The Regeneration of Time in Atwood's *Surfacing*

Lorelei Cederstrom
Brandon University

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* is a radical novel both technically and thematically for it presents a unique and authentically feminine view of history and psychology. The protagonist of the novel moves away from the destructive realm of the male intellect with its view of *history* as progress, toward the realm of the feminine unconscious and its regenerative view of eternally recurring patterns. The novel is dealing with two of the dominant themes in contemporary literature—alienation from the self, and alienation from the natural world —and Atwood indicates that the two are interrelated. The world within and the world without interpenetrate in the course of the novel, and the relationship of the protagonist to the natural world becomes a symbol of her development of a healthy relationship to the feminine unconscious.

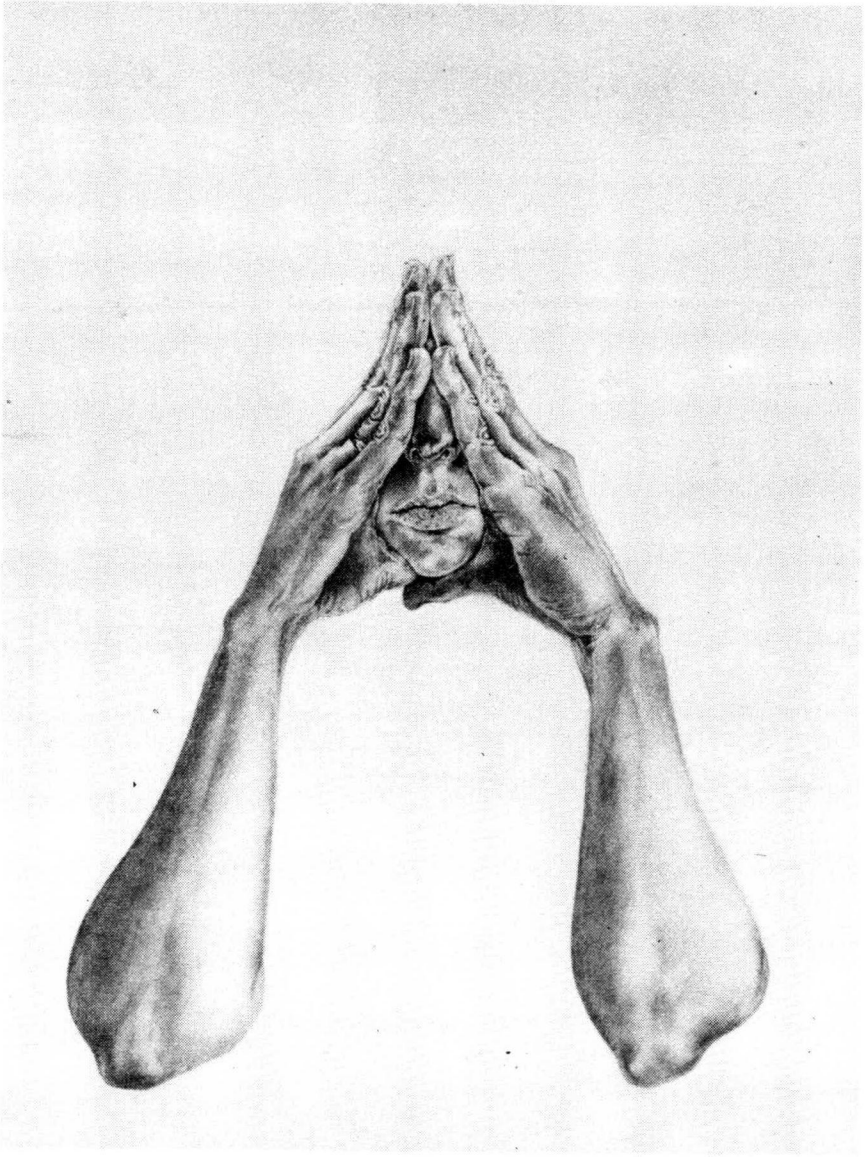
Throughout her career, Atwood has been concerned with the problem of alienation, particularly the kind of alienation from the landscape she sees in the Canadian experience. In her afterword to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie,* she diagnoses the character problem which she explores more fully in *Surfacing:* "Mrs. Moodie," she notes, "is divided down the middle: she praises the landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in the people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness . . . . Perhaps that is the way we still live. We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles, and invaders."[1]

In *Surfacing*, Atwood reveals that this kind of alienation can be overcome by establishing a new view of time, history and progress. A view of progress as beneficent is undermined as the protagonist discovers that she must regenerate time, destroying a view of life as a forward movement from point to point, establishing instead an awareness of life as a part of a timeless cosmic cycle. It is significant that this process is described through a feminine consciousness. The movement is out of time and history, the realm of masculine consciousness, into the primitive myths and rituals associated with the feminine unconscious. This pattern is culturally significant for the re-establishment of an archetypal awareness; the recognition of the power of the feminine unconscious sleeping

within us all, can be a curative for the problems of our civilization. As the protagonist discovers, by establishing a vital relationship with the unconscious, one establishes as well a different relationship to the natural world. She learns that nature is either matter to be mastered by the conscious and used in the interests of progress, or it is alive, our mother-the-earth, life-giving reservoir for our unconscious needs.

The regeneration of time, the restoration of a primitive cosmic view, involves as well a new understanding of the gods. The Canadian setting is challenging archetypally because, as Atwood has pointed out, "we are all immigrants;" the gods of our wasteland are separated from us by culture and tradition. In the course of the novel, Atwood indicates that the gods are available to us, but in her words, "inside the skull." She appears to agree with Jung that each of us has an imprinted collective unconscious in which the gods can be encountered. The protagonist of *Surfacing* eventually confronts these inner gods. Although she begins her journey looking for her real father, the father and mother she discovers and the gods she senses in the wilderness are all projections of her own psyche, made available to her by her developing awareness of herself as a part of the living natural world.

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist lacks vital relationships with herself and the world around her. She is a prisoner



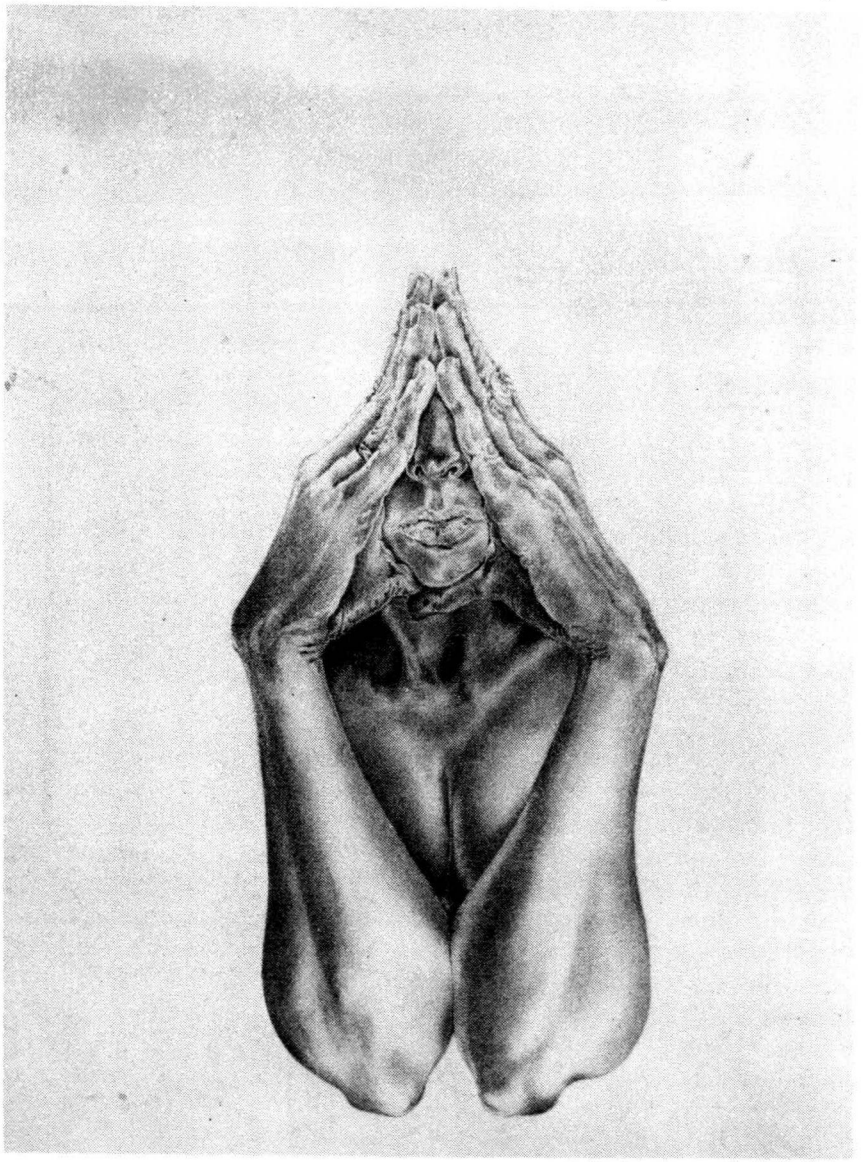
of time; her recent personal history has cut her off from her roots, both physically and psychologically. This problem is projected onto the landscape; the wilderness she remembered as pristine is now blighted. In the opening passage of the novel she notes: "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have seaplanes for hire."[2] This description of the dying trees indicates her awareness of the destruction of the natural world by the mechanization which she also describes. More important in terms of the psychological development of the narrator is the fact that mechanization implies a belief in progress, in history as an irremediable movement from point to point, a view which is responsible for her bondage to a personal history from which there appears to be no redemption.[3]

The protagonist's belief in progress is evident in the career she has chosen in the world of "electricity and distraction" (p. 57) as a defense against the pain of her personal history. Like Stephen Dedalus, the narrator finds history a nightmare from which she wants to awaken. She cannot escape the bondage of her memories; she is haunted by the image of her aborted child. Her main attempt to redeem herself from history has taken the form of a defensive lie. Instead of a lover and an aborted child, she has created a husband and a living child—a lie which has been so useful that it has replaced reality even in her thoughts. To escape a painful personal history, she simply rewrote it: "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrap-book, collage, pasting over the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I'd lived in it until now." (p. 164). This recognition of the lie by which she lives does not occur until nearly the end of the novel. In the first part of the book, the protagonist is struggling to keep this paper persona together, a struggle made all the more difficult because she is returning to her origins where she will be forced to remember and to remember accurately.

The lie has damaged the protagonist psychologically. Maintaining the façade requires all of her strength. Her unconscious cannot allow the truth to break down the carefully constructed persona. The defense of her ego against the unconscious is so great that she will not even allow the unconscious to break through in dreams: "I used to have dreams," she notes, "but I don't any longer." (p. 49) Irruptions of the unconscious do occur, however, in the form of daydreams. The horrifying vision of her brother's dying face, for example, is a demand for recognition on the part of her unconscious. Looking into the water, she sees her lost brother as well as a transmuted image of her dead fetus. "My brother was under the water, face upturned, eyes open and unconscious, sinking gently; air was coming out of his mouth. It was before I was born but I can remember it as clearly as if I saw it, and perhaps I did see it: I believe that an unborn baby as its eyes open and can look out through the walls of the mother's stomach, like a frog in a jar." (p. 35) This passage is full of significant images that recur; bait frogs in jars, a drowning creature, a fetus, here safe within the maternal womb. We can see here, too, one of the narrator's consistent reactions to unconscious messages; she secures them to a past reality and perferably to someone else's pain, in this case, her mother's.

The efforts of warding off her unconscious have taken their toll. She is rigid, unable to feel. Her relationship to her friends is strained,

the narrator's posture clearly indicates psychological armouring. Merely being in the car, on the road to her father's house, she is frightened: "He's a good driver, I realize that, I keep my outside hand on the door in spite of it. To brace myself and so I can get out quickly if I have to. I've driven in the same car with them before but on this road it doesn't seem right, either the three of them are in the wrong place or I am." (p. 8) She is correct to the extent that the three of them, David, Joe, and Anna, are out of place on this journey. With them she is reminded of the limitations of her history. David and Anna, in particular, are typical of the worst the modern world has to offer. As representatives of a progressive view, they see life as a series of points along a line, any one of which can be frozen, made permanent and unredeemable. This is indicated in the movie Joe and David are making called "Random Samples." The movie captures experience as a movement in one direction only, any portion of which is as good as any other since there are no unifying principles or transpersonal values to be expressed in a random sampling. Anna is a prisoner of time as well; she is captured, for example, by her image in the mirror. She tries to redeem herself from time by covering it up, by denying its ravages rather than by accepting metamorphosis as an opportunity for growth. Their view of life can be seen as a kind of fall, reflecting the Biblical fall. Mircea Eliade notes: "history . . . is the fall, the fall from cosmic into profane time, a



fall from a view of life as an eternally renewable principle to a view of life as a one-way journey."[4] The protagonist can be redeemed from this fall only by re-discovering a sense of life as part of a recurring pattern. Lacking a link with her unconscious, she is also cut off from the centres of regeneration within the primordial psyche.

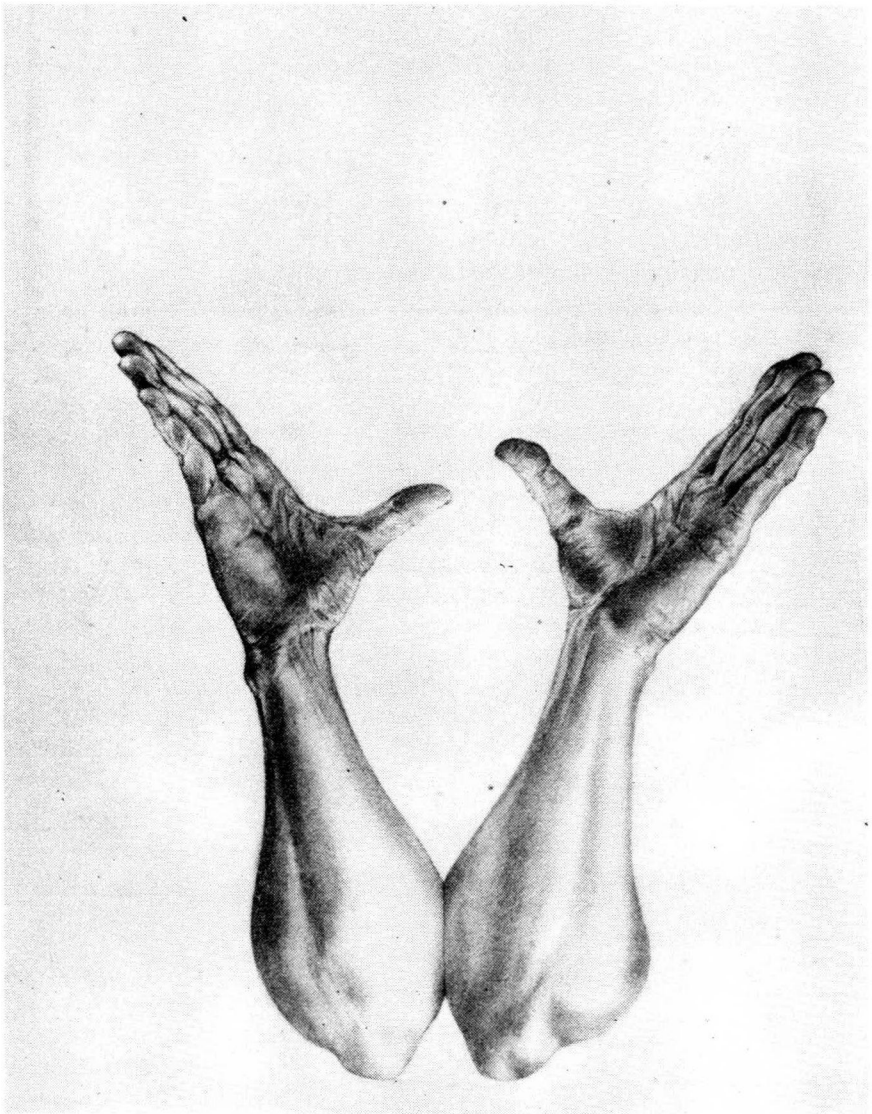
Not only her friends but the world outside, the social structure, contributes to the protagonist's alienation from both nature and her unconscious. The encroachment of the "Americans," the "southern blight" that tames the wilderness with machines and covers the living world with plastic, has prevented the awareness of psychic wholeness known to primitive societies who live in tune with the cycles of regeneration in nature. Plastic people, whose natural diet is canned food, have no relationship to the old spirits of the land, who preside over the great cycles of death, growth and regrowth. Ego-consciousness at the expense of the unconscious, linear progress without renewal, are the norms of modern society. Driving into the wilderness on a modern, double-laned, paved highway, the narrator sees clearly that something is wrong. The modern road has been blasted through the wilderness, it no longer follows the contours of the land. The loss of contact with the landscape in order to hasten movement from point to point makes the road a symbol of ego-consciousness and linear history, facile movement without meaning. "We're here too soon," the protagonist notes, "and I feel deprived of something as though I can't really get here unless I've suffered; as though the first view of the lake, which we can see now, blue and cool as redemption, should be seen through tears and a haze of vomit". (p. 16) In archaic societies, redemption from history can only be obtained by a painful initiation into tribal customs, a process which devalues individuality and replaces personal history with patterns of eternal recurrence. The narrator has not been initiated, the mysteries are still closed to her, but she has, at least, an awareness of what is missing. She needs the hazards of initiation; she must be able to feel pain and transcend personal pain with a transpersonal vision. The modern road is the wrong path; she must make the journey backward under more primitive conditions, and to do so she must escape from her friends and modern civilization all together.

The career the protagonist has chosen indicates her alienation from her unconscious as well. She is not an artist, but an illustrator; in the world of "electricity and distraction" she draws the plastic people for a Manpower Manual. It is highly significant that in the reality of the Quebec wilderness she is unable to illustrate Quebec folktales in her usual stylized manner. Her drawings are suddenly distorted; they run out of control. A princess turns into a monster with an "enormous rear." "What's the alternative to princesses?" (p. 64) she asks, for she has not yet discovered the natural woman within, of whom the princess and monster are caricaturized extremes. Until she is acquainted with the woman within, she will never be a true artist. Otto Rank, in his discussion of art and the artist[5] notes that accepting oneself, integrating the person within, and projecting that integration and acceptance in one's art is the primary step in becoming an artist. Until this journey to Quebec, most of the creative energies of the protagonist have been directed toward the creation of her persona, an effort based on self-rejection rather than acceptance. The fact that she can no longer draw satisfactorily indicates that she can no longer deal with herself or her art on the same superficial level.

As she searches for significance, princesses and monsters remind the protagonist of the fact that she has no inherited religion. She, thereforce, is unable to liberate her un-

conscious by union with the transpersonal experiences and the archetypal symbols of religion that are sufficient for many people. "We never could find out what went on inside the tiny hillside church they fled to on Sundays: our parents wouldn't let us sneak up and peer through the windows which made it illicit and attractive." (p.61) She yearns for mysteries, but when she does attend Sunday School she is given "pictures of Jesus, who didn't have thorns but was alive and draped in a bed-sheet, surely incapable of miracles." (p. 62) Jesus, too, has been Americanized. Without the awe, the *numinosum*, religion has lost its mystery and redemptive value for the protagonist. Without mystery, her unconscious remains aloof; without dignity, the conscious mind, too, rejects this religion.

Although the narrator has no religious heritage, her father has left something in its place. She remembers her father, primarily, in terms of his rational, golden-mean approach to life—a view, she discovers later, which leaves out the "intuitive and irrational." (p. 42) Her father left "survival techniques." He knew how to master nature, to use it—to reduce the wilderness to practical measurements. This emphasis on reasoning, on consciousness, has not been beneficial. It has caused the protagonist to feel "cut in two," centered in the head. She is strangled, cut off from her living and intuitive centres. "I was nothing but a head," she notes, "something minor like a severed thumb, numb." (p. 124) In her jour-



SLEIGHT OF HANDS triptych, Marilyn Noble

ney into her past, looking for her missing father, she uses, first, his own approach. He is an "archeological problem." (p. 52) She considers shifting through the garbage to see how recent it is. The narrator becomes aware of the uselessness of the scientific method as she begins to imagine that her father's logic has broken down. She begins to feel her father's presence watching them: "What I'm afraid of," she says "is my father, hidden on the island somewhere and attracted by the light, perhaps, looming up at the windows like a huge, ragged moth." (p. 69)

Edward Edinger, in his description of the results of alienation between the ego and the self (the latter being that psychic totality of which the conscious personality is only a fragment) has pointed out that the self is "inevitably experienced initially in projection onto the parents."[6] Since the protagonist lacks awareness of the unconscious portions of the totality of the self, the self has already begun to provide compensating images of wholeness.[7] The "huge, ragged moth" looming up at windows is a long way from the organic gardener, eighteenth-century logician she had known as her real father. Clearly she is seeking psychic wholeness.The unconscious cannot be denied and this image of her father is a projection of her own unconscious needs. "Projections," said Carl Jung, "change the world into a replica of one's own unknown face."[8] That moth-like creature of the night is an image of a part of her self with which she must come to terms. Centered in the head, the protagonist is cut off from the wholeness of the self. She must develop an awareness of that part of her father which she carries within. He must become not only logic, but *logos*, spirit. In order to integrate the meaning of her father's life and give it relevance to her own, the narrator must reestablish a link between conscious and unconscious, waking and sleeping, reason and feeling, the world without and the world within.

For the moment, the protagonist's unconscious is a well of chaotic emotions that irrupt so frighteningly that she has chosen rigidity and logic in defense. The wholeness of the self, however, demands a creative relationship to her father and the past. Before she can escape personal history she must achieve a regenerative view of life and time. Eliade, in his studies of the regeneration of time in primitive societies, notes that rituals of renewal begin with an abolition of the past. Past time, personal history, can be eliminated, he notes, by a meaningful return to origins, physically and psychologically. In the novel, the protagonist must face her psychic origins in the place of her childhood. As the second part of the novel begins, she attempts to abolish the past by exploring the meaning of her memories. She uses a technique used in psychoanalysis, *anemnesis*, "trying to free herself from the work of time by recollection."[9] She is aware that she must try to use history against itself: "From where I am now," she says,"it seems as if I've known, everything, time is compressed like the fist I close on my knee in the darkening bedroom. I hold inside it the clues and solutions and the power for what I must do now." (p. 87)

The protagonist, although seeking power over her past, continues to use history as a means of warding off the powers of her unconscious. In another vision of her father, she imagines "his former shape transfigured by age and madness and the forest, rag bundle of decaying clothes, the skin of his face woolly with dead leaves. History, I thought, quick." (p. 90) *Anemnesis*, accurate recollection of her father, leads her always back to the rational and away from the unconscious. Her obsession with her father and his possible death is easier than confronting herself and the real death of her child. Even the copies of magical rock

paintings which might restore the connection with her unconscious are accompanied by pages of her father's logical explanations. She reads these with a mixture of relief and loss: "The academic prose breathed reason; my hypotheses crumbled like sand. This was the solution, the explanation. He never failed to explain . . . I had the proof now, indisputable proof of sanity and therefore of death." (pp. 118-19) Logic, sanity and death are, ultimately, the inheritance she has received from her father. She becomes aware, slowly, that she also needs something from her mother. In the case of her father, history could not be used against itself. Like Cronos devouring his children, her father's rationality caused her to be devoured by her personal history. His reason and historical sense could not be offset without a powerful shock, a shock capable of letting her unconscious break through the armour of her consciousness.

The necessary shock, capable of loosening the hold of her ego, occurs with the discovery of the heron, killed by the "Americans": "It was hanging upside down by a thin blue nylon rope tied round its feet and looped over a tree branch, its wings fallen open. It looked at me with its mashed eye." (p. 133) Although the protagonist is unable to articulate the importance of the heron at this point, the meaninglessness of the bird's death weakens her ability to depend on reason. The shock of recognition, albeit unconscious, is indicated in the rituals she begins, almost immediately, to perform. Eliade notes that rituals are another means by which archaic societies abolish time. By performing an action because the gods have done so or have said it was right, primitive peoples "abolish profane chronological time,"[10] becoming one with the sacred time when such actions were first performed. At first, the rituals the protagonist performs have no sacred function, at least no conscious sacred function. She merely feels compelled to do certain things.She can no longer fish, for example; she lets the bait frogs escape into the water. In her earlier vision, she has already equated frogs in jars with a baby in the womb. The transmuted memory is being released through this compulsive ritual into primitive chaos so that it can be redeemed. The narrator also buries fishbones and plants the innards in the forest. She knows that "no minnow would sprout up in the spring" (p. 145) but plants the fish anyway. Both activities involve a return to the primordial, to the elements of earth and water. A primitive animism becomes more obtrusive in the novel. Everything seems alive, giving the protagonist messages: "Leave no traces." (p. 149) The heron has directed her unconscious to the core of her problem. Lacking a redemptive view, she therefore sees death as final. Before the narrator can live fully, she must see beyond the finality of history and death, particularly the finality of the death of her aborted child. These rituals are reestablishing her relationship to the world of death and life in nature. As the rituals become more pronounced, as her father's gift of reason breaks down, memories of her mother begin to intrude. The archetypal feminine within her, with its awareness of life and death as part of an eternally recurring cycle, is beginning to be activated. She has, at this point, a profound vision of psychic wholeness, a balance of conscious and unconscious, another vision of the self. She sees "mother and father at the sawhorse behind the cabin, mother holding the tree, white birch, father sawing, sun through the branches, lighting their hair, grace." (p. 159)

Immediately following her vision of her parents, the protagonist sets off alone to dive for the cave paintings. Her first thoughts are of the heron:

> I moved toward the cliff . . . . Overhead a plane so far up I could hardly hear it,

> threading the cities together with its trail of smoke; an X in the sky, unsacred crucifix. The shape of the heron flying above us the first evening we fished, legs and neck stretched, wings outspread, a blue-gray cross, and the other heron or was it the same one, hanging wrecked from the tree. Whether it died willingly, consented, whether Christ died willingly, anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn't kill birds and fish they would have killed us. The animals die that we might live, they are substitute people, hunters in the fall killing the deer, that is Christ also. And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. Canned Spam, canned Jesus, even the plants must be Christ. But we refuse to worship; the body worships with blood and muscle but the thing in the knob head will not, wills not to, the head is greedy, it consumes but does not give thanks. (p. 160)

The heron is a complex symbol, bringing together the dominant themes in the novel, the sociological criticism and the mythical recognition. The heron helps to focus the myths being activated as well as the "signature" (the modern clothing) of the myths. The heron is first contrasted with the airplane, the "unsacred cross," symbol of linear consciousness and belief in history as progress from point to point. The heron also reminds her of the sacred cross. Christ and the heron both have been sacrificed for others. By the end of the novel, the protagonist has identified herself with the heron, fearing that "if they guess my true form, identity, they will shoot me or bludgeon in my skull and hang me up by my feet from a tree." (p. 212)

The relationship of the protagonist to the hanging heron may be more apparent by looking at another representation of the same archetypal symbol. The basic shape of the image, structurally, is that of the cross, formed by the tree branch and legs of the bird, with a downward pointing triangle beneath it, formed by the outstretched wings and beak. This is also the structural pattern of one of the Tarot cards, the card of the Hanged Man.[11] The meaning of this card is relevant to the ideas Atwood is using. The Hanged Man represents initiation, willing self-sacrifice to attain knowledge. The figure on the card is not tortured but happy; in one deck a nimbus appears about his head. The card was earlier called the Drowned Man, as it also represents a descent into water, a baptism, immersion in the feminine principle of water, or encounter with the unconscious. It has also been called one of the cards of the dying god. Atwood's reference to Christ and cross is significant. As a card of the dying god, the cross with a downward-pointing triangle represents a descent of light into darkness in order to redeem it. All of these ideas are present in the symbol of the heron; the Tarot simply helps to focus on significant reverberations.

The hanged heron has mythological references as well. The hanging bird with a blasted eye suggests the Germanic divinity Othin (Wotan) who "gave an eye to split the veil of light into the knowledge of . . . infinite dark,"[12] and was then crucified. Self-sacrifice to attain knowledge; descent into the darkness, or the realm of death; initiation into nonrational mysteries: these ideas appear in several mythologies that have tree-crucified beings. In the novel, as in the Tarot card, it is significant that the heron is hung upside-down, for it is the head, the protagonist's legacy from her father, that must be sacrificed first. She is searching for the powers of nameless, wordless gods, gods who can be experienced but not articulated. The protagonist says that she wants

a "true vision, after the failure of logic." (p. 166)

As her rituals indicate, the protagonist is seeking earth gods, chthonic deities, who preside over death and fertility.[13] Both of these realms must be explored by the protagonist. She must get rid of the "encysted death" she has carried within her since her abortion before she can be fertile; and she must put the spirit of her father to rest by discovering a meaning to his life that goes beyond personal death. She undergoes an initiation into chthonic mysteries as she dives to find the cave paintings. In the world below, she encounters death: "It was there but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me drifting toward me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead . . . the lake was horrible, it was filled with death, it was touching me." (pp. 162-63)

After this confrontation with death, the rituals the narrator performs take on a more explicit significance. She knows now that she is seeking *chthonoi*: "I didn't know the names of the ones I was making offering to; but they were there, they had power." (p. 166) The first message she receives from these gods, the first meaningful ritual she performs is the leaving of a piece of her clothing as an offering. She performs this sacrifice in a sacred spot. "The Indians did not own salvation," she notes, "but they had once known where it lived and their signs marked the sacred places, the places where you could learn the truth." (p. 166) This ritual offering is charged with the kind of meaning which Eliade perceived in the rituals of primitive societies. In a sacred place, the protagonist is repeating an action performed *ab origine* by gods, spirits, or ancestors. This sacrifice also makes the basic myth operative in the novel more apparent. The removal of her clothing, the heron as icon of sacrifice and initiation, and her encounter with death direct us toward the archetypal pattern. The protagonist has entered the "sacred time of myth" by repeating the "oldest recorded account of the passage through the gates of metamorphosis,"[14] the Sumerian myth of the descent of the goddess Inanna to the underworld. (This goddess is also known as Ishtar and some of her mythology is known to us through the syncretized myths of the Greek Aphrodite.)

The myth of Inanna's descent touches *Surfacing* at several points. Inanna sought the gods in the realm beneath the earth searching for a dead child. In her descent, Inanna passed through seven doors and left one of her garments behind at each gateway. Naked, Inanna met the spirits of the netherworld. In the myth, Inanna, moon and fertility goddess, met her shadow, the queen of death, her sister Erishkigal. In the modern context of *Surfacing*, the protagonist encounters her shadow side in the death she has carried within. The myth touches *Surfacing* at another point. The narrator fears that she will be hung from a branch like the heron if her identity is discovered. Her fate would be that of Inanna's, for the myth tells us that the judges of the netherworld looked at Inanna with the eyes of death. At their word . . . the sick woman "was turned into a corpse;" the corpse "was hung from a stake."[15] Psychologically speaking, the myth and *Surfacing* are both making the same points. The clothing of the personality must be sacrificed and the ego must experience death before the true nature of the self can be revealed.

Although she has not yet surfaced, has not yet completed the task of becoming whole, after this descent the protagonist has begun to experience the power of the transpersonal

elements of her psyche. Eliade notes that "co-participation in origins" makes the world familiar, transparent, intelligible. "Through the objects of the present world," he notes, "one perceives traces of the Beings and powers of another world."[16] After her sacrifice, the protagonist sees the world with altered vision: "Sight flowing ahead of me over the ground, eyes filtering the shapes, the names of things fading but their forms and uses remaining." (p. 171) The beginnings of spiritual awareness have broken down the barriers between the world within and the outside world.[17] Her "new power" as she terms it, enables the narrator to see into her friends. She sees David, for example, as a "pastiche" of words and phrases "verbs and nouns glued onto him and shredding away, the original surface littered with fragments and tatters." (p. 174) The power results from a fusion of thought and feeling, a movement into consciousness of unconscious patterns. Her unconscious, so long repressed, is beginning to break through more powerfully. Her mother becomes more significant as this realization takes hold. "More than ever," she notes, "I needed to find it, the thing she had hidden; the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the head, antlers rooted in the brain. Not only how to see but how to act," (p. 174)

The narrator discovers the gift from her mother in the scrapbooks she had made as a child. The drawings in these books are archetypal ones, an antlered man and a moon-bellied woman with a child inside. In the child's world, conscious and unconscious are fused; these drawings of archetypal male and female are another vision of the wholeness of the self. She continues to search for the gods; she wishes to learn from them, but recognizes that she does not know their language, the language of the spirit or voice of the unconscious. This language is available only to those who see beyond the doors of time, profane reality, and can read the messages left them by the gods within. The protagonist realizes that a transformation is necessary. The transformation that she undergoes is the result of a movement out of history, out of the social world all together. Before she can see the true shape of the gods, she must enter their realm, complete her movement from unsacred time to sacred *tempus*, from unsacred place, to sacred *locus*. The movement into the realm of the gods is the result of a new awareness of the sacred qualities in the natural world, a vision of the living, eternally recurring patterns in nature. More than anything else, the gift she receives from her mother is a vision of life as metamorphosis. She begins to see life not as written, final, a series of points along a line, but in movement, full of recurring patterns that charge personal history with transpersonal meaning. The second part of the novel ends with the recognition that: "Nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive." (p. 182) This awareness is the narrator's first step toward cosmic consciousness.

The first activity after her recognition of life as metamorphosis is the redemption of her lost child. The protagonist mates with Joe: "He trembles and I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long." (p. 187) This is not a mere sexual encounter but in Eliade's terms, a "restoration of time by repetition of a cosmogonic act."[18] Atwood is activating the myth of Inanna (Ishtar) again. "When . . . Ishtar was away in the underworld . . . nothing could be conceived. It was only after her return to earth that the power of fertility, and indeed of sexual desire as well, could operate once more."[19] Fertility and sexual

desire were not possible for the protagonist until she returned from the underworld, from her preoccupation with death. Her impregnation can be seen as cosmogonic because she sees her surfacing child as part of a restored natural world. She imagines the cosmos participating in the birth of the child, who is not a mere human, but a god. "The baby will slip out as easily as an egg, a kitten, and I'll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs; the moon will be full, pulling. In the morning I will be able to see it: it will be covered with shining fur, a god, I will never teach it any words." (p. 187) The child will be beyond the barriers of the logic that has confined her. This impregnation has altered her view of herself as well. She sees herself now as a part of the natural world, in metamorphosis, beyond the boundaries of life and death: "I remember the heron; by now it will be insects, frogs, fish, other herons. My body also changes, the creature in me, plant-animal, sends out filaments in me: I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply." (p. 194)

Having redeemed her lost child from death, in the final chapters of the novel the protagonist begins to work on herself. She is ready at last to discard her paper persona. She too, must surface, reborn. Her personality is dissolved. She moves into primordial chaos, before reason, before ego-consciousness. She recognizes that "logic is a wall. I built it, on the other side is terror." (p. 202) The protagonist confronts this terror; she is moved only by unconscious processes now, by a power she cannot explain but which tells her how to act. She refuses to be caught by the false images of her ego. "I must stop being in the mirror . . . Not to see myself but to see. I reverse the mirror so it's toward the wall, it no longer traps me." (p. 203)

Possessed by this unconscious power, she completes a series of rituals which serve to destroy history. All the hindering elements of the protagonist's personal past are discarded. She burns her abortive drawings, throws away the wedding ring of her non-husband, tears up the scrapbooks of her childhood, and destroys everything which would bind her to dead time. "These husks are not needed any longer, I abolish them, I have to clear a space." (p. 205)

Once personal history has been destroyed, the protagonist becomes fully open to the living, intuitive centers within, and sees herself, too, as a part of the pattern of eternal recurrence in nature. She achieves cosmic consciousness: "The earth rotates, holding my body down to it as it holds the moon; the sun pounds in the sky, red flames and rays pulsing from it, searing away the wrong form that encases me, dry rain soaking through me, warming the blood egg I carry. I dip my head beneath the water washing my eyes." (p. 206) The narrator is intuitively following the dictum of another prophet of cosmic consciousness, D.H. Lawrence, who wrote: "Start with the Sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen."[20]

When her eyes have been washed, when she has her true vision, the narrator performs another ritual dive. On her previous descent into the water she confronted death; this dive is a baptism into a regenerated life. "When I am clean, I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floating on the surface, a cloth decoy; it jiggles on the waves I make, nudges gently against the dock. They offered clothing as a token formerly; that was partial but the gods are demanding, absolute, they want all." (p. 206) She is prepared to give all now; when the rags of time have been cast off, she surfaces and is reborn, "a natural woman, a state of nature." (p. 220) She has become an Aphrodite/Inanna rising in the water from the severed generative organs of her father, Cronus. Free of time, she perceives herself in a

mystical unity with the world around her. The frogs she has killed and then released to water are a part of the unity she perceives: "A frog is there, leopard frog with green spots and gold-rimmed eyes, ancestor. It includes me, it shines, nothing moves but its throat breathing." (p. 208) Nothing has died but a false way of seeing the world. Her new vision enables her to see beyond rigid forms or chaos into things as they always are: changing but the same.[21] "Something has happened to my eyes," she says, "the forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen, the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water . . . I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning." (p. 210)

The protagonist is able to see her parents, too, in a living, creative way as her frozen, historical view is transcended. She experiences mother and father as a part of nature. Her mother is not a remembered image of a woman feeding the jays; but she lives, creatively transformed into one of the jays she fed. The protagonist makes reparation to nature for her father's wrongs, lets the wilderness grow back into the places he cut out, and sees him now as an animal spirit, changing shape, not dead but in metamorphosis: an animal, a fish, a protecting spirit living within her, "flesh turned to icon." (pp. 216-217) As soon as she is able to see beyond their historical reality, the narrator can put her parents to rest. Conscious and unconscious have interpenetrated. She dreams, for the first time, a dream of her parents, "as they were when they were alive . . . in a canoe, heading out of the bay." (p. 218) History and transpersonal eternal principles, father and mother, conscious and unconscious are at peace. The narrator is ready to return to her own time now. The gods, she tells us, have "receded, back to the past, inside the skull, it's the same place." (p. 219) Returning to her own time, she is a mortal woman once again. Blood flowing from her foot, she is an Eve, capable of human love, preferring life, preparing to give birth, not to a god, but to "the first true human." (p. 222) As a true human this offspring will be capable of carrying on a creative relationship with the world within and the world without, and will be at home with nature, no longer an exile and invader.

NOTES

1. Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 62.
2. Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1972), p. 7. All parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.
3. The distinctions between modern progressive views of history and primitive views of cyclically recurring social patterns in this essay are based on the thorough analysis of these concepts by Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971).
4. Evelyn Hinz, "Rider Haggard's *She*: An Archetypal 'History of Adventure' " *Studies in the Novel* 3 (Fall, 1972), p. 422.
5. Otto Rank, "Art and Artist" in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings* (New York: Random House, 1932), p. 131.
6. Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), p. 39.
7. "The self," Carl Jung wrote, "in its effort at self-realization, reaches out beyond the ego-personality on all sides; because of its all-encompassing nature it is brighter and darker than the ego, and accordingly confronts it with problems it would like to avoid. Either one's moral courage fails, or one's insight, or both, until the end fate decides . . . you have become the victim of a decision made over your head or in defiance of your heart. From this we can see the numinous power of the self, which can hardly be experienced in any other way. For this reason, *the experience of the self is always a defeat for the ego.*" "Mysterium Coniuntionis" in *Collected Works* Vol. XIV (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), paragraph 778.
8. Carl Jung, *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 146.
9. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 88. Eliade notes that there is a distinction to be made between the regeneration of time by anemnesis and the instantaneous regeneration that occurs in primitive societies through the re-enactment of a myth. The protagonist of *Surfacing* uses both of these techniques. Eliade states: "To be sure, moving backward through Time implies an experience dependent on personal memory, whereas knowing the origin comes down to un-

derstanding a primordial exemplary history, a myth. But the structures are homologizable; it is always a matter of remembering, in clear and precise detail, *what happened in the beginning* and from then on." p. 89-90.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
11. An early draft of this paper was presented at a Symposium at the University of Manitoba several years ago. Dorothy Livesay was a member of the audience and commented that she knows Margaret Atwood to be interested in the Tarot. Moreover, Atwood has chosen the card of The Hanged Man as the basis of the cover design for her collection of poems, *Power Politics* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971).
12. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 191.
13. W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (London: Methuen and Co., 1968), p. 218. Guthrie describes the function of the chthonic deities: "They are dwellers in the earth, and the earth does two services for men. By its fertility it provides them with the means of life and it takes them into its bosom when they die. The *chthonioi*, accordingly have two primary functions: they ensure the fertility of the land, and they preside over, or have some function or other connected with the realm of the souls of the dead."
14. Campbell, *Hero*, p. 105.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
16. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 142.
17. Ernest Cassirer has described what he calls "the basic essence of spiritual experience" in terms that suggest the feelings of Atwood's protagonist. Cassirer notes: "In every such form the rigid limit between 'inside' and 'outside,' the 'subjective' and the 'objective,' does not subsist as such but begins, as it were, to grow fluid. The inward and outward do not stand side by side, each as a separate province; each rather, is reflected in the other, and only in this reciprocal reflection does each disclose its own meaning. Thus in the spatial form which mythical thinking devises the whole mythical *life form* is imprinted and can, in a certain sense, be read from it." in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume II: Mythical Thought* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p. 224.
18. Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, p. 57.
19. M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 188.
20. D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (London: Martin Secker, 1932), p. 224.
21. Eric Neumann in *Art and the Creative Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959) has outlined the pattern of the transformation of the personality which Atwood's protagonist has experienced. Neumann found that rigidity and chaos, which have been the two dominant patterns of the protagonist's personality until now, are the two elements which prevent creative transformation. He states: "Rigidity and chaos, these two forms of the negative, are directly opposed to the creative principle, which encompasses transformation, hence not only life, but also death. Across the diabolical axis of rigidity and chaos cuts the transformative axis of life and death." p. 163.