

Margaret Atwood's surfacing as the Story about the Suppressed Condition of Women and Nature

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Abstract- Surfacing is the second available novel by Margaret Atwood. It was first published by McClelland and Steward in 1972. It has been called a companion novel to Atwood's collection of poems, *Power Politics*, which was written the previous year and deals with balancing issues. The novel, grappling with notions of national and gendered self. Atwood's second work of fiction develops many of the thematic concerns of her poetry in redolent prose. Surfacing presents a woman disabled by the penalty of her "marital" experience, but the protagonist's journey from spiritual and emotional paralysis to combined agency has a powerful mythic length that the previous novel lacks. It is an knowledge that has left her anaesthetized, cut off from her emotions by a form of mind/body split, and her recollections are so caring that she represses them in willful amnesia. The quest in search of her father, however, triggers a quest of self-discovery, as the narrator's history refuses to stay flooded; she is haunted by memories of her parents, a marriage that never was, and her involvement in the abortion of her child. Eventually, she is forced to tackle here specters when a dive below the lake surface becomes a symbolic dive into her own insensible. She ritualistically sheds all remainder of a language and culture that has led her into self-betrayal and carry out. Alone on the island, she undergoes a shamanistic cleansing madness, eventually surfacing with a new-found sense of self. The novel's end resonates with Atwood's of that period thematic guide to Canadian literature, *Survival*. Poised to return to the world that she has left, the narrator's idea leaves her with a decision that speaks to her familiarity as both a Canadian and as a woman: "This above all, to decline to be a victim."

INTRODUCTION

As a novel about human's relation with nature, Surfacing shows Atwood's unique insight into the covered up condition of both women and nature. Even though it is published in the early 70's, it demonstrates her particular concern about the crisis of human interference in the wilderness and evokes

the attention to the disequilibrium in the novel. According to Nathalie Cook's observation in *Margaret Atwood: A Biography*, Atwood shows her concern of the topic about nature in her early works: Atwood's earliest work reflects a number of concerns that have remained central to her oeuvre: a profound respect for the natural world, a commitment to Canadian culture, and a firm belief in the rights of the individual. In Surfacing, Atwood embraces many of the dichotomies that have long been standards in Western thought. She connects women with nature and men with culture, which each in opposition to the other. Although these dual categories bring the nameless narrator frequent pains, she relieves herself from the burdens of dichotomy and returns to the city with hop at the end of the novel.

The anonymous narrator in developing grows up in a remote island in northern Quebec. She goes back to her birthplace in search of her missing father. When she puts herself in the remote nature, the narrator finds that she is captivated and summoned by the mysterious power of nature like numerous of the female characters in the fairy tales. She has a special sense as she dwells in the natural environment. She gets the experience in her lifetime to come into contact with and learn about nature. Unlike her unfeeling companions, she believes and senses nature with ease. As she stays in the rustic environment, she feels a kind of safety. "How have I been able to live so long in the city, it isn't safe," the narrator says, "I always safe here, even at night". (70) In comparison with the stifling city, the narrator lives and breathes at ease on the island. For the narrator, living in the city is as if bearing numerous kinds of burdens. Everything in the city for her is a hard task. Getting alone with so many people makes her uneasy. She cannot fit herself into the surrounding at all. Each time she recalls the nights she spent in the city, she

suffers the tension of emotion. In the night I had wanted rescue, if my body could be made to sense respond, move strongly sufficient, some of the red light-bulb neurons, glowing molecules might seep into my head through the closed throat, neck membrane. Pleasure and pain are side by side they said but most of the brain is neutral; nerveless, like fat. I rehearsed emotions, naming them: Joy, please, guilt, release, love and hate, react, relate; what to feel was like what to wear, you watched the others and memorized it. (112)

She is not used to the pressure of modern life. She cannot get used to the life in the civilization. Therefore, she confronts so many difficulties during the period she spends in the city. It's such a hard time in her life. The surrounded by of my arms were stippled with tiny wounds, like an addict's. they slipped the needle into the vein and I was falling down, it was like diving, sinking from one layer of darkness to a deeper, deepest; when I rose up through the anesthetic, pale green and then daylight, I would remember nothing.(112) The narrator's unaccommodated situation in civilization is displayed in her narration as well. Shoes for her "are a barrier between touch and the earth". David and Anna's car is nothing but "a lumbering monster." The "Americans" are intruders. As Hilde Steals notices in "Surfacing: Retracing the Paths of (Self-) Mutilation," the speaker disdains everything symbolizing civilization and never wants to change herself. These foreign signs signal the decline of the "original" landscape, caused by the intervention of other human beings, interference that she connection with violation. The environment that underwent a process as a result of changed context "betrays" her expectations. Therefore, when the narrator comes back to her origin, goes fishing with her friends, and eats artificial food on the natural land, she even has a sense of complicity. A intelligence of crime rises gradually in her mind because she is aware of her taking part in doing something bad to nature. After perceiving her own complicity, she then turns to despise what the "Americans" do to the natural island and even compares them with dogs. They should preserve the beauty of the environment rather than tear down it.

The "Americans" unscrupulously do things bad to nature in order to show their power. They repeatedly ravage and rob the landscape with their own will and

disregard the mutual relationship between humans and the land. Human beings live in the natural world. They should give thanks and preserve it with all pains. Without the support of natural system, it's impossible for humans to sustain themselves well. Whether it died keenly, consented, whether Christ died willingly, anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn't kill birds and fish they would have killed us. The animals die that way we may live; they are substitute people, hunters in the tall killing the deer that is Christ also. And we eat them out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. Canned spamcanned Jesus, even the plants must be Christ. But we refuse to reverence. (141) it's ironic that human beings worship Jesus Christ for his sacrificing life for them but denigrate animals' sacrificing their lives to provide them food. Birds and fish in the novel are victims that convey the embarrassing condition. The way of human's utilization of nature is connected to the oppression of women through the narrator since she is a woman who suffers painfully from the supremacy of men and civilization and has a special bond to nature. Both nature and women contribute to human society but are reserved under men's commanding power. Women have no names in the rustic town. Everyone is called "Madame." They are only objects that belong to men in the male-dominated society. The exist to make happy the physical, domestic and sexual needs of their other male companion. Names for them are not important at all because individuals are not significant. The narrator's abortion of her child is then portrayed as brutal as a butcher's slaughter of farm animals in the novel although the narrator deliberately describes it as if she goes through a delivery: After the first I didn't never want to have one more child, it was too much to tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick senseless into you so you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, you leg are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or snickering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. After that they fill your veins up with red plastic, I saw it organization down through the tube. I won't let them do that to me again. (79)

The narrator is cut into two after the cruel and forced abortion. "I emptied, amputated;" the narrator says, "I [stink] of salt and antiseptic, they [have] planted death in me like a seed". (145) this bound even hurts her actually and mentally since how she feels is never the concern. Women are so humble that they can do nothing they really want to. The narrator's best female friend Anna provides the best example to present society that women are labeled subordinate to men. Within her marriage with David for nine years, she is submissive all the time. She does her best to please him from stem to stem. She is never in control of her life; instead, it's David in control of her life. David symbolizes the power of patriarchy that exploits women in all respects. "What's humiliating about your body, darling?" David said caressingly. "We all love it, you ashamed of it? That's pretty miserly of you, you should share the wealth; not that you don't." (136) by pressing a button, David easily captures Anna's naked images. It's a torture to Anna but a joy to David. Shooting films is an act of taking possession. David takes Anna as his personal property for spending that he can film her as long as he can and he wants. For David, Anna becomes nothing but a pornographic object displaying in front of his eyes. The matrimony between Anna and David is not worthy relationship; on the contrary, it gives the narrator a lesson to scrutinize her own carefully. Contesting the myths of romantic love as the draw of opposites or the balance of complements, Surfacing draws attention to the oppression of women in a male-defined order of hierarchical and oppositional roles that empower men at the expense of women. The narrator regularly realizes the imbalance of Anna's marriage and she decides to fight back. She wants to do something for Anna, but at this point, she is still afraid and feels that "the only defense was flight, invisibility": I wanted to run down to the dock and stop them, struggle was wrong, we aren't allow to, if we did both sides got punished as in a real war. So we battled in secret, undeclared, and subsequent to a while I no longer fought back because I never won. The only defense was flight, invisibility. I sat down in the top step. If the only two kinds of people are killers and victims, then although it may be morally preferable to be a victim, it is obviously preferable from the point o view of endurance to be a killer. However, either choice seems pretty hopeless; you can define yourself as innocent and get killed, or

you can define yourself as a killer and kill others. The ideal would be an important person who would neither be a killer nor a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive connection towards the world. (16-17) Without doubt, Anna embodies the role of victim, a victim of patriarchy. However, the narrator doesn't. She resists being subordinate.

Images of victimization permeate Surfacing. The world of nature that surrounds the narrator and her companions is violated by technology, pollution and human desire. The protagonist, confronted by such evidence of persecution, is convinced that she herself is a victim. As a woman she feels handicapped in a men's world as a commission; Unlike Anna, the narrator asks for equilibrium in her "matrimony". Her previous abnormal relationship with her ex-lover in the city leads her to try to break free from the recognized women's role in the society. Unlike Anna she powerfully refuses to be a victim within the system of patriarchy. The narrator cares nothing about reason anymore. Eating roots, destroying her cloths and sleeping in the wilderness, she reverts to the unique state of life. When she rejects culture and retreats into the wilderness to become a "natural" woman, she gives up eating processed food. Such food is contaminated in the same way that society is impure by patriarchal ideology. Both are unnatural, constructed, man-made, and both threaten to poison her. In this way, the narrator relieves completely from all of her burdens. She accepts nature's healing control.

CONCLUSION

The narrator puts herself in the entire natural world. She immerses herself in the lake and gets a redemptive power and then to finish gets a totally new perspective toward life. The death of the narrator's father is a reunion to the earth, to nature. The narrator determines to accept the restrictions in the city and the barrier of civilization. However, this time, she is different. She is ready to try to fit herself into the world. She does be familiar with that as a human being; coming back to the city is inevitable. Eating food in the cabin, as Emma Parker illustrates in "You Are What You Eat," is the narrator's first step to compromise with the world.

There is no a better or inferiors in the relationship. There is only a mutual corporation for the only universe. That is what Atwood wants to talk about in the book when she mentions it in her discussion. There is an objective world out there; I'm far from being a solipsist. There are a lot of things out there, but toward any object in the world you can take a positive or negative attitude or, let us say, you can turn it into a positive or a negative symbol, and that goes for everything. You can see a tree as the personification of natural beauty or you can see it as something threatening that's going to get you, and that depends partly on you realistic position toward it; what you are doing with the tree, admiring it or cutting it down; but it's also a matter of your symbolic orientation toward the whole thing. Now I'm not denying the reality, the existence of evil; some things are very hard to see in a positive light. Evil obviously exists in the world, right? But you have a choice of how you can see yourself in relation to that. And if you define yourself always as a harmless victim, there's nothing you can ever do about it. You can simply suffer. (212). Looking from a different angle, everything will be different. The borders between women and men and nature and people are not that hard to cross.

REFERENCES

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