THESIS APPROVED BY

Date: 5/8/10

Dr. Greg Zacharias

Dr. Bridget Keegan

Dr. Gina Merys

Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean
Rebellious Readers: A Marginalized Reader Theory of Identity, Text, and Meaning

Krystal Kirwan
Thesis Committee: Dr. Bridget Keegan, Dr. Gina Merys, and Dr. Greg Zacharias
Thesis Final Draft
14 December 2009
OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION
BOOKS AND IDENTITY
READER THEORY, FIVE TYPES OF MARGINALIA, AND INTEGRATION
  • Reader Theory
  • Five Types of Marginalia
    o Summary.
    o Emotional Response.
    o Significance with Symbols.
    o Drawing/Doodling.
    o Unrelated miscellanea.
  • Integration

PSYCHOLOGY OF MARGINALIA
EXAMPLES OF AUTHORIAL MARGINALIA AND GLOSS
BOOK-LENGTH MARGINALIA CASE STUDY
  • Self-Identification and Reality
  • Family and Consciousness
  • Death and Meaning

CONCLUSION
WORKS CONSULTED
INTRODUCTION

Internet and global communications rapidly adapt and are becoming increasingly influential in our daily lives. Inherent in these changes are the following ideas: the world is becoming smaller, people across the globe are becoming more similar, and access to goods and ideas is becoming more convenient. In the context of this paper, I would like to consider identity and books in today’s technological environment. Expressing one’s unique identity becomes more difficult as the world becomes smaller, as it is likely for someone to find more and more people with similar tastes, interests, and ideas through blogs and social networking. And yet, reader identity is a type of identity that continues to offer an opportunity to display uniqueness. Thus, the world of books and publishing, while also affected by technology, still offers a definite link between books and identity in the choices that one makes when reading.

An analysis of the link between identity and reading habits can take us toward a greater understanding of the relationship between meaning and reader. While Jean Wyatt asks, “Can Reading Change the Reader?” (7), I would also like to consider if the reader can change reading. Thus, in this project, I seek to analyze, through psychological means, both the reader’s supplementation to the text in terms of meaning and the text’s supplementation of reader identity. However, without the ability to directly monitor a reader’s thoughts and reactions to the text while reading, I will utilize the most direct, reactionary response to the text that can feasibly be considered—reader marginalia—in order to demonstrate a new version of reader theory; meaning will be found along the margins. To meet these goals, I will: expand on the relationship between identity and books contextually for this project; provide an overview of reader theory, five examples
of marginalia types, and integrate marginalia and reader theory through a discussion of current marginalia scholarship; detail a psychology of marginalia; offer an examination of authorial marginalia; demonstrate the methodology of a marginalized reader theory in practice with an in-depth case study analyzing one reader’s book-length marginalia sample; and, finally, end with a consideration of publishing practices and the future of annotation.

BOOKS AND IDENTITY

The quest for identity lives on. As Bernd Simon suggests in *Identity in Modern Society: A Social Psychological Perspective*, identity is “fashionable” and “Everybody wants to have one” (1). This is why “Lifestyle magazines advertise identities, fashion stores purport to sell them and pop psychology aspires to discover people’s ‘true’ identities” (1). However, contemporary ideas about identity are ironic and conflicting—if everyone has access to the same magazines, advertisements, and fashion stores (via the internet) all selling unique ways to “be you,” these outlets are merely providing identity trends to be shared by others. Hence, today we attempt to find our unique place in a time where information on jobs, fashion trends, and hobbies are just a click away for everyone. Furthermore, Simon claims that it “seems that interest in identity is particularly strong in our times, which are characterized by a process of accelerated modernization and globalization” (1). What this means is that while asserting one’s individual identity is becoming more and more difficult due to world-diminishing technology, the desire to do so remains.
In addition to these cultural reasons, the desire to express one’s individuality through identity also has a biological foundation. In the natural world, mating rituals show the need to oppose ourselves to others in the struggle for survival. In order to successfully assert one’s self, there exists a continual battle for self-consciousness—just as a mating rival must intimately know his strengths and weaknesses to survive, humans today must be closely attuned to their selves in order to have the self-understanding necessary for proper identity assertion. This everlasting battle establishes a ground upon which key components that are crucial to one’s identity are revealed. Even with a partially-formed or incomplete sense of identity, one can still have a basal structure of values/ideas that are inseparable from one’s sense of self.

As I have suggested, one facet of identity expression that has essentially remained the same, despite the intrusions of technology, is reader identity. Whether a reader reads books online, listens to audio books, or still reads with a physical book in hand, he/she still has a library of sorts and a way to express identity through reading selection. Consider a comparison of one’s closet to one’s bookshelf—yes, a wardrobe of dresses, jeans, and sporting apparel from all over the world may suggest a well-rounded lifestyle, but can it suggest the complexity of identity in a way that a home library shelf containing *Moby Dick*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Maltese Falcon* does? Thus, the makeup of one’s library can be original in a way that does not necessarily transfer to one’s wardrobe.

In *Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well* teacher Regie Routman notes the positive relationship between reading and identity:

---

1 As Lee Dye suggests in “Humans Still Follow Old Mating Rituals” on ABC News: “What it all comes down to is we may have moved up the evolutionary ladder past our chimp cousins, but when it comes to one aspect of our sexuality, we haven't moved all that far. When they are fertile, the gals are still checking out the gene pool, and the guys are still trying to hold on to their turf by trying to look like the best bull in the barn.”
When I introduce myself to a new group of students, I always talk about myself as a reader. My reading life is a huge part of who I am, both as a literate person who is seeking to learn more and as a pleasure-seeking person who reads for fun, relaxation, and diversion. Reading is integral to my well-being. I deliberately use my influence as a teacher and role model to foster a love of reading along with excellent reading habits. (23)

The same association between identity and one’s reading habits has also been established, if in a negative way, by governmental interest in the reading selection of suspected terrorists or dubious individuals.\textsuperscript{2} Despite issues of personal privacy, this urge to determine the character or identity of an individual through their reading choices maintains the relationship between reading and identity established here.

In a very literal take on this relationship, it has also been demonstrated by critics like William H. Sherman that books are like textual artifacts for literary archaeologists. Spills, stains, wear and tear, all of these physical changes to a book give us an idea of the reader’s lifestyle, habits, and priorities. For instance, an analysis of a particularly messy tome may indicate a hurried lifestyle where reading is delegated to work breaks only. Furthermore, sloppy book handling may also point to a lack of respect for books and therein a certain disregard for the efforts of the author. On the other hand, a particularly clean book and one kept in pristine condition may be in the hands of a cautious, conservative reader. An unopened book may indicate a reader who, in all actuality, has books for the show of reading and benefits from having others believe that he reads—wearing a mask of intellectual identity provided by the impression given that he often

\textsuperscript{2} See, for example, \textit{Surveillance in the Stacks: The FBI's Library Awareness Program} by Herbert N. Foerstel (1991), or consider the post-911 desire to obtain patron library records of suspected terrorists.
reads books. All of these types of material changes or additions to a book require a type of analysis that deals mainly with the physical, rather than the mental, state of the reader.

In opposition to this literal relationship, Stanley Fish offers a more literary link between text and reader identity: “if selves are constituted by the ways of thinking and seeing that inhere in social organizations, and if these constituted selves in turn constitute texts according to these same ways, then there can be no adversary relationship between text and self because they are necessarily related products of the same cognitive possibilities” (336). To expand on Fish’s theoretical ideas about reading and identity, Catherine C. Marshall cites a more explicit way that readers can engage with the text—annotations are a “direct reflection of a reader’s engagement with the text” (“Toward”). If reading and identity have been satisfactorily linked, I would next like to make the argument that at least part of Marshall and Fish’s ideas of reading engagement are related to the margin writer’s engagement of his/her identity.

**READER THEORY, FIVE TYPES OF MARGINALIA, AND INTEGRATION**

**Reader Theory**

So far, I’ve discussed the link between books and identity in a peripheral way—through a discussion of material signs of connection and a brief introduction of how annotation can reveal a more direct connection between reader and text; I have also suggested the potential for a text’s supplementation of one’s identity. At this point, I would like to consider a reader’s supplementation to meaning in a text by discussing reader theory. This area of study allows us to consider more significant reader-text relationships by focusing on reader response. My theorization of reader identity, text,
and meaning is in the tradition of psychological reader theory. Scholars most associated with this type of theory are Norman Holland and David Bleich, who “regard reading as a process which satisfies or at least depends upon the psychological needs of the reader” (Selden and Widdowson 67). Holland’s basic theory is described as reader “ego-psychology,” while Bleich’s theorizing is called “subjective criticism.” Both critics are proponents of psychological approaches to reader theory. Holland claims in “Reading and Identity” that the easiest way to comprehend that dialectic of sameness and difference is Lichtenstein’s concept of identity as a theme and variations-like a musical theme and variations. Think of the sameness as a theme, an ‘identity theme.’ Think of the difference as variations on that identity theme. I can arrive at an identity theme by sensing the recurring patterns in someone’s life, just as I would arrive at the theme of a piece of music.

In other words, Holland is proposing that a reader’s subjective responses to a text reveal identity patterns of the reader in comparison to the text. I agree, but I also would argue that in order for consideration of reader response to a text to be fully utilized, marginalia must also be part of this process. In this way, identity themes that the reader connects with in the text are revealed through identity themes in the marginalia. Thus, though these ideas suggest that there is a link between text and identity and meaning is dependent on this subjective relationship, I would like to expand psychology-based reader theory to include marginalia.

Bleich’s own theory, “subjective criticism,” focuses on how each reader personally and subjectively responds to a text. In “Negotiated Knowledge of Language
and Literature,” Bleich fleshes out the subjective kind of knowledge he is interested in—one that, in the field of language and literature, must be “negotiated.” This is because it is the “only kind available under conditions of universal literacy” (92)—in other words, trying to create a single, critical approach to universal literature and language is impossible. This is in comparison to “received” and “revealed” knowledge types: “Received knowledge can come only from authoritarian sources; revealed knowledge comes from mystics, seers, and gods” (92). Through these ideas, Bleich demonstrates why reader theory must entail subjective criticism. To take Bleich’s ideas one step further, I would argue that marginalia can represent subjective responses to a text that depict a negotiation of meaning in the white space between the author’s words and the reader’s mind. These negotiated marginal thoughts about a text (marginalia) should provide key insights towards a new direction of reader theory taking off from Bleich’s subjective criticism.

With final regards to the merits of reader theory, this type of criticism subjectively allows for the realization that “Whatever system of thought is being employed (moralist, Marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, etc.), interpretations of particular texts will normally reflect the subjective individuality of a personal ‘response’” (Selden and Widdowson 66). Hence, readers, when recognizing themes and identifying with characters, are relating the text to personal experience; they fill in the gaps with their personal responses to the texts. One result of this process is marginalia—which, in my theory, provides the link between reader, text, and meaning—and so demonstrates a specific way readers provide meaning to a text. In this process, readers who are
contributing to the meaning of a text are also contributing meaning to their identities, as well as the textual meaning for the future readers of their marginalia.

**Five Types of Marginalia**

Before I delve further into marginalia scholarship and the psychology of marginalia, I would like to provide five general types of marginalia to give a clearer picture of what marginalia entails. These five types are intentionally somewhat broad and encompassing so that most marginalia, even when inspired by all different types of responses and triggers, can be grouped into one of the five.

**Summary.** In this case, marginalia is used by a reader to summarize a main idea in the paragraph that may or may not be a main point for the entire book. Readers could be trying to trace a major theme or idea throughout the text, and so this marginal strategy is crucial for this type of analysis because it helps keep a reader focused and makes certain passages easy to find by flipping through pages and scanning the margins. In the example below, the margin writer has found that this particular section of *The Republic of Plato* deals mainly with justice. This is evident in the reader’s marginal comments addressing the “search for justice!” and “justice def[ined]” (111). His writing at the bottom of the page margin is a question and answer that further emphasizes the rationale of Plato’s discussion of justice at this point. Thus, not only is the reader summarizing Plato’s points on the page, but his own ideas about the section as well. Summary marginalia is the most academic and objective of the types discussed, and therefore most often associated with class-related marginalia. For this reason, summary marginalia will not be discussed in this paper any further because it is the least related to a reader theory discussion of identity and meaning.
Emotional Response. Whereas summarizing marginalia is a fairly objective response to the reading, emotional responses to a text are typically very subjective responses (more aligned with Bleich and psychological reader theory). These types of responses are the ones that are most associated with one’s identity and are thus most crucial to my thesis. These moments are the kind when a reader will respond to a text with comments like, “What!!!?” or “Are you serious?” or “Doubtful...” The text has triggered an emotion from the reader—like anger, surprise, or humor—that is powerful enough to cause the writer to want to document it in the margins. The first two examples are from *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* by Michael Ondaatje; the same reader has used a yellow marker to comment on two poems. The first comment is clearly a shocked response and
also represents an informal engagement with the text since cellular “texting” language is used. The second example is a disgusted reaction to a visceral description in a poem.

A third example of emotional response marginalia below includes summarizing marginalia in the beginning of the poem “Rosa Fresca Aulentissima” translated in *Lyrics of the Middle Ages: An Anthology*—“Narrated Dialogue,” “Love growing for her,” and “He seeks her” (James 125) are all written near the top of the page. However, the reader soon responds in a less academic mode—“He really seems to love her but she is a bitch” (James 125). Another note suggests the woman in the poem is “! Fiesty !” (James 125). Finally, the reader echoes the yellow marker reader above, commenting “he would pay for her! gross!” (James 125). For this reader at least, attempts to summarize in an objective way are overridden by his/her urge to respond to emotional triggers in the text. Overall, emotional response marginalia is more closely linked who we are and what we
believe in (relating back to Holland’s identity themes)—so this marginalia, in turn, represents a closer link to identity than the other marginalia types. For this reason, emotional response marginalia is more important to an understanding of the link between marginalia, identity, and meaning and will provide critical foundation for the book-length analysis later in the paper.
Significance with Symbols. This type of marginalia is less about words than it is about symbols; stars, asterisks, and exclamation points are all examples of this type of marginalia. Numbers can also be considered as symbols in this category—since they can be used to designate different themes or patterns in a text that a reader has determined to be significant. Numbers can also be used to count the frequency of instances of a certain term or pattern. In the example below, on the left margin of page 314 we see a star, arrows and two numbers. All of these symbols are linked to key summary points and they could also possibly point to an overall thesis the reader is trying to develop about Mansfield Park. On page 315 in the right margin there is a triangle and a symbol for both genders—possibly denoting change in the dynamics of male and female relationships in the text? At any rate, using symbols is an effective and convenient way to denote significance in a text. However, besides showing a reader’s preference for a certain shape, symbol marginalia are not crucial to a discussion of marginalia and identity and will not be explored further in the paper.
Drawing/Doodling. Drawing or doodling in the margins is sometimes overtly related to the text, but other times the connection is not so clear (or not there at all). The first example below is from a poem called “Mechanism” by A. R. Ammons which references a goldfinch—so clearly, the drawing in the margins is not so much an abstract thought, but more likely a tribute to the subject of the poem. The second example below is not abstract either—it is a drawn chain of linking hearts above a poem that discusses love in James’ anthology. However, this seems to be

These were the circumstances and the hopes which gradually brought their alleviation to Sir Thomas, desiring his sense of what was lost, and in part reconciling him to himself, though the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughter, was never to be entirely done away.

Too late he became aware how uncomely to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their Intel had been continually contrasted with her own severity. He saw how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs. Norris, by its reverse, in himself; clearly saw that he had but increased the evil, by teaching them to respect their subordinates, in whom they had placed their young dependants under their care, and sending them for all their indulgences to a person who was unable to attach them only by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise.

Here had been grievous mismanagement; but, had it as, he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most dreadful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting within, at least, would have won away much of its ill effect. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished in elegance and accomplishments—the authorized object of their youth—could have had no useful influence that way; its general effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his care had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-sacrifice and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them.

Rittertedly did he deplore a deficiency which now he could scarcely comprehend to have been possible. Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, of his being acquainted with their characters and tempers.

The high spirit and strong passions of Mrs. Rushworth especially, were made known to him only in their sad result. She was not to be prevailed on to leave Mr. Crawford. She hoped to marry him, and they continued together till she was obliged to be convinced that such hope was vain, and till the disappointment and wretchedness arising from the discovery, rendered her temper so bad, and her feelings for him so like hatred, as to make them for a while each other's punishment, and then induce a voluntary separation.

She had lived with him to be reproached as the ruin of all his happiness in Fanny, and carried away no better consolation in leaving him, than that she had divided them. What can exceed the misery of such a mind in such a situation.

Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce1 and so ended a marriage contracted under such circumstances as to make any better end, the effect of good luck, not to be reckoned on. She had desired him, and loved another—and he had been very much aware that it was so. The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointment of selfish passion, can excite little pity. His punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment, the deeper grief of his wife. He was released from the engagement to be mortified and unhappy, till another poetry-and-cold-attraction must renew him again, and he might set forward on a second, and it is to be hoped, next prosperous trial of the state—if duped, to be duped at least with good humour and good luck, while she must withdraw with infinitely stronger feelings to retirement and reproach, which could allow no second spring of hope or character.

Where she could be placed, became a subject of most melancholy and momentous consideration. Mrs. Norris, whose attachment seemed to augment with the desertion of her niece, would have had her received at home, and consoled by them all. Sir Thomas would not hear of it, and Mrs. Norris’s anger against Fanny was so much the greater, from considering her residence there as the motive. She persisted in placing his scruples to her account, though Sir Thomas very solemnly assured her, that there had been no young woman in question, had there been no young person of either sex belonging to him, to be endangered by the society, or hurt by the character of Mrs. Rushworth, he would never have offered so great an insult to the neighbourhood, as to expect it to notice her. As a daughter—he hoped a pestilent one—she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right, which their relative situations admitted; but farther than that, he would not go. Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be affording his sanction to vice, or in seeking to lessen its disgrace, be anywise accessory to introducing such misery in another child’s family, as he had known himself.

It ended in Mrs. Norris’s wishing to quit Mansfield, and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, and in an establishment being formed for them in another country—remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment.

Mrs. Norris’s removal from Mansfield was the great supplementary comfort of Sir Thomas’s life. His opinion of her had been linking from

1. A wife’s (not a husband’s) adultery was grounds for divorce, but divorces were costly and rare, requiring a private act of Parliament.
more the doing of a distracted mind, rather than one trying to respond to a poem through art; I base this conclusion on the fact that the first represents a failed attempt and the second a completed heart chain, so that the reader’s attention appears to be more on the successful completion of the drawing rather than how it connects to the poem itself. Drawing/doodling will be discussed later in the paper, with an example of how abstract doodling in a text can represent cognitive stress.

Unrelated Miscellanea. This type of marginalia does not really contribute to the present discussion of marginalia at all, other than to point out the ways that people “use” books other than to read them. In the example below from Selig Adler’s *The Uncertain Giant,*
the reader has used the title page margins for a reminder of a doctor’s appointment. As other readers may use a book for a paperweight, address book, or fly swatter, books are not always seen as sacred objects not to be used in any other manner than absorption through reading. Margin writing, in general, is evidence of an attempt to find meaning in a text and the responses are a part of this search—the responses are keys to putting reader theory to practical use in my methodology. This discussion continues below in the integration of ideas about marginalia and reader theory.

Integration

Heather Jackson, the current leading scholar in marginalia research, claims that “a book without text is a book without marginalia” (81). She is suggesting that both a blank book and blank margins mean the same thing—the absence of meaning. Marginalia fills the void of meaning in the same way that text does in a book. A book is purposeless without the author’s input and thought—in the same sense, without the reader’s input, the blank margins are indicative of a blank reader and an overall disunified relationship between text, reader, and author. Jackson, referring merely to the book-established association between reader and author, claims that “Reading ‘allows the minds of two
people to be more intimately joined than any other form of social contact”’ (82).

However, Jackson also claims that the nature of this connection established by margin writing is “not so much akin to conversation or collaboration or correspondence as it is to talking back to the TV set—and readers like it that way” (85). The problem with this direction of Jackson’s argument is that she attributes insignificance to margin writing by describing it in this informal way. I am opposed to this idea because a better definition of marginalia incorporates the idea of margin writing as being indicative of identity expression and providing meaning. It is a type of collaboration or conversation, or correspondence for that matter, which is ongoing throughout the text between the reader/margin writer and his/her potential audience (the text, the author, him/herself, or future readers of the book). The fact that it is a written exchange implicates margin writing as a written correspondence, in the epistolary tradition.

The main impetus of margin writing makes it informal, in way that represents a type of responsive, impulsive, and even instinctual trigger to connect with the text and/or author; in Jackson’s own words, “[margin writers] often plead irresistible impulse” (82), which brings us back to the way that emotional response marginalia can provide clues to identity. Jackson acknowledges this by stating that: “The essential defining character of the marginal note throughout history is that it is a responsive kind of writing permanently anchored to preexisting written words” (81). The preexisting words are the self-forming thoughts of consciousness that are in question when one defines one’s self according to the text. The text must be a mirror for the reader and the response to the reflection presented is seen through pertinent margin notes. But even if you take them out of the context of a book, they still provide the basis of identity construction for the reader—this
idea is related to the reason why the emotional response-type of marginalia reveals the most about a margin writer’s identity.

Along with refuting Jackson’s conception of margin writing as yelling at a television, I also differ from her marginal analysis in her idea of the relationship between identity and reading. Jackson claims that marginalia drives a wedge between author and reader by the reader’s efforts to “foster independence” through an articulation of difference where “self-awareness is the key thing” (87). But it is not only possible for the correspondence to be between the author and the reader, but also between the reader and the text, or even between the reader and his/her self as margin writing contributes to a process of self-actualization. Jackson feels goes further to say that the wedge may be achieved either through being in accord or dissent, since both mindsets “contribute to the construction of identity” (87). But rather than “construction,” Jackson suggests “discovery” is the proper term as “it generally feels more like discovery” (87). And yet, construction implies something being entirely made from scratch, which is not an accurate consideration of reader identity. Discovery implies a finding of something previously unknown—and this is not applicable because a self-conscious reader knows his identity exists in a matter of constant formation and definition. Thus, margin writing is more of an assertion of identity, or an expression thereof—in terms of the search for one’s true identity. And while Jackson admits “we assume marginalia express a reader’s impulsive and unguarded reactions to a book [and therefore] consider them to be an exceptionally reliable guide to personality,” she ultimately concludes this to be a “shaky assumption” (87). Her reasoning behind this is that readers “are reminded every time they go to their [annotated books] […] [their marginalia] arose out of intense mental
involvement, amounting at times to complete identification with someone else” (88). However, readers keep annotated books on shelves in a “corrected condition” (86) and so readers truly do feel they are rectifying meaning or interpretation by “correcting” both the text and their identity through annotation. One’s ideas about identity can change over time, just as one’s identity can change over time. The flexible nature of identity should not be a reason to dismantle the significance of what is revealed about identity and meaning through marginalia—this is part of the procedural construction of identity.

These ideas show that margin notes are not meaningless or useless (like yelling at the television) because they not only represent the reader’s self-consciousness, but also provide documentary evidence of intimate reading thoughts. This idea has been considered in academic discussions of authorial libraries and the consideration of how reading affects the writing process. Coleridge once wrote in a work of Schelling, “A book, I value, I reason & quarrel with as with myself when I am reasoning” (qtd. in Jackson 82). However, I hope to enter new territory by introducing marginalia into the reader theory arena. I say “new” territory since scholars like Joanna Wolfe note the lack of academic consideration of reader marginalia in connection with meaning: “Relatively few studies […] have looked at how the presence of annotations left on a document by previous readers can influence an individual’s perception of that document and their experience of its claims” (162). In the end, I seek to reveal new ways we can view a text looking through even a common reader/margin writer’s expression of identity on the path to deciphering meaning in and about a text.
PSYCHOLOGY OF MARGINALIA

The nature of marginalia I want to consider for this paper is such that it typically occurs instantaneously with the reading—the margin notes are by their very nature different from post-reading notes and thoughts. After finishing a text, the reader has the entire context and message of the book to consider and is using an approach that is more in line with his perception of the author's attitude towards the purpose and message, rather than his own. Annotations, then, are “hypertextual. They exist in non-linear relationships to the printed linear text: they interrupt linear reading, are orthogonal to it, connect disparate passages, and in general function as hypertext is intended to” (Marshall, “Toward”). They are at times “playful, informal, serious, informative, cryptic, and everything in between” (Marshall, “Toward”). Thus, reflection-based reactions are inherently different from the “spontaneous overflow of emotion”-type of reactions represented by marginalia. This is an important point to remember because marginalia represent unarmed responses to the text that can be traced back to one’s identity and outlook on life: “Marginalia—traces left in a book—are wayward in their very nature; they spring up spontaneously around a text unaware of their presence” (Lipking 612). In other words, emotional response marginalia contains the closest link to identity.

The question to be considered at this point is, what makes a margin writer versus a non-margin writer? Why do some readers feel compelled to make their mark on the margins? After all, “Annotations, in their many forms, frequently bridge between reading and writing” (Marshall, “Toward”). The margin-effacing reader feels the need to respond—to the text, to the author, to previous margin writers, or to themselves. It should be noted that in some instances this may not be a personal need to respond, but a
requirement in terms of classroom expectations. Studies like Avon Crismore’s “Initiating Students Into Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing About Texts” have shown how beneficial the process of margin annotation can be in causing students to think critically about a text, beyond superficial feelings of like or dislike. Another example of classroom-required marginalia comes from an 11th grade English class at Mount Vernon High School. The required summer assignment is called “De-Coding Albert Camus’ The Stranger,” where students must “create an active relationship with what they are reading by ‘talking back’ to the text in its margins.” Color coding and annotation are to encompass vocabulary words and symbols of sun, light, heat, silence, loneliness, and isolation. One flaw in this assignment, other than the possibility of being too structured, is that students are down-graded for “purely emotive” annotation, where an “A” student’s annotation addresses “authorial intent” and is “analytical.” However, this assignment seems to ignore the real basis of how marginalia typically emerges—spontaneously, through emotional reactions to the text. Overall, marginalia written solely for the classroom gives students an idea about how marginalia can be effective as a critical tool. But for analysis purposes, classroom marginalia is a type of forced margin writing (required for a grade) and there is nothing to be gained from analyzing this state of reader in terms of identity and the psychology of reading in the contextual bounds of my thesis.

My path in this paper, instead, will be to consider margin writing as an instinctual response related to the urge to express ourselves—and this idea hearkens back to the points discussed earlier about how identity expression occurs when the self is implicated (like mating rituals) and we incorporate reactionary, second-nature responses. These reactions come from our core belief and values systems that have already been
established in our quest for self-assertion and self-identification. Fortunately, margin writing is one of these habitual activities that becomes second-nature. This has at least been true since 1907, when in a New York Times Review of Macaulay’s Marginalia the reviewer demonstrates the link between identity and marginalia becoming second-nature: “in annotations which are meant for no eye but his own you cannot suspect a man of posing except to the extent to which posing may have become to him second nature.”

Marginalia, then, can become instinctual to the point where self-revelation through reading becomes possible and we respond out of habit.

Furthermore, as Marshall notes in “The Future of Annotation,” “annotation must represent a deep, unselfconscious engagement with the text” (17). The unconscious must be employed during the writing of marginalia because we are not necessarily consciously seeking information or answers during the process—instead, we are often led to wonder why we underlined or noted a certain section of a text because it occurs without consciously thinking, “this section is important here, I should put a star in the margin.”

Marshall and A.J. Bernheim Brush state that during their study of public and private annotation, one student said, “I don’t know why I wrote some of the things I did” (352). I am not suggesting a Ghost-like situation where we’re not writing of our own volition—we are writing our own ideas after all, even if the inspiration to write can be from the unconscious. It merely feels like some type of supernatural experience because the ideas we find important are those that we have trained ourselves to find important instinctively. Our search for our real identity has been ingrained so firmly at this point that we respond impulsively without requiring conscious recognition of the “why” behind our marginal response.
It is the nature of marginalia that makes this process difficult to describe. As Wyatt suggests, “Dealing with unconscious reader responses to particular texts is always problematic because the unconscious is by definition unknown” (8). However, marginalia still can yield a more complete understanding of how meaning and reader are related—through an understanding of identity and text. Thus, not only do margin notes affect the reader’s understanding of the text, they also contribute to the reader’s understanding of self. As proof of this, readers may go back to books used in college and, after a quick perusal of the margins, conclude that they no longer know this “person.” In contrast, a reader may look back at a marginalized text and still agree with all of the comments included. This would indicate that the reader’s core belief system (strengthened through a quest for identity over the years) affected the execution of margin notes at the time and has reached a point of stasis. Either case implies that marginalia contain evidence of a processual unfolding of identity that can change or remain the same over the years. It is more unfolding than construction or creation because the main ingredients are already there, present in the unconscious and in our habitual attempts to establish self-consciousness.

Are then readers who do not write in the margins hasty readers who don’t have a strong enough identity-driven unconscious? Possibly, but a fairer conclusion may be that they do not feel the need to respond, or do not have the confidence, to contribute to the meaning of the text. Part of this mindset can be explained by Estelle Ellis and Caroline Seebohm, who give seven tips for taking care of books in the case of emergencies ranging from fire to actual bookworms. The sixth tip is titled “Ignorance” where they chastise readers who tip over to the side of defiling their books with “scrawled
commentary” (319). According Ellis and Seebohm, “Even the best-educated bibliophiles […] are torn between their respect for books and their desire to enjoy them to their fullest, for instance, by engaging with the text through” marginalia and other reader marks (319). They also provide somewhat of a profile of one such book graffiti artist, Roger Rosenblatt, who confesses, “It’s shameful to admit: I deface books all the time” (qtd. in Ellis and Seebohm 319). Rosenblatt, however, finds that the benefits of margin writing outweigh any shame felt on his part: “I enjoy seeing the scribbling of others. There is a communicative and emotional value in a record of another human being’s thoughts and feelings left for future readers to happen upon” (319). And despite the bond he seems to imagine with other margin writers, Rosenblatt still suffers from the social stigma placed on margin writing: “Of course, though [reader annotation] harms a book, if the scribbler happens to have been Henry James or James Joyce, the book becomes much more valuable” (319). These types of attitudes can lead to readers being on the fence about margin writing, as I would argue the two examples below display:
In order to leave as minimal of a trace as possible, these margin writers have either left only traces of marking on the very fringes of the text near the margins (as in the case of the left example) or only in the margins (in the right example). In some way for these readers, this is the only acceptable way to respond to the text.

A discussion of books and value has larger implications for marginalia. On the one hand, I would argue that personal annotation is always personally valuable to the reader in terms of identity formation. It is also a credit to the author in some cases, as “Medellia” on the topic of “Bookplate Snobbery” notes: “I can’t imagine an author being peeved at the physical signs of a reader engaging with the text. I met one of my favorite authors in person at a reading last year, and the sight of my well-worn and dog-eared
copy of one of his books elicited quite the grin as he signed it.” Moreover, Mortimer J. Adler, in “How to Mark a Book,” warns against having a “false reverence for paper, binding, and type—a respect for a physical thing—the craft of the printer rather than the genius of the author.” Holding a book’s physical, material value over its value in terms of ideas and meaning seems to be the real issue that Ellis and Seebohm introduce—the apparent justice scale of readership where a balance is supposed to be struck between respecting and enjoying a book. This issue of value and meaning is significant because it relates back to the fact that a reader’s view of material value can block him/her from annotating texts. Moreover, book collectors and museums are finding that contemporary, intellectual, and thought-provoking marginalia can add much worth (monetarily and historically) to a text.

But when someone respects a book rather than enjoys it, it is difficult with this attitude not to make assumptions about authorial intent: if one assumes that the utmost respect must be paid to a book, the assumption is made that an author wishes their work remain on a pedestal above reader commentary or enjoyment, in opposition to Medellia’s point above. In addition, this also assumes that the work is somehow affected by a reader’s scribbling. G. Thomas Tanselle provides a comparison between a document and a work through the academic discipline of scholarly editing: “An editor whose goal is to reproduce a handwritten or printed documentary text is focusing on the text of a document, not on a work; an editor who incorporates alterations, however few, can no longer claim to be presenting the text of a document but is going beyond the document to focus on something else, normally a work as intended at some past moment” (17). But using Tanselle’s vocabulary, if a book is viewed as a document instead of a work, the
book can be assumed to have been written for enjoyment by the reader through any means. This is an assumption made about the publisher’s purpose and therefore has less to do with authorial intent (i.e., why the publisher published the book versus why the author published the book). In this light, I would argue that enjoyment should be valued above respect, since authorial intent has been established as elusive in our postmodern age. Thus, margin writing can be said at least to be a part of the analyzing and enjoying of a book—activities that require a respect for the value of ideas rather than the physical document itself.

This controversy continues, however, and apparently plagues libraries most of all. The Cambridge University Library put together an exhibit in 2003 titled, “Marginalia and other crimes.” Tony Harper, Head of Reader Services, stated that the purpose of the exhibit was to provoke a response from patrons in regards to solving the problem. Much to the library staff’s dismay however, readers for the most part were not overly opposed to the extreme examples of marginalia displayed. The outline available on the web provides seven cases of marginalized crime. First, it is suggested that “Occasionally, one set of annotations provokes a further set of comments, both to the detriment of the original text.” Thus, the exhibit gives no credence to the idea of socially-collaborated meaning for a text through marginalia. After all, as Joel Myerson identifies, social collaboration is a valid way for the “socializing process involving the author with other people who ‘contributed’ to the text” (358), which I think is a valid description for margin writers as well. A second case of marginalia is linked to highlighting, where the exhibit caption reads: “[Highlighting readers] must have problems with their concentration.” In their conclusion, the library staff suggests that there is a huge problem
with marginalia that needs to be addressed—most of the blame is placed on apathetic patrons who do not have enough interest in the subject because they live only in the present. One solution would be to consider annotated books as “broken books” that would allow them to be taken out of circulation, like taking a toy away from a child. They also suggest taking away all library privileges for rebel margin writers, once a new “Bodleian Library Declaration” is instated. While I find some of the reasoning and solutions to be mostly overzealous, this discussion of marginalia as a crime makes it clear why many readers are daunted by the idea of writing in a book, and are thus inhibited from active reading by erring on the side of caution. But the fact that readers continue to write in the margins of library books is part of a larger urge to be a part of the creative rewriting process discussed earlier. As Paul Eggert puts it, “With printed material, that opportunity is denied the reader, although library copies of books all over the world bear readers’ marginalia suggesting, often in quite forthright ways, that the desire for textual intervention is not dead” (9).

Libraries are not the only institutions with a misunderstanding of the importance of marginalia. In my search for a range of annotated copies of books, I contacted a variety of college bookstores across the nation to survey their thoughts on annotated books. An interesting response came from Idaho State University bookstore in Pocatello, Idaho store manager Laurie Richards. My original contact message, among other information, stated:

I am attempting to complete work on my Master’s Thesis. The subject of my thesis surrounds the psychology behind readers who feel the need to write in the margins of books—margin annotation, starring key passages,
responding to other margin writing, etc. Part of my thesis is an actual portion where I categorize different types of margin writing in order to create a kind of table of marginalia…I have exhausted all of my resources here in Jackson, WY and was looking for a nearby college bookstore that may carry texts with the type of margin writing which I am speaking of…

Three hours later, Laurie contacted me by email to compliment my “interesting thesis,” but mainly to let me know that the store’s policy is not to buy back annotated books: “We can buy books that have highlighting and underlining of text, but we are not to buy books with actual writing in the margins.”

Intrigued, I replied to Laurie’s email in order to find out more—why have the restrictions, do students or professors demand the clean books, or is it about respect for the books? Laurie’s response reiterated the fact that they buy back “complete” books—which means essentially near-pristine condition (no pages torn, no broken spines or covers, and fewer than five pages written on). The physical value clearly was the emphasis in the policy, and she provided evidence that this was indeed “good business sense” by noting that the “cleaner, nicer books are the first to be picked up for purchases. Students will literally go through the stack of used books to find a ‘real clean’ one.”

However, Laurie’s analysis is not true across the board. For instance, Marshall’s analysis, in “Annotation: from paper books to the digital library,” would refute Laurie’s claim. In order to see whether annotation was indeed meaningful to students, Marshall put four extremely marked-up copies of Challenge of the West under a stack of clean books. She went back the next day to discover that one of the four had been purchased while the new copies on top of the stack remained unsold. In another article, Marshall
cites Andreas van Dam’s colleague “Ted” as an example of someone who always wanted the “dirtiest” copy of a book available, since that invariably contained the most marginalia. Thus, there seems to be more value in marginalia than Laurie and others opposed to annotation are able to see. In closing on this topic, I would like to cite “Peter” who describes in his blog, “how to mark a book,” how the relationship of reading and identity is manifested: “By the time I break in certain kinds of books, I’ve found out more about myself, perhaps, than about any facts or opinions the book offers. I collect quotes that support ideas that affect me […] In this marking process, the book becomes my territory. In fact, the book becomes a part of me in some way.” Thus, the value comes through both the intimate way marginalia connects the reader to the text and the meaning attainable through the marginalia’s supplementation to the reader’s identity and the meaning of the text itself.

Having established how marginalia supplements a reader’s identity, I would like to move the discussion to the ways marginalia contributes or supplements the meaning of a text. Can margin writing affect meaning for anyone but the writer? Yes. First of all, marginalia can have four potential audiences the margin writer is addressing—the author, the future reader, the annotator him/herself, and the text. In attempts to address the idea of audiences of marginalia, biographers have found an expansive new way to ontologically approach their subjects by studying the marginalized traces of the past contained in books, letters, manuscripts, etc. In Keats’s Paradise Lost for example, Beth Lau begins by saying, “Keats’s heavily marked and annotated copy of Paradise Lost, now at Keats House in Hampstead, is without doubt one of the most important of the poet’s surviving books. Perhaps only his two annotated copies of Shakespeare’s plays are
as significant records of Keats’s reading of a major English writer and a shaping influence on his own work.” Roger Rosenblatt also provides Walpole, Darwin, Macaulay, and Blake as further examples of recurrent annotators (2). So annotation denotes not only interest by the authorial margin writer, but also new material for interpreting the author’s works based on their marginalia in the work of other authors. In addition, marginalia provides evidence for speculation about influence. Both of these examples provide meaning for the author’s work, but they also demonstrate that we can learn more about the inner psyche of authorial margin writers, thereby telling us more about their identity as well.

Edgar Allen Poe is another important figure in the history of marginalia, who even wrote his own treatise on the subject called “Marginalia” in 1844. Poe explains, “In getting my books, I have been always solicitous of an ample margin; this not so much through any love of the thing itself […] as for the facility it affords me of penciling suggested thoughts, agreements, and differences of opinion, or brief critical comments in general.” Like Marshall’s description of the varying content of margin notes, Poe realizes that marginalia is “deliberately penciled, because the mind of the reader wishes to unburthen itself of a thought,” no matter how “flippant,” “silly,” or “trivial.” Again advocating something Marshall does in the future, Poe notes the directness between an active annotating reader and the text—annotation “compels us […] into Montesquieu-ism, into Tacitus-ism, […] or even into Carlyle-ism.”

Coleridge is perhaps the most famous example of margin writing who has provided a substantial amount of fodder in his extensive margin note tradition. In Alan G. Hill’s review of Coleridge’s published marginalia, he notes that “In wishing to see his
marginalia published, Coleridge recognized that they were anything but marginal to his whole modus operandi as a thinker” (229). Despite some movement towards an appreciation of marginalia (mainly directed towards famous authors or figures), there still exists a type of surprise for the amount of information that can be gleaned from marginalia. For example, Bruce Thomas Boehrer in “Renaissance Classicism and Roman Sexuality: Ben Jonson’s Marginalia and the Trope of Os Impurum” claims that: “Over the past decade, specialists in early modern English literature have devoted increasing attention to Jonson’s marginalia, which often provide a source of unexpected insight into the poet’s published work and overall achievement” (365). Why “unexpected”? Again, this type of surprise or habit of ignoring marginalia is a detriment to considering identity revealed through reading and meaning inspired through this process.

In an obvious way, margin writing can affect meaning for readers who will have the marginalized copy in the future (such as classic literary texts used over and over throughout the years in college classrooms). As Billy Collins quips in his poem “Marginalia”: “And if you have managed to graduate from college/ without ever having written ‘Man vs. Nature’/ in a margin, perhaps now/ is the time to take one step forward” (l. 30-33). We can also consider Mary Wollstonecraft’s Maria, or, The Wrongs of Woman where Maria and Darnford first communicate through margins of books and their relationship ends up turning rather ambiguously into love. Suzanne Alyssa Andrew relays similar sentiments in her article, “Marginalia,” in the Toronto Women’s Post. Andrew is writing from personal experience how she came to understand her boyfriend at the time in a new way by reading his marginalia in their shared books. She started the process thinking that “reading his interpretations and analyzing phrases he’d underlined
was like peering through a window in his mind” (Andrew). In the end, she realized that:

“Even though reading is a solitary action, his marginalia made it feel like we were sharing [Lisa Moore’s] superlative language in a rather intimate, personal way” (Andrew). Wollstonecraft’s fiction and Andrew’s personal commentary yield the idea that sharing or corresponding through marginalia can be an intimate and enlightening form of communication that can reveal another’s identity in a new light.

Essentially this is all a consideration of whether marginalia has merit—beyond that of famous authors—for the everyday reader and margin writer. As one example, in “Annotations and the collaborative digital library: Effects of an aligned annotation interface on student argumentation and reading strategies” Wolfe reflects on a novice reader named Toby. Toby “responded to nearly every annotation by stating whether he agreed or disagreed with it—and such initial evaluations were often followed up with additional reflection on his own stance. Thus, the annotations appeared to provoke these novice readers to take a stance on the text” (152). But even if the comments were not analytical or academic, readers still appreciated the marginalia: “students remarked that even ‘silly’ or ‘pointless’ annotations encouraged them to expand their arguments and engage further with the text” (162). Therefore, I would add that all marginalia can be considered helpful because in the process of agreeing or disagreeing with views, readers are unconsciously able to strengthen or reconsider their own beliefs and opinions—which is part of the process of establishing identity. The added bonus is that during this process, annotation also contributes meaning to the text itself for the reader, and possibly future readers as well.
Furthermore, beyond academia anonymous margin writers around the world are uniting in blogs and other forums on the internet—and their opinions are valid after all, since this thesis is in part a consideration of the everyday reader. For instance, a discussion on margin writing in cookbooks on Slashfood quickly turned into a discussion of margin writing in general. One commenter said: “I’m a scribbler […] I doodle everywhere. Maybe someday I’ll copy all the interesting stuff and sell the books for cheap.” Another poster considers those who ignore the margins: “I have so far been fortunate enough to not find anything truly irredeemable. If so I would probably just mark through the recipe so it wouldn’t accidentally be used by someone who ignores margin notes.” Another marginalia discussion, “Marginalia Caesaris” on The Valve: A Literary Organ, also becomes more general theory, but in regard to non-cookbooks. For instance, one poster asks about the “rhetoric of marginalia,” while another asserts that it is “interior monologue.” In addition, a third responder writes: “while I do revisit some of the annotations and marks indicating importance, I don’t revisit most of them. From this I’ve informally concluded that the mere act of making the marks is the important thing; actually using them at a later time is secondary—though, on occasion, quite convenient and important.” This is again the idea of unconscious annotation and, overall, these discussions suggest there are everyday people considering the importance of marginalia, even making their own “rhetoric of marginalia.”

But as far as contributing to meaning of the text, Harold Love insists that contemporary readers participate in “creative misreading in order to adjust the text to their own understanding of politics and desires to influence the future” (qtd. in Eggert 8). I wonder if he would consider margin writing part of this flawed process—if so, I would
argue that writing in the margins of a text is an example of creative co-writing or rewriting. I would use these terms instead of Love’s term because, in the context of reading as an activity which contributes to our quest for identity, making a text more relevant to one’s self cannot be seen as a mistake. In addition, Love seems to assume that texts are published by writers who have a single interpretation in mind. But after publication, contemporary authors like Zadie Smith voice the belief that their texts are gone—essentially, out of their grasp and control for good. Thus, the author in publishing his work is already participating in a pre-set, unspoken agreement between authors and audiences made ages ago—the text is a product that becomes a socially interactive dialogue. This social aspect is identified by Eggert who claims “library books all over the world bear readers’ marginalia suggesting […] that the desire for textual intervention is not dead” (9). I have suggested that this occurs because readers are working out their identity and margin writing is an activity that employs the unconscious in a way that offers answers and, in the process, meaning. Marginalia is a form of subjective rewriting of a text that highlights themes essential to the expression of one’s identity.

EXAMPLES OF AUTHORIAL MARGINALIA AND GLOSS

Does the author’s approach to the value of the margins differ from the reader’s—can an author creatively rewrite his text in the margins? Three examples, two contemporary and one more distant, will provide a diverse representation of how authors approach the white frontier of the margin space—and in the end, demonstrate the significance of all marginalia leading up to the case study of book-length marginalia.

Stephen Colbert’s I Am America (And So Can You!) (2007) and Samuel Taylor
Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1817) both provide authorial exercises in ironic marginalia. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* and Alynda Wheat from *Entertainment Weekly* note the prevalence of margin notes in their reviews of Colbert’s book. However, one is positive and one is negative. Maslin finds the margin annotation part of an overall lackluster text: “The printed speech falls surprisingly flat. Neither this chapter nor the rest of ‘I Am America’ is helped by little red annotations in the margins, though these, too, mimic a tactic that happens to be funny on TV.” So for Maslin, the annotation in the book is a failed attempt to mimic the sarcasm and witty jibes that Colbert performs verbally on his television show routinely. Wheat, on the other hand, finds the book to be mostly successful, and this includes the marginal annotation. Colbert “crams an awful lot into *I Am America*, so much that it sometimes feels forced. Do we need the glossary, quippy marginalia […], common-man essays, and stickers […] Probably not, but we do like the stickers and marginalia. The point is, you can carry a joke, an alter ego, or a meta-book only so far.” So overall, Wheat finds that the marginalia does the character of Colbert justice. This disagreement over Colbert’s use of marginalia in his satirical book generally represents the larger conflict over the use of marginalia—but feelings of like or dislike do not seem detract from the overall purpose of the ironic marginalia: to put a bug in the reader’s ear. The reviews also establish that the margins are not only for the reader’s commentary on the text, but an author’s as well.

Below is a sample page from Colbert’s book. The arrows and numbers designate areas that I would like to comment on; these areas are analyzed on the following page:
Now, with great power comes great responsibility. That's why a father should always wear a collared shirt and carry a tire gauge. Never know when a few pounds of air pressure will mean the difference between life and death for you and your family.

A father should also work. A lot. Anything less than 100 hours a week and the kids are going to get to know Dad and, like the old saying goes, "Familiarity breeds contempt."

And sure, it's nice to have a second income to buy the little extras like vacations or a place to live, but the mother should never be the primary wage earner. The kids see that, lose respect for their father, and decide to become gay every time. It's known as teenage rebellion, and I've seen parades full of it.

One of Pop's important jobs is protecting his little family. That's why he needs to sleep with that 9mm under his pillow. And pack it with hollow point bullets. At the least sign of movement in his castle past 8 PM, he should wake up firing. Let God, Allah, or Hallowed the monkey god sort them out, are we right?

PUBLISHER'S DISCLAIMER: DO NOT SLEEP WITH A 9MM UNDER YOUR PILLOW AND SHOOT AT SHADOWS IMMEDIATELY UPON WAKING.

Finally, Dad's got to protect the weaker minds of his wife and offspring from the burden of worry. He can't show any sign of indecision, financial trouble, or even sickness. That's why it is imperative that fathers never go to the doctor. They might find out something is wrong—knowledge which they could never share. The crushing burden of stuffing emotion for decades is our nation's number one killer of dads. Or it should be.

So Dad's got a pretty tough job. That's why he needs to be treated right. Don't give him the burden of worry. He can't show any sign of indecision, financial trouble, or even sickness. That's why it is imperative that fathers never go to the doctor. They might find out something is wrong—knowledge which they could never share. The crushing burden of stuffing emotion for decades is our nation's number one killer of dads. Or it should be.

So Dad's got a pretty tough job. That's why he needs to be treated right. Don't bother him when he walks in the door. Let him make that martini or leaf through the latest issue of Wood Boat Enthusiast before you go running to him with your affections and/or suspicions about the relationship he may or may not be having with the head of Human Resources.
The first area in question is representative for Colbert’s book—where he provides ironic commentary to the text in the margins. The text seems to very seriously suggest that as a father figure, the man of the house needs to make sure all family members’ vehicles have proper tire inflation: “Never know when a few pounds of air pressure will mean the difference between life and death for you and your family” (8). However, the snarky margin note says: “Nothing says love like proper inflation” (8). What this does effectively is set up an opposition between the author of the text and the author of the marginal annotation—but if they are the same person, which viewpoint are we supposed to sympathize with? The overriding witticisms along the margin, in the end, are more powerful than the text since it is these comments that are most like what Stephen Colbert, the opinionated right-wing pundit, would say. This puts the power in the margins, which is further established in the next two examples as well.

In number two, Colbert responds to a question from the main text, “am I right?” by answering in the margin, “I am” (8). Only the voice of annotation has the power to verify the correctness of the text. In the third example, when Colbert says “Do it” in the margin response to the “Publisher’s Disclaimer”: “DO NOT SLEEP WITH A 9MM UNDER YOUR PILLOW AND SHOOT AT SHADOWS IMMEDIATELY UPON WAKING” (8), he effectively trivializes the disclaimer and shows, once again, that the real power lies with the marginal annotator. In other words, Colbert’s book goes a long way in showing the effectiveness of utilizing marginal space, as well as how the margins provide extra space for authors to elaborate on their thoughts in their texts just as reader-margin writers elaborate on their thoughts in the margins of another’s book.
To continue a discussion of authorial commentary, Coleridge’s marginal gloss must be considered in reference to *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* because it is the “most dramatic [change] of all” to the 1817 version, and “to this day most readers take [the gloss] to represent at least one level of Coleridge’s own interpretation of his poem” (McGann 38). In a poem that seemingly evades interpretation and meaning, to suggest that information found in the margins are really clues for readers is to suggest the significance of the margin space itself. But Jerome McGann puts this into perspective in “The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner.” Critic David Pirie, for instance, finds the interpretive function of the gloss hurtful rather than helpful: “[the gloss is a] serious attempt to distract the reader from the poem” and is “Partly just a feeble literary joke, this must have always been intended to confuse the unwary as indeed it continues to do […] the marginalia are by their very nature perverting” (qtd. in McGann 39). Coleridge’s peer Charles Lamb “did not like the distance which the 1800 changes enforced between the ‘mariner’s ballad’ and ‘Coleridge’s poem’” (McGann 40); this attitude largely has to do with the rationalizing marginal gloss in Lamb’s opinion. Lawrence Lipking provides a positive view of the gloss in his inventive article, “The Marginal Gloss,” where he uses marginal gloss to enhance his own essay: “The gloss casts an entirely new light—a kind of secondary imagination—over the poem” (614). Lipking goes further to say that the gloss establishes a “tension between the two ways of construing the mariner’s tale—between experiencing it and interpreting it [which] is recreated by the eye of every reader, as it snakes back and forth between the text and the margin, interrupting and interpenetrating one script with another, and striving to make a simultaneous order our of two different phases of seeing” (621). This scholarly context is an introduction to a
discussion of Coleridge’s marginal gloss. The examples provided below are sample pages and areas of interest are identified with red circles to be discussed after the samples.
The planks looked warped! and see those sails,
How thin they are and sere! ¹
I never saw aught like to them,
Unless perchance it were

CXXII.

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along;
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf's young." ²

CXXIII.

"Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—
(The Pilot made reply)
I am a-feared"—"Push on, push on!"
Said the Hermit cheerily.

CXXIV.

The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirred;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
And straight a sound was heard.

CXXV.³

Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread:
It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.⁴

CXXVI.

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,

¹ What adjectives have been used before in describing the appearance of the sails?
² With what feelings does the hermit regard the ship?
³ What is the effect of the irregularity in the metrical structure of the first line of this stanza?
⁴ Where has the comparison in this line been used before? In which place is the comparison the more appropriate?
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
210 The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.¹

XLIX.
One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
215 And cursed ² me with his eye.

L.
Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,³
They dropped down one by one.

LI.
The souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!⁴

PART IV.

LII.
"I fear thee, ancient Mariner! ⁵"
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.⁶

¹ Can you see any reason for the Poet's making this the longest stanza of the poem? What feeling is delicately suggested in the first line? Notice carefully the details used in this stanza, and then describe the sight. Does the moon add brightness to the scene? The meaning of bar? It has been objected that a star could not be within the tips of the moon. Should Coleridge have changed these lines to accord with facts?
² Where later in the poem is the curse again referred to? Does it become more or less terrible to the Ancient Mariner?
³ Does the Poet gain or lose by using the rather ordinary words rhymed in l. 219?
⁴ What causes the Wedding Guest to fear?
⁵ Ll. 225–227 were suggested by Wordsworth. Is the comparison a happy one?
So lonely 't was, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

CXXXVII.
O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'T is sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

CXXXVIII.

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray;
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!

CXXXIX.²
Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

CXL.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

CXLII.

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,

¹ Why should the Mariner now love to walk to the kirk with a goodly company?
² What is the key word of this and the preceding stanza? Has this same word served a similar purpose in any preceding portion of the poem? Cf. with "Religious Musings":

"There is one Mind, one omnipresent Mind,
Omnipot, His most holy name is Love,
Views all creation: and He loves it all,
And blesses it and calls it very good."
XXXVI.
At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

XXXVII.
A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist! ¹
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged and tacked and veered.

XXXVIII.
With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could not laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail! ²

XXXIX.
With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! ³ they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

XL.
See! see (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal;
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

¹ What is the Poet's purpose in thus gathering the content of the preceding stanza into a single line? How are we made aware of the supernatural character of the approaching ship?
² Which is the more poetic, this stanza or the gloss?
³ Derivation and meaning?
⁴ For joy did grin. "I took the thought of grinning for joy from poor Burnett's remark to me when we had climbed to the top of Plinlimmon and were nearly dead with thirst. We could not speak for the constriction till we found a little puddle under a stone. He said to me, 'You grinned like an idiot.' He had done the same." Coleridge, "Table-talk." May 31, 1830 (second edition), ll. 185-189.
With these four examples from Coleridge’s text, I would like to discuss how the marginal gloss serves to make points shorter and more to the point, describe supernatural elements, and use less-definitive terminology—overall, these ideas suggest that together, the marginal gloss at least has a doubt-inducing effect towards the main text of the poem. Furthermore, in this role, the speaker of the marginal gloss thereby gains power over the speaker of the poem (similar to the way that Colbert’s marginalia gains power over his more serious text. On page 30, the circled section shows a short margin note “The ship suddenly sinketh” next to the four corresponding lines in the poem. This example demonstrates the marginal gloss’ tendency to succinctly summarize in contrast to the expressiveness in the poem. While this does not immediately transfer power from the poem to the margins, objectivity holds precedence over artistry in terms of trustworthiness when the two are considered. The example on page 14, with the three glosses circled, shows another section of apparent speed-up summary marginalia that gives the impression of the gloss writer wanting to get on with the tale, to the meaty parts. This once again suggests that the power is in the margins as the reader is cued by the direction of the marginal gloss rather than the poem. The second circled section on page 14 demonstrates how the speaker in the poem’s inability to describe what he’s experiencing shows that he is too bound up in the supernatural—it is the margin annotator who can describe the experience for the poem’s speaker. While the wedding guest is left to describe the ancient mariner in merely physically descriptive terms, “I fear thy skinny hand!/ And thou art long, and lank, and brown,/ As the ribbed sea-sand” (l. 225-227), the speaker of the gloss helps the awe-struck guest with a summary: “The wedding-guest feareth that a spirit is talking to him” (14).
The third and fourth sample pages go further to demonstrate the superiority of the margin speaker. First, on page 33, while the gloss and the lines of the poem correspond, the marginal gloss adds one step more: “And to teach by his own example” (33). This seems to indicate a lackluster belief in the moral of the poem (if we can call it one) on the part of the gloss speaker. The speaker in the margins is not presented as a proponent of experiential truth—his otherwise objective marginal narration throughout the poem suggests he would not agree with this kind of truth, which is why the disclaimer “his own example” is added. The speaker of the gloss’ reluctance to definitively identify a moral is troubling for the reader, who has most likely has realized by this point that the marginalia cannot be ignored. The gloss on page 11 performs the same function of forming doubt in the reader’s mind about the speaker of the poem, as the language summarizes in a careful way: “At its nearer approach, it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom he freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst” (11). Why the mariner should do such a thing as suck blood from his arm is steriley described by the gloss speaker; the gloss also makes it clear that the superstitious crew could no longer be certain of reality at this point, only what “seemeth” to be real. In this case, the gloss speaker must take over and describe objectively what the crew and the mariner are experiencing, once again showing that the power lies in the margins. Thus, an analysis of both Colbert’s contemporary use and Coleridge’s historically famous use of the margins yields the same conclusion—the margins are a space for authors to expand ideas, challenge their readers, and transfer the power of words. Furthermore, the significance of the margins for provoking thought and recording thoughts is maintained, as has been confirmed for readers in this paper as well.
If Coleridge truly inspired an appreciation for the margins like no other author and Colbert demonstrates its lasting significance even in pseudo-political satire today, first-time author Reif Larsen is another contemporary advocate of marginalia who can be used to demonstrate where the direction of margin usage may go in the future. Larsen received a $900,000 advance for his “unusual book” titled *The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* (Sege). In it, Larsen has created the character of Tecumseh Sparrow Spivet, but adds to the plot and Spivet’s character through supplementation in the margins. Larsen calls the marginal content “exploded hyper-text,” “with arrows directing reader’s to the marginalia that are crucial to his storytelling. It is a novel with graphics, not a graphic novel. Its 255 scattered maps and diagrams and drawings illuminate its main character rather than illustrate its plot” (Sege). It is refreshing to hear marginalia described as “crucial,” considering the still-prevalent views of marginalia as defacement or criminality discussed earlier. Larsen’s hyper-text may also provide a contemporary view of the margins that will allow for better recognition of the ways marginalia can illuminate not only the character’s identity, but the reader’s as well. Larsen’s character shares more in common with the margin writer, as he claims that “we weren’t going to really understand T.S.’s character unless we saw his actual creations […] because in many ways that’s where he lets down his guard” (Sege). Marginalia are the ways readers unconsciously “let down their guard.” Opting against “pompous” footnotes, Larsen advises future readers of the significant details located in the margins: “My only advice […] is don’t skip the margins” (Sege). In order to demonstrate Larsen’s unique cartographical, biographical, and pictorial marginalia, I have provided five examples from the text that represent Spivet’s irresistible urge to annotate, the significance of the marginalia to the
meaning of the text, and how thoughts necessary to the scene or Spivet’s character are reserved for the margins—suggesting that Spivet’s emotions and some of his most important ideas throughout the text are found in the margins, making Larsen’s advice to read the margins even more crucial.

In this example, Spivet acknowledges the societal pressure not to write in the margins: “I know, I know—it was terrible. This was someone’s property” (149). But what allowed Spivet to override his conditioned response? His irresistible urge to annotate—“I just couldn’t help myself” (149). But Spivet goes further to say, in accordance with the frequently unconscious urge to write in the margins discussed earlier, that he wrote in the margins “Without knowing what [he] was doing” (149).
Rather than suggest a mindless activity, Spivet’s confession shows how important it is for him to express his ideas—and the white space of a journal or book provide just the motivation of emptiness that Spivet needs.

One could argue that Spivet also believes his marginalia is significant enough to deserve a spot in the margins. In the second example below, that is precisely what comes through under
“Elizabeth. Yes,” he said, trying out the name. “Well, next time, Elizabeth, I must insist that you use the stone to announce your arrival. Occasionally I have been known to become so enraptured in my work that I don’t respond to any normal human knock. Dr. Agassiz had the current apparatus installed upon repeated frustrations trying to rouse me from my—experiments.”

“Sorry,” she said. “That...thing scared me a bit, to tell you the truth.”

He laughed. “No need, no need. Such inventions are meant to enable us, not to hinder us. We should not be afraid of our own creations—skeptical, perhaps, but not fearful.”

“Well, I will use it next time.”

“Thank you,” he said. “We wouldn’t want the two of you standing in the cold for hours, would we?”

Emma nodded. She was nodding at everything that his voice said.

They settled down for tea. Mr. Englethorpe served them in an elaborate five-step process that involved, among other things, lifting the teapot higher and higher as he poured until the last of the hot liquid was traveling some three or four feet in the air before splashing all across the cup and saucers and the table.

Emma went. It was not for him, however, but for Elizabeth, her mother, who had been the silent navigator this whole time, who had not barked her orders but had nudged the rudder while no one seemed to notice.

Elizabeth fades from this story like the male wasps that, once they have done their duty of procreation, crawl under a leaf, fold their antennae, and wait for death to come upon them. Mr. Englethorpe always spoke of these drones with a kind of admiration, as if they were the heroes of the story.

“No complaints,” he would say. “No complaints.”

Most likely, Elizabeth was not so postulate in her exit stage left. She never remarried, but she captured all that she could in that country house in Concord—she grew the sweetest tomatoes and even penned a couple of ordinary poems, which she timidly showed to Louisa May, who proclaimed them “emotive & telling.” But weak lungs kept her from traveling, and she was never able to see the West or her three
Larsen’s design. On page 162, Spivet shows a doodle from Dr. Clair and explains:
“there was a quiet beauty in seeing the pen absently work the margins of the page as the
mind whirred and tumbled somewhere far away. Doodles were fertile ground; they were
the visual evidence of heavy cognitive lifting.” It is significant for the purposes of this
paper that “heavy cognitive lifting” occurs in the marginal spaces of a text—yet another
example of how ideas used to fill the void of white space represent responses from the
brain seeking to fill a void of meaning. In this case, however, it is a drawing rather than a
written representation of text. And yet, if the reader of Larsen’s book were to skip over
this margin note because it is mainly about an abstract doodle, he/she would not be able
to understand the doodle on page 234—coincidentally similar to the doodle on page 162.
And here, in the second example, there is no text accompanying the doodle to suggest
heavy thinking, the alert reader must interpret or speculate on what Spivet is thinking
depthly about at this point. This very example is the epitome of why Larsen feels the
marginalia is so important—any speculation about Spivet’s character requires knowledge
about Spivet only possible through reading the book in its entirety, including the margins.

The final two examples go further to reveal more about Spivet’s character and
personal life. In the first, Spivet draws an arrow from page 274 to 275 in order to link the
text to some marginalia on the opposing page. The margin note is another confession,
this time about another character named Ricky: “I am embarrassed to admit this, but
even though I was pretty sure most of what he was saying was very racist and very bad, I
kind of liked Ricky” (275). Ricky represents the protection of a father-figure that Spivet
has never had—Ricky is “surprisingly attentive,” “comforting,” and a “saferoom-feeling”
in the cab (275). This little episode emphasizes Spivet’s lack of a father-figure, but it
also reveals how Spivet can work out his inner turmoil on the page (in the margins). The fact that this is a second marginal confession is interesting as well—displaying a type of safe haven for expression located in the margins.
The last example is also like a confession, but additionally entails a general reflection on the workings of the mind that is indicative of the type of cognitive activity that margin writers attempt to express in the margins. Specifically, Spivet forms the idea that Dr. Clair and Emma Osterville are related, but he realizes this must be wrong by labeling the linked margin note “They Are Both Female Scientists, They Must Be Related” (143). Here, Spivet reflects on the nature of stereotypical thinking through the example of his mistake with two female scientists. He asks, “Why do we make these illogical associations in our mind?” (143), and responds by associating this type of error with age. He concludes by suggesting that adults cannot make these types of errors like children because they must be “trying to create a working map of the world” (143). Since Spivet is a cartographer, his mapping of the world and his life functions as a thematic thread throughout the text and the marginalia. But here seems to be a crucial revelation for Spivet, in that he believes the world becomes more and more ordered and detailed as one gets older. However, none of these ideas are found in the text itself, only in the crucial space of the margins.
What a discussion of Larsen, Colbert, and Coleridge has provided to this paper is the idea that authors purposefully utilize the space of the margins because they recognize the possibilities and significance of the empty space. Ideas formed or needing further elaboration find a nest perched next to the text. Whether marginalia is ironic, sarcastic, or just a doodle, it is important nonetheless in the ultimate search for meaning in the texts of these three diverse authors. These conclusions are no different than the conclusions that can be made about everyday margin writers—the space of the margin is a space for responding to ideas and filling a void of meaning for authors and readers alike. With this in mind, it now seems logical to explore the ideas about marginalia discussed thus far in application to a case study of book-length marginalia.
BOOK-LENGTH MARGINALIA CASE STUDY

My methodology as a Sherlockian reader of marginalia reveals new ways we can see the text working in relation to the reader/margin writer and then also the meaning provided for the reader of text and marginalia. As Lipking demonstrates, “Deciphering the apparent nonsense of marginalia, we perform the act of reading, as Poe conceives it: a continual decoding of the keys or intentions secreted in the text” (610). On a quest of this type, I purchased an edition of White Noise by Don DeLillo, at the University of South Dakota bookstore in Vermillion, S. D., where penciled underlining, margin writing, and a few drawings scrawled across the pages. While the amount of fodder is what at first attracted my attention to the text, the depth of the previous reader’s annotation is what kept me reading. Fortunately, I have read White Noise in the past and so was familiar enough with the book to follow the text’s plot along with the progression of marginalia. What I realized in the process of reading the previous reader’s thoughts-on-the-page is that really what I was attempting to do was be some type of literary Sherlock Holmes. Holmes was a behavioral analyst who “read” people by the outer appearance and mannerisms. Instead, I am reading the behavior and character of someone through their written word. This written word, as I have established, is a result of the reader’s spontaneous and subconscious responses to the text that he/she has desired to make public (or at least cause to exist outside of his/her mind).

Theoretically, I would like to put forward that the reader’s marginal themes provide a bigger picture of the themes or main ideas of White Noise according to the reader. Ultimately, margin writer’s ideas are part of my larger framework to provide a new way to experience meaning through a progressive vision of reader response theory. I
do this through a comparison of themes in the reader’s marginalia to themes identified by *White Noise* critics. If the correlation should prove similar, this would suggest that marginalia represent a specific way readers provide meaning to a text. In this process, readers can contribute to their identity and the meaning they derive out of a text. But they also potentially contribute meaning for future readers of the book and the marginalia—marginalia readers compare the margin writer’s expressive themes of identity to their own.

However, to obtain more objective readings of these subjective responses, we must read marginalia like a text, which can be accomplished by realizing that “a theory of reading has to uncover the interpretive operations used by readers” because while “readers may differ about meaning, they may well follow the same set of interpretative conventions” (Culler qtd. in Selden and Widdowson 62). Therefore, we need to find Holland’s themes and structures in marginalia as we would in a novel.

To exemplify what I mean, I turn to Kathleen McCormick’s *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*. McCormick’s view is that “Reading strategies […] include such well-recognized activities as creating (or, as they conventionally may assume, ‘recognizing’) themes, identifying with characters, […] filling in gaps, […] relating the text to personal experiences, […] reading playfully for multiple meanings, [and] relating their own ‘personal’ response to the text to larger aspects of their culture” (86). Marginalia readers thus compare the margin writer’s expressive themes of identity to their own, in addition to the identity themes in the text. This shows the process of how annotation supplements identity in several ways for readers. This idea of unifying themes and structures is key to my approach towards analyzing text and marginalia—marginalia
also is performative in demonstrating how the reader/margin writer has internalized the text in consideration of their own life and identity. Readers, when recognizing themes and identifying with characters, are relating the text to personal experience. They fill in the gaps with their personal responses to the texts. One result of this process is marginalia—which in my theory provides the link between reader, text, and meaning.

**Self-Identification and Reality**

Sean’s continual references to himself are pervasive through the marginalia. This should be no surprise, considering the earlier establishment of marginalia as a process of self-actualization and asserting/working out one’s identity in reference to a text. Sean provides an excellent example of this, as we can see through the examples to follow. For instance, Sean notes an image of the way Babette is catching her breath after stair exercising by walking down the stairs with her head up in the air; Sean writes, “common image. I’ve done it” (14). I use this example merely to begin a discussion of how Sean relates the text to his own life and experiences—he comments on the ways that he does or does not relate to the characters. Not only does this allow him to consider

---

3 Before moving into a close-reading of the *White Noise* margin notes, I would like to make a couple of points of clarification—the first points have to do with font and underline usage in the quotations used, while the second point has to do with a potential identity of the reader. For this section I am using the Jenkins v2.0 font to designate the reader’s marginalia; in addition, the font coincidentally, but not necessarily, somewhat resembles the reader’s writing style. Also of note, when I incorporate underlining in the quotations used below I am attempting to designate the sections where the reader underlined during his/her reading; thus, I am not suggesting that DeLillo’s text was published with underlining by incorporating underlined portions in quotations below. Lastly, at the expense of buying into stereotypes, I would like to suggest a gender and name for the annotator in question for the purpose of convenience and clarity (since there is no owner name listed in the book). The reader’s emphasis and highlighting of sexual references in the text, mention of the type of girls he is interested in, language incorporating “dawg” and “damn,” and mention of a hat he commonly wears hopefully substantiates my decision to name the reader “Sean” and from here forward to refer to the reader in a masculine way. Here are some examples: “The Heimlich maneuver”—Sean: “sounds kinky when related to sex” (146), “Murray told me once he had a crush on her, found her physical awkwardness a sign of an intelligence developing almost too rapidly” (217)—Sean: “I kind of like those girls” (217), and Sean in response to the shooting of six people, “damn, dawg” (44).
the overall reality of the text and its characters, it also allows him to consider the reality of himself and his identity. Readers reading marginalia are replicating the process of considering identity.

Another example of Sean’s assertion of himself occurs when Murray claims, “People who can fix things are usually bigots” (33). Sean notes, “Stereotypes. I hate ppl who make them” (33). So, while this may indicate that whoever “Sean” is will most likely have an issue with how I have identified him, it also shows that Sean’s distaste for stereotyping and prejudice may indicate that he has been witness to it too often in the past. He could also be asserting his desire not to be lumped into stereotypes in a way of convincing himself that he is not a stereotype. A couple of earlier examples provide further discussion in this line; first, Sean identifies, next to Jack’s statement: “If I could become more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously” (17), “the myths of ppl and appearance.” In Sean’s mind, then, the significance placed on our appearance (possibly by parents, future employers, or significant others) falls within the faulty type of thinking that incorporates stereotyping, prejudice, and superficial judgements. Furthermore, when Jack admits at the end of chapter 4: “I am the false character that follows the name around,” Sean writes “we’re all so phony” (17). Thus, in the end Sean seems to conclude that none of our judgements or ways of classifying others are valid.

Ultimately, Sean’s problem with how reality is presented clues us into a discussion of self-identification and reality in the textual arena. If this is true, what can we learn about these ideas from the text of *White Noise*? In “Knowing What We Are Doing: Time, Form, and the Reading of Postmodernity” Mitchum Huehls claims that
“DeLillo’s novel seems to know intuitively that the subject’s inability to relate meaningfully to his or her specific temporality is the foundational crisis of contemporary culture” (64). Thus, in DeLillo’s text we should find characters in a temporal crisis where meaning is so fleeting that characters are unable to relate from the inside. As readers however, from the outside, we realize that *White Noise* “portray[s] characters who know very well what they do but continue to do it” (Huehls 64). From this perspective, the idea that the characters perform within believable limits is satisfying to readers in that the author has created realistic character portrayal.

But even if DeLillo has at least partially earned our trust as readers through a realistic portrayal of characters, we as readers cannot forget that we are making a leap in reading fiction (Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief”). Mitchum Huehls, in “Knowing What We Are Doing: Time, Form, and the Reading of Postmodernity” argues for a temporal reality in *White Noise* where DeLillo attempts to deconstruct ideology that infiltrates every portion of our lives. The characters themselves contribute to this conceptual strategy because they each have their own self-contained framework of reality—in Huehls’ view, the “subjects know what they do but still do it” (65). When this occurs, reality and illusion “remain two [terms], and we are permitted to see how ideology functions—its differential gap of correspondence generously lets us in on its joke” (65). Thus, the characters inside *White Noise* and the readers outside *White Noise* are all part of DeLillo’s metacritical vision in that we see how ideology works and yet we are still a part of it. Thus, according to Huehls, *White Noise* is “DeLillo’s narrative performance of ideology’s self-revealing,” where “the same ideological relation between text and reader” is established (66). Furthermore, Timothy Aubry describes *White Noise*
as a “text which immerses the reader in the near-deafening white noise of American consumer culture, while seeking new modes of subjectivity, resistance, and agency within and through that state of immersion” (qtd. in 73). In conclusion, I believe that Sean’s margin writing demonstrates his ability as a reader to be immersed in DeLillo’s metacritical text about ideology, and yet still recognize the relationship between appearance and reality; this is revealed through his identity-themed marginalia.

**Family and Consciousness**

Comparatively, sections where Sean particularly seems to respond to deal with the Gladney family. In an episode where Denise is making a point at her parents’ expense for example, Sean wonders: “parents on the defense. why can’t I have it like that” (42). He notes this same theme at the end of the chapter, in the white space after the last paragraph, “kids in that house use their knowledge to challenge parents” (46). A related idea is presented again later in chapter 21 when Sean writes, “parents suck on the phone” (107). What is Sean is like on the phone? Sean identifies “it’s like me on the phone” (76) in reference to Babette and Jack, who “tried to remember what [Wilder]’d eaten in the last twenty-four hours, anticipated questions the doctor would ask and [they] rehearsed [their] answers carefully. It seemed vital to agree on the answers even if [they] weren’t sure they were correct” (76). What we can surmise from Sean’s responses to these ideas is that phone communications are somewhat tense for Sean and his parents and that he is possibly somewhat envious of the Gladney children’s power. More importantly, Sean seems to be identifying another
theme of *White Noise*—how family functions as community within the chaos that dominates the book.

While ideology and security breakdown within DeLillo’s work, the idea of family is also subjected to rigorous testing. A conclusive type of statement Sean makes at the beginning of chapter 19 is: “the whole family makes me feel that way,” in response to the idea that “Bee made us feel self-conscious at times” (94). What this really seems to suggest is that the family’s situation is made real for Sean—or at the least, that the Gladney family causes him to realize things about his own family. Take, for one more example, Sean’s realization that Denise’s language “sounds like my mom” (150). Clearly, family is an issue that Sean thinks about in his own life, and he may be having some type of epiphany about his relationship to his own parents through the ideas identified—specifically, that their phone communication could improve, there are issues to resolve with his parents that may put them on the defensive, and that family, dysfunctional or not, is necessary to ideas of self-consciousness.

In consideration of reader psychology, this brings us back to reader theorist Norman Holland—whom I will use to argue in favor of this relationship between consciousness and family. Holland’s “ego-psychology” can be used to explain that “every child receives an imprint of a ‘primary identity’ from its mother” (Selden and Widdowson 64). This signifies the important link between family and identity and thus consciousness as well. Thus, Holland goes further to state that an adult “has an ‘identity theme’ which, like a musical theme, is capable of variation but remains a central structure of stable identity” (Selden and Widdowson 64). This would indicate, according to ego psychology, that individuals carry the core familial identity structure developed in the
home with them the rest of their lives. Where reading comes in is through Holland’s idea that we “use the literary work to symbolize and finally replicate ourselves” (qtd. in Selden and Widdowson 64). If the familial basis of our identity is always there, we then replicate ourselves through a text, at least partly, through our consciousness gained from our family life, as well as identity patterns that provide meaning to our existence and the text.

**Death and Meaning**

In a section where Babette is reading from a tabloid story titled, “Life After Death Guaranteed with Bonus Coupons,” Babette reads: “Dr. Shiv Chatterjee, fitness guru and high-energy physicist, recently stunned a live TV audience by relating the well-documented case of two women, unknown to each other, who came to him for regression in the same week, only to discover that they had been twin sisters in the lost city of Atlantis fifty thousand years ago” (138). To this section in particular, Sean states, “I wish this were real” (138). And while it could indicate Sean’s interest in myth and folklore, I think his statement is a larger clue to seeing another marginal theme Sean is working out through the text. Namely, the idea of death. The article itself is about how a “researcher at the world-renowned Institute [who] has used hypnosis to induce hundreds of people to recall their previous-life experiences as pyramid-builders, exchange students and extraterrestrials” (137). Because this idea is presented earlier than the Atlantis story, Sean could be wishing that the whole idea of having multiple lives is desirable—or he could be wishing that death is ultimately not final and complete, that there is an afterlife.
Sean’s concern seems to be on par with DeLillo’s line of thinking, since his original working title for the novel was *The American Book of the Dead*. Specifically, Laura Barrett claims that *White Noise* “underscore[s] Americans’ unpreparedness for death: characters in *White Noise* cannot even think of death, much less philosophically plan for it” (102). But clearly, the characters’ inability to deal with death highlights DeLillo’s theme of death throughout the novel, and also allows the reader to consider his/her own concept of death in relation to the death as chaos presented *White Noise* (as Sean seems to be working out in his margin notes). Thus, Michael Hardin argues that when “one shifts death from beneath the surface to on the surface” (as DeLillo does), “then one creates the potential for redefinitions of the term if not a complete removal of meaning” (Hardin 22). Furthermore, as Hardin claims, even when “death is beneath the skin of culture,” we still “might interpret its visible ‘absence’ in terms of repression or denial” (22). Hardin’s descriptions of death’s place in culture can be used to become cognizant of the space DeLillo provides for the reader to consider death and the end of life in his/her own terms. In fact, DeLillo’s text ultimately seems to suggest that if we are not thinking about death, we are already dead. As Barrett states, “even the living are dead” (104) in *White Noise*.

Thus, with death as a dominant theme of *White Noise*, an analysis of Sean’s thoughts (while he was reading DeLillo’s text) becomes enlightening to a discussion of text, reader, and meaning. For instance, Jack tells Babette that “All plots move in one direction,” to which Sean replies, with an arrow “-------------> death” (189). By this point, Sean is aware of the novel’s theme and if his eyes have been opened to the living death of the characters in the novel, he will not succumb to the same fate in theory as the
characters. How does this play out earlier, for instance when death and self-pity are said to be interrelated? Grappa says: “Self-pity is something I’ve worked very hard to maintain. Why abandon it just because you grow up? Self-pity is something that children are very good at, which must mean it is natural and important. Imagining yourself dead is the cheapest, sleaziest, most satisfying form of childish self-pity” (206). Besides underlining this section, Sean has also commented: “how about that, I wish I were dead…” (206). I would not argue that this note is suggestive of suicidal tendencies on Sean’s part, but rather that Sean is again picking up on the theme of death in the text—and in a sarcastic way, Sean seems to recognize the futility of Grappa’s sentiments about death. In addition, Sean identifies the more serious nature of death, by writing “ever-present” in relation to the statement that, “The power of the dead is that we think they see us all the time. The dead have a presence” (97). Furthermore, when Jack says: “When I read obituaries I always note the age of the deceased. Automatically I relate this figure to my own age” (98). Sean’s response is, “but death is so subjective,” highlighting the scientific unknowingness of death. Lastly, like DeLillo, Sean is not without a sense of humor when he responds to Blank’s statement that “Death is odd-numbered” with his own, “so death is odd 😁” (189).

Taking all of these ideas into account then, namely Sean’s and the critics’, death is found to be pervasive and existential in *White Noise*. Predictably, a close-reading reveals this conclusion as well, so that reader, text, and meaning (regarding death) are

---

* A representation of a winking face that Sean drew.
bound together. The text tells us even more about this relationship, when Murray suggests that “To plot is to live” (278). So to avoid a state of living death, Murray tries to demonstrate to Jack that we must become active authors in the plot that is our lives: “We start our lives in chaos, in babble. As we surge up into the world, we try to devise a shape, a plan. There is dignity in this. Your whole life is a plot, a scheme, a diagram […] To plot is to affirm life, to seek shape and control” (278). The fact that we as readers gain control of our lives and identity through reading is also elicited by Murray: “To plot, to take aim at something, to shape time and space. This is how we advance the art of human consciousness” (278). The revelation of human consciousness through reading occurs especially in a text, such as White Noise, about death because we are forcefully reminded of the end of our existence; as Murray so lucidly puts it: “How does a person say goodbye to himself? It’s a juicy existential dilemma […] it’s part of the universal experience of dying. Whether you think about it consciously or not, you’re aware at some level that people are walking around saying to themselves, ‘Better him than me.’ It’s only natural” (280). While Murray’s thoughts place death within the framework of existentialism, it is also applicable to the discussion of meaning and consciousness at hand. Whether margin writers like Sean “think about it consciously or not,” there are points in the text where the brain triggers our hand (with writing utensil) to respond. And while Murray claims people identify themselves in opposition to those who are dead, readers identify themselves in opposition to those on the page. In this way, Murray can be seen as an example of a margin-writer in general. In either process, we are consciously forming our identity—but the key is to remain alive, to remain plotting our lives. Thus, active and living margin writers respond to texts that provide meaning for
life and identity. Just as Murray states, “I speculate, I reflect, I take constant notes. I am here to think, to see” (279), margin writers annotate to organize reality in terms of identity and supplement meaning to a text.

**CONCLUSION**

Through analysis, examples, and the linking of identity to reading and marginalia, I hope to have contributed in a new way to reader theory. Even the thoughts of the everyday, common reader along the margins needs to be considered in a new version of reader criticism focusing on marginal meaning. Significantly, psychological considerations of reader identity are possible through this type of reader theory since marginalia provide significant insights into a reader’s responses to a text based on identity and thematic patterns. I would like my theory to contribute to an elevation in the status of the everyday reader—marginalia of famous authors should not end a discussion of the importance of marginalia. All thoughts pertaining to a text should be considered in reader theory, and marginalia goes a long way to accomplish this goal.

As an advocate of marginalia reader theory, I would like to see printing standards expanded to print series of books with wide margins—catering towards margin writers, but also encouraging the more hesitant readers to allow their marginalized voice to be heard. These types of books would also help alleviate some of the constrictions people put on themselves due to societal pressures not to annotate books. However, at least one publisher is encouraging the annotation of the most sacred book of all, the Bible. *Zondervan’s New American Standard “Wide Margin Bible”* offers an example of how books should be published to inspire thought and reflection. Below is the book flap
You can tell when someone has learned not to just read their Bible, but to use it. The margins are full of handwritten notes. Verses are underlined. Personal cross-references abound. Bible-users do more than study God’s Word—they interact with it...No more cramped quarters. You’ll find plenty of space to write down the things God shows you in the Scriptures. If you’re a Bible user, you’ve found more than a tool. The Zondervan *NASB Wide Margin Bible* provides opportunity for a legacy of personal wisdom and insight that grows as you commit to writing what God shows you of his heart in the Script.
The ability to find personal insights linking marginalia to identity has been one of the key points in this thesis—and expanded-margin books would be a great way to inspire this kind of thought.

Even though this kind of publishing would be ideal across the board, there is still the issue of digitalizing books in our modern age. Even though the handwritten letter or note continues to have more significance than an email or text today, Peter Barry claims that “We need to accept that handwriting today has virtually no public function at all—it’s fine for jotting down appointments in a diary or making private notes, but that’s about it” (2). Barry’s point may gain more ground in our increasingly digital age. Annotation itself is changing as we speak—the ability to insert comments, track changes, and format in a variety of ways in Microsoft Word are some examples of trends in digital annotation. Furthermore, the new electronic reading device, the Kindle, offers highlighting and annotating options. And while it is encouraging to see that digital reading and annotating
devices recognize the significance of annotating and marginalia by including it in the features, there is still something lost in the transition. It will be a long time before digital margin notes are as simple and easy as jotting notes in a physical book—but on the positive side, more readers may feel comfortable typing in the margins of digital copies of a book. In the future, digital annotation practices must be considered in new versions of marginalia reader theory to continue developing knowledge about how meaning and identity are revealed in the margins.
Works Consulted


Andrew, Suzanne Alyssa. “Marginalia.” *Toronto’s Women’s Post* 2.6 (June 2003).


http://kenyonreview.org/blog/?p=76.


Barry, Peter. “A passion for teaching - Margins aren't meant to be written in.” *Times Higher Education* (Oct. 2, 2008)


Bartyzel, Monika. “Margin Writing – How do You Denote a Crappy Recipe?” *Slashfood.*


Published by Sampson Low. 1906.


http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1c/16/a6.pdf.


[http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/nholland/rdgident.htm](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/nholland/rdgident.htm)


--“To Lend or To Give.”


[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/ben_macintyre/article401754.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/ben_macintyre/article401754.ece)
“Marginalia.” *Dead Media Archive.*


Marshall, Catherine C. “Annotation: from paper books to the digital library.”


--“Toward an ecology of hypertext annotation.”


_r=2._


--“The Ritual” (13-18) by Robert Kaplan


Rowland, Richard. “Two Plays in One: Annotations in the Third Quarto of *Edward IV.*” Project MUSE.


http://www.apexbookcompany.com/apex-online/2008/11/confessions...
Trimble, Alspaugh, and Joyner. Assignment: “De-Coding Albert Camus’ The Stranger.”

Mount Vernon High School IB English I.

http://www.fcps.edu/MtVernonHS/academics/summer_assignments/forms/ib_english_11_2009.pdf


Weis, Margaret and Tracy Hickman. Annotated Legends (Dragonlance: Legends Trilogy). Wizards of the Coast, 2005.


http://www.springerlink.com/content/b213w47458155003/.
