

Rae Muhlstock

## ***Habent sua fata libelli: Every Book Has Its Own Destiny, And So Does Every Reader***

“The idea we’re given of reading is that the model of a reader is the person watching a film, or watching television. So the greatest principle is, ‘I should sit here and I should be entertained.’ And the more classical model, which has been completely taken away, is the idea of a reader as an amateur musician.

An amateur musician who sits at the piano, has a piece of music, which is the work, made by somebody they don’t know, who they probably couldn’t comprehend entirely, and they have to use their skills to play this piece of music. The greater the skill, the greater the gift that you give the artist and that the artist gives you. That’s the incredibly unfashionable idea of reading. And yet when you practice reading, and you work at a text, it can only give you what you put into it.”

Zadie Smith

When I read I want to bend genres and defamiliarize the landscape, to hold simultaneous the labyrinth, running with my hair behind me ends and wrong turns, to spend years, maybe, putting sense of order in each other’s margins. A book like where it will because it has a will of its own and if we holding hands until neither can remember who back—these are the books I choose. These are the

When I first saw *House of Leaves*, sitting in the gaping hole in its center that felt so familiar and smelled vaguely of danger and eternity, and I did not look up again from its pages until I trod every textual corridor. When I did, everything had changed, all things in the glare or darkness felt alien and strange. I cannot quite explain how all things shifted one quarter inch to the left, how it was like reality but not quite as clear, or a little too clear, like wearing someone else’s glasses. What I thought I had known for years came to me from the wrong end of a spyglass—small and

In my life I neurotically impose order, schedule and compartmentalize, agonize over the details, believing at times that order is the only thing holding me back from the chaos behind the door, that the expected strains out surprise, that this is safe and so am I. I hate this about myself. In my dreams I crave the challenge of chaos, and when I wake I seek out novels that transport me again to that world beyond the door, the one that reeks of danger and eternity, of a hyper-order that resembles its lack.

*I am thirsty or  
I have to pee,  
and I push my bare feet  
from beneath a thin quilt.  
The wooden floor is cold  
and rough  
and the boards groan  
as I pass above them.*

*It is a new house,  
new to me but how old  
I do not know,  
although it feels ancient  
and wise.  
This is my first night  
in what will be my bedroom,  
and I lay awake in the dark  
listening to sounds  
I do not know  
creak and squeal  
from corners  
I have not yet had time to  
understand.*

narratives in my hands, to find my way in through hedges paragraphs deep with dead the pieces together, imposing our shared fairy dust or AURYN, transporting me are going to another land we will do so by climbed first onto the Luck Dragon’s books that choose me.

class, no longer paying attention, I fell into cannot quite explain how all things shifted one quarter inch to the left, how it was like reality but not quite as clear, or a little too clear, like wearing someone else’s glasses. What I thought I had known for years came to me from the wrong end of a spyglass—small and

distant. I saw with their jerking something in this quarter inch to the would be to admit narrative. It was Truant found from the pages on possibilities. chemicals into

*The house is dark  
and I don't yet know my way,  
but I count windows  
as I pass them,  
one, two, three on the right,  
turn left  
and there should be  
the bathroom.*

When the shimmer wore off and the order of the quotidian returned, I mourned the loss of the strange and began a quest for the texts that would sustain the oddity that felt like home. I run my hand across smooth covers and pages and look for that glow. *Cloud Atlas*, *Hopscotch*, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. *Pale Fire* is my favorite book although I do not know what it means because it is so large and can mean so many different things. I've had this dream of defamiliarized space, of endless space, and there are the books that lead to it.

But nothing has changed enough, and safety of genre convention is so mocking, and I mind would stop, would throw order back in my would become tinged with the chaos that keeps writing in the margins, searching for himself in is about him.

I open that door over and over, every in my novels, and I hope that someday I will plight of the textually chosen. I pray for before bedtime, pray for a spatial bleed and the warns of eternity and a night spent trembling in wonder what form would it take and what I is why my bookshelves cradle literary for the change, because the field of the novel has become familiar, but I am still not ready to leave it, like a childhood home I resent and love all the more for staying in me. But an experimental novel can redeem us both, make us new to each other, make us novel, and capture something true in life that cannot be rendered out through order. Something older and wiser.

monsters everywhere I looked but they did not scare me. They fascinated me movements, and I began to feel like the only living person left. But change felt right, like coming home from years abroad, like I was born one left and never knew it, and my parents never told me because to tell me that that they had adopted me and raised me on linear time and conventional my destiny to find myself in the margins of this book the same way Johnny himself in the margins of Zampanò's novel. The Minotaur that has leapt chases me from one corridor of meaning to the next and growls when I settle Did Danielewski know that I was a beaker-shaped reader when he dropped this endless novel? Did he know that his book would find me?

*But the door I find  
has a strange glow about it  
though there is no light  
issuing forth  
and I think it comes  
from my knowledge  
of what is behind it.  
It is a foreboding glow,  
compelling, exciting,  
and I open the door,*

there is normalcy throughout each day and the envy Johnny Truant, I wish that my ordered face, scraping my cheeks, that my corners him screaming in the night, that keeps him a novel he has never read but somehow knows

night in my reoccurring dream and every day find myself in the margins and understand the nightmares while rereading *House of Leaves* slippage of time, for a dark or a light that a labyrinth. If I were to spill ink on my life I could do to become lost in it, and maybe that experimentation and I have given myself over

...---...

*I have to.*

*What we put into it, us readers, sitting alone or in interpretive communities of amateur musicians, sitting in hard wooden or plastic chairs, sitting up in bed at night in yellowed artificial light, sitting in armchairs or caressed by sofas, sitting on long benches lining the bus, in too small seats smelling of others flying to our next destinations, sitting in anticipation in waiting rooms of all sorts, what we readers put into the texts that we read is, of course, our selves.*

the page, change even as I lose my place and it, “it does not simply speak its word, always the answers to the person who questions it and poses

In Richard Palmer’s *Hermeneutics*, language event to seize and overpower and one encounters a literary text, says Palmer, “he seeing his world, his self-understanding, sometimes as for the first time, but always in a

Paul Ricoeur similarly believes that the text is an avenue to self-understanding, a high-road to access ourselves, a weigh station along some darkened highway obscured by reflections of streetlights on the wet pavement that can give readings of the invisible weight we bear within us. In *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, he explains that it is through the interpretive decisions we make while inhabiting a text that we can come to understand something more about ourselves and about the ways we interpret, understand, and interact with our worlds. It will culminate, for Ricoeur, in an ideal portrait, a golden ring tethering textual enlightenment to the self, ending, he says, “in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself” (158).

But I think Johnny Truant puts it best: “It’s almost as if I believe questions about the house will eventually return answers about myself” (297).

There is a model of reciprocity, a model that I have drawn in many margins, have elongated and built from foam balls and cellophane tape like I built strands of school biology, a model that I have questioned and listened to for answers.

When Hans-Georg Gadamer *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, it is as a ongoing conversation between the that can last as long as both, stretch in all directions of fleeting and quantifiable eternity, or end with the turn of a page. It is not as if the text remains mute, he says, as we read it, but that “a text can begin to speak.” They have voices, the books on my shelf, and they speak to me in all of them, tonally as my

*I open it slowly  
and there is no bathroom,  
at first glance there is  
nothing  
but a darkness  
as black as anything  
that can scare midnight,*

*And I know it will not be  
a bathroom behind this door,  
this door that is warning me  
with the insistence of its glow.*

white strings and DNA in high contemplated and explains it in dialogue, an reader and the text

resonate in highs and lows that change as often opinions of them do, change as often as I change return to a previous paragraph. As Gadamer puts same, in lifeless rigidity, but gives ever new ever new questions to him who answers it” (57). “literary interpretation should enable the transform the interpreter himself” (226). When finds horizons of his own world, his way of broadened; he sees ‘in a different light,’ more ‘experienced’ way” (239).

.....

Once,  
 when I opened the door,  
 there was white  
 of such startling purity  
 that it eclipsed all else  
 in its absurd  
 boundlessness.

My mother's voice is a little strained, but only a little, as if she were talking through the tears of hours ago, which she soon tells me she is. "Oh, Honey, you were so cute" she chokes, and I think she puts the phone down on the pile of purple quilts on her bed because new sobs come muffled and distant. I hear my father, also muffled and distant, say "What can I do

to help you stop crying? Want me to put on *The Neverending Story*?" and I am confused because I was the one who would stop crying at the offer and because also muffled and distant is my father laughing and saying "Nance, give me the phone." I begin to move, the soft ruffling my ear and my father's clear and distinct, says "Hi "What is going on, Dad? Did happen?" "Oh, no. Your mother last night to get a DVD recorder. she wants to put all of the old home DVD." "So why is she crying?" I doesn't answer, and I hear a struggle over the phone. My won. "You kicked Ellen Martin in She called you 'Wendy' and you kicked her in the shin! My best friend!" I am confused, and defensive. "Mom, I like Ellen Martin. Why would I kick her? I'm not even there! It has been *months* since I went to Jersey. Why would she call me 'Wendy?' And why would I kick her?" "Because she forgot to call you 'Peter!'" Okay, this is not going to work, it never has. She starts yelling, I start yelling, soon we are both not listening to each other at very loud decibels. I calm. Slowly: "Mom, please tell me what you are talking about." My father grabs the phone. "You were five in the video. Do you remember that I used to read you *Peter Pan and Wendy* every night for, what, seven years?" This I do remember, vaguely. "And how you made everyone call you 'Peter'?" This I do not remember, at all. "You always wanted to be Peter Pan."

*I reach out a hand,  
 I can feel it shake,  
 but in the endless dark  
 or glare of white  
 I cannot see it  
 and it is alien  
 and strange.*

fabric  
 voice, now  
 Sweetie."  
 something  
 sent me out  
 Suddenly  
 movies on  
 ask. He  
 muffled  
 mother  
 the shin!

*Even to this day, I will stop crying when I hear the theme song to The Neverending Story, and I can still recite every last word along with the film. I wore out three VHS copies. The first, taped from HBO when it first premiered, began to fuzz over with static, and I believe I cried like Atreyu cried but not so boldly when I could no longer see poor Artax slip silently into the deadly Swamp of Sadness. The second, taken in my first deviant moment from Rachael Teller's living room, eventually swam with the wrong colors, and the sound, too, came from beneath the sea. The fragile band of tape in the third, purchased by my father from a dollar bin at the car wash, snapped in two flimsy halves as Bastian, now the Adam of Fantasia, revealed The Name.*

*Even to this day, I breathe easier when I stroke the cover of The Neverending Story. I wore through three copies of the book. The first shed pages in more places than I could return to collect. The second cracked in half where the spine, exhausted from opening and closing, became weary. The third I gave in a gesture of adoration to my nine year old niece, whom I suspect reminds me of the nine year old I wish I'd had the courage to be and the twenty-six year old I'm sometimes convinced that I am. She is afraid, she told me at Christmas, sometimes, when she loses control of her imagination. And yet, she said, and yet, that is her favorite part. And yet, I told her, it is mine, too.*

*It catches  
 a cool and smooth wall  
 and I follow it,  
 letting my hand lead me  
 where I cannot see.*

.....

*I get lost.*

The hermeneutic circle that the hermeneutic theorists describe cycles between the text and the self, offering some enlightenment on either end. But the two-dimensional geometry of the circle seems to indicate that, while on its track, one would pass again and again through the same points of understanding continuously passing, passing again, through what we already know. This cannot be true. Knowledge and textual experience build, accumulate and pile. One does not stand

*I wonder how I would react to seeing myself in the margins of a book. Will I scream and thrust it away like Bastian Balthazar Bux does the first time he sees himself in The Neverending Story? Will I jump in fully, like Bastian eventually does, or will it be a more gradual entry, holding it close to my nose to seep into the spaces left open to the reader, like Johnny Truant seeps through House of Leaves?*

on the same spot of understanding, but is rather able to look down, or up, from where they are to see where they have been, where they will be, all of the wheres that brought them here, to this point, to this understanding. One is able to reflect on change and growth, as Johnny Truant does when he rereads his journals in order to gain back himself. The hermeneutic circle is rather, it seems, a helix that indicates mobility. It grows and collapses only to grow and collapse again, mimicking the spiral staircase in scope and design. Each visit to the hermeneutic hemisphere of textual understanding or understanding of the self occurs on a different plane from that which came before, rising, falling, reaching, swirling. As Zampanò says, “knowledge is hot water on wool. It shrinks time and space,” and never leaves you precisely where you began (167). Like the act of reading itself, like the spiral staircase in *House of Leaves*, the hermeneutic helix is characterized by its changeability, and its ability to change its reader, his insights, her fears, all of our understandings of all we are, were, will be. As it is with the *House*, so it is with the acts of reading: says Zampanò,

*I get lost  
again.*

“some critics believe the house’s mutations reflect the psychology of anyone who enters it...that the extraordinary absence of sensory information forces the individual to manufacture his or her own data...the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self—collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual” (165).

*I’m on a spiral staircase built of fragments of knowing. It accordions here and there, arching me closer to the self that is just out of reach, or bending her further away from me. It accordions now, and I can see very far down into the darkness, where I am young and I love Peter Pan. He never grows up. The staircase shifts and wags me closer to myself, and I see Peter Pan suspended forever in an amber gem of a tale, Peter the protagonist in Wendy’s story, a fictional construct in a fictional land, borne of and bred from stories. He cannot grow old unless Wendy allows him to, unless she writes it in, narrates his leafy britches making way for slowly girthing knees, narrates his toes poking like turtle heads from seed pod shoes, his acorn cap falling from his biggening head, the kiss in his pocket growing smaller and smaller in comparison to the gifts that Tiger Lily now brings to his bed. One of me, the one standing higher on the spiral, wonders why I chose Peter, the protagonist, rather than Michael or John Darling, the readers, to dream of being, like I dreamed of being Bastian, chosen, the savior of a universe, or like I dream of being Johnny, slipping like smoke along the ceiling and floors of narrative structure.*

.....

*I call for help  
with scared wind-breath  
and I forget what it means  
to be found,*

I happened upon the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure books in a darkened corner of Longfellow Elementary School’s library, on the bottom shelf under a burned-out light bulb, pushed tightly together displaying their white spines which had never been cracked. We cracked them, Marissa Groveman, Brenna Sevanno and I, we cracked every single one that year sitting, the three of us, in a semi-circle, in socked feet, in that darkened corner, reading aloud in half-whispers. We passed them

*and then I am in a parlor  
of sorts,  
a large and open space,  
and I crouch  
on a balcony  
overlooking it.*

around, took turns reading, and our choices were always made democratically, hands half-raised as if we were not sure what the implications of any decision would be, and therefore each decision was both something to relish and something to fear.

We died everyday that we visited that corner, in magical and special ways: death by ninjas, death by assassins, death by Black Knight, death by falling from mystical cliffs over mystical lands, death by dragons, death by drownings, death in dungeons. We knew these could only be our fates while we lived in each book, and because such deaths could not be ours, each end was both something to relish and something to fear.

Our favorite by unanimous consensus was *Who Killed Harlow Thrombey?*, and we returned to it often, so often that we exhausted all combinations of choice, all combinations of actions and their consequences, and when we could see the lives we’d lived in pursuit of Harlow’s killer as if from the top of a long and winding stairwell, we smiled at each other as if we had reached old age.

We smiled at each other in recognition of lives fully lived. We smiled at each other to sanctify our bond. We smiled at each other because we’d died all deaths, lived all lives, and located the murderous wretch. Then we smiled at each other no more. We may never have spoken again after that day but for once, at high school graduation many years later—and how fitting that it be then—when

Brenna nudged me in no one, not graduates nor pose of Brenna in the whisper: “I think we we’ll never know, now.” circle. I stayed in the memory, the choices I had made and will continue to make, and the winding stairwell that may, someday, show them all to me.

*There are people there  
or they have not yet  
arrived,*

secret and motioned for Marissa to join the huddle under the bleachers where friends nor family could see, when we naturally reassumed the semi-circular center, Marissa to her right and me to her left. Brenna spoke in a half-should have tried one more time, just to be sure we’d gotten them all. Guess She hurried off where popularity took her, and Marissa returned to her own shadows beneath the bleachers for an extra moment, fingering a book in my

.....

*or what is there  
is not people,  
or something else  
is on its way.*

In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode tells this little story of large implication: “Thurber, peering into a microscope, saw his own eye, which was wrong; interpreters, often quite rightly, tend to see the Problem of Interpretation” (27).

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*When I first saw the book it was like seeing myself through the slippage of space and time. I've had this dream, this reoccurring dream of defamiliarized space and when I woke up there was this book and the desperate need to return to some Neverland that has always been chasing me. This desire is the Minotaur that will continue to pursue me through the labyrinth that my life will resemble. As it searches for me I search for it, and through the hedges and bends pages deep and novels high we have yet to find each other. I can hear it pass over the ground, pass just beyond my reach, and I get lost in the stacks trying to find the origin of its cry.*

I forgive you, Johnny Truant, for your chapter-like intrusion into Zampanò's novel, for all of your intrusions, and for everything else. I forgive myself, too, for defending your rights as an editor, even when you have so fully disclaimed them yourself, because I want so very much for it to be *true*, for it to be alright for you to read the way you do so that the way I read may be alright, too. It may be, I think, and probably is, far more intrusive than Charles Kinbote's own imposition on John Shade's poem, and yet I have to reason myself into seeing it

that way, have to force myself to believe what I so fully wish not to be true. Kinbote requests that his autobiography take precedence, that it be read before the poem, that the commentary be read thrice times through, that it be deemed the gravitational pull of the sun rendering the poem—the poem it claims to comment upon—a mere moon in its grasp, but he keeps his imposition in the space allocated to him as commentator. Johnny, however, you overstep and step back over your boundaries. And yet...

I believe that my desire to excuse Johnny for what should have no excuse is further evidence of the connection that I feel growing between him and myself, both of us readers, both of us lost in Zampanò's labyrinthine prose. It is this same connection that disallows me to label Johnny merely “Truant,” as literary and scholarly convention make habit.<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that I am alone in this identification. I have spoken with many readers of *House of Leaves*, and each one, regardless of the nature of their identification with Johnny, admits to *feeling* his plight, as it is their own. His interpretation flourishes where ours does; it falters where we, too, become stuck in the text. He craves space after the extremely claustrophobic placiness of chapter IX, and so do we. He is the textual player extraordinaire, and he makes so explicit the acts, affects, limitations, and freedoms of interpretation that we cannot help but see ourselves reflected through the metaphor of his specular image.

*I cannot see through  
the black,  
through the white.*

...-----...

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<sup>1</sup> I believe but can not be sure that there are only three characters in all of literature that I *cannot* refer to by last name alone, for the mere thought of it makes me squirm in imagined betrayal. They are Peter Pan, Bastian Balthazar Bux, and Johnny Truant. Referring to any of them by the alienating rhetoric of scholarship betrays in every way the *closeness* that has connected us, implicated us in each other's lives.

Dan once introduced me to a friend, a Tim or a Tom, who was given a door one night when he was on LSD. It was a freestanding and foreboding door, and it looked the same from both sides. He circled it, stared at it, talked to it, knocked once (softly), but never opened it. When asked in outrage how he could neglect that voyage he broke into tears and asked how he could have done otherwise. I shook in anger and envy and wished that I had been given such a door in the days when I was doing LSD, or given such a door on all the days after. But secretly I wondered if I would even have the courage to rap.

Once, when my brother came to visit me in my first apartment in Vermont, we sat out on lawn chairs drinking microbrews and watching the houses in the sunset. A little girl picked her way across the roof of a neighboring home, and as she approached we both grew silent. My eyes grew wide and long, and my brother's mouth fell open. We did not talk to each other for the rest of the night. As I lay in bed unable to sleep, I heard him and Dan in the next room talking. "Exactly like her, Man," I heard my brother say. "It was the freakiest thing I have ever seen." Dan came into the bedroom to see if I was asleep, and felt able to ask me when he sees that I am not even pretending to be. "Its not like I know what I looked like when I was ten, Dan." I stared only at the ceiling. "But, yes, she looked *exactly* like me." I wonder, now, if that is how Johnny felt when he found Zampanò's trunk: like he was seeing himself across time and space, in a place where he knew he couldn't be.

*The next day, the day after the night of the book's completion, I was shaking and pale and nauseous. My eyes felt red-rimmed and my hands felt empty. One of them, either Steph or Dan or Corey, asked if I was sick, her or his or her voice sounded slow and far, whispered up to where I was crouching from the bottom of a spiral staircase, the words bending and twisting before reaching me. After she had finished it, Steph had nightmares. In them all things unknown threatened her from the darkness. Corey, to ward off the same, took to sleeping with the lights on. But I, laying in a dark as total as I could make it, prayed for those monsters to find me. I tried to entice them with darkness, to tempt them towards me with the promise of fear, and Dan, snoring beside me, uninitiated and unread of those things that haunted Johnny in the darkness, stirred to ask what it was that I was looking for. "A door," I told him.*

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*They can't see me,  
either,*

Sometimes they are so strong that I have to put the book down to remember. Other times the memories float in undetected and settle like a fine film over the page and I do not realize they are there until I turn to the next and catch for a moment the reflection of the light off the coating. These memories of everything I have done, have been, have read. My subjectivity. And I believe these are me, purely me divorced from all else. But sometimes I wonder if all I am is "all else," if I am, in fact, anything other than the books I have read.

"The margins are where individual memories are most active, most invited to make their marks," Mary Carruthers writes in *The Book of Memory* (245). These memories, this existence in the margins, comes up through our history, passed down from our ancestral medieval scribes, embedded in our DNA. It is my birthright as a reader to remember.

The margins are the limits of the known world; the spaces that plunge us into the depths of the unrecognized or disowned, often both. They are the spaces where textual memory mingles with the self, where the white of the page and the whites of our eyes/Is



blend. “It is in this space,” Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio write in *Book Use, Book Theory*, “where books become part of you becoming yourself” (29).

As he progresses through his reading, Johnny Truant’s footnotes tell the story of Zampanò’s darkness impinging on his subjectivity. “I’ve lost sense of what’s real and what’s not. What I’ve made up, what has made me,” he declares (497).

My own marks in the margins, like Johnny Truant’s checkmark, can send a reader spiraling through space, time, and text to reconstruct a story that exists, like the darkness below the house, beneath the banality of reading.

.....

*I did see myself in the margins of House of Leaves, large chunks of me falling like the ceiling of the Ivory Tower, falling like my stomach falls away from my body when I am scared or excited, falling like the blood in my brain returning to my heart. I had this reoccurring dream where everything I know becomes strange and unrecognizable to me. I had this dream of doorways and darkness, and I had this book, this book within a book, I had AURYN and wished to be Bastian.*

“*Habent sua fata libelli*”—every book has its own destiny. And so does every reader. For me, destiny was Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. I feel as strongly as I have felt anything before that this book was written for *me*, that I was *supposed* to read it. And as strongly as I feel that it was my destiny to read *House of Leaves*, I feel that it was *House of Leaves*’ destiny to be read by me. And I promptly fell in love with this novel that knew me so well, knew me as if I were Zampanò or Johnny, maybe even knew me better than I know myself,

“Hermeneutical reflection fulfills the function that is accomplished in all bringing of something to a conscious awareness... Reflection on a given preunderstanding [prejudice or bias] brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*... Thus only through hermeneutical reflection am I no longer unfree over against myself but rather can deem freely what in my preunderstanding may be justified and what unjustifiable. And also only in this manner do I learn to gain a new understanding of what I have seen through eyes conditioned by prejudice... It is the untiring power of *experience*, that in the process of being instructed, man is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding.”  
Hans-Georg Gadamer

and I promptly began to believe that this startling novel was written *just for me*.

I did not come across *House of Leaves* by any Romantic avenue. When I look at it, stroke its cover and pages, I do not remember a preordained book auction or a dark corner of a dust-mottled book store in Danzig. No, I first heard about *House of Leaves* from a friend’s English class presentation, and ordered my copy from Amazon or Half.com or BetterWorldBooks or something even less glamorous. But my affair with it was romantic—even Romantic—even glamorous. I was courted, each page a lover’s gift. And as I read further, we felt out each other’s scars as only true lovers can.

I believe strongly in interpretive communities, understanding that we can learn far more from each other than we can from ourselves, and while I have loved many books, and have shared them with friends and family, have presented on them in literature classes, have spoken for months—years—about them with anyone who would listen, *House of Leaves* became my secret. There was something undecidedly special about it, and that made me special for loving it. I feared that we would both be rendered normal by its publicity. And so I was heartbroken when I learned that Mark Z. Danielewski, the man with such intimate knowledge of

my reader's soul, was touring with *my* novel. I watched in horror the streaming video from Ohio State's Project Narrative website. I was the lover coming home to find her only heart bedded by another woman. I could not remove myself from the doorway, where I listened, unseen. I had to know. No, not that one! That page was *ours!* I wanted to claw at every audience member who dared ask a question, wanted them to feel my betrayal, my tears, the snot running from my nose where I was too destroyed to wipe it.

*but I know  
that they  
will.*

...---...

My copy of *House of Leaves* has cracked in half, torn right through like a copy of *The Neverending Story* I once owned, and I hoped that this would release the danger and the Minotaur would come for me at last, but even the danger I feel is sickeningly mundane. I want to go back to Neverland, to Fantasia. There is a door somewhere that can take me there, a door in an unfamiliar house, a novel with me in the margins, an experiment that can change chemistry itself and make all things alien and strange it its glow.

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*And I am afraid.*