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Reading Ineffability and Realizing Tragedy in Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*

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READING INEFFABILITY AND REALIZING TRAGEDY IN STUART MOULTHROP'S *VICTORY GARDEN*

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STUART MOULTHROP'S *VICTORY GARDEN*

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Victory Garden, Stuart Moulthrop's 1991 classic hyperfiction, presents a nonlinear story of U. S. home front involvement in the First Gulf War in a way that facilitates confusion and mimics a "fog of war" sort of (un)awareness. Using Storyspace to build his complex narrative, Moulthrop incorporates poetry, fiction, historical references, and low-tech graphic novel type elements. Among the graphic components are all-black and all-white screens that function as variables. Overtly, these screens speak of closure and signify unconsciousness; however, their nonverbal role may also be linked to the ineffability trope as used by Dante Alighieri and re-interpreted by contemporary linguist Ruiging Liang. To date, critics and meta-readers have incorrectly assumed that the protagonist, Emily Runbird, becomes a fatality. By failing to read her life or death as undecidable, we deny the fiction its full power as a postmodern interpretive dilemma. This assumption plays into what might be posited as Moulthrop's real thesis: syllogism in a corrupted (war time) information system is potentially tragic. A summary of theories and critical approaches relevant to the blank screen's use as interstice together with sample engagements with relevant texts—reading *Victory Garden* as per Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological approach, Stanley Fish's reader response theory, and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction—prove *Victory Garden* to be a challenging but consistent literary breakdown (staged malfunction of reading habits). Ultimately, ineffability is

shown to be a reading strategy and the action Aristotle characterizes as key to the definition of tragedy is seen as performed by the reader. Moulthrop dangles the question about Emily's demise as a critical reading moment prone to corruption. The classical anagnorisis is not Emily's; the revelation Moulthrop intends is reserved for the reader and is precipitated by the need to resolve aporia.

Introduction

Generally Speaking

Two decades ago, the genre of cyberfiction held much promise. The theoretical possibilities of computer-based literature, freed from the constraints of print technologies and opened to the possibilities of the hyperlink, seemed limitless. Writers of fiction could experiment with a narrative structure that changed in response to the reader's choices. A title no longer identified a single text, but accessed an almost infinite variety of story fragment permutations. The hope was that because texts could vary between readings and would no longer be tied to requisite beginnings, sequences, or endings, literature might more closely map the human experience of the world. Readers would no longer be required to turn consecutive pages; they would now move freely among narrative threads. Reading became a matter of deciding between and progressing through hyperlinked narrative options.

Through a combination of careful scripting, random access points, and video game strategies (players moving as if through a maze to some next level of understanding and advanced competition), writers of hyperfiction (the label that replaced "cyberfiction") could challenge their audience in new ways. Writers could deconstruct stories, present them as scattered component parts using computer programs, and allow the reader to assume the authorial role of plot construction—even to decide what they were reading. The burden of making sense out of those component parts became the chief responsibility of the newly empowered reader. Even narration was shared between writer and reader. In passages of dialogue, the speakers or context might not be identified. Consequently, such snippets, whether they were keys to character development or

chronology, might be (mis)assigned to any number of developing scenarios. The resulting muddle would then serve various aesthetic purposes. Investigations into memory, identity, dreams, and logic were popular themes addressed via the hyperlinked format. Readers were not just investing in fictitious others; they were, in the context of the developing story, going and doing themselves. The fourth wall would now be broken by the reader not the writer and it would happen at each hyperlink.

Writers and theorists explored the writer-reader interface and attempted to, if not expand the reader's role in story telling by adding choices, at least bring to the foreground the circuitous thought processes readers go through in order to establish chronology, glean narrative, and derive meaning from a text. By eliminating the rigid narrative sequence inherent in books, writers of hyperfiction could further expose the pressures of rhetoric and exploit the reader's engrained need for satisfying conclusions. However, burdening the reader came at a cost. Since the 1990s, the appraisal of hyperfiction has cooled. The label "esoteric" is more frequently applied, and readership is mostly limited to academic circles. Originally published as read-only CDs, those early works are now being excerpted in print, retooled for the internet, or offered in limited-availability on those same but now nearly obsolete operating systems. While the genre continues to evolve, the reading experience it heralds has yet to evolve from a steady diet of mouse clicks into a seamless immersion in virtual reality.[1] Readers of those early works do have choices that affect the order of reading, but not the sum total of what is available to be read. As narratives, hyperfictions promised to invert the reader-author relationship but only did so in part. Kristin Veel explains that those early attempts at inversion unduly stress the act of reading and, in turn, make the reading experience

"unfulfilling, confusing, and without meaning" (168). In the view of Espen Arseth, the reader is forced to become "a meta-reader, mapping the network and reading the map of his/her own reading carefully in order to regain a sense of readership" (qtd. in Veel, 168).[2]

One example from the early hyperfiction cannon is Stuart Moulthrop's 1991 *Victory Garden*—a story of a U.S. college community's response to the First Gulf War. Writing only for computer readers—*Victory Garden* does not exist in print but only on CD—Moulthrop incorporates poetry, fiction, historical references, and low-tech graphic novel type elements. Among the graphic components are all-black and all-white screens whose origins seem overtly linked to comic books, but whose narrative role goes beyond the signification of unconsciousness or the mathematics of infinity. The blank screens represent variables in *Victory Garden*'s narrative equation and are embedded by Moulthrop to facilitate confusion in a way that mimics a "fog of war" sort of (un)awareness. Because as readers we do not know exactly what happens when the black screen appears, we either succumb to the force of Moulthrop's anti-war rhetoric and assume the protagonist becomes a tragic fatality of the First Gulf War, or we imagine her as seriously wounded (as in the case of my readings), read on, and uncover the story (dream?) of her homecoming celebration. Here, it is important to remember that no reader actually finishes *Victory Garden* in a traditional sense and that any reader will eventually maintain multiple, simultaneous readings. Therefore, assuming the protagonist dies is as much about wanting closure or inserting the logic that serious war wounds usually kill or consummating a personalized rhetorical compulsion initiated by Moulthrop's title and computer-assisted crafting of the reading experience. Savvy

readers, like wartime spectator-participants, bring their own context. They have read the summary blurbs, the Borges comparisons, the Eastgate publishing catalog descriptions, not to mention the back of the CD case. Before Moulthrop's promise of dark maze can suggest "victory garden" as a sarcastic synonym for military cemetery or deadly battlefield and quickly substitute, in a Borges-inspired bait and switch, the idea of intellectual maze, we begin to realize this is a story about reading.

Any indecision about Emily's fate foregrounds the possibility of multiple realities and highlights the mental guesswork and potential for error inherent in championing any one plotline as "victorious." Moulthrop seems to be saying truly victorious gardens remain unreadable, that they cannot be reduced to a single or homogenous interpretation. By frustrating closure, Moulthrop also sidesteps the issue of how to categorize *Victory Garde*n. Michael Joyce, for example, sees *Victory Garde*n as an "epic-length lyric" (*Of Two Minds* 86). Other arguments could be made for framing Emily's story within a larger context of *Victory Garde*n as morality play, satire, or tragedy. Because the classic plot components of reversal, recognition, and suffering are left for the reader to identify and resolve, applying the monolith of tragedy seems unlikely. Ironically, that same meta-reading strategy necessitated by the nonlinear, hyperlinked plot, the one also enabled by the blank and black screens, is the engine by which these components are realized. The action Aristotle characterizes as key to the definition of tragedy is, in the case of *Victory Garde*n, performed by the reader. Moulthrop dangles the question about Emily's demise as a critical reading moment prone to corruption. The classical anagnorisis is not Emily's; the revelation Moulthrop intends is reserved for the reader and is precipitated by the need to resolve aporia. Hovering

between optional outcomes is both uncomfortable (but aesthetically rewarding) and potentially tragic. The inertia of meta-reading (pattern recognition and extrapolation) proposes Emily, the protagonist, is killed. We find what we expected to find. Then, upon discovering the possibility of her homecoming, we realize our role in the plot construction.

The case for interpreting *Victory Garde*n as tragedy begins before the missile strikes. We read it in the e-mails, journalism, politics, and fictional Tara college curriculum. One letter writer (possibly Thea) asks, "Why didn't I try to change your mind? Why was I content to let you go? Why is it so hard to resist? If there's a moral failure here, it's as much mine as yours, Emily—maybe more so" ("No Resistance"). The regret and feelings of absence and loss expressed variously by Emily's friends and family amplify the dread of death normally associated with stories of war. Like her people at home, we, as readers, fear the worst. To borrow from Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*,

> PLAYER: …There's a design at work in all art—surely you know that? Events must play themselves out to aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion.
>
> GUIL: And what's that, in this case?
>
> PLAYER: It never varies—we aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies. (79)

Stoppard's Player and Guildenstern playfully argue about "Who decides?" The audience is left to enjoy their circular reasoning and ponder the Player's retort: "We're tragedians, you see. We follow directions—there is no choice involved. The bad end unhappily, the

good unluckily. That is what tragedy means" (80). Moulthrop leads his audience in a similar way, only his version bears the added pathos of a real war and more pointedly exposes the trappings of how we read.

To date readers and critics assume the protagonist becomes a fatality. This assumption plays into what might be posited as Moulthrop's real thesis: that syllogism in a corrupted (war time) information system is potentially tragic and rhetoric—even well-intentioned, anti-establishment, anti-war rhetoric—is potential malware. Faced with the option that she survives, readers who initially assumed her to be dead are forced to rethink everything they have read. They may take solace in the confirmation that truth is a primary casualty of war or reject the option of her safe return as a Hollywood ending. Readings that allow for both alternatives have already negotiated blindspots and stand as testimony to the damage of misconceptions or the power of dreams (another of Moulthrop's themes).

Generally speaking, Moulthrop's efforts are respected as ambitious, but criticized as academic. His readers must struggle to construct narrative(s); they must read and reread; they must be patient and keep reading until the program's guard shields grant access to certain screens; they must go back and explore all the optional links; they must notice the features that disappear after one viewing; they must learn to expect and explore the link opportunities hidden in the white spaces around the words; and they must ultimately consult the alphabetical list of story screens. Most of all, they must come to see each reading as a unique glimpse into what we see and do not see as we read.

Because any reading of a hyperfiction like *Victory Garden* is challenging to catalog and repeat, traditional attempts at close reading are adversely burdened by the

need to document the reading process. Students and critics must generate something akin to an airplane's "black box" of their maze-like journey if they are to discover the meta-trends or hope to explain cryptic passages and graphic anomalies. In the case of *Victory Garden*, cumulative readings reveal a clustering of interconnected narrative segments gathered about the protagonist Emily Runbird and punctuated by the occasional blank and black screens.

Understanding the role of the all-white and all-black screens (with emphasis given to the pivotal all-black screen) requires 1) context—a brief history of the hyperfiction medium and a summary of theories and critical approaches relevant to the blank screens use as interstice; 2) sample engagements with relevant texts—reading *Victory Garden* as per Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological approach, Stanley Fish's reader response theory, and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction; 3) literary precedent—acknowledging the blank and black pages of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and exploring the ineffability trope especially as employed in Dante's *Paradiso* and re-interpreted by contemporary language theorist Ruiging Liang; and 4) evaluation of their success or failure—as both potential roadblocks to closure and vehicles for Moulthrop's postmodern message about tragedy in the First Gulf War.

Ultimately, *Victory Garden* proves to be a challenging literary breakdown (staged malfunction of habit) worthy of the investment Moulthrop demands. His choice of vehicle, the postmodern fog of war in the First Gulf War, is adroitly matched to his tenor of centering a reading experience within the "unpresentable," soft-edged, virtual topography of pre-intentions and différance. The programmed ambiguity, especially as facilitated by the nonverbal, polysemous all-white and all-black screens, delivers the real

tragedy of plot choices and vision narrowed by a desire for closure, limited by an expectation of monolith, and granulated by discontinuity. Reading the blank and black screens as ineffable suggests that postmodern texts blend inexpressibility and ineffability. Moulthrop's realism, a mediated labyrinth experience, simultaneously demands interaction and subverts a dominant discourse.

Articulating the *Victory Garde*n meta-reading experience essentially demands that a poststructuralist text be examined as a structured reading experience. Chapter one will discuss challenges faced by the *Victory Garde*n reader and the dynamics of the reading experience. Special attention will be given to critical models from Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Jacques Derrida. The critical questions to be answered are posed by the character named Tate: how does human experience come from nothing and what is meant by the "convergence between the IS and COULD BE"? The second chapter explores our encounters with the blank and black screens as textual gaps suggesting both the ineffability of what we cannot know about unconsciousness or death and the inexpressibility of what we cannot say about Emily's experiences. Gaps invite the reader to script, but they also harbor the difference between postmodern inexpressibility and the medieval trope of ineffability. Dante scholarship and the work of contemporary linguist Ruiqing Liang demonstrate that *Victory Garden* provides a postmodern update to our understanding of the ineffability trope. Because hyperfiction requires readers to script, ineffability is employed as both a writer's trope and a reading strategy.

The third and final chapter continues to explore the functioning of the blank and black screens. As agents of postmodern undecidability, these screens enforce aporia and facilitate a new take on Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Moulthrop dangles the question

about Emily's demise as a critical reading moment prone to corruption. The classical anagnorisis is not Emily's; the revelation Moulthrop intends is reserved for the reader. By reducing Emily to text, Moulthrop only simulates her demise. Claiming her as a fatality is partly implied by the narrative and partly constructed by the reader.

A Limited History of Hypertext

Hyperlinked writing-reading systems developed as an exuberant praxis of Vannevar Bush's 1945 "memex" idea for "a mechanical, microfiche-based, see-through desktop that would store and recall documents"; Douglas Englebart's 1968 AUGMENT, "a full-blown prototype hypertext system NLS (oNLineSystem)" that "put to serious use fundamentals of…word processing, outlining, windows, electronic mail, computer conferencing, collaborative authorship, and—not last—the mouse"; and Theodor Holm (Ted) Nelson's Xanadu system, "an ongoing design prospectus geared toward establishment of a peaceable kingdom of 'intertwingled' and computerized text on earth" (Joyce, *Of Two Minds* 22-23). The confluence of literature with theoretical concepts like artificial intelligence and unlimited libraries of electronically-stored information tended to give hypertext theory what George Landow deemed a "bizarrely celebratory" quality. Theoretical texts often read like manifestos or sound like sermons—*Of Two Minds* borrows the Willy Wonka mantra "so much time, so little to do" as a chapter title and then repeats the refrain, "Not that change is coming but that it has come and we are its expression" (102). Affirming the awkwardness of the paradigm shift quickly became part of the aesthetic and suggests early evidence of pushback from readers. "Hypertext narratives," explains Dave Ciccoricco, "signal[ed] a moment in literary history when an age-old cultural form open[ed] itself to the influence of digital aesthetics….Indeed, those

who tell stories with computers do not need to call attention to the techniques and conventions of their medium….their literary machinery is already strange enough" (4). An interesting consequence of this strangeness seems to be that early theoretical proponents of the hyperfiction (sub)genre were also its programmer-authors with the result that their work has a self-aware, guided tour element.

While "hypertext," the word, was coined in the 1960s by Nelson, it was not until 1987 when Jay David Bolter, John B. Smith, and Michael Joyce created Storyspace that writers (like Joyce) began to generate canonical works of hyperlinked fiction.[3] The program offered a new way to tell and experience postmodern stories via linked screens or lexia (akin to the pages of books) with multiple (potentially random or nonlinear even blocked) points of access.[4] The success of these fictional ventures ironically hinges on a writing technology that also forcibly impedes the reader's understanding. This paradox is evident when the goals and methods of hyperfictions are examined side by side. For example, in the 1987 *afternoon, a story*, Joyce used Storyspace to realize his dream of a fictional work "that would change in successive readings and [be able] to make those changing versions according to connections that [he] had for some time naturally discovered in the process of writing and that [he] wanted [his] readers to share." As if working a puzzle, the reader must combine and recombine narrative fragments in tandem with the narrator who is trying to remember what he saw as he drove past a car wreck that may have involved his child and ex-wife. Joyce's narrative explores the stepwise, but frustrating, cognitive process of recollection while commenting on the reality and truth value of multiple viewpoints. A second representative of the hyperfiction canon built on the scaffold of Storyspace is Judy Malloy's *it's name was Penelope.* This piece blends

the ideas of randomly thumbing through a family photo album and the gravitational pull of home and wife that powered the great adventures in Homer's *Odyssey* to frame the story of a competitive San Francisco art community peopled by early sufferers of the AIDS epidemic. Malloy establishes the correspondence between literary allusions and the physicality of linked story fragments; she parallels the sacrifices required to make fine art and the challenging responsibility of nonlinear readership.

Another work from the "golden age" of hyperfiction is the aforementioned *Victory Garden*.[5] Storyspace allowed Moulthrop to render truth as "the story that goes on without us." The original version of Moulthrop's revelation about truth came during his childhood imaginings of our vast planet: "Almost from the first, right after you start thinking how there are kids in China walking upside down in sunshine while you're laying there right side up not quite asleep in the dark on the opposite side of the round world, you start to realize that the truth is that everyone's story seems to go on without us" (*Of Two Minds* 85). He uses WW II home front vegetable gardens as a namesake, the First Gulf War as a backdrop, and a Borges short story as a model for a maze-like narrative all to render a composite Dickensian world of interconnected story pathways. Hours of reading and a videogamer's mentality are required to process the milieu of multiple plotlines. Moulthrop's portrayal enlarges the concept of fog in a televised war to include more than the act of reporting, the character's conflicting interpersonal relationships, and the clash of home front ideologies; his use of Storyspace prescribes a steady dose of attention deficit. By shuffling narrative pieces and forestalling recognition, the Storyspace web of text(s) generates an actual confusion (mental fog) as part of the act of reading. The reading space is topographically blended and, as readers, we are always

between contexts/topoi. *In medias res* is more than a matter of plot sequence. *In medias res* is a virtual address that suggests the constant transition between disbanded story fragments.

Problems with Disbanded Story Fragments

Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics, Michael Joyce's influential 1995 exploration of the evolution of hyperlink based fiction, includes his twofold observation that "at the moment most interest centers on the machine side" of narrative development (193) and "not enough attention has been given to understanding the narrative at the interstices" (196). Too much had been made of the cyborg prophecies, the human-machine hybridization of three-way authorship between writer, reader, and computer's "*Mousa ex machina*" (196-97). Hypertext study, he believed, had reached an "awkward" ripeness. Scholars in, what Jay David Bolter termed, "the late age of print" realize hypertext immersion is not a seamless experience; they also understand reader-chosen narrative links represent a postmodern literary conundrum. Joyce explains, "Hypertext is young; narrative is old. In its preadolescence hypertext attempts the impossible: a preservation of hierarchy through managed individuality" (194).[6] To construct narrative hypertexts, Joyce explains, "the reader…not only chooses the order of what she reads, but her choices become what it is. The text continually rewrites itself" (235)—apparent meanings are constantly being replaced or refined (192).[7] Texts are reordered and become "marginal" (193). The demands of such steady shuffling tax the readers who, as a result, "are thus far not particularly apt to participate in maintaining, i.e., coauthoring, narrative hypertexts" (Joyce 193).

In “Electronic Hyperfiction as Esoteric Medium” (based on an exegesis of chapter seven of Jay David Bolter’s 1991 *Writing Space*), Barbara Hamblett places the reluctance for co-authorship squarely on the fact that, unlike bestsellers, hyperfiction is not linear and plot-driven. Readers simply shy away from what Bolter describes as hyperfiction’s steady “violation of the expected and conventional order (also known as) hyperbaton” (qtd. in Hamblett par. 4). “Hyperbaton,” sometimes referred to as “anastrophe,” is “a rhetorical figure involving a reversal of word order to make a point” (Murfin and Ray 231). Like displacement, hyperbaton succeeds because it draws attention to what seems out of order. Bolter and Hamblett suggest hyperfiction readers are reluctant to share authorship not just because they cannot keep up with the discontinuity, but also because they feel the disruptions to be foreign in origin—something Bolter believes distinguishes hyperfiction from its modern and post-modern ancestors. For example, even when attempting what modernist authors would call “stream of consciousness,” hyperfiction seems to be organized and controlled by an external source. When external remediation is combined with what Bolter terms hyperfiction’s invitation “to read multiply” or “to keep open multiple explanations for the same event or character,” reading is made difficult and joint authorship again falters.

In hyperfiction, the discontinuity of moving between rhetorical topoi can be a function of the reader’s intentional juggling or, as Bolter suggests, a matter of programmed interruption—either way it is facilitated by the hyperlink. The hyperlink as a literary device falls somewhere between turning the page of a paper book, checking a footnote, being interrupted by a phone call or text message, accepting a Trojan horse, and being handed the denouement by the *deus ex machina*. Like the cumbersome mimetic

structures hoisted into place by Dante-the-poet to portray a heavenly pilgrimage to a medieval audience, the *Victory Garden* system of hyperlinks intrudes upon the reader's experience of an imaginary, post-modern First Gulf War. Moreover, using the link heightens the aesthetic experience at the cost of, depending on your point of view, further camouflaging the intellectual/spiritual experience or further alerting the reader to the complicated web of narrative threads. Ironically and from both vantage points, the digital medium does not disappear primarily because the text remains open to alternate readings. As realism, these early linked fictions never achieve transparency. In fact, the chief formal conflict they propose is between the program's narrative platform and the stories being conveyed by that platform.[8]

Victory Garden Criticism

In the "Reader's Manual" for *Victory Garden*, Jane Yellowlees Douglas labels Moulthrop's effort a "textual Nashville—lots of stories intersecting across a handful of points in time" (24). She characterizes the work as a little like the memory palaces constructed by Greek and Roman speakers: "*Victory Garden* is a narrative palace, written not in the mind but in virtual three-dimensional space" (21). Joyce asserts that our readings of *Victory Garden* are shaded by both programmed and randomly generated contexts. While Joyce's vision is focused on the resulting (cyborg[9]) mental construct, Douglas understands hyperfiction as a computer-assisted "face to face with the ground zero of reading" (qtd. in *Of Two Minds,* 61). Then again, what Douglas refers to as "getting inside the act of reading," Catharine Smith describes as "a field description of knowledge" (qtd. in *Of Two Minds,* 62). Smith completes the circle by emphasizing that how we know "would include the nature and dynamics of 'the inner life' or affective

processes: forgetting and denying as well as remembering and recognizing associations, rejecting as well as acknowledging connections." Including the computer in the human literature process of remembering and recognizing associations may then be seen as what Patricia Wright termed back in 1991 a "cognitive prosthesis"—a remake of antiquity's memory palace. Hyperfictions merely up the ante by requiring greater complicity from the audience than their spoken and print ancestors; in short, they should come packaged with the label "some assembly required, plan to figure out what you are reading as you go along."

While *Victory Garden* has failed to garner much critical attention (a basic *MLA* database search currently yields eight hits),[10] at least two scholars, Robert Selig (listed in *MLA*) and Raine Koskimaa (listed in *Google Scholar*), offer helpful overviews.[11] Their plot summaries and analyses co-confirm a meta-sense of fabula[12] in apparent defiance of both the poststructuralist's view of the reader as an unstable, inconsistent, "locus of competing and often contradictory discourses" (Murfin and Ray 402) and the steady barrage of disparate, narrative-advancing choices Moulthrop presents. Choosing among several options per screen quickly highlights the reader's preferences or change of preferences as the case may be. In the "Introduction" Joyce explains, "*Victory Garden* invites you—no requires you—to intervene in the development of the narrative….There are three basic gateways between narrative segments, or places, that require you to make definite choices about what you think you're reading and what you'd like to read next" (27). These gateways—"Places to Be," "Paths to Explore," and "Paths to Deplore"—replace an ordered "Table of Contents." Moulthrop invites the reader to pick one of the three as a starting point and proceed by either opting for the default route or selecting the

next available “extra-vagant” narrative tangent.[13] As readers we are encouraged to explore by way of the garden map, but reading sessions become a matter of risk management: self-consciously limited engagements whose aesthetics straddle a threshold between joyful immersion and feelings of failed investment with no end in sight. We encounter passages of disconnected dialogue featuring pronouns with unclear antecedents. The lexia convey a clear mandate for multiple interpretations.[14] Even linear storyline fragments meet with suspicion. The Pynchon-like paranoia that everything will somehow be connected is heightened when the narrator breaks the fourth wall and requests, “Please continue…” Ultimately, the reader may encounter 993 lexias [the hyperfiction equivalent of a page] through more than 2,804 links (Koskimaa 2).

The scope of Moulthrop’s project is noteworthy because it eclipses that of his contemporaries and effectively adds levels of what Jeffrey Conklin terms “cognitive overhead”: "the additional effort and concentration necessary to maintain several tasks or trails at one time."[15] To combat “temporary overload—or being ‘lost in hyperspace,’” *Victory Garden* relies on a Storyspace toolbar with five functions, one of which is a backtrack button based on Mark Bernstein’s “breadcrumbs” (*Of Two Minds*, 27).[16] Bernstein, the pioneer of Eastgate Systems (current publisher of *Victory Garden*), represents a group of researchers fascinated with “how hypertexts can and do exploit disorientation.” Koskimaa’s close reading equates the ambiguity with the idea of a “garden” and locates this ambiguity “in the functioning of the text itself, not in the interpretive strategies” (7). Nonetheless, in Storyspace poetics, ambiguity is a requisite component and the balance between overhead and overload must be maintained.

In *Victory Garden*, as Jane Yellowlees Douglas notes, the topics discussed are not hierarchical: "The first place or path in the list has no priority over any of the others—readers will not necessarily encounter it first, and need not encounter it at all" (qtd. in *Of Two Minds*, 241). Variations in sequence alter the context, "shade" readings, and ultimately cause the reader's interpretations of passages to "oscillate" ("Introduction" 26). Narrative fragments, mostly related to the Gulf War are interspersed with references to or passages from Jorge Luis Borges short stories, *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Finnegan's Wake*, and what Koskimaa describes as "theoretical materials includ[ing] citations from Donna Haraway, Neil Postman, Arthur C. Kroker, Jay David Bolter, Michael Joyce, etc." (3). The screen "Acknowledged" credits "persons who made the garden grow."

A synthesis based on the perspectives of authorial intent of scripted text, reader instability (and overload), reader response criticism's questioning the relationship between meanings and responses, Stanley Fish's idea that literature happens in the mind of the reader (a literary work is a "catalyst of mental events"), and the classification of hyperfiction as a dialectical text—"works that prod and provoke, challenging readers to discover truths on their own" (Murfin and Ray 426), with the affective fallacy's insistence that a reader's response might be irrelevant to the meaning suggests *Victory Garden* is more than an "academic novel" in the pejorative sense.[18] *Victory Garden* has a complex agenda; it produces locally mixed readings; and, after many readings, it generates a meta-sense of narrative. Agreeing with Koskimaa, Joyce explains, readers of *Victory Garden* "can never be complacent about sequence" because "ambiguity doesn't simply hover over the text; it's embedded in the text" ("Introduction" 24-6).[19] In other

words, the ambiguity has a rhetorically, topo-graphical purpose. Supposing *Victory Garden*, like other hypertexts, is "a structure for what does not yet exist" (*Of Two Minds*, 26), means it is "a catalyst of mental events" or palaces.[20] Writers like Moulthrop celebrate the power of ambiguity to generate the physics of parallax[21]; they conceptualize a mechanism to explain both individual/subjective viewings and the monolith of objectivity. Consequently, critical approaches to *Victory Garden* should acknowledge the shifting sands upon which it is built.[22] Not only is there a macro-level conflict between the programmed narrative platform and the story, but there is also a micro-level conflict exposed by the "syuzhet." Jay Bolter explains, "The principle of hierarchy in writing is always in conflict with the principle of association" (qtd. in *Of Two Minds*, 47). As readers who write, we wrestle with both levels of conflict to reach a shared narrative (a personal Victory Garden) about U.S. responses to the First Gulf War and the way those of us who are old enough watched it unfold on TV.

In the "*Victory Garden*—Reader's Manual," Michael Joyce reminds the reader that Moulthrop began his career as a Pynchon critic and implies that Moulthrop inherited Pynchon's version of truth, "that everyone's story seems to go on all at once" (16). Joyce upholds a slightly different version: "the truth is that everyone's story seems to go on without us" (15), but suggests nexus events as moments in time where narrative paths cross. I would argue that Moulthrop explores the possibility of reading as one such nexus event, that he examines the point where the readers' stories and everyone else's (fictional) stories either connect or disconnect. Alice Bell and Astrid Ensslin realize this intersection as a complexity of second-person narration. Their essay "'I know what it was. You know what it was': Second-Person Narration in Hypertext Fiction," part of the

second-wave of hyperfiction analysis, explains *Victory Garden* as a registry of overlapping viewpoints and storylines:

> Protagonist Emily Runbird has been drafted to work in a Saudi Arabian military base, leaving her friends back home in the fictional town of Tara in the United States. Much of the narrative revolves around the two settings with the text documenting Emily's experience of the war in the Gulf as well as the effect of the conflict on her friends, family, and colleagues at home and on the campus of the University of Tara. The motives behind and consequences of the Gulf War resonate throughout the text and are debated either explicitly between characters or implicitly through the various viewpoints that are presented. Offering a mediated view of the conflict, scenes from news broadcasts depict the off- and on-air discussions between two television war correspondents. Theoretical debates between academics at University of Tara take place over the ideological and ethical motives of the war. Quotations from real world figures such as George Bush, Saddam Hussein, and CBS anchorman Dan Rather are also scattered throughout the text that, while usually a product of Moulthrop's artistic license, remind the reader that the Gulf War was an actual world event rather than a purely fictional construction. (318)

When Joyce characterizes *Victory Garden* as an "epic-length lyric of the drama of parallax gnosis" (*Of Two Minds*, 86), he adds the explanation,

> What goes on here [in *Victory Garden*] is the sad, sweet, synchronous truth of the day-to-day stories of all of us at war with the meaning of our

> lives as our lives and that meaning alike are bestowed, unbeknownst, on us. It's a love story about television, brainwaves, and course syllabi that takes place in the stormy desert of shifting electronic pixels on a screen and Chinese menu lists of punning paths.

The meaning-making conflict Joyce identifies is internal, but it manifests in the hyperlink. Generally speaking, we select a link, make connections, and draw conclusions or vice versa.

Reading *Victory Garden* Is Like a Box of Chocolates

If *Victory Garden* has a (default) page one, it is titled "Come In" and states, "IN / THE / labyrinth: beginning." Moulthrop's invitation is a puzzling precursor to the red pill, blue pill choice of *The Matrix* movies. His contract demands that we, as readers, accept and enter a challenging literary construct. We cannot simply picnic alongside this battle; we must engage the paranoia as Moulthrop prescribes. (One of the narrators cites a Vietnam War reporter who claimed we can have no opinion on the war, only a position in the war.) Immersion is not a simple matter of inhabiting a fictitious Other. Nor does the storytelling software allow immersion through an experience of avatar. Immersion comes as an exploitation of the linear act of reading. By substituting the decision to pick among multiple hyperlinks for the traditional "page-turning" process, readers face a steady demand to choose one narrative pathway among many options. These choices generate tension and force the reader to acknowledge their own indulgences (enforcing a kind of pornography), to accept blinders to other (potentially more interesting) story options, to grapple with (unwanted) digressions, and, ultimately, to forfeit (critical) information. In *Victory Garden* the flow of information is also (and ultimately) restricted and disjointed

by Moulthrop's use of the Storyspace platform. The reading experience is still linear, but the hyperlink feature constantly foregrounds the connection between ideas—acts of syllogism are exposed as both authorial and unstable.

In 1991 theorist-author Jane Yellowlees Douglas portrayed hyperfiction as "rejecting the objective paradigm of reality as the great 'either/or' and embracing, instead, the 'and/and/and" (qtd. in *Of Two Mind*s 26). The "and/and/and" paradigm poses interesting critical opportunities. In his 1991 *Of Two Mind*s, Michael Joyce, writing as a theorist and educator, heralded hypertext fiction as a celebration of the workings of the human mind as it coevolves with the digital world. In his brief overview of hypertext history (what I have highlighted here), Joyce also mentions Bolter's book *Writing Space*.[23] Bolter's enthusiasm for the new writing comes across in his charter: "Electronic writing is both a visual and a verbal description, not the writing of place, but rather a writing with places, spatially realized topics…signs and structures on the computer screen that have no easy equivalent in speech" (qtd. in *Of Two Mind*s 23). He adds, electronic symbols "seem to be an extension of a network of ideas in the mind itself." While the glitz of Bolter's theories may have worn thin, the suggestion that hyperfictions somehow participate in scaffolding and not just signify the scaffold is still an idea deserving further inquiry. This idea seems to build on the idea that hypertexts are constructive, that reading is a mental activity/construction (as per Stanley Fish), and that hypertexts (previously defined as versions of what they are becoming) are made partly by the author, partly by the computer, and partly by the reader.

In *Victory Garden*, the demands of scaffolding require the reader to select a hyperlink in order to move between storylines and to explore tangential subjects.

However, answers are rarely forthcoming. As mentioned, questions spawned by a desire to probe embedded ambiguities are typically complicated by Moulthrop's invitation to "keep open multiple explanations for the same event or character" i.e. to "read multiply." Furthermore, clicking on a highlighted word, renamed "hot words" or "Tinkerbell keys" in Joyce's introduction (27-8), typically invites surprise and generally serves to heighten complexity. A sense of play helps, especially when the mental readjustments born of constant jumping grow tiresome. For example, while reading the screen "Know About That," we may assume the speaker to be Urquhart because he is Emily's scientist lover and is elsewhere nicknamed "U." But, what does "U" in the second sentence mean?

> I am a scientist Emily you know that about me. No visionary, no mystic, no shaman. U used to imagine playing God's Fool but those scenes were never really in the picture. Knowledge arises out of complex recursive transactions….We make it up as we make it up, more than half-creating that which we perceive. And this is news? No of course not it's the oldest hat on the rack: epistemodoxy, finest ground, the very Unstuff on which we prop our nonbelief. And so here we sit in this po'moment, two reels deep in the *Return of the Twilight of the Idols*,[25] and what we know above all is that we are but shadows here, poor players. But really folks, you gotta love this game…

Either Urquhart begins speaking and then fraudulently addresses Emily as "U," or the narration switches unannounced from first person to an omniscient narrator disguised as the spouting pedant, the character we have come to expect is Urquhart, or Urquhart (or for that matter one of the other scientists) has been addressing the reader directly all

along. The simple substitution of "U" invites the reader to "read multiply." Juggling all that, we are left to ponder "Unstuff" and the Nietzsche/Plato references. Confused, we click "return" and hope for the best.

Following this abstract thread yields lexia titled "Vast & Perpetual," "Now Here This," "SimYouLocker," and "Engineer." This reading[26] meanders from engineering simulacra to an oration about a vision: "the end of History: All the experience of humankind…is a huge cosmic riddle whose answer is Something Out of Nothing…The moment of convergence between the IS and the COULD BE. / U must / U must / U must / …engineer a System." The next screen "Create" implicates the reader and the computer saying, "we have now entered into the age of autonomous and self-modifying simulacra, the moment of convergence between the IS and COULD BE. Which is where you come in. U must engineer a system—or be enraged by another man's. I protest." Following this plea, Moulthrop returns the text to war and anti-war rhetoric, but not before we the readers have interwoven our own concepts of Divinity, *ex nihilo nihil fit* (nothing is created from nothing) with theories of computer enhanced cognitive prosthesis. If we are to continue our reading, we must continue the construction.

As Joyce explains, at every juncture, the text is a version of what it is becoming (*Of Two Minds* 42). In my sample reading, clicking on the linkword "protest" yielded a previously encountered screen titled "Vast and Perpetual." To avoid what seemed like repetition (a move Storyspace may penalize by hiding new paths, etc.), I chose to backtrack to "Create" and follow the default sequence. The default (return) key yielded what I also recognized as a loop of lexia from "10,000 heroes" to "Our Heroes" to "Absent Brothers" to "Going West." This time, I stayed with it and got re-engaged with a

narrative I thought that I recognized. Seemingly, “Going West” tells of two character, Harley and Veronica, at an unruly pool party where Urquhart is televised (live) urinating in the swimming pool. However, according to Koskimaa, this reading is incomplete. He explains,

> There is a sequence in which Thea, Veronica, Harley, and Miles are swimming in Whitman Creek natural park area, when they learn that the area has been sold to a company planning to build a golf course up stream, effectively ruining the whole creek. Immediately after hearing about these plans, their swimming is further disturbed by a protest against these plans, ending the scene where one of the protestors declares himself to be Uqbari the prophet, condemns the plans to ruin the creek, and finally, symbolically, urinates into the creek in front of a tv-crew in a helicopter. Later the same evening, there is a big costume party hosted by provost Tate. After quite a carnivalesque party scene the provost invites Thea, Harley, and Veronica to his office to discuss Boris, wondering if he is in his mind (after the Uqbari the Prophet scandal). (4)

While the sequence of my reading makes sense without the omitted Whitman Creek episode, it becomes obsolete after encountering Koskimaa’s synopsis. The text as I understood it, even after multiple readings, became a version of the text Koskimaa experienced—in fact, Koskimaa inspired another reading during which I confirmed Uqbari’s public urination happened at Whitman Creek. Had I missed a time marker or index of sequence that would have placed the Creek scene before the Halloween party? Did my reading fail to privilege the Uqbari sequences? Or, by avoiding loops, did I

simply fail to encounter a (hidden?) component to the narrative? Was I being penalized for not going back and exploring every narrative option? Yes and no. This re-reading left me curious about the monolith that *Victory Garden* was becoming. How viable were alternative readings? I had become my own Greek chorus asking relevant questions of myself the determined reader/protagonist. Also, I had come to recognize Moulthrop's notion of a truth that goes on without (and perhaps only partially seen by) me. Further, any critical paradigm would need to follow the "and/and/and" model proposed by Douglas. Such are the problems with a close reading of the narrative (prose) portions of *Victory Garden*.

Another difficulty arises from Moulthrop's use of poetry. In the above sequence, clicking the return/enter key after reading the contents of "Going West" yields the screen/lexia titled "Turnabout"—a two-column "poem" about abstractions like gaps, boundaries, and liminality. See Figure 1. The columns work together as call and response or question and answer or perhaps even as parts of an equation. In the left column of the last row is the word (concept) "gap…" ; opposite it, in the right column, is "out of the swarming, falling out of the crush and dazzle of the impossible into eyes so much like these g aze [sic] back gray the eyes of the prophet Uqbari. Here, Moulthrop first draws attention to the continuation of the concept gap, then links it with gaze and the proximity to Uqbari. Moulthrop also uses two enigmatic phrases: "out of the swarming" and ""falling out of the crush and dazzle of the impossible." Perhaps the next screen would provide a helpful comment. Primed by the suggestions in the lexia "Turnabout," the reader must choose to go back or consider the four forward options. We could click on "disturbing," "back," "threshold," "swarming," or the return/enter key.[27] Selecting return

generates the lexia “About Turn” which replaces the left side of the “Turnabout” poem with lines describing Urquhart’s watching the scene unfold as a reflection in the mirror. Instead of “gap…” we read “Is this you?” and skip over a few spaces to a repeat of the “out of the swarming” line from the previous screen. The complex switch (representing just one line of the “Turnabout”/ “About turn” poem) moves the reader from abstractly considering converging points and crossing boundaries to watching a narrative sequence involving Urquhart to inside Urquhart’s experience of that scene to his possible symmetry with Uqbari the prophet to an invitation to take his place in the scene (as if the reflection he saw in the pool/creek was a mirror for the reader) and finally to the amalgam of holding all of those options simultaneously in a memory palace whose blueprints follow a non-Euclidean geometry.

The “About Turn” lexia offers four more opportunities to advance the reading. The word “disturbance” is a link to the thread “Something Happens.” Another “word that yields” is “limen.” Selecting “limen” produces a lexia entitled “Parley” which loops back to those same characters having a conversation on an elevator before looping back into “Turnabout.” Clicking on the return key produces “10,000 Heroes” one time and something else if repeated. And as happens, I failed to trace the fourth option “Uqbari the prophet. ,j,” [sic]. (Was this where I missed the tie-in to Whitman Creek?) Interestingly, following “Parley” to “Turnabout” to “About turn” lead back to the “Our Heroes” to “Absent Brothers” path.

Unwilling to repeat this loop, I escaped by clicking on the linkwords “fun and games” and encountered Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth Century.” This thread represents another

component of *Victory Garden*: the part self-reflexive commentary, part pre-packaged critical interpretation, and part Virgil getting-us-through-the-dark woods guided tour. In my sample reading, clicking on return at this point yielded the lexia "Drama of Return"—a block quote from Arthur Kroker and David Cook's *The Postmodern Scene*,

> We're living through a great story—an historical moment of implosion, cancellation, and reversal; that moment where the will to will of the technoscope…traces a great arc of reversal connecting again to an almost mythic sense of primitivism as the primal of technological society.

Moulthrop's punning of the word "return" serves to emphasize its different uses. Kroker and Cook's "historical moment of implosion, cancellation, and reversal" invests the moment of pre-hyperlink with Dionysian frenzy. By striking the return/enter key, we as readers re-enlist in the Garden and re-engage with the text. We tap into an unknown partly scripted by Moulthrop and partly determined by programmed responses to our choices.

To recap our example, the point of origin "Know About That" yielded[28] a brief narrative episode, several digressions into hyperfiction poetics courtesy of our anonymous guide, a richly interconnected metaphor of mirroring and gaze, and a brief sighting of nihilism. The reconnection to a mythic primitivism invites images of dithyramb, comparison to Nietzsche's rebirthing of tragedy, even participation in demiurge. That *Victory Garden* operates among such levels of abstraction harkens back to medieval descent and ascent. That we as readers are both pilgrim and part-time guide makes unpacking the literary event that is *Victory Garden* a challenging endeavor, especially as it requires a "meta-sense of pattern recognition." And while the work

exploits a meta-pattern of ambiguity and unsteady chronology, the introduction of wordless silence (as per the blank screens) seems to either disrupt construction by threatening the scaffold or further enhance the pattern by inviting individual response.

Robert Selig's essay "The Endless Reading of Fiction: Stuart Moulthrop's Hypertext Novel "Victory Garden" explores this mix of risk and reward. The following excerpt is lengthy but includes several steps that identify him as a *Victory Garden* reader including the mention of its length and his frustration. Of particular note is the tactic of "embedded ambiguity" he embeds in the phrase "final blacking out." His comments leave us wondering if this is a reference to his screen powering down or Emily becoming unconscious? Selig writes,

> In the end, though, in spite of the fascination of *Victory Garden*'s 124 entire pathways, its many ingenious guard fields, its 1,025 lexias [note the discrepancy], its 2,800 link points, and its often-changing orders and surprising combinations, I finally stopped reading. I gave up clicking through its multiple complexities when about a hundred screenings had brought me to a point of diminishing returns: too many passages seen before (even though in different orders) and no further ones, apparently, as yet unread. But I abandoned this hypertext novel with a genuine regret, a wish that it might keep its extraordinary plenitude no matter how often I screened my way through it. In spite of our desire for closure in the arts, a certain kind of sadness hovers over fictional endings in general and, in a special way, over the final blacking out of Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*. This sadness relates to a basic human feeling about death and loss in

> actual existence—a desire that life might go on forever, in heaven, on earth, or in some other place, at least on our computer screens. Far from wanting closure in hypertext fiction, I offer its authors a friendly challenge. Create with more and more pathways, lexias, link points, guard fields, changing combinations, and, above all, subtleties and nuances of narrative that will not let us stop. Do not just try to make it new. Make it endlessly new, endlessly renewable, a perpetual pleasure to read, the ultimate expression of where hypertext can take us.

Selig's challenge to provide an unending narrative sounds at first like a new frontier of computer-engaged reading opportunities, a futuristic high-water mark of achievement for writers of internet fiction. He buys into the utopian manifesto promising endless hypertext frontiers and the spoils of open-door palaces. *Victory Garden*, in his estimation, should be a threshold to the promised land of docuverse. But what of the "regret," "hovering" sadness, "our desire for closure in the arts," the "final blacking out"?

As per Stanley Fish, Selig and those of his "interpretive community" are "cataloguing formal features" according to "their function in the developing experience of the reader" (8). Selig's negotiations equate the black screen with finality. Other readings suggest the black screen signifies darkness, discontinuity, some kind of break in the more, more, more—perhaps even a Borges-inspired clue. Possibly the black screen, as text, brings us to the threshold of interstice—the aspect of hypertext poetics Joyce described as needing more study. Joyce, in his contribution to the "Reader's Manual," proposes that the stories of characters and readers intersect: "My stories, yours are there too, from time to time, in (t)his garden…you start thinking too hard of how everyone's

story seems to go on without us, until buzzing dreams come scudding like allusions to the sweet silent rockets of the past" (16). As an aposiopesis (a rhetorical device, described by *The Random House College Dictionary*, as a "suddenly breaking off in the middle of a sentence as if from inability or unwillingness to proceed"), what does Moulthrop speak by feigning inability? Do the black and blank screens interrupt the meta-pattern recognition or extend it? The answer seems lodged in privileging the black screen's role as a signifier of Emily's demise.

Chapter One: *Victory Garden*, the Phenomenology of Topographic Writing, And the Not So Close Reading

An Accretive Passage

Victory Garden is to an extent a customizable (we build to suit) labyrinth. The title page (see Figure 2.) is no exception. A thinly veneered vestige of the print world, it reads, "*Victory Garden* / *a fiction* by Stuart Moulthrop / Press Return to begin; for help, click "yes"/--to the map—." All three options for advancing the text beyond this point eventually produce the screen "Come In." Savvy readers who consult the browser icon learn of a fourth option, the entry pathway "propers → Properties," which leads to a traditional copyright "page." Carefully backtracking and selecting the other options confirms that each option also funnels into a "Welcome" loop explaining the basics of the return key, Moulthrop's maze concept, "words-that-yield," and the correlation between the Borges era and the "hypermediated and postmodernized" 1990's. Moulthrop uses Storyspace to offer limited digressions into the labyrinth before corralling all readers within the space of "Come In." This default entry to *Victory Garden* is both portal and tutorial. Only mastery of the yield-words or browser icon allows the reader to escape the introductory loop via the forked path choice between "labyrinth" and "beginning." By this point, we understand the rudimentary mechanics of Storyspace, and we are aware of a complicated collection of narratives "going on without us." Already, we feel pressure to make sense of jumbled, competing story paths; to discern relevance among archived commentaries, and to create the literary equivalent of ongoing FBI character files. All future readings will settle into the continuum between rigorously exhaustive (with extreme cognitive overload) and playfully indulgent. Critical close readings begin as

laborious chronicles (bracketology) of the maze. Selig and Koskimaa champion the rewards of due diligence: plot summary and story analysis. Their meta-readings, while helpful, leave the blank and black screens all but unexplored and suggest other approaches would be beneficial.

Jane Yellowlees Douglas advises the perspective reader of *Victory Garden*, "You don't need to peer intently at every exhibit in every room of a museum to feel that you've done the museum. What prompts us to leave the museum is not the sense of having digested it in every aspect, but the sense of having satisfied—or exhausted—something in ourselves" ("Reader's Manual" 21). Her comments articulate the museum visit as a cognitive event, touch on the felt need to ignore the museum headache so as to achieve a Selig-styled inventory of structure, and include a reader response to the typically daunting gallery map. They also hint at an *a priori* "something in ourselves." Additionally, she posits the fundamental gathering process of an impressionist critic, described by Anatole France as "he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces" (qtd. in Murfin and Ray 244). I propose that critical thinking about *Victory Garden* parallel her composite, reading-as-a-museum-visit strategy and include the same tactic of piecemeal (and, and, and) construction based on gathering glimpses of attractive text and associated criticism. Moulthrop punches our ticket and greets us with the lexia "Come In."

The simple downward stepping construction of "Come In,"

IN

THE

labyrinth : beginning

requires the reader to cooperate by selecting between three options proposed by Moulthrop and then negotiate among the resulting sentences, each of which leads to a different story path. Option one, selecting the yield-word “IN,” repeats the same screen re-titled as “Come Often?” This early encounter with a cul-de-sac foreshadows the frustration and gamesmanship Moulthrop propagates. Option two, selecting the yield-word “labyrinth,” leads to the forked path: “In the labyrinth // America : of time.” Option three, choosing the yield-word “beginning,” results in yet another forked path: “In the beginning // we knew : the word.” Options two and three represent the first “fork” in the garden maze. It should be noted that Moulthrop’s construction makes both viable in an oddly balanced way. Following the diagonal leads our eye to “beginning”; following the pattern of left to right reading leads to “labyrinth.” The spatial arrangement frames our reading as poetry.

Building the fiction’s first sentence requires us to add words or phrases via some three to six more forked choices. Along the way, each partial sentence stands alone and invites interpretation. For example, “In the labyrinth America where everything is what / it seems : we want” appears on a screen titled “Of Little.” “Of Little” works to shape (undermine) the context (the topos) being built by the accretive sentence, but it does so in a way we recognize. In this moment, the text seems to have an agenda: to counter the U. S. culture of more, more, more. The cumulative drama previewed by “Of Little” is a capsule of reader-writer-computer interface. It animates a model of becoming and, in a very controlled way, teaches the reader to script (play along). Further reading is not a matter of animated frames per second or even suspension of disbelief; further reading obligates the reader to don *Victory Garden* as a thinking cap.

One completed “first” sentence, entitled “Left,” reads “In the labyrinth of time you travel a long way in blindness.” “Left” produces the path beginning with “Cyborg Politics”—an alarmist appraisal of the capitalist industrial age giving way to the dangers of the information age—which becomes a loop and includes “Norman Coordinate” (now framed as sarcasm): “Our cause is just! Now you must be the thunder and lightning of Desert Storm.” See Figure 3. Another sentence, entitled “And Farms.” reads “In the labyrinth America where everything happens precisely as if foreseen.” The story path generated by “And Farms.” results in a loop nearly identical to the one just described. Selecting the yield-word “beginning” (the third option and other half of the first fork), results in the screen entitled “In the Beginning” which also has one fork: the decision between the yield-word “go” and the yield-words “only one way.” Both of these generate either a repeat of the “Come Often” cul-de-sac, or they spiral out into ever-widening story paths. In short order, the simple, downward stepping construction of “Come In” siphons the reader from choice to choice and suggests the encountered options may not be a representative sample. Consequently, when Koskimaa summarizes the activity of Moulthrop’s “Come In” as “several different sentences can be constructed, each leading to different starting points (some of the sentences coinciding with the starting of ‘Paths to Explore’ & ‘Paths to Deplore)” (2), we sense the loss risked by meta-reading practicality.

As the introductory three word prepositional phrase builds by accretion into a sentence, readers feel as if they are shaping the topography of *Victory Garden*. Each step alters the previous topos (rhetorical background or origin). The second selection between a “labyrinth of time” and “the labyrinth of America” pushes the text to be more specifically temporal or spatial (socio-political). As previously demonstrated, the

resulting completed sentences end up far from one another in rhetorical space. As readers, we quickly realize our choices have narrative as well as topographical consequences, even unintentional ones. However, with what might be described as card tricks, Storyspace occasionally shuffles and reverses our selections. For example, completing the sentence "In the labyrinth of time you travel a long time in" with "anticipation" rather than "circles" should generate an affirmation of optimism, but the Moulthrop program (without authorization) substitutes "delusion." As a result, our initial labyrinth topography is darker and more negative. Further, by intruding, the Storyspace system adopts the sinister tone of propaganda. Had we picked "circles," the text loops stubbornly back to "Come In." We have been forewarned: *Victory Garden* mediates reading and will morph in ways that necessitate dynamic close reading approaches. The text also seems to equate cyborg politics with anti-war protests as an offshoot of class struggle. In so doing, Moulthrop attractively bundles anti-war sentiment, progressive politics, and technological advancements in a way that begins to mark Emily for death.

The Phenomenology of Iser and Fish

Wolfgang Iser's 1972 essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" and Stanley Fish's 1980 *Is There A Text in This Class?* suggest the mechanics of reading and responding to *Victory Garden*. The relevance of the Iser and Fish texts could have earned them a mention in "*Victory Garden*—Reader's Manual" following the sections about "Getting Started," explanations of "the toolbar," etc., the Joyce comments about parallax gnosis, and Douglas's essay "Are We Reading Yet?" Their ideas help us to see ourselves reading and provide segue to an exploration of Moulthrop's steady

obedience to deconstructionist theory and liberal sprinkling of simulacra-based gamesmanship.

Iser's exploration of the writing-reading interface, what he will eventually refer to as "the dialectical structure of reading" (299), undergirds, in a reductive way, the design of Moulthrop's Storyspace-delivered text while also highlighting the challenges of the reading experience. Iser tracks through the process of reading, trying to expose the mechanics of "virtuality" in a traditional reading context of writer, reader, and text. His thinking synthesizes ideas from Roman Ingarden, Edmund Husserl, Gilbert Ryle, Georges Poulet, and D. W. Harding in an attempt to explain how "reading literature gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated" (297). While Ingarden posits the basic stance of virtuality, Husserl provides the puzzle of pre-intentions, Ryle explains imagination as a rehearsal of expectations, Poulet describes how the reader becomes the subject doing the thinking, and Harding offers "deciphering" as the last step before someone else's thought are formulated in our conscience. Hyperfictions, like *Victory Garden*, exhibit/employ these strategies, but they also demand that we recalibrate Poulet's querry, "Whatever I think is part of my mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world….Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an I, and yet the I which I pronounce is not myself" (qtd. in Iser 297). In *Victory Garden*, Iser's principles of phenomenology are convoluted by the introduction of multiple, non-hierarchical plotlines and attempted reader-writer inversion.

To begin his argument, Iser borrows heavily from Roman Ingarden's theory that reading is an act of realization (*Konkretisatio*n) in which a reader confronts or "brings to light" the subject matter as presented by the structure of a text. Iser explains,

> The phenomenological theory of art…in considering a literary work…must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text….The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. It is the virtuality of the work that gives rise to its dynamic nature. (279-80)

Iser, though he is not addressing hyperfiction or *Victory Garden* specifically, suggests, "As the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematized views' to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results in the awakening of responses within himself" (280). This overview of the reading process suggests not just the dynamics of meta-reading, but it also posits the perceived rewards of hyperlink selection.

Iser concedes that such "virtuality" is not new. He cites Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as a model of this "convergence": "Sterne's conception of a literary text is that it is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of imagination."[1] Sterne himself chides that respecting the reader means to "leave him something to imagine" and "to keep his imagination as busy as my own" (II.11.79). Chief among the resources Sterne expends to catalyze the reader's imagination are the pages he leaves blank. Moulthrop's black screen (see Figure 4.) is commonly considered to be an open homage to the all black "alas poor Yorick" page of *Tristram Shandy*--itself an allusion to the Yorick's grave scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Additionally, Iser

references Virginia Wolf's evaluation of *Jane Austen*—"She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind" (qtd. in Iser 280)—to suggest the process whereby text invites the reader to endow significance to otherwise ephemeral events. Iser locates the origin of this concept in Edmund Husserl's theory of "pre-intentions" and explains, "individual sentences not only work together to shade in what is to come; they also form an expectation in this regard" (282). All sentences, claims Iser, aim "at something beyond what [they] actually say…something that is to come, the structure of which is foreshadowed by their specific content" (282). A phenomenological analysis, suggests Iser, is the best way to approach this process.

Literary texts present a "world" by linking sentences into more complex units. Iser equates the cumulative effect of sequential sentences to a modification of expectations or changing of the horizon and reminds that the effect is also retroactive. As readers, what we read causes us to re-assess what we have already read. Iser speculates, "Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened" and further that memory evoked "can never assume its original shape" (283). Here again, Iser's general comments about the activity of reading are appropriate:

> the activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections. Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the "preview" and so becomes a viewfinder for what has been read. This whole process represents the fulfillment of the potential, unexpressed reality of the text, but it is to be seen only as a

> framework for a great variety of means by which the virtual dimension may be brought into being. The process of anticipation and retrospection itself does not by any means develop in a smooth flow. (284)

While Ingarden suggests classical art is the function of a smooth flow of "sentence-thought," Iser values the role of breaks in the stream of thought. Blockages are not a flaw; they are the means by which "a story gains its dynamism" (Iser 284).

The disparity between Iser and Ingarden predates the discussion of *Victory Garden*'s cognitive overload, but helps to explain the experiences of exasperation commonly encountered by readers. Iser posits, "whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself" (284-85). The search to fill gaps reveals reading to be a dynamic act and forces the reader to grapple self-consciously with narrative chronology. Subsequent re-readings modify the reading experience and alter the virtual dimension (topography) of the text. Because readings are "innovative," the "process of continual modification is closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life. And thus the 'reality' of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience" (286).[2] In Iser's poetics, literary works (and here I would substitute hypertexts and *Victory Garden*) should generate inexhaustibility (what Selig wished for in his synopsis of *Victory Garden*) and mirroring (the accretive sentence, pathways selected, and meta-patterns reflect the disposition of the reader). As part of his claim that literary texts exhibit mirroring, Iser describes a paradox in which "the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality that is different than his own. ….indeed it is only by leaving behind

the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him" (287). In this scenario, a text's impact is determined by how much the reader will fill in the gaps. Immersion in *Victory Garden* fails in direct correlation to a reluctance to continue the link process (what Selig refers to as "diminishing returns").

Third among Iser's references is the work of Gilbert Ryle. Ryle's analysis of imagination speaks most directly to Moulthrop's idea of visioning truth as "everyone's story seems to go on all at once" (Joyce, "*Victory Garden*--Reader's Manual"). Ryle describes the difference between seeing a mountain with your eyes and seeing that same mountain in your mind's eye. He writes, "The expectations which are fulfilled in the recognition at sight of [the mountain] are not indeed fulfilled in picturing it, but the picturing of it is something like a rehearsal of getting [those expectations] fulfilled" (qtd. in Iser 287). In terms of *Victory Garden*, we read about Emily Runbird being stationed in Saudi Arabia and picture her among other soldiers wearing their gas masks and having nervous conversation during the scud missile attacks. We also read about professors arguing over Western Civilization curricula, the lives of broadcast journalists, a teenager doing the Jack Kerouac romp, political protestors, and people mesmerized by the reality of televised, nighttime warfare. Each story goes on independently, but all intersect with Emily's (central) narrative. The conclusions drawn by Ryle have interesting repercussions for the Moulthrop text. Ryle observes,

> If one sees the mountain, then of course one can no longer imagine it, and so the act of picturing the mountain presupposes its absence. Similarly with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the

> written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminancy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination. (qtd. in Iser 288)

As Selig and Koskimaa confirm, for meta-readers, the black screen occurring in the Emily story path suggests that a scud missile struck in the vicinity of Emily. This reading is somewhat confirmed by references to Emily's absence. The image, however, carries rich mimetic ambiguity. Is our black screen a simulation of an actual viewing/picture of an untimely, electronic disconnect (the mountain) with the implication that we abruptly left the reading experience and saw something real, or is the black screen part of the text and therefore a suggestion (poiesis) of the damage and disconnect? In the former case, the disconnect (the mountain) is not present in our reading and, according to Ryle, our reading should be more real because we are witness to evidence of an actual tragedy (like a fatality at the end of a recorded 911 call). In the latter case, the black screen is an "unwritten part" or gap and stimulates the reader's imagination while helping to construct an open, dynamic text. Artistically, the ambiguity is a well-crafted construction; aesthetically, the confusion is a rich conjuring of lifelikeness—part gap for our imagination to fill with flying shrapnel, ruined equipment, and death and part prompt for Army medevac. Ultimately, Ryle asks, (my paraphrase) do we see something or realize that we do not see something (Iser 286)? And, if the black screen is a rehearsal, what are we as reader/critics to expect? Rhetorically, what "pre-intentions" are triggered for future readings? If the black screen is a wordless gap used to stimulate the reader's imagination

of something beyond experience, then it is fair to invite comparison to the ineffability trope. It would also be fair to speculate as to the nature of "ineffability" in a hypertext.

Imagination, claims Iser, is a necessary portion of the reader's ability to synthesize information (288). However, an aesthetic experience should also "exhibit a continuous interplay between 'deductive' and 'inductive' operations" (Iser 292). Iser insists that, as readers, we "strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern"—a process he refers to as forming the "gestalt" of a text. He cautions, "it is always hard to distinguish what is given to us from what we supplement in the process of projection" and warns, "This 'gestalt' must inevitably be colored by our own characteristic selection process" (289). This "selection process" is what Iser refers to as "grouping."[3] Because, according to E. H. Gombrich, grouping involves testing "the medley of forms and colours for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation is found" (qtd. in Iser 289), it also enables the meta-narrative view demanded of hypertext readers. As if anticipating Michael Joyce's discussion of parallax gnosis, Iser also reminds that gestalt views are necessarily rooted in personal configuration. In the words of Louis O. Mink, "…comprehension is an individual act of seeing-things-together, and only that" (qtd. in Iser 289). Further, when a text meets the expectations synthesized via grouping, illusion is achieved. Yet, when expectations generated directly by the text are later confirmed by the text, didacticism is achieved. Upon this criterion hinges the charge of whether or not *Victory Garden* is an academic fiction. To the extent the maze of *Victory Garden* merely prolongs the fulfillment of expectations posed by the text(s), it falls under the category of didactic or academic. To

the extent the meta-narrative achieves illusion, *Victory Garden*'s loops, dead ends, and unannounced shifts escape the label.

The case for Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* being considered art rests on the act of "recreation." As if he were addressing himself to *Victory Garden*, Iser explains,

> The act of recreation is not a smooth or continuous process, but one which, in its essence, relies on interruptions of the flow to render it efficacious. We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their non-fulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic of recreation. This process is steered by two main structural components within the text: first, a repertoire of familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar. Elements of the repertoire are continually backgrounded or foregrounded with a resultant strategic overmagnification, trivialization, or even annihilation of the allusion. The defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations. Similarly, we may be confronted by narrative techniques that establish links between things we find difficult to connect, so that we are forced to reconsider data we at first held to be perfectly straightforward….The question then arises as to whether this strategy, opposing the formation of illusions, may be integrated into a consistent

> pattern, lying, as it were, a level deeper than our original impressions. (293-4)

Defamiliarization is a pressure point for *Victory Garden*, while discrepancies, Iser is quick to point out, "draw us into the text" (295).

As stated, the Moulthrop text never equates the black screen with Emily's death. Like Selig and Koskimaa, we tabulate that result based on what turns out to be a shared meta-reading. Textual clues favor her demise, but the screen "Happy Warrior" reads as if she came home alive. Here again, the Iser argument is well-applied. Iser asserts that "the polysemantic nature of [a] text" must be in balance with "the illusion-making of the reader" (290). Explains Iser, "The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning." In *Victory Garden* readers must see themselves reading—see themselves interpreting, extracting, and configuring[4] and, to the extent we script, we, as readers of *Victory Garden*, are complicit in Emily's death. Following the clues and markers, we connect the dots, but we do so curious about other narrative possibilities.[5] Had the inversion of reader and writer been successful, her character's safe return would have been a viable narrative option and not just a discrepancy used to enforce indeterminancy.

At this critical point in the vivisection of traditional reading, where author and reader converge, Iser first calls on the work of George Poulet and then takes exception to it. Poulet envisions the moment of convergence as the point when the author is no longer perceived as an "alien thought" (Iser 298). Poulet also asserts that this will not happen

until both “the author’s life story” and “the individual disposition of the reader” are “negated.” “A work of literature becomes (at the expense of the reader whose own life it suspends) a sort of human being, that it is a mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own objects” (qtd. in Iser 298). Iser balks at the notion of text becoming an actual viral consciousness and argues,

> If reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the reader will be ‘occupied’ by the thoughts of the author….text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the ‘division’ takes place within the reader himself….as we read there occurs an artificial division of our personality because we take as a theme for ourselves something we are not. Consequently when reading we operate on different levels. For although we may be thinking the thoughts of someone else, what we are will not disappear completely—it will merely remain a more or less powerful virtual force. Thus, in reading there are these two levels—the alien “me” and the real, virtual “me”—which never completely cut off from each other….Every text we read draws a different boundary within our personality, so that the virtual background (the real “me”) will take on a different form, according to the theme of the text concerned. This is inevitable, if only for the fact that the relationship between alien theme and virtual background is what makes it possible for the unfamiliar to be understood. (298-9)

To put this in the context of *Victory Garden*, the meta-narrative position that projects the black screen as an indication of Emily's death and the story pathway that brings her home alive both occupy the thoughts of the reader. Both stories are alien, but draw different boundaries within the reader's personality in order to be understood. Realizing these boundaries, in a virtual context helps define the reader. To borrow from D.W. Harding (as Iser did),

> What is sometimes called wish-fulfillment in novels and plays can…more plausibly be described as wish-formation or the definition of desires….It seems nearer the truth…to say that fictions contribute to defining the reader's or spectator's values, and perhaps stimulating his desires, rather than to suppose that they gratify desire by some mechanism of vicarious experience. (qtd. in Iser 299)

The alien "me" that is wounded-Emily does not live or die vicariously; nor was her life or death a matter of wish-fulfillment. Keeping her fate ambiguous (what Moulthrop accomplishes by switching the text from verbal description to nonverbal all-black screen) pushes the reader to look for (with self-aware, authorial intent) corroborating details. For the reader to enforce her death means that the Moulthrop's "antiwar" rhetoric inspired it as a likely choice.

For Iser, the key to this whole convergence, this "dialectical structure of reading," is the act of "deciphering." He concludes, "For someone else's thoughts can only take a form in our consciousness if, in the process, our unformulated faculty for deciphering those thoughts is brought into play—a faculty which, in the act of deciphering, also formulates itself" (299).

Once again, the model Iser suggests can be extrapolated to include the three-way interface that is hyperfiction: *Victory Garden*, Moulthrop's text as presented by Storyspace can only be configured by the reader who deciphers the computer-enhanced construction.

Another valuable companion text to *Victory Garden* is Stanley Fish's *Is There A Text in This Class?* This compilation of essays begins by tracing the evolution of reader response criticism. Meaning, he explains, "gradual[ly] emerge[s] in the interaction between the text, conceived as a succession of words, and the developing response of the reader" (3). Generally, the reader's experience is temporal, a matter of negotiation, part of a shared, normative experience, and can be self-serving (4-5). Interpreters don't just "extract meaning," they find what they were looking for: "What I am suggesting is that an interpreting entity, endowed with purposes and concerns, is, by virtue of its very operation, determining counts as the facts to be observed" (Fish 8). This not only "blurs the distinction between description and interpretation," it also suggests "that linguistic and textual facts, rather than being the objects of interpretation, are its products" (8-9). To clarify, Fish asserts, "interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading…they give texts their shape, making them rather than…arising from them" (13). Moreover, these interpretive strategies are a product of interpretive communities (14-15).

Chapter six, Fish's 1973 essay "*Interpreting the* Variorum," identifies two distinct interpretations of Milton's twentieth sonnet, "Lawrence of virtuous father virtuous son." One camp would have "spare" recommend a habit of winter-time feasts, the other would have the same word warn of over-indulgence. Fish observes that since neither

interpretation is definitive, a more significant question might be "what does the fact that the meaning of 'spare' has always been an issue mean?" (150). Fish answers that the pressure to decide comes from within Milton's sonnet, specifically from the unanswered "he who of those delights can judge." "He who" is the reader "who comes away from the poem not with a statement but with a responsibility, the responsibility of deciding when and how often—if at all—to indulge in 'those delights'" (151). Fish's resolution of the "spare" controversy suggests a model for how to read Moulthrop's blank and black screens. His answer speaks to the impact of Moulthrop's anti-war rhetoric on our reading of *Victory Garden* as a narrative of Emily's death while the ambiguity embedded within the black and blank screens makes room for reader contribution. Consummating Moulthrop's anti-war rhetoric precipitates the need for casualties. As readers we must actively imagine her status as one of those casualties and thereby surrender our own innocence. We too cannot have an opinion on the war, but rather, we must have one in the war.

In the chapter "Is There a Text in This Class?" Fish responds to the claims of Meyer Abrams that each "Newreader" (Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, and Stanley Fish) plays what Fish paraphrases as "a double game" (303). Abrams accuses Fish of "introducing his own interpretive strategy when reading someone else's text, but tacitly relying on communal norms when undertaking to communicate the methods and results of his interpretations to his own readers" (qtd. in Fish 303). Fish's rebuttal also generates ramifications pertinent to Emily's fictional fate. Fish suggests the answer to Abrams lies in the interpretive community. He postulates, "The reason that I can speak and presume to be understood by someone like Abrams is that I speak to him from within a set of

interests and concerns, and it is in relation to those interests and concerns that I assume he will hear my words." Writes Fish, "a way of thinking, a form of life shares us, and implicates us in a world of already-in-place objects, purposes, goals, procedures, values, and so on" (303-4). The question asked by a Johns Hopkins student to one of Fish's colleagues, "Is there a text in this class?" was not about textbook requirements. Rather, it was about the status of text in a course so heavily invested in reader response criticism. Fish chooses to emphasize not the immediate confusion but the negotiated understanding. The example illustrates, "Communication occurs within situations and that to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions" (318). It is incorrect, he insists, to assume "a distance between one's receiving of an utterance and the determination of its meaning—a kind of dead space when one has only the words and then faces the task of construing them." The confusion (dead space) in the Johns Hopkins classroom was a matter of misaligned assumptions not translation. Fish is afraid his reasoning approximates a "sophisticated" relativism, but counters that fear with two assertions relevant to our reading of *Victory Garden*: one, "while relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy," and two, "there is never a point when one believes nothing" (319). To assume the blank and black screens each signify an uninhabitable nexus of concerns and narrative trajectories imagines them as liminal threshold. Taken a step further, in the Moulthropism "truth is that our stories go on all at once," black and blank screens are more interrupted (or overfilled) signals than signals of nihility. Those lexia are points of exchange or relay (interstices) not "dead space." Alternately, to reach them by hyperlink demands we arrive with assumptions (aka terministic screens).

Delayed *Konkretisatio*n and Reading Backwards: More Topography in *Victory Garden*

Much of *Victory Garden* speaks to and from a topos of lingering, post-Nixon era paranoia and post-Vietnam anti-war rhetoric. For example, the screen titled "Swarming" alludes to a military strategy of decentralized decision making,[6] while the text of "Swarming" confirms a layering of meanings organized around that theme. See Figure 5. The lines of type are arranged to speak typographically (abstractly) of advancing and retreating (a sexual metaphor?) or perhaps progress hinged on the finality of falling back. The word "finally" is featured in the pivotal role—the mirrored axis about which the text reflects.

> From that moment on, I felt
>
> about me and within my dark body an invisible
>
> intangible swarming. Not the swarming
>
> of the divergent, parallel and
>
> finally
>
> coalescent armies but a more
>
> inaccessible, more intimate agitation that they in
>
> some manor prefigured.
>
> Ever have one of *those* nights?

The ebb and flow of anxiety, the looming feeling of a world engulfed in warfare, is echoed in the default next screen "Irrevocable" which features Walter Cronkite's pessimistic "why, pretty soon there'll be no one in the geopolitical arena but warriors and brigands." Sexual energy is confirmed in the story option listed as "dark body → Halftones." Following that link introduces the reader to Emily's sister Veronica and her

love interest, African-American television journalist and news junky, Harley Morgan. Their successful lovemaking sparks pillow talk reflections about Emily's mother (Lucy) and her politics. The narrator reveals,

> Sometimes Lucy was a voice on the telephone as well as in her head, and Veronica knew she would be calling soon. The call would come partly out of concern about Emily and the war, but there would be Lucy reasons as well.
>
> Lucy reasons…had to do with big plots and big stories. People of this generation seemed to need big stories to hold their lives together, to orient themselves. Lucy had gone through a number of stories in the time Veronica had known her.
>
> Lately she was less concerned with the stories themselves than with the way they all ended.

Following the Veronica storyline reveals more about Lucy's "freak flag" ("Rock of Faith" lexia). She attends a New Age fellowship, "the Church of Mutual Assured Rapture," and shares their cult-like preference for "old disaster films" and art based on "an image of the Last Days." Her character becomes Moulthrop's (autobiographical?) cartoon of a "sixties survivor" interested in montage and hypermedia.

Although just one of nearly a thousand screens, the "Swarming" lexia was engineered to be particularly active. It was designed to be stealthy, to have (covert) links that would go unnoticed, and to morph our interpretation with subsequent viewings. It

exemplifies the intrigue of Moulthrop's artistry. On my first viewing, "Swarming" was found to contain a text portion and two curious spaces (not words) that yield link opportunities. The two [ ] spaces are empty rectangles (essentially invisible white on white revealed only by using the browser icon) in the margins around the block of text, and to click on either one should yield another screen. Going back and trying that maneuver again was prohibited. For these "negative spaces" (plural indicates parallax gnosis?) to yield a link is rare in *Victory Garden*. Yet, because of the strange link spaces, reading "Swarming" feels like exploring. Conceptually, these rectangles are scaled-down versions of the more obvious blank and black screens that show up elsewhere. As an example of the communicate-by-avoiding-words meta-pattern, these "spaces that yield" model a something-out-of-nothing scaffold that the reader will recall and apply to the blank and black screen readings. Moulthrop, however, designed this reading to be an elusive glimpse. The program limits and alters the viewings. On the second viewing, there were no words or spaces that yielded digressive textual pathways. Here, striking the return/enter key was the only forward option. On the third and following viewings, the only link became the phrase "my dark body." In this case, Moulthrop has made the reader and text relationship almost adversarial. For those in pursuit of the monolithic storyline, the text seems to employ a strategy of shoot and scoot; for those straining for meta-narrative, (at least initially) the text's windows open to a rhetorical *topos* beyond words. Any conclusion drawn from the reading episode that stems from "Swarming" will invariably be tempered by an examination of the closely related word art that is "SwarmUp." See Figure 6.

Two of the four link options embedded within “Swarming” lead to “SwarmUp,” a relatively crude graphic shaped (ironically) like a chiasmus where “swarming” is in the center and “warming” and “warring” are at points diagonally across from one another and “storming” and “warning” are at the other points diagonally across from one another. Each word repeats over and over until the letters are so entangled that they are illegible except at the center and four corners. The concepts literally converge. Moulthrop’s foray into word art suggests conceptual blending, de-centered and centered concepts, and the dynamics of fog or bees swarming. We encounter the “Swarming” and “SwarmUp” lexia as part of the Boris Urquhart story path.[7] Consequently, they seem to comment on the elements of that reading.

The Boris Urquhart character is soldier Emily Runbird’s lover and a secretive neuroscience researcher/professor of such classes as “CS/HUM 8088 Special Topics in Cybernetic Art and Sciences: Simulation and Subversion.” Plagued by a potential for multiple personality disorder, he claims to be losing his mind and occasionally dons the persona/alias Uqbari the Prophet. (The Uqbari name alludes to “Uqbar,” a fictional Middle Eastern country discovered to be a fiction within the fiction that is a 1940 Borges short story.) The complexity and layering of his character add a sense of secretive, mind-altering drug weaponry; brazen, gorilla-styled protest strategies; and spyware or malware confusion/hoax to the already soft-edged idea of “swarming.” These two screens and the storyline they support demonstrate Moulthrop’s tactic of delaying realization (*Konkretisatio*n). His combination of graphic novel typography, re-circulating literary allusions, and non-linear narrative structure generate a confrontational reading experience that almost begrudgingly “brings to light” (Roman Ingarden’s metaphor) a cohesive sense

of plot. As stated earlier, his Storyspace programmed reading experience mimics the atmosphere, softened edges, and "undecidability"[8] of fog.

While our phenomenological readings and re-readings hunt and gather (swarm) over the text, the eddies and reversals posed by the frequent loops suggest, even encourage, reading against the grain—a maneuver usually associated with the analysis of deconstruction. Following the logic of Iser's phenomenological analysis suggests (Harding's) "deciphering" is the critical moment of reader-text exchange; following Fish's argument suggests "negotiation" is the key maneuver and that members of an interpretive community negotiate meaning in similar ways. Barbara Johnson explains deconstruction as a critique that "reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, universal in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself" ("Translators Introduction" xv). Her chief example is the Copernican re-write of the Ptolemaic universe—"a shift in perspective which literally makes the ground move." In the famous words of J. Hillis Miller, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself" (qtd. in Murfin and Ray 94). N. Katharine Hayles puts deconstruction in a hypertext perspective: "In the heady days when deconstruction was seen as a bold strike against foundational premises, hypertext was positioned as the commonsense implementation of the inherent instabilities in signification exposed by deconstructive analysis" (32).[9] She also suggests Lev Manovich's "fifth principle of transcoding" which "makes the crucial point that computation has become a powerful means by which preconscious assumptions move

from such traditional cultural transmission vehicles as political rhetoric, religious and other rituals, gestures and postures, literary narratives, historical accounts, and other purveyors of ideology into the material operations of computational devices" (34). It is with the hope of probing such "preconscious assumptions" that we look to Jacques Derrida.

Derrida and the deconstructionists oppose phenomenology on the grounds that it is ultimately a matter of metaphysics (Western philosophy's dualisms) built around a single subject (indivisible self-presence) observing a meaning-filled text.[10] Derrida proposes presence is a matter of repressing "*différance*"—the gap or lag between form and content, "a certain spacing between concept and being there, between thought and time"—what Derrida refers to as "the rather unqualifiable lodging of the preface"(*Dissemination* 12).[11] In "Outwork," Derrida exposes the illogic of writing a book's preface after the book is finished in order to shape the reader's preconceptions. Prefatory writing is driven by occasion and "take[s] into account a more empirical historicity" (*Dissemination* 17). Initially, his discussion follows Hegel's thoughts on the matter rather closely. Hegel praises the role of the introduction as, in Derrida's paraphrase, "a more systematic, less historical, less circumstantial link with the logic of the book" (17). Hegel legitimizes the introduction as a practice of linking a book with "the absolute, unconditional generality of logic" (*Dissemination* 18). Hegel's conceptualization of logic, bound as it is in the idea of Introduction, is, from Derrida's perspective, flawed. Speculative logic is "at once the production and the presentation of its own content (18).[12] Logic "remains, like classical philosophy, external to its content" (19). "It must announce from the first, abstractly, what it can only know at the end."

Therefore, Derrida sees a contradiction in Hegel's comments about logic: Hegel's claim "Logic…cannot presuppose any…laws of thinking" necessarily conflicts with Hegel's claim "What logic is cannot be stated beforehand." For Derrida, "Absolute knowledge is present at the zero point of the philosophical exposition. Its teleology has determined the preface as a postface" (20). He adds that writing a true preface is impossible because

> the semantic after-effect cannot be turned back into a teleological anticipation…the gap between empty 'form' and the fullness of 'meaning' is structurally irremediable, and any formalism, as well as any thematicism, will be impotent to dominate that structure. They will miss it in their very attempt to master it…. In diverging from polysemy…dissemination interrupts the circulation that transforms into an origin what is actually an after-effect of meaning. (20-21)

Later in "Outwork," Derrida writes, "the preface is a fiction…in the service of meaning, truth is (the truth of) fiction" (36). Through his deconstruction of preface, Derrida offers a critique of Western metaphysics. As Barbara Johnson, the translator of Derrida's *Dissemination*, explains, "What Derrida attempts to demonstrate is that this *différance* ["lag inherent in any signifying act"] inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present. Even the seemingly nonlinguistic areas of the structures of consciousness and the unconscious" (ix). Consequently, in Johnson's summary, "the illusion of self-presence of meaning or of consciousness is thus produced by the repression of the differential structures from which they spring" (ix). For readers of *Victory Garden*, this position values, if not validates, self-aware phenomenological "black boxes," the process of swarming, and it hints at the ouroboros[13] of recursive loops.

Derrida's position outside of traditional metaphysics[14] likewise exposes (without collapsing) the tautology within Iser's "dialectical structure of reading," and, in so doing, both comments on Moulthrop's tendency to play tour guide and suggests a rationale for Moulthrop's break with text, the blank and black screens.[15] Derrida explains, "The signifying *pre-cipitation*, which pushes the preface to the front makes it seem like an empty form still deprived of what it wants to say; but since it is ahead of itself, it finds itself predetermined, in its text, by a semantic *after-effect*" (*Dissemination* 20). Derrida values the heading "Preface" more than Hegel because it "enable[s] anticipation and recapitulation to meet and to merge with one another." This pattern of merger repeats throughout the author-prescribed loops of *Victory Garden* (suggesting the boredom of repetition or diminishing returns Selig complains about—finding what we have been looking for—is really the result of the tautology indicative of all metaphysics) and helps to exemplify the recursive nature of learning highlighted by hypertext theorists. The blank and black screens exert a force on the reader (a desire for presence); they situate the reader (liminally) at a threshold; they undo the history of logocentrism;[16] they, in the words of Johnson, "dig up something that is really nothing—a *différance*, a gap, an interval, a trace" (x); and they remind us that the reading process is open and endless. Moulthrop positions them at key junctures in his Storyspace web as a homogenous blend of anticipation and recapitulation whose quiet polysemy is appropriate on many story levels.

Chapter Two: Reading the Ineffable [ ] ~~Lexia~~

> To get at the zeroes and ones that are the music of our spheres is to enter the network. Michael Joyce, *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics*

In their introduction to *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett,* Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter begin by acknowledging the difficult nature of their project: how to catalog the disparate ways language has been used to "speak about dimensions of reality which are ineffable, that is, outside the powers of speech" (1). Ineffability, they note, includes what St. Augustine confesses as "What can anyone say about you, O Lord" as well as what Samuel Beckett describes as "There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." Hawkins and Schotter observe that while ineffability began as a "religious notion" it now has "many secular manifestations." "Ineffable" may indicate what we cannot know (the divine nature for example) or what we cannot say (inexpressibility—"the linguistic equivalent of a 'black hole'") (Hawkins and Schotter 1-2). They conclude, "To speak at all is to carry on an assault against silence; to express anything is to create something out of nothing"; and they insist there is an "extent to which language is always working against its own limitations" (3).

In *Victory Garde*n, Moulthrop references the ineffable as "presenting the unpresentable"—something he labels "a basic narrative problem" and "damn postmodern thang" ("Not Yet Implemented"). His phrase "Damn postmodern thang" suggests both religious and secular ineffability and spills over into what Hawkins and Schotter refer to

as “Derrida’s infinitude of ‘writing’” (3). The vernacular “thang” adds further hybrid vigor. By including the “blankness” of death in a later paragraph Moulthrop opens the discussion even more. In *Victory Garde*n, attempts to verbalize death experiences are a matter of ongoing neuroscience research. However, death experiences (here I argue Moulthrop includes Emily’s possible demise) remain not only beyond what we can say, but also outside what we can know. They are “Not Yet Implemented.” Consequently, when readers encounter the silence of the blank and black screens, they encounter signifiers both rich and appropriate.

A Brief Look at Ineffability in *Paradiso*

When Michael Joyce summons imagery of whirling spheres to aggrandize his hypertext poetics, he invites his audience to compare the digital network being tapped by hypertext pioneers with the medieval cosmos as celebrated by fourteenth century master Dante Alighieri. In truth, no employment of the ineffability topos escapes being compared to *Paradiso*. In *Paradiso* 1.82-84 (unless otherwise noted, I will use the Durling and Martinez translation), Dante the confused pilgrim observes: “The wonder of the sound and the great light kindled a desire in me to know their cause.” Beatrice, recognizing his confusion, explains his vision as “a form that makes the universe resemble God” (*Par*. 1.104-5). Peter S. Hawkins, in his essay “Dante’s *Paradiso* and the Dialectic of Ineffability,” sees Beatrice’s explanation as a “discrediting gesture” (13). Hawkins believes that Dante, like Augustine, frames his vision story as “a consolation prize in the absence of the ineffable.” As readers of *Paradiso*, we expect this move because we have been forewarned. Earlier in the first canto, the pilgrim recounts, “I have seen things that one who comes down from there cannot remember and cannot utter”

(*Par*. 1.5-7). Moreover, we read in *Paradiso* 1.70-72, "To signify transhumanizing *per verba* is impossible; therefore let the comparison suffice for those to whom grace reserves the experience." Or, as Hawkins translates, "The passing beyond humanity may not be set forth in words…" ("Dante's *Paradiso*" 8).

The ineffability topos is re-invoked at the conclusion of *Paradiso* with yet another disclaimer: "Henceforth my speech …is not enough (33.106-8). By the end of Canto 33, "the miraculous sight" (33.136) of God has been likened to or experienced as "overflowing grace" (33.80), a single volume "bound with love" (33.85-86), "the enterprise that made Neptune marvel at the shadow of the Argo" (33.95-97), the Trinity—"three circles, of three colors and of one circumference" (33. 116-17), and the confluence of divine and human natures explained as an unsolvable math problem—squaring a circle (33.133-35). Each image signifies and then, as Hawkins argues, "fade[s] indistinguishably into [its] meaning…not in hopes of ever describing the ineffable, but rather to exhaust the possibility of expression" (14). When at last the pilgrim's mind falters, it is "struck by a flash" (33.140). The returned pilgrim describes the supernatural moment, "Here my high imagining failed of power; but / already my desire and the *velle* [will] were turned, like / a wheel being moved evenly / by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (33.142-45). The pilgrim is enlightened, incapacitated, and disposed to respond, but the text simply ends.

In the intervening seven hundred years scholars have pondered Dante's use of this rhetorical device and questioned why he would conclude his *tour de force* monument of poetic theology in words too often described as anti-climactic. Hawkins believes,

> In thereby leaving the reader unfulfilled, this "self-consuming artifact" actually fulfills its destiny, leading us away from the sound of our own speech to a reality that escapes language entirely. In this way Dante's failure in fact makes good his promise to Can Grande, for as it scatters its words into the collection of the divine "volume," the work indeed ends in God Himself…and not in any human words about Him. ("Dante's *Paradiso*" 18)

Key to Hawkins's interpretation is his definition of ineffable as "a palimpsest of images with no discernable Ur-text beneath them; an ineffable Source to be discovered by the poem only in its failure and dissolution, its passage from speech to silence" ("Dante's *Paradiso*" 16). Borrowing from the work of Charles Singleton, Hawkins makes another observation about *Paradiso*, one that is relevant to *Victory Garden*: the poem ends in failure and, while the circle is nearly completed, "any notion of completion runs the risk of falsifying the particularity of this ending" (16). Similarly, meta-readers of *Victory Garden* are tempted to gloss the aporia in an effort to reach completion. Also, we sense that Moulthrop and Dante share a need for exhausting the "possibility of expression"—something Hawkins asserts "enlarge[s] our notion of what cannot be imagined, of what lies beyond the grasp of language" ("Dante's *Paradiso*" 14).

Hawkins's view of ineffability, as somehow appropriate, is shared by Richard Kay—whose analysis of Bernard of Clairvaux's influence on Dante's final vision is most helpful. Kay proposes that if we are to appreciate the poem's ending, it must be viewed in "correlation" to "Bernard's description of how ecstasy is attained in this life by contemplation" (186). Ecstasy may be viewed as the pinnacle of earthly restoration—a

perfect harmony of the soul's will and God's will. Herein, the soul "becomes like God" and loves itself "only for God's sake" (196). Also, in the ecstatic union with God, grace "confers on the soul" a love for and resemblance to the Word (197) such that the soul "is no longer aware of herself" (198). According to Bernard, the ecstatic moment when the soul "leaves her bodily senses" is brief, rare, and "beyond description." The moment is ineffable. It is when "the soul enjoys the Word in bliss" (Kay 198). Such was the "infusion of charity" provided by the "flash of grace" in 33.140 and, thus, only the "net effect of the flash" may be described. God's will and the pilgrim's will are, at last, in harmony. The Pilgrim has reached the "proper place" and "God's love revolved the Pilgrim's desire and will like a wheel that is evenly moved" (207). Here the links to *Victory Garden* are multiple. If Moulthrop's text is to attain to the status of transformational--the environment characterizing a moment of grace—readers must successfully and stubbornly engage the Emily storyline and lose themselves in the Storyspace program with all its required gamesmanship. The profound lessons about corrupt dissemination coalesce in the ineffable reading moment between could be and is, but they require the fog of cognitive overload. Moulthrop demands thought, but our guide is the shared love of (desire for) Emily.

As for Dante's perplexing "ineffability," the Bernardian model simply requires it. Love transports the Pilgrim, not intellect. *Paradiso* 33.142 professes that "Here power failed the lofty fantasy." Kay paraphrases this line saying: "The love that has been infused into the Pilgrim's mind surpasses the power of his intellect" (210). Then, he references Dante's own explanation in the *Convivio*, "my contemplation has transported me to a region where my fantasy has failed my intellect" (3.4.11). The (parallax) love of

Emily as a motive shared by most of the cast in *Victory Garden* contrasts nicely with Dante-the-pilgrim's solitary compulsion to follow Beatrice. Ultimately both women characters are reduced to trace (experience "death") in order to function as presenters of the unpresentable.

Magnus Ullen approaches ineffability not as a (only-love-can-lift-me) shortcoming of human intellect but as more of a contemporary problem of language. His model speaks directly to the blank and black screens. Ullen sees Dante's final complex vision as a paradox, but rather than worry with the Empyrean's blueprint, he tries to explain what he calls "the transubstantiation…of allegory into symbol and vice versa" (177). He defines "allegory" as "a translation of abstract notions into picture-language" and "symbol" as, above all, "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal" (178). The transubstantiation is required because, while the signified is God in both, the signifier must be both at once unrelated and part of the whole. Ullen writes: "This moment of transcendent inspiration is itself at all times: a reference to a future already accomplished, which has nevertheless still to be begun, as this end in truth marks the moment which enables the beginning of the writing of the *Comedy*, the greatest of all allegories" (177). He observes that language "does and does not lie" and believes all text is a process between writer and reader. He concludes that the "transcendence" of the final canto is "itself merely an appearance, the product of our own nostalgic longing for an original fullness that never truly existed" (197). His analysis carries Derrida's required deconstruction of presence, an "original fullness that never existed" = the posing of postface as preface, and offers a very satisfying explanation of the complexity of the all-white and all-black screens. Moulthrop's decision to translate "abstract notions into

picture language" demands a similar "transubstantiation." The all-black screen is both unrelated to and part of several potential outcomes: power outage, unconsciousness, and death to name a few. Also, Ullen's comments about the responsibility of ineffability being shared between the reader and the poet dovetails seamlessly with Fish's interpretation of Milton's twentieth sonnet and the overall message of Joyce's *Of Two Minds*.

In the "Introduction" for the 2011 Durling and Martinez translation of Dante's Paradiso, Robert M. Durling essentially deflates the role of the ineffability topos in the denouement of *The Divine Comedy*. Durling's argument[3] insists that there really is no confluence of smoke and mirrors beneath the stars at the end of *Paradiso*. The entire poem, claims Durling, is a "polysemous"[4] dream-vision, a product of Dante's imagination written as an ethical discourse for careful readers. Durling observes,

> The idea that Dante thought that his account of spatial ascent through the heavenly spheres to the Empyrean was literally true is not only wildly mistaken, it distracts attention from the depth and complexity of Dante's achievement….It is true that *Paradiso* repeatedly appeals to the so-called "**inexpressibility** topos" [emphasis mine] to describe the intense feelings the intellectual ascent and the associated increasing beauty of Beatrice instill in the pilgrim. But there is no vagueness or superhuman transcendence in the doctrinal content of the poem.

Durling concludes with three observations significant to any discussion of Dante-the-poet's employment of the ineffability topos: 1) "*Paradiso* is a literary creation…linguistic not supralinguistic"; 2) "*Paradiso* constitutes one of the most

remarkable struggles with the limits of language in world literature"; and 3) "Dante …treats the dividing line between allegory and metaphor with great fluidity and freedom." Durling's interpretation points to an understanding of ineffability as part language limit, part cognitive boundary. Ineffability, in Durling's view, originates in the inexpressibility topos. Durling also credits Dante's success to "his unsurpassed craftsmanship and his extremely varied use of the inexpressibility topos"—they "hold together" his vast "arsenal" of rhetorical devices.

Ineffability as a Granular Reading Strategy

Contemporary language theorist Ruiging Liang probes the "descriptive gap between language, the so-called digital signaling system, and analogical sensory experience" in order to help explain what he refers to as a "particular version of the traditional ineffability problem" (30). His 2011 essay for *Language Sciences*, "Digitality, granularity, and ineffability," argues that "phenomenal ineffability insists that our ordinary language cannot exhaust the what-it-is-like aspect, or rather the phenomenal content, of sensory experience" (33). Liang organizes ineffability "from the perspective of what substance or entity or state is claimed to be ineffable" (perceptual, aesthetic, mathematical, and religious) and "from the perspective of what causes an ineffable state" (lexical, syntactical, pragmatic, cognitive, and pathological). When compared to Liang's classification of ineffability's causes, the predicament of Dante-as-pilgrim coincides in part with lexicogrammatical ineffability i.e. any human language lacks the "lexical items or syntactical structures" needed to express thoughts about the Divine encounter. Liang states, "This sort of ineffability, also called unrepresentability or unencodability, is often regarded as the prototype of ineffability" (31). Urquhart includes "the constraints of

language, history" in his list of "reductive ontolog[ies]" to be surpassed should their experiments in advancing human consciousness prove successful ("Vox—Pop—"). Nonetheless, presenting the unpresentable is also one of *Victory Garden*'s self-expressed goals.

Dante-as-pilgrim must also be concerned about what Liang labels "pragmatic ineffability." Within the legacy of Judaism, speech acts relative to seeing God's face would be, in Liang's terminology, "sometimes deemed as profane or blasphemous" (31). In *Victory Garden* pragmatic ineffability limits the soldier's conversation during the missile threats. Talking about the likelihood of a direct hit is what Liang would deem "infelicitous." Of course, receiving a direct hit would lead to another type of inability to produce language: pathological ineffability. Aphasia[5] is often attributable to cerebral hemorrhage, but may be the temporary result of what James H. Austin describes as "the possibility that in some [mystically] ineffable states, those parts of [the speaker's left thalamus] usually involved in language are preempted, or are disarticulated from their usual routines, or bypassed" (qtd. in Liang 32).

Victory Garden also includes a sequence that Koskimaa labels one of its "intertextual fields of reference" because it "works as a digitalized version of [William] Burroughs cut up technique" (16). The lexia in this series, each titled by a word fragment, present what appears to be randomly arranged "bits and pieces from previous lexia." Koskimaa suggests, "This sequence could be interpreted as a lesson in cut up, and a key to understand[ing] the hypertext structure as a device with which the reader may 'cut up' their own narratives" (17). Besides reinforcing the fragility of personal narratives and vast number of stories "going on without or around us," cut up also mimics the

pathological ineffability characteristic of "drug induced hallucinations" in Urquhart's research (Koskimaa). As a mixture of "meaningful words in nonsensical combinations" they exhibit Liang's logico-syntactical ineffability. In the lexia "Th," we read, "A little paranoia never hurt anyone, Tate insinuates, nor for that matter a whole lot. / ESCAPE VELOCITY, the P.A. announces. The audience stands to applaud. // What was it, too much Liquid Sunshine back in the sixties?" Liang offers famous examples of what he calls "bad metaphysics": "Heidegger's violation of 'logical syntax' in claiming that "The Nothing nothings'; or Russell's "Quadruplicity drinks procrastination"; even Chomsky's "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" (qtd. in Liang 32). These phrases, like the excerpt from "Th," also demonstrate "logico-syntactical constraints embedded in L [our language]."

Cognitive ineffability, defined by Liang as "X [supposing X is an entity E or an experience of E, a state of affairs or a truth] is cognitively ineffable if it is epistemically impossible for [speaker] S to entertain and express his or her thoughts about X because S does not know X in a manner that lends itself to propositional thought or expression" (32). Liang proposes cognitive ineffability as the distinction between "phenomenal knowledge" and "propositional knowledge." Later in his essay, Liang will use Wittgenstein's example of trying to describe the smell of coffee. In the 1986 *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein remarks, "Describe the aroma of coffee. –Why can't it be done? Do we lack the words? And for what are we lacking?" (qtd. in Liang 33). Wittgenstein's point, thinks Liang, is "not to deny our commonsensical intuition about phenomenal ineffability, but rather to insinuate the invalidity of the thesis of lexicogrammatical ineffability, according to which ineffability is due to lack of lexical or

syntactical resources. Herein, Wittgenstein would agree with Durling's synopsis of the inexpressibility topos in *Paradiso* as linguistically precise. That we may not be able to inexhaustibly describe the smell of coffee, but we can recognize it suggests to Wittgenstein an "asymmetry between the act of knowing and the act of saying when it comes to perceptual experience" (Liang). "What remains ineffable is only the phenomenal content of sensory experience. And it must be further added that this kind of phenomenal ineffability obtains only in a weak sense" (Liang 34).

While these five categories of ineffability are somewhat helpful to our understanding of the blank and black screens, they are also what Liang describes as "disguised or pseudo ineffability" (32). Bound as they are to context and interpretive community these categories are ultimately unable to satisfactorily explain ineffability. Liang asserts that only "the attenuated thesis of phenomenal ineffability" is defensible. In other words, "What is claimed to be ineffable is in fact largely effable, and what remains ineffable is only the phenomenal content of sensory experience" (34). Moreover, Liang surmises that the phenomenal effect varies in direct proportion to the phenomenal ineffability (35). Citing a R. De Clercq study from 2000, Liang conjectures, "Generally speaking, aesthetic experiences are more ineffable than non-aesthetic ones, because one is likely to form an overwhelming holistic impression." His example of a serenade producing a greater phenomenal ineffability than a "bird singing in a spring morning," while not absolute, suggests the greater disparity between what we know and what we can say occurs upon hearing the serenade. He adds that phenomenal knowledge is not required for ineffability. The listener in the previous example need not know the singer—thus distinguishing phenomenal ineffability from cognitive ineffability. Nor does musical

expertise guarantee exhaustible expression. He further argues that sensory experiences do have causal effects ("they exert effects on a subject"), "sensory experiences vary in phenomenal effect," and "the phenomenal effect of E [where E is an entity or experience of that entity] may vary considerably from person to person" (34). It is in establishing a causal relationship that Liang knowingly jeopardizes his argument, but he does so in a way that I find very helpful to an understanding of the blank and black screens. Liang acknowledges that any claim of a sensory experience causing an effect risks rebuttal from physicalists who reduce everything to neuropsychological processes and molecular movements (34).[6]

Going back to the serenade-bird's song example, the more we are frustrated by not being able to describe the listening experiences (the ineffability), the greater the phenomenal effect. This, explains Liang, is

> why supreme entities are sublime in the eyes of religious people, and why some perceptual experiences are aesthetically more pleasing than others. More importantly, the conclusion that phenomenal ineffability is a matter of degree helps to redress the seemingly irreconcilable imbalance between ineffability and communication, which in turn, makes it possible to meaningfully talk about ineffability. (35)

For Liang, meaningful talk about ineffability demands an explanation of what he refers to as "the digital and granular nature of language."

Human language is considered digital in nature because its "linguistic signs are discrete, linear, and systematically combinable"; communication is, in contrast, "essentially analogical" (35). To explain the relationship between ineffability and

digitality, Liang looks to V. Ogryzko's 1996 work suggesting that "there will always be some information, an irreducible nondigital residue, specific for the semiotic system and essential for its being" (qtd. in Liang 35). Liang labels the residue of sensory experience unrepresented by digital language as ineffable. Granularity, he explains, refers to the size (scale) of the digital pieces[7] and is a matter of focus or resolution. He insists "some degree of granularity is unavoidable in digital systems" (36). Granularity is predicated on the role of language as a map: "It's just like zooming in or out [of] a specific place on a Google map" (36). As an example, he offers, "the concept ANIMAL has a higher level of granularity than the concept DOG, which in turn has a higher level of granularity than the concept RETRIEVER." In the context of *Victory Garden*'s lexia titled ".", the all black screen's monochromatic typography maps at a low level of resolution—a high level of granularity. As a map of unconsciousness or experiencing the aphasia of brain hemorrhage, the screen's black rectangle is far from an exhaustive expression of the sensory experience.[8] Consequently, the screens "." and "…and…" present (by simulation, they manifest) the issue of phenomenal ineffability.

In a sense, *Victory Garden* stacks the deck against a Dante-inspired reading, although this claim begs the question of which Dante-inspired reading. And while the metaphysical tenor of the questions posed by many of Dante's interpreters is jettisoned at the axiom "In the labyrinth: beginning," a Liang reading of the blank and black screens as phenomenal ineffability carries weight simply because it reads against that same ontological grain. If, as per Liang, we read the all-white and all-black screens as phenomenally ineffable texts, either as depictions of a sensory experience (unconsciousness or a missile strike) or as the map and signifier of such an experience,

what we extrapolate is not the oblivion and eternal repercussions of death but the phenomenal knowledge of experiencing fatal trauma—something Moulthrop flirts with in "On" when Tate, one of the researchers sighs, "Oh well…Looks like we lost him again. / + / So Long." and the next screen to appear is the all black ".". The empty screens of black and white communicate abstractly as if obedient to Liang's observation that "phenomenal ineffability can hardly be remedied by linguistic means" (36). They simultaneously embed ambiguity and reverse the trend in *Victory Garden* of cognitive overload. The issue of causality is in a sense side-stepped. It is a link left for the reader to provide. More than helpful, Liang suggests that phenomenal ineffability actually enables communication (38). He writes, "digitality and granularity are defining features of human language, and phenomenal ineffability is an unavoidable but welcome result for language would otherwise be too cumbersome for acquisition and communication." Without the contribution of the blank and black screens, readers of *Victory Garden* would not be as cognizant of all that it is either lost or inaccessible. From the vantage point of reader response, the blank and black screens serve to notably augment the virtual component and provide a respite from cognitive overload.

To recap, digital language produces granularity which results in semantic residue[9] = phenomenal ineffability (a version of ineffability free of the confusion caused by lexicogrammatical ineffability) = a welcome opportunity for readers to script.

Dissemination Adds a Layer of Undecidability

The difference between ineffability's what we cannot know and inexpressibility's what we cannot say highlights the traditional literary process of dissemination, especially as it has evolved (in the context of deconstruction) to suggest indeterminability. The

blank and black screens perform in a tradition that includes comic book graphics and Modernist abstractions infused with a medieval, even biblical, legacy of ineffability, but they do so without explanation or hierarchy.[10] As readers, we are left to make sense of them. The text does not decide. Are they pictures or part of the map? Moulthrop provides minimal captioning: the period used as a title for the all black screen suggests closure and meter; the "…and…" conveys the additive construction of omissions and parts. Moulthrop's narrative positions them as nexus. As a result of this surplus of meanings, readers are faced with a (misleading) semblance of cognitive ineffability. Because the all-white and all-black screens simulate a wide and unstable array of signifiers, readers cannot match knowable content with relevant propositions. Effectively, Moulthrop's use of the nonverbal [ ] lexia (~~lexia~~) adds what Liang would categorize as an "intuitive reaction to ineffability claims" complete with "linguistic nihilism, mysticism, and skepticism" (36). We see this most irreverently in the dream experiments and most poignantly in the Emily storyline.

"Something Out of Nothing": The Scud Missile Strike Is Virtually Silent

The nothing of doors and windows makes a room. Sam Francis,

Saturated Blue: Writings from the Notebook

The word "ineffability" is typically not associated with Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*, but, as the Dante scholarship and the current correlation between digitality and granularity suggest, it should be. On several occasions Moulthrop's text brings the reader to a point where words are withheld because either that subject/condition is beyond or prior to description, the topography of the event is outside the bounds of the experiment,[11] or the author thought it best to graphically exhibit a result (portray as a

first-hand experience) rather than describe it.[12] In each case, the link accesses the aforementioned black or blank screen, and no words, save the lexia's title ("."; "This Is It"; and "…and…"), are employed.[13] For instance, in the story path that describes the later stages of Dr. Boris Urquhart's dream experiment, MacArthur is over-stimulated or over-dosed and flat lines. Moulthrop tells this story using ^^^^ and ~~ key strokes to simulate brain wave scans and intermixes dialogue between the researchers with stream of consciousness word play. The sequence "Fire in the Halo" → "Emergency" → "Blowout" presents the sequence of a laboratory crisis event: "…^~^~^ / Eh be see d'E ~ FIRE in th' whole…rainbow rainbow sunburst eye & l/l… aye columbo that she blows, de las' whitewall on my pink caddy lack of Apocalypse and now… /

RrrrrrrrrrreeEEEAAALLLIIIIIIII soonnow / flash / Calypso! Goddess of elisions and concealments! True muse of the labyrinth! No hince! No clews! No telling just lemme go on guessing, lessee…" The next screen, "Escapade" breaks in with "Too late doctor I'm afraid we've lost him." Moving forward from "Escapade" involves three options: 1) jumping to a new storyline that begins with the screen "Now Here This," 2) remaining in the experiment setting with the screen "Bed" which features more brain activity and begins "You are in your big bed in the black bedroom," or 3) the black screen ".". As readers we may choose to follow any of those three, to go back, or to quit. The default, return key choice is the all black screen ".".

When, in his Review of *Victory Garden*, Robert Coover announces, "As one moves through a hypertext, making one's choices, one has the sensation that just below the surface of the text there is an almost inexhaustible reservoir of half-hidden story material waiting to be explored," he did not limit his observation to the screens with text.

By proffering a visual quiet, the all-black and all-white screens—simple rectangles of black and white—accomplish a great deal, much of which has already been implied. Like the marbled, blank, and black pages of *Tristram Shandy*, they invite (and make tangible space for) readers to contribute. In another sense, they, as "radical prosopoeia,"[14] give Emily a voice from the grave. They announce the black and white abstract forces at work (at conflict) in the script, punctuation, and wide-open typography of *Victory Garden*. Moreover, these nonverbal messages register an absence of consciousness and text. As aposiopesis, these lexia foreground virtual construction issues and turn scaffolding into gangplanks; as maze elements, they frequently perform as dead ends. They exist within logical predicaments that are circumstantially complicated by the narrative and necessarily complicated in the Hegelian sense, but they also embed the confusion (undecidability) of *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

On one level, Moulthrop's "…and…" → "." is a low-tech, piecemeal animation of fade to black equals unconscious. As a simulation of a failed signal, these screens force the reader to see what fictional soldiers or Emily's fictional hometown friends and family would have seen. On another level, Moulthrop presents real readers with an actual curtailed text. We see the blank or black screen (albeit the Storyspace presentation commands only a fraction of the computer's screen) simultaneously as part of both scenarios. As Ryle noted in his discussion of the difference between seeing a mountain with your own eyes and seeing a mountain in your mind's eye, "it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminancy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination" (qtd. in Iser 288). We, in effect, see a simulation of a gap. Our reaction to seeing a mountain in

our mind's eye, according to Ryle, is not so much a vicarious one as it is a rehearsal of actually getting our expectations fulfilled. A key to this interpretation is the desire for a simulated future, an artificial (mountainous) horizon. By linking our rehearsal of Emily's curtailment to a real moment that simulates our expectations being fulfilled, Moulthrop extends the virtual experience. However, such a reading follows the grain of the progressing narrative. Reading against the grain as Derrida would and as Moulthrop has perhaps encouraged, we grow increasingly suspicious of desire. Have we manipulated the text? Isn't that what Nixon did? While vacant of text, the all-black and all-white screens are certainly fertile ground, but silence plus fertile does not an ineffability trope make. We acknowledge that Moulthrop's blank and black screens are an artifice positioned at key moments in the narrative web to remind us that we expect more, something is missing, and something else is leading us.[15] Each encounter suppresses a storyline, dangles a tantalizing closure, but ultimately engineers a track change. At each juncture, we see ourselves imagining. Derrida would argue such typography does not signify, for example, Emily's death (the common understanding), but rather serves to sublate[16] or erase her as a sign. It could be argued that *Victory Garden* is a hyperlinked odyssey of Emily's trace.[17] Sublation, suggests Moulthrop, is one of the viable interpretations of Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" model. Emily's death, again in this example, is the decoy—the murder victim whose name tells the Germans where to bomb. In fact Moulthrop openly invites us to make this connection.

The sequence "Wanker" → ""Correct Yourself" → "About Time" → "With Mirrors" portrays an ongoing discussion about Borges's merits and relevance to Virtual Reality research. Macarthur (researcher) and Amanda (student) convince Victor Gardner

(another student who happens to be in love with Emily) that "time" is the answer to the story's riddle. Amanda provides the context, "Time becomes the matrix of all simulations." Viewed from the periphery, Emily's character is a text, another differential trace structure. Stationed in the Middle East, our only awareness of her comes through other character's recollections or from e-mails sent back home to the fictional Texas college town. In the storyline that suggests she has become a war casualty, the reader is confronted with her curtailment as a source of text, narrative pillar, daughter, sister, student, Tara resident, and lover to Victor and Urquhart. The sense of closure coined by this act is evident in the readings of Selig and Koskimaa. The text of *Victory Garden* trains us as readers to expect more and imagine options.

Ineffability is more than nonverbal expectancy. As a trope, ineffability employs the idea of inexpressibility. There must be a realm beyond words for the text to suggest, aspire to, and fail to reach. Paradoxically, Moulthrop's "everyone's story goes on at once" needs such a heterogeneous space. When we come to the black screen, we recognize it as a complex crisis moment largely because Moulthrop invests more into our reading of it than equipment malfunction, brain wave flat line, and time for obituary. The screen "Know About That" seems to explain silence as beyond words, part of the actual language of the universe—the nothing from which something comes, "the very Unstuff on which we prop our nonbelief." In "Know About That," Moulthrop paraphrases Derrida's "*différance*"[18] as "Knowledge arises out of complex discursive transactions. What can we (say we) know that doesn't implicate us in the inquiries….We make it up as we make it up, more than half creating that which we perceive." Johnson, Derrida's translator, comments on Derrida's own writing as positioning silence at the borders so as

to "more actively disconnect itself from the logos toward which it still aspires" (xvii). In *Victory Garden*, the Storyspace program allows Moulthrop to knead the soft edges into the dough of his narratives, thereby multiplying Derrida's model of disconnect and soft-edged flirtation with logocentrism.

By equating the blank and black screens with death, the screen "Name That Fear" embraces just such a strategy of flirtation. It reads, "Name the Horror, go ahead name it. / **Press Return** [heh, heh]" The link options include the obvious pressing the return key which yields the screen "This Is It"—a white rectangle without any text—and clicking on the yield-word "Horror." Using the return key generates a short loop alternating between the "Name That Fear" and the vacant all-white "This Is It" screens with the resulting Edgar Allan Poe-like amplification. Choosing "Horror" produces the screen "Not Yet Implemented" which again breaks the fourth wall with the greeting "Waitaminute THAT wasn't so horrible ." (where the period is moved one space to the right as if the indicates announce a delayed closure). The text/narrator seems to speak directly saying,

> Sorry looks like you're a tougher mark than I gave you credit. Force me to confess and I'll tell you all about a basic narrative problem, presenting the unpresentable, seems to be a lot of it going around these days, damn postmodern thang.
>
> Can't seem to think of the right visual effect to pull this one off, you see. Fade to nothing. Doesn't seem to be implemented.[19]
>
> Where's the blankness can represent the Ultimate Nobody Home? Needs further research. Take a walk out that window, tell me what you see…"

Further reading reinforces the equation of blank and black screens = death and the unconscious, Moulthrop's unabashed salesmanship of postmodernism and "presenting the unpresentable" secures our discussion of ineffability.

In the lexia "Engineer," the character Tate defends the value of paranoia, and reprises the ineffability discussion. His oration, "Let me tell you about my vision…a vision of the End of History: All the experience of humankind is a huge cosmic riddle whose answer is Something Out of Nothing. // The moment of convergence between the IS and the COULD BE. // U must / / U must / U must /

…engineer a system…" follows the downward stepping typography of "Come In" but substitutes "…engineer a System…" for "labyrinth : beginning." Equating labyrinth with (ontological) "System" in the context of (widely implemented, family-scaled) WWII-era vegetable gardens, narrative rhizomes, fictional virtual reality experiments, and the parallels with Derrida's *différance* constructs a rich image linked (by use of the return key) to the screen "No Complaints." In "No Complaints," Urquhart summarizes his more than five hundred, "bright[ly]" burning sexual encounters with Emily that all ended, like the one between Jude and Victor, short of climax. Urquhart (who is actually not named until we hear Emily describe their relationship in another screen) tells Emily, "I've tried to find the reason you put aside what I would call fulfillment….the way you are remains a wonder to me, something alien and apart—but when I lie with you I pass into a wonderful space, a garden of endless approaches and turnings back, / A labyrinth…" We read this as a part of the Emily story, we read it as part of an ongoing Menippean satire, and we read it as an allegory of deconstruction analysis. These passages serve as Moulthrop's confession—his Derrida approved *modus vivendi*.[20]

Seemingly, however, two questions remain: to what extent do the blank and black screens perform as a conveyance of trace? And what is the significance of the "moment of convergence between the IS and COULD BE"? Wrestling with these questions demands a closer look at the critical moment when meta-readers find evidence suggesting Emily's demise.

The sequence in question begins with "Hold…"—a collection of Emily-as-memory snapshots. Urquhart remembers her "sunning bare-breasted," "in tank top and khakis climbing in New Hampshire," "reading the *Voice* or *Mondo 2000*, asking "Who's this Baudrillard anyway…?" His recollection, "That first time, just holding her," is interrupted by the "now" of "she is taken by the game, taken away to serve the war machine, passing their messages, keeping their codes. *Dear Jane, we are praying for you, you are fighting the good fight, give 'em bloody hell, love Mom.*" The present tense of her absence in the text of "Hold…" sequesters his litany of memories and foreshadows, which is to say taints, our upcoming reading. It also marks her character as a trace. Clicking/striking/typing (texting) the return key (a physical act Moulthrop invests with layers of meaning and muscle memory) produces the default screen "What do I Say?"

"What Do I Say?" continues the Urquhart meditation on Emily's military role. He thinks, "it is important what you're doing, keeping the links together… If war has become, has always been, a game of information, then what do you do….Emily my only hope against time. Come back." Rather than come back, the narrative changes locale to the war. In "Down in the Dark" we overhear Emily and other soldiers bemoaning the uncomfortable, plastic, chemical warfare suits. The next screen, "Waste Not Want Not," presents the Army grunt's frustration at having to wait out the missile attacks when even

the Republican Guard had been dispatched so handily and "F-15 jocks" couldn't find any targets that were not already "waxed clean." The lexia closes with one of the soldier's eerie (if self-aware, tongue-in-cheek, postmodern text can be eerie) "I have a bad feeling about all of this." Once again using the return key, we read in "Shortly" how the sergeant reacts, "don't please *don't* start in with the paranoia, 'cause I am in no… mood for it tonight." The nervous banter continues as the soldier named Dexter tries to take a nap. Emily audibly repeats "Home home home." Another soldier responds "Real real soon." The conversation keeps Dexter from sleeping and he yells, "Don't you people know anything about short time?"

While the Emily-in-the-military narrative path continues, we, as readers who script, have come (although probably unaware) to another fork in the path. For linear readers content to "turn the page," Moulthrop's default progression generates a foggy suggestion of the night's missile attacks; for those who look for hidden link-words, in this case Emily's mantra "Home home home," Moulthrop provides the happy ending. The options may or may not be mutually exclusive. The return home could be dreamed. Either way, clicking on "Home home home" generates "Because Because Because." We read "Because she did come home, / Because (la-la) how the life goes on…" as if to the Beatle's melody for "Obladi Oblada," and we are transported to a cheerful domestic scene featuring Emily, Urquhart, and Thea.[21] However, the default storyline progresses to the screen "Time":

Short time. *The shortest.*

A very brief interval.

No time even to know what was happening really.

Just a flash of light

An ovenblast of heat

and

…[22]

Following the story to the next screen presents the third person narration of "…and…" (see Figure 5.) where we find a woman we assume to be Emily in the dark, her head hurting, deafened save the "sick constant buzz." We read (excerpted), "Something had happened to her….She had been thrown across the room, maybe….She began to feel cold and that gave her a flash of fear…her head was throbbing but the pain was going away…she was sleepy now more like passing out drunk…her world going away me too". The lexia does not end with a period and there is only one way to move the story forward; the lexia does end with a curious "me too." The subsequent screen, also titled "…and…" (see Figure 6.) repeats the same text, but the screen has been graphically impacted as if the screen itself had been hit near the middle and cracked like a broken windshield. The words are dimmer and, like the sentences, fragmented. This bit of (comic book) graphic art indicates the mysterious "me" was either the text or her/our computer screen. Since Emily was not narrating the events via e-mail, we are left to consider the "me" as an allegory.

Options for moving forward in the Emily/shattered screen narrative are reduced to the all-black screen which the "Choose a link" window titles "darkness →.". A poetry of enjambment bridges the gap between "me too" and the all-black screen "." The enjambment also participates in a larger, looping movement of the text. A William Carlos Williams-styled poiesis links the title screen with the "." in a way that suggests circular

reading. Comparing the screenshots (and forgiving the ekphrasis), we notice the Moulthrop Title Page is labeled with a centered, small raised circle or bullet point; the black screen is labeled with a centered, lower case period. Reading the abstract markers as a symbol of journey from beginning to end we "see" the ball drop and become a solid black point/period. This obscure but fascinating detail is confirmed by the drop down "Locate" menu which reverses the order (the all-black screen is listed first) and locates them at opposite ends of an otherwise alphabetical list. We are reminded that we begin in the labyrinth, and that we read looping, ouroboros texts. The black screen, as it follows the Emily-has-been-wounded screen brings closure, but the abstraction of "ball dropping" connotes New Year's Eve, sexual maturity, and link-enabled cycles. Had our visit to the museum felt satisfying, had the challenges of the labyrinth eroded the reading pleasures, the caesura of "." is available to grant a merciful closure. Nonetheless, Moulthrop intends for the story to continue. Clicking the return key transports our reading to "Slacktown"—a screen with simulated brain waves across the top in what we have come to suspect indicates dreaming and the "neural interface research" story path.

Ultimately, we want to know what happens to Emily during the blackout in the Riyadh mailroom. Critic Dave Ciccoricco refers to the combination of black screen and shattered screen as "Moulthrop's trademark breakdown" (3). He explains,

> We just don't know for sure what happens to Emily at this point….the crash that reminds us what we're actually looking at, and reminds us of the fragility of our own point of view, in both the physical and ideological sense. If the screen is what allows the paradoxical immersion of the passive viewer, then Emily's friends back home, caught in a continual 24-

> hour news cycle replete with facts, opinions, and images, would seem immersed in much the same way as the reader. But as a hypertext, *Victory Garden* brings the war to our personal screens in a way that suggests a movement from consumption to participation. It asks that we make use of the network form to interrogate the passivity associated with the behind-the-screen perspective.

Passivity is the overt message of the hypnotizing "As Seen On TV" war coverage, the mouth-open spectators, and soldiers willing to serve. Moving readers from consumption to participation is the real trick especially since Moulthrop is determined to keep narrative immersion at the level of tourists in a theme park.[23] Participation is less about immersion and more about the morals of interactivity.

Pausing to tally the results of our phenomenological reading highlights the foibles inherent in an inductively reasoned Emily-becomes-casualty conclusion. As U predicted, half of what we would call true in that (fictional) storyline would be "made up"—actually scripted by the reader. To the extent that Selig, Koskimaa, and others favor this reading in their arguments, they highlight the convergence between "COULD BE" and "IS." Also, in accordance with Derrida's "Outwork," favoring Emily-as-fatality (now in postface) "enable[s] anticipation and recapitulation to meet and to merge with one another" in preface.[24] The black screen in this example is not the irremediable "gap between the empty 'form' and the 'fullness' of meaning," the black screen is the literary device, the product of Moulthrop's (Sterne's) imagination, and the ineffable railroad switching yard (hyperlinked story platform) which facilitates the convergence of semantic after-effect and signifying pre-cipitation—what Ullen describes in his analysis of *Paradiso* as "the

product of our own nostalgic longing for an original fullness that never truly existed." In the jargon of postmodernism, links occupy (transgress) the interstice, the interval of reading time between (nonlinear or disbanded) storylines, between the desire for presence and presence. To borrow again from Barbara Johnson's "Translator's Introduction," "It is not possible to desire that which one coincides. The starting point is thus not a point but a *différance*" (xi). For Moulthrop's alphabetical list of screen titles, the starting point was not a point, it was a point-sized circle. In a masterful detail, the story screens of *Victory Garden* are listed in the difference between the point-sized circle and the period. This serves to reinforce the view that *différance* is the muddle/fog/garden where *Victory Garden* happens.

Such a reading of *Victory Garden* as a gap between meanings (does Emily survive or not?) also reveals the formalism inherent in any discussion of micro and macro thematic parallel. The text of *Victory Garden* operates in accordance with this would be "~~monolith~~" of Derrida's *différance*. Moulthrop has scripted a swarming, a "gathering spray," a compendium of First Gulf War, fictional town Tara, parallax "gnoses" whose occasional hinge pin navel is the blank screen. His use of the hyperlink platform foregrounds what normally would be considered background or topos and the logic of system, the "ground zero of reading." Moulthrop's poetics goes something like this: *Différance* (exposes metaphysics) = "Something Out of Nothing." U = Urquhart and You (the reader). "Engineer a system" = establish your preface (your own personal cycle of anticipation and recapitulation). Being caught in someone else's system = rehabbing Plato or Logos or worse falling victim to a politically motivated ruse i.e. Nixon's secret life revealed after the Watergate scandal.[25]

The moment of convergence is better understood as "between the COULD BE and IS" because, in Derrida's theory, signifying is always an after-effect. In "Outwork," Derrida explained "The liminal space is thus opened up…by an incommensurability between the signifier and the signified. As soon as one tries to reduce its mass {bloc} to a single surface, the protocol always becomes a formal instance." (*Dissemination* 18). The missile strike had to be silent because it came, as the screen "Time" explains (upon re-reading), in "A very brief interval. / No time even to know what was happening really. / Just a flash of light / an ovenblast of heat / and / …" The presence of the scud missile strike favored by meta-readers is the same presence of metaphysics that Derrida worked so hard to destabilize. Moulthrop, like Dante before him, treats the dividing line between allegory and metaphor with great fluidity, and by so doing, creates a linguistic space that presents the unpresentable.

Because such an interval/gap is structurally irremediable, and any formalism, as well as thematicism, will be impotent to dominate the structure, the text needed to skip from anticipated strike to after-effect. This, additionally, is one explanation of the rationale behind why Jude Busch (in disguise as Emily) and Victor only attempted oral sex and could not reach orgasm, and why, in over five hundred encounters, Emily did not reach orgasm with Urquhart.[26] Emily's only successful love making is a brief fling with Victor Gardner (the fiction's fictional namesake, as per Borges). Even then, the climax leaves her sobbing, fearful, and determined to break off the relationship (which she does by e-mail from Saudi Arabia). These fractured relationships (onanism) demonstrate how closely Moulthrop follows Derrida's model. Jude can imitate (signify) Emily but the gap between them must remain irremediable (not admitting cure or repair) and thematically

impotent. Likewise, the professor-student relationship between Urquhart and Emily as a model of logocentrism, shared literary canon, etc. must break down. The relative successes of Emily and Victor compliments their allegorical roles as texts whereby union = homogenous = Derrida's preface = the moment of convergence between anticipation and recapitulation.

Chapter Three: Realizing Tragedy, Alas Poor Emily, or Somehow We Got Disconnected?

> Rich are the gifts of the imagination, bitterness of world's loss is not replaced thereby. On the contrary, it is intensified, resembling thus possession itself. But he who has no power of the imagination cannot even know the full of his injury. William Carlos Williams
>
> Beyond desire is no language. What remains…is measure. Donald Wellman

My Reader's Response

After many screenings of *Victory Garden*, I happened upon the sequence I had read about in the secondary literature in which Moulthrop reveals the narrator, Miles Macarthur, Thea's associate, friend, and now lover. I am not sure why this lexia took so long to find. Did Moulthrop program a guard shield to deny access for x amount of viewings? Storyspace writers have that option. Do I chalk this up to gamesmanship? Or to a resistant text? Or to embedded ambiguity? Was I supposed to entertain the prospect of the text being its own narrator? Maybe even, I had read the "Miles" screen before, without the context it now has (in my mind). The Miles Macarthur I remember was always in on the neural interface/dream research. I think, "Did he ever flat line?" Was he on the couch or watching the guy on the couch? I do remember one of the commentators explaining that because the Miles-Thea relationship remains hidden, readers should rethink the Thea storyline as being biased in her favor. But, she seems likeable enough. After all, she is portrayed as a divorced, politically active university professor with a smart son and soon-to-be remarried ex-husband. She worries, or worried about and now mourns, her former student now former (I think) military mail clerk Emily. Miles, who

was introduced to Thea by Urquhart in Tara—the pseudonym for Austin, Texas—has recently completed a documentary film "about a group of apocalyptic Christians who have an obsession with Hollywood disaster epics" ("Miles"). Emily's mom is one such Christian. "Was she in the film?" I wonder. I should verify this. Where did I record that observation? I scan my seventy or so "post it" notes and realize it must be documented in one of the hand-written legal pads. But which one? Then, I think it is happening to me too.

Selig was right: familiarity with unending hypertext fictions breeds contempt or at least fatigue. But, I was not one of those divide and conquer readers looking for meta-narrative and some emerging traditional plot. I had been a Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*-inspired, let it wash over me, jazzy reader. I am happy with non-linear. I am old enough to remember that First Gulf War. I was one of those watching the night-vision photographed, precision missile strikes. I could not believe what I was seeing on our Sony Trinitron. Surely the reporters would be safe in that one hotel. Surely the Patriot missile system would stop those incoming, random, more defiant than accurate, almost pathetic scud attacks. The made for television briefings were artfully crafted for upright recliner-chair generals across the U.S….Moulthrop got it right I think. Stormin' Norman got the job done and got us out. Now we can argue about what the job was. Did we rescue Kuwait or Kuwaiti oil fields or some weird, candy-coated mix of both? Commanding. Surgical. Shock and awe = Saddam's forces were way overmatched. Every benevolently self-serving, peace-keeping, police force should have technological superiority. Even the sand could not stop us this time. And casualties? When the scrambling enemy soldiers were hit say by helicopter gunfire, they just crumpled up and

stopped moving—their Acme life force expended as if in a cartoon. When they were struck unaware by laser-guided missiles, they just disappeared in a muted spasm of dust and debris. Our wounded faired better. We saw them in tighter camera shots on stretchers with I.V. fluids and neat bandaging. UN fatalities, as I remember, were thought minimal. I remind myself, being in the military is a dangerous business. Fortunately, Germany-based field hospitals performed brilliantly. It seemed as if we could inflict death while outflanking it ourselves. At least that is what I remember from the "real" thing.

Moulthrop's story jives with my recollections pretty well. My museum trip has been relatively satisfying. Like Selig, Koskimaa, and Coover, I stayed longer than most—long enough to feel the cut up narratives interconnect. The room with the comparison to *Tristram Shandy* establishes literary precedence. The gallery featuring blank and black screens = postmodern attempt at reinventing the ineffability trope grounds what *Victory Garden* cannot say in a long tradition of unspeakable topographical frontiers. Moulthrop appropriately confuses the picture of the blank/black screens as allegory (Ullen's definition: "a translation of abstract notions into picture-language") with the blank/black screens as symbol (Ullen's "symbol" as, above all, "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal). Dante might not approve, but he probably looks down from the balcony and smiles in acknowledgement, a little jealous of Storyspace wizardry and a little indignant at what passes for poetry in 1991. Watch out. My postmodern sense of humor is showing. Deconstructors stop me if I get too monolithic—humor (the original deconstruction) will do that.

In the essay "The Artifice of Failure in *Tristram Shandy*" Andrew Wright observes,

> "…it begins in *flagrante delicto*." It begins as a sexual joke, and remains just that until, after nine volumes, the cock-and-bull story ceases, without concluding. The novel is about how anyone comes to know anything, it is about reality more intensely than are most other novels, and the inconclusive conclusion is presented rather than stated: man is a mystery, and the world is inscrutable; ordinary modes of apprehension and analysis are totally inadequate to the tasks they are called to perform; life itself is ineffable, ineluctable, and certainly tragic—redeemed, in so far as redemption may be possible, by laughter which makes sport of the mystery; by love which accepts it; and by art, which re-creates it. (212)

"Presented rather than stated," "inadequate modes of apprehension and analysis," "life itself is ineffable, ineluctable, and certainly tragic" these are the lines I like. They strike a chord running through *Paradiso* (*The Divine Comedy*), *Tristram Shandy*, and *Victory Garden*. These are ideas whose urgency supersedes grammar and poetics, whose explorations require second-person instruction, whose complex inter-weavings stagnate the waters of downstream-flowing linear thought, whose demands on ready-made language and risks to understanding are so mundane as to be tragic. In the end, I like that *Victory Garden* alternately claws at apophatic darkness and basks in sterilizing ozone.

There is just one more thing: What about Emily? If the cynic in us will not allow the happy ending, was she sacrificed as a rhetorical choice or should we mourn her as a tragic loss? Or do we manage to imagine the possibilities of both? Does the black screen effectively push Emily's trace into a limitless future in the way T.V. cliffhangers spawn sequels? Or, do we mourn her in Derrida's unsuccessful way whereby she is not fully

interiorized into our psyche but remains somehow apart, resistant, and sovereign? Is her near-death like her near-orgasms, more a product of postmodern literary discontinuity than anything else? Emily is a fiction, but really she is a postmodern, poststructuralist simulation. As living, breathing readers/screeners, we see her as a fiction—a game piece—not because of weak dialogue or poor characterization, not even because her future is unconfirmed, but because her future is a matter of choosing between yield-words. She has no dog tags or toe tag; she is a text existing somewhere between, in Ciccoricco's thinking, the traditional, historical, narrative poetics and "the influence of digital aesthetics" (3). She is lost in the conundrum of the black screen; her fate is a matter of committee; as a text, she is incomplete. Like Boris and Victor, we want more.

Embedded Ambiguity Can Still Be Damaging to Emily's Health

The screen "Happy Warrior" records a welcome home champagne party in which "Emily takes a thirsty swallow, wincing at the bubbles. She raises the bottle to the camera and the company assembled and says, "Peace and love. Long may it run." / Everybody cheers." "Happy Warrior" forces readers to question/reassess their interpretations and re-examine narrative details. Much like the initial fork-in-the-path choice between labyrinth and beginning, this decision follows either the momentum of a downward diagonal or the standard logic of left to right reading. By sheer quantity of elegiac text, Emily is presumed dead. By the logic of lifespan ends in death therefore she must have recovered from being thrown across the room in "…and…," Emily is home safe. That Moulthrop made both options available raises several red flags. Technological limitation is not an issue—choosing either option could have terminated the Emily storyline and limited future reading. However, we are reminded that *Victory Garden* was not conceived to be

an either/or fiction. Thus, we are left to view this gap between options as (ineffable but) generative and must look to the text for interpretive clues. Knowing already that Selig, Coover, and Koskimaa concede Emily's demise as probable makes decisions to the contrary tentative.

The title "…and Finally:" as we have learned, deserves comparison to other titles combining ellipses and the word "and." Moulthrop's use of similar titles signals a clustering or swarming of content which, in this case, indicates variations on the theme of closure. It is another example of postface becoming preface and offers what was earlier described as "tour guiding." The previously discussed pair of screens titled "…and…" present the text describing Emily becoming unconscious followed by the shattered screen graphic described as Moulthrop's "breakdown." Following the Miles story path leads to "And…"—an account from April (we guess of the same year and only two months after the February 25, 1991 attack we have come to think killed Emily). Herein, someone (we think Thea) asks Miles, "And what about Emily?" The dialogue continues: "He goes on admiring the ocean. 'Well she's gone,' he tells me. I can't think of anything adequate to say in response. 'It's hard, isn't it?' is what I manage." In this conversation, is Miles missing Emily or, more likely, mourning her loss? Clearly, the "and" is meant to remind us of what Douglas described as the "and and and" alternative to the "either/or" of traditional (metaphysical) reasoning.

"…and Finally:" is another bit of graphic art. We recognize a portion of the image from the title page and are struck by the idea of circling back that far. This screen is a little different. It features a simple black silhouette of Texas against a white background. Just below the map is a bold-face period. Inside the map is a maze of white

lines (arranged like the labyrinth schema of intersecting, north-south and east-west electrical conduit). It has no words that yield. Clicking the return key produces no next screen. Only by checking the browser icon do we learn of "praecox → ."[1] Following that option leads again to the all black screen, and despite appearances, the story is programmed to continue to the dream sequence lexia entitled "Slacktown"—a move we have come to expect. Our reading history prepares us to interpret the colon of "…and Finally:" as a critical bit of poiesis linking closure to a fork in the path to a geopolitical concept of Texas as labyrinth and the ~~finality~~ of looping text. Pursuing the browser icon's options means we do not escape our museum visit to *Victory Garden*. Had we settled for either the closure of the period or the fruitless return key, we would have experienced what Douglas terms "closure as satisfaction, satisfaction as closure" (31). As it is, closure and satisfaction are both inhibited by our failure to come to terms with the fate of the Emily character. Drawing from Moulthrop's broad allusion to "The Garden of Forking Paths," we have assumed the scene of Emily's demise signals some kind of hot spot. Remembering Fish's "*Interpreting the* Variorum," we look to the confusion itself as some kind of destination.

Liang's convincing explanation of phenomenal ineffability suggests Emily (as text) has retreated to the ineffable space between living and the sensory experience of dying—something Moulthrop reinforces in an October 2011 e-mail interview with Judith Malloy. Moulthrop responded to her question about the creation of *Victory Garden* and "the role of the Gulf War in the work" by saying,

> The first Gulf War grabbed my attention about as strongly as September 11 did a later generation's. While my Texas boots were never on the

> ground—*Victory Garden* is largely about war As Seen On TV—there was one arguably related fight to which I was a party: George H. W. Bush's decision to launch a "culture war" (his words) against American progressives. After the horrors and excesses of his son's regime, people tend to forget that rightward lurch by the old man—a somewhat feeble attempt to spin up the Nixon-Reagan Southern Strategy. I choose not to forget, just as I somehow can never overlook Mr. Reagan's decision to curtail my teenage brother's survivor benefits the year after our father died. True, as some of the Gulf War vets I've worked with have reminded me, you only understand how stupid it is to call anything political a "war" when the first actual bullet goes past your ear. But words do not just go past, they enter the ears, and other orifices, and there we are. (5)

In his response, Moulthrop confesses to waging a war of words, not one of bullets. His apologetics exclude dramatizing the sensory experience of scud missiles, while also distancing his own discourse from the poststructuralist dogma of everything is text.

Questions about Emily's fate are at the heart of any argument about closure in *Victory Garden*. Jane Yellowlees Douglas links this predicament to the existence of nine different "episodes of closure" in *Victory Garden* and asks, "If the text doesn't supply us with closure, do we generate it ourselves?" (31). Douglas cites Paul Ricoeur's insistence that conclusions be neither "deduced nor predicted," and that they "must be acceptable." "Looking back from the conclusion to the episodes leading up to it," writes Ricoeur, "we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of

action." Although Ricoeur's comments recall Derrida's process of preface as described in "Outwork," Douglas explains them in terms of "prediction." She writes,

> As Peter Brooks argues in his study of narratives, *Reading for the Plot*, we read 'in anticipation of retrospection' (1985:23)—that is, anticipating that everything we meet in the course of reading will make sense once we hit the ending. Moreover, the very act of reading involves the act of prediction: we make sense of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and whole novels based on our interpretation of the words we are reading—in an immediate sense, in light of the ends toward which we imagine they are leading us. (31)

Later in her essay, Douglas observes, "physical endings and the closure they impose on a narrative act as a litmus test of the validity of our interpretations of the narrative…interpretation is a combination of prediction and selection" (32).[2] Douglas, of course, realizes most criteria for closure were intended for "non-interactive media" and suggests Barbara Herrnstein Smith's two facets of closure as more appropriate for hyperfiction. Smith envisions closure as one, "the point at which, without residual expectation, [readers] can experience the structure of a work as, at once, both dynamic and whole"; and two, the point "where goals are satisfied and the protagonist [can] engage in no further action" (qtd. in Douglas 33). "In lieu of physical endings, interactive narratives offer their players a sense of the narrative as a whole" (Douglas). Douglas believes closure becomes a matter of completing or realizing "the greatest number of narrative possibilities," and, that in future interactive media, closure will be increasingly

provided by the "reader/viewer/player." Closure, she surmises, will become increasingly interactive.

One of the contributions of the blank and black screens is that they are pivotal without being explicit. They are structures of ambiguity (large granularity) embedded within *Victory Garden*. As a reading community, we are trained to interpret them, to make predictions and selections based on them, which not only complete or realize "the greatest number of narrative possibilities," but also "engage" the protagonist "in no further action." Michel Chaouli believes however that readers cannot "become hermeneutically active and think their own thoughts about what they are reading" until they have been "released from the labor of constructing a text on a material or topological level" (608). Further, he would argue that "mutable" texts prevent the reader from knowing if "textual blanks,"[3] are "caused by the machine or the user's manipulation." Mutability is one of the attributes of *Victory Garden* that, as Selig complained, diminishes over the course of many readings. Early experiences of cognitive overload diminish as the meta-sense of narrative (fabula) develops. As a result, readers become increasingly able to accomplish (project strategies of) closure.

Gaps like the blank and black screens are obviously programmed roadblocks to any developing sense of closure. As textual blanks they are noteworthy because they are what Chaouli describes as topologically "overdetermined"—"the conscious or unconscious expressions of an agent (be it a person or an impersonal discourse) worthy of our projections" (609). Semantically they are underdetermined. We do not know what they mean; we only know that they present us with a construction site and a building permit. The screens titled "…and…" present two clear interpretations: "Alas poor Emily"

or what I have called the default option—Emily is a casualty of the First Gulf War—and "Somehow we got disconnected" or what could be labeled the path harder to find—Emily returns home triumphantly. Besides being easier to find (closer to a print reading experience of turning the pages), the casualty option also negotiates the pressure of Moulthrop's anti-war rhetoric: the war is worse (easier to protest) if she dies the victim of an unlikely scud missile hit. Oddly, historical evidence also favors Emily as a casualty and is well established by Ciccoricco.[4] Still, culpability regarding Emily's fate is only simulated. We move the cursor and click on an alternate storyline with a video gamer's nonchalance and wonder about disconnect and loss of interest. The blank and black screens serve in part to remind the reader that you ("U") have helped engineer a system to explain Emily's fate.

The Downside of Interactivity

Of course, no decision about Emily's fate need be made at all. Like the discussion of winter feasting generated by Milton's sonnet, literary value arises from the debate alone. Should our opposition to a war fluctuate with the number of casualties? Does Moulthrop's provocative aside, "you're a tougher mark than I gave you credit," set a satiric criminal tone or promise to expose literature's seedy underbelly? Does the "you gotta love this game" cull traditional readers? Or, does it speak with jaded irreverence about postmodernism's frustration with social progress? Why, when we are asked to "Come In," do we get a sense of haunted house? These may be the kinds of questions Moulthrop has in mind for readers of *Victory Garden*. He also clearly wants readers to experience being manipulated by texts. *Victory Garden* is after all a mediated labyrinth experience. If Moulthrop's intention was to break down, to deconstruct, the passivity and

helpless resignation of U.S. combatants (Emily et al. waiting out attacks in their chemical warfare suits) and their home front support group (sending e-mails complaining about the war machine), then he did so by playing the game we assume he deplores. Any euphoria over society's "salvation by hypertext" (Chaouli 606) is circumvented by paranoia about who controls the flow, the deployment, of information (Tara professors arguing about the Western Civ. course canon). Chaouli doubts that any "move toward equality in social relations is hastened by liberating the signifier."[5] He, in fact, argues that for authors and readers to share the burden of meaning-making is dangerous to fiction reading. Chaouli proclaims, "'Interactivity'—high communicativity of any sort--interferes with the unfolding of literature" (607).

Interactivity, claims Chaouli in the essay "How Interactive Can Fiction Be?" has been mistakenly labeled "a good thing" (604). "It is a moral category packaged as a technical feature." Chaouli believes (hyperfiction's) interactivity—sold at the dock as passage to an affordable and level field of opportunity whereby the reader becomes a co-writer—redistributes the power and patriarchy of the writer's pen (605-606). Hypertexts, he thinks, "merely by permitting the reader the option of actualizing different versions of a text, acquires the melodramatic role of holding off 'the imposition of a principle of domination' (as Bolter would have it)" (606). In 1992, Coover likewise testified that the novel is "patriarchal, colonial, canonical, proprietary, hierarchical, and authoritative" and forecasted its dominance would be ended by hypertext, "a radically divergent technology, interactive and polyvocal, favoring a plurality of discourses over definitive utterance and freeing the reader from domination by the author" (qtd. in Chaouli 606).[6]

Chaouli's critique of interactivity suggests that by constantly frustrating the reader's sense of immersion, hypertext authors (like Moulthrop) necessarily generate "a crisis of fictionality" (616). This, I would argue, is evident in our assumptions about closure in the Emily storyline. However, rather than worry about textual ambiguity, Chaouli's argument seeks to explain the disappointments associated with hypertext reading experiences. He first tenders the common technical complaints submitted by computer readers: eye strain, loss of bearings, required use of clunky remote controls, and the demands of awkward posture (600). Then he addresses the problems inherent in creating a fictional world from hypertext (what was initially defined by pioneer Ted Nelson as "non-sequential writing") (601-602). Readers cannot engage critically, Chaouli reasons, until, as stated earlier, they are "released from the labor of constructing a text on a material or topological level" (608). Just being faced with multiple narrative options (multiple link-words and narrative forks) burdens the reader with meaning making and results in an onset of "a certain mental blankness" (611). "The confusion we sense results in part from the semantic looseness that marks all hyperlinking (for every click is a leap into uncertainty)" (612). Chaouli would argue that while Moulthrop's web-like maze of disjointed linear elements may help to replicate and extend mental constructs into virtual space, it does not conjure a fictional world. In all likelihood, Moulthrop would gladly accept such criticism claiming interrupted immersion, like aeration, makes for good gardening.

Interactive reading experiences are also plagued by the asymmetry of fiction and nonfiction.[7] Citing the work of Niklas Luhmann, Chaouli explains that while reading

fictional texts requires the reader to "insert" a "copy of reality," reading hyperfictions requires the reader to

> violate not the distinction of fiction and reality but rather the far more crucial copy of this distinction within fiction itself. For through my choice I intervene in the fictional world, and I do so urged on by my real appetites and anxieties. Instead of extending the range of fiction to myself, my self advances into the fiction. In contrast with ritualized acts of reception (such as turning a page or circling a sculpture), when reading hyperfiction I change the course of the narrative according to my own motivations, which may remain opaque to me. The moment a part of reality appears in its stark nonfictional form within fiction, the latent reference that fiction maintains to reality is interrupted, and the fiction itself begins to come apart. (613)

The argument in this case is that once we see ourselves determining the plot (itself a moment of anagnoris), classic Aristotelian action is interrupted. Luhmann and Chaouli seem unwilling to entertain the sense of being an avatar necessary to respond as the "U" of second-person narration. They focus on the frustration of having to select among story options. For Chaouli, "To narrow the range of possible outcomes and thus the uncertainty" means that "the world of fiction would feel, not open, but rigged" (613-14). Applying this deduction to Liang's observation that any reduction in the aesthetic experience is met with a similar drop off in phenomenal ineffability yields the conclusion that crises in fictionality correspond to a counterproductive cheapening of the blank and black screens. We see these screens as topologically and semantically pivotal and expect

our investment in their meaning and value as a source to be repaid. Author-reader parity backfires when we realize that labels like "ineffability" and "tragedy" are as much a matter of our own investment as Moulthrop's. Moreover, structures like the blank and black screens lose their value while hopes for grandiose thesis statements plummet. Selig and Koskimaa do warn readers that this fiction is (slippery) "buyer beware." They do not acknowledge the way interstices can alternately expand and contract or that reading *Victory Garden* becomes a kind of respiration.

The loop we have just made from semantic richness to poverty is indicative of Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* and should be represented in any accounting of that text. Cycles of advancing and receding understanding are the phenotypical outworking of a genetic code of checks and balances implemented by Moulthrop. He would have his audience question authority and engage its own reading processes. Labeling this type of interactive engagement as "confusing" loses sight of Moulthrop's greater goal, his "culture war" with George H. W. Bush.

Another problem of interactivity in *Victory Garden* stems from its status as a 1991 want-to-be-virtual simulation. Moulthrop's simulacrum of the First Gulf War is not problematic because we are unsure about Emily's status;[8] Moulthrop's simulacrum is problematic because the competing texts within *Victory Garden* remain incomplete without our intervention. Simultaneously cemetery and garden,[9] *Victory Garden* is a heterogenous space, representative of what Foucault terms a "heterotopia."[10] Incompatible issues are juxtaposed and remain incomplete in a demanding reading environment (garden). Chaouli praises hypertext for "instantiating polysemy, indeterminancy, contingencey and difference" (609), but he warns against the confusion

of literal and metaphorical "that emerge[s] when it is not the understanding of a text but the text itself that remains uncompleted, requiring construction by the reader" (610).

As earlier noted, confusion, alien presence, and increased workload are big reasons why readers avoid hypertexts, but there are others. Chaouli writes, "claiming that hypertext [in Landow's words] 'creates an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment' of concepts found in literary theory sidesteps the question of whether the literal embodiment of a concept functions exactly the way its metaphorical instance does." This issue is fundamental to Chaouli's argument about why people do not read hyperfiction. Writers of hyperfiction (like Moulthrop) create "a theoretical short circuit that takes the literal for the metaphorical" (Chaouli 610). They pattern their narratives on theories like simulacra and deconstruction and then expect reader-critics to ignore the all too cozy lack of Baudrillard's "sovereign difference between map and territory"—to address the already abstracted/mediated texts as a map (complex labyrinth) of an outside, living, breathing world full of polluted Whitman Creeks, actual consummating orgasms, and exploding scud missiles. When literature is written from theory instead of the other way around, then not only are labels of academic writing well deserved, but also the natural residue (the byproduct of digital language being applied to analogical experience) is greatly reduced. "Residue" and "*différance*" are the topological home places of phenomenal ineffability. Their absence or diminishment conveys a famine of Thoreau's "extra-vagance" and result in an antiseptic reading experience—weird but not wild.[11]

The complex fluid dynamics of *Victory Garden*'s incomplete and competing texts, demands for readers to decipher and predict, problematic mix of fiction and nonfiction, and macroscopic tendency to insert (confuse) literal theory for found reality is

actualized (presented and stated) in our reading experience. What Moulthrop describes as knowledge proceeding by way of discursive and recursive loops ("Know About That") is evident in the close parallel between reading *Victory Garden* and (the owner's manuals of) phenomenological and deconstructionist theories. Take for example the popular (mis)conception of *Victory Garden* as a leftist leaning text. The exchange of e-mails between Thea and Emily suggests the university faculty leans toward the political left. Moulthrop's unflattering portrayal of a pro-war fraternity seems to confirm political favoritism. However, the text counterbalances that ideology with Emily's inexplicably sincere (possibly naïve) patriotism and willingness to serve. Deciphering leftist ideology inserts a prediction that future narrative strands will be anti-Bush, anti-First Gulf War, but reading "Because Because Because" to the tune of "Obladi Oblada" posits either a laisse faire "How the life goes on" or unreality of research-induced dream sequence or sardonic reading of wishful thinking. Reading Emily's loss as tragic better fulfills "I told you this would happen," anti-war reading strategies. For such pressure to be met with indeterminancy is one of Moulthrop's objectives. Ciccoricco records Moulthrop's comments about the mix of political ideologies from a 1994 interview: *Victory Garden*, claims Moulthrop, "is a story about war and the futility of war, and about its nobility at the same time" (qtd. in Ciccoricco 1).

Reading multiple, cut up, hyperlinked plotlines is supposed to mimic our encounter with a world in which everyone's story goes on all at once. Moulthrop and Joyce seem to disagree about whether the stories go on without us or not. Joyce observes disconnect while Moulthrop seems to suggest it is our reading experience that straddles the divide. He uses the various encounters with Emily to plum that disconnect. As has

been suggested, *Victory Garden* uses confusion to simulate the threshold of our encounter with the world's stories. Classic realism, according to Colin MacCabe cannot produce "a contradiction which remains unresolved and is thus left for the reader (i.e. spectator) to resolve and act out" (qtd. in Hill 211).[12] Engaging the reader therefore threatens classic realism while at the same time subverting any dominant discourse. Moulthrop considers this a win-win situation. Consequently, themes develop, like the meta-narrative, through a calculated and slower process of interaction. Moments when our reading is impeded are both necessary and helpful.

The mechanism by which we progress through Moulthrop's garden is paradoxically denied in the screen titled "And Now…". Coming after "…", an all-white screen featuring only a small infinity symbol (see Figure 7.), "And Now…" is another all-white screen, blank except for the message "— peace —". This screen, unlike the all-black screen ".", offers no yield-words, no browser options, and no default narrative advancement. We read "— peace —" as the absence of choices or more accurately the moment between them. Earlier close readings equate peace with the ineffability of *différance* or possibly the interstice of hyperlink. All we can do at this point in *Victory Garden* is logout or go back to the infinity sign and whatever was before that. Checking the "Locate" feature reveals a screen/lexia titled "Peace Now": a romantic, loving post-coital celebration of oneness, contact, and continuity between Harley and Veronica. A narrator tells us, "Watch closely, angels: this is one of those impossible moments, deceptively quiet but oh so far from equilibrium. It can't last and they know it. They don't care. They're at peace." The next screen, titled "Not Now," interrupts the reverie with a CNN bulletin: "Flashes of light, they're saying. Reports of gunfire in and around

Baghdad. Stand by." Besides reinforcing the theme of discontinuous (cut up) encounters with a world of stories, this plotline also comments on the ubiquity of television and suggests we rethink our perspective on "history." Acknowledging the forward and backward reading process his text requires, Moulthrop inserts "Big Story." This screen features more puzzling commentary: "History is not about return or repetition. You can't get back to the future. History, the big story, is about the possibility of rapid and fundamental change. The kind of thing people fight wars about."

What's So Tragic about Peace, War, and Discontinuity?

The concept of *Victory Garden* as simulacrum may be most vulnerable in the lexia featuring graphic art. These are the screens that present more questions than answers and, in so doing, potentially damage any developing sense of realism by asking more of the reader. The account of Emily passing out after being thrown through the air and across the room, reads like a crashed airplane's black box. After the sequence, she feels cold, fear and adrenaline kick in, and the pain and buzzing go away. We read (without a subject) "dimming out black and silent kind of like falling asleep she was sleepy now more like passing out drunk or when she has to have a general wisdom teeth impact world smaller small her world going away me too" (without a period). We do not question the trauma's ineffability and accept its negative effects on both the stated communication and its poeisis (reminiscent of *Paradiso*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Patterson*, "Book Six"). The concluding "me too" is the twist, the dramatic complication, and segue to the second "…and…" screen. See Figure 9. The third frame of this three-screen sequence is the all-black screen's feigned aphasia. Again, see Figure 4.

In the moment our computer screen does not really shatter in the second "…and…." we see ourselves reading a clearly reproduced graphic of a fractured screen on a working computer monitor[13] wondering if this passage is an obituary of Emily as text. The residue Moulthrop intends for us to experience is a bundle. The ineffable residue we encounter is not just the *différance* between experiencing a real broken monitor and the simulation of a broken monitor (between seeing a mountain and seeing a postcard of a mountain). The residue most crucial to Moulthrop's thesis about corrupted logic is one step further removed. We experience the simulation of a fractured text (a postcard/e-mail) describing Emily's trauma of going dark. As per D. W. Harding, losing Emily is not a matter of wish-fulfilment, nor do we experience the fractured text vicariously. We simply rehearse reading about losing Emily. Ironically, the black screen indicating an Iraqi missile strike connects all our stories by turning Emily's text (not Emily the fictional character) into residue of trace, of a text sublated,[14] of ~~text~~. In fact, Emily the character need not die as long as her text becomes a trace.

Joyce poetically intimates this reality in the "Introduction." Describing *Victory Garden* he writes, "buzzing dreams come scudding like allusions to the sweet silent rockets of the past" (16). "Dreams come scudding" acknowledges the viability of *Victory Garden*'s dream sequences. It also speaks to a dreamscape already one step removed from memory and many possible steps (spheres) removed from an actual scud missile in flight. Joyce also seems to be referencing the undermining logic of deconstruction. What he insinuates as the process of "allusion" (part of postface becoming preface), Moulthrop fondly frustrates. Every hyperlink choice brings us to a literary version of "scudding" missiles—unpredictable input. Nonlinearity, especially as experienced by the reader

through hyperlinks, presents more than patterns we recognize.[15] We are also presented with the need to "jump" between discontinuous texts.[16] Meta-patterns form meaning as we process the ineffable residue of their discontinuity.[17]

In *Victory Garden*, we read about characters experiencing memories of once having been integral in Emily's story. We also encounter others watching the war on T.V. To them, Emily is an unnamed extra, a statistic, a text. If she is killed in the attack, she gains the familiarity of being a named oddity.[18] The e-mails and televised news coverage emphasize more than the physical distance; they also emphasize the mediated screens through which we come to know her. Realizing such an ultimate disconnect may be the profound gift televised warfare provides its viewers—viewers get to rehearse threats to lifestyle, an increased connectivity with death, and pornographic display of total personal engagement (courage). Tragic is the readymade body bag/schema of our meta-reading. Tragic is the way we (dis)miss options like her homecoming in "Happy Warrior." Tragic is the way repetitious T.V. viewing numbs us to its limited version of reality and lulls us to sleep not from realism or illusion but from the substitution of short circuits in phenomenal ineffability.[19] Tragic most of all is realizing, in accordance with Iser's analysis, that the "virtual reader me" has killed off the "alien part" of me that was Emily. This is Moulthrop's greatest success.

Postface→Breadcrumbs→Preface

Tempter. Fare forward to the end.

All other ways are closed to you

Except the way already chosen.

……

Third Priest. …In the small circle of pain within the skull

You still shall tramp and tread one endless round

Of thought, to justify your action to yourselves,

Weaving a fiction which unravels as you weave,

Pacing forever in the hell of make-believe

Which never is belief: this is your fate on earth

And we must think no further of you.

(*Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot)

Our reading of *Victory Garden* addresses the complex, fog-of-war obscured realities of the First Gulf War through what are now dated-looking, small screen lexia instead of the paper pages of print they were to replace or, more significantly, in an arcane format unsupported by contemporary e-books. Just reading the Moulthrop classic requires a computer from that same era. [The ten year old I-mac I borrowed faithfully runs the no-frills *Victory Garden* program on CD.] After opening the files for instructions and introductions, clicking on the work of fiction opens a default-sized small screen that occupies the upper left quarter of the computer screen. See Figure 7. The story screens never cloak the device that presents them. Their appearance and disappearance speak volumes to presence and absence, to the engagement and disengagement with elusive texts, and programmed "randomly" triggered, recursive loops. Even the reader's sovereign act of terminating a reading session demands yet another encounter with a darkened screen.

Both the well-crafted maze and the reader's hard-fought investigation come to characterize *Victory Garden*. Perhaps short-circuited, deconstructionist literary aims;

Borges-inspired, literary maze; and requisite, gamer's mentality are not a happy mix after all. Perhaps a heavy reliance on reader's response and impressionist criticism-based writing makes for a sterile postface-colludes-with-preface pairing. Or, perhaps the genre of hyperlinked fiction has merely progressed through some kind of obstinate adolescence. Or, just maybe, this quirky, once-called new-era classic, now languishing in obscurity hyperfiction succeeds in a profound and previously unacknowledged way. If how we see "inheres" in what we see, as Marco Abel explains, then it is appropriate for Moulthrop's words to disturb and be disturbed as an actualization of a made for T.V. war. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan claims, "Media are not just passive channels of information. They support the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought…" (qtd. in Carr, par. 4). For *Victory Garden* as a hyperfiction, this is doubly true. Consequently, as Iser prescribes, "The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious" (299). In this light, Emily is more than our pilgrim's guide. She is part of us. The screen "Now" states, "I was reading… / Then I reflected that everything happens to a man precisely, precisely now. / Centuries of centuries and only in the present do things happen; countless men in the air, on the face of the earth and sea, and all that really is happening is happening to me…" It is a shame we needed to meta-murder her in the Cathedral.

In his essay "Pushing Back: Living and Writing in Broken Space," Stuart Moulthrop reminds, "Cybertext is not simply a revolt against connection and coherence, but it does ask us to redefine those terms" (8). This echoes the sentiment Moulthrop expresses in the *Victory Garden* screen "The Place of the Big Wind":

> History, they tell us these days, isn't what it used to be….Maybe history is different for us. Perhaps hypermediated and postmodernized, we now live in a universe that looks suspiciously like a Garden of Forking Paths. Or, perhaps the old way of understanding our lives—struggle, question, commitment; love, loss, mourning—can't really be pushed aside. I didn't set out to resolve that issue. I set out to put some stories in motion, hoping they'd take me somewhere. Here's where they led…"

Ultimately, Moulthrop's stories coalesce and reaffirm the old ways, but not before we see them refract through the shattered (simulated) broken screen of the second "…and…" or overlap and interlock at the nonverbal spaces of the blank and black screens.

Moulthrop chronically risks and sacrifices Cixous's fragile "betweenus"[20] to make his point about political leadership during the First Gulf War. He gets us to "jump outside the game" ("Pushing Back" 12) so that we might recognize the war machine's foggy "gimmick." We connect the dots via hyperlinks which Moulthrop admits are "obtrusive and peremptory…a quick dissolve or flash cut" (9). They are "inherently confusing" and "must also convey something of a phenomenological crisis or surprise [even] when they work as intended" (10). He further admits, "Cybertextual work cannot deliver the infinite variation that its multivariate structure disingenuously promises." The mind and narrative program "will always be a mismatch in the end." "Cybertexts are not plagued by breakdown; rather," claims Moulthrop, "they are conceived in breakdown."

Breakdowns are, in the realms of hyperfiction writing and artificial intelligence research, fertile ground. Breakdowns are the malfunctions which, in the words of Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, interrupt "our habitual, standard, comfortable 'being in

the world' and reveal "the nature of our practices and equipment" (qtd. in "Pushing Back" 10). Breakdowns stand between us and the plots that ruin the world. Appropriately orchestrated, they signify the disconnection inherent in First Gulf War television coverage. In terms of what is tragic, breakdowns are a game changer. In the world of *Victory Garden*, the historic roles of order and disorder (chaos) are challenged. Because Moulthrop employs an over-determined (quietly chaotic) black screen, Emily's death becomes more than "fade to black." As a schema deciphered by meta-readers looking for satisfying closure, assuming her death reads, like Oedipus's self-imposed blindness, as a way to maintain order. "Happy Warrior" becomes the hard to swallow blasphemy; the ineffable screens become the smoke and mirrors under the stars.

Postface

Perhaps during the last twenty years critics have been unwilling to engage the text of *Victory Garden* beyond the point of meta-reading summary for the very reason it succeeds as fiction: the reading experience is hard to resolve. The packaging of *Victory Garden* I propose hinges on the almost unasked question of Emily's fate and is corroborated by the pivotal role of the blank and black screens.

The stories Moulthrop puts in motion ultimately indict the communications of war correspondents, government officials, and disengaged armchair generals in the tragedy of an as shown (seen) on television war. As moral players, our stories intersect in such a way that we are all in the war. We might ask, "Is *Victory Garden* a satire?" I would argue yes and no. The labyrinth's voice asking us to "Come in" tips the scale toward cartoonish. Something, however, rings true in Moulthrop's re-creation of the U.S.A. home front during the First Gulf War. His message of breakdown is strangely appropriate

to the unpredictability of scud missiles; greenish, other-worldly, night-vision video footage; and commercially televised reports of death half a world away. Moulthrop does not give us a credible history. Nor does he give us an ultimatum of disconnect. As in Wright's reading of *Tristram Shandy*, we finish *Victory Garden* without conclusion—suspicious that the wounds are irreconcilable and aware that Moulthrop has borrowed the First Gulf War as topos for his reprise of Sterne's question about how anyone comes to know anything. As Wright proclaims, art re-creates what is "ineffable, ineluctable, and certainly tragic." Here, Moulthrop adds the disclaimer: dissemination is corrupt, and we, as characters and readers, must always negotiate.

APPENDIX: LIST OF SCREENSHOTS

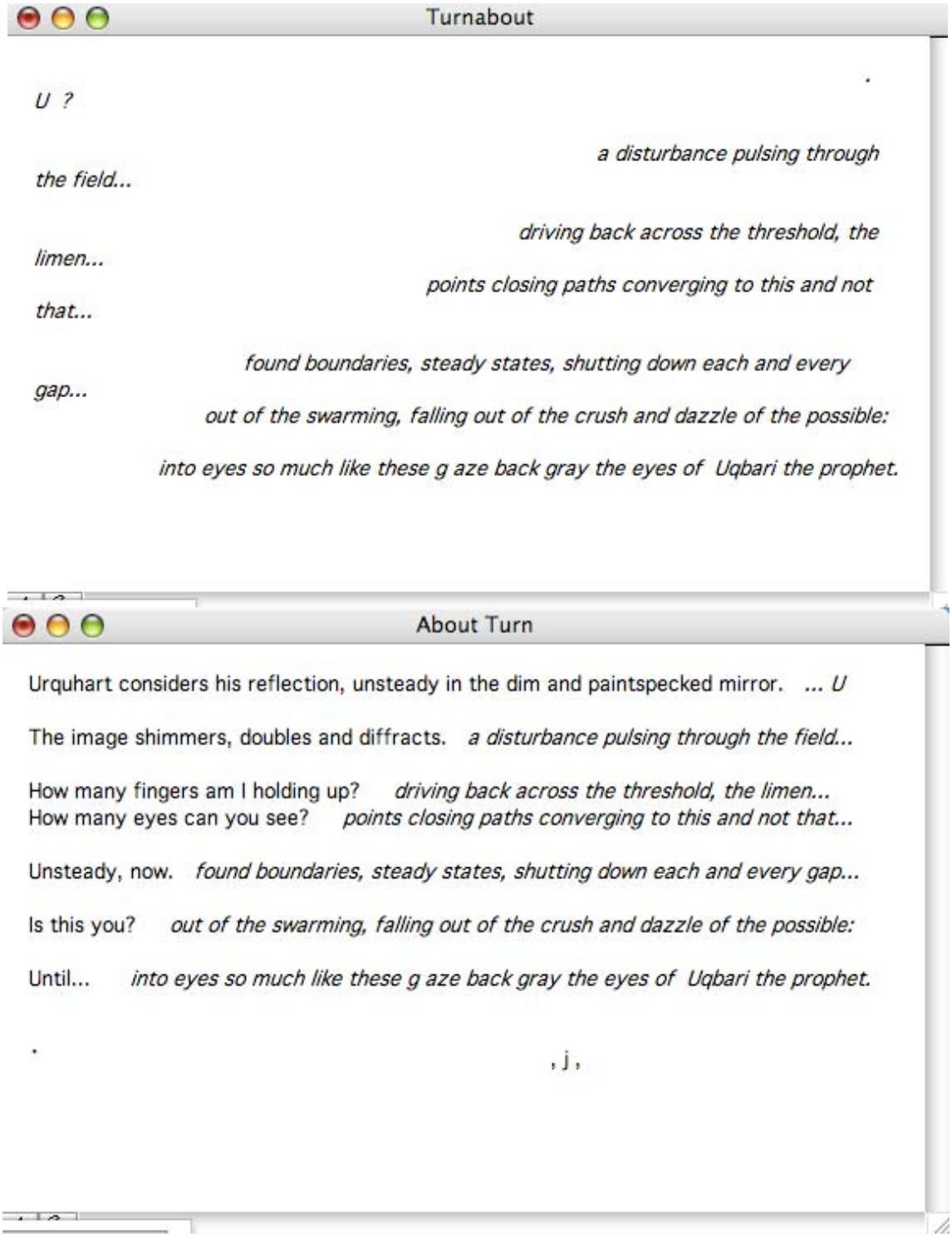

Figure 1. “Turnabout” and “About Turn”.

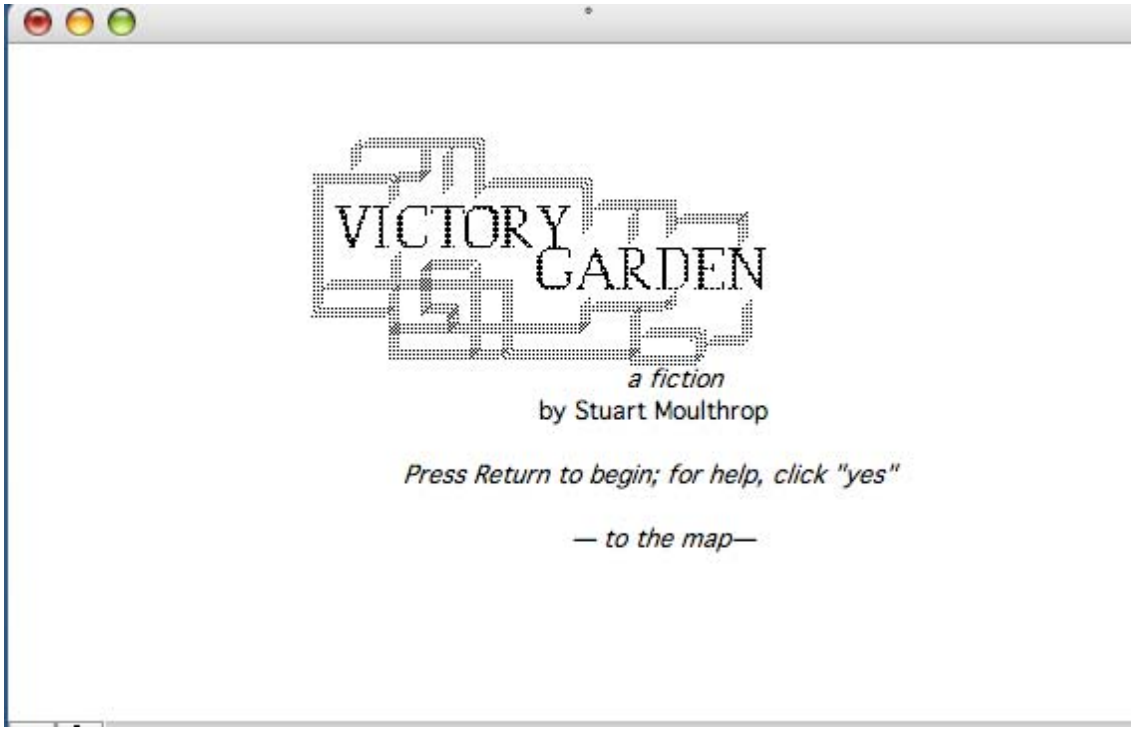

Figure 2. Title Page.

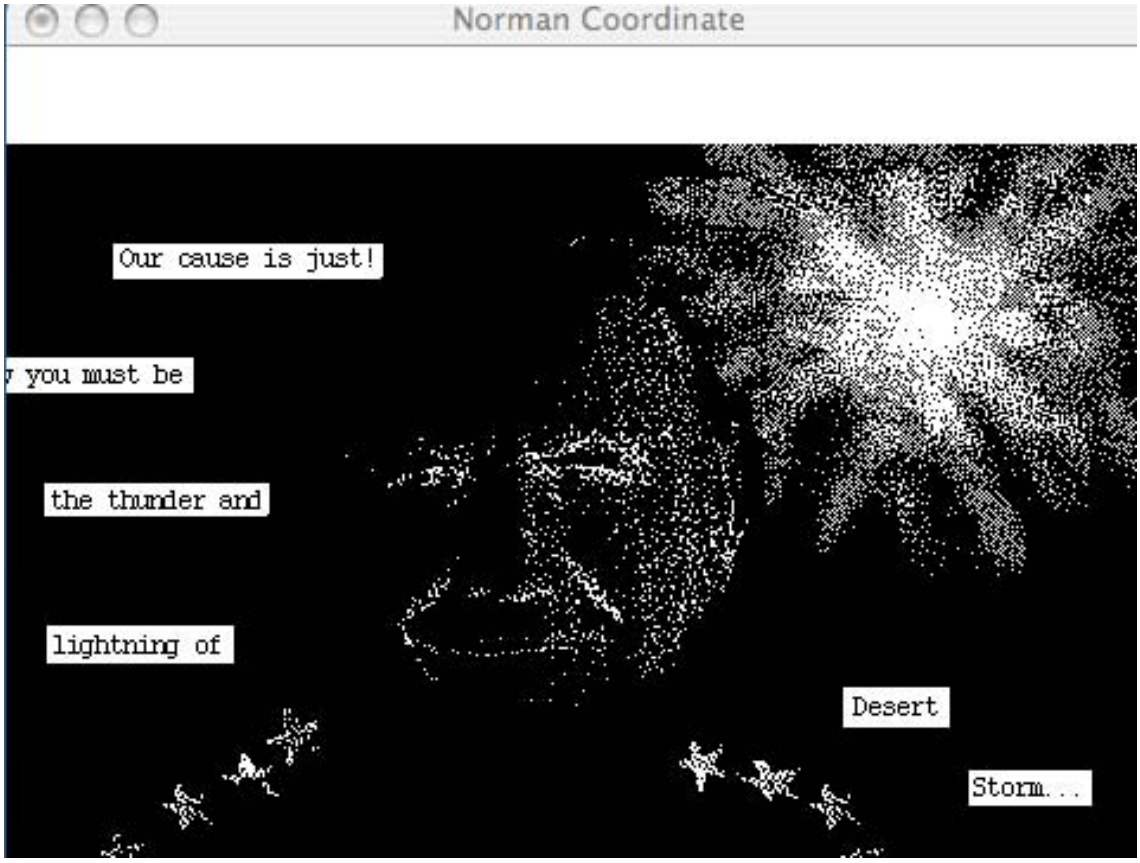

Figure 3. “Norman Coordinate”.

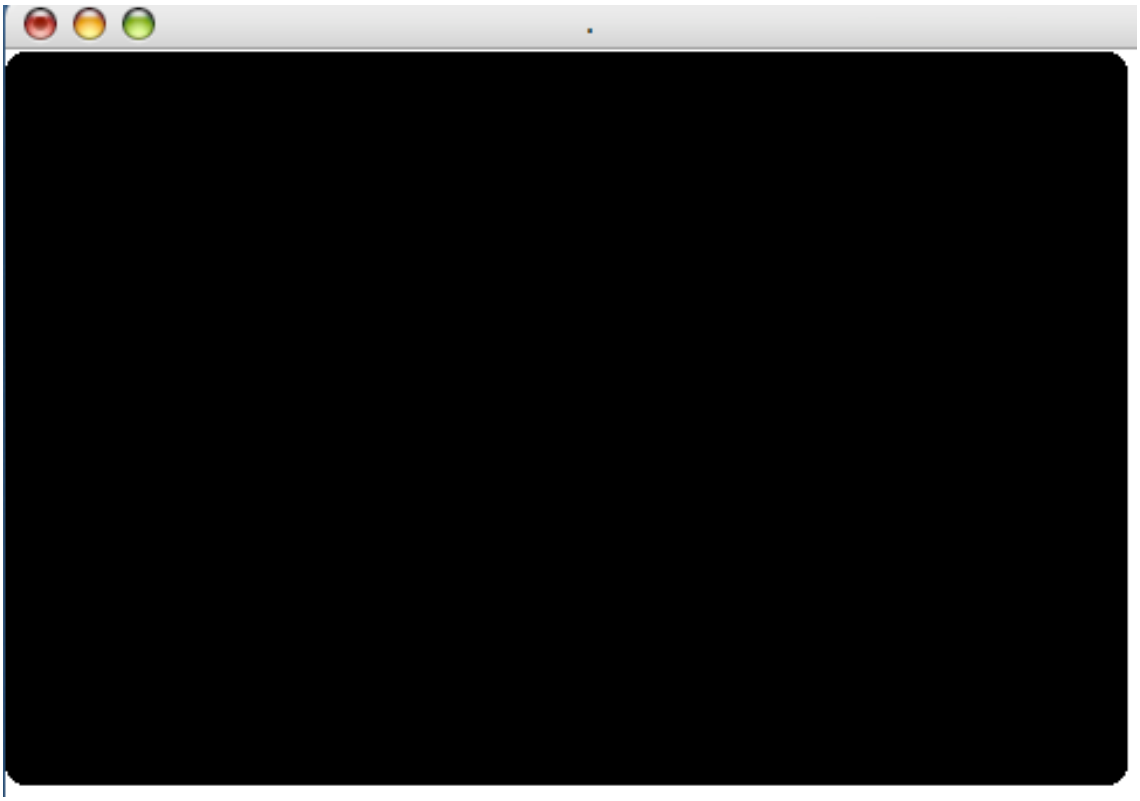

Figure 4. “.”—The All-Black Screen.

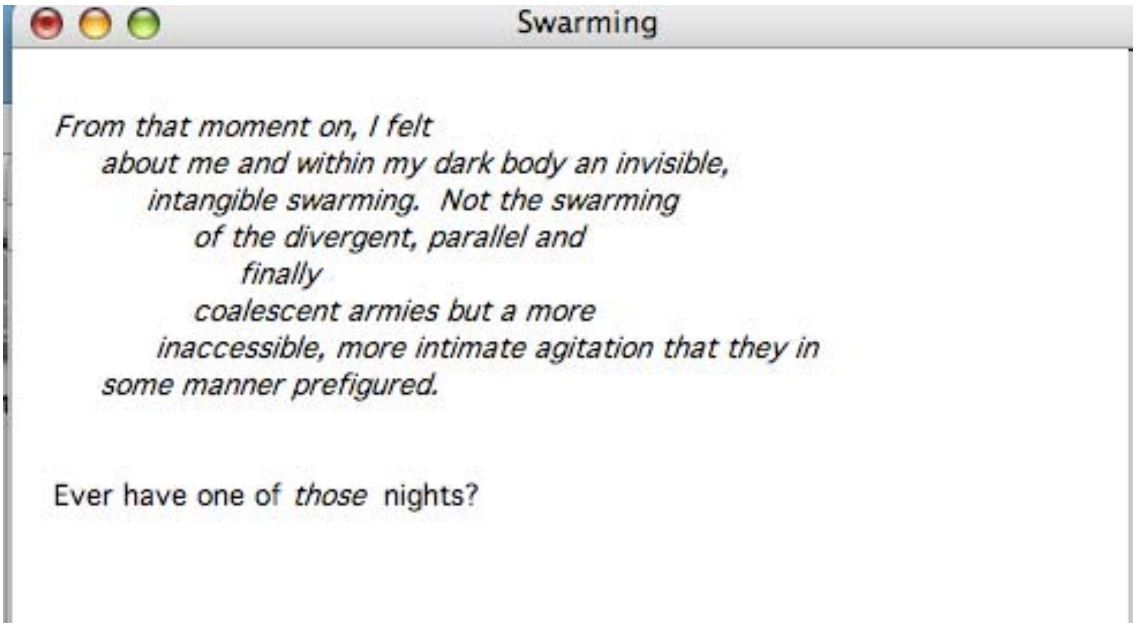

Figure 5. “Swarming”.

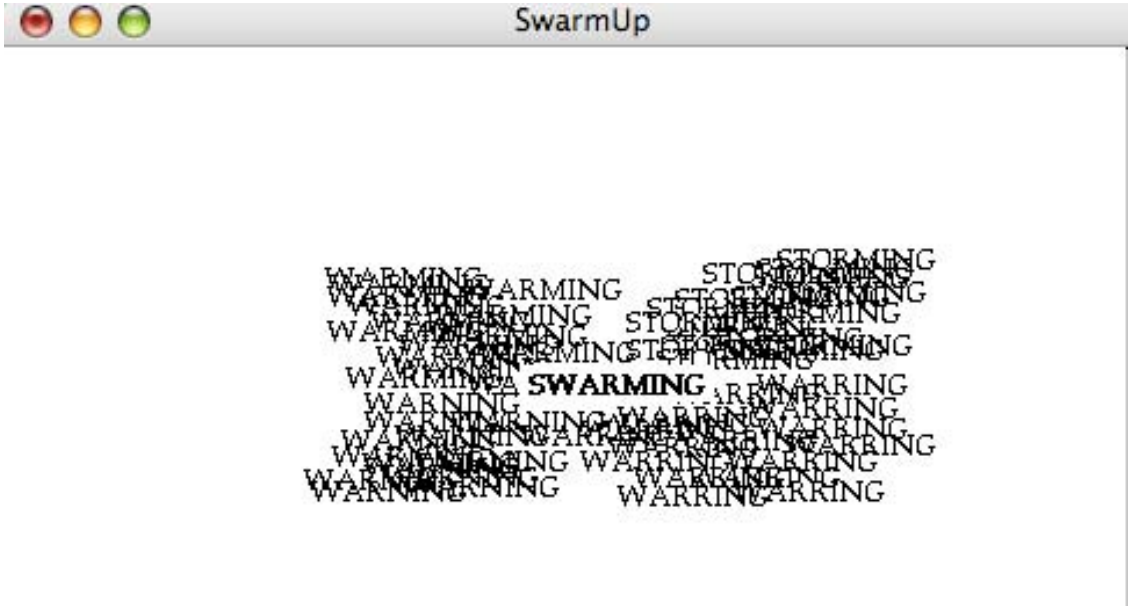

Figure 6. “SwarmUp”.

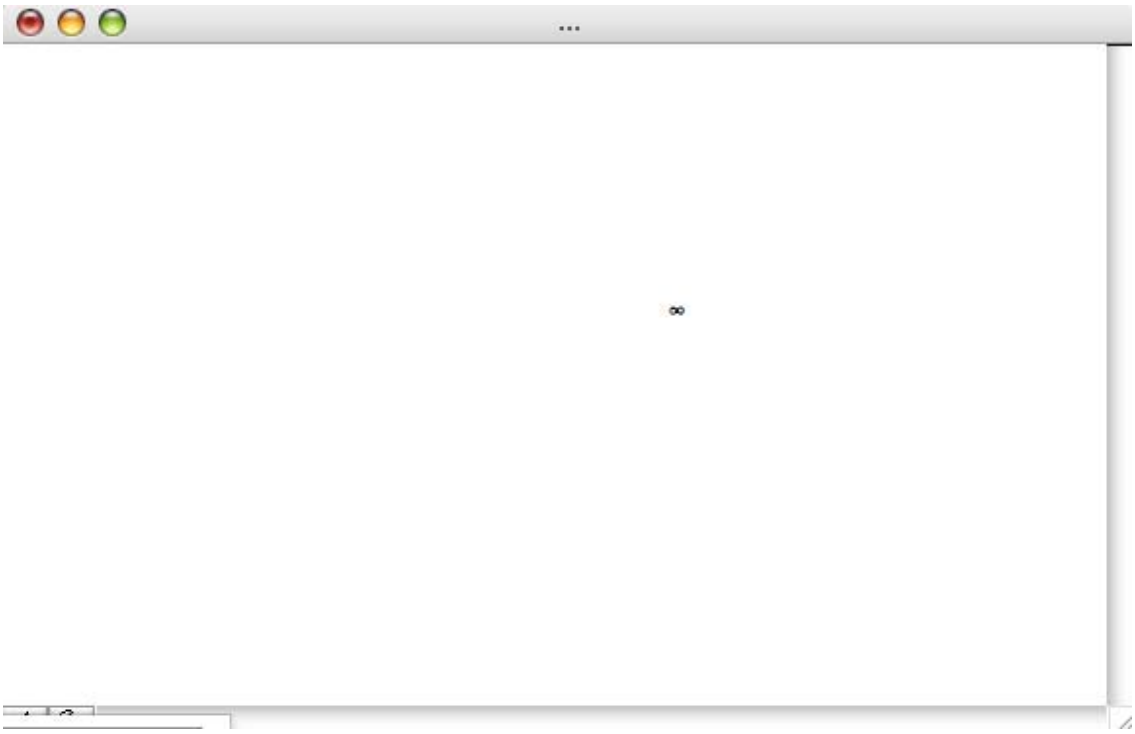

Figure 7. “…”.

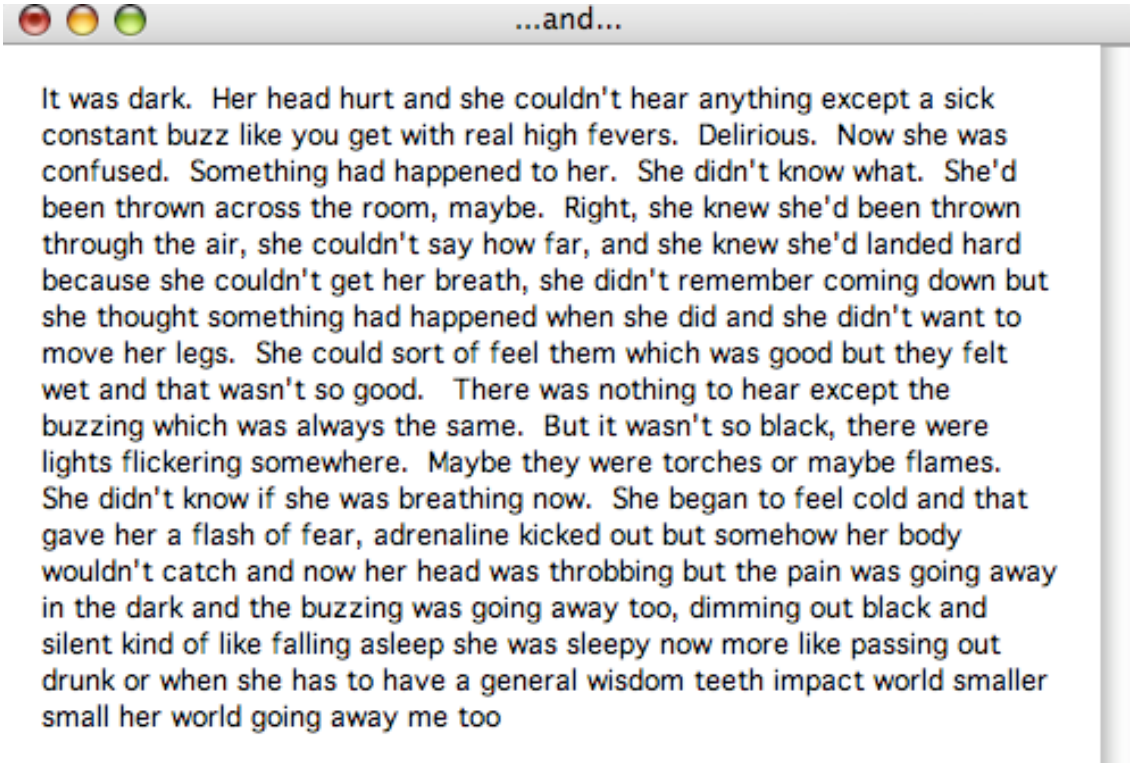

Figure. 8. The First "…and…".

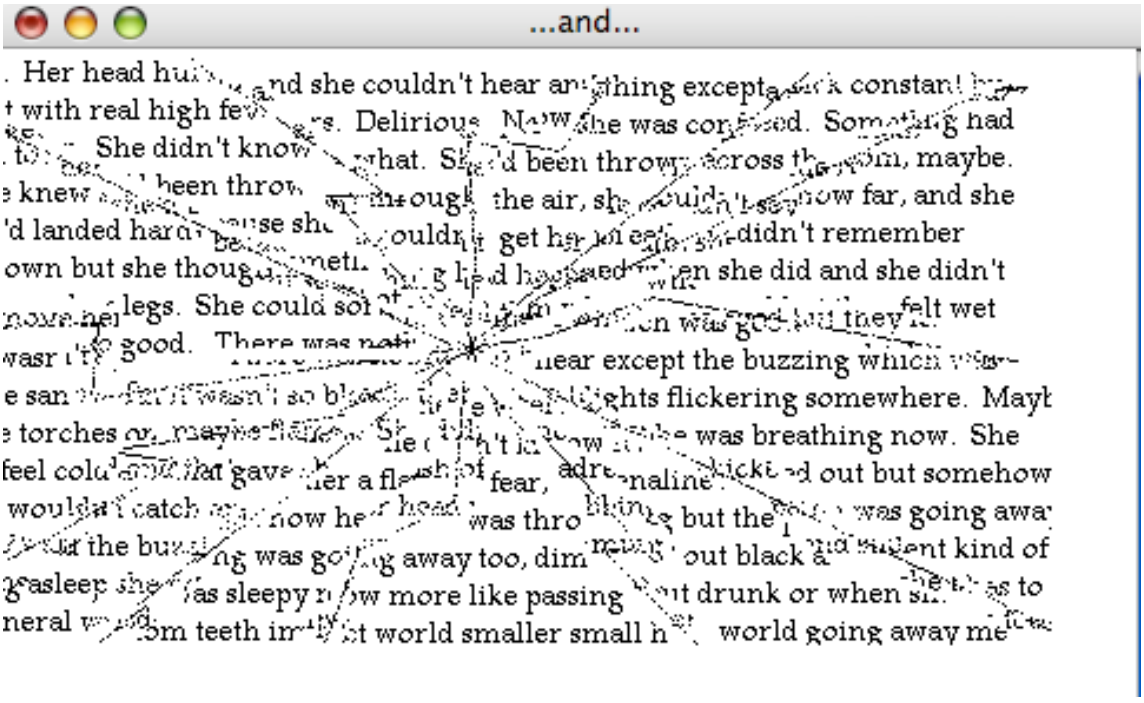

Figure 9. The Second "…and…".

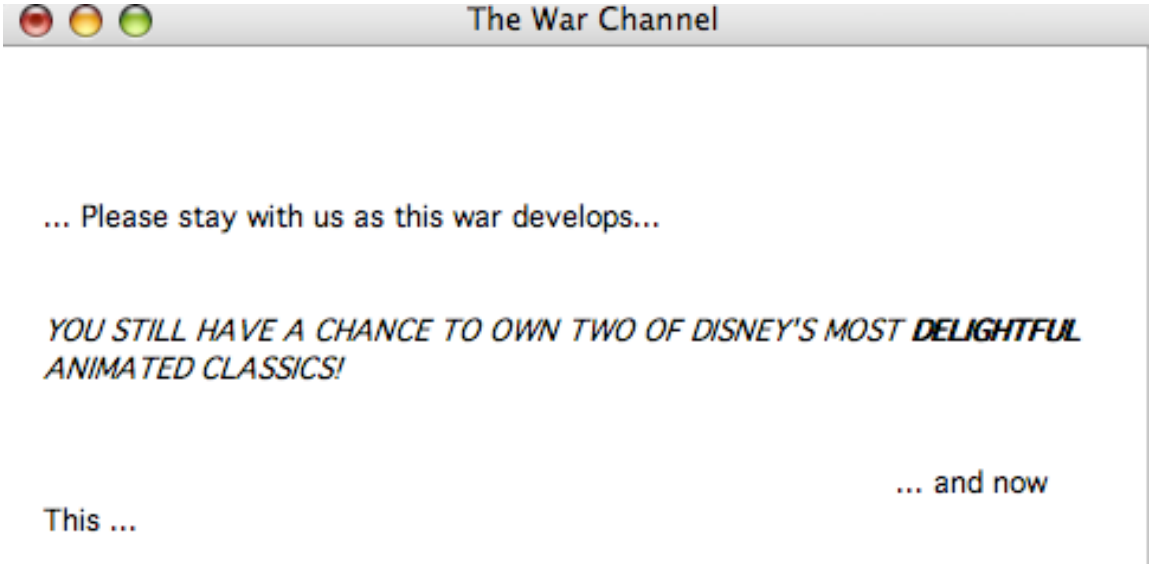

Figure 10. “The War Channel”

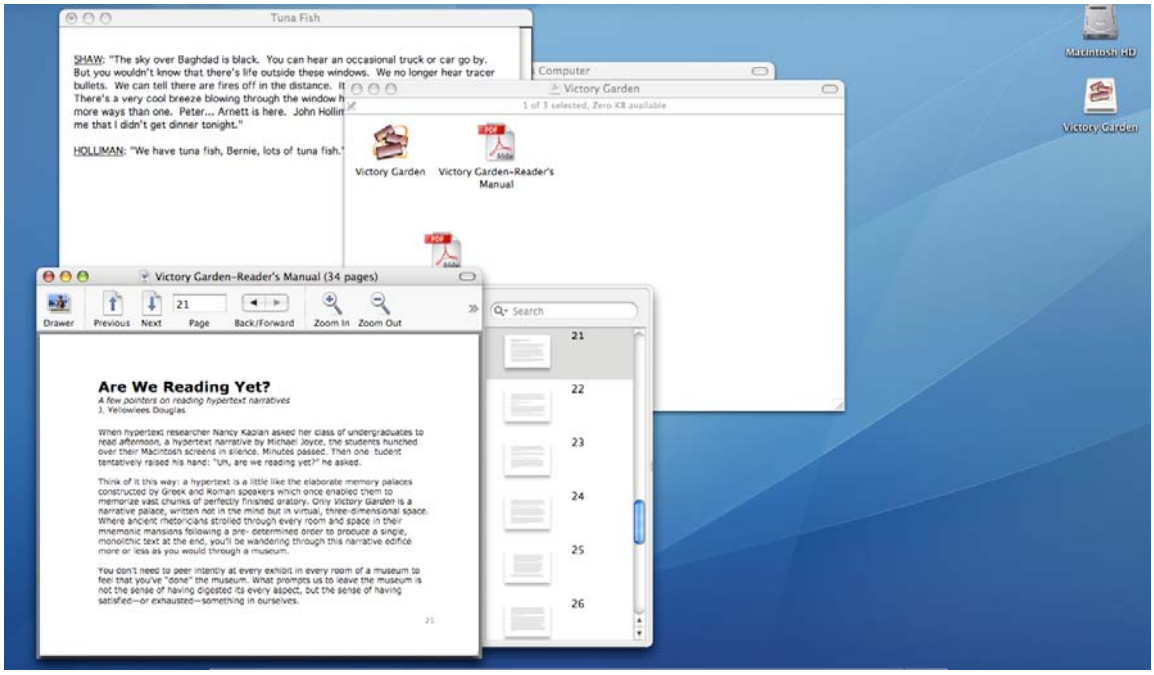

Figure 11. Full-Screen Shot.

NOTES

Introduction

1. In “Where the Senses Become a Stage and Reading Is Direction: Performing the Texts of Virtual Reality and Interactive Fiction,” Jane Yellowlees Douglas establishes the dystopian lineage of hyperfiction as a descendent of Huxley’s feelies, Gibson’s simstim, and the Virtual Reality games with scripted outcomes. While the line between interior and exterior or between Text and Audience/Self is crossed, the move is “not radically new in the history of performance” (19). Virtual Reality “immerses us more completely” (20), “promises to bring that other world physically, viscerally inside us” (21), but it “differs only by degrees.” Our control over the plot, she writes, “is more illusory than real.” She notes Sartres’s view of the act of reading, which he exults as a form of directed creation but which amounts, in the end, to our simply and fleetingly lending our emotions to a fictitious Other” (20).

2. In the article, “The Irreducibility of Space: Labyrinths, Cities, Cyberspace,” Veel also explains Aarseth’s view that reading hyperfiction is an “ergodic process” (168). She writes,

> ‘Ergodic’ is derived from the two Greek words ergon and hodos, which mean respectively ‘work’ and ‘path,’ and it describes open, dynamic texts such as digital narratives that demand that the reader takes action (works) to create a narrative sequence by choosing the paths by which the narration goes (Aarseth 1). This refers to my suggestion that the reader has to perform the process of the implied author, not that of the author.

3. “Storyspace,” writes Joyce, “embodies Bolter’s view that the ‘topographical’ writing of hypertext ‘reflects the mind as a web of verbal and visual elements in a conceptual space” (*Of Two Minds*, 23).

4. Storyspace is a textbook poststructuralist system. As *The Bedford Glossary* explains, “Poststructuralists …believe that signification is an interminable and intricate web of associations that continually defers to a determinate assessment of meaning. The numerous possible denotations and connotations of any word lead to contradictions and ultimately to the dissemination of meaning itself” (400).

5. The “golden age” designation is suggested by Robert Coover. In Coover’s 1999 keynote address “Literary Hypertext: The Passing of the Golden Age,” he refers to pre-world wide web hyperfiction as “pioneer narrative hypertexts explored the tantalizing new possibility of laying a story out spatially instead of linearly, inviting the reader to explore it as one might explore one's memory or wander a many-pathed geographical terrain, and, being adventurous quests at the edge of a new literary frontier, they were often intensely self-reflective” (par. 6). In his Review of *Victory Garden*" for *The New York Times*, Coover wrote, “No one has taken on the hard questions about hypertext and fiction or played so intransigently with the myriad possibilities and obstacles of this new art form as has Stuart Moulthrop, its leading practitioner and theorist. The publication ... of his first full-length narrative work, *Victory Garden*, marks a new stage in hyperfiction's development."

6. Even if these early hyperfictions are deemed unsuccessful, their consistently recognized failings may comment even more on the tendency to “preserve hierarchy.” To buttress this possibility, I offer Stanley Fish’s argument in “*Interpreting the* Variorum”

that 270 years worth of commentary obsessed over the same pattern of unsolvable problems. In the case of Milton's "Sonnet 20," the word "spare" may be parsed as either "leave time for" or "refrain from." Fish suggests it "is a controversy that cannot be settled because the evidence is inconclusive. But what if that controversy is itself regarded as evidence…of an ambiguity readers have always experienced?" The lines of the poem "first generate a pressure for judgment…then decline to deliver it." Fish concludes, "This transferring of responsibility from text to its readers is what the lines ask us to do" (*Is There a Text in this Class?* 147-151).

7. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* celebrates this narrative technique. The obvious difference being that the Faulkner text, which uses a variety of successive retellings to reveal a monolithic timeline of narrative events, builds dramatic tension all the way until the final pages. Moulthrop, on the other hand, randomly deconstructs any potential moment of anagnorisis, and, by denying a sense of closure, curtails catharsis.

8. Not achieving transparency is arguably appropriate for *Victory Garden*. Its resolution, like the (atomized) reality Moulthrop probes, is precisely pixilated but fuzzy. Tone, scenery, and voices are specifically monochromatic—simplified to facilitate multiple interpretations. More generally, hyperfiction's inherent conflict between story conveyed and vehicle of conveyance illustrates larger issues of mapping indicative of simulacra. Systems like Storyspace may then be seen as an added layer between writer and reader.

9. Dictionary.com defines "cyborg" as "a person whose physiological functioning is aided by or dependent upon a mechanical or electronic device. Origin: 1960–65; cyb (ernetic) org (anism)."

10. A *Google Scholar* search of Stuart Moulthrop and *Victory Garden* yields “about 324 hits.”

11. I will also reference Robert Coover’s review of *Victory Garden* for *The New York Times* which features a thorough plot analysis and corroborates the Selig and Koskimaa readings.

12. I refer to the Russian formalist distinction between “fabula” or “how events in a story would be recounted chronologically” and “syuzhet” or “how they are actually presented” (Murfin and Ray 327).

13. Joyce observed that computers “enable ‘fervent errors,’ the kind of errors Henry David Thoreau spoke of as extravagant: “I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. *Extra vagance!* it depends on how you are yarded” (*Walden* 315).

14. A potential critical repercussion of this multiplicity is that a reader becomes more than unstable. The reader may be envisioned as plural.

15. Joyce borrows the term “cognitive overhead” from page 40 of Conklin’s 1987 article, "Hypertext: An Introduction and Survey."

16. As Koskimaa summarizes, “the reader may move in the text by pressing the return key after reading each lexia, double clicking anchor words, opening the link list and selecting a link from the list, by typing a word in the type-in box… or, by back-tracking her way. From the title page on, the reader has several options” (2).

17. Stanley Fish claims in “How to Recognize a Poem When You See One” (1980) that poems are “made” and not “decoded” and that interpretation “is not the art of construing but the art of constructing” (27).

18. Raine Koskimaa’s 2000 *Digital Literature: From Text to Hypertext and Beyond* begins its discussion by noting, “*Victory Garden* has been all but neglected by the critics…receiving mentions as a rather traditional, typical academic novel, etc” (1).

19. I would argue that each reading could be considered a cubist painting’s compression of the narrative subject and the resulting construction a “mashup.”

20. The role of ambiguity does not deny or destabilize the kind of scaffolding envisioned by T. S. Eliot. In section “V” of “Burnt Norton,” Eliot proposes, “Words, after speech, reach / Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness…”

21. Michael Joyce uses the term “parallax gnosis” to describe *Victory Garden*. “Parallax,” according to the *Random House College Dictionary* is defined as “the apparent displacement of an observed object due to the difference between two points of view.” “Gnosis,” from the Greek for “a seeking to know,” is defined as “knowledge of spiritual things, mystical knowledge.”

22. Like the hybridity, the rhetorical cracks and fissures, of (Victorian) colonial fiction, *Victory Garden* proceeds from a disparate gathering of home front viewpoints. However, Moulthrop’s fiction is unified not by a “go forth unto all nations,” but by a rhetoric of anti-war paranoia. The only Middle Eastern presence consists of displaced U.S. soldiers who never leave base. Moulthrop does not give voice to “the enemy” beyond the missile attacks. Nonetheless Homi Bhabha’s essay “How Newness Enters the World:

Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation" suggests that narrative invention is seminal in cultural praxis. Bhabha theorizes that what Walter Benjamin terms "that element in a translation which does not lend itself to translation" positioned at the interstice between cultures, dramatizes the moment when misapplied names become blasphemy (301). "To blaspheme," writes Bhabha, "is not simply to sully the ineffability of the sacred name….it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation" (302). I propose this dynamic helps explain the awkwardness of hyperlink fiction. Hyperfiction readers/screeners must constantly assimilate. In reference to Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Bhabha explains, "For the migrant's survival depends…on discovering 'how newness enters the world.' The focus is on making linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life—the dangerous tryst with the 'untranslatable'—rather than arriving at ready-made names" (303). Moulthrop, in a sense, explores all reading as unstable flirtation with both the "untranslatable" and the "ready-made." We will come to see Moulthrop's use of the blank screen as pop quizzes, exposing or measuring our dependence on the ready-made names. Tragedy is, in this context, the malfunction of ready-mades.

23. Bolter's treatment of the evolution of hyperfiction closely follows the Jeffrey Conklin's 1987 "Hypertext: An Introduction and Survey."

24. To begin *in medias res* is appropriate to hyperfiction.

25. I understand this to be a reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Twilight of the Idols* which suggests that "the old truth is on its last legs." "Return of" implies reprise and unfinished business in a postmodern, comical way. *The Cambridge History of Literary*

Criticism discussion of deconstructionist theory explains, “Most of Derrida’s work continues a line of thought which begins with Friedrich Nietzsche and runs through Martin Heidegger. This line of thought is characterized by an ever more radical repudiation of Platonismoof the apparatus of philosophical distinctions which the West inherited from Plato and which has dominated European thought. In a memorable passage in *The Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche describes ‘how the true world became a fable’” (*From Formalism to Poststructuralism,* vol. 8)

26. Again, any reading of *Victory Garden* may be impossible to duplicate exactly. This resistance partially explains the reluctance of scholars to engage this text.

27. Return/enter again speaks to the concept of *Victory Garden* as labyrinth.

28. Here I continue to use the past tense. While I recognize the MLA convention and rhetorical power of the present tense, the odds of this reading ever being repeated are nil. As such, it is a unique past tense experience.

29. Here we are reminded of T. S. Eliot’s epigram for “Burnt Norton,” a borrowing from Heraclitus: “The way upward and the way downward is one and the same.”

Chapter One

1. This is Iser’s citation of the 1956 London edition. I read *Tristram Shandy* as an Amazon e-book. Discrepancies between versions will figure into my conclusion. This discussion will return to Sterne in Chapter 3.

2. Michael Joyce writes, “A constructive hypertext should be a tool for inventing, discovering, viewing, and testing multiple, alternative organizational structures as well as a tool for comparing these structures of thought with more traditional ones and transforming one into the other” (*Of Two Minds* 42-3).

3. If *Victory Garden* had a glossary, "grouping" would be listed as a possible translation of "swarming." Swarming is discussed further near the end of this chapter.

4. Also, in *Victory Garden*, we come to picture ourselves as readers doing all those things despite constant interruption. The labyrinth metaphor invites us to see resistance as a pre-programmed aspect of Storyspace that must, in Iser's poetics, be understood as part of the illusion, part of the picture ("you've gotta love this game," writes Moulthrop). While Iser predicts that when "one detail appears to contradict another, and so simultaneously stimulates and frustrates our desire to 'picture,' thus continually causing our imposed 'gestalt' of the text to disintegrate," we become frustrated and "put the text down" (290), Selig claims we put down the text when the picture and its apparent contradictions become repetitive.

5. At this point I am reminded of *Villette*'s stormy conclusion and the probable drowning of M. Paul, especially as it is tempered by the trace of doubt. Also, in John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" the text proclaims, "*The day wore on*. You think you're yourself, but there are other persons in you" (85).

6. Swarming as a tactic was used successfully by the North Vietnamese Army and embedded 9/11 terrorists. The strategy is especially relevant in the information age because it prevents a long chain of command from becoming logistically cumbersome by empowering local operating units to work independently to meet shared goals. In the 1991 Operation Desert Storm, Coalition Forces used GPS technology in synchronized swarming strategies (*Wikipedia*). One version of its implementation is the OODA loop (attributed to military strategist John Boyd) and refers to an ongoing strategy of observe, orient, decide, and act. The OODA model has been applied to business management and

sports (mindtools.com) and could just as easily be a strategy for a hypertext reading. In "America's Broken OODA Loop in Action: A Swarming Attack by Ankle-biters in Our Intelligentsia" Fabius Maximus reports:

> Summary: It's fun to watch narratives form in the media, such as the one we examine today. Often mindlessly wrong, but each probably fills some need in our collective psyche. Unfortunately this embrace of nonsensical narratives is part of our growing inability to clearly see the world — which is rapidly weakening America. Observation is the first step in the OODA loop. If that fails, we fail. (fabiusmaximus.com)

7. All lexia can be located individually by clicking on the "Edit" tab at the top of the screen, scrolling down to "Locate space," and selecting the desired title from the alphabetical list.

8. According to the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "undecidability is one of Derrida's most important attempts to trouble dualisms, or more accurately, to reveal how they are always already troubled. An undecidable, and there are many of them in deconstruction (eg. ghost, pharmakon, hymen, etc.), is something that cannot conform to either polarity of a dichotomy (eg. present/absent, cure/poison, and inside/outside in the above examples). For example, the figure of a ghost seems to neither [be] present or absent, or alternatively it is both present and absent at the same time (SM)."

9. Writing in *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Hayles suggests the relationship between hypertexts and deconstruction has evolved. She quotes Bolter's claim in *Writing Space* that hypertexts "took the sting out of deconstruction" (32). She also recommends the work of Markku Eskelinen, Lev Manovich, and others.

10. Derrida thinks that “the phenomenological emphasis upon the immediacy of experience is the new transcendental illusion” (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Jacques Derrida (1930-2004),” “Time and Phenomenology”).

11. Barbara Johnson discusses, “the critique [deconstruction] reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, universal in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself” (xv).

12. Hegel argues, “Logic…cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its own content” (qtd. in *Dissemination* 18). In *Science of Logic?* Hegel notes,

> In no science is the need to begin with the thing itself (*von der Sache selbst*), without preliminary reflections (*ohne vorangehende Reflexionen*), felt more strongly than in the science of logic. In every other science the subject matter and the scientific method are distinguished from each other; also the content does not make an absolute beginning but is dependent on other concepts and is connected on all sides with other material (*Stoffe*). These other sciences are, therefore, permitted to speak of their ground and its context and also of their method, only as premises taken for granted. (qtd. in *Dissemination* 17)

13. “Ouroboros” is an ancient alchemy symbol depicting a snake swallowing its own tail. Mentioned in *Paterson*, “Book Five,” as

> “The (self) direction has been changed
> the serpent

its tail in its mouth
‘the river has returned to its beginnings’
and backward
(and forward)
it tortures itself within me.”

The typographic similarity to “Swarming” is uncanny.

14. Derrida would redefine writing as “that which critiques, deconstructs, wrenches apart the traditional, hierarchical opposition…” (4). Writing “should no longer be able to assume any reassuring form…”

15. Derrida insinuates that “preface” is “admissible today” (despite Hegel’s objections) because “no possible heading can any longer enable anticipation and recapitulation to meet and merge into one another” (*Dissemination* 20).

16. Johnson’s footnote for “Logocentric” defines it as

> that which is ‘centered’ on the ‘Logos’ (= speech, logic, reason, the Word of God)—is the term used by Derrida to characterize any signifying system governed by the notion of the self-presence of meaning; i.e. any system structured by a valorization of speech over writing, immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and (self-) presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity.” (*Dissemination* 4).

When Moulthrop’s character named Tate speaks about the “End of History” it is with overtones of undoing a Logos-based history.

Chapter Two

1. “Will” comes from the 1980 Allen Mandelbaum translation: “Here force failed my high fantasy; but my / desire and will were moved already— like / a wheel revolving uniformly— by / the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”

2. The disparity between this notion and the Michael Joyce sponsored optics of parallax gnosis is a critical example of metaphysics vs. what Richard Rorty, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, explains as thinkers twisting free from the influence of traditional binary oppositions (1). In a note he adds, “The phrase ‘the transcendental signified’ is one of Derrida’s terms for an entity capable (per impossible) of halting the potential infinite regress of interpretations of signs by other signs” (5). In the ‘Afterword’ to *Limited Inc.*, Derrida suggests that metaphysics can be defined as: “The enterprise of returning ‘strategically,’ ‘ideally,’ to an origin or to a priority thought to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order then to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. (qtd. in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Jacques Derrida,” “a. Metaphysics of Presence/ Logocentrism”).

3. In addition to text attributed to Dante in *Can Grande* discussed below, Martinez pulls from the text of *Paradiso* to establish his thesis that “there is nothing of actual ‘mystical’ experience in *Paradiso*. He cites 1.22-4 “that I may make manifest the shadow of the blessed kingdom that is stamped within my head,” 1.67 “Gazing at her [Beatrice] I became within what Glaucus became tasting the herb that made him a consort of the other gods in the sea,” and 1.70-2 “to signify transhumanizing *per verba* is impossible, therefore let the compassion suffice for those to whom grace reserves the experience” as

evidentiary support. Claims Martinez, Dante's pilgrim "does not ascend the essential paradise (the Empyrean itself), but to its intellectual, spiritual, and moral significance."

4. "Polysemous" or "having plural meanings" is from Dante's own description in *Can Grande, Epistle* 13. Dante describes the *forma tractandi* or "mode of exposition" of *The Divine Comedy* as "poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive, as well as defining, dividing, proving, disproving, and positing of examples."

5. Defined as "the impairment or loss of the faculty of using or understanding spoken or written language" by *The Random House College Dictionary*.

6. It is as if Liang is claiming the coast of Great Britain is measurable or despite Zeno's paradox we do arrive.

7. According to Qian (1995), there is no limit to the number of times a "coarse-grained lexical term or grammatical category can be paradigmically replaced by a finer grained one" (qtd. in Liang 36). Such an infinite regress reminds us of Derrida's transcendental signified.

8. As for the counter-argument of "picture theory," Liang notes, "Peter C. Appleby (1980, p. 154), who concedes the occasional complete inexpressibility of intense experiences, especially those 'involving profound emotion, psychological shock, or experiential novelty,' points out that de facto ineffability or ineffability-in-principle claimers believe in a picture theory of language, which states that 'the basic function of language is to create or evoke images in the mind of the reader or listener corresponding to those in the mind of the writer or speaker'" (37).

9. Does non-digital residue mean that everything is not a text?

10. Michel Chaouli argues that hypertext theorists Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen would have us believe dissemination is a matter of "electrifying the signifier." He writes, "In cyberspace all texts have always already self-deconstructed, and all readers, it seems, are poststructuralists even if they may not realize it" (604).

11. The similarity of this second option to the gap in Freud's interpretation of his own "Irma's injection dream" is significant.

12. Moulthrop tells Judith Malloy, "I started playing with Storyspace in the late 1980s, when Jay and Michael handed me early beta versions. At the time I was more interested in Hypercard, largely because of its multimedia features. There are painters and visual artists in my family tree, I've always been powerfully attracted to comics…" (5).

13. This is not to say the screen titles are insignificant. "This Is It" and "." signal closure while "…and…" signals that there is more data to be gathered.

14. "Radical prosopoeia" is a phrase borrowed from Darryl Whetter's comments about the black and white forces at work in the typesetting of *Paterson* by William Carlos Williams. Williams exploits "the animating properties of moving type, attention to sequential operations, and an explicit exchange of *Paterson*'s internally-regulated typography with that of a commercialized public domain (262). According to *The Bedford Glossary*,

> "prosopoeia: (1) A synonym for personification. (2) A figure of speech…in which an absent, dead, or imaginary person is given voice, typically through another person. In "Autobiography as De-Facement" (1979), deconstructive theorist Paul de Man defined prosopoeia as 'the

> fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech'" (410-411).

15. Moulthrop, in "Pushing Back: Living and Writing in Broken Space," explains,

> Hypertext Markup Language provides very few structures for maintaining a larger context. The preterite space through or over which we move remains unseen—though since subsequent links may take us to points within that space, it remains present to the reader's awareness at least by implication….we might think of links as having two components: the visible, binary circuit of connection (technology's fort/da) and the unseen matrix of structure of possible structures against which this transaction is realized, figure against ground. (9)

I suggest the blank and black screens function in the same ways.

16. Sublation is the translation of the German "Aufhebung" "which is Hegel's term for the simultaneous negation and retention of what is being surpassed by the progress of dialectic thought. To sublate is to erase but leave a trace as per a palimpsest or Freud's magic drawing board.

17. "The trace does not appear as such…but the logic of its path in a text can be mimed by a deconstructive intervention and hence brought to the fore" (*IEP*, "Jacques Derrida," "d. Trace").

18. In *Dissemination*, Derrida proposes the concept of "transcendental signified" which "situates every signified as a differential trace" (5). *Différance*, explains Johnson, "is a Derridean neologism combining the two senses of the French verb *différer*,—'to differ'

and ‘defer or postpone’—into a noun designating active non-self-presence both in space and time.” Elsewhere she explains, “*Différance* is not a ‘concept’ or ‘idea’ that is truer than presence. It can only to be a process of textual work, a strategy of writing” (xvi). Derrida writes,

> *Différance*,” also designated, within the same problematic field, that kind of economy—that war economy—which brings the radical otherness or the absolute exteriority of the outside into relation with the closed, agonistic, hierarchical field of philosophical oppositions, of ‘*différends*’ or ‘*différance*,’: an economic movement of the trace that implies both its mark and its erasure—the margin of impossibility—according to a relation that no speculative dialectic of the same and the other can master, for the simple reason that such a dialectic always remains an operation of mastery.

19. This comment flags Storyspace’s lack of animation.

20. *Modus vivendi* is Latin for “manner of living”; “a temporary arrangement between persons or parties pending a settlement of matters in debate” (*Random House College Dictionary*). *Modus operandi* is too monolithic for a Derrida-inspired discussion.

21. The happy alternative Moulthrop provides by hyperlink brings to mind the line from John Barthes’s “Autobiography,” “A change for the better still isn’t unthinkable; miracles can be cited. But the odds against a wireless *dues ex machina* aren’t encouraging” (*Lost in the Funhouse* 38). As an interpretive community, we probably share this pessimism.

22. Here again is another example of William Carlos Williams-styled typography. The specific allusion in this case is to “lift off into flight.” The ellipsis chronicles absence and omission and trace.

23. Part of Moulthrop’s poetics is the continual presence of the storytelling mechanism—what Ciccoricco calls “a resistance to…invisible storytelling technology.” Like Marie-Laure Ryan’s tourists trapped in theme parks, Moulthrop’s lexia “, i” begins “**YOU STILL HAVE A CHANCE TO OWN TWO OF DISNEY’S MOST DELIGHTFUL ANIMATED CLASSICS!**” Moulthrop’s “War Channel” lexia repeats both the Disney theme and the requirement for code switching. See Figure 10.

24. Derrida writes, “A preface would retrace and presage here a general theory and practice of deconstruction, that strategy without which the possibility of a critique could exist only in fragmentary, empiricist surges that amount in effect to a non-equivocal confirmation of metaphysics” *Dissemination* 7). In reading a deconstuctivist-inspired text like *Victory Garden* against the grain, I have done just that. This essay essentially follows my path of discovery. My introduction began as a fascination with the category of non-linear fiction, but was changed to conform to academic standards. Originally, I had no preface until this point in my reading. Also, while I explore the meta-reading consensus that Emily is a fatality, any interpretation, including the one where she comes home alive, is a flirtation with monolith.

25. In the lexia “National Dick,” Moulthrop puns on the word “return”: “In some cases Return is simply impossible; this too is part of the American story. Nixon for instance. The man lies beyond recovery….he has lived through his own apotheosis.”

26. Sven Birkerts refers to the missionary position of reading as beginning a book on page one and following it through to the end (Chaouli 614).

Chapter Three

1. As per thefreedictionary.com, “Praecox Etymology: L, premature pertaining to something that occurred at an earlier stage of life or development.

2. Her comments add probity to my thesis of ineffability as a (reductive) reading strategy.

3. Wolfgang Iser’s concept of “textual blank” “refers to all those silent spots where the text’s meaning remains implicit” (Chaouli 609). Chaouli adds, “According to Iser, the interpretive challenge—as well as pleasure—of reading consists in the process by which the reader comes to fill these textual blanks with his or her projections.”

4. In “Tending the Garden Plot: *Victory Garden* and Operation Enduring…” Ciccoricco observes that despite Emily’s understanding the odds of her being hit by a Scud missile to be less than “get[ting] clobbered by a sizeable meteor” (“I’m OK”), “The name ‘Emily’ is a testament to military improbability. During WWII, the Japanese planned covert operations to attack the west coast of the United States….There were two raids in 1942, but neither succeeded in starting fires or causing collateral damage. The mountain on which the first bomb landed on mainland United States is named Mt. Emily—located 10 miles northeast of Brookings, Oregon” (2). Furthermore, Ciccoricco notes that “In a scene that follows one year from Emily’s presumed death, Thea’s new partner…helps her pack for a trip to London.” While they work, Miles finds a desk calendar from 1991 with the date of Feb. 26 cut out—“the cut was deep, taking several other days with it” (“And Then Again”). Here again Ciccoricco notes,

> "The passage establishes a historical parallel. According to a U.S. Department of Defense paper, in the early evening of February 25, 1991, Iraq launched one Scud missile toward Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. -<8> The Scud missile broke up on reentry and showered a U.S. housing compound with debris. The warhead, however, struck a warehouse serving as an army barracks in the Dhahran suburb of Al Khobar. The explosion and resulting fire killed 28 soldiers and injured 100, half of them seriously. This single incident caused more combat casualties than any other in Operation Desert Storm. February 26, then, marks the day Thea would have received news of Emily's death.

5. Theoretically, liberating the signifier shares or individualizes meaning-making. Sometimes referred to as electrifying the signifier, hyperlink choices, like in *Victory Garden* provide the reader with opportunities to advance the narrative in ways that resolve underdetermined semantics.

6. Chaouli, who is fascinated with hyperfiction's lack of readership, is quick to point out that Coover has since modified his views, and that Joyce, as of the spring of 2005, was planning to only "publish in print." Coover insists that the primary hope for electronic technology nonetheless remains centered upon the "abolition of symbolic forms of domination." Interactivity is supposed to save us by reducing "asymmetrical relations." Chaouli again disagrees.

7. Moulthrop would counter that nonfiction infuses the reader's garden with much needed mulch.

8. In fact by refusing to model resolution in the issue of Emily's life or death, Moulthrop's text shows allegiance to Baudrillard's concept of simulacra. Jean Baudrillard's "From Simulacra and Simulation: From *The Precession of Simulacra*" begins with the epigram: "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. / The simulacrum is true." Baudrillard believes that by 1981 Borges's fable of cartography had come full circle—"the map precedes the territory…. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there."

9. Ciccoricco notes that *Victory Garden* sits atop an unstable axis between the romance of WWII vegetable gardens—"cultivating vegetables also cultivated morale"—and the "more sardonic reading" [which] equates Moulthrop's title with the many 'gardens of remembrance'"--military cemeteries (1). He also acknowledges Coover and Koskimaa as prior readers who "equat[ed] the graphic [overview map] to either garden or graveyard."

10. Not published until 1984, Michel Foucault's 1967 "Of Other Spaces" (as translated by Jay Miskowiec) addresses itself to the idea of herotopias. Foucault writes,

> Bachelard's monumental work and the descriptions of the phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogenous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well….We do not live inside a void that can be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposible on one another. (pars. 8-9).

"The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" ("Third principle"). According to Foucault,

gardens are the oldest examples of heterotopias. They are sacred microcosms—"the navel of the world" ("Third principle"). Additionally, heterotopias, claims Foucault, are "not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications."

11. Koskimaa's summary of *Victory Garden* suggests the presence of rogue texts that simply do not fit storylines, my reading, on the other hand, finds arguable theoretical compliance in every detail (including period placement).

12. Nolan Hill theorizes that this is why watching a "social problem film so often appears to be comforting rather than disturbing" (211). Presenting problems in a resolved, socially progressive way conveys the message that a problem exposed will somehow be righted.

13. The window with the story is one of five *Victory Garden* windows open as I read: individually titled lexia box, toolbar, "Locate" menu, "Reader's Manual," and file contents. Much of the screen remains an open reminder of other tasks, the world wide web, etc. See Figure 11.

14. See Note 16 of Chapter Two. In addition, according to dialectical materialism, sublation includes the moment of negation but comprises more: it also affirms the interrelationships and unity of things and phenomena" (thefreedictionary.com).

15. In their 2011 article "Neuroscience and Reading: A Review for Reading Education Researchers," George G. Hruby of the University of Kentucky and Usha Goswami of the University of Cambridge present a synthesis of current data regarding language

comprehension processes. They point to a 2009 study by Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, and Zacks which suggests

> processing scenes and actions described in narrative texts involves sensory and motor processing areas of the brain. The importance of prior knowledge for text comprehension is well documented….There is the possibility that, insofar as this prior knowledge of language or even of social protocols is the result of over-learned and thus automatized pattern recognition…it would be more appropriately categorized as a form of developed skill rather than as explicit knowledge. (166)

16. Koskimaa claims that it if we interpret *Victory Garden* "in the dream-as-hypertext, or, virtual reality simulation framework, telling which scenes belong to the textual actual world, which to textual alternate worlds is totally impossible" (18-19).

17. Current neuroscience research explores the potential for cognitive overload that results from incongruity. It should be noted that even the Hruby and Goswami survey that I reference acknowledges that one of the challenges to their synthesis is identifying the different ways neuroscientists "parse the floating signifier of language comprehension" (163). They observe, "In essence, comprehension becomes what comprehension tests test, but the underlying subprocesses that present difficulties for struggling comprehenders/readers are often poorly articulated (cf. Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010)." Hruby and Goswami note that some researchers make sense of the data with linear models; others "suggest that traditional notions of syntax and semantics are ill-matched to the processing indicated by ERP evidence" (164). Studies of direct electrical activity known as event-related potential (ERP) studies reveal that among competent adult readers

"syntactic processing begins in the left frontal and anterior temporal lobes with phrase-structure monitoring at approximately 150-250 milliseconds (Segalowitz & Zheng, 2009), expanding to verb-subject or syntactic/thematic processing around 300-350 milliseconds…an assessment of the semantic intention within the sentence at approximately 400 milliseconds (Marinkovic et al., 2003), and culminating…with a syntactic recheck or incongruity/novelty effect, peaking at approximately 600 milliseconds (Hagoort, 2003). Integration of syntactic and semantic processes occur at approximately 400-600 milliseconds (Friederici & Weissenborn, 2007)." These studies typically plot the anatomical areas and time-course involvement in "semantically anomalous sentences (e.g., 'When peanuts fall in love…'). Such anomalies are components parts to the processing required to read *Victory Garden.*

18. Returning to the logic of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Emily is both Hamlet and an ancillary character in the literary theory of parallax gnosis.

19. An amazing actual story of this is documented by Paul Duguid in the essay "Inheritance and loss? A Brief Survey of Google Books." Duguid documents the successes and failures of digitally scanning print-only books. One of his test cases is *Tristram Shandy*. Ironically, scanners left out the blank and black pages (the parts Sterne intended as the home for the reader's imagination.) Of the mishandling he writes,

> By the time this page [27] has been reached, the astute reader will also have noticed that the book has other quality control problems. Famously on the death of Parson Yorick, Sterne quoted Hamlet's phrase, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' and inserted a blank page of morning. The version of Sterne's novel that Harvard offered and Google scanned evidently overlooked this

iconic page, perhaps assuming it was an inky disaster in the print shop rather than part of the author's design. We can see the problem if we compare the Google page to the same page from the Penguin edition (Sterne, 1967): Figure 6A: *Tristram Shandy*.

20. Speaking of her close working relationship with Derrida, Cixous writes,

> So we meet each other in order to think in language; between us it has always been a question of writing, of living in language, of hearing ourselves write, so as to write. We speak to one another so as to hear ourselves read, to know how to read, to write ourselves speaking, to give ourselves the writing that is in speech, sometimes so as to take words from each other's mouth. (Helene Cixous translated by Peggy Kamuf, *Insister of Jacques Derrida* 13)

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