

Condemned:
Reading the Footnotes in *House of Leaves*
by
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Abstract

This thesis ultimately aims to analyze the footnotes within Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*, but due to the challenge this novel presents, the exploration of the footnote begins more generally. This is accomplished by first tracing a shift in the application of footnotes from a scholarly tool to a fictional device. Beginning with the assertion that footnotes do not have the effect of closing, or shoring up a text, this thesis then begins to explore ways that the functional, visual, historical, and contextual elements of a footnote come to affect its meaning and its position within the primary text. This attention to the footnote as a device also inspires thought into how a reader may choose to navigate intentionally challenging texts, such as those that employ footnotes as a device, wherein a reader finds themselves not just reading a text, but navigating through an ostentatiously dense network of ideas and information.

This thesis is not attempting to make a historical argument about how, when, or why footnotes have changed, but seeks to focus on understanding their effect in contemporary texts that lean heavily on the footnote as a narrative device. Even so, historical context is important to consider so that we may achieve a more thorough understanding of the footnote's variations. Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote* helps to inform an understanding of the footnote by providing information about how footnotes have been used in the past, in scholarship and in fiction, which may then be measured against the two novels this thesis studies.

Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine* introduces several new ways to think about the footnote, both in its use of footnotes, but also in its speaker's own musings on footnotes as a device for digression and for building and protecting a truth within a text. *The Mezzanine* is a text that is taken over at times by its footnotes, but doesn't appear to actively try to confuse its reader, which makes an accessible stepping stone for use in approaching *House of Leaves*.

The first two chapters may be seen as establishing a preliminary understanding of footnotes as a metatextual, narrative device, which is necessary to develop a context from which to approach the footnotes within *House of Leaves*. This challenging text explodes the realm of the footnote, using it in many ways, but most importantly to weave several narratives together. Close readings of several footnotes from *House of Leaves* explore the range of application and effect they have on the text, following with a theoretical interpretation informed by the ideas of Derrida and Mark C. Taylor. In conclusion, this thesis presents the argument that in *House of Leaves*, in this book of impenetrable darkness and inescapable labyrinths, the footnotes are more than just a game for the reader, they are a literary representation of great psychological trauma.

Keywords

Footnotes, Narrative Devices, Metatext, Contemporary Literature

Labyrinth, Truth, Trauma

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Short Titles

“House”: Danielewski, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*. 2nd ed. New York: Pantheon, 2000. Print.

Figures

Figure 1: p1, p2

However, even as Holloway Roberts, Jed Leeder, and Wax Hook make their way further down the stairway in **Exploration #4**, the purpose of that vast place still continues to elude them. Is it merely an aberration of physics? Some kind of warp in space? Or just a topiary labyrinth on a much grander scale? Perhaps it serves a funereal purpose? Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? Or, for that matter, imprisons or hides an innocent? As the Holloway team soon discovers, answers to these questions are not exactly forthcoming.¹²⁹

encountered Mint (as Chielitz refers to the Minotaur) and nearly murdered him. Had Minos himself not rushed in and killed the criminal, his son would have perished. Suffice it to say Minos is furious. He has caught himself caring for his son and the resulting guilt and sorrow incenses him to no end. As the play progresses, the King slowly sees past his son's deformities, eventually discovering an elegiac spirit, an artistic sentiment and most importantly a visionary understanding of the world. Soon a deep paternal love grows in the King's heart and he begins to conceive of a way to reintroduce the Minotaur back into society. Sadly, the stories the King has spread throughout the world concerning this terrifying beast prove the seeds of tragedy. Soon enough, a bruiser named Theseus arrives (Chielitz describes him as a drunken, virtually retarded, fat boy) who without a second thought, hacks the Minotaur into little pieces. In one of the play's most moving scenes King Minos, with tears streaming down his face, publicly commends Theseus' courage. The crowd believes the tears are a sign of gratitude while we the audience understand they are tears of loss. The king's heart breaks, and while he will go on to be an extremely just ruler, it is a justice forever informed by the deepest kind of agony.¹³⁰

Note: Struck passages indicate what Zampanò tried to get rid of, but which I, with a little bit of turpentine and a good old magnifying glass managed to resurrect.

¹²⁴"Violent Prejudice in Knowns" by Zampanò in *Soury Will Wait Flyer*, Santa Cruz, 1999, 325

¹²⁵I've no idea why these titles and cited sources are different. It seems much too deliberate to be an error, but since I haven't been able to find the "flyer" I don't know for certain. I did call Ashley back, left message, even though I still don't remember her.

¹²⁶*The Minotaur* by Tappert Chielitz, put on at The Hey Zeus Theater by The Seattle Repertory Company on April 14, 1993.

¹²⁷W. H. Matthews writes "A similar small labyrinth, with a central Theseus-Minotaur design, is to be found on the wall of the church of San Michele Maggiore at Pavia. It is thought to be of tenth century construction. This is one of the few cases where the Minotaur is represented with a human head and a beast's body—as a sort of Centaur, in fact." See his book *Mazes & Labyrinths: Their History & Development* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), p. 56. Also see Fig. 40 on p. 53.

¹²⁸Even in *Metamorphoses* Ovid notes how Minos, in his old age, feared young men.

Quæ, dum facti integer ævis, territoriali magnæ ipsæ quoque nomine gentes: tunc erat insolida, formidandaque iuventutis robore. Miletum Phœbusque parentis æquum portumuit, crediditque ante insurgere regis: hunc tamen est patriæ arcere penatibus omnes.

¹²⁹"When Minos was in golden middle age/ All nations feared the mention of his name./ But now he'd grown so impotent, so feeble/ He shied away from proud young Miletus/ The forward son of Phœbus and Deione./ Though Minos half-suspected Miletus/ Had eyes upon his throne and framed a plot/ To make a palace revolution, he feared to act/ To sign the papers for his deposition." Horace Gregory p. 258-259.4 Perhaps Miletus reminded Minos of his slain son and out of guilt he covered in the presence of his youth.

¹²⁹Strictly as an aside, Jacques Derrida once made a few remarks on the question of structure and centrality.

Figure 2: p3

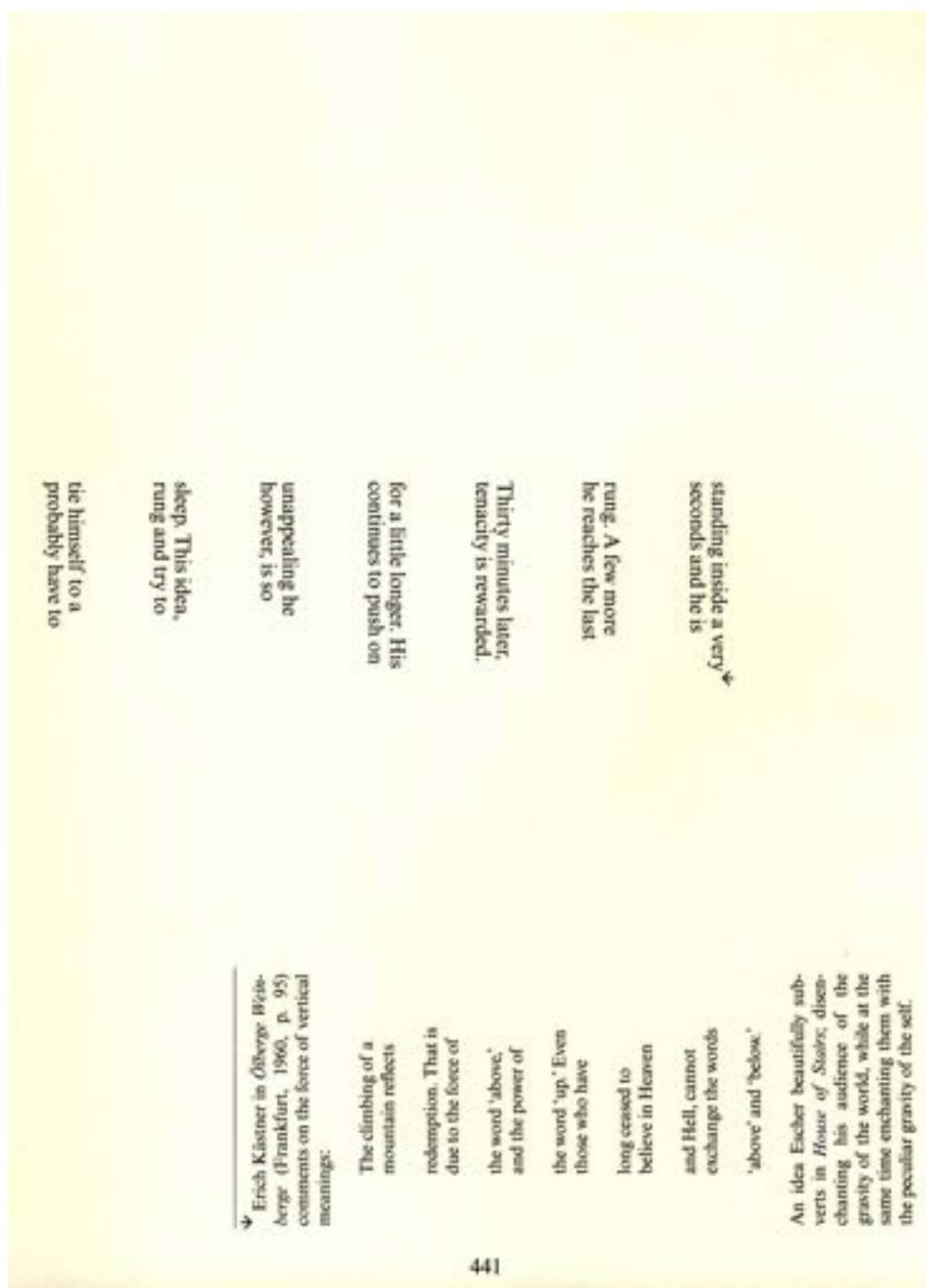


Figure 3: p27

I

I saw a film today, oh boy . . .

— The Beatles

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, “authenticity” still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading obsession—to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes—invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth.¹

For the most part, skeptics call the whole effort a hoax but grudgingly admit *The Navidson Record* is a hoax of exceptional quality. Unfortunately out of those who accept its validity many tend to swear allegiance to tabloid-UFO sightings. Clearly it is not easy to appear credible when after vouching for the film’s verity, the discourse suddenly switches to why Elvis is still alive and probably wintering in the Florida Keys.² One thing remains certain: any controversy surrounding Billy Meyer’s film on flying saucers³ has been supplanted by the house on Ash Tree Lane.

Though many continue to devote substantial time and energy to the antinomies of fact or fiction, representation or artifice, document or prank, as of late the more interesting material dwells exclusively on the interpretation of events within the film. This direction seems more promising, even if the house itself, like Melville’s behemoth, remains resistant to summation.

Much like its subject, *The Navidson Record* itself is also uneasily contained—whether by category or lection. If finally catalogued as a gothic tale, contemporary urban folkmyth, or merely a ghost story, as some have called it, the documentary will still, sooner or later, slip the limits of any one of those genres. Too many important things in *The Navidson Record* jut out past the borders. Where one might expect horror, the supernatural, or traditional paroxysms of dread and fear, one discovers disturbing sadness, a sequence on radioactive isotopes, or even laughter over a *Simpsons* episode.

In the 17th century, England’s greatest topographer of worlds satanic and divine warned that hell was nothing less than “Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/ And rest can never dwell, hope never

¹A topic more carefully considered in Chapter IX.

²See Daniel Bowler’s “Resurrection on Ash Tree Lane: Elvis, Christmas Past, and Other Non-Entities” published in *The House* (New York: Little Brown, 1995), p. 167-244 in which he examines the inherent contradiction of any claim alleging resurrection as well as the existence of that place.

³Or for that matter the Cottingley Fairies, Kirlian photography, Ted Serios’ thoughtography or Alexander Gardner’s photograph of the Union dead.

Figure 4: p28

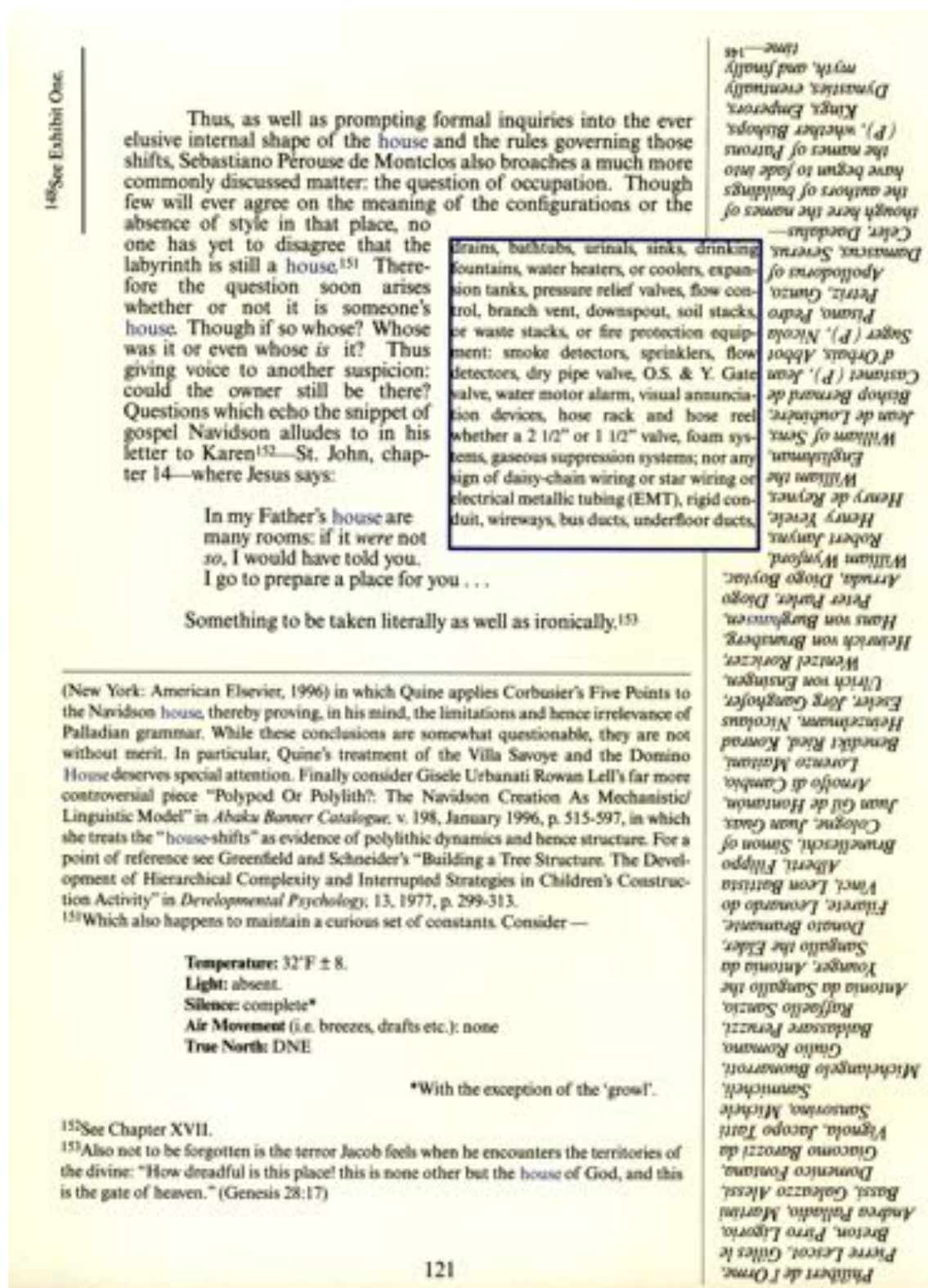


Figure 5: p29



Figure 6, p30

IX

Hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error

— Virgil

laboriosus exitus domus

— Ascensius

laboriosa ad entrandum

— Nicholas Trevet*

*"Here is the toil of that house, and the inextricable wandering" *Aeneid* 6. 27. "The house difficult of exit" (Ascensius (Paris 1501)); "difficult to enter" (Trevet (Basel 1490)).¹³⁵ See H. J. Thomson's "Fragments of Ancient Scholia on Virgil Preserved in Latin Glossaries" in W. M. Lindsay and H. J. Thomson's *Ancient Lore in Medieval Latin Glossaries* (London: St. Andrews University Publications, 1921).¹²⁰

¹²⁰In fact all of this was quoted directly from Penelope Reed Doob's *The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) p. 21, 97, 145 and 227. A perfect example of how Zampanò likes to obscure the secondary sources he's using in order to appear more versed in primary documents. Actually a woman by the name of Tatiana turned me onto that bit of info. She'd been one of Zampanò's scribes and—"lucky for me" she told me over the phone—still had, among other things, some of the old book lists he'd requested from the library.

I do have to say though getting over to her place was no easy accomplishment. I had trouble just walking out my door. Things are definitely deteriorating. Even reaching for the latch made me feel sick to my stomach. I also experienced this awful tightening across my chest, my temples instantly registering a rise in pulse rate. And that's not the half of it. Unfortunately I don't think I can do justice to how truly strange this all is, a paradox of sorts, since on one hand I'm laughing at myself, mocking the irrational nature of my anxiety, what I continue in fact to perceive as a complete absurdity—"I mean Johnny what do you really have to be afraid of?"—while on the other hand, and at the same time mind you, finding myself absolutely terrified, if not of something in particular—there were no particulars as far as I could see—then of the reaction itself, as undeniable & unimpeachable as Zampanò's black trunk.

I know it makes no sense but there you have it: what should have negated the other only seemed to amplify it instead.

Fortunately, or not fortunate at all, Thumper's advice continued to echo in my head. I accepted the risk of cardiac arrest, muttered a flurry of fucks and charged out into the day, determined to meet Tatiana and retrieve the material.

Of course I was fine.

Except as I started walking down the sidewalk, I watched a truck veer from its lane, flatten a stop sign, desperately try to slow, momentarily redirect itself, and then in spite of all the brakes on that monster, all the accompanying smoke and ear puncturing shrieks, it still barreled straight into me. Suddenly I understood what it meant to be weightless, flying through the air, no longer ruled by that happy dyad of gravity &

Figure 7: p33, p36

^k Having already discussed in Chapter V how echoes serve as an effective means to evaluate physical, emotional, and thematic distances present in *The Navidson Record*, it is now necessary to remark upon their descriptive limitations. In essence echoes are confined to large spaces. However, in order to consider how distances within the Navidson house are radically distorted, we must address the more complex ideation of convolution, interference, confusion, and even decentric ideas of design and construction. In other words the concept of a labyrinth.

It would be fantastic if based on footage from *The Navidson Record* someone were able to reconstruct a *bauplan*¹²¹ for the house. Of course this is an impossibility, not only due to the wall-shifts but also the film's constant destruction of continuity, frequent jump cuts prohibiting any sort of accurate mapmaking. Consequently, in lieu of a schematic, the film offers instead a schismatic rendering of empty rooms, long hallways, and dead ends, perpetually promising but forever eluding the finality of an immutable layout.

Curiously enough, if we can look to history to provide us with some context, the reasons for building labyrinths have varied substantially over the ages.¹²² For example, the English hedgerow maze at Longleat was designed to amuse garden party attendants, while Amenemhet III of the XII dynasty in Egypt built for his mortuary temple a labyrinth near lake Moeris to protect his soul. ~~Most famous of all, however, was the labyrinth Daedalus constructed for King Minos. It served as a prison. Purportedly located on the island of Crete in the city of Knossos, the maze was built to~~

of an oil soaked finger against my asshole, circling, rubbing, until finally she pushed hard enough to exceed the threshold of resistance, slipping inside me and knowing exactly where to go too, heading straight for the prostate, the P spot, the LOUD button on this pumping stereophonic fuck system I never knew I had, initiating an almost unbearable scream for (and of) pleasure, endorphins spitting through my brain at an unheard of rate, as muscles in my groin (almost) painfully contracted in a handful of heart stomping spasms—not something I could say I was exactly prepared for. I exploded. A stream of white flying across her tits, strings of the stuff dripping off her nipples, collecting in pools around her neck, some of it leading as far as her face, one gob of it on her chin, another on her lower lip. She smiled, started to gently rub my semen into her black skin and then opened her mouth as if to sigh, only she didn't sigh, no sound, not even a breath, just her moon bright teeth, and finally her tongue licking first her upper lip before turning to her lower lip, where, smiling, her eyes focused on mine, watching me watching her, she licked up and finally swallowed my come.

¹²⁰ So sorry.¹²¹

¹²¹ German for "building plan." — Ed.

¹²² For further insight into mazes, consider Paolo Santarcangelo's *Libre des labyrinthes*; Russ Cram's "The Surviving Web" in *Daedalus*, summer 1995; Hermann Kern's *Labyrinth*; W. H. Matthews' *Mazes and Labyrinths*; Stella Pinicker's *Double-Axe*; Rodney Castleden's *The Knossos Labyrinth*; Harold Sieber's *Inadequate Thread*; W. W. R. Ball's "Mathematical Recreations and Essays"; Robinson Ferrel Smith's *Complex Knots—No Simple Solutions*; O. B. Hardison Jr.'s *Entering The Maze*; and Patricia Flynn's *Jejunum and Beum*.

Introduction: Into the Labyrinth

Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves* (2000) is a syntactically and intellectually challenging book to read and to navigate. There are several speakers within the text, but their voices are not contained within point of view chapters. The speakers, instead, are scattered throughout an assemblage of manuscripts and multi-layered footnotes. Danielewski's plays with the novel's form in many ways, often challenging the distinction between graphical and literary art through creative uses of typography or very minimalist imagery (such as inky black squares), but it is in the footnotes that the story finds its momentum, the speakers find their voices, and a reader may find themselves becoming utterly, utterly lost. This is better explained with an example:

Is it merely an aberration of physics? Some kind of warp in space? Or just a topiary labyrinth on a much grander scale? Perhaps it serves a funereal purpose? Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? Or, for that matter, imprisons or hides an innocent? ... [footnote 129]. (111) (Fig. 1) - *House of Leaves*

This quote questions and explores the seemingly impossible and endless labyrinth within the house on Ash Tree Lane which is at the center of *House of Leaves*. The book also suggests these same questions of itself and its footnotes which invite investigation but elude answers. I will frame *House of Leaves* more thoroughly later, but for now someone unfamiliar with this novel should not worry about being lost in the narrative details. Footnote 129 follows this passage and is written by Zampanò (one of this text's speakers) and framed as "strictly an aside" (111), and includes quotes and translations from Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (1967), which instigate a series of scholarly interpretations, disagreements, and reinterpretations. These digressions offer

different perspectives on how one may understand these questions of structure, frame of reference, and purpose that the quote suggests. Beginning with Derrida, Zampanò writes:

Strictly as an aside, Jacques Derrida once made a few remarks on the question of structure and centrality. It is too complex to adequately address here; for some, however, this mention alone may prove useful when considering the meaning of ‘play,’ ‘origins,’ and ‘ends’ -- especially when applied to the Navidson house: ... (111-112) (Fig. 1)

This is followed with quotes taken from Derrida’s original publication *L’écriture et la différence* (1967), presented, in original French, without clarification. Johnny, another speaker in this text, appends footnote 130 following the French quotes, offering the best English translation he could find. The English translation ends with a citation for its source and then footnote 131, which returns to Zampanò, who begins, “Conversely Christian Norberg Schulz writes: In terms of spontaneous perception, man’s space is ‘subjectively centered’” and then follows with an exploration of how man develops an understanding of a “center of the world.” From there, Zampanò inserts his own interpretation, proposing that “What Derrida and Norberg-Schulz neglect to consider is the ordering will of gravitation...” which is followed by a supposed “physics” based refutation of the first two arguments, wherein Zampanò references physics constants and Einstein’s work to prove his own point, while ending with the reminder that “it is important not to forget how Navidson’s house ultimately confounds even the labyrinth of the inner ear” (113). The reference to the inner ear can be read as a reference then to Derrida’s essay *Tympan* (1972), which is a thread left unexplored as Johnny now appears again in a new footnote offering the suggestion that Zampanò’s intervention “gets at a Lissitzky and Escher theme which Zampanò seems to constantly suggest without ever really bringing it right out into the open Pages 30, 356, and 441, however, kind of contradict this. Though not really” (113).

To follow just one of the dangling threads which Johnny suggests at the end of this series of footnotes, page 441 (Fig. 2) features text that appears sideways on the page; This page's footnote is represented as down arrow instead of a number and presents a poem about "the force of vertical meanings" and how "the climbing of a mountain reflects redemption" through the suggested irrefutability of vertical ascension, but ends with the assertion that Escher "beautifully subverts" this idea in "*House of Stairs*, disenchanting his audience of the gravity of the world, while at the same time enchanting them with the peculiar gravity of the self" (441). First it is worth noting that this footnote appears sideways, as does the passage above which references it, but the two are oriented in opposite directions, so what appears as a down arrow when you turn the book to the left to read the original passage, becomes an up arrow when you turn the book to the right to read the footnote, and vice versa. This, along with the sideways positioning of the text on the works to extends an Escherian reading of space as the formatting of the text and the footnote here further subvert any notion of centralized structure or objective position, returning us to the idea that space changes subjectively with perspective.

As the above example shows, footnotes in *House of Leaves* act as rabbit holes that may appear to begin as a citation or an example, but expand incessantly, branching out into the text in multiple different ways as pathways diverge and loop. As the different speakers begin interrupting each other, we see that the footnotes facilitate a series of argumentative repositionings which appear to be well researched, like a never ending, scholarly game of king-of-the-hill, wherein one person's conceived "truth" (more on this in a moment) is ultimately subject to reinterpretation by and through anyone else. As a meditation on reading, this particular digression demonstrates how quickly a text may be overcome by its annotations, especially in the

case of footnotes and scholarship. Furthermore, if we liken reading *House of Leaves* to wandering within a labyrinth, the insistent presence of intertextuality ensures that there is only one labyrinth that, within, we find not just *House*, but all texts, as the intellectual possibilities of an intertextual network are endless.

By beginning with this example from *House of Leaves*, I aim to illustrate the intentional obfuscation of direction and meaning that the footnotes achieve, and show how the footnotes assert themselves within the text by shifting the periphery into central focus. This metatextual twist on the footnote is not unprecedented, with other intentionally annotated texts like Pope's *Dunciad* (1728), Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) all use footnotes or endnotes in similar metatextual, yet individually nuanced ways. It is not within the scope of this thesis to attempt a comprehensive understanding of postmodern play in the footnote's form, but rather I aim here to take a close look at few contemporary texts which work with footnotes in creative ways, in order to perform a well informed reading of the footnotes in *House of Leaves*.

It also bears mention now that the question of a text's "truth" is a subject which runs parallel to the analysis of footnotes within these texts. The relationship between truth and footnotes is discovered and developed through readings of Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote* and Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*, where within this thesis argues that footnotes serve to develop a peripheral understanding or defense of truth, where the truth is never named directly, but tangentially suggested in many different ways. The words "truth" and "authenticity" within the context of this thesis, are taken from the language of these texts, and thus any claims made about "truth" are made specifically in order to investigate how these texts approach "truth." This thesis then argues that *House of Leaves* represents a dark twist on an understanding of footnotes

as devices which suggest truth, where the footnotes in *House* instead point to great psychological distress and wounding. It might be helpful to keep in mind the questions which began this introduction in the context of the footnote as it is investigated: “Perhaps it serves a funereal purpose? Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? Or, for that matter, imprisons or hides an innocent?” Perhaps it does all of this at once.

Chapter one will focus on a reading of Anthony Grafton’s text *The Footnote* wherein he presents historical research on the different approaches authors have taken to using the footnote over time, which helps to inform a reading of how contemporary authors use footnotes in satirical and creative ways. Grafton’s arguments and an analysis of his own footnotes work together to pose this historical presentation. The intent here is not to create a reading which is suspicious of Grafton and searches for subversion within his argument and his practice, but rather to consider both what he says and what he does as evidence for a scholarly understanding of the footnote’s function. Grafton also introduces the idea that footnotes are an instrument for defending truth, and in this context, the truth Grafton appears to be suggesting is the resolution of ideas into fact in the face of an ever-changing history.

My second chapter presents a reading of Nicholson Baker’s *The Mezzanine*. This short novel offers us an opportunity to examine the ways in which footnotes may be used outside of the realm of scholarship and scholarly satire, as within this novel the footnotes function as space for the speaker to digress on tangential subjects. This book is a very manageable introduction to the game-like, postmodern play of footnotes which could be seen to inspire a text like *House*. The speaker in *The Mezzanine* is, in a way, his own writer, as he is aware of the novel’s textual medium and speaks about his use of footnotes within the text; the speaker directly presents an

interpretation of footnotes as a device for, as we saw in Grafton, defending truth. Baker's speaker indirectly proposes an evolution of Grafton's argument, wherein footnotes are used in an attempt to reveal a complex truth which may not be seen directly, but rather can only be understood through multiple angles of digression and the consequent understanding of how separate ideas are networked together through peripheral similarities.

Chapters one and two may stand on their own feet, but they are also in many ways necessary for building up a shared context and understanding to begin to tackle *House of Leaves*. The example of footnote 129 at the beginning of this introduction shows how this novel hinges on the footnote as a device to direct the reader through the text. The *House of Leaves* chapter begins by taking a measure of other critics who have written about the text and examines to what extent they are interested in the direct study of the footnote. Then, beginning with a close reading of the first footnote in the book, several footnotes are investigated in an attempt to come to a conclusion about what work, specifically, the footnotes are doing within the text. These readings analyze both the function of the footnotes as device which may affect the text's meaning and the content of the footnotes in terms of voice, subordination, and intention. *House* is an effective labyrinth, and in an effort to analyze and write about its footnotes without my own writing becoming similarly labyrinthine, this chapter temporarily takes on a heavily structured form to better clarify and organize explications of the footnotes.

The *House of Leaves* chapter returns to traditional form at its close and will attempt a more comprehensive reading of how the separate footnotes may fit together and how we may read *House* in context with *The Footnote* and *The Mezzanine*. Ultimately, this analysis of footnotes will lead to the proposition that the footnotes within *House of Leaves* are not just an artificial gimmick used to present a puzzle, rather the footnotes come to represent a literary

model for the traumatized and fractured mind which is obsessed with its own darkness, but may never directly address it. That mind returns in broken pieces to whatever its unnamed trauma is, but these returns are always imperfect, failing in any attempt at cathartic healing, and instead causing further wounding. Danielewski's footnote is founded in Grafton's scholarly history and Baker's postmodern play, before introducing a third element: Its own traumatic and unnamed darkness. By braiding these three threads together, Danielewski's footnote becomes a place for a perseverating mind to imperfectly repeat and relive its nightmares. This psychological fracturing is mimicked by the footnotes, and through this mimicry and with a lack of specificity in just what kind of trauma inspired this fracturing, a reader just might find their own haunting, unidentifiable pain within the pages of this book.

Chapter 1: Grafton's Footnote

The appearance of a footnote in a text, traditionally, has had a few choice operational functions: It evidences research, it provides a citation that either validates or refutes a statement, it provides interpretive commentary on an article within the text, or it can suggest further reading. In his text, *The Footnote*, Anthony Grafton tracks the development of the footnote as a tool for historical annotations. He writes that “footnotes matter to historians. They are the humanist’s rough equivalent of the scientist’s report on the data: they offer empirical support for the stories told and arguments presented” (Grafton, vii), thus positioning the footnote as a tool to be used defensively, which he furthers by explaining how “historians perform two complementary tasks. They must examine all the sources relevant to the solution of a problem and construct a new narrative or argument from them, and once they have, the footnote proves that both tasks have been carried out” (Grafton, 4). Similarly, Shari Benstock argues in her article, “At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text,” for an interpretation of scholarly footnotes as acting to “shore up the text by enclosing it and limiting its claims” (Benstock). This presentation of the footnote (if we assume the task has been “carried out” perfectly) could be interpreted as utopian, as it suggests that the simple presence of a footnote is an indicator of completion, of a reader’s expectations being met, the result of a careful research and vetting of all related materials. In this way, the footnote represents a closed, stable system: The text in which the footnotes appear has been completed and, subsequently, become a stable, unifying node to which all the footnotes and related materials connect to. It is a nice consideration to entertain, but Grafton (and any reasonable reader) recognizes that this is rarely the case.

Grafton begins to trouble this understanding very quickly by suggesting in his preface that “The footnote is not so uniform and reliable as some historians believe” (Grafton, viii). Grafton explores how the footnote begins to function in different ways within scholarship, offering that historically:

unlike other types of credentials, however, footnotes sometimes afford entertainment-- normally in the form of daggers stuck in the backs of the author’s colleagues... often they quietly set the subtle but deadly ‘cf’ (‘compare’) before it. This indicates, at least to the expert reader, both that an alternative view appears in the cited work and that it is wrong. (Grafton, 8)

This is an early intimation that the footnote may be used to exercise certain authorial functions, in that it may be used to establish intent, device, and narrative. With the example of “cf,” we have the opportunity to consider how, as Grafton suggests, the author may succinctly dismiss an entire work and establish him or herself in righteous opposition to it, framing their own work as an advancement in theory, or the newest and most proper history.

In this way, footnotes may be seen as calculated insertions into historical texts which wield great power through a reader’s implicit trust. The footnote’s implied authority and scholarly context, however, makes it subject for satire. Grafton writes how “The sterile pedantry of scholars makes a perpetually attractive theme, and the criticism is usually justified--especially in the law, where a single footnote in a judicial opinion or code may exercise an immense influence on the lives of individuals and the fortunes of companies” (25). Here, the power of the footnote is demonstrated in the case of law, where the inclusion of the footnote marks a point of clarification, separate from the body of the text, which shares the same privilege and authority of the main body. But, more importantly, in law a single footnote may change the outcome of a

case. In less direct ways, scholarly footnotes operate similarly on the reader by enforcing a particular stance, notion, or interpretation onto a text.

Pope's *Dunciad* is presented as an example of how footnotes have been satirized, and Grafton explains how "Pope invited friends to contribute their own parodies of learning to the commentary. These became as staccato in form and riven with contradictions in content as any real anthology of commentaries on Petronius or Virgil" (116). Within this satirical employment it becomes clear that the footnote also offers room for play, for a shifting and recentering of ideas, as with expectations comes the opportunity for subversion. Pope's footnotes take advantage of these possibilities, as Grafton explains how they "range in content from the myths and classical parallels to which Pope alluded to the London literary scene he savaged. But hatred of pedantry regularly appears as a central theme" (118). This "hatred of pedantry" is certainly indicative of a theme that Pope saw, which represents the danger within footnotes of falling victim to academic naval-gazing.

As Grafton begins to illuminate these instances of the subversive power of footnotes, both through scholarship and fiction, it is important to remember that Grafton's research operates primarily as a historical account of scholarly footnotes, and even on that front he cedes "footnotes guarantee nothing, in themselves. The enemies of truth--and truth has enemies--can use them to deny the same facts that honest historians use them to assert" (Grafton, 235), uprooting even the notion that a footnote is, at its most reducible level, a defensive assertion of some researched fact. Instead, every footnote is a double-edged blade that may be wielded just as effectively by the critic who seeks to hamstring a work through its scholarship, via refutation or reinterpretation. Grafton, in his own way, plays on this idea himself. In his epilogue, he writes how "wise historians know that their craft resembles Penelope's art of weaving: footnotes and

text will come together again and again, in ever-changing combinations of patterns and colors. Stability is not to be reached,” but more importantly, he includes a footnote here: “Cf. N. Z. Davis, “On the Lane,” *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 572-603” (233). The “cf” which he mentions in the first chapter returns and is attached to this short, but critical, statement. With the prefixing of the “cf” tag, Grafton unsettles and disturbs this penultimate statement of the text, that “Stability is not to be reached,” intentionally “weaving” in this other text, in his own “subtle and deadly way,” injecting into this claim the exact instability and uncertainty of scholarly annotation that he is arguing for.

As Grafton demonstrates, the simple presence of a footnote may create or suggest an awareness of historical change, incompleteness, or lack--either in the text, or in the reader’s understanding of the text. Perhaps here Grafton’s “truth” may be found, where within this incompleteness there is some suspected truth that the footnotes are attempting to define, but succeed only in suggesting its presence. Alternatively, perhaps the truth of an annotated text can be seen in its positioning within a network, a positioning that footnotes help define, when there are ideas that a reader can’t come to a full understanding of without considering the imposed commentary, the suggested references, and the included reference material. The physical presence of the footnote, even, is disruptive, as it directs the reader away from the text by degrees, and in many ways the footnote suggests that its related material is not just subordinate to the main text, but is of equal, if not of *greater* importance than the main text at the time of their introduction (How could you even *consider* reading *Ulysses* without first having read *Dubliners*, *Portrait*, *Hamlet*, and *The Odyssey*, after all...). It is difficult to precisely name, but Grafton presents this idea of a truth which is dependent on the footnote’s action.

A reader flipping between pages as they navigate texts, flipping back and forth from the endnotes to the main text, or even juggling multiple books and cross references is engaged in this act of metatextual scholarship which exceeds simple, inferred intertextuality. Grafton concludes his book by positing that “footnotes form an indispensable if messy part of that indispensable, messy mixture of art and science: modern history” (235), ending with a return to his own emphasis of the history of footnotes as a mixture of “art and science.” But what of situations where footnotes are *more art* than science? If footnotes are, as Grafton suggests, destabilizing elements, or indicators of incompleteness, then we may consider them as a powerful tool for authors to carefully create their own *intentionally* destabilized text, opening up new possibilities for the fiction writer. Benstock writes too of footnotes within fiction, about how “in fiction, footnotes extend textual authority by enlarging the fictional context,” and that through this extension “literary notes highlight the ambivalence by consciously dividing the text against itself” (Benstock). These enlarged “fictional contexts” and self-divisions are challenging as it becomes apparent that footnotes in fictional texts aren’t being used to clarify, as will be seen soon, but rather to expand.

Chapter 2: The Footnote's Shoelaces

Nicholson Baker ends the first chapter of his short novel *The Mezzanine* with the dramatic revelation, “In the stapled CVS bag was a pair of new shoelaces” (9). *The Mezzanine* is about minutiae, which is evidenced in the importance attributed to shoelaces, and in the action of the book, which is the speaker’s escalator ride back to his office following his lunch break. In this fifteen some second stretch of time, the reader is taken along for a ride as the speaker’s mind wanders and we get pulled into his personal history, his detailed thoughts on vinyl records, drinking straws, cigarette butts, vending machines, but most importantly: shoelaces. These thoughts are revealed through a series of digressions that are often explored in footnotes. These footnotes thread the text much like the physical function and literary recurrence of the shoelaces which the speaker’s thoughts continue to return to.

The speaker refers to the incidental snapping of *both* of his shoelaces within two days as a “disruption of physical routine” (Baker, 13), but in the “aftermath of the broken-shoelace disappointment” (14), the speaker begins to consider how he must have been exerting near identical wear patterns on the laces, the “near simultaneity” of which he considers very “exciting” (15). There is a juicy parallel here between the shoelace and the footnote, as similarly the footnotes in this text are “disruptions of physical routine” as they force the reader to make choices as they navigate the text differently, while they also introduce a simultaneity of narrative presentation as this speaker’s footnotes exceed the classification of “notes” and become paragraphs, then entire pages. These footnoted passages impose equal importance to the primary text. For example, on page 27 the footnote nearly overcomes the text, assuming more space on page than the primary text; only the first five lines on the page are part of the primary text, and

the rest of the page is taken up by a long footnote about doorknobs and ties which spills onto the next page where, there too, it takes up more than half the page.

But when escalators intersect with shoelaces, the footnotes take over the text completely. Pages 65-69 are the continuation of one particularly long and important footnote. As the footnote progresses, there are only a few lines of primary text on the top of each page, reminding us of the precedence the footnote has achieved within these pages. This footnote is the result of the speaker's memory of his mother teaching him to "retie my sneakers before I used any system of vertical transport" (Baker, 64), before, as he grew older, he realized how safe escalators actually were and how "casually they could be treated" (65). This insistence on the safety of the escalator introduces a footnote which dwells on the grooves of the escalator stairs, their mechanics, and the speaker's memories of ice skating and listening to similarly grooved vinyl records. Not only is this a long footnote, but it also begins to disassociate itself from the text, as the speaker begins to write about the actions of listening to a record in the second person "you" point of view, before veering even further off track by the end of the footnote, writing:

returning twenty minutes later, near the end of side A, to listen to the technology finish:
 you rode the last grooves as if on a rickshaw through the crowded Eastern capital of the music, and then all at once, at dusk, you left the gates of the city and stepped into a waiting boat that pulled you swiftly out onto the black and purple waters of the lagoon, toward a flat island in the middle; [...] and though your vessel moved very fast it seemed to leave only a thin luminous seam in the black surface behind you where the keel had cut. Finally my thumb lifted you up, and you passed high over the continent and disappeared beyond the edge of the flat world. (68)

The injection of the second person is confusing, because it isn't just directed at the reader, but the "you" is the reader *as* the record player's needle. The point of view is strange here, as the footnote has digressed into a poetic representation of the mechanical action of the record player. In a way, the introduction of "You" as the record needle may be read as an attempt to associate the reader, or the act of reading, with the record needle who, similarly, is following along the "grooves." This may be a critique of common reading and writing practices, where the experience is stuck within the "grooves," guided along without opportunity for twists or turns, and it is only when the speaker's "thumb" finally lifts "you up" that the supposed reader is able to escape the "flat world." But, this is a strange form for this argument to take and the metaphor doesn't hold up for long, so what is important to see here is that within *The Mezzanine* the speaker has gifted the reader the ability to more freely skip amongst the text, to experience the simultaneity of the footnotes and digressions in a way that the record needle trapped in a groove may not.

While many of the footnotes do exist (seemingly) simply as tangential space for the speaker to wax poetic or to digress in new directions, as the story progresses some of the footnotes take on scholarly forms. The speaker begins a footnote on page 45 with the introduction: "Ice cube trays deserve a historical note." This introduction takes on a scholarly tone momentarily, and separates itself from previous introductory lines like, "I was especially interested that the food service had inserted 'sliced' into the title of their sandwich" (Baker, 39), and "for example, I feel no loss that doctors don't perform house calls" (42). Later, the reader encounters an even more scholarly incidence with a footnote being used as space to provide a quote and a citation from Gerard Manley Hopkins, as the speaker draws an association between the braids and twists of urinal piping to a piece of Hopkins' writing; describing these waves, he

writes, “I saw big smooth flinty waves, carved and scuppled in shallow grooves...” (72), combining the scholarly with the poetic, and notably referencing “grooves” again, but now within a new context. These “shallow grooves” are much more intentionally and artistic, and perhaps it is because these grooves suggest pathways, but are not so deep as to trap a viewer.

The speaker’s appreciation of art and literature continues to be a theme throughout the text. Along with the rest of his belongings, he has been carrying around a paperback, Penguin copy of *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius, which he was turned on to, he explains in an unsurprising referential train, by a mention of it within the book *History of European Morals*, which he explains he had been attracted to because of “the ambitious title and the luxuriant incidentalism of the footnotes” (Baker, 121). Here he launches into a footnote, beginning, “In one footnote, for instance, Lecky quotes a French biographer of Spinoza...” (121). Scholarship begins to blend with the speaker’s digression, as he goes on to also cite bits of historical trivia, writing “Hobbes, too, we learn in a Penguin selection of John Aubrey’s *Lives*, page 228...,” “Wittgenstein, as well, I read in some biography...” and then quoting Boswell at length, before finally getting back to the topic of footnotes, where the speaker writes with total self-referential, metatextual flair, “Boswell, like Lecky (to get back to the point of this footnote), and Gibbon before him, loved footnotes” (121). The rest of the passage is very rich and deserves careful attention - to that end, it is presented here broken into block quotes with interpretation in between.

The Mezzanine: Footnote on Footnotes (121 - 122)

They knew that the outer surface of truth is not smooth, welling and gathering from paragraph to shapely paragraph, but is encrusted with a rough protective bark of citations, quotation marks, italics, and foreign languages, a whole variorum crust of ‘ibid.’s’ and

‘compare’s’ and ‘see’s’ that are the shield for the pure flow of argument as it lives for a moment in one mind. They knew the anticipatory pleasure of sensing with the peripheral vision as they turned the page a gray silt of further example and qualification waiting in tiny type at the bottom.

Baker’s speaker begins here by considering a suggestive relationship between literary aesthetics and the concept of truth, arguing for the inconsistencies of truth as being identifiable in the roughness of the page, of the “welling and gathering from paragraph to shapely paragraph,” perhaps literally as the ink saturates the page, but certainly metaphorically as an argument builds and develops upon itself. The idea of truth as “encrusted with a rough protective bark of citations quotation marks, italics, and foreign languages” begins to point toward an understanding of truth as a fragile figure which must be supported with evidence in the form of critical apparatus.

Baker’s narrator is indirectly speaking to Grafton’s idea that “truth has enemies,” and in the face of these enemies footnotes become defensive measures for an author. The idea of critical device as this “protective bark,” or the “shield of the pure flow of argument,” begins to establish an understanding of why we have such devices in literature. They exist to provide intellectual proof for an idea, much like the way in the physical world our senses help to identify and analyze experiences.

The final sentence of this block quote places an emphasis on the footnote, which exists pleasurably within the “peripheral vision,” promises “further example and qualification,” thus acting as the outermost protective layer for the literature’s truth; to put it in another metaphor, it is the armor that is most easily strengthened, appended, and modified. But all footnotes are not supportive, and this is a point which this quote doesn’t touch directly on, because footnotes may

also be divisive chains threaded throughout a text which reveal a different “truth” by exposing the text as false or wrong.

They liked deciding as they read whether they would bother to consult a certain footnote or not, and whether they would read it in context or read it before the text it hung from, as an hors d’oeuvre.

Beginning this block with the question of whether to “consult a certain footnote or not” and whether to “read it in context or read it before the text” offers several different approaches for a reader to engage with the footnotes. First, the decision to *ever* consult the footnotes has to be made first; a reader must decide on the level of mediation they feel will give them the best experience of the text. From my experience, I’ve heard of many readers who will first read a text uninterrupted, completely ignoring any footnotes. Such a reading allows the reader to come to their own conclusions about the text, to make their own connections, and subsequently (whether physically or mentally) fill the text with annotation and personal thought. Such a reader is then prepared to critically engage with a text’s footnotes, to resist or assimilate interpretations different from their own. The danger of, conversely, reading the text first with footnotes, is that the footnotes may impose on the reader’s own ideas and interpretations and limit creative possibilities. Then there is the option of reading the footnotes before the text in which they appear, which primes a reader with interpretation before they have even seen the evidence; this is, perhaps, the most dangerous threat to an authentic “personal interpretation” of a text.

The muscles of the eye, they knew, want vertical itineraries; the rectus externus and internus grow dazed wagging back and forth in the Zs taught in grade school: the footnote functions as a switch, offering the model-railroader’s satisfaction of catching the march of thought with a superscripted ‘1’ and routing it, sometimes at length, through

abandoned stations and submerged, leaching tunnels. Digression--a movement away from the *gradus*, or upward escalation, of the argument--is sometimes the only way to be thorough, and footnotes are the only form of graphic digression sanctioned by centuries of typesetters. And yet the MLA Style Sheet I owned in college warned against lengthy, “essay-like” footnotes. Were they *nuts*? Where is scholarship *going*? (They have removed this blemish in later editions.)

This next passage offers new importance to the physical action involved in reading footnotes. First, this passage presents footnotes as a deconstruction of the traditional reading “form,” like the grooves of the record or of Hopkins. To the speaker, the left to right, “back and forth Z’s” reading form is a stylistic tyranny, but perhaps less cynically, it represents the proliferation of effective design in literature. When strict, utilitarian efficiency is not the priority, however, footnotes offer the opportunity for intellectual *and* physical digression, like the “model-railroader” who enjoys rerouting their trains, there is something appealing in engaging with books in new ways, like the “choose your own adventure” books of the late 70s and early 80s which offered multiple narrative progressions through a “flip to page 80 if you say yes, page 84 if you say no” format. Similarly, the speaker’s incredulity in this passage at the “warning against lengthy, ‘essay like’ footnotes,” creates opportunity for thorough digression instead of short simple suggestion. Following with the statement, “Where is scholarship *going*,” this passage is revealed to be an argument for the power of digression in revealing new angles and aspects to a subject, argued and demonstrated in the same passage as this passage injects into the story’s narrative an argument for the compelling power of the footnote in creating truth. The removal of this “blemish” suggests that this is a form which is becoming more acceptable in scholarship, offering up the opportunity for new explorations in defending, creating, or discovering truth. It

remains problematic, however, that a truth must be “created” or “defended.” What we see instead, then, is that Baker’s speaker is subsequently arguing for the thorough exploration of the network of ideas surrounding a subject, that the word truth doesn’t come to stand for a specific idea, but rather it stands for the great suggestive value of a peripheral network that inspires critical thought and informs new ideas; in less words, Baker’s truth is the reader’s interpretation of all the surrounding information they can consume.

But Johnson was referring here to the special case of one writer’s commentary on another--and indeed whose mind is not chilled by several degrees when the editors of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* clarify every potentially confusing word or line for us, failing to understand that the student’s pleasure in poetry comes in part from the upper furze of nouns he can’t quite place and allusions that he only half recognizes?

The beginning of this passage introduces in Baker to the distinction between an author’s text with their own, self-aware footnotes, and the practice of critical scholarship where scholars create “critical editions” of other author’s texts, filling them with footnotes. This is an interpretation of the danger of scholarly footnotes, which are well removed from the origin of the text, and for many (like our speaker) detract from a reading by eliminating puzzles, like the allusions which a reader may only “half recognize,” from a primary text. The practice seems especially offensive to the speaker, who seems to prize the intellectual rigor of discovery and of polysemic interpretations. The speaker is presenting footnote as an opportunity for the writer not to make the puzzle easier, but rather to add more pieces to it, to flesh out the bigger ideas and implications, and to create more opportunities for the reader to digress in their thoughts and interpretations.

But the great scholarly or anecdotal footnotes of Lecky, Gibbon, or Boswell, written by the author of the book himself to supplement, or even correct over several later editions, what he says in the primary text, are reassurances that the pursuit of truth doesn't have clear outer boundaries: it doesn't end with the book; restatement and self-disagreement and the enveloping sea of referenced authorities all continue. Footnotes are the finer-suckered surfaces that allow tentacular paragraphs to hold fast to the wider reality of the library.

This idea, "that the pursuit of truth doesn't have clear outer boundaries," is the heart of this passage. Footnotes are not just for the reader, they are the opportunity for an author to reinforce their ideas with further evidence in a variety of possible forms. This variety then offers a greater defense and exploration of the ideas at the heart of the text that the author is attempting to reach. The end of this passage, also the end of the footnote, grounds us then in the idea that footnotes, no matter their context, effectively become the "fine suckered surfaces" which allow books to become part of the web, or the "reality of the library," which is the reality of intertextuality. Footnotes are the physical markers of these connections.

To conclude with Baker, the thesis of this book, in a way, is the offering of a demonstrative example of the counter-intuitive value of digression in approaching truths. The book's action can thus be seen as an answer to the question, "What can you suggest to a reader about a character and their world within a fifteen second escalator ride?" What *The Mezzanine* achieves is an increased awareness of the details of life's minutiae, the emergence of a young adult from childhood, an exploration of subconscious social norms and practices, and much more. But, for its emphasis on truth, *The Mezzanine* doesn't strive to present singular truths, like a truth about our speaker, or a truth about consumer culture, rather; it seems to constantly suggest

different approaches through its digressions, and in this way footnotes allow for a multi-pronged exploration of the speaker and his (our) world, where the reader is invited to come to their own understanding and conclusions about the speaker, or about themselves.

Chapter 3: *House of Leaves*

Open House

From Grafton's historical analysis of footnotes to Baker's playful digressive footnotes, it becomes clear that it is impossible to make blanket claims about what the footnote does or does not do. In *House of Leaves* Danielewski, like Baker, takes advantage of aspects of both the scholarly and creative footnotes of other authors. But unlike Baker, Danielewski transforms his footnotes new and strange beasts. Danielewski proposes one particularly interesting perspective for reading the footnotes within *House* when speaking in response to a question:

There's a lot of theater in the book. So what look like academic footnotes are actually other characters entering center stage and conversing with other characters. It's very much the same way as a playwright would approach it. Those characters actually keep the other characters going. There's a great discourse, a great battle. (Danielewski)

The idea of footnotes as theater, as stage cues, is compelling because it inverts the supposition that footnotes are tangential or supplementary. Here, Danielewski also asserts that the footnotes provide this story its momentum, as they “keep the other characters going” in this “great discourse.” This becomes complicated, however, with the admission that these footnotes “look like academic footnotes,” which necessarily implies that something subversive is happening in this text to transform these apparent scholarly footnotes into the stage cues which bring the speakers together. To begin investigating this “great battle,” the stage must be set, and the characters must be introduced.

House of Leaves is a “found manuscript” story. At the core of the text is “The Navidson Record” which is a compilation of information and material detailing the exploration of a house which is, simply put, bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Investigations into the heart of

the labyrinthine house are led by Will Navidson, who had moved into the house with his family before the labyrinth was discovered. Like an onion, an artichoke, or whatever layered metaphor you prefer, “The Navidson Record” and Navy’s (short for Navidson) explorations into the house lie at the core; the rest of the novel builds up from these investigations. “The Navidson Record” is revealed to have been assembled and heavily annotated by an old, blind man named Zampanò. Much of “The Navidson Record” is an analysis of tapes of video footage, which induces some skepticism, as Zampanò is blind. His annotations to the assemblage, thus, are written by others, often young college women, who have helped Zampanò compile the text.

The next layer is where we enter as the reader, as the book begins with an introduction written by Johnny, a mid-twenties tattoo parlor apprentice. Johnny discovers the “The Navidson Record” manuscript in Zampanò’s apartment after hearing of Zampanò’s death. Johnny becomes obsessed with learning about this manuscript, researching, fact checking, tracking down people mentioned (mostly the women who helped Zampanò annotate it), and the location and reality of the House itself. Johnny is the reader’s closest link to the text, and in a way could be seen to similarly represent the reader who is lost in the maze of the text, constantly questioning and checking for deception, searching for truth, but finding that every seeming answer complicates matters.

Few critical articles on *House of Leaves* aim at understanding the ways in which the footnotes operates within the text. To be fair, the extensive use of footnotes is not the only irregularity of this book. Due to this, *House*’s engagement with footnotes is often considered as just one of the many ways the book challenges readers to navigate this text differently from most other books. For example, Nick Lord’s article, “The Labyrinth and the Lacuna: Metafiction, the Symbolic, and the Real in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*,” considers the footnotes and

their voices as a “thematization of both reading and critical practices,” where each layer “exists as a product of the writer’s engagement with a given text” (466), but this is where thinking on the footnote itself stops. For Lord, and many others, the footnotes are mixed into the crowd as just one of many compositional techniques which create the metafiction, and the narrative levels focused on instead of the devices which drive them.

In contrast, Michael Hemingway’s article, “What’s beneath the Floorboards: Three Competing Metavoices in the Footnotes of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*,” is directly interested in the characters at each of the book’s narrative levels and considers the versatility of the footnote in defining the narration. Hemingway writes:

Each voice propels, and at times frustrates, the overall narrative, operating similarly to the hypertext and hyperlinks on the Internet that can stymie the Web surfer’s initial subject search. These footnotes engage *critifiction*, a term coined by Raymond Federman as a narrative technique to further take the reader into a textual tangle, mixing deconstructionist theory, literary discourse, autobiography, history, poetry, and a number of other genres. (273)

Hemingway’s reading places an emphasis on how the footnotes frustrate their own discourse, but the focus turns away from the device which separates the speakers to focus on the speakers themselves. Additionally, it seems to be too reductionist to suggest that footnotes simply “stymie” a search. Certainly the dive into the “textual tangle” introduces complications instead of simple answers, but I think Hemingway would agree that even the idea of an answer, or truth, in *House of Leaves* is a distraction from the narrative’s complications and its apparent incompleteness, which is its real dark beauty.

Methodology

Early during the drafting process, it became clear that to present an effective close reading of the footnotes in *House of Leaves*, structure would be needed to avoid emulating the effect I am attempting to explicate. Thus, to avoid writing my own scholarly labyrinth, I have opted to organize the following chapters into a series of “exhibits.” Each exhibit will focus on a footnote and an effect, and as some footnotes have multiple points of entry and exit, each exhibit will include a subsection analyzing methods of “ingress” and “egress” which will focus on the flow and direction between footnotes. This is not an attempt at a comprehensive mapping, the ingress/egress will focus on connecting material we are exploring in depth, and other references may exist within the book. The exhibits will be formatted as such:

Exhibit A: <Distinct Identifying Detail, Page Number, Figure>

Ingress: Ways in which a reader may be directed to this section and how this navigation may be interpreted.

Explication: A close reading of the footnote’s material and how its positioning as a footnote affects its reading. Also here I will explore where within the network of ideas this footnote is located.

Egress: Places that this footnote may direct a reader and the significance of those destinations.

This format has two aims: It will encompass a close reading of both device and narrative material, while also serving as an exploration in the different ways a reader interacts with an ergodic, postmodern metatext such as *House of Leaves*.

House of Leaves Footnote Exhibits

Exhibit A: Footnote 1: “A topic more carefully considered in Chapter IX.” (3) (Fig. 3)

Ingress:

The first numbered footnote in *House of Leaves* comes at the end of the first paragraph in “The Navidson Record,” the text’s central “manuscript.”

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, ‘authenticity’ still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading obsession -- to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes -- invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth [Footnote 1].

(3)

The immediacy of this first footnote establishes the footnote “device” as an integral aspect of the text. It is also interesting to consider that the text, and this first footnote, begins with this question of truth and authenticity. Grafton’s presentation of footnotes frames them as devices for resolution which illuminate relevant facts and history, correct false statements, or direct readers to more current scholarship. This passage expands this from a literary argument to a graphical one, as it suggests a connection between the footnote and image, as herein they have both “forsaken unimpeachable hold on the truth.” The footnote, as a visual device, directs the reader’s eyes away from the text and to scholarship, and as such it becomes an indicator of metatext; it is this visual cue which reminds the reader of their physical involvement with the book. This passage also immediately suggests that a reader must be suspicious, as what we see, and thus what we read, may not be trusted.

Explication:

Footnote one comes from Zampanò and reads simply, “A topic more carefully considered in Chapter IX.” The question of authenticity that this footnote is attached to is immediately supplanted and a more in-depth study is encouraged. One paragraph into the text, and a reader already faces a division. The footnote could be read as a preview of things to come, or it could be suggesting that the reader turn to and read, skim, or otherwise observe Chapter IX before continuing forward. Whereas Baker’s narrator in *The Mezzanine* might consider this footnote an attempt to regain some sort of purchase on “truth,” here it appears to destabilize the concept even further as it is already creating a bisection within the text, spawning two possible ways of reading the book within just the first paragraph.

Egress:

If the reader decides to turn to Chapter IX, they will find themselves thrown into the midst of this text’s chaos. This chapter is notable for several reasons: First, it features the most volume of “redacted, but rediscovered” material (footnotes and primary), which appear in red strikethrough, of which Johnny writes, “Note: Struck passages indicate what Zampanò tried to get rid of, but which I, with a little bit of turpentine and a good old magnifying glass managed to resurrect” (111). Chapter IX also features some of the book’s most divided formatting which is maintained over several pages, appearing visually similar to Derrida’s *Glas* (1974) at times, with vertical columns on the outside edge of each page, divided columns of primary material and footnotes on the inner edge, and inset squares which contain further footnote material (Fig. 4). This formatting begins on page 120 and is consistent until 131, at which point footnotes start appearing sideways along the inner edge of the page, and then by page 138 all formatting constancy crumbles and the footnotes begin taking over entire pages, appearing backwards,

mirrored, and having a “bleed through” effect on the pages, with little to no primary material appearing on these pages.

Zampanò, Johnny, Navidson, and The Editors are all present as footnotes beget footnotes, nesting within each other, directing the reader forward and back within the book, to the appendices, and of course to other footnotes. The chapter itself is around fifty pages long, an average chapter length within the book, but features some of the most “word-count-dense” pages in the book. Sequentially, it appears about a third of the way through the book, so even if you were to wait and read it “in order,” it would still appear relatively early within the text. The decision to direct a reader immediately from the concept of truth toward one of the most ergodic chapters within the text reflects the implication that this is a text that is not concerned with being understood.

It becomes painfully clear at this point that a linear path through this assemblage of material is impossible. And it is this chapter, at the book’s suggestion, that I would like to focus our attention on. By immediately turning the reader’s attention toward Chapter IX, the book suggests a priority (it is footnote 1, after all), and we may consider it a section of text which could be used to frame our understanding of the work - both in the material which is presented, and in the structure and play of the footnotes. And as the material makes clear to us very quickly, we’re immediately thrown into the labyrinth.

Exhibit B: Air-Ground-Emergency Footnote Code/Collage (582) (Fig. 5)

Ingress:

Instead of just numbered footnotes, some of the footnotes in Chapter IX feature superscripted symbols. A reader is not led to this collage via a footnote or any other directive.

Instead, an observant investigator, or an effective Googler may discover that on page 582, in section “C. Collages,” there is an image of a partially buried “Ground-Air Emergency Code” pamphlet which corresponds to the symbolic footnotes of Chapter IX.

Explication:

The three symbols which appear most immediately are “X: Unable to Proceed,” “K: Indicate direction to proceed” and “_IL: Not Understood” (“_IL” is an approximation of the symbol, “_I” should be a mirrored L). Many of these symbols will be used in place of numbered footnotes, and their meaning as code affects their use as footnotes.

Egress:

Back to any of the symbol footnotes in Chapter IX.

Exhibit C: Chapter IX Latin Quotes/Translations and Footnote X (107) (Fig. 6)

Ingress:

Chapter IX begins with three Latin quotes, roughly pertaining to the difficulty of exiting and entering a house. This difficulty is emphasized and exemplified in many ways on this page, directly relating to Zampanò’s footnote on these quotes. First, this difficulty is emphasized through a footnote trick which is unique to Chapter IX where symbols are also used to direct the reader to footnotes. An “X” directs the reader to this first footnote of the chapter, which provides the translations from Latin. We can see how this X then functions explicitly as an indicator for a footnote, directing the reader to the translations. But also, read as an “Air-Ground Emergency” sign, “unable to proceed,” it implicitly mimics the sentiment of the quotations. We may also interpret this as an end stop “warning,” along the lines of Dante’s “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here” (emphasis *enter*), a visual crucifix representing the burden of the following chapter,

or perhaps even read as a reference to Chapter X, which would indicated an unlikely, quick escape and end to the chapter.

Explication:

Footnote 135 interrupts the body of footnote x, following the Latin translations. Briefly, footnote 135 discusses how viewers of the film portions of “The Navidson Record” are said to be “involved in a labyrinth, meandering from one celluloid film to the next,” while also calling the film a “continually devolving discourse, promising the possibility of discovery while all along dissolving into chaotic ambiguities too blurry to ever completely comprehend” (114). This promise of the “possibility of discovery” is what seems to drive Navidson, Zampanò, and Johnny, but they suffer the same fate of the film which the film, suffering through a “devolving discourse” which is “dissolving into chaotic ambiguities.” It is condemning for this material to appear so soon in this chapter (especially if a reader just turned to Chapter IX from the first page) as Footnote 135 is nestled within footnote x, Chapter IX’s first footnote. Like the speakers who are thrown into the labyrinth, the reader is already being directed deeper into the chapter, to a point which directly concerns them, addressing their positioning as a wanderer within this text which is ultimately incomprehensible.

Egress:

Then, appended at the end of footnote x, is footnote 120, which directs the reader to Johnny Truant’s footnote.

Exhibit D: Footnote 120 - Labyrinth Scholarship and Tatiana (107) (Fig. 6)

Ingress:

At the end of Zampanò's footnote X, which offers translations of the Latin quotes.

Explication:

Johnny's footnote at the beginning of Chapter IX exposes an instance of scholarly indiscretion, as he suggests that the actual source of the Latin quotes and their translations is not Zampanò, rather, they are from a (real life) text by Penelope Reed Doob. Johnny then digresses into how he learned for certain that Zampanò was, effectively, plagiarizing some of his material. This footnote is a three page explanation of how Johnny discovers this beginning with the difficulty Johnny has in leaving his apartment (appropriate considering the Latin quotes) to go meet Tatiana, one of the women who helped Zampanò.

Sickened by anxiety, Johnny leaves his apartment and describes his graphically violent death on his walk over to Tatiana's home. Posed initially as if it were factual prose, he writes how he was hit by a truck and how its grill was "grinding into me [...] like kitchen knives, severing me from the waist down" (108), before it is revealed that this graphic death, and a second death where he is crushed by a tree, are the result of his anxious imagination acting up before he even leaves the apartment. What is particularly troubling is that these violent, imagined deaths seem to be easier for Johnny to write and fantasize about than whatever it truly is that is haunting him. These writerly suicides, to put a phrase to it, are certainly indicators that something is very wrong, something which exceeds confusion over a weird book.

When he finally leaves, he reaches Tatiana's apartment safely. His encounter with her begins with a very brief exchange of scholarly information, including a reading list which reveals that Zampanò had taken material from Penelope Reed Doob's *The Idea of the Labyrinth*, but once the exchange is made, conversation turns and it quickly becomes a sexual encounter. As they sit there, idly chatting, things take an unexpected turn, Tatiana explains,

‘I won’t let you fuck me.’ Time to get going, I thought and began to stand up. Not that I’d expected anything, mind you. ‘But if you want, you can come on me,’ she added. (108)

This is followed with a sexually graphic scene which could be interpreted many ways, perhaps as a way of framing Johnny as a sexually attractive and promiscuous man in LA, or maybe as insight into the kind of women Zampanò recruited to help him, but paired with the previous imagined and projected violence and mutilation, it becomes questionable if this encounter ever happened at all. Most likely, the truest facts presented with are that Johnny is anxious to the point of illness, and that he did pick up the reading list from Tatiana’s apartment. This encounter, real or make believe, returns to the question of reliability and truth, and bears similarity to the footnote within *House* as it is a tool that guides readers into unexpected distractions and revelations. Here, expectations are presented, denied, changed, and met in some capacity, but ultimately, even in the “discovery” of some reality within the text, there is nested within the process further confusions and uncertainties. The footnotes play with their expectations in the same way in this chapter, and as the subject matter begins to revolve around the concept of the labyrinth, there is very little continuity, linearity, or particular rationality behind any of these twists and turns.

Egress:

N/A. No further appended footnotes. A reader would either continue exploring the page that Johnny’s digression ends on, but more likely they would return to the beginning of Chapter IX and try to figure out the next step after this series of footnotes.

Exhibit E: Footnote K and the Problem of the Minotaur (109) (Fig. 7)

Ingress:

Page 151, appended to footnote I> (“Will attempt to take off”)

Explication:

The material most directly concerning labyrinths, especially in the context of the Greek myth of Daedalus and King Minos, exists primarily in the red, strikeout text which permeates the first few pages of this chapter, and then peppers the next forty. The content of Footnote K, symbol for “Indicate direction to proceed,” is presented at the top of page 109. There is no primary material above it. Footnote K is particularly strange because it reverses the anticipated order of reference: footnote, as it appears before its superscripted reference point which is the bottom of page 151, the last page of the chapter, appended to footnote I> (“Will attempt to take off”). This connection between the beginning and end of the chapter, the reversal of the footnote structure, and the air-ground control codes could be read as indicating failure in the “attempt to take off” at the end of the chapter, or perhaps the “direction to proceed” is simply back - to return to the beginning. Footnote K creates a recursive loop within the chapter, sending the reader back from the end of the chapter to the beginning, acting like a musical Dal Segno (similar to the repeat sign), whose return point is seen before the instruction to return occurs.

Footnote K’s content begins by referencing Chapter V, wherein there is a discussion of the implications of the house’s labyrinthine architecture and the effect it would have on echoes within the house. In the third, and last, paragraph of the primary text for this page, we encounter our first bit of strikeout text:

~~Most famous of all, however, was the labyrinth Daedalus constructed for King Minos. It served as a prison. Purportedly located on the island of Crete in the city of Knossos, the maze was built to~~ [end page] ... (109)

This ends a paragraph which explores the history of labyrinths, but is interesting because this is the first instance of a recurring idea: the redacted theme of King Minos and the Minotaur. The following page turn may surprise a reader, as the next two visible pages are presented almost entirely in red strikeout. The paragraph that bleeds onto this page is wrapped up shortly, but is then followed by its own footnote, footnote 123, which is separated by line break. The content of this new footnote provides an alternative interpretation of the Greek myth of King Minos.

In brief summary, the re-imagination of the myth of the Minotaur supposes that the Minotaur is King Minos's deformed son, who King Minos has hidden away in the labyrinth because he cannot accept him as his son, yet he may not outright kill him. He then created the myth of the Minotaur to keep people from exploring the maze, and those who were sentenced to die in the maze died of starvation. Zampanò even cites Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as evidence for the interpretation. This reimagining of the myth lends it greater historical feasibility, but introduces an element of infanticide, while implying that there are no monsters within a labyrinth, but damaged or condemned wanderers.

This redacted material is evidence of Zampanò's attempt to scrub away any mention of the minotaur in "The Navidson Record" manuscript, but also of his apparent own research and publications, as Zampanò appears as a cited scholar in this section with the idea that "the maze really serves as a trope for repression" (110) is supposedly original to and published by Zampanò, with a string of citations and footnotes. Presented in order of reference, the first two are Zampanò's, the third is Johnny's:

1. Citation: ""Birth Defects in Knossos' Sonny Won't Wait Flyer, Santa Cruz 1968" (110),

2. Citation Footnote 124: ““Violent Prejudice in Knossos” by Zampanò in Sonny Will Wait Flyer, Santa Cruz 1969”
3. Footnote 125: Johnny explains, “I’ve no idea why these titles and cited sources are different. It seems much too deliberate to be an error, but since I haven’t been able to find the ‘flyer’ I don’t know for certain....” (111).

The alternative citations, dated a year apart, differ primarily in their title: “Birth Defects in Knossos” v. “Violent Prejudices in Knossos.” The effect of this difference is a change of causation, wherein the first title presents the interpretation from the perspective of the birth defect being cause for the creation of the labyrinth, but the second shifts the causation to the “violent prejudice” toward that which is not acceptable. As a later, revised publication, this change could suggest that Zampanò reconsidered (or at least wants it to appear like he has) his theory and shifted the focus of his interpretation and the causation in the myth, or perhaps, like Johnny, as he fell deeper and deeper into his manuscript he sought to distance himself from his past life and to erase evidence of his work which made him vulnerable.

Egress:

There are several footnotes within K (109) that direct the reader, not to footnotes at the end of the chapter, but to footnotes at the bottom of pages 109-111.

Exhibit G: Footnote _IL (“Not Understood”), Apology, Translation (Fig. 7)

Ingress:

Within Footnote K, Footnote _IL (“Not Understood”) appears affixed to the German word *bauplan*.

Explication:

Notably, this is the first time the Air-Ground code is used by Johnny, evidenced as it appears in his font. Previously, they were only used by Zampanò. His note reads “So sorry.” In the context of its reference, the apology appears as if he were unable to translate the word *bauplan*. The editors offer a translation with Footnote 121, writing “German for ‘building plan.’ - Ed.” Considering the in depth research Johnny has put into other aspects of the text, it seems unlikely that he was unable to simply translate one word. This apology seems to be directed at the reader, maybe apologizing for his inability to open a German-English dictionary, but more likely this apology is referencing an awareness of the complexity in this chapter’s footnotes, structure, and content.

To attempt to read this apology in terms of the questions of truth and authenticity, by affixing an apology onto what would be a simple, traditional footnote, a translation, a clarification of fact and meaning, this could be read Johnny subtly recognizing the fact that truth is “Not Understood” within this chapter in a traditional, expected way. Perhaps by affixing this apology to *bauplan*, it is an apology for his inability to offer any real guidance, like a floor plan, for navigating or understanding the text. Following this, the editors’ footnote could be seen as representative of a reader rejecting or simply missing that possibility and injecting “traditional truth” into the book, in an attempt to gain a grounding and to say “Yes, I have fixed something and broadened my understanding of the text.” The editors, like a reader desperate for the truth, miss the point. By imposing an answer, a definition, they do not afford themselves the opportunity to learn from the imperfect possibilities.

Furthermore, it is likely that a reader would first encounter Footnote _IL as they finish reading about Johnny’s sexual encounter with Tatiana. The footnote appears immediately following and under the line, “she licked up and finally swallowed my come” (109), which is

striking, because this scene of graphic imagery follows immediately with an apology. This may be an apology for the graphic language and depiction of a sexual act, but this seems a bit modest for Johnny. To consider the proximity of the sexual scene with the question of truth, we may read this as potential, subtle admission that Footnote 120 doesn't represent reality, that he lied about his encounter with Tatiana, but instead of admitting outright like he does in the case of his imagined deaths, he hides his apology subtly, in a place where it may be misunderstood, absolving himself for his lie, but allowing him to maintain his fragile pride. If that is the case, a reader may question what it is Johnny is attempting to achieve in telling the story; it certainly seems to reveal sexual frustration, with this anecdote acting as an opportunity for Johnny to live vicariously through his notes (just as he died vicariously a page earlier), or perhaps it is hinting at a history of unhealthy sexual relationships and experiences with women.

Egress:

Editors' Footnote 121 - see above.

Condemned

There's a lot of theater in the book. So what look like academic footnotes are actually other characters entering center stage and conversing with other characters. It's very much the same way as a playwright would approach it. Those characters actually keep the other characters going. There's a great discourse, a great battle. (Danielewski)

To return to the quote which began this chapter, what Danielewski poses in here is a very apt description of how footnotes exist in *House*, but it also unnecessarily suggests that there is an inherent difference between the academic footnote and the idea that the footnotes in *House* function as stage cues or dialogue markers. The one function that may be possible in *House*, however, that may be impossible in works annotated by *different* people, is that Danielewski allows for the possibility for the “primary” texts to respond to the annotations. I think this is the discourse, or battle, that Danielewski describes which becomes central to *House*.

Also, different from the passive positioning of a reader as audience, the *House* reader is ultimately empowered (or encumbered?) in choosing how they read the book and its footnotes. In a sense, if the footnotes are stage cues, a reader becomes the director, choosing when and where players enter and exit the stage, interpreting the ambiguity in who is speaking with (or interrupting) whom, and effectively crafting the conversation in the way that seems to make the most sense to them. With this responsibility it seems unfair to blame people, like our speakers, for seeking an “answer” to the puzzle, for wanting the “truth.” Danielewski spoke on this subject in an interview, saying:

The pursuit of permanence in the world is as damaging as the acceptance of the incompleteness of the world is nourishing. Out of what is not there comes what could be there. (Carpenter)

This quote follows on the tail of Danielewski explaining how his sister had rescued and reassembled a manuscript for Danielewski's own lost manuscript, a text named "Redwood," which he had written for his dying father. The reassembled manuscript has since been lost, and exists as part of Danielewski's mythology, as many readers speculate on "Redwood," trying to tease out info about it from Danielewski and trying to guess what parts of *House of Leaves* may have had their start in "Redwood." This is tangential, as an entire piece could be written about the story around "Redwood," but it illustrates exactly what Danielewski means when he speaks of the pursuit of permanence and nourishing incompleteness; In letting go of "Redwood," Danielewski was practicing exactly what he speaks of here. Similarly, Much of *House* may be read as the folly of the pursuit of permanence. In the narratives we have Navidson attempting to discover something to validate the expeditions within the house, Zampanò's manuscript documenting and annotating the results of these expeditions, Johnny's obsession with puzzling through this assemblage of material while struggling through his own life and traumatic history, and ultimately Danielewski's presentation of a "novel" without an ending.

One reading of the labyrinthine house on Ash Tree Lane which binds all three narratives together is that in the face of the unknown (of incompleteness) people seek understanding. Robert Kelly of the New York Times draws a comparison between the House's Labyrinth and Everest: There is nothing on top of the mountain - the mountain isn't important, what is important is the challenge. What people are looking for is accomplishment and closure. There is no Minotaur haunting the labyrinth within the House. There is no center. The labyrinth becomes occupied by those who choose to wander it, and these wanderers bring into the labyrinth their fears, anxieties, and hopes, and as they wander, encountering nothing but an unintelligible and illogical incompleteness, they begin to manifest their thoughts and emotions, populating the labyrinth with

the ideas of treasure, danger, beast, and man which, still, they will never encounter, but the perceived knowledge of which will drive them and begin to morph or deform themselves into their obsessions.

Could the same then be said of the writer who attempts to solve a text, who is unable to let an incomplete, sleeping beast lie, but must insist on delving into the text to “complete” it? It is possible to read Johnny as such a writer, as an anxious *Flâneur*, who, as he wanders through the labyrinth, becomes progressively becomes more aware of the fathomless nature of his pursuit for a truth within “The Navidson Record.” A reader may emulate Johnny and begin to hunt for meaning within the book, attempting to solve its perceived puzzles, and filling the remaining margins of the book with their own inescapable associations, fears, and beliefs; this is the damaging pursuit of permanence. Alternatively, if one approaches this text as a meditative journey, they let the book take the lead, while relishing in its incompleteness, speculating and guessing, but accepting that the foundation of this house of leaves is constantly shifting and changing; that is to say, if the foundation is not itself a void.

Mark C. Taylor suggests of *House of Leaves* in his book, *Rewiring the Real*, that, “The text is about nothing, ... Nothing is what keeps the text in play by rendering it irreducibly open and infinitely complex” (109). This poststructuralist interpretation, or perhaps approach or methodology, may ultimately be the most valuable. It immediately pares away the pretense of solving or understanding a text, and in turn it opens a reader up to becoming the participant instead of the sleuth, willing to wander within the labyrinth at their leisure, free from any expectations. But, there is always criticism to consider, and here we face the same criticism that Derrida’s theories faced, that is the suggestion that to entertain *any and all* possibilities is not just

unproductive, but immoral, and that to dismiss the pursuit of truth is nihilistic. Taylor writes on this idea in a blog post which touchingly eulogizes and defends Derrida's works, saying:

The obscurity of his [Derrida's] writing, however, does not conceal a code that can be cracked, but reflects the density and complexity characteristic of all great works of philosophy, literature and art. Like good French wine, his works age well. *The more one lingers with them, the more they reveal about our world and ourselves.* ...

Taylor's reading of Derrida informs a poststructuralist approach from literature to philosophy and morality, wherein it isn't in the pursuit of truth that we learn the most, but rather in the steeping of ideas. Like Chapter IX of *House* which is often occupied with the ideas of returns and rereading, obviously with the recursive footnotes and structuring, but also with elements such as the litanies of building materials, fictional and real people, etc., which may be skimmed at first as superfluous and gimmicky, but returned to later with new understanding that there are secrets hidden within. Speaking directly of the criticism, Taylor continues:

To his critics, Mr. Derrida appeared to be a pernicious nihilist who threatened the very foundation of Western society and culture. *By insisting that truth and absolute value cannot be known with certainty*, his detractors argue, he undercut the very possibility of moral judgment. To follow Mr. Derrida, they maintain, is to start down the slippery slope of skepticism and relativism that inevitably leaves us powerless to act responsibly.

Within literature, this criticism may be extended to suggest that to "start down the slippery slope of skepticism and relativism" within a text "leaves us powerless" to come to any conclusions with a text, defying any attempt at creating closure or discovering truth. We see Johnny, however, as a powerful counter-example within Chapter IX, where his increasingly obsessive

efforts in uncovering “truths” or “absolute values” result in great psychological fracturing and instability. Taylor similarly advocates for the uncertainty of truth, as he continues:

Fortunately, he also taught us that *the alternative to blind belief is not simply unbelief but a different kind of belief—one that embraces uncertainty* and enables us to respect others whom we do not understand. In a complex world, wisdom is knowing what we don't know so that we can keep the future open. (Taylor) [emphasis mine]

This is deconstructionism, or the “nourishment of incompleteness,” where it is not certainty or truth which guides righteousness, but rather careful consideration, reflection, and ever-present doubt.

Labyrinths provide another similarity in this criticism which may bridge the gap on a thematically larger scale to *House of Leaves*: Thinking about labyrinths, there are two interpretations that are important to understand. First is the more traditional idea of the maze, like King Minos's labyrinth, which exists as novelty or as a prison without doors. Then there is the labyrinth as meditation, where a single winding path leads the meditating wanderer into the middle of the labyrinth before spiraling them back out. Like the meditative wanderer, Navidson enters the house's labyrinth time after time, finding nothing inside but an ever expanding network of rooms, before eventually finding his way out (either intentionally or inadvertently). Without a “minotaur” to confront, the labyrinth becomes populated instead with ideas, suspicions, doubt, personal meaning, and self-discovery. So too does the reader of the book find themselves repeatedly delving into a footnote, just to find that no matter how deep they dig, how many paths they follow, there are no answers, only more questions. But, to return to the text more directly, how the footnote is working parallels the great, psychological battles the characters are facing in *House of Leaves*. The ultimate discourse of this text is internal, and

within *House of Leaves* this discourse is dark; it is the digressive thought, self doubt, obsession, and subconscious distraction of its characters who suffer from great, psychological trauma.

This text's footnotes may be seen as a literary symptom or manifestation of this trauma, as the speakers may never directly name their trauma, but compulsively approach it. We see this in Chapter IX in Johnny's lies about his violent deaths, in Zampanò's redacted material, in the Editors' attempt to "fix" Johnny's apology, and in the story of the house itself, as Navidson struggles to find significance within the labyrinth. This interpretation of footnotes builds on the work of others who have written about trauma in *House of Leaves*, such as Conor Dawson, whose article, "There's Nothing So Black as the Inferno of the Human Mind" argues that "The archetypal descent into hell can provide a paradigm for the representation of trauma, which is often theorized as being unrepresentable. Mark Z Danielewski's *House of Leaves* models the experience of psychological trauma on the archetypal descent into hell, or katabasis" (284). Dawson's work is very compelling at a narrative level, but only steps briefly into this metatextual level that the footnotes are working on; Dawson suggests that the repetition of the word "house," which appears in blue throughout the text, "strikes the reader again and again, mimicking the trauma symptom of repetition" (294), but he doesn't address the repetition of the footnote, which is one of the most recurrent textual devices within the text, promising repetition and uncertainty, striking the reader repeatedly, but with subtle differences every time.

Conclusion: More than Just a Game

The footnotes in *House of Leaves* are more than just a clever game; through their prolific appearance and insistence, they become as important as the characters which they cue, by coming to represent the challenge of handling the aftermath of psychological distress. Like the object in orbit which is always falling toward, but never reaching Earth, Grafton, Baker, and Danielewski all use their footnotes to suggest a truth to the reader without explicitly stating it. If the footnote is an instrument for truth, as Grafton and Baker suggest, than a conventional interpretation of the footnote would frame it as an attempt at revealing truth by answering a question or clarifying an idea. But this is not quite how we see the footnote working in Baker's novel, and certainly not in Danielewski's. Although they still seem to exist for the purpose of revealing a truth, the footnotes in these postmodern novels defy convention and expectation as they approach this task by, seemingly paradoxically, asking new questions and further opening up the text to new interpretations. We see this framed positively with the Taylor and Derrida interpretation, where this newfound open-endedness allows for a world of discovery and intellectual growth, as we see in Baker's novel which is upbeat, inquisitive, and funny; but what then of Danielewski's footnotes which appear to hint at the truth of great loss, emptiness, or a severe psychological wounding?

Freud writes in his essay "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" (1924), that "the patient repeats instead of remembering, and repeats under the conditions of resistance ... He repeats everything that has already made its way from the sources of the repressed into his manifest personality--his inhibitions and unserviceable attitudes and his pathological character traits" (151). This psychoanalytic perspective informs an understanding of how the characters and their footnotes become trapped in a repetitive pattern of disinformation and redirection, as

they “repeat instead of remember,” like the perseverating infant who continues to grasp at the stimulus even after it is long gone. The “inhibitions,” “unserviceable attitudes,” and “pathological character traits” are all results of the repressed experience and, through repetition, come to replace the act of remembering; the footnote enables these characteristics and many more within *House*, as it becomes a tool which serves to confuse and mismatch information throughout the text’s interrelated narratives. Part of Freud’s solution to this is that the patient “must find the courage to direct his attention to the phenomena of his illness” (152), but as we see in *House*’s footnotes, every attempt is made in order to redirect and digress. There is sadness in this book that is only ever hinted at, with Johnny’s troubled relationship with his family and his institutionalized mother, but even more radically with Zampanò, who likely wrote “The Navidson Record” himself, likely reflecting his pain and losses in both the record and his annotations. Perhaps most tragically, some speculate that the entire novel is the creation of Johnny’s mother, Pelafina, who becomes schizophrenic and writes *House of Leaves* in mourning over the loss of her infant son, Johnny, and transferring that guilt and pain into these stories.

The question of authorship aside, the characters’ fears, pains, and anxieties are so powerful that they are present within the mechanics of the book, embodied in the footnotes, transforming the book itself into the manifestation of this psychological horror. These footnotes are infectious. The challenge of reading the text isn’t just in the navigation, but in the footnotes’ persistent suggestion and emulation of many of these same anxieties, uncertainties, and fears, which strike the reader again and again. Johnny addresses the reader directly in his introduction to the text, explaining that just as this text consumed Zampanò and himself, we, as readers of *House of Leaves*, will eventually come to the realization that “things are not how you perceived them to be at all. For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believed you once were”

(xxii) and how inevitably, we'll end up "fighting with everything you've got not to face the thing you most dread, what is now, what will be, what has always come before, the creature you truly are, the creature we all are, buried in the nameless black of a name. And then the nightmares will begin" (xxiii). In this direct address to the reader, and by pre-suggesting a dark, infectious nature within the text, Johnny is distancing himself while priming the reader to take his place. The footnote's transform this book from a passive to an active reading experience, where the reader is making decisions on every page concerning how they are going to approach continuing on in the text, the process of which can be seen to contribute to this proposed infectious power in a way that a non-mediated form simply cannot achieve.

Ultimately, the footnotes represent and recreate the experience and symptoms of a fractured, schizophrenic, perseverating mind, no matter the specific affliction, which edges ever closer to a personal darkness, but instead finding the "courage" to directly confront the "phenomena of the illness," as Freud puts it, this wounded mind is compelled to repeatedly act out the circumstances of its trauma. This wounded mind is Johnny, it is Zampanò, it is Navidson, it is the book itself, and, at the book's insistence, it may even be the reader who finds *House of Leaves* at just the right, or wrong, time.

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What miracle is this? This giant tree.
It stands ten thousand feet high
But doesn't reach the ground. Still it stands.
Its roots must hold the sky.

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