

GENDER POLITICS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S BOOK

"SURFACING"

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Abstract

"Though Poet, Clever Critic, Brilliant Novelist, Feminist, Nationalist our chief literacy heroine MARGARET ATWOOD A Superb Writer."

"MARGARET ATWOOD" [1939] is one of the most well-known and gifted female writers of postmodern Canadian fiction. One must read Surfacing [1972] multiple times to obtain the true meaning, as it is a very complicated work that lends itself to several interpretations. The work focuses on themes of feminism and introspection. The issues explored in Surfacing include friction between personal and social awareness and between personal and national awareness. You can read about 'Feminism' and the plight of women in her books. As a feminist author, she is interested in writing about women's struggles and the need to find a sense of belonging. She hopes that by writing about it, she may draw attention to and illustrate the tremendous gulf that exists between men and women. Her protagonist, in her newly published work, makes some attempts at assertiveness. At its core, the novel in question is about the author coming to terms with this knowledge.

Paper Identification



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Introduction

The novel *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, published in 1972, centres on the themes of feminism, individuality, and womanhood.

“Surfacing is a novel of self realization, but it also possesses an element of feminism. At the end of the novel there is a sanity, a real understanding of reality”.

The novel's female protagonist is only referred to as "the heroine" throughout the text. She is a failed artist living in "Toronto," where she abandoned her spouse and kids a long time ago. The city life she attempted to fill with a marriage left her emotionally numb and eventually led to an abortion and a breakup. After that, the narrator and her three friends—Anna, a model and friend of the narrator, David, Anna's husband and a filmmaker, and Joe, a friend of David's and the camera person and the narrator's lover—return to her apartment. The narrator returns to a realm from which she describes it as follows:

“It is not perfect, not heaven but neither is it the hell of madness.”

The narrator travels back to her hometown in an effort to locate her absent father. She is concerned about her father and would like to learn his whereabouts. If he were living or dead, that is. The narrator's father was a rational and scientific deity in her eyes. She loved and admired her father very much. The narrator reflects on her parents' treatment towards her. The narrator recalls how she relied heavily on her father's logical justifications. For a long time, her mother's quiet had baffled her. When Part 1 comes to a close, she recalls a drawing made by her brother.

“After she'd told the story I asked our mother where he would have gone if she hadn't saved him. She said she didn't know. My father, explained everything but my mother never did, which only convinced me that she had the answer but wouldn't tell.”

Her father's best friend, Mr. Paul, told the narrator that he has inexplicably disappeared. The narrator is obligated to inquire about her father's whereabouts. Her pals are people she cares about and trusts, but they didn't come with her on the mission to locate her dad.

“I like them, I trust them, I can't think of anyone else I like better, but right now I wish they were not here. Though they're necessary: David's and Anna's car was the only way.....But my reason for being here embarrasses them, they don't understand it. They all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to: Joe never mentions his mother and father.”

The narrator is determined to find out what happened to her absent father, while her companion is just looking forward to getting away from the city for the holidays. The narrator isn't just injured; she's half dead. The trip brought back painful memories from her past. The third chapter's contemplative tone is prompted by the narrator's memories of her father.

“If he’s safe I don’t want to see him. There is no point, they never forgave me, they didn’t understand the divorce; I don’t think they even understand the marriage and leaving my husband and child, that was the unpardoned able sin; I admit I was stupid, stupidity is the same as evil if you judge by the results and I didn’t have any excuses.”

The narrator believes her parents will never forgive her for divorcing them and abandoning her child. She is starting to feel lost in the "tangled maze" that is the mystery surrounding her father's absence.

The narrator certainly wouldn't feel safe there on her own. The narrator, in the company of her close friends, muses over her own brief marriage, which was not a marriage because it damaged their love. The narrator and his companions go off on a trail search. As the narrator sees it, *“I seen now the impossibility of searching the island for him, and even then they could miss him, dead or alive, accident or suicide or murder, or if for some unfathomable reason he’s chosen this absence and is hiding, they’d never find him.”*

Having made it this far, she must now look for her father in the physical world. The narrator keeps looking for signs of her father and considers several odd alternatives, including the notion that he could be hidden on the island. Since finding their way back on the trail has proven so tough, they have given up. The narrator's lingering fear of her father seems to be about more than just her father. Suddenly, in chapter 10, Joe makes a marriage proposal to the narrator. After refusing his proposal out of shock and trying not to chuckle at how unexpected it was, the narrator opens up to him about her marriage and child.

Strange things start to happen in her mind as she recalls her wedding day.

After the nuptials, her husband treated her like an invalid instead of a bride. When the narrator's art teacher asked how she was doing, she could hardly stand due to the weakness in her legs. "I know it's challenging, but this is better," he said. When she investigates the cabin at night, she finds something that seems out of place in such a secluded setting: The narrator's sense of victimhood is encapsulated by a photo album and the unopened wedding gifts from her childhood.

“Nobody loves me Everybody hates me I’m going to the garden to eat worms.”

In chapter 12, we learn that Mr. Paul, a close friend of her father, was convinced that her dad had passed away. When she considers this, her confidence in her theory that he is hidden in the forest wanes. The narrator wonders if the CIA killed him to steal the land. The narrator concludes that her father has gone completely insane. The narrator is confident about her father's death since she has evidence of his sanity. Now that she knows he's not a psycho in the woods, she relaxes.

“Crazy people can come back, from wherever they go to take refuse, but dead people can’t, they are prohibited.”

Joe and the narrator have a lengthy conversation about their uncertain future after Joe's proposal is rejected. She spontaneously suggested that Joe and his family leave their downtown flat and remarked;

“He did not love me, it was an idea of himself he loves and he wanted me to join him.....I didn't matter, so I didn't have to care.”

According to the narrator, Joe really does care for her and wants to marry her because of his love. Insightful is the narrator's commentary on Joe's reaction to her declining his proposal and the subsequent discussion of their relationship. Joe is deeply disappointed because he was rejected when he proposed marriage.

Narrator observed Anna without make up and says 'May be he {David} won't notice it', At this Anna says, 'he will notice.... \she wants me to look like a young girl all the time'. Because of this, Anna feels really sad. To the narrator, she spills the beans on the dirty laundry of their marriage. If she breaks David's rules, he will punish her. When the narrator proposes they get a divorce, Anna counters that they are still very much in love despite the fact that she believes he would rather her death.

What happened to the narrator's father is still a mystery.

The narrator overhears David and Anna arguing as she walks down to the shore. David is currently trying to persuade her to remove her bathing suit so that Joe can capture some revealing photos of her for the film they are making, tentatively titled "Random sample," in which she appears both healthier and happier. As David spoke to her,

“Come on, take it off.....It won't hurt you, we need a naked lady.....you'll go in beside the dead bird, it is your chance for stardom, you've always wanted fame.”

Joe posed like this in a way that Anna didn't like, but it's the only way to recover Ann's former self. The narrator wishes she could break up the argument but doesn't. The situation escalates between Anna and David, who threatens to throw her into the lake if she doesn't agree. Finally, Anna strips down to only her underwear and jumps into the water for Joe to shoot. Anna made a splash by diving into the water. The narrator believes that David is similar to herself.

“We are the ones that don't know how to love, there is something missing in us, we were born that way.”

When the narrator questioned David why he made Anna act like a fool in front of Joe, David said it was because Anna was dishonest and cunning. If you ask David, she is an idiot.

“She goes with other man, she thinks she can get away with it, but she is too dumb, every time I find out; I can smell it on her.....God knows that I’m not jealous....But she is devious, I can’t stand that.”

The story's narrator gets an abortion, and it is a red herring. Having previously revealed that she was married, gave birth to a kid, and then abandoned the child with her husband following their divorce, the narrator now realises, "I could have said, no to the abortion, but I'm a killer."

“I thought, whatever it is part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It was not a child but it could have been one, I didn’t allow it.”

The narrator wished she could run away from her guilt over her child's death. The narrator painted herself as the innocent victim of a failed marriage and the murderer of her own child. The narrator believes she would never agree to that. She learns that her father has been found by an American fisherman in chapter seventeen, when David and Anna give her the news. Mr. Paul was able to positively identify her father's clothes even though his body was beyond recognition. Because the narrator is sceptical, she inquires as to the precise location of the body and is informed that it was discovered close to the cliff where she had been diving. This storyteller has doubts.

The narrator is confident that, despite her friend's avoidance after hearing the news of her father's death,

“Nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive.”

Her reaction to the discovery of her father's body is very out of the ordinary; she has a suspicious attitude. She is sure that the news of his death is an elaborate plot to damage her and that they are lying.

Joe's anxiety levels rise in chapter 20. Joe is at a loss for words after meeting Anna and learning of the narrator's father's death. As a result, he assumes she is in pain and makes no effort to wake her.

“He thinks I’m in pain, he wants to evade it. He bends himself away from me, but I stroke him, moving my hand over his body, he is startled because I am awake. After a minute he turns to me.”

They are making out in the open air, and the narrator explains that she is hoping to get a feel for her uterus with Joe's help. She unexpectedly announces her pregnancy to Joe. As Narrator is with Joe, she begins to experience flashbacks about her abortion.

“ I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, for giving

me, rising from the lake with it has been present for long.”

It appears that everyone is in agreement that the relationship between the narrator and Joe can be salvaged.

“By screwing Joe She’s brought us back together saving the world, everyone wants to; men think they can do it with guns, women with their bodies, love conquers all, conquerors love all, Marriages raised by words.”

Friend of narrator has arrived back in Toronto. The narrator's quest for self-knowledge includes discovering the truth about her father's death. Her journey is perilous, complicated, and unclear. She feels as though her strength has dwindled and she has no defences left. Aside from the fact that she must remain in the cabin by herself, her next move is unclear. She breaks every single piece of glassware, dinnerware, literature, and textile in the house.

When the blaze has been reduced to a smoulder, nothing remains. I take one of the injured blankets with me as I depart.

“Walking to the lake, she lies down in water and remove her clothes. She is hungry; she gathered some vegetable from the garden and eats them”.

Narrator hopes to reconnect with her parents.

She baptises herself with water that is reminiscent of fire after burning all traces of civilization, including drawings, photographs, maps, and more. Hers is a prophetic mission, and she must seek the blessings of the old Indian nature deities by undergoing a rigorous cleansing rite.

The next morning, the narrator is awakened abruptly by the sound of a power boat, despite being all by himself on the island. She flees into the forest. She wonders if it's the police, if it's visitors, or if it's even invaders from the United States.

“They cannot be trusted. They’ll mistakes me for a human being, a naked woman wrapped in a blanket.... They won’t be able to tell what I really am. But if they guesses my true form, identity, they will shoot me... and hang me up by the feet from a tree.’

The narrator, who remains nameless, believes her mother has become a bird, and she realises that her father has become a fish. The narrator saw her parents transform into birds and fish. Her parents had both transformed into creatures of the wild, assuming the form of various birds and animals. The narrator realises the foot prints she had assumed belonged to her father were actually her own, marking the end of her visionary journey.

The narrator has recurring nightmares in which her parents return from the dead to visit her. The following morning, upon waking, she has the epiphany,

“I know they have gone finally, back into the earth, the air, the water, wherever they were when I summoned them. I am the only one left alive on this island.”

The narrator is fairly certain that she will never see her parents again. She can't remain on the island indefinitely. She acted as if she were a victim of her husband's affair.

“The above all, to refuse to be a victim, unless I can do that can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone....with drawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death.”

The narrator puts on her clothes and prepares to rejoin society.

She has certain concerns regarding the unborn child. Assuming she is expecting a child.

She considers it her moral obligation to take good care of herself throughout pregnancy so that she can give birth to a healthy child. She is thinking deeply as she notices Paul and Joe's boat approaching. Joe docks the boat and gives her a call. He came back after abandoning David and Ann to be with her. His patience is running out.

Yet for the time being he must wait. All I hear is the lapping of the water and the rustle of the leaves in the trees around me.

There is no resolution to the novel's climax, and the reader is left wondering what will become of the narrator. The denouement, though, is full of optimism, albeit an optimism grounded in the knowledge that life is far from ideal.

The narrator imagines that her "potential" future with Joe, who has come back to "save" her, involves a new inner self and a creation;

“I watch him, my love for him useless as a third eye or a possibility. If I go with him we will have to talk, wooden houses as absolute, we can no longer live in squirious peace by avoiding each other.”

Narrator is a professional commercial artist, and this happens from time to time. As she looks back, she regrets ever believing her ex-lover when he told her, "there have never been any important woman artist." As a result, she began to believe his assertion that none ever existed. The narrator's art teacher, a married guy who is unwilling to accept her for who she is but is yet anxious to promote her creative ability and her feminist ideology. When compared to him, she would be on top.

In the end, the art teacher performed a ruse on her by pretending to be single in order to convince her to marry him and give her a wedding ring. Finally, she decided to give in and have a baby. She felt pressure from her art teacher, so she made the decision to terminate the pregnancy. The trip brought back terrible memories of her destructive relationship with her high school art

teacher and her unhappy history. Once she lost her dad, she also lost herself. The narrator isn't just injured; she's half dead. she is unhappy with her first marriage and with the way Anna and David are together, so she has no interest in getting married again.

As a feminist novel, an anti-colonial novel, a novel about coming of age, and a novel about finding one's place in the world are all interpretations that have been applied to *Surfacing*. *Surfacing* explores tensions between personal identity and social norms, which escalate into a struggle between local and national identities. The hunt for her absent father provides a mythic framework for the novel's exploration of feminism. The novel's central theme is the narrator's search for her absent father, which functions as a metaphor for women's liberation. Atwood illuminates not only the predicament of a heterogeneous society like Canada, but also the condition of Canadian society as a whole.

The cultural dilemma in Canada is brought into sharp relief, as one group struggles to impose its values on the rest of the country. Canada was dominated by American culture. The United States of America is a nation of evil people. To a large extent, Canadian culture is a direct copy of American norms, from language to style to ideals. The narrative picks back up when the narrator comes back. She learns that American brutality permeates every corner of Canada. The Canadian populace is so depraved that they surpass the behaviour of animals.

The protagonist of Atwood's novel is a young, contemporary woman who is not only determined but also courageous in her quest to upend the status quo and discover a new normal. The narrator embodies the tortured sensibility of a woman who is not willing to make concessions to a society ruled by men and is instead desperately seeking a way out of human society.

The US occupiers are exploiting and destroying the land the narrator calls home. 'Happy Killer' is a label that could be applied to the average American. Victimization of animals mirrors the American way of doing business. The killer of her heron was only interested in showing off their strength by killing a human for fun.

The protagonist in this narrative despises civilization and longs to return to a more natural state. Here's what Jhon Moss had to say about it:

“She must we produce as an animal be only an animal then she can become a human.”

The harshness of life has shaped her into a strong, confident modern woman who is no longer afraid to strike out on her own, seek new experiences, and stand up to the political and sexual colonialism she sees all around her. She undergoes a metaphysical and physiological rebirth.

Atwood's unnamed protagonist is a hardened feminist who wants nothing more than to escape the bonds of her marriage and child. Something occurs near the book's conclusion. She abandons civilised life for the wilds of nature.

The protagonist of "surfacing" aspires to be a strong, independent woman who can confidently tackle any challenge that comes her way. Readers are also positively affected by this quality. Today's women fight for equality.

Everyone has been given the same rights and compensation. The protagonist of the rising novel is well-aware of their own dignity and liberties.

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