Paratextuality and Contemporary Narrative: The Physical Object as a Storytelling Device

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PARATEXTUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE:
THE PHYSICAL OBJECT AS A STORYTELLING DEVICE

by

JAMES MASON

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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The Physical Object as a Storytelling Device

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James Mason

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Paratextuality and Contemporary Narrative: The Physical Object as a Storytelling Device

by

James Mason

Advisor: Nico Israel

This paper examines how the physical and para-textual features (title, cover, front matter, page numbers, footnotes, glossary, etc.) of a book may be used as a vehicle for narrative discovery. Often, reading requires the use of extra-textual knowledge—that which comes from outside the book—to gain a proper understanding of the narrative. Intra-textual knowledge—that which occurs within the confines of the text—is more accessible, but still requires a great deal of foreknowledge to understand. However, contemporary novels that use the paratext for storytelling offer the same amount of accessibility to the reader while disrupting normal reading patterns. Thus, new readings patterns can be developed and access to new narrative devices and storytelling techniques becomes possible.

Writing does not occur in a vacuum, and as such, reading cannot either. In what author Peter Mendelsund (What we See When we Read) refers to as “the game of reading novels,” predicting what will happen in a text requires foreknowledge on the genre, date of publication, style of the author, and so on: “The rules are codified—but occasionally counterintuitive to the unexperienced.” Through the examination of Chekhov’s Gun (which states that an object introduced to the narrative is often a promise that it will be utilized) and Aomame’s Gun (as found in Murakami’s 1Q84, a Chekhovian Gun referenced so often that its use would cause the direction of the narrative to be too obvious) I explain how authors create ambiguity and mystery
in text, and how the reader might properly predict what will occur based on knowledge that has come from outside text. Of course, it is unfair to suggest that authors do not regularly place clues inside the text, however, the detection and understanding of these clues are informed by what the reader and the writer have seen occur in other works of fiction; therefore, the proper application of these clues is not always intuitive, as Mendelsund suggests.

However, contemporary authors have been using the physical structure of the book and the paratext to disrupt the expectations general expectations readers might have entering a novel. I discuss in detail how these expectations are formed and why they exist, how they interact with one another, and which texts break them, such as Julio Cortázar’s Hopscotch, Italo Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler, David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest, Doug Dorst’s S, and Mark Danielewski’s House of Leaves. As I examine the books that break expectations, I argue that the disruption of normal reading patterns in the case of these texts creates additional avenues for discovery of clues and narrative objects, and that finding narrative clues in this manner is more rewarding and accessible than finding clues via the use of extra-textual knowledge.

In the increasingly digital world of text, the act of reading is regularly distilled from reading a book to simply reading its words. It is unfair to suggest that these are the same thing, especially in instances where the book as a physical object can be used as a narrative device. It seems as though many contemporary authors are playing with the physicality of books and with paratext as a way to remind readers why the book, as a physical object and narrative vehicle, is important.
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Chekhov’s Gun and Narrative Economy

Russian writer Anton Chekhov, in a conversation with I. Gurland in 1889 is quoted: “If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it’s not going to be fired, it shouldn’t be hanging there” (Gurlyand 521). The ideology behind Chekhov’s Gun does not relate simply to weaponry, but to narrative economy: the principle that all elements of a narrative should be essential. Despite the popularity of “Chekhov’s gun” as a trope, the ideology was also recorded by Aristotle:

Therefore, just as in the other representational arts a single representation of a single [thing] so too the plot, since it is a representation of action ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that; its parts (the incidents) ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed. Something which, whether it is present or not present explains nothing [else], is not part of the whole. (Aristotle 12)

Thus, it would be just as fitting to title this trope “Aristotle’s gun.” Under these beliefs, no part of a text should be extraneous. If the author mentions that the protagonist was coaxed into buying a set of knives from a door to door salesman, we can expect a stabbing, or at the very least, the cutting of vegetables. Within the same system of storytelling, the eye color of a given character need not be told unless it is so odd that it later leads to him/her finding his/her identical twin. Many writers who subscribe to the beliefs of narrative economy are short story writers, such as the aforementioned Chekhov as well as Jorge Luis Borges. Borges references the Aristotelian ideology of the “necessary” in a foreword written for Adolfo Bioy Casares’ La Invención de Morel where in reference to detective fiction, Borges states: “The adventure novel… is not proposed as a transcript of reality. It is an artificial object that does not suffer any
unjustified part” (Borges 25). If no part of a detective fiction is extraneous then all characters would be suspects, informants, or detectives, and any object described with a semblance of detail would be a clue.

On this topic, scholar Eleni Kefala states: “In order to amplify the hermeneutic scope of the genre, Borges employs a number of writing strategies such as resonance, ellipsis, and allusions which all belong to what he calls ‘el reinado del silencio (the realm of silence); (Kefala 222).” While one might assume that a belief in Aristotle’s “necessary” would lead to a predictable story, the innate ambiguity in language (and silence) prevents this from being so. Irony, sarcasm, and other subjacent modes of language allow for multiple interpretations and outcomes for economically conscious texts. Kefala goes on to explain: “Hints, allusions, and silence all belong to the realm of irony because irony is the method of the hidden and the ambiguous, of what lies beyond the external semantics of the text which is unable to constitute itself fully… Borgesian irony is the agent of deferral. In other words, it affirms the negation of a final, fixed meaning within a text which always exceeds itself” (223). Kefala’s interpretation of Borges’ style is one in which multiple modes of interpretation are essential, as is that which the text does not explicitly state.

Similarly, in looking to Chekhov’s short story, “The Lady with the Little Dog” we can examine how silence is an essential feature in the text. The story follows Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov and his newest affair with Anna Sergeevna, a woman newly married but on vacation alone. One might assume that based on the title of the story and Chekhov’s philosophy on storytelling that the dog should play an important role in the development of the narrative, but on the surface level the dog is rarely seen or mentioned. In addition, it might not seem immediately important
that after making love for the first time, while Anna wallows over her lost virtues, Gurov
distracts himself by cutting fruit:

“It’s not good,’ she said.’You’ll be the first not to respect me now’

There was a watermelon on the table in the hotel room. Gurov cut himself a slice
and unhurriedly began to eat it. At least half an hour passed in silence” (Chekhov
35).

While the scene succeeds in being awkward and quite funny, one must wonder: why is he eating
a watermelon, and where is the dog? Is the dog’s initial inclusion in the story merely there as a
way to set Anna apart from the crowd? Why does Gurov need to cut the watermelon himself?
Surely the hotel is not serving its guests whole, uncut melons, thus this watermelon must have
come from an outside place, but where? Does the philosophy behind narrative economy state that
where the watermelon came from does not matter, or that the watermelon itself does not matter?
These questions are not answered in the text, yet each object still seems to have its place in the
narrative. The watermelon exists so that Gurov can sit in silence for a half hour distracted from
his thoughts. Were the watermelon not there, then the narrator would be tasked with summing up
a half hour of Gurov’s thoughts while he sat in silence with Anna. If the watermelon had already
been cut and ready to eat, then this moment would seem less awkward and drawn out. However,
this moment is supposed to be awkward and drawn out to display the regret between the two
characters, who have just made their lives much more complicated. Regardless of where the
watermelon came from, it is essential in its placement and needed to be uncut.

Yet silence—or, that which is not stated—is just as important as what is explicitly stated.
If we believe in Chekhov’s Gun (or that at the very least, we believe that Chekhov believes in
Chekhov’s Gun) then we know that the watermelon matters, but we don’t always know *why* it matters. Interpretation of that which is not stated is the responsibility of the reader. This responsibility is called up as the story ends with Gurov and Anna in love, but uncertain how to move forward: “And it seemed that, just a little more—and the solution would be found, and then a new, beautiful life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that the end was still far, far off, and that the most complicated and difficult part was just beginning” (Chekhov 47). The piece ends with no clear resolution, and certainly no happily-ever-after. This ending brings forth what Kefala refers to as Borgesian irony—the agent of the deferral—and a refusal at a final, fixed meaning. In contrast, as we enter the story Chekhov tells us that Gurov has had many affairs and how he feels about women. Absent are the examples that would only reiterate what has already been told. When Chekhov needs to describe Gurov, just enough information is given to create curiosity. For example, after hearing how Gurov thinks of women and how he is aging, one might be confused as to why women are drawn to him. To this, Chekhov simply states: “In his appearance, in his character, in his whole nature there was something attractive and elusive that disposed women towards him and enticed them” (Chekhov 32). While the ending uses silence and ambiguity to flesh out the scope of the story, in places where the information might be necessary, *just enough* is used. Women are mysteriously drawn to the “elusive” features of Gurov, and the reader need not know what those features are or how they operate, but simply that they have worked on Anna.

**Aomame’s Gun: Ambiguity through Excess**

Thus, narrative economy does not necessarily mean a simpler story. Chekhov’s Gun tells us that a hanging gun must be fired, but it doesn’t tell us who will grab the gun, if they will miss, if the gun will miss-fire, or if a suicide may occur. The gun should be seen simply as a clue, a
consideration, and an object of notice. By Chekhov’s rule alone we have no way of knowing that
the plot will lead us through a home invasion or an alien invasion. To know that a gun will be
fired could mean very little for a narrative, or it could mean everything. In Haruki Murakami’s
1Q84 one of two main protagonists, Aomame, an assassin, sought out a pistol so that she could
end her own life if she was captured by the enemy. Her contact worried about giving her a gun
based on Chekhov’s rule. “They’re dangerous. And illegal. And Chekhov is a writer you can
trust” (Murakami 407). Throughout the story, great attention is paid to the gun, a Heckler &
Koch HK4. Every time the area around Aomame is described, the gun sits there, a constant
reminder of Chekhov’s promise. Part of her daily routine became reassembling the gun and
drawing it quickly upon herself, then exercising, cleaning, reading (Proust’s In Search of Lost
Time), and staring out the window in search of her long lost love.

Despite the Heckler & Koch HK4 never being fired as the novel concludes, it is still a
valuable narrative object and deserves to be “hanging on the wall.” Chekhov’s Gun is not an
authorial promise of use, it is an authorial promise of importance. The gun sits with Aomame in
mundanity as she hides out in a safe house for months doing nothing but her daily routine and
thinking about nothing but Tengo, the novel’s other protagonist. The gun is a reminder that
Aomame’s life is irrelevant without him; she will swiftly end her life if it means saving his.

At the same time, Aomame’s gun creates questions in the novel about fiction and reality,
and how difference between the two disturb can disturb narrative structure and tropes. By
speaking openly about the principle of Chekhov’s Gun, the characters are expressing an
awareness about being in a storyland:

“If a pistol comes on to a scene it has to be fired at some point.”
“In Chekhov’s view, yes”

“But this is not a story. We’re talking about the real world.”

Tamuru narrowed his eyes and looked hard at Aomame. Then slowly opening his mouth, he said, “Who knows?” (407).

The eponymous world of *1Q84* exists as an alternate reality, wherein two moons float in the sky and tiny people with magical powers control the goings-on behind the scenes. When Tamaru speaks about whether they are playing characters in a story, it is more than a heavy-handed breaking of the fourth wall; it is an acknowledgement that the reality around them is falling apart as weird things occur. The strangeness of this alternate world mirrors that of *Air Chrysalis*, a novel ghostwritten by Tengo at the beginning of the story. *Air Chrysalis* is the autobiography of Fuka-Eri, whose childhood is so strange that her account of it reads like a fairytale. As *Air Chrysalis* becomes a best-seller, the characters of *1Q84* find themselves in a realm of metafiction. In other words: as the fictional tale becomes popular, elements of the story begin to seep into reality. As such, tropes that may apply to fiction could then apply to their real lives. As Aomame becomes tangled in the events of *Air Chrysalis*, she too becomes lost in the story land. If she were unable to escape, then her Heckler & Koch HK4 may very well show itself as a Chekhov’s Gun, and have to be fired.

An additional layer of metafiction is added as Tengo reads the short story “Town of Cats.” The story, which was published in *The New Yorker* prior to the release of *1Q84* as an introductory piece to the novel, tells of a man who visits a quiet town by train on a day where he has nothing to do. At night, the cats come out to party, but are disrupted by the scent of human. However, the man seems invisible to them. The next morning, the train passes right by the town.
without stopping, leaving him stranded: “He knows that he is irretrievably lost. This is no town of cats, he finally realizes. It is a place where he is meant to be lost. It is a place not of this world that has been prepared especially for him. And never again, for all eternity, will the train stop at this station to bring him back to his original world” (505). As Tengo leaves by train to visit his dying father across the country, Fuka-Eri points out that the trip seems very similar to “Town of Cats,” and Tengo agrees. Following this exchange, he points out: “When I looked at the sky a little while ago, there were two moons… I don’t have to tell you that having two moons in the sky is the same as the world of Air Chrysalis. And the new moon looked exactly as I described it—the same size and the same color.” (704). These conversations exemplify Tengo’s acknowledgement that he is a character in a story world, and put him in contrast to Aomame, who carries the belief that her Chekhovian gun need not be fired.

If Tengo is the protagonist of “Town of Cats” then will he become irretrievably lost when he visits his father, or, does knowledge of the narrative and “rules” give him some semblance of agency in the story world? By acknowledging Chekhov’s Gun, Tengo has heeded the warning; he has prepared himself for the likely possibility that if he is in a story, then the metaphorical gun will be fired and he will be trapped. The town in which his father resides is a quiet seaside village. The nurses at the hospital display interest in Tengo on both a social and sexual level. If he wanted to, Tengo could leave his old life behind and stay in the village forever, but one of the nurses warns him: “We all like you a lot here, but this isn’t a place you should stay for long” (1078). The nurse who says this, Kumi, is herself a story book character: she lives by a mysterious forest with guardian owls, and has been murdered in the past and reborn. She knows the secrets behind Air Chrysalis and is aware of her own role in both the fiction and meta-fiction; that is, both Air Chrysalis and IQ84. By reminding Tengo that he must leave the before he gets
trapped, she is reiterating the noticeability of Tengo’s position as protagonist in the “Cat Town” narrative. This storyline paints Chekhov’s Gun as a trap: if a character is on the lookout for landmines, the reader should expect that they will not step on them.

However, while it is true that a character’s (and thus, authors) acknowledgement of conventions allows them some safety, the opposite is also true. The characters acknowledge the threats at their feet, such that for the author to damage them from that angle would break an expectation and seem inadequate. However, that does not make the character invincible (and the plot so predictable). In other words, if a character is paying close attention to the landmines at their feet, they might miss the mortars coming at them from above, or the approaching army behind them. If a character is aware of Chekhov’s Gun, then it will not fire. However, things get much more complicated when a character becomes aware of his or her own awareness of Chekhov’s gun, for then he or she can no longer predict the direction where threats might assail him/her from, be it above, behind, or perhaps even from the original trap at his/her feet.

**Noticeability and the Extra-textual**

This conflict, the awareness of an awareness, is one that narrative scholar Peter Rabinowitz addresses as a “rule of notice.” In his book, *Before Reading*, Rabinowitz tackles the concepts of narrative economy by discussing the noticeability of objects via a hierarchy and the ways in which people read:

If one assumes that all features of a text are to receive close attention from an interpreter, then a text (even a lyric poem, certainly a novel) becomes an infinite and impenetrable web of relationships. In the end, such a view not only makes
everything equally important, but also makes everything equally unimportant: only boredom can result. (Rabinowitz 51)

This notion contradicts Chekhovian economics, because it argues that portions of the text are “skippable.” At the same time, it is hard to argue that all text is created equal: certainly dialogue and action draws the reader’s attention more than a description of New England pine. But at the same time, this hierarchy of importance must be subjective. One who is studying descriptions of forestry in American literature will find importance in areas of the text skimmed by other readers. This subjectivity, along with the “infinite and impenetrable web of relationships,” makes it impossible for an author to grant meaning to every single object and word in the text.

Sometimes it is easy to understand where the author is directing focus. A woman jumping off a bridge in a detective novel is cause for attention, but what are the determining factors for drawing and deflecting focus? Essentially, if the goal of the readers is to understand—or perhaps predict—the narrative then focus is directed toward the clues that get them there. Of course, then the question becomes… what is a clue? How do authors plant clues and how do readers find them? Should clues stick out? If so, how is this achieved?

If an author wants a clue to “stick out” it often disrupts the tempo of the text in some way. A character might hesitate before they speak, or attention might be given where it seemingly doesn’t belong. This sort of thing happens all the time: when the cop plans to leave the crime scene but declares they will use the bathroom first, it should catch the spectator’s attention. This goes back to narrative economy: even the densest novel strays from boring the reader with the bowel movements of the 95th precinct. If the police officer is going to the bathroom then he’s almost always either a suspect, going to find a clue, or going to die. Authors can (and do) play with this by doing the opposite—deflecting attention where it is needed.
Alternatively, this could be viewed through the notion of focus and periphery. There are objects which call the reader’s attention, and those that appear to have little importance to the narrative. This can be used by the author to play with the reader, by hiding objects they should notice in places they do not anticipate or expect. A popular example of this can be found in Mark Twain’s “A Double-Barreled Detective Story” where he hides an important clue behind a surreal description of nature:

It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere,—far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God (Twain 28).

The story itself is an American spoof on the European detective genre, going so far as to include Sherlock Holmes as the detective on the case. At the same time, this passage riffs on the American style of nature description that Rabinowitz—and 19th century readers—might deem “skimmable.” Twain, being aware of this includes a footnote telling readers to go back and read the passage carefully such that they might question the oesophagus. Twain then is playing with his reader’s expectations by forcing focus on the periphery. In detective fiction, this is especially interesting because of the importance of clues in the genre. Earlier it was stated that importance and hierarchy are subjective elements. However, in detective fiction it is a little different, in that
readers becomes participants in the story; they want to solve the mystery before the detective
does. This is one of the reasons why narrative scholars such as Rabinowitz and Peter
Mendelsund pay close attention to this genre: the authorial hierarchy is well-defined. The objects
that the author wants you to pay attention to (and those they perhaps want you to miss) all reveal
themselves clearly at the end when the mystery is solved.

Mendelsund, author of *What We See When we Read* argues: “All good books are, at heart, mysteries. Authors withhold information. This information may be revealed over time. This is one reason we bother to turn a book’s pages” (Mendelsund 122). This plays into the hierarchy of focus. There are parts of the text that readers wants answers to, and they are willing to skim over the seemingly pointless parts in order to locate what they want. For example, in John MacDonald’s *Darker Than Amber*, faux-detective Travis McGee is on the water for some late-night fishing as the novel begins with one of the most popular openers in the genre’s history: “We were about to give it up and call it a night when somebody dropped the girl off the bridge” (MacDonald 7). What immediately follows is a description of the previous hours: McGee’s fishing trip. He spends the time talking about his boat, his friend who is accompanying him, and what they caught. Through this, MacDonald gives us something to look forward to and creates suspense, while putting the reader in the mundane and apathetic mood that McGee must have been in moments before the events of the novel began. That said, after the girl falls off the bridge in the first sentence of the story, she becomes the focus. McGee’s boat, though given more attention on the following four pages, is always in the periphery. The reader turns the page to discover what happened to the girl, not to know more about McGee’s boat or his buddy’s marriage, as they will likely not help solve the mystery.
To give an example from another medium, J.J. Abrams’ *Lost* is famous for deflecting attention in order as to mislead. In the episode “The Cost of Living” characters exploring an underground bunker are startled by a sound that turns out to be their friend Paolo, a background character, exiting a nearby bathroom. The moment on a surface level fits into narrative economy: it startled the main characters and reduced tension upon the realization that no one else was down there with them. It was not immediately strange that Paolo was in the bathroom and exited it in this way, because it caused a dramatic rise and fall in mood. Nine episodes later, the focus falls on Paolo and his girlfriend Nikki, who is also a background. The two are thieves and lovers in possession of a stash of diamonds. When Paolo becomes afraid that Nikki will leave him and run off with the diamonds, he hides the stash in the tank of the toilet in the underground bunker, thus making additional sense of a moment that did not seem so strange in the first place. By shifting focus, objects that were in the periphery come to the center: what seems important changes, and the existence of the narrative hierarchy becomes emphasized.

Paolo exiting the bathroom becomes a clue, but it becomes a clue to a mystery that the spectator does not know about yet, because they are focused on the mystery of the bunker. In text, this deflection is part of the game of reading novels. Mendelsund examines this in his discussion on character traits:

The rules are codified—but occasionally counterintuitive to the inexperienced. Such a character who is “sulky and heavy featured,” or “dark,” or “wildly unkempt,” or who is in the possession of a “shifting gaze,” or a “vulpine mouth,” will certainly, when all is said and done, be revealed to be innocent—a classic red herring. Occasionally, an author will be artless enough to genuinely telegraph a characters guilt through their appearances, and sometimes, an author will be so
artful as to set up a false red herring: the shifty-eyed stranger really is the killer.

In these cases, adjectives are feints, parries, moves, and countermoves.

(Mendelsund 126).

Reading can certainly be a game, if to “win” is to guess correctly what will happen next. In such a game, the rules are determined by the hundreds of years in writing and reading that back it. The “rules” state that a reader can skim the early-American nature scenes if they know the rules of early-American literature, or that they can skip the in-depth description of women’s ears in Murakami. At first, a reader might decide to focus wherein reading Murakami’s *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the girlfriend’s ears are described as having magical powers. The knowledgeable reader will later be unsurprised when nothing comes of this magical force: a red herring to those unaware, and a false red herring to those who have the extra-textual knowledge.

Novels maintain a strict and sometimes indiscernible balance between the rules of reality and the rules of literature. In reality, it is unsurprising that a cop might have to use the restroom before heading back to the station, but again, in literature it is often a call to attention. In reality, it would be fascinating to meet to meet someone with magical, hypnotizing ears; in literature, it could mean nothing. Because of this, noticeability is not always obvious. Just because something would stick out in real life, does not mean it would stick out in a novel. Likewise, something that seems normal in a Murakami story might seem strange in a story by Chekhov. While a metric can be made for what is “normal” based on date of publication, genre, author, and so on, there can be no standard. Samuel Richardson’s novel, *Pamela*, was strange given its 1748 publication date due to—as it was considered at the time—its feminism, but the objects that made it feminist in that day’s context today read as misogynistic. Understanding the context matters. Inside the novel, the most apparent and readily-authoritative reality is the text itself. If the novel takes place
in the 1700s America, we might be unsurprised that a family would own slaves, but readers would be plenty surprised and disrupted were they to have a small robot that cleans the floors. For a novel set in the 2000s America, the opposite is true. However, if we are aware that the novel we are about to begin is set in 1730’s America where time travelers have arrived, we are no longer disrupted when a Roomba finds its way onto the scene and begins vacuuming crumbs. However, if too much attention is paid to the Roomba, watch out for it! An example of this can be given in context to a piece previously mentioned: Chekhov’s “The Lady with the Little Dog”. A contemporary reader might be confused that Gurov and Anna never consider divorce and option. However, with the extra-textual knowledge of time and place of the publication, it makes sense that breaking off their marriages is impossible.

To reiterate, focus and noticeability depend on both the norms of reality and the norms of common and alike fiction. Thus, the knowledge required properly to focus on anomalies and that which “sticks out” is extra-textual, requiring that readers have knowledge which preempts their reading. With this in mind, some novels will go through the trouble of alerting readers what commonly happens in literature, such as in Henry James’ The Golden Bowl, wherein Prince Amerigo tells Princess Maggie that the coincidence of them both happening across the gilded crystal bowl is “extraordinary—the sort of thing that happens mainly in novels and plays” (James 450). This example does little for the narrative but to state that the character’s awareness in the strange coincidence that has befallen him while also stating his own unawareness that he is a character in a novel himself. It is a ploy at realism, attempting to state that the book is a mirror for reality. A coincidence this strange should not occur, and yet it does. Thus, the characters respond in the way that those outside a novel might: by comparing it to the realm of fiction.
Similarly, Agatha Christie’s *The Mystery of the Blue Train* finds Poirot investigating a reader of detective fiction:

""You confess that you read detective stories, Miss Grey. You must know that anyone who has a perfect alibi is always open to grave suspicion."

‘Do you think that real life is like that?’ asked Katherine, smiling.

‘Why not? Fiction is founded on fact.’

‘But is rather superior to it,’ suggested Katherine” (Cristie 131).

Poirot’s interrogation of Miss Grey is thus reliant on the tropes of detective fiction. Her perfect alibi is something that pulls the reader’s focus—if not before this interrogation, then certainly after when Poirot acknowledges it is unusual. However, this raises a similar problem to one mentioned earlier, yet on different terms: The perfect alibi is cause for concern. Yet, because the alibi is overtly recognized by the detective, it would be too obvious that Miss Grey is the guilty. There would be little mystery if the person with the perfect alibi were the killer, but she would not be a suspect were she to be written off so easily either. As Mendelsund suggests, this moment between Miss Grey and Poirot is a series of feints, parries, moves, and counter-moves.

However, even when a novel attempts to tell the reader how things “usually happen” in similar works of fiction (or reality) it still requires a great deal of extra-textual knowledge on behalf of the reader to approximate what might happen. Rabinowitz, on discussing what he refers to as the “rules of rupture,” states: “Writers occasionally rely on what appears to be a deviation from a formula but what has in fact become a formula in its own right… We almost expect the true villain to be the head of the major spy operation on the good guys’ side” (71). The “rupture” is an expectation disrupted, not for the novel’s protagonist, but for the reader. If the reader is told
that a perfect alibi is a cause for concern, then a rupture occurs, but only under the circumstances that the reader is new to the genre and does not know the rules of detective fiction. That said, the “rules” of detective fiction state that the biggest moment of suspense should be the reveal of the guilty. If it turns out that Miss Grey were the killer, and Poirot were to state: “The case was closed as soon as she had the perfect alibi,” it would be a let-down—albeit, a funny one, as it would make a large portion of the novel irrelevant.

Upon revisiting Aomame’s gun, does it make sense that it was not fired? As previously stated, the conflict is spurned by an “awareness of an awareness.” Both Aomame and the reader are aware of Chekhov’s Gun, but the repetition of the pistol in the novel catalyzes an awareness that becomes too overt: aware of its own awareness, the opposite of the “realm of silence” and yet the end-result is the same: ambiguity.

This narrative ambiguity—Aomame’s Gun—can be considered the result of too much being said or too little. In the realm of narrative excess, it can be difficult to tell which of the many objects will be prominent. In the realm of narrative economy, that which is unstated becomes an object of curiosity. Both of these methods require foreknowledge on the reader’s part. Reading typically involves prediction. At the very beginning of a novel when a character speaks before a setting is described, it is the onus of the reader to put them somewhere sensible. As Mendelsund describes: “We are picturing what we are told to see, but also we are picturing what we imagine we will be told to see farther down the page. If a character rounds a corner, we predict what’s around the bend (even if the author refuses to tell us) (94). The “bend” is more than locational, this accounts for narrative bends as well. If a character is at a fast food place, then the reader predicts—or imagines—that it looks like a fast food place that they’ve been. The reader is apt to steal aspects from a reality they’ve seen to make sense of one they have not.
Similarly, if the protagonist of the main story has a gun pointed at them, the reader will borrow aspects from alternate realities (other stories) to predict what will happen. The reader might realize he/she is only 100 pages into a 500 page novel, and affirm that the protagonist will escape with his or her life.

**The Rules of Reading**

When characters make decisions based on foreknowledge, it should call the reader’s attention. In Henry James’ *The Golden Bowl* Prince Amerigo and Charlotte find the eponymous object—the golden bowl—in a pawn shop. Charlotte is fascinated by it, but Amerigo walks out without paying much attention to it. After, they have the following exchange:

He looked at her harder. ‘You mean you really don't know?’

‘But know what?’

‘Why, what's the matter with it. You didn't see, all the while?’

She only continued, however, to stare. ‘How could you see—out in the street?’…

‘Why, it has a crack.’

It sounded, on his lips, so sharp, it had such an authority, that she almost started, while her colour, at the word, rose. It was as if he had been right, though his assurance was wonderful. ‘You answer for it without having looked?’

‘I did look. I saw the object itself. It told its story. No wonder it's cheap.’

‘But it's exquisite,’ Charlotte, as if with an interest in it now made even tenderer and stranger, found herself moved to insist.

‘Of course it's exquisite. That's the danger.’ (James 122-3).
Following this conversation, the reader may not know whether Amerigo is correct. The way in which he authoritatively states his assertion could lead one to believe that, at the very least, Amerigo believes what he is saying.

Three-hundred pages later when Fanny purposely smashes the bowl on the floor our chances at finding out whether the crack was real are lost...except they aren’t. The Golden Bowl does have a crack, because *The Golden Bowl* itself has a crack: one that separates the novel into two books. Amerigo’s authoritative statement seems to be just that. His assertion stems from his inability to trust to the Jewish shopkeeper with such a fairly priced item. There must, he thinks, have been a catch. However, the reader did not need extra-textual knowledge to realize this: he/she need only pay attention to the physical object—the book itself—and ask, “Why is this novel titled *The Golden Bowl*?” While there are many reasons why this may be, as scholars argue various symbolic meanings for the bowl and its crack, it is fascinating to consider that the book could be a tactile representation for the intra-textual object. To take this a step further, it could then be argued that the physical act of opening the book “cracks” it, thus to say that by peering into the affairs of the bridge group—the novel’s four main characters—the spectator cracks the bowl. If the bowl is argued to be a symbol of the relationships between the novel’s lead characters, then the act of *reading* into these relations is the cause of the disruption between them.

While this theory may be interesting, it is not immediately intuitive. To suppose that the novel’s form might grant clues to its narrative changes the rules of reading. This type of information is complicated because it is both intra-textual and extra-textual at the same time; it happens within the confines of the book, yet outside the confines of the narrative.
However, this idea fits into Aristotelian ideas about narrative—to consider that the delivery mechanism of the narrative should adhere to the same rules as the narrative itself. To requote Aristotle: “Its parts ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed. Something which, whether it is present or not present explains nothing [else], is not part of the whole.” (Aristotle 12). Novels which use this type of storytelling—ones which change the rules of reading—force concentration on the elements that exist inside the novel, rather than worrying about how the novel works in relation to others in its genre. That is to say, the “the game of reading novels” becomes less about recognizing the shifting gaze of the suspect and more about the specific rules of the structure he/she is a part of; though, that’s not to say the shifting gaze will no longer be important. The physical book becomes an object of the plot, a clue in itself, and as such comes closer to the absolute “whole” which Aristotle suggests a constructed narrative should be.

Since it has not been clearly stated yet, what are the rules of reading? More specifically, what are the rules of a novel? In a way, there are not rules, but rather a set of expectations, such as:

1. The cover of the book tells the title of the story inside.

2. If the words are read in the order they are most generally laid out within the given language of the book, then the narrative in being followed in the way that the author has intended.

3. The language will be comprehensible. Where it is incomprehensible (such as with A Clockwork Orange), then there is good reason. The reader is expected to be able to read.

4. The story is immutable. The reader cannot change the outcome.
5. Information para-textual to the story (page numbers, table of contents, publication information, title page, dedication, spine, back cover, glossary, etc) are for the use of the reader to navigate the text.

What follows is a closer examination of how these expectations operate, how they work with one-another to construct the book as a storytelling device, which novels break these expectations, and ultimately how the destruction of these expectations might be used to increase the intra-textuality of problem solving and deduction in the game that is reading novels. Specifically, a great deal of attention will be paid to the second expectation, because this is the one where the physicality and structure of the book play the largest part, especially in contemporary fiction.

**Titles and Privileged Positions**

It is almost impossible for a reader to enter into a text with no bias or expectations. The way in which one accesses the text will undoubtedly say something about it, whether it be through a URL or a book shelf. The readers have come across the story somehow and for some reason; they are perhaps familiar with the author, the genre, or it has been recommended to them by friends, strangers, or an online-store algorithm. It is likely that before opening the book, the reader has an idea on some loose genre the text might fit into. While it is difficult to categorize every book out there, it doesn’t stop sellers from trying. A story cannot be entered blindly, for there is a road that must be taken to find it.

Even if a reader were to dispel any foreknowledge on where the book came from, the title of the story is a forced consideration. The title of the novel is what Rabinowitz refers to as a privileged position:
The concentrating quality of a detail in a privileged position can be demonstrated by looking at *Anna Karenina*. The novel has a large cast of characters—so large that we might hardly notice Anna's arrival were the novel not named for her. But because of the title, we know from the beginning that we should look at the other characters in their relationship to her, rather than vice versa (59).

Similarly, Henry James’ *The Golden Bowl* certainly could have had another title, but instead James wills that the reader focus on the object, questioning it and the book itself. The title grants the reader a focal point: some object or character which must have importance. When Amerigo and Charlotte leave the bowl behind it is unsurprising that it returns later on, despite the extreme coincidence which leads Maggie upon it.

The title is a privileged position, but it also puts the reader into their own “privileged position”. Amerigo and Charlotte do not know that the golden bowl is important, but the reader does. Alternatively, in the Sesame Street title, *The Monster at the end of this Book*, Grover is aware that he is part of the story, and the promise of a monster in the title frightens him:

![Monster Image](image.png)

*Figure 1. Image (Smollin), Text (Stone and Smollin)*

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1 There are two editions of this book. In the more recent edition, Grover refers to the cover as the “first page” instead. This is likely so that it makes more sense on e-readers.
(Stone and Smollin, 2-3). The titles of children’s books are always on the nose. Most likely, a child will be able to accurately guess what *The Shy Kitten* is about before the story begins; that’s the power of a title. The title of first novel in the *Harry Potter* series is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. In the novel, the reader meets Harry almost immediately, and from then on the question will always be in the back of their minds: what and where is the philosopher’s stone? Later on when the philosopher’s stone appears, it is unsurprisingly an object of great importance. If it weren’t, it wouldn’t be on the cover.

It would be surprising, perhaps confusing, if in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* the magical object that granted the novel its title never appeared. The title creates an expectation that the philosopher’s stone will not only be mentioned, but that it will be at the core of the story. If the reader were to get to the end and never hear about the stone, they might suppose that the story is unfinished, or that they have made a critical error in their reading.

Although the title of a story can affect the way in which the novel is read intra-textually, extra-textual knowledge can still play a part in deciphering the meaning behind the title. Murakami’s *1Q84* by title alone may immediately be compared to Orwell’s *1984*. Similarly, Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* becomes more interesting and important if one is familiar with Richardson’s famous epistolary novel *Pamela*, published two years earlier and featuring Pamela Andrews as the protagonist. The reader of 1742 in the midst of *Pamela* fever would immediately recognize *Joseph Andrews* as a parody—or perhaps a sequel?

Of course, some titles mislead deliberately. Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* is named after a story within the text, but this is not immediately apparent. The first chapter opens: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade”
(Calvino 3). When Calvino’s “you” is later revealed to be not the reader, but instead a character who is reading the novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, it becomes apparent that the title of the novel is the setup for misdirection. The reader is lead to believe that Calvino is speaking with him or her about the novel in his/or hands, but this is not the case. Calvino’s (actual) novel, as it turns out, becomes one about reading novels, and as such, shares its own philosophies on expectations:

> It’s not that you expect anything in particular from this particular book. You’re the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything from anything… You turn the book over in your hands, you scan the sentences on the back of the jacket, generic phrases that don’t say a great deal. So much the better, there is no message that indiscreetly outshouts the message that the book itself must communicate directly… Of course this circling the book, too, this reading around before reading inside it, is part of the pleasure in a new book, but like all preliminary pleasures, it has its optimal duration if you want it to serve as a thrust toward the more substantial pleasure of the consummation of the act, namely the reading of the book. (7-9).

Here, not only does Calvino attempt to fool the reader into thinking he is making assumptions about their reading patterns, but he also reiterates (falsely) on the physicality and tangibility of *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. The book he is describing is not the same one that the reader is holding. *If on a winter’s night a traveler* begins as a story about a book titled *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, but that’s ultimately not what it’s about. Instead, it’s really a novel about reading. Thus, the novel never really loses its through line—the cover of the book *does* tell the title of the story inside—but it *also* misdirects.
It should also be stated that not all titles are simple, and not every title intends to be a storytelling device, or a clue. Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* is—like Calvino’s novel—a façade for another book:

![House of Leaves title page. Photo by author (Danielewski i)](image)

In Danielewski’s novel, *House of Leaves* is a novel written by a character named Zampanò, with footnotes written by another character named Johnny Truant—though a deeper reading of the novel brings leads one to question if any of that is true. The fictional novel-within-the-novel follows, among many things, a documentary titled *The Navidson Record*. The possibly fake documentary follows the Navidson family on an exploration of their home, which seemingly grows infinitely larger on the inside and refuses to follow the rules of Euclidean Geometry. One might wonder if the house in which the Navidson’s reside is the *House of Leaves*, and the answer is both yes and no. The book (Danielewski’s, not Zampanò’s) is the house of leaves, leaves being pages such as Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, and the book being a representation for the object, like James’ golden bowl. At the same time, the title does not give readers an object of immediate focus, but it doesn’t mislead readers either.
Ultimately, the title of the book reveals an object or idea that the author wants the reader to pay attention to. That object, regardless of its relationship to ideas outside of the text (like *1Q84* and *1984*) gives the reader stable ground in an unknown world, something on which to compare and contrast to the objects around it. While it would eventually become obvious that Harry Potter matters more than Dudley Dursley, and that Anna Karenina matters more than Darya Onlonskaya, the title directs the readers focus such that from the very beginning of the novel, the reader knows where to direct his or her gaze. This focus does not require knowledge of the outside world; one need not know that *Joseph Andrews* is the brother to Pamela Andrews before they open the text, they need only know that Joseph Andrews is the novel’s title character. The title is therefore a promise stronger than Chekhov’s Gun, since it is made before the novel even begins.

*Hopscotch* and the Narrative Through Line

Despite the many ways in which one can *choose* to read a novel, in general there will be a linear string of words that one can follow from the beginning to the end, after which one can declare that the book has been “read”. Books rarely come with an instruction manual; as such, it is expected that one who knows how to read would be able to walk into a book store, select any book off the shelf, and begin decoding the text in a way that the author has expected and intended. That is not to say that texts are so easily interpreted; Rabinowitz reminds us that a string of words can be a web of infinite and impenetrable relationships. Interpretation is complicated, but reading is usually simple.

Written text is one of many evolutions derived from the oratory mode of storytelling. The oratory form is both linear and ephemeral, whereas text is not. Once a word has been read, it remains on the page alongside the words before it, such that it might be re-read. An incautious
reader might glance a few-too-many words forward and realize where the story is going before their conscious minds get there. In the oratory form, this is impossible. Those thirsting for meaning might consider the oratory form as a faucet: with the missed droplets falling down the pipe and into oblivion. Then, the written text is a lake: allowing the reader free movement between one space of wet and the next. Through this body, one can move back and forth, one can drink in the words, yet on the page they remain. The body of text is unmoving, and one can swim across it as they like; unless of course, they’re trying to get from one end to the next, then there is a well-defined current to follow.

That said, because all of words exist on a page at one time, it is possible for uncertainty to arise in the order in which they might be read, especially if the author has intended this uncertainty. This is a common trait of contemporary authors such as Julio Cortàzar (Hopscotch), David Foster Wallace (Infinite Jest) Doug Dorst (S), and the aforementioned Mark Z. Danielewski (House of Leaves), among others. Each of these authors has their own style of disruption and uncertainty, but the techniques are often similar, forcing the reader to consciously approach the act of reading from a new angle, and thus instilling new rules which uproot the expectations of narrative—and thus textual—linearity. The disruption of these expectations force the reader to read the book as a physical object, rather than simply the words it contains.

It should be mentioned that multi-narrative novels, those akin to “choose your own adventure”, do not at a surface level defy the expectations of the reader by providing multiple ways through the narrative. Of course, if a reader were expecting a traditional novel and at some point through were asked to make a choice, this would be surprising and as such, a disruption of expectations. Imagine if the reader had a choice as to whether Fanny smashed the golden bowl or let it stay it intact. At some point, the novel would diverge in two directions, leaving what one
could consider one multi-narrative story, or instead: two linear texts. The next page shares a story map from the first book in the *Choose Your Own Adventure Series*, titled *The Cave of Time*.

The *Choose Your Own Adventure* style is more a stitched-together web of miniature narratives than it is an object of reader agency, it could also be seen as unintuitive and self-destructive. If the purpose behind the illusion of choice is immersion, then that immersion is broken by the physical navigation of finding the narrative through-line in the book (turning pages to locate the story path). That said, sometimes this breaking of immersion is purposeful, as with Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. 
Figure 3: Cave of Time, 1982 (Granger & Packard). Map by Mark Sample (Sample).
The example of CYOA was brought up here specifically to discuss it in relation to the style of Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. Earlier it was stated that books rarely come with an instruction manual, and *Hopscotch* is an exception to this rule. Following the title page, there is a brief set of rules:

> In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all.

The first can be read in a normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56, at the close of which there are three garish little stars which stand for the words *The End*. Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience.

The second should be read by beginning with Chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter. In case of confusion or forgetfulness, one need only consult the following list:

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Each chapter has its number at the top of every right-hand page to facilitate the search.

*Figure 4:* Image by (Kinloch) Text by (Cortázar ii).

By the language—the garish stars representing *The End*, and the clear conscience by which the reader can ignore a third of the text—it is clear that the author prefers the second reading of the novel, the one by which its title *Hopscotch* is apt. A closer examination of the hopscotched
chapter path will reveal that the novel still travels along the traditional arc (that is, chapters 1 – 56) in a linear fashion. Chapter 2 still comes after chapter 1, and chapter 6 still follows after chapter 5. However, there are chapters that do not appear in the hopscotched reading, such as chapter 55 as well as chapters that appear multiple times, such as 131.

It may be unfair to suppose that Cortàzar prefers one reading over the other, as it is important that the first reading be completed in order to understand the ways in which it differs from the second reading. On the first read, it might seem disposable in chapter 4 when La Maga picks a leaf off the ground and begins to speak to it (25). However, the hopscotched reading leads here from chapter 84, in which Horacio has picked up a number of golden dried leaves and pastes them to his lampshade. He then begins to judge his company by the way in which they react to the leaves (405). The passage in chapter 4 reads differently because the reader has knowledge that will bias their opinion towards leaves and their appearance within the novel. This knowledge comes from further in the book, yet narratively preempts the street scene on the hopscotched path.

What is the appropriate way to read a Choose Your Own Adventure novel? As a young child, my older brother told me it was cheating to choose another path if the main character dies; but undoubtedly most readers of CYOA will keep a finger on the page of the decisive fork as they read the damning conclusion before returning and selecting another option. A reader might be dissatisfied enough with an ending that they discard the book entirely, but in doing so they are missing out on a large section of the narrative. That said, it is unlikely that upon witnessing the protagonist’s death, the reader will find themselves returning to the beginning of the book. Re-reading the first three pages of The Cave of Time, before any decisions are made, will offer no greater meaning to those who have witnessed the stories various endings. It is more likely that a
reader will jump to a branch in the narrative and continue on to a part of the book they have not seen.

Thus, the appropriate way to navigate *Hopscotch* may differ from CYOA novels, as the re-reading of the same passage is expected. It is fascinating to consider the novel in terms of outside and inside information as it affects the story. The hopscotched path has the reader leaving the primary narrative—chapters 1 through 56—to learn side plots and be introduced to a greater cast of characters. One such character is the avant-garde writer Morelli, who appears to be in the midst of constructing a book very similar to *Hopscotch*. In chapter 154, among the final in physical book, Morelli requests Oliveira’s help in getting his latest work published while he is in the hospital, but Oliveira is hesitant because he worries that it may be printed incorrectly without Morelli’s guidance: “‘Who cares,’ Morelli said. ‘You can read my book any way you want to. *Liber Fulguralis*, mantic pages, and that’s how it goes. The most I do is set it up the way I would like to reread it. And in the worst cases, if they do make a mistake, it might turn out perfect’” (556). Readers along the main path know that Oliveira is a writer, but it is never mentioned what he writes. The structure of the book paired with Oliveira’s own disjointed life could lead one to think that *Hopscotch* is an autobiography of sorts. It is only via the hopscotched narrative that the expectations of who is writing—and who is narrating—changes. The reader is, in a sense, going to some place out of the narrative and returning with information that allows them to see the text in a different light. However, the conceit is that this “other place” is still within the confines of the book, and thus within the confines of the narrative.

Scholars Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin, and Robert Parmar include *Hopscotch* in their project, *Electronic Library*, which houses a timeline of influences for hypertext fiction. Their timeline includes Richardson’s *Pamela*, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* as
well as many other titles that may be considered a surprising influence hypertext fiction and CYOA. On the structure of the book, the scholars question the inclusion of listing the order for the chapters at the beginning:

It is a commonplace that readers often cheat the plot of a book by jumping to the final pages to see "how things turn out." Nothing is gained by such a stratagem here. Yet Cortázar has provided us with a "cheat." The instruction page lists the sections in order of occurrence, supposedly "in case of confusion or forgetfulness" (i), though one wonders. This seems a sop to simple-minded readers without bookmarks, or perhaps indicates a lack of nerve on the part of the author himself. Or is it something more? Perhaps Cortázar is daring us to peek at the end of the list, to see how things turn out, structurally speaking. (Keep, McLaughlin and Parmar).

This question returns us to one we’ve already asked: what is the appropriate way to read a novel of this type? The expectation is that the author intends the novel to be read in the order that is natural of a book. In Hopscotch, this is not exactly the same, but the alterative reading of the novel guides reader by telling them where to go at the end of every chapter. Thus, the scholars’ question is fair: why include the chapter order up front? In a way, Morelli has already answered this question: the order doesn’t matter. In fact, the final chapter in the hopsotched reading is also the antepenultimate one, chapter 131. Readers are asked to go from 131 to 58 back to 131. They would then be sent to 58 again, in an endless loop between the two chapters. Therefore, one reason why the Cortàzar might have included a chapter list is to let readers know that they need only read 131 twice, but not chapter 58. At the same time, this repetition speaks a great deal about the novel’s structure. The novel’s disjointed chapters are a representation of Oliveira’s life.
Chapter 131 is a brief conversation between Oliveira and his friend Traveler about religion and money. Chapter 58 is also a short chapter, but tells of the Oliveira and Traveler stopping at an inn to eat and rest. Thus, the final two chapters and their repetition could be seen as microcosmic for all the small conversations, eating, and sleeping throughout the novel.

If a reader were to jump ahead and read anything in *Hopscotch* that might be considered a final chapter, be it 56, 58, 131, or 155, they would find no conclusion. The book always leads someplace else—even if it’s somewhere it’s already been. As one moves between the chapters, they are asked to flip past that which they have read and that which they have yet to read. This is something that also happens in CYOA: the reader is invited to graze over and move past possible potential narratives. In doing so, there eyes might catch something they should not see yet: the death of a character, or perhaps some grand reveal. This occurrence is an involuntary breaking of the expectation that the author determines the direction of the narrative. This is the type of thing that Morelli—and thus, Cortàzar—has already determined and accepted: “if they do make a mistake, it might turn out perfect”.

**Infinite Jest and Paratext**

David Foster Wallace’s famously complicated cult-classic, *Infinite Jest*, does not contain the various through-lines or alternative readings of a book like *Hopscotch* or *The Caverns of Time*, but its structure is complicated enough to merit multiple guides on how the book should be read. This is particularly fascinating because the appropriate way to navigate the book has been determined by its readership, rather than the author. The novel is a labyrinth of interwoven narratives, end-notes, and a meta-textual film unsurprisingly titled *Infinite Jest*, which causes those who watch it to become entranced and think of nothing else until they go mad and die; a device similar to American writer Robert W. Chambers 1895 anthology, *The King in Yellow*,
whose stories center on a forbidden play (which is of course is titled *The King in Yellow*) that drive those who watch it into madness.

To briefly define the structure of *Infinite Jest*, the best term might be encyclopedic. In Frank Cioffi’s examination of the work, he states “*Infinite Jest* is itself a performance: its narrative comprises so many storylines that it reinvents the idea of narrative, and the storylines intersect in such unexpected, often adventitious ways that even ‘hypertext’ fails to describe the work. Perhaps the best label would be ‘encyclopedic heaping’” (Cioffi 161). Another scholar, Theuwis, explains that it is encyclopedic in that it is “an anthology of the time and place it was written” (Theuwis 16). The novel goes into great detail about seemingly minute moments, disrupting the expected flow of the narrative and forcing the reader to balance multiple textual arcs simultaneously. The book is also encyclopedic in size, with the most popular edition of the book (via Amazon) being 2.2 inches thick and 3.2 pounds. One guide on how the book should be read states:

Some readers have found it useful to rip the book in half for easier reading on the subway or on the beach. If you do this, you also need to tear the footnotes from the back half and tape them to front half. This technique has the side effect of giving you the appearance of A Very Serious Reader of *Infinite Jest*, which will either keep onlookers' questions to a minimum or maximum, depending on the onlooker. (Kottke)

Due to the size and structure of the text, bookmarks are essential. Two guides on *Infinite Jest*, one written by Jason Kottke and the other by Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Maniatis, both recommend the use of three bookmarks: one for the main text, one for the footnotes, and a third
Figure 5: Infinite Jest story map by (Potts)
for the page 223, which includes a reference for the several goings-on in the narrative. It is interesting that such a reference would be found in the middle of the text, rather than the beginning of the end. Fitzpatrick and Maniatis’ guide speaks on this, requesting that the reader trust the author and stating that “David Foster Wallace ordered the book the way he did for a reason”. Due to the importance of 223 as a reference, an alternative method suggested by guides is to photocopy it, or tear it out. By the end of reading *Infinite Jest*, the book is expected to be cut in half, torn apart, dog-eared, inked in, and abused.

Abuse is an apt term, because it is the one in which *Infinite Jest* reciprocates upon its reader. On this, Cioffi states:

> The novel’s impact derives in part from how it is at once an easy, pleasurable novel to read—full of narrative action, excitement, local delights—and at the same time a trying, annoying, difficult novel that is constantly interrupting itself, breaking comfortable routines it has set up, and, in many cases, syntactically reinventing the English language…

The world of *Infinite Jest* is ultimately disturbing because it disrupts the reading process itself. It is itself a staggering performance, and any such performance will necessarily be disturbing in that it exceeds normal limits and expectations. Wallace draws the reader in with his own virtuoso, tour de force performance, a one-can only-stand-back-and-clap kind of performance that breaks down reader defenses so that scenes of exquisite horror and pain come in, as it were, under the radar, and hence make an enormous impact. In addition, the novel forces the reader to perform actions that he wouldn't ordinarily have to do while reading, things that draw the reader out of the engagement with the text and into a paratextual mode (“Did I read that correctly? Would what happens to this character be actually, physically possible? Let me re-read it," or "What is an 'intercostal muscle'?" or "I won't think of that scene about the broom," or "I will hide this book for a week"). Part of this "paratextual mode" involves a physical "performance" by the reader, who must consult foot notes or reference works on a continual basis throughout. (Cioffi, 162).
The abuse of both book and reader becomes a fascinating narrative consideration when discussed against the books themes of addiction and abuse among the residents of Ennet House. Infinite Jest, that is, the film described within the narrative of the book (which is also referred to as “The Entertainment”) drives those who view it into elation, and then madness. Cioffi paints *Infinite Jest* in much the same way: what begins as a joyful, somewhat normal reading experience spirals out and is disrupted by its own paratextual mode. That said, paratextual mode—that which references the periphery of the main text including title, cover, front matter, back matter, footnotes, etc—is a complicated in-between of inside and outside: it is intra-textual in that it is found alongside the narrative (and in *Infinite Jest*, a great deal of narrative is found in the para-text), though an argument could also be made for the opposite; that the para-text is extra-textual because the reader must leave the narrative to locate it. However, if the footnotes are an essential part of the main narrative (which they are), then is one really leaving the narrative by delving into them? Additionally, if part of the ‘abuse’ the narrative—and thus the readers full understanding of both Infinite Jest and *Infinite Jest*—is best understood by delving into the paratext, then it should certainly be considered essential to the mainline of the story, and thus, the intratext. Because of this, a simpler, easier version of *Infinite Jest* that removed the necessity of readers’ self-abuse would not be the same story with the same level of impact and performance.

**S: Artifice and Para-Narrative**

Doug Dorst and J.J. Abram’s multi-narrative story, *S*, is more than simply a novel. The piece may fall under mashup fiction, as it is the paratext and the inclusion of physical objects and other leaflets between the pages of a book titled *Ship of Theseus* that in their summation comprise *S*. The book—or perhaps project, as its narrative contains many pieces—is a grand
work of artificial found text: the sealed slipcase around the book is the only piece that gives away its artifice. With the slipcase titled S removed, the *Ship of Theseus* appears as a 1949 edition of a book by (fake) author V.M. Straka, complete with library sticker, stamps, and weathered pages that somehow manage to smell musty:

(Above) Figure 6: *Ship of Theseus* in Slipcase. Photo by author.

Figure 7: *Ship of Theseus* all inserts. Photo by (Driscoll).
The title *Ship of Theseus* refers to Theseus’ Paradox. In Plutarch’s *Life of Theseus* he muses as to whether a ship that has had all its parts replaced remains the same ship: “They constantly removed the decayed part of her timbers, and renewed them with sound wood, so that the ship became an illustration to philosophers of the doctrine of growth and change, as some argued that it remained the same, and others, that it did not remain the same” (Plutarch XXIII).
Figure 8: Conversation between Jen and Eric: paratext of Ship of Theseus, but through line of S. Photo by author. (Dorst 17).
Of course, Theseus’ Paradox also calls to question whether one would consider the copy of *Ship of Theseus* contained within $S$ as a genuine copy. Bear in mind that *Ship of Theseus* does not exist as a novel outside of $S$, so is the paradox null? Theseus’ Paradox perhaps a more apt consideration for Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*, which was created by cutting out the majority of words from Bruno Shulz 1934 novel *Street of Crocodiles*:

![Image of Tree of Codes (Safran)](image)

*Figure 9: Tree of Codes (Safran). Picture (Cecconi).*

Whereas $S$ relative to *Ship of Theseus* is additive, *Tree of Codes* relative to *Street of Crocodiles* is subtractive. With much of the body and structure removed from *Street of Crocodiles*, it is impossible to say that it exists within *Tree of Codes*; however, Safran has structurally and narratively created his own story within *Street of Crocodiles*. Would it be fair to suggest that *Codes* has always been a part of *Crocodiles*? The words that together comprise *Trees of Codes* always existed inside its mother text, but it is unlikely that Shulz structured his novel such that it could be cut apart in this way. As such, Safran has disrupted the expectation that the words
should be read in the order they have been laid out. Does this mean there could be a third Matryoshka novel nested in his, perhaps *Tee of Cos*?

Similarly, would *S* be the same object without the artifice? If the pages in *Ship of Theseus* weren’t so musty, if the front matter didn’t depict a 1949 novel, if it didn’t have a library stamped BOOK FOR LOAN printed on the first page? As mentioned, *S* is an amalgamation of *Ship of Theseus*, the inserts, and the artificially augmented paratext. Were any of these objects missing, the story would not be the same: “its parts (the incidents) ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed” (Aristotle 12). Therefore, all the pieces should be considered essential. Were it not for the intentionally faded pages and false publication, the façade would be broken and *S* might simply be *Ship of Theseus*.

*S* is, for all intents and purposes, a mystery novel. Therefore, the “game” of reading the novel has an end goal: ascertain the identity of the author, V.M. Straka. In order to do so, the reader must consider the clues via the main text, paratext, and inserts, but one must also consider the language that *S* uniquely creates. One expectation going into a novel is that the language will be understood, but *S* contextually creates its own language through the handwriting of Eric and Jen, and it is the language of their handwriting: specifically, the colors of the pen they use. This language aids the understanding of when the notes between the two have been written, chronologically. One would be wrong to assume that the notes in the paratext are written perfectly one-after-the-other between the two students, and the initial clue to this is on the novel’s second page:
This image details not only the obvious difference between the two sets of handwriting, but gives an introduction to the chronology of colors used by the two, which depicts the passing of time. Jen—who writes in script—starts by using a blue pen, then purple, then black. Eric—who writes in print—uses black, then red, then pencil (Dorst ii). This first image exists as a cipher of sorts, though very soon after, new colors are introduced that must be placed within the timeline of colors. This further obfuscates the order in which the text should be read. For example, on page viii when Jen begins to write in yellow and Eric responds in green, the characters have been exchanging back and forth notes for a long time, and know a great deal more about each other by that point than is initially obvious. As such, one might notice that the tone of conversation becomes different between the different colors of ink and also that the characters are discussing much deeper plotlines:

Figure 11: photo by author (Dorst viii).
For example, the above excerpt occurs early in the text, but is chronologically much further on. If one missed the not-so-obvious ink cipher on page ii (or perhaps noticed it, but do not know where to place this text as this ink isn’t included on the cipher) they might not know how to comprehend the conversation between Jen and Eric. Thus, the use of different inks in $S$ is a language unto itself that can be learned only through its context in order to fully follow the plot and piece together what occurs when.

**House of Leaves: Trusting the Physical Object**

Though the title and front matter for *House of Leaves* have already been discussed, this novel seems to break every expectation put forth, for better or worse. In terms of its guiding the reader down the narrative through line and toward a proper story, *House of Leaves* contains elements from every other novel discussed so far to disrupt this expectation. Like *Hopscotch*, it contains multiple readings and sections that can be skipped. Like *Infinite Jest*, the footnotes are unavoidable, contain footnotes of their own, and often go on for longer than the main text. Like $S$, there are conversations occurring in the margins of the main story that comprise the main story of Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, but not Zampanò’s *House of Leaves*.

*House of Leaves*, perhaps more so than any other book, is famous for its physicality and the way in which the text is laid to the page. The text on the page is often used as a representation of the Navidson home, with hallways that expand, move, and disappear without warning. At one point, the Navidson family hires a professional explorer, Holloway to traverse a newly found corridor in the home. Holloway spends over three days in the complete darkness of the corridor, with areas that seem somehow only able to lead to them to where they’ve already
been. Danielewski and Zampanò’s description of this is fairly Euclidean until Halloway finds an actual labyrinth:

Here, the text breaks into four distinct parts that rise, fall, break off, black out, and disappear, both literally and textually.

Section 1 describes what is occurring in *The Navidson Record*, the documentary on which Zampanò’s *House of Leaves* is written.

Section 2 is a footnote for a passage that occurs at the beginning of section 1. It explains how the architectural style of the home does not match any in history, real or fictional.

Section 3 is footnote 144, and began on the previous page (so directly behind it). It is the mirrored text of the same square that occurred on the page before.

Section 4 is a footnote written by Zampanò, wherein he suggests that readers learn more information on the subject at hand (Palladian architecture) by diving into both real and fake texts—*The Logic of Architectures: Design, Computation, and Cognition* exists, but *Palladian Grammar and Metaphysical Appropriations: Navidson’s Villa Malcontenta* does not.
Someone attempting to dismiss the footnotes based on their subject matter might miss that they are half true, which ends up being an important and reoccurring facet among the book: is what the author says truly authoritative? Can the author be trusted, can the text be trusted?

The text mirrors the physical geometry of the house once more when the walls open up and swallow Navidson’s children. Navidson then delves into the abyss to search for them. Here, the space he must navigate is not claustrophobic like Halloway’s expedition, but instead agoraphobic—infinitely large. The book attempts to capture this by spacing the description out over several pages, as is the case with the page show here. This picture depicts that the book must be turned upside-down to read the text: “Navidson is sinking, or the stairway is stretching, expanding” (Danielewski, 289). It is important to note that unlike *Ship of Theseus*, *House of Leaves* does not attempt the same level of artifice. As the photo shows, the page number is depicted correctly. The book is not attempting to be the house—though that would be impressive if possible—but is instead trying its best to replicate the sensation of the house’s geometry in textual form. That said, the book in some sense capable of the same geometric feats as the house if one considers that the entirety of the Navidson home fits within the confines of its walls.

*House of Leaves* clearly attempts to unsettle the reader in much the same way that the house would unsettle its inhabitants. It is labyrinthine in not only

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Figure 13: photo by author (Danielewski 289).
physicality, but structure and substance as well. In much the same way that Holloway and Navidson marvel at the strange layout of shifting rooms and the impossibility of wood paneling that carbon-dates back millions of years, the reader is tasked with navigating sentences that make little sense on a surface level, and lack familiar structural rules. Several narrators and editors, each represented by different typeface, prove their inability to tell the truth, or even to make sense. This is due in part to *The Navidson Record*’s resemblance of the “brown note” trope. The brown note trope is the use of an object whose sensory input is harmful, such as the play in *The King in Yellow*, and the film in *Infinite Jest*. In most instances of the brown note trope, the reader never is never subjected to the note, but only the way it affects those who study it. The viewer cannot see *The Navidson Record* documentary, but they know that those who study it seem to be driven mad. However, Danielewski seems to induce the same madness upon the audience: is the book crazy, or is it the reader?

The further in the book goes, the more distraught and unreliable the narrators (both Zampanò and Truant) become; this seemingly happens in tandem as Navidson travels deeper into his home. Immediately before Holloway enters the labyrinth shown previously, Truant delivers the following piece about his love life:

> I strained to see what this was all about, my Australian gal giggling, both pacmen going crazy, she lived right around here somewhere but wasn’t that funny, she couldn’t remember exactly where, and me not caring, just squinting, appeared tired perhaps, uncertain too, but bright nonetheless with a wry smile on those sweet lips—Natasha leaning out of her car ‘I guess love fades pretty fast, huh?’ winking at me then, even as I shook my head, as if that kind of emphatic shaking could actually prove something, like just how possible it is to fall suddenly so hard, though for it to ever mean anything you have to remember, and I would remember, I would definitely remember, which I kept telling myself as that white? car, her car?, sped off, bye-bye Natasha, whoever you
are, wondering then if I would ever see her again, sensing I wouldn’t, hoping senses were wrong but still not knowing; Love At First Sight having been written by a blind man, albeit sly, passionate too?, the blind man of all blind men, me,—don’t know why I just wrote that—though I would still love her despite being unblind, even if I had all of a sudden started dreaming then of someone I’d never met before or had known all along, no not even Thumper—wow am I wandering—maybe Natasha after all, so vague, so familiar, so strange, but who really and why? though at least this much I could safely assume to be true, comforting reality, a wild ode mentioned at New West Hotel over wine infusions, light lit, lofted on very entertaining moods, yawning in return, open nights, inviting everyone’s song, with me losing myself in such a dream, over and over again too, until that Australian girl shook my arm shook it hard— (Danielewski 117)

This passage is long and quite complex, containing several themes and codes—and it is also only one sentence. It occurs within a footnote to provide commentary on the shifting walls of the Navidson home. Structurally, the story is shifting focus, allowing Truant’s footnotes to cover several pages before the walls shift once more and it begins to emphasize Halloway’s expedition as shown earlier. Unlike the labyrinthine page layout of Halloway’s scene, this scene unfolds on a normal page; as such, the action reflects this: Johnny is walking down the street with a girl, and another girl he was seeing passes by and notices them. This normal, albeit somewhat awkward, situation leads Truant to muse over what he wants in a woman. On the surface he seems unable to identify it clearly, but he hides the answer stenographically: by reading the first letters between “a wild ode” and “song” the phrase “a woman who will love my ironies” appears. While this passage and type of code works outside the physical structure of the book, Truant’s anxiety, as depicted by his sentence structure, is better understood as a response to The Navidson Record and the objects which he is providing footnotes for. This passages bridges the crossover between the double-false reality of The Navidson Record, Truant’s reality, and actual reality. It is
impossible to comprehend the sensation of moving through a space that cannot physically exist, thus Truant reacts to the passage with something much more feasible, yet powered by the anxiety and frustration of both the situation inside the Navidson home and inside his own life. The reader must then encounter the anxiety and frustration twofold. As such, the book as a physical object mirrors both the authors and the house: unreliable, cryptic, and sometimes incoherent.

Not only is the book hard to follow in terms of its physical structure, story structure, and its sentence structure, but at a key climax of the novel, the chapter ends and does not conclude the sentence at hand until over a hundred pages later. In this moment, Navidson’s wife, Karen, has not seen her husband for months: he is irretrievably lost within the dark parts of the house. As Karen is scanning the rooms she is familiar with, she happens upon all of the clothing Navidson was wearing when he was lost. She immediately focuses her attentions on one of the Navidson’s journal tapes that might hold a clue, but fails to notice that the wall behind her has transformed into darkness:

Since Karen faces the opposite direction, she fails to notice the change. Instead her attention remains fixed on the Hi 8 which has just finished rewinding the tape. But even as she pushes play, the yawn of the dark does not waver. In fact it almost seems to be waiting for her, for the moment when she will finally divert her attention from the tiny screen and catch sight of the horror looming up behind her, which of course is exactly what she does do when she finds the video tape shows (417).

Then, the scene ends. Funny enough, the next chapter begins; “Nothing of consequence” was how Navidson described the quality of films and tapes rescued from the house” (418). In a way,
this gives the same answer as the true conclusion to the sentence: “nothing more now than the mere dark. The tape is blank.” (522). Of course, the true suspense was never about what was on the tape, but rather what would become of Karen when she turned to find the darkness looming over her. The suspense of the tape, then, seems somewhat strange: inverted. The tape was not the object of interest, but the way in which the scene is framed and the way in which it ends leads it to be an object of interest. Since the next chapter begins “Nothing of Consequence” one must immediately assume that the tape Karen is about to find needs to have something on it, but it’s a red herring.

Nested in the last pages of *House of Leaves* is an extensive index, comprised of over 40 pages, that seems to hold several clues about the novel that are not initially obvious. For example, there is a looming presence in the novel that haunts Zampanò, which he refers to as the Minotaur. In the novel, text containing the Minotaur theme has a red font and strikethrough, to indicate that Zampanò planned to have any instance of the creature/discussion removed from the text. By referring to “Minotaur” in the index, it lists the first occurrence of the subject appearing on page 4, which is fascinating because on that page the word “Minotaur” never appears, nor is the red font or strikethrough present (686). Instead, the page and the chapter in which it resides lay the groundwork for one of the novels primary themes, authenticity:

*The Navidson Record* did not first appear as it does today. Nearly seven years ago what surfaced was “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway”—a five and a half minute optical illusion barely exceeding the abilities of any NYU film graduate. The problem, of course, was the accompanying statement that claimed it was all true (4).
Later, Zampanò supposes that the labyrinth in the Navidson home must contain a Minotaur and in a footnote (in red font and strikethrough) explains: “At the risk of stating the obvious no woman can mate with a bull and produce a child. Recognizing this as simple scientific fact, I am led to a somewhat interesting suspicion: King Minos did not build the labyrinth to imprison a monster but to conceal a deformed child—his child” (110). On the following page, Truant explains: “Struck passages indicate what Zampanò tried to get rid of, but which I, with a little bit of turpentine and a good old magnifying glass managed to resurrect” (110). This means that Zampanò must have successfully struck the Minotaur’s story from page 4, and Truant was unable to recover it. Additionally, the index contains over 60 entries marked DNE, most likely this stands for “does not exist”. Why are these included? Entries such as Donkey, Lime, Jerusalem, and umlaut, have a space in the index with the only possible reason being to show that they do not exist in the text. The index even goes through the trouble of stating that the word “House” does not appear in the novel in black font; as the cover depicts, every instance of the word “House” throughout the novel, even in the front matter, is blue font. Despite the seemingly exhaustive index, there are objects in the text that do not appear in the index, such as “Mouse” which occurs on page 271. It is almost as if the index exists to imitate authenticity and exhaustive editing on the part of the in-text editors, but in the end they fail to capture the extent of *House of Leaves*, much like Navidson, Zampanò, and Truant.

Like *S*, *House of Leaves* also has a language that one must de-code to understand the text fully. This language is the recognition of typefaces used throughout the text. Early on, in the novel, a footnote tells readers: “Mr. Truant’s footnotes will appear in Courier font while Zampanò’s will appear in Times” (4). As Elise Hawthorne suggests in her piece “Font Function in *House of Leaves*”: “Danielewski is able to use font, typically an extremely basic typographical
choice, to actually add another level of meaning to his novel, simultaneously helping the reader to organize information and narrative threads, pick out recurring themes, and gain otherwise unavailable knowledge about characters” (Hawthorne). Based on the specific typefaces, some assumptions can be made about how the characters in the narrative could be viewed. Times New Roman represents Zampanò, who writes the story’s primary narrative, it is the default font. Courier represents Johnny Truant, who edits Zampanò’s work and “delivers” it to the public, via the mysterious (probably non-existent) first edition. This is noteworthy because the Courier font was originally called “Messenger,” and is default on many typewriters. The font of the imaginary editors of the novel is Bookman, it is bolder and larger than other fonts, as to represent authority and neutrality. Pelafina, Johnny Truant’s mother, is represented in Appendix II.E: The Three Attic Whaestoe Institute Letters, by the Dante font, which thematically makes sense in terms of her romantic language and constant illusions to famous literary works.

By identifying these typefaces, the reader can make some interesting discoveries about the true nature of the text. On a base level, they might notice that the index is Bookman font, therefore it is written by the editors. However, what about the title page of the book? It bears a striking resemblance to the Dante font. In fact, the appears to be Dante across Pelafina’s letters, the title page of House of Leaves, the “Pelican Poems” in Appendix II.B, and “Yggdrasil”, which is the poem on the last page of the book. Based on this, she could be the sole author and editor of House of Leaves, with Zampanò and Truant being a figment of her imagination. To further this possibility, in one of Pelafina’s letters to Truant, there is a stenograph referencing Zampanò (who it should be impossible for her to know):

So sad really. So many years destroyed. Endless arrangements—re. zealous accommodations, medical prescriptions, & needless other wonders, however
obvious—debilitating in deed; you ought understand—letting occur such evil?
hardships, creating a monstrous mess really, a travesty for the ages, my ages.

(615).

This passage contains the message (from the words destroyed to evil); “Dear Zampanò who did you lose?” This hints that Pelafina is connected to Zampanó somehow, potentially his creator and the orchestrator of the narrative in its entirety. However, this is never explicitly stated.

Instead, the authenticity of Zampanó and Truant’s work is left a subjective matter. This theory is elevated via an interview with Danielewski wherein he states: “The Navidson Record is really the voice of Zampanò. Then there's Johnny Truant, who's another player, and there's Johnny's mother, who is more pervasive throughout the book than most people recognize” (Biancotti).

Simply put, a close reading of the typefaces used could transform the whole narrative: suggesting that the story is being written by a woman in an insane asylum who likely strangled her baby boy Johnny, and invented the whole thing as a means to cope with the loss of both her sanity and her family. This alternative reading is non-essential to the main text, but nonetheless fascinating and exemplifies the way in the base attributes of a text—such as typeface—can be used to elevate discovery in narrative.

**Conclusion: Research and Discovery from the inside-out via the Paratext**

Readers want to be surprised, but readers also want to feel clever. When an important reveal or plot twist occurs, the reader can either feel satisfied or cheated. This moment is defined by how well-hidden and interesting the clues leading up to the moment were. Every novel contain clues, because all good books are mysteries in their own way, as Mendelsund suggests: “All good books are, at heart, mysteries. Authors withhold information. This information may be
revealed over time. This is one reason we bother to turn a book’s pages” (Mendelsund 122). If the clues are obvious, then the reveal feels unrewarding. If the clues are non-existent then the reader feels cheated, causing a trope referred to as deus ex machina: when the solution to a problem comes out of seemingly nowhere. As former Pixar story artist Emma Coats suggests: "Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating" (Lasseter). Additionally, if the clues require extra-textual knowledge to understand, then some readers will feel rewarded, others not.

However, when the paratext and physical features of the book provide the information and clues necessary to understand the direction of the narrative, then the whole readership is assured access. Clues hidden in the primary body of text become subject to narrative rules established over hundreds of years. However, by developing new physical and textual styles, authors such as Calvino, Cortázar, Wallace, Danielewski, and Dorst among many others have been able to create and implement new narrative devices for clues and storytelling, for those willing to read between and beyond the lines. These storytelling devices can mimic research: allowing the reader to leave the primary text and find information that will inform them on the narrative elsewhere, yet they can do so without leaving the book.

This trend towards physical hypertext comes at a time when one might imagine that books are more likely to be purchased through an app store than off a book shelf. While the market for physical books declined heavily in the United States between 2009 and 2013 following the proliferation of e-readers, it has seen a steady increase since then:
This data, retrieved from Nielsen BookScan, shows an increase in physical book sales by over 10% between 2013 and 2014. In a recent NY Times article, Alexandra Alter reports that:

Publishers, seeking to capitalize on the shift, are pouring money into their print infrastructures and distribution. Hachette added 218,000 square feet to its Indiana warehouse late last year, and Simon & Schuster is expanding its New Jersey distribution facility by 200,000 square feet. Penguin Random House has invested nearly $100 million in expanding and updating its warehouses and speeding up distribution of its books. It added 365,000 square feet last year to its warehouse in Crawfordsville, Ind., more than doubling the size of the warehouse (Alter).

This article and many others from various publications were catalyzed by the Nielsen BookScan data for the 2015 year, and every author has a different set of beliefs for why paper books are on the rise and e-books are slumping. Alter suggests that the industry is trending toward hybrid readers: those who read both physical and digital books depending on the book. Writer Frank Catalano, argues that based on survey of college students performed by Hewlett-Packard, e-
readers and tablets can distract the reading process, allowing one to lose their focus and immersion in a text (Catalano).

Of course, for physical books where the paratext disrupts the natural reading process, distraction and loss of immersion can be a key feature. For example, *House of Leaves* requests at that the reader leave the text and be distracted by the books appendices. In a footnote by the book’s fake editor:

> The reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, however, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his past may wish to proceed ahead and read his father’s obituary in Appendix II.D as well as those letters written by his institutionalized mother in Appendix II.E — Ed. (72).

One in the midst of researching *House of Leaves* might find it useful to visit the texts suggested by Zampanò in the footnotes, only to find that they do not exist—or sometimes, that they *do* exist, but in no way reference *The Navidson Record*. In this case, by leaving the book behind in search of answers, the reader may only find disappointment. All of the answers needed to solve the puzzle are within the novel, whether it be the main text or the paratext. Books like *S, House of Leaves, Hopscotch*, and *Infinite Jest*, reward exploration, reward getting lost, reward getting distracted, and make the reader feel clever for solving not only the puzzles of the narrative, but the puzzles of the reading proces
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