Othering America?: "Canada" in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* *

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Introduction: Atwood and Her Anti-American Literary Canadianism?

> The history of Canada, and therefore of Canadian literature, has been profoundly influenced—*and not always for the better*—by the almost nine thousand kilometer border that we share with the most powerful country in the world. (Atwood and Gibson, qtd. in Becker 30, emphasis added)

Always aware of the hegemony of the United States, Margaret Atwood, who was born in Ottawa in 1939, never forgets that "her writing is grounded in a strong sense of her cultural identity as a Canadian and a woman" (Howells 5). Simultaneously, however, she challenges "boundaries of nationality and gender in its explorations of what it means to be a human being" (5).

In the 1960s and 1970s, particularly around 1972 when she published *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* and *Surfacing*, Atwood was passionately involved in the post-centennial Canadian literary nationalism movement as a scholar, a critic, a writer, and an editor of the House of Anansi, a nationalist publisher. This literary nationalism movement, now known as the Canadian thematic criticism movement, had its roots in Northrop Frye's "Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*" (1965) and was fostered by the publication of D.G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock* (1970), Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972), and John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation* (1974). They sought the distinctiveness of Canada and its literature through studies of literature in Canada and fundamentally shaped the character of the English-Canadian literary canon of today. Particularly, they tried to distinguish their literature from American and British literature.

This article will examine Atwood's concept of Canadianness as manifest both in form and content of her novel *Surfacing*. While she tried to define the distinctiveness of English-Canadian literature in *Survival*, her study on

Canadian literature, Atwood gave fictional shape to her concept of Canadianness in *Surfacing* by analyzing various power relationships, especially, that of Canada and the United States. Although Coomi Vevaina and Robert Lecker argue that it is a mistake to read the two in tandem, critics such as Frank Davey, Rosemary Sweetapple, and Keith Garbian regard these two works as logically paired, and see *Surfacing* as a novel written to validate *Survival*.[1]

Ⅰ. Establishing a Canada-U.S. Binarism: a Tentative Proposal

A brief reading of the English-Canadian tradition as defined in *Survival* is offered here to understand Atwood's concept of Canadianness. Atwood argues that 1970s Canada as a whole is "a victim" or "an oppressed minority," in short a "colony" (*Survival* 35), and defines "the central symbol for Canadian literature" as "survival" (32). The survival thesis is explored through the treatment of motifs such as nature, animals, natives, explorers, settlers, family, immigrants, artists, and women; thus the survival thesis concludes that a traditional ending of this survival game is the failure of its hero or heroine (34). Because survival is only an issue when there is some force to overcome, Atwood's analysis here is based on the dichotomy of victim/victor. Importantly, however, Atwood's argument moves away from that binary opposition, leaving open the possibility for a victim to become a non-victim.[2]

In *Surfacing*, foreign characters such as Americans and regional others within Canada, such as Quebecers, become agents who carve out an identity for anglophone Canadian characters. This method, "defining others first and oneself after, by negative contrast," exemplifies Canadians' lack of an independent identity (McCombs, "Politics" 154).[3] The construction of otherness is "one further important element that is primary to nationalist representations" (McLeod 73).

The employment of a Canadian-American binarism is Atwood's chief technique for constructing the distinctiveness of English-Canada (McCombs 142). In *Surfacing*, particularly, "the image of Canada as a colony, physically exploited and psychologically oppressed by the United States, is manifest" (Schlueter 1):

> Americans don't usually *have* to think about Canadian-American relations, or, as they would put it, American-Canadian relations. Why think about something which you believe affects you so little? We, on the other hand, have to think about you whether we like it or not. . . . Americans and Canadians are not the same; they are the products of two very different histories, two very different situations. Put simply, south of you you have Mexico and south of us we have you. (Atwood, "Canadian-American Relations" 372-73)

Thus, Atwood depicts Americans as the opposite of Canadians: masculine, cultured, powerful, and capitalist.[4]

Atwood's exploration of Canadian/American relationships is a part of her study of the "paradigms of dominance/subservience" (Castro 223). Atwood explains that in the novel there are five other layers of binarisms, whose oppositions are interchangeable: human/the land, Quebec Hydro/the lakes, the English/the French, the whites/the Indians, and men/women (223).[5] These paradigms of dominance/subservience dominate the basic structure of *Surfacing*.

Surfacing first appears to be a quest narrative in which the unnamed first-person narrator and her friends,[6] Joe, Anna, and David, make a trip to a resort village in northern Quebec to look for her missing father, who has already drowned in the lake in his attempts to photograph Native art. This quest for the narrator's father is at the surface of the narrator's multi-purpose journey. Like the paradigms of dominance/subservience, this journey has a layered structure that hides other quests for her lost mother, for herself, and for Canadian national identity. The unnamed female narrator who is "emotionally disturbed" by her past and present experiences can be a symbolic "representative of the Canadian psyche" (Broege 123).[7] An unnamed narrator can function as the collective voice of a people in nationalist writing (McLeod 93). Moreover, the "[p]owerless status of Canada" is often compared to that of women (Hutcheon, "Process" 139).

According to Atwood's text, Canada belongs to the domain of subservience, while America belongs to the realm of dominance. The narrator's quests are interwoven with the attributes Atwood associates with Canada: natural, feminine, passive, lacking identity, and suffering a victim

complex.[8] Those images and binary structures are expressions of what Atwood asserts is the central image of Canadian literature: "a collective victim's struggle for survival" given the country's hostile environment and colonial history (Toye 446).

Atwood uses the narrative device of a trip from an urban location in Ontario to a resort village in northern Quebec via northern Ontario, "the wilderness of Canadian cultural myth" (Howells 22). In *Surfacing*, signs of American power that are too abundant to see in Ontario city become much more obvious in rural Quebec, "a colony inside a colony" (Piercy 43). The travel from the English-Canadian world, which is geographically, culturally, and linguistically closer to America, to a French-Canadian area, helps the characters to recognize American power and ideologies, the infectious "disease" from the south now spreading through Canada (Kaur 40, 48) and to contemplate their condition in North America. Atwood's characterization of "the south" as where the disease comes from reinforces the perception of America as evil in *Surfacing.*[9]

The power of America is inevitable even in northern Central Canada. In the Ontario-Quebec border area, the narrator expects to see the familiar landscape of her childhood. However, she finds numerous transformations brought about the invasion of American capitalism and commercialism, including a gravel pit, power lines, a new paved road, and a stuffed moose with an American flag on the roof of a local gas station. As a physical response to these symbols of invasion, the narrator loses her way and cries. Thus, as the narrator goes deeper inside Quebec, where she expects to see the unspoiled Canada and cannot find it, the narrator's anti-American sentiment increases. She has naively expected Quebec's culture and language to form a barrier blocking the influence of the States.

All these changes to the natural world, which are the signature of a "distinctive national heritage" (Howells 23), are automatically recognized as projects of "bloody fascist pig Yanks" (9), though the narrator does not see any American bodies there. In fact, contrary to the frequent mention of Americans in the novel, there are few Americans present in the landscape of the story. In many cases the narrator and her friends are just commenting on imagined, purely conceptualized Americans.

By the middle of the novel, Atwood "tentatively" defines Americans as

the opposite of Canadians in order to establish and then question the Canadianness of Canadians. The protagonists' perception of Americans becomes very clear when they meet a few actual Americans during the trip. The first Americans they meet are Evans, the owner of a local motel, and his son, Claude. Evans and Claude are described as committed capitalists; Claude sells ridiculously expensive beer in his bar and Evans, "a laconic American in checked shirt and peaked cap and knitted jacket with an eagle on the back" (30), charges them five dollars for a ten mile boat trip to the island whereas Paul, a local Quebecer, takes them for nothing.

In addition, these American capitalists invite their fellow Americans to Canada, multiplying like a virulent disease. Atwood describes this multiplication of Americans as ants passing words to gather their group for a prey. Atwood portrays the multiplying Americans in Claude's motorboat who come near the narrator's canoe as ferocious and wasteful hunters who "catch more than they can eat and they'd do it with dynamite if they could get away with it" (66). The narrator compares the Americans with sharks, and depicts their destructive behavior such as the throwing away of cigarette butts which pollute the environment (66). The Americans' motorboat, as the vessel of the merciless hunters, reflects their behavior. The boat is a despoiler of the landscape and a menace to the safe operation of the Canadians' smaller canoe (Broege 118). The relationship of the motorboat to the canoe, a big roaring motorboat circling around and rocking a small canoe, evokes that of a predator to its prey (66). The Canadians' wooden canoe is contrasted with the Americans' motorboat, the product of technology. The boat obtrusively commits this violence bearing an American flag, unlike the anonymous canoe which lacks a flag to identify the nationality of its occupants. Notably, too, a canoe is a popular symbol of Canada. Judy Waytiuk explains that canoes, which "built trade between the early exploring French and English and the aboriginal people," have "floated into the hearts of even non-paddling Canadians as the perfect symbol for the country" (45). John Jennings points out the exceptionality of canoes as a peaceful means of conducting trade in the frontier period: "There were wars going on all around, all the time, but the actual trading thing was extraordinarily peaceful" (qtd. in Waytiuk 45). By juxtaposing a canoe with a motorboat, Atwood recalls this symbolic legacy of peace, order, and

respect for nature.

To describe the Americans, in addition to the disease/virus metaphor, the narrator applies the science fiction metaphor of the Martians to these Americans who "whoosh away into nowhere" after their hunting (67). This indicates the narrator's fear of the elusive and omnipresent Americans who could appear anywhere again. Atwood uses this Martian metaphor repeatedly in her works to describe the incomprehensibility of foreigners.[10] The comparison of the Americans to Martians indicates "a great gulf between [the] Canadian and [the] American mentality" (Broege 118).

The narrator's description of the other identified American, Bill Malmstrom, is consistent with these representations. The narrator's fear of aggressive Americans rapidly increases later in the novel when she finds that she is trapped on the island with no way to return to the city by herself. She might somehow reach the village with her canoe without Evans's motorboat, but she has "never learned to drive" and thus cannot get back to the city (70). This immobility underlines her lack of autonomy and her entrapment in modern society as a victim. The American from Michigan appears with signs of masculinity, authority and power: the whine of a motorboat, an "executive mustache," grey hair, tobacco, and money (93-94). Significantly, he is the only person whose identity (full name, occupation, and hometown) is fully disclosed within the novel; much less information is given about the central characters. Such an abundance of knowledge reminds us that a "name" always comes with a certain power.[11]

The situation in which wealthy Americans buy out the properties of Canadians is a typical example of American capitalists' power over Canadians. The narrator is already a victim of American capitalism; she is a commercial artist who imitates British and American products to make her living.[12] Therefore, she instantly recognizes Malmstrom's capitalist features: "a small harrumph" (94) and a business card. The narrator anticipates the results of selling her family cottage to the Americans: "motels [and] highrises" displacing nature (95). Thus in her mind, the image of Americans as capitalist land developers, as despoilers of nature, and as cunning hunters, are all linked. Malmstrom's innocent appearance as an environmentalist and a children's garment merchant contrasts with his traitorous intention: to build a hunting and fishing lodge for members of the Detroit branch of the

Wildlife Protection Association of America. The association whose name promises conservation is preparing to destroy the environment by building their lodge.

This plan of so-called American conservationists emphasizes the perniciousness of the American doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which may be reflected in Atwood's construction of American figures. Since the nation's beginning,[13] America self-righteously has regarded itself as morally superior and has continued its God-justified expansion: "He has made us the master organizers of the world. . . . He has made us adepts in government that we may administer government among savage and senile people" (Beveridge 121)." However, such American expansion is always accompanied by the destruction of the natural world and cultural systems of others.

The escalation of anti-American paranoia can be seen in David's recognition of Malmstrom as a CIA agent, and his plausible speculation about a war between Canadian nationalists and "Yank pigs" over the clean water.[14] David, who can "spot them in a crowded room," suspects that Malmstrom is here to build a "snooping base that will be strategically important during the war" (96). He speculates that during the war, the CIA would send Marines through Quebec. His distrust of Quebecers as American sympathizers is an instance of his tendency to "other" Quebecers, the majority of whom are of French ancestry. Traditionally, they have had ambivalent feelings towards the English governance of Canada, and they sometimes supported America against Britain.[15] Contrary to David's confidence in his nationalist guerilla force to prevent U.S. invasion, the narrator sees the impossibility of success with the guerilla war for urbanized Canadian nationalists who do not know how to survive in the bush: "I thought about the survival manuals: if the Movement guerillas were anything like David and Joe they would never make it through the winters" (97).

Ⅱ. Questioning the Canada-U.S. Binarism: "America" as a State of Mind

However, the conclusion of Atwood's study of the distinctiveness of English-Canada is not merely the establishment of its distinctiveness in a hierarchical Canada/America binarism. Her aim is, I argue, the reevaluation

of the validity of that same binary relation and the Canadian victim complex. The transcendence of such binarism and the achievement of "some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony rather than a destructive relationship towards the world" (Atwood, "A Conversation" 27) are far more important for Atwood. As Rao suggests, "splitting the world into discriminatory categories and opposites" is ultimately pointless for her (8).

Atwood seems to be more interested in defining English-Canadian distinctiveness as resolutely undefinable and ambiguous. The opposing sets of qualities permeating *Surfacing* are more accurately described as dualities or ambiguities that can coexist in an entity than binary opposites that annihilate each other. This attempt to transcend binarism is suggested as Position Four of the basic victim positions in *Survival*: being free from the chain of victim/victimizer. Moreover, as Frank Underhill notes, the border between Canadians and Americans is very ambiguous in its nature. As a country which is "more exposed than anyone else to the social and cultural influences which the Americans spread abroad," Canada has "become more like the Americans than any other people has yet become" (13).

The Canadian characters' attempt to establish their distinctiveness by comparing themselves with the Americans becomes desperate when the word "American" signifies not simply nationality, but "state of mind" (Rao 8) as victimizers. Infected by the "virus" coming up from the south, Canadians in *Surfacing* are becoming like Americans:

> They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the difference. Like the late show sci-fi movies, creatures from outer space, body snatchers injecting themselves into you dispossessing your brain, their eyes blank eggshells behind the dark glasses. (129)

The virus cannot easily be stopped because of the ambiguity of the borders between Canada and the United States. This fluidity of the border is well represented by the image of water in *Surfacing*. Sherrill Grace points out the importance of the image of water in *Surfacing*.[16] It functions as both border and entrance, stressing the ambiguity of the binary oppositions. Not only

does the image of water divide and join two countries, but it also functions as the ambiguous border between the narrator's past and present, which is also explored in the novel. The change in perspective that dissolves the borders between all binary opposites is dramatized by the shift of tense from first-person-present tense to first-person-past tense in chapter nine.[17]

By the end of Part Two, the narrator's anti-American sentiments escalate to the point that she speculates as to whether Americans are worse than Hitler, the most evil figure in her childhood value system. Then, the narrator becomes increasingly sensitive to America as a state of mind. She starts to see reflections of the American habits and viewpoints in Canadians: "If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them, I was saying, you speak their language, a language is everything you do" (129).

The narrator's recognition of American traits in Canadians is validated by her encounter with quasi-American Canadians at the lake. Her party, paddling their traditional canoe, meets another group in a shiny aluminum canoe. She first judges them as Americans disguised as Canadians, on the basis of their predatory American language ("Getting any?"), their ferocious over-fishing, and their "starry flag" (121). Her hatred is so intense that she even wants to "swing the paddle sideways, blade into his head: his eyes [then] would blossom outwards, his skull shatter like an egg" (128). However, she soon finds out that they are Canadian Mets fans.

There is another significant aspect of this encounter with quasi-Canadians: the so-called Americans mistake the narrator's party for Americans and ask where they are from:

> "Say, what part of the States are you all from? It's hard to tell, from your accent. Fred and me guessed Ohio."
>
> "We're not from the States," I said, annoyed that he'd mistaken me for one of them.
>
> "No kidding?" His face lit up, he'd seen a real native.
>
> "You from here?"
>
> "Yes," I said. "We all are."
>
> "So are we," said the back one unexpectedly.
>
> . . . . "We thought you were Yanks, with the hair and all."

> I was furious with them, they'd disguised themselves. "What're you doing with that flag on your boat then?" I said. My voice loud, it surprised them. The front one withdrew his hand.
>
> "Oh that," he said with shrug. "I'm a Mets fan, have been for years, I always root for the underdog. (128-29)

After this incident, she detects American traits even in her own group. She identifies the element of Canadian-American/victor-victim relationships and realizes she is trapped by Americans. She also recognizes the affinities between her own experience as a powerless female and those of other victims, and begins to comprehend the relationships between victimizer/victim chains. By this time, the main purpose of her quest is no longer her father's fate but her own (107).

The prolonged primitive island life, in which they need to prepare everything by hand, exacerbates the natural conflicts between so-called victors and victims. In this context, males, especially David, show their discursive "Americanness" by exercising power over their victims in various ways. Masculinity, power, and the image of America are closely connected in this novel. Because of the narrator's idea that everything with power is evil and American, her hatred toward David is unavoidable; David is nothing more than a "second-hand American" who was so "infested" and "garbled" that she "couldn't help him: it would take such time to heal, unearth him, scrape down to where he was true" (152).

In fact, David's acts are comparable to those of the real Americans. He is a man of technology; he drives a car, a terrestrial motorboat; he has the only watch in their group; and he operates a camera, which he is using to "shoot" *Random Samples*, with his "Murder Thumb" as Anna describes it (98).[18] Moreover, David, "a great white hunter" (29), overfishes. For the narrator, fishing has become a form of murder when it is not necessary for life: "[w]e were committing this act, violation, for sport or amusement or pleasure, recreation they call it, these were no longer the right reasons" (120). To compensate for David's "murdering" of the natural world and to be relieved of her feelings of guilt by not stopping him, she goes on to rescue the frogs the others have collected and imprisoned in a jar of water (121).

David's tool for hunting is not only a fishing rod. He uses an axe to chop

the trees (Sweetapple 63), a camera, and importantly, his male body. His film is a collection of shots of his and the Americans' victims: chopped trees, innards of caught fish, a killed heron, bones of a deer, and naked Anna, who is forcibly stripped of her clothes. This juxtaposition of the victims of David (an anti-American-quasi-American), Canadian nature, animals, and women, captured by his camera emphasizes the relation of imagery in this novel. The fish innards with partly digested crayfish and leech is another indicator of the victimizer-victim hierarchy (Kaur 145).[19]

As the days go by, David shoots the group member for *Random Samples* because he has "used up everything" on the island (134). The narrator's description of Joe's shooting of Anna—"[swiveling] the camera and [training] it on them like a bazooka or a strange instrument of torture and [pressing] the button, lever, sinister whirr" (135-36)—emphasizes her recognition of this scene as a "war." David, the sexist, violates Anna's body by fully using his power, especially his male power over Anna as her husband:

> "Fuck off, you want bloody everything don't you, you can't use that stuff on me."
>
> "Why not," David said evenly, "it works. Now just take it off like a good girl or I'll have to take it off for you."
>
> "Leave her alone," Joe said, swinging his legs, bored or excited, it as impossible to tell.
>
> ". . . Shut up, she's my wife," David said. His hand clamped down above her elbow. She jerked away, I saw his arms go around her as if to kiss her and she was in the air, upside down over his shoulder, hair hanging in damp ropes. "Okay twat face," he said, " is it off or into the lake?" (135)

In the end, David rips Anna's clothes off and films her. Humiliated and defiled, she escapes by diving into the lake. Anna's act can be understood as her attempt to be purified by merging herself with nature. Nature, especially the water of the lake, is given the power of purification in *Surfacing* (Grace 104).

The narrator even regards victimized Anna as an American because she wears clothes with a metallic zipper (163). According to the narrator,

"everything metal" is American (186) so that almost all civilized human beings who use metal goods turn into Americans, not only her enemies, but even her friends (16).

Ⅲ. Constructing a New Canadianness Beyond the Binarism

Eventually, the narrator realizes that she herself is an American, although she hates Americans so much that she wishes to have "a machine that could make them vanish, a button [she] could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else" to rescue the victims of these predators (154). The narrator's recognition of herself as American becomes decisive in her last attempt to search for her father's body in the lake. While she was looking for her father's body, she was also searching for her lost past through her study of the power politics of "Americans" versus "Canadians": the "thematic decoy" of victimization (Bessai 396). When she finally discovers her father's disfigured corpse, it resembles a fetus. This recalls her traumatic abortion of a child conceived with her previous partner. Her father's body is associated with the Native art he died for, itself representative of a victimized race. Her father's victimization has continued after death: he is hooked and drawn up by American fishermen. This final indignity suggests the muted, subordinate nature of Canada's national history.

In the narrator's decision to abort her child, she is no less an American than her previous partner. She accuses him of impregnating her to test his masculinity, only to demand an abortion afterward. However, she recognizes that by failing to reject his request, she, too, is guilty. By realizing her Americanness, she finally corrects the fantasy that constructs Canadians as innocent victims who are "slaughtered because they exist" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 128; *Survival* 242). She has "to recant, give up the old belief that [she is] powerless and because of it nothing [she] can do will ever hurt anyone" (*Surfacing* 191). The discovery of her own role as a destroyer through the act of aborting her child resonates with her earlier regrets of her participation in the animal killings, which she also regards as an American act. Her participation in American acts echoes Canada's complicity in American capitalism as "*les solde*" (132), and its result, the destruction of nature:

> My country, sold or drowned, a reservoir; the people were sold along with the land and the animals. A bargain, sale, *solde. Les soldes* they called them, sellouts, the flood would depend on who got elected, not here but somewhere else. (132)

The change in the narrator's state of mind from that of victim to victimizer, and then finally an approach to a neutral non-victim appears in her communications with males. At the end of the survival game on the island, the narrator rejects David, who finally sexually assaults her: "He reached his arm around me, invading, and pulled me over towards him; his neck was creased and freckled, soon he would have jowls, he smelled like scalp. His moustache whisked my face" (151). This time, the seeds of resistance within her enable her to evade David: "the power flowed into my eyes, I could see into him, he was an imposter" (151). Her protest against the violence has been implied in the novel. She has liberated captivated animals; she has also been an "escape artist" (72) who was able to avoid the violence of men. This is the potential of the narrator and the difference between her and other females in the novel: Anna, who reluctantly accepts David's sexist requests, and her mother, who jumps from the roof assuming that she is a bird and breaks both her ankles, finishing her life in a hospital, much like a caged bird.

The narrator's relationship with Joe, her present partner, also exhibits her move towards Atwood's Position Four in *Survival.* In terms of the exercise of masculinity over the narrator, Joe is an American who tries to sexually colonize her and make her his possession by marrying her. His Americanness is suggested by his profile, which resembles the American buffalo on the U.S. nickel (8). However, by rejecting the offer of marriage, which is inevitably a power play within a victor-victim relationship, but making love to him in order to conceive a child, she seems to find a new way:

> You really want to marry me, let me fuck you instead. You really want to fuck, let me marry you instead. As long as there's a victory, some flag I can wave, parade I can have in my head. . . . But marriage was like playing Monopoly or doing crossword puzzles, either your mind worked that way,

like Anna's, or it didn't; and I'd proved mine didn't. (87)

Rather than participating in the power game, at this moment she chooses to be a "small neutral country" (87). With this stance the Canadian narrator becomes conceptually both Canadian (woman/victim) and American (male/victimizer).

The emergence of a new conceptual mode of ambiguity beyond binarism is confirmed by the narrator's investigation of her parents' past. The narrator's encounter with her parents' heritage and the ghosts of them make her realize the falseness of binarism that has permeated *Surfacing*. The parents' ghosts appear by transcending the borders between this world and another world. They also change their forms from human beings to animals: a wolf and a jay. More importantly, the narrator's image of them, in which the mother is pregnant, reminds her that she is the mixture of the two, male and female, and fundamentally dual and ambiguous.

The parents, who first appear as a pair of opposites, are not opposite at all. The narrator's father is rational but lyrical enough to enjoy the quality of the King James Bible; and her mother is natural but still rational enough to understand her brother's need for violence to protect himself from other boys and strong enough to guard her children from a bear.[20] Her family's respect for alien lifestyles such as those of the Quebecers, Paul and Madame, also exemplifies this theme of the abolition of borders. Unlike Americans and English-Canadians who are pursuing technology and have interests in clearing the ground, they cooperatively live in both civilization and nature by recycling old car parts and growing vegetables in the garden. The way in which Paul's wife and the narrator's mother communicate shows that they have surmounted the artificial barriers of languages. They hardly understand each other's language, but can smile at each other.

The narrator's approval of this cohabitation of opposing qualities appears to bring her back to sanity. She decides to return to the city to survive and bear her child who "might be the first one, the first true human" (191) free of power politics.[21] However, this ending does not provide a clear resolution. The pregnancy of the narrator may be her fantasy. Moreover, if she successfully gives birth to her child, she will likely enter another circle of victimizer/victim because childbearing is demanding.[22] This ambiguous

ending implies the start of another survival game, which verifies Atwood's survival thesis: Canada is perpetually in search of its unstable identities and must continuously struggle for its survival.

Ⅳ. Using and Abusing Literary Conventions in *Surfacing*

The formal orientation of *Surfacing* also represents the ambiguity explored in its content. *Surfacing* manipulates and subverts literary genres and themes.[23] As Linda Hutcheon points out, Canadian writers first have to deconstruct British social and literary myths in order to redefine their colonial history (Introduction 6). Therefore, Atwood makes *Surfacing* a pastiche of the British and European literary conventions such as Wordsworthian pastoral romanticism and Grail romance.[24] The novel questions these conventions and does not give readers a traditional conclusion such as redemption through contact with nature as in a pastoral romance or the accomplishment of a quest or the conception of a child in a Grail romance. Atwood writes in *Survival* that in a conventional Canadian exploration and settlement story, which is a variation of the Grail romance tradition, a hero/heroine does not find anything, nature is more hostile than redemptive, and mothers and babies tend to die. Reflecting the defined Canadian tradition, the narrator's father, who was in search of Native art, is killed in an accident and submerged under the water; and the narrator looking for her father only finds him dead; at the same time, the narrator recovers her memory of abortion. By using and abusing the Grail romance tradition, Atwood demonstrates her version of an English-Canadian tradition in *Surfacing*.

Atwood's final destination is not an establishment of an English-Canadian "survival" tradition. In *Surfacing*, not only are the old British and European traditions contested, but even the defined pessimistic Canadian tradition is challenged by the novel's ambiguous conclusion. As she writes in *Survival*, Atwood's emphasis is on the search for a new mode of Canadian literature that escapes from traditions by exploring them:

> If you're a writer, you need not discard the tradition, nor do you have to succumb to it. That is, you don't have to say, "The Canadian tradition is all about victims and failure, so I won't have anything to do with it;" nor need

> you decide that in order to be truly Canadian you have to give in and squash your hero under a tree. Instead, you can explore the tradition--which is not the same as merely reflecting it--and in the course of the exploration you may find some new ways of writing. (238)

In contrast with the "doomed babies" tradition (*Survival* 187), which represents the victim complex of Canadian literature, *Surfacing* points to a possibility that the narrator may bear a child, who will be a new kind of human being; Atwood creates the narrator as one potentially poised to overthrow the victim/victor binarism.

Conclusion

The narrator of *Surfacing* represents a vision of being Canadian, using ambiguity that goes beyond binarism throughout the story. Atwood enacts the last step of survival theory, in action, which is often ignored, and validates it in *Surfacing* both through the development of the narrator's state of mind in the story and its formal exploration. This orientation shows that Atwood supports change and the independence of a Canadian tradition, which is nevertheless aware of the traditions of its colonial past, and must find a constructive way to move past such limitations.

The nationalist critics in the early 1970s did not pay much attention to this aspect of *Surfacing* and Atwood's concept that questions various borders. The ambiguity of Atwood's concept of Canada was reexamined after the late 1970s when the literary nationalism movement ended with the arrival of anti-thematics whose aim was to read Canadian literature free from its contexts.

Notes

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1 See Vevaina 265; Lecker, "Janus" 201; Davey, "Atwood" 75; Sweetapple 50; Garbian 50.

2 Atwood suggests that Canadians occupy basic four victim positions to analyze Canada. Position One is to deny the fact that one is a victim (36). Position Two is to acknowledge

the fact that one is a victim, but to explain it as inevitable (37). Position Three involves acknowledging that one is a victim, but trying to escape that role (37). Position Four is to be a creative non-victim by finding freedom from the victim/victor chain (38).

3 In "Eleven Years of 'Alphabet,'" to characterize Canadian ways of thinking, Atwood first defines American and British perspectives, claiming that Americans value "taste," and British appreciate "technique." She goes on to define Canada's vision as emphasizing "synthesis" and the discovery of "where to fit in" (62-63).

4 Hengen introduces the terms associated with America in opposition to Canada. She argues that although Atwood's goal is to deconstruct the dualism that dominates Western thought, pairs of opposites such as Canada/US structure are pervasive in *Surfacing* (63).

5 In fact, Atwood says there are seven pairs of "dominance/subservience" in the interview with Castro. However, she mentions only six of them (223).

6 Vevaina and Stein argue that the narrator is alienated from her friends. For example, she describes neither their personal details nor mentions their family names (Vevaina 274-75; Stein 54).

7 Bennett and Brown note in *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* that the central theme of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* is a lack of "authenticity" (777).

8 Broege associates these terms with a Canadian psyche (123).

9 See Hengen 63; Kaur 48.

10 Atwood also uses this Martian metaphor for an Oriental man to describe his behavior, which is "unfathomable to the Canadians," in her short story "The Man from Mars."

11 The namelessness of female characters such as the Quebecois Madames, "none of [whom] had names" (27), her mother, and herself also seems to imply the powerlessness of these female characters.

12 Artists who are barren, have abortions, or suffer from other physical disabilities are one of the recurring motifs in Canadian literature introduced in chapter 9 of *Survival* titled "The Paralyzed Artist" (177-94).

13 As a prototype of the expressions of Manifest Destiny, see Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" (Boller and Story 1: 19-23). The quotation on this page is from a speech "America's Destiny" (1900) by an American senator, Albert Beveridge, justifying the American colonization of the Philippines.

14 Notably, this CIA allegory also appears in Atwood's next novel *Lady Oracle* (Broege 124-25).

15 The position of French Canadians in North American history is ambivalent in terms of their relationship to Americans. For example, a mutual defense pact (1778) between France and America helped Quebec resist the expansion of British power, although the initial intention of France was to foster the dependence of America. Interestingly, among the local Quebecers, however, anti-Americanism was popular because they were not in favour of Americans' Puritanism and Republicanism.

16 See Grace's *Violent Duality* (104).

17 Bartlett explains that the shift from what he calls the aggressive "first person sports-commentary tense" (21) to the past tense in the Part Two of the novel is designed to "convey more effectively [the narrator's] spiritual death and where its causes lie" (25).

18 As Hutcheon points out, Atwood is playing upon the associations of the verb "shoot," which can be applied both to cameras and guns ("Process" 142). Burgin, a visual artist and critic, theorizes the politics of the photographic gaze. In the process of objectification, the gaze becomes male-gendered and socially empowered so that a photograph, which is a record of "looking" and "being looked at," is "a site of multiple relations of empowerment, submission, gender, surveillance, identification, and control" (Taylor 79).

19 Sontag's theory of group photography explains the significance of being filmed together in *Surfacing*. According to her, not only does a filming occur at a moment of integration, but such a moment has a bonding effect on a group being filmed together. For more information, see *On Photography* by Sontag and "The Social Psychological Power of Photography: Can the Image-Freezing Machine Make Something of Nothing?" by Burgess, Enzle, and Morry.

20 Bartlett and Hintz discuss the ambiguity of the parents in their articles.

21 Atwood published a poetry collection titled *Power Politics* (1971). In the collection, she explored the deceptiveness of romantic relationships, which she argues is best described as power politics.

22 See Sweetapple 60.

23 See Hutcheon, Introduction 9-11.

24 As for Grail romance, see page 186 and 194 of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.

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