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Ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

A Graduation Research Project
Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of B.A in English Language & Literature

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Abstract

This paper attempts to take an in-depth study of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) from an ecofeminist perspective by specifically examining the interconnections between women and nature in a patriarchal society. As the term indicates, ecofeminism is a branch of both ecocriticism and feminism intended initially to investigate how the oppression of women in patriarchal society mirrors that exerted on nature by human beings since the reasons behind their inferior position are quite similar. Simultaneously, this study demonstrates how the nameless protagonist discovers her real identity by establishing an analogy between her wounded self and the destroyed nature surrounding her in Quebec. This action has been exemplified by the unreasonable killing of a heron by a group of hunters, something that the narrator found similar to her husband's attempt at abortion of their babe and viewing it as an animal. Further, it examines the way the female protagonist eventually turns herself from a victim to heroine, dismantling the patriarchal dualities, therefore it cannot confine her being anymore.

Section One: Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

Today, the global problems, especially those related to environmental and feminine issues, challenge the whole world. Global warming, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, human overpopulation, food waste, environmental degradation on one hand and exploitation and subjugation of women on the other hand are examples of these issues. The ecological crisis and exploitation of women have not only been recognized by the environmental activists but also by literary scholars, including literary critics, novelists, and poets. Those who care about women and nature because it has caused a great deal of harm towards them who are in turn victims of man's dominated culture (Vadilla et al, 2020, p.59). They are aware that it is highly significant to preserve the environmental sustainability and women's rights. Therefore, they want to raise the awareness and consciousness of people about these contemporary events through their literary works.

Instead of living arm in arm with nature humans exploit it. Due to the patriarchal system and capitalist development in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, USA, and Canada and developing countries such as India, Indonesia and others, the environment and women's fate are increasingly vulnerable. Because of a number of factors, including women's inherent propensity for nurturing, procreating, and caring for others, patriarchal ideology defines women as feminine. The positioning of nature as feminine is due to the intimate connection between exploitation and attitudes toward women. Additionally, oppression and exploitation agreeably underrate the value of femininity and nature. Technology and science develop rapidly and increase the capitalist patriarchy gap that dichotomizes man/nature, man/woman, and

culture/nature. The exploitation catches the attention of authors, environmental activists, and literary figures such as Margaret Atwood, Ursula K. Le Guin, Barbara Kingsolver, Anindita S. Thayf, Doris Lessing, Carol Warner, Alice Munro, and Jeanette Winterson (Vadilla et al, 2020, p.59).

In her novel *Surfacing* published in 1972, the Canadian author and activist Margaret Atwood(1939-) deals not only with her bread and butter theme, which is gender dynamics and power but also introduces the environmentalism theme. *Surfacing* is the story of an unnamed narrator heading back to her unnamed hometown in northern Quebec, Canada, with two of her recently made friends Anna and her husband David, as well as her lover Joe, in order to trace the main character's missing father's whereabouts. Her search for her missing father stands as a pretext for the search for her inner-self which is revealed as she gradually becomes absorbed in nature and develops mystical visions. In the story, the protagonist realizes that there is a gap between her natural self and her artificial self only when she encounters nature. She is considered an ecofeminist who recognizes women's victimization which is parallel to the awareness that men exploit women and nature just for their enjoyment. She understands that as she has been abused, the essence of "mother earth" has also been violated in the same way (Bhat, 2022 p.244).

1.2 Culture-Nature Dualism

Ecofeminism is an offshoot of ecocriticism and feminism because it studies the interconnectedness between domination of nature and the domination of women in the world (Gaard, 1993). Therefore, one of its chief concerns is "the belief that human culture is connected to the physical world; that is, humanity, the microcosm, directly affects and is affected by the physical world, the macrocosm" (Bressler, 2011, p. 235).

Ecofeminists share the critique of all sorts of dualisms in order to provide a non-hierarchical and non-reductionist perspective of life. This dualism critique is based on a necessary re-conceptualization of the hierarchical dualisms that were passed down from Western metaphysics, such as reason/emotion, culture/nature, male/female, subject/object, production/reproduction, superior/inferior, dominator/dominated and so on. These dualism sets are typically governed by gender categories, where the second terms are traditionally and culturally seen as inferior to the first terms of the dualisms (Khalil et al, 2018, p.1).

The idea of removing duality and creating unity is not something novel, but it rather has been the fundamental problem for the majority of philosophers including Hegel. Unlike his predecessors Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Descartes, Hegel believed that duality is the origin of the need for philosophy and declared that to cope with duality is the responsibility of philosophy. In Hegel's opinion, the perfect goodness was the unity of living; unity in all aspects of being whose appearance comes in three stages: 1. Self-unity, 2. Unity with others, and 3. Unity with nature. Dualism is the main opposition to such unity (Tahmasebi and Mehdi Dehbashi, 2017, pp. 140-141).

Although it is difficult to separate the sets of dualisms from each other and to accurately decide which leads to the other, it can be said that the culture/nature dualism can helpfully be foundational because it is inclusive and embraces all the other sets of dualisms. Since nothing happens without any reason, the appearance of ecocriticism as a revolutionary movement in 1970 in America is due to the historical of domination of nature by humanity and culture. Just like women were seen as “other” as Beauvoir maintains, the same thing is true about nature as it has been viewed as “the other” from the cultural perspective. Since God has given

the right to humans for dominating every living and nonliving things on the earth. So nature should serve all human's desire. This ideology leads to the exploitation and degradation of nature (Garrard, 2004, p.64)

Ironically, despite their attempts to dispel the culture/nature dichotomy and all the other sets of dualisms it includes, first- and second-wave feminists largely unintentionally contributed to its upkeep. It is true that they challenged them and expressed skepticism toward them, but they were unable to deconstruct them. Indeed, it may be argued that first-wave feminists perpetuate and unwittingly support the patriarchal oppression of women in their quest to free women from the domestic and maternal responsibilities that society has assigned to them. They maintained the man/woman, mind/body, and, more broadly, culture/nature dualisms as they are without attempting to dismantle them by adopting the position of rejecting the relationship between women and nature. What they managed to do was move women out of the sphere of nature with all its connotations into the sphere of culture and all it entails. Even second-wave feminists who emphasized the bond between women and nature avoided the dualism altogether. Modern ecofeminists seek out to not only deconstruct dualism but also redefine the terms of the dualisms themselves (Khalil et al, 2018, pp. 14-15).

In *Surfacing* the social “borders” accessible for the narrator to live within have failed her, casting her in the role of a victim who is so detached from her real self that deprived her of her emotional self. In order to retake her self-definition and become whole, the narrator must debunk the social binary distinctions such as culture/nature, reason/emotion, male/female, colonizer/colonized, and human/animal.

1.3 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism grew out of various social movements in the 1970s and early 1980s, including feminist, ecological, and peace movements. The term became popular in the context of numerous protests and activism against environmental destruction (Shiva & Mies, 2014). The term was first coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974). According to d'Eaubonne, the marginalization and oppression of women, people of colour, and the poor are essentially linked to the degradation of the natural world since both come from patriarchal dominance. Ecofeminists emphasize that the repercussions of environmental problems, such as climate change, are more likely to have a negative impact on women because of patriarchal institutions, a societal imbalance that normally favours men.

According to Karen Warren (2000), “nature is a feminist issue”. Because women were so acutely aware of their inferiority along with nature, they were the driving force behind the revolutionary movements of ecofeminism and ecocriticism. Both approaches got their beginnings as a response to the environmental issues. Women sought to reestablish new gender relationships between the sexes and even between nature and humans by establishing those ground-breaking approaches. Fundamentally, a variety of ecological movements were initiated by women. “environmental issues that particularly affect women have contributed to the building of a feminist-environmental coalition” (Merchant, 1996, p. 151).

Ecofeminism has its roots in the third wave of feminism, which is also its main source of inspiration, broadly speaking. Because it believes in the equality of all individuals without any discrimination, ecofeminism primarily rejects all “-isms” and encourages variety. All forms of oppression, including racism,

classism, and colonialism, are included in ecofeminism's anxiety. Concomitantly, ecofeminism is mostly interested in the diversification (Demir, 2011, p.18).

Ecofeminism is an ongoing philosophy just like ecocriticism and they are still in progress. Their philosophy focuses mostly on the exploitation of women and nature. Hence, both approaches' foundations are undoubtedly tied to the close relationship between them. According to western culture, nature and women are determined as inferior to mankind (Demir, 2011). Similarly, women already stay inferior to humankind despite the fact that they come from different nations, social groups, and racial backgrounds. Humanity does not show any sympathy neither towards them nor toward nature. Because they believe that both women and nature are absolutely something that can be tamed, western societies have always endeavoured to rule both. According to Aristotle, "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled. Woman is matter, waiting to be formed by the active male principle" (Bressler, 2011, p. 145).

One of the most fundamental assumptions of Ecofeminism is value-hierarchical thinking. The idea of value hierarchy, in the opinion of many ecofeminists, serves to sustain capitalist patriarchy. In other words, society is set up in a hierarchy that prioritizes certain groups or traits above others. According to ecofeminists, because nature is not viewed as valued and because value-hierarchical thinking places humans above nature, any actions that harm the environment or animals are acceptable. The same hierarchical thinking places women below men and accords them less value, making any actions that injure or oppress women acceptable (Guy-Evans and Olivia Guy, 2023). Women and nature's interrelatedness is accepted since they both are affected by the same reasons. "The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them" (Warren, 1997, p.12).

Atwood clarifies this in *Surfacing* vividly especially, when David takes nude photos of his wife Anna and puts them next to those of animals. Likewise, the narrator's husband forced her to have an abortion just like the dead heron which has been killed and hanged, the narrator's foetus have been killed and thrown away.

Nothing happens out of thin air, not even the process of dominance, which has a long history dating back many centuries. As Carolyn Merchant says in her article, "The Genesis story of The Fall provides the beginning; science and capitalism, the middle; recovery of the garden, the end" (1996, p.133). This displays that the main three factors behind the intimate connection between women and nature in the history of their domination are: Christianity, the Scientific Revolution, and the rise of capitalism specifically, in the Western world.

The biggest criticism of ecofeminism is the idea of essentialism. Some writers believe that the historical and mythological connection between women and nature reinforce their domination by men. Also, that when women decided to become caretaker of nature and they established revolutionary movements to protect it, men feels free of nature responsibility. As a result, according to Sturgeon (1997), ecofeminism theory should stop linking women with the natural world. Even the concept of "mother nature" needs to be rejected. On the other hand, ecofeminists contend that "partnership" is the greatest way to address problematic notions about the relationship between women and nature. The "partnership" concept is something that ecofeminists take very seriously. In this instance, both sexes are accountable for upholding the duty of defending nature from exploitation and deterioration. By promoting equality between the sexes, ecofeminism philosophy seeks to divide the obligations each gender has to the environment.

Section Two: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Surfacing*

2.1 Strands of Ecofeminism

There are several sub-branches of eco-feminism, which vary from one ecofeminist thinker to another. These include materialist, spiritual, vegetarian, liberal, cultural, and social ecofeminism. The ones that one can discover in *Surfacing* are vegetarian, cultural, and social ecofeminism.

If ecofeminism can be seen as the offspring of feminism, then vegetarian ecofeminism is surely feminism's third generation. Since its inception ecofeminism has had a contentious relationship with the idea of animal liberation. Vegetarian ecofeminism puts into action the feminist insight that "the personal is political" and examines the political contexts of dietary choices as well as strategic and operational choices in science and economics (Gaard, 2002, p.117). The female protagonist in *surfacing* says that "I am a part of the landscape, I could be anything, a tree, a deer skeleton, a rock" (Atwood, 1972, p.137). She does not think that she is superior to nonhumans and unites with nature.

The term "vegetarian feminism" was popularized by the publication of Carol J. Adams's book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). In understanding the links between the oppression of women and the oppression of nonhuman animals, Adams's "absent referent" is especially crucial in linking the two. Adams explains absent referent as "that which separates the meat eater from and the animal from the end product". This is pointed out in *Surfacing* when the narrator says:

Anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn't kill birds and fish they would have killed us. The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people, hunters in the fall killing the deer, that is Christ also.

And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life (Atwood, 1982, p.103).

The narrator feels affiliated with nonhuman life rather than human beings. She thinks that humans are the ones who are the most destructive creatures on earth.

One of the strands of ecofeminism is cultural feminism (sometimes referred to as “radical” or “spiritual” feminism), it frequently has anti-science and anti-technology roots, emphasizes the bond between women and nature by reviving old traditions that focus on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system (Merchant, 2005, p. 202). Atwood portrays nature as the elemental force that makes a the female narrator realize the essence of humanity which demonstrates the novel's use of ecofeminism, and only in oneness with nature, with a complete surrender to the ways of nature and in fully embracing nature as opposed to the man made materialistic society, she can attain harmony both within and without, and also self-sustainability, as dawns on the protagonist in the course of the novel. Prior to her “surfacing,” she experiences a minimal shift in perception. As a result, she learns to embrace nature and heal herself in the process (Tandon, 2008, p.163). After surfacing in the river, she finds it a sacred place which makes her submerge and then surface to reality.

Social ecofeminism sets itself apart from goddess-worshipping cultural ecofeminists who recognize a specific historical connection between women and environment and seek to liberate both simultaneously. Instead, it starts with the materialist, social feminist analysis of early radical feminism, which aimed to rebuild the oppressions placed on women by marriage, the nuclear family, romantic love, the capitalist state, and patriarchal religion (Biehl, 1991, p.23).

In the novel the female characters have been oppressed by the stereotype image the society puts on them. Marriage seems to be something balanced by the

parties engaged in. Although it seems to be a successful superficially, David and Anna's relationship is a spoiled one which seems more likely based on mutual hate rather than a love relationship. The narrator's oppressed state is due to the same reason which is willingly and passively acting on what she has been told by the other as she admits: "I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer" (Atwood, 1972, p. 106). However, she eventually revolts against the patriarchal system through the act of destroying the camera film which contains her friends as well as dead animals photos and decides to live in a natural way rather than being an artificial woman that society expects her to be.

Whereas socialist ecology and socialist ecofeminism focus on the conventional Marxist notions of production and reproduction and employ dialectics rather than dualisms, social ecofeminism centres on dominance and hierarchy and challenges dualisms in Western culture. Nonetheless, both forms of ecofeminism share the belief that capitalism and patriarchy oppress women and nature, and that taking part in ecofeminist activities can lead to liberation (Merchant, 2005, pp. 207-208).

2.2 Identity and Otherness

Surfacing is a story of submersion and self-discovery, through which Atwood reflects on how the narrator rediscovers the true reality of her life from beneath the surface. The narrator is in search of finding her lost self, which is split between her "inner" self and her "social self", through her search for her missing father. Her true self is so estranged that in order to feel whole again, she intends on taking off her clothes, adopt an animal identity, and set out on a quest to recover both her dead father and her lost self as the cost of living in a false identity is to lose one's self identity (Jabbar, 2018, p.11).

One's identity can be constructed in a variety of ways: having self-knowledge that has been developed through one's own history, childhood experiences and belonging to a particular society help to define an individual's conception of themselves in relation to the cultural standards of that society. These traits are necessary for the development of a solid personal identity, and when they are difficult or problematic, the individual must struggle during the identity construction process (G. Sankar and R. Soundararajan, 2016, p.40).

After staying in the cabin which is located in a wild place in northern Quebec, the protagonist starts to question the nature of memory and to review her life's story to make sure it still "fits", due to the remembrance of her childhood memories. She senses her memory is intact until one point, the time she "left", when it becomes disjointed. Also, she is not sure whether her memories are her own or not. She spirals into fear, thinking, "If the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too" (Atwood, 1972, p.51). In any case, she is aware parts of her memory are missing which causes her to feel unmoored from herself. However, the narrator says she holds "the clues and solutions and the power" (Atwood, 1972, p.54) for her next step, suggesting she is on the cusp of an emotional or spiritual breakthrough.

After finding evidence her father was not insane, just interested in rock paintings, she determines her next step: follow in his footsteps by visiting places he had identified as sites of the paintings. This decision seems to be a relief, and more importantly, the narrator has found something active to do rather than passively wait. In addition, admitting her father is dead frees her up to focus on another problem: "It was no longer his death but my own that concerned me" (Atwood, 1972, p.78). Her father's fate is an external mystery. The more important one is what has happened to her memories and emotions which are an essential part of her identity.

The four set off in canoes to find the rock painting location she had identified from her father's papers. She remembers being anesthetized as if it were sinking down through layers of darkness, then rising up again to daylight with no memory of what had happened. Furthermore, her brain is “covering over the bad things and filling the empty spaces with as embroidery of calculations and numbers” (Atwood, 1972, p.98). This statement both shows her attempt to find and face the truth about her father and her attempt to find out her true personal identity. She knows she has repressed or altered memories, and she wants to know why.

While searching for the rock paintings which she thinks are located somewhere underwater, she repeatedly dives down and then surfaces, she get to know the painful memory of her abortion: “I killed it. It wasn’t a child but it could have been one, I didn’t allow it” (Atwood, 1972, p.105). This is a powerful moment in which the artificial reality falls away, revealing reality. It is the starting point of bringing the parts of herself, which have been separated, back together which is the beginning of finding her true identity. Later on the narrator fully breaks from reality.

As the female protagonist saw her mother transforms, she sees what her father “has become”. Her father changed, too. She must face it, and so in her delusion, she does face it, quite literally. The fact that the footprints of the figure she saw end up being her own footprints suggests she must face and accept the change in herself as well which she has refused to face all of these harsh facts about her past before in preference to the fictional reality. This means that the narrator suffers from a “state of amnesia in which she has suppressed the facts of her own life story” throughout the novel (Bloom, 2009, p.161). The transformation of the real fish into an artificial fish and back to a real one suggests the narrator, too, can regain her natural self.

In chapter twenty-six the narrator begins to surface to return to sanity after her submersion in delusion. This takes several forms. She recognizes the need to live, not just for herself but for the love of her parents: “To prefer life, I owe them that (Atwood, 1972, p.138). She puts all of the difficult events of her life in proportion. In the final chapter, the separate parts of herself—child, woman, daughter, potential mother, lover, animal, human—have begun to become integrated into one self: a natural woman. She envisions this integration as the process of a time traveler stepping back into the present: “I reenter my own time” (Atwood, 1972, p.141). Now she needs to integrate into human society. Finally, in the last chapter, the narrator has accepted as normal, and even good, something she once found frightening: change. And Joe is someone she can trust because “he isn't anything, he is only half-formed” (Atwood, 1972, p.141). Ultimately the narrator has accepted the natural stages of life and death that are part of being human.

However, it was not only her personal identity that has been lost in the modern society she lives in, but also her gender identity in the patriarchal society and her national identity in a colonized country have been shuttered. Although Atwood has never identified herself as a feminist author—she believes that a writer's work should exist outside of any ideology's constricting framework—her writing nonetheless provides feminist criticism with invaluable resources because it examines the experiences of women in Western patriarchal society from a specifically female perspective.

Atwood raises an unsettling question in *Surfacing* about what it means to be a woman and a man in a society that is already based on the fundamental distinctions between subject and object, culture, and nature. The most acute and thorough critique of contemporary Western civilization and its underlying myths may be found in *surfacing*. Thus, it is not strange that the main themes and

problems in this story are power, gender identity, and madness. The fundamental factors that enable a patriarchal society can be viewed as power structures that extend to gender issues, while madness is the area where the norms underpinning power structures and the prevalent gender ideology fail and are thus symbolically inverted (Özdemir, 2010, p.57).

At first, the unnamed narrator feels like she is powerless and victimized. As she has disappointed in finding hints about her father she chooses to be passive and wait rather than take action: “There’s no act I can perform except waiting”. She willingly gives up her own agency and power. Even when she does have power, for the majority of the novel, she does not want to acknowledge it. She makes up a wishful scenario about fishing and frog-hooking. She describes fishing as something you could do by “invocation” or “prayer” rather than admitting her power over the fish, and the frog as “magic.” She dislikes the idea of using power to cause harm. This was exacerbated by world events that show abuses of power. In reference to Hitler and Second World War, she thinks about attaining power: "If I'd turned out like the others with power I would have been evil" (Atwood, 1972, p.24).

The interesting conversation between Anna and the narrator about being on birth control pills, the thing they abandoned to take due to the side effects, addresses a societal power imbalance between men and women. Furthermore, because the system favours men, efforts to make birth control pills less risky for women are lacking. Anna complains, “You think they'd be able to come up with something that d work without killing you” (Atwood, 1972, p.56).

Like Nature, Anna's body is also seen as a resource to be commercialized. During the lake scene in which David forces Anna to strip off her clothes for the movie *Random Samples*, he refers to her as, “darling...a good girl...twatface” and

desires to put her picture, “in beside the dead bird” (Atwood, 1972, p.99). David succeeds in taking her nude photographs. Here Anna is described in animal terms and this naturalizing of women shows that in a patriarchal culture, women are also seen as inferior to men as animals. The narrator shows tremendous courage to react against male oppression and commercialization of the value of female body in market by destroying the camera film (Tandon, 2008, p.163).

After the real surfacing from her delusional state, she confronts her power—the real power as human being as it is shown in the novel's final chapter. Rather than being a passive bystander to the world's pain and her own pain, she realizes she does have power. She resolves to “refuse to be a victim” and “to give up old belief” that she is powerless, rather she had allowed herself to believe she was powerless partly to avoid taking responsibility for the use of power. She no longer believes she can't “ever hurt anyone.” By getting back her power and agency alone with her female consciousness she redefines her gender identity.

The female narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* is often seen as a representative of Canada (G. Sankar; R. Soundararajan, 2016, p.40). As a Canadian, the narrator feels oppressed by the cultural imperialism of Americans who see Canadians as the other, and she believes that this is the cause of her problems. Throughout the novel, the theme of Canadian identity is presented which is partly connected to the theme of the loss of personal identity. She is a Canadian and comes from a region of Canada where two cultures coexist. The narrator's identity is bound up in Canadian identity, which is a challenge in and of itself. There is a persistent perception that the Canadian identity is perceived in opposition to the more assertive American identity, which poses a threat of engulfing and demolishing Canadian culture. The novel's first paragraph alludes to a tree disease from the South as a metaphor for American culture, which spreads like a disease.

Americans are characterized as colonizing and rapacious. Because of the violent and senseless manner in which it was killed by Canadians—behavior the narrator typically associates with Americans—the dead heron becomes a symbol of the destructive expansion of Americanism. This theme is also somewhat connected to the theme of power because the narrator feels as though she has no control over her own life decisions, such as whether to have children or not, and she also feels as though American society is eclipsing more submissive Canadian culture. Canadian culture appears vulnerable in the face of the violence of American exploitation and brutality, making Canada the victim.

2.3 Survival: Recognition of Victimization

Atwood claims that in order to live, victims must transform into "creative non-victims" (Somacarrera, 2006, p.45). A person needs to be aware of both their own victimization and their own capacity to victimize. The unnamed lead character discovers that she has been a victim in the past and acknowledges her own guilt; as a result, she regains her strength and survives.

The turning point of the story and the end of the protagonist's problem occurs when she sees a group of hunters killed a heron for no reason, and they have hanged it upside down to a tree by a rope. This incident is very important because it indicates the process of self-analysis that lets the protagonist discover the source and cause of her victimization (Gupta, 2006, p.45). A heron is the symbol of beauty and freedom of nature (Farber, 2007, p. 97), it also stands for the male quest to hunt and victimize women (Renza, 1985, p. 4). The protagonist identifies herself with the dead heron and sees a parallel between men's treatment of nature and their treatment of women (Cooke, 2004, p. 59).

The main character is initially horrified by the scene and wonders why they murdered a bird that they couldn't possibly eat. When she notices that the bird is dishonoured, she questions herself:

Why had they strung it up like a lynch victim, why didn't they just throw it away like the trash? To prove they could do it, they had the power to kill. Otherwise it was valueless; beautiful from a distance but it couldn't be tamed or cooked or trained to talk, the only relation they could have to a thing like that was to destroy it. (Atwood, 1972, p.58).

Her ex- husband's treatment of her, how she was used and cast away, is what this act of killing and dishonouring a bird makes her think of. For “any thing we could do to the animals we could do to each other: we practiced on them first” (Atwood, 1972, p.88) and by this comparison of victimization of nature and the heroine Atwood shows how men use power to victimize women, and how they violate women because they believe that the soul and body of women belong to them and they are free to treat them for their desires.

Next, the protagonist wants to know the source of evil power and asks herself:

But how did they evolve, where did the first one come from, they weren't an invasion from another planet, they were terrestrial. How did we get bad? For us when we were small the origin was Hitler, he was the great evil, many-tentacled, and indestructible as Devil ...But Hitler was gone and the thing remained... I was asking are the Americans worse than Hitler. (Atwood, 1972, p.95)

The main character has since discovered that males who abuse women for their own gain are not always dictators; instead, they might be fathers, husbands, or sons (Somacarrera, 2006, pp.44-45).

After realizing this, the main character begins to despise and blame herself for having done nothing but wait and allow the hunters to murder the heron:

I felt a sickening complicity, sticky as glue, blood on my hands, as though I had been there and watching without saying No or doing anything to stop it: one of the silent guarded faces in the crowd. The trouble some people have being German, I thought, I have being human. In a way it was stupid to be more disturbed by a dead bird than by those other things, the wars and riots and the massacres in the newspapers. But for the wars and riots there was always an explanation, people wrote books about them saying why they happened: the death of the heron was causeless, undiluted. (Atwood, 1972, p.96)

She feels terrible about the manner she gave the hunters permission since she believes she was complicit in the crime and that being a human entails guilt. Consequently, she hates all human beings for doing such terrible act:

I leafed through all the men I had known to see whether or not I hated them. But then I realized it wasn't the men I hated, it was the hunters, the human beings, men and women both. They'd had their chance but they had turned against God, and it was time for me to choose sides. I wanted there to be a machine that could make them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for animals, they would be rescued. (Atwood, 1972, p.113)

This realization makes the protagonist see a parallel between the contribution to this act and how she has allowed being victimized (Steno, 2013, p. 58) by allowing her child to be aborted, she reproaches herself and says that “I could have said No but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer” (Atwood, 1972 , p.106), and confesses to her guilt when she says “whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allow it” (Atwood, 1972 , p.105). The protagonist now has learnt that if she calls herself an innocent victim then she has to witness her victimization, and no one can victimize her unless she allows them to do so (Steno, 2013, p.63). This point is explained by Atwood herself, who believes that:

If you define yourself as innocent then nothing is ever your fault--it is always somebody else doing it to you, and until you stop defining yourself as a victim that always be true. It will always be somebody else's fault, and you will always be the object of that rather than somebody who has any choices or takes responsibility for their life. (Bouson, 1993, p.80)

Yet, she wants to start a new life and take charge of her own identity; she no longer wants to be a helpless victim. She must thus let go of her sense of helplessness and declares:

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. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been. (Atwood, 1972, p.140)

Via her association with nature, her female consciousness reaches its climax, and the protagonist feels ready to revolt against being victimized. She uses Joy to become pregnant again. The struggle for power appears to reach its conclusion. She is quite self-assured and does not want to play the victim (Tandon, 2008, p.162).

Bouson believes that this act of the protagonist is a weak point in the novel and he calls it a “rescue scenario”, and it is used to solve problems of the character which she obviously cannot solve for them (Bouson, 1993, p.53). But the conception is symbolic and it indicates the end of conflicts and her saying yes to life again. The protagonist also decides to fight against the cause of victimization after she has understood so many types oppression in her life, and when her feminine consciousness reaches its climax she becomes ready to revolt against exploitation and oppression (Tandon, and Anshul Chandra, 2009, p.72). She steals away the camera which David has used for his movie, contains the photos of dead animals and naked body of Anna and throws it to the lake that symbolizes the submersion of women subjugation.

Eventually, the protagonist goes to the lake and performs an act of diving and surfacing. This symbolic act shows that the protagonist was drowned as an innocent victim but emerges as a wise and experienced individual. Having shaken off the past experience now, she begins a new life (Howells, 2003, p.18).

Conclusion

This study has examined *Surfacing* from an ecofeminist viewpoint that as it discusses topics related to both feminism and ecology. The book takes a critical attitude toward the patriarchal hegemony that rules the universe. Only after coming into contact with nature does the protagonist recognize the difference between her true self and her constructed identity. Her quest for her inner-self, which can be seen through her gradual engulfment in nature and progression toward a spiritual vision, is prefaced by the search for her father, who has vanished, in the wilderness. The main character appears to have undergone a complete transformation and is convinced about returning to the cultural world in her full power. She transforms from victim to heroine and turns patriarchal space inside out so that it can no longer constrain who she is. In order to become a natural woman, the protagonist rejects how men have traditionally construed femininity.

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