

# Recount Restriction and Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

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### Abstract:

*Margaret Atwood's Surfacing crams the effects of the demarcation of identity revels in Canadian history where the question of Canadian national identity was sprouting, becoming a pointer that was more clearly defined and more intentionally sought out by Canadian artists and citizens. Atwood's Surfacing can be considered in light of these historical developments, in sketching the establishment of recount restriction and not an avowal of the positive effects with such identifiers can bring. As a Canadian writer and a woman in particular, the narrator's communal groupings stipulate her victimhood, a notion that explores in relation to Atwood's major work of Canadian literary works. The narrator's initial state of close proximity total psychological constriction is pinpointing the peril of social borders, and it is only in evading the identifiers that define her in peculiar of national, gender, and epistemological establish that she comes to a sort of completeness. This breaks out takes the form of a turn towards the chaotic world as a truly borderless space where it is doable to mendan inconsistent self.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Psychological, Epistemological, Canadian

### Introduction

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* charts the re-enactment of identity embarked by a narrator who moves toward to terms with the metaphorical borders in protagonist life. Her journey to selfhood explore the scantiness of social groupings of national and gender constructs, along with the failure of normative prejudice, as personified in cause, language, and individuality, to provide meaningful definitions of identity. The journey of Atwood's narrator highlights the challenging groupings that her society command in terms of nationality and gender.

The narrator is on a mission with her lover and friends to the place of her childhood in search of her missing father. Truncated isolation, away from the busy and noisy city life, surrounded by unflustered nature and foreboding inspiring wilderness, her attempt to discover the truth about the death of her father turns out to be an intense self-exploration to dig out her concealed past. To access revelation and make a meaningful relationship with what she has lost, the narrator departs behind social borders. The visit to her childhood home does not just prompt a sense of nostalgia, but literally drag her back in time. She goes through a brooding state of deep reflection about

her life so far, about various people she had met and events she had gone through. Pryingly, this perception is not a typical, heartrending reminiscence about bygone days and good time.

In contrast, it is a meticulous, protracted extrication of imageries from the past, interpolating between the things she knows to reason with the happenings she could not fathom and extrapolating from the known to decipher her own mysteries. The visit to her childhood home does not just trigger a sense of nostalgia, but literally catapults her back in time. She goes through a meditative state of deep contemplation about her life so far, about various people she had met and events she had gone through. Atwood creates a narrator who feels alienated by social conventions that cast her in a specific gender role.

Socially isolated and doubtful of love, the narrator suffers an emotional numbness and eventually experiences a grand psychological as well as spiritual transformation. Atwood uses an old archetypal quest motif to explore the contemporary questions of female identity. Such questions cannot be labeled as archaic when a missing person's investigation ultimately becomes a search for her authentic self. Her journey to her erstwhile home is in fact an expedition into the uncharted territories of her own psyche.

### Self Identity

The novel, *Surfacing* is structured like a road novel as the narrator travels back to her native place. The opening paragraph portrays a realistic description of a journey. "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along the past the lake" (S 3). Journey in a modern world, as such is not an menacing idea as it used to be in olden times. Physical dangers and uncertainties of the journey would not be relevant in modern times; however the emotional aspects and the possibilities of its projections to various metaphoric realms transcend all technological advances which try belittling the very idea itself. Image of journey is repeated several times like a refrain which serves to communicate the purpose of the novel.

The protagonist descends into the depths of the metaphoric lake of her past and unconscious and surfaces into the present with a clear vision of reality. She is adaptable to live in the wilderness as well as in the city. The surroundings no longer matter to her. Really, she feels liberated to have essential freedom in life as a new woman with a strong social identity. She is feels duly armed with increased self-knowledge to strengthen her against the grasping nature of modern society and to lead her fellow Canadians. Through her mythical adventure she realizes the redemptive power of the primitive Amerindian Gods "these gods, here on the shore or in the water, unacknowledged or forgotten" (185).

Atwood puts forth an interesting theory that the real solution for the problems of modern life is a return to the pre-historic values and mysteries of nature, though at no point the novel claims it to be an easy universal remedy. While the novel ends with the narrator's renewed stability and potential return to civilization, this does not mean that she leaves beyond the new-found insight that she has gained from her fusion with nature. Instead, her involvement has left her with a new selfawareness of how she can construct her own identity within a society.

**"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" (203).**

This is a regain of subjectivity from a society whose rules of nationality, femininity, and logic having left her separated and emotionally dead. Though Atwood offers no practical solutions for how the narrator might live in society with her reclaim subjectivity, the narrator's new-found knowledge leaves her confident and determined about her future:

**“The word games, the winning and losing games are finished; at the moment there are no others but they will have to be invented, withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death” (203).**

The narrator is at last fixed in her own self-definition and prepared to face the social world. The narrator’s journey to self-reconstruction in *Surfacing* morals the destructive power of the borders that placed in day today lives. Originally a suffer as a Canadian and as a woman, the narrator is absolutely cut off from her inner self. It is only in decolonizing herself, and invented new forms of knowledge in nature that the narrator can live with the truth of herself: an adopted with a dead child who is also a suffer of national and patriarchal power structures.

### **Conclusion**

*Surfacing* basically deals with the theme of identity crisis. It not only deals with a woman’s identity but also the identity crisis of her own country. During the continuous search for her father, she witnesses the destruction of nature and killing of innocent creatures for American technological advancement. The novel presents the female quest for identity with reference to profession, marriage and motherhood. In spite of these seemingly constant and insurmountable hardships, the narrator heals herself when in a state of communion with nature, free from logic and language and towards the power of divine disclosure. In *Surfacing*, wholeness is found beyond borders. By the time the novel ends, spiritually reborn and mentally rejuvenated protagonist is brimming with hope and self-assurance as she embraces motherhood with a sense of responsibility.

### **References**

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