WHY WE BROKE UP...

And It’s Not Just Because the Semester Ended
“Dreaming of a world more glamorous and lovely than the one you're stuck in is pretty much the definition of love and old movies both.” – Daniel Handler
AUTHORSHIP, HANDLER STYLE

Lemony Snicket

Daniel Handler
All the secrets of the world are contained in books. Read at your own risk.
- Lemony Snicket
In contemporary celebrity culture, an author’s public persona is entangled in the mass production and consumption of literature. Authorial identities constructed through biographical blurbs and professional photographs on book jackets, interviews, live readings, book signings, and so on serve an empowering function: ‘to sell books’ (Douglas 813). Indeed, because the author’s self-presentation itself sells, an author’s identity can be carefully crafted into what is arguably a creative fiction” (Magnusson 86).
LEMONY'S WEBSITE

A Series of Unfortunate Events

WARNING: DO NOT ENTER
THIS SITE IS VERY UNPLEASANT.

A DIRE DAY FOR THE BAD BEGINNING LOOMS NEAR!

We've ignored Lemony Snicket's cautious advice and are implementing our misguided plan to drop five thousand copies of THE BAD BEGINNING across the USA, blanketing this unlucky country with the first book in the saddest series about even sadder orphans.
“It is a miracle if you can find true friends, and it is a miracle if you have enough food to eat, and it is a miracle if you get to spend your days and evenings doing whatever it is you like to do, and the holiday season—like all the other seasons—is a good time not only to tell stories of miracles, but also to think about the miracles in your own life, and to be grateful for them.” –LEMONY SNICKET
LEMONY SNICKET’S FICTIVE UNIVERSE

- *The Series of Unfortunate Events* texts chronicle the lives of the Baudelaire orphans, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, who struggle against their nemesis Uncle Olaf, a man determined to eliminate the children and gain their inheritance.

- While the *SoUE* texts seem to call into question the didactic sentimentalism of traditional children’s literature by constantly subverting the readers’ expectations, the very act of subversion serves a didactic purpose (as does the author’s use of SAT words).
I’m sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant.

It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing.

With all due respect, Lemony Snicket.

The book costs $12.99
MY FAVORITE COVER
Unfortunately, I have dedicated my life to researching and recording the sad tale of the Baudelaire Orphans. There is no reason for you to dedicate yourself to such things, and you might instead dedicate yourself to letting this slippery book slip from your hands into a nearby trash receptacle, or deep pit.

With all due respect,

Lemony Snicket
CORPORATE GREED?

- As Daniel Hade has noted, “today’s children’s book publishers are looking for stories that transcend the medium of the book and become a recognizable brand that can be licensed and integrated across a wide range of products and media” (140).
- Lemony Snicket/Daniel Handler seems to work very hard behind the scenes to create texts that accomplish this, while openly calling into question the idea of children’s literature as commodity.
WILL THE REAL AUTHOR PLEASE STAND UP... OR FALL OVER A CLIFF?

- “On the one hand, by not claiming authorship of the text, Handler works to remove himself from the mode of production. But on the other, he creates an author so inextricably tied to the text’s marketing—a presence so manifest in its pages and companion productions—that he encourages readers to play along as willing participants” (Magnusson 89).
By placing layers of complexity between himself and his readers, Snicket/Handler creates a situation in which child readers have to develop a sophistication about reading that they might otherwise not, were the texts being “spoonfed” to them.

In many ways, Handler’s collaboration with illustrator Maira Kalman, *Why We Broke Up*, also asks readers to contemplate their own observational abilities.
COMMONALITY?
This novel tells the story of Min Green and how she and Ed Slaterton met at a party, saw a movie, followed an old woman, shared a hotel room, and broke each other's hearts.

That's Their Breakup Story - What's Yours?
ENTRIES

i wrote too much and you wrote far too little.

we broke up because we were such a mess together - but we are an even bigger mess apart.
I always think when people think back on high school, the number of memories that take place in a classroom, or have something to do with actual work they were possibly doing there, is nil. It’s all about these moments that are mostly internal, when you’re thinking about something that’s happening, or some disaster.
I had a lot of girlfriends in high school. In fact, I just saw my eighth-grade girlfriend for the first time in a long time, and she described me as a “playa,” which is not a term that existed when we were in eighth grade. I was shocked at that, because I thought of myself as an endless romantic. I just kept falling for girl after girl after girl. And she thought of me as a playa. I thought it was interesting that there’s kind of a fine line between those things.
HANDLER & KALMAN

Despondent
The bird is despondent.

In fact, she is so sad that she hops off the table to look for something to cheer her up.

Cake
Under the table is a cake.

It is in a box tied up with string. The bird unties the string and opens the box to see what kind of cake is inside.
THE ARTWORK

- Handler on Kalman’s contribution: “She wanted to paint small objects, ordinary objects that could only become magical when an artist was painting them or when someone was looking at them and remembering something magical. We went from there.”
WE DO NOT SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE, WE SEE THINGS AS WE ARE.
I just began to think about what makes an ordinary object beautiful in life. One of the things that can do it is just a memory. You can look at something, and it’s renewed with life, and you can say, “Oh my goodness, look at this sock I just found, remember when I wore this?” Something that looks like, to everyone else, something to throw away will look magical to you.
CONTEMPLATING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

- How would you characterize the illustrations? What about their style?
- What sort of colors are used and what impressions might these colors evoke?
- How would the text have been different without the illustrations?