Nonlinearity and Incarnation
in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*
and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

by

Rebecca Sutton Koeser
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

_____
Walter Kalaidjian
Advisor

_____
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese
Committee Member

_____
John Johnston
Committee Member

_____
Ronald Schuchard
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Dean of the Graduate School

_____
Date

Nonlinearity and Incarnation
in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*
and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

by

Rebecca Sutton Koeser
B.A., Wheaton College, 1998

Advisor: Walter Kalaidjian, Ph.D.

An Abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

2006

In "Nonlinearity and Incarnation in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Susan Howe's 'The Nonconformist's Memorial,'" I argue that nonlinearity is present in both language and literature, whether printed or electronic, and investigate two specific cases of poetic nonlinearity in printed works. Nonlinearity in language generally has been identified in, or at least suggested by, the work of a wide array of different literary and media theorists, and the comments of both scholars and poets reveal that nonlinearity is present to an even greater extent in poetry than in other written forms. In particular, this nonlinearity is evident in the decentered, linked structure of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which demands that its readers explore the space of the text and discover connections of various kinds within the *Quartets*. In "The Nonconformist's Memorial" nonlinearity is a component of the nonconformist textual practices Susan Howe employs, which implicate and include the reader in the text's confession of nonconformity. In both instances, Walter Ong's notion of secondary orality is a significant component of poetic nonlinearity, and the hypertextual structure of lexia and link is a useful model for approaching these nonlinear poems. Finally, both poems include reference to the Christian Incarnation, which is itself an act of divine communication that cannot be fully conveyed by text alone; the nonlinear structures of these two works create the possibility for a fuller communication of the message of Incarnation than is possible with traditional texts.

Nonlinearity and Incarnation
in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*
and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

by

Rebecca Sutton Koeser
B.A., Wheaton College, 1998

Advisor: Walter Kalaidjian, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

2006

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Susan Howe for the gracious hospitality she showed me when she allowed me to visit her and interview her in her own home. It is a special privilege to write on the works of a poet who is still living, and that privilege is doubled when the poet is as kind and generous as Susan Howe.

I would also like to thank W. Bradford Paley for allowing me to use his TextArc program for this dissertation.

This dissertation would not exist in its present state without invaluable feedback and assistance from Walter Kalaidjian, who helped me define and refine the project from the beginning; John Johnston, who turned me on to Marshall McLuhan and media theory in the first place; Ron Schuchard, for his careful eye; and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for her perception and precision.

I owe a special thanks to all the friends and family members who have encouraged and put up with me throughout this process, specifically: the ladies of the Beck Center—Alice Hickcox, Erika Farr, and Tavishi Bhasin—for their encouragement, interest, and feedback; Louisa McCullough, who coached me to the finish; my parents, sister, and grandparents, for their many prayers and encouraging words; and, most of all, to Greg for his unfailing patience and love.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1. Nonlinearity in Language and Poetry

Our minds are still moving, and backwards as well as forward; the nearest we get to truth at any given moment, is perhaps, only an idea—a dash of truth somewhat flavouring the indeterminate substance of our minds.

- Laura Riding

Nonlinearity is a burgeoning field in the sciences and mathematics, and is beginning to capture the attention of literary scholars interested in media theory and hypertexts. Physicist Lui Lam describes nonlinearity as a "quiet revolution" that touches "every discipline in the natural and social sciences" (1, iii). Unlike the more sensational revolutions of quantum mechanics and relativity, which are only applicable at the extremes of light speed and microscopic size, nonlinearity is relevant to the whole spectrum. Likewise, an understanding of literary and linguistic nonlinearity holds potential relevance for every level of language and literature.

In both mathematics and the physical world, "linear equations are the exception rather than the rule" (Campbell et al. 374); even nature itself is "intrinsically nonlinear" (374). Linearity is the result of a predictable cause-and-effect chain, and in mathematics this results in complex linear systems that can be segmented for analysis; nonlinear systems are the result of a much more complicated causality that involves feedback between causes and effects and, as a result, such systems cannot be simplified for analysis (374). The areas of nonlinear science most familiar to those outside the mathematic and scientific communities include fractals, chaos theory, pattern formation, and complex systems. These nonlinear structures and systems seem utterly chaotic and random to the casual eye; certain nonlinear dynamical systems exhibit "deterministic chaos" and generate random behavior by their very structure (376). In spite of their chaotic appearances, these systems can be described mathematically—although often the

actual equations are beyond us; in the past, "nonlinear was nearly synonymous with unsolvable" (374). Nonlinear equations can be problematic because of the number of variables, or because feedback amplifies noise and uncertainty, resulting in a sensitivity to initial conditions which may be difficult to measure (376); in other cases, the equations are known but are too complicated to compute. Nonlinear science is a fascinating field on its own, but ideas of nonlinearity also seem to offer new directions for literature as we move out of the linear era of the printing press and into the nonlinear age of electronic text.

Nonlinearity in Language

As a society, we have been using language in mostly linear modes for many centuries, and it is only in the past century that we have come to recognize printed text as one medium among others, and our exposure to electronic texts, in parallel with the post-structuralist movement, has begun to challenge our assumptions about language. Language is a deeply complicated system, and even at the level of words there is evidence of chaos and nonlinearity.

What exactly does it mean to claim that language itself is nonlinear? To begin to understand nonlinearity as it applies to language, we must first examine the ways we think of and use language as if it were linear. Certainly, no one argues or claims overtly that language is linear; but centuries of the influence of print have led us to assume that language is linear, and we treat it as such without consideration. It should be admitted that thinking of language as linear may be a useful approximation, similar to the fact that the movement of a pendulum under certain constraints may be described by a linear model (Campbell et al. 375), or that Newton's equations for physical motion approximate

the more complicated equations Einstein elaborated: Newton's equations yield accurate results for the majority of cases, and they are much easier to compute. The cases where the approximations are inaccurate warn us to be careful, and I would argue that, in terms of language, literary writing and poetry in particular are the least likely to conform to this approximation of language as linear.

Jerome McGann suggests that the basic, elemental components of language, such as words, phrases, and even morphemic and phonemic units, might be thought of as the "operating system of language" (115). This metaphor illustrates the complexity at the heart of language. As prevalent as computer use is today, few users pay much attention to their computer's operating system until it breaks or causes some kind of problem, and even fewer users actually understand the operating systems they use to any significant degree. In language, as with computers, we have a tendency to simply take the operating system for granted. This is a fault that both readers and critics are guilty of, and perhaps it is excusable for readers; one cannot always be thinking of every level of structure and complexity in the systems one uses. However, for those who devote themselves to the study of language and literature, it is vital to be more aware of the function of this fundamental level of language that makes all other language use and operation possible.

When we do not think carefully about these detailed and complex levels of language, it is easy to misconstrue how language operates; specifically, in this case, we tend to think abstractly of language as if it were linear. At a very simple, physical level, we treat language as linear when we read from left to right on a page, and from front to back within a book.[1] Of course, the letters and words on a page do not literally make a

---

[1] Admittedly, not all cultures print their texts in this fashion; words may be read from top to bottom and right to left, but the idea of the text as a continuing line is still in operation.

line, but we conceptualize it as one long, continuing line interrupted by paragraphs and chapters; a line that wraps a certain way on the page, simply because of the constraints of the physical object and the way it is created; in this instance, the size of the page and the kind of type used by the printer.

The content of language may be linear, as well, so in addition to physical linearity, we have a kind of conceptual linearity. For instance, a narrative progression may proceed chronologically from beginning to end in a book such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), where the story begins with the title character's birth and continues through his life sequentially. Chronological progression is one of the more obvious kinds of conceptual linearity, and writers have experimented with it extensively. Some authors employ circular narrative progression; for instance, in *Tar Baby* (1981), Toni Morrison repeatedly presents the same scenes through the eyes of different characters. In another experiment with temporal flow, Martin Amis exploits the concept of linear time by reversing the direction of *Time's Arrow* (1991) for a profound and moving effect.

Narrative writing is not the only kind that can be conceptually linear; non-narrative writing is often just as linear. For example, the argumentative or expository prose that is taught in schools lays out a form with a specific, linear progression. Indeed, there are assumptions of linearity in certain models of communication that treat language as a conduit for information between a sender and a receiver. As Walter Ong notes, the very term media "suggests that communication is a pipeline transfer of units of material called 'information' from one place to another" (*OL* 176). It should be noted that this model may be a useful approximation, since language can certainly be employed in such

a fashion; but this is not the whole picture of what language is and does, and it is much less helpful as a model for literary language, since literature is not merely concerned with information transfer.

These are just a few examples to illustrate the many ways that we tend to use and think of language in linear modes, both physically and conceptually, at the level of paragraph and sentence or an entire written work, whether an essay or a novel. To some degree, we also have a tendency to treat individual words in a similar fashion: we prefer words to map directly to definitions. In certain fields, such as the sciences, where precision is both useful and necessary, the ideal for language is that there should be a one-to-one correspondence between word and meaning. Dictionaries, with their insistence on correct spellings of words and numbered and labeled definitions, are a concretization of this tendency. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan makes the case that dictionaries and even grammar are a direct result of print technology.[2] Walter Ong also remarks on the connection between print culture and dictionaries, and notes that "words ... have layers of meaning," many of them irrelevant at any given time (*OL* 46). It might seem that human communication would be less error prone if we were able to chart and diagram the meanings of words, but without the complexity of subtlety, nuance, and ambiguity, both literature and our everyday conversations would be far less interesting.

---

2 McLuhan elaborates that "technology is explicitness … the spelling out of one thing at a time" (*GG* 56); in relation to language, this explicitness results in the "drive for fixity of spelling and grammar" that McLuhan sees as inevitable in the printed form of any language (*GG* 751). The typewriter and concomitant sales of dictionaries present strong evidence for the "pressure of Gutenberg technology toward 'correct' or uniform spelling and grammar" (*GG* 606). McLuhan contrasts this with the sensibilities of Medieval writers and their attitudes towards word definitions and grammatical structure; he states categorically, "nobody ever made a grammatical error in a nonliterate society" (*GG* 779).

Print technologies and dictionaries have accustomed us to thinking of words as having set, articulated definitions; however, research in cognitive science suggests that the human brain, which operates in a massively nonlinear fashion with extensive feedback loops, actually stores meanings of words in a structure more analogous to an encyclopedia than a dictionary, filled with word associations and connotations and remembered usages. Researchers have demonstrated that "metaphor, and to a lesser extent metonymy, is the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning" (Gibbs 17). This finding suggests that carefully articulated definitions for words, such as those found in dictionaries, are not as natural to human language use as we may assume. Our internal understanding of words may be much more chaotic and associative than such precise definitions.

When we examine language more closely, we see that it is far more complicated than our linear models and usages would suggest. Words do not have one-to-one mappings to meanings, like mathematical functions; instead, meanings are multiple and malleable over time. This illusion of linearity, created and perpetuated in part by the codex book, is one that most of society seems to have adopted without much consideration. Linearity is a useful abstraction that may make it easier to use words on a day-to-day basis; perhaps we would go mad if we were constantly aware of the chaotic history of each word's development and its many meanings as we hear and use those words in mundane conversations. We cannot always be aware of the inner workings of the operating system of language, even as we make use of the functionality made possible by that very operating system. However, just as a computer programmer or a systems analyst must have a better understanding of the operating system than a computer user,

those who work closely with language and literature must take a more deliberate and careful approach to language and words, and avoid reliance on incomplete and approximate models.

The nonlinearity of language is apparent to many different theorists of language and textuality. Similar ideas on the complexity of words and the assumptions in the codex form are present in the works of theorists as diverse as the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson; post-structuralists Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Mikhail Bakhtin; media theorist Walter Ong; and electronic text experts Jerome McGann and Espen Aarseth. These theorists may use varying terminology, and approach language from diverse vantage points and with varying purposes, but there are striking commonalities in their work, which contribute to our understanding of the complexity inherent in the use and function of language.

Nonlinearity and Poststructuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure developed the idea of language as a system of signs, rather than symbols which directly represent objects. Saussure's structuralism aspires to be a

Figure 1-1. Saussure's diagram of the linguistic sign
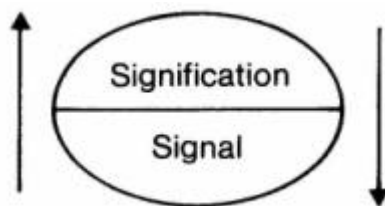
more scientific approach to the system of language that underlies all our spoken and written utterances. Saussure conceived of language as a system of arbitrary correlations between meanings and signals, and his diagram of the linguistic sign expresses this one-to-one correspondence (113), which in mathematical terms would result in a linear equation. Later theorists have extended Saussure's work, or developed their own theories in part by elaborating on the flaws of structuralism; Jakobson develops Saussure's understanding of language further, while

Lacan and Derrida work from the failings of structuralism. Working in a separate

tradition, Bakhtin comes to similar conclusions about the instability of language.

Roman Jakobson's fundamental argument is for a "bipolar structure of language"

(111), or two different methods for arranging linguistic signs: combination and selection,

which he famously maps to the tropes of metonymy and metaphor, respectively.

Jakobson suggests that, while Saussure understood these two operations, he only

recognized the mode of combination or "temporal sequence" and, as a result, he

"succumbed to the traditional belief in the linear character of language" (99). Jakobson

takes the linear theory of Saussure and complicates it, giving us a sense of language

creation as two dimensional; the axis of combination or connection runs parallel to the

sentence itself, Saussure's line, but there is another axis orthogonal to the sentence, that

of selection, a range of alternate possibilities for every word used. Jakobson complicates

our understanding of language slightly, moving from mere linear combination to a two-

dimensional scheme.

Like Jakobson, Jacques Lacan makes use of metaphor and metonymy in his

reaction against the limitations of Saussure's theory. In "The agency of the letter in the

unconscious or reason since Freud," Lacan takes Saussure's formula of signification,

S / s, "the signifier over the signified" (149), as his point of departure, but as soon as he

presents this formula, he begins to complicate it. For Saussure, there is clear distinction

between these terms, and the bar between them acts as a barrier; Lacan argues that there

are cases when "the signifier enters the signified" (151), and it is possible to use a

signifier "to signify *something quite other* than what it says" (155, emphasis original).

To illustrate his complication of the Saussurean formula, Lacan suggests a recursive

image for language; he describes "the signifying chain" as the "rings of a necklace that is

$$f(S \dots S') \, S \cong S \, (—) \, s$$

$$f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right) S \cong S \, (+) \, s$$

Figure 1-2. Lacan's equations for metonymy and metaphor

a ring in another necklace made of rings" (153). Lacan takes Saussure's formula of direct correspondence in the linguistic sign and extends it, developing equations to express the relation of signifiers which generate meaning in metonymy and metaphor, and the subsequently transformed correspondence between the signifier and the signified (164). As with Jakobson, the literary tropes of metaphor and metonymy are useful tools, which Lacan uses to complicate Saussure's simple formula further, elaborating the connections, interactions, and elisions within language that they make possible, and which are not accounted for by Saussurean semiotics.

Lacan refers specifically to linearity in language in his evocation of the uncertainty in the relation between signifier and signified. He describes this uncertainty as "an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (154). Lacan views Saussure's diagram of language as the "intermediary between thought and sound" (Saussure 110, 111) as indicative of this uncertainty; the two "wavy lines" represent a "double flux" marked by "vertical dotted lines supposedly confining segments of correspondence" (Lacan
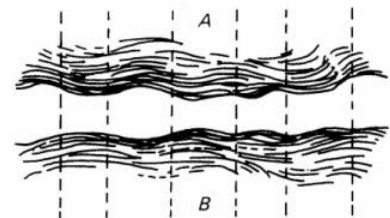
Figure 1-3. Saussure's diagram of language connecting thought and sound

154). Lacan takes issue with Saussure's continued insistence on linear correspondence. Saussure sees the chain of discourse as linear, whether it is an audible "emission by a single voice" (154), or a visual line, with its "horizontal position in our writing" (154); Lacan responds that "if this linearity is necessary, in fact, it is not sufficient," and elaborates that this linearity applies "only in the direction in which it is orientated in

time" (154), and thus it is only significant in languages where the order of words determines their function in a sentence. Lacan argues that "all our experience runs counter to this linearity" (154), and suggests a much more fluid model of language, that of "anchoring points" in the midst of flux. Lacan presents a picture of signification as a chaotic, recursive process.

Different aspects of linearity in language and writing are evident in the work of Jacques Derrida. Derrida is interested in the limitations of the book form, and thus with nonlinearity. Like Lacan, Derrida touches on Saussure's ideas about language, but he approaches language with a philosophical bent. He attributes "Saussure's entire theory of the 'linearity of the signifier'" (72) to a linear understanding of history rooted in Western philosophy from Aristotle to Hegel, an understanding that designates time "in terms of spatial movement or of the now" (72). Derrida blames this linear conception for both "the linearization of writing, and ... the linearist concept of speech" (72). Derrida admits that temporality is necessary to discourse, but contests that the modern Western understanding of time, which he sees as implicit in Saussure's theories, is faulty.

Derrida suggests that this linear model be replaced with one of what he calls pluri-dimensionality. Specifically, he proposes the "mythogram" as an alternative to linear signification, a "writing that spells its symbols pluri-dimensionally" and in which "meaning is not subjected to successivity" (85). Derrida claims the linearity in written language is "not loss or absence but the *repression* of pluri-dimensional thought" (86, emphasis mine). The use of the word "repression" and the additional claim that "writing in the narrow sense ... is rooted in a past of nonlinear writing" (85) suggest that Derrida sees traces of pluri-dimensionality even in the linear writing of the book. For Derrida,

recent revolutions in philosophy, science, and literature are significant enough that they may "gradually destroy[] the linear model" (87), and he claims that "what is thought today cannot be written according to the line and the book" (87), despite the fact that these new writings and thoughts, including his own, are often published in book form.[3] It seems clear that Derrida's pluri-dimensionality is a kind of nonlinearity, and this notion adds to our understanding of language as nonlinear.

Mikhail Bakhtin offers yet another understanding of the function and interaction of words, but one that is still complicated, chaotic, and nonlinear. Bakhtin describes language principally in terms of stratification and by means of the two contrary forces that he labels "centrifugal," tending towards unity and centralization, and "centripetal," decentralization and disunification, tending towards more chaotic language. He claims that any "national language" is stratified into dialects and jargons according to various kinds of social and professional groups and fashions. For Bakhtin, language is continually in flux; he claims that "any utterance" can be shown as "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (272). There are different presences and forces at work in language, and language itself is constantly changing, and being pulled in different directions by centrifugal and centripetal forces. The possibilities for language to change over long periods of time are further evident in Bakhtin's ideas of unfinalizability and great time. These two opposing tendencies towards unity and chaos that Bakhtin identifies provide us with yet another set of axes to complicate our multi-dimensional understanding of language.

---

3 Derrida seems to propose that there is a strong correspondence between linear writing and the codex book form; however, his own work undercuts that idea. Derrida has published extensively in book form, and he often makes use of a distinctive, nonlinear style as part of his argument. The correspondence between physical form and the linearity of the content seems an unnecessary generalization.

Nonlinearity and Media Theory

Jerome McGann is a theorist of textuality who combines theories of language with practical experience from working with electronic text collections. In *Radiant Textuality* (2001), McGann examines the connections between printed and electronic texts in order to expose the underlying functions of texts. He claims that all textuality should be seen as having a radiant and decentered structure (25). For McGann, characterizing traditional, printed texts as static and linear in contrast to digital texts as open and interactive is reductive. He illustrates this false split by showing that terminology normally used only for electronic texts is also relevant to printed texts. He says that both kinds of texts are already "marked up" (139), and that many digital text projects have failed to expose our assumptions about texts (142), or to, in effect, "reveal codes" (144). McGann suggests that the page space is "a kind of graphic interface" (199), one we are so accustomed to that we fail to recognize it as such. A text like a magazine or a codex is presented in a specific way; it is "marked up" and must be "parsed" in order to be read (145). He comments that we have come to think of prose as "a genre of transparency" that transmits "noise-free information" (110), which is another version of the information conduit model of communication. As McGann works to reveal the codes of the codex form, he comments that even apparently linear texts have "residues" of nonlinearity in the form of footnotes, glosses, and the like (148). McGann declares that "textual ambivalence" is present even at "graphical, presemantic levels" (145), and claims that "texts are not self-identical," although their ambiguities work in "precise and determinate ways" (149); he even compares texts to "fractal derivations," which are iterative and recursive (151). McGann uses electronic texts as a foil to expose

our assumptions about how printed texts function, and proposes a radical new understanding of all textuality that is profoundly nonlinear.

Espen Aarseth is another theorist of the book who draws on many kinds of electronic texts and even moves beyond the realm of what most scholars would consider literature into the analysis electronic games. Aarseth's work is particularly useful because he is very careful with his terminology. He briefly addresses the potential confusion caused by the term nonlinear, and instead of using a term that seems problematic to him, he appropriates the term "ergodic" from physics. Aarseth characterizes ergodic literature as works in which "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (*Cybertext* 1). He also uses the term cybertext, and defines the text "as a machine ... a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal signs" (*Cybertext* 21). Like McGann, Aarseth points out that the boundaries between electronic and printed texts are artificial. Aarseth begins with the premise that there is no essential difference "between paper texts and computer texts ... beyond the obvious differences of appearances" (*Cybertext* 17). He elaborates that "writing always has been a spatial activity ... ergodic textuality has been practiced as long as linear writing" (*Cybertext* 9); in fact, Aarseth says, "many of the forms of computer-based textuality have more in common with some of the paper media than with each other" (*Cybertext* 19). In relation to these different definitions of nonlinear and ergodic textuality, Aarseth takes a moment to consider the "implied corollary of linear textuality," and he comes to the surprising conclusion that the codex form itself does not have strongly linear tendencies.

> How can a text be linear? Clearly, the physical properties of the codex is
> not enough to ensure it ... any book can be opened at any page and can be

started at any point. The book form, then, is intrinsically neither linear nor
nonlinear but, more precisely, random access (to borrow from computer
terminology). The book is well suited to linear discourse but is just as
accommodating toward nonlinear discourse, as an encyclopedia or a
forking-path story. ... Even hypertext can be a much stronger linear
medium than the codex. (*Cybertext* 46)

Aarseth deduces that, since this linearity is not intrinsic to the codex form, its

"dominance" must be "primarily an ideological one," possibly even one that goes back to

the time of "the more strictly linear papyrus scroll" (*Cybertext* 47), and suggests that the

codex structure itself is an important step in the development of nonlinearity. Aarseth

provides us with useful terminology for specific kinds of nonlinearity, and he also

illustrates the potential for nonlinearity in various forms of printed and electronic texts.

The philosopher, theologian, and media theorist Walter Ong approaches language

from yet another angle, looking at the cultural impact of textual technologies. In *Orality*

and Literacy (1982), Ong focuses on the shift from oral culture to manuscript culture in

order to analyze the different ways these kinds of communication affect society and

human thinking. Ong emphasizes the transitory nature of spoken language, since "sound

exists only when it is going out of existence" (*OL* 71), and illustrates this with the famous

Homeric phrase of "winged words," which Ong interprets as suggestive of "evanescence,

power, and freedom" (*OL* 77). Ong argues that writing "is not a mere appendage to

speech," but rather that "it moves speech from the oral-aural to a new sensory world, that

of vision," and as a result, "it transforms speech and thought" (*OL* 85). As a more

permanent form of communication, writing creates the possibility of "'context-free'

language" or "'autonomous' discourse" which is "detached from its author" (*OL* 78),

something which is impossible when the speaker must be physically present to

communicate. Although Ong focuses most of his attention on the shift from oral society to manuscript culture, he spares some attention for print culture. Ong claims that "the illusion that logic is a closed system has been encouraged by writing and even more by print" (*OL* 169). He also elaborates on the visual changes begun by manuscript technology, which are further extended by print technology; "print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did ... print locks words into position in this space. Control of position is everything in print" (*OL* 121).[4] Since "typographic space works ... also on the literary imagination" (*OL* 128), this visual shift and the emphasis on the position of text is particularly relevant to the study of poetry. Ong also provides us with the useful idea of secondary orality; he claims that electronic media, such as radio and television, have "deepened the commitment of the word to space ... and ... brought consciousness to a new age of secondary orality" (*OL* 135), which he elsewhere labels "residual orality" and "literate orality" (*OL* 160). Marshall McLuhan makes a compelling argument for the connection between linearity and the printing press (*GG*), and this suggests that any movement away from the strict, visual ordering of print technology, such as the shift Ong identifies in secondary orality, is likely to erode the textual linearity engendered by the printing press. Ong's analysis of orality and literacy gives us yet another set of axes by which to orient language, that of sound and vision, and his idea of secondary orality extends the relation between these two realms into our own technological era.

---

4 It is interesting to note that the technologies of electronic text seem to be extending this spatialization of language even further, as authors work for more efficient and effective ways to control the position and appearance of their texts. In fact, one prominent website for controlling the appearance of web pages is actually named "Position is Everything" (Gallant and Bergevin).

As we have seen, different aspects of the complicated nature of language and textuality are evident to many different theorists and scholars. Jakobson makes us aware that constructing phrases involves the axes of selection and combination. Lacan pictures language as a recursive chain of signification. Derrida provides us with the idea of pluri-dimensionality and nonlinear time. Bakhtin examines the social forces at work to change language over time, and Ong addresses the differences between the spoken and written word. Aarseth and McGann extend this work by looking specifically at the codex form with reference to electronic texts. All of these ideas add to our understanding of the many forces at work in a single word, in a sentence, and in any kind of text.

Nonlinearity in Poetry

An understanding of nonlinearity is particularly useful to the study of poetry. While nonlinearity is inherent to some degree in all language, nonlinearity is more evident in some kinds of language than others. The illusion of linearity, which has become so familiar that we often fail to recognize it, is closely related to the technologies of writing and the printing press, and the related ideas of closure and text as object.

Poetry is an ancient genre, and its history extends back before the written word; the origins of poetry are rooted in an oral world of voice and music. Lyric poetry is "as old as recorded literature" (Johnson 173), and the origins of oral poetry can be found in religious ritual and mystical experience (174), where the repetitive, rhythmic sounds granted a sense of "power to the words and actions of rituals" (Lord 211). Poetry's connection to music is evident in the etymology of the word lyric, which is derived from a musical instrument, the lyre (*OED*), and even today is still used to refer to the words of popular music.

The technology of writing instigated a significant shift in poetry. According to John Hollander, "all poetry is originally oral, and the earliest inscriptions of it were clearly ways of preserving material after the tradition of recitation had changed or been lost" (250). However, that changed very quickly, and the written form of poetry became more and more significant, providing new and different modes of expression such as visual poetry and pattern poetry. Once poetry was written down, it began to be "composed for the eye as well as, or more than, for the ear" to such an extent that one could claim "all printed poetry is visual poetry in a broad sense" (Berry, "Visual Poetry" 335). It may be a common perception that visual poetry is something new and experimental, but this is not the case; poets began experimenting with new media as soon as they became available. There is evidence in Cretan and Egyptian texts that suggests there may have been pattern poetry written as early as 700 BC (Higgins), and Optatian's *versus intexti*, from around 325 AD, provide us several examples of visual poetry (Doria). In the sixteenth century, George Puttenham made a systematic catalogue of the various kinds of patterns used in poetry, including the "square-shaped poem" which "even today, we overlook as being a trivial consequence of typographical necessities" (Hollander 261). As manuscript technology was replaced by the printing press, poetry continued to change according to the possibilities of the media. McLuhan credits the printing press with "separating poetry from song, and prose from oratory" (*UM* 399). Indeed, the physical form of the codex functions as a kind of limit for lyric poetry, as evidenced by the fact that "the overwhelming majority of lyric poems are meant to fit on a codex page," in order to "meet the reader's eye as a simultaneous apprehensible whole" (Berry, "Visual Poetry" 335). As poets are well aware, the visual form of a poem significantly affects

how a poem is read, a fact which is clearly evident in many varieties of written and printed poetry.

Poets have adapted their work to written form, and experimented with the possibilities of written and printed texts, but there is still a tension between the oral and visual aspects of poetry. This is evident in the history of poetry, as poets variously champion the importance of either the visual or the oral aspects. William Wordsworth equated lyric poetry with sung ballads, and incorporated the speech of common people into his work; Gerard Manley Hopkins invented his own system of sprung rhythm, and carefully annotated his poems like a musical score for performance; W. B. Yeats experimented with reading his poetry in a chanting voice accompanied by the lyre, and tended to compose his poetry orally before writing it down. Other poets have emphasized the importance of the visual in poetry. George Herbert provides us with two of the most famous examples of concrete poetry in English language, in his poems "The Altar" and "Easter Wings"; Walter Ong notes that "in manuscripts, this kind of visual structure would be only marginally viable" (*OL* 128).[5] There are also instances of more typographically visual poetry, such as that composed by e. e. cummings and the Language poets. After a careful reading of e. e. cummings' "Untitled Poem No. 276" about a grasshopper, Ong concludes that "white space is so integral to Cummings' poem that it is utterly impossible to read the poem aloud" (*OL* 129). In fact, Marshall McLuhan makes the counter-intuitive suggestion that the typewriter encouraged free verse as a "recovery of spoken, dramatic stress in poetry" (*UM* 601-2). Poets such as Williams, Olson, Creeley, and Zukofsky expressly declare their interest in the visual aspects of

---

[5] It is amusing to note the pervasiveness of codex thinking, which is evident here in Ong's use of the term "marginally"; the first and most common definition of this word refers to the physical page space of the codex book.

poetry, and yet still underestimate its importance; they "fail to give equal time to the ear and to the eye" (Berry, "Visual Form in Free Verse" 94). Poems by those who claim the "printed text as a score for oral performance" ("Visual Form in Free Verse" 91) often include "purely graphic" features that contribute nothing to the text ("Visual Form in Free Verse" 93). Henry Sayre discovers in the late poetry of William Carlos Williams a "visual text" with far-reaching epistemological effects, which Williams began to understand later in his career, but never fully articulated (3). The work of such poets as these, especially those who fail to understand or articulate the importance of the physical text to their work, illustrates the conflict between the oral and visual aspects of poetry as poets continue to push the limits of what poetry can do in either realm.

This struggle between the aural and visual aspects of poetry is not the only tension in poetry; there is also a conflict between linear and nonlinear tendencies in both speech and writing. These tendencies do not neatly ally themselves only to the more aural or visual modes; in fact, as the examples above make clear, the technologies of written language and the printing press allow for new kinds of visual nonlinearity in poetry that were not possible before. And, for some reason, these nonlinear, visual experiments seem more appropriate and more common in poetry than in the more linear-tending form of prose.

The nonlinear possibilities of poetry are apparent to theorists of language and textuality, as evidenced by the fact that they often turn to poetry for examples to illustrate the complexity of language. Lacan uses poetry to illustrate his view of the nonlinearity and flux of language when he claims that "one has only to listen to poetry ... for a polyphony to be heard, for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the

several staves of a score" (154). Similarly, Jerome McGann admits that we may usually read poems in "linear modes," but claims we still recognize that "they move in complex recursive ways," and quotes Tennyson on the strange "angles" of poetry (108). Elsewhere, he says that "every poem comprised in our inherited Western corpus could fairly be described as a nonlinear game played (largely) with linear forms and design conventions, but often with nonlinear forms as well" (148). The fact that these critics single out poetry to illustrate their understanding of nonlinearity suggests that there is a more obvious, and perhaps more easily comprehensible, nonlinearity evident in poetry.

Nonlinear Poetics in the work of Eliot and Howe

There is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos. - T. S. Eliot
These sounds, these pieces of words come into the chaos of life, and then you try
to order them. - Susan Howe

Language is complex and chaotic, and these nonlinear tendencies are even more evident in poetry. If all language and all poetry are pervaded by nonlinearity, then a nonlinear perspective may be a useful approach for nearly any poem. As our understanding of language and texts shifts, our reading strategies necessarily change as well, and we learn to read in a new way. Not only will we approach new material differently; we also will come to re-read and re-interpret past works of literature. In Derrida's words, "we must desediment 'four thousand years of linear writing'" (86). However, nonlinearity is more evident in the work of some poets than others, even to the point that as readers we may be confronted with something so new and different that we may ask ourselves the question, "How do I read this?" To extend Derrida's metaphor, the works of T. S. Eliot and Susan Howe can be considered loose sediment near the top of the literary strata, which makes their poetry an easier place to begin the task of desedimentation. The work of these two poets, specifically *Four Quartets* (1944) and

"The Nonconformist's Memorial," evidence a significant degree of nonlinearity in a variety of ways. They both have a kind of sensitivity to the time period they live in and the technological changes going on in the culture (whether they understand the technology or not), and this sensitivity plays out in poetic nonlinearity, which is partially evident in the form of secondary orality. As a result, it is a valuable and worthwhile endeavor to pay particular attention to nonlinearity in the work of these two poets.

Both of the works under scrutiny here have a rough similarity of structure that is relevant to their nonlinear poetics; both can be classified as lyric sequences, which in the hands of modern poets has become a very loose, associative genre. A modern lyric poetic sequence is characterized as "a grouping of mainly lyric poems and passages, rarely uniform in pattern, which tend to interact as an organic whole" (Rosenthal and Gall 9). Each individual poem in the sequence is autonomous, but simultaneously takes part in a movement "toward a state of equilibrium," however momentary, which holds in balance "conflicting and logically irreconcilable energies" (11). This modern version of the lyric poetic sequence is "a response to the lyrical possibilities of language opened up by those pressures in times of cultural and psychological crisis, when all past certainties have many times been thrown chaotically into question. …it fulfills the need for encompassment of disparate and often powerfully opposed tonalities and energies" (3). The modern poetic sequence exhibits an organization that is an "association and … modulation among shifting intensities" (10), a structure that is "improvisatory but not undisciplined" (17). While such poetic sequences may incorporate "narrative and dramatic elements," they do not depend on these elements for structure or artificial continuity (9). Instead, the components of such a sequence combine "neither to resolve a

problem nor to conclude an action but to achieve the keenest, most open realization possible" (11). This poetic form can be "intimate, fragmented, self-analytical, open, emotionally volatile," and is appropriate to a "modern sensibility even when the poet aspires to tragic or epic scope" (9), so perhaps we may consider this loose, associative structure to be the epic form of secondary orality.

An understanding of how the modern lyric sequence functions will help us in our approach to Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," because both books are composed of sequences and subdivisions. In *Four Quartets*, there is the obvious division into the four quartets of the title, but within each quartet there are divisions into movements, and in several places there are distinct sections within the movements. The relationships between the different quartets, the connections between the movements of the quartets, and even the repetition of lines and images throughout quartets all are part of this loose, associative structure that makes up the sequence.

Likewise, Howe's volume *The Nonconformist's Memorial : Poems* (1993) is composed of four poems fitted together in a two-part structure, and the title poem is further divided into three sections. As in *Four Quartets*, white space often subdivides these sections, and many of the pages or pairs of pages seem as if they ought to be approached as a single lyric poem. This makes the poem feel like a sequence of brief lyrics, with an ephemeral, associative structure that is difficult to pin down.

Secondary Orality in *Four Quartets*

Walter Ong's notion of "secondary orality" is helpful in our approach to understanding the nonlinearity in *Four Quartets* and "The Nonconformist's Memorial."

Ong describes secondary orality as a "deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print" (*OL* 160), and Ong enumerates its characteristics: "communal sense," "concentration on the present moment," and "use of formulas" (*OL* 136), all of which are characteristics of primary oral culture. This idea is useful for scrutinizing the work of Howe and Eliot because their poetry works extensively with both the aural and the visual aspects of language, and both of them seem to be operating with a kind of secondary, literate orality.

For Eliot, the importance of the sonic qualities of poetry is evident in his idea of the "auditory imagination" and his explanation of the relationship between music and poetry. As a denizen of the twentieth-century, Eliot's orality is also influenced by the technologies of sound. Juan Suárez makes a detailed and compelling case for the importance of the radio and the phonograph in *The Waste Land*, claiming that at various points the poet is operating like a gramophone playing back sounds, or a radio tuning in different frequencies (Suárez). Michael Coyle documents Eliot's commitment to the "essentially *oral* medium" of radio (144, emphasis original); Eliot clearly distinguished radio from television and movies, which he felt contributed to a phenomenon of "secondary illiteracy" (147). In *Four Quartets*, the relationship between music and poetry is made more explicit by borrowing the structure and title from music. In the *Quartets*, Eliot evinces a highly literate and visual orality: he makes use of a variety of poetic forms with different rhythms and sounds, but these forms also have distinct presences on the page.

Eliot's literate orality is also evident in his infamous allusions. His writing is veined with lines from other texts and writers, but his borrowings and thefts here seem

less self-conscious and intrusive than they do in a poem such as *The Waste Land*, to
which Eliot added his own footnotes. There are still allusions present throughout the
poem, but they seem less ostentatious; this seems more similar to oral modes, where
borrowing is natural, and the audience is less likely to be aware of or concerned about
such literary theft, and may only have a vague notion, if they notice at all, that a phrase or
a line sounds familiar.

Some of the characteristics common to oral literature are present in Eliot's work,
and the most obvious of these is repetition: the *Quartets* repeat structural and formal
elements, as well as specific words and ideas. However, as we might expect for an
orality that is secondary and literate, Eliot was self-conscious about these repetitions. He
was concerned that "East Coker" followed the model of "Burnt Norton" too closely in
places, and even that he might be parodying himself (Gardner 41), and mentions
something similar within the poem: "You say I am repeating / Something I have said
before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?" (*FQ* 28-9). In this case, he consciously
decides to continue in his repetition.

Other aspects of secondary orality in Eliot's work may be less obvious. There is a
hint of the use of formulas, partly in Eliot's repetition and variation on phrases like "In
my end is my beginning" (*FQ* 32), and in other oracular phrases. The communal sense is
not as evident, but personal and spatial context are significant in the poems; each of the
Quartets is named for a specific place, and has some reference, however oblique, to a
personal experience which Eliot says should "give power from well below the surface"
(Gardner 24). Eliot's work is highly literate and allusive, simultaneously working in both
visual and oral modes, which exemplify Ong's ideas of secondary orality.

Secondary Orality in "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

Susan Howe's work is both profoundly oral and visual. Howe says that poetry is about "time and space; the way the ear and the eye are connected, time and space are absolutely connected in some fundamental way," and gets at this idea again when she says, "it's the eye and ear at once" (*Personal Interview*). The aural qualities of Howe's language are evident in her playfulness with words. She uses puns, for instance in the title *Thorow*; she plays with the sounds of words and echoes, and sometimes uses partial words, nonsense words, and non-words that evoke meaning simply by their sound. However, it should be noted that these aural puns are also very literate, and often their meaning depends in part on the visual form or spelling of the word on the page. Howe values the oral so highly that she reads her poetry aloud, even in the challenging cases where she had to "figure out a way to read aloud" (Howe, *LINEbreak*). Likewise, she is also very much concerned with the idea of voice; even though voice is often used in reference to writing, we should recall that this is an orally-based notion. Many of her projects can be seen as an attempt to recover voices lost because of textual tradition, so in a sense she is working to recover orality that has been lost in literacy.

At the same time that we identify all these oral tendencies in Howe's work, her poetry is also intensely visual. The importance of the visual is most clearly evident in the complicated, chaotic pages covered with overlapping, angled lines of text in *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, but it is also apparent in some of the visually simpler pages, which take advantage of upside-down text, or mirrored text on facing pages; in all these pages, the importance of a word's position within the page space takes on heightened significance. In Howe's more recent work, *The Midnight*, her interest in the visual is

played out in a different mode: she incorporates photographs into her work, and meditates on the conflict between image and text in printed works. Such complicated poems as these make significant demands on the reader; at one level, we must be aware of the complexity and history in a single word. To make sense of the puns and partial words, we must make use of Jakobson's "axis of selection," and be alert to Bakhtin's centrifugal and centripetal forces. At the same time, we must be aware of the "axis of combination," but in a more heightened sense than is normal, even for poetry. Howe's words exist not only in relation to the other words within a sentence or a phrase; they also must be considered in terms of typographical space of the page, where adjacent words and phrases may be parallel, upside-down, striking off at an angle, or even written over each other and obscuring each other. The physical arrangement of words in Howe's visual texts undercut our assumptions about printed text, and make us aware of the complexity inherent in language and poetry.

Howe's secondary orality is also evident in her concern with community and contextual communication. The ideas of testimony and confession play a key role in "The Nonconformist's Memorial," and are even suggested as a model of communication between the reader and writer. This is significant because confession and testimony are profoundly oral, contextual, and even intimate forms of communication; beyond that, they may even demand a response or a reaction from their audience. Even as Howe subverts the normal rules and expectations of texts by the placement and orientation of her words and by mixing poetry and prose, she also works to undo some of the erasures, and the losses of voices and names that have been perpetrated by printed texts.

The importance of orality to Howe is also evident in her interactions with modern technologies. She describes herself as "a product of radio days," and elaborates that her "childhood imagination was shaped by listening" ("Keller Interview" 14). Her writing processes and styles have also been influenced by the capabilities of the writing technologies she uses. Her earlier works were written on a typewriter, and Howe explains that "writing poetry put me into immediate contact with my voice, because I believe that every mark on paper is … an acoustic signal," and elaborates that the typewriter "makes things sharper… It cuts into a page" (*Personal Interview*). Howe's earlier poems, such as those in *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, were created through an iterative process of typing, cutting, and Xeroxing, which Howe describes as a "thoughtful collage process" (*Personal Interview*); now, Howe says, with the right computer program, this kind of textual collage has "gotten too easy," so that it "means nothing anymore" (*Personal Interview*). Howe transitioned to using the computer for her prose some time before she began using it for poetry; she says that using a computer has been "extraordinarily freeing" for her prose, because it allows her to "cut into lines" and "play around," but that it has been "much more troubling in poetry" (*Personal Interview*). Howe's own conception of the process and the technologies she uses for her writing demonstrate the mixture of the acoustic and the visual, and the literate, secondary orality that infuses her work.

In addition to their structural nonlinearities, both Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Howe's "Nonconformist's Memorial" involve ideas of complicated, recursive patterns, and are concerned with what it means to communicate, issues which are all relevant to nonlinearity and secondary orality. In theorizing nonlinear textuality, Espen Aarseth

expresses a lack of interest in "the plot, or the narrative, or any other well-known poetic unit," in deference to "the shape or structure of the text itself," with the reasonable excuse that "a narrative may be perfectly nonlinear ... and yet be represented in a totally linear text" ("Nonlinearity" 52). Aarseth's concentration on form to the exclusion of content plays to his own desire to scrutinize interactive electronic games as literature. Clearly, for the study of poetry at the very least, and particularly those works with nonlinear structure, the content and form must both be considered relevant.

Eliot's *Four Quartets* is a poem sequence filled with the characteristics of secondary orality, and both ideas and examples of nonlinear, chaotic, and recursive patterns; the poetic structure here prefigures the hypertext, as it is made of up textual segments that are connected by a diverse array of verbal, conceptual, and stylistic links. The poem presents itself as a complex textual space, and directs the reader to explore the text in a non-sequential fashion, where any node can act as an entry point into the larger poetic sequence. Current technological tools also provide readers with the possibility of exploring the poem non-sequentially, and discovering new connections within the text.

In the case of Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," nonlinearity is employed as a poetic nonconformity which challenges the reader on many levels at once. The visual poetry upsets familiar reading strategies and compounds the mental difficulty of parsing ambiguous, unpunctuated lines; navigating the poem requires interaction. In addition, there is a spiritual component to the interaction demanded by the text; in the act of memorial, the poet acts as witness and gives the reader the opportunity to become a participant in and witness to nonconformity.

Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial" also both share a concern with the paradoxical and mysterious concept of Incarnation. In *Four Quartets*, we find a cluster of different formulations with varying terminology and language, but which all point to the paradox of Incarnation. Howe's poem also mentions Incarnation, but Howe seems more interested in the margins and boundaries of Incarnation, which forms the context for Mary's nonconformity. Media theory holds some interesting connections with and implications for the idea of Incarnation; the Gospel of John describes the Incarnation as *logos* or Word, and elsewhere Christ is called the mediator. According to Kierkegaard, there is a significant connection between the message of Incarnation and the medium used to communicate that message; in the effort to make Incarnation comprehensible, it may be reduced to a mere teaching (Fitzpatrick 259). These nonlinear poems, which require our interaction to discover the presence and significance of Incarnation within the text, offer the reader a personal, experiential contact with the paradoxical mystery of Incarnation in a medium that is more suited to its message.

The nonlinearity and chaotic nature of language is evident to a diverse array of literary and media theorists, and poetry displays this nonlinearity to a greater degree than other kinds of texts. T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial" feature the characteristics of secondary orality and different kinds of nonlinearity, and they demand to be approached carefully and non-sequentially. These two works exhibit the wide variety of the structure, content, and affect that can be achieved through the use of nonlinear poetics.

Chapter 2. Reading the Nonlinear Structure of *Four Quartets*

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* is an incipient hypertext, and there are clear correlations between the structure and composition of the poem and hypertext. In addition, *Four Quartets* shares with hypertext certain features of Walter Ong's secondary orality as well as spatial metaphors for understanding and navigating the text. Because of this nonlinear structure, *Four Quartets* should be read non-sequentially; instead of a sequence, it should be considered a complicated textual space that may be traversed by many paths.

Reading *Four Quartets* as hypertext

Concepts derived from our understanding of hypertexts are also applicable to a poem written before the internet existed. Textual theorists such as Jerome McGann and Espen Aarseth have taken steps to break down arbitrary distinctions between electronic and printed texts, and their work suggests the possibilities inherent in letting ideas about electronic technologies both inform and be deepened by our understanding of the more familiar codex text. McGann rejects the simplistic division between traditional text as static and linear and digital text as open and interactive, and suggests that we should think of all texts as more or less radiant and decentered structures (25). McGann uses the term "radiant"[6] to evoke the relationships among the many components, versions, and interpretations of a text; he describes the "indeterminate set of interfaces that open into alternate spaces and temporal relations" that are present in every text (181). McGann's

---

[6] The word "radiant" is an evocative choice. McGann does not evince any interest in the term's associations with light, although that meaning is not entirely inappropriate in the context of electronic text, which may, in fact, be literally radiant. However, if we understand it in terms of components radiating outward, then the term is at odds with the insistence on a "decentered" text. I suspect that McGann is aware and appreciative of this ambiguity and wordplay—the term itself illustrates his view of texts.

work suggests that the openness and absence of closure evident in hypertext narratives is also present in texts we tend to consider more traditional.

Espen Aarseth's work is also useful to any application of hypertext structure to a traditional, printed text because of the care he takes with his terminology and his attempts to avoid arbitrary divisions between digital and printed texts. Instead of using more familiar words such as hypertext or nonlinear, Aarseth appropriates the term "ergodic," which is derived from the Greek words *ergon* (work) and *hodos* (path). He defines ergodic literature as that in which "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (*Cybertext* 1), and contrasts it with nonergodic literature, "where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, with no extranoematic responsibilities placed on the reader except (for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning pages" (*Cybertext* 1-2). Aarseth insists that both printed and digital works can be ergodic, just as digital texts can be more forcefully nonergodic than any codex text. Strictly speaking, by Aarseth's careful definitions, *Four Quartets* is not an ergodic text. It can certainly be read from front to back in sequential order, only demanding the reader's "eye movement and … turning pages" (*Cybertext* 2); that is, there are no explicit instructions that inform the reader this poem should be read in any other way. But, instructions and hints the poem contains suggest that it would be profitable to read *Four Quartets* as an ergodic text.

The claim that *Four Quartets* should be treated as an ergodic text is bolstered by the fact that a passage in "Burnt Norton" describes an experience very much like reading a hypertext. The poet meditates on "what might have been," labeling it an "abstraction," and a "perpetual possibility," but only in "a world of speculation" (*FQ* 13). The

sentiment here is strikingly similar to Espen Aarseth's description of reading a cybertext. According to Aarseth, the reader of a cybertext is "constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard" (*Cybertext* 3). Hypertext scholar J. Yellowlees Douglas mentions some of her frustrated attempts at finding certain paths when reading Michael Joyce's *afternoon* (173), and compares her experience to "Dante's penetration of the rings of Hell in *The Inferno*" (20). Eliot articulates a similar notion of the inaccessible or unchosen path in "the passage which we did not take" and "the door we never opened" (*FQ* 13). Aarseth elaborates that, for the reader of a cybertext, "each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact result of your choices; that is, exactly what you have missed" (*Cybertext* 3); this sense of loss is evoked by the poem's remembered echo of footfalls from steps that were never taken. The significance of the correlation between this meditation on "what might have been" and the experience of a reading a cybertext is not merely the shared metaphor of choosing certain paths and necessarily leaving others behind, as is made clear by the poem's concluding lines. The poet concludes, "my words echo / Thus, in your mind" (*FQ* 13), which makes it clear that his speculation about abstractions and possibility also applies to language and poetry.

Jerome McGann and Espen Aarseth both argue that traditional printed texts may have more in common with electronic texts than we suspect, and that insights gained from hypertext are relevant to printed works. *Four Quartets* can be approached as a traditional print text, but it offers several points of similarity to hypertext, and there are benefits to considering and reading it as a nonlinear text.

Secondary Orality in hypertext and *Four Quartets*

Walter Ong's notion of secondary orality is another point of connection between *Four Quartets* and hypertext. Ong defines secondary orality as a "deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print" (*OL* 160), and notes that it shares several characteristics with primary orality, including a strong communal sense, a focus on the present moment, and use of formulas (*OL* 136). To varying degrees, these features are present both in hypertext and in *Four Quartets*, and orality is one aspect of the shift away from a more linear textuality.

Certain aspects of Ong's secondary orality are evident in the internet generally, and others are present in more specifically literary narrative hypertexts. Modern technologies have enabled our society to transform into a culture of secondary orality; no longer a purely visual or textual culture, our "texts" now include audio and video components, and hypertext is no longer purely textual, but has become hypermedia. The internet is often touted as place of "virtual" community, and in many cases communities form around shared interests. The use of formulas is also evident in the shared language of such communities, particularly in the form of acronyms. Hypertext also mimics the ephemeral quality of spoken language; as with oral epics, any revisions made to hypertext are effectively invisible, since there is often no record of previous versions. Even the standard we use for citing electronic resources, not only documenting the date published but also the date viewed, highlights the time-sensitivity and potential unreliability of these resources. In addition, literary hypertext narratives exhibit other characteristics of secondary orality. Some hypertext narratives, such as Joyce's *afternoon*, include central lexias to which the reader must repeatedly return; this repetition does not function in

quite the same way as a formula or a refrain, but is a more literate, sophisticated kind of repetition. There is also a performative aspect to hypertext literature, since different readers may experience "wildly different versions of the narrative" (Douglas 164), depending on the choices they make. Thus, both the internet generally, and literary hypertexts in specific, evidence qualities Ong attributes to secondary orality.

The characteristics of secondary orality are also present in Eliot's thinking, and in *Four Quartets* more specifically. Eliot expresses his interest in sound and the aural in his notion of the "auditory imagination," his thoughts on the connections between music and poetry, and also in his relations to various technologies of sound. Juan Suarez makes a compelling argument for the importance of the radio and the gramophone in *The Waste Land*. Michael Coyle describes Eliot's early involvement with radio, and the fact that Eliot distinguished radio from television and movies. The emphasis Eliot placed on orality is evident in his concern that television was transforming the "audience," a group of listeners, into "spectators," merely watchers (151).

Certain characteristics which Walter Ong ascribes to a more literate, visual orality are also present in *Four Quartets*. The presence of a diversity of poetic forms shows a range of audible qualities, such as distinct rhythms, and sounds, but the literate quality is continually present in the variation of the look of the poetry on the page, the length of line, and the use of white space. Eliot is infamous in some circles for his allusiveness, and *Four Quartets* is no exception; however, the allusions in the *Quartets* are less self-conscious and intrusive than those of *The Waste Land*. This is entirely appropriate to a more oral mentality, since an oral audience is far less aware of, or concerned about, such literary "theft." *Four Quartets* also exhibits a great deal of repetition—both at the level

of structural and formal elements, and, in many instances, specific words, phrases, or ideas. The poet's self-consciousness of this repetition marks it clearly as a literate orality; he addresses the issue directly in section three of "East Coker": "You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?" (*FQ* 28-9). As part of this repetition, there is also something akin to the use of formulas. There are many instances of oracular phrases and repeated lines in *Four Quartets*, although the wording is often varied so as to avoid too exact a repetition. This repetition suggests a shift towards a more oral mode, but one that is still literate and self-conscious.

Several of the traits ascribed to Walter Ong's fascinating and useful notion of secondary orality are evident in hypertext, in Eliot's ideas about poetry, and in his poetry itself. This suggests that both hypertext and Eliot's *Four Quartets* are part of a larger shift towards a different way of writing, a shift away from the more linear modes of printed text into nonlinear modes.

Four Quartets as a space to traverse

A hypertext is a network of textual nodes, or lexias, which are connected by hyperlinks anchored at specific points within those lexias. The structure of *Four Quartets* can be understood similarly: it is a text divided and sub-divided into sections by titles, numbers, white space, and shifts in style; and within and between those sections, there is an intricate network made up of conceptual, verbal, and even stylistic connections. In addition to these similarities of structure, Eliot and *Four Quartets* share with the world of hypertext a use of spatial metaphors to understand and illuminate both the structure of the text and the act of writing. We often use spatial analogies for the organization and navigation of hypertext networks, as evidenced by such common terms

as cyber*space* and web*site*. Eliot worked with similar spatial metaphors for his poetry,

including the notions of architectural structure, poetry as land to be explored or

conquered, and both poet and reader as explorer.

We find the idea of architecture as poetic organization in Eliot's appropriation of

George Herbert as a poetic ancestor, and as a "spiritual architect of *Four Quartets*"

(Schuchard 66). The "complex architecture" (55) of Herbert's *The Temple* becomes a

model for Eliot's own poem sequence, and Eliot's descriptions of Herbert's poetry as a

synergistic, "coherent sequence" are likewise applicable to *Four Quartets* (79,80). It is

also possible that these architectural notions of poetic structure relate to the ancient art of

memory, by which orators used familiar architectural structures to organize and recall

their ideas.

Our notions of hypertext use spatial metaphors for understanding and describing

electronic documents and how they are organized. Not only did Eliot place a high value

on particular places; he also makes use of spatial analogies for writing poetry, in

particular the metaphors of poetry as a territory to be explored or conquered. Eliot speaks

of the poet as a frontiersman exploring or taming the territory of language. Helen

Gardner argues that "the bent of his natural genius" was towards exploration (15).

Exploratory language is evident in Eliot's description of the poet as one "occupied with

frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist" (*OPP*

30). Eliot also articulates his understanding of the two tasks of poetry with similar terms,

claiming that "there are times for exploration and times for the development of the

territory acquired" (*OPP* 30), and calls the development and exploration done by

Wordsworth and Milton "perilous adventures" (*OPP* 36). Eliot even couches his opinion

of metrical scansion in spatial terms, calling it "a simplified map of a complicated territory" (*OPP* 27). There is also a concern with exploration in the *Four Quartets* themselves; at the end of "East Coker," we read the injunction, "old men ought to be explorers" (*FQ* 32), which seems an admonition spoken to the poet himself.

Eliot's description of poetry as a territory to be explored also opens the possibility for the more violent metaphor of writing as battle or conquest. To some extent, ideas of conquest may already be suggested by Eliot's idea of developing the territory that has already been acquired, since this bears a resemblance to ideas of occupation or land gained through conquest. Eliot claims another task of the poet is "to battle against degradation" of language (*OPP* 38), and in section five of "East Coker," we find the metaphors of exploration and battle used together describe the writing process. Poetry is something "to conquer," and a "fight to recover what has been lost," although it "has already been discovered" (*FQ* 31).

As with secondary orality, these spatial metaphors that Eliot uses, both to talk about his poetry and within the poetry, are another point of connection between *Four Quartets* and hypertext. The reader may approach the text with a mindset of exploration or conquest, but in either case there is an understanding of the text as a territory which must be traversed.

Reading according to the Text Itself

When we read *Four Quartets* nonlinearly, we are actually following the advice of the poem itself. There are a variety of statements in the *Quartets* that can be taken, and even seem to be offered, as advice. Some of these lines sound like the poet's injunctions to himself, while others are more obviously directed at the reader. Most of these

statements could be interpreted as more general advice for living, and some of them are specifically about writing, but the advice is also applicable to the act of reading.

Throughout the poem, there is a repeated insistence on the importance of the journey and traveling, the need for exploration, and the value of continuing the journey. In two instances, the poet specifically addresses the reader as a person on a journey. In section three of "The Dry Salvages," the reader is referred to as a "traveler" and a "voyager" (*FQ* 43), and repeatedly encouraged to "fare forward," to keep moving. In the first section of "Little Gidding," the poem again shifts into second person and addresses the reader as a pilgrim nearing the goal of their pilgrimage (*FQ* 51). There are several specific landscapes that reader and poet must explore or travel through; in "Burnt Norton," this landscape takes the form of a garden that we explore in search of half-heard echoes (*FQ* 13). In "East Coker," our journey takes us through a dangerous landscape, "On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold, / And menaced by monsters" (*FQ* 26).

In the third section of "East Coker," there is a clear desire to arrive, and the poet describes the contradictory paths we must take to do so. However, there is an equally strong insistence on the need to continue traveling: the conclusion of the first four descriptions of the ways we must take to arrive all begin with the statement "You must go" (*FQ* 29). This insistence on the need to journey and explore continues; the poet claims, "Old men ought to be explorers," and tells us "we must be still and still moving" (*FQ* 32).

Eliot's idea that we commonly miss the meaning in our own experiences, but may be able to recover the meaning through the experiences of others, is also relevant to this

kind of exploratory reading of *Four Quartets*. To paraphrase Eliot, we read the poetry but missed the meaning, and approaching it in another form, or from a different direction, restores the experience of reading, and gives us a new access to meaning (*FQ* 39).

At the end of "Little Gidding," the poet tells us that any action is both a death and a starting point (*FQ* 58), and he goes on to say that

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. (*FQ* 59)

Even here, in the last lines of the poem, the poet continues to encourage exploration, and suggests that we must continue, proffering a contradictory "end" for our ceaseless exploration, the goal of greater understanding. If we, as readers, are willing to accept the repeated injunctions to be explorers and travelers, and if we take the poet at his word when he claims that "every sentence and phrase is a beginning and an ending" (*FQ* 58), then literally any part of *Four Quartets* can be an entry point to the entire poem, and there are innumerable paths that the reader can explore in order to traverse the complicated landscape of the poem.

Hypertext and "Spatial Form"

In raising the idea of hypertext and connecting it with architectural and spatial metaphors for poetry, it becomes necessary to address the notion of "spatial form" as formulated by Joseph Frank. Frank's idea is that certain works of literature should be apprehended "spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (10). Frank claims that in works such as Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*,

> syntactical sequence is given up for a structure depending on the
> perception of relationships between disconnected word-groups. ... while
> they follow one another in time, their meaning does not depend on this
> temporal relationship. (14)

Frank's emphasis on the importance of structure and relationship among sections has some similarities to the ideas suggested by hypertext and textual networks. Frank's idea of spatial form may offer some insight about the complex structure of works such as *Four Quartets*, and it is difficult to imagine mapping out the complex relationships of words and concepts within the *Quartets* without thinking in terms of space. However, Frank insists that the whole of such a work of literature must be apprehended in one instant, "in a moment of time," and this is a crucial point, which his critics have turned against him.

Despite the correlations between complex poetic structure as hypertext and as "spatial form," Frank's aim for the reader to fully grasp the structure in a single moment seems both unattainable and useless. In a work as complicated as *Four Quartets*, the structure is rather like Incarnation: understanding is given only in glimpses and hints. Critics of spatial form argue that "reading 'is an experience in time and not in space, and that we read, we know 'what it is like to read,' in sequence'" (Frank xi). Frank concedes that the reader's spatial apprehension of a work is "ideal," and not an experience that can be fully realized (xi).

Frank and his critics fail to make a clear distinction between any actual structure in the text and the reader's experience of that structure. A reader's apprehension of a text is not the only important aspect to understanding or describing that text. Every text has its own organization, and that structure may well be nonlinear. The example of electronic texts and hypertexts makes this inherent structure more obvious, and also suggests the

worth of spatial analogies. However, nonlinear structures can also be found in non-electronic texts, as Jerome McGann and Espen Aarseth both make clear.

Furthermore, the distinction critics assume between simultaneous and sequential perception is far from clear cut, which the architectural metaphor demonstrates usefully. If we grant, for the sake of simplicity, that our perception of a single room is immediate or simultaneous (although even this is a point which could be argued), to experience the entire architectural structure still requires movement from room to room, and depending on the complexity of the building, there may be many different sequences through the space. The path from room to room may not be straightforward; some doors may be hidden, and some rooms may contain alcoves or niches. Thus, our experience of the architectural space, or of any text which can be seen as divided into connected "rooms," is always a combination of simultaneous and sequential experience.

Joseph Frank's idea of spatial form is a flawed one, and the lack of theoretical rigor or principles for application further limits its value. However, it does get part of the picture; the spatial metaphor is certainly interesting and relevant, both to the structure of certain texts, and to the reading experience. Contemporary literary and media theories and technologies, which were unavailable to Frank when he formulated his idea, allow us to move beyond the limitations of his spatial form into a better understanding of nonlinear texts which must be apprehended both sequentially and simultaneously, and which we may never glimpse in their entirety in a single moment.

Following the links in *Four Quartets*

Eliot's understanding of language, especially by the time he is writing "Little Gidding," places a heavy emphasis on the importance of connections and the relationship

between words and sentences. Discussions of language within *Four Quartets* touch on the importance of associations between words, an idea articulated most clearly in the lecture "The Music of Poetry," where Eliot says,

> The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises
> from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it,
> and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of
> its immediate meaning in the context to all the other meanings which it
> has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association. (*OPP*
> 32-3)

Eliot thinks of each word as "a point of intersection" (which must make us think of the many other important points of intersection in *Four Quartets*), in terms of two different kinds of connections to other words. The music and meaning of a word are necessarily related to its context, where and how it is used in a sentence. Here Eliot points out the importance of different uses of the same word repeated within a work, and even uses of the word in other works. Eliot goes on to say,

> Not all words, obviously, are equally rich and well-connected: it is part of
> the business of the poet to dispose the richer among the poorer, at the right
> points, and we cannot afford to load a poem too heavily with the former.
> (*OPP* 33)

This description of the poet's disposition of words is expressed poetically in Eliot's description of the "sentence that is right" in section five of "Little Gidding" (*FQ* 58). Eliot uses the metaphor of dancing to describe his ideal sentence, and this is a useful analogy because it stresses the importance of the relationships between words, but also suggests the movement and beauty of language.

Eliot's idea of the power of language is evident in his explanation of the reason that the poet must distribute words so carefully; he says that "at certain moments … a

word can be made to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization" (*OPP* 33). This is the strongest statement of Eliot's understanding of the powerful and evocative linkages between words.

The repeated phrase or image is one kind of link we find in *Four Quartets*; in one case, we find a cluster of repeated images and phrases packed tightly together in just a few passages. This cluster of links is most noticeable in the exact repetition of two phrases, the "wild thyme unseen" and "winter lightning" that appear together in both section three of "East Coker" (*FQ* 28) and section five of "The Dry Salvages" (*FQ* 44). When we begin to examine the context of these two repeated phrases, we discover connections to other sections of the *Quartets*: the phrase "shaft of sunlight" in "The Dry Salvages" passage also appears in section five of "Burnt Norton," and the word "waterfall," used only twice in all of the *Quartets*, links us to the end of "Little Gidding" (*FQ* 59). The waterfall link suggests a broader connection of water imagery among these passages, which ranges from the "whisper of running streams" in "East Coker" (*FQ* 28) to the thundering voice of the waterfall, and also includes the "two waves of the sea" between which other things may be heard (*FQ* 59).

These four passages exhibit a shared concern with things that are unseen, unheard, or hidden. The thyme is unseen, the "laughter / Of children in the foliage" is hidden (*FQ* 20), while in "Little Gidding" it is the waterfall that is hidden (*FQ* 59). Juxtaposing these phrases reveals a subtle shifting of the senses between what is perceived and what is missed: the thyme is unseen, but as an herb would be better sensed by smell; the children's laughter is hidden from our eyes, but not necessarily our ears; and the waterfall, powerful in both sound and sight, is only half-sensed, because it is hidden, but

undoubtedly still heard. These are partial or incomplete perceptions, and we find more explicit versions of them in the music of "The Dry Salvages," which is "heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all" (*FQ* 44) but rather experienced, and also in the voices of both children and waterfall in "Little Gidding," which are "Not known, because not looked for / But heard, half-heard" (*FQ* 59). These varied instances of imperfect or failed perception are all the more appropriate when we discern that these passages are all dealing with or describing the "unattended moment ... in and out of time" (*FQ* 44), a moment of epiphany or inspiration.

Seeing these passages together also enables us to discern another imagery link, but one that is not conveyed through exact repetition of phrases. In the passage from "Burnt Norton," there is "hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage" (*FQ* 20), and we find variations on this image in three of the other four passages in this cluster of linked images. In the "East Coker" passage, we find the less specific phrase "laughter in the garden" (*FQ* 28), which repeats the word "laughter" exactly, and taking the place of "foliage" is the more generic term "garden," although this broader term, with its definite article, also evokes the garden of Eden. In "Little Gidding" we find yet another variation, the "children in the apple-tree" (*FQ* 59). As with the "East Coker" passage, one word is repeated exactly, although a different one, and there is also a similar term, this time made more specific as the foliage becomes explicitly an apple-tree. Seeing these three versions of the same image as linked together emphasizes the Edenic quality of the final scene of "Little Gidding," and also offers us varying ideas on the important aspects of this image of children, possibly laughing, within some kind of vegetation.

These four passages offer us a cluster of image-centric linkages, and it would be possible to continue, perhaps endlessly, to explore the connections to other portions of the text with repeated phrases or ideas; a few obviously profitable or interesting terms include stillness, dust, music, and on a conceptual level, descriptions of moments of epiphany. It seems worth noting that these four passages do not all occur in the same section of their respective quartets; three of the four appear in the fifth sections of their respective Quartets, but the "East Coker" passage crops up in section three. If we merely read the fifth section of each quartet in sequence, no doubt there would be important and valuable insights, but the significant connections between these four passages, and their phrases and images, would remain unseen and unheard.

Another kind of link we find in the *Quartets* is a conceptual connection, where identical or similar ideas are expressed in different words. One example of this kind of conceptual link might actually be discovered by the repeated phrase, "the point." The only two places where we find this phrase are in section two of "Burnt Norton," and section five of "The Dry Salvages"; what is more, these two passages are the only instances where the word "point" is used as noun in all of the *Quartets*. Starting with this simple link of repeated words, we discover a conceptual link; both passages describe a paradoxical overlap or intersection of opposites, expressed in spatial terms as "the still point of the turning world" (*FQ* 15), and in temporal terms as "intersection of the timeless with time" (*FQ* 44). Eliot's description of "the impossible union / Of spheres of existence" (*FQ* 44) is appropriate to both of these passages. Jewel Spears Brooker points out the importance of connections and relations in this poem sequence, and observes "a focus on betweenness, on what is absent or 'not there'" (90). Brooker claims that this

"causes relation-in-itself to emerge as the most important presence of the sequence," a presence which she maintains is anchored "not in a myth, but in a pattern, a pattern archetypally presented in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation" (90). Brooker's idea of betweenness is present in these two passages in the form of a paradoxical union of opposites, and the connection with Incarnation is confirmed in "The Dry Salvages," where the poet explicitly labels this "impossible union," telling us that "the hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation" (*FQ* 44).

Identifying the conceptual link between these two passages gives new insight into our understanding of "the still point of the moving world" in "Burnt Norton." Reading it with "the intersection of timeless with time" in mind, we are more likely to notice a simpler version of that temporal paradox here, since the still point is the location "where past and future are gathered" (*FQ* 15). This, in turn, connects Incarnation and the still point to the recurring themes of the past, present, and future in "Burnt Norton" and the other Quartets. If we understand Incarnation as the still point, which is both the site of "the dance" and what makes the dance possible, we may find a deeper, more spiritual understanding of the ideas of pattern, relationship, and movement conveyed by the word dance.

The discovery that these two rather different passages are both dealing with the same concept of Incarnation suggests that it is worth looking elsewhere in *Four Quartets* for similar concepts expressed with different words, and such a search does not disappoint. One fairly obvious place to look for mention of Incarnation is in the meditation on Good Friday in section four of "East Coker," which includes such oxymoronic personages as the "wounded surgeon" and the "ruined millionaire" (*FQ*

29,30). These phrases play on the idea of Christ as the "great physician," and the notion of God owning "the cattle on a thousand hills" (*NIV*, Psalm 50:10), but are also appropriate to the health and hospital imagery that pervade this section. Though far less philosophical than the two expressions of Incarnation we have so far discovered, this passage is linked to the other two, both by its portrayal of Christ and by the use of paradox. The whole section is full of seemingly contradictory statements, not just about the Incarnation, but also about the human condition: "our only health is the disease"; "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse"; "if we do well, we shall / Die"; and "if to be warmed, then I must freeze" (*FQ* 29-30). Indeed, the use of paradox suggests some kind of relationship between the nature of Christ and the paradoxical path humanity must take to be healed.

These references to Christ, which draw more directly from the Bible and Christian tradition than the more philosophical formulations of Incarnation, suggest we may find other, more Biblical allusions to Christ within *Four Quartets*. In section five of "Burnt Norton," the poet tells us that "the Word in the desert / Is most attacked by voices of temptation" (*FQ* 19). In context, these lines are part of a statement about the constant deterioration of language, but the capitalization and the words "desert" and "temptation" confirm the Biblical allusion, and serve as conceptual link to other formulations of Incarnation. This expression of the Incarnation as Word, and the juxtaposition of the Incarnational Word with the problems of language, suggests a connection between these many different formulations of Incarnation and the poet's repeated concerns about writing and poetry.

The importance of capitalization, both in "the Word" of "Burnt Norton" and "Incarnation" in "The Dry Salvages," makes it possible to identify the capitalized "Love" in section four of "Little Gidding" as yet another reference to the person of Incarnation. These lines emphasize the importance of the word "Love," both by capitalization and insistent repetition, since the word appears at the end of one line and the beginning of the next. The poet asks, "Who then devised the torment?" and then answers with the single word, "Love" (*FQ* 57); this is not an abstract quality, but a person. As in the other formulations of Incarnation, we find a touch of paradox here in the phrase "unfamiliar Name" (*FQ* 57), which links us back to the formulation of Incarnation in "The Dry Salvages" as "the hint half guessed, the gift half understood" (*FQ* 44). Connecting this "Love" with the other formulations of the idea of Incarnation also suggests a whole new set of paths and possibilities within the poem, dealing with the ideas of love and how they relate to this named, personal Love, and through it, to the complicated, paradoxical ideas of Incarnation.

These five passages use a range of different words and terminology, but all are linked by the paradoxical concept of Incarnation. These connections not only provide increased understanding for the importance of this pivotal concept, and the different forms it can take, but it also gives us a new way to begin to traverse the *Four Quartets*, and offers potentially innumerable paths branching out from this small cluster of conceptually linked passages.

Eliot uses many different poetic styles through the course of *Four Quartets*, and these variations also contribute to the hypertextuality of the poem. Shifts in poetic style, which in many cases are quite abrupt, serve to underscore the divisions between sections

within each quartet, which are already demarcated by numbers and white space. In addition to this separation of text, certain repeated poetic styles, or combinations of styles, also function as links between lexias within the quartets.

In some cases, the link of poetic style underscores connections between specific sections of each quartet. For instance, critics have noted that the second section of each quartet is comprised of two parts: the first is generally written in traditional poetic style, usually characterized by shorter lines, with rhymes and more obvious rhythms, while the second part is written in a looser mode, with longer lines. In one instance, the second part offers commentary on the preceding section, describing it as "a periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion" (*FQ* 25). The shift between drastically different poetic modes is consistent, but Eliot is flexible in terms of style. The more traditional, fixed forms used exhibit quite a range of variation, from the use of stanzas to their absence, from the modified terza rima of "Little Gidding" to what David Barndollar labels a "modified sestina" in the second movement of "The Dry Salvages" (188).[7] Walton Litz considers section two "the most 'open' section of the *Quartets*," since other sections remained "remarkably close" in length, while "part II gradually expanded to over double the length as Eliot moved from 'Burnt Norton' to 'Little Gidding'" (185). The repeated shift in poetic styles functions as a link among the *Quartets*, but the variation in the particular styles also serves to differentiate and separate them.

---

[7] Strictly speaking, this passage bears fairly minimal similarity to a sestina. It is written in six stanzas, each of which consists of six lines, and that is where the comparison ends. Eliot's passage is written with a consistent rhyme scheme, which is quite different from the sestina's repeated words in varying order. In addition, Eliot ends this poetic passage without the tercet that commonly ends a sestina, which makes me suspect that he was not attempting to write even a modified sestina. Certainly such a skilled poet, who made frequent and subtle use of repetition, could write a flawless sestina if he chose.

The variation of poetic styles also has a musical function within the *Quartets*, which substantiates the secondary orality of the poem. Barndollar compares Eliot's use of the passage from Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1530) on "the association of man and woman / In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie" (*FQ* 24) to a quartet incorporating a dance theme (Barndollar 188), and suggests that the use of terza rima in "Little Gidding" may be similar to the use of an old-fashioned musical mode that gives the movement an "antique flavor" (189).

The wide range of poetic styles found in the *Quartets* functions to demarcate the divisions of sections and subsections within the poems. But the styles also work as links to other sections, in much the same way that repeated phrases and images, or a concept repeatedly expressed in different words, link particular passages and offer us paths to traverse the complicated architecture of this text.

Reading *Four* Quartets Nonlinearly

If we understand the structure of *Four Quartets* as an incipient hypertext, and if we are willing to follow the advice within the poem itself, we should see that the sequence demands to be read nonlinearly. Scholars such as Edward Lobb and Walton Litz claim that, while it would be ideal to read *Quartets* nonlinearly or spatially, such a feat is sadly impossible. Lobb elaborates,

> … ideally, we are supposed to keep the previous parts of the *Quartets* in
> mind as we read, so 'East Coker' is always, in theory, balanced by the
> vision of 'Burnt Norton.' But the ideal reader who experiences the
> sequence spatially as well as temporally has never been more than an ideal
> fiction, and Eliot was aware of this. (28)

Lobb goes on to say that "we read … discretely" (28). Similarly, Litz suggests that it is "necessary to see [the *Quartets*] as superimposed structures … a series of overlays," but prefaces his comment with the claim that "the *Quartets* can – and must – be read in sequence" (187). Barndollar goes so far as to say that, in order to understand either Beethoven's late quartets or Eliot's quartets, we must experience them "repeatedly, and in time" (192), which is at least a step in the right direction.

If we conceptualize the *Quartets* as a complicated architectural structure (perhaps one with hidden passageways and secret doors), it gives us the freedom to admire and explore the structure, traversing the poem in whatever path we choose, without feeling constrained to perceive the whole structure "in a moment of time" (Frank 10), as Joseph Frank seems to think necessary. If we take the poet at his word when he states that "every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning" (*FQ* 58), then any part of the text becomes an entry point, linked to the rest of the text, which we can enter and traverse as we choose. Even Mary Weinig, who examines the poem as sequentially as it is possible to do, in an excruciatingly detailed line-by-line analysis, still frequently interprets passages with other parts of the *Quartets* in mind (passim). If we consider *Four Quartets* to be an instance of what Jerome McGann calls "radiant textuality," then we have a greater degree of freedom in approaching the text. We are no longer constrained to read the *Quartets* in any particular order; Weinig's work is locked into the view that *Four Quartets* must be approached and interpreted according to the sequence in which they were written, and thus she is always looking forward to the "end" or finding echoes of "previous" sections. A radiant, nonlinear approach to the text means that we

do not have to give a particular quartet the final say; not everything must be interpreted according to the printed order, and "Little Gidding" does not have all the answers.

Deforming the text with TextArc

Jerome McGann suggests that, as poems are imaginative works and more performative rather than being "transmitters of information" (108), there is a gap in interpretation when it is "scientia applied to poiesis" (127). McGann claims that much literary criticism is expository and informative, and contrasts this with editions and translations, which he considers "performative" interpretations (114). As a counter to information-laden interpretations, McGann suggests the approach of what he terms "deformative scholarship," citing Randall McLeod's "transformissive" explorations as an example (115). He then outlines four kinds of poetic deformation: "reordering" (for instance, reading a poem backwards line by line), "isolating" (for example, examining only the verbs or nouns in the text), "altering" (making use of different versions, words, or changing the spatial organization), and "adding" to the text (117). McGann's idea is that deformation is an interpretive move that may expose things already present in the text.

There are some problems with McGann's idea of deformation. Some of these deformative strategies may be merely a way to make more visible trends in a poem that a careful reader of poetry is likely to notice anyway, such as a preponderance of verbs, or a specific placement of nouns within the poetic line, which would be exposed by isolating those terms. It is also worth noting that McGann feels it necessary to cite a normative interpretation to support his use of deformation as an interpretive move for his example poem (121). In spite of these flaws, McGann's idea of deformation is still a useful one

that is relevant to the technological tools available for analyzing poetry, since computers
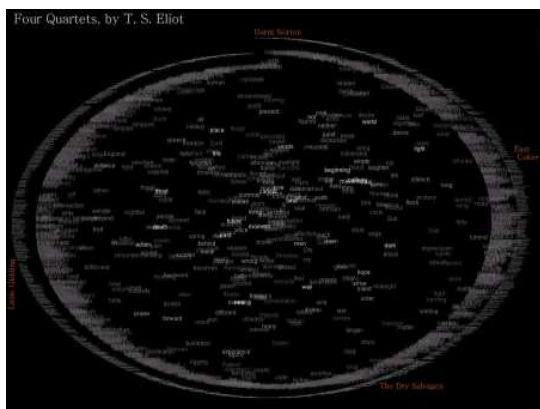offer us the possibility of deforming texts swiftly and dynamically.

Figure 2-1. TextArc image of *Four Quartets*

TextArc is one such tool, created by W. Bradford Paley as an experimental visual index to interface with texts, described by its creator as "a funny combination of an index, concordance, and summary" (*TextArc.org*). According to McGann's terminology, TextArc performs an altering deformation as it displays the entire text twice in a new spatial configuration. The entire text is printed, in miniature, in an arc around the perimeter of the screen, and then significant terms are mapped within the interior of this oval space, in a spatial "average" of the term's occurrence in the text; for instance, a word used frequently and consistently throughout a text will be found near the center of its TextArc, while a word used only in the first quarter of a text will be somewhere in the right top quadrant of the TextArc space. Paley illuminates the logic behind this placement: "imagine each word attached to where it belongs around the spiral by a tiny rubber band; if the word appears in two places two rubber bands are attached. The net result of this rubber band tug-of-war is that a word will appear closer to places where it is used more" (*TextArc* 2) In addition to using spatial placement to convey word distribution, word frequency is marked by color; words used repeatedly are quite bright, and less commonly used terms are displayed more

faintly. This innovative user interface is designed to allow human visual processing to uncover patterns in the text.[8]

TextArc came to prominence in 2002, and with it came a flurry of news articles and web mentions of the program. From the beginning, it seemed that people were intrigued by TextArc; but there is also evidence of uncertainty as to how it should be used.[9] One news article claims that TextArc "allows viewers to quickly see relationships between words and characters at a glance, even without having read the book" (Fildes), and one person describes TextArc as a "'new method' of reading a text," and wants to know how it is better (Gray). While it is true that TextArc includes a line-by-line reading mode, it seems unlikely that it would replace more traditional reading practices, and Paley himself emphasizes that is not meant to be used in this way: "This is just a visual index. I still want you to go back to the real work" (quoted in Fildes).

TextArc offers many features that are impossible in traditional text concordances. One of these features is that the viewer can actually read the text that is indexed and displayed. The full text can be opened in a smaller window, and the text can be read line by line. In the reading mode, each line is successively displayed at the bottom of the TextArc screen, and each key word is highlighted in order. As each term is highlighted in this line of text, its counterpart within the TextArc space is also highlighted, and the lines of text around the perimeter which contain that term are highlighted as well. This means that as you read the text, you have a sense of where and how frequently a word is used in the text. TextArc can also visually connect associated words by displaying

---

[8] To view images of portions of *Four Quartets* rendered with TextArc, please consult Appendix A.
[9] Literary scholars seem to be either uninterested in TextArc or unaware of it. Paley's innovative visual interface has been borrowed by young scholars in the Information and Social Sciences to model their own data (Fisher; Tkatchenko), but I am unaware of any published literary scholarship that makes use of TextArc.

smaller arcs between related words, such as future and past, neither and nor, or water and fire. In addition, TextArc's reading mode provides an optional "storyline" mode, which traces the words in the TextArc space as you read through them line by line. This gives the reader a more immediate visual sense of the distribution of words within the text. In sections full of unique terms, the storyline hugs the perimeter of the text space – for example, section II of "Burnt Norton," in which the first six terms ("garlic," "sapphire," "mud," "clot," "bedded," and "axle-tree") are used only once in all of *Four Quartets*. Sections with more frequently used terms, such as the meditation on "time past and time present" that begins "Burnt Norton," exhibit storylines that tend to loop more towards the center of the TextArc space.

A computer program such as TextArc can dynamically "deform" and reorganize a text such as *Four Quartets* in just a few minutes. However, McGann's idea of "deformative interpretation" requires another step, that of human interaction and analysis. Paley's tool allows for human visual processing to recognize patterns within a deformed text, but the significance of those patterns must still be determined.

In "Burnt Norton," the words "future" and "past" are equally bright and occur at the same exact spot within the TextArc space, slightly down and to the right of center.

Figure 2-2. Detail from TextArc of "Burnt Norton"

The words actually overlap here, and it might be difficult to identify them if the TextArc interface did not allow the user to highlight individual words. This TextArc detail reveals that in "Burnt Norton" the words future and past are always used together or in very close proximity, and their occurrences are distributed nearly equally throughout the poem. Examination of the eight uses of

these two words reveals that, in all but one instance, they appear on the same line, and the furthest apart we find them is one line apart, in the first two lines of the poem. TextArc gives us a sense of "the enchainment of past and future" (*FQ* 16) the poet is so concerned with: the two terms are so closely linked that one cannot appear without the other. The conceptual connection between past and future is reaffirmed by the physical placement of the two terms within the text; to make use of TextArc terminology, they inhabit the same point in the space of the text.

TextArc also brings to light a shadowy centrality of roses throughout the poem sequence. In each TextArc of the individual quartets, there is some form of the word

Figure 2-3. Detail from TextArc of "East Coker"

rose. These appear only faintly, because they are not repeated often, but they invariably appear near the middle of the TextArc space. In "Burnt Norton," the word is "rose-garden," used only twice, which shows up slightly right and below center. In "East Coker," we find the word "roses" close to the exact center of the text space, again faint because it occurs only twice. In "The Dry Salvages," it is the singular form that appears slightly below and right of center within the text space and, again, the term is used only twice in the poem. The singular form recurs in "Little Gidding," where it is used four times, and is anchored more firmly in the top left quadrant, although still fairly central. Examining the TextArcs of the individual *Quartets* enables us to discern something that might not be as obvious in the more crowded text space of the TextArc of the complete *Four Quartets*, which is the faint but noticeable presence of roses at the center of the text, what Eliot might call "the spectre of a Rose" (*FQ* 56).

TextArc is a fascinating tool, which allows us to interact with texts in new ways and offers the possibility of new insights which might otherwise remain undiscovered. It is unfortunate that more literary scholars have not explored the uses of TextArc, because not only does it offer a useful, dynamic index and several possibilities for the exploration of texts; it may also suggest other innovative tools for text analysis. TextArc provides us with a new space for mapping out the relationships between the component parts of a text, and it is to be hoped that TextArc will not be the last experimental program to provide us new ways of thinking about and interacting with texts.

Problems with reading *Four Quartets* nonlinearly

It is possible critics will point out one flaw in the kind of nonlinear reading I am proposing: traversing a poem such as *Four Quartets* by entering it at any given point and exploring the connections in the text requires the reader to be quite familiar with the textual terrain in order to find useful, traversable paths. This does not even touch on the problem of whether or not all paths are useful, and who, if anyone, might have the authority to decide which paths are useful, and which are merely wandering through "a dark wood, in a bramble / On the edge of a grimpen, … / menaced by monsters" (*FQ* 26).

It is possible to imagine a computer tool that would enable a reader unfamiliar with the text to discover connections within the poem, along with references to other text, and to explore the texts based on those connections. Currently existing technologies offer hints and ideas of future tools that would allow readers to view, differentiate, and traverse connections within a text. It is possible to imagine a tool that would incorporate such features as the innovative user interface of the Visual Thesaurus, which enables users to explore and interact with the connections and associations found in a traditional thesaurus

(*Visual Thesaurus*) with text analysis tools such as those currently in development by the Text2Knowledge project (ALG). A tool like this should incorporate links that could be automatically detected by a computer, including repeated words, synonyms, or related terms, but should also include links identified by scholars, such as various expressions of similar concepts. An interface like this would enable readers new to the text to explore the entire work and beyond.
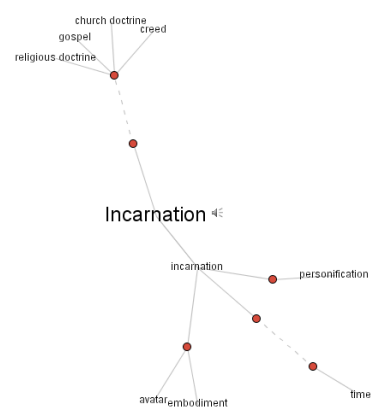

Figure 2-4. Visual Thesaurus display for "Incarnation"

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* incorporates secondary orality into a structure similar to that found in modern hypertexts, with the text divided into sections and subsections like lexias and with several different kinds of connections, like hyperlinks, among the various parts of the text. *Four Quartets* and hypertext share the use of spatial metaphors to communicate the structure of the text, which converts the experience of reading into one of traversing a space, following one of many possible paths. Hypertext and *Four Quartets* also exhibit characteristics of Walter Ong's secondary orality. Because of these similar notions of structure, reading experience, and orality, there are significant benefits to be found in reading the text nonlinearly, as if it were a kind of hypertext. This task is one that has been made more possible by current technology, such as TextArc, and which will hopefully become increasingly more accessible to modern readers, so that this computer-literate generation will find new pathways into the complicated and fascinating space of texts such as *Four Quartets*.

Chapter 3. Nonlinear Poetics as Nonconformity in "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

Confessions implode into otherness

Susan Howe's poem "The Nonconformist's Memorial" employs nonlinear poetics to memorialize and enact a nonconformity that offers a challenge to the reader mentally, physically, and even spiritually. A conceptual difficulty similar to that found in many works of twentieth-century literature is present here; understanding the poem requires effort, and our conclusions often seem provisional due to what we might term Howe's nonlinearity of thought: seemingly contradictory statements, ambiguous phrases, and multiple meanings evoked by the same terms. The mental challenge is aggravated by the difficulty of placing Howe in relation to poetic tradition; structural similarities to hypertext provide insights to her work along with comparisons to printed poetry. However, Howe's poem also demands physical interaction, particularly in the sections where the nonlinearity of the text is represented visually. At the most basic level, this physical interaction is the simple rotation of the book, but the reader must also learn to negotiate a rotational reading that integrates the visual aspects of the text. In addition to these technical and textual demands, there is also a spiritual element to Howe's nonconformity. Ideas of testimony and witness recur significantly through the text, offering us a model of communication which is based on oral tradition and requires a response. Not only does the reader act as witness to the nonconformists Howe memorializes; in the process of negotiating the poem's nonlinearity, both in the

complexity of thought and confusing textual formations, the reader is given the

opportunity to become an active participant in Howe's nonconformity.[10]

The title of Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," along with that of

the 1993 volume of poetry which includes it and three other poems, comes from a

seventeenth-century account of the lives of "protestant" or "dissenting" ministers ejected

from the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity in 1662. The Act of Uniformity

was the result of a religious power struggle, and both editors of *The Nonconformist's*

Memorial (1802) cite evidence that the act was purposely framed to drive the

nonconformists out of the church (Calamy and Palmer iii, 31). In his introduction,

Calamy repeatedly refers to the nonconformists as "ejected ministers" and "silenced

ministers" (54), and emphasizes the fact that, after being ejected from the church, these

ministers were not allowed to preach or do any religious work (34, 55). Calamy's book

records the lives and works of many of the ejected ministers, but as Samuel Palmer

admits in his preface, there are cases where no details are known: "the bare *Names* of a

great number still appear in the list, whose characters and history are irrevocably lost"

(xvi, emphasis original). Thus, the attempt to memorialize the nonconformist ministers is

not completely successful.

The fact that *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (1802) does not fully accomplish the

memorial it aims at, and must resort to a list of names, seems likely to increase Howe's

fascination with this text written as a record of the lives of those who have been silenced,

supposedly in the name of uniformity. In her poem, she takes up these ideas of dissent,

separation, and silence as she muses on the person of Mary Magdalene, along with others

---

[10] I do not make use of TextArc for my analysis of nonlinearity in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" because, despite its innovative approach to texts, TextArc is still only designed to handle more traditional, linear texts, and interprets no formats suitable for poems such as this one.

who have been labeled "nonconformist" and thus have been removed, to differing extents, from both the textual record and accepted Christian tradition.

The organizational structure of *The Nonconformist's Memorial : Poems* (1993) shows that Howe is playing with the relationship between the ideas of turning and conversion. The volume of poetry is comprised of four poems grouped into two sections: "Turning," which includes the title poem followed by "Silence Wager Stories," and "Conversion," which is comprised of "Eikon Basilike" and "Melville's Marginalia." [11] The title poem explicitly bears out the interest in turning and conversion, with many different concepts related to both terms. Most certainly Howe, who loves the play of language and can see a single word as "an infinite chain leading us underground" ("Foster Interview" 35), is aware of the etymological connection between these words.

The word conversion comes from the Latin verb *vertere*, to turn, along with the prefix *con-* together, or altogether. Embedded in this word conversion we find the word version, which has to do with translation, form, and points of view, and is connected to the word verse, which we use to refer to poetry (*OED*). Verse is also connected to the trope, a figure of speech which twists the common sense of words; trope is yet another word derived from Greek and French words for turning (*OED*). Significantly, the term "verse" was applied to poetry with the furrows of a farmer's plow in mind, with a row becoming "a line of writing … so named from turning to begin another line" (*OED*). In fact, certain passages of "The Nonconformist's Memorial" make use of right-side-up lines followed by inverted lines, and in these cases Howe follows the model of the

---

[11] One internet bookseller describes this structure as "half-ironic nonconforming counterpoint to Eliot's *Four Quartets*" (*FrontList Books*). When I asked her about this, Howe laughed and responded that she "had Eliot in mind," along with H.D. and Mary Shelley, but that seeing the structure as intentional correspondence "would be reading too much into it" (*Personal Interview*).

economic ploughman, who "does not return to the point of departure," but simply "proceeds in the opposite direction" (Derrida 288). Howe's lines physically embody the "*boustrophedon*" or "turning of the ox" (288) that is embedded in the history of the word verse.

René Girard complicates the etymological connection between these two terms with a more sophisticated understanding of conversion. Girard writes that the Latin word *conversio* means "turning around in a circle ... a full circular revolution that ultimately brings you back to your point of departure," whereas a "Christian conversion is not circular; it never returns to its point of origin. It is open-ended; it is moving toward a totally unpredictable future"; it is "a transformation that reaches so deep it changes us once and for all" (3). This insight complicates the apparent connection between turning and conversion, and challenges us to scrutinize the many different turns that occur in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" to determine whether they are circular revolutions, or a more radical kind of change.

Each of the two sections of this volume begin with an epigraph, and these shed a somewhat uncertain light on the two words. Section one, "Turning," begins with a quote from Mary Shelley's *Journal* that is marked in Melville's marginalia: "The enthusiast suppresses her tears, crushes her opening thoughts, and—all is changed" (*NCM* 1). These last three words, "all is changed," set off dramatically by the dash, suggest a deep change that seems more like Girard's understanding of conversion than mere circular rotation. This quote seems illuminating until we come to the epigraph for section two; underneath the block letters of "CONVERSION" is a quote from Melville's Bartleby, "I like to be stationary" (*NCM* 43). This statement upsets our expectation, and it is difficult to see

how the quote relates except as a perverse rejection of turning, and perhaps even of conversion. However, the juxtaposition of Bartleby with Mary Magdalene suggests the possibility of different kinds of nonconformity. Mary is a passionate, vocal, active woman who offers testimony in a society that did not consider a woman's testimony legally valid, while Bartleby is a passive, still, quiet man who is unsettling to the working men around him. Also, in both cases the textual record of these nonconformists is incomplete and unsatisfactory.[12]

There is one more connection between these two epigraphs, and that is Melville. Howe explicitly notes the source of the first epigraph as being "Marked by Herman Melville in his copy of *Shelley Memorials*." Thus, the very beginning of the volume points to the last poem in the work, "Melville's Marginalia." It seems both significant and fitting that this line is taken from another memorial, written by one whom many would probably consider another nonconformist.

The Mental Demands of Howe's "difficult" Poetry

Thought has broken down

Modernist works of literature have become somewhat notorious for their difficulty; T. S. Eliot famously wrote that "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*" ("The Metaphysical Poets" 65). William Christie argues that difficulty has been present in poetry far longer than this, citing examples from Pindar and the Romantic poets (543, 558). In any case, readers of twentieth-century poetry should be accustomed to poetry that is "difficult," abstruse and obscure, allusive, and often elusive

---

[12] The narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" claims that "no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. … Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small" (Melville 16).

as well. If we make use of George Steiner's typology of difficulty, Howe's poetry would be classed, along with the Modernists, as one of *tactical* difficulty: understanding takes great efforts to attain, and always remains provisional (271); the difficulties of the text force readers to think and perceive more carefully (273).

Even literary critics admit that they find Howe's poetry challenging to read. Susan Schultz says Howe's "poems are puzzles" (1). The kind of poetry Howe writes forces the reader to make connections and fill in gaps, much like readers of hypertext literature do as they navigate their way through different sections of text and attempt to discern the relationships between them; here, we are also forced to fill in the absent punctuation. In this poem, Howe says that "Citations remain abbreviated / Often a shortcut / stands for Chapter" (*NCM* 5), and in reviewing *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, Susan Schultz comments that Howe provides the shortcut, while the reader must supply chapter and verse (9). In more specific terms,

> Howe's poetry is built on an aesthetic of parataxis that makes 'primal indeterminacy' an integral element in the poem itself. It is a poetry of phrases and fragments best read as elements of a collage in which the reader supplies the connections … (Naylor 55)

Howe's complex poetry taxes the mental faculties, forcing the reader to engage the text with care.

The reader of Howe's poetry must continually attempt to discern the relationship between fragments of text. Howe uses punctuation very sparsely in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" so that, even on pages that do not seem obviously complicated to the eye, the reader is forced to determine which lines and sections connect and which do not. We are not provided with the commas, periods, and colons which

usually give us such cues; the reader must choose whether to read spaces between words, lines, or stanzas as a kind of invisible punctuation or as enjambment, and any interpretation based on those choices remains provisional, "rendered even more indeterminate by the absence of punctuation" (55). This ambiguous structure in Howe's text "makes it virtually impossible for the reader to 'master' it by applying the grid of traditional grammar" (55), because Howe is not following the rules.

W. S. Merwin wrote that punctuation "stapled the poems to the page" (1) after he had moved away from his early formalism and the use of punctuation. His statement suggests that unpunctuated poems should be less fixed or "stapled," and that the lack of punctuation would encourage a more challenging, open reading experience. However, Merwin describes punctuation as a "structural convention" that "alluded to and assumed an allegiance to the rational protocol of *written* language, and of *prose* in particular" (1, emphasis mine). Merwin's abandonment of punctuation is clearly connected to a desire that language as spoken and heard should be essential to his poetry (1). The connection between the absence of punctuation and orality evidenced by Merwin is also relevant for Howe, whose poetry is heavily invested in both the oral and the visual.

Howe's poetry and hypertext

Hypertext literature provides some useful ideas for approaching Howe's poetry; of particular importance are the two key ideas of the lexia and the link. The term lexia was coined by Roland Barthes to mean a discrete unit of reading; the term has since been adopted by scholars of hypertext literature such as George Landow, Terence Harpold, and J. Yellowlees Douglas, and even appears in the title of Talan Memmott's hypertext work,

Lexia to Perplexia.[13] At the simplest level, a hypertext is a collection of lexias that are

connected by links, "a direct connection from one position in a text to another" (Aarseth,

"Nonlinearity" 67). It is the hyperlink that transforms a collection of disparate lexias into

a textual network that can be traversed, usually with many different paths possible. There

is quite a range of thought about the hyperlink; some critics dismiss it as "merely a

connector, a glorified page to turn" (J. Parker); Terry Harpold theorizes the hyperlink as a

fetishized gap ("Contingencies"), and Jeff Parker tries to categorize hyperlinks according

to function and literary effect (J. Parker). For our purposes, we can sideline these

debates; the relevance of hypertext to Howe's poetry is in reading it as a network of

linked lexias.

The lexia and the hyperlink help us in approaching Howe's visually chaotic

poetry, where some pages are filled with scattered or overlapping lines of poetry at

various angles. Like a hypertext, Howe's poetry presents us with a number of connected

lines of text which can be read in a variety of sequences, depending on the reader's

choices; thinking of these lines and text segments as lexias may be useful to the reader.[14]

However, while the connections between lexias within a particular hypertext can be

mapped out in virtual space (for instance, with the mapping function provided by

Eastgate Systems' StorySpace), Howe's lexias are actually organized within the two-

dimensional space of the page, and the linkage between them is not virtual, but spatial.

---

[13] Espen Aarseth suggests the term "texton" to denote the "basic element of textuality" in order to avoid the connotations of sequentiality and violent destruction or cutting of text associated with Barthes' term; Aarseth interprets Barthes' "lexia" not as a "building block of textuality," but as a way of reading ("Nonlinearity" 60). However, in spite of Aarseth's concerns, lexia has become the dominant term.
[14] The term lexia is not only useful, but also strangely appropriate to Howe's poetry. Barthes' idea of lexias as "cuttings" of text suits the fact that Howe, in composing her poetry, would physically cut apart lines of text. She describes her writing process for creating these chaotic or "scattered" pages as an iteration of typing, cutting, pasting, and xeroxing (Howe, *Personal Interview;* Howe, "Keller Interview" 8).

Thinking of Howe's textual units in light of hypertext lexias is a helpful way into complicated pages of poetry that might intimidate even experienced readers.[15] However, several factors make Howe's work more difficult to read than a normal hypertext narrative. For one thing, because of their position within the page-space, Howe's lexias have the added quality of their angles; Howe thinks of vertical lines as "a sharp, violent voice" (*Personal Interview*). Howe elaborates, "with this craziness here, it would be very hard to read it aloud … I hope that … the way it's placed on the page lets you get a sound" (*Personal Interview*). Howe's readers must take into account the placement and angle of the text, just as they would attend to other visual, typographic cues such as bold or italicized text.

Howe's readers are forced into unfamiliar territory because Howe's poetry evades established poetic categories and refuses to conform to typographical and authorial standards. Someone reading "The Nonconformist's Memorial" is given fewer clues than the reader of a hypertext narrative because the structure is unlabeled and the links are unclear. A hypertext, by definition, contains hyperlinks, which are anchored at specific points within the text; usually the links are words or phrases, and now increasingly images or other media. The placement of hyperlinks and the contents of linked lexias can assist readers in interpreting the text; the hypertext reader, to some extent, "*believes in the link*, in its promise of a relation between lexias" (Harpold, "Conclusions" 209, emphasis original). Links are a significant part of the structure of a hypertext, and programs like StorySpace that provide a visual interface to map out the connections between lexias can

---

[15] Scholars have also compared Howe's poetry to palimpsests (Ma 478; Vanderborg), which is theoretically interesting; however, hypertext is a more accessible analogy for contemporary readers, and can also be a powerful tool for teaching difficult texts such as this (McDonald).

give the reader some idea of that structure. There is no categorical label on Howe's text to give us any assurance of the poem's operation.

It is possible, on certain pages of "The Nonconformist's Memorial," to discern links between lexias; there are structural connections with semantic significance. For example, the word "Transfiguration" on page 8 visually connects several lexias by its placement and proximity to them, and is a central concept as well. Howe suggests that there is a link between lines of text going the same direction on facing pages: "it's important that these last lines go in the same direction … they are *linked* in the process of what happens" ("Keller Interview" 11, emphasis mine). However, these kinds of links are tenuous and uncertain; they are not colored or underlined, and there is no "reveal codes" button that will display them for us. This uncertainty is appropriate to the tactical difficulty of Howe's poetry; she does not want a reader to be "just a passive consumer," but instead hopes for "readers to play, to enter the mystery of language, and to follow words where they lead, to let language lead them" ("Keller Interview" 31). The kind of interaction Howe's lexias and spatial links demand is much more taxing than moving a computer mouse and deciding which link to click first.

In "The Nonconformist's Memorial," there is an additional complication: lexias can actually interfere with or obscure each other. Letters, and sometimes even words, can be nearly lost and difficult to decipher. In attempting to make sense of the text, the reader may attempt to shift the page into perspective, as if it is a three-dimensional space with lexias layered on top of each other. This "writing-over-writing gives the page a sense of *depth* that affects reading strategies… [it] gives the page the semblance of three-dimensions and … asks the reader to look *behind* letters in addition to looking *at* them"

(Back 138, emphasis original). We quickly discover that "surface horizontal and vertical reading procedures prove inadequate" (138) for Howe's poetry, but even as we discard them for techniques that attempt to deal with these textual depths, we struggle to place and relate lexias within this visual field. Like an optical illusion, words seem to shift back and forth between different configurations; focus on a particular passage, and for a moment it is the foreground; focus on an overlapping lexia, and other lines of text may seem to move into the foreground, like obscuring slats in a window shade which we read through, or they may recede into the background. Brian Reed suggests that Howe's verse "resembles the optical illusions made famous by Gestalt psychologists" (23). Even the reader's natural desire to order the text is problematic, because this spatial organization is an attempt to impose a hierarchy on the lexias, which the poet continually subverts. Howe does not clearly privilege any of these lexias; even the right-side up text is not clearly dominant. On the more scattered, chaotic pages, the right-side up text is rarely central, most noticeable, or even most memorable, and the vertical orientation is often reversed on adjacent pages.

Reading the lexias and linkages on a single page or pair of pages is difficult enough, but the reader's task is complicated further by the necessity of relating the sections and pages to each other. In Howe's poetry, it is often unclear where sections begin and end, and how we ought to refer to these sections. This is particularly difficult in works such as *A Bibliography of the King's Book, or Eikon Basilike*, where prose and quoted excerpts are interspersed with original poetic text. Rachel Tzvia Back calls the opening section of *Eikon Basilike* the "epigraph poem" (132), and refers to this section, and sometimes to single pages (particularly the more visually complicated ones), as

poems, although they are not marked or labeled as such in the text. That such a careful critic shows this uncertainty about the confines and limits of these texts is a telling instance of the difficulties inherent in Howe's poetry.

Howe in relation to Poetic Tradition

The difficulty of categorizing Howe's work leaves her readers without the advantage of familiarity with generic conventions or comparison to similar texts when they approach her poetry. Hypertext literature is now somewhat established as a genre; there are well-known works considered to be "canonical" by those who study the field, and once readers have become familiar with a few of these texts they should have a sense of how to approach other hypertext narratives. In contrast, Howe's poetry is unique and difficult to categorize, as one suspects she may prefer. Marjorie Perloff calls Howe's "visual devices-- line placement, typography, page design ... a signature (quite literally, a series of marks made on paper) as unique and 'personal' as any we have in poetry today" (413). Because of her distinctiveness, there is no clearly agreed upon label that quite fits Howe. She is sometimes grouped with the Language poets, but there is also evidence of connections with Modernism, and even Confessional poetry. Howe's work also bears some similarity to concrete poetry, but it would be a stretch to consider her visual work representational enough to actually label it as concrete.

Howe's texts and views on the poet-reader relationship share some characteristics with those of the Language poets. These similarities include "a commitment to transforming the reader into an active participant" and a rejection of "textual closure" (Back 14), aims that are also frequently espoused by hypertext authors. However, unlike Language poetry, Howe's work is not "explicitly political" (Tuma 914). Howe herself

claims that she is not a Language poet, although she admits that she considers the

Language poets her peers ("Keller Interview" 20). For reasons of chronology, theory,

and relation to tradition, Howe does not fit neatly into the Language poetry group.

Howe describes herself as "working in an eccentric twentieth-century American

tradition that embraces among others Duncan, Olson, Williams, Stevens, H.D., and Hart

Crane" ("Difficulties Interview" 18). The poetic traditions Howe draws on include a

significant dose of Modernism. She confirms this when she acknowledges "much of my

inspiration comes from modernist writers" ("Keller Interview" 20), and her fondness for

the Modernists is substantiated by her frequent references to them in interviews. She

mentions Lawrence, H.D., Eliot, and Stevens (Howe, *Falcon Interview* 41; "Foster

Interview" 48), Joyce and Pound ("Keller Interview" 31), claims Wallace Stevens as her

"favorite poet of the twentieth century" ("Keller Interview" 18), and names Eliot's *Four

Quartets* and H.D.'s *Trilogy* as ideals of what she would like her own poetry to achieve

("Keller Interview" 18). She repeats this last sentiment in her latest work: "'Little

Gidding,' Eliot's fourth Quartet, has served me as a beacon for what poetry must

achieve" (*The Midnight* 123). The Modernists are important for Howe, and not as a

movement to rebel against, but as inspiration.

The ideas of testimony and witness are important themes in "The

Nonconformist's Memorial," and are even offered as a model of communication. In light

of their significance, it is worth taking a moment to consider Howe in relation to one

more tradition: confessional poetry. It is somewhat strange to think of her as a

confessional poet, in the usual sense of the term; her work may be "particular, personal,

self-revealing," but it is clearly "not authoritative or unified" (Back 12), nor is it

dominated by a first-person voice. Howe's prose often seems far more autobiographical than her poetry.[16]

Howe's work shares some surface commonalities with confessional poetry, including an insistence on the importance of craft in poetry (Hoffman 696, 705, 706) and an "artistic commitment to truth" (Hoffman 698).[17] As evidenced above, Howe's work draws on some of the same poetic traditions that fueled confessional poetry, including Modernism (Hoffman 690, 692, 705; Molesworth 165, 177), and T. S. Eliot in particular, in spite of his status as "the champion of poetic impersonality" (Hoffman 691). Of particular interest to both Howe and the confessional poets are Eliot's later works, such as "Ash-Wednesday" and *Four Quartets*, which are "deeply personal" and "outright confessional … in a more traditional, religious sense" (Hoffman 708). These two works also dovetail with the other significant tradition shared by Howe and the confessional poets, which is the appropriation of religious thought and language (Hoffman 689, 701; Molesworth 164, 167, 173).

In spite of these shared traditions, Howe's poetic philosophy differs significantly from that of the confessionals. The confessional poet believes that "his own sensibility … is the only subject available to him" (Hoffman 688), which results in an inherent selfishness in confessional poetry that has exposed its practitioners to charges of "supreme egotism" (Molesworth 172) and "poetic solipsism" (Hoffman 698). In contrast, Howe feels no compunction to limit her subjects in this way, and her poetry is full of other voices. Like confessional poetry, Howe's work often bears witness to

---

[16] Fiona Green reads Howe's *Secret History of the Dividing Line* as "a process of mourning [for Howe's father] that works toward a point of rest" (83); however, it is questionable whether this would be apparent to a reader without access to the unpublished biographical materials included in Green's research.

[17] When asked about post-structuralism by Lynn Keller, Howe answers in terms of truth: "I think there is a truth, even if it's not fashionable to say so anymore" ("Keller Interview" 30).

traumas; but rather than writing about "one more psychotic episode, one more terminally ill relative, one more horrendous familial crisis" (Molesworth 174), Howe tends to focus her attention on traumas that are historical and textual in nature.

Howe also shares with the confessional poets a belief in the power of language, in the "redeeming word" of poetry (Molesworth 166), although she may direct that power to different ends. It is difficult to accurately assess the therapeutic value of confessional poetry to the writer, and Hoffman characterizes the "presumption that the confessional manages to exorcise his private demons through his work" as "the therapeutic fallacy" (Hoffman 706). Confessional poets admit that the resolution in their poetry does not always correspond to actual, emotional resolution; but in spite of this, they still strive for resolution in their poetry, for the "construction of a self" that is whole (Hoffman 701), one that exists at least in the text, if not in actuality. In contrast, both in person and in her poetry, Howe evinces a much greater degree of comfort with fragmentation and lack of resolution. As she tells Janet Falcon, "I don't think conflicts are ever dissolved. You just learn to abide them" (*Falcon Interview* 40). In the past, Howe has shown outright animosity towards confessionalism; she declares to Lynn Keller, "I do not like confessional poetry. These days, in America, confession is on every TV program, let alone in most poems" ("Keller Interview" 33). However, in spite of these strong sentiments and differences in philosophy and focus, there are discernible connections between Howe and the confessionals, even if Howe herself is unlikely to admit it.

In Howe we find a poet who refuses to conform to poetic traditions, and whose work cannot be neatly categorized. Although she has connections to hypertext literature, concrete poetry, Language poetry, Modernism, and confessional poetry, Howe herself

resists all of these labels—sometimes vocally. And after all, perhaps it would be inappropriate for a poet who celebrates nonconformists and antinomians to be too easily categorized.

Transformation, Versions, and Conversion

A useful entry into the poem "The Nonconformist's Memorial" is the passage from the Gospel of John that is placed at its beginning. The passage is taken from John 20:15 – 18,[18] and in this passage there are several different kinds of "turns" that the poem deals with repeatedly. The passage describes the moment when Mary Magdalene meets the resurrected Christ and mistakes him for a gardener until he calls her by name. Here we find the first and simplest turn of the poem, the physical turn of Mary to Christ: "She turned herself" (*NCM* 3). But there is also the mental turn of recognition: at first Mary thinks that Christ is the gardener, but when he calls her by name she turns to him, recognizes him, and calls him "Master." This is recognition not only of a person, but also of position and authority.

The quoted passage ends with the statement that "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples," which is recapped later in Howe's words "Came saw went running told" (*NCM* 12). Mary turns away from Christ towards other people in order to share her experience; this is an instance of testimony, which is a major concern of the poem. In particular, Howe is interested in the transmission and translation of testimony, and the different versions of stories which we receive, along with the testimonies that are lost.

---

[18] Here and elsewhere, in other biblical references in the poem, Howe uses the King James Version. It is unclear why she makes this choice; it may simply be one of preference or tradition. However, it is worthwhile to note that this particular religious text was produced at the behest of a secular king, as is evident in its label as the "authorized" version.

The poet evinces an uncertainty towards the testimony conveyed by historical documents; she declares that "the shadow of history / is the ground of faith" (*NCM* 13), but this shadow seems hazy and uncertain. Howe's concern with the transmission and versions of stories is complicated by the presence of different historical documents with varying, and sometimes conflicting, details—in particular, the "synoptic" Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), which contrast with Howe's source text, "the 'nonconforming' and last of the New Testament's four gospels, the Gospel According to St. John" (Back 162). The substantial differences in material suggest that the Gospel of John was written based on "a distinct set of traditions and sources" (Blessing 586). The poet refers to "Improbable disciple passages / Exegetes explain the conflict // some manuscripts and versions" (*NCM* 15), and raises the issue of conflicting texts and the apparent need of experts to harmonize them. This is a difficult task, since "John differs in overall material, in the length and sequence of events, and especially in the nature of the Christ as pre-existent Son of God" (Blessing 586). Elsewhere in Howe's poem, between references to two different historical events recorded in the Gospels, one of them explicitly in Mark, we read the lines "Retrospective chronologies / Synoptics speak" (*NCM* 13). The poet brings to our attention not only the source, but also the timing of these records: a retrospective chronology is something an exegete might write, to "explain the conflict" and harmonize timelines. Marshall McLuhan notes that "scriptural scholars of both the Old and New Testaments frequently say that while their treatment must be linear, the subject is not" (*UM* 54). Kamila Blessing points out more specifically, "the need to reconcile the various Gospels is a modern problem, and a misunderstanding of the nature of ancient writings. For the first-century writer or reader,

differences do not imply that one or the other must be wrong" (586). This attitude towards texts is one that belongs to an oral culture; in contrast, print-culture seems to induce the need to control and authorize texts, and produces the kind of society that issues authorized editions of the Bible and Acts of Uniformity. Howe's poetry suggests a movement towards a more oral sensibility; her open-ended texts offer us many interpretive options, without much finality or closure.

The poet is not only concerned with these variations between manuscripts; she is also interested in those details, particularly names, that are missing from the record: "Two women with names / followed by two without names" (*NCM* 15). As Howe struggles to recover and remember Mary Magdalene from these texts, she touches on other women who are even more absent from the textual record. "You have your names," she says, and then repeats herself, "You have your names // I have not read them" (*NCM* 14). Another passage dwells on uncertain and conflicting details:

> Wording of an earlier tradition
> Disciples are huddled together
> We do not know
> The Evangelist from tradition
> He bent down
> Mary was standing
> In the synoptic tradition Mary
> Enters the tomb (*NCM* 12)

These lines contrast the physical positions of the disciple bending down to look into the tomb and Mary standing, and these two figures present us with two different kinds of uncertainty: the details about the disciple who bends over to look into the tomb are scarce, while there are too many, seemingly conflicting details about Mary's interaction

with the tomb. The disciple's story is only found in John; in Luke there is a similar story,

but instead of two disciples, only Peter runs to the tomb (Luke 24:12); the other Gospels

omit it entirely. In the one place where the story is found, there is no name; only "the

other disciple, whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2), a description found elsewhere in John,

which tradition has attributed to the author of that Gospel (*NIV*, 1624).

Mary's position here is also uncertain, but not for lack of detail. In Mark and

Luke, we are told explicitly that Mary and the other women enter the tomb (Mark 16:5,

Luke 24:3). The story in Matthew is a bit more vague, and undercuts the similarity even

within "synoptic tradition." The women meet an angel at the entrance of the tomb; he

invites them to come and look inside the tomb, but there is no clear indication that they

do so (Matthew 28:1-6). To add to the confusion, each Gospel lists a slightly different set

of names for the women who accompany Mary. Only in John do we find this seemingly

solitary figure, who "stood without at the sepulchre weeping" (John 20:11), the kind of

woman whom "no community can accompany" (*NCM* 15). These examples demonstrate

the poet's concerns about the reliability of written testimony, both in regard to omissions

and contradictions.

The repetition of the word "tradition" in this passage is worth noting. It appears

three times within seven lines, and twice at the end of lines, each instance separated by

two lines of poetry. The insistence "we do not know" betrays an unwillingness to rely on

tradition, and Howe's poem is most involved with the Gospel that is outside the "synoptic

tradition" of the other three Gospels. This concern about tradition is relevant to larger

questions of control, both as to the authority behind these traditions, and whether or not

their attempts to make things uniform should be trusted. The very act of writing down

the Gospel is implicated; Howe explains, "somehow the net gets torn, the idea gets broken—the Gospel, when it becomes gospel, when it is written, grasps" ("Keller Interview" 11). Howe's statement seems to contradict the lines in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" which say the exact opposite: "The nets were not torn / The Gospel did not grasp" (*NCM* 7), but the capitalization here is significant. For Howe, the true "Gospel" is not torn or grasping; but when it is written down, it loses those qualities. Walter Ong points out the difference in the reliability of oral and textual records: "Oral witnesses could certainly not be forged" ("Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization" 4). The written record has a degree of authority, but in the process of becoming text, voices are lost.

There are two less obvious turns implied in the passage from John 20, which are made more explicit later in the poem. The spiritual turn of conversion is implicit in Mary's physical and mental turns; this conversion is described most explicitly in the third section of the poem: "It is the Word to whom she turns / True submission and subjection" (*NCM* 30). We find a pertinent description in the first section of the poem, on a page that begins with the title-like label "the Narrative of Finding."

> One solitude lies alone
> Can be represented
>
> where the capture breaking
> along the shock wave
>
> interpreted as space-time
> on a few parameters   (*NCM* 13)

Howe uses contemporary vocabulary to express a moment of intense, dramatic change—
"the capture breaking / along the shock wave" sounds similar to the Christian conversion
that René Girard describes, a deep transformation that is "open-ended" and moves
towards "a totally unpredictable future" (3). Howe appropriates mathematical and
scientific terminology here to express a personal, spiritual experience. This is akin to her
appropriation of the term "singularity" for the title of her 1990 volume of poetry, which
she discusses in an interview with Edward Foster:

> In algebra a singularity is the point where plus becomes minus …
> The singularity … is the point where there is a sudden change to
> something completely else. It's a chaotic point. It's the point chaos
> enters cosmos, the instant articulation. Then there is a leap into
> something else. ("Foster Interview" 30-31)

As with the terminology in "The Nonconformist's Memorial," this "sudden change"
seems to have a connection to Girard's open-ended, unpredictable transformation. Howe
goes on to say that the term singularity "seemed to be a way of describing these poems of
mine. They are singular works on pages, and grouped together, they fracture language,
they are charged" ("Foster Interview" 30-31), noting also that the term has a certain
spiritual significance as well. In both of these quotes, Howe uses scientific and
mathematical language to convey a moment of dramatic change that can be a spiritual
event, or a poetic, linguistic one ("the instant articulation"); and, it may be that the two
are related.

The last turn implied in this passage from John is transfiguration or
transformation, turning into something else. Some kind of physical change is suggested
both by the fact that Mary fails to recognize Jesus at first, and by the resurrection of a
body that was dead and crucified. Jesus tells Mary "Touch me not; for I am not yet

ascended to my Father" (*NCM* 3), and the poet seems to puzzle over this strange

command, repeating it, in various forms, through the course of the poem: "Don't cling to

me … stop touching me" (*NCM* 11), "Do not touch me" (*NCM* 15), and "stop clinging to

me" (*NCM* 22). This is indeed a difficult verse, and it is hard to reconcile with passages

from the other Gospels; in Matthew we find a variation on the story in John, but there we

read that the women "came and held him by the feet" (Matthew 28:9), and there is no

reprimand. Adding to the confusion, in Luke the disciples are given a directive that is the

exact inverse of what Mary is told: "handle me, and see" (Luke 24:39). One well-known

commentary implies that Mary is already touching Christ, and suggests that she is being

told to let go; when Christ says, "I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17) it is to

reassure Mary that she will see him again; however, the wording of this interpretation is

equivocal, and it is offered only as one possibility (*NIV*, 1636). Howe admits that this

verse could be interpreted as "a sexist moment" since Christ "says 'touch me' to doubting

Thomas, but to her, 'no, don't touch me'"; but she considers that a reductive reading.

Howe adds that if Mary were to touch Christ, that would "stop the moment of …

ascending to the father, of dying" (*Personal Interview*). The moment in the garden with

Mary is a gap between the transformed Christ's resurrection and ascension.

The Christ figure is repeatedly characterized as transformed throughout the poem,

and several references figure him in some other form. For instance, the early statement

"Flesh become wheat" (*NCM* 4) presents a communion image stated in a revision of the

Gospel writer's phrase, "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Later, near the end of the

first section, we read the line "word flesh crumbled page edge" (*NCM* 13), which again

plays on John's idea of Christ as the logos, but extends the metaphor to consider the written word, and how we are to deal with the physical, bookish presence of this word.

Elsewhere, we find an entire page devoted to the varying forms and names of the Christ figure.

> In the Evangelist's mind
> it is I absolutely I
> Word before name
> Resurrection and life are one
> it is I
> without any real subject
> all that I say is I
> A predicate nominative
> not subject the I is
> the bread the light the door
> the way the shepherd the vine   (*NCM* 10)

The breathless, unpunctuated rush of nouns separated only by a repeated definite article that ends this passage is a list of names that Christ gives himself in the Gospel of John. The six names or forms in the last two lines each occur as an "I am" statement, usually at the beginning of a sermon or speech, and most of them are presented as metaphors for salvation; Blessing suggests that "the seven 'I am' statements of Jesus" are one way to structure the Gospel of John (588). It should be noted that Howe sets apart the "resurrection and life" on its own line, and differentiates it from the other terms. These words are also recorded in the Gospel of John as spoken by Jesus, and like the others, they are preceded by the words "I am" (John 11:25); however, instead of occurring in an address to a group of people, this statement is made to an individual, in a very personal context: it is addressed to Martha, whose brother Lazarus has recently died, and shortly

thereafter Jesus demonstrates the power of this resurrection and life by bringing Lazarus back from the dead.

The two words "I am," on their own, form a strong statement that was viewed as blasphemous by the Jews, since this is the name of God as revealed to Moses. Howe picks up on the Gospel's repeated portrayal of Christ's "I am" statements in the repeated, insistent "I" of this passage; the word "I" occurs six times, and ends three lines. The statement "it is I absolutely I" further underscores this insistence. Howe also plays with grammar a bit, saying "a predicate nominative / not subject the I is" (*NCM* 10). The metaphorical terms are predicate nominatives, while the "I" is indeed the subject of the "I am" sentences, grammatically. Thus, while the "I" may be the subject, it is not subjected; that is, it is not dominated, subjugated, or controlled. Howe's subtle use of language serves to further underscore the strength of this insistent statement.

The poet further hints at a transformed Christ in section two, where we read "Snow and white as wool // bleak bright sea-wind spray // Who will bear witness" (*NCM* 17). The phrase "snow and white as wool" might, at first glance, be taken as an echo of the singular event of Jesus' transfiguration;[19] however, the epigraph from Revelation 19 at the beginning of this section, coupled with the fact that the transfiguration is not recounted in the Gospel of John, make it seem more likely and more accurate to identify this with the description of the glorified Christ in the first chapter of John's Revelation. "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; … and his voice as the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1:14). The imagery of snow and wool appear almost unchanged in Howe's lines; the flame suggests

---

[19] The description here is similar to that in the accounts of Christ's transfiguration (Luke 9:29, Mark 9:3, Luke 17:2), which is often interpreted as a prefiguration of his later glorification; similar terms are also used to describe angels (Luke24:4, Matthew 28:2-4).

a brightness that might be difficult to endure, hence "bleak," and the "sea-wind spray" is suggestive of the "sound of many waters" to which John bears witness. The bleak, bright figure described here and in Revelation is a glorious, transformed Christ that was only hinted at by his temporary, earthly transfiguration.

These ideas of transfiguration and transformation do not apply only to Christ; the poem suggests that Mary also experiences some kind of transformation. On the last page of the first section of the poem, after several pages of upright lines of text, we encounter another page with overlapping and angled text. At the top of the page, upside-down, we read "Out of enclosure She / was out of enclosure" (*NCM* 16), and moving diagonally across these words, also upside-down, is the word "*Transfiguration*." This word draws our eyes both because of its placement and because it is italicized; it connects back to the earlier statement "the soul's ascension in a state of separation" (*NCM* 9), another line that is angled upwards across other text. Here, the word "transfiguration" seems to sum up both the page and the section that it ends, and connects to the lines about Mary, the only subject evident in the text to experience this transfiguration.

"The Nonconformist's Memorial" engages and challenges the intellect with the complexity of several different kinds of turns and the notion of conversion. This mental challenge is heightened by the difficulty of understanding Howe's place in poetic tradition, and the need to discern the structure and connections within the text, like a hypertext with unmarked links. However, the poem moves beyond merely engaging the reader's brain; the reader must engage physically and spiritually, as well.

The Physical Demands of the Words on the Page

How often do critics consider poetry as a physical act? Do critics look at the print on the page, at the shapes of words, at the surface—the space of the paper itself—? Very rarely. - Susan Howe (1990 interview)

We have begun to approach "The Nonconformist's Memorial" by way of the mental challenges inherent in reading Howe's poetry, but it is also necessary to address the physical demands her work makes on the reader. These demands may not be strenuous, but they are fairly unusual for most readers. Because Howe experiments with the visual appearance of text on the page, writing lines of text at different angles, sometimes upside-down, sometimes overlapping each other, in order to read the poem the reader must physically rotate the book. Howe comments that "the upside-down, the fact that you have to move it around ... that should really mean that you can read it any way" (*Personal Interview*). This physical aspect of the poem challenges the reader to interact with the text in a new, visual, rotational reading, which demands careful attention to the placement and orientation of words and phrases.

The first instance of experimental typography that the reader encounters in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" is fairly simple, visually—although it is already challenging to interpret. When we first glance at page six, we see three couplets in the middle of the page; however, the second line of each couplet is upside-down. This is a strange new, and perhaps more physically accurate, instance of the turn of the farmer's plow which the word "verse" is derived from. On first encountering this, a reader is likely to wonder how to go about reading poetry like this; the reader has several choices to make, both in ordering the lines and in interpreting them.

Although some of these pages seem impossible to read aloud, Susan Howe does so. It would be impossible, even with several voices, to make the sounds overlap the way

the words do on the page, yet Howe reads her own poetry. In a *LINEbreak* radio interview with Charles Bernstein (*LINEbreak*), Howe reads aloud some of the most visually complicated pages from "The Nonconformist's Memorial." Before she begins reading from the poem, Howe comments, "I had to figure out a way to read aloud, because there are pages … that are scattered, one might say." Howe is a careful, skillful reader, which is hardly surprising given the theater background in her family, and her readings seem to be well received; at one poetry reading given by Susan Howe several years ago, "mobs of people jammed the tiny space," and were "thrilled, delighted, awed" (*Small Press Traffic*).

An author's interpretation is certainly not the final or most accurate word about a work of literature, but it may provide us with some insights. Howe's choice in the instance of the upside-down couplets on page 6 is fascinating: she reads the lines in order as they go down the page, but she whispers the upside-down lines. She elaborates that this choice is meant to "sound like another voice—the hissing return of the repressed" ("Keller Interview" 11).

In an interpretive move that seems to fit this idea of whispered lines, Susan Schultz reads this page as the "feminine rendered upside-down ... as if to counter the 'single' and coherent 'thread of narrative' found in the Gospels," and says that the woman's voice confronts and displaces "the masculine voice" despite "its typographical certainty about itself" (8). Howe confirms that "the reversed text on either side was a kind of break-in, some other thought going in some other direction" ("Keller Interview" 9). However, there is another way to read this page; it seems likely that many readers would flip the book over to read the upside-down text, and this, of course, reverses which

lines are granted "typographical certainty" on the page. In either case, there are at least two obvious, different ways to order the lines when reading them: in sequence, disregarding typographical orientation, or in groups by orientation. Howe says, "the order I have in mind goes through the three lines that are right-side up and then follows the order of the other three lines if you turn the book upside down"; but she admits that "you could read with the reversed lines interpolated between the ones that are right-side up" ("Keller Interview" 9). Schultz's reading seems to fit with Howe's self-described aim "to illustrate the process of her [Mary's] interruption and erasure" ("Keller Interview" 11), but it is in fact reductively simplistic; perhaps Schultz has made assumptions about what this text says without looking at it closely. She labels the upside-down lines as feminine, but gives no clear reason for doing so; the two explicit references to Mary are in the first and last right-side-up lines, and the quote about the "single thread of narrative" is one of the upside-down lines. Even Schultz's claim that the "thread of narrative" found in the Gospels is "single" and "coherent" seems incongruous, since Howe repeatedly dwells on the differences of versions and details in these texts. Howe's presentation of the interplay between male and female voices is far more complicated than what Schultz would have us believe. Howe complains that "Mary, the disciple, the first one who witnesses the resurrection, the one whose story we go by, gets dropped away almost at once," but she also says that Mary is "continuing through these narratives" ("Keller Interview" 11). To a limited extent, the written record of the Gospel does include Mary's voice.

Determining how to read these lines is further complicated by the facing page; the next page is very nearly a copy of the three couplets, but flipped upside-down.

According to Rachel Tzvia Back, "This 'mirroring impulse' is prominent in much of Howe's work, and Howe herself identifies the use of this technique as an expression of her sense that these verbal reflections strengthen the impact of the visual design on the page," although there are thematic issues present in Howe's mirroring as well (143). Howe tells Lynn Keller that it was in writing *Thorow* that she first discovered the power of mirrored pages to make "the scattering effect … stronger" ("Keller Interview" 9). In many instances, the two pages are a perfect mirror image (for example, a pair of pages in *Eikon Basilike*, *NCM* 56-57), and on the more chaotic pages this is actually a helpful tool to read all of the scattered text.

In the case of pages six and seven of "The Nonconformist's Memorial," the mirroring is inexact: the lines are grouped differently, and two new lines are added. These lines gives the second page a very different visual character, and emphasizes different phrases. Page six looks very spare, with each of the three mirror-couplets surrounded by white space; by contrast, the text on page seven is much denser. The new configuration emphasizes the third line, "a single thread of narrative," because it is indented, and juts out to the right from a cluster of five lines. Two phrases have been added to the lines from the first page, "the nets were torn" and "the Gospel did not grasp," and these lines stand out. This may be due partly to the fact that we are reading them in the context of words we have already seen once, but the emphasis is heightened by the visual arrangement. These two lines stand out because they are more isolated by white space than the other text on the page, and because they appear at the bottom of the text.

Perhaps these two pages are a kind of rotational reading warm-up, because the page that follows is the most visually complicated one in the poem. The lines that are

printed upright are actually in the minority (a total of four lines that are strictly upright and horizontal), and it takes a good deal of time and patience to examine the complexity of the text on this page. Although we may need to rotate the book to read the lines, we still have to read them bearing in mind where they are on the page and in relation to the rest of the text, particularly on a page as complicated as this one. When we look at this page as a whole, the word "*Testimony*" (emphasis original) commands our attention for two reasons: it is italicized (a typographical detail used very sparingly in the poem: only three times for non-titles), and it is the visual center of the text. The long angled lines have a visual weight that puts the text slightly off-balance, and makes it seem as if the text wants to turn. The word "*Testimony*" is the point around which the page hinges; it is the center line of the nine lines that are upside-down, and by proximity on the page it also connects two of the sideways text sections. Back sees this page as dominated by a leaning crucifix made by the crossing lines at the top right; this is a kind of visual testimony, since "that which has been witnessed is conveyed ... also through pictorial—or iconic—typography" (167). Although Back sees the crucifix as leaning slightly to the right, the length and weight of the lines might make it seem that the cross is actually on its side, turned over. In either case, if we take this as an iconic testimony, it confuses the persons involved: who is the witness and who testifies? Based on the narrative, we might be inclined to say Mary Magdalene, but the lines are blurred and now the poet herself also participates in bearing witness.

As we have already seen, oral and textual testimony are both significant in this poem. Here, on a page that centers around the word testimony, the word knowledge is mentioned twice. There is "Effectual crucifying knowledge" at the bottom of the page,

and "night drift shreds earth knowledge" (*NCM* 8) in what Back identifies as the crucifix beam. Knowledge is portrayed here as both dangerous and fragmentary. Not only that, but the source and intent of the words is unclear, even to the poet; they may be "a command issuing from authority or counsel." This ambiguity of this statement, with its uncertain antecedent, is heightened by the lack of punctuation; instead of two options we are actually offered three: the word "counsel" may be understood as advice which is proffered, but could also be a person, or an advisor. Either of these meanings is acceptable (*OED*), and the syntax allows for either; in fact, because of the proximity of authority and counsel, it almost seems easier to read the more paradoxical meaning first, that of an advisor issuing a command. Even the wind—which is often connected to words and language, since it is related to spirit and voice—is described as "blowing and veering," movement rather like the words and meanings on this page.

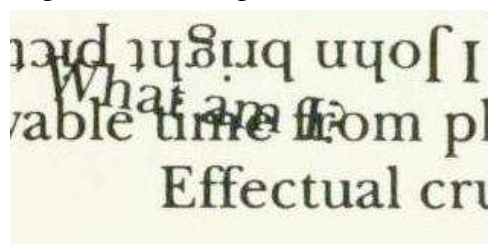One particularly interesting detail on this page is the question "What am I?"; it is angled and overlaps other lines in such a way as to render it almost unreadable, particularly the "I," the center of this question about identity, which is very nearly obliterated. Here is an uncertainty, a lack of knowledge quite different from the very certain representation of Christ as "I absolutely I" (*NCM* 10). When Howe reads this page on LINEbreak, she emphasizes this line more; she reads the question not once but twice, both times quickly and insistently, and the second time it comes as an interruption in the line it overlaps: "suddenly unperceivable – what am I? – from place to place." Howe omits the word "time" (which is half visible on the page), but not the word "from" (also half visible,

Figure 3-1. Detail from *NCM*, page 8.

although the first two letters are almost completely obscured). If we consider the page as a space with depth, where lines of text are layered on top of each other, it might seem that to Howe the question "What am I?" is in one of the uppermost layers within this textual space.

Howe's reading of this page is enlightening in other ways, particularly because of an accidental omission. In the LINEbreak recording, Howe never reads the four horizontal upside-down lines above the word "Testimony," the section that begins with the line "More in faith as to sense."[20] Howe is a careful, systematic reader, and her copies of these complicated, scattered pages are covered with a complicated notation for reading order and delivery styles ("Keller Interview" 14-15). Howe laughs, with a hint of self-deprecation, at her notation and admits, "in a way, you could say … 'she's faking it'" (*Personal Interview*). Despite her carefully "plotted out" ("Keller Interview" 13) reading, or perhaps even because of this rigorous order, mistakes are a distinct possibility. Howe admits, in reference to a passage from "The Frames," that "this central piece of text can get lost. A couple of times I've actually missed that, and that's a very important part" ("Keller Interview" 16).

These mistakes, and even the planned nature of Howe's readings, betray the secondary nature of Howe's oral performance: her reading is an orality in service to the text which precedes it. The reversed connection between orality and text becomes apparent when we compare Howe's careful, plotted reading to Cicero, who wrote his texts only after an oration had been given, or the "radically oral" medieval university,

---

[20] In describing her reading practices, Howe explains, "I don't read the upside-down lines; I read the material on the facing pages" ("Keller Interview" 16); in this case, the four upside-down omitted lines are duplicated on the facing page. When I asked Howe about this, she said there is no mirroring here; after checking her notation, she said the omission was a mistake (*Personal Interview*).

where text was always "recycled in one way or another back into the oral world" (Ong, "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization" 3, 4). For Howe, the poem as text comes first. She values sound highly and loves poetry read aloud; but she also admits that, when she wrote the poem, she did not plan to read it in a particular way (*Personal Interview*).

Howe states that she is "quite rigid" in the way she reads her poetry, and compares her readings to lines "spoken by an actor on a stage," but at the same time she insists that the reader should not have a set way of reading, and that the text can be read any way (*Personal Interview*). While we should not let Howe's reading limit our own, there are insights to be gained from tracing her path across a complicated page of her poetry such as page 8 of *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. Howe describes her reading of this page as "unseverity battling against severity" (*Personal Interview*), and she begins in a stern, commanding tone with the angled text at the top of the page, "Whether the words be a command," and then continues with the vertical line "Dissenters gathered" and the angled "night drift shreds…" (*NCM* 8). She lands on the upright phrase "Wind blowing and veering," and then leaps to the center of the page and raises her voice to cry out the word "Testimony." Howe manages to give an oral emphasis to this word that seems quite similar to the visual emphasis it is given on the page. For the most part, Howe works her way down the rest of the page in order from top to bottom, skipping back up briefly to read the horizontal three-line "cherubim" section. Of course, Howe is reading as a poet and a performer, as she is herself aware; a reader, especially one encountering the text for the first time, is likely to progress much more slowly through the words and

sections on the page, perhaps reading some of them more than once rather than miss any of them.

As we saw with the last pair of pages, the following, adjacent page is also a partial mirror-image or echo of the previous page. Once again, the main text is inverted, so we can easily read the text that was upside-down on the preceding page. In the last pair of pages we went from a simple configuration to a slightly more complex one; here, we move from a very complex page to one that is slightly less so. The two main text segments from the previous page (the line "I John bright picture" section and the three line "cherubim" bit) are kept in roughly the same configuration (their relative spacing is the slightest bit different), and two new lines are added: "Baffled consuming doggerel," which moves downward, and "The soul's ascension in a state of separation," which visually ascends across the other words, diagonally to the top left, drawing the reader's eye upward. Even though this page is much simpler visually, interpreting the significance of spatial and textual relationships is not any easier. Are the added lines commenting on the text they are written over? Are they a replacement for, or a rewriting of, the other lines on the previous page? These are only a few of the questions that are apt to leave Howe's readers baffled, and perhaps consumed by this text we are unlikely to label "doggerel," whatever else we may call it.

Howe's reading of this page is interesting as well, and since the page is somewhat simpler, it is easier to follow the path she takes as she traverses the text. She goes from one section to the next, picking up a line that starts where the last one ends, in a manner reminiscent of the way someone might track colors and patterns in a painting. She begins with the long, normally printed section that begins "I John bright picture," and where it

ends she reads the long angled line about the "the soul's ascension," letting the pitch of her voice rise as the text does. From there she picks up the cherubim section (and again, it begins near the end of the last bit), and ends by reading "baffled consuming doggerel" swiftly. Interestingly, Howe does not vocally emphasize the word "testimony" on this page, which seems suitable, since it does not have the visual centrality here either.

After these pages, the poem settles into the more familiar horizontal print we are accustomed to, with few instances of angled and overlapping text. However, one term is
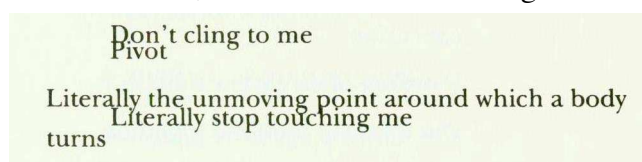

Figure 3-2. Detail from *NCM*, page 11.

relevant both to the many turns in the text and also for its typographical iconicity. On page 11 Howe returns to the words of the opening quotation from John, "Don't cling to me," and uses the term "pivot" to refer to Mary's physical motion. Several of these lines are placed unusually close together, so tight as to be almost overlapping, uncomfortably close. Howe returns to these two phrases by defining them, and the definition of pivot is broken so that it actually hinges, or pivots, around the other line. Not only that, but the meaning is shifted as well. Read next to "Don't cling to me," the word "pivot" sounds like a command, an imperative; and in Howe's recorded reading it comes across this way as well. Yet Howe defines it as a noun, "the unmoving point around which a body / turns" (*NCM* 11). When Howe reads these lines, she actually interrupts herself with the phrase "Literally stop touching me," and she says it loudly. This should make us notice that both orally and visually, the word "turns" is isolated and set apart on the page.
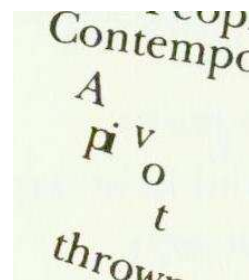

Figure 3-3. *NCM*, page 57.

Another typographically iconic instance of the word pivot crops up in *Eikon Basilike*, and in this instance it is the letters of the word pivot that actually pivot.

These visual, textual details of "The Nonconformist's Memorial" engage the reader's mental faculties, and at the same time the reader's hands and eyes are physically involved, to an uncommon extent, in traversing this text. But Howe does not limit the demands of her text to these realms.

The Spiritual Demands of the Poet as Confessor

Crying out testimony

In addition to the mental and physical demands that Howe's poetry makes on her readers, this poem also makes spiritual demands; and this may be both the most interesting and the most challenging aspect of the work. It seems fairly natural that a poem concerned with religious dissenters and which begins with a passage from scripture should have spiritual implications; but just as Howe's poetic style is directly connected to what she communicates, so this spiritual aspect is ultimately tied to the way the poem functions and involves its readers.

Howe evinces a spiritual understanding of language and poetry that sheds some light on the spiritual workings of this poem. In an interview with Lynn Keller, Howe says that poetry "connects to blasphemy and to the sacred for me. It connects to God. … Being a poet is a calling. You are called and you must listen" ("Keller Interview" 33). Rachel Tzvia Back elaborates that, for Howe, "the poet is not … one who chooses her art but rather she who—like the Puritan 'Elect'—is 'chosen,' one whose artistic expression is both a sacred 'Vocation' and 'Justification' of self in the world" (158). Given such a

spiritual understanding of poetry, we should not be surprised that the idea of the Word

crops up in a poem that begins with a passage from the gospel of John.

Perhaps one of the more surprising references to the "Word" is found in a direct

address to the reader, when the poet says,

> Reader I do not wish to hide
> In you to hide from you
> It is the Word to whom she turns
> True submission and subjection (*NCM* 30)

These lines seem to be an explicit description of Mary's conversion experience.

However, Back prefers to interpret it as a more generic transformation, which includes a

spiritual experience only as one, perhaps minor, component.

> The Word—sacred and secular both—is attributed a humanlike
> presence, as indicated by the objective pronoun *whom* preceding it ...
> and as such, is itself always alive, vital, and subjective to change. It
> is the Word, and Mary's turning to it, that also *effects* change—a
> transfiguration and resulting liberation ... (171)

In my reading, the word "whom" necessitates that we understand the Word to be not

merely "humanlike," but actually a person; this point is underscored by the Grenfell Press

edition, where the word "Whom" is capitalized (*Grenfell NCM* 30). The Word is, of

course, language that is alive and powerful, particularly the language of testimony,

whether oral or written, and it also refers to scripture; but it seems absurd to leave out

what may be the most significant meaning here, the person that the poet explicitly

identifies; to quote Howe, "I will use the bare name / Christ" (*NCM* 19).

The famous beginning of the gospel of John, where Christ is first described as the

Word, is repeatedly referenced throughout Howe's poem. In her 1990 interview with

Edward Foster, Howe displays both her familiarity with this passage, and its significance

to her. In response to Foster's comment that "the things we know aren't simply things we made up," Howe responds:

> … whatever they are, they're a kind of order. They're a kind of beauty, they're blue, they're light. Words are candles lighting the dark. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' I think that there has to be *some* order if only order in disorder. And words and sounds are... They reach up out there. A little flicker in silence... a signal. ("Foster Interview" 54)

Throughout this work, the poet is interested in John's famous, language-oriented formulation of Christ. Early on in the poem, we find this description:

> the I *John* Prologue
>
>
> Original had no title
> Ingrafted onto body (*NCM* 4)

This is referred to again in a briefer notation as "I John bright picture / dark background" (*NCM* 8, 9); shortly after that, we read,

> In the Evangelist's mind
> it is I absolutely I
> Word before name (*NCM* 10)

Although Christ himself is portrayed as being language, the Word, Howe sees a kind of namelessness here ("before name," "had no title") that seems to relate to the many other references to those whose names are not recorded in the historical record. "You have your names // I have not read them," the poet says, and perhaps we should understand ourselves, as readers, to be included here as well.

In Howe's work, it is necessary for the readers of this demanding poem to become active and involved; but Howe goes beyond the usual kind of reader interaction and gives

the reader a spiritual position, as well. At the beginning of the third section of the poem, the poet says,

> I am not afraid to confess it
> and make you my confessor
> Steal to a place in the dark
> least coherent utterance (*NCM* 23)

The poet puts the reader into a specific, spiritual position as *her* "confessor," and there is an ambiguity here that makes the possessive pronoun significant. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "confessor" can mean "one who makes confession or public acknowledgement or avowal" of either religious belief, or a crime or sin (both of which seem relevant here). But the word can also signify the person who listens to confession, such as a priest. This latter meaning seems initially more appropriate, since the poet claims to be making a confession, and the pronoun "my" suggests that the reader is her audience. This is odd, though, given the difficulty of understanding this "least coherent utterance." How are we to fulfill our duty as confessor if we cannot even interpret what we hear, much less respond to it? The poet, making her confession in the dark, leaves her readers and would-be confessors in the dark as well.

The other meaning of confessor as the one who makes confession is also present in this passage. We are *her* confessor because we are publicly acknowledging her belief, and perhaps her "sins" also, and we do this in part by the very act of reading. Two pages after this passage, the poet continues in a similar vein, "I want to accuse myself," and then goes on "Reader if I told anything / my crookedness roughness" (*NCM* 25), which reaffirms the position of reader as the priest-like confessor. Between these statements, though, is the strangely beautiful line "Confessions implode into otherness." Like many

of Howe's oracular statements, this statement is difficult to interpret; there is an inherent

violence in the word "implode," but there is also a connection to sound, since in

linguistics implosion denotes a particular kind of utterance with indrawn breath

(*American Heritage Dictionary*, ; *OED*). This evocative phrase suggests that voices and

stories, communicated in the form of testimony, can effect a transformation that destroys

internal boundaries and gives us access to "otherness," such as those nonconformists who

are missing from the authorized, written records and would otherwise be inaccessible.

> Once again, the poet addresses the reader directly:

> > Believing unbelieving reader
> > there is now no rest
> > She confessed to a Confessor
> > tell lies and I will tell (*NCM* 29)

The contradictory, ambivalent label we are given seems quite appropriate to the strange

position that Howe has put us in as her reader-confessor, but now it is others who are

confessing: the "she" (which probably refers mostly to Mary) also seems to include the

reader as well, to whom the last line is addressed. This sounds like a threat (you will be

exposed if you fail to tell the truth), but as the unpunctuated last line on the page it has an

open-ended quality that leaves us wondering what the poet might tell; perhaps, yet again,

she is proffering some kind of testimony.

> Howe's work shares some qualities with confessional poetry, as discussed above,

notwithstanding Howe's avowed dislike of confessionalism. Howe's ambivalent

connection to confessional poetry sheds some light on her use of confession in "The

Nonconformist's Memorial." Here, confession takes on a more strongly religious aspect,

and also involves the reader to a greater extent than is usually seen in confessional poetry.

In Howe's poem, there is an important connection between confession and testimony, or bearing witness. Near the beginning of section two of the poem, the poet asks "Who will bear witness" (*NCM* 17), a question which Back finds "baffling" since "section one of the poem seemed to establish that Mary and poet both were taking on the role of testifier" (176). The poet's question comes in the context of language that suggests both the glory of angels and the glorious transformation of Christ, and just after Mary's experience of transfiguration that concludes section one, so the answer to the poet's question seems clear: it is the reader who must bear witness to this event, this new transfiguration.

Howe's poem goes beyond turning the reader into a witness and confessor, in both senses of the word. In this poem that is labeled as a "memorial," Howe remembers those she considers to be nonconformists, those who were "ejected" by "the act of Uniformity" (*NCM* 5) by retelling and mulling over their stories. But Howe also memorializes the nonconformists by becoming a poetic dissenter herself, in her refusal to conform to typographic standards. In doing so, she forces the reader to be a nonconformist as well; someone reading this poem in a public place may feel self-conscious, if they glance up from its pages and look around; few, if any, other readers are likely to be turning their books sideways or upside down.

It is possible to object that turning the text is merely one option we are given when we read "The Nonconformist's Memorial," that it is not necessary to turn the book in order read the text. Many people can read upside-down text without too much difficulty, although this may come more naturally to some than others, and very few read inverted text with the same facility as right-side up text. No matter how a person reads this poem, there is some kind of rotation taking place. The reader may rotate the book in

her hand to align eyes and text, or the reader may angle her head while keeping the book stationary, both of which entail physical movement. It is possible, although less likely, that a person might read this poem without any evident physical turning of either the book or the reader; but such a reader must still rotate the text mentally, internally, in order to read it, which is still an unfamiliar and unconventional mode of reading. In each of these instances, the reader is participating, to some degree, in the turns, conversions, and transformations taking place in the text.

Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial" employs a nonlinear poetics and tactical difficulty in order to challenge the readers of the poem to interact with the text on many levels, engaging the mind, the physical being, and even the soul. At least for the duration of the time that a person spends reading this poem, she becomes a nonconformist reader, a turner, and a witness. For those who are willing to engage with the text, Howe offers the possibility for a dramatic transformation; the reader is given the opportunity to act as confessor to the poet, and to bear witness to the testimony recorded and memorialized by the poem. Just as Mary turned away from the resurrected Christ and went running to tell the others, the reader who truly interacts with this transformation turns away from the text as a witness and testifier to nonconformity.

Chapter 4. Encountering Incarnation through Nonlinear Poetry

We face again the question of whether the incarnation is a poetic construction, serving the interests of human imagination and devotion, or whether it is the mode of divine existence making actual God's presence among us. - Murray A. Rae

The Christian Incarnation is a unique communication act of divine revelation, an "immanent sign *of* transcendence – God appearing in the flesh" (Smith 123, emphasis original). This singular message *had* to be communicated in the particular form of the God-man (Athanasius 34, 38), the Word had to become flesh, and as a result, the full meaning of Incarnation cannot be completely conveyed by language alone (Fitzpatrick 259; Miles 390). However, certain texts may communicate Incarnation more fully than others; in particular, nonlinear poetry such as T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," which demand the participation and interaction of their readers, offer the possibility of an encounter with Incarnation. In *Four Quartets*, Incarnation is a central concept articulated in several different forms, and it operates as an ideal model for human life and art, which the poem itself strives for. In contrast, Incarnation occupies a more marginal position in "The Nonconformist's Memorial," and the depiction of Incarnation is made up of inconclusive phrases and fragments, much like the text itself; in spite of this, Incarnation is present throughout the poem, and is connected to the possibility of transformation for both poet and reader. In contrast to theological teachings or doctrinal statements, which may reduce the message of Incarnation to powerless words, these two poems offer the reader the possibility of a fuller communication of the Word made flesh.

Defining Incarnation

The word incarnation is derived from a passive form of the Latin verb *incarnare*, to make flesh, and thus literally means "to be made flesh" (Lewis). The Oxford English Dictionary includes this phrase in the first definition, and elaborates that the word means "embodied in flesh, taking up bodily form." When used in the specific, this term refers to Christ, and the OED entry notes that this definition is "the earliest and still the prevalent sense." Some dictionaries also explicitly note that capitalization usually distinguishes the specific meaning, "the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ," from the more general meanings (*Webster's Unabridged*). The term can also be used generally or figuratively to refer to other kinds of embodiment or putting into a particular form; thus, the word can denote a thing or a person who embodies a particular principle or quality. The idea of flesh is central to this word, as evidenced by the various obsolete and archaic definitions, which all relate to flesh—flesh colored, a wound healed by the growth of flesh, and even a light pink, flesh-colored flower, from which our modern carnation is derived. The related adjective, incarnational, only has one definition listed in the OED: "of or relating to the theological doctrine of incarnation," which links it directly to the first and most specific definition of incarnation.

For Margaret Miles, Incarnation is absolutely essential to Christianity, which she defines as "the religion of the Incarnation" (1); she identifies Incarnation in the "core belief … that God entered the human world of bodies and senses in the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (1). Incarnation has played a crucial role in shaping Christian history, and many of the early church conflicts centered on the doctrine of Incarnation (29); the articulation of Incarnation in the Nicene creed was specifically formulated to emphasize

both the physicality of Christ and that he was fully divine, in order to refute both Gnostic and Arian views (89). The intensity of these conflicts is underscored by the continuing disagreement between Catholics and Protestants as to the nature of Christ's presence in the sacrament of Eucharist (304). Miles also traces the influence of Incarnation on Christian arts, which express "the religion of the 'Word made flesh' … in the world of bodies and senses" (4); this influence is present in Christian architecture through a "theology of visibility" (74); Christ's physicality is the basis for worship as a "communal sensory experience" (76); and medieval religious paintings are another instance of "making God's Incarnation visible" (168).

The most famous Biblical text on Incarnation is the prologue of the Gospel of John: the Word, who was "with God, and … was God," became "flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1,14). According to orthodox Christian theology, the Incarnation was simultaneously both fully human and fully divine. St. Athanasius, in his treatise *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, addresses this "strangest paradox" (88) and the purposes for which "the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world" (33). According to Athanasius, it was a matter of consistency that the renewal of creation should be accomplished by "the Self-Same Word Who made it in the beginning" (26), and since death was the only way to rid creation of its corruption and accomplish that renewal, the immortal Word "assumed a body capable of death" (35). Athanasius also explicitly points out certain paradoxes of Incarnation; he notes that, "at one and the same time … as Man He was living a human life, and as Word he was sustaining the life of the universe, and as Son He was in constant union with the Father" (45).

These theologians, both ancient and modern, emphasize the centrality of Incarnation to Christianity. In spite of its paradoxical nature, and the variety of interpretation and articulation, Incarnation plays a central role in Christian faith, and the physicality of Christ has particularly significant implications for Christian philosophy, ritual, and arts.

Incarnation and Media Theory

At first glance, it might seem strange to apply media theory to Incarnation; however, when we consider Christ as the *logos* or Word, and note his association with a message of good news, then media theory becomes more obviously relevant. Marshall McLuhan famously wrote that "the medium is the message" (*UM* 23-24), and in a sense, the Incarnation is a perfect exemplar of this statement. As the "Word of God," Christ can be considered a divine message from God the Father. The New Testament records the fact that Christ frequently states his purpose in coming was to preach the "good news" of the Gospel. However, according to Christian theology, it was necessary that Christ come in this particular form—in no other form would it be possible to renew and re-create humanity in the image of God, which is seen most clearly in the Incarnation himself. The Word takes on human flesh, and it is this form, this medium, that enables the powerful message of Incarnation to be communicated to humankind. Elsewhere in scripture, Christ is called the "mediator" (1 Timothy 2:4-6; Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24) because of the role he serves between God and humanity. By taking on human flesh, Christ bridged an existential gap and made a specific kind of communication possible between God and humans. In more philosophical terms, Incarnation can be described as "a manifestation, a revelation, a *certain* presence" that makes it possible for "transcendence … to 'show up'

in terms that a finite perceiver of sensible perception can understand" (Smith 126). The act of taking on flesh is an act of communication, of divine self-revelation.

If we view the Incarnation as a peculiar instance of divine communication, we must acknowledge that, because of its unique form and content, there are inevitable limitations on the possibilities for the transmission and reception of this message. Language and the written word, in specific, are seen as being insufficient for this task. Saints, scholars, and philosophers address these limitations when they voice their concerns about the difficulties and failures of understanding and communicating the message of Incarnation. According to St. Irenaeus, the traditions of the church are "not fully represented by writings on parchment or paper," but must be "carried forward in warm bodies" (Miles 390). Thomas Aquinas suggests that revelation should be approached, not with the rational mind, but with faith, and elaborates that "mysteries of faith can be illuminated by apt analogies, but they cannot be explained or proven" (Miles 169). Descartes argues that mysteries such as the Incarnation are "beyond reason" and "ought simply to be believed" (Miles 327). Christina Bieber, in her discussion of the incarnational aspects of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, emphasizes that "God reveals himself incarnationally—in the person of Christ and through His people and not in an abstract theorem" (20), and adds that "the word became flesh and is known only through the flesh, never purely as word" (22). These disparate thinkers all agree that language is insufficient to communicate the Incarnation.

The difficulty of communicating Incarnation is also evident in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. According to Christian interpreters, Kierkegaard emphasizes the centrality of Incarnation as "the constitutive event of Christian faith" (Rae 63). In their view,

Christianity is for Kierkegaard a "personal appropriation of the historical fact that God existed in human form (the Supreme Paradox)" (Fitzpatrick 259), and attempts to "mak[e] comprehensible the Incarnation … destroy its effects" (259); when the paradox of Incarnation is articulated and reduced to a teaching, something significant is lost. According to Murray Rae, Kierkegaard's writings imply that "the incarnation is itself a confession that existence and the concept of God are brought together in a particular human being" (53). For Kierkegaard, "authentic Christian faith" is not "a matter of intellectual assent" to a particular doctrine, "but a mode of existence" (Rae 64), which is characterized not by "a relationship to some eternal principle passed on by the teacher, but a relationship to the teacher himself" (92). In this interpretation of Kierkegaard's views, then, Incarnation is crucial to Christian faith and is difficult to communicate in language because it must be approached personally, and not with the intellect.

Athanasius also touches on the issue of Incarnation as a communication act that requires a specific form. In his treatise on Incarnation, Athanasius states that humans, who were created in the image of God, were given "this gift of Godlikeness in themselves" in order that "they may be able to perceive the Image Absolute, that is the Word Himself, and through Him to apprehend the Father" (38). In taking on human form, Christ "became Himself an object for the senses" in order that God might be perceived (43), and Athanasius adds that Christ was "manifested according as [humanity] could bear it" (78), in a form that is within the limits of human capacity to receive. The divine communication is purposefully formulated in a medium that could carry the weight of the message without overwhelming the intended recipients.

In claiming that the Incarnation cannot be fully communicated by text or language, I do not mean to imply that the Gospels or the Bible fail in that task. Certainly, there is a significant difference between propositional statements about Incarnation, such as those found in theology and doctrine, and the narrative representation of parables and personal encounters with Christ found in the Gospels, and there must be a corollary variation in what they may successfully convey about Incarnation. But even with regard to the Biblical text, different thinkers and traditions identify the need for extra-textual elements, such as faith, community, or the Holy Spirit, which enable readers to fully encounter Incarnation. For Kierkegaard, faith is required because "the usual modes of human enquiry: reason, imagination, and historical investigation, are inadequate" (Rae 97). For Calvin, the Spirit is essential to understanding because it "applies inwardly the external meaning of … the historical incarnation of Christ" (Miles 273). Other groups recommend a reliance on communities of faith for understanding scripture, whether those of contemporary believers or historical communities preserved through tradition. The insistence on these extra-textual elements necessary for understanding Incarnation underscores the limitations of the written word to communicate this message of the Word made flesh, as well as the potential difficulty of receiving the message.

Nonlinearity may be particularly appropriate to Incarnation, since nonlinear science deals with paradoxes. For instance, some fractals are enclosed within a finite area but have an infinite perimeter (Russ 4), which provides a remarkable parallel to the union of the infinite and the finite found in Incarnation. Certainly, within the chaotic system of history, Incarnation is a significant factor with a profoundly nonlinear effect. Just as nonlinear systems cannot be described by the simple, linear logic of cause and

effect, human reason is inadequate to explain Incarnation (Rae 177); indeed, in Kierkegaard's view, Incarnation should be "the basis upon which our reasoning and logic are transformed" (178). Nonlinear science incorporates what traditional mathematics is incapable of dealing with directly, and in the same way nonlinear texts may be capable of communicating paradoxical concepts such as Incarnation.

Incarnation in Literary Studies

Incarnation is clearly not what we might call a "hot topic" in literary studies, but there seems to be a fairly regular, if infrequent, occurrence of scholarship relating the idea of incarnation to literature.[21] In addressing the influence of Catholicism on American culture, Albert Gelpi emphasizes the importance of Incarnation to Christian writers and scholars in general, and to Catholics in particular. Gelpi identifies the Catholic imagination as being grounded in "the central mystery of the Incarnation, the belief that God became human in the person of Jesus" (203) and describes the works of Christian writers and thinkers as an effort "to comprehend and actualize the awesome implications and ramifications of God's immanence in material and corporeal existence" (203). Gelpi notes that Incarnation is also central for Protestants, although he argues that the "Incarnationalism of Catholics," who emphasize mediation through community and the sacraments, is much stronger (206).

A sampling of the scholarship on topics of incarnation reveals that, in some instances, the authors employ the word "incarnational" as it is defined in the OED and investigate connections of various sorts between literature and Christian doctrine. But in

---

[21] A search for "incarnation" on the MLA International Bibliography returns 218 entries (the oldest from 1953, and 49 since 2000). Searching for "incarnational" returns only 30 entries; the titles of this second set pair the adjective with such terms as art, poetics, verse, aesthetic, hermeneutics, realism, and theology.

many cases, the use of these terms is imprecise and vague; writers fail to clearly define what, exactly, they mean by incarnation, or to articulate its relevance to their chosen subject. In particular, these works show a lack of clarity as to which definitions of incarnation are in use and when, whether they are talking about incarnation in general, or about the Incarnation in specific. For instance, Denise Lynch describes Denise Levertov's work as "poetry of Incarnation" (60), but never defines this phrase. Lynch is clearly interested in the idea of Christian Incarnation, and refers to related ideas such as paradox, immanence, and transcendence, but never establishes the correlations between them. She briefly connects incarnation with the relation between form and content in poetry (63), but for the most part her article is an exploration of spiritual or sacramental Christian imagery in several of Levertov's poems with references to incarnation that are sometimes evocative, but usually insubstantial. Levertov's poetry may well be incarnational, but Lynch fails to make that claim convincingly. To be fair, Lynch is at least generally consistent in her use of capitalization to distinguish between Christian Incarnation and incarnation in a more generic sense, although she fails to clearly articulate how the two concepts relate to each other or to the incarnational poetry of her title.

Kathleen Henderson Staudt presents an idea of incarnational poetry that is both more precise and more interesting than Lynch's approach to Levertov. Staudt applies the phrase to works which simultaneously call attention to the text as material (by way of concrete poetry, collage, or opacity of language) and text as a sign which communicates something transcendent. The reason for her choice of the word incarnation is unclear until nearly half-way through the article, where she discusses the poetry of David Jones.

Jones deliberately incorporates ideas of the Incarnation and Christian sacraments into his poetry in order to negotiate competing views of textuality. In this article, it is clearly not the definition of incarnation as embodiment that Staudt appropriates, but rather the union of opposites, transcendent divinity and physical humanity, in the figure of Christ. Staudt extends the idea of incarnation to "the sacraments of the church" which she describes as "material signs that claim to show forth a real spiritual presence" (20); her application of Incarnation to the poetry is most clear in her description of Jones' poetry as "a union of material forms and significant meanings" (25). As Staudt admits, this is a philosophical view of poetic language as embedded in the temporal and historical, but with the possibility of pointing to another reality (26), and a view that could be applied to many texts.

Even in a theological essay that purports to be about Incarnation, very little time is spared to dwell on ideas or definitions of incarnation; in fact, the author barely touches on Incarnation, suggesting that readers must of course be familiar with the word (Lloyd 47). The author eventually describes incarnation as "the ideal and spiritual expressed in and through the natural" (64), and employs this concept for an argument in favor of the union of the church and nature in what he calls a "home" or "near idealism" (66, 67), rather than attempting to conquer or explore the natural world. As with Staudt, incarnation is apparently used as a symbol of union—but what is being united, and for what purpose, and how that connects with Incarnation is for the most part omitted from these arguments.

In contrast to most of these other scholars, Christina Bieber uses the word "incarnational" with accuracy and precision in *The Incarnational Art of Flannery*

O'Connor (1999). Bieber clearly establishes her terms, defining Incarnation with Christian texts and in contrast to philosophical views. For Bieber, Incarnation is the cornerstone of an epistemology of embodiment, and this leads to her understanding of O'Connor's fiction as "an act of defiance against Cartesian epistemology" (26), and a simultaneous reaction against the Gnosticism evident in the tendency of American Protestantism to "substitute words for presence, text for body" (3-4). Bieber identifies Incarnation with O'Connor's grotesques, "beings in whom Christ's shadowy ghost becomes sufficiently embodied to be 'fierce and instructive'" (32), and cites God's self-revelation in the mystery of Incarnation as the model for O'Connor's aim for fiction to reveal rather than explain (20). The clarity and depth of Bieber's use of Incarnation in this study must be aided by her choice of subject: a Catholic author who is outspoken and articulate about the significance of Incarnation in her work. Nonetheless, Bieber's thoughtful integration of literature and Incarnation is still an instructive example of the possibilities for good scholarship in this area.

The idea of incarnation, and Christian Incarnation in specific, seems to be a compelling one to many scholars in a variety of fields. Anne-Claire Mulder takes Luce Irigaray's reversal of the Incarnational phrase of John 1:14, "the flesh becomes word," and extends it into a feminist ethical and theological principle. Jaouën and Semple, in their introduction to a special journal issue focused on "Textual Transfigurations of the Body," claim Incarnation as "the founding model for the duality inherent in the body," and suggest that Incarnation and Eucharist are models for the many possibilities of textual bodies, and the links between text and body—"the figure of the text in the body (the word made flesh) and the body into text (the flesh as word)" (3). Clifford Ando sees

Incarnation as the key to Augustine's semiotics and metaphysics, and notes that, for Augustine, Incarnation is a "disruption" of both history and traditional semiotics (43). James Smith, building on Augustine's understanding of words as "iconic signs" (123), uses Incarnation to develop "a radically Christian phenomenology of appearance and revelation" that depends on "a 'logic of incarnation' as the condition of possibility for language in general" (151). In this handful of instances alone, the notion of Incarnation works as a starting point or central metaphor for a diverse array of projects in semiotics, phenomenology, medieval textuality, and feminist ethics.

Scholars seem to have, for the most part, failed to take full advantage of the powerful idea of Incarnation, and in particular have overlooked the importance of Incarnation as communication, with all its attendant problems and difficulties. The idea of embodiment or enfleshment is an interesting one, and the idea of Christian Incarnation in particular seems powerful and compelling to some scholars, as evidenced by even those who fail to adequately define or effectively use the term. In many cases, these authors have adopted Incarnation as a model without addressing the nature of Incarnation as a communication act that takes place in a specific medium, a communication that text cannot fully convey.

The Paradox of Incarnation in *Four Quartets*

the impossible union of spheres of existence

The full weight of Incarnation is difficult to convey in language, and the problems inherent in the task of communicating Incarnation through language are remarkably similar to T. S. Eliot's understanding of the kind of meaning that can be conveyed by poetry. In Eliot's view, wisdom, like Incarnation, "is communicated on a deeper level

than that of logical propositions; all language is inadequate but probably the language of poetry is the language most capable of communicating wisdom" (*OPP* 226). According to Edward Lobb, "Eliot never saw poetry as a means of explanation" (37), and Eliot articulates his concern that if "we place all the emphasis upon *understanding*, we are in danger of slipping from understanding to mere explanation" (*OPP* 117). Indeed, Eliot's own poetry often seems to defy explanation; Lyndall Gordon describes Eliot's poetry as "fragmentary, and left … deliberately incomplete," designed not to "expose the speaker but to create the reader"; rather than a confession which invites intimacy, Gordon labels such texts as a "form of sermon: a call to awaken" (49). Eliot's understanding of the function of poetry and the practice of his own writing aligns with the problems and possibilities of communicating Incarnation.

Incarnation in Eliot's *Four Quartets* is deeply connected to the poem's major themes of redemption, temporality, epiphany, and even to writing and language; but more than that, Incarnation functions as a model both for ideal human love and for art, and thus for the poem itself. The epigraphs underscore the significance of Incarnation to the text, since by this time Eliot had come to read Heraclitus' *Logos* as "a pagan prefiguring of Incarnation," with the chief distinction that, in the Christian view, "God becomes one with nature, not out of necessity, but out of love" (Lockerd 45). Tracing Incarnation through the text allows us to discover some of the many possible connections that might be made by an exploratory reader who approaches the text in the nonlinear fashion I suggest in chapter two. The interaction required to read the poem in this way makes it possible for a reader to encounter Incarnation in the text, both by relating the differing

articulations of Incarnation and by seeing Incarnation as a model for the structure of the poem itself.

The central passage for Incarnation in Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and the single place where the actual word is used in the entire work, is the last section of "The Dry Salvages," where we find a very philosophical formulation of Incarnation as "the point of intersection of the timeless / with time" (*FQ* 44). The temporal language suggests the paradox of eternal God present as a mortal man; in Athanasius' words, this is the "union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature" (35).

Critics seem to concur that this passage refers "to the Christian doctrine of God's Son becoming man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (Servotte 377), but there is a range of interpretation on the source and significance of Eliot's use of Incarnation. Jean-Paul Rosaye contests that the idea of incarnation constitutes, not a discontinuity, but rather a progression in Eliot's philosophical ideas; he sees all of Eliot's work as "une commémoration de la signification essentielle du Christ" (35). For Benjamin Lockerd, belief in Incarnation is "particularly congenial to the use of symbols that are … 'bound to the cosmos'" (70). Marden Clark finds the "concept of incarnation deep in the poet's consciousness," and claims it as the "structural and thematic center" of "Little Gidding" (11), while Brett describes Incarnation as "the pivot around which the four poems move" (97). Siew-Yue Killingley documents Eliot's "fusion of ideas and myths drawn from various sources," including Hinduism and Indian thought, in order "to illuminate his vision of Christian truth in terms of the centrality of Christ's incarnation and man's redemption" (50), and notes that while Eliot may draw on an "Indian model of time" (53), or the "theory of desireless action" (60), these notions are "accommodated into

Christian doctrine" and "couched in Christian terminology" (60). For Herman Servotte, "Christian concepts … loom large," and Incarnation seems "to occupy pride of place" in *Four Quartets*; but the absence of a definite article in "The Dry Salvages" passage "seems to universalize the notion, … not to limit it to Christ" (377), which makes the concept more widely applicable, and specifically allows the inclusion of "the aesthetic experience and the work of art" (385).

Incarnation is described in "The Dry Salvages" as a "point of intersection," and these words connect us to "the still point" of "Burnt Norton" (*FQ* 15), which is depicted in predominantly spatial terms: stillness and movement, fixity and dancing, ascent and decline. Eliot's evocation of the "still point" bears a marked similarity to Athanasius' articulation of the paradox that the divine Word was present in, but not limited by, a human body:

> The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere … When He moved His body He did not cease also to direct the universe … Existing in a human body, to which He Himself gives life, He is still Source of life to all the universe … (45)

The description of the "still point" also verges into temporality; this is the point "where past and future are gathered" (*FQ* 15), which connects to the repeated concern with "time past" and "time future" in "Burnt Norton" and throughout the *Quartets*; in "The Dry Salvages," the poet tells us that in Incarnation "the past and future are conquered, and reconciled" (*FQ* 44). The "still point of the turning world" in "Burnt Norton" and the "point of intersection of the timeless with time" in "The Dry Salvages" are both characterized as "the meeting of two highly charged realities" (Servotte 378); they are

paradoxical instances of "the impossible union / Of spheres of existence" made actual (*FQ* 44).

These two passages articulate Incarnation in fairly similar modes; in both, Incarnation is "defined in topological terms" and characterized by way of "geometrical abstractions" (Servotte 378), but this is not the only way the *Quartets* express Incarnation. Among other contrary descriptions, the "the still point" is characterized as "neither flesh nor fleshless" (*FQ* 15), and this word suggests the paradox of the divine, fleshless Word who took on human form. The word flesh, which is a key term for Incarnation, is also a term that yields connections to other parts of the *Quartets*.

Besides the three instances of "flesh" and "fleshless" in "Burnt Norton" II, the word flesh is only used twice in all of the *Four Quartets*, both times in "East Coker." The word is used at the beginning of "East Coker" as part of the succession of the cycle of time, "Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth / Which is already flesh, fur and faeces" (*FQ* 23). The second half of this passage relates these cycles to the country dancing which keeps the rhythm of the seasons, and the idea of dance links us back to the still point of "Burnt Norton," without which "there would be no dance" (*FQ* 16). The word flesh also appears in the paradox-laden description of Good Friday found in "East Coker" IV. In this case, it is an allusion to the Christian sacrament of Eucharist:

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of which we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood— (*FQ* 30)

The first "flesh" is that of Christ, depicted as insistently physical by the repeated blood, while the physicality of our own human flesh is called into question. The choice of the

word "substantial" is significant here, since it suggests the terms "consubstantiation" and "transubstantiation," which refer to differing doctrinal views on the degree and nature of the physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of Eucharist (*OED*). This entire passage presents Incarnation in a very different mode than the abstract, conceptual evocations of "Burnt Norton" II and "The Dry Salvages" V. The poet makes use of more obviously religious language, and there are many paradoxical descriptions borrowed from Biblical metaphors for Christ, such as "wounded surgeon," "dying nurse," and the "bleeding hands" that heal (*FQ* 29). This section focuses on the physical, bloody death of Christ as redemptive, rather than on the fact of Incarnation itself and, by this alternate view, increases the complexity of the portrayal of Incarnation in the *Quartets*.

These depictions of Incarnation are also conceptually linked to love in the *Quartets*. The adaptation of "God as the unmoved mover" is made explicit in "Burnt Norton" V, where love is described as "unmoving / Only the cause and end of movement" (*FQ* 20); Lockerd characterizes this as the "famous answer … that everything in the world is moved by love, desire for the divinity, the final cause" (48). Love is presented as "supreme motive power" (Weinig 37), and Weinig sees it as the "focus and perhaps radiant center" of the *Quartets* (38). The only unquestionably capitalized[22] instances of "Love" occur in "Little Gidding," where Love is declared to be "the unfamiliar Name" who "devised the torment" (*FQ* 57), and this force is described as a person. Love has a similar function to that of Incarnation in the text; just as Incarnation

---

[22] The capitalization of the word Love is significant in *Four Quartets*, but a bit tricky to distinguish; in two instances, the capitalized form occurs at the beginning of a line (*FQ* 20, 31), where the word would be capitalized normally. This seems like something a poet so attentive to detail would be aware of, so it is logical to assume this placement is purposeful. In any case, the reader encounters it as a capitalized term.

is the ideal for transcendent art, Love as unmoved mover is presented as the ideal for unselfish human love.

Love as unmoved mover adds yet a different dimension to the depiction of Incarnation, and like the portrayal of Christ in the "bloody flesh" of Eucharist, must necessarily add complexity to these linked notions of Incarnation. The idea of the "unmoved mover" connects again to the union of motion and stillness found in "Burnt Norton," and the idea of love as detachment from our own place and time (*FQ* 31, 55) makes a similar link with the union of eternity and temporality of "The Dry Salvages." However, in this case, the presentation of Love in "Little Gidding" contrasts with the other depictions in presenting Incarnation in a more personal than conceptual manner, and this underscores the significance of Christian Incarnation in the text as the union of all of these concepts.

Incarnation and the Timeless Moment

The temporal language used to evoke Incarnation in "The Dry Salvages" links us to the experience of the "timeless moment" and, although this is a temporal moment, nearly all of these experiences are expressed in terms of motion and stillness. The poet claims that to apprehend the intersection of eternity and temporality is the goal of the saint, but that most of us only experience "the moment in and out of time," the "distraction fit," and the language here repeats phrases used elsewhere in the *Four Quartets*, which links this passage to several other moments in the text. The exact phrases "winter lightning" and "wild thyme unseen" are also used in "East Coker" in the context of waiting in the dark; this moment is described in the contradictory terms, "the

darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing" (*FQ* 28), which also evokes the still point of "Burnt Norton."

The "shaft of sunlight" is another instance of the "distraction fit," and this repeated phrase links us to the last section of "Burnt Norton." The poet meditates on love as unmoved mover, "only the cause and end of movement" (*FQ* 20). Love is described like the incarnate Word, with eternal and god-like qualities; it is "timeless, and undesiring" except when "caught in the form of limitation / between un-being and being" (*FQ* 20). When love is embodied in mortal life between life and death, it is necessarily limited by human capacity. This passage suggests a connection to the "still point" of "Burnt Norton" II in the contrast between the apparent stillness of the sunlight and the dust motes dancing within it. The complementary nature of the stillness and dancing are evident here since it is the sunlight that makes it possible to perceive the movement of the dust, which would otherwise go unnoticed.

The waterfall is another evocation of the "moment in and out of time," and this word links us to the Edenic scene of "Little Gidding" V. Shortly after the poet declares that "history is a pattern / Of timeless moments" (*FQ* 58), a pattern which is necessary for redemption from time, the poem closes with a description of a final arrival at the starting point, and here the "stillness / Between two waves of the sea" (*FQ* 59) gives us yet another instance of stillness in the midst of movement. The paradise-like garden imagery evokes the rose-garden of "Burnt Norton," and the line "Quick now, here, now, always--" is an exact repetition of a line from the end of the first quartet, but the attitudes toward time differ; the negative "ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (*FQ*

20) of "Burnt Norton" contrasts with claim that "history is a pattern / Of timeless moments" that makes redemption from time possible (*FQ* 58).

The final entry in the list of timeless moments in "The Dry Salvages" is the longest one, and it is expressed in auditory terms. Here, the "distraction fit" is compared to "music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, but you are the music / While the music lasts" (*FQ* 44). Music is not directly referred to many times in the *Quartets*, so it is natural to connect these lines with "Burnt Norton" V, which expresses the significance of pattern in terms of music, along with other art forms.

The poet meditates on the potential of art to "reach / Into the silence" and states that "Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness" (*FQ* 19). The passage goes on to articulate this condition in musical terms: "Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts, / Not that only" (*FQ* 19). This time, it is an ideal of artistic creation to strive for the union of movement and stillness that the "still point of the turning world" embodies. The poet proceeds to discuss the time-ridden limitations of language which affect the possibility of poetry to reach the silence. Words "strain, / Crack and sometimes break," or they "decay with imprecision," or they are assailed by "shrieking … scolding, mocking, or merely chattering" voices (*FQ* 19). In the context of the temporal limitations of language, the poet makes a connection to a similar weakness in the Incarnation: "The Word in the desert / Is most attacked by voices of temptation" (*FQ* 19). This passage, which is concerned with the stillness and movement of art by way of pattern, not only suggests a connection to the spatial articulation of Incarnation, but also alludes to the Biblical Christ as Word.

In the passage where we began, section five of "The Dry Salvages," these resonant phrases and images are listed as evocations of epiphany, and they connect us with other passages in the poem which all, to some degree, evoke the union of stillness and motion found in "the still point" of "Burnt Norton," the corollary expression of Incarnation to the temporal version of "The Dry Salvages." However, these timeless moments are described as a kind of failure; these moments "are only hints and guesses, / Hints followed by guesses" (*FQ* 44); they are merely glimpses of Incarnation which most of us must settle for, rather than the full apprehension which demands the attention of a saint, and even then, like the timeless moment itself, must be received as a gift.

Incarnation and Redemption

Incarnation is the figure of salvation in Christianity, so it is logical to suspect it may have some relation to the Quartet's concern with redemption. In "The Dry Salvages" Incarnation is identified as the point where "past and future / Are conquered, and reconciled" (*FQ* 44), and this key term "conquer" opens up redemptive connections within the space of *Four Quartets*. There are two other instances of this word in the *Quartets*; the first one is in the context of the redemption of time, and the other relates to the artistic struggle. In both cases, redemption is found in the very *fact* and form of Incarnation.

The meditation on the "still point of the turning world" in "Burnt Norton" section II closes with the affirmation that "only through time time is conquered" (*FQ* 16), and this statement seems to counter the poet's fear that "all time is unredeemable" (*FQ* 13). There is a recurring desire in the *Quartets* to be "redeemed from time" (*FQ* 58), which is linked to a need for history, specifically history as pattern (*FQ* 39, 55, 58). The figure of

Incarnation, by its very nature as the "impossible union" of eternity with time, makes the redemption of time possible.

The *Quartets* focus not on a particular sacrificial act but on the nature of Christ's entry into history in bodily form, uniting God with humanity, and this interpretation of Incarnation is not unique to Eliot. The second-century Bishop St. Irenaeus "emphasized Christ's incarnation and *life* as salvific, not his death" (Miles 33, emphasis original). Murray A. Rae explains that "recognizing the incarnation as absolute fact," as Kierkegaard does, results in an understanding that "God's participation in history affirms that same history as the locus of the divine-human encounter" (93). In Benjamin Lockerd's investigation of Eliot's cosmology, he observers that the "notion of salvation history," which "sanctifies the four-dimensional, temporal world," makes for a natural fit with Eliot's "instinctive anti-dualist tendency" (39-40).

In "East Coker" V, we find the only other use of the word "conquer" in the entire text. This passage is a meditation on the artistic struggle of writing, and after several lines about the difficulty of using words, the poetic effort takes on a spiritual tone:

> … And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once, or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate—but there is no competition—
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again … (*FQ* 31)

The language here is remarkably consonant with that of "The Dry Salvages" V; like the apprehension of Incarnation, which requires "ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" (*FQ* 44), the artistic challenge demands "strength and submission" (*FQ* 31). The mood here is also similar to the attitude of the last lines of "The Dry Salvages," where the poet

submits that we are "only undefeated / Because we have gone on trying" (*FQ* 45). This allows us to relate the "right action" of "The Dry Salvages" with the "sentence that is right" of "Little Gidding" and to identify Incarnation as the poet's ideal for art by its perfect union of movement and stillness, and this suggests the possibility for a personal, artistic redemption.

For Eliot, Incarnation is applicable more generally to art, poetry, and language. Herman Servotte observes that, while Incarnation does refer specifically to Christ, it is also used as a "broader concept" that includes "the aesthetic experience and the work of art" (385). Lockerd claims that Eliot's poetic theory has a "theological basis" which is made explicit in Eliot's identification of "the gift of incarnation" in Dante's poetry, as well as in his description of "adequate poetic thought as 'the *Word made flesh*'" (78, emphasis original), and the search for language in which "thought and sensation, spirit and flesh" are reconciled (78). According to *Four Quartets*, poetry, along with other art forms, has the capacity to "reach / Into the silence … The stillness" (*FQ* 19) through pattern, which makes it, "like the Word, an event both in and out of time" (Brett 98). Eliot compares "the Word of God and the word of the poet … the Logos of God in Christ and the incarnate thought of the poet in his work" (Brett 98), and according to Brett this is a sign of Eliot's "conviction that the vocation of the Christian poet can be an Imitation of Christ" (98). This view of the poet suggests that the poem has the potential power, through the reader's perception of meaning, to "recreate[] the world which it purifies and clarifies" (Servotte 380), which means that writing itself may be a redemptive act.

These connections between Incarnation and *Four Quartet*'s major themes of time, epiphany, writing, and redemption are only some of the links that a reader may discover,

and this is only one possible path to follow Incarnation in the complicated space of *Four Quartets*. By finding these links and tracing ideas and articulations of Incarnation through the nonlinear structure of this poem sequence, the reader is given the opportunity to apprehend the intersection of the timeless with time. As Jewel Spears Brooker notes, the poem itself, with its pattern of words, "is in many ways the most immediate instance of the incarnational principle for the sensitive reader" (105). The task of apprehending Incarnation is a difficult one, and as Eliot suggests, may require "observance, discipline, thought and action," along with "ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" (*FQ* 44). In the end, we may be left with hints half guessed, and a gift that is incompletely understood: a personal experience of Incarnation through the pattern of moments and words that is the *Four Quartets*.

Incarnation in the Margins of "The Nonconformist's Memorial"

fragility union of glory

Unlike Eliot's *Four Quartets*, where Incarnation plays a central and crucial role, in Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," Incarnation is a shadowy but pervasive presence in the margins of the text. In contrast to Eliot's mostly philosophical and conceptual portrayals of Incarnation, Howe draws extensively on Biblical texts, even while she displays a certain distrust of the authorized record. According to Howe, "the idea gets broken—the Gospel, when it becomes gospel, when it is written, grasps" ("Keller Interview" 11); the traditional texts have failed to communicate, and this includes a failure to convey the message of Incarnation. Howe's poem works to get back at that idea of "Gospel" before it is broken, and does so through the voice of Mary, which

is absent from the textual record; in the process, the poem reveals Incarnation through Mary's encounter with Christ.

Howe describes her own poetic process in very spiritual terms, which include references to Incarnation. Unlike Eliot, who in *Four Quartets* takes Incarnation as a conceptual model for the process of writing and poetic form, Howe draws more on Incarnation as inspiration. Howe considers her writing in terms of vocation: "being a poet is a calling. You are called and you must listen" ("Keller Interview" 33); the poet is not "one who chooses her art but rather she who—like the Puritan 'Elect'—is 'chosen,'" (Back 158). She says poetry is "in the service of something out of the world—God or the Word, a supreme fiction" ("Difficulties Interview" 21), and describes words as "candles lighting the dark. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' … A little flicker in silence … a signal" ("Foster Interview" 54). She characterizes the writing process as mysterious ("Difficulties Interview" 21; "Keller Interview" 33), and says that those who are called to such a vocation have been "granted some grace" ("Keller Interview" 34). Howe makes specific reference to Mary's Incarnational encounter in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" when she explains, "that great scene, in the tomb … is so much about writing" (*Personal Interview*). She describes this writing moment as a "point … of intensity," but adds that "there's always going to be a death and a loss in that moment"(*Personal Interview*). For Howe, poetry is a spiritual vocation, and the poet is called, much like a prophet or seer, to communicate something unknown, from beyond. Incarnation is both an exemplar of the poetic word that conveys mystery and a site where inspiration may occur.

Like Eliot's fragmentary, difficult poetry, although perhaps even to a greater degree, Susan Howe's poetry resists easy interpretation and definite conclusions. Howe describes this characteristic in reference to Dickinson forcing her readers "through shock and through subtraction of the ordinary, to a new way of perceiving" (*My Emily Dickinson* 51). The necessary struggle for meaning in "The Nonconformist's Memorial" creates the possibility for the reader to encounter Incarnation. As I have articulated in chapter three, Howe's texts are characterized by tactical difficulty, and make great demands on the reader. Such difficult works may result in a failure to connect when the reader is unwilling or unable to respond to the challenge. As Naylor notes, "many people may indeed read 'accessible' poetry, but that does not guarantee that it does vital cultural work" (38); for the reader who chooses to engage with the text, Howe's poem holds the potential for a much fuller, more personal and experiential communication, since Howe's "fragments … require the reader's own connective act of authorship" (Naylor 56). In the case of "The Nonconformist's Memorial," the possibility for powerful communication with the engaged reader is well-suited to the difficult task of conveying the meaning of Incarnation in the written word.

Susan Howe's poem takes its departure from a passage in the Gospel of John and, among other things, meditates on the figure of Mary Magdalene and the unknown authorship of that Gospel. Given her choice of subjects, it would be difficult for Howe to avoid historical Incarnation, central as it is to the Gospel of John and to what little we know about Mary, but Howe does not attempt to avoid it. In John's Gospel, the figure of Incarnation is central, and Mary Magdalene is a secondary character. In contrast, Howe's text shifts the focus to Mary Magdalene, who occupies a place nearer to center (if Howe's

poetry can be said to have a center), and the figure of Incarnation moves to the periphery. Howe's writing often exhibits her predilection for the marginal and the missing, particularly feminine absences from textual records, so it is entirely appropriate that here the central figure of the traditional text is encountered only in fragments and in relation to Mary. In "The Nonconformist's Memorial," Incarnation is mediated through Mary's experience and her testimony.

An encounter with Incarnation is a crucial moment for this text; the poem begins with, and repeatedly refers to, Mary's encounter with the resurrected Christ in the garden, as recounted in the Gospel of John. When asked about Incarnation in her text, Howe identifies this scene as an "incarnational moment," and compares it to the "uncertain hour before the morning" of "Little Gidding" (*FQ* 52). She elaborates, Mary has "got to let go, and that moment between the … letting go and grabbing on, would be a moment that is timeless" (*Personal Interview*). Howe considers this a "moment of between," and explains that incarnation would mean "it's no longer between, it's right, it's one," and adds that she is fascinated by the "betweenness," rather than the unity and consummation of incarnation (*Personal Interview*). Just as the poem focuses on Mary and leaves Christ in the margins, Howe is interested in the moment just before incarnation, rather than incarnation itself.

Incarnation and the Transformation of Mary

Mary's experience in the garden with Christ is a critical moment, a transformative encounter with Incarnational. She comes to the tomb for her own reasons, but she is given a new purpose: she becomes a witness, and the poem draws parallels between Mary and such other witnesses as John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Christ himself.

Like the "still point" of *Four Quartets*, Christ is portrayed as "the unmoving point"

around which Mary pivots (*NCM* 11), but Howe is more interested in Mary's movement

than in Christ's stasis. As a result of this movement, Mary is transfigured and even

becomes a kind of Christ-figure herself, so that the reader's encounter with Incarnation in

the text is mediated through the person of Mary.

Mary approached the tomb with a specific purpose: "she was coming to anoint

him" (*NCM* 6). The act of anointing is crucial to Mary's relationship with Jesus; the poet

associates it with Mary's own confession: "she ran forward to touch him / alabaster and

confess" (*NCM* 11), and the specificity of the word alabaster alludes to an earlier

anointing, one that Christ himself explained was "to prepare me for my burial" (Matthew

26:12, Mark 14:8). All four Gospels record variations of the story of a sinful woman who

anoints Jesus with expensive perfume from an alabaster jar, and wipes his feet with her

hair (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 7, John 12); this event is alluded to in the description of

Mary as "matron undone her hair / falling down" (*NCM* 28). In two of the Gospel

retellings, Jesus declares that this woman's actions will be memorialized wherever the

gospel is preached (Matthew 26:12, Mark 14:9), and yet only one version mentions that

the woman's name is Mary (John 12:3). Now, after Christ's burial, Mary approaches

once again to anoint him and tend to his physical body; she finds something besides a

dead body, and she clings to the feet that she had previously anointed. Mary faces the

one she calls "Rabboni," or Master, and he gives her a new purpose when he commands

her to turn away from him, and go tell others what she has seen.

This encounter turns Mary into a witness. She is commanded by Christ to give

testimony, and the language of the poem connects her with other biblical witnesses. The

poet insists that Mary "has a voice to cry out / No community can accompany her" (*NCM* 15), and the wording here is reminiscent of John the Baptist, whom the Gospel writers considered the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Isaiah 40:3, NKJV). Mary is posed as a kind of mirror-image figure to John the Baptist; like him, she is isolated from society, but while he testified about Christ to prepare the way beforehand, Mary offers her testimony afterward, and discovers a new path.

In "The Nonconformist's Memorial," the oral witness of John the Baptist is connected with the written witness left by John the Evangelist. The name John is mentioned several times in the poem, and most frequently it refers to John the Evangelist, author of the book of Revelation and the nonconformist Gospel that acts as a source for Howe's poem. Twice, these two figures are paired in the repeated phrase "nether John and John harbinger" (*NCM* 6, 21), which is evocative both by its consonance and near-chiasmus as well as by the juxtaposition of these distinct witnesses. John the Baptist, of course, is the "harbinger" who comes to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3); John the Evangelist is the other John, the later one, and "nether" perhaps also suggests a "deeper" John who received the vision recorded in Revelation. This short phrase brings to the light that, in a sense, both Johns act as forerunners, since John's Revelation pertains to Christ's second coming.

The descriptions of Mary in the text also hint at her similarity to John the Evangelist. Like John, she is a visionary, and her isolation and the use of water imagery suggest John's exile on the isle of Patmos. The poet tells us, "She fled from consolation," but "attacks came suddenly / even fierce as the Evangelist / the struggle in

S. John" (*NCM* 28). Elsewhere, she is described as "already fatherless / Isled on all removes" (*NCM* 32), and even the word exile is used; the poet says, "I wander about as an exile / as a body does a shadow" (*NCM* 30). The closing lines of the poem, emphasized not only by their finality but also by their exact repetition of earlier lines, describe Mary "moving away into depths / of the sea" (*NCM* 26, 33). Yet in spite of these similarities with John, Mary's testimony is distinct in that it remains unwritten and unrecorded.

Not only is Mary given a new purpose by her encounter with Incarnation; she is also transformed and transfigured, and this turns her into a Christ-figure; just as certain Old Testament persons are considered "prefigurations" of Christ, Mary now becomes a post-figuration, a kind of afterimage or echo of Christ. At the close of the first section of "The Nonconformist's Memorial," Mary is described emphatically, twice, as "out of enclosure," and the word "*Transfiguration*" overlays the words at an angle (*NCM* 16). These lines are upside-down, which suggests that Mary is beyond even the enclosure of traditional text and its rules, and also implies that there is a uniqueness to her transfiguration; Rachel Back asserts that Mary's transfiguration is "an unstable and ultimately fleeting state," but that the poet and reader are also included in the temporary transformation (175). The line "fragility union of glory" (*NCM* 17), which appears on the page immediately following, suggests the union of deity with mortal humanity that is Incarnation; but it is also applicable to a transfigured Mary, as a fragile creature who shows Christ's glory. Like that line, the vague, repeated phrase "some love-impelled figure" (*NCM* 21, 25) is a suitable description for both Christ and Mary. Christ's choice to come to earth as Incarnation is motivated by love; but Mary's actions are similarly

motivated, as she follows the instructions that "her Love once said in her mind / Enlightenedly to do" (*NCM* 33). Other descriptions confirm this association of Mary with Christ; the poet says she "lay at night on thorns" (*NCM* 25), which summons associations of Christ's crown of thorns. Even the description of Mary "Moving away into depths / of the sea" (*NCM* 26, 33) seem to echo the eschatological description of Christ, "He / Upon Cherubim / in deep ocean" (*NCM* 8, 9). These descriptions heighten our sense of Mary's transfiguration and her image as a figure of Christ, and allow us to encounter Incarnation through her.

Incarnation in the Background

Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial" is filled with brief references and allusions to Christ. According to *Four Quartets*, we are offered at most "the hint half guessed, the gift half understood" (*FQ* 44), although the *Quartets* themselves give us several different, lengthy descriptions of Incarnation. In contrast, Howe's poem only offers us hints and glimpses of Incarnation, but never a full picture, and what little we are offered is open-ended. The poet makes no clear judgments or conclusions, and instead forces the reader to make up his or her own mind rather than taking the easier path of reacting to a definite authorial voice. These glimpses and mentions in the text include names of Christ, references to Christ's miracles, and communion images. The poet describes the prologue to the Gospel of John as "bright picture / dark background" (*NCM* 8, 9); in the Gospel text, it is Incarnation in the foreground, but in Howe's text the transfigured Mary is the "bright picture," while Incarnation is only partially visible in the shadowy background.

The glimpses of Incarnation include several references to events in the life of Christ and the miracles that he performed, which in some cases are undercut or questioned by the surrounding text. The line "the nets were not torn" (*NCM* 7) alludes to the miraculous catch when the fishermen follow Jesus' advice (John 21); Howe comments that she meant to "associate Jesus as fisherman" ("Keller Interview" 11). Another miracle is "the feeding Narrative in Mark" (*NCM* 13), which could refer to either (or both) of two instances when Jesus fed thousands (Mark 6, 8). The description of Christ as "minister of the sea / Walking on the sea and feeding" (*NCM* 19) refers again to the same miracle and succinctly relates the actions of Jesus recorded in Mark 6. However, the line just preceding this summation, "Hallucinated to infinity" (*NCM* 19) casts doubt on these events; it may relate to the disciples' initial, fearful supposition that what they saw was a ghost walking on the water, but the line also suggests an inaccuracy or lack of validity about these miracles.

Howe's poem is sprinkled with fragments of the authoritative text that is her starting point. In addition to the specific miracles, there are several other Biblical references to Christ in the text. The crucifixion is mentioned by location, "Scene Calvary the open destitute" (*NCM* 19), and by time, "the Three Day Reckoning / Alone in the dark to a place of / execution" (*NCM* 12). The second section of "The Nonconformist's Memorial" concludes with a meditation on Christ and calls him "a man of Sorrows," a designation taken from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:3). At another point, the description of "Protestant dissenters / Who walk along this road / Who knows better than you know / I remember the strangers" (*NCM* 31) hints at the Emmaus road (Luke 24), an Incarnational encounter similar to Mary's moment in the garden: two nameless disciples

travel with the resurrected Christ, but, like Mary, fail to recognize him until he reveals himself. This encounter is akin to the incarnational moments described in *Four Quartets*, an "unattended moment," but rather than being "in and out of time" and receiving some apprehension of Incarnation (*FQ* 44), these disciples fail to see the Incarnation when he is physically present with them; he must reveal himself to them before they can understand.

In addition to Mary's Incarnational encounter in the central garden scene, the text also includes several specific references to the Gospel of John. One passage is filled with the names that Jesus gives to himself in the seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John (*NCM* 10). The poet also cites the central Biblical text on Incarnation, "The I *John* Prologue," and the following lines articulate John's idea of the Word made flesh, but in new language: "Original had no title / Ingrafted onto body" (*NCM* 4). The key term "flesh" is used twice in the poem, and both instances are suggestive of Incarnation. The line "Flesh become wheat" (*NCM* 4) takes the progression from Word to flesh a step further and suggests Christ's presence in the sacrament of Eucharist. The sequence of terms "word flesh crumbled page edge" (*NCM* 13) plays on the same ideas, but conjures up an image of the word made flesh recorded in brittle, limiting textual form.

"The Nonconformist's Memorial" includes a few statements about a capitalized "Love" and, as in *Four Quartets*, these references must be connected to Incarnation, although that may not be their only significance. John makes the connection between Christ and Love explicit when he declares that "God is love," and elaborates that this love is best demonstrated in the person of Incarnation (1 John 4:9-9). At one point, the poet asks, "how could Love not be loved" (*NCM* 13). Another passage resonant with Biblical echoes uses the same name: "Paths of righteousness / Love may be a stumbling // out on

the great meadows" (*NCM* 14) . The middle line seems to allude to the apostle Paul's

description of Christ as a "stumbling block" (1 Corinthians 1:23), but the surrounding

lines call to mind the 23rd Psalm, which portrays the good shepherd who leads his sheep

"in the paths of righteousness," in the "green pastures" and "still waters" of a great

meadow (Psalm 23:2-3). Towards the end of the poem, this name is used again when the

poet declares that "Love is the orbed circle" (*NCM* 25), a line which is evocative of the

description of God as "a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is

nowhere" (attributed to Timaeus of Locris in Voltaire)[23] and which also resonates with

Eliot's evocation of Incarnation as the "still point of the turning world" (*FQ* 15).

      The direct allusions to the names and miracles of Christ are difficult enough to

interpret, but there are also other, even more cryptic references that seem to relate to

Incarnation. For instance, Christ is the most obvious candidate for the referent of the line

"Pure Sacrosanct Negator" (*NCM* 8), particularly because of the adjectives, but the

unfamiliar noun is difficult to situate. Perhaps Christ could be considered a "negator" in

the sense that he is conqueror of sin and death; but the word also means the denial or

rejection of something, historically in a religious context (*OED*), which pulls in

associations of dissent and nonconformity and complicates our interpretation. Again,

such phrases as "some love-impelled figure" (*NCM* 21, 25) and "fragility union of glory"

(*NCM* 17) are fascinating as descriptions of Incarnation, but the references are ambiguous

and also applicable to Mary, at the very least. The latter phrase could certainly be

---

[23] This line is often misquoted and attributed to a range of varying sources including Augustine, Timaeus of Locris, and Pascal. Indeed, Pascal uses markedly similar language when he describes nature as "an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere," and declares it "the greatest perceptible mark of God's omnipotence" (60). Nonetheless, the prevalent misquotation and misattribution underscores the familiarity of the idea.

extended to the crumbling pages of a text that attempts to convey the glory of Incarnation, such as the Gospels or even Howe's poem itself.

One more passage underscores the ambiguous presentation of Incarnation within the text. This loose stanza is eschatological in tone and begins with "King of Righteousness," and then goes on to describe the "interminable trajectory of authority" that is "at the end of history" (*NCM* 26). The choice of the word "interminable," which is comparable in meaning to more positive terms such as infinite or eternal, brings in negative connotations of impatience or disgust (*OED*). To some extent, this passage seem extremely harsh and negative, for instance in the descriptions "truly primitive" or "a ravenous coming" (*NCM* 26). Howe's syntax leaves these phrases only loosely associated and their referents vague, which makes it difficult to draw any certain conclusions. Even the unpunctuated question that concludes this stanza, "Who is this distance / Waiting for a restoration / and righteousness," is ambivalent in tone, and it is impossible to be certain if the "King of Righteousness" is still the subject. However, the dark aspects of this passage are not completely incongruent with scripture; the line "Night when the warrant comes" is consonant with the comparison of Christ's second coming to "a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). As with many of the other Biblical allusions in the text, it seems clear that at least some of these lines refer to Christ, but there is no great certainty as to how we are to react to him or his coming kingdom.

The poet's explanation that "these are thoughts / This is not intention / as to the sense of it" (*NCM* 22) is a helpful one to understand the nature of the ambiguous and often-times seemingly contradictory references and descriptions of Incarnation within "The Nonconformist's Memorial." She affirms this sentiment again in the line "there is

no Proverb / Here is the depth of it" (*NCM* 22); there is no easy, concise way to sum up the experience of Incarnation. In a typically compelling but seemingly incomprehensible statement, the poet declares "Not finding names there / Immanence is white with this" (*NCM* 31). Earlier, the poet associated the Word made flesh with the crumbling "page edge" (*NCM* 13), so it is, in a way, a literal interpretation to say that the divine presence, the immanence of Incarnation, is most visible in the edges of Howe's text: not in the printed names, but in the white space and the edges of the page, in the space between words and ambiguous references to Christ. The reader must navigate among the confusion of the written words and lines to uncover Incarnation in the margins.

Whether it is in the margins of Howe's poem or the central concept of Eliot's *Quartets*, the Incarnation is a unique act of divine communication and brings a message to humanity that is difficult to convey within the limits of language or text. T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial," by their nonlinear form and varied inclusion of Incarnation in their subject matter, make it possible for their readers to encounter Incarnation within these texts. In the case of these two complicated texts, the exploration I have done here is far from definitive or complete; there is doubtless much more to be interpreted and connected with Incarnation. However, I leave that task to other readers and scholars in the hope that they will encounter the glorious and mysterious message of Incarnation by engaging with these poems.

Conclusion

...speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the ear, not conscience ring.
-- George Herbert, "The Windows"

In his poem "The Windows," George Herbert compares a preacher to the stained glass windows in a church. When the light of truth shines through this "brittle, crazy glass," there is something added by the stories "anneal[ed] in glass" of the individual person that affects the reception of the message. The poem begins by questioning a medium, human speech, that seems unsuited to the message with which it has been entrusted ("LORD, how can man preach thy eternal word ?"), but it ends by claiming that the combined media of "doctrine and life, colors and light," eternal word and human life, can convey that message to human hearers with greater power. The "colored" light combines with the spoken word to convey a message that is heard more deeply than in the ear. Herbert's use of a technological metaphor, that of stained glass windows, betrays an uncertainty about the capabilities of media, whether human or brittle glass, but also reveals a clear understanding of the power that language can, but does not necessarily, have.

Poetry is an ancient genre which has survived, and changed, through the transitions from oral culture to manuscript culture to typographic culture. Throughout those times, poets have expressed concern about the ways we communicate, as George Herbert does in "The Windows," and in many cases poets have been particularly interested in the specific kinds of meaning that can be conveyed through poetry. Now, as our culture is in the midst of a technological shift into the electronic age, these concerns of media and communication are at the forefront once again.

In our technological age, nonlinearity has arisen as a "quiet revolution" in mathematics and the sciences that affects everything (Lam 1, iii), at every level of the spectrum, in contrast to the more sensational shifts of quantum theory and relativity, which are limited only to certain extremes. Nonlinear science is most familiar in popular culture by way of fractals and chaos theory, but its implications are potentially much further reaching than those examples might suggest. Likewise, just as nonlinearity affects everything in mathematics and the sciences, there is a nonlinearity present in language that holds the possibility for widespread and significant changes in the ways we understand and use language.

This nonlinearity in language has been noted by a diverse array of literary and media theorists. Roman Jakobson complicates the idea of language as linear or temporal sequence with his claim that linguistic signs are arranged by both combination and selection as part of a "bipolar structure of language" (111). In opposition to Saussure's linear semiotics, Jacques Lacan proposes a chaotic, recursive view of language with "anchoring points" in the midst of flux (154). Jacques Derrida also rejects the linearity he finds in Saussure and proposes instead the pluri-dimensional "mythogram" as a means to get beyond language as mere succession (85). Mikhail Bakhtin perceives flux and chaos in language and specifically identifies centripetal and centrifugal forces which are constantly causing change and contradiction within any given language system (272). Despite the variety in their terminology and interests, these theorists all touch on the nonlinearity that is present in language.

The general nonlinearity present in language identified by these theorists extends to more specific nonlinear features in the codex book, which has until recently been

treated as a predominantly linear form. Jerome McGann argues that all texts should be considered as radiant and decentered (25), and exposes significant similarities between the codex form and more obviously nonlinear forms, such as electronic texts. Espen Aarseth contributes to this argument and points out that hypertext can actually be far more controlled and linear than the codex book (*Cybertext* 46). Walter Ong's work on oral and literate cultures is also relevant because it emphasizes the importance of both aural and visual aspects of text, and his notion of a secondary, literate orality is particularly significant for understanding some of the features of nonlinearity in both printed and electronic texts.

Poetry in particular seems to be more congenial to nonlinearity in language, a fact which has been observed not only by theorists and scholars such as Lacan and McGann, but also by poets themselves. Poetry's roots in the spoken or sung lyric exhibit their continued presence in the tension between the aural and visual aspects which are both significant to poetry, and the linear modes that have been so successful in the novel were never completely appropriated by poetry.

One specific example of this poetic nonlinearity is T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which exhibits a nonlinear structure much like that of a hypertext; the text is broken into sections and subsections, and there are many significant connections of repeated words, phrases, images, or ideas that create links between the different parts of the text. Not only do the *Quartets* display various features of hypertext, but the poem itself creates a textual space that demands to be explored by the reader. *Four Quartets* also offers the opportunity to use technology to explore the space of the text by using TextArc and to do what Jerome McGann would label a "deformative" interpretation; this use of TextArc

further suggests the possibility of future technologies, which may improve on this process and allow us even greater access to the textual space.

It still remains to do a complete reading of the *Quartets* as a hypertext, and this task poses several difficulties. What would such a reading look like, and when would it be complete? Existing interpretations of hypertext works tend to emphasize the lack of closure and finality that such reading experiences engender, and if we use those studies as a model for approaching *Four Quartets*, we will also borrow their problems. It is unclear how to determine when such a reading can be declared finished, or whether it would require exploring the full space of the *Quartets*, visiting every section of the text at least once. It could be that such an analysis would not resemble traditional scholarly interpretations; it might, in fact, take the form of a hypertext instance of *Four Quartets* that not only identifies, but also renders operable the links and connections within and between the *Quartets*. There are hypertext versions of Eliot's "The Waste Land" currently in existence, which take advantage of hypertext to provide glosses, annotations, and revisions (Arum), and in some cases treat Eliot's allusions as a kind of hyperlink (R. A. Parker). In a few cases, these are useful and innovative projects, but a hypertext version such as I propose would be an instantiation of specific paths through, and links within, the textual space of *Four Quartets* to illuminate the hypertext-like structure that is already present in Eliot's Quartets.

Susan Howe's "The Nonconformist's Memorial" offers a different kind of poetic nonlinearity than that of Eliot's Quartets; Howe's poem is profoundly visual, and transgresses the usual rules of printed text. In spite of the differences in the kinds of poetic nonlinearity, here as well as with the *Four Quartets*, hypertext is a useful model

for discovering ways to read Howe's poetry and for a language and terminology that allows us to relate the disparate sections to each other. As with more traditional poetry, paying close attention to the words on the page is very important, but new features of the text, such as angle, orientation, and spatial placement must now also be taken into account.

The notion of secondary orality is significant to "The Nonconformist's Memorial," since the poem draws extensively on ideas of confession and testimony. These modes of communication are profoundly oral, but are also both contextual and personal, and they demand a response from their audience, just as Howe's poem does from its readers. There are many different kinds of turns, transformations, and conversions at work in the text, but at the same time the reader must rotate the book in order to read the poem, and thus the reader is offered the possibility of transformation by the act of reading the poem and being involved in the confessions of Mary Magdalene and the poet herself. Merely by reading this poem, the reader participates in the nonconformity of the text and becomes a new witness to the nonconformists that Howe memorializes in her poem.

Nonlinear texts may have the potential for communicating different concepts, or conveying ideas more fully and directly than other sorts of texts. Howe and the Eliot of *Four Quartets*, for different reasons, both have an investment in Christian theology and history and, in these particular poems, that interest is evident in the idea of Incarnation. This is a powerful, paradoxical idea which is central to Christianity, but when approached from the vantage point of media theory, we see that Incarnation can be understood as a divine act of communication. Christ, as the "Word made flesh," carried in his body a

message that could only be conveyed in that particular method and, as a result, any

attempts to communicate the message of Incarnation through language are necessarily

incomplete. Some texts seem to be more suited to this difficult task than others, and

different Christian traditions propose the necessity of extra-textual factors such as faith,

the Holy Spirit, or community, to encounter Incarnation even in the Gospel texts.

In the case of *Four Quartets* and "The Nonconformist's Memorial," the

nonlinearity of the texts enable the reader to encounter Incarnation and allows these

poems convey a fuller message of Incarnation than could be done by traditional texts

alone. In the *Quartets*, Incarnation is a core concept articulated in several different

forms, despite the fact that the word "Incarnation" is used only once in the text (*FQ* 44).

Incarnation is expressed predominantly in conceptual terms as "the impossible union / Of

spheres of existence" (*FQ* 44), and the poet takes the union of Incarnation as an ideal for

unselfish love and art that unites stillness with motion in order to attain transcendence.

Incarnation also holds a significant, but not a central, position in "The

Nonconformist's Memorial." Howe's poem focuses on Mary, and Incarnation is revealed

through Mary's encounter with Christ and her subsequent transformation. The poem is

rife with Biblical allusions, which depict Incarnation in a fragmentary, contradictory, and

inconclusive manner. Where Incarnation is central to *Four Quartets*, it occupies a more

marginal position in "The Nonconformist's Memorial," present in the white space and the

edges of the text. In contrast to Eliot's depiction of Incarnation as a union of opposites,

Howe offers us a glimpse of Incarnation as "fragility union of glory" (*NCM* 17),

predominantly through the figure of a transfigured Mary. Like *Four Quartets*, Howe's

poem allows the reader to encounter Incarnation, but her poem presents us with a strikingly different version, one which is fragmentary and incomplete.

As George Herbert suggests with the metaphor of stained glass windows, the medium that a message passes through can color, or even transform, that message, and may radically alter the reception of that message by those who receive it. As with the Incarnation, which is a communication act of divine self-revelation that required a specific medium to be communicated, there may be other messages that can be conveyed more fully by nonlinear texts than by traditional ones.

Understanding the nonlinearity in poetry has significant implications for the ways we read and study poetry and opens up new realms of possibility. In some cases, reading printed texts in a nonlinear fashion may result in interpretations that are only subtly different from careful readings done by insightful critics; but in other cases it may give us radically new, transformative understandings of familiar texts. An understanding of nonlinearity in such texts also has the potential to make more traditional texts accessible to a new generation of readers who have grown up with hypertext and are more comfortable with radiant, decentered texts that demand interaction, texts which hold the possibility of encounters, and even of being transformed by the act of reading.

Appendix A. TextArc Images

Included are five still shots of TextArc indexes. These images are from the TextArc representations of *Four Quartets*, followed by each quartet individually. These were captured as screen shots of the program running, without any user interaction or selection of individual words.

For ease of readability and printing, these images have been color inverted (black on white, instead of white on black). TextArc navigation aids and buttons have been removed. In addition, I have added titles and section labels as markers on the perimeter of the TextArc space as a slight compensation for the lack of interaction.

Permission was granted from W. Bradford Paley to make use of his TextArc software for this dissertation.
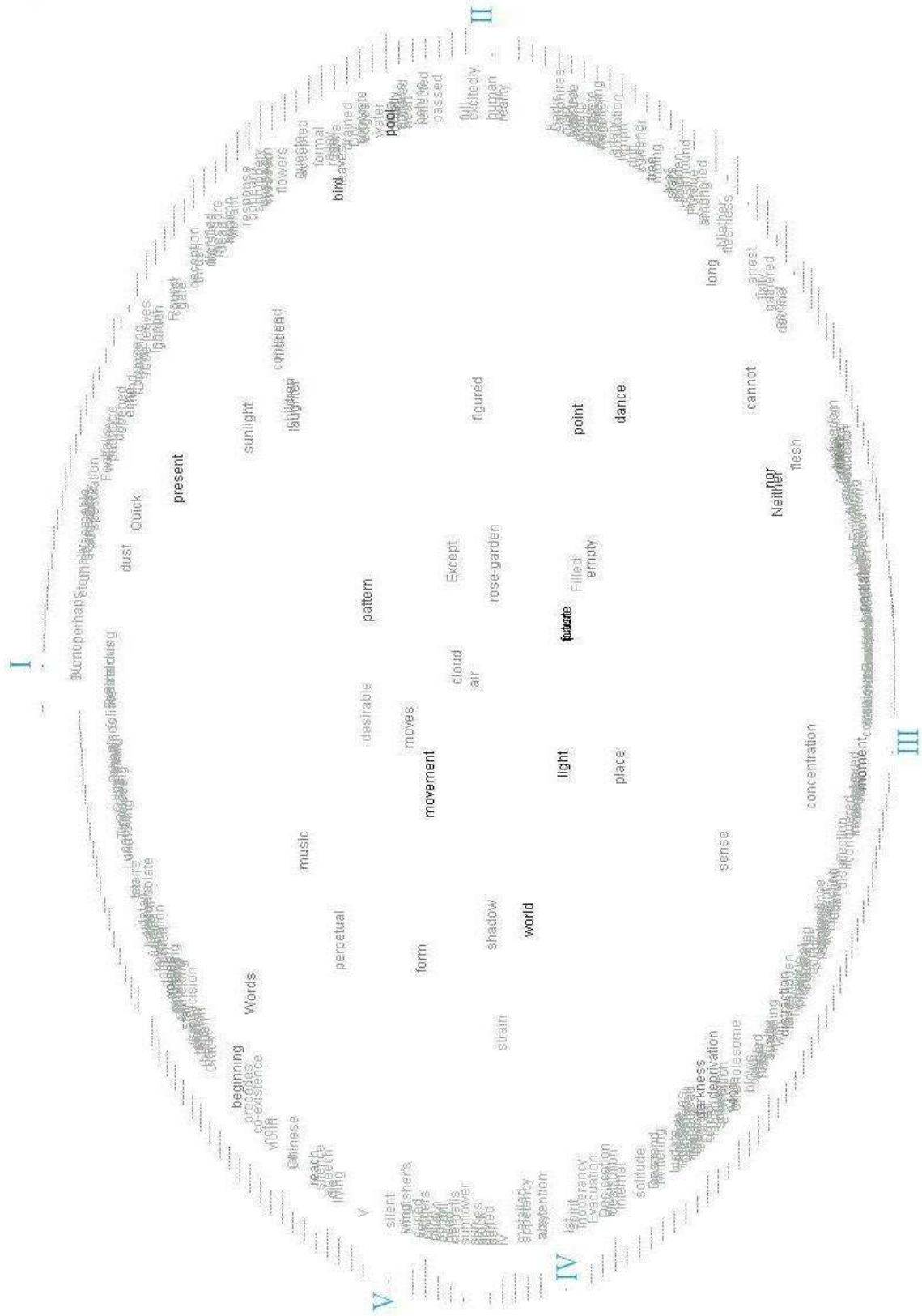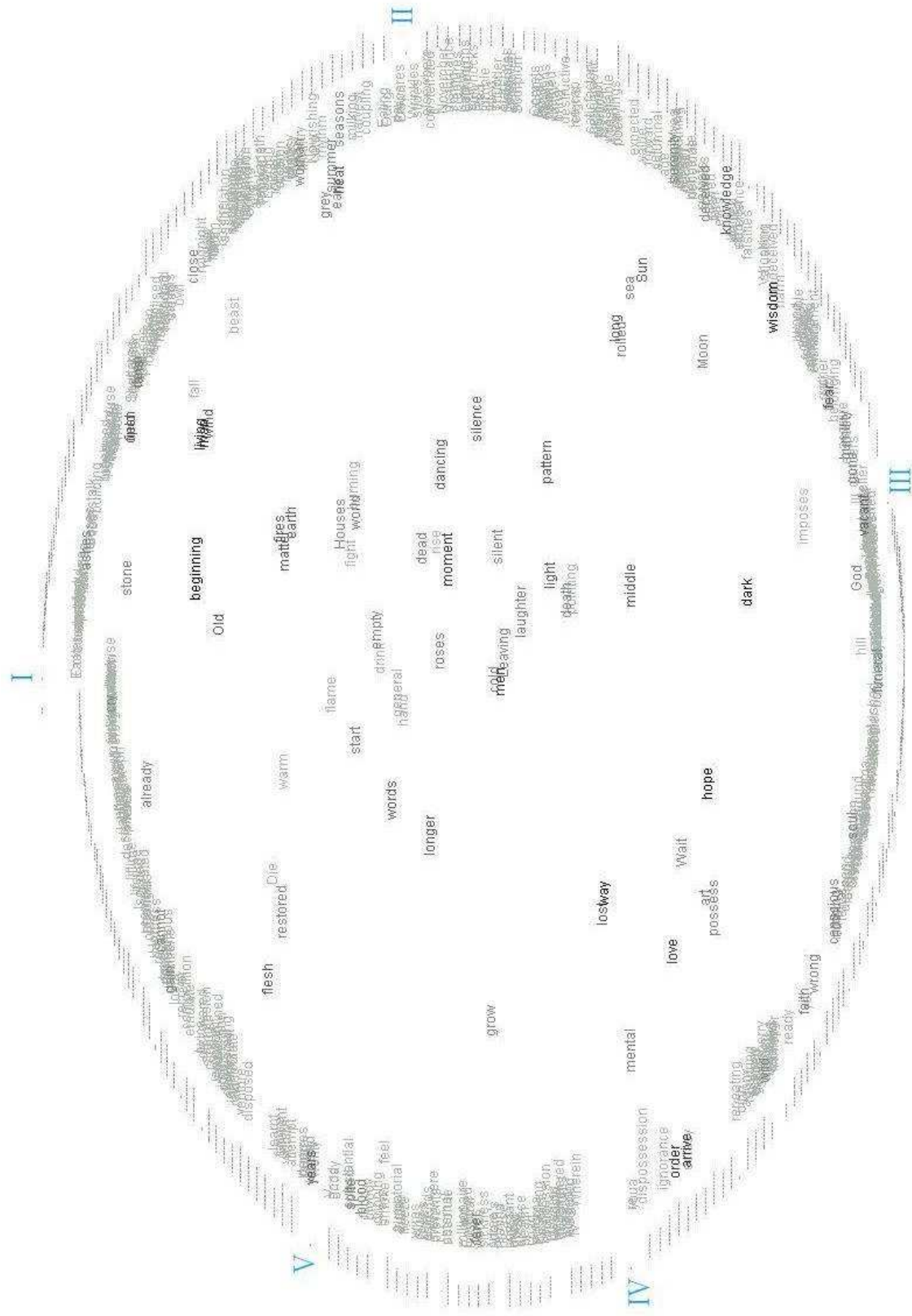
Figure A-1. TextArc of Four Quartets

Figure A-2. TextArc of "Burnt Norton"

Figure A-3. TextArc of "East Coker"
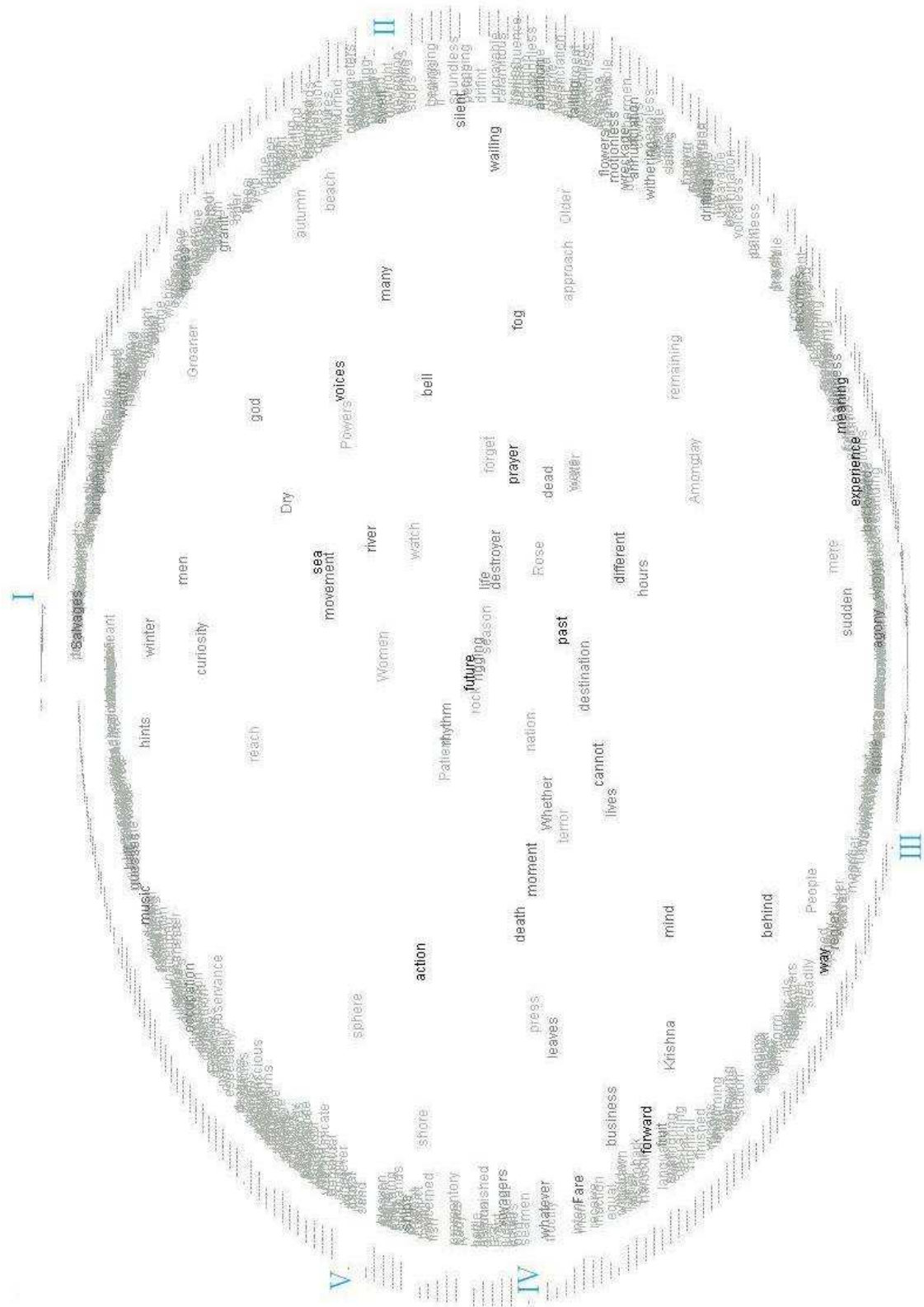
Figure A-4. TextArc of "The Dry Salvages"
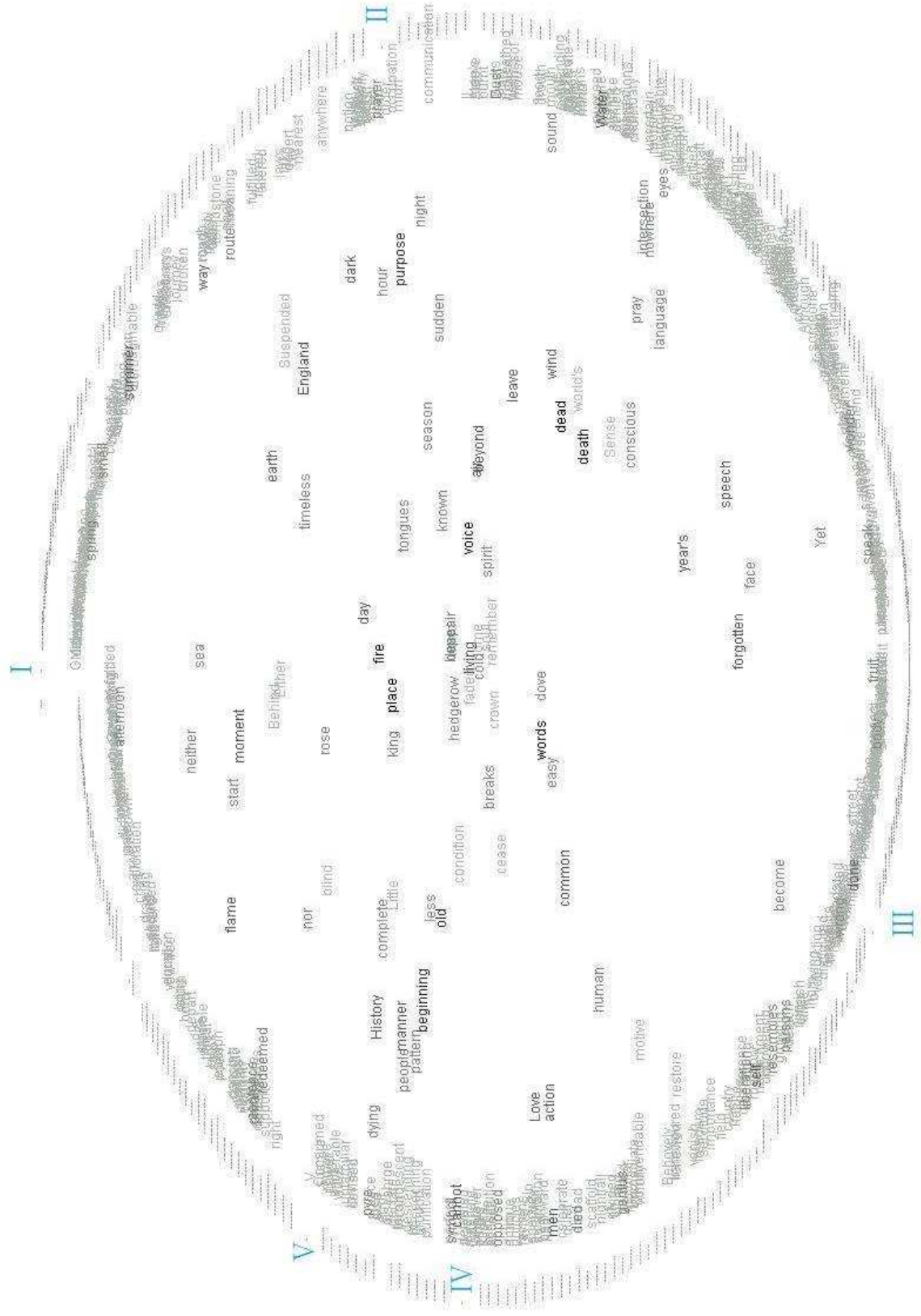
Figure A-5. TextArc of "Little Gidding"

Abbreviations

FQ   Eliot, T. S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1944.

OPP   Eliot, T. S. *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.

NCM   Howe, Susan.. *The Nonconformist's Memorial : Poems*. New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1993.

GG   McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy; the making of typographic man*. Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

UM   McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, c1964.

OL   Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the word*. London, New York: Methuen, 1982.

All Scripture references from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

Works Cited

Aarseth, Espen J. *Cybertext : perspectives on ergodic literature*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

---. "Nonlinearity and Literary Theory." *Hyper/text/theory*. Ed. George P. Landow. Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 51-86.

ALG. *T2K Overview*. 2004. Accessed on September 27 2005. <http://alg.ncsa.uiuc.edu/do/tools/t2k>.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Fourth Edition: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

Ando, Clifford. "Signs, Idols, and the Incarnation in Augustinian Metaphysics." *Representations* 73 (2001): 24-53.

Arum, Arwin van. *T. S. Eliot Hypertext Project*. 2002. Accessed on March 22, 2006. <http://members.chello.nl/~a.vanarum8/EliotProject/>.

Athanasius. *The Incarnation of the Word of God: being the treatise of St. Athanasius, De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*. New York: Macmillan, 1961, c1946.

Back, Rachel Tzvia. *Led by Language: The Poetry and Poetics of Susan Howe*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2002.

Bakhtin, M. M. "Discourse in the Novel." Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *The dialogic imagination : four essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259-422.

Barndollar, David. "Movements in Time: *Four Quartets* and the Late String Quartets of Beethoven." *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music*. Ed. John Xiros Cooper. Border Crossings. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000. 179-194.

Berry, Eleanor. "Visual Form in Free Verse." *Visible Language* Winter 23.1 (1989): 89-111.

---. "Visual Poetry." *The new Princeton Handbook of poetic terms*. Ed. T. V. F. Brogan. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. 335-337.

Bieber, Christina Marie. "The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor." Dissertation. Emory University, 1999.

Blessing, Kamila A. "Commentary on John." *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*. Ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans. Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002. 584-605.

Brett, R. L. "Mysticism and Incarnation in *Four Quartets*." *English: The Journal of the English Association (London, England)* 16 (1966): 94-99.

Brooker, Jewel Spears. "From *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets*: Evolution of a Method." *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*. Ed. Edward Lobb. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. 84-106.

Calamy, Edmund, and Samuel Palmer. *The Nonconformist's memorial; being an account of the lives, sufferings, and printed works, of the two thousand ministers ejected from the Church of England, chiefly by the Act of Uniformity, Aug. 24, 1666*. Second Edition. London: Button and son and T. Hurst, 1802.

Campbell, David, et al. "Experimental Mathematics: The Role of Computation in Nonlinear Science." *Communications of the ACM* 28.4 (1985): 374-384.

Christie, William. "A Recent History of Poetic Difficulty." *English Literary History* 67.2 (2000): 539-564.

Clark, Marden J. "Timeless Moments: The Incarnation Theme in 'Little Gidding'." *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 28.1 (1974): 10-17.

Coyle, Michael. "T. S. Eliot on the Air: 'Culture' and the Challenges of Mass Communication." *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World*. Ed. Jewel Spears Brooker. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. 141-154.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. 1st American. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Doria, Charles. "Visual Writing Forms in Antiquity: The *Versus Intexti*." *Visual Literature Criticism: A New Collection*. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979. 63-92.

Douglas, J. Yellowlees. "Tell Me When to Stop: Closure and Indeterminacy in Interactive Narratives." *Hyper/Text/Theory*. Ed. George P. Landow. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 159-188.

Eliot, T. S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1944.

---. "The Metaphysical Poets." *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975. 59-67.

---. *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.

Fildes, Jonathan. *Visual net spins literary web*. 29 November 2002. BBC News. Accessed on July 14, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/2512369.stm>.

Fisher, Danyel Aharon. "Social and Temporal Structures in Everyday Collaboration." Dissertation. University of California, Irvine, 2004.

Fitzpatrick, Jr., Mallary. "Kierkegaard and the Church." *The Journal of Religion* 27.4 (1947): 255-262.

Frank, Joseph. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Gallant, John, and Holly Bergevin. *Position Is Everything*. January 9, 2006 2002. Accessed on March 24 2006. <http://www.positioniseverything.net/>.

Gardner, Helen. *The Composition of Four Quartets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Gelpi, Albert. "The Catholic Presence in American Culture." *American Literary History* 11.1 (1999): 196-212.

Gibbs, Raymond W. *The poetics of mind : figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge England ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Girard, René. "Literature and Christianity: A Personal View." *Philosophy and Literature* 231 (1999): 32-43.

Gordon, Lyndall. "The American Eliot and 'The Dry Salvages'." *Words in Time: New essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*. Ed. Edward Lobb. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. 38-51.

Gray, Christine. "Textarc??" Online posting. 6 January, 2003. SHAKSPER 2003: The Global Electronic Shakespeare Conference. Accessed on July 18, 2005. <http://www.shaksper.net/archives/2003/0026.html>.

Green, Fiona. "'Plainly on the Other Side': Susan Howe's Recovery." *Contemporary Literature* 42.1 (2001): 78-101.

Harpold, Terry. "Conclusions." *Hyper/text/theory*. Ed. George P. Landow. Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 189-222.

---. "The Contingencies of the Hypertext Link." *Writing on the Edge* 2 (1991): 126-138.

Higgins, Dick. *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Hoffman, Steven K. "Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic." *ELH* 45.4 (1978): 687-709.

Hollander, John. *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975.

Howe, Susan. Personal interview. 10 July 2004.

---. "The Difficulties Interview." *The Difficulties* 3.2 (1989): 17-27.

---. "An Interview with Susan Howe conducted by Lynn Keller." *Contemporary Literature* 36.1 (1995): 1-34.

---. Interview with Charles Bernstein. *LINEbreak*. State University of New York at Buffalo. 1995.

---. *The Midnight*. New York: New Directions Books, 2003.

---. *My Emily Dickinson*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1985.

---. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. Illus. Robert Mangold. New York: The Grenfell Press, 1992.

---. *The Nonconformist's Memorial : Poems*. New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1993.

---. Interview with Janet Ruth Falcon. *Speaking with Susan Howe*. December 3, 1986.

---. "Susan Howe." *Postmodern Poetry: The Talisman Interviews*. Ed. Edward Foster. Hoboken, NJ: Talisman House, Publishers, 1990. 48-68.

Jakobson, Roman. *Language in literature*. Eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987.

Jaouën, Françoise and Benjamin Semple. "Editors' Preface: The Body into Text." *Yale French Studies*.86, Corps Mystique, Corps Sacre: Textual Transfigurations of the Body from the Middle Ages to the Seventeeth Century (1994): 1-4.

Johnson, James William. "Lyric." *The new Princeton Handbook of poetic terms*. Ed. T. V. F. Brogan. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. 172-180.

Killingley, Siew-Yue. "Time, Action, Incarnation: Shades of the Bhagavad-Gita in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." *Journal of Literature and Theology* 4.1 (1990): 50-71.

Lacan, Jacques. "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud." Trans. Alan Sheridan. *Écrits : a selection*. New York: Norton, 1977. 146-178.

Lam, Lui, ed. *Introduction to Nonlinear Physics*. New York: Springer, 1997.

Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary. Founded on Andrew's edition of Freund's Latin dictionary*. Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879.

Litz, A. Walton. "Repetition and Order in the Wartime *Quartets*." *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*. Ed. Edward Lobb. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. 179-188.

Lloyd, A. H. "Incarnation: An Essay in Three Parts." *The American Journal of Theology* 20.1 (1916): 45-80.

Lobb, Edward. "Limitation and Transcendence in 'East Coker'." *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*. Ed. Edward Lobb. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. 20-37.

Lockerd, Benjamin G., Jr. *Aethereal Rumours: T. S. Eliot's Physics and Poetics*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998.

Lord, Albert Bates. "Oral Poetry." *The new Princeton Handbook of poetic terms*. Ed. T. V. F. Brogan. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. 211-214.

Lynch, Denise E. "Denise Levertov and the Poetry of Incarnation." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 50.1-2 (1997): 49-64.

Ma, Ming-qian. "Articulating the Inarticulate: Singularities and the Counter-Method in Susan Howe." *Contemporary Literature* 36.3 (1995): 466-89.

McDonald, Gail. "Hypertext and the Teaching of Modernist Difficulty." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 2.1 (2002): 17-30.

McGann, Jerome. *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy; the making of typographic man*. Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

---. *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, c1964.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby." *The piazza tales*. 1853. Ed. Egbert S. Oliver. New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962. 16-53.

Merwin, W. S. "Preface." *The second four books of poems*. Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 1993. 1-5.

Miles, Margaret R. *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005.

Molesworth, Charles. "'With Your Own Face On': The Origins and Consequences of Confessional Poetry." *Twentieth Century Literature* 22.2 (1976): 163-178.

Mulder, Anne-Claire. "Incarnation: The Flesh Becomes Word." *Paragraph* 25.3 (2002): 173-188.

Naylor, Paul. *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*. Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies. Ed. Marjorie Perloff; Rainer Rumold. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

The NIV Study Bible, New International Version. Ed. Kenneth Barker. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985.

The Nonconformist's Memorial -- Poems -- Susan Howe. 2002. FrontList Books. Accessed on October 29 2004. <http://new.frontlist.com/detail/0811212297>.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the word*. London, New York: Methuen, 1982.

---. "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization." *New Literary History* Vol. 16. No. 1, Oral and Written Traditions in the Middle Ages (1984): 1-12.

Oxford English Dictionary. Second Edition: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Paley, W. Bradford. *TextArc.org*. 2002. TextArc.org. Accessed on July 18, 2005. <http://www.textarc.org/>.

---. *TextArc: Revealing Word Associations, Distribution, and Frequency*. 2001. Digital Image Design Incorporated. Accessed on July 18, 2005. <http://www.textarc.org/TextArcOverview.pdf>.

Parker, Jeff. "A Poetics of the Link." *Electronic Book Review* Vol. 12. Fall (2001).

Parker, Rickard A. *Exploring "The Waste Land"*. 2002. Accessed on March 22, 2006. <http://world.std.com/~raparker/exploring/thewasteland/explore.html>.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin Books, 1966.

Perloff, Marjorie. "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo." *Critical Inquiry* 25.3 (1999): 405-34.

Rae, Murray A. *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Reed, Brian. "'Eden or Ebb of the Sea': Susan Howe's Word Squares and Postlinear Poetics." *Postmodern Culture: an Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 14.2 (2004).

Rosaye, Jean-Paul. "L'Incarnation selon T. S. Eliot." *Etude Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne, Etats-Unis* 50.1 (1997): 26-39.

Rosenthal, M. L., and Sally M. Gall. *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Russ, John C. *Fractal Surfaces*. New York: Plenum Press, 1994.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Roy Harris. Eds. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Riedlinger. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1983.

Sayre, Henry M. *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.

Schuchard, Ronald. "'If I think, again, of this place': Eliot, Herbert and the Way to 'Little Gidding'." *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*. Ed. Edward Lobb. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. 52-83.

Schultz, Susan. "Exaggerated History." *Postmodern Culture: an Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 4.2 (1994).

Servotte, Herman. "The Poetry of Paradox: 'Incarnation' in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 72.4 (1991): 377-85.

Small Press Traffic > Susan Howe. February 8 1997. Small Press Traffic. Accessed on February 22, 2005. <http://www.sptraffic.org/html/authors/howes.html>.

Smith, James K. A. *Speech and Theology : Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. (Radical Orthodoxy Series). London; New York: Routledge, 2002.

Staudt, Kathleen Henderson. "The Text as Material and as Sign: Poetry and Incarnation in William Blake, Arthur Rimbaud, and David Jones." *Modern Language Studies* 14.3 (1984): 13-30.

Steiner, George. "On Difficulty." *Journal of Arts and Aesthetics Criticism* 36.3 (1978): 263-76.

Suárez, Juan A. "T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, the Gramophone, and the Modernist Discourse Network." *New Literary History* 32.3 (2001): 747-768.

Tkatchenko, Maria. *Survey Visualization*. 2004. Accessed on July 18, 2005. <http://www.cs.ubc.ca/~tmm/courses/cpsc533c-04-fall/projects/survey.pdf>.

Tuma, Keith. "Psycho-Politics and the Conventions of Contemporary Poetry." *American Literary History* 1.4 (1989): 908-915.

Vanderborg, Susan. "A Tale of Two *Keys*: Rosmarie Waldrop's Poetics of the Book." *How2* 1.8 (2002).

Visual Thesaurus. 1998. Thinkmap, Inc. Accessed on September 27, 2005. <http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>.

Voltaire, Francois Marie Arouet. *The Philosophical Dictionary*. Trans. H. I. Woolf. New York: Knopf, 1924.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged. [Alexandra, Va.]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996.

Weinig, Mary Anthony. *Verbal Pattern in Four Quartets: A Close Reading of T. S. Eliot's Poem*. Troy, MI: International Book Publishers, 1982.