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**Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Gemma
Corradi Fiumara's Theory of Language
and Metaphor**

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“So, even though we’re not actually in the same place,

and we’re not actually together,

we kind of are in a way, you know?”

– *Aftersun* (2022).

To my Mom.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is identifying and commenting upon the most significant metaphors concerning the characters of Margaret Atwood's second novel, *Surfacing* (1972). Atwood's employment of metaphors will be looked at through the lens Gemma Corradi Fiumara presents in her 1995 text *The Metaphoric Process. Connections between language and life*. Corradi Fiumara's theoretical framework sees metaphor not only as a linguistic tool, but as a psychological instrument shaping our understanding of the world, and the way we interact with the people whom we come into contact with.

As the events are told through the perspective of a first-person narrator, the metaphors utilized to describe the characters' actions, thoughts and inner worlds are the result of the narrator's perception of them. Consequently, metaphors are arbitrarily appointed to secondary characters creating a narrative that is entirely driven by the protagonist. Hitherto, the metaphors analyzed throughout this work will be those concerning the protagonist herself, Anna, David, Joe and the narrator's parents.

Furthermore, as the narration takes place in the Canadian wilderness, the natural theme is extremely relevant and metaphors are built around nature as well. The protagonist's relationship with nature will, consequently, impact her psychological insight regarding the events she is living and the people around her.

INTRODUCTION

“Please, picture me
In the weeds
Before I learned civility
I used to scream ferociously
Any time I wanted”
(Taylor Swift, *seven*)

Margaret Atwood is regarded as the most renowned Canadian writer to discuss natural, political and feminist themes. In particular, the author’s relation to nature is extremely important in her writing because it is intertwined to events of her life.

Born on 18th November 1939 in Ottawa, to a former nutritionist (Obidic) and a biologist, Atwood would travel to the woods between Ontario and Quebec for about half a year every year (Wilson, 29), due to her father’s research work. Moving to and from the bush “meant...there were...two environments that I could feel comfortable in” (Rosenberg, unpublished 1978 quoted in Wilson).

Atwood began her career as a writer with the publication of a collection of poems, titled *Double Persephone* (1961). However, having started her career as a published poet, she had to undergo several criticisms when her first novel was published: early critics believed the author’s poetic style to be far too present in her prose, complicating language for no apparent reason. Furthermore, they believed Atwood’s capability as a poet was not mirrored in her prose, and that she had tried to enter a world – that of prose – that was not meant for her (Rosenberg).

Considering Atwood’s critical reception, it is safe to assume that there are innumerable academic texts revolving around her writing, concerning both her topics and her

language. For this reason, this dissertation will focus on just one of Atwood's texts, namely her second novel, *Surfacing* (1972), and it will concern one particular aspect of her writing, that is her use of metaphor.

“Metaphor” will, in this text, refer not merely to similes lacking ‘as’ or ‘like’: it will, instead, be framed in a way that resembles Aristotle's definition of analogy. To do so, I will make use of the framework sketched in *The Metaphoric Process. Connections between Language and Life*, published in 1995 by Italian psychiatrist Gemma Corradi Fiumara. Differently from scholars coming from Linguistics, who seemingly are interested in metaphoricity as a mirror to understand and evaluate the ways in which people interact, Corradi Fiumara concentrates on the psychological meanings behind our use of metaphor, as her theory aims at regarding metaphor not just as a linguistic tool, but as a psychological instrument. In particular, she argues that every metaphor we employ sheds light on our psychological and physical condition, as well as on our metaphoric potential and our ability to evolve.

For this reason, throughout this dissertation I intend to select and investigate the metaphors *Surfacing*'s narrator as well as secondary characters employ. Clearly, as the events are narrated by a first-person voice, the passages containing metaphors regarding secondary characters are the result of the narrator's idea of those characters, hence the metaphors would probably be different if another person was narrating the events.

The work will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will revolve around *Surfacing*: firstly, I will provide a detailed re-telling of the events of the novel, as I deem it essential to look at the bigger picture (i.e. the novel) in order to be able to understand details that will prove pivotal to my argumentation. Secondly, I will provide a state of the art on *Surfacing*, which will regard the various interpretative grids that have been applied to the novel (including mystery novel, religious quest, feminism and naturalism). Particularly, the

presentation of the various studies regarding the importance of language will prove essential to demonstrate that literary scholars have paid scant attention to metaphors in *Surfacing*, as they usually tend to simply discuss Atwood's use of figures of speech. Finally, I will sketch George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's very well-known theory of metaphor and discuss the most important features of this theory, as well as how they diverge from Gemma Corradi Fiumara's framework.

The second chapter will concentrate on Gemma Corradi Fiumara's theory of language and metaphor. Given that she believes it is not possible to thoroughly account for language in a mechanistic way, Corradi Fiumara's position in defining metaphor is broad, given that her goal is that of considering it as an ongoing process. In the text, the scholar discusses the use of language in a philosophical and psychological perspective, exemplifying the need for a new interdisciplinary dialog. Corradi Fiumara, in fact, argues that Western philosophies consider dialog as a war to be won to prove a point; conversely, she suggests a shift in dialogical style in favor of a philosophy of listening that captures the metaphoric allusions and metaphoric potentials of others. By so doing, she proceeds to compare metaphoric language to literal language, and discusses the downsides of the avoidance of metaphor, as well as the possible issues deriving from the transportation of words into a different domain.

In the third chapter, I will be delineating the language of *Surfacing*'s nameless protagonist. I will define the concept of "unreliable narrator" and exemplify the reasons why this narrator can be deemed unreliable. Consequently, I will illustrate, by referencing Corradi Fiumara's theory, the Surfacers' metaphors that I have selected, namely the static (symbolizing an erasure of events), the neck (that stands for a separation between emotions and rationality) and the jars (representing the narrator's guilt). All three of them are employed by the narrator to escape a repressed trauma. The Surfacers are, in Corradi Fiumara's perspective, a "developing person", embracing her own metaphoricity whilst keeping track of

society's current epistemologies. Furthermore, I will also provide an additional image, that of the fist, working as a transition element that allows to comprehend the Surfacers' journey towards the embracing of metaphor. Finally, I will exemplify the narrator's preference for the non-verbal (pictures and gestures) over language, and how this connects to her preference for metaphoric over literal expressions.

The fourth chapter will concern the characters of Joe, Anna and David, the narrator's friends. I will argue that each character represents a different level of metaphoricity, that is to say a different evolutionary potential. The metaphors I will be considering will also account for their possible development – or lack thereof.

First, I will be discussing Joe's body hair, and how his relation to nature – and to the narrator – could represent a possibility for development: Joe can, in fact, be considered a developing person because he embraces both the world of metaphoricity and the world of literalness. Then, I will account for Anna's incompetence at communication, which she hides behind a façade of makeup. Makeup will be central as, on the one hand, it is the metaphorization of Anna's developing potential; on the other hand, it exemplifies her imprisonment into a patriarchal society. The idea of Feminism, and especially the historical reality of Second Wave Feminism, will prove central to investigate the different approaches to womanhood embodied by Anna and the narrator. Finally, the character of David will be looked at through the lens of literalness, as David embodies the absence of metaphoricity because of his having embraced society's epistemologies, as well as the literal language that conveys them. Additionally, this section will show how David is deemed untrustworthy by the narrator because he possesses many of the characteristics that she assigns to Americans: namely, he does not respect nature, does not respect his wife and is violent towards both.

In the fifth and final chapter, I will be considering the different approaches to nature that cohabit in the novel: the Americans' and the narrator's parents'. The metaphor I will be

analyzing concerning the Americans is that of the heron, that they have killed. Although, in the novel, the term “Americans” does not refer to a citizenship rather to an ideology, the heron will come to symbolize the killing of innocents and the defacement of nature to obtain mastery over the environment. Americans represent the polar opposite of the narrator because, as they cannot live in harmony with nature, they cannot embrace metaphor and are stuck into a world of literalness. The different approaches to nature will also be exemplified, in this chapter, by means of a comparison of Canadian Literature and American Literature, through the employment of Atwood’s *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972).

Finally, the narrator’s parents have a completely different approach to nature than the Americans, as they embrace nature and return to it after death. The narrator’s parents, in fact, come to symbolize both the halves that the narrator is split into: her father, the logic half; her mother, the emotional half. Hence, I will be discussing the shift in the narrator’s approach to nature, that overlaps with her period of madness, as she envisions her parents transforming into animals, and acknowledges the rationality of feeling. Finally, I will return to the theme of the pictorial to discuss how the narrator’s parents’ legacies are visual, rather than linguistic, and how this aids the narrator in coming to terms with her parents’ death.

CHAPTER ONE

ON *SURFACING*

1.1 *Surfacing*

Published in 1972, *Surfacing* is Atwood's second novel: it tells the story of an unnamed first-person narrator, a young woman, on a journey back to her homeland together with a married couple of friends, Anna and David, and the narrator's current lover, Joe.

The title of the novel gives account for something that is happening, due to the use of present continuous; furthermore, it is also linked to the semantic field of water, which will prove crucial to the protagonist's journey, in both a literal and a metaphoric way. The novel is divided into three sections and, interestingly, each of them makes use of a different verbal tense: the first part is entirely narrated in the present tense (aside from the narrator's memories), whilst the second part in the past tense and the third one again in the present tense.

1.1.1 Part One

Atwood's novels usually open with the protagonist facing a moment of life crisis (Potts), and so is the case with the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing*: the journey she has embarked in is actually an expedition, as the narrator's father has gone missing and she wants to find him. The narrator's companions, however, do not share any interest in the ulterior motive behind the journey, "they all disowned their parents long ago" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 13)¹, and

¹ All references to *Surfacing* come from Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*. Anchor Books, 1998.

decide to just go on a fishing trip on the island. Moreover, Joe and David are in the process of making a movie, titled *Random Samples*, and they plan to get filming done during the trip.

The setting of the novel is the Canadian wilderness, where the narrator has lived most of her life. She has now been away from it for many years and did not think she would be going back, especially now that her mother has died. The journey back to the island is, per se, a reason for panic to the narrator, as she feels her “home ground” is actually “foreign territory”: this derives partly from her having spent so much time away, getting married – and consequently divorced – and having had a child while far away from her parents. Her status of divorcée may cause distress to townspeople, hence it is kept a secret, and Joe would fill the role of husband for town use. The narrator repeats herself (and tells the reader) that the child is in the city, tended to by her former husband. And yet, she has never mentioned to Joe the marriage nor the child: “there’s no use to...there aren’t any pictures of it [the baby]...I have to behave as though it doesn’t exist, because for me it can’t, it was taken away from me” (45). Another reason why the narrator’s homeland is perceived as foreign to her is the town’s bilingualism between French and English. The Surfacier, in fact, does not speak any French, and is unable to communicate with a part of town, who in turn perceives her as a foreigner. Being targeted as an English-only speaker has her ashamed, although she shares the ideal that “if you live in a place you should speak the language” (22). That of language is another essential theme to the novel, as the narrator realizes its limitations in the course of her stay on the island.

Arrived at the cabin, the protagonist notices the growing vegetables and estimates that her father must have been there in late July: it is revealed her parents taught her how to survive in the wilderness, as her father “believed with the proper guidebooks, you could do everything yourself” (34). For this reason, she decides “there’s only two places he can be, on the island or in the lake” (43). But, upon finding a stack of papers by a lamp, a series of hand

shapes drawn on them accompanied by words the narrator cannot make sense of, a new, creepy alternative is created: the possibility that her father has gone insane and is now wandering in the woods.² Despite her fear, the narrator does not share the news to her friends.

The following day, as she lies besides a sleeping Joe, the narrator ponders about her feelings for him: although she believes to be “fond of him... it would be nice if he meant something more to me. The fact that he doesn’t makes me sad: no one has since my husband” (39). The protagonist also notices that the things she prefers about Joe happen to be physical, as his body reminds her of animals’, hairy and rough; in addition, she discovers her appreciation for his failure, deriving from her own past failures, such as her divorce and her current job. She did not envision to work as an illustrator at all, rather she wished to become a painter: the career as illustrator, “I suddenly found myself having. I didn’t intend to but I had to find something I could sell”. It is revealed that this decision was suggested to her by “he”, presumably her former partner, who believed her dream was “cute but misguided” (49), as there had never been any important female artists.

Later that day, the group leaves on a fishing trip. The fishing scene represents the first time the narrator’s uneasiness around killing is expressed: “I feel a little sick, it’s because I’ve killed something, but I know that’s irrational, killing certain things is all right” (62). However, the Surfacer does not express her concerns to her companions, leading them to believe she lacks emotions altogether.

The excursion is cut short by the arrival of an American motorboat: the narrator immediately urges her friends to go back to the island, as she believes the Americans to be “the kind who catch more than they can eat and they’d do it with dynamite if they could get away with it” (63).

² In Canadian Literature, a character’s death can also be caused by Bushing, that is to say the character has remained isolated in Nature and has, for this reason, gone insane (Atwood, *Survival*, 55).

The next day is supposed to be the group's last on the island, but David proposes to Joe and Anna (only later to the narrator) to spend one more week at the cabin, for more fishing and filming. The first part ends with a realization, on the part of the narrator, of her own unreliability about the events of her life: "I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people...if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them" (70).

1.1.2 Part Two

Part Two concerns the narrator's coming to terms with the truth about her life, and opens with a train of thought about the limitations of language.

The protagonist proves to be unable to cope with other people's feelings when Joe proposes marriage to her: she refuses with what she believes to be a logical explanation, confessing to her previous marriage, and notices her lover "growing larger, becoming alien, three dimensional" (87). This image is related to the protagonist's perception of feelings: since she is unable to cope with them, it seems that he is growing disproportionate and scary. At this point, the narrator confesses to having had a child and reminisces about her wedding day, her partner calmly driving to the venue, the narrator panicky asking "why are you doing this to me?" (88). She also looks back to the day her child was born: her partner was not present but "he should have been since it was his idea, his fault" (80). The language she employs to refer to childbirth is extremely puzzling for readers: she talks of "technicians, mechanics, butchers, students" and notes how "it was too much to go through for nothing" (79).

Marriage is exemplified in the novel primarily by Anna and David: the protagonist believed them to have a perfect relationship, but she actually finds they embody an ongoing war of the sexes. The very first day on the island, in fact, the narrator notices Anna forces herself into wearing makeup all the time because David wants her to look young. In addition, Anna

confides to the narrator David would want her to reprise birth control, regardless of her having undergone health problems because of it.

Searching for clues to find her father, the narrator finds several childhood notebooks belonging to both her brother and herself, filled with drawings. She is struck by the realization that all her scrapbooks contain illustrations from magazines, and recalls how ‘a lady’ or ‘a mother’ were answers she would give when asked questions about her future: “and it wasn’t a lie, I did want to be those things” (91).

The following day, the narrator is visited by her father’s friend Paul, accompanied by a man named Bill, who is a member of the Wildlife Protection Association of America. The Association would want to buy the cabin and turn it into a meditation center for its members. The narrator refuses his offer and tells her friends about the meeting: David immediately envisions a scenario where Americans are almost out of clean water, as “they’re dirtying up all of theirs” (96), hence they want to create a strategic base in Canada to use in case of war. Upon finding the narrator did not accept the offer, David compliments her heart – and her body, too –, which leads to Anna accusing the narrator to believe David is infatuated with her when, instead, he just wants to humiliate his wife by telling her about his infidelity.

Again on search for clues, the narrator finds a typed letter addressed to her father: the letter, bearing a University crest, is about pictograms the narrator’s father had discovered in the nearby caves. This discovery is the confirmation of her father’s death, for the narrator, as she rules out the possibility that he had gone insane: this is supposed to cause an emotional reaction in her, but she feels nothing, and she admits that she has not felt any kind of emotion in a long time. For this reason, the narrator now believes her neck is separating her body from her mind, leaving her incapable of emotion.

Additionally, the narrator finds herself incapable of putting her perceptions into words when Joe proposes they continue living together regardless of her having refused his marriage

proposal: she believes he will hit her upon her second refusal, but he does not, rather inquires about her feelings for him. Surprised by her lover's reaction, the protagonist cannot even find a proper answer to his question and now realizes her envy for Joe's ability to experience emotions. Her goal, hence, becomes that of retrieving the moment she stopped feeling: although no evidence is present in her childhood pictures, the narrator ponders the possibility that the "wrong" half of her survived, the thinking half, whilst the emotional part has disappeared.

In order to "match the drawings" in the caves "with reality" (105), the narrator takes her companions on a new fishing trip. Despite her failure at locating the painting in the area, the narrator recalls the University letter referred to pictures her father had taken: this leads her to hypothesize her father had the camera with him when he disappeared.

On their way to the island, the protagonist notices men in helmets cutting down trees with a chainsaw and leaving them to rot: thus, she envisions their goal is of rising the lake level, eroding the hill. On the track to camp, the group discovers a dead heron, hanging upside down from a rope tied to its feet. The narrator feels sickened by this image, as she wonders about that unjustified and reckless killing: she believes Americans to have perpetrated the crime for reasons of power, but she also feels guilty for the murder, as she did not bury the animal. This leads to an internal argumentation about the killing of animals: whereas, in Part One, the narrator believed killing animals for food to be acceptable, now she finds "our proper food was tin cans. We were committing this act, violation, for sport or amusement" (118). This feeling of guilt however, is not shared by the other members of the group, especially David, who film the corpse of the dead heron for *Random Samples*.

The group's meeting with the Americans hints at Canada's past as an English colony: some interpretations to *Surfacing*, in fact, revolve around the post-colonial nature of Canada

and to the treatment reserved to natives when colonizers first arrived to the country.³ When the two groups engage in conversation, the narrator discovers the Americans are actually Canadians: this has her livid, because the fishermen had disguised themselves as Americans. And yet, she believes the label “Americans” to refer not just to citizens of a Nation, rather to anyone who is detached from nature and exploits it.

The narrator, thus, looks back on her childhood, when she believed Hitler to be the origin of all evil: once he was gone, she found evil to be natural to humankind, as “anything we could do to the animals we could do to each other” (122). She consequently recalls of a ‘laboratory’ her brother used to take animals into when they were kids: one day, having found the site, the narrator freed the animals, which made her brother angry. Thus, he moved the laboratory but, although she had retraced its location, the narrator decided avoiding freeing the animals again and “because of my fear they were killed” (132).

As she feels she is almost out of time, the following day the narrator decides to get to the closest cave on her own. Before leaving, she finds Anna is more confident: back at camp, in fact, she had confessed the narrator of having forgotten her make-up at the cabin. Afraid of what her husband’s reaction would be, Anna also confessed about a set of ever changing rules that her husband wants her to respect: whenever she breaks one of them, she is raped or punished. Despite the narrator’s suggestion of a divorce, Anna merely acknowledged her feelings for David once more.

Anna’s newfound confidence, however, is shaken by David forcing her to strip in front of the camera, so as to have shots of her for *Random Samples*. Anna cries at that imposed humiliation, but David reassures Joe, who is running the camera, that his wife is “an exhibitionist at heart” (136). The narrator’s confrontation with David about the event turns out to be inconclusive, as David does not believe his wife loves him, and the narrator finds herself

³ In particular, the narrator remarks “the people were sold along with the land, and the animals” and she realizes Canada to be inextricably linked to other countries, namely the United States, so much so that “the flood would depend on who got elected, not here but somewhere else” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 133).

incapable of proving him wrong because “it was the magic word but it couldn’t work because I had no faith” (139).

Reaching the underwater cave, the narrator dives countless times in the lake: finally, through blurred eyes, she sees something coming towards her.⁴ The vision, “whatever it is...I killed it. It wasn’t a child, but it could have been one, I didn’t allow it” (144). This is the moment of complete truth for the narrator: she never had a pregnancy, just an unwanted abortion. Due to her inability to accept “that mutilation, ruin I’d made” (144), she had created a fake reality for herself: the day of the abortion became the day of her wedding, the ring on her finger not a memento to an ended marriage but to an affair – as her partner was one of her married professors.⁵

The fact the narrator could have refused the abortion and have the baby but chose to say nothing “made me one of them, too, a killer” (146). Regardless of her not being a religious person, in order to repent from the sin of killing, the narrator makes an offering to the ancestral Gods that reside in the lake: she can perceive their presence and wants to thank them for having allowed feelings to return within her. Out of the water, the Surfacer finds Joe: she wishes she could tell him about the revelation she just had, but believes he would not understand it. When they touch, the narrator realizes “language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole” (147); Joe, on the other hand, believes her to want to have sex with him. She refuses him again, but this time he forces himself on her, stopping only when she tells him she will get pregnant if they have sex: at this point in the narration, sex reminds the narrator of death and, for this reason, she is afraid of the power Joe holds over her.

The ability to perceive the presence of the Gods also allots the narrator new skills. She can sense the dangers of nature and she believes the Americans to be planning an attack

⁴ Later in the narration, readers will discover it was her father’s corpse she had seen.

⁵ According to Jerome Rosenberg (1984), some readers could go as far as to state that the revelations of chapter 17 are just another fake scenario that the protagonist has constructed for herself. However, the scholar notices how the pace of the narration changes drastically after this discovery and how the events that the protagonist had suppressed allow her to make further realizations about the world and her place in it.

against nature: thus, she wishes upon them a “death by nature”.⁶ Furthermore, this power equals, in her perspective, to the failure of logic and of reason, which in turn connects to the failure of language: she discovers new difficulties in conversing in English with the others, primarily David, who candidly confides to her that Joe and Anna have had sex earlier that day. Consequently, David offers to have sex with her as revenge. Empowered by her new perceptions, the narrator rejects David, who asks her not to mention the event to his wife. Shortly thereafter, however, it is David himself who tells Anna about it, leading her to believe he did have sex with the narrator. The Surfacer immediately tells the truth, but Anna does not seem pleased, rather she agrees with David’s statement that the narrator hates men. This has the narrator pondering and finding she hates humankind altogether: she expresses a desire to be a machine – which is actually similar to her previous emotionless state –, so as to destroy mankind and allow animals to have more space in the world.

Diving in the lake, the narrator had realized her father must have had the same visions as her, which must have led him to admit the defeat of reason; as a consequence, she must now recover her mother’s gift for her in order to be whole. Considering her father’s gift was about being able to see the reality of things, she deems her mother’s gift will teach her how to act.

Her search, however, is interrupted by the arrival of a motorboat. David promptly informs the narrator that her father’s drowned corpse has been found by a group of American fishermen: she does not believe it to be true, rather she believes David to have come up with a story, on the basis of the missing camera, to get revenge on her for having rejected him. As a result, she resumes her search, and almost immediately finds a picture that she had painted as a little girl: on one side, a pregnant woman, the unborn baby (her own self) gazing out in the world from

⁶ It is a death caused by the environment: in Canadian literature, nature is beautiful, but it is also dangerous hence, in her *Survival*, Atwood notes how the world of dangers is exactly the same as the real one, the one we usually inhabit (38). Atwood implies nature can actively kill, “that it can be a malevolent monster which destroys people rather than a nurturing mother” (Gibert, 88), although it seems to happen more frequently in Canadian literature than Canadian society.

her stomach; on the other side, a God with horns and a tail. The Surfacer believes this very picture to contain her mother's legacy, the gift of motherhood.

The ending to the second part has the Surfacer acknowledging salvation is still possible for Joe, but not for Anna nor David, as they are "already turning to metal" (160). All of them are avoiding her now, as she is in mourning, but the narrator actually deems "nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive" (160).

1.1.3 Part Three

Part Three is the final and shortest section of the novel; it is also the most linguistically poetic, as the narrator loses touch with reality and with language. It is narrated in present tense because, having now successfully faced her past traumas, the narrator can focus on her present.

The last night at the cabin, the narrator guides Joe in the woods to have sex and keeps him close for protection from the dangers of nature. The narrator now perceives pregnancy as something she has power over as well, not merely her male partner (Rubenstein, 396). Additionally, her intentions towards pregnancy have changed, since she now seeks a new pregnancy not only to accept her mother's legacy but also to repent from the abortion. "Pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 165): the narrator wants to find harmony with nature again, and to do so she has to embrace her animal part; Joe should do the same, but he is still too human. The narrator instantly feels "my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me" (165), which leads her to believe she must have gotten pregnant: she can already picture the birth of the baby, a silent fur God.

The last day, the Surfacer notices Anna often mirrors herself to check on her fake-real face: she believes this behavior to derive from Anna's becoming more and more a machine, although she can remember her crying, just the day before, after having been filmed naked.

The narrator comes to believe Anna can be liberated from her cage with the destruction of the movie: hence, she immediately tosses the film into the lake, freeing “hundreds of tiny naked Annas” (170), as real-life Anna watches speechless. The narrator escapes the harbor on a canoe, whilst Anna screams for Joe and David: the group yells her name, but she denies having a name at all, having stepped away from the meaninglessness of language and of civilization.

Having watched her friends depart from the island, the narrator goes back to the cabin, and finds the door has been locked, so she has to break in. Emptied of the power, she goes to the garden and, for the first time, she cries the death of her parents: “I’m not mourning, I’m accusing them...they decided it was time to leave...they didn’t consider how I would feel, who would take care of me” (176). Afraid of being alone in the cabin, that night the narrator witnesses the return of her parents – perhaps providing a new meaning to the sound of wind outside.

The next day, a new surge in power has the Surfacer wishing to purify herself from civilization with fire: thus, she burns work and kitchen tools, scrapbooks and photo albums; then, she slashes clothes, sheets and blankets. She then leaves the cabin with one of the blankets and heads to the lake to baptize herself. That same day, the protagonist finds that the cabin and its tin-canned foods are forbidden, hence the only source for nourishment is nature. The following day, however, she is denied access to the garden as well. In a way, the narrator is saved by the thought of pregnancy, which had caused her much suffering earlier on, as she only feeds herself in order to feed the God she believes is growing inside her.

Sharon Wilson (110) argues the language of the novel to mirror the narrator’s beliefs and thoughts, hence, it also mirrors her loss of control over reality. The narrator’s detachment from reality culminates in visions of her parents: first, her mother, feeding the jays in the garden; then, her father by the fence, incapable of entering the garden. Swiftly, her father

becomes a yellow-eyed hybrid, but he seems uninterested in the protagonist because she is a part of the landscape. Finally, he transforms into a fish. Going back to the spot where she had seen her father, the narrator finds the footprints are actually her own. By means of these visions, Atwood wanted to symbolize, in Roberta Rubenstein's perspective (396), that the narrator had always had her parents' teachings within herself. In addition, Robert Lecker (62) finds that the protagonist's madness⁷ wants to connect her to the power in nature and, in turn, with the power in herself: openness towards nature and respect for the Earth translate in knowledge deriving from other living things.

Awakened by the sound of a motorboat, the narrator envisions the police searching for her, or the start of the war David had foreseen. Intercepted by the searchers, she runs away, praying to the invisible power to not get her caught. Unharmed, the narrator decides avoiding going back to the cabin for fear of traps. During that night, the narrator dreams for the first time: she dreams of her parents, of when they were alive, and she knows once awake the limitations are over. The Gods are gone, too, she will never see them again. At this point, the narrator decides to go back to the city, despite the massive presence of Americans there, as she owes to her parents to prefer life.

In the final chapter, the narrator acknowledges her need to refuse being a victim: being a victim would translate into a powerless inability to hurt other people, which she has instead proven to be capable of. She also finds going back to the city equals embracing traditional language again, as other means of communication do not yet exist.

Finally, the sound of a motorboat, Joe on the front: the Surfacer decides to go back to Joe, admitting her love for him for the first time. However, as the novel is open-ended, readers do not witness the couple's reunion.

⁷ In *Surfacing*, the meaning associated to the term 'madness' does not have to do with a mental illness causing the patient to act in a chaotic and dangerous way (*Oxford English Dictionary*); rather, it accounts for the narrator's loss of contact with reality, deriving from her grieving her parents.

1.2 *State of the art on Surfacing*

Firstly, it needs to be stressed that most of the topics regarding the novel have been discussed before, due to the huge academic critical industry around Margaret Atwood. As will be highlighted, the novel has been read through many lens, both in terms of plot and language used.

Surfacing is in part a detective story, as the narrator wants to solve the mystery of her father's disappearance as well as the disappearing of her own self. The narrator's quest is read, in Sharon R. Wilson (1997), as a descent into madness and a consequent awakening, which leads her to a discarding of the false self to get to the true one (79). Wilson herself points out that the narrator has embraced a false self (the cool, inhuman woman) to fit the life she had created for herself; but once the reasons behind the detachment are revealed, she can no longer stick to the false personality and falls into a spiral of madness.

The first scholar to propose the interpretation of the fall into madness as a breakthrough for a journey of sanity was Margaret Laurence (1973), and her idea shaped many of the following essays on the topic. Laurence focuses on how paradoxical it is that the narrator's parents are scientists and rationalists, hence they only find answers in reason, while she is forced to live in an irrational world, and she cannot seem to find any answer in logic. The reason why the narrator descends into madness is, according to Laurence, not only her not being able to understand why her father has died; but also her acknowledging the fictionalization of her past at her own hands. Only by acquiring knowledge about these spheres of unknown will the narrator be able to exit the state of madness and go back to civilization.

The natural theme is, as mentioned, one of the most important ones in the novel. Carol Ann Howells (2006) argues that seeing nature as a commodity is a betrayal in Atwood's texts and, as such, it has consequences (84). Nature is the supposedly beautiful setting to the story

but, as the group sees nature as gracious, the narrator is only capable of noticing the harm humankind has caused to the landscape. During her madness, the narrator is forbidden any tin-can food and she can only feed on unprocessed foods, because they come from Mother Nature, which means nature was not exploited to obtain them: this idea represents a critique against consumer society, which Atwood has refused in many of her texts (Wilson, 165).

The narrator is, according to Kate Turner and Bill Freedman (189), sympathetic of nature, although she acknowledges that a full integration between humans and nature is impossible to achieve.

Linked to the natural theme is Wilson's analysis of the dichotomy between city and bush: as the city embodies a place of artifice, people become more and more machine; in the woods, instead, the characters get in touch with their reality and reintegrate the entirety of their selves into their consciousnesses (60-65).

When writing *Surfacing*, Atwood's goal was also that of voicing the invisibility imposed upon Canadians by American people, which she does by defining what Canadians are not, if compared to Americans: this goal is achieved by means of the presence of the "American" fishermen. Being American, in the novel, does not simply refer to being a citizen of the United States: it is rather a state of mind (Rao, 8), and it refers to people who kill for fun and are cruel towards nature. Thus, Atwood wants to push Canadians to reject the position of victim imposed on them by Great Britain and the United States, becoming creative non-victims in the process (Gibson; Obidic): in the novel, the narrator's recuperating her past and accepting her responsibility for other people's sufferings allows her to become a 'non-victim'.

A post-colonial view is evident in the narrator's journey because, only after having refused colonization, does she truly begin evolving out of a colonized consciousness. According to K. Jagan Babu (2019), the novel is not to be considered post-colonial per se, as it does not focus on the quest for political independence. However, the author notices the

creation of a Canadian identity for the novel's characters. Furthermore, in the post colonial view, living in a colonized country can result in the splitting of one's personality: in the very first pages of *Surfacing*, in fact, Anna notices some double lines on the narrator's palm, and inquires about a twin sibling (Atwood, *Sfg*, 4).

Related to the notion of Canadianness is also Ronald Granofsky's essay (1990) about Atwood's reinterpretation, in *Surfacing*, of elements from fairy tales. According to the scholar, this reinterpretation derives not from a mere interest, on the part of the author, in folk-narrative as a tradition of Canadian literature; rather as an exploration of Canadian cultural conditions. As a result, the novel is seen as a critique to the fairy tale structure.

Rosenberg (103) has noted critics of *Surfacing* believe, given that it was written by a woman and narrates the story of an unnamed woman who embarks in a quest in the woods to find herself, the book must be about women's liberation. However, Atwood often lamented that the only reading of the novel provided by Canadian society is one of National identity, while the one provided by American society is of feminist fight (Lecker, 47-49).⁸ In this respect, Atwood would prefer the novel to be associated with no feminist theory, as "I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism. That part of it is simply social reporting. It was written in 1965 and that's what things were like in 1965" (Atwood quoted in Kaminski, 27). In the novel, men are imposing their law on women by means of marriage, language, child-birth and religion, and perhaps the very namelessness of the main character is an incentive, for Atwood, to allow every female reader to resonate with what the protagonist is facing. The feminist interpretation of the novel focuses, according to Thejalhouno (2022), on the female characters' individuality and their quest for self-discovery in a male-oriented society where gender differences are uncross-able. Around this topic, Pearl Brown and Michele Hoffnung (1991) enlist *Surfacing* among a series of literary pieces that deal with sex-

⁸ Furthermore, American reviewers seem to believe the "American" theme of the novel to be the preference for nature over civilization.

role stereotypes and cultural assumptions about women. The two developed a course on growing up female and being on a quest to find oneself while getting in touch with one's own past as a female and humankind's past for women.

Fiona Tolan (2007) focuses, instead, on the protagonist's alienation from social expectations: by so doing, the author stresses how the protagonist blames Canadians and feminism for perpetuating her victim status, all the while being incapable of liberating herself from said victim status, due to her belief that, being a victim, she cannot hurt other people. The very passage in which the narrator wanders naked in the forest is a rebellious act against a male dominated society, where women are imposed what to wear and how to act.

Connected to the feminist interpretation is also the mother-daughter relationship exemplified in Coles Publishing (1998): as the narrator's mother's legacy is motherhood, to embrace her own femininity, stolen from her by the unwanted abortion, the narrator becomes pregnant again (or tries to). Conceiving a child with Joe while in the forest is a way to be drawn into the environment, and once again a connection is created between the narrator's dead mother and the wilderness.

Furthermore, as it is one of the major motifs of the novel, many scholars also focused on the religious theme. Meera Clark (1983) mentions it is embodied by the narrator's father, who did not believe in the Christian God, but has left the older gods of an ancient native tribe for his daughter to find. Eleonora Rao, instead, notices the narrator's life to be "devoid of a belief in God" (112), which she is able to find in the figure of her parents, who guide her through the process of rebirth by means of their gifts of vision. Once she has acknowledged the real past she had erased, the narrator is both physically closer to the depths of the lake, and spiritually closer to her own unconscious: as a result, she is able to find both the "power of the Gods...and the power which resides in the unconscious" (59). Coles Publishing (48) also interprets the narrator's coming to terms with her past as a religious experience because,

having been granted vision by her father's legacy and the Indian Gods, the protagonist is restored a sense of feeling, which she had been detached from for many years.

Other researches focus on the importance of language for characters to share experiences. Barbara Ewell (1981) focuses on alienation, and in particular refers to the narrator's concerns about the limitations of language, as they are means for modern technology and, as such, obstacle our relation to nature. Consequently, the characters in the novel acquire fragmented bias that obscure their understanding of themselves: this is why the narrator becomes unable to express herself in English and searches for a new language to help her. The narrator has always been at war with and alienated from language: as a result, the dichotomy word-meaning is lost and non-correspondences are created. Furthermore, the author stresses the divisive categories created by the narrator, which distort her perception of reality – an example is her representation of American males. Particularly, Part Three presents a change in syntax that is derived from the narrator's inability to cope with language: she, thus, replaces language with vision, creating a distinction between and within people.

Other readings attributed to the novel revolve around psychological theories. An example is the Lacanian reading provided by Jennifer Murray (2015) to the narrator's lack of emotion, which is considered the focus of the protagonist's quest. Esmá Biroglu (2018), instead, focuses on the psychological traumas of the narrator and attributes to her symptoms of alienation and schizophrenia. Noor Saady Essa (2020) also focuses on the narrator's alienation, this time from society, as a result of her abortion. This alienation, the author argues, will also empower the narrator into re-joining her society.

As far as research on metaphors in *Surfacing* is concerned, academic works about the topic tend to compare and connect metaphors with other figures of speech present in Atwood's poetry: an example is Judith McCombs' research (1978) focusing on the myth of women's nature. Teresa Gibert (2018) presents the various metaphors employed to refer to

childhood in the text. The scholar notices Atwood's metaphors can be ambivalent, due to her preferring reshaping conventional metaphors about childhood; furthermore, Gibert stresses Atwood's use of non conventional metaphors to refer to less straightforward notions about childhood and children. Particularly, the author points out that the idea innocence is innate in children is actually refuted in *Surfacing*, as the narrator recalls having destroyed a doll, together with her brother, because it was their least favorite. The only positive example of children is to be found in the past, with the narrator's parents, because "they were from another age" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 145).

Clark (1983) particularly focuses on the language of diseases the narrator uses in both a literal and a metaphorical sense: whenever she refers to the disease spreading from the South that is now killing the trees in the North, the narrator also refers to the disease she is carrying from her own past. Words, thus, become symbols pointing to both facts and concealed truths: what the narrator deems to be her memories are but a series of graphics and drawings, "mythical images springing out of the depths of her deeply troubled mind" (Clark, 6).

In her 1997 research, June Deery connects Feminism to Science, stressing how science has for centuries been considered male, "as opposed to the more feminine arts and letters" (470). And yet, she finds science has been employed by Atwood in various works to metaphorsize women's adaptive strategies when switching from the physical to the psychological realm.

The present work attempts at shifting the perspective on details regarding the use Atwood makes of metaphors, and in particular the way the narrator employs said metaphors. In the following chapter, the theory of language illustrated by Gemma Corradi Fiumara in her 1995 text will be exemplified in order to investigate the scholar's definition of metaphor and how her view on the topic is different than previous academic work.

1.3 Working on metaphors: Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we Live by*

The most common framework when it comes to analyzing metaphors is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors we Live by* (2003). Before laying out their theory, the scholars argue most people to believe metaphors are used only in extraordinary language. On the contrary, they believe metaphor to be "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (4), that is to say the very conceptual system that governs our lives is metaphorical in nature. The authors, just like Gemma Corradi Fiumara, stress metaphor is not to be seen as a mere rhetorical device, nor to be conceived of as simply being rooted and used in language (36).

Lakoff and Johnson provide examples to the most common metaphors used in the English language, and they try to explain the reason why the very use of these metaphors tend to influence the experiences we engage in. Many concepts that are important to human beings, for example emotions, are very difficult to express in literal terms due to their being abstract and not clearly delineated with first-hand experience. As a result, other terms become necessary to understand those concepts, hence, metaphors are used. Without a metaphorical definition, in fact, the concept itself would not be delineated clearly enough in itself; thus, it must be comprehended indirectly, via the use of metaphor.

Consequently, the abstract terms that are most important to our cultural and social background create systemic correlates with our sensory-motor experiences, building the basis for metaphorical concepts such as "HAPPY IS UP" or "SAD IS DOWN". By so doing, metaphors conceptualize our emotions in more defined terms (59). The scholars also argue how we usually conceptualize the non-physical by means of the physical, so as to make the less clearly featured item more understandable via features of the clearer described item. As a result, our understanding of one kind of experience is oftentimes translated into terms that are

actually related to another kind of experience. The scholars, thus, are concerned with how human minds get a handle on the concepts, and particularly to clarify what gets defined and what does the defining (117).

The two, thus, proceed to explain the classical and widely used theoretical framework that is comparison theory. The comparison theory stated metaphors to just be matters of language, not related to action or thought, which Lakoff and Johnson as well as Gemma Corradi Fiumara (and the author of this text, too) reject, as metaphors are primarily about thought and action, just secondarily matters of language per se. Furthermore, as for the comparison theory, a metaphor can only describe preexisting similarities, thus, it is incapable of creating new ones. Consequently, a metaphor of the form “A is B” is a linguistic expression to be read as “there are similarities between A and B in these respects...” (86); hence, the similar respects that are found are known as “isolated similarities”.

Although they tend to reject most of the theoretical framework behind the comparison theory, Lakoff and Johnson accept the basic notion implying metaphors are possibly (but not exclusively) born out of isolated similarities between items of different areas (154). Nonetheless, they argue that similarities are only perceived as such because of common experiential factors among different people. The power of metaphor is, for them, its ability to create a reality, rather than merely providing a way to conceptualize an already existing reality (145): this thought alone, they admit, rejects the traditional conception of metaphors, as it gives account for metaphors’ being rooted in our conceptual system.

As humans, we believe language to result in data that can create general principles of understanding, which involve the entirety of the concept systems used not merely by a single individual, but by entire communities. But it needs to be stressed that the conceptual systems of religions and cultures is as metaphorical as the language that contains them. Lakoff and Johnson found the major physical orientations of abstract concepts to be shared in the

majority of cultures, namely UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, CENTRAL-PERIPHERAL or ACTIVE-PASSIVE. What seems to change, however, is the physical orientation of the concepts, as well as the dichotomies that turn out to be most important for a given culture.⁹ Our experiences can differ from culture to culture and / or be metaphorical in nature, that is to say our understanding may depend on translating one kind of experience in terms of another. Being conceptual in nature, metaphors are among the most important vehicles for understanding; moreover, they play a central role in the construction of a social and political reality. Some metaphors can derive from a cultural or religious legacy, while others are comprehended by virtue of our own attempt to create a coherence between what we say and the conceptual system we live in. Regardless of their being new or conventional metaphors, they still hold the power to define reality, as they “highlight some features of reality and hide others” (158). Once a metaphor is accepted, it forces the users to only focus on the aspects it highlights, hence those aspects become true, as far as the reality enclosed by the metaphor is concerned.

Since truth is relative to understanding and true statements depend on the way we categorize matters, because these categories highlight certain aspects of reality and hide others, for the scholars truth of a statement is dependent upon the suitability of the categories employed. As a result, truth of statement will always depend on the comprehension of the category used and its purpose in a given context. Furthermore, truth is also relative to our conceptual system: in terms of truth, as in terms of metaphor, it is not possible to achieve a definite and complete account on reality. This derives from the absence, in metaphors and in human concepts, of inherent properties: the two categories, in fact, only present interactional properties, that is to say their nature can change from culture to culture (182).

⁹ For example, “for us ACTIVE IS UP and PASSIVE IS DOWN in most matters. But there are cultures where passivity is valued more than activity” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 25).

As regards the common elements between Gemma Corradi Fiumara and Lakoff and Johnson's theories, they share the necessity to use metaphors as a way to express "the unique and most personally significant aspects of our experience" (189). Both texts, in fact, stress that ordinary, literal language, will be incapable of giving account for matters of personal understanding. Literal language, according to the scholars, can be unfair because, in order to achieve objectivity, it can leave out the most important aspects of a personal experience in favor of the abstract and universal truth. Furthermore, per both texts, metaphors allow for the creation of new meaning and new realities: as a result, metaphors enable an increase in human understanding. In the text, Lakoff and Johnson also refer to the experientialist theory (230-231), arguing that, since humankind is in constant interaction with the world, it is clear men will be changed by the environment and will change the environment in turn. Similarly, Gemma Corradi Fiumara will argue at length about the importance of interaction between humans and environment in order to achieve understanding by means of metaphors.

CHAPTER TWO

METAPHORS ACCORDING TO GEMMA CORRADI FIUMARA

2.1 A psychological view on language

Gemma Corradi Fiumara is an Italian scholar. Born in 1939, she graduated from Columbia University (New York) and then Rome University (Italy). For many years, she has collaborated with the Italian Psychoanalytic Society, of which she is a member; and has taught Theoretical Philosophy at the Università Roma Tre as well as La Sapienza University, also in Rome.

Many of her published works revolve around the symbolic and philosophical function of language: in particular, this study will concentrate on her *The Metaphoric Process. Connections between Language and Life* (1995). The framework provided in Corradi Fiumara's work will be employed to investigate the use of metaphor in the characters of *Surfacing* as well as their evolutionary potential.

When discussing language, Corradi Fiumara's goal is to stress the importance of a philosophy revolving around listening when engaged in dialog, so as to avoid considering the other person's ideas as something to be attacked and destroyed. When engaged in dialog, in fact, "we ultimately seek to produce arguments so powerful that they cannot be refused, so cogent that they are accepted" (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 19; Nozick, 4). In Corradi Fiumara's view, instead, the very action of listening, as well as the figure of the listener are foregrounded in order for us to grow as communicators. With *The Metaphoric Process*, the author aims at exploring the primary function metaphors played in the intellectual development of humankind. To create a new way of living in the world, Corradi Fiumara argues, we would

have to listen carefully to what others tell us, so as to capture the metaphoric allusions they use and the struggles they want to convey. Whenever discrepancies arise between the “standard perceptions and personal perceptions” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 23) of reality, usually a metaphor has been employed: by becoming aware of the discrepancies and allowing links between verbal and non-verbal communicative elements, we will become ever more mindful of the connections existing between language and life.

According to the scholar, a position that is shared by the writer of this text, metaphors are much more than just similes lacking *as* or *like* (26): “metaphoricity is a basic mode of functioning whereby we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind” (98).¹⁰ Although metaphors are usually regarded as belonging to the sphere of symbolic activities, Corradi Fiumara’s intent, with this text, is that of reinforcing the need for a transition from isolated epistemologies with shared features; to a metaphoric integration of dissimilar domains. For this reason, the result is a text that revolves around linguisticity¹¹ and the human ability to express one’s innermost experiences through metaphors, by means of a philosophical and psychoanalytic lens, which is innovative in the field. Likely, the new insight provided by the scholar in this particular field of language derives from her being a psychoanalyst, a scientist, rather than a linguist.¹² The very profession of the scholar allows her to view language as a construct of affects that is inextricably linked to cognition: her goal is shedding light on aspects of our mental life that we would not be able to comprehend if we did not apprehend them with a specific cognitive frame in mind (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 9).¹³

¹⁰As will be exemplified in the following pages, Corradi Fiumara’s idea of metaphor is more similar to what Aristotle called “analogy”.

¹¹“Human linguisticity” refers to human’s ability to employ language in order to be understood and understand others. Corradi Fiumara mentions the myth of the Tower of Babel to give account for the different personal languages of human beings.

¹²To further understand the differences in studies concerning metaphors in the area of linguistics and in the field of psychology, see Gardner and Winner (1978, ed. by Sacks)

¹³For Corradi Fiumara (*Mind*, 44), affects in philosophy constitute a paradox: on the one hand, they are not considered a necessary precondition for any theory; on the other hand, as matrix for research, they are not

Metaphors tend to illustrate the most important aspects our life, as they shape our understanding of the world as well as “the cultural world we wish to inhabit” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 27). Thanks to this shaping function, so to speak, metaphors also influence the relationships we build with other people; being aware of the importance metaphors have for human beings, and of which metaphors are most important to us, would make us more responsible regarding our desires and beliefs, as well as the way we interact with the world and the people in it. On the other hand, metaphors are linguistically used to fortify the way we see things, by inducing ‘seeing as’ responses, that in turn generate possible developments – shaping and reshaping reality, similarly to what Lakoff and Johnson had noted in their 2003 text. If so considered, metaphors are expressions of cognitive and relational factors, and they help in developing coherence among the experiences of our lives.

To use metaphors in order to specify the experiences we undergo in the course of our existence equals avoiding denying, obscuring or deteriorating these events, as would be the case, instead, if we were to employ only literal language (98-99). Corradi Fiumara argues “linguistic lucidity” (5) to be one of the most important features shaping the metaphoric constructs of humans: as such, it allows and facilitates the creation of relations among and within people. Another significant criterion to the metaphoric potential is a person’s very own intellectual and formal achievements: the connection of these distinct realms highlights the interlacement of affect to reason. Although Western philosophers admitted the presence of a link between affect and language, affects cannot be ruled out from reason, nor reason ruled out from feeling. And yet, these philosophers decided to list affectual issues among the rationally explicable kind.

In the scholar’s perspective, language is constitutive of our whole being, not merely in terms of cognitive abilities: every time we try to alienate rationality from feeling, we

easily described in the language they also contribute to create. Consequently, our affective life does not seem relevant to philosophic theories regarding the human system, because philosophers deem issues regarding affects to be marginal with respect to philosophic activity (52).

involuntarily submit the life of our mind to an epistemology, decreasing our possibilities to think and to relate to others (39). As a result, whichever our dominant metaphors might be, they are engaged in practices which bring us closer to our own inner lives and, accordingly, they influence our intellectual behavior, shifting to perspectives that were not available before (85).

In addition, since metaphors are used to connect an item with something coming from an entirely different area, they operate both on cognitive and affective ways of understanding: hence, they are the result of operations of two distinct kinds, equally involved in a rational process. Metaphors bring together the people engaged in their construction (i.e., the creation of a metaphor by means of words from different domains) and construal (i.e., the meaning associated to the metaphoric phrasing): by providing significance to unfamiliar sounds and unfamiliar meaning, the process of “creating familiarity” generates a shared belief, which in turn generates a bond. Creating a bond produces intimacy: dominant metaphors usually are recondite ones (Cooper, 165) that require a certain amount of intimacy to be appreciated, as they derive from deep personal experiences.¹⁴ We might believe intimacy to be created by means of metaphors, but it is actually not so: intimacy is created via potentially destructive relations, that are prevented from erupting into violence. In order to avoid such an occurrence, we must make use of intimacy and prevent any attack against one’s psychic life. We can become so absorbed in the philosophy of literalness that we are inhibited from symbolizing life altogether, which is one of the worst possible dangers to the human mind. However, such dangers usually go unnoticed and may result in not just an inability in the use of language, but also in a fear of any kind of creative expression, as they endanger the ‘normality’ established by literal language.

¹⁴Ted Cohen (1978, ed by S. Sacks) as well stresses how metaphors can only be acknowledged by selected communities, because a certain degree of intimacy between teller and hearer is necessary.

Corradi Fiumara also draws our attention to the difficulties deriving, in a dialog scenario, from a speaker inducing their companion to share their use of metaphor. In doing so, the two speakers are called to decide whether their interpretation of the metaphor is compatible. When the idea associated to the use of a metaphor is not shared, in fact, the speakers do not participate in a common experience of the world as, when “metaphors succeed, more passes from speaker to hearer than would have passed otherwise” (Booth, ed. by Sacks, 52). But when the idea of the metaphor is indeed shared, the interlocutor can respond from within the metaphoric expression, outside of it or by means of a common ground: in any case, sharing an interpretation will increase the level of ‘intimacy’ for the speakers (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 106) and create a connection between the self and the dominant epistemology.

2.2 What is a metaphor?

At the very beginning of the text, acknowledging the importance that Aristotle has had in the inquiry regarding metaphors, Corradi Fiumara anticipates that her proposal will read metaphor according to an “interactive approach” rather than a “formal outlook” (1), which is the customary route among scholars. Corradi Fiumara then proceeds to link Aristotle’s view on metaphors with his ideals regarding social philosophy, as the theorist would seem to have maintained some aspects of his predecessor Plato’s ideals about the purity of thought.

Plato states that the truth cannot be grasped by means of the senses alone, and stresses the use of mind in a form that resembles “pure and adulterated thought” (Plato, 48). Aristotle, on the other hand, while asserting that the metaphoric potential of humans is “the greatest thing, by far” (Aristotle, 2234-5), still seems to preserve some particular aspects of Plato’s theory. Namely, Aristotle points out slaves must always avoid the use of metaphors, because they must abstain from making use of the human genius and generate competition with their

masters, as “it is not quite appropriate that fine language should be used by a slave” (2239). If slaves were allowed metaphors, in fact, they would create new world-views for themselves and for others, escaping the narrow vocabulary that confined them and recognizing their own ability to move from one context into another. This very realization would make slaves peers to their masters, a possibility that was to be prevented.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle describes “metaphor” as a figure of speech that could be subdivided into four different types: (1) genus to species, meaning the writer prefers to use a term usually employed in a different domain, rather than the general term; (2) species to genus, meaning exactly the opposite of type (1), with the general term used instead of the more specific one; (3) from one species to another species; (4) analogy, which takes place when “B is to A as D is to C, then instead of B the poet will say D and B instead of D” (1457b.7).

As for Corradi Fiumara’s position on the topic, the scholar believes that, since they are a complex and ongoing process rather than just a concept, metaphors cannot be precisely defined, hence she prefers to proceed with a broader view on the matter. This decision derives from the scholar’s desire to view metaphor as more than a mere figure of speech, hence as a way to “use one part of experience to illuminate another, to help us approach something that only seems to exist if we can somehow symbolize it and use the symbolization” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 27). The reason why the scholar opposes a mechanistic view on language, in fact, is that this view does not account for the metaphoric process, as it seems to imply it could be possible to discover how metaphors actually work, which is virtually impossible in Corradi Fiumara’s perspective.

The ideological legacy we inherited from Ancient Greece has, at its core, a style of philosophical discussion aiming at invalidating the adversary's position, polarizing the two positions and striving for bringing the other person to change their perspective to equal and

espouse our own. As a consequence, only one position is the right one (ours), and only one position can survive the discussion (ours). Corradi Fiumara exemplifies how our argumentative style tends to prefer scholars who reject the other's position, as they always seem to be in advantage compared to scholars who propose new intellectual ideas. Consequently, we seem incapable of conceiving philosophical discussions in any other way:¹⁵ what would be the use of philosophy if there was no adversary to criticize, no position to bring down and no triumph to be obtained (Midgley)?

The alternatives are far more complex and demanding than the 'war metaphor' is: adopting a new style of discussion would mean to "frame 'right' on the challenging domain of 'responsibility' " (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 42), that is to say becoming careful debaters. Allowing different styles of debate to come into being, it would be easier to understand that each position might be determined by a philosophical view as much as by the way each one of us handles their mental life. By the same token, advantage would be represented by the recognition that a philosophical theory derives from life so interwoven with language (arguments, in this case) that the two cannot be separated. Corradi Fiumara then, proceeds by referencing Mary Midgley's work: the scholar exemplifies how, if disagreeing with our own intellectual community, the only logical step is joining an opposing group, as they would have reverse beliefs than our previous community. In this way, it "looks as if single 'right' or 'positive' alternatives dominated our cognitive culture" (51): therefore everything not labeled as 'right' will definitely be 'wrong'. Oppositional metaphors, however, simply create irremediable opposites and, by so doing, widen the division between logic and life.

Even though metaphors have been defined as the greatest function of the human mind, they have been overlooked by scholars in the centuries following Aristotle's study, due to an inability to consider metaphor as a process. When empirical science started to become a

¹⁵ Furthermore, the use of the oppositional metaphor as the only discussion style brings about an objection against any other style of discussion: "we tend to regard arguments that are structured and conducted differently as no arguments at all" (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 45).

model for truth, poetry and rhetoric started once more to be looked at suspiciously by Western thought. As a result, metaphors as well as other figurative devices were once more overlooked. Hobbes, for example, argues that to use metaphors rather than literal language is absurd; Locke believes all metaphors do is insinuate wrong ideas in people via the art of rhetoric. For these reasons, they advise avoiding the use of metaphors altogether (Lakoff and Johnson, 191).

But Western rationality still presents problems of equilibrium between hermeneutics and epistemology: the former inquires methodological principles of interpretation, especially regarding literature, philosophy and sacred texts; the latter revolves around theories of nature and knowledge, referencing both the limits and the validity of each considered theory. The advanced status assigned by rationalists to epistemology (which is considered lucid and coherent) results in a challenge for hermeneutics (considered variable and inventive), striving for that same superior status. If hermeneutics were to stop esteeming epistemology and began focusing on its very own potential, it could be possible to recognize the importance of closeness for fecund coexistence. But epistemology alone cannot give account for our belonging to life, as human rationality is often efficacious only in precise domains of literalness, which means dominant epistemologies shall delegate the creation of links with external domains.

As a matter of fact, the platonic view is being debunked by the substitution of an idea of language into one of “ ‘pure thought’, and words for ‘concepts’ ” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 1): the result is that the prevailing cognitive model still seems to be a subject-object one. This model, however, does not allow for a coexistence between nature and culture. “Our biological nature projects itself into culture which in turn generates metaphoric guidelines for the inhabitation of our world. But then, it is a world that is now primarily cultural in the sense that the ‘existential’ dangers are feared as much as biological crises” (28).

The rational model is looked at as a way to organize language, and creating a normative standard for it. Nevertheless, by so doing, linguistic behaviors become idealized and inner experiences that could be expressed by the use of metaphor are not expressed at all due to a lack of non-metaphorical elements to describe it. Metaphoricity as a creative area emerges as restricted on the one hand by our own affective life (because we believe metaphor and affects to be incompatible); and, on the other hand, by areas of strict logic, thus literalness. When metaphors are not utilized, and the mind is stuck in a literal, non-metaphorical vocabulary, the result is a segregated psyche, utterly indifferent to both life and death. This occurrence would be the result of a passing from one literalness to another, in avoidance of metaphoric productions altogether, as they can create problems of translation and of linking.

The potential incivility of metaphor, resulting from its function of transporting words into different fields, poses problems of *containment* (as new metaphors can be created everyday and they can have a proper meaning to those who create them) and of *mastery* (the inability to manage the process of creation and usage of the metaphors themselves). These difficulties derive from speakers' desire to balance their uncontrollable and innermost metaphoricity with the literalness that they mistakenly believe to be the only real way to communicate with each other.

Sophists diverge from pure philosophers on the basis of the sort of 'power' they aspire to obtain: as the first group seeks cognitive control, the second group is after social control. Sophists consider metaphors as deviant, alien to communication and so only acceptable if adapted to the standard vocabulary, hence, to literalness. Corradi Fiumara argues about the pragmatic reason why many philosophers believe literal meanings to be of major importance: literalness creates the official meaning of an epistemology, hence using it facilitates communication. Furthermore, literal meanings seldom cause misunderstanding and

equivocations, while the same cannot be applied to metaphoric meanings. Even so, an excessive propensity for literalness could be detrimental for language, causing it to become ever more detached from the complexity of human beings and their interactions, making us blind to both nature and culture. As a result, our affective and metaphoric potential would be limited by sticking to the ideals of dominant epistemologies (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 125).

As we will see, in *Surfacing*, the narrator is unable to express her feelings by means of words, due to their being inadequate for her; this translates into and is intertwined deeply to her inability to feel any emotions. Only by finding new words in what she deems to be a “new world” will the protagonist be able to get back to reality, embracing her emotions and the events of her life.

2.3 Language and linguistic life

By being more aware of the use of metaphors, and of how metaphors allow our imaginative construction of reality, we may understand that they are not a pastiche of nonsense to be resolved. As a matter of fact, metaphors constitute the linguistic hypothesis for an emotional event or situation we previously lacked words to describe, and they can enable us to explore a context in which new knowledge is implicit, although it is not manifest yet. Language is to be seen as an expression of life, and to be considered alive per se: language develops and grows, it deteriorates and goes extinct, following the changes in human society. Corradi Fiumara points out that, although there is now (at the time of her writing during the 1990s, but even more so in present day society) a preoccupation with the destruction of planet Earth that humankind has caused and continues to cause, a preoccupation of a similar kind is not extended to the deterioration of language.¹⁶ “[S]uccessful metaphors range from being new-born and entirely innovative, to being worn out and extinct into literalness” (15): that is

¹⁶ A deteriorating language, in fact, could and would lead to an inability to create authentic relationships with people, or to demolish said relations due to destructive behaviors.

to say human language, too, shares the vulnerability and precariousness of human life. The author, referencing David E. Cooper, remarks that each time a metaphor is used in place of a literal expression, it becomes ever more extinct: once the metaphor has lost its metaphoricity, it becomes a part of the literal vocabulary.¹⁷

As a consequence, the scholar wants to stress the ability of language to reproduce: instancing Charles Peirce's theory about the "reproductive capacities" of human language to develop by means of an innate competence, rather than by a metaphoric process of construction, Corradi Fiumara underscores the human inability to view language as dissociated from everyday life, as on the contrary she believes metaphor and reason cannot be separated. New language can derive from the integration of new and unexpected elements, proceeding to discard old structures in favor of innovative and more complex ones. Anyhow, these structures all derive from human events, and even more so from human interaction.

When presented with the question of why we speak metaphorically, Cooper (141) refuses to accept the concept that speaking metaphorically is an innate human ability: conversely, he stresses how some people whose mind is still in development cannot manage speaking metaphorically. For this reason, they prefer to rely on whatever kind of literal language is available to them: it would seem that these people lack the genius of metaphor, hence cannot construe and recognize metaphors. Similarly, in Johnson's view (65-100) humans' reasoning can be considered metaphoric inasmuch as (and only so far as) it involves and employs structures to be used to translate items belonging to the physical world onto a more abstract field of understanding.

Western rationality is, though, characterized by a disembodied style of knowledge: this very attribute, however, tends to create a dualism formed of disembodied language on the one hand, which results from some sort of "alien organism" having nothing to do with human

¹⁷ Corradi Fiumara also signals the paradoxical nature of trying to illustrate metaphors by use of literal language, since the latter is the result of nothing more than metaphors that have gone extinct.

beings; and of the human linguisticity, from which the first element is discarded, on the other hand. In order to resolve this dualism, metaphor and life might be brought together and become one single unit but, insofar as the living organism producing language is being described in terms of “hardware”, both linguistic representation and cognition are segregated into a nonmaterial arena: the mind. In order to maintain the mind as literal as possible and avoid the influence of emotions, speakers could decide to conform to a detached language, which would equal preferring dissociative expressions, as well as employing public linguistic forms, rather than a more personal language,¹⁸ as the goal is precisely that of excluding emotions from language. Consequently, the detached language could be led back to a superior intellect, resulting in the conclusion that animals and infants are not equipped with language because, as ‘mindless’ creatures, they “can thus be regarded as mere objects of knowledge” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 23). In so doing, language per se could be considered a justification for appropriation and control over other human beings as well as the products of the Earth.

However, it would be of no use to consider the mind as being “in” the body, as if the two elements could be separated: it is not possible, in fact, to extract the substance from the living creature; hence, linguistic interactions are to be considered as deriving from the living being (the human) creating them. Looking at language from a detached perspective would only separate it from its linguistic life, developing an unconscious concealment of linguistic life as such. By the same token, the fracture created between linguistic analysis and linguistic life would go unnoticed due to the philosophers’ inability to conceive of something other than literal facts. As a result, linguistic life would be reduced to an artifact, but we would be unaware of both this demotion and of the concealment that follows.

¹⁸ Any result drawn from the impersonal perspective adopted, anyway, will have to be included in one’s personal view before influencing in any way future research on philosophy.

Corradi Fiumara notes that the mind-body dichotomy (which will be essential to the comprehension of the language of *Surfacing*'s nameless narrator) is one of the most urgent and most antiquated academic problems: perceiving the world as we do, we act in ways that allow us to continue perceiving the world as such; the world itself is, however, shaped by the beliefs, desires and languages of each of us. To put it simply, the perception we have of the world can derive either from how the world really is, or from our own subjective view of it: metaphoric language by itself can allow speakers to constantly renew and re-contextualize their dichotomous approach on life by means of the adjusting of "a knowing 'subject' pursuing truth, and of an 'objective' reality being described" (91).¹⁹

Another important feature in Corradi Fiumara's theory of language is her argument that "even the highest intellectual achievements of a culture" (25) are shaped by means of our life vicissitudes, as the metaphors we choose mirror our physical and psychological condition, hence, they are not randomly chosen.

Sketching Marcia Cavell's theory about the connection between language and life, Corradi Fiumara states that action, language and mind are united, and that separating the parts in order to analyze them individually would lead to failure. Nevertheless, another person's metaphors, deriving from their own life events, may not be comprehended or understood by those who did not undergo the same experiences: to describe what is unknown, "we must resort to concepts that we know, and that is the basic effect of metaphor: an unusual juxtaposition of the familiar and the unfamiliar" (26). Hence, Corradi Fiumara stresses how, in unfamiliar circumstances, we take refuge in more familiar domains, in life as well as in the field of language.

Whenever we find ourselves unable to depict an anomaly, "either we have not sufficiently mastered the vocabulary of the epistemology we inhabit" (82), or the concepts we

¹⁹ In spite of this, Corradi Fiumara notices (*Mind*, 53) that some truths are not expressible via means of a totally neutral language, that is to say a different idiolect becomes necessary.

are dealing with are not enough to give account for the different qualities we could actually recognize in them. Indisputably, changes in language may also result in a reshaping of already existing metaphors, inserted in a new life and cultural cycle, and thus transformed: the deeper the connection we are seeking to find, the less adequate our language to describe it will be. As a consequence, in order to connect life and language, our vocabulary must embrace both, all the while taking into consideration the various shades of human expressiveness. Considering this, language has to become ‘alive’, that is, capable of accounting for the functions it plays in our cognitive development (100).

2.4 Concerns about metaphor

Returning once more on the dichotomy of literal language and metaphoric speaking, Corradi Fiumara poses the possibility of literalness inducing a gap between a “private ‘true’ self and a social ‘false’ self” (57). This case would view the impossibility to use a personal language due to a non-responsive environment, which would lead to the surrendering of one’s authentic qualities to the creator of the prevailing epistemology. Whenever personal language becomes fictitious in order to imitate standard language (generally, literal language), it is rarely possible to prompt progress and growth in one’s vocabulary (136). If a personal need is ever expressed via the use of a language that is not mirrored in the current epistemology, the “speaker is perceived as interfering with the established order” (136): metaphors are, in fact, only accepted when they stand as a tribute for the literalness of a phatic community, hence to reality itself. In so doing, attempts at an introspective life are blocked in every situation where metaphoric resources have been denied and corrected to be restored to literal language. But read in a literal way, metaphors lose their main characteristic, which is semantic absurdity, due to their joining “words whose semantic markers are incompatible” (117). What a literal phatic community does not seem able to comprehend is that “truth” is actually built upon the

system of belief on which the community itself is based: considering this, each community copes with the world by “representing, and misrepresenting it, in terms of mental schemata which are tested and modified by feed-back mechanisms” (102). In order to achieve a proper representation, it is not necessary to resolve to psychological researches, but rather to reconnect literalness and metaphoricity by means not merely of “revolutionary ideas”, but by rejoining in a culture’s neglected and quite forgotten past.

When dealing with the theme of creation of the self in literature, Corradi Fiumara reflects on the characterization of young and adult protagonists. In the case of young protagonists, she argues, the goal is to conquer the outer world, mastering the unconscious in the process; as regards adult protagonists, instead, of chief importance is a quest for maturity rather than an adventure to accomplish something. At any rate, the goal in writings that concern this topic is that of coping with divisions and denials – as is the case, for example, with Atwood’s protagonist in *Surfacing*. At any rate, Corradi Fiumara argues, it is never clear whether human metaphors seek enduring changes or the continuation of a past relation with someone or something, as if the metaphors alone can create significant changes in one’s inner world.

Corradi Fiumara particularly focuses on the figure of the parents, and most importantly on how, with just their behavior, they can change their children’s inner world. This would mean that any parent has got in themselves transformational powers capable of shaping other people’s interior nature. The actions of a parent can alter children’s experiences in a positive or negative way: Corradi Fiumara exemplifies particularly the narcissistic tendency to expect children to fulfill their parents’ life goals, which children tend to follow out of love for their parents.²⁰ As ‘unformed human beings’ in the earlier stage of life, children can be left emptied of their desires and become mere containers for someone else’s

²⁰ Referencing Judith Butler (7, as in Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 127), Corradi Fiumara acknowledges the formation of the self is subordinate to affectual attachment to parents and other “superior beings”.

expectations, which are hardly ever satisfied. Clearly, the scholar states, each pair of parents is different than the next, hence their dialogic interaction with children will be different as well. Even when the child still has not developed the ability to join in the conversation with actual words, some parents tend to contemplate any babble or sound as “the child’s turn” in conversation; conversely, other parents may avoid interactions with non-speaking children altogether.

Corradi Fiumara, thus, wonders: what kind of conversation or interaction could children be having if they are not involved with their own parents? In cases similar to the second example, children may be driven towards maturing stages while still unaware of their dialogic needs: nascent conversations represent crucial passages in children’s lives because they prevent cognitive or affective damages. As a consequence, whenever these “conversations” are avoided, it is possible for damages to occur: “these early ‘language games’ may profoundly influence the quality, rigor and creativity of human ratiocination” (111).

There is, however, much of a difference between misusing a term due to a shortening vocabulary and employing a metaphor: young children may improperly rename an object, although they know the correct term for it, because they want to highlight some features that strike them. According to Ellen Winner (41), “whenever a child renames an object without previously transforming it through a fictional action, the metaphor remains based on some degree of physical resemblance” (quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 112). Winner also states that, at very young ages, children tend to create nascent metaphors by means of symbolic plays, that are rooted in a functional similarity but created by means of fiction.²¹ As a result, relations with such objects are created rather than discovered: hence, aside from perceiving an amount of resemblance in the function of different objects, children also perceive the objects’ inner potential to take part in a fictional dynamic. By so doing, children

²¹ In order to comprehend the different approaches to literal and metaphorical language children take, see the study conducted by Gardner and Winner (1978, ed. by Sacks)

are merely perceiving similarities, rather than “imaginatively creating functions and roles by means of a much deeper *personal* involvement” (112).

The figure of the parents, and particularly their teachings, proves to be of chief importance for the nameless narrator of *Surfacing* and her journey back to sanity. Conversely, another important figure is the narrator’s former lover, a married man with whom she had an affair: perceiving the man as a perfect human being because she was in love with him, the narrator had shaped her future dreams on the man’s preferences, rather than her own. As a result, the protagonist never pursued her dream for a career as a professional painter and ended up becoming an illustrator of fairy tales.

Corradi Fiumara argues that metaphor actually governs not just our view of the world and of language itself, but also our very acquisition of language. In order to prove this point, the scholar quotes directly from Willard V. O. Quine (161-162), stating that “besides serving us at the growing edge of science and beyond, metaphor figures even in our first learning of language; or, if not quite metaphor, something akin to it” (quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 74). This does not mean, however, that metaphor is more important than literal language: instead, it means metaphorical language can influence “the development of our propositional achievement” (108). Using metaphors, in fact, we could be concealing the ‘unconscious’ perceptions of meaning either expressed or implied in literal discourse: at this point, Corradi Fiumara stresses once more the importance of a combined approach to language, in particular a listening strategy acknowledging both literalness and metaphoricity. In so doing, current epistemologies would be aware of the primordial linguistic expressions that are not yet understood by culture.²²

²² Different schools of thought can create metaphors to symbolize their belonging to a culture, just as different cultures tend to create their own unique representation for their relation to other epistemic areas. It is by creating links between different perspectives that we can enhance our metaphoric potential.

However, although it is silently acknowledged that the experiences of our lives influence philosophy, this factor is rarely ever taken into consideration for philosophical study. Whenever a philosophical theory is considered metaphorical, it is inevitably deemed 'inadequate', and scholars seek other, more literal theories, unaware of their possible substituting one metaphorical theory with another. By so doing, academics willingly ignore the most important issues of the human life, such as the cohabitation among people in nature. Rather, our philosophical view is once more linked to traditional concerns that are detached from us, but that we have embraced due to their being traditional. In these conditions, however, we are not allowed to further our knowledge about nature and about those that inhabit it, nor are we able to raise awareness about language and its mechanisms.

In conclusion, employing an evolutionary perspective when analyzing language, speakers would experience virtually no surprise upon realizing that the literal meaning of a phrase can be metaphoric, whilst the metaphoric meaning can be literal (113). By the same token, the experiences of life are considered both biological events and cultural ones, as seemingly they can be both at the same time, but there is actually no way of deciding whether one or the other is predominant. At any rate, if reality was construed of only bits and pieces, that we as humans had to cope with regardless of our ability to do so, and no metaphoric process was involved in the relation between life and language, surely our cognitive and affectual experiences would significantly decrease.

Ending the book, Corradi Fiumara once again stresses the paramount importance of appreciating the complexity of life in order to develop a metaphoric linguisticity that allows for both construction and construal. Furthermore, a remark by Jerome Bruner is provided, stating contemporary society values culture more than nature, hence culture "has become the world to which we must adapt" (*Acts*, 12). As a consequence, in order to achieve a fuller

account of human understanding, we need to increase the interactions with nature and people, rather than reducing them, as Western philosophy seems to favor.

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE SURFACER

3.1 An unreliable narrator

As has been delineated throughout chapter One, in *Surfacing*, the events are narrated from the point of view of the main protagonist, a nameless young woman, who narrates while seemingly experiencing the events. At the beginning of the novel, the Surfacer could be considered a reliable narrator because, as readers, we have a tendency to trust first-person narrators, as they are the ones telling the story. As the narration unfolds, however, the reader realizes the narrator's take on some events, namely those concerning her past, present some discrepancies the more she tells about them. This very realization leads readers to understand *Surfacing*'s narrator is, indeed, unreliable.

An unreliable narrator, per the definition provided by Wayne C. Booth in 1961, is one whose credibility is compromised. That is, a narrator whose narration of events creates, for readers, a gap between what they are led to believe happened, and the real unfolding of events. According to Booth, a narrator is considered reliable "when he speaks for or acts in accord with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (158-159). Booth had worked on unreliability in reference to the concept of 'implied author' and had found it to be the author's implicit version of events as it can be recollected from the text itself, as well as embodying the core values of the text. James Phelan extends Booth's distinction into types of unreliability and identifies six different kinds evenly split into two larger categories: the "mis-" category, constituted of mis-reporting, mis-reading

and mis-regarding; and the “under-” group, comprised of under-reading, under-reporting and under-regarding (Phelan, 34-37).²³

In *Surfacing*, the narrator’s realization that her take on some of the events of her life was either incomplete or false only occurs in Part Two, which is when the reader, too, discovers the falsity of the previous accounts of the events. And yet, the narration is composed of shifts in tenses between present and past simple, which would lead the reader to wonder whether the narrator is experiencing the events or simply narrating them once they have all taken place. Considering that the unfolding of the events is narrated in the past simple, and that the present tense is employed only when referencing to the narrator’s traumatic memories (hence, it becomes the primary tense in Part Two, as the protagonist has to come to terms with those memories), it is safe to assume that the protagonist is telling about the events that she was involved in after they have passed. And yet, when narrating the events, the protagonist makes use of the degree of knowledge she had when experiencing the events, regardless of the increase of her knowledge about the events deriving from their having concluded.

Readers are able to conceive of unreliability in *Surfacing* due to some inter-textual signs (Nünning), that are: memory gaps, contradicting oneself and lying to other characters. During the narration, in fact, the protagonist often mentions having gaps in her memories concerning events following her departure from the island, which means that she is incapable of giving account for a portion of her life. Furthermore, at the end of the first part, the narrator contradicts herself and finds that she needs to be more careful about her memories (Atwood, *Sfg*, 70). Finally, there are many instances of the narrator lying to other characters: to begin with, she never tells Anna, David or Joe about the pictograms that her father had discovered; she had never mentioned to Joe having been married or having had a child (or that she

²³ The main difference between the “mis-” category and the “under-” category is that the former refers to something being wrong, the latter to something being insufficient (Phelan, 49-53).

believed to) until he proposed marriage to her; finally, the narrator effortlessly lies to Paul about having found a note from her father.

The two main types of unreliable narrator to be considered when referencing *Surfacing* are under-reading and under-reporting. On the one hand, the narrator could be seen as underreporting, that is avoiding admitting the entirety of what she knows about the events that are unfolding. Nonetheless, the narrator seems to be unaware of being read by an audience, hence she would be telling about the events only to herself. As a result, it is rather plausible that the narrator is actually under-reading, that is to say saying less about the events because she consciously does not know the entire truth, or is not ready to admit it to herself. As a consequence, it is rather challenging to determine whether the most prominent category is under-reading or under-reporting: due to the peculiar position the narrator/character holds in the narrative, the two categories become, in fact, inextricably tangled.

Another theory that needs to be sketched in order to comprehend the degree to the narrator's unreliability is Jerome Bruner's 'life as narrative'. The scholar argues life to imitate narrative and vice versa as, whenever we tell other people about our life, "it is always a cognitive achievement, rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given" (Bruner, 692). Self-narratives can pose problems of reflexivity, as narrator and protagonist are roles played by the same person. Furthermore, the events narrated are never random, rather they are carefully chosen to construe a specific kind of narrative; consequently, the events omitted are as important as those narrated.

Self narratives are also subject to cultural influences that render them fairly unstable: in *Surfacing*, the narrator prefers to tell about a failed marriage and a child left behind, rather than about an affair and an abortion (other than for reasons of unprocessed trauma), because the former are more culturally comprehensible, in her environment, than the latter would be. "Eventually, the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling

of life narratives achieve the power to...organize memory” (Bruner, 694): the nameless narrator recalls the day of her wedding and the birth of her child so many times (if just to herself, as she rarely mentions them to other characters), that in the end she convinces herself that the events really did unfold that way, further suppressing the trauma she underwent.

According to Corradi Fiumara (*Mind*, 154), a way for human beings to become more aware of their emotions and intentions when expressing feelings is to produce a narrative reconstruction of events. By telling others about our emotional experiences, in fact, we allow ourselves to explore happenings in a more conscious manner, in the context of a relation between peers. The very fact that the narrator never discusses her feelings or past experiences with her friends or with Joe is symptomatic for her not having accepted an event that had happened to her: for this reason, she is unable to retell them for others to know.

Being the filter to the events, the narrator is the only character that the reader seems to get to know: every other character (including Anna, Joe and David as much as the narrator’s parents) results sketched in comparison because every aspect of the narration derives from the protagonist’s perspective. As a result, the narrator’s description of the characters is the only one being provided: what we know about the characters is what the narrator does (Cole notes, 70) and even the emotions we feel towards them might be the result of a narrative pushing towards a certain position, although it is not a given that every reader will share the protagonist’s sentiments about the other characters. Hence, there is no way to know if the other characters really think what the narrator deems they think, if they act driven by the same reason that the narrator has hypothesized; or if the narrator’s perception of events is just another example of her unreliability. It is, in fact, never possible to verify a first-person narrator’s telling of events, and whether it is the factual reality of things: “there is no way to ascertain the metaphorical conceptualizations” of other characters (Gibert, 36).

Finally, it must be emphasized that the metaphors that will be investigated in the course of the following chapters are also screened by the narrator's view of both the events and the other characters involved.²⁴ Consequently, it is likely that, if other characters were to narrate the same events, they would employ different metaphors than the ones the Surfacer uses to convey her take on reality and on the people around her.

I have selected three main metaphors to account for the protagonist's language and the reason behind their employment on a psychological level. In particular, the three metaphors I will be examining are: the static, the neck (which is emblematic of the mind-body separation) and the jars. An additional aspect to be considered is the relation that the narrator has to the pictorial and to language: the struggle in her understanding and employment of language does not, in fact, apply to the comprehension of visual elements that she encounters throughout the novel.

3.2 Static: an erasure of events

Of central importance to the narrative of *Surfacing* is "the speaker's discovery of her own forgotten past, which is less acceptable but more real than the false past she has invented for herself" (Atwood, *Self Discovery*, 7-8). The creation of a fake past derives from the protagonist's inability to formulate a logical account of the events using the "official mass media language" (Ewell, 190). Without a language of her own, the only possibility that the narrator has of using the language of current epistemologies to describe the events of her life is to alter the very experience she endured: in consequence, the wedding is just a cover to protect the narrator from the reality of her affair, and it comes to symbolize the reason for her unhappiness, deriving from the abortion (Granofsky, 59). The protagonist, thus, takes refuge into the narration of a broken marriage because it allows her to experience feelings that could give account for both the fake narration and the real one.

²⁴ To put it with Aristotle (1459a, 5-10), in fact, metaphor is the only thing that cannot be learned from others, and it is a sign of one's originality as well as one's personality.

The narrator, however, does not even trust the language that she has used to construe the new reality of the events of her life: although she created false memories to heal herself from an unprocessed trauma, these false memories become a barrier that separates her first from her experiences and then from her own self (Ewell, 192). As a consequence, the protagonist experiences complete isolation and disconnection from the people around her: she feels isolated from everyone and at the same time she lacks a true identity, as she is unable of experiencing any feeling toward the other characters. The narrator embodies the average speaker's striving at normality (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 22), by means of her "cool" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 24) and "inhuman" (155) language: this detached language mirrors her lack of feeling, as both her linguistic and affective life are broken and all that is left to her is an artificial view on her own life.

I will now proceed to the analysis of the image of the static, which is the first metaphor to be presented in the course of the narration, as it is present in the first part of the novel, shortly after the group's arrival on the island.

I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi; it fits, it's all there till the time I left. Then static, like a jumped track, for a moment I've lost it, wiped clean; my exact age even, I shut my eyes, what is it? (Atwood, *Sfg*, 70).

The static is a metaphor symbolizing the narrator's erasure of the traumatic events she underwent. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes static as "noise or other effects that disturb radio or television signals and are caused by particular conditions in the atmosphere". This definition allows us to consider static as background noise: in this context, it comes to represent the fact that the narrator has been living through her life, as if it was white noise.

This passage represents the first time that the narrator starts to suspect that her version of some events of her life is or could be flawed, incomplete or even false. The narrator seems to be able to remember the events of her life prior to the moment she left the island, that is to say the period the 'static' concerns (i.e. the events that have been erased from her memory) is the time of her relationship with her married professor, which ultimately led to the pregnancy and the unwanted abortion.

Corradi Fiumara (*Mind*, 183) argues that the I becomes more stable the more it undergoes experiences in life to be elaborated as part of its story. But, at this point in the narration, the Surfacer is unable to recall the traumatic events that she has experienced, thus, her self is not really her own, but just a persona she has created. Unconsciously, in fact, the narrator has used another metaphorical 'static', in order to avoid dealing with the trauma that the abortion has caused her: not only did she erase the memories of the affair and of the abortion, but she has also substituted them with memories of a marriage and a child. As Corradi Fiumara puts it, the narrator has been forced back into "a subjective life for which the standard vocabulary is not sufficient" and, for this reason, she has opted "for whatever cultural forms of psychic anesthesia seem to be available" (*Metaphor*, 59).

Each developing person, while creating a consensual reality for themselves, gets hold of an epistemic structure which can deteriorate the most personal aspects of their lives.²⁵ When employing for the most part literal meanings, metaphoric constructs tend to decline, so that both the self and the reality around them are built upon the vocabulary of dominant epistemologies. This prevalence can be viewed as "life damaging" because, instead of utilizing metaphors, we would tend to paraphrase what we mean, "even at the cost of annulling original meaning and de-symbolizing our own linguisticity" (56). In so doing, the

²⁵ The developing mind is able to reflect on some crucial circumstances, but is unable to organize its knowledge in terms of diverse propositions. Furthermore, although traditional philosophy tends to avoid drawing examples from infancy, senescence or pseudo-languages, Corradi Fiumara stresses metaphors are always present in these areas, regardless of philosophy's studying them.

literalness of language is transmitted into the speaker's effort to feel normal, mirroring every aspect of their struggle for self-creation while, at the same time, creating a new inner conflict deriving from an inability to align to current epistemologies (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 22). Turned, in a way, into "acting", a new artificial linguistic life is built where "broken relations are replaced with fresh relations, discarded objects with new objects in a general style derived from the consumption of standard goods and world-views, rather than from a personalized generation of culture" (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 57).

Although the narrator is not aware of the factuality of her past, her symbolic potential is set in motion by means of the use of these metaphors. Corradi Fiumara stresses that one's symbolic potential does not aim at mirroring their inner or outer existing reality, rather it aspires at creating a new one by means of new symbolic instruments.²⁶ Considering this, the metaphor of the static is employed not so much to discuss the narrator's suppressed feelings, but to allow her to realize that new categories are needed to give account for her experiences. Having lost contact with the real events of her life, the narrator has also lost contact with her own true self: Corradi Fiumara believes (*Mind*, 23) losing contact with one's private self and becoming detached from it, causes an inability to be psychically alive. The very notion of psychic death would explain the narrator's discarding her personal language in favor of a distant one, due to her lack of feeling: as she has denied herself any emotional commitment, the narrator is, in fact, endangering her inner self by damaging both her cognitive and affective functions (*Mind*, 103)

The fact that she has created a new scenario for her life does not mean, however, that the narrator is not reminded of the erased events during her daily life. Corradi Fiumara (164), in fact, notices how past events are frequently linked to emotions, which means said emotions are usually activated by similar circumstances in one's present: especially in the first part of

²⁶ It could be argued that the creation of an entirely new symbolic instrument takes place during the narrator's period of madness, in the third part of the novel, with her rejection of language.

the novel, in fact, the narration is interrupted by the protagonist's memories about her past with her former lover, triggered by actions occurring during the days on the island. The static, thus, comes to symbolize that, for the narrator, the erased trauma has to be found in the very person of the former lover, culminating in his imposing the abortion over her. She is incapable, in fact, in the passage quoted above, to recall any detail concerning her relationship, her marriage or the birth of her child: that is to say, her will is to erase any memory she shared with the married professor.

3.3 The neck as an illusion

The following metaphor, which is that of the neck, is to be found in the first chapter of the second part of the novel.

The trouble is all in the knob on top of our bodies. I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them. If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm's or a frog's without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn't be able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body, both of them will die. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 75)

Surfacing's narrator realizes that the neck is an illusion because it is not possible to separate body and mind into two distinct beings – else the person attempting the separation would die – and the fact that the neck attempts a physical separation of the two is, of course, a misconception. In the context of the novel, the mind-body separation stands for the narrator's

metaphorical acknowledgment of her detachment from her own linguistic and affective life. It stands especially for the narrator's unconscious refusal to come to terms with her feelings about the traumatic event she underwent, which led her to rejecting feelings altogether. The metaphor of the neck separating body and mind and isolating one from the other aims at stressing the narrator's getting away from her guilt and hurt in order to restart her life.²⁷

Additionally, this metaphor is accompanied by what we can consider another metaphor, that is referencing to the neck as an "illusion". Given that the neck does exist to separate head and body, in *Surfacing* it becomes the symbol for the separation between the narrator's rationality and her feelings, two spheres that did not cohabit in her for a long time. As a consequence, the neck is easily recognizable in its metaphoricity, but it is not so for the "illusion". That of the illusion is an image employed to metaphorize the conception that mind and body are separated, but not two distinct spheres, as one could not survive without the other, nor without the presence of the neck. In a way, hence, the narrator employs the "illusion" to metaphorize the discovery of the metaphor of the neck.

For Corradi Fiumara, too, it is not possible to conceive of the mind as just being "in" the body, because mind and body cannot be separated. This separation would, in fact, mean to consider our linguistic interactions as detached from those who create them (that is to say, ourselves). However, the scholar also stresses how metaphor and life have to be brought together as one, in order to avoid segregating language and reason into literalness.

Another important image to be considered is that of the fist. Shortly after having acknowledged the neck metaphor, in fact, the narrator proceeds her train of thought by reflecting:

²⁷ By the end of the novel, the narrator will manage to re-open the gap, embracing her traumatic past whilst being able to move on with her life.

I'm not sure when I began to suspect the truth, about myself and about them what I was and what they were turning into. Part of it arrived swift as flags, as mushrooms, unfurling and sudden growth, but it was there in me, the evidence, only needing to be deciphered. From where I am now, it seems as if I've always 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. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 75)

Although this is just the beginning of the narrator's journey to embrace metaphor, she is already able to find her fist symbolically contains a seed of the power that will drive her actions once she will be able to acknowledge the truth about her abortion. In my opinion, the narrator's stating that her fist contains power is to be considered as a metaphor: in fact, I believe the fact the Surfacers' fist is closed on her knee in this passage to account for her avoidance of a truth that she is not yet ready to embrace. For this reason, the image of the fist will present itself again, at the end of Part Two.

I unclose my fist, releasing, it becomes a hand again, palm a network of trails, lifeline, past, present and future, the break in it closing together as I purse my fingers. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 160)

Differently than before, the fist becomes now a hand: I believe the reason behind this unclosing of the fist to be the Surfacers' having discovered the truth about her past, permitting the power to flow freely within her now. In addition, she has also found her parents' legacies, teachings that allow her to comprehend that her past can cohabit with her present, whilst

enabling the creation of a future. At the beginning of Part Three, in fact, the narrator's period of madness begins, starting her journey towards sanity, finalizing her embracing of metaphor and her living in harmony with nature.

Despite the fact that both the neck and the fist are metaphorizations of parts of the human body, that is all they share: on the one hand, in fact, the neck stands for the separation between mind and body, that is to say feeling and rationality; on the other hand, the fist allows for the comprehension of the narrator's power, that is to say her ability to make use of metaphor.

In keeping with Corradi Fiumara's theory of language, the Surfacer can be considered a developing person, because she is able to make use of metaphors, even though in an unconscious manner. The unconscious use of metaphor is highlighted by Corradi Fiumara's argument that describing a developing person as able to speak metaphorically at all does not mean he or she knows what they are doing. Each developing person is, in fact, supposed to create a reality for themselves whilst comprehending the current epistemologies: being at war with both the current epistemology (the language she has refused) and her own reality (the memories she has erased), the narrator is the epitome of a speaker striving for normality. As a consequence, the Surfacer's relation to metaphor changes with her acknowledgment of the real events of her life, as it allows her to "categorize experience in a stable and consensual manner" (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 55): by re-contextualizing and renewing her approach to metaphor, her relation to life and language is re-contextualized and renewed as well.

The narrator is faced with a reality she cannot interpret nor cope with, that of her abortion: hence, deprived of her own narrative, she turns (as any developing person would do, according to Corradi Fiumara) to strategies allowing her to cope with a new reality, the false one. The narrator is, thus, striving at pursuing the truth about herself and the world, though

she is able to acknowledge that the reality she is looking into is not immobile or objective, rather ever changing, just like her relation to it.

Corradi Fiumara acknowledges the human inability to delineate a goal before attempting its description (*Mind*, 92). The narrator employs the metaphor of the neck to explain her isolation from feeling: thus, by use of her “in-creation vocabulary”, which is characteristic of developing people, the Surfacer attempts at describing her purpose, that of restoring feeling within her. The ability to envision this goal derives from the use of in-creation vocabularies, which allow to see something that has not yet been described (*Mind*, 97).

At this point in the narration, the protagonist has two alternatives emerging in front of her: the first one is to maintain a detached language, thus excluding emotions from her personal language. This would mean, in Corradi Fiumara’s perspective, the employment of an exclusively literal language, which would lead to a mind that is uninterested in any life event. The second alternative, which the narrator moves toward in the course of the narration, is embracing her own metaphoricity, by accepting the rationality of both feeling and linguisticity. This choice is facilitated by her capacity to acknowledge, in the passage regarding the neck quoted above, the ongoing fight between mind and body, which allows her to begin realizing that emotions, too, are rational.

In the end of the novel, the narrator admits the necessity to go back to the shared language, regardless of its limitations, because there is no other way of communicating yet (Atwood, *Sfg*, 197). Nevertheless, she is also capable of realizing her knowledge about the reality of things is much bigger than everyone else's, due to her relation with the “power”. What the narrator refers to as the power gifted her by the Gods can be considered, in the perspective of Corradi Fiumara's theory, as the metaphoricity of the human mind, that the narrator has now embraced. As will be clear in the course of the following chapters, in fact,

the degree of metaphoricity that each character embodies is different, and so is the degree to which, according to the narrator, they can or cannot be saved.

3.4 “Because of my fear they were killed”

Corradi Fiumara argues that the metaphors we choose mirror our physical condition, which means that they are not, as one would think, arbitrary; rather, metaphors are manifestations of our biological functions and affective experiences. Consequently, the way we think, and the way we express our thoughts, result from “contingent problems of self formation” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 28). The self comprises a coherence which allows to reflect on the self’s own life but, in order to acquire this relation with itself, the mind has to develop a concept of understanding that can only derive from interactions with the world. This means that the self cannot be created by means of “hermetically closed loops of the dictionary or the semantic network” (91).

The image of the jars is to be found in the second part of the novel, shortly after the discovery of the dead heron, just before the narrator comes to the realization of having suppressed the memory of her abortion.

The laboratory, he was older then. He never caught birds, they were too quick for him, what he caught was the slower things. He kept them in jars and tin cans on a broad shelf back in the forest, near the swamp; to reach them he made a secret path, marked only by small notches on the trees, a code. Sometimes he forgot to feed them or perhaps it was too cold at night, because when I went there by myself that day one of the snakes was dead and several of the frogs, their skin dry and their

yellow stomach puffed up, and the crayfish was floating in the clouded water with its legs uppermost like a spider's. I emptied those bottles into the swamp. The other things, the ones still alive, I let out. I rinsed the jars and tins and left them in a row on the board. After lunch I hid but I had to come out finally for dinner. He couldn't say anything in front of them but he knew it was me, there was no one else. He was so angry he was pale, his eyes twisted as though they couldn't see me. "They were mine" he said. Afterwards he trapped other things and changed the place; this time he wouldn't tell me. I found it anyway but I was afraid to let them out again. Because of my fear they were killed (Atwood, *Sfg*, 132).

As the narrator is unable to recall the abortion, she is also unable to recall the feelings that the abortion caused her: as a consequence, she unconsciously makes use of this memory to account for those emotions. In order to make sense of the puzzling circumstances she has found herself in, the narrator symbolically compares the experience of an unwanted abortion to that childhood day when she found her brother's hidden jars. The narrator feels guilty for the death of these animals at the hands of her brother, and it is guilt that links this episode of her childhood to the unwanted abortion she recently underwent. Richard Lazarus and Bernice Lazarus (6, quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 158) argue that the human mind tends to link one specific emotion to each of the events of our life, and the linked emotion will be the one that arises within us whenever we recall the event. Every emotion, in fact, gives account for the way we have internalized an event: as a consequence, both the abortion and the laboratory, together with the killing of the heron, are a source of guilt for the narrator.

As per Corradi Fiumara's theory, the narrator is able to come to terms with suffering by associating one experience (the laboratory) with another (the abortion). The jars become a symbol for the innocence of both the animals trapped and the aborted fetus, killed because of the narrator's fear: hence, the narrator makes use of this metaphor to refer to the feelings she has suppressed. Consequently, Corradi Fiumara states (*Metaphor*, 79) that metaphoric constructs are used to make sense of puzzling and unfamiliar events, so as to substitute the unknown event with the known one: the feeling of guilt the narrator now experiences, which pushes her to the creation of a different past for herself, is the same she had experienced that day upon finding the caged animals. Moreover, guilt is far more sharp in the case of the aborted fetus, because the narrator had realized before undergoing the abortion, that she wanted to be a mother, hence she feels like one of the 'killers'. It is not a case, in fact, that the narrator later recalls having seen the fetus inside a jar after the abortion at the hospital: through this image, the narrator conveys her repentance for having refused to "grant[ing] it sanctuary" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 146) and having allowed the procedure to take place. As a matter of fact, the narrator had already compared an unborn baby to a frog in a jar once before, at the beginning of the novel (28), stating her belief that fetuses have their eyes open and can look out of the mother's womb, aware of what is happening and able to understand it.

The emotional silence the narrator imposed on herself for reasons that she did not yet comprehend has to be seen, in Corradi Fiumara's psychological perspective (*Mind*, 9), as more than a mere exclusion from emotions. In, fact, silencing emotions altogether could lead to finding the person is living in denial, which the narrator indeed is.

3.5 The Pictorial

One final feature to be considered when discussing the language of the Surfacer is her very relation to language, although no precise metaphor will be presented about this topic. The idea that, according to the narrator, language is wrong is presented to the reader in the first few pages of the novel, as the protagonist immediately poses the problem of language comprehension. It is clear that she is uncomfortable with language not just as a means of communication, but as a concept altogether, as she would be far more at ease with gesture communication (Atwood, *Sfg*, 7).

Referencing Donald Davidson, Corradi Fiumara argues that metaphors can also come into being whenever we try to link the verbal to the non-verbal, hence whenever we create something that might not come into being if we don't. For the scholar, whenever our experiences and expectations are not entirely our own, rather they are the result of someone else's mirroring their expectations onto us, it becomes necessary to explore the advantages of one's innermost language, that is to say make use of personal idioms rather than of dominant epistemologies. Interestingly, as a trained painter, *Surfacing*'s narrator seems to be more able to express her feelings and life events with pictures rather than words. It is, in fact, only when the narrator dives into the lake, searching for the native paintings her father was studying, that she is able to come to terms with the death she had caused, to both her child and to herself, by means of the abortion.

It was there, but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards 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 (Atwood, *Sfg*, 143).

The image of the aborted fetus in the water is extremely important because this is the first time that the narrator acknowledges she never actually gave birth to a child. The shared language had, in fact, only permitted the narrator to substitute her traumatic experience with a totally different one, a divorce (and the abandonment of a child), as it would have been a more socially accepted reality. In this respect, the narrator's experience is not mirrored by language, hence, she cannot come to terms with it. With the image of the aborted fetus surfacing towards her, the protagonist is finally capable to admit to herself the real experience of the abortion, and only after the vision is she able to find a way to put her trauma into words:²⁸ "It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allow it" (144).²⁹ Acknowledging her responsibility for the abortion, the narrator comprehends the degree of her war with language, and discards it altogether, allowing for communication to be filtered through gestures and physical touches alone.

Like our artists, we strive to create a picture of our world, yet that picture is never complete; for we continually pass on to new experiences and new images of reality. Not only do we grow and change but our world seems to change with us. Although the truths revealed through our art are founded in our experience, they seem more permanent and public than the acts of discovery leading to them (Shiff, ed by Sacks, 106).

²⁸ Similarly, the narrator envisions her parents transforming into animals (her mother into a jay, her father first into a wolf, then into a fish) before being able to fully accept their deaths.

²⁹ In any case, the narrator never openly uses the word "abortion", which allows for understanding that words are not directly a part of the experience, and neither of the uncovering of the experience, as both are mediated by images.

The fact that vision comes before words is to be regarded as a key factor when discussing the narrator's developing psyche as well as her developing language. I argue that the narrator prefers the field of the pictorial to that of Linguistics for various reasons: to begin with, it is her opinion "language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 147). Furthermore, the pictorial can have different interpretations at once, hence it is, in this regard, closer to metaphor: like metaphor, pictures allow for different perspectives to be acceptable at the same time; like metaphor, different meanings can be attributed to the same picture by different people. For this reason, the connection between signifier and signified is more immediately understandable in literalness, than in metaphor.

Words are, in *Surfacing*, consequently linked to rational thought, as logic is the foundation of language, and both are led back to the image of the jar: "The bottle had been logical; pure logic, remnant of the trapped and decaying animals, secreted by my head, enclosure, something to keep the death away from me" (144). Although the narrator refers to it as logical (which would call for a linguistic term), the jar is an image, not merely a word. It does not want to evoke, in fact, simply a glass container, rather it conveys the guilt of the protagonist as, once again, it refers to the entrapment of guiltless creatures, be it animal or human. Finding that the meaning behind the jar metaphor was one of remorse, as the lid does not allow for the victims' liberation, the narrator also discovers that the logic behind this image was not what she was seeking.

Aristotle says that *lexis*, of which metaphor is a part, is what allows language to appear as it does. The Greek scholar "also says that the gift of making good metaphor relies on the capacity to contemplate similarities" and good metaphors are thus considered when they allow speakers to picture what the metaphor wanted to display: "what is suggested here is a kind of pictorial dimension, which can be called the *picturing function* of metaphorical meaning" (Ricoeur, ed. by Sacks, 142). As in the past the narrator had tried to keep her

feelings at bay, enclosing them in a jar, so to speak, she now realizes it is not possible to fence off the death lingering around her (the aborted fetus, her missing father and dead mother) and inside her (her emotional self), and all that is left for her is to get away into madness to comprehend the reality of the world around her and how she conceives of it.

Corradi Fiumara found that often, in verbal to non-verbal cases, personal languages tend to differ greatly from the logical languages that we have been taught to seek: according to traditional philosophy, though, to separate from major epistemologies means to exit the group of the enlightened; at the same time, in order to remain in this group, one would have to give up the very features that make them unique (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 24). It is by means of her solitary period of madness that the Surfacer is able to fully get in touch with the features of her uniqueness. Thus, the narrator exits the group of current epistemologies, realizing it is not them who are enlightened, and enters a space of true enlightenment, which comes to her from the “power” found on the island, now flowing within her, allowing her to see the reality of things. In this way, she is able to make use of the shared language in a more comprehensive way, as she acknowledges that, although this language is not an ideal means of communication, there is no other way, which means she will have to cope with it, also thanks to the newfound knowledge, until a new instrument will be created.

CHAPTER FOUR

METAPHORIC INTERACTION

4.1 Joe's body hair

The following chapter will revolve around the metaphoric endeavors of the secondary characters of the novel, namely Joe, Anna and David. I will assign one metaphor to each character and show how the selected image gives account for that character's metaphoric potential.

The first character I will be discussing is Joe, the narrator's lover. Joe, a pottery teacher, shares with the protagonist an inability to handle language but, differently than her, he prefers to refrain from speaking altogether. There are, in fact, many references to Joe's silent presence: "He doesn't talk much" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 105), the narrator says to Anna when inquired about his quietness.

According to Corradi Fiumara (*Metaphor*, 14), language poses problems especially during the communication between people hence, for different personal languages to connect, a continuous metaphoric struggle is necessary. In the case of the narrator and Joe, a connection of personal languages is never possible because, on the one hand, the narrator is at war with language, which means she does not believe that it can convey her experiences and feelings; on the other hand, Joe prefers to remain silent and expresses himself very rarely – exclusively by means of literal language. Corradi Fiumara also stresses the importance of listening to be able to recognize the metaphors of others and understand what they want to convey but, as the narrator is incapable to make sense of the metaphors that are most important to her (those related to her trauma), she is also unable to

recognize Joe's metaphors and connect with him on a personal level. This leads to her being utterly incapable of creating a real relationship with Joe.

Joe's preference for silence also translates into his having fewer lines than the other characters: hence, I will be exemplifying the view of his personality with a passage employing a metaphor the narrator deliberately applies to Joe.

But in some other stories they do it the other way around, the animals are human inside and they take their fur skin off as easily as getting undressed. I remember the hair on Joe's back, vestigial, like appendices and little toes: soon we'll evolve into total baldness. I like the hair, though, and the heavy teeth, thick shoulders, unexpectedly slight hips, hands whose texture I can still feel on my skin, rough and leathery from the clay. Everything I value about him seems to be physical: the rest is either unknown, disagreeable or ridiculous. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 53-54).

The train of thought leading the narrator from stories about animals to Joe's body is clear, as is the similitude comparing Joe's hairy back to additional appendices: and yet, I do not believe the symbolism behind the use of this term to simply aim at comparing Joe's appearance with an animal's by means of a similitude.³⁰ In fact, I deem this passage contains a metaphor, a hidden meaning, to give account for the reason why the narrator is so drawn towards Joe. The narrator supposes Joe can still be saved from the spreading

³⁰ This is not the only comparison the narrator makes between Joe and the natural world: "From the side he [Joe] 's like the buffalo on the US nickel, shaggy and blunt-snouted, with small clenched eyes and the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction" (*Sfg*, 4); "I curled up, concentrating on excluding him [Joe]: he was merely an object in the bed, like a sack or a large turnip" (*Sfg* 92); "I undressed by touch; he [Joe] was obscure beside me, inert, comforting as a log" (*Sfg*, 125); "He [Joe] smiles, a plump smile, contented, his beard puffed up like a singing toad throat, and lowers his face to kiss me" (*Sfg*, 167).

second-hand Americanism, and the reason behind this belief is Joe's being half-formed. Being a speechless half-man, half-animal, Joe can be considered a bridge character, as he is close to both nature and civilization. To put it into the perspective of Corradi Fiumara's theory, the narrator discovers that Joe, too, belongs in nature, whilst she herself reconnects with the natural environment and enhances her metaphorical potential. For this reason, she aims at modifying her inner world by means of metaphor and, at the same time, trying to save Joe by increasing his relation with nature. Joe's ability to live without language constitutes, for the narrator, a reason for trust, as he is able to comprehend that language is the result of an epistemology and, so, it would convey different meanings within other epistemologies (Rorty, 6, quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 97). His connection to nature is the reason why Joe can be considered a developing person: being in contact with both the environment and society, he is able to keep track of the current epistemologies without losing sight of his own metaphoricity.

Corradi Fiumara finds that, in order to work, reason has to cohabit with affects. Even so, affects can distort reason and cause it to become useless or ineffective (*Mind*, 7): consequently, it is necessary to pay attention to the conflicts and synergies between our emotion and intelligence. The Surfacer seems unable to acknowledge her feelings for Joe by means of words, but she is still capable to give account for them by linking him to nature. Regarding Joe, the narrator is ambivalent: although she would "rather have him around than not" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 39), she does not love him; at any rate, she longs for the safety his presence gives her and wishes to protect him.

Corradi Fiumara, though, finds that affects do not create dichotomous couples, that is to say that one term does not define its opposite as well as its definition. In order to give account for an individual's inner features, in fact, we must renounce exploring nature as invariably related to our affective life and start, instead, considering it as an exploration of

language and contingencies deriving from our personal experiences. Richard Shiff (Sacks, 114) found that each life experience is mysterious, as speakers are incapable of translating their inner sensations into external formulations, that is to say linguistic outputs.

Corradi Fiumara points out that, when engaged in interactions, we could improperly believe our interlocutor to not be equipped with resources to express his / her experiences and feelings, which would lead us to “make use of our own metaphoric capacities to give voice to the other’s inner experiences” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 135). When such circumstances take place, the scholar argues, it is because we believe most aspects of our lives to be shared with other people’s. But when life events are not shared, that is when one of the interlocutors is “gradually deprived of the opportunity to exercise his metaphoric resources” (135), due to our own jumping to conclusions about his / her linguistic resources. As a result, whenever, in a dialogic scenario, metaphoric efforts are not noted and a lack of construal is met, consensual thinking is difficult to develop, as speakers are unable to realize their inner world could also be articulated to others and shared. Consequently, the speaker would be stuck in a non-literal scenario, unable to make use of his / her existing linguistic resources.

In *Surfacing*, Joe is overpowered by the other characters’ linguistic productions and beliefs and is, thus, denied the possibility to voice his take on his life experiences.

Differently than David, who tries to impose his belief on the other characters in various ways – for example implicitly stating “You haven’t seen them [the Americans] in operation the way I have” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 96), or convincing Joe that Anna wants to strip for the camera because “she likes her lush body” (136) –, Joe’s seclusion in his silence allows readers to comprehend that he does not aim at imposing his beliefs on anybody else. However, considering the narrative is directed by the nameless protagonist, readers can only experience her frustration deriving from Joe’s relentless inquiries regarding her feelings for him, never Joe’s point of view.

For this reason, although Joe can be considered a developing person because of his ability to balance his existence in both the world of literalness (i.e. the city and its spreading American ideology) and the world of metaphor (i.e. the bush), he is still too close to the current epistemologies, which means he is for the most part incapable of embracing his metaphoricity. An exemplary passage about this can be found in the third part of the novel, when the narrator, wishing to get pregnant, guides Joe to the woods. As they walk on the cold leaves, she notices him shivering and finds that he is not quite capable of seeing in the dark: in order to live a natural life with her, “he needs to grow more fur” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 164).

As a consequence, in the passage I have analyzed earlier, the image of “hair” does not simply refer to the strands growing from the skin, but also to Joe’s psychological ability – or inability – to come to terms with his linguisticity. By growing more fur, Joe would be competent in balancing metaphor and linguisticity: the fact he currently does not have enough fur to live in the woods comments on the status of his developing metaphoricity.

In another passage from the novel, at the very end of Part Two, the Surfacer notices how each of her fellow travelers has in her / himself a different amount of second-hand Americanism:

For him [Joe], truth might still be possible, what will preserve him in the absence of words; but the others [Anna and David] are already turning to metal, skins galvanizing, heads congealing to brass knobs, components and intricate wires ripening inside (Atwood, *Sfg*, 160).

In a way, this passage allows for the creation of a ranking of the characters as far as their possibilities for growth are concerned: Joe's aforementioned metaphoricity, though still nascent, is enough to save him from the American ideology that is spreading to the others. The image of a "second-hand Americanism" that destroys Canadian people's chances at salvation can be compared, adopting Corradi Fiumara's theory, to the collision between literal language and metaphoricity. By excluding the employment and creation of metaphors, in fact, the mind becomes confined in its literalness, consequently causing an indifference to every aspect of life. Similarly, the spreading Americanism transforms people into machines, which does not allow them to seek salvation.

As far as Anna and David's manifest destiny goes, according to the narrator, they are already far too deep in the American ideology to be restored from it and saved. Consequently, any limited chance at salvation would require a considerable amount of effort on the couple's part. The following paragraphs will explain why the pair's destiny is equivalent in light of Gemma Corradi Fiumara's theory.

4.2 Anna's artificiality

Anna, the next character whose metaphors and metaphoric endeavors will be exemplified, is David's wife and the narrator's closest friend, albeit their knowing each other for only a few months. Anna's metaphor is not to be found in a symbolism she employs when engaged in dialog nor in an imposition of the narrator's. Rather, it can be detected during the cohabitation of the companions throughout their stay on the island: the narrator, in fact, often mentions Anna's obsession with makeup and refers to her wearing a "fresh façade of makeup" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 135) all the time. As makeup becomes, in the course of the narration, almost an appendice to Anna, I chose to exemplify the ways this

symbol was metaphorized by the narrator and employed to illustrate Anna's metaphoric endeavors.

Corradi Fiumara (*Mind*, 29) argues that there are several misconceptions about the cognitive anatomy of the human mind: in particular, it would be absurd to talk about characteristics that are specific to a male mind, due to the fact language rarely is considered gender-specific. And yet, this absurdity does not apply to the language of women.³¹ Corradi Fiumara, in fact, stresses how many features are considered natural for the language of women, even if the most evident differences are found in the comparison between the idiolects of different women.

When it comes to the characteristics of the ideal woman, Anna and the narrator are on two very different fronts. On the one hand, the protagonist, an independent young woman who works as a "commercial artist" (49) to sustain herself and never wears makeup, rather believes the picture of a "natural woman" to coincide with what society would lock in "the hospital or the zoo" (196). The protagonist is also quite unsure about her ability to make a sentimental commitment to Joe, regardless of her being fond of him. On the other hand, the narrator sees Anna as a frivolous person because of her hobbies, that include getting tanned or reading mystery novels; even the very image of makeup can be used to highlight the differences between the two.

The friends' different approach at womanhood is also shown in Anna's relation to her husband, David: the narrator's conviction that the couple had made a sentimental commitment to one another is correct but, differently than what she believed, it is one of hate rather than of love (139). And yet, Anna, who does not deem herself as a victim of patriarchy, is unable to divorce her husband, hence the two remain married regardless of the sufferings the marriage causes to Anna. Furthermore, Anna's entire life seems to

³¹ A trans-cultural view of dominant epistemologies has proven that what we believe to be the most evident differences between men and women are just part of a web of metaphors that is not even directly linked to gender per se (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 199).

revolve around her husband, as her having a job is never mentioned, which leads the reader to believe the couple's only means of subsistence is David's job as a Communication teacher.³² For these reasons, Anna can be considered the embodiment of the female stereotype, who has remained indifferent to the changes prompted by Second Wave Feminism.

There's a zippered case on the counter in front of her [Anna], she's putting on makeup. I realize I've never seen her without it before; shorn of the pink cheeks and heightened eyes her face is curiously battered, a worn doll's, her artificial face is the natural one. The backs of her arms have goose pimples.

"You don't need that here," I say, "there's no one to look at you." My mother's phrase, used to me when I was fourteen. She was watching, dismayed, as I covered my mouth with Tango Tangerine. I told her I was just practicing.

Anna says in a low voice, "He doesn't like to see me without it," and then, contradicting herself, "He doesn't know I wear it." I glimpse the subterfuge this must involve, or is it devotion: does she have to sneak out of bed before he's awake every morning and into it at night with the lights out? Maybe David is telling generous lies; but she blends and mutes herself so well he may not notice. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 41)

³² It needs to be stressed that in the early 1970s – the setting of the novel –, women earned less than two-thirds pay for the same job and the same amount of work of a man (*The Canadian Encyclopedia*). The very fact the narrator works for a living could be considered a revelatory sign for the socially complicated situation she lives, being an unmarried woman.

Although Atwood stated she would prefer avoiding associating her novel to any feminist theory, it is important to notice these differences between the two main female characters because of the political and social activity of the Feminist Wave that started in the USA but spread to several Western countries, including Canada, between the years 1960 and 1985.³³

Women, in Atwood, are often victimized and minimized by men and their societies, mainly because of the alleged inferiority of their gender. In addition, they sometimes display a struggle for ownership of their bodies, as female bodies are considered propriety of men, who impose on them birth control, pregnancy and marriage – as much as makeup, as is Anna’s case.³⁴

Whenever Anna and the narrator engage in conversation, an example being this very passage, it is clear that the both of them do not entirely understand the way the other’s mind works. More than once, in fact, the protagonist finds that Anna’s mind operates differently than her own, which does not allow her to comprehend her friend’s behavior, language or use of metaphor. Anna, on the other hand, deals with difficulties at communicating with others: in her need to hide her true self from David, Anna substitutes her natural face with an artificial one, and mutes her own voice. She does it “so well he may not notice”, but at the same time she gives up her potential bit by bit, becoming a single metaphor, the makeup, which is also her only protection from her husband’s “little set of rules” (123), due to her inability to employ her own personal language.

Anna’s incompetence, though, derives from her living in a non-representative environment: being David’s wife, Anna is not exposed to metaphoric interactions, because of her husband’s inability to employ non-literal language. As a consequence, Anna’s

³³ Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, written and published during the period of Second Wave Feminism, is regarded as one of the most inspiring pieces of writing for the history of the Feminist movement.

³⁴ Other female characters struggling with their femininity because of men’s impositions and expectations are to be found in other Atwood’s novels such as *The Edible Woman* and *Bodily Harm*.

symbiosis with David results in her confinement in a non-metaphorical state. Anna passes from one literalness to another, in order to please her husband and communicate with him; David, on the other hand, seems incapable of developing as a person and uninterested in communicating with people, most of all with his wife.³⁵ As David only employs literal language to show his thoughts or feelings, he transforms any metaphorical attempt into literal expressions: for this reason, Anna is led to believe literalness is the only means of communication and metaphor is not necessary.

However, I would argue that Anna is – to a certain extent – still salvageable according to the narrator: as was the case with Joe, who can improve his metaphoricity by means of his relation to nature, Anna can embrace her own by leaving behind the male dominated world that keeps her confined into literalness. The narrative time portrays Anna hardly as a developing person, but she cannot be considered a literal mind either: her mind is stuck between the two polarities and is not a part of either category.

The reason why Anna is in part considered salvageable is her ability to face events and emotions: differently than the narrator, who only finds out about her being split later in the novel, Anna is never divided into two halves, and she cohabits with both her thinking-half and emotional-half. Antonio Damasio (1996, quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 71) stresses how feelings, and especially strong ones, can hurt one's reasoning just as much as a lack of awareness about them would, especially in those circumstances that play a key role in our lives. Considering this, strong emotions can go as far as to disrupt one's progresses in terms of reasoning: when in the camp, Anna confesses to the narrator of having forgotten her makeup at the cabin, she also voices her fear about David's reaction when he will find out. Hence, Anna's fear of her husband is the dominant emotion of the passage. Anna never explicitly tells the narrator whether she feels forced to wear makeup

³⁵ David J. Brooks argues that with David, *Surfacing* exemplifies the oppression of women in a patriarchal society, and most of all how roles that empower men often do so at the expenses of women (1993, quoted in Bhalla, 3).

to please her husband, but rather clearly points out that David's rules aim at her suffering, "He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 123). On the one hand, it would seem Anna tries to "justify" her husband's behavior by means of the stereotypes stating only women are allowed to cry, whereas men are not; on the other hand, she confides her friend about the psychological and physical abuses she has to endure at David's hands. The narrator's proposition that a divorce might solve her situation leaves Anna indifferent, as she only states her feelings for David once again. Although "a sound came out of her throat, a cough or a laugh" (123), Anna is incapable to acknowledge that a divorce might be a solution for her unhappiness. This can be considered an additional feature to her peculiar linguistic situation: having espoused the current epistemologies for so long, Anna seems yet unable to discard such epistemologies and find a way out of her marriage. Anna is incapable to let go of her artificial life (i.e. her fake face covering the natural one and her unhappy marriage disguised as a happy one), as much as she is incapable to find that the reason for her linguistic stasis is that very artificial life.

Corradi Fiumara believes that language constitutes the entirety of a human being, not merely one's cognitive abilities: every time we separate rationality from feeling we unwillingly surrender the life of our mind to an epistemology. Consequently, we decrease our possibilities to not only think but also to relate to other people (*Mind*, 39). As a consequence, whichever our dominant metaphors might be, their goal should be that of engaging in practices that bring knowledge about our inner lives; accordingly, they influence our intellectual behavior, shifting to perspectives that were not available before (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 85).

Hence, by further embracing her metaphoricity, Anna would be able to connect with her intimate sphere, shifting the perspective she has on both the world and her role in it, just as the narrator does in the course of the narration. If she were to divorce David,

Anna would be allowing herself to become a more “natural woman”, getting away from a patriarchal society, hence her metaphoric endeavors and symbolic potential would be prompted. It is not possible, however, to discover whether our assumptions about future events concerning the novel’s characters are correct, as the book is open-ended.

4.3 David’s disguise

As I have previously outlined, Anna and David live in a non-metaphorical environment that does not allow for any degree of mental development. But, if Anna’s ability to still experience emotions allows for her partial salvation, David is considered irremediably lost: Anna’s misogynistic husband is, in fact, a Communication teacher who fails at communicating. In the course of this paragraph, I will argue about David’s impossibility to embrace his metaphoric potential, and about how this inefficacy translates into his final “turning to metal”, to put it in the protagonist’s words (Atwood, *Sfg*, 160).

In order to account for David’s complete inability to express himself through metaphor, I have selected a passage in which he proposes sex to the narrator as a way to punish Anna for sleeping with Joe. Here, the two characters are involved in a “language game”, as Corradi Fiumara labels it (*Mind*, 74): the winner of such a game is not merely the one who can defeat the interlocutor, rather the one who manages to create a link between diverging world views. So, to refuse David’s advances, the narrator has to make use of an expression that he would understand: this is when the narrator realizes David’s true nature as an artificial human being. In the perspective of Corradi Fiumara’s theory, the passage accounts for David’s inability to deal with language, and with metaphor in particular, as he believes that in order to say what he means he can only employ literal language.

There must be a phrase, a vocabulary that would work. 'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but you don't turn me on'.

'You,' he said, searching for words, not controlled any more, 'tight-ass bitch.'

The power flowed into my eyes, I could see into him, he was an impostor, a pastiche, layers of political handbills, pages from magazines, *affiches*, verbs and nouns glued on to him and shredding away, the original surface littered with fragments and tatters. In a black suit knocking on doors, young once, even that had been a costume, a uniform; now his hair was falling off and he didn't know what language to use, he'd forgotten his own, he had to copy. Second hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 152-153)

In this passage alone, a number of elements concerning David's character can be exemplified. To begin with, here the narrator finally acknowledges that David is not his own person, as he is simply a "pastiche" of elements. The very term "pastiche" is a metaphorization that indicates that the various elements of David's personality do not fit into each other, rather they clash against one another due to their being emptied copies of other people's personal languages. Hence, David is not capable to make use of a non-literal language, as he seems to have embraced literal epistemologies when he was very young, and so, he has been wearing a costume ever since. As a consequence, his life has turned into an act because of his having rejected metaphor, thus, his affective life is as artificial as his linguistic one.

This passage exemplifies that the genius of metaphor is only present in the narrator, as she is a “talented thinker whose visual metaphors do successfully link [her] own area of literality with a domain previously regarded as totally useless for cross-fertilization” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 75). In particular, the narrator employs the image “turn [me] on” because it is a metaphor that David, whose idiolect revolves around a language of conquest, will understand. Consequently, David’s response to this statement is exactly what the narrator had envisioned: he insults her, and he does so because the image that she has used to reject him is “such that it creates a very relevant link” (75) for him.

David represents, in Corradi Fiumara’s framework, the complete absence of metaphor, as he is irremediably unable to make use of it. David’s incompetence at creating a relation with people derives from his incapacity to communicate his feelings. And yet, his inability to discuss feelings derives precisely from his avoidance of metaphor, as emotions are better expressed through means of non-literal language, whilst David constantly attempts at literalizing messages that he could express by means of metaphor. As a result, David takes refuge in the realm of literalness, but, by doing this, he grows incapable of linking metaphor to his affective life and is more and more confined into literalness.

Corradi Fiumara argues that literal language is not fit for integrating elements concerning the sphere of life and of affects: as a result, those humans who can only employ literal language become ever more unable to express their feelings and they turn into irrational and isolated beings. Any mind that does not employ metaphor, in fact, becomes segregated and indifferent to every single aspect of the human life. Sticking to literal language deprives a person’s unconscious mind of expressive resources, which renders one unable to face “the challenges and burdens of constantly attempting to translate messages from the inner world into shareable language” (135). In addition, refusing to create and

communicate non-literal messages impedes the growth of thought and of the mind, failing to allow the existence and the functioning of human metaphoricity.

At some point in the narration, the protagonist acknowledges a similarity between herself and David: “we are the ones that don’t know how to love, there is something essential missing in us” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 138). The trait the narrator is referring to actually comprises two different aspects: the first one is the very ability to feel emotions, which the protagonist lacks at this point in the narration due to her not having come to terms with her trauma. The second aspect is to be found in human metaphoricity, which allows to put feelings into words. I argue David is not merely unable of experiencing emotions, rather that he is utterly incapable of voicing them, due to his having rejected his metaphoric potential. This is the reason why the narrator deems David is past any possibility of salvation: being too involved with current epistemologies, David is unable to increase his metaphoric potential and, as a consequence, he is incapable to develop as a human being.

Although metaphoricity is innate in human beings, in order to properly function it needs to be cultivated, something David is either not willing or not able to do. “Some developing individuals”, Corradi Fiumara argues, “simply cannot manage to speak metaphorically and imitatively restrict themselves to the paths of whatever available literal language there is; it is possible that they may simply not succeed in developing the ‘genius’ for the construction and construal of metaphor” (*Metaphor*, 105).

In this perspective, David’s denial of metaphor can be considered the reason for the narrator’s mistrust of him. As I have exemplified in chapter 3, the narrator is at war with language due to its only having one individual meaning at a time, hence, she does not trust David because of his employment of literal language. Nevertheless, this perspective does not aim at conveying the idea that metaphoric meaning is more important than literal language: rather, it stresses how metaphorical language can influence “the development of

our propositional achievement” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 108). In fact, it is only after having come to terms with her own metaphoricity that the narrator is able to comprehend a new means of communication is necessary but that, until it is created, she will have to make use of literal language, aided by the newfound knowledge gifted to her by the power. Conversely, David embodies the very reason why Sophist philosophers would label metaphors as “deviant”, considering them as alien to communication and only accepting their use if adapted to the standard vocabulary – hence, to literalness. Like Sophists, David believes literal meaning to be superior to metaphorical potential, as literal meaning represents the official meaning, which is likely to facilitate communication.

Another feature David shares with Ancient Greek philosophers is to be found in his preferred style of dialog. To David, dialog is a war, that is to say only one position can survive the conversation because only one position is correct. Considering dialog as a war is extremely different than the approach of active listening proposed by Corradi Fiumara (*Metaphor*, 73-76), because when, like David, we are not interested in comprehending other people’s ideals and in acknowledging the diversity of our points of view, the goal of dialog becomes that of overturning the other person’s beliefs. For example, when David forces Anna to strip in front of the camera, he repeatedly reassures Joe that Anna’s is “token resistance...she wants to [strip], she’s an exhibitionist at heart”. Regardless of his wife’s crying and accusing him of wanting to humiliate her, David remains solid on his belief Anna likes to be the centre of attention.³⁶

Finally, David’s being untrustworthy needs to be pointed out. David is, in fact, deemed as dishonest not only because of his preferring literal language, but also because, regardless of his loathe of the American culture, he possesses all the unpleasant

³⁶ As, according to Sherrill Grace (*Canada*, 104), in the novel nature has the power to heal (e.g. the narrator baptizes herself to wash off civility), the fact that Anna jumps in the water in order to escape her husband after having stripped is essential, because she reunites with nature to escape a person who does not know how to interact with it in a positive way.

characteristics the narrator ascribes to Americans: David is cruel and possessive towards Anna and he wishes to govern on every aspect of her life, including her personality; similarly, “Americans” transform the Canadian landscape to have it fit their desires, even at the cost of defacing it. By means of David’s behavior towards Anna and the Americans’ to nature, readers are able to experience two different versions of a patriarchal society. On the one hand, the Americans are exploiting nature for reasons of consumerism and killing animals just for fun; on the other, David is objectifying his wife for sexist and misogynistic reasons. Both behaviors are connected to a feeling of superiority and to a belief that the ‘other’ – for David, his wife; for the Americans, nature – is their property.

CHAPTER FIVE

APPROACHES TO NATURE

5.1 The American way of life

As has been thus far outlined, the wilderness plays an integral part in the unfolding of the events narrated in *Surfacing*, just as the relation to nature is essential for the nameless narrator's development.

For this reason, in the course of this chapter, I will be sketching the importance of the natural theme – and the relation to nature – for Canadian Literature. Then, I will investigate the interactions with nature conducted by “the Americans” in the novel, and discuss the diverging approaches of this group when compared to that of the narrator's parents. In addition, a focus on the protagonist's parents will be provided so as to exemplify the role that they played in the creation of the narrator's bond with the environment.

The natural theme is essential to *Surfacing* as a novel as it is for Atwood as a writer. In 1984, Canadian documentarian Michael Rubbo spent five days vacationing on Atwood's family island together with the author, her partner, her daughters and her parents. Rubbo, in fact, believed several plotlines of Atwood's novels to derive from her personal experiences, hence he wanted to investigate on the topic. In the course of the documentary *Once in August* (1984), Atwood discusses her being keen of gardening, her being an expert in bears and her ability to deal with the wild animals that inhabit the island. In addition, she remarks a shared characteristic between her own father and the Surfacers' father: their being mushroom experts.

Atwood's relation with nature comes across as pivotal for the author, due to her having lived for about half a year every year in the Canadian wilderness, because of her father's work as a botanist (Wilson, 29). Hence, it is possible to argue that the author's ability to survive in the wild and her connection to nature was passed on to *Surfacing's* protagonist. Regardless of this, the documentarian's focal point was not that of clarifying the relation between Atwood and the environment around her – giving account also for the inspiration nature represents for the author –, but to corroborate his belief that there exists an unspoken deeper connection between Atwood's personal life and the storylines featured in her novels. For this reason, Rubbo's approach to the family caused unease to Atwood. In the course of the documentary, in fact, the author repeatedly stressed how her plotlines derive from the society, century and history of modern-day Canada, not merely from her own life.

The identity of Canadian people is inextricably linked to its wilderness, as Louis-Edmond Hamelin puts it “the background of the picture without which Canada would not be what it is” (quoted in Grace, *Canada*, 68). The theme of nature, and most of all the dangers that nature can bring upon humans, has long been pivotal to Canadian literature, although Gaile McGregor argues: “no one has satisfactorily explained the causes or noted the ramifications of these recurrent images of a hostile wilderness – or, in fact, fully traced the extent to which such an image, mediated and mutated, pervades and dominates not just Canadian literature but Canadian culture as a whole” (9-10).

Despite this, in her 1972 *Survival*, Margaret Atwood argues that in Canadian culture, “the answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ is at least partly the same as the answer to another question: ‘Where is here?’ ” (17). Atwood finds that a person can exclusively wonder about his / her identity when living in a well-defined and overwhelming environment. This belief is based on the premise that an overwhelming atmosphere does

not permit people to separate their identity from the natural environment they inhabit. On the contrary, Atwood believes that wondering about the place one inhabits also conveys the idea one is lost, wondering “Where is this place in relation to other places? How do I find my way around in it?” (17). The answers to these questions will depend in equal part on the features of the place and on the person’s abilities and desires.

Hence, Atwood taps into this common knowledge of Canada as an unknown territory to foreigners as well as to its citizens. She writes: “I’m talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the place you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It’s that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost” (18).

Consequently, the author stresses the identification of the Canadian citizen with the homeland, a motif she has also often employed in her narrative. This identification allows Atwood’s characters to “dive deep under the surface to find lost meaning: we also see that this identification changes them, enables them to gain powers that both strengthen and endanger [them]” (Wilson, 38). Nonetheless, it is this very identification that renders characters aware of their inability to conquer the wild, as they can only live in it while facing the dangers it throws at them.³⁷

As a consequence, the role nature plays in Canadian literature largely differs from the role it plays in U.S. literature. The protagonists of U.S. novels, in fact, usually go into the wild in order to find themselves, and are able not only of accomplishing this task, but also of conquering the wild in the process. The goal of U.S. literature is, in these cases, to prove that no matter where one starts from, he or she can achieve whatever they set their mind to: what's more, it is rare for an American protagonist to die in the wild, and consequently being unable to return home. This is based on the assumption that “in any

³⁷ Canadian literature presents two very different types of natural theme: the first one portrays nature as indifferent in the regards of man, who in turn becomes alienated from it; the second presents an actively hostile nature, which usually results in a dead (or, at least, threatened) man.

case, Nature was ‘good’ and cities were ‘evil’. Nature the kind Mother on Earth had joined and in some cases replaced God the severe Father in Heaven” (Atwood, *Survival*, 49).

Many Canadian poets seem to connect Nature to a “nasty chilly old woman”, which is a metaphor linking “female horror” to the environment (202). Could this be connected to the idea of American culture as “masculine, cultured, powerful and capitalist” (Araki, 191), whilst Canadians are “natural, feminine, passive, lacking identity and suffering a victim complex” (191-192)? In *Surfacing*, the more the narrator acknowledges the changes imposed by humankind on the natural world, the more she recognizes the power American ideology holds over Canadian culture; consequently, the more her anti-American sentiment increases.³⁸ Despite her belief, though, the Surfacer never meets American citizens throughout the narration, as the people she deems “Americans” are actually Canadians. “American”, thus comes to represent “what’s in store for us, what we’re turning into” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 130), not merely the belonging to a community.

All in all, actually, both Americans and Canadians derive their relation to nature from the figure of the pioneer.

The pioneer belongs in both American literature and Canadian literature. Regardless of his being closer to the American perspective, as he wishes to master the landscape, as a matter of fact the pioneer differs from the perspectives of both literatures, whilst also sharing features with both.

In “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer”, contained in Atwood’s collection of poems *The Animals in That Country*, the nameless protagonist tries to conquer the wild by fencing the land and building on it. As the land has not yet been named, it is possible to consider the land portrayed in the poem as exemplary of any place that man has colonized throughout history. In the course of the poem, the protagonist tries to conquer and master nature,

³⁸ In this perspective, the narrator’s final remark of “refusing to be a victim” can be considered a refusal of American capitalism just as much of American ideology.

resisting to its will. For this very reason, the protagonist will be killed in the end of the poem.

In Atwood's works, as well as in history, the figure of the pioneer accounts for humankind's disrespect for nature. For this reason, Americans and Canadians, in *Surfacing* are equals, as both of them relate to nature similarly to the way pioneers related to a new environment.

The meaning associated, in the novel, to American culture is exemplified in a passage to be found right before the narrator discovers her true memories.

I felt a sickening complicity, sticky as glue, blood on my hands, as though I had been there and watched without saying No or doing anything to stop it: one of the silent guarded faces in the crowd. The trouble some people have being German, I thought, I have being human. In a way it was stupid to be more disturbed by a dead bird than by those other things, the wars and riots and the massacres in the newspapers. But for the wars and riots there was always an explanation, people wrote books about them saying why they happened: the death of the heron was causeless, undiluted. (Atwood, *Sfg*, 131)

The passage comes after the moment in which the heron has been killed, hence, it comes to metaphorize American people's disrespect for nature and, even more so, the killing of innocents.

In *Surfacing*, Americans are the representation of what Corradi Fiumara, referencing Francis Bacon (*Metaphor*, 138; Lakoff and Johnson, 4), defines as a desire for

mastery over nature. In the scholar's perspective, knowledge, considered an aspect of interactive life, is to be linked to everyday questions of personal value and meaning. But humans, Bacon says, may go as far as to consider themselves too distinct from nature and, hence, feel empowered to dominate it. For Corradi Fiumara, domination is partly connected to detachment, but not so much as to lead to a lack of participation. Consequently, domination involves a sense of relation that is passionate and intruding, regardless of how detached it may seem.

The detached approach could seem like the only way for the person to look out at the world and comprehend their role in it. Although it accounts for "how to get at things as they really are" (*Metaphor*, 87), this epistemology has not been imposed onto us by external features, rather it derives from the appeal that impersonal detachment has for individual thinking.

In the aforementioned passage, the narrator acknowledges the cruelty of American people's relation to nature: although she had already referred to the improper way they live in nature – eradicating trees and over-fishing in the lake –, here, she is referring to the deaths of innocents at the hands of a colonizer. The heron, in fact, stands for the destruction of nature caused by Americans: the narrator feels a sense of guilt towards the heron, because she did not protect it (by preventing its killing) nor bury it when she discovered its corpse. At this point, the protagonist becomes obsessed with the idea of killing, and especially senseless killing: she accuses the Americans of being killers because of their defacing and destroying nature, but soon realizes that she is no different than them. The aborted fetus can, thus, be considered similar to the heron, as it is disposed of in a ruthless way: once the narrator has regained the memory of her abortion, she finds that she is a killer as well, because she has refused to stand up for her beliefs – as she actually did want to become a mother – and reject the abortion.

And yet, the most important difference between the narrator and the Americans is to be found in their relation to nature: if, on the one hand the Surfacer has become aware that, in order to live in communal with nature, she has to refuse playing a victimizer / victim game with it; on the other hand, the Americans tend to beat “up helpless nature”, but do not seem to understand “there’s as much chance to play victim if you then identify with Nature and see the plight as inescapable” (Atwood, *Survival*, 63).

It is possible to argue that Americans are comparable to the slaves of Aristotle’s times, deprived of the gift of metaphor, forced to speak plainly to their masters (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 88; Aristotle, 2239) and consequently confined into literalness. When seen against the sense of guilt that the narrator feels towards nature, animals and her aborted fetus – in other words, innocents –, Americans are inferior, because they do not share such a feeling, as they solely employ a detached language. Hence, just as slaves for Aristotle, Americans cannot compete with the narrator, who is gifted with both metaphor and guilt, therefore they are incapable of using metaphor.

The death of the heron is placed in a point of the narration where the protagonist is on the verge of discovering the truth. In the novel, the defacing of the environment seems to mirror the narrator’s feeling of “amputation” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 39): just as nature is being mortified for men’s consumption, so the narrator feels mutilated for having allowed her lover to impose his will on her. Only by recalling the abortion, the Surfacer manages to live in harmony with nature: this period of harmonic living interestingly coincides with her madness, during which the narrator goes as far as to compare herself to the heron, by envisioning the Americans hanging her by the feet from a tree upon discovering she is about to become an animal (190). This comparison allows for the creation of an association between nature and women: in fact, just as they aim at dominating the natural environment, Americans also aim at controlling women.

Despite their disdain for American culture, the narrator's friends are deeply influenced by its ideology and, for this reason, they turn into "second-hand Americans". The narrator, in fact, notices how her friends behave in nature (Anna getting tanned, Joe and David exploiting the heron's corpse and the fish for their film), and finds that they are much more similar to Americans than they are to her. This derives not only from the fact that she has lived in the bush all her childhood, but also from the degree of her metaphorical development: being a developing person – whereas the other characters are salvageable only to a certain extent –, the narrator is capable to embrace both society's epistemologies and the natural world.

It is especially with David that we find several negative traits that the novel usually associates to Americans: David mistreats his wife, beats her, rapes her and even forces her to strip for his movie; he sexually assaults the narrator when she refuses to have sex with him; additionally, he seems to reject Women's Liberation Movement (112). By the same token, he mistreats nature by over-fishing for entertainment, capturing frogs and filming the corpse of the heron to have it featured in his movie. Hence, David comes to symbolize, in this respect, the way American ideology is shaping Canadians into its look-alike: "Ideology is crucial in creating consent, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted and more importantly, held to be true" (Loomba, 30).

Gemma Corradi Fiumara shows that metaphors are generated by the connection with nature, which in turn connects to culture and allows for the creation of new metaphors (*Metaphor*, 28).

Surfacing's narrator is only able to acknowledge the divergence between her artificial self and the real one when she encounters nature: at the beginning of the novel, in fact, the narrator is uneasy, she does not deem herself capable of living on the island because she has lost contact with nature, having spent many years living in the city. Bruner

found that contemporary society values culture more than nature, hence “culture has become the world to which we must adapt” (*Acts*, 12; Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*, 170) and nature has become background noise. And yet, the narrator, who had lost her true self to civilization, once again adapts to the world of nature to find herself. Nonetheless, she will also have to go back to civilization to continue living her life.

Hence, similarly to Corradi Fiumara’s theory (*Mind*, 61), *Surfacing* does not present dichotomous couples, as according to Grace, Atwood’s goal is that of creating “interrelations[hips] between the polarities” in order to “[break] imprisoning circles” (*Atwood’s Untold*, 13). This gives account for the co-presence of opposing dualities in the novel (Araki, 196): American and Canadian’s different views on nature do not aim at annihilating each other, rather at acknowledging the different ways to approach nature and live in it, which also lead to different degrees of salvation.

5.2 Teachings from the parents

The final section of this work will revolve around the figure of the parents, namely the narrator’s parents (nameless just as she is), as the other characters “all disowned their parents long ago” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 13).

The Surfacer’s parents could be compared to new metaphors, that is to say concealing new meanings besides the ones that we think we already know. The fascination for new metaphors, according to Christopher Bollas (24), suggests a link with life-changing phases of our existence, in which major transformations are to be comprehended and created by external figures – namely our parents, immediate relatives or any other “superior” being. The importance this fascination holds on us derives from “experiences and expectations, which we somehow ‘know’ but cannot clearly think about and articulate” (Corradi Fiumara, *Metaphor*,

62): as a result, the metaphors that mostly work on us as adults derive from previous expectations about the turn of events.

In *Surfacing*, when, by the end of the first part, the narrator discovers that her memories about some of the events of her life are false, she starts “checking it like an alibi” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 70). Although this realization is supposed to help the narrator learn which event is incorrect – thus, aiding her in retrieving the truth about her abortion –, she is incapable to do so because “the ones who could help are gone” (70). This is the first time the narrator acknowledges the fact both her parents have left her. Interestingly, in this passage, the term “gone” can be considered as carrying a double meaning: on the one hand, the narrator’s mother is “gone” because she has passed away; on the other hand, the narrator still does not know that her father is dead, too. Rather, she believes he has gone insane and is hiding on the island: in this perspective, “gone” might refer to the fact that, due to his madness, her father is not the person he used to be. And yet, the narrator is still unable to uncover the anger she feels towards her parents for having left her, thus she feels powerless and incapable of recognizing her reality as false without her parents’ help.

Bollas (24) suggests that, as young children, we perceive our parents as “forces” capable of transforming both our inner world and our surroundings: as a result, we tend to think we have experienced a person or event before we got to know about them. In *Surfacing*, the narrator thinks she knows her parents because they raised her, but actually she was incapable of understanding their take on life until they were gone. The discovery of “hidden” features to her parents allows the narrator to embrace their view on nature, hence living a freer and more peaceful life.

Considering this chapter revolves around the different relationships to nature, I will be analyzing metaphors that regard the narrator’s parents and their connection to the

environment. I will then proceed to explain the implications of these metaphors in relation to Corradi Fiumara's theory.

The narrator's discovery that dualities can cohabit and that they do not need to invalidate each other comes to her during her madness, when she hallucinates her being a part of the landscape and even sees both of her parents again.³⁹ This section of the novel allows for the blurring of the world of the living and the world of the dead, with the narrator in the middle of the two spheres, envisioning the people she loved, who have now left her. Marge Piercy (43-44) found that many of Atwood's protagonists fight a solitary battle to dispel their victimhood: oftentimes, as is the case with *Surfacing*, their only allies are the dead, alongside the forces of nature. Clearly, the Surfacer does not acknowledge that she is hallucinating, rather believes her parents to have come back from the dead because she had prayed upon their return.

The two metaphors I will be discussing are presented to the reader among the hallucinations the narrator experiences during her madness.⁴⁰ This is the only period of time she is able to live in harmony with nature during the events narrated: however, it is possible to argue that, as the narrator's relation with nature has considerably changed, she could live in harmony with it in the future.

I can hear the jays, crying and crying as if they've found an enemy or food. They are near the cabin, I walk toward them up the hill. [...] Then I see her. She is standing in front of the cabin, her hand stretched out, [...] She doesn't move, she is feeding them: one perches on her wrist, another on her shoulder. [...] The jays cry again, they fly up

³⁹ It is not a case, in fact, that the narrator's madness is triggered by the discovery of her father's corpse.

⁴⁰ In these passages, it could be argued that the narrator is simply acknowledging her feelings for the loss of her parents: her descent into madness could be compared to psychoanalysis, as both allow for the living of a mature life, where emotions are not feared, rather embraced. In addition, both allow for the preservation of the person's inner life (McDougall, 244, quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 190).

from her, the shadows of their wings ripple over the ground and she's gone. [...] I squint up at them, trying to see her, trying to see which one she is [...] (Atwood, *Sfg*, 188).

He is standing near the fence with his back to me, looking in at the garden. [...] He has realized he was an intruder, the cabin, the fences, the fires and paths were violations; now his own fence excludes him, as logic excludes love. He wants it ended, the borders abolished, he wants the forest to flow back into the places his mind cleared: reparation (Atwood, *Sfg*, 192-193).

Corradi Fiumara argues that most Western theories tend to associate the mind to the sphere of rationality, as dominant philosophical theories generally refuse to acknowledge the existing link between affects and language. And yet, by acknowledging this connection, we would not imply the independence of the affective sphere from the rationality of the mind, nor the opposite (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 14-15). Corradi Fiumara stresses that the prevailing idea concerning affects is that they act as “obstacles to the progress of reason towards truth” (57): for this reason, contemporary philosophers decided to include affective issues in the domain of rationally explicable problems.⁴¹ Despite this, emotions are still considered merely irrational.

A quite different point of view is that of Corradi Fiumara, who notices (115) that any emotion we feel gives account for something happening within us, something that is important for us in a given moment. In other words, emotions present their own form of logic, as we give precise meaning to them on account of the events of our lives.

⁴¹ According to Antonio Damasio (52), Western culture tends to consider emotions as accessory functions that accompany rational thinking. As a result, positive emotions are to be considered a fortune, while negative emotions a reproachable intrusion (Corradi Fiumara, *Mind*, 105).

In *Surfacing*, the nameless narrator believes “logic excludes love” (Atwood, *Sfg*, 192). At the beginning of the novel, this thought is bearable to her, due to her lack of feeling; but, as she goes insane, she realizes it is not true. Logic is, indeed, excluded because of her madness, but she is still able to acknowledge what is most important to her, as the mind is not separated from feeling, rather intertwined to it.

In addition, the fact that her father was missing is, for the narrator, proof that his philosophy has failed him, and it has also failed her, as she used to praise her father’s ideology growing up. The failure of logic, and especially the failure of rational language, represents a confirmation of the inability of the old language to describe the narrator’s experiences. Hence, she starts to seek for “the other language” (159), in order to comprehend that the confinement of good and evil into categories is impossible, just as it is impossible to consider human actions as mere consequences of victimhood. Differently than the father, the narrator’s mother is more interconnected to nature, rather than to logic, hence she is to be considered the emotional one in the pair.

At this point, we could argue each of the parents to embody one of the two halves the narrator is split into until she finds out the truth about the abortion: the father is the logical part, the mother is the emotional one. Hence, while the father’s teaching allows the narrator to properly see reality, the mother’s legacy regards the right way to act in the world. It is, in fact, only after she found her mother’s gift – a picture she painted when she was a child – that the narrator retrieves the desire to become a mother herself. Consequently, her father’s disappearance might be seen as a way to underscore that, since she had left the island, the narrator was living only of logic, but now discovers that reality is found in a balanced cohabitation of emotions and rationality. This discovery occurs to the narrator at the moment she accepts the death of her parents: having come to understand that both halves are part of herself, she also embraces the need “to prefer life. I owe them [her parents] that” (194).

Corradi Fiumara creates a link between the metaphors that are most important to us as adults and the experiences of our past, especially our childhood. I argue that, for this reason, the narrator recalls and metaphorizes two scenes from her childhood, with her mother feeding the jays in the garden, and her father embracing rationality as a guide for survival. The visions aim at conveying the idea that the teachings the narrator was seeking as her parents' legacy had, in reality, always been within her, but she was unable to reach them because she believed her parents to despise her life choices.⁴² As the wilderness comes to symbolize the narrator's spiritual journey, the visions might also represent her parents' forgiveness, which allows the protagonist to retrieve their teachings in herself.

Important is also the fact that the narrator manages to get in contact with her parents by embracing an ancient religion that revolves around pictograms as well as one's relation to nature, which accounts for her parents' non-belief in the Christian God and highlights how both of them were in deep connection with nature. By allowing the truth about her abortion to emerge, the narrator is able to find a connection to nature, which allows for a connection to her parents: it is, in fact, by means of nature that the narrator manages to connect spiritually with her parents.

Finally, I want to discuss the importance these visions hold for one of the topics we have discussed in relation to the narrator: her preference for the visual over the linguistic.

Corradi Fiumara mentions the invention of written language as one of the major forces behind human cultural evolution. The scholar explains that communication by means of pictograms had been discarded when the human mind became capable of bringing together two inherently different spheres, namely sound and sign (*Metaphor*, 123). In addition, she deems "the essential mark of metaphor" (123) to be at work in the Sumerians' invention of written

⁴² At the beginning of the novel, in fact, the narrator questions the reason for her journey to the island, as "they never forgave me, they didn't understand the divorce; I don't think they even understood the marriage" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 25). And yet, the events the Surfacer is referring to (i.e. her wedding and her divorce) are but false memories that she has construed to cope with the trauma of her abortion.

language, especially in the very metabolic act of linking something (the sound) to something else (the written language).

Although she looks for “a note, a message, a will” (41-42) from her parents, expecting a linguistic sign of some kind, the narrator of *Surfacing* does not think that language would be of any consolation to her. Interestingly, both her parents’ teachings are presented to her in a visual manner, her father’s by means of the vision she has in the underwater cave, her mother’s by means of the narrator’s own drawing. This, once again, comments on the narrator’s training as an artist and, even more so, on her preferring the pictorial to the linguistic.

This very preference can arguably be considered as the reason why the narrator merely hallucinates about her parents: she does not talk to them or hear their voices (as it would mean they are speaking), she simply sees their figures.⁴³ What’s more, she sees them transforming into animals – her father first into a wolf and then into a fish, her mother into a jay. These transformations account for the narrator’s belief that, in death, her parents have become one with nature, just as she is attempting to during her madness.

The narrator’s metaphoric potential in relation to the connection of two entirely different spheres is to be found in the fact that, by means of the hallucinations she experiences, she is able to come to terms with her life choices and plan the future that is ahead of her. The two different spheres I am referring to here are the visual and life, that turn out to be inextricably linked but also incredibly different. And yet, as Corradi Fiumara finds, it is by the assessment through metaphor that we find “both what ‘ is ’ and what ‘ is not ’ ” (*Metaphor*, 124).

⁴³ The narrator also dreams about her parents, right after having seen them. In this case, too, she simply sees them, she never talks to them or hears them speak.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed at examining the use of metaphor in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* through the lens of Italian psychiatrist Gemma Corradi Fiumara. *The Metaphoric Process*, in fact, aided the comprehension of the linguistic outputs and metaphoric potential of the characters in Atwood's novel.

The metaphors that I have selected regarding the novel's characters exemplify a connection between nature and metaphor. As the narrator leaves behind the commodities of the city and embraces the rural habitat of the island, she retrieves a dormant power that allows her to see and understand the world thanks to metaphoric interactions.

According to Corradi Fiumara's take, the Surfacers are developing persons because of their innate use of metaphor. The metaphors that I have analyzed regarding the narrator all revolve around her repressed memories: by metaphoricizing her feelings about the traumatic circumstances, the narrator is able to recall the events and expand her metaphoric potential.

The characters' relation to nature, hence, gives account for their development and their possibilities of salvation from second-hand Americanism. For this reason, the narrator deems Joe to still be salvageable whilst Anna and David's transition into second-hand Americans is far too advanced.

In Corradi Fiumara's perspective, too, Joe is somewhat of a developing person because of his ability to balance life in the bush (i.e. metaphor) and life in the city (i.e. literalness). As regards Anna, Corradi Fiumara's framework allows us to consider her as slightly salvageable because of her capacity to feel strong emotions. Finally, David cannot be saved due to his inability to metaphoricize thoughts and feelings. This is connected to the idea that American culture symbolizes, in the novel, a preference for literalness. But, as literalness cannot account for one's feelings, the exclusive employment of literalness translates into a segregated mind,

that is indifferent to the matters of life. In this respect, David is much closer to the Americanized Canadian fishermen than he is to the narrator. The Americans are to be considered, in Corradi Fiumara's framework, more similar to the slaves of Aristotle's times, confined in literalness because, when compared to the masters (in this case, the narrator), their status is perceived as inferior. Such inferiority derives from the Americans' wish to master and conquer nature.

Finally, the narrator's parents represent a life in harmony with nature as, in the narrator's view, they turn into animals after she acknowledges their death. The fact that the narrator metaphorizes childhood memories of her parents in order to achieve a freer life in the environment is in keeping with Corradi Fiumara's argument regarding the importance of a relation to one's parents for the construction, during childhood, of metaphors that will prove essential for one's adult life.

I believe that further research is necessary to investigate metaphor through Corradi Fiumara's framework. As, in *Surfacing*, it is the relation to nature that allows for a categorization of the characters into salvageable and non-salvageable, additional research concerning other works by Atwood could prove useful to exemplify the different ways in which her characters embrace or reject their metaphoric potential. Moreover, Corradi Fiumara's framework could be applied to novels by authors of non-Canadian nationality: since every literature is based on ideals and features that are essential to its culture, the goal would be that of investigating the possibility of a connection between the author's society and his / her approach to metaphor.

Finally, I bring forward the possibility of further research in the field of psycholinguistics regarding the affective turn of logical thinking: the idea that "logic excludes love" (Atwood, *Sfg*, 192) is in keeping with Western theories that consider emotions as irrational. Corradi Fiumara, instead, believes emotions to carry their own form of logic. For this reason,

literary inquiries could focus on the rationalization of emotions and on the way emotions are indeed conveyed in literary texts.

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