CHAPTER - 4
MARGARET ATWOOD’S SENSE OF CANADIAN IDENTITY AS DEFINED IN SURFACING
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This reflects Margaret Atwood’s sense of Canadian identity as defined in Surfacing.

4.1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. She went on to study at Victoria College at the University of Toronto and eventually received a master’s degree from Radcliffe College. Surfacing is Margaret Atwood’s second novel, which was published in 1972, only three years after her first novel The Edible Woman was published. Though one of Atwood’s early novels, Surfacing is not one of Atwood’s earliest publications. By the time Surfacing was published, she had already published several books of poetry. Atwood’s writing has been published in more than thirty languages.

Margaret Atwood is Canada’s best-known writer and one of the most highly acclaimed living writers world-wide. Her work has achieved both extremely high sales and international critical respect, culminating with her Booker Prize for The Blind Assassin in 2000. She was born in 1939 in Ottawa and as a child she spent much time travelling. Her parents were from Nova Scotia, but they left during the Depression, and Carl Atwood became a professor of zoology, based in Ottawa, and later Toronto. He ran a research station studying tree-eating insects and during the warmer months he took his family to a bush cabin in a remote part of Quebec.

Surfacing takes place in Quebec, and the unique identity of Quebec’s population comes into play in the novel. Quebec is the only Canadian province populated by residents of French (rather than British) descent. Atwood wrote Surfacing at a time when the cultural differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada were manifesting themselves in terms of rising Quebec nationalism. The 1960s saw the Quiet Revolution in Quebec: a series of economic and educational reforms coupled with a secularization of society. The Quiet Revolution afforded Quebec greater political and economic autonomy, giving Quebec’s French citizens a
sense of nationalism and a desire to separate from Canada. Atwood marks this political change in Surfacing.

Surfacing is a postcolonial novel, though not in the traditional sense. Most postcolonial novels are written by authors from countries that have gained bloody independence from empires such as Britain, France, Spain, or America. These novels usually mark the effects of upheaval and bloody revolution, documenting a search for an independent national identity coupled with a reaction to the political scarring left by imperialism. Since Canadian independence from Britain occurred so gradually, Surfacing does not fall into the traditional postcolonial categorization. Surfacing does, however, explore an emerging Canadian national identity. Atwood includes a passage about the Canadian national flag, which had only been adopted in 1965. More important, Surfacing exists as a postcolonial novel in its consideration of Americans and the way that America exerts its cultural influence over Canada. Atwood claims that America’s subtle cultural infiltration of Canada is actually a form of colonialism.

Through Surfacing, Atwood questions a woman’s conventional social and sexual role. Surfacing touches on the health risks associated with hormonal contraception, the idea of contraception as a male invention, the power inherent in pregnancy, the social implications of makeup, the potentially false ideal of marriage, the notion of a natural woman, and the psychological mechanisms that men use to exert control over women. Atwood creates a narrator who feels alienated by social pressures that cast her in a specific gender role, and the narrator’s response to those pressures is complete withdrawal. As such, Atwood presents a frank condemnation of the sexual and social norms forced upon women. Surfacing can therefore be seen as a proto-feminist novel.

Surfacing marks a social period of growing secularization and of widening generational gaps. Atwood deems religion as more of a social regulatory force than a truth. For example, the town priest abuses his religious authority on the village by enforcing a strict dress code for women. The narrator also labels Christianity as a social control mechanism that is learned at a young age and stays potent throughout adulthood. Religion in Surfacing becomes a false ideal, and Atwood’s condemnation of Christianity marks a larger social tendency toward secularization. At the same time, Atwood explores a growing rift between generations. The narrator of the book casts the older generation as crippled by a rigid sense of morality. In this way, Atwood
documents a split between the conservative older generation and the liberal younger generation.

A minor undercurrent in *Surfacing* is the novel’s existence as a post–World War II novel. The narrator recalls growing up in the wake of World War II and documents small effects of the war on her childhood. She believes that the war served as an outlet for men’s inherent violence, and she tries to trace the effects of pent-up violence in a society devoid of war. The narrator sees the American infiltration of Canada as a direct result of American restlessness during the post-war period. *Surfacing* examines the ambiguous moral landscape left in the wake of World War II. The narrator’s childhood recollection of Hitler as the embodiment of all evil depicts the World War II era as morally simplistic. The post-war world is more ambiguous, and the narrator challenges herself to discover the roots of evil now that humans no longer have a single scapegoat.

*Surfacing* predates the environmentalist movement, but the narrator’s reverence for the Canadian wilderness is a pro-environmentalist one. The narrator feels protective of nature and reacts with hostility to the American tourists who overfish, kill for sport, and litter the ground. *Surfacing* is full of tourists, urban outgrowth, and technology that directly encroach upon the unspoiled land. These environmental concerns still resonate today given continuing trends toward overconsumption and the prevalence of technology that relies upon natural resources.

**4.2. Plot overview**

The unnamed narrator returns to Quebec after years of absence to search for her missing father. She brings her boyfriend, Joe, and a married couple, Anna and David. On the way to a village near her father’s island, the narrator visits her father’s friend Paul. Paul can provide no new information on how to locate the narrator’s father. A guide named Evans takes the narrator and her companions to her father’s island, where the narrator searches for clues regarding her father’s disappearance. She becomes convinced that her father has gone mad and is still alive.

The narrator works in spurts on her freelance job illustrating a book of fairy tales, but her worries prevent her from accomplishing any real work. David proposes staying on the island for a week. The narrator agrees, though she secretly fears her crazed father’s reemergence. During their stay, David launches constant insults at Anna, couching them as jokes. Anna confesses to the narrator that David is a
womanizer. She complains that David constantly demands that Anna wear makeup. The four go on a blueberry-picking expedition. They canoe to a nearby island, where Joe unexpectedly proposes to the narrator. The narrator refuses Joe, telling him how she left her last husband and child.

Back on the island, Paul arrives with an American named Malmstrom. Malmstrom claims to be from a Detroit wildlife agency. He offers to purchase the island, but the narrator refuses. She pulls Paul aside and tells him that her father is still alive. Paul seems skeptical. After the visitors leave, David offhandedly accuses Malmstrom of being a C.I.A. operative who is organizing an American invasion of Canada. The narrator looks through her father’s records and consequently believes that he is likely dead. She sees that he had been researching Indian wall paintings and that he had marked several sites on a map. She decides to visit a site.

The narrator convinces her friends to accompany her on a camping trip to see the wall paintings. On their way to the campsite, they see a decomposing blue heron that has been hanged from a tree. David insists on filming the dead heron for a movie he is making called Random Samples. The heron’s death haunts the narrator. She sees evidence of two campers entering the area beforehand, and she quickly assumes that they are Americans and to blame for the crime. Meanwhile, the four companions set up camp. Anna tells the narrator she has forgotten her makeup and David will punish her. The narrator goes fishing with David and Joe. They encounter the Americans, and the narrator notices an American flag on their boat. The narrator brings her companions to a site from her father’s map, but there are no wall paintings. Frustrated and confused, they return to camp. On the way, they again encounter the American campers. The narrator is surprised to discover that the campers are actually Canadian; what she had thought was an American flag is actually a sticker. However, the narrator claims the campers are still Americans because their slaughter of the heron is a distinctly American action.

The four return to the cabin. The narrator locates another site on her father’s map but realizes that the government has raised the water level in this part of the lake. She will have to dive to see the paintings. Outside, the narrator observes David tormenting Anna by insisting she take off her clothes for Random Samples. Anna eventually relents but then feels humiliated. The narrator asks David why he tortures Anna, and David claims he does so because Anna cheats on him. The narrator canoes
to a site from her father’s map. She dives repeatedly in search of the paintings. On a particularly deep dive, she sees a disturbing object and screams and swims for the surface. Joe has followed her onto the lake and demands to know what she’s doing. She ignores Joe and realizes that what she saw was a dead child. She believes it to be her aborted baby. She changes her story from leaving her husband and child to having an affair with her art professor and being forced to abort their baby.

The narrator’s vision throws her into a psychosis. She believes that her father had found sacred Indian sites and resolves to thank the gods for granting her “the power.” Joe tries to speak to the narrator, but she remains impenetrable. He tries to rape her, but he leaves her alone once she warns him that she will get pregnant. Later, David tries to seduce the narrator, telling her that Joe and Anna are having sex. The narrator nevertheless resists David’s advances. A police boat comes to the island, and David tells the narrator that the police have found her father’s body. Deep in her madness, the narrator refuses to believe David. That night, she seduces Joe so she can get pregnant. She feels that a new child will replace her lost baby. Joe falsely believes that the narrator has forgiven him for cheating on her.

On their last day on the island, the narrator abandons her friends. She destroys David’s film and escapes in a canoe. The narrator’s companions search in vain for her, eventually leaving the island. Alone on the island, the narrator falls deeper into madness. She destroys the art from her job and nearly everything inside the cabin. She becomes an animal, running around naked, eating unwashed plants, and living in a burrow. She imagines raising her baby outdoors and never teaching it language. She also has visions of her parents. Eventually, hunger and exhaustion bring the narrator to sanity. She looks at herself in the mirror and sees just a natural woman. She resolves not to feel powerless anymore. Paul arrives at the island with Joe. The narrator realizes she loves Joe and resolves to reunite with him. She pauses in the cabin, looking out at Joe, waiting.

4.3. Character list

The Narrator - The unnamed protagonist of Surfacing. The narrator is reverential toward nature, intensely private, anti-American, and introspective. She works as a freelance artist. She searches for her missing father on a remote island in Quebec along with her boyfriend, Joe, and her friends, David and Anna. Socially alienated and distrustful of love, the narrator suffers a debilitating emotional
numbness that eventually fixes itself through a grand psychological transformation. She eventually goes mad on the island. For a time she lives like an animal, but she eventually emerges as a more enlightened being. Surfacing is composed entirely of the narrator’s unfiltered thoughts and observations.

Joe - The quiet, shy, well-meaning boyfriend of the narrator. Joe is an unsuccessful artist who makes ugly pottery and teaches pottery classes. Joe remains too simple-minded to understand the narrator’s complexities. He insists on marrying the narrator, which she resists. Joe is a good man, but he is also potentially violent.

David - The psychologically abusive and womanizing husband of Anna. David is a communications teacher who loves baseball. He is an amateur filmmaker composing a film with Joe called Random Samples. David’s constant joking and imitation of cartoon characters serves as a poor cover for his selfish and sexist behavior, and the manner in which he communicates with Anna is deeply cruel. David is staunchly anti-American, yet he possesses all of the awful qualities that the narrator associates with Americans.

Paul - The compassionate yet reserved best friend of the narrator’s father. Paul is the first one to inform the narrator of her father’s disappearance. He is a poor man who lives a modest life, and he operates by traditional morals and codes of courtesy and provides as much help as he can in locating the narrator’s father. Paul was the model of “the simple life” to the narrator’s father, though the narrator observes that he is a model through financial necessity and not choice.

The Narrator’s Mother - An aloof and secretive woman. The narrator’s mother died from a brain tumor before the novel begins, and the narrator constantly tries to remember her. Her mother serves as the narrator’s image of inner strength. The narrator continually remembers the image of her mother in a leather jacket feeding blue jays.

The Narrator’s Father - A stern man who disappears, forcing the narrator to search for him on his island. The narrator’s father is an atheist and a fan of the eighteenth-century rationalists. Self-reliant and rugged, he built the cabin on his own and had used the island as respite from city life. He dies accidentally on a trip researching local Indian wall paintings.

The Narrator’s Brother - A character who never appears in person. The narrator’s brother fled from his parents years before the novel takes place. The
narrator finds it difficult to imagine him as an adult. He nearly drowned as a child, and the narrator constantly reflects on the image of his drowning. He was loving toward his sister, but he had a rather dark childhood. He kept a laboratory on the island, running experiments on animals in jars.

The “Fake Husband” - The narrator’s ex-lover. The fake husband is eventually revealed to be the narrator’s art professor, a married man with whom she had an affair. He forced the narrator into having an abortion. He is emotionally callous in nature and tries to avoid letting his affair with the narrator influence his actions.

Bill Malmstrom - A shady and wealthy American whom the narrator immediately distrusts. Malmstrom claims to be a representative of a Detroit-based wildlife preservation agency. He offers to purchase the narrator’s father’s island. David suspects that Malmstrom is an undercover C.I.A. operative.

The “Americans” - Two Canadian campers whom the narrator initially mistakes for American tourists. They are avid fishers, and they befriend David. They are also responsible for killing and hanging a heron, and for their senseless violence the narrator believes them to be Americans.

Claude - A young boy working at a generic bar attached to a new motel in the village. Claude gives fishing licenses to David and to other tourists and also guides American tourists on fishing expeditions. He speaks in a yokel dialect.

Evans - The seasoned American guide who takes the narrator, Joe, Anna, and David to and from the narrator’s father’s island. Evans is gruff and minds his own business; he is aware that the narrator’s father has disappeared, but he never asks the narrator about it.

Madame - Paul’s wife. Madame is a French woman living in the village close to the narrator’s father’s island. Simple and polite, she speaks only French. Because they only speak English, the narrator and the narrator’s mother both experience long, awkward conversations with Madame.

The Town Priest - The local priest whom the narrator remembers from childhood. The town priest forbade women in the narrator’s village from wearing slacks. Instead, he forced them to wear long, concealing skirts. The narrator reflects that he is likely dead by now.
The Old Shopkeeper - One-armed French woman whom the narrator remembers simply as “Madame.” The old shopkeeper operated from a storefront attached to her house. The narrator remembers how the shopkeeper used to tie packages with her stump arm and how she used to sell candies that the narrator was never allowed to buy.

The New Shopkeeper - A French woman who works in a small village near the narrator’s father’s island. The new shopkeeper is a rude, snide woman who humiliates the narrator for speaking broken French. The shopkeeper wears slacks, which would have been forbidden in the village years ago.

4.4. Analysis of Major Characters

The narrator

Atwood avoids naming the narrator of Surfacing in order to emphasize the universality of the narrator’s feeling of alienation from society. The causes and effects of the narrator’s psychological transformation remain somewhat mysterious. The narrator feels emotionally numb, isolated by the numerous roles she is supposed to play in her life. Part of the cause is grief, and part of it is due to spending too much time in the wilderness. But the narrator’s madness also stems in large part from systematic social alienation. Atwood explores a woman’s place in all of its facets: as a human, a wife, a religious person, a mother, and a sexual being. The narrator’s madness seems to arise from her anger at all of the standard roles forced upon women. Her response to this alienation is to become an animal. She sees animals not as beasts without reason, but as graceful creatures that are better than humans at peacefully coexisting with nature. The result of the narrator’s transformation is a greater understanding of her place in society. This understanding comes out of necessity, because the narrator realizes that complete withdrawal from society will result in her death. However, the narrator also reaches new conclusions about how she will cope with society’s ills. She resolves to rejoin society without succumbing to the pressures that once subdued her.

Joe

At first, the narrator depicts Joe as simple-minded and agreeable, but as Surfacing progresses, Joe’s personality undergoes changes. Where once he seemed content, he becomes irritable and sullen when the narrator refuses his marriage proposal. Also, Joe’s actions become less predictable. His proposal is unexpected, and
the narrator becomes less able to discern Joe’s intentions. When David asks Anna to be filmed naked and Joe defends her, the narrator has trouble discerning whether Joe is helping a friend or seeking a way to become sexually aroused. The narrator shows herself to be unreliable in depicting Joe objectively. For example, she keeps bracing herself for a hit from Joe that never comes.

As her impressions of Joe fluctuate, the narrator’s impression of their love also shifts. Initially, the narrator downplays Joe’s love for her. She believes that Joe wants to marry her out of a conceptual ideal and not out of affection. The narrator also downplays her love for Joe, claiming she only enjoys Joe for his physical qualities. However, Surfacing ends with legitimate love between the two, and Joe displays his sincere affection for the narrator when he searches for her on the island. Despite this love, the narrator filters Joe’s actions through her own biases, making his true character unknowable.

David

David is the model of male dominance in Surfacing. David initially appears to be an ideal husband, as he jokes and flirts with Anna. However, Atwood twists her portrayal of David by revealing the cruelty that underscores his jokes and the emptiness of his flirtation. Under the guise of joking, David constantly tries to control Anna’s behavior. As the week progresses, he becomes overtly antagonistic toward her, calling her fat and snubbing her ideas, and eventually uses psychological cruelty to dominate her. He also objectifies Anna by referring to her body in front of Joe. The narrator recognizes that David’s flirtation serves as a display. She calls his banter with Anna a “skit,” noticing that both David and Anna drop their flirtation once they lose their audience.

David spews generic anti-American sentiment, calling the Americans pigs and proposing that they be thrown out of Canada. However, these anti-American politics lack substance. The best justification that David can muster for hating Americans is a ridiculous prediction of an American invasion of Canada. David possesses nearly all of the despicable characteristics the narrator comes to associate with Americans. Additionally, his own life seems at odds with his anti-American sentiments. David loves the distinctly American pastime of baseball, and he constantly laughs like the American cartoon character Woody Woodpecker. David’s political standing illustrates that Americans are marked by behaviors and not by nationality.
Anna

Anna’s primary role in Surfacing is to crystallize the narrator’s opinions about love, sex, and marriage. Anna’s constant chatter helps the narrator to better understand relationships. She asks whether the narrator takes birth control, mentioning the blood clot she developed in her leg as a result of taking the pill. Anna’s frankness about contraception allows the narrator to identify contraception as a male invention that puts females at risk. When the narrator asks Anna about marriage, Anna’s comparison of marriage to skiing blindly down a hill helps solidify the narrator’s fear of marriage. Also, Anna’s admission that David either-withholds sex or hurts her during sex helps the narrator to see the way men use sex as a weapon.

The narrator also observes the psychological cruelty that men inflict on women through the way that Anna crumbles in the face of David’s cruel jokes. The degradation of Anna’s marriage confirms the narrator’s suspicions about marriage in general. At first, the narrator seems to envy Anna’s love for her husband, and she marvels at the way Anna keeps her marriage together. However, the narrator eventually comes to understand Anna’s marriage as one balanced by hate rather than love, and David’s cynicism allows her to reject marriage altogether. Anna’s life as a whole becomes a cautionary tale for the narrator. The narrator learns through Anna the pitfalls of unhappy marriage, empty sex, and fractured love.

4.5. Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Themes

Language As Connection to Society

Throughout Surfacing, the narrator’s feeling of powerlessness is coupled with an inability to use language. When she goes mad, she cannot understand David’s words or speak out against his advances. Similarly, when the search party comes for her, she cannot understand their speech, and her only defense from them is flight. Words betray her, as it is by yelling that the search party discovers her. The narrator maintains the false hope that she can reject human language just as she imagines she can reject human society. She admires how animals know the types of plants without naming them. When she goes mad, she vows not to teach her child language—yet eventually she conquers her alienation by embracing language.
The Total Alienation of Women

Atwood uses the narrator’s near-constant feeling of alienation to comment on the alienation of all women. The narrator feels abandoned by her parents because of the disappearance of her father and the detachment of her mother. She finds men especially alienating because of the way they control women through religion, marriage, birth control, sex, language, and birth. She depicts the way that men view relationships as a war, with women as the spoils. The narrator also describes her alienation as systematic, highlighting the way that children learn gender roles early on in life. The result of the narrator’s alienation is madness and complete withdrawal. The narrator remains unnamed, making her a universal figure and suggesting that all women are in some way alienated.

Motifs

American Expansion

Atwood packs Surfacing with images of Americans invading and ruining Canada. The Americans install missile silos, pepper the village with tourist cabins, leave trash everywhere, and kill for sport. David even goes so far as to theorize an American invasion of Canada for Canadian fresh water. Atwood depicts American expansion as a result of psychological and cultural infiltration. The narrator calls Americans a brain disease, linking American identity to behaviors rather than nationality. To the narrator, an American is anyone who commits senseless violence, loves technology, or over-consumes. David claims he hates Americans, yet he loves baseball and imitates Woody Woodpecker. Atwood depicts American expansion as destructive and a corruptive psychological influence.

The Power

The narrator mentions power several times before going mad and actively seeking “the power.” In Chapter 4, she remembers thinking that seeds from a certain plant will make her all-powerful. In Chapter 9, she says that doctors pretend childbirth is their power and not the mother’s. In Chapter 15, she remembers alternately pretending to be a helpless animal and an animal with power. The narrator’s later quest for “the power” emphasizes her response to alienation. Ever since childhood, she has been isolated and emotionally numb, crippled by unsuitable religious ideals and gender roles. The narrator’s psychotic search for “the power” represents the false hope that by withdrawing from society she can regain her humanity. Ultimately, the
narrator gains power by resolving not to be powerless. She acknowledges that in order to function in society, she must learn to love and communicate. The narrator’s quest for “the power” is similar to her anxiety over social alienation.

Symbols

The Barometer

Paul’s wooden barometer, which features a wooden man and woman inside, becomes an unfortunately accurate emblem of marriage for the narrator. The narrator’s shifting assessment of the barometer traces her shifting attitudes toward marriage. Initially, the narrator views the barometer couple as representative of a simplistic and even empty marriage, and she compares them to Paul and Madame. She mentions how Paul and Madame even look wooden. The narrator later compares the barometer couple to Anna and David in that the wooden couple, like Anna and David’s happiness, is not real. The narrator also thinks of the barometer in relation to her parents. She compares the image of the barometer with the image of her mother and father sawing a piece of birch. The image of the birch is evocative because the narrator associates birches with unspoiled nature. The implication is that the barometer represents an unattainable, unrealistic version of love, whereas her parents possess true love.

The Hanged Heron

The hanged heron at the portage represents the American destruction of nature. The narrator obsesses over the senselessness of its slaughter, especially that it was hanged and not buried. The heron’s death emphasizes that the narrator defines someone as American based on his or her actions. She condemns any act of senseless violence or waste as distinctly American. That the bird is killed with a bullet and hanged using a nylon rope emphasizes the subversion of nature to technology. Also, the narrator thinks of the hanged bird as a Christ-like sacrifice, which reflects Christian ideology. By using Christian ideas to describe nature, the narrator emphasizes her near-religious reverence for nature. The narrator also compares herself to the heron during her madness, when she worries that the search party will hang her by the feet. By associating the narrator with the hanged heron, Atwood associates the way Americans destroy nature with the way men control women.
Makeup

Anna’s makeup, which David demands she wear at all times, represents the large-scale subjugation of women. The narrator compares Anna to a doll when she sees her putting on makeup, because Anna becomes David’s sexual plaything. At the same time, makeup represents female deception. Anna uses makeup as a veneer of beauty, and the behavior is representative of the way she acts virtuous (but sleeps with other men) and happy (but feels miserable). Makeup goes completely against the narrator’s ideal of a natural woman. The narrator calls herself a natural woman directly after her madness, when she looks in a mirror and sees herself naked and completely disheveled. The narrator comments that Anna uses makeup to emulate a corrupt womanly ideal.

The Ring

The narrator’s ring symbolizes marriage and its entrapping effects. The narrator describes wearing both her boyfriend’s and her fake husband’s rings around her neck. She compares her rings to a crucifix or a military decoration. The crucifix suggests that marriage is not only a sacrifice but a sacrifice toward a false ideal. The image of a military decoration implies that marriage forces women into becoming the spoils of war. Atwood uses the narrator’s ring to foreshadow Joe’s demand for marriage, as she mentions in Chapter 1 that Joe fiddles with the narrator’s ring.

4.6. Important Quotations Explained

1. He’s enjoying himself, he thinks this is reality . . . He spent four years in New York and became political, he was studying something; it was during the sixties, I’m not sure when. My friends’ pasts are vague to me and to each other also, any one of us could have amnesia for a year and the others wouldn’t notice.

The narrator observes David and comments on his past just before taking her friends to the island in Chapter 3. The narrator’s disdain for David’s enjoyment of Greenwich Village reflects her intolerance for tourists who come to Quebec seeking an authentic outdoor experience. David is a city-dweller, and the narrator feels perturbed by his casual enjoyment of the trappings of outdoor life, such as fishing or chopping firewood. She inherits this disdain in part from her father, who used to size up men for their ability to live outdoors on their own. Another part of her resents the American tourists who seek out the wilderness only to spoil it.
The flippancy with which the narrator describes David’s political conscience is in fact justified. David knows politics only superficially, and his nondescript anti-American sentiment comes across as a weak substitute for true political knowledge. Also, his background in New York seems ironic given his anti-American leanings. The narrator continually juxtaposes David’s anti-American statements against his clear adoption of American culture. Though he says he hates America, David imitates American cartoons and loves baseball. David’s years in New York help build a picture of a hypocrite who claims to hate Americans and yet is dominated by American culture.

The narrator’s admission that she knows little about her friends’ backgrounds emphasizes the superficiality of nearly all of her relationships. The narrator remains unable to commit to people emotionally. She retains only insubstantial friendships, which she recognizes. The same message comes across when she comments that Anna is her best friend, and then admits they have known each other for only two months. The narrator’s withdrawal from her friends points to her role as a social outcast. An intensely private and introspective woman, this passage emphasizes the gap between the narrator’s thoughts and her outward appearance to the other characters.

2. I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they’re my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I’ll start inventing them . . . .

The narrator makes this statement in Chapter 8, when she holes herself up in an outhouse, waiting for David and Joe to explain to Evans that they want to stay on the island. While hiding in the outhouse, the narrator remembers facets of her childhood and contrasts the time she spent on the island with the time she spent in the city. She decides she has always felt safer in the wilderness than in the city. She then retracts that notion once she remembers all of the times she felt scared on the island. The narrator begins to worry here that her memories are unwittingly changing, and this quotation points out the frightening notion that memories are subjective. She panics at this realization, worrying that if she changes her memories she will have no way of checking herself. She worries she will act irrationally by relying on information that is not accurate.
Though here the narrator worries about others’ opinions affecting her memory, it is actually the narrator’s own subconscious that corrupts her memory. This passage foreshadows the narrator’s later exposure of a repressed memory. She recants the memory of her wedding, replacing it with the memory of having an affair with her art professor and aborting their baby. Interestingly, the false memory contains multiple true facts lifted from other sources. For example, she remembers a fountain from the company town near the village, but inserts the fountain into the memory of her wedding. She remembers what her lover said to her after the abortion, but instead remembers him saying it after her wedding. She even goes on to create a new false memory just as she exposes the repressed one. She remembers her brother keeping frogs in jars and inserts that memory into her abortion, falsely claiming that the doctors gave her the fetus in a jar. The narrator’s memories change themselves to fit with her desires and emotions, effectively erasing her abortion. Atwood’s audience becomes subject to the same difficulty as the narrator, unwittingly relying on false information.

3. It wasn’t the city that was wrong, the inquisitors in the schoolyard, we weren’t better than they were; we just had different victims. To become like a little child again, a barbarian, a vandal: it was in us too, it was innate. A thing closed in my head, hand, synapse, cutting off my escape . . .

The narrator compares the cruelty she exhibited toward animals on the island with the cruelty that school children inflicted upon her in the city. Her rumination on cruelty occurs after she sees the hanged heron at the portage. The narrator recalls throwing leeches into fires and also claims responsibility for killing the animals that her brother had kept in jars in his laboratory. She also recounts how she killed a doll, remembering how she pretended to be a swarm of bees and had ripped up the doll and thrown it into the lake. She calls the instance a killing because, as a child, the doll had been alive to her. By weighing her own cruelty against that of the schoolchildren who used to torment her, the narrator concludes that all children have an innate capacity for violence. For a while, she had entertained the hope that the island would be a haven for her. This passage disavows the narrator of that notion, because violence seems to follow humans regardless of environment.

4. Joe is not there. He appears then at the top of the sand cliff, running, halting. He yells my name, furiously: if he had a rock he would throw it.
The canoe glides, carrying the two of us, around past the leaning trees. . . . The direction is clear, I see I’ve been planning this, for how long I can’t tell.

The narrator’s description of Joe casts him as a caveman. The detail of throwing a rock paints him as a sort of frustrated and helpless primeval man. The narrator’s description contains a seed of truth, in that Joe’s simplicity repeatedly prevents him from grasping the narrator’s complex and sophisticated private world. Joe’s insistence on marriage and his one-sided conception of love fail to match the intricacies of the narrator’s conceptions of love and relationships. This passage contains specific words that reflect the narrator’s deepest concerns. She mentions that the canoe carries two people, which is a reference to her pregnancy. After remembering a past abortion, the narrator maintains constant awareness of her current pregnancy. Her new baby becomes a means for salvation from her guilt, and she thinks of the child as a potential solution to the social ailments she sees all around her. Her mention of the sand cliff points to her awareness that the island is eroding. The narrator remains concerned about the impermanence of the cabin, perhaps because she fears that the erosion of the island will erase her childhood. However, the narrator eventually embraces the erosion of the cabin because it signifies the triumph of nature over human development.

5. This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I 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 . . . withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death.

The narrator makes this remark in Chapter 27, after coming out of her madness. The phrase punctuates her attempt to completely withdraw from society and live like a natural animal, and it contains her cathartic conclusion to rejoin society. When she refers to being a victim, she refers to mental stumbling blocks that had once made her believe she was being oppressed by forces beyond her control, including religion, men, and marital conventions. Here, the narrator decides not to be a victim. The narrator’s mention of powerlessness echoes her earlier search for “the power” during her madness. The narrator had searched for “the power” in her dead parents, the Indian gods, and in nature. Here, her resolution not to feel powerless marks the moment when she finally seeks refuge from her social isolation by internal (rather than external) means.
In this passage, the narrator comes to the conclusion that she possesses agency, and that her actions have consequences. Previously, emotional numbness had prevented her from believing that anything she did could affect others. She believed that her friends looked at her as a mirror of themselves, and that therefore she played no part in their lives. This opinion comes about when she asserts that Joe wants to marry an idea rather than a person. Here, the narrator concedes that because she will become an active member of society, her actions will have consequences. She relinquishes her emotional numbness by acknowledging that in possessing emotions, she will affect others’ emotions.

4.7. MARGARET ATWOOD: A FOOTNOTE ON SURFACING

Surfacing contains considerable technical advances over Margaret Atwood's earlier fiction. At the same time, however, Atwood remains true to the basic theme which informs all her prose and poetry - the conflict between form and experience - on which she plays many variations. In this conflict, psychic survival depends on upon escaping the distortions and constrictions imposed by the accepted ordering of North American society, individual consciousness, inherited language, and ultimately, civilization itself. Where Surfacing does depart significantly from Atwood's previous writing is its location in Quebec. With Atwood, geography is never a matter of accident; in Surfacing, not only is French Canada an essential element in the heroine's search for her past and for herself, but by using Quebec in this way, Atwood places herself within a small but steady stream of English-Canadian writing.

From the publication of Julia Catherine Beckwith Hart's Saint Ursula's Convent in 1824, through to the present day, Quebec has maintained a peculiar hold upon the imagination of English-Canadian writers who may not themselves be natives or residents of Quebec or Montreal. For these authors, Quebec is both "us" and "not us." When they write about French Canada they implicitly or explicitly use Quebec to mirror themselves, their conflicts, their ideals, and frequently their sense of dispossession. The nineteenth-century version of this Pattern appears most distinctly in the work of historical novelists like William Kirby and Gilbert Parker, who were conditioned by the writing and influence of Sir Walter Scott to define both history and fiction in terms which English Canada could not adequately fulfill. When these writers turned to Quebec they found ample romance, colour and legend to compensate for English Canada's rather staid cultural heritage (hence Quebec as "us"), while at the
same time Quebec was distant and distinct enough for its tales of corruption, infamy and gothic fantasy not to disturb the respectability of Protestant Ontario (hence, thankfully, "not us"). At the end of the century, Duncan Campbell Scott modified and modernized the convention when he used Quebec in his short stories to explore the underside of what Robertson Davies has defined as Canada's "Scotch banker"1 veneer. In his version of French Canada, Scott creates a mirror for the vagaries of English Canada's suppressed "rather extraordinary, mystical spirit,"2 not unlike the way Leonard Cohen returns to the time of the Jesuit missionaries in Beautiful Losers and Clark Blaise uses various personas to probe Montreal for the core of Canadian identity in A North American Education. Hence when the nameless narrator of Surfacing christens Quebec "my home ground, foreign territory" she in fact defines a vision of French Canada which for more than one and a half centuries has formed a subliminal tradition in English-Canadian literature.

In the mental geography of the heroine of Surfacing Quebec is simultaneously home and not home: home because it is where her parents have painstakingly built the house on the wilderness island which is the locus of her only true sense of self, but not home because the province really belongs to a mysterious, alien people. From the time of her childhood, the narrator suspects that Quebec enjoys a kind of cultural authenticity that has been forfeited by English, "American" Canada. Unimpressed by her father's eighteenth-century scientific rationalism, she was instead fascinated by the village's "tiny hillside church ... our parents wouldn't let us sneak up and peer through the windows, which made it illicit and attractive." As a child, she attributed special powers to the unknowable, so that her memory of the one-handed storekeeper who sold forbidden candies is fused with other mysteries of Quebec in a vague but powerful sense of religious magic:

I can see . . . the potent candies, inaccessible in their glass reliquary, and the arm, miraculous in an unspecified way like the toes of saints or the cut-off pieces of early martyrs, the eyes on the plate, the severed breasts, the heart with letters on it.

As an adult, she retains much of her childhood vision of French Canada. When she returns to Quebec at the beginning of the novel, thoroughly alienated from her own gods, she is still intrigued by the sight of "a roadside crucifix with a wooden Christ, ribs sticking out, the alien god, mysterious to me as ever."
In Surfacing Quebec's uniqueness means that, unlike the rest of North America, its mythic identity has some counterpart in the real world. The narrator herself is so accustomed to encountering cultural lies that she is actually annoyed with Madame and Paul for "looking so much like carvings, the habitant kind they sell in tourist handicraft shops; but of course it's the other way around, it's the carvings that look like them." Because they belong to the narrator's childhood experience of French Canada, Madame and Paul acquire special significance as the last living contacts with old Quebec and with the heroine's dead parents. With their children's houses clustered around theirs, they represent a sense of family and community long since lost by metropolitan English Canadians like David, Anna and Joe. Hence it is most appropriate that after making her peace with her ancestors the narrator finally leaves her island not in the powerful speedboat belonging to Evans the American, but in Paul's old homemade boat, "thick and slow and painted white."

The narrator's refusal to accept as genuine the trite folk tales she has been commissioned to illustrate reveals the sort of cultural authenticity she wants Quebec to have. For her, English Canada has no genuine folklore; its children's literature consists of "Humanoid bears and talking pigs, Protestant choo-choo trains who make the grade and become successful," which she can illustrate quite fittingly as "fake Walt Disney, Victorian etchings in sepia, Bavarian cookies, ersatz Eskimo." But she wants Quebec's traditions to be recognizably unique and preferably gothic:

This isn't a country of princesses, The Fountain of Youth and The Castle of the Seven Splendours don't belong here. They must have told stories about something as they sat around the kitchen range at night: bewitched dogs and malevolent trees perhaps, and the magic powers of rival political candidates, whose effigies in straw they burned during elections, When she speculates that "There should be a loup-garou story in Quebec Folk Tales," the narrator is in fact asking French Canada to fit the conventions used by William Kirby, Susan Frances Harrison and Duncan Campbell Scott. The heroine of Surfacing ultimately admits that she has constructed her version of Francophone culture entirely from the outside: "the truth is that I don't know what the villagers thought or talked about, I was so shut off from them"

The narrator's severance from the community is emphasized most dramatically by her inability to speak its language. In Quebec, the token school French learned by English Canadians serves only to widen the gap between the two cultures;
"memorized passages of Racine and Baudelaire" fail to equip the Anglophone even to buy hamburger without embarrassment. But it is this very confrontation with the foreign language of her home territory that initiates the heroine's suspicion of verbal language which is so integral to her later plunge through the layers of pre-verbal, irrational experience. The novel's assault on the deceiving conventions of accepted language begins with the communication problems between the narrator's parents and Madame and Paul. For the heroine's mother and Madame, the only available medium is meagre verbal form - "Il fait beau" and "'ow are you" - words whose literal meanings are overshadowed by their significance as ritual greetings, and which therefore are as devoid of real content as the word "love" which Joe keeps trying to impose on the narrator. But the narrator's father and Paul begin to find a way beyond the falsities of public language when they evolve the private language of their exchange of vegetables. In Surfacing, the barriers and deceptions implicit in inherited linguistic structures, and in English Canada's lack of a language distinct from that of the Americans, are underscored by the very concrete communication difficulties between Anglophones and Francophones which form a background to the narrator's attempts to distinguish actual meaning from facile verbal form.

The ways in which Quebec is "not home" for the heroine of Surfacing emphasize the extent of her alienation from her past, her present life and her emotions, but the fact that Quebec is still very much her home means that in Lower Canada she can recover her buried life. Because Quebec is where both the narrator and her parents lived the most valuable parts of their lives, it is also where the narrator can confront and come to terms with all her ghosts. During her days of isolation she turns her back on rational civilization in order to probe the levels of her own psyche. She penetrates the surfaces of her personal life to realize truths about her parents and her fabrications regarding her affair and her abortion; beyond her personal past she encounters the ghosts of the land and its original inhabitants who left the rock paintings; beyond humanity she reaches towards her most primitive evolutionary ancestors - frogs, fish and trees - until she finally arrives at the beginning of life itself, the goldfish foetus of her just-conceived child.

Just as the Quebec wilderness is the place where the narrator strips away her own false surfaces, it is also the place where she learns to see through the facades of her friends and the culture they represent. Hence Anna is literally unmasked when she
has to go without her make-up; under close scrutiny her apparently perfect marriage turns out to be a union of hate; the more David rants against the Americans, the more he speaks their language and becomes one of them.

As the heroine of Surfacing discovers, not even the protection of language, religion and tradition can save Quebec from the Americans. Because Quebec used to be so distinct, the marks of Americanization are here much more visible than in English Canada. Wherever she looks, the narrator finds signs that her childhood version of Quebec is being violated by Americans and Canadians who have assimilated the "American" values of material progress and self-centred ecological destruction. - The road to the village has been straightened and shortened; the gas station is decorated with stuffed moose, one waving an American flag; the village economy depends on catering to American holiday fishermen, "businessmen in plaid shirts still creased from the cellophane packages." At first the narrator assumes, like David, that in the wilderness the Americans are easy to identify. They are the ones who scare away the fish with their souped-up speedboats, who violate the game laws by catching far more than they can eat, and who want all their camping equipment to be automatic and collapsible. But in northern Quebec, Americanism reveals itself to be not a nationality, but a state of mind. When the narrator's party and the Ontario fishermen mistake each other for Americans, the narrator suddenly realizes that in North America it is impossible to be non-American: "If you look like them and talk like them and think like them you are them ... you speak their language, a language is everything you do."

4.8. Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing as a Critique of the Enlightenment Reason

The Enlightenment, especially its American version, with reason as its instrument and its promise of progress and democracy has been the dominant paradigm in western thought since the eighteenth century despite the many critiques leveled at it, especially in the twentieth century. The critics, for instance, have talked of “crisis of reason” (Plumwood, 2005, p.3), for the aftermath of the approach to reason as a mere instrument has been disastrous. One of the main disasters is the ecological one; in fact, what the ‘rationalists’ have done is manipulate nature and reduce it to a blank canvas for their ‘enlightened’ reason. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer, there is no difference between what they promise as rational science and progress and magic myth (qtd in Wilson, 2007, p.16). In addition, as Adorno and
Horkheimer also argue, “enlightenment involves the thoroughgoing expulsion of any inherent meaning from natural phenomena” (Wilson, 2007, p.16).

Hence, the ecological feminists or ecofeminist critics have recently tried to make connections between nature and the woman. In fact, the disaster mentioned above affects both women and nature. In Ariel Salleh’s words, “the basic premise in ecofeminism is acknowledgement of the parallel in men’s thinking between their ‘right’ to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women on the other” (qtd in Peter Hay, 2002, p.75).

Also in a simple definition of the ecofeminism by Karen J. Warren, this connection is acknowledged more explicitly. She says that ecofeminism addresses the relationship between the inferiority of nature to culture and the inferiority of women to men.

Karen J. Warren in ecological feminist philosophies (1996, p.iv-xxvi) attempts to uncover the connections between feminism and the environment in eight domains: historical, conceptual, empirical, epistemological, symbolic, ethical, theoretical and political. There is many a dualism here crucial to this relationship some of which are: mind/body, reason/emotion, rationality/irrationality, culture/nature and, most importantly, man/woman. Hence, one can see here the connection between the critique of the enlightenment and ecofeminism, for the patriarchal society is the official culture which pursues the notions of reason, rationality, power and knowledge associating nature with irrationality and emotion, an object to be known and dominated. On this, Plumwood remarks:

Nature as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotion, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the nonhuman world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and madness. (2003, p.19)

Margaret Atwood’s groundbreaking second novel Surfacing (1972), deals with the exploitation and destruction of the wilderness of Canada by those who claim to be rational and enlightened people. The novel tells us the story of a narrator who returns to her hometown after several years to search for her missing father. She is at first shocked to see so many changes in the region and the wild nature most of which caused by Americans. The toll economic development and material gain has taken on nature, by using tools supposed to be the means of progress, is horrendous to the
sensitive narrator. To her “the familiar smell of road dust fuming behind and mixes with the gas—and upholstery smell of car” (Atwood, 1972, p.10) is the gift of Americans to Canadian people. J. Brooks Bouson (1993) remarks that Surfacing “rejects the masculinist culture—which is depicted as both rationalistic and dangerously aggressive—and idealizes a nature-identified femininity.” (39) This ‘rationalistic’ and ‘aggressive’ mentality, we should bear in mind, is the legacy of the Enlightenment. The modern heirs of this legacy throughout the novel are called Americans or Americanized Canadians.

Surfacing movingly dramatizes the ecofeminist idea of masculine culture vs. feminine nature. Central to ecofeminism is the idea that “nature is fragile and threatened” (Fiona Tolan, 2007, p.43). This is obvious right from the beginning of the novel where there is an image of disease: “the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south” (Atwood, 1972, p.1). The south, of course, is America. As the novel goes on we become more conscious of the extent of the widespread damages to nature: “rocks blasted, trees bulldozed over, roots in the air” (Atwood, 1972, p.10). Although at first the protagonist is somehow strange to the place, she gradually feels affinity with nature and tries to defend it against the things that are happening to it by the ‘Americans’. Here there exists a parallel to the narrator’s own condition, for, as Fiona Tolan argues, “in accordance with ecofeminism, the narrator identifies herself as a woman with nature, and therefore perceives herself as threatened and victims. In chapter 14 after they catch a fish, David wants her to kill the fish but she says: “the fish is whole, I couldn’t any more, I had no right to...these were no longer the right reasons ” (Atwood, 1972, p.12, emphasis added). The usual ‘reasons’ for treating nature aggressively do not sound ‘right’ to her anymore. Hence she perceives her body, fragmented through her past abortion, as identifiable with that of the fish whose wholeness of body she cannot desecrate by killing. Her sense of identity with nature and its creatures goes to the extent that towards the end of the Hossein Pirnajmuddin; Omid Amani. Studies in Literature and Language, 3(2), 6-10 novel she considers herself not as human: “they mistake me for human being...if they guess my true form, identity, they will shoot me...and hang me up by the feet from the tree” (Atwood, 1972, p.190); in fact, she imagines herself being treated as other animals, especially the mutilated hanged heron.
A related binary is that of male (associated with reason, civilization, culture) vs. female (associated with unreason/insanity, wilderness, nurture). The contrast between the female protagonist’s parents is a sharp one indeed. A very interesting precursor for the narrator to think of herself as nature is her mother, though she is initially under the influence of culture and civilization, ‘the law of the father’. She tells us about her mother: “on some days she would simply vanish, walk off by herself into the forest” (Atwood, 1972, p.49) or, elsewhere, “standing beside the tray for the birds, her [mother’s] hand stretched out; the jays were there too, she’s training them, one is on her shoulder, peering at her with clever thumbtack eyes, another is landing on her wrist, wings caught as a blur.” (ibid, 108) What Carolyn Merchant describes as “the ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother” (qtd. In Tolan, 2007, p.42-43), is well exemplified in the narrator’s mother.

The narrator thinks of her mother and herself as victims of a culture based on cold ratiocination, “She [the mother] hated hospitals and doctors; she must have been afraid they would experiment on her, keep her alive as long as they could with tubes and needles even though it was what they call terminal, in the head it always is; and in fact that’s what they did” (Atwood, 1972, p.17). She has a lucid vision of this sense of victimhood when she sees the dead heron hanged upside down, she says: “why had they strung it up like a lynch victim…to prove they could do it, they had the power to kill” (Atwood, 1972, p.118). This idea of ‘power’ over nature, central to the Enlightenment, gained through reason-generated tools has become the ‘power to kill’ unreasonably, the power to colonize nature.

This ‘power’ is epitomized in the narrator’s father who is the very opposite of her mother. He plays the role of a rational man and he is what the narrator calls an “eighteenth century rationalist” (Atwood, 1972, p.34). Pragmatism is his religion, “he believed that with the proper guide books you could do everything yourself” (ibid.). He is in fact a “Robinson Crusoe figure.” Like many of the Enlightenment thinkers, he is an empirical-minded scientist whose attitude towards nature is that of colonialist. His job, which remains a mystery, is to help the government to exploit nature, as the protagonist tells us, “our father had gone on a long trip as he often did to investigate trees for the paper company or the government” (Atwood, 1972, p.78). Even if his real job is to spy for the Americans, that is, to help them have power over Canada,
keep it as a sort of colony, again it is in line with the masculinity, exploitative, colonialist attitude.

The narrator’s absent brother was also under the influence of his father, as a child he had built for himself a laboratory in which he used to try to experiment with insects and animals; he “kept them in jars and tins on a board shelf back in the forest,…one of snakes was dead and several of frogs, their skin dry and their yellow stomach puffed up, and the crayfish was floating in the clouded water with its legs uppermost like a spider’s” (Atwood, 1972, p.132). There is an attempt to pass this ‘culture’ from the father on to the son.

The father’s cold ways, his mechanical life, turns his wife and children to emotionally desiccated people; this is most evident in his wife who is extremely reserved about her feelings. When the narrator finds her diary, she realizes that:

All she put in it was a record of the weather and the work done on that day: no reflections, no emotions. She would refer to it when she wanted to compare the years, decide whether the the spring had been late or early, whether it had been a wet summer (Atwood, 1972, p.18, emphasis added).

There is a lot of pathos in that she finds this diary “on the bedside table with the flowers and chrysanthemums”

For it is implied that there is no beauty in the life of a genuine lover of the beauty of nature because of the coldly rational, mechanical lifestyle imposed by her husband on her.

Another major female character in the novel is Anna. She is the ideal type for the masculinist ideology. As Eleonora Rao argues, “Anna in Surfacing adopts “masculine” points of view and interests. She remains, however, in the perception of her husband, excluded from the Male world of the intellect, and is defined in relation to her body, a “dumb” talking doll” (1993, p.138). For Atwood, Anna is “locked in, she isn’t allowed to eat or shit or cry or give birth” (Atwood, 1972, p.169); she is just a doll, a robot of her husband, David. Despite all the abuses by her husband, Anna still tries to be a faithful companion to him. Oddly enough, she is happy to leave nature for a culture in which she is a victim: “I’ll be glad to hit the city” (ibid., 168). She has to use makeup all the time, that is, to look artificial rather than natural, as a whim of her husband. Remembering her mother’s “dismayed” (ibid, 41) look at her daughter’s attempt to put on makeup, the narrator tells Anna, “you don’t need it
here...there is no one to look at you” (ibid., 41) but Anna seems to have internalized the ‘male gaze.’

As mentioned before, the idea of ‘power’ is central in the novel. The power/knowledge nexus over/about nature/woman is a staple topic in any ecofeminist analysis. As Karen J. Warren notes, there is an epistemological connection between these concepts and ecofeminist critics challenge “mainstream views of reason, rationality, knowledge and the nature of the knower” (1996, p.xiv). Surfacing also, as J. Brooks Bouson (1993, p.52), argues “challenges the privileging of masculinity as the site of power and knowledge.” This knowledge which empowers its owners to ‘rape’ nature is “evil”, as the narrator puts it: “if I’d turned out like the others with power I would have been evil” (Atwood, 1972, p.33). The power/knowledge nexus and its ravages are embodied in the novel in the imperialistic attitude of America towards Canada, which by and large symbolizes ‘nature’. “For us”, says the narrator, “when we were small the origin was Hitler, he was the great evil...But Hitler was gone and the thing remained ...It was like cutting up a tapeworm, the pieces grew;” she asks, “are the American worse than Hitler” (ibid., 130) . The Americans, the narrator says, “spread themselves like a virus” (ibid., 130), they also “get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can’t tell the difference” (ibid.). The virus of ‘empowering’ reason has infected humanity.

Ironically, those who are not infected, the novel has it, are considered insane (insanity as a major theme in the novel). As Erinç Özdemir points out, “surfacing embodies the view of female madness as an expression of powerlessness and revolt against patriarchal society” (2003, p.66). Hence, those surrounding the narrator think of her as a mad woman, due to her escape from their civilization; as the narrator says: “they would never believe it’s only a natural woman, state of nature” (Atwood, 1972, p.196, emphasis added). Indeed the contrast is between their “state of mind” and her “state of nature.” This is her revolt against the ‘man’-made civilization, against the masculine/masculinist culture that marks her as ‘insane’:

I have become hungry. The food in the cabin is forbidden, I’m not allowed to Go back into that cage, wooden rectangle. Also tin cans and jars are forbidden they are glass and metal.... I eat the green peas out of their shell and the raw yellow beans,
I scrape the carrots from the earth with my finger, I will wash them in the lake first (Atwood, 1972, p.183).

She tries to avoid whatever is made in the course of civilization and just stick to nature, like an animal (she carries a blanket to protect herself from the cold weather “until the fur grows” (ibid., 182), or towards the end of the novel “crawls” like a child/animal back into the bosom of the mother nature).

The narrator is labeled ‘mad’ by the patriarchal order, the order of law and reason, because she escapes from civilization. Hence language (or discourse in Michel Foucault and other modern theorists’ terms) becomes a means of exercising power. Enlightenment view of language was that of a transparent tool or means of rational communication. The ‘language of civilization’-of politics, commerce and social exchange - is that of power.

In Lacanian terms, the narrator escapes from the Symbolic order - the law of the father, the norms of culture, the rule of language – and returns to the Imaginary order, the infant’s experiences of wholeness, of unity with the body of the mother. She flees the city and civilization and returns ‘home’ in more than one sense. On returning she experiences a sort of reverse ‘mirror stage’; this occurs after diving into the lake and ‘surfacing’. The lake works as the mirror for her and she finds again the Mother Nature there; the homecoming becomes a going back to the Imaginary order and forgetting the language that “wasn’t mine” (Atwood, 1972, p.107).

As with postmodern literature and art in general and ecofeminism in particular, the theme of representation, in language and art, is a seminal one in Atwood’s novel.

Most of the figures in the novel (the narrator, David, Joe) are artists or have artistic aspirations and pretensions. The novel could be read as, in a sense, a critique of masculinist art or art generally as a component of masculinist culture. Consider, for instance, the image of camera in the novel which is used mainly as a means of entrapment, as ‘man’s’ tool to represent nature and woman. David and his crew try to capture “samples” of Canadian nature and life in a film shot for an educational channel. Ironically their supposedly documentary film, ‘realistic’ representation, is a distortion, is a ‘sample’ of commercialized. Here is how the damage done to nature, like the dead heron, turns into a ‘documentary’ which as commodified art fails to capture the reality of the tragic scene. David says:
“We need that; we can put it next to the fish guts”

“Shit,” Joe said “it really stinks.”

“That won’t show in the movie,” David said, “you can stand it for five minutes, it looks so great, you have to admit it” (Atwood, 1972, p.117)

This is also clear in the scene in which they, David and Joe, force Anna to take off her clothes so her naked body could be shot for the movie; they force her to be represented the way they want it. They ask her to go and stand beside the dead heron: “you will go in beside the dead bird, it’s your chance for stardom, you’ve always wanted fame. You’ll get to be on Educational TV”

Both woman and nature become objects of representation for leisure ‘education’ (a central concept of the enlightenment). They want to do the same to the narrator but, as Alice Ridout points out, she “refuses to be represented by David and Joe in the same way as they represented Anna” (2011, p.79). Interestingly, the narrator in an act of defiance destroys the film by throwing it into the lake (a multivalent symbol in the novel). Masculinist representation is resisted.

As mentioned, the narrator is also an artist: “I am what they call a commercial artist, or, when the job is more pretentious, an illustrator. I do posters, covers, a little advertising and magazine work” (Atwood, 1972, p.9). Doubting the artistic abilities of women, her husband, a mouthpiece for the masculinist culture, tells her: “I should study something I’d be able to use because there have never been any important woman artist” (ibid.). As for her Canadian employer, “what they like best is something they hope will interest the English and American publisher too” (Atwood, 1972, p.50). The quoted passages bespeak of the commodification of art in the modern/postmodern age, the position of women as artists and the status of Canadian art at the time as subsidiary to the English/ American mainstream.

Also related to the concept of art is the figuring of ‘primitive’ art in the novel, that of Indians inhabiting Canada before ‘enlightened’ European colonized it. There are examples like rock paintings or cave paintings which the narrator’s father ‘discovers’ and is fascinated with. The missing father in his correspondences with a university professor had tried to make sense of, to ‘rationalize’ the drawings. Puzzled with the color red in the drawings they try to rationalize. The professor in a letter to narrator’s father remarks, “the predominance is red, with minor occurrences of white and yellow, this may be due either to the fact that red among Indians is a sacred color
or to the relative availability of iron oxides” (Atwood, 1972, p.103). The drawings also ‘document’ the presence of the natives centuries before the Europeans. As such, it could be said that there is attempted a ‘rewriting’ of the history of Canada.

In Michel Foucault’s formulation “power means relations, a more -or-less organized, hierarchal, co-ordinated cluster of relations” (qtd. in Somacarrera, 2006, p.44). Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing is about such relations which have their roots in the Enlightenment view of ‘reason.’ It celebrates, among other things, the attempt to ‘surface’ from the ‘lake’ of such relations of power which have ‘submerged’ the feminine and the natural.

4.10. Margaret Atwood, Surfacing : searching for roots

Worldwide literature has gained a new pillar with the popularization of Margaret Atwood as an agent of Canadian creativity. Her insightful perspectives on cultural, psychological and social issues, to which one can add her complex personal experience laid the foundation of her imaginary microcosms. During the period when postmodernism began to develop, she started with The Edible Woman (1969), enriching literature with new narrative perspectives, in a similar manner with John Fowles who, in the same year, published his well-known The French Lieutenant’s Woman that brought new postmodern elements to the limelight. Then, she carried on with her masterpiece Surfacing , followed by Lady Oracle , The Handmaid’s Tale , Cat’s Eye , The Blind Assassin , Alias Grace , etc.

Notwithstanding the present success of Canadian literature, in the past, it was not much taken into consideration because of the lack of advertisement and of motivated writers who would plead its cause before the entire world. Atwood made a deliberate attempt attuning her native literature into a precious gem owned globally by first bringing it to the attention of the Canadian public. She fulfilled her task through the writing of Survival , in which “she excavated an important part of the culture”, as Hilde Steals emphasizes it. Thus, Atwood put in very much effort in order to point out the paramount role of the Canadian literary bequest. She succeeded admirably due to her gift for detailed (post) modern stories, her original protagonists, although sometimes inspired from real life, and her taste in developing rich plots. The space in which the action of her novels unfolds ranges from the bush to the fashionable urban environment, while the time sequence is constantly fragmented leaving place for unchronological jumbled pieces and also causing the fragmentation of the space as
such. Playing with time and space, Atwood steers her novels towards the postmodern sea from which the only missing part seems to be the jocular mood that is replaced by a serious modern stream of consciousness In Surfacing (1972), the reader is directed to a return path from city to bush, on which the main nameless female character searches for her roots, i.e. she looks for her identity. She goes back to the place of her childhood, a cabin in the middle of the woods (the Bottle Villa), accompanied by her lover Joe and the couple Anna-David. In complete isolation, away from the noise of the city, after a while, having succeeded in leaving her friends behind, surrounded only by nature and wilderness, she manages to recover her balance and to discover the truth about the death of her father. The explanation of the title can be found in the final act that the character decides to make – that of diving into the lake of the forest. There, under the surface of the water, she undergoes a process of transformation, having visions that connect her with her ancestors and with her father that passed away. She undergoes the rebirth of herself, as she rediscover her piece of mind through this shamanistic experience (Staels 61). Consequently, the title Surfacing, refers to her surfacing in the water of the lake and to her understanding of her own real self.

The protagonist prepares the descent into the subterranean region by following a shamanistic ritual that takes several days. She deliberately goes in search of shamanistic powers and she deliberately invokes the guardian spirits of the earth. In order to enter into contact with the spirits, she first withdraws into solitude. She prepares her descent into the underground through the mediation of mushrooms that cause a state of trance. The imagery with which the narrator describes the mushrooms that cause her intoxicated mental state bear resemblance to the symptom signifiers that used to regularly erupt from her unconscious. The white, “fish-colour” mushrooms, with “chalk gills” and an “invisible part, threadlike underground network” call back to mind the deadened life force of the protagonist. Yet the mushrooms are associated both with death and life (Staels 61).

Janice Fiamengo, in her article ‘Postcolonial Guilt in Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing ’notes that “the Canadian bush is a pristine space, the green world of escape and self-revelation”. Atwood mirrors this in opposition with the urban space left behind which has an overwhelming influence on the character, making her unable to hear her thoughts and to gain the balance she sought. Once in the middle of nature, the
fleeing character is disturbed by an incident that she witnesses together with her friends – some people whom she believed to be American, kill a heron for pure pleasure. She cannot disguise her rejection of such behavioral paradigms and is distressed to discover that her friends (especially David) enjoy having fun in the same manner, thus condoning their act. This represents a decisive moment in the process of her recovery as she realizes that she too has to change. She now becomes aware of the fact that she cannot become her old self again as long as her entourage is formed by such people as David and as long as she does not dare chastise such tourists in public.

That was their armor, bland ignorance, heads empty as weather balloons: with that they could defend themselves against anything. Straight power, they mainlined it; I imagined the surge of electricity, nerve juice, as they hit it, brought it down, flapping like a crippled plane. The innocents get slaughtered because they exist, I thought, there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or piety; for them the only things worthy of life were human, their own kind of human, framed in the proper clothes and gimmicks, laminated. It would have been different in those countries where an animal is the soul of an ancestor or the child of a god, at least they would have felt guilt (Atwood 121-122) believes are represented by her ancestors who lived peacefully in the wild Canadian bush in communion with nature. Her cultural identity appears to have been built starting with the layer of her native Canadian Indians, to which the English layer was added, the French one realized by the strong influence of her family friends, as a child, and the American one that has been acquired while living in the city. Troubled by the many unfortunate situations with which she had to cope – a broken marriage, an abortion, a difficult relationship, unfit friends, she suffers all the more for not really knowing who she really is and what she wishes to do. The overwhelming influence of her father disturbs her even more as she cannot connect her spiritual and physical part. The main character struggles to find a natural solution for this lack of balance and in order to do this she understand that she has to face her past. She needs to avoid thinking in the terms set by her father, an extreme rationalist who excluded the existence of an unknown and unpredictable inner force of the soul and who caused her to feel split into two: body and mind(Staels 38).According to Descartes (63), man, by nature, is a methodical rational being (“Cogitoergo sum” – “I think therefore I am”) who cannot trust his or her corporeal senses, a theory which has been proved to be flouting the laws of reason.
Furthermore, he supports the idea that one’s soul is, by nature, independent from one’s body – which the protagonist finds as a wrong view gullibly borrowed from her father. Her Descartean split is solved by finding a stability link between the two parts. The sensitive, feeling and irrational part gains as much importance as the rational, scientific, logical one, after the transformation that the woman undergoes in the lake of the forest. Thus, the problematic Descartean division is overcome and Spinoza’s monism takes its place to give rise to a unitary whole.

In a remark referring to Proposition XIII, Part II of his book “Ethics and “De Intellectus Emendation”, Spinoza emphasized the wholeness formed by the human mind and body. Although an evolutionary theory as opposed to Descartes’, it has its flaws such as Proposition XIX according to which “the human mind has no knowledge of the human body, nor does it know it to exist save through ideas of modifications by which the body is affected” (Spinoza 56), which is of course false. As with Descartes, Spinoza’s theory has its imperfections, such as Proposition II of Part III: “The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor the mind the body to remain in motion, or at rest, or in any other state (if there be any other)” (Spinoza 64). At the time it was hard to realize that body and mind can determine each other to act according to each one’s specific function(s). However, today there is widespread knowledge of their close relationship and of their mutual influence through nerves or senses. Later, the empiricists (Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and also Mill, Russell, Ayer) finally acknowledged the importance of sense experience (Cottingham 14), thus making a breakthrough in the philosophy of corporeality. Even though each of them has managed to improve his theory about mind/ body matters as opposed to their predecessors, not one of them managed to come to the idea that relying on both mind and matter is the solution in order to achieve an overall psychological balance of the human being. The protagonist of Surfacing aims at achieving this balance. We may trace her steps as she gradually gives up her dichotomical standpoint that separates her from the rest of the world. In Madan Sarup’s vision (9), people who favour dichotomies tend to believe that “the outside is negativity” and “the inside is positivity”, thus tend to think using rigid delimitations which make them unable to grasp the in between’s, which is exactly the psychological and geographical territory that the character finds herself in.
Dichotomies are exercises in power and at the same time their disguise. They split the human world into a group for whom the ideal order is to be erected, and another which is for the unfitting, the uncontrollable, the incongruous and the ambivalent (Sarup 9).

Consequently, she uses them in order to feel secure, to cling to some sort of splitting/ordering mechanism that she can apply and can give her a false sense of stability in the rush of the modern world. She aspires to the ideal, flawless and peaceful society, a sort of a paradise where she can feel safe and happy at the same time and put her conscience at rest. The problems that the female character has are reflected by the narrator. This double status of the narrative identity is also an important aspect of the manner in which the identity of the character forms. The psychological-linguistic difficulties encountered by the protagonist become secularized by the linguistic difficulties that the narrator starts having once the process of identification with nature has begun.

Slowly I retrace the trail. Something has happened to my eyes, my feet are released, they alternate, several inches from the ground. I’m ice-clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh, the ribs are shadows, the muscles jelly, the trees are like this too, they shimmer, their cores glow through the wood and bark. The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen; the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water, even the rocks. In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a longer moment. The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning break out again into the bright sun and crumple, head against the ground am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place (Atwood 175).

In order to be able to identify with nature she feels the need for ritual. This has been explained by Mircea Eliade (21) as surging from the feeling of having fallen, having committed a sin, having made a mistake. The soul that needs this spiritual peace is the one on apart from the initial harmony between itself and creation. The protagonist uses a shamanistic ritual to both find answers for her father’s death and find answers for her own disoriented life. She succeeds in doing both and leaves the water of the lake having symbolically washed her sins and discovered what she wants and why she previously lost her balance.
Rituals in Surfacing are used by the narrator to help her gain willpower, so she is able to push herself hard enough to try to find a way to survive. The narrator’s will to survive drives her on a ritual vision quest. She is aided by the spirits of her father and mother and by ‘magic mushrooms’. The result is that after searching the depths of her soul, she surfaces as a stronger person who has the strength to fight for survival (Culpeper).

The antler fish of the underwater paintings are what his father was taking pictures of and what caused his death – supposedly having knocked his head against one of the rocks. Hence, they connect her to him and also establish a link with her ancestors, the Indians that painted the caves while they were at ground level. Trying to find her roots, she contacts the unseen world of the dead in order to receive the needed reassurance of her true identity. According to Fiamengo (9), “

Surfacing consistently uses ideas associated with aboriginality to make its critique of white culture”. She underlines the fact that the woman flees civilizations she sees it because it would bring her to an early grave – which is what she really does. From a narrative point of view, the references she makes to present and past realities result in a mixture of present, past and past perfect which, around the moment of revelation, lack any logic – the present being related in the past tense, as if the experience had already ended. The style used by Atwood also suggests that the novel was written from a feminist-romantic perspective and the apparently happy ending wished for – the new baby she bears – does not contradict the postmodern open-ended story to which one can attach whichever conclusion one wishes.

4.11. Role of Nature in Self-Exploration in Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing

Colonialism and patriarchy are seen as power structures that exploit. In Canada, colonial exploitation is seen as a kind of exploitation of both Nature and women. Colonial power structures have gone deep into the collective unconsciousness of Canada and have become metaphor for feminine and nature exploitation for women writers in that country. This gives rise to Eco-feminism.

Eco-feminism or ecological feminism is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. Joyce Nelson says, —Eco-feminism bridges the gap
between ecology and feminism: strands of analysis which have existed side by side over past decades without necessarily intertwining. By making explicit the connection between a misogynist society and a society which has exploited ‘mother earth’ to the point of environmental crisis, Eco-feminism has helped to highlight the deep splits in patriarchal paradigm.

Eco-feminist theory links the oppression of women with the oppression of nature. More specifically, —ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections—historical, symbolic, and theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics .(warren, .p.235)

Eco-feminism is dealt in Margaret Atwood’s novel Surfacing (1972). Margaret Atwood is a leading novelist of Canada. She is best known for her feminist novels around the world. Surfacing is one of the best novels of Atwood which projects the story of an invisibly visible character without name in form of narrator of the story. The title of the novel is very significant because it reveals the efforts of an individual’s self exploration which undergoes many phases of physical troubles and mental traumas. All the efforts of an individual in the novel for self exploration clearly come up on the surface in midst of the nature from deep conflict between self and society and gives a new power of re-thinking and insight to the nameless heroine of the novel for further process of life.

The protagonist grows up in a masculine world where it was worse for a girl to ask questions than for a boy. If a boy asked a question the other boys would make derisive sucking noises with their mouths but if a girl asked one the other girls would say —Think you’re so great in the washroom afterwards.

Thus growing up in a culture saturated with male bias, women remain reconciled to their own inferiority. Margaret Atwood draws attention to the fact that—the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it ruled it, and still dominate it today, are men.(Beauvoir, p.557)

In Surfacing the narrator of the story remains nameless throughout the novel. Commenting on the namelessness of the heroine Nancy A. Walker says that the narrator —lacks a clearly defined _self_ that can be named . Being nameless the protagonist says to her friend Anna, —I no longer have a name.
It can be said that by depriving her protagonist of a name, Margaret Atwood has been able to suggest that Surfacing is not a story of a particular woman but of the millions of women all over the world who may identify themselves with her. The protagonist loves her art teacher who uses all his skill to seduce her. He gave a wedding ring and almost succeeds in creating the image of himself as her husband. When she is pregnant, he uses all tricks.

The protagonist discovers that after marriage women’s exploitation, oppression and victimization gets sharpened. According to her marriage is nothing but a surrendering of values and distortion of the identity of a woman. Thus the protagonist’s journey into the interior provides her, —a means for tapping emotions that would otherwise remain inexpressible, and reveals aspects of her personality hitherto hidden. (Stewart, p.156) In an interview Margaret Atwood says, —It seemed to me that getting married would be a kind of death. (Valerie, p.16) According to Margaret Atwood, marriage should follow love. A marriage which is not based on mutual love is meaningless. The narrator says she was fool to enter into the bond of marriage. But in reality she never got married. Her lover was a —middle aged , —second hand and —selfish man. He has refused to marry her because he is married. The narrator feels shattered when he shows the photographs of his wife and children, —they had names, he said I should be mature.

She is betrayed by selfish lover but says, —for him I could have been anyone but for me he was unique, the first, that’s where I learned. I worshipped him...I kept scraps of his handwriting like saints’ relics... (Atwood, p.142) The narrator cannot forget the misery abortion has caused her. She says: —I couldn’t accept it, that mutilation, ruin I’d made .

The unnatural act of her abortion and the continual struggle for her to feel comfortable with words and language illustrate the extent to which society or man oppressed and consumed the surface. Both empowering and dominating nature of her ex lover shows, —The unborn child was my husband’s, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a replica of himself.

Margaret Atwood is emphasizing the fact that men exploit the bodies of women for their needs. They have controlled the process of childbirth which nature has assigned only to women. Men want women to remain powerless victim. She
refuses Joe’s marriage proposal. —The finality; and he’d got the order wrong, he’d never asked whether I loved him, which was supposed to come first. I would have been prepared for that.

Joe does not realize the need for it because men except women to be absolutely passive and also because they think marriage is a woman’s destiny. The relationship between the protagonist and Joe, offers an interesting insight into male-female dichotomy.

The protagonist’s acceptance of the partnership is almost fatalistic. She realizes that for Joe sexual need is primary and he wants to dominate and control her. She perceives a killer and victimizer in him.

We can notice the split between the narrator’s feminine self that is peace and harmony in married life and her feminist self which suggests Anna to walk out of marriage instead of suffering. Her imaginary divorce caused her tremendous pain and suffering. Remembering her parent’s reaction on her divorce she says: —They never forgave me, they didn’t understand and divorce, I don’t think they even understood the marriage, which wasn’t surprising since I didn’t understand it myself. What upset them was the way I did it, so suddenly, and then running off and magazine illustrations, suitable for framing.

Margaret Atwood’s —Surfacing takes woman as an existential condition, the condition of being powerless and manipulatable.(Jaidev, p.54) Since power is centralized in the hands of man, they feel nothing wrong in destroying her dignity or creativity. According to them, a woman has no right to have a baby without a husband. When the pregnancy of the protagonist concluded not in childbirth but in abortion she feels emptied, amputated.

Margaret Atwood displays a superb, penetrating awareness of the traumatic experiences of abortion in the life of sensitive woman. Sushila Singh, an exponent of feminism in India thinks that, —the trauma of abortion has never been dealt with such an extraordinary understanding before in fiction. The protagonist undergoes emotional and artistic death at the hands of her teacher. It is a —planted death in her . As Malashri Lal says, —...the pain of aborting life unhinges the minds to a degree that it creates an alternate _truth_ to the event.

The protagonist suffers from a guilt complex and in the end of the story, she decides to conceive a baby and resolved that, —this time I won’t let them. (Atwood,
The narrator wants to prove that the process of childbirth is women’s power not men’s and a woman can deliver the baby the natural way. She says: —This time I will do it myself.... The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten and I’ll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood retiring to the ground where it belongs; the moon will be full, pulling. In the morning I will be able to see it: it will be covered with shining fur, a God.

After her abortion, the protagonist comes to develop deep sympathy for the flora and fauna of the Quebec Island. She finds that the beauty of Nature is being destroyed by the Americans. The relationship between nature and Americans is relationship of exploitation and the entire landscape has been mutilated, raped: —Further in the trees they didn’t cut before, the flood are marooned, broken and gray white tipped on their sides, their giant contorted roots bleached and skinless; on the sodden trunks are colonies of plants, feeding on disintegration; laurel, sundew the insect eater, its toe nail- sized leaves sticky with red hairs. Out of the leaf nests the flowers rise, pure white, flesh of gnats and midges petals now, metamorphosis.

Within Surfacing, power and domination directly oppress both the feminine world and the natural world. From the human driven need to control the dam to the destruction of older trees. . The protagonist looks with disgust on the disrespect of her companions and others towards the natural world. When she sees a dead heron, obviously killed by a human and on display to reveal the killer’s ego, she is sickened and becomes more sickened when David wants to film it because it looks suitable for a film titles —Random Samples . She opposes to eating animals, saying she had no right to it and even suggests that killing a fish is worse than starting a war because there are always reason for killing a living creatures.

Eco-feminists argue that two very defined, contradictory, and dualistic worlds exist in the patriarchal society the feminine and the masculine; on the one hand, the feminine principle represents Mother Nature, the body, irrationality, emotion and mysticism. On the other hand, the masculine principle represents rationality logic, separation from nature, the head, intellectualism, language and concrete reality. The protagonist tries to re-unite these two dualities: —The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I’m not against the head or the body either: only the neck that creates the illusion that they are separate.... If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm’s or a frog’s without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn’t be
able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die.

The surface struggles with the notion that the head (a masculine element) should be remotely separated from the body (a feminine element). In order for each to prosper to the fullest extent, they must work together. The narrator, in the last few pages, sees the natural world as her equal, refuses to fall into the same patriarchal trap that initially destroyed her, and reclaims her ability to trust. Though she does not return to society, she does so as a changed person. She realizes, —that human beings are not radically separate from nature: that the fulfilment of our humanity is profoundly linked with learning to appreciate the nature within us and without standing there, with,—the trees [surrounding her]...asking and giving nothing, she has embraced the eco-feminist ideal.

Narrator's journey ends off discovering about herself. She discovers about herself and her relation with the world. She explores the power-politics in interpersonal relationship and relates the women’s crisis of identity not only to the patriarchal structures of power and domination but also to the women’s passivity and complicity in the power structures that subject and subjugate them.

Despite her fear of the consequences, her search for her missing father and her search for self increasingly offers her the power to resist the oppression inherent in their relationship and to reassess her own need. Margaret Atwood seems to be questioning the existing power politics, the traditional notions of male superiority, and the mutilation of women by men. She is trying to assert that women can refuse victimization and can gain transcendence from the male defined world and can hope to breathe freely in a world defined by them. Emma Parker says:—Her rejection of, and return to [nature] society is reflected by what she eats. 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 contaminated by patriarchal ideology. Both are unnatural constructed man made and both threaten to poison her.

Instead, the narrator eats only the raw food that nature provides. Surfacing represents the feminine consciousness and shows a woman’s struggle to free herself. Her association with the people and Nature raises her consciousness of victimization
of woman. When her feminist consciousness reaches its climax, the protagonist makes ready the ground for revolt against exploitation oppression. As Carol Christ says, narrator awakens, —from a male-defined world, to the greater terror and risk, and also the great potential healing and joy, of a world defined by the heroine’s own feeling and judgment.

In order to attain her identity she feels, she must avoid every association with the —metal killer society and go back into the remotest forest. In course of this impasioned, desperate search she takes her plunge literally in the ancient lake, mentally in the memory of her parents and mystically in the vision of their continued existence in Nature. She also tries to attain some unknown but ancient wisdom, which might have been behind the rock paintings. At the end she reverses the mirror in order —not to see myself but to see, and alone resumes her journey which finally brings her through extreme hardship to the symbolic plunge and to resurface—this time with the defiance never to be a victim any more. The protagonist moves from struggling with the oppression and domination of the male world to associating with various feminine principles and motifs to eventually embracing and returning to the natural world as an equal, unassuming member. Margaret Atwood shows men’s misuse and women’s use of nature in Surfacing. Women’s association with fertility and men’s with environment abuse specifically as a metaphor of the violation of women by men.
References:


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