



The Presence Of Ecofeminism In Margaret Atwood's Novel Surfacing Is Evident.

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

The primary issue that humanity currently confronts is the deterioration of land and the environment, as well as the subsequent impact on human existence. Within this particular setting, the word ecofeminism assumes significant relevance. This research aims to comprehensively analyze Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) using an ecofeminist approach. This essay views power and control as oppressive forces that directly target both the feminine realm and the natural world. The narrative's anonymous main character is an ecofeminism advocate who revisits the unexplored island of Northern Quebec, her childhood home, to locate her absent father. Upon contacting the natural world, the main character becomes aware of the disparity between her inherent identity and fabricated persona. The work implicitly demonstrates the influence of Ecofeminism via the protagonist's reconnection with the natural world. Her connection with nature enhances her awareness of the exploitation of women. She chooses to live on the earth as a genuine ecologist, understanding that the natural realm interconnects all living beings with a wide range of species and intricate systems. The story serves as a prime literary illustration of ecological feminism since it addresses themes related to feminism and environmentalism. The novel's language, events, and characters mirror a civilization that subjugates and controls women and nature.

Keywords: Dominance, Ecofeminism, Femininity, Nature, and patriarchy.

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"I am not an animal or a tree; I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow; I am a place." (Surfacing, 236)

According to Ecofeminism, an end to women's oppression is bound up with ecological values, and women should be centrally concerned with ending ecosystem exploitation (Collard, 1988). Ecofeminism has gained significant traction among radical feminism and the Green Movement. The deterioration of land and the environment and the subsequent impact on human existence is humanity's primary challenge. Within this particular setting, the word ecofeminism assumes significant relevance. Ecofeminism is a contemporary approach to understanding and engaging with the environment. Andy Smith states that ecofeminists primarily focus on the subjugation of women and the degradation of the environment. Ecofeminists argue a close link between the historical subordination of women and the exploitation and destruction of our planet. Therefore, power dynamics, control exertion, and the state of being subordinate are critical aspects of Ecofeminism. Ecological feminism is a blend of ecological principles and feminist ideology. Greta Gaard argues that the fundamental principle of Ecofeminism is that the same ideology that allows for oppression based on factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and physical capacities also permits the oppression of nature.

Ecofeminist thinkers analyze the interrelationships among sexism, the subjugation of the natural world, racism, speciesism, and other forms of societal inequities. This research aims to comprehensively analyze Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) using an ecofeminist approach. The Canadian author has extensively explored the theme of women and the natural world in several literary works. *Surfacing's* composition and release align with the rise of feminist and environmentalist movements and reflect the preoccupations of its day. In her writings, the primary topics are the subjugation of women in a patriarchal culture and the

exploitation of nature in a technologically advanced civilization. This essay views authority and control as direct forms of oppression towards both the feminine and natural worlds.

The protagonist of the narrative is an individual who advocates for both environmental and feminist causes. They visited an untouched island in northern Quebec. They raised her with the intention of finding her absent father. The main character is a professional artist who appears to have returned to her hometown after a long absence. Her three companions, Anna, Joe, and David, accompany her. The narrative centers around the protagonist's quest to find her father, catalyzing her exploration of her identity. Her growing immersion in the natural world and her pursuit of mystical experiences exemplify this journey. This quest coincides with her exploration of her romantic and platonic connections.

The woman's relationship with her instructor and her decision to undergo an abortion, which she now views as a murderous act, illustrate her emotional and creative decline. She represents those who suffer exploitation and mistreatment because they lack influence. By the story's conclusion, she realizes that nature does not offer any sense of self, and she proclaims her readiness to embrace motherhood and reintegrate into society. Through this process, she reveals the contradictions and incongruities in her existence and her male-dominated society. The protagonist embarks on a psychological journey that takes her directly into the natural environment as she strives to rediscover her identity and roots.

The main character only becomes aware of the disparity between her inherent identity and her fabricated persona after experiencing the natural world's presence. While scouring the countryside and exploring underneath the lake in her quest to find her father, she becomes acutely aware of the Americans' profound damage inflicted upon nature. This acknowledgment is comparable to her developing self-awareness as a "victim." For their amusement, men indiscriminately exploit nature and women. The connection between nature and humans is one of exploitation. Petra Kelly observes, "Women are sex toys for men; women's lives count less than those of men; women who assert their independence and power are in some way defective" (118). People perceive women who demonstrate their independence and authority as inherently flawed. She acknowledges that her violation parallels the violation of Mother Earth's sanctity and disrupts ecological harmony, which entails all species' interdependence. In *Surfacing*, Atwood portrays men's improper exploitation of nature and the appropriate utilization of nature by women.

The opening phrase of the text signifies the demise of white birch trees. "I cannot believe I am on the same road again, twisting past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have seaplanes for hire". (*Surfacing*, 3) Atwood draws a correlation between technology's expansionist nature and Birches' death. "Americanism" refers to the cultural, linguistic, and ideological characteristics that are distinctively American. Canadians perceive the narrator's empathy for the dying birches, symbolizing nature, as a characteristic. The two Americans who callously slaughtered the heron stand in stark contrast to this.

However, research revealed that they were Canadians. According to Atwood's statement in *Surfacing*, if you look like them and think like them, then you are them (*Surfacing*, 165). Atwood suggests that an individual's appearance and mindset determine their identity.

The anonymous main character discovers a representation of her misfortune in the Quebec scene. She articulates a profound apprehension for the environment and facilitates the readers' comprehension of the symbiotic relationship between women and nature. During her route back home, she realizes that "nothing is the same. I do not know the way anymore." (*Surfacing*, 10) She is alienated from her country because the old road has been closed for years, and she needs a new one, but she doesn't know how. Throughout the novel, Atwood reminds the readers that ecological destruction pervades the setting, whether it is to control the dam or the destruction of older trees: "The trees will never be allowed to grow tall again; they are killed as soon as they are valuable; big trees are scarce as whales." (55) Fishing in the lake serves as a metaphor, suggesting a sense of entrapment or confinement.

Eventually, the female main character realizes that she is no different from the others in her ability to commit wicked acts. The facade of her childhood purity shatters when she recalls a childhood pastime the act of stabbing a doll that predicted her future abortion. The story underscores the difference between natural predators and human hunters, with the latter motivated by the thrill of taking a life. This exacerbates the estrangement of contemporary individuals from the natural environment. According to Vandana Shiva, the act of hunting itself does not cause a violent connection with nature. "It is the elevation of hunting to the level of ideology that does so" (*Staying Alive*, 50). The narrator highlights two instances of senseless killing: the heron's gunshot and the American fishermen's detonations at the lake.

The narrator is increasingly affected by whatever evil she witnesses being inflicted upon others. The environment encompasses many ecosystems and habitats and includes various animal species. Joe and David's documentation of the fish's internal organs horrifies her. On the second occasion, she no longer wanted to take the fish's life personally. She felt she lacked the authority to do so and believed there was no necessity since their suitable sustenance came from tin cans. We were performing this particular act. "I could no longer do it; I had no right to; we did not need it; our proper food was tin cans." They refer to this act as a form of pleasure and recreation. (*Surfacing*, 153). The term "re-creation" has been employed ironically in this context. Subsequently, she sets the frogs free in the lake, which evokes recollections of her brother's release of the confined frogs. The fury that follows serves as her first experience with patriarchal coercion. People frequently refer to the terminated fetus as a preserved frog. "Her childhood artwork depicts rabbits with

colorful egg houses, symbolizing all things green and every day" (116). On the other hand, her brother's artwork depicts conflict and death, and his occupation as an adult entails damaging the environment.

Significant conflicts and a noticeable imbalance characterize the relationship between Anna and David. David assumes the role of an authoritative and dominant masculine figure, aiming to degrade and embarrass Anna. Bousoon asserts that David's novel "Surfacing" highlights the oppression of women in a male-driven societal structure, marked by hierarchical and conflicting roles that prioritize men over women. Similar to nature, the female body is also viewed as a commodity that can be exploited and turned into a source of profit. Anna's sprint towards the lake, completely unclothed and coated in sand, evokes memories of scorched leeches making their way to the water, reminiscent of a childhood game played by the female protagonist. In the lake scene of the movie *Random Samples*, David compels Anna to remove her clothing and addresses her as "darling." The user's text is a single period. There is no text provided—a well-behaved young woman. In *Random Samples*, he refers to her as "darling... a good girl... twatface and desires to put her picture beside the dead bird" (172-73). He successfully captures explicit images of her without clothing. In this passage, animalistic language characterizes Anna, emphasizing how patriarchal societies perceive women as subordinate to males, akin to animals. She first protests against the patriarchal system that commodifies the feminine body by symbolically destroying camera films. David's camera has captured Anna's feminine essence, permanently imprisoning her deformed self behind its radiant lens.

The camera serves as a phallic emblem, symbolizing the dominance of males over the feminine body. As a result, it profoundly impacts Anna: "bazooka, or a strange instrument of torture." (173). The tale draws parallels between some animal characters and women who are victims. David desires for Anna to be photographed in a state of nudity next to the deceased heron. In this episode, she is also likened to a tree. David's joke, alluding to the divided beaver and its significance as Canada's national emblem, amalgamates the oppression of the beaver, women, and Canada. According to Linda Hutcheon, the beaver was first an attractive bait for European fur traders and colonists, and later for American capitalists.

The depiction of the beaver has associations with the objectification of women in pornography, as well as symbolizing Canada's history of exploitation and colonization by England and then by the United States. The Moose family's presence at the petrol station exemplifies the commercial exploitation of a romantic portrayal of nature being tamed and made suitable for human use. The narrator's initial romantic partner manipulates her into terminating her pregnancy by employing images of his wife and children, which he regards as mere objects: "his preserved and displayed family." The narrator's portrayal of herself as a helpless animal is initially suggested when the boys fasten her to the tree at school and unintentionally neglects to set her free. She experiences a sense of being an adept escape artist skilled at unraveling knots. As an escape artist, she relies on perceiving herself as a victim and detachment and flight as her means of escape. She strives for her emancipation by regressing to a primitive state, fully immersing herself in her surroundings to the point of living like a feral creature.

Remarkably, her mother transforms into a jay in her vision, while her father is a fish-like creature. The story implicitly demonstrates the influence of Ecofeminism via the protagonist's reconnection with the natural world. Before her emergence, she experiences a profound shift in her understanding and thus develops a deep appreciation for the environment, achieving personal healing. She endures the subjugation and control of a male-dominated society, lacking the power to resist for her survival, and ultimately agrees to get an abortion. Her abortion deviates from the natural order, demonstrating the ex-lover's ability to exert power and control over her. "The unborn child was my husband's; he imposed it on me, and 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 to me; he wanted a replica of himself". (39) The act of abortion exemplifies the principles of ecofeminist ideology, which posits that a society that devalues the act of giving life and instead glorifies the act of taking existence has far-reaching consequences for both the environment and women.

The protagonist's former partner lacks any emotional connection to the unborn child, viewing it as a trivial matter akin to removing a wart. He stated that it was "simple, like getting a wart removed. He said it wasn't a person, only an animal." (185). Atwood highlights the notion that males utilize the bodies of women to satisfy their desires. They exert authority over the process of birthing, a task that nature has exclusively designated for women. The main character also raises concerns about the overuse of reproductive technology. While ostensibly helping women, contemporary methods deprive them of their ability to perceive their physiological cycles. Therefore, she wants to prevent the kid from being extracted with a fork, like removing a pickle from a jar. The protagonist's vision is significantly affected by the fertility-regulating drugs, causing her eyesight to become blurred.

The author has endeavored to establish a strong connection between the injured psyche of the unidentified main character and the devastated terrain of the island in the border region of Quebec. Her trip to Quebec, accompanied by her three friends, gave her a profound insight into the essence of existence. Along the way, she distanced herself from her companions and the American Canadians who engaged in mindless acts of cruelty against birds, trees, and fish. Atwood is the author of the following text: "At the midway pond, the heron was still there, hanging in the hot sunlight like something in a butcher's window, desecrated and unredeemed. It smelled worse. The heron's death was causeless and undiluted". (167) She eventually recognizes, however late, that no individual can assist her in uncovering her true identity. Consequently, she seeks solace in the embrace of nature.

Paradoxically, she only finds herself when she connects her identity with the devastated environment. She assimilates into the environment, relinquishing her wedding ring, name, and identity. The narrator draws parallels between herself and the deceased heron during her recovery journey. The heron's harsh and unjustifiable killing is a clear ecological analogy to the narrator's experience. "The protagonist sees the heron as symbolic of her psychological death" (100). She has profound repulsion towards the act of murdering the bird, which is analogized to the persecution and harassment experienced by women. The relationship between women's fertility and men's environmental damage serves as a metaphor for men's exploitation of women. Why did they hang it up like a lynching victim instead of simply discarding it like garbage? They demonstrated their capability by causing death; otherwise, any connection they might establish would be worthless.

The intention behind such an action was to eradicate everything. Following her abortion, the main character develops profound empathy for plant and animal life and recognizes that rejuvenation via nature is the only remedy for her deterioration. Nature inherently interconnects with human beings, and our understanding and appreciation of the natural world, both inside and around us, closely ties our ability to realize our humanity fully.

Only the capacity for creation can harmonize with the capacity for destruction. Over time, she realizes that she has been opposed to nature. She attempted to disrupt the natural order by undergoing an abortion procedure. As a result, she must make amends for her behavior, which defies nature.

Therefore, she decides to have a child and raise it in a manner consistent with the typical development of a human being. This time, I will do it myself. The baby will slip out easily, resembling an egg or a kitten, and I will lick it off and bite the cord, causing the blood to return to its rightful place on the ground. Meanwhile, the moon will be complete and tugging fiercely. I will be able to see it in the morning; its fur is shining. As a god, I will never teach it any words. (209) By establishing a connection between her existence and that of other entities in the natural world, she has the ability to discern nature's inherent pattern, the continuous cycle of birth and death. She believes that to connect with nature, she must remove her clothing and adopt the vulnerability of the creatures she encounters. Her sustenance consists solely of mushrooms, plants, and berries. She assimilates into the forest, falling to the level of the plants. By immersing herself in the natural world, she experiences a profound transformation in her life. She experiences: the sun peeks through the trees; the swamp around me smolders; the energy of decay transforms into growth; a green fire ignites. "I remember the heron; by now, it will be insects, frogs, fish, and other herons. My body also changes; the creature within me, a plant-animal, releases filaments; I transport them safely between death and life and multiply." Simultaneously, she transforms into a plant, animal, earth, and woman, embodying the essence of a natural lady who deserves recognition as a novel archetype. She manoeuvres with the agility of an animal; blood surges within her body like the sap of a cell, yet she maintains her innate femininity, "a new kind of centrefold" (248). She believes she has great power because she embodies qualities of being innate, human, and virtuous at the same time. She has undergone a significant transformation since the start of the story. She comprehends the fundamental anguish experienced by her parents and acknowledges that this is the sole verity of her existence.

The narrator in the story withdraws from society and seeks solace in the untamed wilderness surrounding her. Through transformation, she becomes one with the natural world, blurring the distinction between herself and the non-human elements. This is evident in her statement, "I lean against a tree; I am a tree-leaning" (Surfacing, 236). Her connection with nature enhances her awareness of the exploitation of women. When the protagonist's heightened awareness of her femininity reaches its peak, she prepares the foundation for a rebellion against exploitation. She manipulates Joe into impregnating her, but she declines to marry him, possibly as a form of retaliation for her former partner's exploitation of her.

The power battle has concluded. She exudes unwavering self-assurance in her abilities and adamantly rejects the victim role, stating, "This above all is to refuse to be a victim." (249). She chooses to remain in Quebec and give birth to the "goldfish" growing in her belly. She is uncertain about the gender of the child in her womb, but she has decided to express her autonomy by allowing the fetus to develop. "I cannot yet determine the individual's state; it is too early. However, I assume that if I die, it also dies; if I starve, it also starves. It might be the first individual and actual human; its birth and acceptance are essential". (Surfacing, 250)

The writer has implied that germination would occur, suggesting the protagonist's firm intention to give birth to the child. Active resistance against male aggression can safeguard both women and nature. She is acutely aware that the dominance of men over women is profound and systemic. A significant number of individuals believe that it is a universally recognized and inherent phenomenon. Petra Kelly asserts that our society and our minds deeply entrench the subjugation of women. Women experience both systemic tyranny and mistreatment from individual males.

However, the protagonist would exhibit distinct characteristics. She refused to submit to male dominance. She is well aware that the unrestrained "ultimate result of unchecked, terminal patriarchy will be an ecological catastrophe." Kelly (1118) identifies as the source of this information. This is why she cultivates a friendly relationship with Joe, despite his gender identity, as she perceives him as a supporter of feminism. Living as a true environmentalist, she acknowledges the interconnectedness and abundance of diversity and intricacy in the natural realm, where all living beings coexist. She is fearless. No one can exert authority over her and infringe upon her physical being. She achieves a state of completeness with her revered Mother

Earth. She discards her entire civilization because of its negative impact on the planet. She has the potential to establish a society that values and actively pursues a harmonious relationship with nature. The individuals she is acquainted with live in an urban area but in a different era. She recalls her partner, the "counterfeit spouse," for whom she currently experiences only sadness. She is entirely dependent on Mother Earth. She doubts the existence of gods, including Jesus Christ, whom she views as merely speculative. She is unwilling to depend on anyone, including Joe. She now has complete autonomy. She expresses immense satisfaction with a deep connection to the earth, much like the ancient inhabitants of the past, stating, "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (251). The story serves as a prime literary illustration of ecological feminism since it addresses themes related to feminism and environmentalism. The story's language, events, and characters reflect a society that subjugates and controls both women and nature.

The literal interpretation of this voyage pertains to the physical aspect; however, the profound significance resides in exploring one's true self and affirming one's unique identity. These two types of meanings establish a connection between ecology and feminism, resulting in a book that explores ecofeminist themes. Nevertheless, she is not inclined to dismantle patriarchy and establish women's supremacy. She seeks to peacefully alter male authority systems and establish a state of balance and unity between females and males.

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