

Multi-authorial Strategies in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* & Mark Z. Danielewski's
House of Leaves

Reputation precedes both Vladimir Nabokov's 1962 novel *Pale Fire* and Mark Z. Danielewski's debut of 2000, *House of Leaves*. They are, we are made to understand, less novels and more puzzles that have assumed the form of books. We are forewarned that, replete with metatextual apparatus and dense with self-referential literary devices, these texts will pose us problems. The experience of reading the novels, however, reveals that more than the referencing and cross-referencing of footnotes, appendices, and indices, or any tricks of typographic eccentricity, it is the presence of multiple voices within the works that defines the challenge of reading them. As readers of a multi-authorial, multi-part text we are tasked with asking a set of questions: how does each part of the text modify the other parts? What is the sequence of the elements' composition, and does this affect how we read them? Are we able to determine amongst the elements, and the authors, a hierarchy of authority that will enable us to place our trust in some voices or elements over others?

In *Pale Fire* these questions are addressed directly in the Foreword attributed to Charles Kinbote. He places great emphasis on the importance of his own commentary, directing the reader to consult it before, during, and after the poem itself (Nabokov 2011, 22-23). This suggestion marks one of the first, though not *the* first, indications to the reader that their commentator may not be entirely trustworthy. Prior to this we have witnessed his insertion of non-pertinent, personal information into an ostensibly scholarly work ('There is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present lodgings.' (11)), and the inclusion of two suggestions of his incompetence (his descriptions of the Shadeans' 'imputations' (12), and the encounter at a grocery store in which he is labeled 'insane' (20)). Aside from the material Kinbote *elects* to supply, the reader also encounters the erroneously included 'Insert before a professional' (15), which calls into question his editorial competence.

Before so much as completing the Foreword then, the reader is faced with questions both of narratorial reliability and reading strategy. Having likely made judgements already as to Kinbote's suitability as a guide through the text, the reader reaches a fork in the road at the Foreword's conclusion and must decide how to proceed. Is the reading strategy advocated by Kinbote a valid one, or is the text better approached as a traditional scholarly edition wherein familiarity with the primary text will be essential to benefit fully from the commentary?

Brian Boyd alerts us to an alternative path which forks even earlier in the text; if we take seriously Kinbote's direction to '(See my note to line 991)' (13), thereby skipping over the poem entirely in preference for the notes on its final stanza, we may return to the Foreword armed with an entirely different understanding of our commentator. Boyd argues that this path, which leads from the Foreword to notes on lines 991, then 47-8, and 691, before returning to 47-8, and through the note to line 62, back to the Foreword, is designed by Nabokov to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the commentator. Boyd's suggestion that '[i]f we have followed this trail to the end, we know to trust Nabokov' (Boyd 22) is of interest here as much for the ground it does *not* cover: what if we did not follow the trail to the end (or at all)? And to what extent is Nabokov's reliability a balm in the light of our narrator's corruption?

A similar conundrum is encountered in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, when the book's anonymous 'Editors' suggest to the reader by way of a footnote that greater understanding of the commentator, Johnny Truant, might be obtained by consulting Appendices II-D & II-E. The tone here is more of suggestion than Kinbote's direction, with the qualification added: 'The reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note' (Danielewski 72 n.78). Whilst the reader may be wary (or at least curious) as to the Editors' intentions, the openness of this invitation is less suggestive of ulterior motivation than Kinbote's insistence on the primacy of his commentary. Similarly, Boyd's question as to whether the novel's ultimate author is to be trusted is not as simply answered here. Whilst Danielewski obviously wishes to make readers aware that more

information concerning the character of Truant is available to them, the wording of the Editors' footnote is careful to emphasise the possibility of multiple valid reading strategies.

These instances of the texts drawing attention to their own non-linearity are privileged here by virtue of their primacy: both appear relatively early and provide the reader with a choice they cannot avoid making. In truth however, neither text is ever far from raising the matter of its own composition and that of its network of authors.

Pale Fire's diptych of poet and commentator is at question throughout the work. Kinbote is not content just to advocate for the primacy of his notes but also seeks continuously to emphasise his importance to the material of Shade's poem. The greatest flaw of Kinbote as a commentator is his willful refusal to address the content of the poem itself, instead preferring to espouse at length on his chosen theme: the flight of the exiled king of Zembla. In this way Kinbote is active in an authorial role in the text as the creator of an elaborate fiction of his own, and in reading the novel we are asked to determine where properly to situate Kinbote's fiction in relation to Shade's poetry. We must concern ourselves with what Kinbote terms 'the underside of the weave' (14).

There is a note of desperation in the nakedness with which Kinbote reveres and needs Shade. Though the evidence of his unsuitability for the role of commentator and editor is manifest in the text for the reader to judge, we have little reason to doubt his *own* judgement of his lack of skill as a poet. Kinbote requires Shade therefore to construct a poem around 'all that I was helpless myself to put into verse'. This relationship he characterises as 'a secret compact' in which the material he provides to Shade acts as a 'catalytic agent' (all 69) for the poem's composition. Perhaps aware of this imbalance of authorial power (if not *sufficiently* aware to shield his jealousy from the reader of his commentary) Kinbote openly wishes for the older man to suffer a second heart attack. Such an occurrence, as he envisions it (with 'a resurrected Shade weeping in my arms' (81)), would right the balance.

This, of course, is before he has read the poem. Kinbote is convinced that Shade's work will be a poetic celebration of Kinbote's own themes, and the relationship as he conceives of it at this point therefore is of himself as muse to the poet: 'he was reassembling my Zembla!' (204). The use of the term 'reassembling' here is of particular interest since it positions Kinbote's fiction as the original and Shade's work as the reinterpretation. When Kinbote reads the finished article his disappointment is compounded by the realisation that he has not acted as the source of the material at all; he finds himself unexpectedly relegated to the role of mere commentator as opposed to originator. Whilst this is precisely the arrangement that a reader would expect in an annotated volume of poetry Kinbote is unwilling to let it lie. He recasts his role as 'an attempt to sort out... all the many subliminal debts to me' (233), and in line with his inability to accept those debts as merely 'subliminal', he seeks to agitate by other means to remain active in the text. The broadest example is his constant co-opting of Shade's phrases for his own ends, providing lengthy, personal commentary on the false premise of it being pertinent to the single word he has anchored it to in the poem. There are several more acute instances, such as Kinbote's admission in his note to line 550 that a previous note (to line 12) contained a fabricated couplet of his own composition; and also when, recognising a gap intentionally left by Shade, Kinbote implies that it is a coded reference to himself (135-6). To support such claims Kinbote extrapolates from Sibyl Shade's understandable dislike for him a malevolent strategy of censorship, shifting the blame for the omission of the Zemblan theme to her so as to keep intact the fiction of his 'secret compact' with Shade.

'Pale Fire' itself contains a warning that 'Time means succession, and succession, change' (l 567). Leaving to one side the various 'single-author' theories of *Pale Fire*¹ we can at least be sure of the temporal sequence of the fictional work's construction: the poem is composed first, and the Commentary, Foreword and Index follow. This lends a certain advantage to Kinbote as author of the latter sections to provide an interpretation which suits him, and which goes unchallenged by the poem's deceased author. As Kinbote himself states in closing his Foreword: 'for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word'

¹ discussion of which is omitted here in the interest of concision

(23). Treating the text holistically however, the reader becomes aware of Kinbote's bias and is able to evolve an objective interpretation of both poem and commentary not explicit in the text. If Michael Wood is correct that in the case of *Pale Fire* 'real is not an explanation, it is a (disputed) territory' (Wood 178), the reader is then forced to adopt a reading strategy which compensates for this dispute. Wood argues that we are able to 'arrive at the plain story... by reading *across* Kinbote's' (198). That is to say that a successful reading of the novel is one in which a gestalt of the textual elements can be constructed other than in the order(s) (either linear or hierarchical) as they are given, and which reveals the narrative to be quite different from the sum of its parts. This is strikingly similar to the hermeneutic Shade writes of in the final three stanzas of 'Pale Fire's' third canto: an emphasis on 'not text but texture' (l 808), and the gleaning of a 'web of sense' (l 810) instead of simple truths.

David Galef draws an interesting parallel between the ways in which the novel forms its narrative and its characters:

'The self-reflexive quality of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a fictional creation governed by its fictional creator, applies not only to the structure but also to the characters. As a group, they are self-referential, appearing as shadows, twins, and inverted images of one another.'

(Galef 421)

Galef goes on to identify the quality of 'self-reflexivity' in terms of the much commented on similarities and mirrorings with which Nabokov has carefully imbued his characters², but we might adapt it in a slightly different direction and say that just as a true picture of the text's narrative arises not directly from its comprising elements but in their interplay one to another, so it is with the novel's characters. Ellen Pifer argues for the merits of what Wood terms reading 'across' the Commentary, saying that in doing so 'we glimpse what Kinbote often misses: the poet's lucid perceptions. We even glean how well Shade

² In particular he draws a lengthy and interesting comparison between Kinbote and Hazel Shade

understands his eccentric neighbour' and that 'the poet's compassion for his mad neighbour informs and enlarges the reader's own perception of Kinbote' (Pifer 116).

As Boyd suggests, our trust should lie with Nabokov and the belief that he has provided us with all of the textual evidence necessary to determine the truth of the relationship between Shade and Kinbote, and an objective understanding of characters and narrative. The question is more complicated in the case of Danielewski's *House of Leaves* where we are provided with less certainty by virtue of having more moving parts to contend with. We will find that Danielewski introduces into the text further complications concerning the relationships between textual elements, posing to the reader a set of additional questions running parallel to concerns about narratorial reliability and the hierarchical authority.

By way of a point of entry let us take a distinction between the two novels drawn by Steven Belletto:

'Pale Fire differs from *House of Leaves*... because readers are provided the text of Shade's poem so that they may judge for themselves just how detached from the original Kinbote's interpretations and observations are. In *House of Leaves*, by contrast, there is no original.'

(Belletto 2009, 106)

This formulation perhaps places too much unquestioned trust in the sanctity of the text we are presented with as Shade's, especially in the light of some of the fabrications noted above. Nevertheless, Belletto's point is sound: in the case of Nabokov's novel the reader has in front of him both the primary and secondary texts; the comments and the work they (supposedly) relate to. In the case of Danielewski's novel the network of reference has more nodes, and their relationships are both tenuous and contingent.

The reader's first dilemma, as Belletto states, is the lack of primary text. We must, however, expand our idea of what this denotes by virtue of the text's multiple participants. The commentator / author relationship from *Pale Fire* can be transposed to *House of Leaves* with only limited success as in fact both of the text's primary authors (Zampanò & Truant)

are engaged in separate acts of commentary: as Truant is annotating Zampanò's manuscript, so that work is itself a commentary on Will Navidson's film. We can extend this model one iteration further as Navidson's film is itself a commentary, with the original referent being the house on Ash Tree Lane. In this dynamic the reader of *House of Leaves* is missing not just the original referent (the house), but the secondary referent (Navidson's film), and has reason to suspect that the tertiary referent (Zampanò's manuscript) is supplied in something other than its original form. The text includes yet a further layer of obfuscation with the presence of the unnamed Editors, who take up a position somewhere between Truant and the reader.

Inside this highly unstable architecture the reader encounters similar problems to those faced in *Pale Fire*. Truant's suitability for the role of commentator is questionable, and indeed questioned by him. He admits an inability to cut Zampanò's material, and openly embraces the errors it might contain: 'I have come to believe that errors... are often the only markers left by a solitary life' (31 n.36). The reader is unlikely to find this too surprising at this point in the novel, if they have heeded Truant's own warning in his Introduction:

'Add to this my own mistakes (and there's no doubt I'm responsible for plenty) as well as those errors Zampanò made which I failed to notice or correct, and you'll see why there's suddenly a whole lot here not to take too seriously.'

(Danielewski xx)

There is an increased sense as we read the novel that Truant sees his role not merely as commentator on the text but participant in and co-author of it. 'Zampanò provided the blanks but never filled them in' (63 n.74) he notes with the obvious implication that he feels at liberty to do so. In this particular instance Truant refrains, where we have seen Kinbote take full advantage of gaps in Shade's text to insinuate his own inclusion. But Truant's perception of his relationship to Zampanò is constantly shifting. At points Truant attempts to glean better understanding of his assumed co-author but has to 'strain now to see past *The Navidson Record*' (337 n.302), confusing the man for his work. This despite his insistence that 'Zampanò is trapped but where may surprise you. He's trapped inside me... I can hear him' (338 n.302). This complication of the author / commentator relationship

allows Truant to take one step further than Kinbote and make an addition to his referent text, and, taking another step, not apologise for having done so but openly challenge the reader's presumed objection (16 n.18).

The reader would have greater cause for objection were it not for the dubious nature of the next textual node. Zampanò's manuscript, we must remember, purports to be a lengthy examination of a film, written by a man blinded decades before the film's creation. Indeed, if we are to believe Truant's testimony, the film itself does not exist. Whether or not that is the case—and we have as many reasons to believe that it is not as to believe that it is—Zampanò's work has either a tenuous link to its referent, or no referent at all. To this we must add Zampanò's penchant, noted by Mark Hansen, for 'mixing real and fictional sources in an apparent bid to garner verisimilitude for his enterprise' (Hansen 600), the impact of which necessitates a reconsideration of the connections both back to Navidson's film and forward to Truant's text.

There is another node the reader must adapt his reading strategy to permit: that of the unnamed Editors. In the opening pages of the book the reader finds Danielewski's name tellingly on a page of its own, framing the rest of the novel in the possessive. Truant and Zampanò's names appear on the title page (in a relationship which, as we have seen, is not nearly as neatly delineated as it is here presented), but there is no mention of additional Editors. Assigned no particular task at the novel's outset therefore, the Editors' function within the text is nebulous. On occasion they provide further clarification to a note by Truant, such as at note 99 wherein they supply a translation Truant, failing again in his role as commentator, has left out of note 98 (90). Conversely, where Truant's notes actually perform the function of a commentary they are often formatted in a manner unsuitable for purpose (eg. 34 n.40), but go uncorrected by the Editors nevertheless. How are we to understand the hierarchy here? In one instance a note by Zampanò is 'corrected' by Truant, whose own note is 'corrected' by the Editors (252 n.242-4). It becomes part of the reader's

task to parse this discord between the narrative voices, but a clear hierarchy of authority does not emerge.³

The situation then, is far worse than Belletto states above. Not only is the reader not presented with an ‘original’, the question is posed at every textual level as to what that original might be: does the house exist for Navidson to film? Truant’s attempt to verify its existence meets with failure (505). Does Navidson’s film exist for Zampanò to write about, and how do we account for his inability to see it? What is the true status of the manuscript we are presented with as Zampanò’s if Truant openly admits to changing it? Throughout the work Danielewski places these roadblocks to interpretation in the reader’s path, making it possible for us only to construct a set of contingencies instead of a coherent understanding. We can say that *if* Navidson’s film exists *then* Zampanò’s text *may* have basis in fact. Likewise, *if* the text of Zampanò’s manuscript is largely unaltered *then* Truant and the Editors’ commentary *may* elucidate our understanding of its author.

These contingencies are all throughout the novel and at every narrative level. Consider the point raised by Larry McCaffery in conversation with Danielewski regarding the authenticity of the letters which comprise Appendix II-E: that the letters as they appear in the novel could not (typographically) have been composed by someone without access to a word processor, and as such ‘someone else must have intervened and created this document’ (McCaffery 120). Here we encounter by now familiar questions: who intervened and what is the nature of their intervention? It is the Editors who point us (at 72 n.78) to the letters’ inclusion, but they also relay ‘Mr. Truant’s wishes that it be known some names were changed (586). Another problem occurs when the Editors show awareness of the photograph by Kevin Carter on which, as they put it, Navidson’s prize-winning image ‘is

³ It should be noted that this network of authors is yet incomplete. Though it does not advance my argument to consider them in detail here there are also textual elements authored by Karen Green (354-165), and numerous unnamed contributors to Zampanò’s project (Appendix I-B). In the latter case the Editors provide a humorously uninformed footnote: ‘Presumably “Original” indicates an entry written by Zampanò’s own hand, while “A” “B” “C” etc. etc. indicate entries written by someone else’ (542 n.432, my emphasis). The incomplete alphabet of contributors here goes as far as X, perhaps suggesting that Z (for Zampanò?) is not far away, and thereby situating Zampanò at the beginning and end of a closed circle of authorship.

clearly based' (368 n.336). This knowledge of a real photograph not only renders fictional Navidson's doppelgänger thereof (and concomitantly Navidson himself and the existence of his film), but situates the Editors, at least temporarily, within the reader's own frame. These same Editors who here assign *The Navidson Record* to the status of a fiction within Danielwski's fiction, later include in Appendix III a still image taken from it.

Anchoring all of these contingencies is the novel's central impossibility: that of the house itself. Mark Hansen phrases the problem by terming *House of Leaves* 'a realist novel about an object that, for precise technical reasons, cannot belong to the 'reality' we inhabit as embodied beings' (Hansen 607). We find ourselves then, in possession of too many certainties that cannot coexist. Physics precludes the existence of the house in our 'reality', and knowledge of Kevin Carter's photograph situates the Editors firmly on that plane - where are we to break the chain of referents which links the two? A similarly troublesome logic hole appears in Appendix II-E, wherein a letter ostensibly written by Pelafina and dated 1986 makes direct, if coded, reference to Zampanò⁴. How are we to modify our fragile conception of the narrative elements' interconnection to account for one character's familiarity with the other?⁵ And if we are willing to attempt that, then what of Navidson's reading and burning of a text entitled *House of Leaves* (467) within the events of Zampanò's manuscript? Or Truant's encounter (at 513) with the 'first edition' of a text he is, at the time, still composing? As Hansen points out, this latter raises problems surrounding 'the status of this section of the novel (chapter 21) and, more generally, about whether Johnny's notes are properly located inside or outside of its frame' (Hansen 620).

The fabric of Danielewski's novel resists the construction of an infallible and coherent picture of the narrative truth, and what is more the reading 'across' the text which proved so rewarding in approaching *Pale Fire* is thwarted here by the inclusion of numerous logical inconsistencies. Where Nabokov allows us to glean insight into his novel's characters and its reality by paying careful attention to how the elements interact,

⁴ the first letter of each word of page 615's second paragraph spelling out 'Dear Zampanò, what did you lose?'

⁵ Jessica Pressman (see Bibliography) makes an interesting, if ultimately unconvincing, argument for attributing the entire text to Pelafina

Danielewski actively thwarts such a strategy by making the elements' relationships so tenuous and contingent. '[T]here are many ways to enter *House of Leaves*,' he states in interview with Larry McCaffery, only for the interviewer to observe that '[t]hey may be equally valid, but choosing one will necessarily affect the rest of your journey' (McCaffery 111). Plural validities is certainly the crux of the problem in interpreting *House of Leaves*, where the closest we can come to a holistic understanding of the narrative is a set of 'if x then y' propositions.

Both novels are acutely aware of the problems they create for readers seeking verification of truths, and both figure this dilemma thematically into their narratives. So in Shade's poem he relates his frustrated attempt to corroborate his near-death experience ('Life Everlasting - based on a misprint!' (l 803)), and Kinbote fails to verify the source of the poem's title despite engagement with precisely the correct passage in *Timon of Athens* (68). Navidson, despite a cadre of enlisted assistants and a battery of measuring equipment is unable to verify the exact dimensions of his house; Truant fails to prove *or entirely disprove* the existence of the house itself or of Navidson's film, and disputes the existence of many of Zampanò's sources - going so far as to declare (at xx) that one particular book does not exist when in fact it is pictured in Appendix III (658).

The effort of sense-making takes a physical toll on Kinbote, as he reports: 'I abhor such games; they make my temples throb with abominable pain' (152). This comes in response to a passage of Shade's poem to which I have already referred (the antepenultimate stanza of Canto Three), and thereby provides one of many neat dichotomies that arise between the poet and commentator when we are able to read each in the light of the other. The remarks are also echoed by Truant, who experiences his own difficulties elucidating Zampanò's text: '...I've lost this sentence, I can't even finish it, don't know how--' (43 n.50).

That these problems of veracity are figured in the texts themselves necessarily impacts our reading of them. The challenge, as Rachel Trousdale sees it, is to 'distinguish between objective and interpretive truths' within the text (Trousdale 37). Brian Boyd engages with the same dilemma:

'Kinbote sees all too little of the world around him, and yet we have to see most of *Pale Fire* through his eyes. We can make out how much is false in his image of himself... but can we ascertain how much is true?'

(Boyd 89)

But might we also see the textual impossibility of verification as liberating? Confronted with these difficulties in reading *House of Leaves* Mark Hansen writes that 'the impossibility of an external, first-order observation of the entire system functions to ennoble second-order observations' (Hansen 628), and likewise Eric Naiman argues that Kinbote's faults as a reader alleviate pressure on the reader of *Pale Fire*:

'This novel that sets the standard for misguided interpretation paradoxically manages to free the reader from interpretive anxiety.'

(Naiman 118)

In the early stages of *House of Leaves* just such a relaxed reading strategy is posited by Johnny Truant. Alongside his previously quoted warning that 'there's a lot here not to take seriously' he tells us that 'Zampanò knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here' (both xx). Just a few pages later we encounter the same philosophy in Zampanò's own words: '..."authenticity" still remains the word most likely to stir a debate' he warns, before giving his opinion that it is more fruitful to concentrate on 'the interpretation of events' and accept that the house 'remains *resistant to summation*' (all 3, my emphasis).

What avenues open up if we accept this shifting of the critical goalposts? Stephen Blackwell reads *Pale Fire* as a 'metafiction' that '[b]y underscoring its fictionality... destroys the illusion that the novel as artistic utterance has a stable and unitary referent' (Blackwell 64), and David Rampton proposes a similar reading based on the novel's unyielding subjectivity: 'The referential drops out because there is nothing left to refer to' (Rampton 2). In these readings we are not limited by our inability to discern narrative truths, but emancipated from the task by virtue of its impossibility. Instead we are to see the novels'

irreconcilable subjectivities, per Ellen Pifer, as ‘illustration of the essential singularity of human nature and perception’ (Pifer 117). If we are able to do this we find that certain critical doors are closed to us, but that others open. If we can turn away from what Kinbote calls ‘the underside of the weave’ (Nabokov 14) and focus instead on ‘interpretation of events’ (Danielewski 3), as Zampanò advocates, we are likely to find fewer of our efforts frustrated. Thomas Karshan suggests treating *Pale Fire* as ‘a set of pieces to be rearranged as in a game’ (Karshan 195), noting that ‘[g]ames offer an image of self-enclosed order without reference to external truth’ (204).

To my mind this manner of critical examination may well yield fruit in the form of insight into the characters, and, as Pifer suggests, the nature of perception, but its usefulness will be limited by the nagging feeling that whatever insight we gain is applicable only to the self-enclosed environment of the novel as game. The temptation to test lessons learned from the texts against the world of our own experience is likely to be too strong, and the success of being able to do so is predicated upon our first comprehending the text’s proper relationship to our reality. Danielewski seems to predict this reaction through the actions of his commentator characters. As Truant points out (at 149 n.195) Zampanò is prone to falling into his own trap and attempting to verify the truth of Navidson’s film. Truant himself, as well as his flawed attempts to verify Zampanò’s sources and Navidson’s house, follows Zampanò’s example in sealing his home in the search for a space ‘inviolable and most of all immutable’ (xix). It is in their nature to seek a stable comprehension of their referents, just as Danielewski and Nabokov know that we will in relation to their novels.

‘Hopefully you’ll be able to make sense of what I can represent though still fail to understand’ (Danielewski xv) Truant says in his Introduction, with re-reading lending a crucial double meaning to ‘represent’: both ‘relay’ and ‘stand for’. Not to attempt as much would be to abdicate our duty as readers. After all ‘[t]he final responsibility for the creation and success of fiction’ argues Rachel Trousdale, ‘...lies not with the writer but with the reader, who can synthesize all the perspectives of the novel’ (Trousdale 76). This returns us to the matter of authorial hierarchy, but to a different facet thereof. Whilst we have looked at the messy intermediary stages of the narrative chain we have yet to address the

relative certainties at its beginning and end. As convoluted as they may be between the covers, both *Pale Fire* and *House of Leaves* arrive at the reader bearing the names of single, identifiable authors. And both texts take as a central theme the act of authorship and inquiry into what defines it.

One way in which this is figured is the extent to which both novels exhibit their author's thumbprint at one textual layer or another. The path from *Pale Fire's* Foreword to footnotes and back is, as described above *per* Boyd, an example of Nabokov's hand guiding the reader to greater insight at an early stage in the work. As we progress through the novel, he suggests, 'we naturally find it mysterious and surely significant when we detect a sustained harmony between part and ostensibly discordant part' (Boyd 111-2) and should embrace 'the satisfaction of sensing the author's order everywhere behind the commentator's chaos' (37). Shade has a similar revelation of a higher orchestration at work when encountering his white fountain, realising 'that the sense behind / The scene was not our sense' (ll 709-10).

In *House of Leaves* too the author's presence is felt, just as in *Pale Fire*, behind the intricacies of every network of coincidence, connection and reflection. It is also there in any number of other interesting forms: the positioning of the house at the corner of Ash Tree Lane and 'Succoth' (Danielewski 18) is suggestive of the influence of a higher authorial power overseeing the narrative, and the name of the particular deity in this instance is encoded across the initial letters of multiple footnotes (22-37, notes 27-42 spelling 'Mark Z Danielewski'), crossing as it goes the boundaries between Zampanò, Truant and the Editors.

Both texts also deal with the relationship between authors and readers. Nabokov's belief that 'in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world' (Nabokov 1989, 290), which he later clarified to '...the author and the reader' (Nabokov 1973, 183)⁶, shows us the centrality of this relationship to the work

⁶ both quotes here referenced at Boyd 8

and phrases it in rather antagonistic terms. We could read *House of Leaves*' anti-dedication 'This is not for you' (Danielewski x) in the same way, as setting up an oppositional relationship between author(s) and reader. But this is not necessarily the case; Alison Gibbons urges us to accept the challenge posed by the text's refusal to belong to us, and to reframe the ordinary act of turning a page as 'a defiant performance of reactance, one which works to reassert the reader's free behaviour' (Bray 27). We are empowered from the start by our act of trespass, and made aware of our enormous influence as readers of the text.

This too is something that is thematically present in both novels. If Trousdale is correct, above, that responsibility for the success of these narratives '...lies not with the writer but with the reader', we see this play out in both *Pale Fire* and *House of Leaves* where many of the texts' authors are also figured as readers. Kinbote, Zampanò, Truant *et al*, as well as being authors within the text are each engaged in the reading and interpretation of another work. What we have previously considered to be their trespasses into and alteration of those works, therefore, we can also frame as a form of reading and (re)interpretation. So Steven Belletto says that Kinbote 'controls chance by replacing texture with text' (Belletto 2006, 768) and writing his own version of the narrative of Shade's death. Kinbote's reading of Shade's text fails due to his inability to discern the poet's true meaning ('I abhor such games...'), and his commentary contains a structure of causal relationships that he *can* understand, to replace the truths he finds uninterpretable (or unacceptable). Kinbote's reading becomes a re-writing.

Mark Hansen sees *House of Leaves* in the same way: 'the text we're holding in our hands... is a copy with a difference, which is to say a singular embodied reading of a "text" that doesn't exist in any other form' (Hansen 618), he writes, adding that 'Truant's narrative figures the act of reading as an act of copying with a difference' (619). Indeed this authorial strategy is central to the operation of the multiple interpretive relationships we have explored in the novel. Danielewski phrases it thus:

'The way that Johnny projects himself into, or onto, Zampanò's book shows how the text of *The Navidson Record* functions as it is being read and assembled by the readers themselves. Johnny even goes so far as to modify it... Not only does the book permit that, it is really saying to the reader, "Now you modify it."' (McCaffery 120)

The message of these texts is that reading and interpretation is also an act re-writing. This fact is at the center of all of the interpretive problems we as readers encounter in the novels as it blurs the lines between originals and interpretations; destabilises the hierarchy of narratorial authority; and recasts the roles of both reader and author. In texts that already contain a surfeit of authorial voices we are made aware that simply by interpreting the novels we too are joining the ranks not only of their readers but also of their authors. Michael Wood phrases it well:

'If the death of the Author really is the birth of the reader, then the birth of the reader is the start of a whole family of (lower-case) authors. This is one way of saying what reading is.'

(Wood 18)

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