that's come before. The speaker has already associated herself with the "eye," but in this moment the reader also becomes that eye, suddenly "open" and shocked by the ugly metamorphosis of love into violence.

The openness of the eye is both horrific—it's completely unprotected from the approaching fish hook—and strangely courageous. An open eye isn't shielded, and it's able to fully see and to understand. The reader might even spot a pun on "eye" and "I": the speaker herself, laid open to the terrible revelation

of the fish hook, is able not just to see it but to report back on it. In fact, to see the fish hook is to be less at its mercy. The speaker's new understanding of the violent gender dynamics in a relationship that on the surface seems so loving isn't what you'd call pleasant. But it does give the speaker the ability to write this very poem, naming what it's seen.

However, the eye is also in a position to lose its vision. Thus, the poem keeps a *tension* between seeing and blindness, love and violence. In a patriarchy, the poem suggests, relationships between men and women can never be quite easy: disproportionate male power is always *there*, even in those moments when it isn't enacted as violence. The shifting identities of the "hook and eye" always present a threat to the "eye" of the situation.

SYMBOLS

THE HOOK AND EYE

A hook and eye refers to a kind of clothing fastener made up of two parts: the hook, usually a piece of bent wire, and a loop of the same material that the hook fits into. Hook and eye closures are often used in women's undergarments— think of a corset or bra clasp. Their role as fasteners on clothing carry connotations of snugness and matching. A hook or an eye on their own are useless; it's only *together* that the two can do their job. In a way, then, this image pair represents a romantic coupling, the way that partners may complete each other, keep each other secure and fulfilled.

The first stanza's image of the hook and eye also specifically suggests sexuality, in a number of ways. A hook and eye is composed of two parts, one inserted into the other—a clearly sexual image, with hook as penis and eye as vagina. And on a more literal level, hooks and eyes might come into play when someone is getting dressed—or undressed. Consider that one most often finds hooks and eyes on bras.

The image of the hook and eye thus sets the reader up to imagine a straight couple in a rather traditional relationship: one in which the man and woman are imagined as two different parts that come together to make a whole.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "hook into an eye"

THE FISH HOOK

When the hook is revealed to be not an innocent little fastener but rather a *fish* hook, its symbolic weight changes substantially.

There's some clear phallic symbolism with this image; essentially, the fish hook can be thought of, on one level, as representing male genitalia. Also note that a fish hook is far from innocent. It's even actively deceptive: it's used to lure, capture, and kill prey. It's sharp, barbed, and difficult to escape, and if fish's reactions are anything to go by, it's extremely unpleasant to have stuck in one's body. If the speaker's lover is a "fish hook," then, he's both alluring and dangerous. To be "hooked," here, is to be trapped in a dangerous situation. This might be interpreted as representing the way passionate love can seem tempting at first but tip easily into pain.

The final line complicates this symbol even further. The hook here is not being used as it normally might—to capture—but as an instrument of torture, stuck into "an open eye." The implication is that this situation of gendered violence is unnatural on a number of levels.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "a fish hook"

THE OPEN EYE

The "open eye" of the poem's last line is a complicated symbol. It in part represents the speaker herself, female genitalia, and also a general awareness of social realities.

As the helpless victim of the descending "fish hook," it's disturbingly vulnerable: the eye doesn't even blink to flinch away from the violence that it sees coming. But in that "openness," the eye also has a subversive power. The "open eye" can see what's going on (at least for the moment). Having your "eyes opened" is an idiomatic way of describing suddenly understanding something. The speaker symbolically associates herself with the eye, and the eye is also an "I", a person who can see something true about what's going on in her romantic relationship. Perhaps the openness of the "eye" is what allows for this poem to be written.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "an open eye"

POETIC DEVICES

ANTANACLASIS

Antanaclasis is the device upon which this poem hinges. It's the double meaning of "hook" and "eye" that gives "[you fit into me]" its punch and its power.

Here, this repetition brings to the reader's attention the multiple meanings of the words "hook" and "eye." In the first stanza, when the speaker sets the reader up to expect a love

poem, the reader presumes the "hook and eye" are the kind that one uses to close a bra or a dress: simple, innocent, everyday objects. Moreover, they are objects that belong together—that are useless without each other, even.

It's the introduction of new adjectives that makes the reader see the more sinister implications of the words. The reader who doesn't wince at the idea of a "fish hook" entering an "open eye" would be pretty unflappable. The revelation that the hook is a "fish hook" adds symbolic power: a fish hook, after all, is used to lure, capture, and kill. And an "open eye" is helpless and vulnerable, but also has an ability a hook lacks: it can see what's happening.

The speaker's ordering of her antanaclasic repetition here makes the effect that much more powerful. She keeps the hook and eye in the same positions in both stanzas, one after the other, so that the very last image of the poem is the "open eye," down at the bottom, looking up at the hook as it descends.

Where Antanaclasis appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "hook," "eye"
- **Line 3:** "hook"
- **Line 4:** "eye"

ASSONANCE

The poem's assonance underlines its images of penetration and matching. It's only in the first stanza that the poem uses assonance:

> you fit into me
> like a hook into an eye

Here, "fit" and "into", rather appropriately, "fit into" each other with a shared short /i/ vowel sound. Similarly, "like" and "eye" share a flat long /i/ sound. These likenesses of sound play into the deceptive coziness of the first two lines, soothing the reader's ear with its smoothness.

The second stanza, with its shocking violence, does away with these sonic similarities. But it does use a complicated correspondence of vowel sounds. The phrase "a fish hook" uses shorter, blunter vowel sounds, while "an open eye" uses long, lolling ones. In each case, readers see *letters* that match, but *sounds* that don't: the "oo" of "hook" resembles the "o" of "open" but these make very different sounds.

This variation of vowel sounds is a very subtle effect, perhaps one the reader is not likely to notice at first. But next to the feeling of in-tuneness that assonance provides in the first stanza, this understated not-quite-matching fits right in with the poem's ideas. In a romance complicated by cultural sexism, the senses might not always agree about what they're perceiving.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "fit," "into"
- **Line 2:** "like," "eye"

ENJAMBMENT

The enjambment between the first and second lines of the poem helps to prepare the bait-and-switch of the second stanza. By separating out the idea of a snug "fit" from the image of the hook and eye, the line break slows the pace of the poem, preparing the reader for a different kind of poem than the one they're about to get.

Take a look at the way the line break isolates the poem's first idea.

> you fit into me
> like a hook into an eye

On its own, the words "you fit into me" create a feeling of meeting and matching, and the penetrative sexual connotations are right there on the surface even before the introduction of the "hook and eye" in the second line.

Separating out the second line also helps to give the simile greater emphasis. Prepared by the first line for a romantic or sexual image, the reader is ready for the "hook and eye": that pause, tiny though it is, gives the reader room to be receptive.

Indeed, by softening readers up through this enjambment, the speaker helps them to share her position in the poem. Though the speaker addresses a "you," the reader experiences the poem from the speaker's perspective, as the speaker and not the hearer. The structure of the poem makes the reader, like the speaker, the receptive party.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "me / like"

JUXTAPOSITION

Much of this poem's shocking power comes from the juxtaposition of its objects. Most obvious is the juxtaposition between the "fish hook" and the "open eye." Here, it's not just the image of violence that disturbs the reader, but the differences between the two objects. The thin, gleaming, metallic, lifeless sharpness of the fish hook feels not only threatening to the soft, round, wet, living softness of the eyeball, but strikingly *different* from it. Where the "hook and eye" are the same material shaped differently, the fish hook and the open eye are not just at odds, but alien to each other.

Thus, there are *two* notable juxtapositions here: between fish hook and open eye, and between fish hook/open eye and "hook and eye." While the "hook and eye" is made of two separate

pieces, it still has a certain oneness; you can't use a hook without an eye any more than you could use a button without a buttonhole. It's not only the threat of the fish hook to the open eye that disturbs here, but the shock of realizing that the neatly-matched hook and eye are in fact a horribly disparate "hook" and "eye."

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-4

SIMILE

Simile is a common poetic device, but it's especially frequent in love poetry. From "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" to "My love is like a red, red rose", poems about love can't resist saying what their love is like. The simile in the first stanza of this poem thus likely leads the reader to expect a love poem by its very presence, before the reader even considers what the simile is really about.

This particular simile, in which the lover "fits into" the speaker "like a hook into an eye", encourages the reader to think in terms of fitting, matching, and complementing—all familiar ideas in a love poem. It's also more than a little bit suggestive: parts that "fit into" each other have a pretty obvious sexual connotation.

The shape, content, and presence of the simile here thus all set readers up for a shock when they reach the second stanza. In using simile to introduce the images that she's about to horribly undermine, the speaker lulls the reader into a false sense of security—perhaps the same false sense of security that the speaker herself might have had on first entering the relationship she here describes.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "you fit into me / like a hook into an eye"

PUN

The flashiest moments of confused or tricky meaning in this poem happen in the transitions between the "hook and eye" and the "fish hook" and "open eye." But there's also a subtler moment of linguistic complexity here: the possible pun on "eye" and "I."

As discussed in the "Symbols" section of this guide, the "open eye" has its own peculiar power: it's vulnerable to a horrible piercing from the hook, but it can also see. If that "open eye" is also an "open I," there's an even more complicated melding of exposure and strength here.

The speaker has already associated herself with the "eye," so it's not a huge leap to imagine that the "eye" is also an "I," a self. And if that "I" is "open," it's not shut down or closed off, but fully experiencing the ambivalent and sometimes terrifying world of straight romance.

This openness may be what allows this poem to exist at all. The speaker is able and willing to look at what's going on, even as she feels threatened and horrified by the intimations of violence just under the surface of her relationship. Being open is a blessing and a curse—and it seems less available to the eyeless, "I-less" fish hook.

Where Pun appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "an open eye"

VOCABULARY

Hook and eye (Line 2) - A kind of two-part fastening, usually used on clothing, in which a hook (often made of wire) fits into a ring made of the same material. Think of the clasp on a bra.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem doesn't use a traditional form, but its shape still reflects the ideas it's working with.

The poem is divided into two couplets: a pair of pairs. This choice reflects both the symmetries and the tensions in the poem's theme. Right there in the word "couplet" is the idea of a "couple."

But the matching, happy couple of the first stanza appear in a very different light in the second. It's as if the break between the two stanzas serves as a distorting mirror: the second coupling of "a fish hook" and "an open eye" reflects horribly back on the seeming harmony of the first.

METER

There's no particular meter in this poem, which instead uses free verse. The lack of strict patterning makes the poem feel loose and conversational, making its final twist all the more shocking.

Yet while the poem doesn't follow a metrical pattern, it's still powerfully rhythmic, and the difference between the rhythms in the first and second couplets help to bring home the horror of the final images. Both lines in first stanza are longer than those in the second, stretching out the initial simile. The second stanza is then just seven syllables total, and every word apart from "open" is monosyllabic. This lands the striking image of the second stanza with a wallop; the twist comes quickly and bluntly, the percussive syllables like a sudden gut punch.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written in free verse and has no rhyme scheme.

This, in turn, underlines its sense of unease. In its other formal choices, the poem reflects themes of the meeting of two different things (for instance, the paired lines suggesting paired romantic partners—see the "Form" section for more on this). But the total absence of rhyme throws a wrench into conventional expectations for love poetry. Rhyme would fit in perfectly here if this were a poem about comfortable matching: rhyme, after all, has the power to create an aesthetically satisfying feeling of likeness within difference. But the absence of rhyme here helps the reader to feel that this poem isn't dealing with the surprise and delight of finding a happy match in someone different from oneself. Rather, the difference between the man and the woman in the poem, while matching them in one way, sets them badly at odds in another.

SPEAKER

The poem uses a first-person speaker, and the reader can glean a surprising amount about this speaker in the space of four short lines.

The reader can be pretty sure, for instance, that the speaker is a woman in a relationship with a man. The clues are there in the images. Fitting together "like a hook into an eye" speaks to traditional ideas of heterosexual romance: two different-shaped parts that match up. There's a sexual connotation here (hook and eye as penis and vagina) as well as the gendered connotation of male and female matching up to make a fitting pair.

The speaker associates herself with the "eye," and in her role as the eye seems both vulnerable and perceptive. She's "open": threatened by the fish hook's violence, she nevertheless has the power to see and understand what's going on. The poem is a record of the speaker's realization of a woman's dilemma in a patriarchal society: the "eye" turns to the "hook" for pleasure and love, but can't look away from the violent imbalance of power that the poem suggests underpins relationships between men and women.

SETTING

The poem doesn't have a clear setting, but the flavor of the poem gives readers some hints at the general world it's set in. The image of gendered violence, combined with the image of the hook-and-eye fastening (most familiar from their use on bras, which were only invented in the 20th century), suggests a modern world—and one in which women are beginning to be more vocally opposed to their own oppression.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Best known for her novels, the Canadian author Margaret Atwood is also a prolific poet, and her work has been a major influence on many contemporary writers. Atwood's interest in fairy tales and myths often colors her writings, and the trickiness of this poem has a hint of sinister fairy-tale metamorphosis as the seemingly romantic union of a hook and eye transforms into a gruesome penetration.

Atwood's writing first rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, and her poetry collection *Power Politics*, in which "[you fit into me]" was first published, was one of her breakout works—though some unsympathetic critics dismissed the collection as a polemical product of "women's lib."

Some of Atwood's contemporaries include Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*) and Octavia Butler (*Kindred*), fellow writers who share her interest in the political and feminist implications of science fiction, fantasy, and myth. The American writer Adrienne Rich explored similar themes related to feminism and gender in works such as "Diving into the Wreck." One might see also Atwood's influence in the recent trend for apocalyptic or dystopian fiction—for instance, in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This poem was first published in 1971, in a collection of poems called *Power Politics*. From this title alone one can get a pretty good sense of what was going on in the world around the book's publication.

Power and politics, especially as they related to gender, were major issues in the 1970s. When Atwood wrote *Power Politics*, the women's movement was in full swing. The feminist movement of the '60s and '70s saw women demanding respect, safety, power, and freedom—things they had been denied in both subtle and overt ways by the male-dominated world around them. Activists worldwide vocally resisted stultifying gender expectations and spoke up against patriarchal power structures and male violence.

Atwood was a major literary figure in this movement; her most famous work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a dystopian novel in which women are forced into a caste system and used as sex slaves. Atwood herself has remarked that she included nothing in the book that hadn't really happened somewhere in the world.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Atwood's Dystopias — This essay focuses mostly on Atwood's dystopian fiction. (https://www.newyorker.com/

magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia)

- Atwood's Biography — Some biographical information on Atwood and links to more of her poems. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/margaret-atwood)
- Hook and Eye Closures — The history of the clasp mentioned in the poem. (https://www.apparelsearch.com/definitions/miscellaneous/hook_and_eye_closure_definition.htm)
- The Poem Animated — This reading of the poem leans on its sinister elements right from the beginning. (https://youtu.be/ELBwjTwgAbw)
- An Interview With Atwood — Watch as Atwood discusses her writing process. (https://youtu.be/gwW3I8SMnr8)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER MARGARET ATWOOD POEMS

- This Is a Photograph of Me

HOW TO CITE

MLA

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