

Dwelling in the Dissolve: Trans-Corporeality and Aquatic Materiality in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

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Abstract: There has always been a dichotomy between the decadent urban lifestyle and the pristine countryside. Drawing on literary examples ranging from Aristotle's *Poetics* to modern works, Northrop Frye identifies a mode in which the protagonist's withdrawal or escape from society becomes a crucial step toward their redemption and eventual salvation. In her much-appraised book of criticism, *Survival*, Margaret Atwood, too, underlines not only the nurturing essence of nature but also the evilness of cities in Canadian literature. In a similar vein, the protagonist in Atwood's *Surfacing* resorts to nature to purge herself from the diseases and wounds inflicted on her in the city. It is not just Old Mother Nature as a redeeming space to which she resorts, but the adherence to the values of the modern society, with its emphasis on makeup, grooming, and childbearing precautions, from which the narrator in the novel seeks refuge that help her tinker herself piece by piece. By way of Stacy Alaimo and Sidney Dobrin, among other new materialist and blue humanities thinkers, this paper explores the natural environment as a lively agentic force and addresses the idea of lake as body, thereby unmooring ecocriticism from its terra-centered anchors. Positioning and embedding the human body in proximity to other bodies which populate the natural environment, this study discusses how the entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies restores wholeness to an otherwise psychologically fragmented self.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, blue humanities, new materialism, pantheism, porosity, *Surfacing*, trans-corporeality

Introduction

In “The world is too much with us” (Wordsworth 2005, 802), William Wordsworth laments the way the city dwellers have adapted themselves to the norms an urban lifestyle necessitates. The urban environment with all its “sordid boon,” Wordsworth argues, diminishes humans’ appreciation of the “nature that is ours,” and agonizes the heart. The modern man, he goes on, will not be moved through beholding the sea “that bares her bosom to the moon;” nor by harkening to the “winds that will be howling at all hours / And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers.” In order to reclaim the pastoral joys and “have glimpses that would make” him “less forlorn,” the poet would rather “be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn.” He would let go of all the “boons,” comfort and convenience offered by the city life, and convert into a primitive faith in order to be inspired by nature. The main heroine in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, by the same token, in order to reconstruct herself, would rather revert to a “creed outworn.” In other words, she dismisses ecclesiastical doctrines, opts for pantheism, and sets about “clutching” the superannuated gods. She shuns makeup and makes love without precautions. And while the majority would embrace a progressive, luxurious and tempting urban lifestyle, she would rather retreat to the rustic countryside. It is through all these old-fashioned practices, these “creeds outworn,” that the protagonist gathers strength.

Northrop Frye, the Canadian literary critic and theorist, posits that there was no figure among the world’s major writers who could be associated with and labeled as a Canadian writer up to the first half of the twentieth century. The idea of Canada as an independent state having her own cultural heritage was initially pondered by Atwood at a seminar on the American Puritans at Harvard University: “if one can study this [the literature of the American Puritans] in a university, I thought, why not Canadian literature?” (quoted in Staines 2021, 17). It was with the publication of *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* in 1972 that Canadian literature claimed a voice of its own which distinguished it from literatures elsewhere in the world, particularly those of America and the British Isles. Atwood in *Survival* traces the

ways nature had been represented up to the middle of the nineteenth century. In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, representations of nature were strongly shaped by Edmund Burke's aesthetics, particularly the notions of beauty and sublimity, which encouraged admiration for nature's magnificence and emotional power. The first half of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed the rise of a Romantic sensibility associated with Wordsworth, one that conceived of nature as "a kind Mother or Nurse who could guide man if he would only listen to her. In the popular mind, the two modes often combined; in any case, Nature was 'good' and cities were 'evil'" (Atwood 2013, 46).

Surfacing is Atwood's tribute to the healing assets of Canadian backwoods. The novel unfolds the story of an unnamed female character who sets about a journey into a Quebecois wilderness, having her lover, Joe, and another young couple, David and Anna, as her companions. For the narrator, the modern city becomes a source of alienation rather than fulfillment. Her journey into the wilderness represents an attempt to escape the constraints of social expectations and recover a more authentic mode of existence, a desire reflected in her rejection of the civilized identity she has long performed. The journey which was initiated to look for the narrator's father, at the end, brings about an eradication of the American disease internalized by the character as a result of her urban milieu.

Literature Review

In "The Voice of Subaltern in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*," Cristina Nicolaescu (2015) examines the novel through the combined perspectives of Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern and ecofeminism. The pith of the article is that Atwood portrays both women and nature as subalterns, marginalized by patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist ideologies. To substantiate this claim, the author contends that the unnamed protagonist's lack of identity symbolizes the silencing of the subaltern, whose voice is drowned out by the dominant patriarchal discourse. Her journey into the Canadian wilderness, Nicolaescu maintains,

becomes not only a search for selfhood but also the rejection of colonial, patriarchal, and anthropocentric values. Through exploring the experiences of the protagonist and her companion Anna, the article illustrates how women are objectified, manipulated, and deprived of agency within the patriarchal society. Symbols like the camera and the dead heron, Nicolaescu adds, signify surveillance, violence, and ecological destruction. The fact that the protagonist rejects these structures, the author concludes, signifies both the personal liberation and resistance to oppressive ideologies. Although Nicolaescu contributes to the scholarship on Atwood's work, such a framework risks degrading nature as a marginalized object of representation. New materialism, in contrast, seeks to destabilize this mindset by approaching nature as an active participant.

Approaching the novel through a psychological and archetypal lens, Monica Bottez (2017) examines the psychological and spiritual transformation the *Surfacing* protagonist undergoes as a process of death and rebirth. The writer argues that the narrator's emotional alienation, traumatic past, abortion, and self-deception create a state of psychological death from which she gradually surfaces through her return to her childhood abode. The narrator's descent into the lake, Bottez states, represents an inward journey into her unconscious, enabling her to confront with suppressed memories. The cycle of descent and ascent, plunging and resurfacing, the writer notes, parallels an archetypal journey from death to rebirth. Bottez views the lake as a maternal and regenerative space which allows the narrator to reconnect with her parents and her authentic self. Ultimately, the study argues that the narrator's rebirth falls short of restoring her to a pre-traumatic state. Rather, it signifies her willingness to jettison self-deception and confront the reality of the corrupted world surrounding her. Bottez contributes to *Surfacing* scholarship by interpreting the protagonist's transformation through the archetypal symbolism of death, descent, water, and rebirth, underlining how her immersion in the natural environment facilitates self-discovery and psychological recovery. The psychological recovery

as approached by the writer, however, leaves unexplored the material agency of the lake which fosters the transformation. This present study attempts to fill this gap by approaching the psychological transformation as materially informed by the human/nonhuman entanglement.

Xiaoshuang Dong (2025) views the city from which the protagonist takes refuge as a site of patriarchal control, where the protagonist's body has been alienated through male domination and the trauma of a coerced abortion. The wilderness, on the other hand, the study argues, allows her to reconnect with her emotions, physicality, and identity. Dong contends that unlike the second-wave feminism, which ultimately denies femininity by preferring male traits over female ones, Atwood embraces the female body's distinctiveness and vulnerability as sources of renewal rather than weakness. Dong goes on to align the protagonist's transformation with the Canadian national identity: the narrator functions not only as an oppressed woman but also as a symbolic representation of Canada, a victim of the American culture and economic imperialism. Unwilling to confine it to nationality, the writer employs the term "Americans" to describe a broader ideology grounded in hierarchy, domination, and anthropocentrism. Employing Donna Haraway's concept of kinship, Dong argues how the narrator develops a relational identity, recognizing humans, animals, and plants as interconnected participants in a shared ecosystem. Although the study also aspires to address new materialism, its theoretical framework only touches on new materialism in passing. Moreover, while Dong's study pivots on nature at large, this present study explores a trajectory from new materialism to trans-corporeality to blue humanities by particularly focusing on the material exchanges between the protagonist and water as an agentic material actant. In addition, the fact that the writer leans toward feminism and the female body is at odds with the post-humanist spirit of new materialism.

Rajni Devi and Jyoti Syal (2026) examine Atwood's *Surfacing* through the combined frameworks of ecofeminism and sustainable urbanism. The authors contend that Atwood

portrays urban life as a site of alienation, environmental degradation, technological domination, and emotional breakdown. They argue that the narrator's journey from the city to the Canadian backcountry symbolizes the rejection of patriarchal and consumerist values in favor of self-discovery as a by-product of proximity to nature. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, the study argues that the exploitation of women and the destruction of nature arise from the same hierarchical structures of patriarchy and capitalism, making social justice inseparable from natural sustainability. A major contribution of the study, however, is its interpretation of *Surfacing* through concepts associated with sustainable urban development, including green infrastructure, affordable housing, and sustainable mobility. The authors argue that Atwood critiques the concept of smart cities by exposing their tendency to generate surveillance, social isolation, and ecological neglect. The novel, in contrast, advocates a more holistic vision of sustainability by juxtaposing ecological awareness and cultural memory.

All in all, while these studies have contributed to both feminist and environmental concerns in Atwood's novel by critiquing the parallel domination of women and nature, the scholarship on *Surfacing* has primarily been a land-based criticism and does not adequately theorize the lake as a material participant in the protagonist's transformation. This current study, therefore, sets itself the task of filling this lacuna through approaching nature, particularly the bodies of water which play a pivotal role in transforming the character, as an active material agent rather than merely a site of anthropogenic practices along with exploring how the human body becomes materially entangled with the nonhuman world, thereby emphasizing the permeability of human and nonhuman boundaries.

Theoretical Framework

Rejecting such deep-seated binaries of modern thought as nature/culture, object/subject and human/thing dualisms, whose anthropocentric orientation is widely viewed as a driving force behind the current ecological and civilizational crises, new materialisms espouse the vitality of

things, thereby rectifying the attitude which considers matter as inert and passive. Associated with Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Stacy Alaimo, among others, new materialism is “a research methodology for the nondualistic study of the world within, beside and among us, the world that precedes, includes, and exceeds us” (Tuin 2018, 277-8). New materialism challenges anthropocentrism by granting significance to nonhuman entities, crediting nature with agency, and emphasizing that humans are only one kind of entity among many.

An emerging strand in new materialisms is the concept of trans-corporeality. Rooted in ecofeminist concerns about the bodily implications of environmental injustice, the concept of trans-corporeality has been articulated by feminist thinkers such as Karen Barad, Claire Colebrook, Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman. Initially coined in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), the concept of trans-corporeality conceives of human bodies as “not only imbricated with one another but also enmeshed with nonhuman creatures and landscapes” (Alaimo 2010, 67). Elsewhere it is defined as “a new materialist and post-humanist sense of the human as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments” (Alaimo 2012, 476). Elaborating further on trans-corporeality, Alaimo highlights the material exchanges linking human bodies, nonhuman actants, and the broader physical world. In this framework, the term body encompasses any material entity, irrespective of its size or form. Although bodies differ in their capacities and characteristics, every entity – from the smallest particle to the largest organism or system – constitutes a body. Each body is therefore a complex assemblage composed of multiple interconnected entities while simultaneously functioning as a unified entity itself.

Perceiving ecocriticism exclusively as green criticism has created a blind spot resulting in exclusion of more than seventy percent of the Earth’s surface: “. . . in ignoring water, the environmental humanities have unduly privileged specific forms of nature at the expense of others” (Kluwick 2025, 1). In an attempt to redress this injustice, Alaimo in “States of

Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea” (2012) extends her theory of trans-corporeality by examining various bodies of water as a material space that reveals the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman bodies. Challenging anthropocentric views which denigrate the seascape as a passive backdrop, the writer argues that various bodies of water function as dynamic sites of material exchange where bodies, substances, and ecological processes relentlessly interact. Through the concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo demonstrates that human bodies cannot be severed from the wider material world, as marine organisms, chemicals, contaminants, and other forms of matter inhabit across human and nonhuman boundaries. The crux of her argument is its emphasis on the porosity and permeability of different forms of bodies and the instability of conventional binaries of human/nonhuman, nature/culture, and organism/environment. Alaimo contends that these material entanglements undermine the notion of an autonomous human subject and, instead, position humans within complex ecological networks, on a par level with nonhuman entities as animals, plants, and natural elements. The metaphor of “suspension” captures not only the physical movement of bodies and substances through marine environments but also the conceptual uncertainty that accompanies the dissolution of fixed categories. The article also foregrounds the ethical and political complications of trans-corporeality. By illustrating how environmental pollutants circulate through oceans and into human bodies, the writer argues that environmental degradation should not be approached as an external problem but must be recognized as a direct consequence of shared material existence. As a result, she calls for environmental ethics grounded in the recognition of bodily interdependence and ecological responsibility.

Drawing its impetus from Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), the concept of porous bodies as appropriated by Alaimo, suggests that material entities are inherently open to exchange rather than self-contained. The relationship between the earth and the sea, where water continually moves through the earth’s porous structure, serves as a model

for understanding how all bodies interact. However, porosity does not simply allow external substances to pass through unchanged; instead, these exchanges generate mutual transformation as bodies influence and reshape one another: “All things that exist are bodies and all bodies exist in perpetual states of assembly, disassembly, and reassembly, all of which require interaction and enmeshment with other bodies. Bodies do not exist independent of other bodies” (Dobrin 2021, 153). Consequently, bodies are best understood as deeply entangled material assemblages whose interactions operate across multiple scales, sometimes appearing as exchanges between distinct entities and at other times revealing them to be components of a single, inseparable material network.

The blue humanities has emerged as part of a broader environmental turn in ecocriticism, exploring waters from sociocultural, historical, literary, and many other perspectives, one that expands the study of humanity’s relationship with the natural world beyond land-based environments to include aquatic spaces. The blue humanities has historically been dominated by narratives that treat the sea primarily as a metaphor through which to explore human experience, including existential uncertainty, imperial ambition, and psychological interiority. Although the sea has frequently been portrayed as a volatile and uncontrollable space, it has also been represented as a refuge for enslaved people, an arena for colonial conquest, and a repository of memory in diasporic writing. However, the growing influence of posthumanist thought has prompted an “aquatic turn” (Oppermann 2023, 6) in literary studies, shifting attention toward the sea as a material and more-than-human space by asserting its narrative agency rather than approaching it merely as a symbolic reflection of human concerns. Unwilling to degrade water as a metaphor, the blue humanities, owing its inception to Steve Mentz’s paper “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies” (2009), underscores the material role the bodies of water play in our cultural and social interactions by approaching them as a space where human and nonhuman entities interact. Rejecting the concept of water

as a passive object utilized by human agency, the blue humanities perceives the relationship between water and society not as two self-sustained entities but “co- constitutive” (Boast 2020, 19).

Salvation through Escape from Society

Drawing on literary examples ranging from Aristotle’s *Poetics* to modern works, Northrop Frye distinguishes between two different kinds of plots: the plots comic in aspect as the fictions in which the hero is “incorporated” into his society, and tragic plots in which the protagonist is “isolated” from the society (Frye 1973, 35). In the latter ones, the protagonist’s withdrawal or escape from society becomes a crucial step toward their redemption and eventual salvation. Elaborating on myths surrounding Hercules and Mercury, Frye explores how on withdrawal from their communities, “a hero is accepted by a society of god” in classical literature. Such an escape from the society into the pastoral landscape provides the hero with the means to “salvation” (43). He goes on to mention the rudimentary rustic lifestyle and proximity to flora and fauna as recurring imperatives of salvation in classical literature as well as in the Bible (43). In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Margaret Atwood (2013), similarly, underlines not only the nurturing essence of nature, but also the evilness of cities in Canadian literature.

Early in the novel, the narrator laments the spread of a disease: “I can’t believe I’m on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south [i.e. America] . . .” (Atwood 1998, 3). The violence and ecocide executed by “Americans” and the incremental estrangement from nature reaches its apogee in the scene where the narrator finds the body of a heron hanged by the neck “like a lynch victim” (125), redolent of a crucifix. Taken as a metaphor, the disease extends beyond the environmental damage visible in the landscape: it signifies a broader cultural and psychological corruption that affects human relationships and individual consciousness. Capitulating to her

lover's irresponsible attitude by agreeing to terminate her pregnancy is another aspect of the "American disease" inculcated by the narrator. In the course of this traumatic experience, she is strapped to "the death machine," with the "technicians, mechanics, butchers, students" (79) bending over her claiming a "section" of her "own life, sliced off [from her] . . . like a Siamese twin" (45) and at the end, the baby is taken out "with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar" (79). Initially, the readers are led to believe that the abortion resulted from a decision made jointly by the narrator and her former husband. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that the pregnancy was the outcome of an extramarital relationship. Consequently, the narrative develops into a critique of a culture that separates sexual intimacy from responsibility, presenting abortion as one of its painful consequences. The emotional trauma associated with this experience continues to haunt the narrator and follows her into the wilderness.

Another aspect of the narrator's urban disease is characterized by the ubiquitous mechanization, symbolized by technological elements as power lines, motorboats, and cameras. This condition is further reflected in her emotional detachment and the impersonal tone of her narration, which often gives her the appearance of a machine: "The narrator's inability to feel, reflected by the flat detached tone of her narrative, makes her sound at times like a robot – an indication that she is infected with the mechanized American disease" (Edwards 1989, 47). Consequently, Anna is not amiss to assume that she is inhuman:

Maybe it [i.e. her being a misandrist] was true, I leafed through all the men I had known to see whether or not I hated them. But then I realized it wasn't the men I hated, it was the Americans, the human beings, men and women both. They'd had their chance but they had turned against the gods, and it was time for me to choose sides. I wanted there to be a machine that could make them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for the animals, they would be rescued. (Atwood 1998, 155)

Perhaps the rationale behind her misanthropy and doting on nature instead is the ideology of the modern society with its focus on the lascivious lifestyle and the noxious way it shapes the masses' mentality so much so that they would "talk about it [abortion] as though it was legal, simple, like getting wart removed. He [the narrator's ex-lover] said it wasn't a person, only an animal" (145). In withdrawing from this social and cultural milieu, it is not only its inhabitants the narrator runs away from, but also the ideology which is so pervasive that makes the change for her improbable, if not impossible.

An aspect of urban disease that has received scant attention is the narrative's implicit critique of contraceptive pills and birth control precautions which may bring about such adverse side effects as those experienced by Anna, who got a blood clot in her leg, and the narrator, who got blurry vision: "They said it would clear up after a couple of months but it didn't. It was like having Vaseline on my eyes" (79). David, Anna's husband, would rather she went back on pills saying "it's no worse for you than aspirin" (79). It is an indictment directed against modern society which views childbearing as an adverse side effect of lovemaking: "Love without fear, sex without risk, that's what they wanted to be true; and they almost did it. . . . Love is taking precautions" (79), allowing men to shirk the responsibility of starting a family, "flesh making more flesh, miracle, that frightens all of them" (148). That explains why the narrator, in an attempt to make up for an earlier abortion, takes Joe outside the cabin and they make love without any physical or chemical precautions in the presence of the moon and she conceives a child in the most natural way.

Dwelling in the Dissolve

The *Surfacing* protagonist does not simply escape society and find salvation in a passive natural refuge. Rather, her withdrawal exposes her to material forces that destabilize the very distinction between human subject and natural environment. When everybody else is getting ready to depart the island, the narrator chooses to stay like her father: "to go with them would

have been running away, the truth is here” (Atwood 1998, 174). This conviction to extend her sojourn and her withdrawal from mainstream social institutions should not be regarded as an impetuous decision. In another divergence from conventional institutions, she opts against Christianity and inclines to pantheism. Her skepticism toward salvation through Christianity stems not only from her father’s orientation – he would inculcate his children with Jesus as a “historical figure” and God as a “superstition” (104) – but also her own disillusionment with religion: while she used to pine for Sunday school in order to quench her curiosity, “We never could find out what went on inside the tiny hillside church they filed into on Sundays: our parents wouldn’t let us sneak up and peer through the windows, which made it illicit and attractive” (51), her faith in it fades as her prayers are not answered:

I didn't last long at Sunday School. One girl told me she had prayed for a Barbara Ann Scott doll with figure skates and swans-down trim on the costume and she got it for her birthday; so I decided to pray too, not like the Lord's Prayer or the fish prayer but for something real. I prayed to be made invisible, and when in the morning everyone could still see me I knew they had the wrong God. (69-70)

Having become disheartened by the merits of religion, and the exposure to her parents’ agnosticism toward Christianity, she goes on to beseech the gods of nature: “These gods, here on the shore or in the water, unacknowledged or forgotten, were the only ones who had ever given me anything I needed” (146). In beseeching the truth in nature, she follows some rituals: she shuns makeup and refrains from indoor accommodations. And as far as her eating habits are concerned, she avoids tin cans and jars, and instead feeds on peas, beans and carrots. Moreover, she avoids dishes and kitchen utensils. She uses a knife to slash through her clothes and wanders around solely wrapped in a blanket, not wearing any footwear or garments of any kind. It is water into which she steps, “peeling” her clothes away from her “flesh like

wallpaper” (183). She lies her back on the sand, rests her head against the rock, spreads her hair in the water, and rinses her eyes.

Toppling human exceptionalism, the concept of trans-corporeality, which describes the continuous movement and exchange of substances, forces, and agencies across human bodies and the natural world, dissolves rigid boundaries between nature and culture, body and environment, and emphasizes that human existence is constituted through dynamic interactions with nonhuman actants: “Submersing ourselves, descending rather than transcending, is essential lest our tendencies toward Human exceptionalism prevent us from recognizing that . . . we dwell within and as part of a dynamic, intra active, emergent, material world” (Alaimo 2011, 283). Elsewhere Alaimo employs the phrase “dwelling in the dissolve” to describe the entanglement between human and nonhuman and the erasure of boundaries between the two (Alaimo 2016, 2). The narrator’s descent into the lake, which initially served the purpose of locating her father’s submerged petroglyphs, becomes a pivotal moment in the novel, as the immersion in the natural world initiates a process of psychological transformation, leading to her symbolic rebirth. Surfacing from this experience, she begins to jettison her false body along with spurious narratives and confronts with the vision of her aborted child, which compels her to acknowledge her own responsibility in that loss. The lake, however, does not function merely as a symbol of psychological rebirth but as a site of trans-corporeal encounter in which human and non-human agencies participate in the reconstruction of the self: the buoyancy the protagonist gathers from this surfacing assists her to not only to recover from the pangs of abortion but also rekindles a new hope and opportunity in motherhood. She accretes a sense of oneness with the natural world, thereby dissolving the conventional boundaries which demarcate human from nonhuman: “I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning . . . I am not an animal or tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow” (Atwood 1998,

181). Such intimacy with nature purges her and paves the way for a better interaction with the world.

Reimagining space through the characteristics of water allows us to approach the complexity dynamics of the waterscape “as a space of *churning*, where . . . place is provisional and forever being (re)produced” (Steinberg and Peters 2015, 258). Because bodies are inherently porous, they remain open to the movement of matter and forces, enabling constant interactions through which entities mutually influence and transform one another:

In this space of the open sea . . . the spatial configuration of surface and depth are in constant flux, with one becoming the other in continual intensity of motion. Depth rises to surface only to be returned below once again. Surface is submerged, becoming depth, in a regular oscillation. This flowing materiality of merging and folding presents the open sea as an elemental experience. (Ryan 2016, 1)

However, water does not simply connect otherwise discrete bodies; employing the concept of “amnion,” originally referring to the sac and liquid surrounding the embryo, Neimanis identifies three different aspects of amniotics: gestationality, whereby water participates in producing and nurturing new bodies; differentiation, which emphasizes what emerges out of the aqueous interactions between different bodies is not simply a repetition but a different becoming; and interpermeation, describing the way water connects bodies across different times and spaces through complex cycles, movements, and exchanges (Neimanis 2017, 94-97). The amnion simultaneously separates and connects: it creates a distinct environment for the developing body while allowing the exchange of matter between bodies. Rather than viewing bodies as separate and self-contained entities, the writer argues that the unrelenting passing of water as a fluid substance that flows, seeps, and permeates links bodies often in unexpected ways:

We are created in water, we gestate in water, we are born into an atmosphere of the same water although more diffuse, we take in water, we harbor it, it sustains and protects us, it leaves . . . at the same time as we are always to some extent, in it. The passage from body of water to body of water (always as body of water) is never synecdochal or metaphoric; it is radically material. These complex and shared cyclings—body, to body, to body—comprise our planetary hydrocommons. (Neimanis 2017, 86)

This framework challenges the traditional Western conception of the individual as a self-contained, sovereign subject. Instead, bodies are conceived of as processes that are continually constituted through relationships with other human and nonhuman bodies. Water demonstrates that connection does not eliminate difference: bodies can remain different while simultaneously flowing into and through one another. Neimanis, therefore, proposes a posthuman logic of “both/and” rather than “either/or.” The writer’s discussion also expands the meaning of ontology. For Neimanis, ontology should not be concerned only with what exists; it should also consider the conditions that enable beings to exist and become. Water is particularly important because it represents both the material condition from which life emerges and a substance that continues to constitute living bodies. Thus, the gestational element is not merely something belonging to a womb or to reproduction – it remains materially immanent in all bodies of water.

Informed by the gestation of embryos in aqueous wombs, Neimanis’s concept of amniotics captures the essence of the transformations the narrator goes through. In opening herself to impersonal material forces that compose and recompose us, culminated in her submersion, she is visited by interpermeation which connects her body with various permutations it has gone through across different times and spaces: she begins to confront memories and truths she has long suppressed, emerging with a more honest understanding of herself and her past. In addition, as water destabilizes any distinction between past and present,

self and other, human and nonhuman, the lake is a particularly felicitous space for the narrator to reimagine her aborted child. The child is not merely a psychological memory retrieved from the unconscious. The underwater encounter materially disrupts the protagonist's previous understanding of herself. Finally, in addition to different transformations her body goes through and along the same lines as Neimanis's concept of gestationality, her repeated encounters with the lake foster the procreation of another body within hers, who surfaces with her: "I bring with me from the distant past five nights ago the timetraveller, the primaeval one who will have to learn, shape of a goldfish now in my belly, undergoing its watery changes" (Atwood 1998, 223).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that while the material environment does not entirely recuperate the protagonist and destabilizes her as much as it heals, it nevertheless participates in bringing about unpredictable processes of transformation. In her respite from the adulterated urban civilization, however transient, the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing* moves from fragmentation and repression to wholeness and self-acceptance. Exposure to the natural environment enables the character to be purged of the American disease and reject social conventions as ecclesiasticism, grooming, childbearing practices, and ecocide. The sense of oneness with nature helps her to rediscover instinctive knowledge and reconnect with a more integrated sense of existence. Approaching *Surfacing* based on the premise of new materialism which considers all things that exist as bodies and the notions of permeability and porosity, which debunk speaking of an independent human subjectivity, allow us to trace how Atwood's character performs disanthropocentrically by extending herself outward into nonhuman realms.

The study contributes particularly to the blue humanities by demonstrating how a freshwater body – the lake, rather than the ocean – can participate in posthuman understandings

of embodiment and subject formation. Reconnecting with nature as living reality and seeing herself entangled with the living earth bestows the *Surfacing* protagonist the opportunity not only to pass through the pangs of abortion, but also to redefine her relationship with Joe, their child-to-be and society. Besides, it is discernible that although her narrative, initially, suffers from unfounded claims, out of her womb-like submersion surfaces a more reliable narrator who begins to disclose the facts the way they happened to her. This inward journey transforms the narrator from a passive victim of her past into an individual capable of re-entering the human community with a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Destabilizing the static and delimiting framings that define the human's terrestrially-informed perception of place and territory, the novel calls for adopting an aquatic turn which resonates with our ever-becoming, protean existence.

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