

The Quest for Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* And William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

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Abstract: Margaret Atwood's unnamed narrator and William Shakespeare's Hamlet are both on a mission concerning their dead or missing father. Hamlet is assigned the task of avenging the murder of his father at the hand of his uncle, King Claudius. *Surfacing* is about a nameless woman who goes in search of her missing father on a remote island in the northland wilderness of Quebec. While the protagonists' ostensible expedition revolves around their father, their journey is about self-discovery. Both works uncover a link between the role of the father and identity. The journey they describe is an exploration into the nature of the self and the nature of subjectivity. The analysis will follow the development of the characters by tracing the network of binary oppositions of sane/mad, living/dead, weak/powerful. The investigation will focus on three grail motifs: nature, madness and ghost. These motifs could be regarded as a form of intertextuality that connects the works. All three motifs coalesce in questions of identity, and more specifically the fragmented self. By focusing on these motifs I will tease out hidden similarities and differences between the texts. Both protagonists experience a clash between individual awareness and social consciousness. The representation of this clash interrupts the steady linear narrative progression that appears to follow a predetermined trajectory. Events are constantly interrupted by long narrative pauses describing the protagonists' self-reflection that essentially delays and stretches the unfolding of the action.