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The [ftaires!] to Remembrance:  
Language, Memory, and Visual Rhetoric  
in Chaucer's House of Fame and  
Danielewski's House of Leaves

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# The [ftaires!] to Remembrance:

Language, Memory, and Visual Rhetoric in

Chaucer's *House of Fame* and

Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

by

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## Introduction

As a young reader, my tastes had always been geared toward the copious, physically intimidating tomes found on the lower-most shelves of the fiction section of the library. At the age of fifteen, having already set the patron record for most books checked out at my high school of three-thousand odd students, I was always looking for the next challenge. I had discovered that the best stories were the ones that were told in bulk, and so would often go through an entire series in a week. I had yet to realize that the best stories were often found in the smallest, slimmest volumes; however, appreciating "the perfect exercises of the great masters"<sup>1</sup>, as they are called by one of my favorite Chilean authors, Roberto Bolaño (also, quite uncoincidentally, a fan of catalogues, lists, and other unabridged creations of a copiousness-loving mind), was a skill I had yet to learn. At first, *House of Leaves* appeared to fit into the former category as a physically intimidating tome and (then) yet another reading challenge to conquer; however, it is *also* a perfect exercise in copiousness, and somehow manages to tell a rather thrilling tale at the same time.

Mark Z. Danielewski spent ten years working on *House of Leaves* before he debuted the novel in 2000. The book almost immediately gained a cult following. Although *House of Leaves* is well-loved by those who choose to undertake the arduous task of finishing its 709 pages, it poses several challenges to the traditional reading experience that discourages general readers. In other words, its readership is highly self-selecting. Most of the readership is no older than Danielewski himself, meaning that they share his ideas about how we do, and how we should, interpret media. These same parameters could easily apply to medieval readers who, although they were often limited more by their privilege (class, literacy, and education) than by their

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<sup>1</sup> Bolaño, 2666, p. 27.

personal taste, nonetheless also had a "virtual" or "mass-mediatic"<sup>2</sup> understanding of the visual rhetoric, the tropes, and the symbols of their culturally-informed literary corpus. The prodigious memory of a medieval mind in Geoffrey Chaucer's day lent itself well to an intertextual (or copiously textualized) understanding of their world; the prodigious storage availed us by the internet and the virtual memory of different online communities likewise enables us to understand mass media and other intertextual products of our time.

In recent years, literary criticism and scholarship have had a shared interest in the Book as a cultural artifact as well as how readers, audiences, or entire communities interpret a given medium. This interest has come to fruition in the development of Media/TV Studies programs, comic-book scholarship, and other non-traditional scholastic foci. Medieval-literature and culture scholars have paralleled these reader reception arguments in order to investigate how the making of the manuscript itself encouraged different reading strategies.

My own reading strategies have evolved over the course of this project. The original paper could have been thought of as either a medieval reading of *House of Leaves* from the point of view of the *House of Fame*, the Chaucer dream poem that originally piqued my interest in the possibility of a comparison study, or, as a retrospective attempt to place *House of Leaves* within a genealogy of authors who used various "visiographic" (an awkward neologism of my own creation that attempted to encapsulate Chaucer and Danielewski's unique visual rhetoric) methods to guide reader reception. My main engagements with the texts were mediated by (personally) significant images excerpted from manuscripts concurrent with Chaucer's time. Even though, as I realized later, the images did not lend the paper historical accuracy, they

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<sup>2</sup> During "Chascas" Valenzuela's (a Chilean author) his kick-off lecture for the Spanish Colloquium in 2010, he proposed a new way to think about the modern author, a "mass-mediatic" (masmediática) figure who uses different media to control the reception of their work. I have adapted the term to signify a community of readers who engage with a culturally produced body of (mostly literary) work in unconventional ways.

nonetheless gave me profound insight into a formerly alien culture. The ability for readers to personalize their reading, either by physically appending their observations in the margins or by mentally affixing a signifying image to a particular passage, was and still is an important part of understanding the text. If, as I found in *House of Fame*, the narrator appears to describe his surroundings in a cursory manner, the very things he describes are not unimportant. He makes deliberate narrative choices that orchestrate our experience of a given scene, much like any film director. We form memories of books, places, and other people based off of where we happen to be located in relation to them, and in a medieval dream book, ekphrasis and strong visuals give the reader both a locus for remembrance and encourage emotional connections that further personalize the reading experience.

The current paper contains the tenor of that former focus, but its application concentrates on the modern, experimental novel. It posits that graphic design, illustrations, and other textual cues have a subtle yet powerful psychological influence on our reading and our memory of texts (hence the collective shudder that goes through the room if a speaker has the nerve to use the Comic Sans font in their PowerPoint presentation). Paratextual or "secondary" features of a text such as its typography, font choice, line design, color scheme, and even minutiae like kerning collectively approximate an ur-character (in nontraditional texts like *House of Leaves*) whose sole function is to educate the reader on how the book should be read. Symbolically, the paratext acts as a manicule: it calls attention to important passages most worthy of remembrance and consideration. As *House of Leaves* is a "perfect exercise" in copiousness, these singularly important passages tend to get lost in the cacophony of the novel's many narrative voices. Accordingly, the features and passages I have chosen to analyze are not "universally" singular so much as personally significant: those same features that puzzled me long after my first reading also inspired me to pursue their meaning further for this Honors thesis.

In the end it was the dream not the dressers that "dissolved." The way out was with-out. They found themselves on the front lawn, birch trees standing over them like protective sentinels, alive in the peal of nature as lights flickered on neighborhood homes, a dog barked and birds dared to race the imminence of dusk.

The only ominous note was struck by the ambulance driver who took Davidson and Karen to the hospital:

Rush-Jones [with "Surrounded"]

It was late afternoon, nice, real peaceful, and we got him on a stretcher and loaded up, and she started to cry a lot, sort of coming out of the shock of it, I seen that happen a lot. It was real intense -- he being about to die and she crying and all -- so I shouldn't have noticed anything else but I kept hearing this banging. Over and over, bang, bang, bang. So finally I lookt over at the house and sure enough their screen door was slamming open and shut. I forgot about it until I'm driving back to the hospital. See, I told you it was nice out. Well that was true. Real nice, but there weren't no breeze to speak of. The trees weren't staying, nothing, just still. But that screen door was banging open and shut like we were in the middle of a darned hurricane. A few weeks later I drove by the house but the door was closed and they'd started putting up that big fence.

The house was taken off the market, an eight foot fence built around the property line with "No Trespassing Signs" posted everywhere. Apparently graffiti now marks the signs and vandals have broken all the windows. Following the release of the film, someone tried to burn down the house but it never caught fire.

The house still stands on Ash Tree Lane. Karen still owns it. It is not for sale. As she warns: "There is nothing there. Be careful."

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Iuid.

ACTRESS -> MURDER  
✓ [unclear]  
✓ [unclear]  
✓ [unclear]  
✓ [unclear]

Color Plate 1 Scan of p. 550 from the Appendices of House of Leaves. Supposedly a part of the "original" manuscript written by Zampanó and assembled by Johnny Truant.









## The Culture of the Book

*To rede forth it gan me so delyte,  
That all the day it thought me but a lyte...*<sup>1</sup>

Reading is a delight, a seasonal tilling of the brain. The book is a symbol of our reading, and evidence of how our enjoyment of a text progressed to either purchase or memorization of important passages. In a printed book culture, our own interaction with a text is highly limited, as information books and school texts reflect traditional mass-produced publishing practices. The layout values function over aesthetic, and very rarely do we ever get a glimpse of the high-end, exquisitely crafted works made during Chaucer's time.

As the "portal" to another world, all elements of a book's making reinforce the idea that reading is a sensory experience. Manuscripts and book production are only two such technologies that aid in the dissemination of language and ideas; "patronage, by economic power, education, [and] translation"<sup>2</sup> are others, and perhaps we can add to that list "links," "cookies," databases with retrieval systems, and the annual project of defragmenting one's hard-drive. "As the articulation of a vast memory, the computer is the latest in a procession of mnemonic aids and archival technologies that [as Ruth Evans argues] can be traced back to the future" (Evans 44). Now, our memories are located outside of ourselves, in a digitalized location whose filing system can be carried in our pockets.

The above three color plates are testimony to both the medieval and modern author's love of the printed word, and their understanding of a book as a physical object that should entice and excite the reader's interest. The careful script, the hastily scribbled marginalia ending in exclamation points--all of these details point to a relationship with the Book that goes beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Foules* ll. 27-8.

<sup>2</sup> Evans 69.

text itself. The handwriting shows a mind under pressure; the marginalia and drawings demonstrate the work of either a very attentive reader or a reader who was preoccupied with other matters, and perhaps, seeing an empty space, felt inspired to "authorize" their own life by writing in the margins. *Color Plate 2* appears to be a draft of the academic essay that would later become *House of Leaves*. *Color Plates 3* and *4* display two different handwriting styles, belonging to the editors. Their frustrations with the text (note the burn marks) are all carefully arranged in rows, like at a crime scene. This is as much of a manuscript of *Leaves* as we will be able to examine. It is not yet a printed book, but it wants to be. A reader cannot find a better way to experience the printed novel: an author's "foul papers" (much like a composer's sketchbooks) reveal the machinations of a work-in-progress in its rawest form.

Reading practices seem to have come about primarily as an instrument for self-instruction. To a college aged audience, this practice is a source of annoyance, resulting in the purchase of heavily scribbled "used books" in "good, fair, or poor" condition according to how well loved they were by their previous owner. We almost feel as if we are "cheating" if we use the notes of others to guide our own reading of a texts; it does not feel like we can discuss any of the former owner's discoveries, and certainly we cannot trust the underlining and hi-lighting, because that was how *they* experienced the text: *our* reading must start from the beginning. Says Mary Carruthers in her *Book of Memory*, "...medieval readers [had the habit] of simply adding material as the spirit move[d] them to texts by someone else...it is a mark that one's work has truly been read, and made his own, by someone else, and this in turn is another way of indicating that it is gaining 'authority,' as it generated further texts" (Carruthers 212-13). We still encourage marginalia and underlining upon a first reading of the text; however, we do not need to have others' marginalia covering the text in order to know whether or not the edition we purchased is

"authoritative." After all, we found the book in the "x" section of the book store, which was published by "y" company, or ordered by the professor and added to the book list--if we are required to read it, it must be authoritative.

As with our own culture, good readers in the Middle Ages were expected to be familiar with certain number of well-known authorities so that they could engage with the texts on their own terms. Ignorance of certain key references on their part was a sign of not being well read, or "illiterate" (ignorance of Latin), which was equal to moral decrepitude. Chaucer's body of readership would have been well-versed in recognizing famous sources. The ability to recognize famous authors outside of their original context was the mark of an ethical reader. Not knowing a source would reveal the reader's ignorance. Also recall the oral nature of courtly poetry: an audience does not need a citation in order to recognize the beauty of the spoken word, nor to appreciate the merits of a good story. It is no wonder that books themselves inspired Chaucer's dream visions, for "the book (literature) both causes the dream and exists within it" (Boitani 60).

External to works like *House of Fame*, scribes, copyists, illuminators, and book binders were the true controllers and disseminators of the author's work to the reading public. Manuscript making put many people and stages of production between the author and the final product--*they* were the final mediators of the text to the reading public. Like an assembly line, the production process was enacted through a series of "stages" ("levels of reality" in the dream vision), each one further removing creator from control of his creation. Chaucer addresses some of these concerns to Adam Pinkhurst, his scribe, in his poem, "Chaucer's Words To Adam, His Own Scribe". This poem is included in the "Appendices" to emphasize the similarities between Johnny

Truant, Zampanó's 'scribe' and tertiary narrator in *House of Leaves*, and Chaucer's scribe, Adam Pinkhurst, who may have been the scribe for the "Ellesmere Chaucer".<sup>3</sup>

In this poem, Chaucer lambasts Adam for his sloppy copying, imbuing the scolding with Biblical condemnation appropriate for a late medieval writer who knew that his writing in a Fallen language, especially the English vernacular, was proof enough of the mutability and "secondariness" of his poetry. Adam does not help Chaucer's cause "thurgh [his] negligence and rape" (ll. 7) with the text. Chaucer's is a common authorial anxiety that comes to the forefront of *House of Leaves*, which owes its existence to a fluke of a discovery and the obsessive interest of its mentally unstable narrator, Johnny Truant. Just as Adam's handwriting dictates how we remember Chaucer's words, JT's presence in Danielewski's text mediates how we remember and experience *House of Leaves*. Textual accuracy is extremely important for memorial purposes, making Danielewski's decision to "abdicate" his control over the text seem at once disturbing but also appropriate. Chaucer did not have that control either, although he could go back over his manuscripts and "rubbe and scrape" (ll. 6) at mistakes. What we have today of old authors, and of modern authors like Danielewski who are trying to find their place in a lengthy line of *auctors* who have already "done it all before," is due to the successful mediation between narrator and reader, scribe and manuscript editor--or, as it happens, between software, reader, publisher, and book stores. The distinction begins to blur again the closer we get to the present day. The next section, "In Search of the Author," is just that: a trans-historical search for that authority figure, one who (increasingly enough) is so much more than the phantom voice in the text.

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<sup>3</sup> Mooney 67.

## In Search of the Author: Reception and Audience

This is not for you.

Johnny Truant

It stondest wryten in thy face,  
Thyn error, though thou telle it nat to me;  
But dred thee nat to come into this place  
**For this wryting is nothing ment by thee**  
Ne by noon byt he Loves servants be;  
For thou of love hast lost thy taste, I gesse,  
As sek man hath of swete and bitternesse.

Parliament of Foules  
ll. 155-161

Who is master?  
It must be the author, the one who creates the words.  
It must be the characters, the ones that live in the words.  
It must be the words, the ones that create the author.

G. Scott Robinson  
"Characters That Run Away"<sup>4</sup>

It only takes one book or key passage for us to realize that books are the formative measurement for our perception and living. We may have moments where we identify with a particular character or appreciate the ideas expressed in a certain chapter, but once the book has ended, our moments of living the life of a stranger ends. There is always an appropriate scholarly distance from "who I am" and "how that character develops", whereas readers in a medieval manuscript culture knew themselves as extensions of what they read. An "author" is *he who writes*; an *auctor* is *he who authorizes*; a reader is also *he who authorizes* a text (simply by virtue of having read it and responded to it in a public forum); a *text* may consist of one *auctor*, or it may be composed of *many auctors*, *reading* each other all at once. A book was not "over" once they finished reading it, but continued to effect their development as a moral and ethical human beings.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendices.



This section begins with the above quotes to illustrate an argument: a debate between author, character, narrator, reader, and critical audience; one of which qualifies literature as a work of interpretation that writes itself and is interpreted outside of the control of its creator, often termed the "Author-God." This critical position gives the privilege of the ultimate interpretation to the reader, who takes over the work's reception the moment the author has published it, thus nullifying the "author-function"'s agency in his own text. However, who exactly serves these functions in a medieval memorial culture is less than obvious: readers, *auctors* and editors used to have the same "reading" and "authorizing" practices which makes them equal agents in the creative process. Those who work in the Culture of the Book naturally diffuses the singularity of the idea of authorship among a multiplicity of participants in the literary process.

It is difficult to say who first decided which works had *auctoritas* and were worthy of remembrance; however, like folk lore traditions, the continuing importance of past literature is determined by whether or not it is read, discussed, and passed on to be digested by future generations. The combination of authorial voices in concert in a work was a more indicator of authority during Chaucer's time than the "original" work of a single author.<sup>5</sup> *Memory*, but more accurately, *remembrance*, is a part of demonstrating authority situated in a culture that remembers and cherishes its past authors through retellings.

The construction of a single authorial persona assumes the presence of what we have commonly called the "self." Its defining moments are supposedly when the persona breaks, allowing the audience to clearly see the "real Author" standing behind his narrator-mouthpiece.

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<sup>5</sup> This, too, had its place; however it did not have the cultural relevance it does now with the popularity of the "one" creator or Author.

In a medieval memorial culture, the talent (or *auctoritas*) of the individual *auctor* was demonstrated through his memory of the works by authors past. "Original" ideas or additions were always mediated through older works, much in the same way that a solo voice in a musical ensemble<sup>6</sup> will rise in volume above the other voices before subsiding back again into the mix of sounds. The wise composer does not make the soloist bear complete responsibility for the melody throughout the entire piece; likewise, the location of the medieval *auctor* in his work is not as distinct as it is *corporate*: it is a presence that reflects a greater tradition of works, a voice that converses with other *auctors* to create a literary background of homogenous sound.

Sometimes called the "Father of Middle English", Chaucer, singular, certainly was an interesting figure. His social position as the "son of a rich merchant" inspired trust in his ability to keep a public office, but as in his texts, Chaucer was also "well liked for being funny, clever, and inoffensive"--the perfect, politic public servant. Derek Brewer also observes that, "it is not difficult to see why Langland, having or being none of these things, did not. Resentment in the one bred protest and sublime transcendence; comfort and satisfaction in the other led to those accommodations and silences which are as much the character of Chaucer's handling of his matter as of his handling of the language, style, and point of view."<sup>7</sup>

"Chaucer's" point of view in his dream visions and later poems is represented by his narrator, usually an inadequate love poet or a novice initiate in Love's court, much like L'Amans from Romance of the Rose. The narrator is considered "unreliable" because as a novice, he is

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<sup>6</sup> Musical analogies are especially helpful in discussing this phenomenon, as "polyphony," "choruses of voices" or "voices in concert" are some of the defining remarks of music from this period. The study of the connections between music and literature of the same period is another branch of both literary and music scholarship, and covers a variety of authors in their times. Sigmund Spaeth's *Milton's Knowledge of Music* (1913) is one of the first exemplars of this tradition; Chaucer contributions literary-music studies include C. C. Olson's "Chaucer and the Music of the 14th Century" (1941) and Nigel Wilkin's *Music in the Age of Chaucer* (1979) and more.

<sup>7</sup> Brewer 101.

only permitted to view the main action (a role that allows him to comment, but only from the peanut gallery) and because he can only deliver the "meaning" of the story to the reader through fiction. However, the framing devices of the dream poem separate the narrator not only from his audience but also from his story, thus allowing him to maintain the illusion of critical distance. Structural details like frames, gates, and doorways are therefore all important parts of suspending the reader's disbelief: transgression is necessary for entrance into a fictive space. As Guy de Mori<sup>8</sup> says, "And if anyone wishes to have some information concerning my name, I will not now reveal it to him in any other way than by the following words: for it is through me that one enters one's lodging."<sup>9</sup> The dissonance between the perceived and the real is of course central to the "spirit" of the dream vision, where it can become hard to know for certain whether we, like the dreamer, are "more at home with life in the dream than in reality."<sup>10</sup> For this reason, an astute reader will always be able to find a duality of "purpose" in a text: the ventriloquism of the narrator, echoing an argument between the narrator and his perceived audience, and the reader's own voice, the "true," extra-textual audience.

Chaucer's narrator is often quite blatant about his interference in the text. He openly mocks courtly conventions in *Parliament of Fowles* using one of the unlikeliest of mouthpieces (a *doke*<sup>11</sup>). The narrator never misses an opportunity in *Book of the Duchess* to tactlessly mishandle his consolation of the grieving Black Knight,<sup>12</sup> and changes colors and coarseness like a chameleon in the characters throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. Brewer calls this successful accommodation "a considerable achievement in the face of a medieval orthodoxy that required

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<sup>8</sup> Another of *Roman's* editors who amended a number of lines to the text after the first addition by Jean de Meun (from Guillaume de Lorris's original).

<sup>9</sup> de Mori q. Akbari 99.

<sup>10</sup> Brewer 86.

<sup>11</sup> As I discussed in a previous section. (Footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.**)

<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, as a younger poet vying for a patron's favor, this self-effacing technique is quite effective.

either assent or jest...but could not tolerate the two together" (92). Where this leaves his readers is often, as it happens, "up for them to decide." A certain amount of readerly engagement is worked into all literature, and if an audience did not exist then perhaps it would have to be fabricated.<sup>13</sup> Innovations in digital media have also made us change the way we think about the writing and reading process and the distinctions between the above terms--who writes, who reads, who controls distribution--is once again beginning to blur. What it means to be a reader in our culture is fundamentally related to what it means to be an author, someone who "originates or creates with words, who adds something new to the store of ideas, knowledge, imagination." They are often the same individual (Robinson 145). As Solveig C. Robinson notes in *The Book in Society: An Introduction to Print Cultures*, when entire projects (Wikipedia) are dedicated to the distribution of *authoritative* material, "collaborative text generation" or other symbiotic modes of authorship start to become the norm (Robinson 146). The search for this authority figure is nonetheless an important part of the reader's connection to and understanding of a text. We do not need to wear Chaucer's clothes to think like the author, and find him in between the shelves of a vast archive. The author-functions in *House of Fame* and *House of Leaves* might be "dead",<sup>14</sup> but their narrators are certainly not so: in the one he is dreaming, and in the other, he is having a nightmare. The dead do not have either.

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<sup>13</sup> "The presence of an audience would appear to be crucial to the making of the ethical action. This simply reminds us that a rhetorical conception of ethics requires that its social and public nature be stressed. But it is remarkable that instances of moral judgment in medieval literature seem so often to require both a literary text and an audience to complete them, whether the audience is in the work itself or is created by a direct address to readers" (Carruthers 180).

<sup>14</sup> Danielewski's refusal to discuss any part of *House of Leaves* in reader Q & As gives credence to this idea.

## **The Archive**

Archiving impulses run concurrent with incidences of extreme historical loss. In Chaucer's case the Black Plague, coupled with a recovering economy and the "benign" patronage of Richard II, instigated a cultural renaissance in the last half of the fifteenth century, one that was obsessed with, more than ever, preserving what of the past was lost as a means of living in the present and as a guide for living in the future. With this history in mind, let us now turn to Chaucer, and examine how a middle aged wool, modestly educated wool controller fits into this extraordinary culture of the book, and why he would have chosen the dream vision as his go-to poetic genre.

The setting is London, England, still a relatively cultural "backwater of a backwater" in the fourteenth century,<sup>15</sup> where French was the language of polite society and official court documents, Latin was for the Church and English was spoken in the marketplace and in the home. London had just weathered two outbreaks of the Black Plague, which decimated its population; however, Derek Brewer, in his Chaucer biography, cautions us from thinking that the Black Plague also instigated the kind of apocalyptic chaos, moral lassitude and cultural backwardness that we have come to expect from its portrayal in popular media. Far from--in the latter half of the 14th century, England had a brief cultural renaissance before the wars of the 15th century, and its literary heroes included Chaucer and his contemporaries, William Langland and the Pearl Poet, among others.<sup>16</sup> Chaucer's triumph in particular is a linguistic victory--English, not French, was the language of his poetry, for "English, though it may have lacked the finesse of polite discourse of French and the abstract and conceptualizing vocabulary of Latin,

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<sup>15</sup> Pearsall 19.

<sup>16</sup> Pearsall 26-7.

was after all the mother-tongue, with more immediate access to the deeper wellsprings of emotional experience" (Pearsall 73).

However, during Chaucer's tenure as a public servant, the English court still imported its culture from the Continent, and especially took a shine to France's *Le roman de la rose*, an exemplar courtly allegory told in the literary mode of the dream vision. Books at court were cultural artifacts, and were shared, discussed, and dissected. It is wonderful to think that *The Book of the Duchess* may have been inspired by one of these conversations; however, from the very start of his literary career, "there is a confidence in Chaucer, a lack of anxiety, or the need to assert a knowledge of the court life and mannerisms" (Pearsall 57). We can assume that this independence from courtly life led to his more inventive compositions, like *The Canterbury Tales*.

A desire for independence from academic conventions likewise informs the formal structure of *House of Leaves*; however, its archiving tendencies cannot necessarily be considered to be a reaction to extreme *historical* loss. Other novels and authors who have used similar devices, such as *The Raw Shark Texts* and the novels by Jonathan Safran Foer, were published after the attacks on the World Trade Center, or during the Iraq Wars. Their "archive fever" and inability to describe the visible (indicated by the interpolation of text and photographs or the complete reliance on photographs to coordinate the reader's interpretation of the visual rhetoric) are characteristic of the desire to encapsulate or otherwise control stressors, triggers, and emotions following a traumatic event. Danielewski's reasons for doing the same may have been far more personal, and far more academic in nature.

Following the death of their father, the Danielewski twins (Mark and his sister who sings under the stage-name, "Poe") both turned to what they knew to describe their loss. For Mark Z.



Danielewski, the medium he was most familiar with was the academic essay, and the vocabulary of the film world. *House of Leaves*, of course, was the hyper-textualized result of his efforts.<sup>17</sup> Poe's own debut album was released concurrently with *House of Leaves*, entitled *Haunted*, and she and Mark toured together to promote their work. *Haunted* likewise dealt with a kind of hyper-textualized musicality, or what is better known as the genre of "noise". Her clean-singing style is delivered on top of moody distortions, eerie synthesized note-bending, and clips of her father delivering an "audio-letter" to her and her brother. The sensation of loss or absence permeates *House of Leaves*, as does the feeling of being "haunted" (see *unheimlich* in the reading guide) by the textual traces of past works.

As a structure, the archive is a tribute to the idea of the everlasting mind of human ingenuity and the unlimited capacity for total cultural remembrance. When we refer to "archiving" something, we usually think of a remote, inaccessible (and seldom permitted) corner of the library or the hard drive. For medieval authors, the archive was a mental model conducive to remembering the vast amounts of literature they needed to know in order to compose especially if the author did not have direct access to a physical copy of the text. One practical benefit of this archival memory system is a well ordered mind. Structure based mentalities give the *auctor* the mental preparedness required for composition. Memorial techniques facilitate the readers' ability to listen to a text, hear its cadence, and let the text speak through them how they would have thought it was meant to be spoken. An archive is only limited by the imagination of its creator. Therefore, so long as the reader maintains his emotional and intellectual connections to his *auctors* (by continuing to read and contribute to the authorization processes), as he lives he

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<sup>17</sup> *House of Leaves*, unlike *Haunted*, is not an explicit tribute to the older Danielewski's memory, although it does deal in the nature of the loss of a parent (Johnny Truant's mother dies in a mental institution).

will always have a "psychic" (or rather, virtual) shelf in the collective consciousness of memorial culture.

Chaucer *House of Fame* and Danielewski's *House of Leaves* are both "archival" works of literature, as they establish their authority using the genres that let them "build" their houses using a wide variety of the textual material, within the restrictions of the dream vision and the academic essay, respectively. However, the idea of a house as an archive or memory structure has a long history.

Throughout their existence as cultural and architectural ideals, Houses have represented the face of a people and time, taking different forms to suit each culture to their own memorial structure. They are the best way to identify a culture and its values, for Houses are also associated with specific places, making them a part of cultural memory as much as a method for remembrance.<sup>18</sup> The House is a versatile trope for exploring the world of the mind, as it seamlessly maintains the integrity of the interior, private space (the isolated thoughts of the dreamer) to its representation in a permanent structure. The flexibility of genre determines whether or not the House has enough room for reader interaction with the text -- as both Chaucer and Danielewski's *Houses* do, despite the seeming rigidity of their framing devices. The House presents endless possibilities for creative interpretation, given its status in Chaucer and certainly our time as "the 'archetypal loci' of the Western mind" (Boitani 73). Different from Odysseus's vision of the "home" as the center of both spiritual stability and physical belonging,

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<sup>18</sup> This is especially true when you consider national landmarks. They are not "Houses" in the strictest sense; however they are still emblems of the culture of their time, and their longevity ensures that those memories are preserved for a long time to come. The visual magnificence of some of these buildings is particularly correlated to widespread remembrance--for example, the Eiffel Tower, or the Pyramids, in contrast to their less visible cousins, the Lascaux caves and the Scara Brae settlement. (I do not pick these buildings arbitrarily; surely Danielewski was thinking of public institutions in this way when he wrote his "Epic Catalogue-style" footnote, which reads as an art historical compendia of all such potentially memorial structures, though with a different purpose in mind. See the *HOL* section for more information.

the House permits a broader examination of its contents, whether under the public or the private eye. We are certainly made to feel this openness in both *House of Fame* and *House of Leaves*, where the houses are either mostly empty space and quite literally bigger on the inside. If the intrusion on our parts is not unwelcome, then neither does it go unnoticed, for both authors are extremely conscious that their works will be read, or in Chaucer's case, performed.

Newer technologies of memory replaced mnemonic techniques, and the subsequent innovations in memory technologies that led to the creation of the Internet has brought the House model to a threshold of perception that medieval scholars could not have imagined. The "digital archive" heavily informs both the publication and reception of *House of Leaves*,<sup>19</sup> and is analogous in many ways to the medieval memorial (manuscript) culture of Chaucer's time. The methods of information dissemination is taken to an entirely new level with the development of search bars, now a material process where it once used to be entirely immaterial with the different search functions encoded in a medieval reader's mental archive. Each time we hit "enter," we are searching through someone else's memories, someone else's ideas of where to find the most pertinent information related to our search.

We "refresh" a page to correct a faulty connection, "bookmark" important pages, and "follow links" to find out more. These links lead us to discover new authors and subjects, each catalogued in its own cell in a larger database by a modifying sentence or phrase, or "disambiguating." A typical search yields the "best of" the general, non-specialist information, and further searches draw the user in deeper into this archive. Extensive searching leads to one of the infamous "Wikipedia Black Holes," where the curious user, interest piqued by an unknown phrase, follows its link to another unknown phrase, and yet another, and so on. The result (apart from the long hours spent at one's computer) is a cascade of texts, "progenitors of a whole family

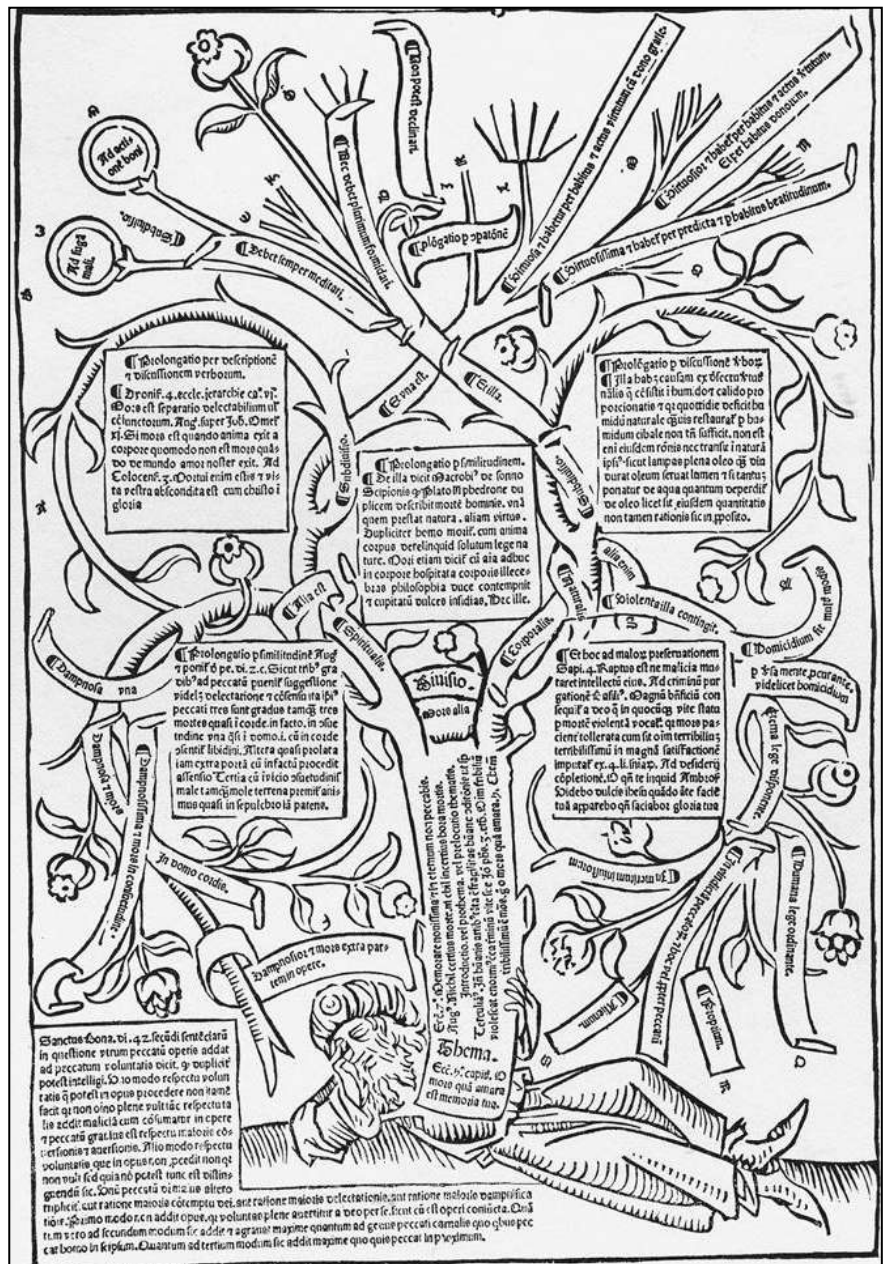
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<sup>19</sup> The first "leaves" were published online.

of textual descendants, especially commentaries and other adaptations, which are the indication, or 'authorization' of a work's institutional standing in the public, communal memory" (Carruthers 191).

See Figures Plate 1 and 2. The site is probably one of the best modern analogies for both our modern conception of public memory, and as an illustration of how a medieval reader interacts with their manuscript: at any moment in time, changes are made, sentences are added by a different, anonymous writer, and debates are carried out in the "sidelines" of the main article.

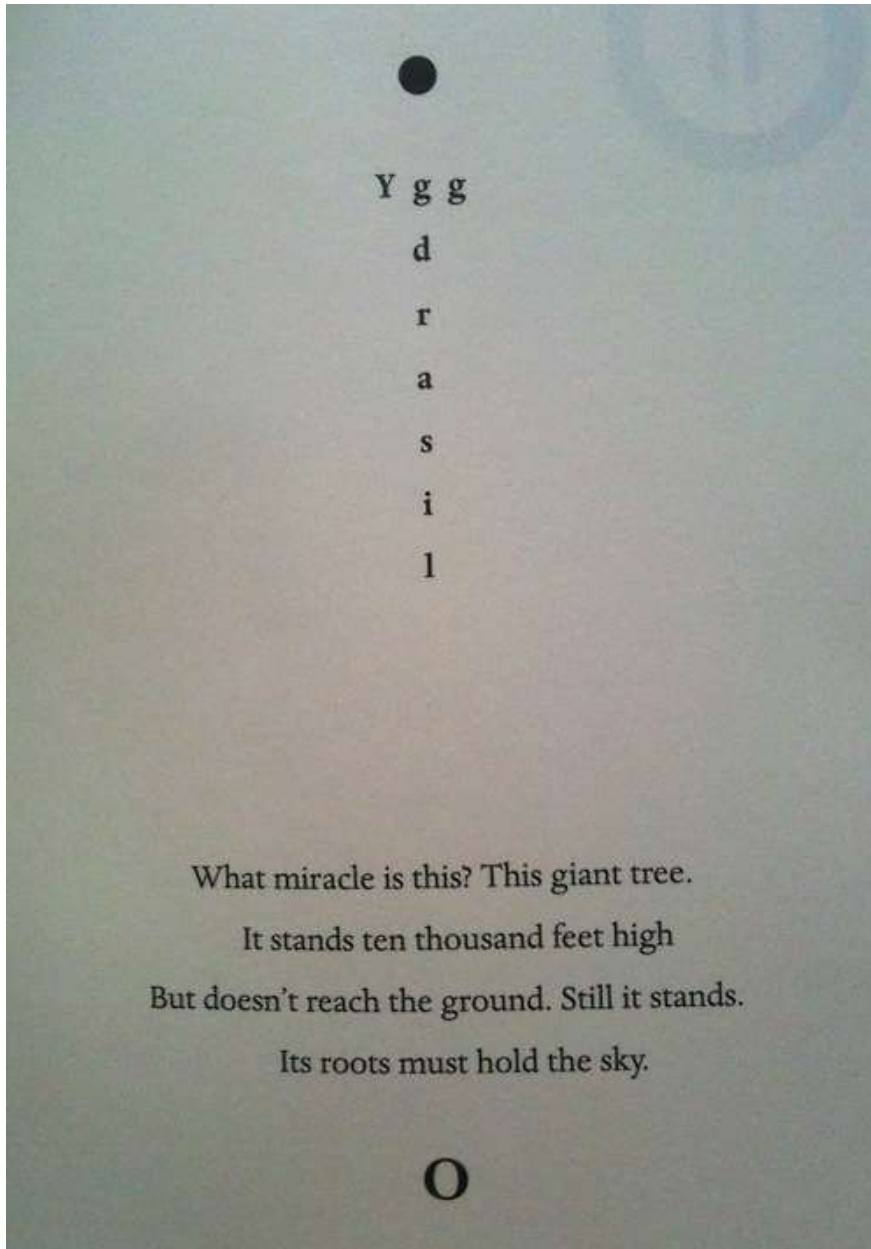
It is interesting to note that the very same practices that would have been praised in



**Figure 1** Anonymous Artists. Texts Arranged Diagrammatically in the Form of a Tree; MORS (O Mors Quam Amara Est Memoria Tua) | O Death, how Bitter is Your Memory. Artist unknown. circa 1483. In ARTstor [database online]. [access date 25 June 2012]. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.

"Progenitors of a whole family of textual descendants..." (Carruthers 191). This image, which was meant to illustrate Biblical exegesis, is suggestive to me of the inherent interconnectedness of literary works. It also provides a descriptively accurate visual of the taxonomy of an authoritative work: no matter how long or tall a branch grows, it always yearns for its source material. This is certainly true of *House of Leaves*, which also taps into the idea of a "textual tree" on pg. 709, which depicts Yggdrasil (the "World Tree").

a medieval manuscript community and would have sufficed for proof of the author's *auctoritas* is now cause for suspicion in our world. Derek Pearsall observes in a footnote that, "the serendipity of Chaucer's use of source materials, the magpie-like nature of his raids on scholarly texts, may



**Figure 2** p. 709 of *House of Leaves*: The World Tree.

This world tree is literally a "textual" tree as it is composed entirely of words (Bookman Old Style, the authoritative font).

be the product, more than we know, not of his own indefatigable reading but of his own conversations with more learned friends" (Pearsall 242). The practice of proper citation and the judicious usage of secondary sources are two of the hallmarks of modern notions of intellectual property, one that distinguishes between "author", "reader", and "text". *House of Leaves* and *House of Fame* are intriguing for their refusal to make that distinction, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

## House of Fame

[The] artistic effect of *The House of Fame*, with its dynamic restlessness, is positively enhanced by incompleteness. Some words of Arnold Hauser about Gothic architecture might have been written with this poem in mind:

A Gothic church...seems to be in process of development, as if it were rising up before our very eyes; it expresses a process, not a result. The resolution of the whole mass into a number of forces, the dissolution of all that is rigid and at rest by means of a dialectic of functions and subordinations, this ebb and flow, circulation and transformation of energy, gives us the impression of a dramatic conflict working up to a decision before our eyes. And this dynamic effect is so overwhelming that besides it all else seems a mere means to this end. So it comes about that *the effect of such a building is not merely impaired when it is left uncompleted; its appeal and its power is actually increased*. The inconclusiveness of the forms, which is a characteristic of every dynamic style, gives emphasis to one's impression of endless, restless movement for which any stationary equilibrium is merely provisional.<sup>20</sup>

*House of Fame* affects the same personality as the aforementioned Gothic Church, in that it is appealing not because it is incomplete, but almost *in spite* of its incompleteness. The chaotic whimsy of this particular dream-poem is suggestive of its noisier cousin *The Canterbury Tales*, but its deliberate, careful constructed imagery and philosophical underpinnings also share a strong familial resemblance to the high, courtly art found in *Troilus and Creyseyde*. We may think occasional romantic thoughts of belonging to another, "better," age, but for Chaucer's time, both the Golden Ages of the Classical past and the Christian present were long gone, and what remained from that heritage was an anxiety-ridden decision to find a place in that world through Fame, "a form of secular immortality, a way of transcending the world and death which did not need the props of religion."<sup>21</sup> *The House of Fame* is another dream vision from Chaucer's early works, and the second or third installment<sup>22</sup> in his attempts to find himself as a *auctor* and it was written at a time in his poetic career when he was still making the transition from the courtly

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<sup>20</sup> *The Social History of Art*, (London 1951), vol I, p. 220, q. Spearing 89.

<sup>21</sup> Brewer 110.

<sup>22</sup> It is still unknown whether *HOF*, a long, unfinished poem, comes before or after *POF*, a shorter, finished and far more unified poem.



maker of *the Book of the Duchess* to the true, Boethian poet of *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>23</sup> *House of Fame* has been described as a kind of "virtual, psychic archive"<sup>24</sup> whose contents are as much a meditation on the responsibility of authors to preserve and maintain the archive of history as a reflection on Chaucer's own contribution to that history.

The book world in *House of Fame* does not resemble Milton's pendant earth hanging from the heavens by an invisible chain, nor does it attempt the dizzying sublimity of Dante's *Comedia*, where the narrator entrenches himself in humanity's hellish basement before exploding through its divine attic.<sup>25</sup> The most experimental of Chaucer's dream visions, *the House of Fame* finds its bookish narrator searching for answers and authorities he is not sure he will find, and finding out that in the imaginary world of dreams, people are just as far away from realizing the "Truth" as they are in the real world. The various structures he finds himself in - a temple of glass, a desert wasteland, Fame's house, and the twiggy labyrinth of the house of Rumor - are like shelves in a vast library that goes on forever, unconstrained by the rules of time and space. Symbolically, Chaucer was scanning these shelves, searching for his rightful place in literary history, and consulting different authorities about the legitimacy of his authorship, which perhaps reflects a time when he was "debating the value of poetry, or more painfully, the value of his own poetry" (Pearsall 110). The effectiveness of these poems, which have been termed "Chinese boxes" by Kathryn Lynch, the editor of the *Norton Anthology of Dream Visions and Other Poems*, hinges on the associative property of memory so that an author like Chaucer can employ

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<sup>23</sup> Spring 2011 Eng. 300 Chaucer class comments.

<sup>24</sup> Evans 66.

<sup>25</sup> Although, John of Lydgate has pointed out HOF's similarity to the Divine Comedy and praised it as "Dante in Inglissh," but neither we should, as Chaucer did not, take this comparison too seriously. Chaucer takes his authorities very seriously, but he enjoys his literary games far more. The Eagle in Book II may have been "flown out of the Purgatorio," but he has been thoroughly "plucked of his allegorical significance" so that he may serve as roly-poly Chaucer's conveyance to the House of Fame (Muscatine 316).

a reference ironically, in a way diametrically opposed to its original significance, and count on his readers to tell the differences.<sup>26</sup>

*And never be false yow but I mete...*<sup>27</sup>

Medieval poets were inspired by dreams, that is to say, they thought the best possible muse to be the source of inspiration itself<sup>28</sup>: the dream, the unconscious mind, and the world of the imaginary. With the creation of *Le roman de la Rose*, we see the emergence of characters and situations "generated from the mind"<sup>29</sup> as a kind of "psychological allegory."<sup>30</sup> *Le roman de la rose* was a work that, along with the other dream visions which succeeded it, addressed a lack in medieval culture, for "-- Precisely because it was almost impossible to tell from any individual dream whether it was a reflection of a truth outside itself, the dream in general was felt to be a highly ambivalent phenomenon."<sup>31</sup> Dreams were generally thought to communicate the truth; however, the presence of an intercessor (the narrator/dreamer) complicated matters. The intercessor, or narrator, as in this case, "translates" common concerns (philosophy, myth, courtly love, religion, social politics) via dream vision, which was a safe haven for subversive or dangerous thought. The dream may reflect waking desires and enable the narrator to explore philosophical modes of inquiry, but if these avenues are only available in an artificial space, then is their legitimacy compromised by the mode of their telling.

Dreams have ambiguous beginnings and endings. The lack of an ending in *House of Fame* is also very true to the nature of dreams. Something that is only partially remembered, or written many years after the fact, is never fully "complete," leaving the reader with the

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<sup>26</sup> Paraphrase of Phillips 17.

<sup>27</sup> *Book of the Duchess*, l. 1234.

<sup>28</sup> Phillips 9.

<sup>29</sup> Akbari 105.

<sup>30</sup> Muscatine q. Akbari 105.

<sup>31</sup> Spearing 74.

interpretive choice of making the dream whole. Dreams are only one example of a sustained image creation; after all "the notion of the imaginative journey [is] implicit in the experience of dreaming" (Boffey 165). ...the dream vision, a form of allegory that specializes in half-seen figures, unearthly scenes, and fantastic creatures as they flit through and away from the narrator's line of sight--is already a foil for reality, already a perfect model for discussing the artificial, the mutable, and the uncertain.

Dream visions stretch themselves away from ultimate truths in order to (paradoxically) bump into them from behind. As a dream poem that "expresses a process, not a result..." (Spearing 89), or as a work that is already uncertain about what it wants to express, the *House of Fame* also meditates on the process of self-authorship and the ability of any author to trust "my own auctoritee". The work is a "process," not only because it is actually an unfinished work but also because the narrator/author of his own story has yet to decide which voice will get to narrate what part of the story. Those voices informing the dream vision stand out in comparison to the rest of the *House*, much like how the "Easter Eggs" in a movie call attention to a film's awareness of past influential films. Reminiscences of other books, and of moments and scenes in other books, are not just inert decoration, for to know the source of a reference is not to read its meaning in Chaucer's text. These textual "treasures" invite the reader to recall their memories of an earlier literary experience. The closer the reader comes to the text, the more likely they are to remember its wisdom.

No one "level" of the dream vision is truly close to the text; every character, narrator and reader is one or multiple levels removed from the action by virtue of the distance in time, location, and the sleeping or waking world. The purpose of the frame device and the narrative distance, apart from making more apparent the obvious elusiveness of an ultimate Truth, is to

emphasize one of the properties of any Archive: copiousness. Archives are copious, storing vast amounts of information that is not always catalogued in a coherent manner. The framing device of the dream vision is archival because it creates copious levels of reality; however, although it is a "structure" it allows blending between the levels. The narrator is meant to be the mediator for the reader, and the reader is supposed to identify with the narrator through his depiction of the world of his discovery or how, as it usually happens, he tells the tale.<sup>32</sup>

For Chaucer's narrator, "tale-telling" is a major part of his *rhetoric of discovery*, or how he reinvigorates his past experiences in the dream world through a series of thought associations and recollected images. We would most likely identify this technique with what we have now termed *stream of consciousness* writing, for Chaucer's narration strongly suggests the same mental picture a reader would establish if they were inside the narrator's head. From the outset of *House of Fame*, Chaucer orients his reader in a miniature of the medieval mind:

But as I slept, me mette I was  
 Within a temple y-mad of glas  
 In whiche ther were mo images  
 Of gold, stondinge in sondry stages,  
 And mo riche tabernacles,  
 And with perre mo pinacles,  
 And mo curious portreytures,  
 And queynte maner of figures  
 Of olde werke than I saw ever.  
 For certeynly, I neste never  
 Wher that I was, but wel wiste I  
 It was of Venus redely  
 The temple, for, in portreyture,  
 I saw anonright her figure  
 Naked fletinge in a see...<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See *Diagrams* section, pg.

<sup>33</sup> *House of Fame* ll.119-133.

In this mini-catalogue of antiquated items, the dreamer's memory is mediated by vision. From "olde werkes" and "statues" he recalls the image of Venus, "naked fleting in a see," surely one of the most popular goddesses for statuary subject matter in the Antiquity. Venus, the narrator thinks to himself, was Cupid's mother (137); but, yes, also Vulcan's wife (138) yet she was not faithful...one of these illicit affairs resulted in the birth of several semi-divine offspring--Aeneas, "fugitif of Troy contree" (146), son of Venus, one of the involved parties in the Trojan war. He lists each item as he sees it, and once he establishes the image of the object in mind, he is able to recall the next "memory peg" in a series of cascading images that will eventually lead him to recall his true purpose in the Temple of Glass: a complete recitation of *the Aeneid* (*House of Fame* ll.151).



**Figure 3** Botticelli, Sandro. *Birth of Venus* (1486). [Common Domain.]

At least, this is one imagining of the process. Thought association is like trying to pick up the thread of a conversation, a forgotten chunk of personal, private memory: Chaucer's narrator grasps around for subject matter to fill the negative space between the meaning he seeks (the *Aeneid*) and his cognition/awareness of the absence of memory. Other modern readers will recognize the image of Venus, naked in a sea. As one critic remarks, "the appearance at the outset of the poem of a naked Venus might seem to be a Renaissance anticipation and might prompt comparison with Botticelli's Venus rising from the waves...for the Renaissance is now immutably associated with the restoration and rediscovery of classical statuary and a pagan aesthetic" (Bennett xi; *See Figure 3*). Chaucer emerges from ancient memory to give the reader a shared memory, the Trojan War, through the image of his patron goddess who, as a goddess of love, encourages the reader to want that shared memory, to engage in the telling of a story many have loved, making it worthy of remembrance.

The sententious imagery at the beginning of the *House of Fame*, while vivid, is not the most memorable part of the dream poem, and certainly not where Chaucer displays his talents at their best. For example, many *Troilus and Creyseyde* to be Chaucer's magnum opus. As a tragedy, it has all the characteristics of "high art" and its formal structure, philosophical inquiry, and visual rhetoric are the epitome of poetic slickness. But *Troilus and Creyseyde* is not an approachable text. It is not the Chaucer text most-commonly taught at the high school and college level--that honor was claimed by *The Canterbury Tales*. As a comedy, it may not (at first glance) be considered "high art", but its comedy and raunchy content makes it accessible to students and general readers. The cheeky, slyly intellectual manner in which that humor is deployed also makes it popular with critics and scholars. To earn both the love of the general reading public and the admiration of the specialists is no mean feat--in fact, this ability is an

integral part of Chaucer's genius. Anyone can tell a good joke. Few can tell a joke that appeals to so many or that, upon remembrance, makes you laugh as if you were hearing it for the first time.

The *House of Fame* is a perfect vehicle for such humor. The narrator in a dream vision is usually a young man; Chaucer's narrator in *HOF* is the exact opposite: he "noyous for to carie" (ll.574), "too olde" (ll.995), a "lewed man" (ll. 866) and easily stupefied<sup>34</sup> by the words of his entirely undignified guide, the Eagle. "The reader recalls medieval portraiture of a small, plump Chaucer and the other places in his poetry where he represents himself as a "popet" (a little doll) with a wide waist" (Lynch 40).<sup>35</sup> This narrator quite literally carries the "weight" of interpretation. The Eagle character is yet another instance of Chaucer's literary game. A.C. Spearing says in his book *Medieval Dream Visions* that "the eagle is a personification of philosophical thought itself"<sup>36</sup>; but, if this is philosophical thought, then it is philosophy at its most pedantic: the Eagle is merely passel of clichés coined as narrative "Truth." His lecture on the physics of sound doubles as a lecture on flatulence, for "Soun is nought but air y-broken" (ll.765), and speech is nothing but the breaking of empty wind ("air" ll. 768). The eagle "recalls by retelling,"<sup>37</sup> but something is always lost in translation. Authority is therefore transformed in the mouth of a bird-brained pedant from being the hard-won quality of the text demonstrating both intellectual acuity and precision into a substance-less rhetorical effect: he whose speech approximates an authoritative fart certainly leaves a more memorable impression.<sup>38</sup> The narrator is too old to learn anything more; Jove's appointed messenger preaches to the wrong audience; the garden is a desert of sand whose potentially creative energy cannot be tapped by the feckless narrator--there is no one in this House whose "tydings" can possibly tell the truth.

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<sup>34</sup> "Fully dawsed" (ll.658).

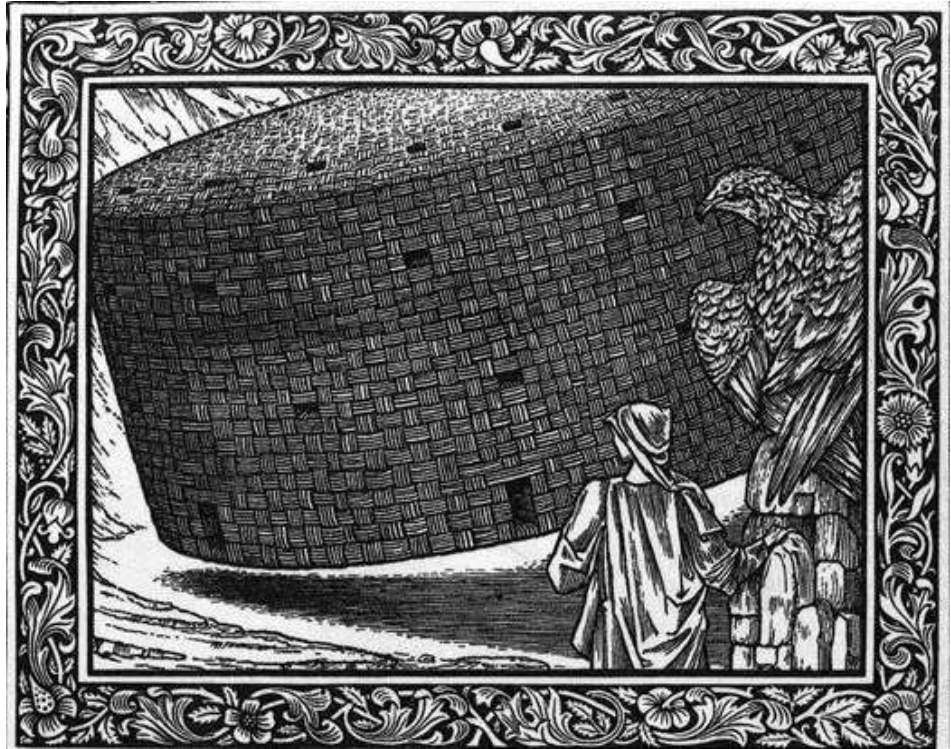
<sup>35</sup> As in the Ellesmere MS Chaucer Portrait.

<sup>36</sup> Paraphrase, Spearing 76.

<sup>37</sup> Paraphrase, Carruthers 191.

<sup>38</sup> Much like the "doke" in *Parliament of Foules*.

Even the comedic bustling of the earlier parts of the text cannot compare to its last excursion: the House of Rumor. Gone is the methodical visual catalogue from the House of Glass: Rumor is full of "whispringes," "rouninges," "jangles," with about fifty different stories flying through the air all at once (ll.1958-



**Figure 4** Burne-Jones, Edward, and Morris, William. *Kelmscott Chaucer: illustration detail from "The Hous of Fam."* c. 1896. From ARTstor [database online]. [access date 25 June 2012]. Available from ARTstor, Inc., New York, New York.  
<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8D10djArJCxdLS04eTx5RnwsXA%3D%3D>

1976). Rumor, fame, and unreliable mediators complicate what exactly is an authority at the same time as they are trying to validate their version of the truth. Within the poem, the House of Rumor is "an exhilarating and bewildering vision of the archive gone mad" (Evans 57), having just as many entrances and exits as it does noises, "and eek this hous hath of entrees / As fele as of leves been on trees" (ll.1945-46). This copiousness of noise creates a **House of Leaves**: an archive of auditory texts piling into one another until the sounds "out go" (ll.1950), much like *Figure 1*'s representation of the proliferation or "multiplication of texts." The illustration above from Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris' edition of Chaucer's collected works, commonly called *The Kelmscott Chaucer*, clarifies the narrative confusion: their House of Rumor is a



wicker-basket structure, thus transforming all of the inhabitants (those would-be narrators) into bonafide basket-cases. If the true narrative may be found here, no one would recognize it. At that shaky conclusion, both Chaucer's narrator and Chaucer himself quit the poem: its ending, like Spearing's unfinished Gothic Cathedral, open to the night sky.

Yet, perhaps for the same reasons that authors of medieval dream visions knew that the imperfections of language created possibility for finding certainty amid the uncertain realm of dreams, memorial architects like Chaucer built their Houses of Memory with the knowledge that structural defects are necessary in order for their Houses to function in the context of a memorial culture as a vehicle for remembrance. The *House of Leaves* is almost the inverse of the dream world of Chaucer's House; there, Chaucer's authorities are static objects, paintings and writing on walls that only come to life when the dreamer's attention is focused on them, or when the narrator can finally remember the source he has been trying to access. Danielewski's *House* is an alive and possessive archive: the many methods of reading the book, normally a delight, are a trap for the reader, who finds themselves, like Johnny Truant, at the midst of a story whose hold on itself is coming apart. Fact or fiction? Dream or nightmare? *House of Fame* and *House of Leaves* depend on their readers' understanding of the Book, how it works, and its ability to transmit knowledge even as it admits that it withholds any definite answers.

## House of Leaves

*Nightmares may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experience in dream vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day.*<sup>39</sup>



The beginning of *House of Leaves* starts with a pause (*upper right*), tucked away into the right corner of the front flap of the book, almost unnoticeable but for the fact that this is also the way the novel ends. The pause signals a break from reality, a departure from normal conventions. The convention in this work is the academic essay; the break from reality is a break from the world of the academic essay that is *House of Leaves* and into a hybrid genre of fiction. A dream is also pause from reality, and the dream vision leads the narrator down that hallway (represented by the two vertical || lines) to new thresholds of perception. For Chaucer, the dream vision allows him to explore new avenues of philosophical thought, and experiment with varying degrees of narrative autonomy through the constant interplay of narrator and narrative, and the changes in point of view. But Danielewski is not interested in dreams, and neither is the culture in which he writes.

Danielewski writes in a digital culture that has become disenchanted of its lurid dreams. Post Freud and Jung, we no longer consider dream theory as an adequate method of psychoanalysis, and though we may muse about our dreams, we know now that they are the products of the unconscious mind processing all the emotions and events of the day before. This has not stopped our fascination with dreams as a genre of, for instance, movies, or our obsession with the dream's opposite, the nightmare. Danielewski plays with an American audience's

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<sup>39</sup> Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, from the *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*, q. Lynch 266.

appreciation of the cinematic and the profane, and their compulsive need to temporarily disrupt their normal lives and completely replace it with the story of another's. *House of Leaves* is a novel whose suspension of disbelief is effected by the basic assumption that its readers yearn for a completely different reading experience, one that acknowledges their multi-leveled interactions with a variety of cultural texts and, therefore, not only want to be told what to read but how to read, and what to do with their reading as well. It is a book that refuses to be ignored.

The second image after the pause sign is what we may assume to be JT's desk; however, there are similar photos of the desk in the "Collage" section of the Appendix (Titled #1 and #2, respectively). It is a visual catalogue of items that most accurately represent JT's mental state while he was compiling the manuscript. They are (right to left, top to bottom): various pieces of paper or photos of some of the novel's Appendices,<sup>40</sup> an unspent bullet cartridge, a sign that reads "RED," drops of blood, a compass, a seamstress's tape measure, untouched pills, a strip of paper with a series of air plane codes, a regular tape measure, thread, a partially seen labyrinth, three cent stamps featuring portraits of Edgar Allen Poe (with different facial expressions), and what looks to be the corner of a candy wrapper. Some of these items only make sense in the context of the Appendices of *House of Leaves*; Edgar Allen Poe is quoted elsewhere, which is appropriate considering his influence on the horror genre and the novel's own indulgence in horror.<sup>41</sup> The tape measures, compass, string, and labyrinth are most easily explained: they are the navigator's tools for exploring the labyrinth. The labyrinth is the structure of *House of Leave's* archive; an explorer needs a compass to find one's way out; a length of string could be used for much the same purpose (drawing on the Greek myth of the minotaur in the labyrinth,

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<sup>40</sup> Specifically, #0001280 (p. 570), *Rescue: The Navidson Record* by Tyler Martin (p. 659), partially burnt *Another Great Hall on Ash Tree Lane* (p. 660), *Conceptual Model of the Navidson House* (p. 661).

<sup>41</sup> It may also be a nod to Danielewski's sister, "Poe" the singer, who released her second album *Haunted* concurrently with the release of *House of Leaves*.

see *Reading Guide*); and tape measures, to make sure that the house really is 1/4" (p. 29) larger on the inside than it is on the outside. Other items are more concerning, immediately provoking questions of the narrator's reliability: What is the bullet cartridge doing on the desk? Whose blood is splattered across the papers? Why hasn't Johnny Truant taken the pills?

The question of authority comes to another pause a couple pages later, on the dedication page. The usual acknowledgements are missing: in their place is a single sentence--

This is not for you.

--set in Courier New font, a font that designates one of the narrators, Johnny Truant.<sup>42</sup> Most readers believe this dedication to be Danielewski's warning to the reader, or to be a disclaimer for the whole novel. However, the dedication appears in the context of a book that is itself a negation of the critical essay. Negation is a powerful way to call attention to something of significance; double negation, doubly so. Whether they are found in oral rhetoric, poetry, or an academic essay, double negatives (which never sound natural to speakers of modern English) command the kind of notice that is not given to sentences without them. One of *House of Leaves'* signature tropes is its vigorous use of the meta level of language (see the "ftaires" analysis). In other words, "This is not for you" is not *just* a warning; the novel is not *not* for you. More simply put, in a not-book, "this is not (not) for you" means that *yes*, in fact, this book is for you. This statement accords with the experience of many who own copies of the novel, and the dedication has never swayed them from finding ways to make the book their own.

The primary narrator is Zampanó, the pseudo-scholar and original writer of the manuscript. Font choice plays a particularly important role in distinguishing between the three "main" narrators, and is often catered to each narrator's ability to see themselves in the text. For

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<sup>42</sup> See the framework diagram on the "Analysis" page.

example, Zampanó is represented by the Times New Roman font, the standard font for an academic essay. Zampanó's *House* (how he has structured the text in his head) is a reflection of his scholarship: he shows off his learning with great bravura and never misses an opportunity to play with the reader (see *Appendix A.6*, as well as the middle section of *House of Leaves*). These sections are almost childlike in their playfulness: in A.6, one of Zampanó's sources curls in on itself, forming two concentric rings almost like the "cigarette butt" at the bottom of movie screens which let the projectionist know when to flip the page. And so we flip the page and are greeted, as is typical of the middle section, by empty space. The sparseness of words on some of the pages is often used to convey a scene with very little moving room or a scene with vast, almost infinite dimensions of space. The reader must rapidly flip the pages to get the truest sense of this effect, for just like the cigarette butt earlier, the rapid flipping of the pages corresponds to the feeling of watching an old film with significant gaps between the frames. This is quite appropriate, considering Zampanó's subject matter is a documentary. At other moments in the text, Zampanó changes his tone, moving between the authorial voice of a "scholar" and the far more intimate, personal tone of a man confessing his deepest thoughts.

These changes are represented in font color: black Times New Roman represents Zampanó-the-scholar; ~~anything in red strikethrough represents his personal musings.~~<sup>43</sup> There are three variations, none of which are narrated by Zampanó and therefore have no relationship to the text as "true" parts of the narrative (although they are important to the whole). Karen Green's interview series (entitled "What Some Have Thought") is set in either Arial or Helvetica (giving it the feeling of a newspaper, p. 354). The transcript of "Tom's Story" is set in American Typewriter (loosely related to the Courier New font, p. 253). Johnny Truant's insane mother, Pelafina, uses the Dante font for her "Whalestoe Letters" (which have also been collected and

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<sup>43</sup> The red strikethrough is also an allusion to the minotaur myth.

printed in a separate volume). At these moments, the narrative's transparency lets us see (via the different fonts) the adeptness of Danielewski's ventriloquism.

"Perversion" occurs whenever the emotions of the characters are significantly intense, enough so that Zampanó felt it necessary to convey these emotions by changing the position of the Times New Roman Font. And so, during scenes where the characters experience claustrophobia or agoraphobia (of which there are many), the reader finds letters clustered together or scattered across the page, respectively. This is not the only case of this phenomenon: in the Appendices examples, the letters are turned on their heads, mirrored, or blacked out completely--in these moments Times is inverted, *Time* is out of joint, creating the sensation that both the character (within a given scene) is out of or held separate from the time, position, and reality of the rest of the novel. The switch between neatly ordered rows of Times to the haphazard, schizophrenic crookedness of the inverted Times mimics a light bulb switch, and the mechanism of the text either being "on" (straight, traditional) or "off" (stylized, experimental) forces the reader to choose between worlds: black and white, on or off. Never is the text so well behaved that each "flick" of the switch does not produce an equal, but not necessarily opposite, effect.

These tendencies make for a very disjointed text, doubtful in its authority, and ever so slightly contemptuous of its readers' reception. Luckily (unluckily, rather) we have Johnny Truant to guide our decisions. He is second to the reality of our now, one level removed from the Editors, which are supposedly closer to the audience as the last members of the publishing process to handle the text; but, he is physically closer to the text he transcribes, as he belongs to the same world as its (now dead) original author. Johnny is always represented in *Courier*

New, because he is the courier or the "messenger" of the text.<sup>44</sup> The minimalist font, with its lack of serifs, exudes a sense of transparency, a feeling that Johnny Truant sat down at his typewriter one day and painstakingly pecked out his manuscript. An owner of a typewriter would most likely possess corrective fluid, and in places where Johnny abuses his privilege as the narrator, it is almost as if he sloshes the fluid over Zampanó's text, providing the multi-textual, "Leaves" branch of the House of Memory. Zampanó constructed the House, his is the source text; Johnny is the reader authorizing their presence in the source-text by leaving traces of their presence in the margins--marginalia, partial responses to the source text, the leaves hanging off of the tree.

Like all of Chaucer's narrators, he is not only the messenger, but also the guide and interpreter: the gaze of the seeing subject and the audience's representative in the text. His name is significant for several reasons. He is "Johnny" because he is a John, a common guy who just happened to come across *House of Leaves*. His nickname "Jack" is also true to his character: Johnny "jacked" Zampanó's text (it was never for him either). As a latecomer to the text, he is a truant to the scene of a textual anomaly. Johnny Truant is both dreamer and scribe, to draw on the terminology of Chaucer's dream poem and of the medieval manuscript community, because he is simultaneously controlling and controlled by the narrative. His emotional attachment to the text makes him the best medieval reader of "The Navidson Record" that Zampanó could have possibly asked for. As he reads *House of Leaves*, he gradually starts to integrate the supernatural effect of the text into his own life, an event that is represented in his "journal" entries, which form a bulk of the footnotes.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, he is also *HOL's* "auctor," but his authority is circumspect. In the beginning, Johnny may have considered it his mission to transcribe *HOL* and bestow the god-like

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<sup>44</sup> House of Leaves forums.

<sup>45</sup> See Appendices (A.1-6), look for the Courier New font.

academic text upon the world at large, by the end of *HOL* he has not only realized that he is not the work's sole authority, but to claim ownership of any part of the house--even the part he writes himself into, in the corner of the room or aloft, where Zampanó sits and observes--is to be possessed by its influence.

"The image creates the means by which to accredit it"<sup>46</sup> is the statement of purpose for why the book was written the way it was written. The very deliberate misuse of the book as a technology that facilitates the reading experience (that is, the reader has to turn *House of Leaves* upside down, read it in front of a mirror, etc. in order to "do" interpretation) as well as the book's parodying of the academic essay (the falsification of evidence) is the means by which the book establishes its authority and trustworthiness. The published book is supposed to be a self-accrediting entity, and from its first page, *House of Leaves* gives every appearance of not being such. "~~Picture that. In your dreams~~" (*Appendix A.4*) is one such example of the book's puckish humor: it offers an image to the reader and negates it simultaneously, so that all the reader is left with is the misleading impression that they have been given some modicum of quantifiable evidence to validate their impressions of the book.

Zampanó falsifies his evidence by inserting footnotes to reference made-up articles and authors. He uses the standard formatting for citation, which appears to legitimize his work, but as we find out through Johnny Truant, most of his claims lead to nowhere--leading back, in fact, to himself.<sup>47</sup> The false evidence says more about the nature of authority in an academic essay than does it condemn Zampanó's scholarly practices, and it also says a lot about Zampanó's audience.

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<sup>46</sup> *Appendix A6.*

<sup>47</sup> Too numerous to list here. --is actually a direct quote from the novel, where it appears to excuse the lack of films (not) cited in the (fake) Bibliography (p. 152). At the time I started this project, I typed the above footnote without realizing where it came from, or why the phrase sounded so familiar. Like Johnny Truant, I developed the uncanny knack for remembering the language of *House of Leaves*!. See further down for why the unusual note (truncated where normally they are quite lengthy) is so significant, and *Figure 5*.



We are convinced by the superficial appearances of things, and such is the nature of Zampanó's game that we do not need the weight of actual *auctoritee* to back up his claims so long as they are formatted according to the standards to which we are accustomed.

Closely related to falsified evidence is Zampanó's overabundance of evidence, again catering to the superficial nature of his audience. Pages 120-134 of *House of Leaves* exhibit a particularly interesting section of the work, not only for the mirrored and inverted text, but also for the dramatically-extended footnote (*See Appendix A.2*). In this scene, Zampanó is trying to describe the house. Unable to do so succinctly, he then gives the reader a pages-long footnotes (14 pages, to be exact) explaining what the house does *not* look like. The house apparently does not have anything in common with any important architectural work in the history of Western art. That it would not share any structural features with a "Brutalist" work is not improbable; that it would not share any structural features with the oldest and most basic works of architecture like those found in the Scara Brae settlement is impossible.

Zampanó's dramatized inability to describe the visible is a failure of his duties as a narrator, to be the reader's eyes onto the text. However, this catalogue also demonstrates his recollective prowess and his authority as a scholar, which is to say that authority in scholarship is defined by the inability to say things succinctly and the marked tendency for copious amounts of digression. This high-brow jab at academia is in keeping with the tongue-in-cheek humor of the rest of the book, surfacing nowhere quite as prominently as this example, which I have aptly come to call the "catalogue from hell".

Much in the style of Polonius's speech to Hamlet,<sup>48</sup> which also comments on the nature of dramatic, visually mediated forms of art, characters are digressive when they are uncomfortable or lacking knowledge in the topic. They make up for their lacking quality information with quantities of information, or in copiousness. Whereas mature writers can be concise, the immature writer's prose is laden with run-on sentences, over-use of adjectives, and one too many footnotes. It could also be a sign of the writer's enthusiasm, as if he could not contain the flow of his writing via periodic interruptions (the period itself) and so uses "strong commas" long after the sentence could have been considered finished. "Of course, this is a good place to start but it cannot end there either," Zampanó notes before signalling another footnote (147) that will supposedly continue the list (alas, this footnote does not exist).

As a text, *House of Leaves* also seems to be in the process of discovering something: of finding a "good place to start" which is itself a tried and true technique to capture the reader's attention and make a memorable impression. While most narratives tend to head in the direction of a definable plot after "this good place to start", in *House of Leaves* that promised end is never brought to fruition on purpose: the story is too good, or the narrator's rhetorical flourishes too many (Zampanó certainly has many), to cut short--"and so it cannot end there either." Zampanó's reluctance to give the reader a definite ending suggests his propensity for an oral story-telling whereby the narrator starts in the middle of his thoughts (*in media res*) and searches for the beginning--in this footnote's case, ending with Scara Brae is not only a "good" beginning (or "good place to start") but the *best* beginning, as it (among the other early artworks listed) is considered the first beginning to Western art history; in the beginning *ex nihilo*.

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<sup>48</sup> "The best actors in the world, either for **tragedy**, **comedy**, **HISTORY**, **pastoral** **pastoral-comical**, **historical-pastoral**, **tragical-historical**, **tragical-comical-historical-pastoral**, **scene indivisible**, or **poem unlimited**" (*Hamlet* Act II sc ii).

Although this catalogue is not the only such lengthy list the novel offers us,<sup>49</sup> it is the most obnoxious. When writers say too much, they are avoiding saying the shorter thing that

would take up less space. When writers say too little, they leave the reader with an interesting conundrum (*Figure 5*). "Too numerous to list here" is a phrase that somehow entered my critical vocabulary when I first began writing this paper, another example of the extraordinary remembrance the novel seems to encourage. Its significance is such that at first it went unnoticed in my revisions until I finally caught the reference: the phrase is the exact sort of directional cue any student would write themselves

in the margins (memo, note, question etc.) reminding them to do something with the text (and

<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>	
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<b>Film:</b>	
Too numerous to list here.	

**Figure 5** p. 152 of *House of Leaves*: a fake bibliography.

"Too numerous to list here" comes across as rather cheeky considering the monstrous size of the catalogue that preceded this bibliography.

<sup>49</sup> *House of Leaves* p. 64, footnote 45.

then conveniently forgetting to delete the memo later). Zampanó's casual negligence is humorous for this reason and also because his dismissive tone reveals both his age and perhaps his cranky attitude towards what was fast becoming a rather unwieldy text. It is the exact sort of surly marginalia that traditionally appears at the end of manuscripts when the work is completed (also called a colophon).<sup>50</sup> Zampanó's colophon is yet another example of his puckish sense of humor: *House of Leaves* never seems to find its beginning nor its ending, and so its "end material" (the Bibliography) appears in the book's textual center.

Like the catalogue, the effectiveness of this utterance also hinges on the visual. Whereas the length of the catalogue signified an *inability* or *failure* to mediate the visual in an instance where it shouldn't have required as many words as were printed in order to describe the house, the "Too numerous to cite here" quip represents an inability or failure to translate the visual to the written in an instance where brevity is almost a falsehood. Film is a visually striking medium that necessitates copious description: without its traditional signifiers in a bibliography (director, leading actors, producer, studio, premiere date etc.) we cannot "watch it". Instead, Zampanó makes us "read" the shortest film that *House of Leaves* has "produced", which calls upon our

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<sup>50</sup> In Solveig Robinson's remarks on the arduousness of scribal life in chapter two of his book, "Scribal Culture and the Codex", he describes a scribe's daily routine and the physical aches and pains that accompanied doing work in stale, dim room. The colophon I refer to above is the following:

Margaretha von Schonbergk has written this with her left hand.

Thin ink, bad vellum, difficult text.

Thank God, it will soon be dark.

Have patience with the errors. Written in my 73rd year with great labour in the Wienhausen convent during the expulsion from our monastery.

Now I've written the whole thing: for Christ's sake give me a drink.

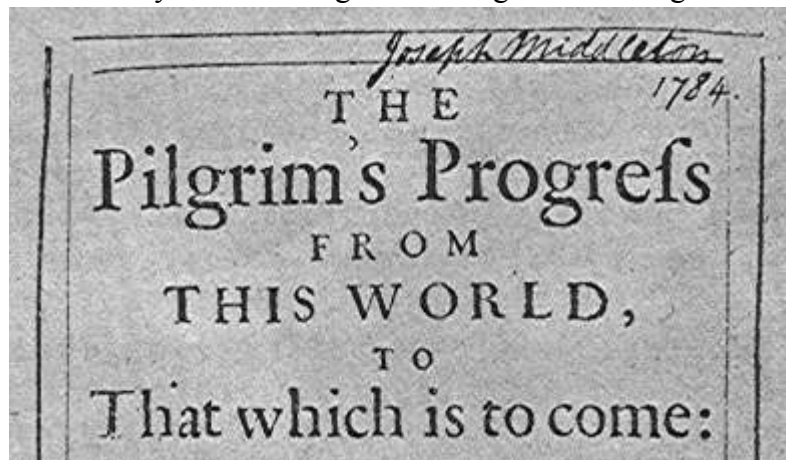
(Robinson 69).

ability to imagine the visual as a virtual, mass-mediatic text. Remembrance is therefore a collaborative experience negotiated between author, reader, and narrator.

The experience of reading and compiling *House of Leaves* influences Johnny's worldview to the extent that it even impacts his diction and spelling. The "Ftaires" episode, is one such example (see *Appendix A.1 & A.3*). Danielewski supplements *HOL*, which is a story of discovery, with other accounts of past discoveries. This particular account relates the travel journals of "three men had left the Jamestown Colony in search of game" during the "starving

winter of 1610."<sup>51</sup> As the journals reveal, the men traveled for several days until they stumbled onto an icy field where they camped for the night.

The following spring two of their thawing bodies were found along with the manuscript that would eventually fall into Zampanó's, and through him Johnny's, but finally to the reader's, hands (p. 410). Before their deaths, the men of 1610 discovered a remarkable



**Figure 6** *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That which is to come: Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream wherein is Discovered, The manner of his letting out, His Dangerous Journey; And safe Arrival at the Desired Countrey* written by John Bunyan (1678).

Although *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not the only such text published around the time of the discovery of the house on Ash Tree Lane, it is a good example of the use of the fancy "f"s. Interestingly enough, although *Pilgrim's Progress* is a Christian allegory, it is also a dream vision.

set of "Ftaires!" (p. 414) that will eventually become a part of the foundation of the house that the Navidson family moves into, thereby providing historical validation of the house's "existence".

<sup>51</sup> See *Figure 6*, an example of a printed text from that time.

Johnny Truant empathizes with the explorers' fruitless search, seeing in their own disaster a mirror image of his own tirelessly searching for "the food" of *House of Leaves*: its ultimate meaning, thus justifying his reasons for transcribing a project that negatively impacts his ability to pay rent as well as take care of his sanity. However, it is not only the discoverers' "search" that yields nothing, so much as their "fearch" for food yields "nothing," an intriguing aberration of traditional spelling that Johnny Truant takes in stride. Johnny certainly must have found the "fearch" (that particular misspelling of the term) worthy of remembrance as he continues to use it throughout the rest of his footnote, which results in an unintentionally hilarious lisp that continues uncorrected for about a page and a half before the Editors themselves (exasperated but ever politically-correct, always the pink of editorial somberness) intercede:

<sup>399</sup>Mr. Truant has mistaken the long "S" for an "f." John Bell the publisher for *British Theatre* abolished the long "S" back in 1775. In 1786, Benjamin Franklin indirectly approved of the decision when he wrote that "the Round s begins to be the Mode and in nice printing the Long S is rejected entirely. --Ed.<sup>52</sup>

After this footnote, Johnny Truant disappears from the narrative only to reappear eighty pages later to announce the death of another character, this time without the long "f." Apart from their unintentional comic effect, the "fancy" 'fs' articulate part of JT's mental ontology during his transcribing efforts: yes, he has internalized the world to the extent that it has changed his language; but also, he latches onto the "fs" in a world where "Ss" usually refer to the dangerous staircase in the depths of the house. The stronger consonants give JT a lifeline in a linguistic nightmare. The "Ftaires!" episode is also a clear example of inter-textual congress: it is the perfect response (however misguided) of an ethical reader to the text that holds his interest.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid p. 413


By examining the various textual and extra-textual intersections between these two works, I hope to start a new cross-temporal conversation bridging the works of Chaucer's time with our own "experimental" and "post-modern" literature, and also to continue the work of those in the field of medieval studies who have already made the connections between the various technologies of our digital age<sup>53</sup> and the "virtual" technologies of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>53</sup> A popular work well-received by both non-medievalists and the critical community is Beverly Bryant's *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog*, which is still running at [houseoffame.blogspot.co.uk](http://houseoffame.blogspot.co.uk) and has also published the 2006-2009 entries in book format along with commentary from other critics researching the Middle Ages and New Media.

## Reading Guide

A selection of terms used throughout the essay, as well as others that go unmentioned (either because they did not fit into my analysis or because, as with the many paralinguistic creatures in *House of Leaves*, their meaning has been explored quite extensively by the folks over at the *House of Leaves* forums site, <http://forums.markzdanielewski.com>.) All definitions are my own. For the Middle English: *The Riverside Chaucer* is the standard Chaucer text with excellent notes on the pronunciation and grammar of Chaucer's Middle English. Other guides may be found at the beginning of most editions of Chaucer's works.

<p><b>"The 5 ½ Minute Hallway"</b></p>	<p>Sometimes notated as  in the footnotes that reference it, "The 5 ½ Minute Hallway" is a "teaser" of <i>The Navidson Rapport</i>. It is also an abstract of the novel at large, giving the reader only the most significant pieces of information (the hallway that leads to the stairs, the house itself, the growling sound that occurs as the house reshapes itself, the camera angles), just as an abstract for a real academic essay would, or even a film synopsis.</p>
<p><b><i>auctor, auctoritee, auctoritas</i></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (n) one who uses multiple authorities</li> <li>2. (n) (an, the) authority</li> <li>3. (adj. / abstract n.) a property of an authoritative text (established after an appropriate amount of time, through its popularity as a reference in the works of other <i>auctors</i>)</li> </ol>
<p><b>"Exploration #4"</b></p>	<p>A somewhat longer film-short taken from <i>The Navidson Rapport</i>, "Exploration 4" is an example of <i>House of Leaves</i>' motivic tendencies. Instead of one continuous clip, it is composed of shots of random (yet purposeful) things in the house here and there, occasional voices or quotes from the main characters, and other material that probably amassed during the film's shooting. When I call <i>House of Leaves</i> "motivic", I am referring to its ability to work with a very small amount of material and significantly expand upon it as it threads throughout the narrative (much like a Beethoven symphony). An entire paper could be devoted to tracking how and when "Exploration #4" is used in the narrative.</p>
<p><b><i>ftaires!</i></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. refers to an editorial error made by Johnny Truant, who read the antiquated "s" as "f" (a common mistake immediately rectified by the Editors in the next footnote); a humorous lisp of a mis-reading/transcription of an 18th century printed text.</li> <li>2. Also refers to Johnny Truant's consistent confusion of the text with his own life as he "descends" by various degrees into the world of the <i>House</i>, merging fact and fiction.</li> </ol>



	<p>3. The "ftaires" are also <i>HOL</i>'s version of "Eureka!" although it is not always uttered in the cheerful context of a welcome discovery.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(See Analysis section)</p>
<p><i>house</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The <i>house</i> is the <i>locus amoenus</i>, labyrinth, archive, world-tree, and heart of <i>House of Leaves</i>.</li> <li>2. Appears in blue to mimic the digital "blue screen"--the background for movies, the blank canvas before the start or after the finish of productions.</li> <li>3. A house in <i>HOL</i> holds a dark mirror to the Western idea of home by taking the home's feeling of stability, centeredness, and structure and inverting it to produce instability, uncertainty, and the labyrinth.</li> </ol>
<p><del><i>minotaur</i></del></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the "minotaur" is a reference to the famous labyrinth and Theseus myth. Its various functions in <i>HOL</i> suggest that it is the symbolic, existential (and linguistic) center of the work.</li> <li>2. The strikethrough is the photographic negative of the paratext.</li> <li>3. The "strikethrough" technique also means that all the words in red (aside from "minotaur") were not supposed to make it into the final draft of <i>House of Leaves</i>; however, Johnny Truant chose to preserve their presence in the text. The strikethrough also indicates that Zampanó himself was uneasy about letting the reader see his raw, impressionistic reactions to the text; however, nonetheless needed that authorial version of himself to be heard.</li> <li>4. The scholarly authorial voice is that of Zampanó-the-scholar, a querulous perfectionist (author implicit in the text). The minotaur authorial narrative voice is the author explicit of the text -- it is the voice that readers are cautioned never to use as a part of their academic analyses, e.g. "The author thinks this..." or "The author did this because"</li> </ol>
<p><i>"Muß es sein?" (Must it be?)</i></p>	<p>The "second dedication" to <i>House of Leaves</i>, is taken from the manuscript marginalia of Beethoven's String Quartet 16 (Opus 127), the last work he ever composed. Here I'll shamelessly quote Wikipedia's summary (directly sourced from the Gutenberg E-Book Project of the Quartet and IMSLP, International Music Score Library Project, both highly reputable sources), "Under the introductory slow chords in the last movement Beethoven wrote in the manuscript, "Muß es sein?" to which he responds, with the faster main theme of the movement, "Es muß sein!" (It must be!). The whole movement is headed "Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß" ("The Difficult Decision")." Composed after</p>

	<p>Symphony no. 9, Beethoven's final string quartets are significant, even privileged, in the repertoire for Beethoven's mature thematic transformations, and the chromaticism and emotive dynamics that would come to pervade the Romantic period.</p> <p>At the beginning of <i>House of Leaves</i>, the dedication suggests the feeling of inevitability that characterizes the decisions of the characters throughout the rest of the book. For example, Will Navidson does not <i>have</i> to explore the staircase, nor does Johnny Truant <i>have</i> to complete his transcription project, nor does Zampanó, the "blind bard" of the book, <i>have</i> to take on such a substantial academic project of (as it turns out) complete fiction. However, as interpreters or "readers" of their respective realities, and as authors of their own experience, they <i>must</i> make those difficult decisions that contribute to the development of their characters, for better or worse.</p> <p>The phrase is also characteristic of Danielewski's "motivic" (as opposed to "lyrical", as in "a beautiful melody", however <i>House of Leaves</i> also tells a great story) style, where he takes very small, thematic materials and threads them throughout his "composition", much in the style of Beethoven, who is known as a motivic composer. The themes encapsulated by "Must it be?", "ftaires!", "house", "minotaur" etc. are just a few of the book's leitmotifs.</p>
<p><b><i>The Navidson Family</i></b></p>	<p>Nuclear family/central characters who move into the absurd house that is the book's central story. Will Navidson and Karen Green and their two children, Chad and Daisy. Will Navidson's character is loosely modeled after the life/work of Kevin Carter, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer most known for his photos of the famine in Sudan in the early 90s. Carter was a member of the "Bang-Bang Club", a group of photographers active from 1990-1994 during South Africa's transition from apartheid. Carter killed himself three months after winning the Pulitzer. Most say he did it out of guilt over the questionable ethical decisions that went into the making of the winning photo; however, this is mostly urban myth.</p> <p>The name "Navidson" is an exercise in negation. "Navidson" is a nonce word and an uncommon (if not unheard of) name in English. It is most likely a "negation" of the "Davidson" just as the Navidson family's world is a negation or inverse of the real.</p>
<p><b><i>paratext, paralinguistics paratechnologies</i></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The "ur-character" of a given text, speech act, or technological product.</li> <li>2. In traditional texts, the paratext is composed of the font choice, copyright page, dedicatory page, title page, back pages. Technically, the epilogue could also count as the paratext as it is usually unrelated to the story proper. The paratext of a scientific paper includes seemingly unimportant decisions such as where to place a graph/diagram/illustration on a page, or at what point in the narrative it should appear.</li> </ol>

	<p>A book's cover and whether or not it was published in hardcover or paperback could also be considered part of the paratext, as both do not contribute to the telling to the story but nonetheless influence how the reader interacts with the book.</p> <p>2. The paralinguistic features of speech consist of the sounds, rhythms, tonal personality, etc. that are common to many languages but (arguably) native to none. For example, even scholars of the languages used during Classical Antiquity can only ever approximate the cadence and intonation of Ancient Latin. The same can also be said for any language whose speech community no longer exists. "Hmm", "Huh?", "Ow!", "Psh", "Tsk" are paralinguistic features of English; however, although most paralinguistic features of language are onomatopoeias, not all onomatopoeias are paralinguistic features of language. Beatboxing is a perfect example of such. Although systems have been developed to transcribe beatboxing sounds phonetically, these systems are not in common usage. For me, the paralinguistic features of <i>House of Leaves</i> are those aspects of its language (syntax, diction, exact quotes, etc.) that find their way into the readers' vocabulary without their conscious knowledge. When the readers write these utterances down, they have become the ventriloquists of the text, and moderators of its extra-textual memory. "Ftaires!" is once such occurrence, my own "Too numerous to list here" is another.</p> <p>3. The "paratechnology" of <i>House of Leaves</i> is its "psychic" or otherwise connection to its readers. (Closely related to parapsychology, the study of paranormal/supernatural happenings). This term mostly applies to what happens to Johnny Truant as he transcribes Zampanó's manuscript; however, it could also include <i>House of Leaves</i> "actual" readers--those on the forums have reported a number of weird occurrences. Readers have been known to experience increased feelings of paranoia or the desire to measure the rooms in their houses--however, this could be hearsay. There is the odd suggestion in the book itself that it should, and can, be burned (a la Will Navidson running out of matches during one of his explorations). Disappointingly enough, as one intrepid forum-goer reported, <i>House of Leaves</i> burns much like any other book, and there is nothing particularly spooky that may be gleaned from its charred pages.</p>
<p><b><i>unheimlich</i></b></p>	<p>Freud's notion of the uncanny; one of the novel's leitmotifs and a big part of its philosophical underpinnings. Literally translated as "the opposite of what is familiar", the term gets its name from <i>heimlich</i> or "homely". The house on Ash Tree Lane is certainly an "unhomely" place, more akin to a tomb than to a nice place to raise the family. What is uncanny about the house's "ftaires" is not their depth so much as their mutability: the explorers who go down them are well used to documenting the uncanny on the earthly plane, but down in the labyrinth exists a set of rules that are not theirs to control. What is also emblematic of the uncanny is the simple fact that the dimensions of the house on the inside are larger than those of the outside (which perhaps accounts for the ftaires, the labyrinth and all that extra space).</p>

Appendix A1: Front matter first page preceding copyright page.





146 For example, there is nothing about the house that even remotely resembles 20<sup>th</sup> century works whether in the style of Post-Modern, Late-Modern, Brutalism, Neo-Expressionism, Wrightian, The New Formalism, Miesian, the International Style, Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, the Pueblo Style, the Spanish Colonial, to name but a few, with examples such as the Western Savings and Loan Association in Superstition, Arizona, Animal Crackers in Highland Park, Illinois, Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, or Mineries Condominium in Venice, Wurster Hall in Berkeley, Katselas House in Pittsburgh, Dulles International Airport, Greene House in Norman Oklahoma, Chicago Harold Washington Library, the Watts Towers in South Central, Barcelona National Theatre, New Town of Seaside Florida, Tugendhat House, Rue de Laeken in Brussels, Richmond Riverside in Richmond Surrey, the staircase hall in the Athens, Georgia News Building, the Tsukuba Center Building in Ibaraki, the Digital House, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, the interior of the Judge Institute of Management Studies in Cambridge, Maison à Bordeaux, TGV Railway Station in Lyon-Satolas, the post-modernism of the Wexner Center for Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio, Palazzo Hotel in Fukuoka, National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, Sainsbury Wing of the National

**Appendix A.2: "The Epic Footnote" (Scan of Pg. 120 and 134 of *House of Leaves*)**

*Left:* The start of the footnote, and *Below:* the end of the footnote.

the Colosseum, the sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia, Praeneste with its axonometric reconstruction, the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, the Forum Boarium in Rome, the Maison Carrée at Nîmes, or the House of the Vettii in Pompeii, the walls of Herculaneum, the terrace of Naxian Lions on Delos, the Tower of the Winds in Athens, the Stoa of Attalus in the agora of Athens, the plan for the city of Pergamum or city center of Miletus or the Bouleuterion in Miletus, or the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, Temple of Athena Polias at Priene, Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the theatre at Epidaurus, the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens as well as the Temple of Olympian Zeus, or the tholos at Delphi, or the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, or the Erechtheion on the Acropolis, the Propylaea on the Acropolis, the Parthenon with its Panathenaic frieze, Athen's acropolis, the temple of Aphaia at Aegina, the Temple of Olympian Zeus at Acragas, the Temple of Hera or Poseidon or Neptune at Paestum, the Temple of Apollo at Corinth, the shrine of Anubis at the Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir al Bahari, or the Lion Gate at Mycenae, or the palace at Mycenae, the palace of Tiryns, the Palace of Minos, Knossos, Crete—which seems like a good place to end though it cannot end there, especially when there is still the Great Zimbabwe Enclosure, the Giza pyramids of Mykerinos, Cheops and Chefren, to say nothing of Ireland's New Grange passage grave, France's Essé gallery grave, Malta's Ggantija temple complex, Scotland's Skara Brae's settlement, the Lascaux cave, the Laussel pre-historic rock-cut Venus, or the notion of the Terra Armata hut which is also a good place to end though of course it cannot end there either—147



## Appendix A.3: The "Ftaires" Episode.

Lord De la Warr's timely arrival with supplies those still living would have fled.<sup>395</sup>

With the help of John Rolfe's tobacco industry, the marriage of Pocahontas, and the naming of Jamestown as the Virginia capital, the colony survived. However Nathaniel Bacon's fierce battle with the tidewater aristocrat Sir William Berkeley soon left the village in flames. Eventually the capital of Virginia was moved to Williamsburg and the settlement quickly decayed. In 1934 when park excavations began, very little remained of the site. As Park Warden Davis Manatok reported, "The marsh land has obscured if not completely consumed the monuments of the colony."<sup>396</sup>

All of which is relevant only because of a strange set of pages currently held at the Lacuna Rare Books Library at Horenew College in South Carolina.

Supposedly the journal in question first turned up at The Wishart Bookstore in Boston. It had apparently been mixed in with several crates of books dropped off from a nearby estate. "Most of it was dreck" said owner Laurence Tack. "Old paperbacks, second rate volumes of Sidney Sheldon, Harold Robbins, and the like. No one here paid them much attention."<sup>397</sup>

Eventually the journal was bought for a remarkable \$48.00 when a Boston University student noticed "Warr" penciled inside the cover of the badly damaged volume. As she soon discovered, the book was not De la Warr's but one he had kept in his library. It seems that prior to Warr's arrival, during "the starving time" of the winter of 1610, three men had left the Jamestown Colony in search of game. As the journal reveals, they traveled for several days until they stumbled onto an icy field where they camped for the night. The following spring two of their thawing bodies were found along with this priceless document.

For the most part, the entries concern the quest for game, the severe weather and the inevitable understanding that cold and hunger were fast colluding into the singular sensation of death:

18 Janiuere, 1610

We fearch<sup>398</sup>for deere or other Game and alwayes  
there is nothing. Tiggs believof our luck will change.

<sup>395</sup>Consider the interesting mention in Rupert L. Everett's *Gallantrie and Hardship in the Newfoundland* (London: Samson & Sons Publishing Company, Inc., 1673), where a colonist remarked how "Warr in Fray sure was all tabled Balls, full with much Delight and of course strange Veering Spirit."

<sup>396</sup>*Virginia State Park Report* (Virginia State Press, v. 12, April 1975), p. 1,173.

<sup>397</sup>Personal interview with Laurence Tack, May 4, 1996.

<sup>398</sup>This sporadic "f" for "s" stuff mystifies me,<sup>399</sup> but I don't care anymore. I'm getting the fuck out of here. Good thing too, fince I'm also being evicted from my apartment for failure to pay. It took them all of January, February and moft of March to do it but here it is the end of March and if I'm not out by tomorrow, people will come for me. My plan's to leave tonight and take a southern route all the way to Virginia, where I hope to find that place, or at the very least find some piece of reality that's at the root of that place, which might in turn—I hope; I do, do hope—help me addrefs some of the awful havoc always tearing through me.

Luckily, I've managed to put enough money together to get the hell away. My Vifa was canceled a month ago but I had some good fortune selling my mother's locket (though I kept the gold necklace).

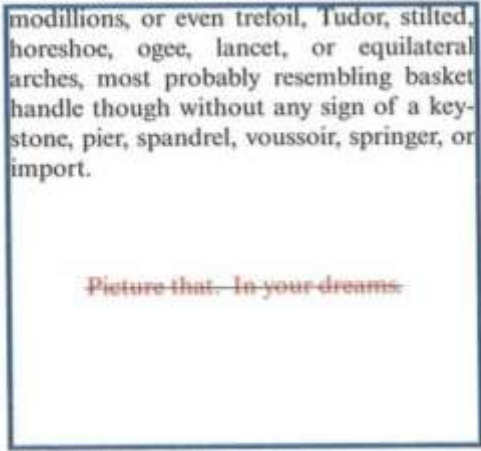
Appendix A.4 & A.5: Danielewski's creative use of negative space.

Currently, the greatest threat comes from the area of digital manipulation.

In 1990 in *The New York Times*, Andy Grundberg wrote:

"In the future, readers of newspapers and magazines will probably view news pictures more as illustrations than as reportage, since they will be well aware that they can no longer distinguish between a genuine image and one that has been manipulated. Even if news photographers and editors resist the temptations of electronic manipulation, as they are likely to do, the credibility of all reproduced images will be diminished by a climate of reduced expectations. In short, photographs will not seem as real as they once did."<sup>184</sup>

Kovachev, Will Roberts, Josef von Sternberg, René Clément, Connie Field, Roy Boulting, Jack Glen and Lothar Wolff, Lipscomb, Alain Resnais, Karl Gass, Ruspoli, Jean Grémillon, Lionel Rogosin, Marcel Ophüls, Louis Lumière, Fred Friendly, Koenig, Georges Franju, John Huston, Bunny Peters Dana, Yuli Stroyanov, Jim Brown, Brault, Raymond Depardon, Michael Apted, Cinda Firestone, Louis de Rochemont, George Rouquier, James Algar, Frederick Wiseman, Harry Watt, Erik Barnouw, Jean Renoir, Robert Snyder, Jerry Blumenthal, Jennifer Rohrer, Gualtiero Jacopetti, Yulia Solintseva, Dziga Vertov, Robert Flaxman, Edgar Anstey, Sergei Eisenstein, Ralph Steiner, George Stoney, Gheorghe Vitandis, Léon Poirier, Heinz Sielman, John Korty, Helen Whitney, John Whitmore, Budd Boetticher, Janus Majewski, Howard Smith-Sarah Kernehan, J. B. Holmes, Peter Davis, Jeremy Sanford, Charlotte Zwerin, Amalie Rothschild, Emile de Antonio, Thor Heyerdahl, Jonathan Danam Christian Blackwood, Herbert Kline, Siegfried Kraussner,	Richard T. Heffron, Robert Gardner, Alexander Petrovich Dovzhenko, Eric Haims, Beryl Fox, Robert Vas, Morton Silverstein, Andy Warhol, Abe Osberoff, William Richert, Frédéric Rossif, Jean Painlevé, Arthur R. Duba, Kon Ichikawa, Chris Marker, Vsevolod Pudovkin, John Pett, Al Di Lauro, Garson Kanin, Denys Colomb de Daunant, John Coben, Sergei Gerasimov, Nicola van der Heyde, Yevsey Hogg, David Helfern Jr., Bruce Weber, Bert Haanstra, Harold Mantell, Roger Graef, Frank Capra, Jacques Kadiar, Seymour Stern, Marc Allégret, M. C. Vovk, Hellen, Andrew and Annelise Thorndike, Ken Burns, Susan Clayton, Jonas Mekas, Charles Guggenheim, Alan Lomax, Pare Lorentz, Yelizaveta Svilova, Gil Kofman, Les Blank, Tony Richardson, Josef Csoke, Joseph Strick, Lindsay Anderson, George Greenough, James Algar, Murray Lerner, Karel Reisz, Michael Powell, Bert Stern, David Wojper, Herman van der Horst, Albert and David Maysles, Arthur Baron, Gerhard Scheumann, Craig Gilbert, Garson Kanin, Sidney Meyers, Wladislaw Slesicki, Bruce Brown—183
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<sup>184</sup>Andy Grundberg, "Ask It No Questions: The Camera Can Lie," *The New York Times*, August 12, 1990, Section 2, 1, 29. All of which reiterates in many ways what Marshall McLuhan already anticipated when he wrote: "To say 'the camera cannot lie' is merely to underline the multiple deceits that are now practiced in its name."



Ironically, the very technology that instructs us to mistrust the image also creates the means by which to accredit it.

«Or TNT. Truth And Truth therefore becoming another name  
 for the nitrating of toluene or C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>5</sub>N<sub>3</sub>O<sub>6</sub>—not to be  
 confused with C<sub>16</sub>H<sub>10</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>—in other words one word: trini-  
 trotoluene. TNT<sup>188</sup> telegraphing a weird coalition of  
 sense. On one hand transcendent and lasting and on the  
 other violent and extremely flammable.



As author Murphy Gruner once remarked:

“Just as is true with Chandler’s Marlowe, the viewer is won over simply because the shirts are rumpled, the soles are worn, and there’s that ever present hat. These days nothing deserves our faith less than the slick and expensive. Which is how video and film technology comes to us: rumpled or slick.

“Rumpled Technology—capital M for Marlowe—hails from Good Guys, Radio Shack or Fry’s Electronics. It is cheap, available and very dangerous. One needs only to consider *The George Holliday Rodney King Video* to recognize the power of such low-end technology. Furthermore, as the recording time for tapes and digital disks increases, as battery life is extended, and as camera size is reduced, the larger the window will grow for capturing events as they occur.

“Slick Technology—capital S for Slick—is the opposite: expensive, cumbersome, and time consuming. But it too is also very powerful. Digital manipulation allows for the creation of almost anything the imagination can come up with, all in the safe confines of an editing suite, equipped with 24 hour catering and an on site masseuse.”<sup>186</sup>

<sup>186</sup>Murphy Gruner’s *Document Detectives* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), p. 37.<sup>187</sup>

One can imagine a group of Documentary Detectives whose sole purpose is to uphold Truth & Truth—by guaranteeing the the authenticity of all works. Their seal of approval would create a sense of public faith which could only be maintained if said Documentary Detectives were as fierce as pit bulls and as scrupulous as saints. Of course, this is more the kind of thing a novelist or playwright would deal with, and as I am pointedly not a novelist or a playwright I will leave that tale to someone else—



## Appendix A.6: A "faked" footnote that curls in on itself.

Hans Staker from Geneva, Switzerland has researched the Navidson-match question. By carefully analyzing one black & white print which briefly appears after the flare vignettes, Staker managed to magnify the matchbook just visible in the lower left hand corner. Navidson's thumb obscures most of the design but the Latin words *Fuit Illium* can still be made out along with the English words *Thanks To These Puppies*.

Based on this scant evidence, Staker successfully determined that the matches came from of all places a pub outside of Oxford, England, run by a former classics professor and amateur phillumenist by the name of Eagley "Egg" Learned who, as it turned out, had designed the matchbook himself.

"Most British septuagenarians have their gardens to putter about in. I have my pub," Learned told Staker in an interview. "I tinker constantly with my ale selection the way the incontinent fret about their tulips. The matches came out of that sort of tinkering. There's actually a factory not too far from here. I merely applied twenty years of Latin to come up with the cover. Call it an old man's hat tip to anarchy. A touch more incendiary than the old Swan Vestas, I think. Designed to keep the goraks away."<sup>L</sup>

Staker goes on to trace how the matchbook got from Learned's pub to Navidson's steady hands. Learned actually stopped ordering the matches back in '85 which was right after Navidson visited England and presumably the pub.

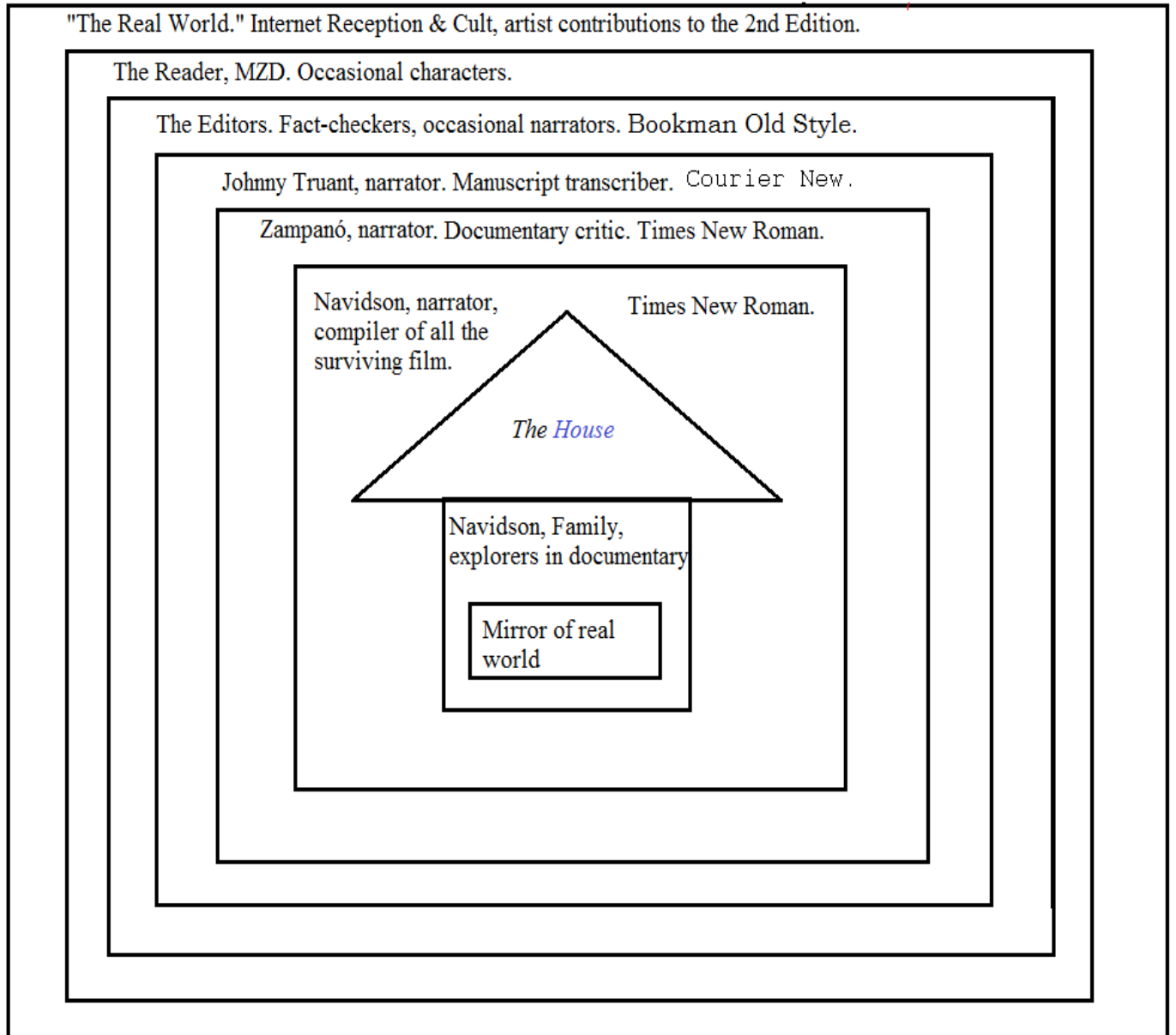
It is highly unlikely Navidson ever intended to use a book of ten year old matches on a journey as important as this one. In fact, he packed several boxes of recently purchased matches which he lost along with the trailer and bike. Probably some private history caused him to carry the matchbook on him.

To Learned's credit, they are good matches. The heads ignite easily and the staffs burn evenly. Staker located one of these matchbooks and after recreating the conditions in the house (namely the temperature) found that each match burned an average of 12.1 seconds. With

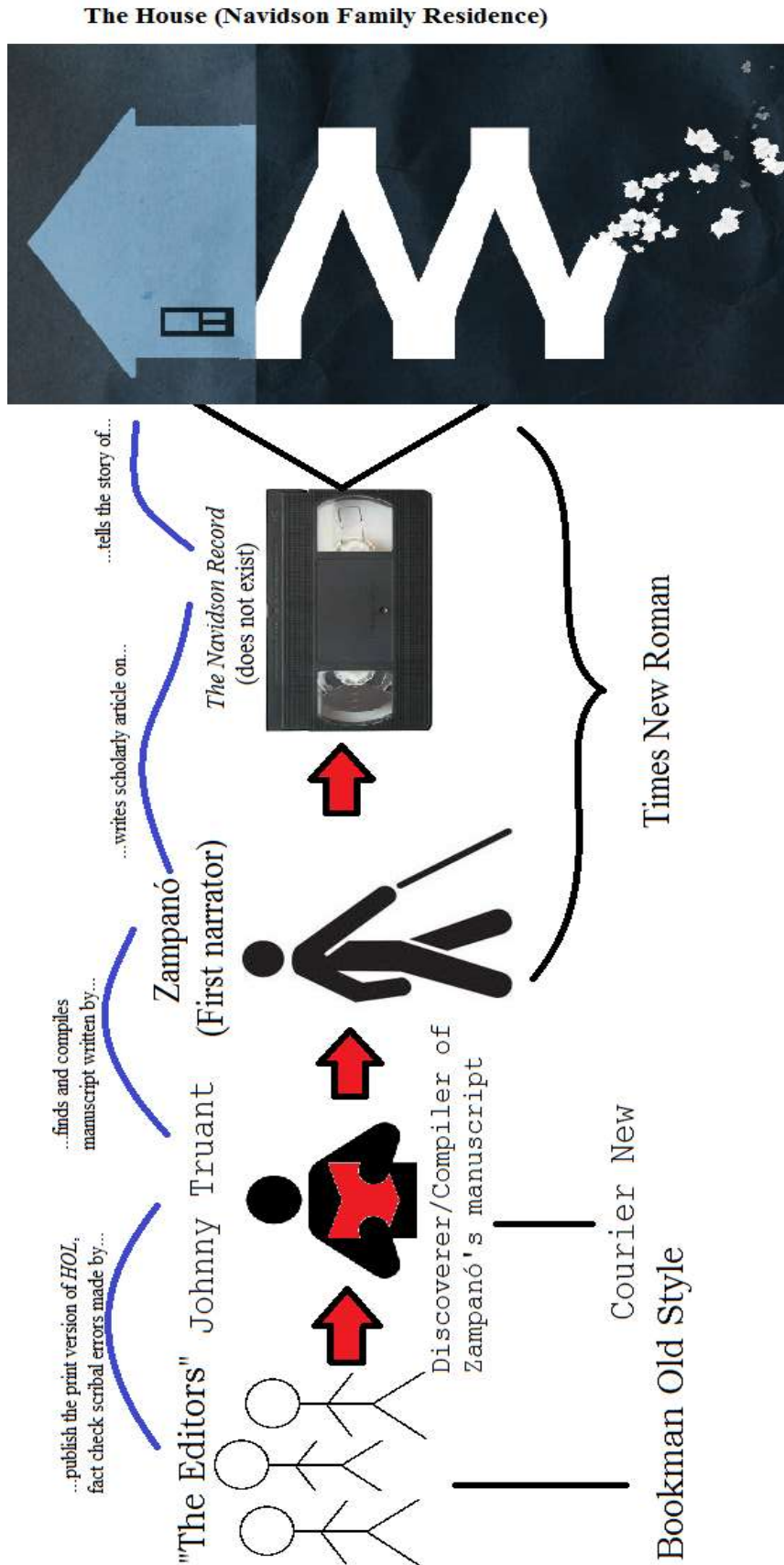
See Hans Staker's "Thanks To These Puppies" in *Collected Essays* on "Exploration #5"<sup>L</sup> (Liverpool: Babel Press, 1996), p. 89-142.

## Diagrams

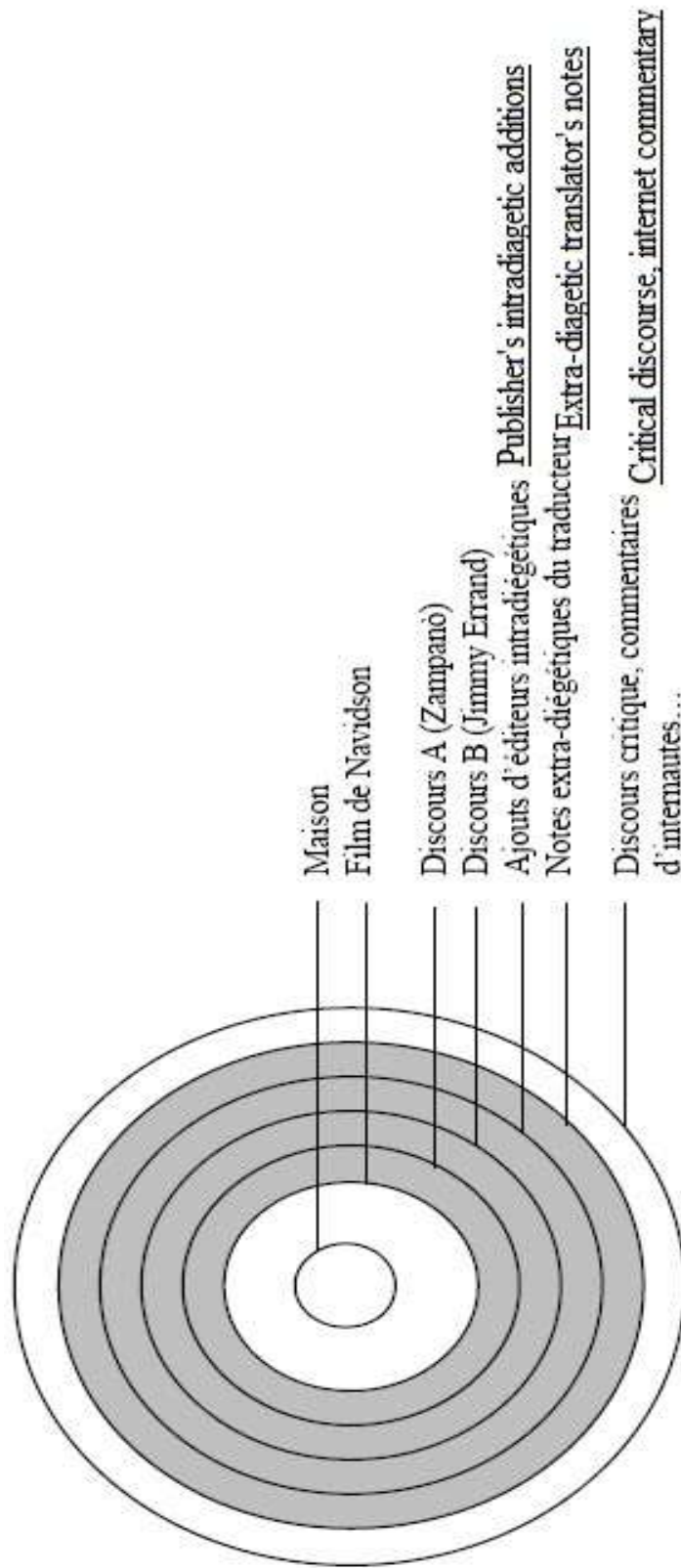
**D.1:** Levels of Narrative Reality in *House of Leaves* (initial sketch by author).



D.2: Levels of Narrative Reality in *House of Leaves* (by author, revised for subsequent presentations.)



D.3: Levels of Narrative Reality in *House of Leaves* (diagram c/o *House of Leaves* forums)



## flashquake Nonfiction

### Characters that Run Away<sup>1</sup>

#### by G. Scott Robinson<sup>2</sup>

Just as Geoffrey Chaucer was beginning *The Canterbury Tales*, he wrote a long poem entitled "The Legend of Good Women." By 14th-century standards it sucks. By today's standards it sucks. Critics and Chaucerians look for ways around it. There are numerous suggestions that even Chaucer got bored with it, and for that reason, it got worse and worse until he gave up on the project entirely. It was literature's first black eye — a colossal bomb created by the greatest English writer as he was writing the greatest work of English literature.

Aaron Miles and I are on a Southwest Boeing 737, the Hyundai Accent of the airline world, traveling 300 miles to see Mark Z. Danielewski. Four years ago, Danielewski wrote a book called *The House of Leaves*, a quasi-encyclopedic work that is more of a labyrinth than a novel. Aaron is reading his copy of it, trying to think of questions that will make him sound smart.

Aaron is nothing like me.

I don't even like him most of the time.

In "The Legend," Chaucer writes about a character named "Chaucer." They both write the same poems, and they were both dreamers. But Chaucer the character is not Chaucer the author. Chaucer the author was an aristocratic kiss-up. Chaucer the character spends all day gazing at wildflowers. Six hundred years before scientists cloned sheep, Chaucer the author cloned himself, and in the process he showed how the person on the page runs from the person with the pen.




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<sup>1</sup> I first came across this story during the initial stages of the research process, when I tried to find (and failed) any evidence of other scholars examining the same connections that I had made between Chaucer and Danielewski's works. (There is of course a large body of literature analyzing their works separately.) "The Characters That Run Away" is the only result I have found, scholarly or otherwise, of someone having made that same connection. The story creatively explores different narrative personas and their relationships to their authors: Johnny Truant of *House of Leaves*, Chaucer's persona in *Legend of Good Women* (another of Chaucer's dream visions) and the short-story author's own persona, Aaron. The short story had a significant impact on how I viewed my research. In particular, the concluding lines of the story inspired me to explore how to define the levels of narrative reality in a given text. Permission to reprint "Characters That Run Away" granted by G. Scott Robinson, 24th August 2012 via email.

<sup>2</sup> G. Scott Robinson is an Assistant Professor of English at Nevada State College.

Danielewski created a character named Johnny Truant. They both traveled to Europe, they both wrote the same poems and they both share some insight into the instability of telling "true" stories. Johnny Truant is not Mark Danielewski, but every once in a while Danielewski signs a book "JT."

Who cares about dreams anymore? Hippies and stoners. The rest of us see them as your mind screwing off while you're trying to get some rest. For Chaucer dreams were a way for him to write about everything without taking blame. How could you hold someone accountable for a dream? When Chaucer dreamt in "The Legend," he dreamt of gods that had read his stories. In his dream, these gods don't like what they've read, and they don't like him.

This is where it gets good:

The gods in "The Legend" are Chaucer's creations, acting at his whim. And yet, they have the audacity to boss Chaucer around. They tell him to write stories that reflect their values.

So he does.

Here, in what was possibly Chaucer's worst work, he redefines the role of literature. He agrees to his character's request and lets the text tell him what to do.

At that moment, when Chaucer threw his hands in the air and gave up control of the text, he became the first postmodernist writer — six hundred years before the term was invented.

Before the signing, Danielewski does a Q & A with Larry McCaffrey's college English class. The students want answers; they want to know why there are so many ambiguities in his text. They want things nailed down. Danielewski almost always replies the same way: what is it about you that wants to know? He relinquished control of his book before it was finished. Aaron has been practicing his inane questions so they sound like they just flew off the top of his head, and I look away when he asks them. I too have questions, but I keep quiet. At that moment, I don't want to know what he thinks. Even worse, I don't want him to ask: what is it about you that wants to know?

Almost every critical piece on Chaucer's "Legend" begins with a kind of apology: "For years, this work has been overlooked, forgotten amongst the greats..." I'm convinced the recent interest in the poem is due to the fact that scholars have prodded over all of Chaucer's other poems for centuries. American explorers faced the same dilemma when they reached the West Coast. What the hell do we do now? North, lads, to the untamed north. Chaucer's "Legend" is a literary Alaska.

It took Danielewski ten years to write *The House of Leaves* and it's as dense as an encyclopedia. He said he just wanted something he could be proud of.

Chaucer's characters in "The Legend" command him to write "true" stories that glorify love. They ask for the literal translations of the classics, and but Chaucer's stories are nothing like the



originals. He changes the focus in some, and the point of view in others. It's his little way of saying authors can do what they're told and still not do what they're told.

Danielewski finishes his reading and people line up to have their books signed. Aaron, always shameless, gets Danielewski to sign 3 books, and then gets in line again to have him sign two more. How could he. Danielewski signs every one, with fierce scribbled lines and various abstract comments. Aaron is thrilled. Of course he is.

Once, Aaron was a pawn, a minor character in the first story I ever wrote. He was going to be the protagonist, but he never listened to me. So I swapped everything around and made him a nobody. But when the story ended, he stuck around, and now he never leaves my side. He's always there to do the things I'll never admit to doing. He's not me, but most people can't tell the difference.

Chaucer seems to earnestly attempt to comply with the wishes of his characters, but as he translates, the stories gain a breath of their own. Chaucer is commanded by his characters to write twenty thousand stories. He finishes nine short ones.

It is the most basic question there is.

*Who is master?*

It must be the author, the one who creates the words.

It must be the characters, the ones that live in the words.

It must be the words, the ones that create the author.

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*Title artwork by G. Scott Robinson*

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Chaucer's Words to Adam, His Own Scribe<sup>3</sup>

Adam, scriveyn, if ever it thee befalle  
Boece or Troilus for to wryten newe,  
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle  
But after my making thou wryte more trewe.  
So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renew,  
It all to correcte and eek to rubbe and scrape;  
And al is thurgh thy negligence and rape.

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<sup>3</sup> The text of this poem is from Kathryn Lynch's Norton Critical Edition of Chaucer's *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (2007), pp. 216-17. Lynch's footnote to the text says, "Chaucer's scribe has recently been identified as Adam Pinkhurst, who also produced a manuscript of Chaucer's *Boece* (his translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*) and *Troilus and Criseyde*; he is also the scribe of the two best manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* (the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts). "Chaucer's Words to Adam" was probably composed during the mid (to late) 1380s, when the poet was still drafting or had recently completed *Troilus* and *Boece*, and is significant for showing the close working relationship between the poet and his scribe..." (Lynch 216, f. 1).



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