

## **FEMINIST IDEOLOGY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S NOVEL OF SURFACING**

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### **Canadian Literature:**

Great literature accepts an advanced and well-integrated society, a mature body and a self-conscious soul. The stirring records of explorers and pioneers, the cumulative chronicle provided in the journals of discoverers, in the memoirs of master-builders and in the pages of political and constitutional history, show clearly enough how the physical outline of Canada gradually took shape. By discovery and exploration, confederation agreements and purchase, the frontiers were ultimately set. The chronicle, if it were complete, should also tell of the parallel romance of industry, of commerce, of democratic government, of the Church, of education, art, and literature. The dim beginnings of literature in many a nation are concerned with wanderings, quests, and pilgrimages of every sort. The literature of Canadian travel and exploration is rich in romance, but it rarely achieves literary excellence.

### **Re-constructions of self –identity in surfacing**

The term feminism has many different uses and its meanings are often contested for example, some writers use the term "feminism" to refer to a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe, other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of

these injustices. Although the term “feminism” has a history in English linked with women’s activism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, it is useful to distinguish feminist ideas or beliefs from feminist political movements, for even in periods where there has been no significant political activism around women’s subordination, individuals have been concerned with and theorized about justice for women. So for example, it makes sense to ask whether Plato was a feminist, given his view that women should be trained to rule ( Republic book v).even though he was an exception in his historical context.

Margaret Atwood is recognized as a major figure in Canadian literature. she was born in Ottawa in 1939 and grew up in Toronto. Atwood is a poet, novelist, essayist and feminist, social campaigner and short story writer. Atwood using such devices as irony, symbolism and self-conscious narrators, she explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the dark side of human and power as it pertains to gender and politics. Atwood has helped to define and identity the goals of contemporary Canadian Literature and has earned a disputation among feminist writers for her exploration of women’s issues. Her works are acclaimed internationally and have been published around the world. She has been awarded booker prize for the novels. The Hand Maids Tale, Robber Bride, Alias Grace, Blind Assassin. She has received honorary degree from universities across Canada.

The futuristic vision that Atwood presents in the novel depicts the total appropriation of the women's identity in the repressive Canadian society. Gender roles are well – defined.

Men are the rulers and women their subjects. In fact, as in primitive societies, women are reduced to being men's possessions, mere objects. Atwood sums herself up quite rightly. When she says: "it's being constant interest of mind: change from one state to another change from one thing in to another". In her novels Atwood explores the power politics in inter personal relationship and relate the women's or Canada's crisis of identity not only to the patriarchal structure of power dominion but also the woman's or Canada's own positivity and complicity in the power structures that subjects and subjugate them. Atwood's feminist polemics against sexual and gender roles imposed upon women in paternalist society. As a result, she acquires a surfeit of identities, all of them fictional, and ends up having an authentic or recognized identity.

In *Surfacing*, the narrator protagonist's journey begins as a physical or geographical journey. In search of her father who has been missing for many days .however, as the novel progresses, the physical or geographical journey triggers off a parallel psychological or spiritual journey. Thus, the narrator's discovery of the father's corpse triggers of discoveries about herself.

The psychological or spiritual journey towards self-discovery finds its culmination in a ritualistic re-alignment with the primitive world and a subsequent re-alignment with the lived-world with altered perspective and a new ideology.

In surfacing the unnamed central character narrates the entire novel in the first person. Before the story opens, Narrator, while studying to be an art illustrator, was seduced by her professor, a married man with two children. After she conceived, Narrator was persuaded to accept an abortion. Later, she refused to continue the affair. By this time words of love and promise seem only a trap to her. Watching him from her coverts, she realizes that she is ready to accept him, for by this time her instinct and her parents have taught her that besides those of elemental nature there are other powers which must also be reckoned with: the forces of language, of mind, of society. She realizes that being human she cannot simply live in the wilderness, but must live with other people, in society and city. Having faced her guilt, having relieved her psyche of its immense burden of repression, she can summon her fall resources to live, to bear children, to raise "the first true human" (Withim 223). One in which body and mind, emotions and languages are united.

This novel surfacing is a great feminist novel capable of transcending the world of feminism. The distinct feminist voice of Surfacing is heard through the desperate and anguished voice of a protagonist who surfaces from the depths of exploration and oppression. The protagonist uneasy relationship with her art teacher and her abortion, she develops hatred for life in the city for her, the city life represents nothing but meaningless relationships and hypocrisy. She feels an urge to go to Northern Quebec island where she spent her childhood. Her intention to return to the place of her birth is a quest to return to her roots in order to discover her identity.

The protagonist not only struggles to survive with dignity in society and to face the reality but she also desires to organize all the weak, victims to protest against the oppression of the strong, victimizers. Thus the protagonist becomes a spokesperson of all the vulnerable and explored creatures by turning a feminist theme into a universal one in which the battle is not only between the two sexes but also between the strong and weak. She ends up an activist. Surfacing emphasizes that women need to recognize their inner potential and power themselves. It suggest that women artist can create the myths necessary to depict the integrity of a female who is both courageous and warmly. It leaves the task to future mothers and daughters. This portrayal of women's place in the society, their search for identity and their struggle to come to terms with existence, the self and the land gives a new dimension to the Canadian landscape which portrays the changing character of their country.

Her return to northern Quebec bring her in contact, with her past, especially as she investigates and imagines the life of her father, who seems to symbolize the various attempts Canadians have made to adjust to their land. The rediscovery of the past, in contrast to modern, Americanized, urban Canada, is the equivalent of a national search for identity and authenticity.

Bruce King himself admits, the real or rather the deeper theme of the novel seems to be that of a woman stripping her social mask, defenses and ideas to discover her essential self. He wants to recognize as it is evident from the following reflection of hers:

That is the real danger now, the hospital or the zoo,  
Where we are put, species and individual, when we can  
No longer cope. They would never believe its  
Only a natural woman, state of nature, they think of  
That as a tanned body on a beach....skin grimed and  
Scabby, hair like a frayed bathmat stuck with leaves and twigs. A new kind  
Of centerfold.

(Bruce 210)

In a novel which steadily moves towards this “new kind of centerfold, “towards the discovery of the self, the landscape across which the journey takes place can never really be either geophysical or cultural but the interior landscape which transcends all local, regional, nationalistic or cultural concerns.

With an aim to construct a universal women archetype, not defined or concretized in specific socio cultural, economic or racial terms, the narrator is deliberately left unnamed because naming it may have given her a class and race specific identity.

### **Conclusion:**

The novel surfacing describes man’s imposition on women in matters of profession, marriage and motherhood which cripples her intellectually, emotionally and morally.

The protagonist of the novel surfaces from under the swamp of the male discourse by narrating her experiences in her own discourse that is distinctly feminine. Surfacing is structured like a journey of the nameless narrator in which through her association with the people and nature, she become aware of different victims and victimizers. Atwood's women to be deemed survivors she must accept some responsibility for their own victimization. They need to become "creative non-victims" (surfacing 38).

Portrayals of women characters in literature in literature are as varied as the authors who create them. Female protagonist has represented an interminable array of roles throughout literary history. Whether women are represented as angels or metaphorical monsters, it is obvious that female characters have been pigeon holed and stereotyped for centuries. The heroin of the novel surfaces from the swamp of the male discourse by narrating their experiences in their own discourse that is distinctly feminine.

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