

Victim To Victor: Subvert The Thesis of Survival In The Novel Surfacing of Margaret Atwood



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A B S T R A C T

Women characters have been portrayed in various ways in literature. Female characters have represented everlasting arrangements of roles throughout literary history. It is clear that female characters have been treated by stereotype mentality for centuries. This approach remained the same whether women were characterized as angels or symbolic monsters. This prototype affinity is challenged by Margaret Atwood, as well as many other female authors. This paper attempts to examine the protagonists of Surfacing who do not fit into conventional twofold oppositions of good versus evil. Atwood's portrayals of female characters are distinctive in several ways. Every female character reveals the story of her victimization which leads her to reject it by several means. The unique feature of Atwood's novels is that all the female protagonists who seem, initially, as victim gradually emerge as victor.

Keywords: The Theme of Survival in Surfacing.

Introduction

The unnamed narrator of Surfacing is a victim for the half part of the novel. She was victimized by the patriarchal society, haunted memories, inability to connect and male domination. The narrator is alienated from the society and was dragged into struggle both externally and internally. Her unvoiced nature, initially, marked her as a victim, but by the end of the novel readers are aware that she has gone through a symbolic recovery and is now capable of connecting, but how has she arrived at this place? Several other feminist authors have written so much on female victimization and vindictiveness but the idea of divided self and inability to connect are two unique characteristics where Atwood differs.

The main woman character of the Surfacing is no doubt a victim but in order to understand her journey from victim to victor it becomes very important to know how she was victimized. The heroine of the novel has been isolated and seems to have had a comparatively tranquil childhood, being singled out of society's social circles later in life. This external struggle is a direct result of a serious internal struggle that stems from her past. It is this struggle that causes the protagonist's most severe problems.

This is her past where the root of her problem lies. It is learnt that the protagonist has had an affair with a married man, was impregnated by him, and was, in some sense, forced to get an abortion which leaves her feeling like a murderer. Her constant references to her husband illuminate the internal struggle that she is dealing with. When she goes down to the depths of the lake searching for the truth about her father, another, more important truth is revealed, the truth of her past.

One significant issue that the narrator struggles with is her inability to feel, her absolute lack of emotion. This is obviously a psychological effect of the abortion. Her abortion has caused her to feel cut off from humanity and her failed affair has resulted in her inability to love. The protagonist was unaware of the psychological damage that these two events had on her. Throughout the entire novel, the narrator's lack of emotion causes many problems, most significantly with Joe. To become whole again, the protagonist must dive into the depths of her subconscious to reconnect with the self that she lost prior to her abortion.

Two important incidents took place that helped the protagonist to become whole again. First a picture she finds from her childhood and the second her dives to find her father. The picture made her realize that one way to mend the split within her is to have another child. Another event that seemed to extricate her repressed memories from their entrapment was when she was diving into the lake to find her father.

The flooding of memories that happen as a result of the dive allows the protagonist to begin to close the gap that has divided her for so long. Perhaps it is the release of these memories that push the protagonist over the edge and launch her in one final attempt to become whole again.

Conclusion

During her temporary animalistic journey she is able to connect the two divided selves even more. She is finally able to cry and she takes the marriage ring off her hand and drop it into the fire. In the end, she realizes that she cannot remain in this non-human state forever. At the conclusion of the novel the protagonist overcome her many obstacles and surfaces as a survi-

vor. She regained the ability to feel and hopefully love again. She unfolds the answers that she was seeking about her father. She has recovers and repairs some of her lost language, ultimately possessing the ability to deal with language in a non-linear way. She tries to consider the animal communication and understands the rule. The non linear use of language is one sign that

the protagonist is on the road to recovery. She basically refuses to play the role of victim any longer. She is thus able to accept responsibility for her role in the victimization that she endures. Most significantly, she is no longer a victim. She has survived!

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