



Feminism in The Surfacing Novel of Margaret Atwood

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ABSTRACT

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

The prolific writer 'MARGARET ATWOOD' [1939] is one of the most famous and talented feminist writer of Post Modern Canadian Fiction. Surfacing [1972] is an extremely complex work which lends itself to several interpretation one has to go over the text several time to get the real meaning. It is a novel about 'feminism' and 'self discovery'. Surfacing deals with the conflicts between 'self & society' and conflict between 'individual awareness' & National consciousness. In her novels we find the 'Feminism' and woman's suffering. As a feminist writer her aims to exploring woman's inner psyche, her conflicts and search for identification. through her writing she wants to demonstrate and highlights the terrible gap existing between man and woman. In her surfacing novel the protagonists attempts to be assertive. This self realization is at the heart of her novel under consideration.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Margaret Atwood 's 'Surfacing'1972 deals with the major theme of the novel feminism, Identity of selfhood and Identity of womanhood.

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

Heroine of the novel 'Surfacing' is unnamed. she is an unsuccessful artist in the city of 'Toronto' who has left her husband and family long ago. During her city life, she entered a empty marriage and emotion numbing abortion and divorce. After that she returns to her home with her three companion Anna, narrator's friend and a model also, David, Anna's husband and a flim maker also, Joe, David's friend, a camera man and narrator's lover also. The world from which narrator returns, she express in such words:

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

Purpose of narrator's returns to her home ground is to find out her missing father. She wants to find out what has happened with her father. He was alive or dead. Narrator was worshiped her father as a logical and scientific man. She was very devoted to her father. Narrator remarks her parents' attitude toward her. Narrator remembers that she had always depended on her father's rational explanations. Her mother's silence had been a mystery to her. At the end of part one the memory of her brother's drawing.

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

Mr.Paul, whose' her father's best friend, informed narrator that her father is reported to have vanished mysteriously Narrator has to enquire about her father. She likes and trusts her friends, but they hadn't accompanied her on this errand of finding her father,

"I like them, I trust them, I can't think of anyone else I like better, but right now I wish they were not here."

Though they're necessary: David's and Anna's car was the only way.....But my reason for being here embarrasses them, they don't understand it. They all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to: Joe never mentions his mother and father."

Narrator's friend treats the trip as a break from city life and holidays while narrator is very serious about her missing father and will discover something. Narrator is physically mutilated rather she is half dead. The journey revised the memory of her unhappy past. Narrator thinks about her father in chapter three and said:

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

The narrator is convinced that her parents never forgave her for either her divorce or leaving her child. The mystery of her father's disappearance is becoming a 'tangled maze' for her. Narrator wouldn't want to be alone that place. While in the company of her friends, the narrator reflects on her own brief marriage, which was not actually a marriage because it destroyed their relationship. Narrator's group departs on a search of a trail. Narrator thinks that:

"I seen now the impossibility of searching the island for him, and even then they could miss him, dead or alive, accident or suicide or murder, or if for some unfathomable reason he's chosen this absence and is hiding, they'd never find him."

The physical journey now turns into a physical search for her father. The narrator continues to look for clues to her father's whereabouts and she thinks of other possibilities, strangest of all is, he might be hiding somewhere in the island. The search on the trail becomes difficult and she abandon it. Narrator's fear of her father is still evident and her fear seems to be directed not only at her father but for herself. In the chapter ten suddenly Joe propose narrator to marry him. Narrator is shocked and cries not to laugh at the suddenness of the proposal and refuses to his proposal after that Narrator begins to

tell him about her marriage and her child.

The memory of her wedding that follows is very strange. When the ceremony was over, her husband behaved as if she were invalid, not a bride. Art teacher asked narrator if she was feeling better and she could hardly stand because her legs were shaking. He said: I know it's tough, out it's better this way. At night she goes into one of the bedrooms of the cabin and discovers something that she felt were out of place in that remote area: a photo album, some unused wedding presents of a childhood rhym sums up narrator's view of herself as a victim;

"Nobody loves me Everybody hates me I'm going to the garden to eat worms."

In chapter 12 we find that Mr. Paul, her father's friend, seemed certain that her father was dead. Thinks of this she doubts her theory about his hiding in the forest. Narrator thinks perhaps the CIA had done away with him to get the land. Narrator becomes sure that her father must have gone totally mad. Narrator has proof of her father's sanity and therefore of his probable death. She is sure now that he is not a madman lurking in the woods,

"Crazy people can come back, from wherever they go to take refuse, but dead people can't, they are prohibited."

After rejecting the Joe's proposal, Joe and Narrator discuss in detail something regarding their uncertain future. All of a sudden, she offers Joe, to move out of the city apartment and said;

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

Narrator believe that Joe does love her, and that is the reason he wants to marry her. Narrator's comments on Joe's response to her refusal of his proposal and the discussion of their relationship is revealing. Joe is very unhappy to rejecting his marriage proposal.

Narrator saw Anna without make up and says 'May be he {David} won't notice it', At this Anna says, 'he will notice.... he wants me to look like a young chick all the time'. Anna is extremely upset over it. She reveals to the narrator sordid details about their marriage. David has a set of rules if she breaks them she is punished. So narrator suggests a divorce, Anna explains that she loves him, even through she thinks he'd like her to die.

The narrator still hasn't found out what happened to her father. As narrator goes down to the shore, she overhears an argument between David and Anna. She looks better and also happy but at this moment, David is trying to talk her into taking her bathing suit off so that Joe can take some shots of naked her for movie, they are making a movie called 'Random sample' David was telling her,

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

This was the pose which was taken by Joe, against Anna's desire and this is the lost Ann's identity. The narrator wants to stop the fight but she doesn't. Both Anna and David become very angry, David threatens to throw her into the lake if she doesn't cooperate. Finally, Anna gives to takes off her bathing suit and dives into the water while Joe films her. Anna jumped into the lake. Narrator is thinks that David is like her.

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

Narrator asked David why he forced Anna to humiliate herself

{that too in front of Joe}, David tells her that Anna is devious and unfaithful. She is stupid, according to David,

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

Narrator has had an abortion, it is a sock for the readers. Earlier she has told that she was married, had a child and left the child with her husband when they divorced Narrator comes to the realization that I could have said, no to the abortion, but I'm a killer,

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

Narrator wanted to escape the moral responsibility for the death of her child. It was easies for the narrator to present herself as the victim of a broken marriage and killer of her child. Narrator think that she could not allow it. In chapter seventeenth David and Anna tell her that her father has been found by some Americans fisherman. His body was unrecognizable, but Mr.Paul identified the cloths as her father's. The narrator is suspicious of the information, when she asks them where they found the body they tell her it was near the cliff where she was diving. The narrator doesn't believe them. Even though her friend avoids her because of the news of her father's death, the narrator is convinced that,

"Nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive."

After finding narrator's father body, her reaction is very strange, she feels suspicious. She is convinced that they are lying and the report of his death is a trap designed to hurt her.

In the chapter 20 we find that Joe is uneasy. After the encounter with Anna and the news of the narrator's father death, Joe is not sure how to approach her. Her thinks she must be in pain and tries not to awake her up.

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

They are making love outside, Narrator wanted to feel her womb again with the help of Joe. She says to Joe, "I! get pregnant." During the union with Joe, Narrator feels that her aborted child is surfacing within her,

" I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, for giving me, rising from the lake with it has been present for long."

Everybody seems to be sure that the narrator and Joe's relationship has been saved.

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

Narrator's friend return back at the city of Toronto. Narrator is looking for not only the truth about the death of her father, but also the truth about herself. Her quest is dangerous, difficult and confusing. She feels that the power has left her and without it, she is without protection. She knows she must remain there all alone in the cabin, but she is not at all clear of her next step. She destroys the glasses, plates, books, blankets and clothes.

When nothing is left intact and the fire is only smoldering. I leave, carrying one of the wounded blankets with me.

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

Narrator wants to make contact in some way with her parents. She burns everything connected with civilization, drawing, photographs, maps etc. she baptizes herself in water like fire. Her quest is clearly a visionary one, and she must search for the power of the gods, the ancient Indian gods of nature, through a ritual of personal purification.

All alone on the island, the narrator is awoken suddenly the next day by the sound of power boat. She runs into the woods to hide. She thinks it might be the police or possibly tourists, she even wonders if they are American invaders.

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

Unnamed narrator thinks that her mother transformed into a bird, and she recognized that her father has been transformed into a fish. Narrator witnessed her mother turning into a bird and she sees her father turning into a fish. Both of her parents have become embodiments of nature, taking on shapes of animals and birds. The end of her visionary quest is signaled by the narrator discovering that the foot prints she thought of her father's turn out to be her own.

Narrator dreams of her parents that they have been gone and never comeback. The next morning when she wakes, she realizes,

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

Narrator is pretty sure that her parents will never appear to her again. she cannot stay there on the island forever. She pretended to be a victim of a failed marriage.

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

Narrator gets ready to re-enter life by putting her clothes on. She wonder about the baby she is carrying. If she is pregnant. She feels it is her duty to feed and take care of herself so that she will be able to deliver a healthy baby. Lost in thought she sees a boat arrive with Paul and Joe in it Joe gets out of the boat and he calls her. He has returned { leaving David and Ann} especially for her. He won't wait much longer. But right now he waits. The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving 'nothing'.

The novel ends without an ending what the narrator will actually do afterwards. But the ending is full of hope, hope that is based on realistic expectations and an acceptance that life is not perfect.

Narrator thinks that a new inner self as well as a creation, represents her "possible" future with Joe, who returns again to "rescue" her;

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

Narrator is a commercial artist and every once in a while. She recalls that she would have become a great artist, if she had not listened to what her former lover used to tell her,

'there have never been any important woman artist.' Thus her mind was filled with this view that he was right, there never has been any. Narrator's Art Teachers, who is a married man, determined to press her artistic talent and feminism because he cannot accept her. She would be superior then him.

finally, the art teacher played a trick on her by concealing his marital status and gave her a wedding ring and convinced her for marriage. At last she agree and become pregnant. She aborted the child under the pressure of her art teacher. The journey revised the memory of her unhappy past and a painful relationship with her art teacher who destroy her life. Lost her father become the lost of herself. Narrator is physically mutilated rather she is half dead. she does not want to marry Joe because she is already frustrated by her own first marriage and also by the relation of Anna and David.

Surfacing has been interpreted variously as a novel of self discovery as a blue-print for revolution as an anti-colonial novel and finally as a feminist novel. Surfacing deals with the conflicts between self & society which broadence into a conflict between individual awareness and national consciousness. In this novel we find a feminism through myth the search for her missing father. Whole novel based on the narrator's attempt to search for her missing father. which becomes a symbolic representation of feminism. Atwood brings the condition of the Canadian society to the light along with the problem of the multicultural society like Canada.

It's highlights the cultural predicament in Canada, where one cultural tries to dominate the other. American culture dominated Canada. Americans are evil. Canadian's language, fashion and values are all imitative, borrowed by Americans. When narrator returns. She discovers that whole Canada is full of violence by Americans. In Canada people are even worse than animals.

Atwood's protagonist is a young modern woman, who not only struggle but is an adventurous to break the old structure of the life and find a new order. The narrator reflects the torture sensibility of a woman who is not ready to compromise with the male dominated society and is looking for an escape from this human society.

The narrator is seeing her home ground exploited and destroyed by the American. All American may be called as a 'Happy Killer' Americans operation is seen in the victimization on animals which is similar of man. The killer of her heron for sport is merely to kill and proved their power even human being.

Narrator reject humanities, seeking the primitivism and return to nature. Jhon Moss says;

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

The grim realities of life make her a modern woman, more independent and adventurous and she recognizes seeking of colonialism both political and sexual and refuses to be trapped and victim . she becomes physically and spiritually reborn.

Atwood's nameless protagonist is a heart boiled feminist, who thinks nothing but of separating from her husband and child that shackled her freedom and individuality. At the end of the novel. She reject the human society and turns to primitive world.

Narrator in surfacing plans to be assertive and a bold lady to face all obstacles with courage. This characteristic has a positive effect on readers also. Women today struggle for justice. Equality in payments and rights have been provided to them. In surfacing novel protagonist is aware of their rights and equality.

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