

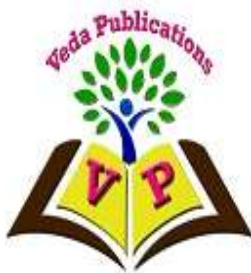


VICTIMS AND VICTIMIZERS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

Dr.D.L.Jaisy

(Assistant Professor of English, St.Jude's College, Thoothoor. K.K.Dist..)

ABSTRACT



Victimization, Alienation and Survival are the themes explored by Margaret Atwood in her novels. Margaret Atwood's novels examine themes related to the politics of gender, such as alienation of women under patriarchy, the delimiting definition of women as a function, the patriarchal attempt to female space by women through various strategies and women's quest for identity, self-definition and autonomy. Margaret Atwood's conflict in her fiction is not only to expose woman's complicity but also in the processes that lead to the victimization. She wants to explore the possible idea that was combating patriarchal structures of power and domination that refuses female's equal claims as an individual in society. The protagonist of Margaret Atwood is identical in refusing to be a victim and only survive giving into the severe system of male chauvinistic society.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Victim, Alienation, Survival, Estrangement.*

Citation:

APA Jaisy,D.L. (2018) Victims and Victimiziers in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 5(2), 168- 170.

MLA Jaisy,D.L. "Victims and Victimiziers in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.5, no.2, 2018, pp.168-170.



The character in Margaret Atwood's novels struggle to overcome alienation and achieve personal and social integration. Margaret Atwood's novels are set in the city of Toronto, described as the symbol of alienation in the world. In the novel *Surfacing* we can see the alienation from self and others is caused by estrangement from one's own past. Thinking sees bound arise separating victim from predator, male from female, mind from body, self from other and good from bad people.

Canadian literature has progressed from imitative art to the assertive and parotic. Her novel *Surfacing* – focuses more directly on the psychological dimensions and strategies of sexual politics. It traces the experiences of the unnamed central female character including a devastating extra marital affair, abortion and the death of her father which lead to alienation and ultimately to her mad identification.

The heroine of *Surfacing*, a talented woman goes in search of her missing father on a remote island on Northern Quebec with her lover Joe and her friends Anna and David. But soon she finds herself as a victim of violence, sex and dangerous choices and amongst families and broken marriages. She identifies these are only by the male dominants of the society. The narrator found her first victim in the form of her father. It was a terrifying glimpse of man torturing her mother. The protagonist finds her mother's suffering in the hands of her father. Now she sees herself being ruined by her husband's domination. She finds her own life and that of her mother's suffering in a male dominated society. The narrator remembers her father when he left away leaving his wife, son and daughter. This shows a vivid picture of male shambles on a sylph.

The narrator's father built a dock for them which was a huge fence cage with only one gate. The atmosphere was silent and serene without the rusting noise of leaves and wind. Her mother and her brother were kept in it. In this calm environment her mother heard something down by the water. She went there to look but was gasped in her track and stood helplessly while the narrator's brother was under the water sinking gently. This affects the narrator permanently. She explore her sufferings here she says, "I believe that an unborn baby has its

eyes open and can look out through the walls of the mother's stomach like a frog in a jar" (*Surfacing* 35). Hence the narrator feels if it wasn't for her father, the boy could have been saved. She finds him as a murder victim.

The heroine and her friend Anna have had a maladroit experience in their childhood and also have an ignoble relationship with men. Margaret Atwood identifies certain victim positions present in the Canadian psyche. This novel is a mind style of the narrator and not of Margaret Atwood. The protagonist's perception of the pitfalls, hypocrisy, exploitation, oppression and victimization of women in marriage gets sharpened.

According to the protagonist in *Surfacing*, marriage is contorted one because she married her lover secretly and wears his ring. But in reality he tries to misuse her body. As a result of his macabre behaviour she was conceived. She has unfeigned fond with him. But he told her that she must abort the conceived child. This shows his unscrupulous nature towards the protagonist. Till now she doesn't divorce him. She thinks that, "A divorce is like an amputation, yours survive but there is little left of you" (*Surfacing* 46). She loved her unborn child and found that it was another victim from birth to death. So the protagonist recognizes that the men are the victimizers and the women victims and undergo torture. The protagonist suffers abuse at the hands of men which broadens and complicates the theme handed by the author in a neat and direct way.

Later, the protagonist of *Surfacing* refused to continue the affair. Here the protagonist's sense of victimization about the father of the aborted child is symbolized in one way. She considered that what she ate at the time of pregnancy was controlled by the fake lover. Here the killing of the unborn baby is linked with the slavery of women and he was called one of the killers, the clay victims damaged and strewn behind him.

Initially Margaret Atwood's heroine appeared as victims and later they realized their victimization and they wheedled their relationship. The narrator rejects her oppressive environment. She lives like a wild beast on roots. Then she laments and desired for a child she feels her lost child is surfacing within her and it has been prisoned for so long its



eyes and teeth phosphorescent, "The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten and I'll lick it off and bite the cord" (*Surfacing* 173). Joe loves her to use her body for his lust. But the narrator finds him a disgusted victimizer, who suppresses her and makes her his victim of lust and deceit.

The victimizer Joe's clumsy advances have been rejected by the protagonist. When Joe tries to rape the narrator in *Surfacing* she tells him to stop; Trapped in the powerless role of victim, the narrator finds oral communication difficult. In the same way that her identity is moulded by an image of womanhood, she also finds that her speech is not her own. So she identifies her own life and the life of her companion, Anna in the state of male – domination. The exploitative behaviour of her former husband and her lover Joe explained the sexual colonialism.

On the rock paintings other cultures are marked, most notably the European cave paintings which expressed the narrator's feelings towards the modern culture and the male dominated society. Throughout her journey she finds some pictures which express the different victims namely the females by the male characters. The pictures in the magazines were compared to the animals such as the men and women. And says, "the animals with scales and spines and tentacles; and a man eating plant, engulfing a careless victim" (*Surfacing* 97). According to William H. New, "The sense of 'victimization' which provides the central metaphor of her critical work *Survival* appears very strongly in *Surfacing* as the link between the femaleness of the central characters and the dilemma of the nation which she lives"(273).

The drawings were ornately – decorated singly and in groups. The narrator wondered who had brought the pictures which fully denote female as a victim, even in the magazines, wall paintings, rock paintings, newspapers, and pornographies all expressed the women as a shabby creature. They were the only thing to use for the male's alacrities. Including all the drawings, especially men's magazines were about pleasure and victimizing the females. The males try to shatter females through the way of calamities, concealment, humiliations and inhumanities. This Atwood gives voice to similar sentiment. Female protagonists are victims of a male-

dominated society. Her novel focuses on the woman's identity crisis.

In *Surfacing*, the male characters use abusive words, filthy languages they think woman are looked as a symbol of sex which was expressed by the words of Joe and David. Once they were sitting near the dock beside their defeated log, axe men, arms folded, Anna sit beside them. They said the abusive words about her. It denotes, "Anna with no clothes on jumping off the end of the dock" (*Surfacing* 178). It refers to the oppression of male over female. The feminine characters are imposed. The protagonist found another victim that the females are compared to animals and to the insects and also that the females are rubbish ones. David urges Anna to have sex with him. So she glanced at him, contemptuous and bent.

The *Surfacing* heroine manages to articulate to herself what her role exactly should be. She refuses to be a victim. She experiences that her aborted child, floating before her. Margaret Atwood's novels are best feminist texts that rise above gender. Thus the whole picture shows the victimization of the males towards the females.

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