

# Critical Positioning and Annotated Bibliography

By Kendall Henderson, English 490

Much has been said about the disconnect language perpetuates in *Surfacing*; the spoken word is a major source of disillusionment for the narrator and critics often find the gap between language and truth one of the novel's crucial themes. Barbara C. Ewell describes in "The Language of Alienation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" the use of language as a channel for exerting control by superficially categorizing the world and invalidating nonconforming experiences. When the narrator finds that her emotional responses are not in agreement with the feelings that those around her (usually men) presume should follow her experiences, it creates a sense of alienation in her personal relationships and from reality.

Ewell asserts that this invalidation of the narrator's experience results in her estrangement from her own past and identity: "The distance between language and experience has separated her from herself, leaving her with borrowed, empty sounds" (192). For the narrator, language becomes something untrustworthy and she increasingly distances herself from it as she finds that for those around her it is a tool for manipulation and deception. The disappearance of her father, whom the narrator remembers categorizing everything as objectively good or

bad, is the beginning of the narrator's realization that the system of linguistic and logical rules can fail. This exploration into the breaking down of categorizations forms a solid foundation for further study of the novel's methods of portraying failure of binaries to accurately reflect reality.

Meera T. Clark also finds connections between logic and language in "Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*: Language, Logic, and the Art of Fiction," focusing on the relationship of language to reality, reason, and the written word. In Clark's examination of language, she focuses on Atwood's narrative technique and unconventional diction as reflectors of the author's views on the failures of language. Like Ewell, Clark perceives the emphasis on the factual in the language of the novel and the bending of truth in the speaker's narration, positing that the inconsistencies in what the narrator reveals to the reader are Atwood's way of underscoring the frequent discrepancy between words and truth.



Figure 2 Margaret Atwood in Stockholm in June 2015. Photograph by Frankie Fouganthin, used under the CC BY-SA 4.0 with no changes. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Margaret\\_Atwood\\_in\\_2015.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Margaret_Atwood_in_2015.jpg).

Though both critics acknowledge aspects of the novel like *Random Samples* and the narrator's father's study of cave drawings as a kind of language or reflection on language, neither directly examine the relationship between the visual and the real

in *Surfacing*. Rather than viewing the art and visual representation in the novel as extensions of linguistic analysis, exploring them as independent influences on the narrator's perception of herself and her world can illuminate her rejection of binaries and categorizations in new ways. Clark concludes that when language fails to represent the feelings and experiences of the narrator, she eschews it altogether in favor of visions. The connection between these visions and the visual art in the novel is under-explored, leaving a window open for inquiry into the role of visual art as a mode of enlightenment for the narrator.

Carol P. Christ perceives the narrator's process of discovering reality and herself as a spiritual quest, analyzing the importance of visions to her development. Christ positions the narrator's distorted memories as the key visions which guide her state of mind in the novel. The narrator uses her memories as tools to reinforce her perception of herself as a victim: "Her selective vision holds fast to the illusion that she is helpless and 'they' do things to her" (319). It is not until the narrator is able to confront the truth of her past that she is able to move toward a state of enlightenment and certainty. If one extends this examination of the visual as a way of manipulating or illuminating reality to the art that the group of characters in *Surfacing* each produce, the idea of visual art as a way of creating a false reality can provide valuable insight into the narrator's ultimate departure from categorizing the world into warring dichotomies. The narrator, as Christ observes, both victimizes herself and attempts to find total autonomy before realizing through vision (her father's corpse being the key image) that reality lies somewhere in the middle.

In expanding on these critics' ideas, particularly their analysis of the conflict between language and meaning, it is necessary to reference Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy as a fundamental means for understanding the discord between the representational and the real for *Surfacing's* narrator. Analyzing the narrator's contradictory

and illusory world and the failure of language (whether it be spoken, written, or visual) to wholly portray its complexities is an essentially deconstructionist approach, with the question of the narrator's conclusion about her place somewhere between a societal binary left unanswered reflecting Derrida's philosophy of infinite textual interpretations. The narrator herself begins to take a deconstructionist perspective, questioning and finally undoing her firm dualistic belief system. She discovers over the course of the novel that there is no ultimate method of communicating or being; adhering strictly to one structure of logic or categorization fails to satisfy her, as the narrator realizes by attempting to embody both the docile, domestic partner and autonomous wild thing. It is interesting to consider the intentional contradiction Atwood imbeds in her narrative and its reflection on her own deconstructionist perspective on language and representation. Focusing specifically on the visual art in *Surfacing* can yield further insight into the deconstruction of binaries in the novel.

#### Works Cited

Christ, Carol P. "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2.2 (1976): 316-30. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Oct. 2016.

Carol P. Christ perceives the narrator's process of discovering reality and herself as a spiritual quest, analyzing the importance of visions to her development. Christ positions the narrator's distorted memories as the key visions which guide her state of mind in the novel. The narrator uses her memories as tools to reinforce her perception of herself as a victim: "Her selective vision holds fast to the illusion that she is helpless and 'they' do things to her" (319). It is not until the narrator is able to confront the truth of her past that she is able to move toward a state of enlightenment and certainty. The narrator rejects the duality of what is genuine vs. what is false, finding a truer sense of identity

in between. The narrator, as Christ observes, both victimizes herself and attempts to find total autonomy before realizing through vision (her father's corpse being the key image) that reality lies somewhere in the middle. Feminist analysis is key to this alteration of the narrator's perception of reality: "Feminism is a challenge, not only to traditional social and political structures, but also to the perception of reality which underlies and legitimates them" (Christ 318). However, Christ notes that the critical feminist consensus as to whether the narrator escapes her victim mentality and establishes her own identity and power is unsure: feminist critics posit that her transcendence of the rational/logical and embracing of the spiritual ignores the real issues women continue to face, making it impossible for the narrator to truly escape victimization—her final reconciliation of society vs. spirituality is merely a compromise.

This source can help me more closely examine the narrator's moments of realization and reconciliation with the truth, whether it be the truth of her own abortion or her father's death. This also ties into the victim/oppressor dichotomy and discusses whether she escapes that categorization or not, which I can tie into my argument that she realizes she must. This article presents a spiritual focus on the narrator's experience that, while I'm not centering on that aspect, illustrates the concentrations others have taken towards similar questions to mine.

Clark, Meera T. "Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*: Language, Logic and the Art of Fiction." *Modern Language Studies* 13.3 (1983): 3-15. *JSTOR*. Web. 05 Oct. 2016.

Meera T. Clark examines connections and disparities between logic and language, focusing on the relationship of language to reality, reason, and the written word. In Clark's examination of language, she focuses on Atwood's narrative technique and unconventional diction as reflectors of the author's views on the failures of language. The narrator's parents are positioned as the extreme

embodiment of logic: "her parents, relics of an eighteenth-century rationalist England, have stubbornly guarded their reason and enlightenment in the encroaching French Canadian jungle" (Clark 4). Clark perceives the emphasis on the factual in the language of the novel and the bending of truth in the speaker's narration, positing that the inconsistencies in what the narrator reveals to the reader are Atwood's way of underscoring the frequent discrepancy between words and truth. The narrator attempts to revolt against this mode of logical thinking entirely, living in the wild guided solely by her spiritual desire, yet "with the abandonment of rational points of view, all that remains is mere existence" (Clark 8).

This clearly sets up the critical focus on language as a deconstructionist aspect of the novel and the divisions between two opposites, real/imagined etc. I can easily use this to present a common critical focus and then use a similar approach to examine art. I think particularly the failure of language is an interesting focus that I can expand on and situate myself alongside, as well as the role of logic in interpreting the world.

Davidson, Arnold E., and Cathy N. Davidson. "The Anatomy of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 10.3 (1979): 38-54. Web.

This article examines *Surfacing* in the context of traditional myth and quest stories, concluding that the ending of the novel is "anti-mythic" and "serves as a modification of and addendum to" the conventional three-part structure of the myth, which the narrator fails to complete (Davidson and Davidson 38). The narrator, the authors argue, passes through the first two stages of minor struggle and crucial conflict, but fails to reach the final stage in which the hero gains notoriety and praise (and, in essence, a defined identity as a hero). She is unable to truly triumph because she is still forced to compromise and conceal aspects of herself to assimilate into the world she chooses. The

authors explore the mythic symbols within the novel and the narrator's spiritual visions as part of their straightforward exploration of the novel's quest narrative, noting where the narrator follows the conventions of this genre and where she deviates. She is guided by spiritual and natural presences that lead her away from the expectations of her relationship with Joe, professional life, and domesticity and towards wildness and freedom in nature, but the typical heroic triumph in this realization is complicated because the narrator "has also seen that what she has learned must be protected, fostered, but partly hidden when she returns to society" (Davidson and Davidson 49).

This will be a useful article against which to contrast my main argument, especially because of its thorough coverage of all the relationships, themes, and key plot developments in the novel. Where these authors believe that the narrator does not reach a satisfying conclusion because she has failed to attain a definitive identity, I argue that she is satisfied with a place in between "hero and villain" and any other good/bad dichotomies. I see this being really helpful in strengthening my argument because it gives me something to argue against and a way to address an opposition to clarify and specify my conclusion.

Ewell, Barbara C. "The Language of Alienation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *The Centennial Review* 25.2 (1981): 185-202. *JSTOR*. Web. 05 Oct. 2016.

Ewell asserts that invalidation of the narrator's experience through a strict divide between real and imaginary results in her estrangement from her own past and identity: "The distance between language and experience has separated her from herself, leaving her with borrowed, empty sounds" (192). For the narrator, language becomes something untrustworthy and she increasingly distances herself from it as she finds that for those around her it is a tool for manipulation and deception. She must find a new way of existing and communicating that accurately depicts her experiences and

emotions. The disappearance of her father, whom the narrator remembers categorizing everything as objectively good or bad, is the beginning of the narrator's realization that the system of linguistic and logical rules can fail. Assessing her situation from a purely rational point of view gives the narrator such feelings of guilt that they transform into denial. Ewell extends this analysis to Anna, who "though she has not entirely lost her capacity to feel and is thus genuinely hurt by the verbal machinations, she has nevertheless accepted the game itself" (194). The narrator diverges from Anna by choosing not one side or the other, but a middle ground.

I think this is a key critical article to position my argument alongside. Language is the critical focus that I found most often, and this article exemplifies the critical consensus about language and deconstruction/dichotomies. I think this will be an important article to present in order to show how I'm deviating from the focus on language but employing a similar critical focus on binaries and disparity.

Goldblatt, Patricia F. "Reconstructing Margaret Atwood's Protagonists." *World Literature Today* 73.2 (1999): 275-82. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Oct. 2016.

Goldblatt delves deeply into the origin and development of Atwood's key characters, noting similarities across Atwood's work. She first looks at the sexual opposition between Atwood's female protagonists—Anna and the narrator in *Surfacing*—and their romantic partners; both David and Joe are aware of the power they hold over Anna and the narrator, and make gendered assumptions about what they are entitled to demand and what these women deeply desire. Both presume to know what "women really want," positioning them as patriarchal influencers and Anna and the narrator as passive conformers. When either woman resists, she is seen as "unnatural" or unpleasant: "Women, it seems, must be made malleable to men's desires, accepting their proposals, their advances. They must submit to

their socially determined roles or be seen as ‘demons’” (Goldblatt 277). Goldblatt also observes that Atwood’s protagonists are often in the midst of realizing the possible deception and untrustworthiness of language and the way it can be used to manipulate. These women once “trusted in family, marriage, and friendship [and] discovers that treading societal paths does not result in happiness” (Goldblatt 278). They, including the narrator, continue to perpetuate conformity until they assume roles as creators that allow them to transcend fear and tradition.

This will be a good source to support specific observations about the relationships in *Surfacing* as I examine the role of art in creating/representing gender divides within those relationships. This also takes the language angle, which I can extend to visual language. This also looks more broadly at Atwood’s work, which could be beneficial in understanding her use of other female characters to contextually examine Anna or the narrator. I think this also gives me some insight into Anna that I’ve felt was missing.

Hite, Molly. “Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.2 (1995): 135-59. *JSTOR*. Web. 06 Oct. 2016.

While Hite centers her analysis on Atwood’s novel *Cat’s Eye*, she draws conclusions about the development of self-concept and identity through visual art in the novel that enrich the study of parallel themes in *Surfacing*. Visual art, as in *Surfacing*, is a lens to examine “visibility: about who sees and is seen, about evading or controlling the gaze, about the seeing that is the precondition and the product of art [...] the portrait of the artist proves to be a metamorphosing construct” (Hite 136). Society is based on systemic good and evil in *Cat’s Eye*, and as in *Surfacing*, characters categorize the world into oppressors and victims, exempting the victims from personal responsibility and rendering the oppressors as representative figures of society regardless of personal actions.

Art seems to both depict a feminine world for Elaine in *Cat’s Eye* and represent a constriction that “femaleness” implies and that Elaine resists. Hite writes that the gender-stratified society in which Elaine attempts to create art and obtain visibility creates psychological tension for Elaine: “For women, to be seen is both to have an identity and to be identified as vulnerable: both a requirement and a stigma” (139). Those who see are those with power; to resist, one must assume one’s own vision. The narrator in *Surfacing*, who begins her relationship with the visual by clipping out women from magazines to scrapbook, makes this same journey toward “gazing back” at the patriarchal watchful eye, becoming a creator of her own vision rather than as an object to be seen. narrator does in *Surfacing*.

This is one of the only sources I can use as direct support for my argument where someone has examined art and vision in a similar way and reached a similar conclusion. There isn’t as direct a focus on the actual creation and use of art itself in the novel; Hite examines vision more generally, exploring what one sees vs. the deeper truth in a way that relates to my deconstructionist angle. I think this will be a great source to present and then take to a more specifically art-focused exploration. I also think this gives me some great information on the relationship of art to identity that will be very useful.

Kapuscinski, Kiley. “Negotiating the Nation: The Reproduction and Reconstruction of the National Imaginary in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*.” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 33.3 (2009): 95-123. *ProjectMUSE*. Web. 5 Oct. 2016.

This article examines Atwood’s depiction of a “national mythology” and ideologies of identity based on geographical location or origin. Atwood’s female protagonists, Kapuscinski argues, are often political in that they are a “formulation of the violent woman as an individual who reconceptualizes the dominant national imaginary, or the limited set of ideals

and images that Canadians frequently draw on to construct and maintain their sense of national identity” (Kapusinski 96). Atwood challenges the divisive mindset of nationalism by having the narrator break the distinction between Canadians and Americans in the novel, questioning the identities Canadians often consider inherent to their nationality. Like the narrator, Kapuscinski opines that Canadians often see themselves as peaceable and innocent, ignorant of their own capability to possess power and violence. *Surfacing*’s narrator transcends this assumption of victimization and inculpability (and the extremist opposite, the invasive and destructive Americans) through realizing the danger of passively taking on an identity rather than assuming responsibility and choosing to live actively. The narrator’s father is also a key example of this: he explores the native history of the country, acknowledging a violent past that has been suppressed, much like the narrator has suppressed her own past.

This really focuses on one particular dichotomy which I can definitely use to extend to broader discussions of binaries and divisions. This gets deep into the issue of the narrator’s possible victim complex and provides more of a historical context that, while it might not be super relevant, could be useful to insert in my paper to deepen an understanding of the narrator’s inherent categorizations of the world. This specific investigation into the Canadian mindset can definitely be helpful in analyzing the narrator’s perspective more largely.

Larson, Janet L. “Margaret Atwood and the Future of Prophecy.” *Religion & Literature* 21.1, Religious Themes in Contemporary North American Fiction (1989): 27-61. *JSTOR*. Web. 06 Oct. 2016.

Larson argues that Atwood often seeks unity in the connecting of past, present, and future: “For Atwood the way to wholeness is not to simplify into one thing—a monovocal self, a single truth, a myth to live by, a saving ideology. Typically she seeks after the possible unities of things by

searching back through the lives of the earth and its cultures for wisdom” (27). She examines the role of “truth-teller” characters in Atwood’s work as those who do not just communicate the ideologies of other cultures but who have the power to create new systems of living to empower their identities and to transmit to the reader. Prophetic characters realize that a “truthful witness must be informed by an attentive relaxing of the will, that one might renounce power games and be led out of the self’s illusions of self-sufficiency or helplessness” (Larson 31). Larson sees *Surfacing* as an example of a “prophetic call-narrative” (31) in which the narrator comes to communion with the spiritual guides surrounding her home and applies that enlightenment to her return to civilization, rejecting tradition and creating new philosophies for herself. There is an inherent spirituality in the narrator’s ultimate conclusion to return to civilization after her mystical experience in the wild in which the narrator realizes she cannot conflate being a victim and being innocent, becoming aware through spiritual vision of her own power despite not being “innocent.”

This is another article that can work well as a foundation for explaining the narrator’s search for wholeness and unity as she combines the binary identities she faces into one middle ground. This also takes a spiritual angle, which can offer an interesting insight into possible interpretations of this journey that I can contrast my art-focused argument against/position my argument alongside. This is useful for presenting other critical explanations of the narrator’s mentality and intentions, and can lead to my providing a specifically art-focused argument.

Nealon, Jeffrey T. “The Discipline of Deconstruction.” *PMLA* 107.5 (1992): 1266-279. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

Nealon examines the process of analyzing a text through a deconstructive lens and the issue that arises in deconstructionist theory of basically

contradicting itself by making the blanketed assumption that there is no meaning or structure. He includes Derrida in his discussion of deconstructionist technique and the way we incorporate Derrida's philosophy into literary analysis, concluding that the common understanding of his philosophy in relation to literature often "fails to account for the complexities of Derrida's work" (Nealon 1268). Nealon argues that Derrida's arguments and deconstructionist philosophies became commodified and simplified for a scholarly public and that the goal of deconstructionist theory is "not a move toward neutralization" (1269) of binaries, but a "displacement of the systematics in binary opposition and the reinscription of the opposition within a larger field" (1269)—not a denial of all dichotomies but a re-examination of how they fit into a larger system of understanding and a usurping of their role as defining ideas.

I think this source is really important to defend my deconstructionist angle in a way—it's useful to have this source as support in addressing the issues with deconstructionism and the question of whether claiming there are no categorizations is in itself a system of structure.

Nuyen, A. T. "Derrida's Deconstruction: Wholeness and Différance." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 3.1 (1989): 26-38. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 Oct. 2016.

Nuyen argues that for Derrida, wholeness and totality of being are only divisible into opposing parts through a system of discrimination that is only possible within the whole itself. In order to be something, it must be possible to define what that thing is not. Nuyen relates this to deconstructionist theory by proposing that this system of differentiation by which things are defined creates identities that cannot be represented fully, leading to a discrepancy in interpretations. Rather than binaries existing separate and opposite of one another, they depend on each other and are largely related. Nuyen argues that Derrida believes everything

that is divided was once whole, and the complexities of these fragmentations and their interpretations leads to what we consider deconstructionism: the variance in interpretation of how things divide and separate themselves. The nature of a signifier is that it is only a representation and "cannot be pinned down to any single context" (Nuyen 32). Nuyen criticizes common deconstructionist analysis as leaving out Derrida's emphasis on wholeness and focusing more on the parts than their unity.

This is a really interesting angle to incorporate into my discussion of deconstructionism. I think that I can easily adapt these ideas of wholeness vs. distinction into my examination of the narrator's identity and concepts of the world. I can also use the idea of an inherent unity in division to help me reach my conclusion of the narrator's ultimate pursuit of wholeness or a new, complete identity that exists without traditional binaries.

Schaeffer, Susan Fromberg. "'It Is Time That Separates Us': Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *The Centennial Review* 18.4 (1974): 319-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 05 Oct. 2016.

Schaeffer describes the narrator's attempts to break "time barriers" between the dead and living, present and past, spiritual and physical. She argues that "to do this, the narrator, who has been given two religions by her parents, must attempt to create a third of her own; her parents' religions have failed both themselves and her" (Schaeffer 320). Schaeffer approaches the failure of two opposing categorizations through a spiritual lens, yet still concludes that the narrator's best option is to create a third category in between. The key dichotomy that Schaeffer examines is the divide between death and life: the narrator has false memories of her brother's death as a toddler and of her own abortion, wishing for a spiritual belief to bridge the disconnect between what is dead and alive. Schaeffer also explores divisions between the logical (associated with male characters, a further binary) and spiritual (associated with the

female), observing that the narrator attempts to live life logically (and fails when her rationalizations are exposed as delusions) and then spiritually in nature, concluding that the narrator finds fulfilment in neither and must create a third place where she is neither victimized by death nor life.

This is a differing approach to the narrator's attempt to bridge the gap between opposing binaries, specifically focused on death and life. This is useful for illustrating the critical conversation about the divisions in the novel and can be good set-up for me to introduce my take on it. It offers interpretations of the narrator's perspective towards her abortion and her father's death that can help me expand on those concepts in a different direction, arguing that they result from the creation of art in the novel, and also discusses gender divisions in a way that I can extend to art and deconstruction.

Thomas, Sue. "Mythic Reconception and the Mother/ Daughter Relationship in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 19.2 (1988): 73-85. Web. 6 Oct. 2016.

Thomas explores the expression of sexual desire in the narrator of *Surfacing*, noting "the psychological processes, maturational crises and cultural conditioning which may lay waste to the sexual self-expression of women" which Atwood reveals (74). The narrator conflates destruction of the environment with the vulgar Americans, while she herself is emotionless and detached, so far as to be completely detached from her own memory of sexual trauma and admired by her boyfriend as apathetic towards sex. Thomas examines the motif of "the grail" in *Surfacing* as a life-giving source and impregnation as a symbol for the hope the narrator is searching for in the novel. The narrator's choice to have Joe unwittingly impregnate her, so the narrator believes, and the visions of revitalization that the narrator then experiences "facilitate a reading of the narrator's experiences in *Surfacing* as a process of

emerging restoration to spiritual health and reproductive, creative vitality" (Thomas 79). Creation (or reproduction), rather than "Canadian chastity" or "American lustfulness," is a source of power for the narrator. The narrator is repulsed by David and Joe's lustful advances in which she believes the heart plays no role, and is haunted by memories of her mother, a protective woman "of the heart" who does not play mental games "of the brain" like David, Joe, and Anna. Anna's glamorization of herself for David's enjoyment is also off-putting to the narrator, perceiving this as a symptom of the sexual control Anna is under and the victimhood of sexuality. The narrator resolves the conflict between sexual victimization and non-sexual powerlessness by not doing something or nothing, not choosing to be sexual or chaste, but choosing to create and produce something new and therefore attain power: a "pregnant mother is apparently quite calm in the presence of an all-powerful male figure" (Thomas 83).

This is a great source to use in exploring Anna that I can use to argue that her "glamorization" of herself is a form of visual art. I can use a lot of this examination of victimized/powerful and man/woman dichotomies as foundations for my argument and I think this hits a lot of the bases that I plan to hit and then specify for my particular argument. The specific focuses on sex and spirituality are also good critical context that tie into the deconstructionist angle but can be adopted into my focus.

Ville, Jacques De. "Desire and Language in Derrida's 'Force of Law'." *ARSP: Archiv Für Rechts- Und Sozialphilosophie / Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy* 95.4 (2009): 449-73. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

This source examines critical understanding of Derrida's work *Force of Law* and Derrida's ideas of mysticism, and good/evil, and the communication of desire through language. Derrida proposes that language is used as a

reward or deterrent in order to achieve a goal: De Ville writes that for Derrida, language is used as a tool to influence through the promise of a fulfillment of desire or a threat against it. He also examines Derrida's ideas on death in comparison to Freud's concept of the ego in relation to the death drive and life drive, concluding that Derrida offers a conclusion to these questions in that there is no opposition between the death and life drive and likewise no opposition between the conservative ego instinct and sexual desire instinct. This article also looks at Derrida's deconstructionist view of language as a system of signifiers that are defined by their changeability depending on interpretation and context (iterability). The idea of dissolving or challenging structure is key: in a particular

examination of law and the ways in which it upholds structure, De Ville writes, "Law founding entails the positing of what is believed should be conserved; it therefore entails the promise of its own repetition in the future [...] Derrida seeks to draw the consequences of this structure of conservation" (463).

These deconstructionist ideals will definitely be useful in explaining the breakdown of the narrator's concept of binaries and her realization that it is necessary to shed her traditional way of thinking and categorizing the world. I think this is a helpful take on Derrida's attitudes towards language, structure, and binaries that can provide an extremely supportive context for my argument towards these same things in *Surfacing*.