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### House of Leaves: Navigating the Labyrinth of the Deconstructed Novel

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# SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

*“House of Leaves: Navigating the Labyrinth of the Deconstructed Novel”*

written by

Molly Throgmorton

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for completion of the  
Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Johnny Wink, Thesis Director

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## *House of Leaves*: Navigating the Labyrinth of the Deconstructed Novel

Ever since I learned how to read, I assumed that books must be read a certain way: open to the first page, start at the top, and read from left to right, top to bottom, page after page until the end. I thought that books have one main narrative told by one narrator, and that this narrative has a clear beginning, middle, and end. I also believed that books have clear meanings and explanations (tense). After reading Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, however, I realized that not all books are so neat and predictable.

*House of Leaves* is a novel unlike any other I have ever read. It attacks its readers with its enormity. This novel is about a house that is bigger on the inside than the outside, and by the end of the novel, readers realize that the novel itself is like the house. Both the novel and the house are paradoxical labyrinths that smash readers' preconceived notions of reality. Because both entities resist interpretation and make readers extremely aware of their vastness, *House of Leaves* deconstructs readers' understanding of how a novel should look, act, and be read by showing that language isn't as reliable as is commonly believed. It clearly reveals the deconstructive theory that "literature is as dynamic, ambiguous, and unstable as the language of which it is composed" (Tyson 258). In other words, *House of Leaves* is a model for deconstruction because it shows the ambiguity, instability, and constant flux of language.

Many critics have meticulously analyzed *House of Leaves* and pointed out important aspects of the novel, including its representations of Freud's "uncanny," its textual complexity combined with visual innovations, its use of remediation techniques, and its relation to the detective novel.<sup>1</sup> These critics analyze and explore different parts of the novel and the labyrinth

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<sup>1</sup> See Nele Bemong's "Exploration #6: The Uncanny in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*;" Martin Brick's "Blueprint(s): Rubric for a Deconstructed Age in *House of Leaves*;" Alison Gibbons's "A Visual and Textual Labyrinth: The Eyes' Dilemma Mark Z. Danielewski's *The House of Leaves*;" N. Katherine Hayles's "Saving the

within it, elucidating some of Danielewski's methods and motives as author as well as giving readers a greater understanding of how the novel works. Their arguments play a key role in the conversation about *House of Leaves* because they point out parts of the novel's whole, which helps readers understand the whole novel better. Their analyses, however, lack an understanding of what the novel as a whole demonstrates. This vastly intricate novel refuses to fit inside one simple meaning; a study of only one of its aspects fails to show how the total work affects readers. Therefore, this paper will show how *House of Leaves* is an example of an intentionally deconstructed novel that forces its readers to confront their process of reading and interpreting literature and the world around them.

Deconstruction is an extremely complex philosophical theory originally developed by Jacques Derrida. It seeks to show the extreme instability of our understanding of the world in which we live, and argues that everything we understand about the world is based on ideologies, and that these ideologies are built on never-ending chains of signifiers. By understanding how the ambiguity of language forms these ideologies, readers are better able to see ideologies as attempts to solidify and steady an unstable and continually changing world.

*House of Leaves* depicts the concept of deconstruction by presenting a sprawling, layered tale that has countless meanings within it. The house within the novel is like language in that it is continually shifting, changing, growing, and constricting. Both the novel and the house, like life, resist interpretation. Like the house within it, the novel refuses to be constrained by theories and explanations. Instead, the novel demands that readers accept the story as it is: complex and chaotic.

*House of Leaves* is often described as a postmodern novel because it presents “a denial of order” and a “highly fragmented” world (Postmodern). Postmodernism is related to deconstruction in that it builds on previous understandings of literature while simultaneously challenging those ideas. Both postmodernism and deconstruction reject the idea of clear-cut meaning and understanding and instead see the world as vastly complex and fragmented. Like the postmodern novel that it is, *House of Leaves* attempts to show this complexity of the world. The postmodern view sees life as not always explainable or even understandable, and this novel also presents an inexplicable and incomprehensible story. It makes no attempts to offer any conclusions or resolutions, but instead forces readers to accept and be affected by its fragmented and chaotic world. By presenting a completely unpredictable and constantly changing world, this novel also depicts the postmodern world in which we live.

Before analyzing the form of *House of Leaves* and this form’s effect on the readers, let’s briefly look at the narratives of the novel, which will remind us of the novel’s plot and complexity. At the beginning of *House of Leaves*, we find a young man named Johnny Truant who has stumbled upon the fragmented and disheveled manuscript of a critical work called *The Navidson Record*. This massive exposition was written by Zampanò, a mysterious and lonely old man who has recently died. Zampanò’s strange manuscript examines a documentary, also called *The Navidson Record*, by Will Navidson. In the documentary, Navidson, his partner Karen, and their two children move into a house on Ash Tree Lane, hoping to settle down and lead a normal domestic life. Soon, however, things in the house begin to change. Navidson discovers the measurements of the house don’t match up: its inside is 5/16” bigger than the outside. To add to this strangeness, a doorway appears that leads down an empty black hallway. From then on,

things in the house take a turn for the worse. The labyrinth within the house consumes its explorers<sup>2</sup> grows to infinite sizes, and then completely disappears in the end.

As Johnny reads this narrative, he tells his story in footnotes he attaches to the text of *The Navidson Record*. We read his accounts of the relationships, parties, sex, drugs, and adventures that make up his wild life. As the novel continues, Johnny becomes increasingly involved in the plot of *The Navidson Record* and eventually develops extreme paranoia. As far as we can tell from the abrupt end of his narrative at chapter XXI, the house manages to consume him as well.

Johnny's mother, Pelafina, plays a key role in *House of Leaves* as well. She appears most noticeably in the appendix, where we find her letters written to Johnny from the Whalestoe Institute. She was institutionalized there, we learn, because of her mental problems that led to her attempt to strangle Johnny when he was younger. Her letters to Johnny reveal information about Johnny's past, the beauty and illness of her mind, and their relationship with each other.

These narratives, which blend, harmonize, contrast, expand and contract like complex musical compositions, consist primarily of the stories of Johnny Truant, Zampanò, Will Navidson, and Pelafina Lièvre, but the novel also contains quotations, arguments, and sub-stories of countless other people. Zampanò uses quotations from numerous people, both real and made-up, to support his analysis of *The Navidson Record*. Within *The Navidson Record* are the stories of Karen Green, Tom Navidson, Daisy and Chad Navidson, and Holloway Roberts, to name a few. Johnny's narrative includes stories about his friend Lude and their numerous love interests. Pelafina's letters shed some light on her husband, Johnny's stepfather, and the Director of the Whalestoe Institute. Each of these minor characters tells a story, one that is different from the others but harmonious to the symphony of voices in *House of Leaves*.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the house's explorers (Jed Leeder, Holloway Roberts, and Tom Navidson) are literally consumed by the house. Others, such as Navidson, become consumed mentally by the house and are forever changed by it.

These numerous plots twist and intertwine with each other, creating a complex web of narrative that is difficult to unravel completely. Instead of presenting one cohesive story, the novel melds and meshes several plots together, and each of these stories draw readers towards other plots, which in turn lead on to more plots, *ad infinitum*. Readers seek to find the central narrative of the novel, but are unable to because of the plots' interconnectedness and inexhaustible continuations, both in and outside the novel. Readers can follow these plot trails endlessly and still never reach any satisfactory central story of the novel. Similarly, deconstruction argues that there is no center to our understanding of ourselves and the world, but that instead the world consists of an endless chain of signifiers that never reach their signified. There is a lack of a stable center both in *House of Leaves* and in our world, and deconstruction reveals this fact to us.

*House of Leaves* presents a fascinating reading experience that is unlike the reading experience of many novels. Many books follow a relatively conventional pattern in their formats, styles of narration, development and portrayal of characters, and plots. We as readers know what to expect when we open these traditional books. We assume that the novel's form will follow the "standard" novel form, and that we will not even have to think about the form while we read. Essentially, most other novels have lulled us into a habit of passively consuming the text on the page. In our rush to discover the heart of the story and plot itself, it becomes easy to forget the beautiful complexity of textual layout and narrative structure. This traditional form reflects the conventional view of the world as orderly, stable, and even somewhat predictable. It shows the structuralist concept of humans attempting to place structures and meaning on the world, and reveals the many patterns and constructions traditionally used in novels.

Danielewski takes a different approach to the novel by emphasizing the implications of its genre: novelty. Instead of following the aforementioned convention, Danielewski takes a more inventive approach. Through *House of Leaves*, he seeks to develop and advance a tradition of breaking tradition. In writing the novel, Danielewski found inspiration for *House of Leaves* in many different places. He cites Shakespeare and the King James Bible as major sources of inspiration, as well as authors such as Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Borges, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Charles Bukowski, Carlos Fuentes, and Jack Kerouac (Benzon 3 and McCaffery 123). These authors, along with Danielewski's countless other predecessors, broke away from the mold of tradition and predictability, choosing instead to develop their own forms of expression and creativity. In doing so, they expanded their genres and opened up new ways of understanding literature and thus the world around us.

Specifically, the innovative works of these authors helped shape the format, style, development, and plot of *House of Leaves*. One particular example is Jorge Borges's book entitled *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, which is a collection of different stories about labyrinths, the things that live inside them, and their effects on people. One story in this book that especially relates to the style of *House of Leaves* is "The House of Asterion," which tells the story of the Minotaur from the Minotaur's perspective. This work, along with the works of these other artists, shows where Danielewski got some of his ideas for the novel's nontraditional approaches, such as the Minotaur section. Danielewski used the ideas and methods of these authors as inspiration for his deconstructed novel, and in doing so further fragments *House of Leaves*.

One particularly interesting aspect of *House of Leaves* is its form. The novel's form not only reveals influences from earlier writers and writing techniques, but it also forces its readers



to take an active role in the process of reading and interpreting the physical text. The novel is filled with countless formal complexities, including colored text,<sup>3</sup> unique text layouts,<sup>4</sup> numerous layers of text,<sup>5</sup> an index that includes seemingly unimportant words,<sup>6</sup> and appendices with everything from pictures and drawings to letters and poems. Indeed, the novel's first significant unique use of form appears before readers even opens the book. The cover is black with a labyrinth embossed on it, and is slightly smaller than the pages it holds. These small details of the cover subtly begin telling the novel's story even before the narrative begins, suggesting that readers are in for a reading experience unlike any other. Each aspect of form works together to draw readers' attention to form and their interaction with it.

Another unique formal aspect of *House of Leaves* appears on its copyright page, which explains different editions of the novel and has a message from "The Editors." This page also foretells the coming attractions of the novel when it describes the different editions and their colors of text. Readers usually pass over this page in other novels, but in this novel, their attention is drawn here. Here again readers find Danielewski compelling them to slow down and take in every aspect of the novel, including its form.

The actual text of *House of Leaves* contains all sorts of inversions of the traditional novel form. For starters, the text is written in three different fonts, each indicating a different speaker: Times Roman (Zampanò), Courier (Johnny), and Bookman (the Editors). At the beginning

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<sup>3</sup> The word "house" appears in blue, each of Zampanò's deletions that Johnny preserves in the final text (including his references to the mythical minotaur and its labyrinth) are written in struck-through red text, and the phrase "what I'm remembering now" in Chapter XXI appears in struck-through purple text. See pages 110-111, 408, and 518 for examples.

<sup>4</sup> See pages 134-135, 140-141, 204-205, 288-289, 336, 432-433, 464-465, 624-628, and 631-634 for some of the most notable examples.

<sup>5</sup> Zampanò's main text, *The Navidson Record*, includes footnotes written by him, footnotes on these footnotes written by Johnny, and footnotes on Johnny's footnotes written by the Editors. See pg. 319 for one example.

<sup>6</sup> Danielewski has explained that this index is not useless. He states that one of his reasons for including an index was that it "allows you to suddenly start asking questions about books you normally wouldn't think about in these terms" (McCaffery 119).

of *The Davidson Record*, each page consists primarily of Zampanò's text, with occasional footnotes by Johnny or the Editors. These texts flow in the traditional horizontal line across the page and contain no unusual formats or styles.<sup>7</sup>

As the novel progresses, however, the traditional novelistic pattern fades away. Zampanò and Johnny's narratives begin competing, each fighting for space on the page as well as the readers' attention. They beckon readers to follow trails of footnotes that lead to explanations, other footnotes, or texts in the Exhibits and Appendices. Beginning on page 119, the Zampanò text further departs from the normal pattern by appearing in myriad forms on the page. One example occurs on pages 134-135, where the main text of *The Davidson Record* and its footnotes are in five distinct sections. These sections run either horizontally from left to right, upside-down, reverse, or sideways across the page, forcing readers to notice the page's form and consciously navigate through the novel's intricate labyrinthine texts.

The use of color throughout *House of Leaves* is also significant in Danielewski's development of and focus on form. Not only does the word "house" appear in blue text throughout the novel, but the word "minotaur" and all Zampanò's ~~struck~~ passages appear in struck-through red text. Additionally, a sentence in Chapter XXI and the words "First Edition" on the copyright page appear in struck-through purple text. The novel's inclusion of exhibits, several appendices, and an index serve to round out the unique formal and stylistic aspects of *House of Leaves*.

In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Danielewski gives his reason for creating such intricacy of form in *House of Leaves*:

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<sup>7</sup> The only exception is the word "house" and its various forms in different languages, which appear in blue text. See pages 651 for examples.

The idea of how text might be placed on the page was something I'd always been interested in ... It wasn't uncommon for me to wander into the library hoping to find any old book that looked different; and when I would find something, I was in heaven. I get the same reaction from looking at the Talmud or some scribbled bit of marginalia on one of Conrad's old letters. Those bits somehow thrilled me with their sense of textual life, of participation, even of collaboration. (119)

This description of Danielewski's love for textual uniqueness and complexity reveals his desire to encourage and even to force readers to interact with the text directly. He places a conspicuous complexity in *House of Leaves* that screams out, "Hey, pay attention to my form! Look at how complex this story is!" The result of this intricate form is a novel that demands that readers pay close attention to its formal aspects, just as deconstruction demands that we see and carefully examine the structures we have built for ourselves. In other words, both *House of Leaves* and deconstruction prohibit passive consumption of structure and choose instead to illuminate those structures, their strengths and weaknesses, and how they affect us and our understanding of the novel and the world.

Sudha Shastri points out yet another example of deconstruction in *House of Leaves*. While the beginnings of most novels progress logically towards conclusive endings, the beginnings in *House of Leaves* remain stationary and never reach their assumed endings. Following the *in medias res* tradition, *House of Leaves* does not start at the beginning, follow a single narrative, and end with a strong sense of conclusion. Instead, it presents multiple beginnings that sometimes point back to other beginnings within the novel.

Examples of these numerous beginnings include the starts of Johnny, Zampanò, and Navidson, Pelafina, and the Editor's narratives, along with the countless mini-beginnings found

in the footnotes of Zampanò's text. Readers assume that each of these beginnings will reach their logical conclusions, but instead Danielewski paradoxically uses the beginnings to draw readers progressively further from the ending. Shastri states that the novel "generously enhances and prolongs the beginning," but never allows the beginning to reach an end (Shastri 88). In a sense, it takes the concept of *in medias res*, which tells an entire story in non-chronological sequence,<sup>8</sup> and alters it by leaving out any sort of definitive conclusion.

Even the end of the novel can hardly be called a legitimate "ending." At the end of chapter XXI, Johnny's narrative ends abruptly and never returns, leaving readers with an enigmatic story about a child who dies soon after birth. A few pages later, the labyrinth within the house mysteriously vanishes without any solid reason or explanation for its existence or sudden disappearance. The existence of the house and *The Navidson Record* documentary that explores it remains uncertain. And the most mysterious character of all, Zampanò, stays in the shadows throughout the entire novel. The reader never discovers exactly who he was, how he died, and why he wrote *The Navidson Record*. Instead, his story remains untold, leaving a gap in the overall narrative of the novel. Zampanò serves to remind readers of the trace, or "always-already" figure who is simultaneously absent and present, of deconstruction. This is because while he is never actually present in the narrative of the story, he is always already playing a key role throughout it, especially through his absence.

This suspension of ending, while frustrating for readers, helps illustrate the deconstructive idea of *différance*, specifically the concept of deferral in language. According to Derrida, language never reaches its intended meaning, but instead defers meaning through an endless chain of signifiers. Just as in Zeno's paradox the arrow never reaches its target because it

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<sup>8</sup> See Dr. Jay Curlin for more information about this issue as it relates to the ordering of the books in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but don't bring your dog to the interview.

must first reach its halfway point, but before that, the halfway point to that, etc., so *House of Leaves* and the language it reflects are trapped in never-ending successions that lack specific and stable conclusions.

*House of Leaves* also presents moments that stir up the readers' sense of the uncanny. My favorite of these moments is found in chapter XVIII, which describes three Jamestown colonists who get lost in the woods while searching for food. While their search for food is unsuccessful, they do stumble upon something very mysterious. One of the men writes in his journal, "Ftaires! We haue found ftaires!" (414). It's strange enough to find stairs in the middle of a forest, but the situation becomes even stranger because we assume that these men found these "ftaires" in approximately the same place as the location of Will Navidson's house on Ash Tree Lane, which has a huge spiral staircase within its inner labyrinth. In other words, the 17<sup>th</sup> century "ftaires" and the stairway of Navidson's house appear to have a connection.

The description of the "ftaires" in the colonist's final journal entry raises several unanswerable questions. Since only two of the three colonists' bodies are discovered the following spring, readers are left to wonder what happened to the third. Perhaps he ventured down those peculiar stairs. If so, and if they are the same stairs inside the house on Ash Tree Lane, what happened to the third man? Did he venture down the stairway, only to die of exhaustion from delving into the labyrinth's infinite depths? Could he have experienced the shifting of the stairs and found himself eternally trapped within the labyrinth? ~~Or did he encounter the Minotaur?~~ The text gives no hints as to the fate of this vanished colonist, but instead leaves readers confused and ill at ease.

This specific narrative shows Danielewski's use of the imaginary to disturb our perception of the real. He presents this segment of the story to show the history of the house's

labyrinth, and in doing so, distorts what readers understand as possible versus impossible. In essence, he is showing the deconstruction of the novel's world by combining reality with impossibility. This moment reveals the undecidability of both the novel and our world: while we assume that the novel and the world are stable and that there are "real" and "unreal" aspects to them, deconstruction shows us that it is impossible to decide which aspects of life are "real" and which are not. In other words, by reading this section that contains impossibilities described as fact, the reader realizes that many of the world's concepts and experiences don't necessarily fit neatly into self-contained structures, but instead break out and refuse to be contained.

At several points in *House of Leaves*, readers feel vastly separated from the story. An example is the novel's several lengthy footnotes, which lead readers through page after page of lists of words, authors, and other writings.<sup>9</sup> The novel creates conspicuous space between the story of the house, the narrators who relay this story, and readers. Alongside this distancing, however, is the readers' deep involvement with many parts of the plotline, particularly the plots involving Johnny, Pelafina, and the Navidson family. The heartbreaking story of Pelafina and her relationship with Johnny is perhaps the most complexly beautiful story in the novel; as a result, readers become especially involved in her story and its intricacies. The novel connects and immerses readers in the plot, continuously forcing them to interact and interpret the text.

These two aspects of *House of Leaves* play against each other, allowing them to clash throughout the novel so that readers feel both connected and vastly separated from the stories told. After experiencing the tension created by reading a novel that both repels and attracts them, readers are better able to understand the deconstructive concept of conflicting ideologies. Just as readers feel a simultaneous intimate connection to and vast separation from the story of *House of*

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 144 beginning on page 119 for one of the most uniquely designed examples of this phenomenon.

*Leaves*, so do we as humans manage to hold two or more opposing or nearly opposing beliefs at the same time.

Related to the distancing in *House of Leaves*, the narratives of the novel are intricately woven together. The story of the house on Ash Tree Lane lies at the core of the novel, and in order to get to the heart of the story, readers must go through a process of untangling it from the outer narratives. The number of narrators, for instance, establishes a dramatic sense of distance from the main story because of Danielewski's method of layering narrative on top of narrative. At the heart of the novel is Will Navidson's depiction of the labyrinth-house in "The Navidson Record" documentary; describing this is Zampanò; compiling, organizing, and occasionally editing Zampanò's work is Johnny; and on top of all these are the Editors, who sometimes step in to add their part. Thus, there are four levels of narration that separate readers from the core of the story: the house on Ash Tree Lane. The addition of Zampanò's countless number of cited authors, as well as Pelafina, Johnny, and Zampanò's personal stories, twists and complicates the story even more. These numerous, layered narratives put distance between the stories and readers. Readers again discover a feeling of separation from what they are reading.

At one point in the novel, Zampanò comments on a particular example of this distancing in *The Navidson Record*. He considers the moment in the documentary when the house consumes Navidson's brother, Tom, and addresses the effect of the many layers that Navidson creates to separate the viewers from the actual event. Zampanò describes Navidson's style of storytelling as follows:

By relying on Reston as the sole narrative voice, he subtly draws attention once again to the question of inadequacies in representation, no matter the medium, no matter how flawless. Here in particular, he mockingly emphasizes the fallen nature of any history by

purposefully concocting an absurd number of generations. Consider: 1. Tom's broken hands → 2. Navidson's perception of Tom's hurt → 3. Navidson's description of Tom's hurt to Reston → 4. Reston's re-telling of Navidson's description based on Navidson's recollection and perception of Tom's actual hurt. A pointed reminder that representation does not replace. It only offers distance and in rare cases perspective. (Danielewski 346)

In "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*," Katherine Hayles elucidates another facet of this section of the narrative. She states that "[t]he 'pointed reminder' [which Zampanò discusses] sharpens when we discover that the Last Interview [from which Reston's narration supposedly comes] is missing, so that we see the complex chain of mediation only through Zampanò's written remediation of it, remediated in turn by Johnny and the editors" (786). In short, this section shows an intricate web of layered narration that puts considerable distance between the story and its readers.

Although this structure of layered narration may at first glance seem needlessly complex, it serves an important purpose. The novel's plot focuses on the labyrinth contained within the house, and the labyrinthine appearance of the narrative reflects this labyrinth. This narrative trail is similar to Danielewski's use of the text as an imitation and reflection of the action of *The Navidson Record*'s narrative told from within the labyrinth. Readers must navigate through what at times seem like endless layers of narrative, just like the explorers in "The Navidson Record" must navigate through the complex labyrinth within the house.

This layered structure serves as yet another example of deconstruction's concept of the endless chain of signifiers. Just as readers must follow a trail of stories that never reach any truly "central" story, deconstructive theory argues that language users must blaze their way down a



never-ending trail of signifiers that have no center and never reach an end, namely a “transcendental signifier.”

Yet another interesting part of *House of Leaves* is the relationships between the main characters. Danielewski describes the novel as “a three-character play” (McCaffery 107). He refers to this again in an interview with Sophie Cottrell: “I like to look at *House of Leaves* as a three character play: a blind old man, a young man, and a very special, extraordinarily gifted woman” (1). These three characters are Zampanò, Johnny Truant, and Pelafina Lièvre. To describe *House of Leaves* as a three-character play, however, is unusual for several reasons. First of all, most three-character plays have the characters physically interacting with each other. Each character is physically present and plays a key role in the development of the plot. *House of Leaves*’s main characters are different. Johnny and Pelafina have interacted in the past, but we only see this interaction in Pelafina’s letters. Johnny and Zampanò never physically interact with each other at all, and it appears that Zampanò and Pelafina never even met each other. To add to the unusualness of this “three-character” plot, only one of the three characters is alive in the novel. We learn Johnny’s story from him firsthand, but what little we know about Zampanò and Pelafina we find out through texts they wrote years ago. Even though these three main characters have few apparent links between them, I think their connections to each other are deeper.

Several subtle clues hint at a possible connection between Zampanò and Pelafina. Specific repetitions in the novel, Zampanò’s poems, and Pelafina’s letters suggest this connection. One repetition involves the mention of summertime and rootbeer. In Zampanò’s poem, “That Place,” we find a reference to “summer love / and rootbeer” (558). Here Zampanò describes a summer in which “some children went down to that place / and they never came back” (ibid). Just a few pages later, in the Whalestoe letters, Pelafina gives Johnny this

exhortation: “May your summer be full of rootbeer, joy, and play” (593). Are the two occurrences of this phrase mere coincidence, an example of Danielewski’s intentional repetition of certain phrases throughout the novel, or a sign that perhaps Pelafina and Zampanò knew each other?

Another instance of this strange repetition appears early in *House of Leaves*. Zampanò writes: “Echo, however, rejects his amorous offers and Pan, being the god of civility and restraint, tears her to pisces, burying all of her except her voice” (41). In another one of Pelafina’s letters, she tells Johnny, “To endure over two months without a word and then with the first words learn such terrible news tore me to pisces” (599). This misspelling of “pieces” in a variant of the phrase “to tear to pieces” seems unlikely to have happened by chance. Instead, they appear to be hinting at some mysterious connection between Pelafina and Zampanò. Just as Eros and Aphrodite escaped death together by transforming themselves into two fish, so perhaps Pelafina and Zampanò shared some past experiences unknown to readers.

The next set of clues involves the relationship between Johnny and Zampanò. At first glance, *House of Leaves* gives us no reason to believe that these two have ever interacted. Johnny himself tells us at the beginning of the novel that he didn’t even know who Zampanò was until after he had died. Only then did he discover Zampanò’s disorganized trunk with *The Navidson Record* inside. A sort of relationship between the two starts to appear, however, as Johnny begins organizing the papers that make up *The Navidson Record*. As he reads, edits, and adds his own commentary, Zampanò’s work starts to haunt him and eventually consumes him. Apart from this, however, there are no other obvious connections between Johnny and Zampanò.

Some small points in the novel, however, lead me to think that their relationship might be more complex. In Zampanò’s “Bits” section of the appendix, we find a scrap of text that reads,

exhortation: “May your summer be full of rootbeer, joy, and play” (593). Are the two occurrences of this phrase mere coincidence, an example of Danielewski’s intentional repetition of certain phrases throughout the novel, or a sign that perhaps Pelafina and Zampanò knew each other?

Another instance of this strange repetition appears early in *House of Leaves*. Zampanò writes: “Echo, however, rejects his amorous offers and Pan, being the god of civility and restraint, tears her to pisces, burying all of her except her voice” (41). In another one of Pelafina’s letters, she tells Johnny, “To endure over two months without a word and then with the first words learn such terrible news tore me to pisces” (599). This misspelling of “pieces” in a variant of the phrase “to tear to pieces” seems unlikely to have happened by chance. Instead, they appear to be hinting at some mysterious connection between Pelafina and Zampanò. Just as Eros and Aphrodite escaped death together by transforming themselves into two fish, so perhaps Pelafina and Zampanò shared some past experiences unknown to readers.

The next set of clues involves the relationship between Johnny and Zampanò. At first glance, *House of Leaves* gives us no reason to believe that these two have ever interacted. Johnny himself tells us at the beginning of the novel that he didn’t even know who Zampanò was until after he had died. Only then did he discover Zampanò’s disorganized trunk with *The Navidson Record* inside. A sort of relationship between the two starts to appear, however, as Johnny begins organizing the papers that make up *The Navidson Record*. As he reads, edits, and adds his own commentary, Zampanò’s work starts to haunt him and eventually consumes him. Apart from this, however, there are no other obvious connections between Johnny and Zampanò.

Some small points in the novel, however, lead me to think that their relationship might be more complex. In Zampanò’s “Bits” section of the appendix, we find a scrap of text that reads,

that “[m]eaning is not a stable element residing in the text for us to uncover or passively consume” but instead “is created by the reader in the act of reading” (Tyson 258).

In an interview with Sophie Cottrell, Danielewski sheds some light on his motivation for developing such a nontraditional novel:

Ruler-wielding didacts have instilled in them [readers] the notion that a book must start here, move along like this, and finish over there. But books don't have to be so limited. They can intensify informational content and experience. Multiple stories can lie side by side on the page. Search engines—in the case of *House of Leaves* a word index—will allow for easy cross-referencing. Passages may be found, studied, revisited, or even skimmed. And that's just the beginning. Words can also be colored and those colors can have meaning. How quickly pages are turned or not turned can be addressed. Hell, pages can be tilted, turned upside down, even read backwards. I'd love to see that. Someone on the subway spinning a book as they're reading it. But here's the joke. Books have had this capability all along. Read Chomsky, Derrida, Pinker, Cummings. Look at early 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts. Hell, go open up the Talmud. Books are remarkable constructions with enormous possibilities. ...somehow the analogue powers of these wonderful bundles of paper have been forgotten. ...I'd like to see the book reintroduced for all it really is.” (Cottrell 8-9).

Danielewski loves the potential abilities of books to relay stories and information. They are perfect tools for exploring abstract concepts such as deconstructive theory. Danielewski clearly has a love for books and the things they can show the reader. While he didn't write *House of Leaves* with the sole purpose of explicating deconstruction, he was clearly influenced by its ideas and implications.

Since working my way through the labyrinth of *House of Leaves*, I have developed a much greater understanding and appreciation of deconstruction and the novel genre. I am now better able to see complexities in other works, as well as how these works demonstrate deconstruction. Reading *House of Leaves* showed me that the idea of the novel is always evolving and always challenging its boundaries, just like the labyrinth inside the house. Because authors like Danielewski simultaneously stay true to the novel's heritage and innovatively look for new possibilities, the novel genre is exciting to study and has a bright future. *House of Leaves* provides its readers with an unforgettable reading experience that opens doors to a lifetime of studying and exploring houses that are bigger on the inside than the outside.

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