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ELF *Volume 7 Table of Contents*

<i>Editor's Introduction</i> by Jay Meadows, Student Editor.....	2
<i>Commentary on "Gretchen's Shade"</i> Commentary by Nicole Martinelli, English 275 (Masterpieces of World Literature).....	3
<i>Black and White: Dance Deconstructed</i> Digital Theory Application Project by Jay Meadows, English 483 (Theory of Literary Criticism).....	4
<i>The Construction of a Play: Structuralism in Oedipus the King</i> Critical Analysis by Jacob Cooper, English 483 (Theory of Literary Criticism).....	6
<i>Critical Positioning and Annotated Bibliography</i> Critical Positioning by Kendall Henderson, English 490 (Senior Seminar).....	9

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Editor's Introduction

By Jay Meadows, Student Editor

Literature is defined in various ways by the people who discuss it. To a novelist, literature consists of novels, short stories. To a literary scholar, it consists of anthologies, the canon. To a musician, literature is a reference to various pieces of music. Literature, to me, is all of the above. It is a catch-all term which refers to any form of written, oral, musical, or bodily communication. In today's modern society, abounding in the sciences of technology, literature is studied and presented in myriad new ways.

Within the University of South Carolina Upstate's *English Literary File*, you will find many projects which present studies of literature



in various forms. There are infographics, which use pictures and quotes to explain literature. There is a dance, which explores a novella through the utilization of music and the human body. There are standard essays, which allow for the in-depth discussion of literature and what it means.

English as a discipline is ubiquitous. Its tenets and methods can be applied in almost any way you can think of.

Enjoy the *English Literary File* and what the students and faculty of USC Upstate have been working on in their academic endeavors of late.

Commentary on “Gretchen’s Shade”

By Nicole Martinelli, English 275

Contracts with the devil ignorantly made, true love found and lost, an innocent young girl corrupted by the promises of an older man – these tropes are neither new nor uncommon but they do all culminate in Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe’s *Faust*. The German play surrounding bargains made with devils give rise to dozens of popular derivations from Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” to films like *The Shining* and *Bedazzled* and even anime like *Death Note*. The piece inspires Faustian deals to be made in all sorts of media and throughout popular culture.

At its core, *Faust* may be about a man seeking to live to his fullest capacity and discover the secrets of life, but we also see who suffers for his nihilism—his love, Gretchen, the one who manages to deliver his soul from evil.

For all his deals, it is Gretchen who suffers like so many young women do in these stories of dark, handsome strangers leaving behind shining gifts and ill-kept promises, and it is in that spirit that the short story “Gretchen’s Shade” is written.

“Gretchen’s Shade” attempts to follow an old German tale from a fresh, modern, and feminine perspective. Gretchen’s point of view adapts the supernatural tale into something that absolutely any young woman walking alone down a dark street can relate to. From that first

meeting with a very forward Faust in the street, to their reunion at her neighbor’s house, this story endeavors to turn the virginal love interest into her own protagonist. The reader can take several detours to get there, but all roads eventually lead back to that shade, Faust, that she can never quite shake. Underneath the deceit, of course, Faust does love Gretchen – but never so honestly as Gretchen loves him while the young girl is lusted after and preyed upon by the older man. It’s an unfortunately common

tale that is told, and lived, time and time again. From *Lolita* to *Twilight*, the story hardly ever depicts its women making healthy decisions.

Here, as the reader, we are offered several decisions that differ from the original incarnation. As Gretchen, you may choose to speak to Faust when he initially con-

fronts her or continue on home. You can have Gretchen reveal the second box of jewels to her mother or keep it a secret. You may decline Mephistopheles’s invitation to meet Faust at Martha’s garden or agree to the liaison. Unfortunately, no matter the choice, Gretchen still ends up in Faust’s company, unaware of what his presence in her life will bring. Seeing this from Gretchen’s perspective we can see how smart and earnest she is, even in her naiveté – but the machinations of a devil are not so easily ignored.



Black and White: Dance Deconstructed

By Jay Meadows, English 483

For my multimedia project, I have chosen to choreograph and perform a dance. The dance is an interpretation of the events of the novella *Heart of Darkness* and includes the characters of Kurtz and the African mistress, both portrayed by myself. There are innumerable ways through which one could interpret this novella, but I think a dance piece is a perfect fit for me for two reasons. First, as a dancer, I am able to express the emotions and feeling I have while exploring a song, or in this case a novella, with my body. Dancing is also one of the most effortless forms of media of communication for me. Second, the novella to me is like a dance. The novella is one long narration by Marlow, as told through the eyes of an unnamed narrator. A dance is itself a narration, and the way that Marlow describes the interactions of Kurtz with the African continent, its people, and the mistress, is exactly what I see a dance to be: evocative, mysterious, and, above all, informative in some way.

While creating the dance, I looked at the novel through the lens of deconstruction theory as defined by Jacques Derrida. The binary of African and European, black and white, is prominent throughout the novella and Derrida's theory of deconstruction shows how the power struggle between Africans and Europeans can be explained by the dissolution of this binary. Through the medium of dance, I prove that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is an analysis of the binary of black and white and that through the lens of deconstruction, readers are able to see the power dynamic at play in the novel.

The song that I have chosen to use for my dance is Ezio Bosso's "The Sky Seen from

the Moon." The song lends itself to the story I want to tell in that the composer breaks the song up into sections through the use of long sections of rest between verses. Each of these verses is a different part of the dance. I also chose this song because when I listen to it I feel a sense of mystery and exploration, which is exactly the tone of Conrad's novella. As the song begins, the listener hears only one string instrument and after two verses, two string instruments play together. This to me is perfect because the sections show Kurtz exploring, his observation of the Africans, and then his interactions with the African people, particularly the African mistress. The end of the song completely flips the idea of exploration on its head, and as it fades out, listeners are given the chance to understand a sense of struggle and power shifting. This is exactly what happens between Kurtz and the



African people.

I have chosen to utilize the characters of Kurtz and the African mistress for a few simple reasons. First, Kurtz and the African mistress are the most prominent examples of Europeans and Africans in the novel. Kurtz is also the only European character of importance within the novel whom the reader sees after his interactions with the African people. The African mistress is important because she exemplifies the power of the African people. Conrad writes of her, "She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" (60). No other African character within the novel is described with nearly as much detail as she is and she also has an

obvious relationship with Kurtz. The two are easily an example of the deconstruction of binaries, which is the final reason I have chosen to use these characters.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction has many important qualities. Of the most important of these is that of binaries. The binary most readily seen in *Heart of Darkness* is that of black and white as portrayed through characters of European and African heritage. Traditionally, because of European imperialism, the binary of black and white shows that white dominates black. Conrad deconstructs this commonly seen binary in the novella and shows that black can and often does dominate black and that both Europeans and Africans are affected by the interaction between the races and the deconstruction of this binary. Kurtz goes to the Congo in search of ivory, but when he arrives in Africa, he is enveloped in the culture there and this immersion corrupts his European power. The last thing that Conrad writes about Kurtz while he is alive shows the destruction that Africa has brought to this man, "He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: 'The horror! The horror!'" (69). Kurtz then dies. This is only after he has been living and interacting with the Africans in the Congo.

Imperialism's goal is for the mother country to go in and control the people there. In this novella, the opposite happens, thus breaking down the traditional binary. At the end of the novel, the African mistress is left alive and saddened by the passing of her lover Kurtz, and Kurtz is seemingly killed by the vision of the Congo and the atrocities he was forced to enact there as well as the culture he was immersed in.



Where the white traditionally dominates and outlives the black, the white dies and the black is left saddened and changed by the white.

In the dance, I show the above binary in a very simple way. When I am wearing all white, I represent the character of Kurtz. I then don black clothes to represent the African mistress. The third part of the dance shows me in a white top and black pants. This shows the white dominating the black, but I end this movement of the dance by completing a shoulder stand which turns me upside down and puts the black on top of the white, showing the inversion of the binary. I end the dance in all black to show the complete breakdown of the binary and the death of Kurtz.

This dance piece is a simplified look at the effects which the binary of black and white have upon the characters of *Heart of Darkness*. My dance ends with Kurtz dying and the African mistress alive and well, seen by the disappearance of the white clothes by the end. This is my demonstration of the fact that within the novella, Conrad breaks down the traditional white over black binary. The dance is a means through which a different form of communication, literally body language, can communicate quite easily the complexities of binaries, imperialism, and deconstruction. This novella and this dance are a cleverly created insight into the theory of deconstruction put forward by Jacques Derrida.

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The Construction of a Play: Structuralism in Oedipus the King

By Jacob Cooper, English 483

In *Oedipus, the King*, a play by Sophocles, we are presented with the mythical king who defeated the Sphinx and now rules over Thebes. However, he got the position by killing his biological father, Laius, at a crossroads years before the play takes place. A major purpose or meaning is to present the great irony surrounding Oedipus and his rule. However, there is a systematic construction, or structure, through which the play gets its meaning across. To understand the meaning, we must first understand the structure. Whether it be through the layout of specific scenes or the order of the scenes through the entire play, the structure is what gives the play the ability to make its meaning possible; structure is the catalyst for meaning.

Before we get to the structure and the significance or point of a scene, first we must find what the structure is. Structuralists say that “form is inevitably bound up with meaning; structure, however, is what makes meaning possible.” (Bertens 47). They are correct. Without a structure to give form to meaning, meaning is unable to be presented. Only through structure are stories crafted, and it is the vehicle to integrate the purpose or message. The structure of stories is this: narration. Structurally, “narrative belongs with the sentence without ever being reducible to the sum of its sentences: a narrative is a large sentence, just as any declarative sentence is, in a certain way, the outline of a little narrative”

(Barthes 241). Narrative is involved in the sentences of a work, the basic blocks of its structure. But it is the culmination of these sentences, these building blocks, that make up the whole and ultimately give meaning to the work.

Basically, a narrative “appears as a succession of tightly interlocking mediate and immediate elements; dystaxy initiates a ‘horizontal’ reading, while integration superimposes on it a ‘vertical’ reading. There is a sort of structural ‘limping,’ a constant interplay of potentials, whose ‘falls’ impart ‘tone’ or energy to the narrative. Each unit is perceived as a surface texture, while an in-depth dimension is maintained, and in this way narrative ‘moves along’” (Barthes 270). There is an overarching connection to a work such as a film or text, in this case a play, which enables meaning.

The narrative is the broad connection of sentences or units, and it is these units that make up the structure. Multiple levels of meaning are assigned, not just the immediate or surface. A superior level is made up of these lower levels or units of the text that act as the skeleton. The construction of these units forms the structure. Again, it is this structure that gives the intention of a medium to expose itself. This theory in Structuralism can be applied to *Oedipus the King*.

One of the points of Sophocles’s play is to demonstrate the many ironies that are involved in Oedipus’s life. An example of this



Dimitri Tavadze, Tskhinvali Khetagurov Theater; Sophocles – Oedipus the King 1968, CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons

comes early on in the play starting at line 301, during a conversation between Oedipus and the Chorus of Theban Elders. It starts with Oedipus saying,

But now
I possess the ruling power which Laius held
in earlier days. I have his bed and wife—
she would have borne his children, if his
hopes
to have a son had not been disappointed.
(301-305)

These lines not only tell us that Oedipus is acknowledging his replacement for Laius as Jocasta's husband, but also that Laius and Jocasta have no children besides Oedipus himself, though he does not know that. He continues with "Children from a common mother might have linked / Laius and myself. But as it turned out, / Fate swooped down onto his head" (306-309). Here Oedipus is stating that Laius was a victim of fate. Lastly, Oedipus says,

So now,
I'll fight on his behalf, as if this matter
concerned my own father, and I will strive
to do everything I can to find him,
the man who spilled his blood, and thus
avenge [Laius]. (309-313)

Oedipus claims to do everything he can to find Laius's murderer, and vows that he has taken up the cause as if it was his own father. The structure of these lines is important in portraying the irony in Oedipus's quest. They match the exact specifications of Oedipus's fate as he was told by Apollo's oracle. Oedipus has replaced his father as the ruler of Thebes (after killing Laius), and he becomes king by marrying the queen, Jocasta. It is clear that Oedipus doesn't know that Laius and Jocasta are his parents, and it is clear that he doesn't realize that he is, in fact, Laius's murderer, but readers do.

The biggest irony is that Oedipus calls Laius a victim of fate, which is actually true. Oedipus does not realize how true his words

ring, and that he is as much a victim as he is an agent. All of this information is given as Oedipus is starting his investigation at the beginning of the play. This is important for the structure because it sets up the major irony, the overall meaning that is meant to be portrayed. Its placement is necessary to make this a tragedy composed entirely out of irony.

In fact, irony drives the actions of virtually every character in the play. In another important scene, Jocasta tells Oedipus to ignore oracles after he relays the oracle's claim that he is the murderer. In her attempt to comfort him and disprove the oracles' power, she tells him about the prophecy that Laius would die by his son's hands, but he died by robbers instead at a place where three crossroads meet. After this, Oedipus is clearly shaken. Oedipus explains his fate to Jocasta that he was to kill his father and marry his mother, the same prophecy as Jocasta recited to him. He continues,

When I heard that, I ran away from Corinth.
From then on I thought of it just as a place
beneath the stars. I went to other lands,
so I would never see that prophecy fulfilled,
the abomination of my evil fate. (955-959)

The scene's placement is important for the structure of the play. It repeats the irony, bringing it back to the forefront of the focus. Oedipus tries to defy his fate by leaving his family in Corinth. However, it is this attempt to defy his fate that ultimately brings it to fruition. And this scene demonstrates that Oedipus is starting to realize that. Having Jocasta repeat the prophecy in an attempt to comfort Oedipus after he is told that he is the murderer is crucial in reinforcing the irony of the play. This repetition of the prophecy leads to Oedipus's uncertainty, which in turn begins to unveil the irony to the central character. Oedipus needs to realize that he is the murderer, that his fate is realized. This is the turning point of the play, the beginning of the revelation. This is a component of tragedy, and it is a stepping stone in the unraveling of this great irony.

Finally comes the revelation and the conclusion. The revelation comes at the end of the play because it is what the play was about, the unraveling of irony. This tragic irony about defying fate is the point of Sophocles's play. When Oedipus truly understands that his attempt to stop destiny is what actually caused it, he says,

Ah, so it all came true. It's so clear now.
O light, let me look at you one final time,
a man who stands revealed as cursed by
birth,
cursed by my own family, and cursed
by murder where I should not kill. (1418-
1422)

Oedipus realizes that he is a cursed man, a victim of fate. In his mention of light, he is not only talking about his sight. He is also referring to the revelation, to the truth. The truth is he is a corrupted man, and he wishes for nothing more than to block it out. Not just the fact that he killed his father and married his mother. No, he wishes to have awareness itself eradicated. The placement of this statement is important because it leads to the major consequence of this tragic truth.

Oedipus blinds himself after Jocasta commits suicide. When he is questioned on why he chose self-blinding rather than simply killing himself, he tells the Chorus that he won't be able to look into his family's eyes in Hades. He even says he would make himself deaf if he had the knowledge to do so. Oedipus continues,

I'd make a dungeon of this wretched body,
so I would never see or hear again.
For there is joy in isolated thought,
completely sealed off from a world of pain
(1638-1641)

Again, he is trying to eliminate awareness of the truth. Solace lies in solitude.

The suffering of Oedipus is necessary for the conclusion of this play because it is the

meaning. His suffering is the culmination of his irony. His revelation and suffering are what the scenes, the narration were building towards. From the investigation to the gradual unraveling to the revelation and conclusion, this narration was aimed at the destruction of Oedipus. Each scene was meticulously placed, the position or structure of each scene was necessary in achieving the meaning. The intention and impact of this play wouldn't work otherwise. Simply, structure is "that which enables meaning to emerge" (Bertens 47).

In Sophocles's play *Oedipus the King*, we are shown the fall of the mythical king of Thebes. The irony of fate, and the irony brought about by defying it, are the causes of his devastation. The irony surrounding Oedipus and his topple from the grace and admiration of his kingdom is the focal point of this play; it is the reason this play exists. However, the enlightenment of this irony is brought about through the structure of the play. This is achieved through the sentences and placements of scenes by narration. From Oedipus's investigation to the exile of the conclusion, each scene, each unit that builds them up, are placed with purpose. They have to be. Meaning emerges through the use of structure.

Works Cited

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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.

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*.