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Unit X – Post Colonial Literature and European Literature in Translation

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1. Margaret Atwood's Surfacing

Margaret Atwood

Life:

- ✪ Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on 18 Nov, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada.
- ✪ Her parents were Margaret Dorothy and Carl Edmund Atwood.
- ✪ Her father was an entomologist.
- ✪ She studied in Victoria College, Radcliffe College, Harvard University.
- ✪ Her professors were Jay Macpherson and Northrop Frye.
- ✪ She taught at university of British Columbia.

Career:

- ✪ Margaret Atwood was Canadian novelist, Poet, Critic, feminist, Environmental activist.
- ✪ Her Genres are
 - Historical fiction
 - Speculative fiction
 - Science fiction
 - Dystopian fiction
- ✪ She is the founder of the writer' Trust of Canada.
- ✪ She is founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize.
- ✪ She belongs to confessional school of poets of 1960s.
- ✪ She is Current Vice – President of PEN international.
- ✪ She is Female star of Canada's elite.
- ✪ She is Prophet of her own country.
- ✪ She is Queen of Canadian letters.

Works:

- ✪ *The Edible Woman (1969)*
 - ☞ It helps to raise "Protofeminism".
- ✪ *Surfacing (1972)*
 - ☞ It is companion novel to the collection of poems "Power Politics".

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- ☞ It is emergence of Canadian nationalism.
- ✪ **Lady Oracle (1976)**
 - ☞ Protagonist “Jan Foster” is a romance novelist.
- ✪ **Life Before Man (1979)**
 - ☞ It was finalisted for the Governor General’s Award.
- ✪ **Bodily Harm (1981)**
 - ☞ Protagonist Rennie is a travel reporter.
- ✪ **The Handmaid’s Tale (1985)**
 - ☞ It is a dystopian novel, Science fiction, Speculative fiction.
 - ☞ Theme is women in subjugation.
 - ☞ It won Governor General’s Award in 1985.
 - ☞ It won Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987.
 - ☞ It was nominated for Booker prize in 1986.
- ✪ **Cat’s Eye (1988)**
 - ☞ It is finalisted for the Governor General Award in 1988.
 - ☞ It is shortlisted for Booker prize in 1989.
- ✪ **The Robber Bride (1993)**
 - ☞ It is story of three friends.
- ✪ **Alias Grace (1996)**
 - ☞ It won of Giller Prize in 1996.
 - ☞ It is finalisted for Booker prize in 1996.
 - ☞ It is Historical fiction.
- ✪ **The Blind Assassin (2000)**
 - ☞ It won Booker prize in 2000.
 - ☞ It is Historical fiction.
 - ☞ Protagonist is Iris Chase.
 - ☞ It is Memoir.
- ✪ **Oryx and Crake (2003)**
 - ☞ It is dystopian novel, speculative fiction.
 - ☞ It is adventure romance.
 - ☞ It was shortlisted for Booker prize in 2003.

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- ❖ ***The Year of the Flood (2009)***
 - ☞ It is Speculative fiction, Dystopian.
 - ☞ It is companion to “Oryx and Crake”.
- ❖ ***MaddAddam (2013)***
 - ☞ It is Speculative fiction, Dystopian.
 - ☞ It is companion to “Oryx and Crake”.
- ❖ ***The Penelopiad (2005)***
 - ☞ It is Novella, Parallel novel.
 - ☞ It is part of “Canongate Myth Series”.

Short fiction Collections:

- ❖ ***Dancing Girls (1977)***
 - ☞ It won St. Lawrence Award for fiction in 1977.
- ❖ ***The Circle Game (1966)***
 - ☞ It won the Governor General Literary Award for poetry.

Poetry Collections:

- ❖ ***The Circle Game (1964)***
 - ☞ It won Governor General’s Award in 1964.
- ❖ ***Power Politics (1971)***
 - ☞ “You fit into me like a hook into an eye a fish hook an open eye”.
- ❖ ***The Journals of Susanna Moodie***
 - ☞ English women’s response to the landscape of Eastern Canada.
- ❖ **Anthology**
 - ☞ The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (1982)

Critical Works:

- ❖ ***Survival: A Thematic Guide t Canadian Literature (1972)***
 - ☞ Literary Criticism.
- ❖ ***Second Words : Selected Critical Prose (1982)***

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Awards:

- ✪ She was awarded
- Order of Canada.
- Order of Ontario.
- Fellow of Royal Society of Canada.
- Arthur C. Clarke Award for *“The Handmaid’s Tale”*
- Prince of Asturias Award.
- **Booker Prize for *“The Blind Assassin”* in 2000.**
- **Governor’s General’s Award in 1966 for *“The Circle Game”***
- **Governor’s General’s Award in 1985 for *“The Handmaid’s Tale”***
- Humanist of the year 1987 by American Humanist association.
- Prince of Asturias Award for literature in 2008.

General:

- ✪ Many of her poems **are inspired by myths and fairy tales.**
- ✪ **Garrison Mentality:**
 - ☞ The term coined by Northrop Frye.
 - ☞ It was explored by Margaret Atwood.
 - ☞ It is Canadian identity that fears the emptiness of the Canadian Landscape.
- ✪ **Linda Hutcheon** calls her works as **“Historiographical Metasfiction”**.
- ✪ Margaret Atwood is a Passionate Observer of **Canadian life and environment.**
- ✪ She provides a significant insight into Canadian **heritage and literature** in her works.
- ✪ She talks of **animals** in her works.
- ✪ She took active role to prevent **“Environmental Pollution”**.
- ✪ She is interested in the concepts of **Self awareness and Self consciousness.**
- ✪ **She portrays the Man – Woman relationship in her poetry.**

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Surfacing

- ✪ *Surfacing* is Margaret Atwood's **second novel**.
- ✪ It was published in **1972 by McClelland and Stewart**, only three years after **her first novel *The Edible Woman*** was published.
- ✪ It has been called a **companion novel** to Atwood's collection of poems, *Power Politics* which was written the previous year and deals with complementary issues.
- ✪ It was adapted into movie in 1981.
- ✪ *Surfacing* takes place in **Quebec**, and the unique identity of **Quebec's population** comes into play in the novel.
- ✪ Quebec is the only Canadian province populated by **residents of French** (rather than British) descent.
- ✪ Atwood wrote *Surfacing* at a time when the cultural differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada were manifesting themselves in terms of rising Quebec nationalism.
- ✪ **The 1960s saw the Quiet Revolution in Quebec:** a series of economic and educational reforms coupled with a secularization of society.
- ✪ The Quiet Revolution afforded Québec greater political and economic autonomy, giving Québec's French citizens a sense of nationalism and a desire to separate from Canada.
- ✪ Atwood marks **this political change** in *Surfacing*.
- ✪ *Surfacing* is a **postcolonial novel**.
- ✪ Atwood includes a passage about **the Canadian national flag**, which had only been adopted **in 1965**.
- ✪ Atwood claims that America's subtle cultural infiltration of Canada is actually a form of colonialism.
- ✪ Through *Surfacing*, Atwood questions a **woman's conventional social and sexual role**.
- ✪ *Surfacing* **touches on the health risks associated with hormonal contraception**, the idea of contraception as a male invention, the power inherent in pregnancy, the social implications of makeup, the potentially false ideal of marriage, the notion of a natural woman, and the psychological mechanisms that men use to exert control over women.
- ✪ **Religion in *Surfacing* becomes a false ideal**.
- ✪ The narrator recalls growing up in the wake of World War II and documents small effects of the war on her childhood.

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- ✪ *Surfacing* examines the ambiguous moral landscape left in the wake of World War II.
- ✪ **The narrator's childhood recollection of Hitler** as the embodiment of all evil depicts the World War II era as morally simplistic.

Character list:

The Narrator:

- ⊙ She is the unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing*.
- ⊙ The narrator is reverential toward nature, intensely private, anti-American, and introspective.
- ⊙ She works as a **freelance artist**.
- ⊙ She searches for her missing father on a remote island in Quebec along with her boyfriend, Joe, and her friends, David and Anna.
- ⊙ Socially alienated and distrustful of love, the narrator suffers a debilitating emotional numbness that eventually fixes itself through a grand psychological transformation.
- ⊙ She eventually goes mad on the island. For a time she lives like an animal, but she eventually emerges as a more enlightened being.
- ⊙ *Surfacing* is composed entirely of the narrator's unfiltered thoughts and observations.

Joe :

- ⊙ Joe is quiet, shy, well-meaning boyfriend of the narrator.
- ⊙ He is an unsuccessful artist who makes ugly pottery and teaches pottery classes.
- ⊙ He remains too simple-minded to understand the narrator's complexities.
- ⊙ He insists on marrying the narrator, which she resists.
- ⊙ He is a good man, but he is also potentially violent.

David :

- ⊙ David is the psychologically abusive and womanizing husband of Anna.
- ⊙ He is a communications teacher who loves baseball.
- ⊙ He is an amateur filmmaker composing a film with Joe called **Random Samples**.

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- ⊙ David's constant joking and imitation of cartoon characters serves as a poor cover for his selfish and sexist behavior, and the manner in which he communicates with Anna is deeply cruel.
- ⊙ David is staunchly anti-American, yet he possesses all of the awful qualities that the narrator associates with Americans.

Anna :

- ⊙ Anna is the vulnerable yet sly wife of David.
- ⊙ Anna puts on a veneer of sweetness in order to please her husband.
- ⊙ She constantly sings and applies makeup.
- ⊙ She believes her marriage is a war that she fights using her body; Anna uses sex with her husband and with other men to curb David's behavior.
- ⊙ She is more talkative and social than the narrator but far less introspective or self-aware.

Paul :

- ⊙ Paul is the compassionate yet reserved best friend of the narrator's father.
- ⊙ He is the first one to inform the narrator of her father's disappearance.
- ⊙ He is a poor man who lives a modest life, and he operates by traditional morals and codes of courtesy and provides as much help as he can in locating the narrator's father.
- ⊙ Paul was the model of "the simple life" to the narrator's father, though the narrator observes that he is a model through financial necessity and not choice.

The Narrator's Mother:

- ⊙ She is an aloof and secretive woman.
- ⊙ The narrator's mother died from a brain tumor before the novel begins, and the narrator constantly tries to remember her.
- ⊙ Her mother serves as the narrator's image of inner strength.
- ⊙ The narrator continually remembers the image of her mother in a leather jacket feeding blue jays.

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The Narrator's Father:

- ⊙ He is a stern man who disappears, forcing the narrator to search for him on his island.
- ⊙ The narrator's father is an atheist and a fan of the eighteenth-century rationalists.
- ⊙ Self-reliant and rugged, he built the cabin on his own and had used the island as respite from city life.
- ⊙ He dies accidentally on a trip researching local Indian wall paintings.

The Narrator's Brother:

- ⊙ He is a character who never appears in person.
- ⊙ The narrator's brother fled from his parents years before the novel takes place.
- ⊙ The narrator finds it difficult to imagine him as an adult.
- ⊙ He nearly drowned as a child, and **the narrator constantly reflects on the image of his drowning.**
- ⊙ He was loving toward his sister, but he had a rather dark childhood. He kept laboratory on the island, running experiments on animals in jars.

The "Fake Husband":

- ⊙ He is the narrator's ex-lover.
- ⊙ The fake husband is eventually revealed to be the narrator's art professor, a married man with whom she had an affair.
- ⊙ He forced the narrator into having an abortion.
- ⊙ He is emotionally callous in nature and tries to avoid letting his affair with the narrator influence his actions.

Bill Malmstrom :

- ⊙ He is a shady and wealthy American whom the narrator immediately distrusts.
- ⊙ Malmstrom claims to be a representative of a Detroit-based wildlife preservation agency.
- ⊙ He offers to purchase the narrator's father's island.
- ⊙ David suspects that Malmstrom is an undercover C.I.A. operative.

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The “Americans”:

- ⊙ They are two Canadian campers whom the narrator initially mistakes for American tourists.
- ⊙ They are avid fishers, and they befriend David.
- ⊙ They are also responsible for killing and hanging a heron, and for their senseless violence the narrator believes them to be Americans.

Claude :

- ⊙ He is a young boy working at a generic bar attached to a new motel in the village.
- ⊙ Claude gives fishing licenses to David and to other tourists and also guides American tourists on fishing expeditions.
- ⊙ He speaks in a yokel dialect.

Evans :

- ⊙ He is the seasoned American guide who takes the narrator, Joe, Anna, and David to and from the narrator’s father’s island.
- ⊙ Evans is gruff and minds his own business; he is aware that the narrator’s father has disappeared, but he never asks the narrator about it.

Madame Paul’s wife:

- ⊙ Madame is a **French woman** living in the village close to the narrator’s father’s island.
- ⊙ Simple and polite, she speaks only French.
- ⊙ Because they only speak English, the narrator and the narrator’s mother both experience long, awkward conversations with Madame.

The Town Priest :

- ⊙ The local priest is the one whom the narrator remembers from childhood.
- ⊙ The town priest forbade women in the narrator’s village from wearing slacks. Instead, he forced them to wear long, concealing skirts.
- ⊙ The narrator reflects that he is likely dead by now.

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The Old Shopkeeper :

- ⊙ She is an One-armed French woman whom the narrator remembers simply as “Madame.”
- ⊙ The old shopkeeper operated from a storefront attached to her house.
- ⊙ The narrator remembers how the shopkeeper used to tie packages with her stump arm and how she used to sell candies that the narrator was never allowed to buy.

The New Shopkeeper :

- ⊙ She is a French woman who works in a small village near the narrator’s father’s island.
- ⊙ The new shopkeeper is a rude, snide woman who humiliates the narrator for speaking broken French.
- ⊙ The shopkeeper wears slacks, which would have been forbidden in the village years ago.

Summary:

The unnamed narrator returns to Quebec after years of absence to search for her missing father. She brings her boyfriend, Joe, and a married couple, Anna and David. On the way to a village near her father’s island, the narrator visits her father’s friend Paul. Paul can provide no new information on how to locate the narrator’s father. A guide named Evans takes the narrator and her companions to her father’s island, where the narrator searches for clues regarding her father’s disappearance. She becomes convinced that her father has gone mad and is still alive.

The narrator works in spurts on her freelance job illustrating a book of fairy tales, but her worries prevent her from accomplishing any real work. David proposes staying on the island for a week. The narrator agrees, though she secretly fears her crazed father’s reemergence. During their stay, David launches constant insults at Anna, couching them as jokes. Anna confesses to the narrator that David is a womanizer. She complains that David constantly demands that Anna wear makeup. The four go on a blueberry-picking expedition. They canoe to a nearby island, where Joe unexpectedly proposes to the narrator. The narrator refuses Joe, telling him how she left her last husband and child.

Back on the island, Paul arrives with an American named Malmstrom. Malmstrom claims to be from a Detroit wildlife agency. He offers to purchase the island, but the narrator refuses.

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She pulls Paul aside and tells him that her father is still alive. Paul seems skeptical. After the visitors leave, David offhandedly accuses Malmstrom of being a C.I.A. operative who is organizing an American invasion of Canada. The narrator looks through her father's records and consequently believes that he is likely dead. She sees that he had been researching Indian wall paintings and that he had marked several sites on a map. She decides to visit a site.

The narrator convinces her friends to accompany her on a camping trip to see the wall paintings. On their way to the campsite, they see a decomposing blue heron that has been hanged from a tree. David insists on filming the dead heron for a movie he is making called Random Samples. The heron's death haunts the narrator. She sees evidence of two campers entering the area beforehand, and she quickly assumes that they are Americans and to blame for the crime. Meanwhile, the four companions set up camp. Anna tells the narrator she has forgotten her makeup and David will punish her. The narrator goes fishing with David and Joe. They encounter the Americans, and the narrator notices an American flag on their boat. The narrator brings her companions to a site from her father's map, but there are no wall paintings. Frustrated and confused, they return to camp. On the way, they again encounter the American campers. The narrator is surprised to discover that the campers are actually Canadian; what she had thought was an American flag is actually a sticker. However, the narrator claims the campers are still Americans because their slaughter of the heron is a distinctly American action.

The four return to the cabin. The narrator locates another site on her father's map but realizes that the government has raised the water level in this part of the lake. She will have to dive to see the paintings. Outside, the narrator observes David tormenting Anna by insisting she take off her clothes for Random Samples. Anna eventually relents but then feels humiliated. The narrator asks David why he tortures Anna, and David claims he does so because Anna cheats on him. The narrator canoes to a site from her father's map. She dives repeatedly in search of the paintings. On a particularly deep dive, she sees a disturbing object and screams and swims for the surface. Joe has followed her onto the lake and demands to know what she's doing. She ignores Joe and realizes that what she saw was a dead child. She believes it to be her aborted baby. She changes her story from leaving her husband and child to having an affair with her art professor and being forced to abort their baby.

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The narrator's vision throws her into a psychosis. She believes that her father had found sacred Indian sites and resolves to thank the gods for granting her "the power." Joe tries to speak to the narrator, but she remains impenetrable. He tries to rape her, but he leaves her alone once she warns him that she will get pregnant. Later, David tries to seduce the narrator, telling her that Joe and Anna are having sex. The narrator nevertheless resists David's advances. A police boat comes to the island, and David tells the narrator that the police have found her father's body. Deep in her madness, the narrator refuses to believe David. That night, she seduces Joe so she can get pregnant. She feels that a new child will replace her lost baby. Joe falsely believes that the narrator has forgiven him for cheating on her.

On their last day on the island, the narrator abandons her friends. She destroys David's film and escapes in a canoe. The narrator's companions search in vain for her, eventually leaving the island. Alone on the island, the narrator falls deeper into madness. She destroys the art from her job and nearly everything inside the cabin. She becomes an animal, running around naked, eating unwashed plants, and living in a burrow. She imagines raising her baby outdoors and never teaching it language. She also has visions of her parents. Eventually, hunger and exhaustion bring the narrator to sanity. She looks at herself in the mirror and sees just a natural woman. She resolves not to feel powerless anymore. Paul arrives at the island with Joe. The narrator realizes she loves Joe and resolves to reunite with him. She pauses in the cabin, looking out at Joe, waiting.

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1. Margaret Atwood's Surfacing

1. Who is the Founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize?

- a) Margaret Laurence
b) Margaret Atwood
c) P.K.Page
d) Henrik Ibsen

2. Atwood herself described one of her novels as a profeminist rather than feminist work.

Which novel is it?

- a) Surfacing
b) Lady Oracle
c) The Handmaid's Tale
d) The Edible Woman

3. How many times Atwood has been shortlisted for Booker Prize?

- a) Three times
b) Five Times
c) Two times
d) Seven times

4. The Quiet Revolution is a term applied to the changes that took place in Quebec from _____

- a) the late 1960s to the late 1970s
b) the late 1940s to the late 1950s
c) the late 1950s to the late 1960s
d) the late 1920s to the late 1930s

5. Surfacing is a companion novel to the collection of poems titled _____

- a) Expeditions
b) Two-Headed Poems
c) Snake Poems
d) Power Politics

6. Which novel of Atwood preceded Surfacing in publication?

- a) The Handmaid's Tale
b) Lady Oracle
c) The Edible Woman
d) Life Before Man

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7. Which work of Atwood is considered a dystopian novel?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) <i>Surfacing</i> | b) <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> |
| c) <i>Life Before Man</i> | d) <i>Cat's Eye</i> |

8. When did Atwood receive the companion of the Order of Canada?

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| a) In 1986 | b) In 1981 |
| c) In 1985 | d) In 1987 |

9. *Surfacing* takes place in _____

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| a) Manitoba | b) Manawaka |
| c) Quebec | d) Ontario |

10. *Surfacing* is a _____ novel.

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| a) <i>protofeminist</i> | b) <i>scientific</i> |
| c) <i>dystopian</i> | d) <i>postcolonial</i> |

11. What becomes a false ideal in the novel *Surfacing*?

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) <i>Politics</i> | b) <i>Religion</i> |
| c) <i>Gender</i> | d) <i>None of the above</i> |

12. *Surfacing* examines the ambiguous moral landscape left in the wake of _____.

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) <i>Quiet Revolution</i> | b) <i>World War I</i> |
| c) <i>World War II</i> | d) <i>Political change</i> |

13. Who is the protagonist of the novel *Surfacing*?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| a) <i>Joe</i> | b) <i>David</i> |
| c) <i>The Unnamed narrator</i> | d) <i>Anna</i> |

14. The unnamed protagonist of the novel *Surfacing* is a/an _____.

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) <i>Lawyer</i> | b) <i>Freelance artist</i> |
| c) <i>Archeologist</i> | d) <i>Doctor</i> |

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22. Who in the novel *Surfacing* is a French woman living in the village close to the narrator's father's island?

a) Anna

b) Madame Paul's wife

c) The Old Shopkeeper

d) The New shopkeeper

23. The narrator of *Surfacing* realizes towards the end that _____.

a) She no longer loves Joe and resolves to live alone.

b) She loves Joe but thinks that she cannot reunite with him now.

c) She loves Joe and resolves to reunite with him.

d) No one is reliable.

