



David and Anna, the examples of fragmented psyches and dysfunctional modern relationship in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*: A Psychoanalytical Study

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David and Anna are married couple and friends of the unnamed protagonist in the text *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. Atwood seems to be primarily concerned about the psychological state and psychological development of the protagonists and the other characters rather than the plot of the story of the novel. Although she tries to explore the psyche of both- the male and female characters - but the manner in which she deals with the intricacies of the female psyche and shows its various shades is simply astonishing. Her treatment of the subject is not merely to trace the psychological nuances. She has a purpose which she insinuates in the story. She wants to highlight the things that keep the female psyche limited and captive to societal norms, which gets perfectly exemplified in the character of Anna. In her own way, she tries to give ways of breaking free from such limitations too, which could be observed in the voice of unnamed protagonist/ narrator. The same ideas are reflected in her interview, "The Female Body", as well that she has projected in her major novels including *Surfacing*.

The kind of relationship David and Anna shared as a married couple was disturbing. Let alone love, they didn't even respect each other. Their relationship had a latent anger and animosity towards each other. Essentially "they hate each other" (177). It appears, "hate" was the only way they knew to co-exist because they did not want to leave each other. The unnamed narrator was right in calling them the "barometer couple" (177). Their relationship shows the fragmented psyche of modern people and the latent consumerism in their action towards each other. David was consuming the socially constructed stereotyped femininity from Anna, and Anna was extracting a 'relationship' out of David. Their actions and behaviours were far from 'natural' or 'normal' human actions and responses. But they were unable to realise how 'perverted' their acts were. David justifies his perversions in the name of 'broadmindedness'; and Anna inflicts and tolerates these perversions out of her necessity to keep David.

In the manner David behaved, spoke and acted, throughout the story, it revealed he acknowledged mere menial physical sensations, nothing beyond that. When he addressed Anna, he consistently remarked on her body in much derogatory sense, as if she was only a structure of assembled bones and flesh. He never complimented her face, just her "tits", "ass", and her "curves". But he couldn't tolerate her without makeup; for she must appear 'youthful' not 'beautiful'. It had such a serious impact on Anna's psyche that she panicked whenever she forgot to put on her make up even for a day: "'God,' she said [Anna], 'what'm I going to do? I forgot my makeup, he'll kill me.'" (156). She was aware that she would be 'punished' by David in the form of rough sex: "'He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts.'" (156). But David didn't bother about it, maybe because his insensitivity towards other people had made him forget the difference between 'rape' and 'love making'. He even once "asked her [Anna] how she would like to be raped by a porcupine." (143). As Anna rightly pointed out, deep down his psyche was troubled and he hated women: "The trouble with you [David] is you hate women" (143). Having intercourse with them was his way of punishing them. It gratified his psyche, for it made him feel superior to women. It reinforced his masochistic psyche. He felt proud that he could "screw" them and get away with it.

He never missed a chance to emotionally hurt Anna. In front of her, he tried to seduce the unnamed narrator. As per Anna's account he had this regular habit of seducing other women in front of her. As she put it, "Teasing, shit. He was doing it to me. He always does stuff like to other women in front of me, he'd screw them with me in the room if he could. Instead he screws them somewhere else and tells me about it afterwards." (126).

He literally attempted to convince the narrator to have intercourse with him (193). The reason he stated that Anna was having intercourse with Joe (narrator's boyfriend). The allegation was true and it confirmed his behaviour towards Anna was governed by his desire to seek revenge on her. It was not clear anywhere in the story, who began this loop of sexual betrayal and when? Did Anna find out that David was cheating and acted out in revenge or vice versa. It was disturbing to witness this distorted connection between the two: where they were aware about each other's betrayal. They emotionally and physically abused each other. They fought like street dogs; yet they had regular intercourse. Interestingly, on many occasions they supported each other like best of friends.

From the closer analysis of their storyline, it appeared, David was much more hostile to Anna than she was to him. The reason, which Anna gave to the narrator "It used to be good, then I started to really love him and he can't stand having me love him. Isn't that funny?" (157). But more than 'love' it resembled the psychological condition of an addict who cannot let go of the addiction and kept on pursuing the object of addiction. "Addictive behaviours... follow the same processes that we all use to identify and pursue things that we see as important to our survival. With Addiction, these habits become deeply entrenched and overvalued, so they begin to push out other, previously important parts of life.... Addiction tricks people by sending them after things that can never meet their needs in long run" (Svanberg 2). Similarly, Anna seemed to be trapped in that state. She kept on enduring the insults inflicted by David to such an extent which reflected that she had no sense of self-esteem. It caused subconscious frustration within her and she used to lash out on David by committing adultery to hurt him, in the same manner he hurt her.

This psychological state of hers was revealed in the following incident. For the collection of photos, which David called ‘random samples’, he insisted Anna take off her clothes so he could have a picture of “a naked lady with big tits and a big ass”. (172). He kept on pestering her till she surrendered: “Now just take it off like a good girl or I’ll have to take it off for you.” (173). She took off her clothes; jumped into the lake; when she came out she was crying but she didn’t fight back. She just left the scene.

The novel at two points has depicted two naked ladies. One is the narrator when she discards her clothes and another is Anna. Through the narrator one sees the ‘natural’ state of woman beyond any influence of society. And through Anna, one sees the objectified version of woman for the consummation of patriarchy. The narrator’s release of clothes was to find her own self, as a ritualistic process; whereas Anna was forced to release her clothes to reveal her bodily curves for ‘photos’ without her consent. Anna’s surrender is symbolic of the abuse of women which is still perpetuating, just the mannerism has changed. She represents those women who are yet captive of patriarchal holds for various reasons: for love, for children, for family, because of dependency, etc. Here Anna’s desire to be with David, irrespective of the cost, was making her lose herself. In the words of the narrator:

....she was desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight: she was fighting him because if she ever surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere. To continue the war. (196)

She was allowing her to be reshaped and abused. She did all she could to keep David with her. She wore makeup for him; had intercourse as per his needs. She endured all the abuse. To seek the emotional comfort, she went to someone else; yet she returned to David. She believed till she keeps on participating in this latent war between them, David would remain engaged with her, because if she was defeated, he would take the war to someone else. She didn’t realise that she was already defeated: she lost her original being in efforts of keeping David. She was a psychological prisoner, for she couldn’t break free from her own weakness and twisted desires. She had been fighting this psychological latent war with David but she was his captive; for she did what he desired and she always returned to him. While pondering how she could have freed Anna from this psychological prison, the narrator thinks, “Anna’s soul closed in the gold compact, that and not the camera is what I should have broken.” (228). Anna’s psychological imprisonment

didn't allow her to leave. She makes a fine example of all those women who are so called empowered in other senses (economically, educationally, sexually, etc) but are still psychological captives.

David's behaviour towards women - be it Anna or the narrator, his constant sexual remarks on their body; his attitude that he could have intercourse with any woman he wishes, unravelled his fragmented psyche. He somewhat represents those men who are habituated of the old traditional structure of 'man to command, woman to obey'. In the incident while collecting photos for 'random samples' (discussed earlier), on Joe's objection to David's demand from Anna to get naked, he shouted back "Shut up, she's my wife" (173). It clearly showed that he felt authorised to do as he wished with Anna because she was his 'wife'.

This type of men, who couldn't stop the changing dynamics of the society in favour of women, harbour latent anger against this change. The equalisation process between men and women extracts this latent anger against women in different forms of violence and derogatory acts. David's behaviour of reducing every female in his vicinity to a sexual object was his reaction to this change. In his conversation with the narrator, this struggle within him surfaced: 'I am all for the equality of women; she just doesn't happen to be equal and that's not my fault, is it? What I married was a pair of boobs, she manipulated me into it...' (176). His dissatisfaction from his 'wife', who did not conform to the traditional stereotype of obeying her 'master' (husband), was apparent from his statement. His unconscious psyche was not ready to accept Anna as his "equal". His defence mechanism to hide the failure of authority over Anna was reflected in the statement "she manipulated me into it", which was contrary to his other remarks about her being "dumb" in the story. He was frustrated that he was not receiving the privileged treatment that the 'husband' of the older patriarchal tradition used to get from their wives, from Anna. In addition to that he had to meet the obligation of accepting his 'wife' as his equal. Both the factors seemed to bring out this perverted behaviour in him. It seemed his unconscious and conscious minds were conflicted. His unconscious mind, which was conditioned by the old traditional beliefs regarding being a 'man'; and the new emerging concepts about modern men which his conscious mind had to process and adopt, left him deeply troubled and confused. As unconscious mind is more powerful than the conscious mind, hence his conscious mind couldn't overpower it. Thus, his unconscious mind wanted to exercise full control over Anna. He wanted to grant her liberty to the extent to which he felt comfortable. But in the modern era it was not possible as

Anna rebelled in her own ways. This was confirmed from Anna's statement, when she was having conversation with the narrator:

“He's got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I'm never sure. He's crazy, there's something missing in him, you know what I mean? He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself.” (156)

When Anna was instigated emotionally, she consciously broke the 'little set of rules' to challenge his authority. Perhaps, her act of having intercourse with other men was also an act to show David that she *too* could do the same and there was nothing much he could do about it.

David and Anna's marital relationship was a perfect example of a dysfunctional relationship. They didn't have a healthy emotional, physical or mental connection. Every aspect of their relationship seemed perverted. The core reason behind this dysfunctional perverted relationship seemed to be lack of 'naturalness' in their being. They were stuck in their fragmented psyches and flesh of the body. Neither their head nor body existed in the healthy state of existence. Their actions depicted that they were disconnected from both: their head and body, i.e. rationality and emotions. At the level of the head, they operate from the fragmented psyches; and at the level of the body they operate from the level of "flesh". The 'naturalness' of human emotions was lost to them. They were the fine representation of distorted and fragmented masculinity and femininity, which were at war, because they were unable to overcome their psychological conditioning. David was stuck in the old traditional men's psyche, whereas Anna was perpetuating the constructed femininity to appease David's psyche. Their inability to connect to their true selves brings out this grim picture of the 'genderization' process (in which the social psychological conditioning of humans is done to shape them into men and women) by society that gravely impacted their inner being, their life and their relationships. It completely ripped them off from achieving their 'wholeness' of being that comes from the harmonious existence of masculine and feminine within oneself, leaving them fragmented and broken.

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