
The Contradiction Of Love

After someone peruses Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink", they may deduce that love is a critical necessity for survival while the speaker uses contradiction, through breaks in rhythm, in developing her concept of love. Looking in between the lines of this poem, the reader can explore if love is a foundational pillar for survival in life or if love is an overrated emotion. The contradicting attitude the speaker portrays through imagery can indeed lead to various interpretations of a true definition of love. The speaker's negative connotation of love in the beginning of the poem gives the reader an indication how love cannot help in times of a problematic crisis.

The speaker mentions, "Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink and rise and sink and rise and sink again" (3,4). Through the use of imagery Millay challenges the reader to understand how love will not help a man fighting for his life in dangerous levels of water. However, it can be argued that at this moment love is crucial to propel you forward to keep you struggling for every breath of air and to not give up. Furthermore, the repetition of rising and sinking can be interpreted as a man coming to the realization that with the strong power of love and admiration he has for himself, he can rise to overcome his fear and that his life is worth fighting for. When something in life pushes a man down, love and appreciation for life is what helps him rise again. Love may not be a replacement for food and water, but it does allow for comfort and motivation in desperate times of need. If one doesn't love himself, then he may question if survival is a necessity. Although the speaker originally addresses how love cannot triumph over necessities crucial for survival, she continues by changing her attitude through a break in rhythm.

For example, in line 7 the Volta acts as a slight change in the speaker's perspective about the value of love. For instance, the speaker states, "Yet many a man is making friends with death" (7). This line demonstrates the speaker beginning to question whether love is relevant. She finds that even with all the necessities for survival such as food, water, and shelter many men will agonize over love in which without it they would metaphorically rather die. After someone reads the poem they realize that love must have some deeper significance for survival because it allows people to look forward to something greater than themselves. In addition, the Volta transitions into the speaker being more personal with her audience about how love plays a role in her life. At this moment the speaker begins to form an abstract concept of love through contradictions and opposing attitudes.

Lastly, the speaker tends to not only contradict herself, but also seems to be indecisive about the value of love. The speaker strongly states, "Or trade the memory of this night for food. It well may be. I do not think I would" (13,14). The underlying tone of these lines upholds the idea that love is a powerful provision for survival since the speaker hesitates to trade the memory of love for food. Even though the speaker is contradicting, the reader can remark that the emotional embodiment of love allows for sacrifices which need to be made to ensure survival. Basic necessities ensure survival, however to attain these provisions sacrifices need to be made to define our journey in life. Overall, Millay's poem addresses how love is an abstract concept with no concrete definition. Through the speaker's reasoning a sense of contradiction is found which leaves the reader with the decision of fostering their own personalized value of love. Food, water, and shelter may be critical for survival, but love is as well since it defines our

pivotal moments in life. The love for life, the love for one another, or even the love for yourself motivates you to survive and live every day waiting for what the next brings.

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