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# The Role of the Interruption in Young Adult Epistolary Novels

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The Role of the Interruption in Epistolary Young Adult Novels

by

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A dissertation submitted for partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **Dedication**

To my children who never allow me to take myself too seriously

To my husband who is unwavering in his love and support and really believes all things  
are possible

### **Acknowledgments**

In 2004 I had the privilege of spending the summer as a fellow with the Tampa Bay Area Writing Project in Tampa Florida. Here is where my journey for advanced degrees was rekindled through the power of learning with inspired and inspiring teachers. Through the years I have been honored to work with these exceptional people, meet other teachers from around the world through conferences and workshops who continued to influence my desire to learn more about the art of writing and teaching.

During my years of study for my Master's Degree, Dr. Margaret Hewitt encouraged and challenged me to continue my studies. It is because of her wit and wisdom that I have completed this journey.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iii
List of Figures .....	iv
Abstract .....	v
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Overview .....	1
The Interruption without Pardon: Adapting Old Ways with New Technologies .....	4
Written Communication Has Experienced a Renaissance .....	5
The Phone Becomes More Than a Voice .....	6
Sophisticated Communication and Interruption of Written Text .....	7
The Text and the Author .....	8
Young Adult Literature in the Classroom .....	10
Heteroglossia: Many Voices, One Story .....	10
The Reader: Creator of Meaning .....	11
The Purpose of the Study .....	13
Research Questions .....	13
Hermeneutics .....	13
Significance of the Study .....	14
Conceptual Framework .....	14
Heteroglossia and Rhetorical Choices .....	14
Summary of Methodology .....	17
Text Selection .....	17
Ethnographic Content Analysis .....	18
Using Epistolary Texts in the Classroom .....	20
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....	22
The Epistolary Novel .....	22
Reader Response .....	25
Letter Writing and Polyphonic Texts .....	27
Expansion of Literacy Skills .....	28
Abbreviated Writing .....	29
Spelling and Conventions .....	29
Authentic Language .....	30
Voice .....	30
Self-discovery Through the Novel .....	30
Text Complexity .....	31
Summary .....	33
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	35
Hermeneutics: How the Parts Relate to the Whole .....	36
Ethnographic Content Analysis .....	37

Methodological Perspectives .....	38
Social Constructivism .....	38
Ethnographic Positionality.....	39
Case Study of <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	40
Coding System .....	40
Complicated Text.....	50
Polyvocal Texts.....	51
After the Interruption .....	54
The Effect of the Interruption on the Narrative .....	57
Radical Change Theory in Young Adult Literature.....	59
Rules Learned and Applications .....	59
Selection Procedure .....	60
Coding Revisited.....	63
Initial Coding .....	63
Second Coding.....	63
Coding What Happens After the Interruption.....	64
Chapter Four: Text Analysis .....	65
Book 1: <i>Virtuosity</i> by Jessica Martinez .....	65
Story Summary .....	65
Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles .....	67
The Complexity of Polyvocal Texts .....	67
Third Cycle of Coding .....	69
What Happens After the Interruption .....	70
The Impact of Interruptions .....	71
Time .....	71
Complexity of Polyvocal Texts .....	73
Book 2: <i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> by Rachel Cohen & David Levithan .....	73
Story Summary .....	74
Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles .....	74
Expatriating Characters' Thoughts.....	79
What Happens After the Interruption .....	82
The Impact of the Interruption.....	84
Book 3: <i>Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel</i> by Sara Shepard .....	86
Story Summary .....	86
Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles .....	86
Categorizing Text Signals.....	88
What Happens After the Interruption .....	92
Impact of the Interruptions.....	93
The Epistolary Texts and What Followed .....	94
Return to the Narrative and Detail.....	95
Rising Action .....	96
Epistolary Message Ends the Scene.....	97
The Role of the Epistolary Interruption .....	98
Mechanics and Rules of Grammar.....	101
General Observations Learned from Analysis of the Four Young Adult Novels.....	103
Rules of Synthesizing the Text of Epistolary Young Adult Novels .....	104
Chapter Five: Findings.....	106
Signal Words in New Epistolary Fiction .....	107
Interruption and Readers' Interpretation of Texts .....	112

Epistolary Communication in New Narratives and Old Letters .....	113
It's Complicated: Literacy and Literary Skills.....	115
Adding Epistolary Young Adult Texts into the Classroom Canon.....	117
References .....	119
Appendix A: Request to Use Graphic from <i>The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers</i> .....	129
Appendix B: Request to Use Pages from <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	132

## List of Tables

Table 1:	First Coding for <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	46
Table 2:	Pointer Words in <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	48
Table 3:	Texting Shorthand in <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	49
Table 4:	Initial Notations on the Text <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> .....	54
Table 5:	Codes for What Happened After the Interruption .....	56
Table 6:	Initial Coding on the Text Following the Interruption.....	57
Table 7:	What Happens After the Interruption.....	58
Table 8:	Reading the Page and Sorting the Text for <i>Virtuosity</i> by Jessica Martinez .....	67
Table 9:	Second Cycle of Coding for <i>Virtuosity</i> .....	69
Table 10:	After the Interruption in <i>Virtuosity</i> .....	71
Table 11:	First Cycle of Coding for <i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> by .....	77
Table 12:	Second Cycle of Coding for <i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> .....	78
Table 13:	Text Signals for <i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> .....	80
Table 14:	Quantified Types of Interruptions in <i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> .....	83
Table 15:	First Cycle of Coding for <i>Crushed</i> .....	87
Table 16:	Text Signals for <i>Crushed</i> .....	89
Table 17:	Quantified Types of Interruptions for <i>Crushed</i> .....	93
Table 18:	What Happens After the Interruption Quantified Across the Three Novels .....	98
Table 19:	Punctuation, syntax, and spelling conventions in epistolary messages.....	102



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Refinement of Analysis .....	19
Figure 2: <i>Falling for Hamlet</i> Text Features .....	42
Figure 3: Example of Use of White Space .....	43
Figure 4: Example of the Three Styles of Print .....	44

## Abstract

Within the genre of young adult literature, a growing trend is the use of epistolary messages through electronic methods between characters. These messages are set apart from the formal text of the narrative of the novel creating a break in the text features and layout of the page. Epistolary texts require a more sophisticated reading method and level of interpretation because the epistolary style blends multiple voices and points of view into the plot, creating complicated narration. The reader must navigate the narrator's path in order to extract meaning from the text. In this hermeneutic study, I examined the text structures of three young adult novels that contained epistolary excerpts. I used ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1987) to isolate, analyze, and then contextualize the different epistolary moments within the narrative of the novel. The study was guided by two research questions: 1. What types of text structures and features did authors of selected young adult literature with epistolary interruptions published since 2008 use across the body of the published work? 2. How did the authors of selected young adult literature situate the different text structures of interruption into the flow of the narrative? What happened after the interruption? I used a coding system that I developed from a case study of the novel *Falling for Hamlet* by Michelle Ray (2011). Through my analysis I found that the authors used specific verbs to announce an interruption. The interruptions, though few in number, require readers to consider context of the message for event, setting, speaker, purpose and tone as it relates within the message itself and the arc of the plot. In addition, following the interruptions, the reader must decide how to incorporate the epistolary interruption into the narrative as adding to the conflict, adding detail, ending a scene, or simply returning to the narrative. . Therefore, the interruptions in epistolary young adult novels incorporated the text or literacy practices of young adults. Such incorporation reflects the changes in literacy practices in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that may render novels of this style a challenge to readers in creating meaning. The study further incorporates Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia (1980) that

a novel does not contain a single language but a plurality of languages within a single language and Dresang's Theory of Radical Change (1999) of connectivity, interactivity, and access. Texts of this nature offer teachers of reading opportunities to guide students through text features to synthesize information in fiction and non-fiction texts

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Overview

Young adult literature has become one of the fastest growing literary forms (Goodnow, 2007). As literature, it has ardent fans alongside serious researchers. Fans of young adult literature maintain websites to explore and discuss their favorite books. Fanfiction currently has a list of over 2000 titles for fans to follow and add to (fanfiction.net). In 2000, the American Library Association created the Michael L. Printz Award “for a book that exemplifies literary excellence in young adult literature” (YALSA). Young adult literature also has detractors who minimize its quality as a literary form and view YA literature as inappropriate for serious, mature readers (Graham, 2014, Hagelin, 2005, Manning, 2009). Other detractors include conservative groups such as the American Family Association, Family Friendly Libraries, and the American Family Association that find “young adult literature not as literature at all but as ... propaganda...or pornography” (Gaffney, 2014). Like most literary forms, young adult literature includes works written for fun and entertainment as well as high quality writing deserving serious study.

Young adult literature includes a variety of genres: historical fiction (e.g., *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation Volume II: The Kingdom of the Waves* by M.T Anderson, 2008); poetry, (e.g., *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, 1997); fantasy (e.g., *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling, 1997); and science fiction, *Unwind* by Neal Shusterman, 2007).

While young adult literature stretches across a variety of genres, this dissertation takes a special interest in the rebirth is the epistolary novel. Traditionally, the young adult epistolary novelists used letter writing between and among characters to tell a story (Campbell, 1995). More recently, however, YA authors are using 21<sup>st</sup> century electronic communication as the mode through which they create epistolary texts. Current epistolary novels incorporate email, text messaging, and social networks to connect characters and inform them about events happening outside the scene of the narrative. These

messages reflect common literacy practices of modern youth who share information and thoughts through electronic means. According to the 2014 annual report by the Center for the Digital Future “65 percent [of mobile phone users ages 18-34] said that texting is important or very important in maintaining social relationships” and 52 percent believe that “social networking sites are important for maintaining social relationships” (p. 91). Young adults’ connections are epistolary in nature and form a foundation for friendship. The messages contain the voice and point of view of the sender that the receiver must interpret and then choose how to respond.

The epistolary young adult novel uses these same digital modes of communication within the framework of a novel. The epistolary messages contain the voice and point of view of the sender and/or the reaction and interpretation of the receiver. The reader of these novels must be able to identify narrative shifts and plot turns created by epistolary messages, The reader must be able to recognize and accommodate changes in point of view and voice as epistolary messages appear in the context of the novel. As in real life, the YA novel reader must decide how to interpret and respond to the epistle. The recipient must consider the context and the author in which the message was written while attending to the recipient’s current social context. The recipient performs a series of tasks in order to extract meaning from an epistolary message. The tasks begin with choosing whether or not to open or attend to the message at the moment of arrival. Next, the recipient needs to identify the sender and consider their relationship as friend, associate, classmate, parent. If the message is opened, the recipient now addresses the social context of the message: where is the sender, urgency of the message, purpose of the message (inform, entertain, ridicule). After clarifying these positions, then the recipient can read and understand the message. The final task is whether to respond. If the recipient chooses to respond, then she must decide how much and which voice to use. All of these actions reflect the complexity of electronic communication.

Digital epistles differ from traditional letterforms because they may arrive at any time of day without warning. They include email messages, text messages, posters, handwritten notes, song lyrics, transcripts, blogs, tweets, and instant messaging. Typically predicated by a noise, beep, or ring, electronic

messages interrupt the actions of the recipient and the recipient must decide how to react. The message may have great importance requiring immediate action. The recipient may be intensely occupied and unable to respond and make the sender wait. The recipient may glance at the message and choose to ignore it. These types of interruptions reflect the connectivity, interactivity, and access of modern life (Dresang 1999).

Additionally, new technologies allow users to message multiple recipients with the same message at the same exact time, a practice unavailable to letter writers. Text messaging, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat, and Tumblr allow users to send texts or images to multiple recipients or to allow users to post an observation or comment for “followers” to access (Asur et.al. 2011). The epistle, or letter, now has a more pervasive form and a wider audience, an audience who then may continue to share the message with additional audiences with or without the original author’s consent. The option to “forward” a message or “tag” a person in an image is one of many tacit agreements among users. Only when the author sets specific privacy settings will the epistle be contained within a certain circle of friends or specific audience (Facebook, 2013). Presumably then, not setting those more restrictive privacy settings conveys the original author’s permission to be copied and resent. Understanding audience adds a layer of complexity to the electronic communication modes available to young adults. They need to consider the greater context of their messaging within the social setting of their lives.

Considering their wide use, and considering the social expectations regarding the use and access to these multiple methods of communication, authors of young adult literature have blended the use of the interruption via textualized versions of electronic messages into the text of the novel. These messages add complexity to the text and the plotline since the narration can be broken into by an outside voice.

Within the novel, the reader must adapt to a different piece of text. The author has chosen to insert information into the narrative by way of electronic communication. The reader must consider the narrative of the story as it unfolds before the break in the text by an epistle, consider the context of the epistle, and then synthesize the information from the epistle into the greater narrative arc of the novel. The reader must also decide what value the message has to the context of the story. It is this rhetorical

decision by the author to include epistolary interruptions into the novel that guides this study.

### **The Interruption without Pardon: Adapting Old Ways with New Technologies**

The interruption is not new to human interaction. Licoppe (2010) recounts a history of notification systems and compares the ringing of church bells to alert a village of a crisis to the tailored ringtones of cell phone users to identify callers. These types of interruptions have become increasingly “personalized, adaptive, context-aware notifications, adjusted to the circumstances in which they might be activated, and somehow made sensitive to the way they might be received and to the kind of interruptions that might ensue” (Licoppe, 2010, p. 290).

The interruptions, as described by Licoppe, are the bells and whistles used by the owners of digital devices, but these interruptions go beyond notification and include the written messages attached to the alert. These written modes of communication, quick, easy, and accessible, have become regular “interruptions” in our daily lives. They carry their own sets of rules of usage and spelling, determined by the composer for a particular audience. The levels of communication reflect Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of heteroglossia. Heteroglossia is “internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 67). The English language has several unifying styles of writing for published works such as the Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, and Chicago Style. Newspapers have their own style guides to reflect agreed upon editorial styles. The epistolary messages of texting, blogging, and email are not bound to the rules of style of formal publications and can reflect the usage of the author and by extension, the heteroglossia of the current era.

Text message and email users may incorporate slang and dialectical usages of the context of the author. These usages can appear through invented spellings such as “2” for “to” or “r” for “are”. Websites and blogs incorporate different styles to appeal to younger audiences or to satirize or parody traditional formats. The website Thug Notes is a parody of the traditional study guide, SparkNotes. The host, Sparky Sweets, PhD, offers a summary and analysis of classic literature using a hip-hop dialect (Thug-Notes.com, 2015). The format is relaxed and makes the classic works of literature accessible for students who

may struggle with the language or themes of works such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Dracula*, or *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The texts used by those through electronic communication reflect these differences in usage and style. The authors may use simplified syntax, invented spelling, or slang rather than standardized American English. The participants in these exchanges may archive their communication in order to return to it for individual reflection, a written record of an event as evidence, or as a piece of entertainment to share with other friends or associates either at the time of delivery or at some future date. The result is an epistolary relationship, a relationship developed and nourished through written communication.

English is a living language that takes on the shape and form of the context of its speakers and writers. The writers will include elements of the spoken form in the electronic, epistolary communication to fit the occasion. The forms reflect the heteroglossia of the time.

### **Written Communication Has Experienced a Renaissance.**

The rebirth of written communication began with the advent of instant messaging systems in the 1990s (Tyson & Cooper, 2013) that allowed users of computers with Internet access to “chat” with each other in real time. Writing instant notes back and forth caught on quickly, and soon users began working at their computers while holding conversations with friends and associates, simultaneously. Multitasking users of this new technology became accustomed to frequent interruptions during their work or study time, to the point of expecting them. Used in the present context, interruption means: “verb (used without object) to cause a break or discontinuance; interfere with action or speech, especially by interjecting a remark” (Dictionary.com, 2013). An interruption by users of technology is an unexpected notification by someone outside of the receiver’s physical space who has no knowledge of the receiver’s physical activity like a knock on the door by a friend or stranger. They operate much like a third party interrupting a conversation without regard to the engagement of the conversant and force a break in the original interaction to cause the participants to discontinue their activity in order to attend to the message or call from a technological source with the purposive decision not to respond, to ignore.



These electronic interruptions that began with the ringing telephone of the early 1900s and then the “beeper” of the 1980s as extensions of the business world have become a common, accepted, and eagerly anticipated behavior in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jett, 2008; Licoppe, 2004). At present, during face-to-face conversations, people continuously check their phones or other devices to see if anyone has called or messaged them; in fact, interrupting themselves in anticipation of being interrupted by someone else. Interruption has been socialized.

The “connectivity, interactivity, and access” to electronic communication make the epistolary message an integral part of modern life (Dresang, 1999). The epistolary messages make literacy a cornerstone of relationships which requires users to make choices about acting upon the interruption or filing it away for a later time. The interruption becomes artifact holding the message in place to review, revisit, or share. The ability to juggle conversations between and among a group of friends demonstrates a complexity of thinking that requires segregation of information or a synthesis of information. Young adults move within a system of literacy structures and adjust their perception from global to specific and back again depending upon their interpretation of the epistolary message. The ability to adjust to new information is a skill necessary in creating meaning from complex, polyvocal texts.

### **The Phone Becomes More Than a Voice**

During the time of the evolution of the instant messaging system, the cellular phone was undergoing parallel evolution to include the capacity to send and receive texts, as well as voice messages (Urmann, 2009). Sending and receiving text, rather than answering a phone call, started to catch on with users, especially young adults (Latchford, 2003). Text messaging is a behavior not unique to western societies. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, text-based SMS systems are a major communication mode (Center for the Digital Future, 2014).

These systems of messaging have become the most common methods of communication with the result that many young adults prefer texting their friends rather than talking on telephones or face-to-face (Kerr, 2012). As a teacher of high school English, in conversations with my students, I have learned that a number of young adults prefer texting each other rather than participating in face-to-face conversations--

even during disagreements. One reason they often cite is that texting saves time. One does not need to expend time with niceties and the possibility of becoming side tracked onto other subjects. The text keeps them on topic. Likewise, text is impersonal enough that greetings can be shortened and manners can give way to efficiency. I have also heard parents say that they think it is so “cute” when young couples are so shy that they sit next to each other and text rather than hold verbal conversations. The parents may believe that this communication affordance helps young people learn how to interact with someone new—perhaps playing the role of their own *Cyrano de Bergerac*. I have also heard of adults and children texting each other during parties to pass along observations of other people that the texters would never say aloud; a written variation on Alice Roosevelt’s comment: “If you have nothing nice to say, come sit next to me.” These interruptions or written communications have evolved into a back channel of communication that allows people to carry on various conversations simultaneously, at different levels, with different people, at the same event, in the same moment.

### **Sophisticated Communication and Interpretation of Written Text**

Balancing the various messages from a variety of sources requires a level of sophistication in writing and interpreting messages. Young adults who depend upon electronic epistolary messages to maintain relationships have developed the literary skills necessary to understand the heteroglossia of their language along with the hermeneutical turn needed to weave together information from a variety of sources into one narrative, the narrative of their lives. Though they may have learned to balance the give and take of multiple conversations among multiple people, they may not recognize this as a literary skill. Teachers can use students’ ability to move between conversation and formats as a connection to higher order thinking and reading skills.

The written communication is not only for people separated by great distances but also by social distances observed within the same room. It is not uncommon to see a couple dining “together” while each is actually independently working smart phone keys to communicate with a third and fourth party. What makes digital interactions unique is the dyadic nature of them even when a user is engaged in multiple conversations (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Bernard Steigler labels this type of communication

*psycho-technologies* that “replace the social formation of attention by its automated management, reduced to a minimum on the side of the human ‘subject’, who is no longer between deep attention and hyper attention; ...[and] delegates his or her attention to automata” (Licoppe, 2010, 289, emphasis in original). This area between types of awareness develops a power paradigm between speaker, the sender of the message, and audience, the recipient. In the case of adolescents, being interrupted by a text message or other notification while in the presence of others, often signals a sense of importance that people in other places need the recipient’s attention that requires the recipient to disengage from the physical environment to the cyber environment. The people in the physical space will often retract and allow the cyber environment to take precedence.

The adjustment between the cyber environment and the physical environment requires a hermeneutic turn. The individual shifts attention from one space to another and within the shift must narrow the focus or expand the focus. The recipient of the message must take other factors into consideration such as whether to share the incoming message with the physical audience or keep it private. The users of electronic communication understand the importance of speaker and audience. The originator of the message has a specific audience in mind at the time of the communication. The audience, recipient of the message, recognizes the speaker and must discern the intended audience. Shifting from specific to global allows the recipient to integrate the message into real time.

This ability to move the whole to the part and then integrate the part into the whole exemplifies the sophisticated reading techniques necessary to adjust to epistolary interruption in epistolary young adult literature. The reader needs to adjust from the overarching narrative to the narrow focus of the message and then integrate back into the narrative with the information gleaned from the epistolary interruption.

### **The Text and the Author**

Young adult literature is an increasingly popular genre showing growth in the publishing industry and influencing modern culture (Cart, 2008; Brown, 2011). “Kids are buying books in quantities we've never seen before,” said Booklist magazine critic Michael Cart, a leading authority on young adult

literature. “And publishers are courting young adults in ways we haven't seen since the 1940s” (Goodnow, 2007). However, young adults are not the only ones seduced by this genre. Adults are also buying and reading young adult literature. Young adult literature has become a source for film and television entertainment as well from the Harry Potter film series and *The Hunger Games* on the big screen to *Pretty Little Liars* on ABC Family Television.

The novel has been an ideal format for authors to explore the human condition while experimenting with the language of modern culture through the use of various forms of written communication. In their writing about the social settings of LGBT students, Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) point out “social life happens at four coordinates, the intersection of one or more *actors* engaging in one or more *activities* (behaviors) at a particular *time* in a specific *place*” (p. 121, emphasis in original). These four elements, actors, activities, time, and place influence, if not determine, the style of language appropriate for the current situation. In order to incorporate the variety of text structures, authors need to understand and employ the different voices or heteroglossia of a language determined by the actors, activities, time and place to give the text an authenticity that young adults will identify with and believe. “The language of the novel is a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 47). The author is the creator of the novel, yet the author has mimicked the voices and styles of the language through the characters. It is within these voices that the heteroglossia of the language appears.

The language of the novel includes the voices of the characters who, when well-written, are multifaceted. Between the covers of current young adult literature, authors need to reflect the spoken usage and speech patterns of youth along with the style of language they use in a variety of textual formats addressing a variety of audiences. Authors include formal and informal language along with casual terms and dialect. Maler (2014) labels these “language shifts...where the narrator slips into the dialect of the protagonist whose thoughts or words she is representing” (p. 143). Authors of young adult

literature slip into the vernacular of young adults to reflect the thoughts and words of the characters in an authentic way.

### **Young Adult Literature in the Classroom**

The use of young adult epistolary literature in the classroom is an opening into the usage and heteroglossia of the students. By including a variety of voices and formats, teachers can model the style of current practices juxtaposed to academic language and language of literature in the traditional canon. Teachers “teach mainstream dialects and code switching so students can be effective in their future academic and business careers” (Dredger, Horst, Martin & Williams, 2014, p. 5). Understanding the values of time and place for different types of languages underscores the importance of learning code switching. The complexity of linguistic use both verbal and written can be explored through the use of epistolary texts. Students can relate to the concept of speaker/subject/audience for their rhetorical choices while texting or using social media. Applying the dialogics and hermeneutics of the part connecting to the whole, teachers can guide students to understand how their everyday practices of communicating with multiple audiences through electronic, epistolary messages show complexity and higher order thinking necessary in the adult world. Using young adult literature in the classroom allows teachers to explore current literature while introducing the concept of heteroglossia in everyday communication practices.

### **Heteroglossia: Many Voices, One Story**

Authors like Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Toni Morrison have incorporated a variety of spoken dialects to capture the essence of their characters and to situate them geographically, socially, and economically. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain uses seventeen different dialects to reflect the diversity of the characters that Huck and Jim encounter during their journey on the Mississippi. He included an explanation about the dialects in the frontispiece of the novel.

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremist form of the backwoods Southern dialect; the ordinary “Pike County” dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with

these several forms of speech. I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters trying to talk alike and not succeeding. THE AUTHOR.  
(Twain, p.3)

Dickens used a similar technique while developing his characters in *Great Expectations* to reflect how language was a major social barrier in Victorian England. Toni Morrison continued the tradition in her novels. For example, in *Beloved*, Morrison segregated her characters through the dialects they spoke to add authenticity to the characters' persona and expectations. As part of this long tradition, the choices by authors of contemporary young adult literature are guided by the language formed and held in the written messages created and developed by 21<sup>st</sup> century young adults. These current authors have an advantage over their predecessors since the syntactical structures, voice, grammar, and usage of youth are publicly available in written form and do not demand the skills of translating the oral into the written form of dialect.

The multiple voices in the young adult novel present the plot from different perspectives that create complexity to the text. The multiple points of view reveal elements of the story from different times and places. For example, in *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007), the plot is told from two different time periods. The dual narrative between Hannah and Clay are told forward by Hannah and understood backward by Clay. In *Second Impact* (Klass and Klass, 2013), the narrative is told through emails and blog posts by Carla and Jerry. Each character has an element of the story and it is through their epistolary communication that the full story is revealed. Both of these books use contemporary, youthful vernacular diction to capture the heteroglossia of modern life. Both books demonstrate a complexity of text that requires a sophisticated reading technique to understand the full story.

### **The Reader: Creator of Meaning**

The role of the reader, interpreting the interplay of different perspectives, different voices, and utterances (heteroglossia) as a whole, creates a new paradigm between author and audience. The author is not simply the storyteller and the reader the receiver of the story from beginning to end. The author creates a rhetorical situation through the use of multiple voices and a variety of text structures that require

the reader to assemble the parts into the whole of a story. “The literary text enables its readers to transcend the limitations of their own real-life situation; it is not a reflection of any given reality, but it is an extension or broadening of their own reality” (Iser, p. 79). Readers identify with characters in novels on various levels. Louise Rosenblatt refers to this as reflective reading or “the trying on of alternative modes of behavior in imagined situations” (p. 146). At times readers see mirror images of themselves or they may peek through a window into a different life during the reading process. “The basic premise here is that all readers should have opportunities in literature both to see how other people live, think and perceive the world, and to see their own lives reflected in the characters and topics they encounter” (Bond, 2006, p. 70).

Finding works that reflect their world is a frequent comment that my students have shared with me. They have said that they choose novels based on connections that they can make with the text. For example, they have said they want a novel that has a problem or issue that they or a friend might experience. They look for the reality and authenticity of the conflict to draw them into the story. Some look for affirmation through the mirror of the text or seek insight by peering through a window into another (Sims-Bishop, 1990). One way authors may draw in readers is through the use of “believable” text. When authors incorporate multiple voices through multiple genres, readers can learn to view the world from different points of view that may help them develop empathy for others or understand absurdities. “The possibilities are infinite: the insights derived from contrasts with my own temperament and my own environment; the empathy with violence, the sadistic impulse, that may now be faced and perhaps controlled; the compassion for others formerly felt to be alien; ...the trying out of alternative modes of behavior in imagined situations” (Bond, 2006, p. 146). By incorporating multiple text structures that interrupt the anticipated flow of the narrative, authors may be mimicking life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – interrupting- (Reinsch et al, 2008) while giving readers opportunities to create meaning through familiar usage. This study endeavors to unlock the dialogics of interruption that occur between author and text that opens the path for interactivity by the reader.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Epistolary texts require a more sophisticated reading method and level of interpretation because the epistolary style blends multiple voices and points of view into the plot, creating complicated narration. The reader must navigate the narrator's path in order to extract meaning from the text. Through multiple points of entry, interactivity between reader and text adds a sophistication to the reading skills necessary to create meaning. The reader needs to do more than identify with a character to understand the actions and plot twists that develop in the pages of a young adult novel. The interruptions of the text by different types of messages from different characters require the reader to understand a variety of dialects and epistolary styles from handwritten notes to shorthand text messages. The variety of modes represents an aspect of the heteroglossia of a culture.

## **Hermeneutics**

In this hermeneutic study, I examined the text structures of three young adult novels that contained epistolary excerpts. The authors have created rhetorical challenges in the text that the reader will need to identify for purpose and voice and then discern their value to the overarching plotline. This type of reading is an example of text complexity often touted as the type of complex reading students must be able to perform (Glaus, 2014). Exposure to a variety of texts and text structures within the format of a novel gives the reader opportunities to practice creating meaning and interpreting texts in a comfortable and familiar setting.

## **Research Questions**

My dissertation study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of text structures and features did authors of selected young adult literature with epistolary interruptions published since 2008 use across the body of the published work?
2. How did the authors of selected young adult literature situate the different text structures of interruption into the flow of the narrative? What happened after the interruption?



## **Significance of the Study**

### *Conceptual Framework*

Literacies are socially constructed (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Gee, 1996; Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). The style of writing contained in epistolary novels reflects the social nature of text structures. In order for readers to understand the meaning of the various text types, they need to engage their social schema to interact with the utterances on the page (Bakhtin, 1981). It is Bakhtin's theory of dialogism that brings the text and the reader into contact. "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer word" (p. 280). In their encounters with the written word, readers act and react to the text. "In a literacy event, this indeterminacy may, rather than frustrating participants, serve to involve, excite, or intrigue them. They may perceive such indeterminacy as a creative social challenge" (Beach & Anson, 2004, p. 252). With authors incorporating a variety of text structures that interrupt the flow of the narrative, these events may more fully engage the reader of the young adult novel than if the text were maintained as standard prose. It is also possible that multiple voices, interruptions, and changes in perspective may serve to frustrate readers because of the addition of complex text features.

This study is important because it considers the complexity of young adult literature and the demands made upon readers. What may appear on the surface as distractions or pop culture references to titillate and entice a young reader, may prove to be the opposite. Epistolary breaks in the text could mark the beginning of a different type of text complexity that gives the reader opportunities to create meaning from different sources.

This study considers the epistolary tradition of the novel and its latest iteration in young adult literature, through the use of electronic means of communication as an extension and element of the epistle.

### **Heteroglossia and Rhetorical Choices**

"Reading is not the discovering of meaning (like some archaeological 'dig') but the creation

of it” (Benton, 2005, p. 89). As a teacher of Advanced Placement English classes, my students often admit that the books they choose for pleasure reading have familiar situations or conflicts. Often, they reference stories referred to as the “teenage problem novel”. These novels appeal to young readers because the readers see a reflection of their own lives or the lives of their friends. Through this reflection, a reader begins a dialogue with the text from the lived experience of the reader. The texts may reflect a particular social stance that young adults are developing through their social settings along with the development of personal identity they are creating in response to their society. According to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, “[a]s discursal and generic resources become internalized from encounters with real people and real texts, they become part of a person’s socially structured and structuring *habitus*” (Ivanic, 1998, p. 287). When an author breaks the prose with an excerpt of digital communication, the reader may need to form an understanding of the purpose of the interruption and fold it back into the narrative to create meaning from the interruption, perhaps analogous to their use of interruptions in lived experience.

The interruption of a technological event like a text message differs from a verbal interruption because it carries with it the fixed usage of the sender/author. The text holds in place current stylistics specific to a language group within a larger language. This, according to Bakhtin (1981), “is the problem of heteroglossia *within* a language, ... the problem of internal differentiation, stratification characteristic of any national language” (p. 67). This “stratification of language” may lead to the dismissal of young adult literature as a serious genre or to label it as easy to read and unworthy of serious discussion. Yet, the readers of a work containing multiple voices written in multiple formats must balance these texts for point of view, character development, and plot all while braiding together the variety of text structures for a holistic understanding of the novel. Reading at this level of interplay between reader and text goes beyond simple narrative understanding of the text and requires a more sophisticated interpretation of the work. Young adult literature that uses this “stratification” is an example of complex text.

With the variety of voices and points of view, young adults are exposed to aspects of the heteroglossia of their culture (McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Young adults have the opportunity to communicate with a variety of people in a variety of formats from text messages and emails to Instagram

and Snapchat. They may be interrupted by these messages at any given moment of their days. Since they don't know when to expect the messages, they need to decide whether to attend to the interruption or delay responding. In other words, the practice of adapting to interruptions during their daily lives may provide them with the skills necessary to attend to the interruption and then return to the flow of the day. Will the *habitus* of composing in an Internet or electronic format create a hybrid style that blends traditional or standard forms of composition with styles of everyday texting or other electronic communication? Young adults making these decisions on a moment-to-moment basis demonstrate higher order thinking that prioritizes incoming information within the context of the setting when it was received. Knowing how to respond to a message: with text, voice, or images, demonstrates another layer of sophisticated communication and composition.

“Available and familiar patterns of utterances (that is, genres) provide interpretable clues that allow people to make sense of each other's utterances and to frame utterances meaningful to one's interlocutors (Bazerman, 2012). Mead (1934) has in fact proposed that “our sense of the self arises from our attempts to represent our meanings to be intelligible to others within a social field” (Bazerman, 2012, p. 229). What is not clear is the function of epistolary, multimodal texts in the self-fashioning that young readers do. Considering these epistolary multimodal texts in young adult literature, the reader may create specific interpretations (meanings) presented by the signs of the text used. These signs in the text may include invented spellings or spelling shortcuts often used in text messaging. Or the signs may include the use of similar fonts from various types of electronic communication that would differ from the fonts used in the body of the text to carry the narrative of the story. The formatting may include margin spacing, change in fonts and sizes, or line spacing. Yet, different technological communications also carry specific and distinct meaning with the style and format as signs of identity for the young adult.

These signs, recognized as variable across genre, open potentially different dialogues between reader and author. “The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance” (Bakhtin, 1981, 272) By using a

variety of genres that mimic technological communication—text messaging, email, Twitter—(mimicking “the authentic environment of an utterance”) the reader co-creates meaning using social experience and identity. The author legitimizes the use of alternative text structures within the traditional genre of the novel. The alternative text structures resemble the layout and form of electronic communication positioning it in the stratification and heteroglossia of the culture and the user.

Lewis and Fabos (2005) explored the identity development and discourse of adolescent users of instant messaging. These young users were able to juggle multiple conversations and with multiple subjects comfortably and demonstrated ease without confusing content or subject of each electronic conversation. This real life experience of balancing a variety of conversations may be something for educators and authors to map onto other reading tasks. According to Koss and Teale (2009), “[t]he reading of texts written using multiple narrative perspectives can offer challenges to teen readers and parallel the piecing together of information that is becoming common in their everyday lives” (p. 570). The ability to balance a variety of text structures while reading may demand a higher level of interpretation by the reader than that of a single format across a novel rendering young adult literature a more complicated reading experience.

### **Summary of Methodology**

In this hermeneutic study, I focused on identifying and categorizing the text structures and strategies deployed by authors of selected young adult literature that contained epistolary excerpts.

#### *Text Selection*

To make the undertaking more manageable, I targeted texts published after the year 2008. I chose this year as a start date for the study to reflect recent publications and the advent of the common use of electronic communication by young adults and adults. I limited the literature to works published in English in the United States. The novels I selected featured young adult protagonists, a common definition for young adult literature. The novels were reviewed by one or more of the following: *ALAN Review*, *The English Journal*, or one of my students. I chose a young adult’s review in order to include the target audience and to expand approval beyond teachers or academics.

The purposefully selected literature included epistolary communication between and among characters. Epistolary communication included, but was not limited to, text messaging, email, instant messaging, letters, or transcripts of conversations or broadcasts. The layout of the epistolary communication differed from the body of the text in font, size, spacing, or margins. I noted frequency of epistolary excerpts or changes in text or style of delivery to the flow of the narrative and the number of formats (instant message, text, email, or transcript), the type of text signals (Lorch, 1989) along with my interpretation of the author's purpose.

#### *Ethnographic Content Analysis*

To determine the type of epistolary excerpt and discern its purpose, I used Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987). This reflexive method allowed me latitude to interpret the form and function of different epistolary texts within the context of the larger work. I used a coding system (Saldana, 2009) that I developed from a preliminary case study of the novel *Falling for Hamlet* by Ray (2011). Ray used a variety of text structures throughout the novel that are marked by changes in font, layout, line spacing, point size, and margins. The three main font styles represent the three main threads of the storyline: Ophelia on stage, Ophelia interrogated, and Ophelia to herself. Ray incorporated electronic interruptions of these three formats to introduce plot changes or shift the point of view of the narrative. The codes derived from this exploratory case study identified the individual parts of the larger work, creating a set of analytic tools to use with the study texts. After developing the coding procedure in the pilot study, I applied the hermeneutical turn to understand how these small, individual parts related to the overarching plotline or the whole work and then back to the individual part as it related to the author's intention. The hermeneutical turn required the reader of *Falling for Hamlet* to braid together the three story perspectives to create a complete plotline. The parts created the whole while the reader needed to decide which perspective was the "truth" of the story.

During the coding of the texts selected for the study, I used a constant comparison analysis (Leech, 2007) to refine the a priori codes I developed during the pilot. I also added codes as I made new discoveries during the refinement of the analysis (figure 1). I quantified the patterns and words or terms

used by the authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Fairclough, 2010; Krippendorf, 2003 ) to support the description of the terms and styles of writing used by authors of young adult literature.

Considering the quantity and types of text structures encountered by young adults when they read, connect and communicate, I analyzed the role of the epistolary excerpts through different formats of textual communication into the body of the text in young adult literature. Further, I considered the expectations authors placed on their readers to understand the choice of digital communication causing the interruption along with the demands placed on the reader to understand the role of the format used to create meaning by synthesizing the different voices and perspectives from the multiple genres. Considering the variety of options for authors to include as epistolary interruptions, I analyzed the appearance of the interruptions and the background knowledge necessary to understand their uses. Did the appearance of the interruption look like a text message, an email, or other format? I further explored the nature of the interruption. Did the interruption make sense for the character and setting involved? Did it reflect the habitus of young adults?

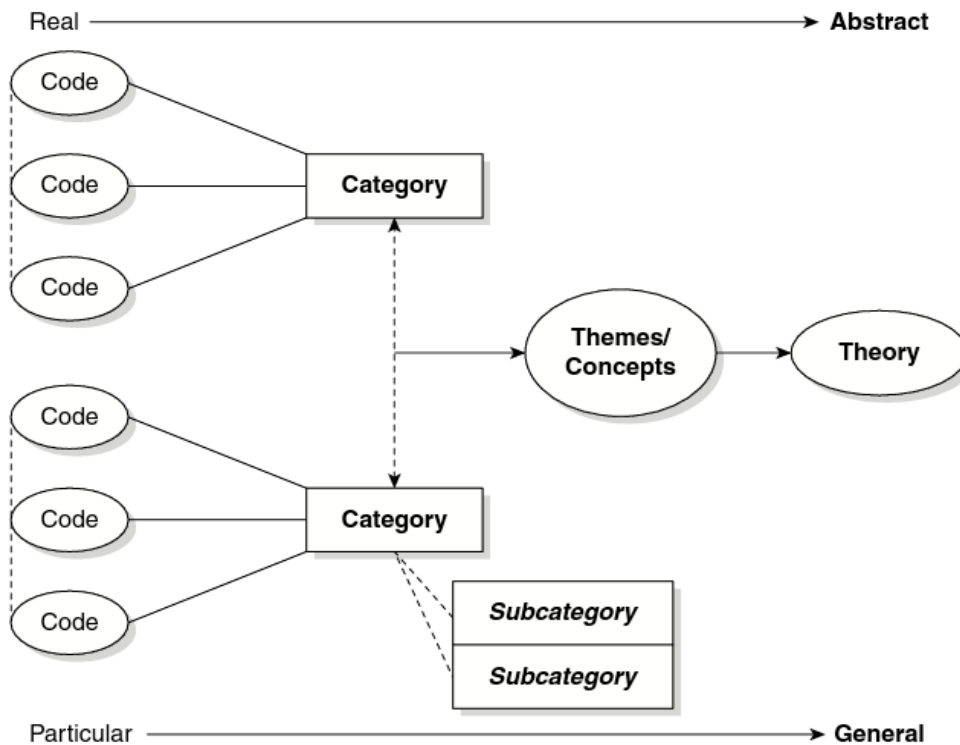


Figure 1. Refinement of Analysis (from Saldana (2009), page 12)

## Using Epistolary Texts in the Classroom

Another ethnographic element to this research was my position and perspective as a secondary teacher of English. My work with high school students influenced my perspective on adolescent literacy practices and guided my understanding of interpretations of the texts studied. In class discussions and in private conversations, I learned about the literacy practices of my students and discovered what they considered to be “true” or “false” in usage by authors. The students shared their sources for information and entertainment by writing quotes on the whiteboard in the classroom or discussing what came across their newsfeeds on Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, or Twitter. It was through these exchanges that I learned current linguistic stylistics and was able to develop a more informed opinion about social media usage as presented by the young adults in my life. By understanding my students’ daily literacy practices, I developed an appreciation for their grammatical constructions and was able to guide them in developing their academic language and usage. These experiences informed my interpretation of the texts chosen for the study and helped me identify the structures used by the authors of the selected texts for this study.

Teachers benefit by understanding the literacy practices of their students. When in a quandary about a word definition or historic event, students are quick to ask if they can “look it up”. Looking it up for them means conducting a quick Internet search—on their phones. By encouraging them to pursue a line of inquiry, the teaching moment is enhanced, and they feel empowered by the new knowledge they can immediately apply. For example, my students were reading 19<sup>th</sup> century American poetry. One group read a poem by Emily Dickinson that included the word “bobolink”. Their group discussed what a bobolink could possibly be. I suggested they look it up and encouraged them to find a link that included the song of the bird. After reading a description of the bird, listening to its song, and watching a short video of one in the wild, the students had a clearer image of why Dickinson included the bird in her poem. The immediacy and the different formats allowed the students to use the type of literacy practices they use everyday. This type of interruption enhanced the classroom pedagogy by following natural lines of inquiry and applying the information to the coursework.

Teachers can direct students to follow the rhetorical choices authors make. By using the students’

experiences, teachers can demonstrate the use of heteroglossia in everyday life and then model the overlay into the academic realm. The young adult epistolary novel gives teachers the opportunity to point out the text features and signals, such as specific verbs, within a text that lead to meaning making.



## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

In this chapter, I present a short history of the novel with a focus on epistolary literature.

Literature in this review explores literacy practices of young adults, uses of technological communication, multi-voiced novels, and the role of the reader in creating meaning. Studies excluded addressed only educational reading or pedagogy of young adults and adolescents since this study focuses on young adult literature as literature.

### **The Epistolary Novel**

The novel is a popular genre in American letters, yet "...the novel is a comparatively recent genre" (Bakhtin, 1980, p. 50). Earlier genres, such as the epic, the lyric, and the drama, were able to "transmit, mimic and represent" a variety of voices (Bakhtin, p. 50). The epistolary novel as a style of the novel genre was invented and used extensively in the first half of the eighteenth century (Whyman, 2007, p. 577). Novels using epistolary text incorporated letters or excerpts from letters written between characters to expose the internal thoughts of the characters without the author's intrusion, or to allow characters to make confessions to other characters that would simultaneously move along the plot. Epistolary novels contain letters written by the main character in order to release her inner feelings or frustrations (Campbell, 1995, p. 337). These letters are essential for advancing the plot. Epistolary, for this study, will be used to define any type of message sent between characters that would appear in written or visual form. Some of these messages may appear as images while others will appear as text that may or may not change in font or point size. Most often these messages will appear in an interruptive form, apart from, yet embedded within the flow of the narrative of the novel, usually denoted by additional space, change in font or point size, or indented text. Most often this style of writing was considered a feminine style (Campbell, 1995, p. 332). "Epistolary fiction, with its fragmentation, subjectivity, abandonment of chronology, repetitiveness, associative and sometimes seemingly illogical

connections, and, most of all, unconventional use of language, embodies the definition of *l'écriture féminine*" (Campbell, 1995, p. 335). A burgeoning middle class during the nineteenth century was accompanied by more people becoming literate, especially women. These women "lacked formal education but had time and money to devote to literary activities (Whyman, 2007, p. 577). This use of text by a wider swath of society foreshadowed the use of technological communication used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is, the use of the epistolary genre is again a popular literary habit, only the mode has changed. Young adults, in particular middle class youth, have had access to computers and cellular phones at young ages. Their parents encouraged them to use them through games on CD Rom and then through the use of the Internet (Dresang, 1999). Just as the women of the Victorian Era become comfortable with writing and receiving letters, young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century became comfortable with electronic communication. Victorian women devoted time to writing letters and diaries in the privacy of their homes much like the young adult spent (spends) time in the privacy of her room writing blogs, posting messages, and maintaining connections through social networks. Young adults developed the practice of using a variety of forms and voices, dependent upon their audience and purposes for writing. This heteroglossia, as defined by Bakhtin (1981), refers to the different voices in one language. These voices will use the same language, English for example, while reflecting the usage of different social groups or ages of characters. This social diversity of speech types or levels is demonstrated throughout *Huckleberry Finn* in "the way in which the human voice is used as a register for how the different characters negotiate class" (Pearce, p. 155). In young adult literature, these voices vary the registers used by characters for different purposes. According to Bakhtin (1981), the novel usually breaks down into the following basic types of compositional-stylistic unities:

1. Direct authorial literary-artistic narration
2. Stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration
3. Stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration  
(the letter, the diary, etc.)
4. Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral,

philosophical or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth)

5. The stylistically individualized speech of characters (p. 262)

Just as the Victorian woman learned written discourse through reading letters and novels, 21<sup>st</sup> century young adults learn the discourse of electronic communication through interactivity, connectivity, and access (Dresang, 1999).

In its historical treatment, the genre of the epistolary novel divided into two varieties: the seduction novel and the identity novel (Campbell, 1995, Whyman, 2007, Watt, 1967). The seduction novel focused on the plight of a woman, often of a different social class, who faced amorous advances by her employer (Whyman, 2007). The woman would likely experience one of two endings: she would defend her honor and be “rewarded with marriage to her master” or suffer abandonment by her family and friends after being raped by her master; and then subsequently saved her virtue by committing suicide (Whyman, 2007). An example of the “abandoned woman story,” *Lettres Portugaises* (1669, published in English in 1678) records the letters from a nun to her former lover. Because the story involves seduction that is complicated by the characters’ inability to be together, the letter writers take on a very emotional stance and suffer from the seclusion needed to write the letters. Perry writes, “What writers enact in their seclusion is at the core of the epistolary novel: ‘a self-conscious, self-perpetuating process of emotional self examination which gathers momentum and ultimately becomes more important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing letters’” (Campbell, 1995, p. 338). An example of the young adult “sitting alone writing letters” is *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007) in which the protagonist, Hannah Baker, records a series of thirteen audio tapes that explain her decision to commit suicide. Upon her death, these tapes are given to Clay Jensen to learn the truth behind her suicide. The novel is set after Hannah’s death, yet she is the protagonist of this modern seduction story. Her communication was solitary and focused so in the end, she saved her virtue through the now exposed reasons behind her death. Could Hannah Baker have used the traditional form of the diary to coordinate

the same ending? Undoubtedly. The difference here is that the use of technology has pulled her friend more deeply into her story because he is compelled by the sound and tone of her voice on the tapes. The numbered tapes only reveal what Clay Jensen needs to know when she wants him to know it. He honors her memory by following her directions explicitly. This creates a dialogism between characters while involving the reader. Dialogism in this context refers to the dialogue between author and reader but will more importantly refer to the dialogue among characters and characters and the author/narrator (Bakhtin, 1981).

### **Reader Response**

Reader response includes the reader's responding to the text and the characters within it that creates a second dialogic. A practical example of this was during a discussion with my Advanced Placement Language and Composition class about Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the role of dialect and language. They shared that they found the dialectical spellings difficult to understand initially, but after they stuck with it, they become more fluent in reading and understanding the dialogue. I then asked them about the first person perspective of the narrator, Huck, for the novel. I wondered aloud why Twain would use this character to tell his story. The strongest response came from one of the boys in the room. He stated that it had to be from Huck's perspective to keep the story real. If Twain had used third person, the shift in language would have made the story feel fake and the text clumsy. The other students agreed with him and further stated that they did not want another voice to enter into the narrative. They realized the role the dialogics played in the novel. They, as the audience, did not want to interrupt the flow of the story by the injection (interruption) of an inauthentic voice giving background or descriptive information. They also did not want to know anything ahead of Huck. It was important for them to see the story through Huck's eyes only and understand events as they unfolded in "real" time without any adult interpretation of events. For me, the comments from the students embodied Bakhtin's theory of dialogics. "The language of the novel is a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" (47). Twain created a space for my students to identify with the protagonist Huck by using his voice as the thread to weave the other voices together. It also allowed Twain to pass

judgment on characters or situations by using the voice of Huck as his filter. My students could then connect more easily with the themes presented because of their identification with Huck. For them, the idea of a third-person narrator felt like an interloper hacking into an intimate journey of self-discovery. The story was about Huck and Jim—there was no third person.

Like Twain, the women writers of the 1800s would incorporate “their letter-writing skills into fictions of a domestic disposition” (Salsini, 2001, p. 353) using their authentic voices to which their audience could identify. The authors of young adult literature turn to the technological skills used by young adults for the same purpose. Women were growing in their literary skills, practiced it through personal letters, and learned different writing techniques by reading epistolary novels. Young adults, learning to use and incorporate a variety of communicative technologies into their lives, see these practices echoed in literature written about them and for them (Ray 2011, Cohen & Levithan 2010, Mackler 2010, Wasserman, 2007, Shepard 2006). Elizabeth Campbell “notes that modern texts focus less on an erotic plot and more on an exploration of female identity” (Salsini, 2001, p. 353). Applying that same shift from the original epistolary novels to contemporary epistolary works is parallel to the use of technology in young adult literature. Campbell and Salsini maintain that the shift by women writers leads to “an exploration of female identity” (Salsini, p. 353).

The novels *Pamela* (1741) and *Clarissa* (1748) by Samuel Richardson were very popular novels of their time. Both of these novels used the epistolary form to connect with an audience of women who were becoming more literate, used letter writing as a common method of communication, and reflected their rising social ranks through improving literacy skills. The use of letters to stay connected in their own lives made the epistolary novel a comfortable genre for women. As Whyman points out, women used letter writing to stay connected and share their own observations of life and learning with other women and through these letters improved their own literacy skills.

The young adults in 21<sup>st</sup> century literature are often isolated psychologically or socially rather than the physical separation of women in the aforementioned novels of the 1700s. Ophelia in *Falling for Hamlet* (Ray, 2011) remains within the confines of Elsinore yet feels psychologically and emotionally

isolated from Hamlet and the actions of her father, Polonius. Unable to trust anyone, she must look inside herself to find her internal strength in order to act in ways to ensure her survival. Her lack of trust in authority requires her to communicate through various epistolary methods to friends she does trust, much like the women in the early novels. Just as the women in the 1700s used letter writing, new literacy practices for them, to explore and expose their internal dialogues, Ophelia uses electronic methods of communication, new literacy practices.

### **Letter Writing and Polyphonic Texts**

Building on this foundation of letter writing to create community, women in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century organized literary clubs to “enhance the possibility of lifelong learning” (Long 2004, p. 336). These literary clubs, also known as reading groups, gave women the opportunity to read, review, and study the classics and the literature of their day. Long continued: “...women’s association for self-development through literary education empowered its participants, changed their identities both individually and collectively...” (p. 337). This empowerment and identity development are echoed by young adults. According to Anderson-Butcher, Lasseigne, Ball, Brzozowski, Lehnert, & McCormick (2010) blogs may offer adolescents opportunities for “identity exploration, the development and nurturance of friendships, and overall positive youth development” (p. 73) and may also work as a traditional diary.

By incorporating a variety of formats of text, authors develop a polyphonic style. Polyphonic text is a text in which “the independence of characters from their narrator” (Pearce, 1994 p. 45) exists. This independence gives the author the opportunity to weave together a variety of points of view within one novel or work, a key element in the young adult novel. Dresang’s (1999) theory of radical change suggests that young adults expect to connect to a variety of texts and voices through their connectivity to others via the Internet.

A growing community for young people to connect with is the world of fan fiction where fans of a published work extend the story into undeveloped or underdeveloped plot lines created by fans. The majority of these communities are based in cyberspace and maintained by the members. These young

adults are engaged in full literacy practice of reading and writing and moving into media literacy by creating and not merely consuming what is available online (Jenkins, 2006). These sites include elements of epistolary texts since the submissions invite members to comment or add information to entries posted by other members of the community. These communities enhance the multi-voiced texts young adults have read and are familiar with.

Young adults have experienced these multi-texted books at very young ages. One example is *The Magic School Bus* (Cole, 1992) series. These children's books, a blend of fiction and non-fiction, introduce scientific concepts and facts through the fictional world of Miss Frizzle. The content of these books is presented in a non-linear, multi-voiced format that requires the reader to decide where to enter the content on the page: through the fictional narrative of the teacher and students or through the facts spread across the page in text bubbles or captions or through the artwork. The reader then braids the information together into a single story. The information shared is delivered in one style of writing, while the fictional storyline and character dialogue is delivered in others.

Other examples of polyphonic text are novels by Jodi Picoult. Within her novels, she weaves the stories together through the perspective of the different characters. In her 2006 novel, *19 Minutes*, she created the tapestry of a school shooting through the perspective of the shooter, his family, his friends, the investigating officer, and the judge. These multiple perspectives developed a deeper, richer image of the event than through a single third-person perspective. This weaving of perspectives allowed the author to share information or to withhold information from the reader until the character, who knew what was happening from a more detailed perspective, could reveal it. Sort of like real life.

### **Expansion of Literary Skills**

Just as women in the 1700s improved and expanded their literary skills, so do 21<sup>st</sup> century young adults. Both these woman and the 21<sup>st</sup> century young adults mimic style, conventions, and voice by authors of their contemporary times. Whyman (2001) describes these women as:

a group usually defined by social and economic historians according to wealth, status, occupation, or values...below the level of gentry and are either self-taught or educated in the home...united

by their possession of reading and writing skills, access to printed materials, and enjoyment of poetry and prose. As they learn new skills and adapt to intellectual stimuli, their literary aspirations grow (p. 579).

Long (2004) pointed out that “women’s reading groups are gatherings of equals” (p. 347). This sense of equality resonates with members of fan fiction groups.

### *Abbreviated Writing*

For young adults, one area of learned literacy skills is in texting and blog posts. These young people echo this description by Whyman when they learn new technologies to communicate. With each new format (or genre) of communication, these middle class—“below the level of gentry”—youth enjoy sharing information through text and images. They, too, are mostly self-taught and have access to equipment (cell phones, laptops, computers) to maintain these connections to each other. Whyman “tracked the rise of epistolary literacy with expanding postal services and in the presence of letters in every genre” (Whyman, 1999, p. 580). A similar rise could be tracked for the expanded use of electronic communication in an epistolary fashion over the last decade (Lewis & Fabos, 2005).

### *Spelling and Conventions*

Young adults experiment with spelling and conventions of print (West, 2008). Carrington (2007) posits that the hullabaloo over invented spelling or spelling shortcuts boils down to a power struggle between the keepers of the canon and the creativity of new literacies. However, contrary to the adult expectation of “teenage invented spelling” (Carrington, 2007) as the apocalyptic sign of declining standards, rather it shows an interest in language and an exploration of the limitations and creations of style and usage within a certain context or occasion understood and developed by a specific speaker to a specific audience. This type of discourse reflects a shift in the ever changing and growing English language. As women of earlier centuries began to mimic the writing of published authors, so they took to using their own language of everyday life and concerns addressing an audience of their peers (Whyman, 2008).



## **Authentic Language**

The women and young adults in these novels reflect the use of real language and real usage for their lives, or the habitus of lived experience that may create an authenticity to the plot. Habitus in this context follows the concept presented by Bourdieu: “as discursal and generic resources become internalized from encounters with real people and real texts, they become part of a person’s socially structured and structuring *habitus*” (Ivanic 2004, p. 287). Habitus marks a subject’s almost unconscious approach to acting within a particular social field--their ability to recognize social cues and their instinctual manner of response. This concept of a person or character as socially defined aligns with Bakhtin in that a subject is socially defined and he/she is constituted by and through language, and the language is determined by the political and ideological context in which the character offers her utterances. All this ties back to heteroglossia since the characters are using the language of the time and place.

### *Voice*

This epistolary novel style fell out of favor during the Victorian Era, yet Victorian authors often used the letter as “an opening into the sender’s and receiver’s psychology” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 40). The interjection of the letter into the text gave authors the opportunity to give a clear voice to a particular character or to allow a character to reflect on a specific event or emotion. In particular, the letters—or at times diary entries—allowed the sender opportunities “to work out problems she faced as a parent, wife, friend” (Whyman, 2007, p. 589) just as women did in their real lives. This style of writing was familiar to women of the era who were beginning to use a variety of literacy practices to show that they were developing socially and psychologically.

### *Self-Discovery Through The Novel*

Campbell (1995) delved more deeply into the psychological use of epistolary writing. The protagonists of the novels use writing for self-discovery and to “write about the past in order to escape from the version of herself she cannot live with” (p. 346). The dialogics developed here are between two

versions of the self that give the reader a model of writing that young adults often encounter in young adult literature and online forums. This mixing of languages is what Bakhtin refers to as hybridization: “A mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance...separated by ...social differentiation” (p. 358). The novel, according to Bakhtin (1981) “must know all the other languages of heteroglossia” since the novel includes a variety of usages within the artistic development of the novel (p. 366).

### **Text Complexity**

The use of a variety of text structures in 21<sup>st</sup> century young adult literature creates a complexity to the text that reflects current literacy practices. Although women of the 1700s and 1800s were limited to the use of written epistles (letters and diaries), today’s youth regularly employ a variety of formats to communicate socially or privately. Text messaging, blog posts, fan fiction, and email follow similar epistolary restrictions to the *l’écriture feminine* of earlier works yet reflect modern usage. Audio recordings, live streaming, video and still photos are new literacies that enable 21<sup>st</sup> century youth to communicate and document life events or intimate, personal messages to specific audiences. These digital modes reflect the active, developing, and growing epistolary communication available to youth and adults. Just as authors of an earlier era incorporated the epistolary communication to reflect the expanding literacy practices of their audience, so do current authors appeal to their intended audience through the expanding electronic literacy practices of their time.

In response to the shifts in text, parallel shifts in reading have occurred. Readers must now consider context which includes “an event, a place, a social group, a realm of knowledge, or a moment in time” (Moje, 2000, p. 167). Readers bring their personal experiences, their schema, to bear in reading and responding to text. With the inclusion of a variety of digital modes in the novel, young adults carry their personal practices into the crafting of meaning from the text. They understand the shifts they make from a passive consumption of information while watching a film to the active composing they perform when they are interrupted by a text message during that film. They also understand the social implications of responding to and becoming engaged in epistolary communication. The communication may be dyadic

with just one other person or collectively on social media such as Twitter.

Moje (2000) includes the complexity of self-identity while participating in literacy events. Young adults practice the heteroglossia of their lives through these textual exchanges. Text requires a much larger definition in these cases to include the social context. The literacy events are not limited to print because young adults incorporate images, film, and video recordings in their exchanges. For example, Snapchat allows users to overlay captions and other text features on the photographs or short videos that they send. The self-identity surfaces through the tone of the epistolary message, the urgency of the message, and the purpose of sending the message. The recipient must blend tone, urgency, and purpose in order to capture the full meaning of the message.

The novel, as a genre, continues to evolve and the inclusion of epistolary segments (albeit short, inventive, and popular) has the potential to increase the complexity of young adult literature.

Text complexity has been defined as the relationship between sentence length and syllable count as calculated through readability formulas. The Fry Readability Scale is a method that teachers can use to determine the reading level of a text and its suitability for a classroom of students or individual student (Walker, 2004). The simplicity of the scale allows teachers to quickly estimate the reading level by using two factors: vocabulary and grammatical complexity. Primers and beginning readers use simple words and sentences with predictability and patterns for early readers. Words and grammatical constructions become more sophisticated in books and texts written for more complex concepts and older readers. The quantifying of text is just one method to determine text complexity.

As Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey (2012) point out, “We now know that many factors affect text complexity” (p. 62). This type of complexity is addressed in the Triangle of Text Complexity (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). The three sides of the Triangle are: Quantitative, Qualitative, Reader and Task. The Quantitative side includes a readability formula like Fry. The Qualitative side is defined as “levels of meaning, language conventionality and clarity, structure, and knowledge demands” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). These types of elements include, but are not limited to, dialect, student social context, polyvocal texts, and multiple points of view of the epistolary young adult novel.

The third side, Reader and Task, addresses reader motivation and purpose for reading. Pedagogically, Reader and Task require teachers to consider their students' maturity levels, cultural experiences, background knowledge, and motivation of students to read. Teachers may weigh these elements when assigning reading for a whole class or when recommending a book for free reading. As the Triangle of Complexity demonstrates, reading in the classroom requires consideration and balancing of multiple factors to choose appropriate texts.

### **Summary**

I am interested in the influence of everyday epistolary practices of young adults and how these practices may have or have not influenced the literature they read. Along with the potential changes in the literary texts, I am curious about what types of literacy practices readers of young adult literature need and deploy to understand in order to create meaning. According to Dresang's theory of radical change, young adults expect to be interactive with the text, connected with the text and others, and have access to a variety of mediums while reading (Dresang, 1999). She further states:

They (young adults) are interactively and freely organizing information and making their own connections, not from left to right, not from beginning to end, not in the traditional straight line, but in any order they choose. They are endlessly exploring, innovating, and authenticating for themselves. (p. 4)

If Dresang's theory is a productive representation of young adult reading, then young adults must incorporate the underlying principal of hermeneutics, an enactment how the parts relate to the whole, or in the case of epistolary young adult literature, weave together the narrative structure of the work, the various voices and points of view of characters, and the different text styles and features used by the author to create a complete storyline in order to understand the themes and plots of contemporary young adult literature.

These factors point to a type of text complexity that teachers need to consider when assigning or recommending literature to their students. Text complexity includes much more than a numeric assignment from a mathematical formula. The text complexity of epistolary young adult novels

incorporates the qualitative features of the context of the reader and the text.

However, considering the exemplars supplied by the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, the qualitative features of the epistolary young adult novel are not included in the list (Appendix B, 2015). The traditional canon continues as the type of text for classroom use. If Dresang (1999) is correct in her theory of Radical Change, then the type of text complexity that accompanies connectivity, interactivity, and access has not been included in these standards. Students will benefit from the integration of a variety of texts for classroom use and the ability to seek information as needed in the moment from a variety of sources in a variety of formats.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

In this hermeneutic study, I examined the text structures of four young adult novels that contained epistolary excerpts. Through this analysis, I explore the resulting expectations placed on readers of young adult literature. In developing this study, I used Ethnographic Content Analysis following the methods of David Altheide (1987) and Johnny Saldaña (2009).

The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. *What types of text structures did authors of selected young adult literature with epistolary interruptions published since 2008 use across the body of the published work?* For this study, I chose three books published since 2008 that used epistolary modes of communication among characters. Epistolary interruptions were any type of message sent between characters that appeared in written form. The text may or may not have changed in font or point size but did change in style and layout. Books containing these messages were potential texts for this study. These messages were separated from the body of the narrative text by white space or deeper margins or both with obvious breaks or interruptions in the physical space of the page.
2. *How did the authors of young adult literature situate the different text structures into the flow of the narrative? What happened after the interruption? Were the interruptions announced through changes in text features such as font, layout, or white space? Did the interruption of the narrative “break” into the text without foreshadowing (like a cell phone in lived experiences of young adults) or did the author prepare the reader for the interruption? If the author prepared the reader, how did the author allow the reader to anticipate the upcoming epistle? What happened after the interruption?*

## **Hermeneutics: How the Parts Relate to the Whole**

Petr Pokorny records the ancient history of hermeneutics in *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Understanding* (2011), “[h]ermeneutics...has its roots far back in Greek philosophy and rhetoric” (p. 3). He presents three distinct definitions: 1. expressing divine matters in human speech, 2. translating from one language to another, and 3. the interpretation of written texts (p. 3). Eagleton (1983, p. 74) presents the history of hermeneutics as having three distinct eras of focus: first on the author, (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); second on the text (New Criticism) and third on the reader (Reception theory). Hermeneutics traditionally “focuses on interpreting something of interest, ... a text or work of art” (Patton, 2002. p. 497). In this study, I will use the hermeneutical circle as a method of analysis to interrogate authors’ integration of a variety of text structures into their novels, the stylistics of these potential interruptions, and the demands placed on the reader in order to blend or braid the variety (parts) of the text into a comprehensible whole. The hermeneutical circle is a process aimed at enhancing understanding through a circular technique of analyzing a part to identify its connection to the whole and then how the whole influences the part. “This is not a vicious circle but actually a spiral that allows us to gain a greater knowledge of ourselves as we gain a greater knowledge of the text” (Pokorny, 2011, p. 91). I chose the definition of the hermeneutical circle as “individual features are intelligible in terms of the entire context, and the entire context becomes intelligible through the individual features” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 74).

A reader begins a text with a general idea of its content. Then while reading, the reader will develop questions about how segments of a text interconnect with the main theme or interpretation of the entire work and ultimately the work in its entirety. “From a part of the text we proceed to the ‘spirit’ of the whole, and from the latter we can then understand the individual part; we are proceeding from questioning to the text and back again” (Pokorny, 2011, p. 90). The recursive process readers use refashions the plotline according to perspectives readers share with the author. These perspectives emerge through a variety of genres or points of view that may be grounded in culture or experience. The small parts of the text connect much like the pieces of a mosaic to create a larger image or story. Ricoeur refers

to these reflective actions as the “hermeneutic turn” as a way to create meaning. “To ‘hear’ the word of the symbol [written word] one must first go through the detour of thought...Just as one may learn to better appreciate art through criticism, so does the philosopher of culture learn to appreciate the symbol through reflection” (Ihde, 1971, p. 162).

It is important to bear in mind the variety of text structures and voices authors use to tell the story, since the heart of the epistolary novel is in the exchange of messages, traditionally letters. Current research on epistolary text has expanded the definition of the genre “as a style and manner of writing, with letters or other communicative acts foregrounded or even attempted, rather than a set of prescriptive conditions, and is no longer limited to the traditional early-modern communiqué of the letter” (Schiffman, 2008, p. 423). This supports Campbell’s (1995, p. 333) assertion that the plot of these works is “determined, advanced, and resolved by letters” as well as “act as psychological motivators on characters”. Therefore, I include the short interruptions created by text messages or other types of electronic communication as a distinct style of text that extends back into this epistolary tradition.

As a reader, the messages may be dismissed as detail. In general, these are small pieces of text. If a reader ignores them, like running a stop sign, the loss may be minor. However, if the reader chooses to note and follow them, the reader may experience what Rosenblatt (1978) describes as aesthetic reading. The role of the reader is an interactive process in which the reader co-creates meaning with the text and with the author. This further connects to the “implied reader” developed by Iser (1978). According to Iser, text spaces are left open by authors so that the reader may fill them in with their own experiences and interpretations of the text. The reader may interject and interpret text according to the individual schema brought to the reading. The young readers of 21<sup>st</sup> century epistolary young adult novels have the specific schema of communicating through text or Tumbler or Instagram and are able to fill the blanks left by the authors through the textual interruptions in the narrative.

### **Ethnographic Content Analysis**

Ethnography as a research method has been developed within the field of anthropology to study: “any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will develop a culture” (Patton, 2002, p.



81). This style of research is predominantly narrative and descriptive in style to capture the observations of the researcher. Ethnographic research has evolved to include media studies, social problems, storytelling, and other types of social phenomenon, and from these topics of study, ethnography has grown to include the study of people's behavior on the World Wide Web and text (Patton, 2002). In addition, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is reflexive. Glaser and Strauss maintain that "ECA is embedded in *constant discover* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances" [emphasis in original] (Altheide, p. 68). For this study, as I developed coding systems and methods, they evolved from the data and my observations of the text under analysis. The analysis did not begin with specific categories to collect hard quantitative data, but began with general observations that developed into unique categories that grew from the text being studied.

### **Methodological Perspectives**

#### *Social Constructivism*

I hold to the basic premise that meaning behind language is socially constructed, "there is a real sense in which language belongs to my society before it belongs to me" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 71). By this quote, Eagleton means that when a child is born, the child is immersed in the culture and the language used by the members of the culture. As the child grows and learns to speak, the child uses the language developed by the native culture. Language is a shared element of a society. As a child grows and is exposed to new cultures, he or she will assimilate structures and styles of other established societies.

Another theory base is D/discourses as defined by Gee (1999) "[d]iscourses, through our words and deeds, carry on conversations with each other through history, and in doing so, form human history" (Gee, 1999, p.18) . Discourse only has meaning within a context, "[t]he behaviors of any individual person, at a specific time and place, are meaningful only against the Discourse or, more often, set of complementary or competing Discourses, that can 'recognize' and give 'meaning' and 'value' to that behavior" (p. 194) which can be complicated in contemporary societies. People are members of a variety of different groups who use specific language styles and Discourses for specific social settings. As Gee points out, "Discourses can interact in yet other ways" (p. 195). Speakers are rewarded when using the

appropriate Discourse for a specific occasion and thus begin to identify with a specific social group or develop agency.

Bakhtin states that (1986) “the utterance...cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (p. 94). I recognize that the types of discourses used by authors for this study represent the heteroglossia of modern American English usage. All text included in this study was written in this English dialect; therefore, each novel analyzed included a variety of styles such as standard published American English, youth slang, text message, regional dialects, transcriptions of television broadcasts, or legal jargon. For example, the presumed speaker may be a teenaged female “sending” a text message to another teenaged girl who writes with fragments and abbreviated or invented spelling, Bakhtin’s third basic type of compositional stylistic unity. The message, discourse, is in English but represents a specific style of writing and is imbedded in the narrative prose of a third person narrator written in standard published American English. Complicating this language exchange is the potential that neither of them may be teenaged or girls. The inherent identity shifting that is possible with electronic communication is part of its rhetoric.

#### *Ethnographic Positionality*

As a teacher of secondary English, I have read and continue to read a great deal of young adult literature. I read these works because my students recommend them to me, or so I may recommend a work to a student. I use young adult literature as companion pieces to classic works of literature. The current young adult fiction is used to introduce my students to the classics, much like Kaywell recommends in her series *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (1992, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2010). I read young adult literature as an adjunct instructor of young adult literature where I introduce the genre to future teachers of secondary English Language Arts. I read young adult literature as a fan of the form: I find the writing compelling with fast-paced storylines that expose elements of young people’s lives that I may or may not be familiar with. Young adult literature includes a wide variety of genres such as fantasy, poetry, magical realism, historical fiction, and science fiction that makes it

accessible and appealing to a wide audience. Keeping up on the latest novels gives me opportunities to engage students with literature they are comfortable with in order to encourage them to practice reading for pleasure. Many of these novels have been made into feature films or television programs such as *Pretty Little Liars*, *Beautiful Creatures*, *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hunger Games*, and *City of Bones*, which also leads to discussion and debate with the young adults in my classroom over the merits of making these into films and the interpretations of the books by the screenwriters and directors.

One particular novel caught my attention, *Falling for Hamlet* by Michelle Ray (2011). The novel was part of the collection of novels included in the 2011 ALAN (Assembly on Literacy for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English) in Chicago. It was also one of the novels recommended by my teenaged daughter who is an avid reader of young adult literature. As a student of English literature, I enjoy Shakespeare, so a retelling intrigued me. In this retelling of Shakespeare's story of the Prince of Denmark, Ray retold Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a story of power and madness from Ophelia's perspective, set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and using all the modern methods of communication—email, text messaging, and cell phone conversations—and the 24-hour news cycle endured by political figures and celebrities. The text, with all these various styles, required the reader to take in the story from various perspectives that may or may not have a complete contextual setting. How does a reader braid all these genres together to make a comprehensible whole? I used this work as a case study to build my methodology to analyze the literacy devices used by authors of adolescent fiction. I included my perspective as a teacher of young adults and my experiences with them as a specific perspective in my interpretation, understanding, and analysis of the data.

### ***Falling for Hamlet: A Case Study***

#### **Coding System**

I began by previewing the novel for text features such as layout, white space, font and stylistics. This first assessment of the text was a quick thumbing through the pages looking for breaks or “interruptions” in the layout of the text. If the novel is all one style of font from beginning to end with the only breaks denoting chapters, I chose not to include it. The layout must reflect the appearance of a

variety of everyday text structures such as the screen appearance of a text message or layout of a letter. The body of the novel and the different types of texts must be separated by white space. Without clear breaks in the text, the first pass of coding will not be possible.

*Sorting the text and isolating the epistles.* I used a method of descriptive coding recommended by Saldana (2009) for the first cycle of coding of *Falling for Hamlet*. The first cycle of coding chunked the text into broad styles (Saldana, p. 118). The prologue of the novel incorporated three distinct types of text that Ray used throughout the novel to create the structure of the story.

1. Italicized text written in present tense, third person.
2. Transcript of a police interrogation written with three voices, Ophelia and two interrogators. Limited or no detail. Typewriter style font with names in bold that precede the interview.
3. Ophelia's first person narrative of events written in past tense written in a standard font, Times New Roman. This section functions as a traditional epistolary element: a letter. Though not identified as a letter with an identified audience (but presumably the reader), the text begins, "You wanna know the truth? Here it is. Not the truth I tell Zara [talk show host for TVT code section] or the truth I tell the DDI or anyone else. *I'll tell you*, but no questions. I've had enough questions" (p. 3, [emphasis added]). The traditional epistolary novel has the protagonist "telling the truth" in letters to a specific audience as a form of confession of her experience.

These units of text worked together, but did not flow one into the other nor were they introduced by the previous text. One style of text ended and the next began. Without any type of transition for the reader other than the text features, the reader had to adjust for speaker, audience, and subject of each chunk of text. These conditions constituted my inclusion of the construct of "interruption." The sections of text interrupted each other much like three people attempting to tell the same story at the same time with a television blaring in the background.

Each chapter in *Falling for Hamlet* began with the italicized text followed by the first person narrative and the transcript at the end. Each of these sections was marked as TVT (TeleVision transcript)

for the italicized sections, DDI (the Denmark Department of Investigations) for the interrogation section, and no marks for the third section since this section is the body of the work and stands on its own. The third section contains markings for future phases of coding, so marking it during the first phase would lead to confusion.

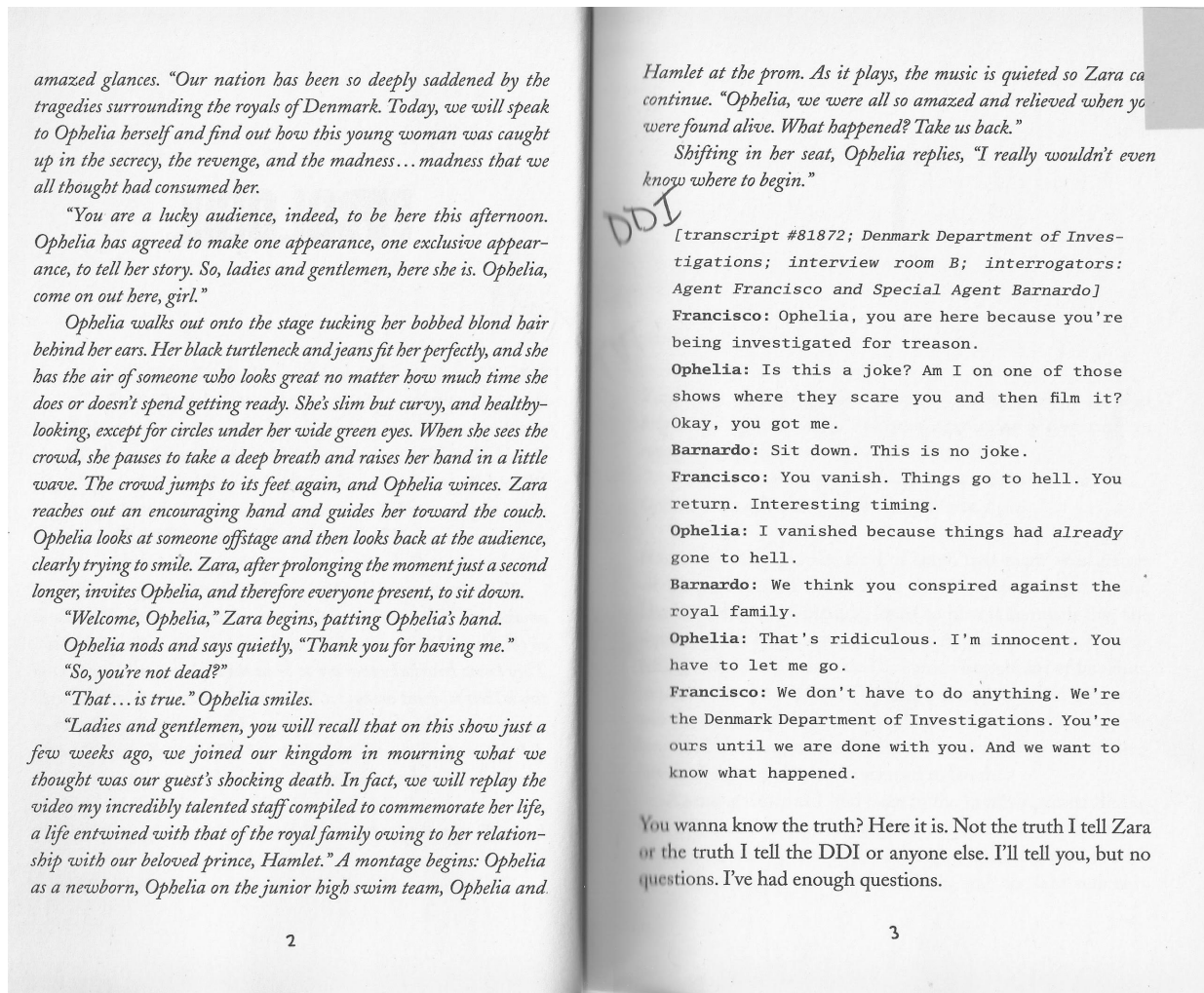


Figure 2. *Falling for Hamlet* Text Features. The top set of text is written in italics to reflect the dialogue from the television show transcript. The middle set of text, labeled DDI, is presented in official format to reflect the legal transcript of the Denmark Department of Investigation interview with Ophelia. The bottom set of text, unlabeled, is the diary of Ophelia's "true story".

The next type of obvious chunked text was the text message. The text style was in the same font as

Ophelia's narrative but it was separated from the main body of the text by a large white space created by a

triple space in the layout. Each message was centered on the page and preceded by the name of the sender. If several messages appeared in succession as in the following example from pages 47-48, several lines of white space separated each message indicating different characters sending independent messages. These messages differed in quantity of white space if “Ophelia” responded to the sender to give the impression of an answer or two-person text exchange. If “Ophelia” initiated the exchange, or sent one quick message to another character, her text, without her name or preceded by “Me”, was centered on the page with extra white space preceding and following it (Figure 3). These messages were coded TM for “text message”.

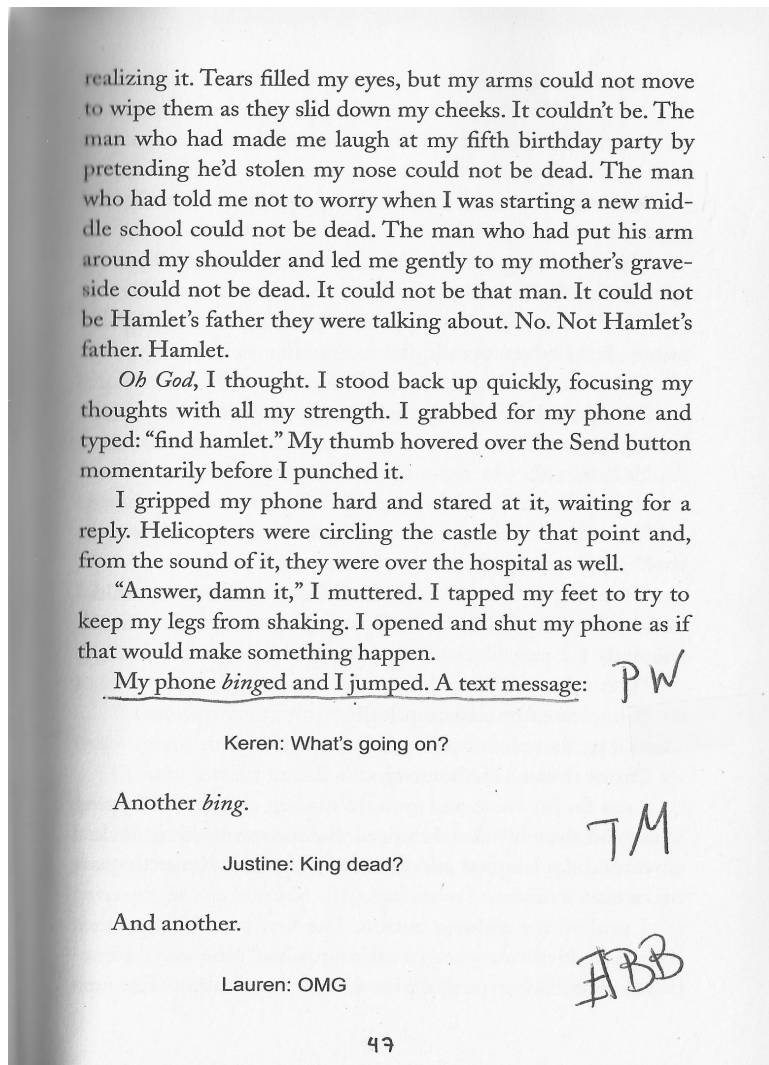


Figure 3. Example of Use of White Space.

The novel had one passage of a handwritten note. I coded this HW. It appeared in a handwritten style font and was separated from the body of the text with an extra line of white space and indentations on both sides to accentuate the difference in text and purpose. The letter was written in first person and follows Standard English style.

The last style of text noted during the initial coding was the excerpt from a tabloid on page 298. I coded this TAB. This was set apart by extra white space, a headline in a larger point size and in bold, underscore, and then the text written in a newspaper font set with narrow margins on both sides. This initial coding identified the text features that the author used. The reader can identify the shifts in perspective by the appearance of the text (Figure 3).

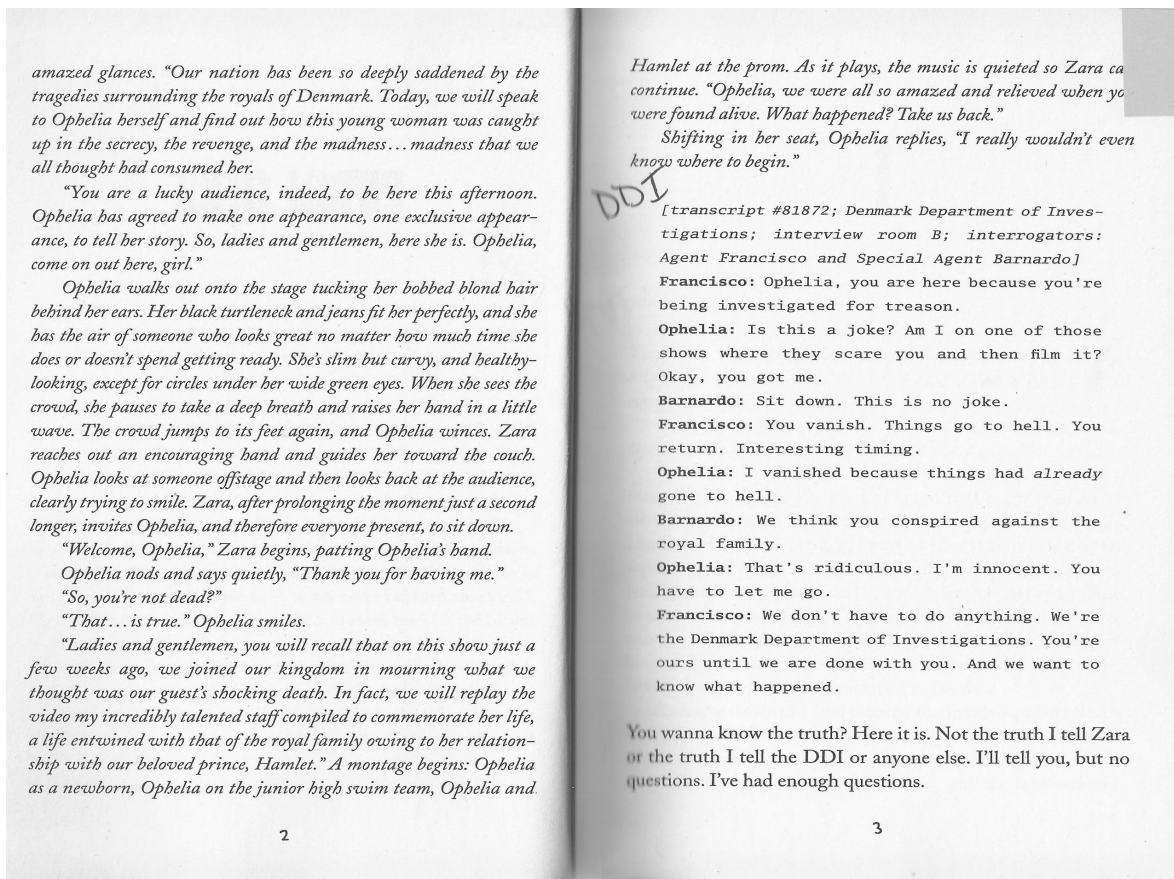


Figure 4. Example of Three Styles of Print.

These cues differentiated parts of the story, but were also needed in order to understand the entire story. That is, close analysis of each of these parts was needed in order to understand how each contributed to the entire work, and conversely, how the work determined the meaning of the parts. These sections required the reader to employ the hermeneutical circle or turn of reflection in order to create a full understanding of the plot. With each chapter set up with the following format: TVT, main text, and DDI, the reader will know the shift in speaker, voice, and point of view. Each section related the same events (Table 1). The reader is left with the responsibility of deciding which version is “true” and understand how each version influences the reader’s opinion of Ophelia and the events at Elsinore. The reader is required to employ the hermeneutical circle in order to create meaning from the text. I defined this circle as the overarching plot that contained various entry points for a reader: TV transcript, Ophelia’s diary, or police interrogation. I noticed that I would nod in agreement with the text or smirk in response to a point of depending upon which point of entry I had taken. The story was not all that it seemed and it reminded me of Shakespeare’s line: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 1 scene 5). The circle required me to connect what Ophelia had confessed within the police interrogation and then back again to the story as set up by the television transcript in order to follow the plot. As a reader, I needed to move from insider to outsider, and then back again.

*Second cycle of coding and pointer words.* The second cycle of coding noted the text signals used by the author. According to Lorch (1989), “[a] variety of pointer words or phrases may be used to direct attention to important content in a text” (p. 227). Though Lorch’s study focused on expository text and the role signaling devices play in memory processes, attention, and comprehension, similar signaling processes alert readers of literature to changes or interruptions of the narration of the plot. Lorch also stated “a title guides a reader’s processing of a text by indicating *relevant background knowledge to which text information might be related*” (216) [emphasis added].



**Table 1. First cycle of coding for Falling for Hamlet**

<b>Type of Text</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Text Features</b>	<b>Speaker/Point of View</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Television Transcript	TVT	Italics; Times New Roman; single spaced	3 <sup>rd</sup> person limited; provides a prologue to each chapter to give readers a hint about events at Elsinore	Initiates the public image of Ophelia and events at Elsinore to contrast to Ophelia's and DDI's versions
Letter or Diary entries	No marking	Plain text in Times New Roman; single spaced; separated from TVT and DDI by extra line of white space	Ophelia, first person, her narrative of 'true' events at Elsinore	Sets up the concept of insider language and point of view
Interrogation Transcript	DDI (Denmark Department of Investigation)	Typewriter font; names in bold of police officers and Ophelia; dialogue in plain font; single spaced; separated from letter entries by single line of white space	3 <sup>rd</sup> person limited; straight transcript of interrogation of Ophelia by Denmark Police	Creates an outsider voice along with a controlling adult perspective on a teenage girl's experiences; presents doubt to Ophelia's story
Text Message	TM	Separated by extra lines of white space, centered on the page with large indentations, printed in a smaller point size	Name of sender heads first line separating message from name by a colon. Message in the voice and point of view of the sender.	Incorporates varied spellings and uses insider language to be misconstrued by outsiders like DDI

This type of signaling used in textbooks or other expository texts may apply to terms used in literature that cue the reader about changes ahead and for the reader to adjust reading rate or style. Knowing what lies ahead would help readers to shift gears to a different reading mode that would allow readers to comprehend the text or blend it in with the previous text.

During the second cycle of coding, I noted the verbs or other “pointer words” Ray used before introducing a different style of text. Also during this second cycle of coding, I noted that Ray announced an incoming text message with an onomatopoeic “bing” in italics to denote the sound made by cell phones. The first such interruption set the pattern: “My phone *binged* and I jumped. A text message” (p. 47). The other text signals used by Ray were the verb “text” (p. 89) or “vibrated” (p. 113). These lines of text I coded as PW for “pointer word”. These verbs reflected the language of cell phone users. They set their phones on “vibrate” so the ring will not disturb their social setting but will inform the owner of an incoming call. Text messages announced themselves to the owner with a different sound than the sound used to announce a phone call. Even if users do not say, “My phone *binged*, they think it or recognize the denotation of the word which in this setting underscores the insider language used by characters who text each other.

Other pointer words appeared to announce the tabloid passage. Ray set the scene with Ophelia standing in a checkout line at a market where she sees “my own name on a magazine cover” (p. 298). Ray continued to prepare the reader with descriptions of Ophelia taking the tabloid home and then, “I read:” (p. 298). After the tabloid passage, Ray continued to remind the audience that Ophelia *read* the article with “I reread the article” (p. 300). What made this important was that Ray did not write that Ophelia, or any character, “reads” a text message. Characters “texted”, (89, 134, 147, 204, 285) “check[ed] in” (56), “pulled out [a] phone” 155, “looked” (249), or “opened” (316). All of these terms reflect the discourse of text messaging as message and not as a text to read. (Table 2)

**Table 2. *Pointer Words in Falling for Hamlet***

<b>Pointer Words</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
Text, check, pull out, look, open, send	To read or write a text message sent through a cell phone	Mark the interaction of a cell phone with a character	Word appears before message; Action initiated by the character
Bing, vibrate	Announcing of an incoming message on a cell phone	Announces an interruption created by another character out of the scene	Verb appears in Action initiated by the cell phone or electronic device;
Rang	Announcing of an incoming voice phone call	Sets up a “real time” conversation between characters	Action by a character out of the scene bringing information or conflict to the scene
Video chat	Electronic connection between characters that includes visuals	Allows characters to “see” what is happening in different locations	Action may be initiated by any character

It was in this second cycle of coding when I noticed that texting was the only section of text that included invented spelling and texting short hand. These text messages included shortened spellings such as “U” for you, “2” for to, “4” for for, “r” for are, or “@” for at. This led to the next code used during the second cycle of coding, IS for “invented spelling”. Some spelling is onomatopoeic which uses the phoneme for a word like “r” for “are” or omits vowels in an ideographic manner that depends upon the reader to know which and how many vowels to include when decoding the text, for example “intrstn” for “interesting”. Texting shorthand may also include the first letters of words in a common phrase such as “OMG” for “Oh! My God!” or gosh or goodness. This shorthand was coded ABB for “abbreviation” in Figure 3. This shorthand that depends upon an agreement between sender and receiver can cause conflict among characters when the message is interpreted by the recipient differently from the intention of the sender.



## **Complicated text**

The first misinterpretation on page 40 set up the beginnings of the complicated relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet. The text exchange was revealed by the police. The investigating officers believe the text, “u bin gn 2 long. im w/ sm1 new. sry.” marks the beginning of a break-up of the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. She maintains that it was a joke and proves her point by having the officers locate Hamlet’s reply of “me 2.” Ophelia adds, according to the transcript, “And for the record, I laughed”, to which the officer replied, “Interesting relationship.” Ophelia confirms the insider position with her final quip, “You had to be there.” The invented spellings and the tone created by Ophelia and Hamlet demonstrated for me the reader a much more intimate relationship between them than the police or an outsider might understand. This led me, as the reader, to give more credibility to Ophelia’s version of the story than the version being created by the investigating team.

The second misinterpretation on page 316 had a much darker turn. This particular misinterpretation leads the police to believe Ophelia was involved in or relieved by the deaths of the king, queen, and Hamlet. “o gd. all r dead” text that Ophelia receives from Horatio has the police believing that “gd” means “good” that they interpret as a completion of conspiracy to murder the royal family. In contrast, Ophelia maintains it means “God” or “Goddamn it” (p. 317) and Horatio is texting his disbelief and sorrow. Abbreviated spellings resulting in different interpretations demonstrated an insider’s discourse.

It was during this second pass of coding when I noticed this repeated text message in the DDI transcripts. The repeated text message was not one of the text messages exchanged by characters and was not revealed as part of Ophelia’s diary confession. Rather, these messages were presented as almost hearsay, used as evidence in the investigation of the deaths of the royal family, and were reported by the Denmark police during the interrogation of Ophelia. What made them significantly different from the other text messages was that the police misinterpreted the original text messages. Horatio had texted Ophelia with: “o gd. all r dead” after the poisoning scene at the end of the play. Ophelia, in hiding at the time, was on a video chat with Horatio that broke off just as the queen, the king, Hamlet, and Laertes die

from the poison planted by the king. After all the deaths, Horatio texted her the message in question that made the investigating officer believe Ophelia and Horatio were part of the conspiracy to kill the royal family. As the reader, I understood that Horatio was horrified by the scene and was not involved in the treachery, but the Denmark police were attempting to reconstruct the crime with an outsider's perspective on any messages sent and received by the characters affected by the crime. Ray built this tension through the tone of confidentiality used in the diary section with Ophelia telling the truth of events contrasted to the tone of distrust and antagonism used in the Denmark Department of Investigation.

It was through tone and perspective that the author built credibility in one version and distrust in another. This exchange models the type of misunderstandings that young adults experience through text messaging when the tone is not communicated by the text, and the receiver feels hurt or offended by the message. These types of interpretations often spark rapid-fire exchanges between friends in an attempt to set things right and smooth over hurt feelings. Here the exchange made a profound turn that resulted in deeper suspicion of Ophelia as a suspect by the Denmark Department of Investigation.

Other realizations about the use of a variety of spelling shortcuts that I noticed were that I needed to slow down my reading to make sure my understanding of the text fit the context of the story. Several times I needed to stop and look away from the text to consider options for the meaning of the text. For example, on page 249 Ophelia receives a text from Horatio, "Cnt miss mor skl. 2 bhnd." "Skl" took me some a minute to decipher since she received this message after the death of Polonius and Ophelia was highly distraught. So remembering to situate Horatio as a college student took a bit of recall on my part as the reader about the character and the original play by Shakespeare. Spelling shortcuts are a common practice among young adults when texting, so the author has made the assumption about the audience that they will read the texts without difficulty or need for translation. Another example of insider language and usage.

### *Polyvocal Texts*

I noticed that the quantity of text messages was small, a total of 12, yet each message functioned as a transition in a scene or added a plot shift. The shift may have been an added complication or an

intensification of antagonism between characters. For example, the first message (p. 40) intensified the antagonism between Ophelia and the Denmark police interviewing her in the third section of each chapter. The antagonism in this scene intensified the belligerent attitude of Ophelia while encouraging the reader to question the motivations of or the veracity of the version of events presented by the authorities. Another type of transition was the addition of a plot complication such as the texts between Ophelia and Horatio announcing the engagement of Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, to his uncle Claudius. The reader learned of the marriage before Hamlet and was given a sense of insider information since this plot complication was first shared in the diary section, Ophelia's version of the story. The text, "Strnge things r afoot @ the circle K" (p. 90) demonstrated an insider's language and point of view. It also set up the reader to expect intense complications whether or not the reader was familiar with Shakespeare's play. These short epistles continued the tradition of the epistolary novel by advancing the plot and developing a sense of insider/outsider language developed by the main characters.

The outsider language developed during the interrogations with the tone developed by Ray for the officers questioning Ophelia. The investigating officers, Francisco and Barnardo, questioned Ophelia with a stereotypic style of diction and "good cop/bad cop" style. For example, in the first section of transcript:

**Ophelia:** Is this a joke? ...

**Barnardo:** Sit down. This is no joke.

**Francisco:** You vanish. Things go to hell. You return. Interesting timing.

**Ophelia:** I vanished because things had *already* gone to hell.

**Barnardo:** We think you conspired against the royal family.

**Ophelia:** That's ridiculous. I'm innocent. You have to let me go.

**Francisco:** We don't have to do anything. We're the Denmark Department of Investigations. You're ours until we are done with you. And we want to know what happened. (p. 3).

Ray developed an adversarial tone in the first interaction. The DDI had no apparent trust in anyone, which gave me as the reader license to suspect their position or questions of Ophelia if I as the reader was to believe Ophelia's version. Creating a sense of trust in the protagonist is a trait of traditional epistolary novels. In *Pamela* (Richardson, 1741) and *Clarissa* (Richardson, 1748), the author created his protagonists as victims of their lovers or their environments just as Ray did with Ophelia. The epistolary elements allowed the protagonists to tell their side of the story using the literacy tools available at the

time: letters. Ray incorporated the literacy tools available during the 21<sup>st</sup> century: text message, email, television, instant messaging, and video chat to reveal Ophelia's side of the story. This variety of textual styles creates a complexity to the text. Young adult readers would have a familiarity with sending and receiving a variety of messages to and from different people in response to a specific event.

In the original play, Shakespeare sent Hamlet back to college with his "friends" Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet intercepted the letter they carried from Claudius instructing the captain of the ship to kill Hamlet, an epistolary moment, and Hamlet arranged for the captain to kill his "friends." In *Falling for Hamlet*, Ray recreated this twist using text messaging. Hamlet stole Rosencrantz's cell phone and found that it contained the message from Claudius and "forwarded the text as if Claudius were making changes to the plan" and "the paramilitary guys shot Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the spot" (p. 286). A common trope in literature had been revised for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience.

Ophelia's isolation began early in this story with her brother Laertes leaving for school and her father Polonius becoming more involved in his work to protect the new king after the death of Hamlet's father and therefore needed to make her own decisions in times of challenge or crisis. Ray arranged this isolation in the second DDI transcript on page 15:

**Francisco:** ... You were alone with Hamlet constantly, yet your father, from what we understand, was very protective of you.

**Ophelia:** My dad was too busy and too tired to notice what I did a lot of the time.

**Baranardo:** So you took advantage of his schedule and his position?

**Ophelia:** (pause) No more than any other teenager.

**Francisco:** So that's a yes?

The element of isolation was necessary in developing the plot because Ophelia was never sure whom to trust, other than Hamlet. This lack of guidance became a point of discussion on the television program and during the investigation. Ophelia visited Hamlet at Wittenberg College and they were caught by the paparazzi during a party. Elsinore always protected Hamlet from the press, but now he and Ophelia were captured on film drinking excessively and dancing suggestively. Not only was Ophelia alone, but also was Hamlet as he explained in Ophelia's diary, "He canceled my security detail for starters. That's how the photographer was able to get into the party. And I got some information from Marcellus [head of



security] that makes me really suspicious about Claudius’s other plans. I’d rather be paranoid than dead” (p. 163). Hamlet and Ophelia were both estranged from their families with Hamlet feeling particularly abandoned after his mother remarried. These separations added complications to the plot and built tension between and among characters. Ophelia felt even further abandoned after Hamlet decided to trust no one and push her away, or as Shakespeare put it: “Get thee to a nunnery” (*Hamlet*, Act 3 scene 1). It was not until Ophelia learned of the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and her knowledge of Claudius’s desire to kill Hamlet that she finally reached out for help. It was with the help of Horatio and Marcellus that Ophelia was able to escape Elsinore under the guise of an accidental drowning from swimming after taking tranquilizers.

### **After the Interruption**

The interruption creates a break in the physical layout of the page. The sentence preceding the break contains a pointer word to denote the arrival of a message or an incoming connection to the characters in the scene. When people are interrupted in lived experience, they do not maintain a state of interruption. People must make behavioral decisions about a response to an interruption. Authors make similar decisions about their characters’ behavior and reactions to the textual interruptions.

I began by writing the page number on a separate sheet of paper followed by a brief description of what happened in the text. My notations were simple comments on the action in the paragraph, as shown in the following table:

**Table 4. Initial Notations on the Text Falling for Hamlet**

<b>Page Number</b>	<b>Notation</b>
47 & 48	She ignores the messages by hitting the ignore button until she receives a call from Horatio; someone she wants to talk with
56	Feels loved by her friends; “they kept checking in, which was sweet”; then Ophelia returns to the narrative
90	adds detail of Ophelia’s social life with her friends; then returns to narrative about engagement
113	Message from friend outside the scene—closes the scene and picks up the narrative in a new setting
134	Text transitions to a conversation to add detail to what Ophelia knows about the ghost of Hamlet’s father

**Table 4 Continued**

<b>Page Number</b>	<b>Notation</b>
147	Transition in text to scene to absorb time in narrative and ask affirmation of views from another character
155	Triggers internal dialogue of reflection on her behavior
204	Ends the scene with internal dialogue shared with Horatio
218	Series of voice messages adds Hamlet's perspective and intensifies conflict; Return to narrative
249	Short exchanges add intensity to the scene by raising the emotional level in Ophelia; Part of the narrative
310	Short exchanges add intensity to the scene by raising the emotional level in Ophelia; Part of the narrative

The initial notations of the following paragraphs held few specifics, so I needed to return to the text and look more closely at the narrative in the preceding paragraph, the interruptive message, and the following paragraph.

In the second reading of the paragraphs following the interruption to understand what happened following the interruption, I looked at the preceding paragraph to see what connections existed between the two without the epistolary interruption. I read the narrative beginning in the preceding paragraph, skipped the interruption, and then read the following paragraph. This reading allowed me to note any shifts in perspective by the character or behavior by people within the scene. Reading the overarching narrative without the interruption made the purpose of the interruption clearer. I returned to the notebook, and wrote the page number followed by a short commentary of the action in the scene. Then I wrote the signal word (binged, beeped) followed by the purpose of the interruption. I then wrote what action the recipient or sender in the scene performed (ignores, feels, internal dialogue). I then could develop a code for the text following the interruption. If the message was the end of a section, I wrote ends scene, coded E. If the message added detail, I wrote what type of detail: characterization, builds suspense or conflict, coded D.

Upon further consideration about the detail added to the narrative, I noticed that the type of detail served different purposes. Some of the details simply described a character's actions or behaviors: "I couldn't deal with my friend's questions, so I hit Ignore over and over and paced" (Ray, 2011, p. 48).

Other times the narrative showed a rise in the conflict or tension in the story: ““Shoot,” I muttered. “I can’t tell him?” I asked, knowing the answer” (Ray, 2011, p 249).

I realized that the coding needed to reflect the different reactions to the epistolary interruption and the character’s response along with the overarching plot line. I added “Rising Action” to the coding and marked it RA (Table 5). My final coding was determined with five variations on the effects of the interruptions.

**Table 5. Codes for What Happened After the Interruption**

Description of Action	Code
Return to Narrative	RN
End	E
Internal Dialogue	ID
D	Detail
Rising Action	RA

After writing short pieces of text from the paragraphs that preceded the interruption in my notes and describing them in my notes, I returned to the novel to annotate the paragraphs. I read the paragraphs that preceded the interruptions and the paragraphs that followed without the interruption to note any connections. This required me to notice any shift in the narrative had occurred and to employ the reflexive method of Ethnographic Content Analysis (cite). That is, .I returned to the text to refine my notations and observations to maintain a clear pattern of identification of interruption structures. If the narrative continued without any shift, I coded that as NR: No Response. If the following paragraph began with a new setting or perspective, I coded that E: end. If the following paragraph included detail that appeared in the as new information that was not in the preceding paragraph, I coded that: D for detail. If the following paragraph shifted to the thoughts of the character, I coded that ID: Internal Dialogue. If the following paragraph included information that was not in the preceding paragraph but was in the interruption and created tension to the story by the character sharing the message or reacting with a change in emotion or demeanor, I coded this RA: Rising Action (Table 6). My final coding of *Falling for Hamlet*

**Table 6. Initial coding on the text following the interruption**

<b>Page Number</b>	<b>Notation</b>	<b>Code</b>
47 & 48	Narration continues with phone as prop	RN
56	Feels loved by her friends; no new info	RN
90	Back to narrative; adds detail	D
113	Return to narrative; transition	E
134	Adds detail to build suspense and rising action	RA
147	Return to narrative; shows internal dialogue	ID
155	Triggers internal dialogue of reflection on her behavior	ID
204	Ends the scene	RA
218	Return to narrative	RN
249	Part of the narrative	RN
310	Ties the narrative together through misinterpretation	RA

### **The Effect of the Interruption on the Narrative**

Coding the paragraphs following the interruption required a hermeneutical turn in order to discern whether the character was acting or reacting. I had to reread the paragraph with the knowledge gained from the previous reading in mind. When reading the paragraphs as if there were no interruption, the paragraphs sometimes blended smoothly without the epistolary interruption. At others, they were confusing and unclear because the epistolary message contained new information in the following paragraph. So I needed to reread the interruption in order to understand the meaning relationship between the two paragraphs. For example, “My phone *binged* and I jumped. A text message: I couldn’t deal with my friends’ questions, so I hit Ignore over and over and paced” (Ray 47-48). In this example, the text messages were short inquires like “What’s going on?” and “U ok?”. These were not vital to understanding the connection between the preceding and following paragraphs, yet they add detail because the messages were sent by four different characters, which gave detail about the size of Ophelia’s social group. This section that added detail to the scene, I labeled D for detail. The hermeneutical turn required me to take in the reactions by the friends, weigh their value, and return to Ophelia’s narrative, the overarching storyline.

In *Falling for Hamlet*, Ray inserted twelve epistolary interruptions within the scope of the novel. In order to return to the interrupted narrative, Ray connects the interruption to the storyline. Ray used five different methods to return to the narrative:

1. The narrative picks up where it left off with the character continuing the action. Looking at the phone is portrayed as a detail similar to sitting down or getting a glass of water.
2. The interruption concludes the chapter or chapter section. This type of construction creates a cliffhanger effect or signals the end of a scene by adding new information that would be picked up deeper in the next chapter or section.
3. The interruption adds detail that appears in the next narrative paragraph. The recipient of the message does something with the device or the message.
4. The interruption triggers internal dialogue in the recipient. The internal dialogue gives additional information about the recipient's behavior and emotional state.
5. The interruption adds tension to the story, which increases conflict or rising action by the character sharing information or reacting to the new information. The characters in the scene must make decisions about what to do next.

Ray used the epistolary interruptions for five different purposes (Table 7). The adding of detail helped to flesh out characters, in particular Ophelia. The details show how she involves other people in her daily actions or how others are interested in what she is doing. Other times, the interruptions bring information to build tension in the scene or build conflict in the plot line. Ray also uses the epistolary interruptions to end a scene and as a rhetorical device to shift the action or end the action. The epistolary interruptions all served a rhetorical purpose to the storyline.

**Table 7. *What Happens After the Interruption***

Return to Narrative	Ends Chapter or Section	Adds Detail: Appears in Next Paragraph	Triggers Internal Dialogue	Causes Rise in Conflict or Action
1 time	3 times	3 times	3 times	2 times

The reader of the novel must decide how to incorporate the information contained within the epistolary message. The ability to hold information, add new information, and synthesize the old with the new requires the reader to understand how the part (the interruption) affects the whole (the plotline) and continue with the story as a whole. The messages create a complexity in the text through the adjustments for point view and adding information.

### **Radical Change Theory in Young Adult Literature**

The interruptions within the narrative exemplify an interactivity, connectivity, and access the characters expect with each other. The characters use their phones and computers to stay in contact with each other throughout the story. The author chooses to incorporate an interruption at various times during the narrative. For example, Ophelia is concerned about telling Hamlet about his mother's engagement. While she is worried about him, she texts Horatio. Rather than continue the narrative about Hamlet's condition, Ray breaks the narrative with message from a minor character, inviting Ophelia to get together to watch a television show (p. 90). The reader needs to realize that this piece of information has nothing to do with the plot; it merely adds detail to Ophelia as a socially active teenager. The reader then makes the hermeneutic turn to tightly focus on the character of Ophelia and then readjusts to the larger narrative two paragraphs later about Hamlet's potential reaction to his mother's engagement. The characters also choose whether or not to use the incoming information in the current setting. It is this choice that makes the interruption a rhetorical decision made by the author. The rhetorical decision adds complexity to the text by adding layers of information and connections among characters.

Readers of young adult literature are faced with choices regarding the interruptions that give depth and complexity to the text. The information included in the interruption is announced through the pointer words in the preceding paragraph, set aside by changes in text features, and turned hermeneutically for value to the plot.

### **Rules Learned and Applications**

*Falling for Hamlet* has laid groundwork for further investigation of other young adult novels. The author used specific language for distinct types of text like the text message and the transcript in

contrast to the body of the work. The text message, though small in quantity, played an important role in plot development by introducing a complication or announcing a shift in the story. The creative spellings of text messaging lends itself to specific discourse with an insider's perspective understood by the characters that used it as a mode of communication and opens the door for plot twists from misunderstandings by outsiders intercepting text messages. Ray employed specific pointer words to announce an upcoming change in text and discourse. These pointer words reflected a language the author expected the audience to know and understand. The pointer words functioned like more insider language that the author purposefully chose to entice the audience into believing they are part of the inside information.

The text of the interruptive epistolary messages does not add a great deal of information in and of itself. The recipient of the text makes decisions about how to react to the messages. The recipient can ignore the messages and continue with the action of the scene or respond physically or emotionally to the messages. The action performed by the recipient determines the influence of the message on the action of the plot. The reader weaves together the information supplied by the message to the overarching narrative by attending to the action before and after the interruption through a hermeneutical turn. The author guides that process by including the new information from the text in the following paragraph or by ignoring the information and continuing the narrative with descriptive detail of the characters in the scene. The rhetorical choice by the author to include pointer words preceding the interruption shifts the focus to the upcoming change in the text by defining it as an electronic or epistolary message. The author adds authenticity to the text by choosing to have the characters react to the interruption or treat it as a learned behavior to respond to a beep or bing without changing their actions much like current users of electronic communication.

The variety of texts, the addition of multiple viewpoints, and the ability to synthesize the information exemplify the complexity of young adult epistolary literature.

### **Selection Procedure**

My search for representative works to analyze began in Boston, Massachusetts at the 2013

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) Annual Workshop, when I opened the box holding the novel selections for 2013. This box contained over forty books “written *about* teenagers, *for* teenagers, and within contexts that mirror the world of teenagers [in which] they see their lives reflected in the characters, settings, plots, conflicts, and themes, and they find issues nested in familiar contexts that are pertinent to their daily lives” (Brown & Mitchell, 2014, p. 6). As I stacked the books in front of me in preparation for presentations by the authors, I began thumbing through each text looking at the text features: white space, font changes, font style changes, text layout and design. Graphic novels were eliminated from this study because I was looking for works that were completed in prose. Works of poetry were eliminated because I was considering only prose with obvious breaks in the text that interrupted the flow of the prose by white space and changes in font style or font type.

From this collection of books, three were graphic novels, *Dogs of War* by Sheila Keenan and Nathan Fox, *Saints* by Gene Luen Yang, and *Romeo and Juliet* by Gareth Hinds, and two were written in poetic form, *Sarafina’s Dream* by Ann E. Burg and *Smoke* by Ellen Hopkins. The collection included three works of historical significance that included large quantities of photographs, charts, and maps that made them unsuitable for this study, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* by Richard Plant, *Starry-Eyed: 16 Stories that Steal the Spotlight* edited by Tedd Michael & Josh Pultz, and *Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickels, America’s First Black Paratroopers* by Tanya Lee Stone. From the remainder, I identified only four that met this minimum requirement of interruptions in the text by changes in text features, only three appeared to have interruptions of the text and of those, only one had epistolary elements, *Second Impact: Making the Hardest Call of All* by David Klass and Perri Klass (2013).

The next collection of books I used for recommendation was the 2013 Florida Teen Reads compiled by the Florida Association for Media in Education (FAME). Each year this group selects fifteen books for middle and high school students to entice adolescents to read.

Teens in Florida read and Florida media specialists know it! Florida Teens Read is a list of 15



titles that have been chosen by a committee of thirteen media specialists specifically to engage high school students (grades 9 through 12) and reflect their interests as well as represent a variety of genres, formats, reading levels, viewpoints, and ethnic and cultural perspectives.

(Floridamedia.org)

Using the same criteria for consideration of text features that mark specific breaks, interruptions, of the prose, I selected one novel from the group of fifteen, *Virtuosity* by Jessica Martinez. The other selections had no obvious breaks in text or changes in font styles that denoted an interruption in the storyline of the work.

My next choice was to consider the bestsellers at local bookstores. I visited three different stores: one independent, one chain, and the third, a university bookstore. I noted the selections set on display tables as most popular and “hot” sellers. Common at all three stores were the *Pretty Little Liars* series by Sara Shepard. The first book in this series was published in 2006 and the series has continued with the fourteenth published in 2013. The series has been a successful television series on ABC Family since 2010.

In this collection of books for this study, I wanted to include books that represented appreciation by reviewers, teens, and professionals such as teachers and authors. By including a work from these varied groups, I would balance literary critics’ choices with representatives of pop culture with no longevity or value beyond light reading or escapist literature. Using a title from the ALAN conference, I had the tacit involvement of the professional communities of teachers and young adult authors. *Virtuosity* reflects an award winner having been recommended by FAME and it has a wide distribution among state schools along with reviews by students and professionals. The final selection, *Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel*, represents a best seller with longevity that has become a fan favorite with Twitter feeds for the show, a page on Wikipedia, clothing line, fanfiction sites, Tumblr site, Instagram along with a variety of other websites such as “Would you Rather” or “Which Character Are You?” This work represents the social media explosion that often accompanies a blockbuster of young adult literature that invites fans to

share their ideas and criticisms while exploring the “what if” feature that incorporates a wide variety of literacy practices available to highly connected users of the Internet and cyberspace in general.

### **Coding Revisited**

My coding methods followed the same patterns I used for *Falling for Hamlet*: descriptive coding of each style of text in the novel, labeling the chunks of text for method of epistolary message, labeling text signals used by the author, and the final coding focused on individual words within the messages.

#### *Initial coding*

The first coding I conducted during the first read of the novels. With pen in hand while reading, I marked the text for a change in the text features using the same notation: TXT for text message, email for email, HW for handwriting, TVT for TeleVision Transcript. This first coding allowed me to chunk the text and create distinct sections for further review. Chunking the text while reading set my purpose for reading. Rather than reading for pleasure or plot structure, my reading focused on the use and frequency of epistolary communication in contrast to the body of the novel, the narration, which would not be coded.

#### *Second Coding*

The second reading was a close reading of the interruptions only. While reading them, I identified text features for font and style and white space. Next I noted the sender and recipient for point of view and significance of the message (Table 5). The messages were usually addressed to the recipient and signed at the end by the sender unless they were set up like a dialogue with quick exchanges that had narrative description in between. “Di, It’s taken care of. Don’t worry, no paper trail. And you thought I was good for nothing...Jonathon” (Martinez, 2011, 242). If the messages included invented spelling or numbers for words, I marked it IS. If the messages included an abbreviation for a person’s name or action, I marked that ABB.

Lauren: U looked pretty = IS (U for you is invented spelling)

Me: I lookd like cotton candy (ABB for lookd, shortened spelling)

Lauren: Hamlt there yet? (ABB for Hamlt, shorted spelling)

Me: Yep. intrstn (ABB for intrstn, abbreviated spelling)

I next read for pointer words or signal terms within the paragraph preceding the interruption. The list of terms from *Falling for Hamlet* gave me specific onomatopoeic verbs to consider. While reading the preceding paragraph or sentence, I underlined the sentence containing the signal term and marked the passage PW for pointer word, the term originated by Lorch (1989).

I reread the messages for spelling and punctuation. The invented and abbreviated spelling were unique to *Falling for Hamlet*. The other three books used standard spelling rules in text messages and emails. Since spelling was consistent, I wanted to compare mechanics across the texts for any patterns or style.

After marking and coding the text for what preceded the interruption and the epistolary message, I returned to the interruptions to read and annotate the text in the paragraph that followed the interruptions.

#### *Coding What Happens After the Interruption*

I began by writing the page number on a separate sheet of paper followed by a brief, summary description of what happened in the text before the interruption. I then wrote a summary of what happened after the interruption. My final notation was an explanation of the role of the interruption. With the final notation, I added my code of RN, E, ID, D, or RA.

I followed the same methodology of reading, coding, rereading, coding, noting, and coding for all the novels. I used the same codes and definitions across the works.

## Chapter Four: Text Analysis

After developing a coding system using Ethnographic Content Analysis for *Falling for Hamlet*, I applied the system to three novels I selected, *y* (Martinez 2011), *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* (Cohen & Levithan 2010), and *Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel* (Shepard 2013). This chapter explains the coding process and the role of the epistolary interruption in each of the novels by identifying what happens before, during, and after the interruption. Along with the identification, I include the use of the hermeneutic turn in order to braid together the plots from their multiple points of view and heteroglossia of the epistolary interruptions.

### Book 1: *Virtuosity* by Jessica Martinez

#### *Story Summary*

*Virtuosity* is a coming of age novel about a young violin virtuoso, Carmen. Carmen's mother has managed Carmen's career all of her life and now is preparing Carmen for the most prestigious competition yet: the Guarneri Competition. Carmen's mother, an accomplished opera singer who lost her voice after failed polyps surgeries, understands the strain of performance at the highest levels yet doesn't fully trust her daughter's ability to perform under pressure. Carmen has a main competitor, Jeremy, who forces Carmen to look more broadly at her own life and motivations to play. These two characters become romantically involved. Carmen learns of her mother's conspiracy with the judges to insure Carmen's victory which forces Carmen to re-evaluate her motivation to play the violin and determine her own priorities.

#### Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles

During my first read of *Virtuosity*, I noticed changes in fonts and large sections of white space separating the font changes from the body of the text. Reading with a pen in hand, I marked the text with the same codes I used from *Falling for Hamlet*: txt for text message, email for email, HW for

handwritten, and TVT for TeleVision Transcript. I did not mark the body of the text that carried the narrative arc of the story. My notations were made on text that differed from the main narrative in font, style, or separation by white space. *Virtuosity* had only three types of differentiated texts: body of work, email, and handwritten (Table 5). The first reading gave me the opportunity to learn the arc of the story and note the major interruptions in the text. This novel did not contain any transcripts from television or other media.

I next returned to the text to identify the text features, speaker/point of view, and significance of the different text types. I set up a table with the headings: type of text, abbreviation, text features, speaker/point of view, and significance. I used the copyright page to identify the type of font used for the narrative of the novel (Janson Text LT). Beginning with the first interruption (27), I used the table to note the text features, the speaker, and then the significance to the story. I completed the same process for each interruption in the novel to complete the table.

Next, I read the text just before the break and the text causing the break to discern if the font change denoted an interruption or a shift in point of view from a different character (See Table 8, columns 4 and 5). Most importantly, I determined if the interruption was epistolary in nature: a text message, email, letter, or other written communication.

The novel was broken into three main types of text:

1. The narrative of the storyline, told in first person from the perspective of the protagonist, Carmen. This was the majority of the book.
2. Email messages. The messages were both sent and received by Carmen. These were separated from the body of the novel with all the text indented, then by doubled white space, and a narrow font different from the body text.
3. Handwritten messages or notes. These were also indented like the email messages and set apart by white space but were set in italics of the same font as the body of the novel.

The types of text were few. Twenty-seven interruptions in the entire work with three of them handwritten and 24 email messages. Some email messages came in a succession of short bursts that interrupted the

narration every few lines, specifically on pages 134-135. The messages were a conversation between the protagonist and her love interest, yet did not flow like a conversation because the author maintained the narration between the sending and receiving of messages.

**Table 8. Reading the page and sorting the text for *Virtuosity* by Jessica Martinez.**

Type of Text	Abbreviation	Text Features	Speaker/Point of View	Significance
Body of work; narration	None	Plain text in Jansen Text LT	Protagonist: Carmen; First person	Gives perspective of the narrative and shows the internal conflict of the main character excluding other perspectives unless revealed during narration
Email	email	Block indent; narrow font; double spaced text; triple spaced before and after narration	Point of view varies: Carmen, Jeremy (Carmen's love interest), Jonathon (Carmen's father), Dr. Nanette Laroche, (violin teacher at Julliard)	Gives an alternate point of view to Carmen's narration; introduces conflict to the plotline
Note or card	HW for handwritten	Jansen Text Italics; separated from narration by three lines of white space; text of note single spaced	Carmen, Jeremy, Carmen's grandparents (Thomas and Dorothy Glen)	Peace offering or clarification of previous actions

### The Complexity of Polyvocal Texts

In *Virtuosity*, the messages interrupted the protagonist's internal debate about her purpose in life. While she was in the process of figuring out what she valued most, her violin competition or pursuing her own interests, the email messages broke into her train of thought thus interrupting the narration of the story. Negotiating these epistolary interruptions required me to develop a hermeneutic turn that pivoted on the value of the message in relation to the development of the protagonist. The reader must choose if the messages

challenge the internal dialogue or affirm it. This choice determines how the reader understands future actions Carmen takes.

In the second cycle of coding I noted the text signals used by the author. In this pass, I noted the language that preceded the interruption of the text as it appeared in the body of the narration. I used the set of terms from *Falling for Hamlet* as a guide for specific terms in the text. *Martinez* often included a description of the character's actions in the paragraph preceding the interruption by the email text as if opening email was part of a routine or a behavior Carmen used during episodes of insomnia.

My bedside clock said 2:21 when I finally gave up, untangled myself from my sheets, and sat down at my desk. My computer whirred softly as I brought it to life and checked my inbox (Martinez, p. 26).

Martinez continued to give clues about the upcoming email with words like: subject line, sender's address, foreign spam, cursor, delete button (p. 27). Finally, the sentence before the message read: "I opened the email."

The next set of interruptions were also preceded by text signals that denoted email such as "reply" used as a noun or a verb, "responded", "pressed send", "opened", and "checked." The terms Martinez used are the standard on the navigational bar of email systems. As a result, these terms, which have several definitions, are used predominantly for electronic communication and reinforce this common usage thereby introducing the novice user to the language of electronic communication (Table 5). For example, the email system developed by Microsoft Outlook, has the words: send, reply, reply all, delete, forward, and open. These terms not only described Carmen's actions but also included cues to the reader about the change in the following text and how to prepare for it. Their appearance was consistent across the novel. Each epistolary message was preceded by one of these terms and additional white space with the exception of a message that began on page 211. This rare occurrence was identified by the additional white space, change in font, and deeper margins. The message was a continuation of a verbal conversation that ended with a line by the character who would send the message. This unusual setting was followed by the use of a signal word, "reply", in the first sentence of the next paragraph that picked

up the narration in the font and layout of the narrative text. So, even if the epistolary message was not preceded by a signal, a signal word was embedded directly following the epistolary interruption to identify the kind of message created and sent by the characters.

These text signals differed from the words that preceded handwritten messages. The handwritten messages included a card that accompanied a floral bouquet and two handwritten messages. “Card” and “note” appeared in the line immediately preceding the message. These terms marked a distinction between electronic and hard copy communication.

**Table 9. *Second Cycle of Coding: Text signals for Virtuosity***

<b>Text signals</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
Opened, reply (verb), waiting, was, typed, responded, hit reply, email, stared at the cursor, get, send, check, screen (noun), address (noun), reply (noun), inbox, subject line	The character received an email message and began to read it.	Announces the appearance of an email message outside the flow of the narrative	Email, cursor, inbox, subject line usually appear early in the preceding paragraph as part of the description of the character’s actions. Typed, get, reply (noun), responded, opened, tapped send usually appear in the sentence immediately preceding the email.
Note, card, scribbled	Character has received or composed a short message written on paper	To explain an action or ask forgiveness.	These short epistles appear just before or immediately after a major plot twist.

### **Third Cycle of Coding**

The third cycle included the type of text features within the epistolary interruptions focusing on spelling and mechanics. Unlike *Falling for Hamlet*, *Virtuosity* followed standard spelling rules and punctuation. Martinez did not use any invented spellings or abbreviations. The sentence syntax was simple with a conversational tone. End marks were full stops and question marks. Most communications were full sentences with only truncated clauses used in quick email exchanges. Therefore, I did not include coding for invented spelling or abbreviation.

Here is the point where I want to read about what happens after the interruption.



## What Happens After the Interruption

When people are interrupted in lived experiences, they choose how to respond: ignore, react, or contemplate the new information. An author has chosen to include an epistolary interruption in the novel and then must make decisions as to how their characters will react to the interruptions. I returned to the text to read the interruptions and the paragraphs that followed. I refer to the text after the interruption as the following paragraph.

I turned to the interruption on page 27 and read the following paragraph. In a notebook, I wrote down a short description for each one. I identified them as: return to narrative (RN), ended chapter (E), adds detail or complication (D). After labeling them in this broad fashion, I put a check mark in front of those that ended a chapter or a chapter section for quantifying. Of the thirteen interruptions, five ended a chapter or section of a chapter.

I then returned to the novel to reread what happened before the interruption as well as during the interruption. On a new sheet of paper, I wrote a summary of the scene followed by the action in the following paragraph. I read the text without the interruption to discern if the interruption added to the narrative. I determined this by noticing if the following paragraph picked up where the preceding paragraph ended or if the following paragraph showed a shift in action or point of view. In order to determine if the action changed, I needed to perform a hermeneutic turn, which involved rereading from an additional perspective, and with the knowledge of the previous reading, in order to understand the following paragraph. If I could read without having to adjust my meaning making, then there was no change and it was RN: return to narrative.

In cases of shift, I labeled the passage with the coding system I developed for *Falling for Hamlet*. The description of the action in the following paragraph included more detail to the plot. For example, detail included building tension through rising action, added backstory, or showed resolve by character. I then coded the transcripts in the notebook using the language from *Falling for Hamlet*: RN-return to narrative, E-end, ID-internal dialogue, D-detail, RA-rising action (Table 6) table numbers are funky right now, but you get the idea.

**Table 10. *After the Interruption in Virtuosity***

Return to Narrative	Ends Chapter or Section	Internal Dialogue	Detail Backstory	Rising Action or Conflict
1 time	5 times	2 times	3 times	2 times

### **The Impact of Interruptions**

The quantity of interruptions is small, yet their purpose across the novel is to introduce a complication in the narrative or a shift in the storyline. The initial email Carmen receives is from her major competitor in the Guarneri Competition for young violinists. Though the characters, violin prodigies, play at the same level and will compete for this prestigious award; they have never met. They have seen images of each other and read reviews of each other's performances but have yet to actually meet. The email interrupts Carmen's insomnia and introduces the voice of her competitor, Jeremy, to the storyline along with the complication of two rivals testing and challenging each other.

#### *Time*

The complications presented in the inaugural exchange are enhanced by the amount of time and ruminating performed by Carmen before she replies to Jeremy's initial message. The contrast between the epistolary communication and an oral conversation is striking. The written exchange plays with time. For example, the sending and receiving of the message can happen any time and is not anchored to traditional times of day when people work, attend school, or attend social functions. In oral exchanges, the participants do not have the luxury of time to second-guess their responses or plan them let alone weigh their words for a specific effect. The author has the opportunity to show the character in composition mode through the invention of the message. The message is not just blurted out but reviewed, revised, edited for the specific effect desired by the character.

The shifting of time requires the reader to synthesize information from several points in order to develop meaning from the text. Synthesizing information from a variety of sources and points of view moves the reader hermeneutically, that is, requires/allows the reader to reread with additional insight gained from a previous reading, which gives depth to character and complexity to the novel. The reader

needs to show a sophistication in making inferences in order to create deep meaning from the text.

I was several pages into my diatribe before I stopped to breathe. I'd lost sense of time. ...I read over what I'd written. I sounded...insane. ...I couldn't send this. My index finger found the delete key and I watched the insults disappear one letter at a time (Martinez, 29).

Granted authors have this time, yet their text must also reflect real time so authors must give the characters the style of discourse suitable for the fictional social setting. Within the setting of an email exchange, authors may enhance internal monologues to develop the character composing along with their attitudes about the recipient or event held within the epistle.

I laced my fingers behind my head and bounced against the back of the chair. I needed to write something simple, something profound but totally void of emotion....Before I could talk myself out of it, I pressed send, a thrill running up my spine (Martinez, 2011, p. 30)

Martinez stretches the time before and after Carmen replies to an email to build tension in her protagonist and highlight her development and internal conflict. Martinez shows Carmen wrestling with the drafts of her messages and mulling possibilities of word choice and tone. After sending the message, Carmen then exhibits the anxiety of waiting for a response and the possibility of misinterpretation.

I read the email six times. During the first reading I registered shock and shock alone. Second, humiliation. Third, humiliation. Fourth, humiliation with just a glimmer of anger. Then during the fifth and sixth readings the anger grew into rage, and I knew I was done when I was ready to put my fist through my computer (Martinez, p. 28).

Another example of stretching time for a reply:

I started my reply, deleted the first few words, then gave the cursor the same half-hour stare Jeremy claimed he'd given it...I got up and poured myself a bowl of Froot Loops, sat back down at my computer and stared at the cursor for another ten minutes (Martinez, p. 212).

*Expatriating character's thoughts.* Authors can show the emotions of a character through the drafts of messages and the evolution of their thinking about the purpose for composing the epistle and the

desired effect it would have on an audience. The use of text gives internal dialogue a concreteness; a character awakens to the reality of his or her thoughts when confronting them in black and white. This confrontation creates opportunities for character development along with connections between characters.

The author of *Virtuosity* used email as the primary mode of epistolary communication. On two separate occasions, the author presented text messaging as an option and dismissed it. The protagonist Carmen emailed Jeremy then regretted it. The character then begins an internal dialogue about the value of email and the agony of waiting for a reply. She then wonders: “Maybe I should have texted instead” (Martinez, 133). The choice of options available to the character may show a privileging of one type of discourse over another. The other possibility is character development. Since the protagonists are driven musicians, the use of texting may be interpreted as an unnecessary interruption to their day while email is a method they can control and use at their convenience.

The use of epistolary messages allows the author to explore the different perspectives of the protagonist’s own life and her motivations to play at the highest musical levels. The epistolary messages open up the protagonist’s voice to explore her own mind and not simply follow the direction given by her mother and her violin teacher. The epistolary messages allow the protagonist to find her own voice. That voice has more weight when Carmen sees it in black and white, written text. These types of choices underscore the demands placed on the reader in order to appreciate the multi-voiced narrative. The reader must filter and weigh the value of differing voices to the plotline and character development by deciding whether the epistolary interruptions add value to the meaning of the story. The reader takes a hermeneutic turn and may turn away from it in order to create meaning from the text.

#### *Complexity of Polyvocal Texts*

Throughout *Virtuosity*, the reader must move hermeneutically to shift from the internal world of Carmen to the outside world of high stakes competition. The reader must also decide the value and veracity of the epistolary messages sent between characters in order to fully understand the characters and their motivations. Carmen, herself, is unsure about her own version of events which makes her narrative unreliable.

As a reader, I needed the extra information in the following paragraphs in order to synthesize the information from the epistolary messages into the overarching storyline. The following paragraphs included detail through explanations of backstories to validate or undermine Carmen's interpretation of events. These details appeared as motivation for her mother's (Diana) controlling behavior: the loss of her own professional musical career from a medical mishap. Diana was motivated to keep her daughter in the spotlight since hers had dimmed quickly and unexpectedly. As a reader, I have the choice to identify with her motives or find her terrible like her daughter.

The characters in *Virtuosity* are not as dependent upon the interactivity and connectivity as those from *Falling for Hamlet*, yet they do expect to have access to technology to connect them with others when they so desire. The complexity of weaving together the backstory of the characters challenges readers to predict motivations and outcomes of the plot.

## **Book 2: *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* by Rachel Cohn & David Levithan**

### *Story Summary*

Dash and Lily are two high school aged protagonists who have never met, yet challenge each other through a shared appreciation of adventure and the written word. The structure of the story follows that of a Noel Coward farce with missed opportunities and outrageous juxtaposition of characters and settings. The two protagonists meet through the chance placement of a Moleskine notebook in a bookstore. Placed in the store where Lily's cousin works, Dash finds the Moleskine in the stacks, takes Lily's dare, and then challenges her in return. Throughout the winter holidays, these two strangers discover that they share friends and acquaintances who are unaware of the Moleskine notebook and its escalating dares. Through mishaps and hijinks, the two realize that they just may become good friends.

### **Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles**

Each chapter was headed by *Dash or Lily and* followed by the date in italics beginning with December 21<sup>st</sup> and ending with January 1<sup>st</sup>. While reading, I needed to keep in mind the point of view of the narrator for each chapter. During the first read, I coded the large sections of text using the same system I used for *Falling for Hamlet*: TXT for text message, HW for handwriting, Email for email, and

no marking for the body of the narrative. The body of the narration is set in Goudy font style and the Moleskine extended epistolary sections in Hoefler Text italics (labeled in the copyright page of the book). White space, before and after the epistolary interruptions, separated the epistolary messages from the body of the narrative. The premise of the novel began to take shape with the characters, unknown to each other, sending a Moleskine notebook back and forth with written clues, like a scavenger hunt through New York City's East Village, to each other's identity. The reader, much like these characters, has to navigate the dare through these epistolary messages. The reader discovers what is likeable about the protagonists through the written exchanges rather than the face-to-face shenanigans.

A criterion for inclusion in this study is that the text included interruptions and did not follow a pattern of text exchanges that mimic a conversation. This book could clearly fit within that category. The second chapter, -Lily-, included breaks in the text for text-embedded flyers announcing a caroling event she was organizing, lyrics to Christmas carols, text messages from other characters, and handwritten messages that were separated by white space and written in italics, bold, or different fonts. The breaks were used to interrupt the narrative. The narrative did not alternate between the epistolary messages and the narrative in a set pattern.

The epistolary messages functioned as a distraction to the protagonists during their usual winter break activities. The Moleskine functioned as an outlet for their philosophy and desires as well as challenges to test each other's wit and intelligence. The novel was a weaving together of three major plotlines: Lily's vacation activities, Dash's vacation activities, and the exchanges in the Moleskine. The only pattern in the text was the handoff of the Moleskine shifted the point of view and vacation narrative to the holder of the notebook. When the characters chose to return to the Moleskine was dependent upon their life activities.

An interesting non-example of a pattern set with alternating voices is the book *Second Impact* (not part of the study corpus). The novel, *Second Impact* (Klass & Klass, 2013), used epistolary methods to tell the story from three points of view of a high school football player who received a major concussion during a football game. These communications followed a pattern that after a few chapters,

the reader was able to recognize and follow the turn taking used by the authors to tell the story. *Second Impact* was like a conversation in letters or email posts that set the narration rather than have epistolary interruptions in the narrative. Conversely, the changes in the text in the three books of this study did not have a pattern that followed a give and take of a conversation. These books had specific narrative storylines that were interrupted by these different epistolary communications. These communications were unexpected by the characters and interjected a different point of view from the flow of the narrative. *Second Impact* had no interruptions of the narrative since each chapter was a section of the storyline told totally in one character's point of view followed by a second character who retold the event from character one's chapter with additional information. The chapters mimicked a back and forth conversation or a debate. Each character's chapter was just that character's perspective on the developing story.

Dash and Lily exchanged a Moleskine notebook. Each chapter was told from one character's point of view about the encounters of his or her day during the holiday season. As the story developed, the flow of the narrative was broken by text messages or other interruptions from other characters who were friends or relatives of Dash or Lily and by the handwritten messages in the Moleskine notebook when the character had a moment to read it during the course of his or her day. No pattern evolved or developed when the character read the Moleskine notebook.

After my first reading, I returned to the text to code additional interruptions beyond the handwriting, email, and texting that I had developed for *Falling for Hamlet*. The first coding for *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* now included handwriting, flyer, lyrics, and texting. These four text types created the most obvious breaks in the narration with white space before and after the entries, changes in font or style to italics, and the text centered on the page with deeper indentations.

**Table 11. *First coding for Dash & Lily’s Book of Dares***

<b>Type of Text</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Text Features</b>	<b>Speaker/Point of View</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Handwriting	HW	Italics; Goudy; block text with white space around all four sides; single-spaced; centered on page	Alternates between two protagonists: Dash and Lily; in “Dash” chapters, HW is Lily’s POV; in Lily’s chapters, HW is Dash’s POV	The epistolary section of the novel through which the protagonists become acquainted. Readers and characters learn the character traits of the protagonists. HW messages move the plot.
Flyer	Flyer	Bold; Goudy, block text with white space around four sides; 1.5 spaced; text centered on page	Lily or neighborhood mothers of small children	Enhances character development through tone and POV; advances the plot by adding complications
Lyrics	Lyrics	Italics; Goudy; white space around four sides; single-spaced	Lily’s POV	Demonstrates a character trait: her love of the holiday and singing
Texting	TXT	Font changed to typewriter; Sender’s name is first followed by a colon then the message of the text. Protagonist’s text is in the narration with the font change and preceding colon	POV of character texting	Interrupts the narration to inform characters of new developments. The text affects the line of the story.

The next coding included additional types of text that interrupted the narrative text: dictionary, video chat message, graffiti, phone, copy, blog, and newspaper. All of these text formats changed in font or style to italics. The video chat messages were in italics and had little if any additional white space to separate them from the narrative because they functioned as face-to-face dialogue. The italics emphasized



that Lily would not speak to her parents but would communicate only through text. She had developed this behavior as a young child “to express [her] feelings instead of letting she-devil Shrilly express them through shrieking. It was supposed to be a therapeutic tool (p. 97). This differed from the typed response, printed a different font, which was separated by white space and indented to emphasize Lily’s deepening frustration with her parents. Each graffiti message had a distinct font to underscore it as having a different author. The photocopies, blogs, dictionary entries, and newspaper articles were separated by additional white space and font styles to mark their breaks in the narrative and give them prominence.

**Table 12. *Second coding for Dash and Lily’s Book of Dares***

<b>Type of Text</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Text Features</b>	<b>Speaker/Point of View</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Dictionary	Dict	Bold; Ariel; white space four sides; text centered on page; target word in bold, definitions numbered and in regular text	Neutral	Develops characteristics of protagonists as lovers of words; their mutual appreciation for language solidifies their relationship
Video Chat Message	VC	Typewriter font, regular; four sides of white space	Lily	To distance herself from her parents while they holiday in Fiji
Graffiti	Graffiti	Bold, Apple Casual; extra white space before and after; centered on page; one all upper case; third entry in Goudy italics	An anonymous writer; third entry by Dash	Set the scene for finding the journal; Dash’s entry is a clue to Lily to locate the book
Phone Call	Phone	Goudy; part of the narration	Minor characters; often ignored by protagonists	Separates characters: those with phones reflect a different social class from the protagonists; advances the plot by sending photos or adding detail
Photocopy	Copy	Italics, Goudy; block indent	Copy of a poem; included by Lily	A ploy by Lily to convince Dash about her sincerity

**Table 12 Continued**

<b>Type of Text</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Text Features</b>	<b>Speaker/Point of View</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Blog	Blog	Bold, all caps, centered on page; surrounded by white space; each response preceded by username before a reply to a post; each addition separated by double white space	Upper East Side mothers and random posters with names like: maclarenpusher, zacephron, christwearsarmani	Develop attitude and build stereotype against the overprotective parents in Lily's neighborhood
Newspaper	NP	Goudy; upper case; embedded in narrative text	Extreme political positions of the editorial staff	Public response to Dash and Lily's snowball fight

**Expatriating Characters' Thoughts.**

Throughout the narrative, the authors included characters' internal dialogue to add detail to a scene or share their true feelings about an incident or another character. These lines of dialogue changed to italics just like the earlier handwritten passages but had neither quotation marks denoting them as internal dialogue nor separation by white space segregating the thought passages from the narration. Though the text features changed, the internal dialogue text was part of the narration and therefore not coded. The text also reflected the characters' emotions with segments of dialogue in all upper case, denoting anger, frustration, or pure joy. Some of the changes in font or style represented internal dialogue to explain a character's reaction to an event.

With each chapter written in first person from the point of view alternating between Dash and Lily, the internal dialogue gave an added dimension to each character. This change in text feature also went uncoded since it was part of the dialogue used by characters and an integral part of the narration.

The text features changed often which required me as the reader to note the purpose of the text features and discern whether these changes denoted interruptions, or breaks, in the storyline, or rather an element of character development employed by the authors and editors. The separation of text with white space proved to be an important feature to understand the shift in narration.

The text signals in this particular text were vital to understanding what the upcoming change in the text feature denoted. Each chapter alternated between protagonists that shifted point of view and minor characters that built tension of the story. The connection between the protagonists was the epistolary text. They wrote to each other in the red Moleskine notebook and passed it between each other with clues about their identities and instructions for an activity for the other to perform. The other modes of epistolary communication to the narrative were text messages, blogs, email, and flyers. These types of communication reflected dialogic choices such as video chat, lyrics, and phone conversations that also advanced the plot. Lily’s parents were in Fiji on an “anniversary trip” but really interviewing for a job prospect at a boarding school there. Lily and her brother video chatted on Christmas morning. In this scene the parents spoke and Lily wrote on an eraser board that she used “to express [her] feelings instead of letting she-devil Shrilly express them through shrieking. It was supposed to be a therapeutic tool” (Cohn & Levithan, 2010, p. 97). These methods of communication appeared with different font styles or different fonts to denote a change in communication from oral to electronic or written. All changes in text features were preceded by a text signal to alert the reader about a shift.

**Table 13. Text Signals in Dash and Lilli by Rachel Cohen & David Levithan**

<b>Text Signals</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
Scrawled Note (n) Slip of paper Post-it note Wrote/write Returned Said Red notebook Moleskine Handwriting Turned the page Page (n) Opened Add a line Went on Scribbled Commune	The character has written a message by hand into the notebook the protagonists use to challenge each other to perform a dare.  All entries in the shared notebook are handwritten messages except for the stapled in copy of a photocopied poem on page 186.	To mark the shift in character action from interacting within the scene to physically writing an entry into “The Book of Dares”. It marks when the recipient shifts from paying attention to his or her surroundings to reading the entry written by the other protagonist. Only the protagonists share these pieces of text.	The text signals appear in the sentence preceding the white space that separates the narration of the story to the message within the red moleskine notebook.  Action initiated by character as part of a game.

**Table 13 Continued**

<b>Text Signals</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
A text Texted back Texted Received	To read or write a text message sent through a cell phone	Mark the interaction of a cell phone between characters	Word appears before message; action initiated by the character
Typed a message Click	Email message sent or received	Announces an interruption by a main character interacting with a friend or family member out of the scene	Word appears before the inserted text; action initiated by protagonist
Third verse	Text of Christmas carol lyrics	Announces the detail of the obscure set of lyrics to a Christmas carol; adds detail to the characterization of Lily	Appears before the inserted text
Made my own flyer Sign	Announces the insertion of a break in the text	Explains the shift in the Point of view and voice of the break in the text	Appears before the inserted text
Link Computer Posting Click it	Announces an incoming message via computer in the form of a blog post	Blog post functions as a public announcement to minor characters of a plot complication	Appears before the inserted text
Rang Looked Picked up	Announcing an incoming phone call or cell phone message	Announces an interruption by another character out of the scene. Protagonist recognizes the incoming interruption but chooses whether or not to respond	Word appears before the message appears or dialogue begins between the protagonist and another character
Phoned Typed	Electronic connection between characters that includes visuals, sound, and text	Creates an opportunity for characters to converse that are separated by great distances. Allows characters to “see” what is happening	Action initiated by characters outside the narration. Brings in complications to the plot and allows Lily to exhibit personality traits and show elements of the parent/child dynamic

The variety of methods of epistolary communication demonstrates a level of sophistication and privilege of the characters. They demonstrate a comfort level with the technology available to them as well as the expectation of connectivity, interactivity, and access as demonstrated with the video chats, YouTube

videos, and sending and receiving images on their cell phones. They appear to prefer the handwritten methods of the Moleskine notebook while employing alternate methods of communication when it suits them. With multiple voices and points of view, the reader has to weigh the validity of the speaker to decide where the truth to the story lay. This heteroglossia hearkens back to the unreliable narrator of Poe and Bronte and adds to the complexity of the text. Just as the epistolary tradition required readers to develop more sophisticated ways of reading innuendo and context, so too does the new digital epistolary. Young adult readers must blend information from a variety of sources on a singular event to craft a cohesive narrative. This blending of texts exposes readers to a variety of styles that inform the plot while developing sophistication in reading and understanding text. The reader must make value judgments about the importance of the interruption to the story just like the protagonists choose whether or not to respond to an electronic interruption after acknowledging its appearance. “Another call rang on my [Lily] cell, this time displaying my favorite picture of Mrs. Basil E...I ignored Mrs. Basil E.’s phone call” (Cohn & Levithan, 2010, p. 161). “I [Dash] looked at the screen:/ Thibaud./ Despite my deeper reservations, I picked up” (p.172). Both characters choose whether or not to allow the interruption by electronic means. The choice added to the complication of the plot by commitment or omission. Other times, characters used text messaging to gather information in a streamlined way. On pages 181-182, Lily texted a mutual friend for information about where to locate Dash. She abruptly ends the exchange when he changes the subject.

### **What Happens After the Interruption**

The interruptions in *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* contained a different quality. The majority of the interruptions came from the Moleskine and formed a separate narrative between Dash and Lily that built the arc of the plot: will these two strangers meet. The narrative of the novel was a chronicle of Dash and Lily's lives during their winter break from school. This chronicle was interrupted by text messages, video chats, flyers, blog posts, and newspaper articles. The interruptions by the Moleskine were the result of choices made by Dash and Lily to stop whatever they were doing to read the Moleskine entries, think about them, and respond. Considering the variation of these types of interruptions, coding the text after

the interruption proved more challenging and demanded employment of the hermeneutic turn to fully understand their function.

I followed the same methodology of recording the page number and a short synopsis in a notebook. I followed this entry with the code for the interruption (i.e. HW, TXT, email) and a brief description of the content of the interruption. I next read the narrative beginning before the interruption, skipped the interruptive text, and then began where the narrative restarted, the following paragraph. I wrote in my notebook what happened in the following paragraph by describing the action in the text.

After reading the following paragraph, I would stop to decide if the narrative followed smoothly or if it were confusing. This required me to use the hermeneutic turn in order to move from the broad view to the narrow view and back again while determining if the following paragraph added information that had not come from the paragraph preceding the interruption. If the following paragraph contained new information not from the preceding paragraph, I needed to decide if that new information added detail, intensified the action by adding conflict or fueling the rising action. If the following paragraph received information from the preceding paragraph, the interruption added nothing new to the narrative.

I used the same coding system to label the role of interruption: return to narrative as RN, end as E, internal dialogue as ID, detail as D, and rising action as RA (Table 8). I noted 54 different interruptions across the novel.

**Table 14. *Quantified types of interruptions in Dash & Lily’s Book of Dares***

Return to Narrative	End	Internal Dialogue	Detail	Rising Action
RN	E	ID	D	RA
11 times	6 times	7 times	14 times	16 times

The use of the Moleskine presented a challenge. The Moleskine not only developed the plot and the rising action, but it also included the heteroglossia of young adults. Within the Moleskine, Dash and Lily shared their philosophy of life and observations of the world. Outside the Moleskine, Dash and Lily use a common vernacular of Modern American English. Within the Moleskine, they use a literary style tinged with philosophy and psychology.

I'm not sure how this Being a Teenager thing is supposed to work. Is there an instruction manual? I think I have the moody muscle installed, but I don't flex it that often. More times I feel so filled with LOVE for the people I know—and even more so for the dogs I walk in Tompkins Square Park—that I feel like I could well up like a giant balloon and fly away. Yes, that much love. But other teenagers? ...I don't mind being the odd girl out; it's kind of a relief, maybe. In the language of soccer, however, I am highly fluent. That's what I like about sports. No matter if everyone playing the game speaks completely different languages, on the field, or on the court, wherever they are playing the language of moves and passes and scores is all the same. Universal.

(p. 108- 109)

The reader needs to take the information within the epistolary text of the Moleskine and compare and contrast it to the characterization in the narrative. In order to understand Dash and Lily, the reader must move between the outward actions chronicled in the narrative and the internal dialogue given voice in the epistles between Dash and Lily. This type of complexity of text demonstrates the type of demands authors place on readers in epistolary young adult literature in order to make meaning from the text.

Bakhtin (1981) defines the multiple layers of language as dialogism, “the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia” (426). Within each chapter, the authors shift point of view from the big picture view of the lives of the protagonists to the smaller world of the Moleskine, which includes the epistolary conversations between Dash and Lily and the recording of Dash's and Lily's internal dialogues. Weaving together these points of view and voices is how dialogism and the hermeneutic turn unite. “Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings...[and is] settled at the moment of utterance” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 426). Readers make adjustments in response to text features of white space and font changes, then make refinements to those adjustments by interpreting the speaker, point of view, and time setting of the text in order to create meaning to the novel.

### **The Impact of Interruptions**

*Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* includes epistolary messages and technology that mirrors the use of

epistolary communication common to adolescents' lives. The epistles represent a certain level of privilege that comes from a middle to upper-middle class lifestyle. Just as the characters in the epistolary novels of the 1700s reflected the up and coming use of literacy practices available to them—reading novels and writing letters—Dash and Lily have access to cell phones, computers, the Internet, and video images that members of their social class find commonplace. This access makes the braiding of the heteroglossia of their lives appear authentic. Dash and Lily use one type of language with their family and another language with their friends and a third that gives voice to their internal hopes and desires. When Lily learns that her soccer teammates actually like her and want to help her, she is humbled and surprised. By making a decision about who they, Dash and Lily, desire to be and allowing themselves to become those people, they learn to enjoy their friends and family. The textual communication between Dash and Lily gives them the opportunity to slow down their lives and take the time to embrace the people they will become.

The characters Dash and Lily use a wider variety of epistolary methods to communicate between themselves and among their friends and family. These methods open up the definition of text from the handwritten entries of the Moleskine notebook to the video footage on Youtube. All formats require a sophistication on the part of the reader to understand the style of delivery and appreciate the alternating points of view in order to create one narrative of the escapades involving Dash and Lily. The heteroglossia of voices reflects not only the usage and point of view of the speaker but the stylistics of the medium. The textual cues from text messaging, email, and handwriting require identification of the speaker and audience along with purpose of the epistle. The video sequences are presented as a narrative within the narrative that is based upon a speaker and a point of view that requires the reader to incorporate the hermeneutical turn of folding the embedded narrative into the main narrative in order to extract meaning and understand the scene. The collaboration between the reader, the text, and the author create complexity to the text and the plot.



### **Book 3: *Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel* by Sara Shepard**

#### *Story Summary*

*Crushed* by Sara Shepard is the sixteenth book in the *Pretty Little Liars* mystery series that began in 2006. The mystery is built around a group of friends from an upper middle class community in Pennsylvania who are drawn into the disappearance of a fifth girl named Allison. The four girls who form the group communicate extensively through text messaging and other electronic means. They are taunted and badgered by an unknown character known as A, who, in contrast, knows everything about the members of the group and uses their secrets to torment them and keep them quiet.

This series uses technology and other forms of epistolary communication more than the other books in this study. The modes of communication have evolved with the evolution of electronic communication in American culture. For example, in the first book of the series, *Pretty Little Liars* (Shepard, 2006), the characters checked their Blackberries and Treos for texts and phone calls. In the 2013 book, *Crushed* (Shepard, 2013), the characters used burner phones to keep their communication secret; and they used Twitter and Google Alert as news feeds to keep informed. The characters in the series demonstrate the Radical Change Theory of connectivity, interactivity, and access. They are in almost constant contact with each other or at least have the expectation of being available at any given moment. The characters used their phones for a majority of methods of communication rather than using a variety of pieces of technology for different methods. In this novel, the protagonists use their phones for phone calls, texts, Twitter, News Feeds, and email. Rather than use brand names of phones or computers as in the earlier books, Shepard used generic terms like cell phone or laptop for identification of hardware with iPad as the only specific name brand.

#### **Sorting Text and Isolating Epistles**

I began reading with pen in hand to mark the large changes in text features while reading for plot, character development, and literary elements. I used the same basic codes that I used with *Falling for Hamlet* to mark the large chunks of text.

On the first coding I noticed that the bulk of the book was in standard type style Goudy with

imbedded sections of the same font in italics. The text messages were surrounded by white space with extra white space separating the body of the novel from the text message. The messages were indented block with a different font, smaller point size, and set in a block layout. The only text messages set apart from the body of the novel were original texts. Any text shared between characters so another character could re-read the text was embedded in the text like dialogue and set in italics. Email was set in italics but not separated from the body of the novel. Handwritten messages appeared in the same format as the email: embedded in the text, set in italics.

The other change in text format appeared when a character conducted a Google search or used another browser. The text typed by the character and the text read by the character from the browser was all in uppercase resembling Copperplate Gothic Light. The other use of all capitals was in direct quotes from a blog post. The final use of italics embedded in the text is the internal dialogue by the characters. The novel is written in third person omniscient to allow the author to include the individual ruminations and observations by each character.

**Table 15. *First coding for Crushed by Sara Shepard***

<b>Type of Text</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Text Features</b>	<b>Speaker/Point of View</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Text Message, original	TXT	Double white space before text; blocked text indented; change of font	First person of the sender; sent by a character out of the scene	Builds tension in the plot by adding mystery to the storyline if sent by A; character is out of the scene
Text Message, re-read	TXT	Same font changes to italics	A third party usually known by the characters reviewing and rereading the text	Informs other characters of additional information; clarifies the recipient's emotional state
News Feed	NF	New paragraph, font changes to italics	Neutral tone that supplies general information	Adds complication to storyline
Tweet	TWT	All upper case in font change to Copperplate Gothic Light	Updates characters on social events such as prom	Adds information to fluster or aggravate protagonists
Email	Email	Embedded in the text; font changes to italics	Point of view changes depending upon the sender;	Minor characters add complications to the plot; major characters exchange important information

**Table 15 Continued**

Type of Text	Abbreviations	Text Features	Speaker/Point of View	Significance
Handwriting	HW	Embedded in the text; font changes to italics	Point of view of the character; may be major or minor	Adds detail to the plotline or gives a clue to solving the mystery
Transcript	Trans	Embedded in text; all upper case without change to font	Neutral point of view; transcripts originate from television news reports or newspapers; formal tone	Adds details to the plot line or suggests a clue to solving the mystery
Blog	Blog	Embedded in text; all upper case without change to font	Biased point of view from conspiracy theorists about the disappearance of character Allison	Supports suspicions of protagonists and energizes them to pursue a theory; acts as a method of introduction to new characters by creating a relationship between protagonists and blogger
Instant Message	IM	Embedded in text; font changes to italics. Each IM is indented giving the exchange the feel of written dialogue.	Point of view of characters writing back and forth; protagonists may or may not know the correspondent	Protagonists can question an anonymous minor character for information and potential clues; characters communicate in real time

**Categorizing Text Signals**

The second cycle of coding was more challenging with *Crushed* than with the other texts. The epistolary text separated from the narrative with additional white space and font changes for text messages. Other epistolary text, email and handwritten, differed from the narrative text by italics or font changes yet was not separated by additional white space. The epistolary text changed by font features only and not font features and layout of white space. The other common trait was the use of italics to denote a different type of communication as email, instant messaging, or handwriting. Just as the other books in this study included internal dialogue by the protagonists, *Crushed* included internal dialogue of all four protagonists that was printed in italics. Making meaning from this text required an additional

hermeneutic turn to discern the role of the italicized text as originating from within a character or from without by another character.

In order to code the text for text signals, I needed to read and reread the text before the italicized text to determine if the italics represented an epistolary message, if the epistolary message was new to the scene or repeated from a previous scene, and the type of message. To make the pointer words more obvious, I underlined and highlighted them. The pointer words consistently identified the type of text to follow.

The text signals became vital to understanding the meaning of the italicized text. The text signals included onomatopoeic verbs to denote the alert made by a cell phone of an incoming message or call, the type of paper or appearance of handwriting, and electronic medium for email or instant messaging. Shepard maintained a consistent use of the name of the method of epistolary contact to alert the reader to the type of communication that would appear next so the reader would understand the change in style of text and how information was exchanged (Table 16).

**Table 16. *Text Signals for Crushed by Sara Shepard***

<b>Text signals</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
Beep Pinged Flashed Bloop Bleep Bleated Inbox	Announcing an incoming text message on a cell phone	Mark the interaction of a cell phone with a character	Word appears before the message; action initiated by a character out of the scene
Logged into Tweet Peeked Beep Message	Tweet sent and received on a cell phone	Announces an action taken by a character to send or acknowledge a tweet	Word appears in the sentence preceding the text of the tweet
Popped Inbox Note Checked Buzzed Clicked on Opened	Email message sent and received on a cell phone	Announces an action taken by a character to send or acknowledge an email message	Word appears in the sentence preceding the opening of the email by the character to send or receive the message

**Table 16 Continued**

<b>Text Signals</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When</b>
Written Scrawl Paper Slip of paper Note	Handwritten message	Acknowledges a message written on paper; usually discovered by the character	Word appears before the text; action taken by protagonist
TV screen News report blared Turned on the radio	Announces an interruption by traditional media into a scene	Adds detail to the scene or informs protagonists of events outside their small world of mystery and intrigue	Appears in the sentence preceding the transcript of the broadcast
Type Loaded Link(ed) Clicked Post(ed)	Marks the beginning of interaction with a blog post as a reader and then as a writer	Creates communication between protagonists and unknown ally	Appears in the sentence preceding the blog
Popped up Blinked New message Read Wrote Flashed Typed Logged into Ping	Announces an incoming instant message or a response to an instant message on a computer	Creates real time communication between protagonists and minor characters outside the inner circle	Appears in the sentence preceding the written dialogue between characters
Buzzed Screen Beeped Bleated Butt-dialed	Announces an incoming phone call	Allows character to see who contacted her and to decide whether or not to communicate with the sender	Appears in the sentence preceding the description of the phone screen
Article Read on Scanned News article	Announces the interaction between the character and print media	Introduces outside information in a concrete form that the characters may return to or share with another protagonist	Appears in the sentence preceding the transcript of the text contained in the newspaper

Shepard incorporated a wider range of representation options for epistolary communication in her novels from a variety of perspectives than the other books in this study. There is an expectation that the reader is familiar with all these forms of communication and how they are transmitted; yet she includes a clear pattern of text signals and symbols preceding the changes in text and point of view to guide the reader. Every message or electronic communication is introduced with a text signal to mark the type of message or communication to follow. The only overlap of text signals is the onomatopoeic verbs that announce an incoming message on a cell phone. For example:

Her phone *pinged*, and she grabbed it. GOOGLE ALERT FOR THE SPLENDOR OF THE SEAS ECO CRUISE. Hanna pressed READ. She'd set up an alert for the cruise she and her friends had just gone on... *Graham Pratt, a passenger on the bombed Splendor of the Seas Eco Cruise is still in a coma after suffering multiple burns sustained in the explosion*, the first line read (23-24).

The only way the reader knows if the announcement is for a phone call, text message, or tweet is by the description in the predicate of the sentence that declares text, tweet, or phone call.

Another e-mail popped into her in-box. NEW MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL AGENT JASMINE FUJI. Hanna squinted at the subject line. It read, simply, TABITHA CLARK (25).

And:

Hanna's cell phone flashed insistently inside her purse. She pulled it out. ONE NEW TEXT FROM ANONYMOUS (31).

And again on pages 37-38:

Emily ran her fingers over the smooth leather of a display pair of Doc Martens, getting an idea. She pulled out her phone again, opened the Twitter app, and logged into her account. Then she copy-pasted the prom invite into a new tweet. PROM IS IN TWO WEKS, she typed. WISH I COULD TAKE MY TRUE LOVE. She hit TWEET, feeling satisfied.

Shepard incorporated the behavior of current cell phone usage and behavior in her description of the epistolary communication in the novel. Cell phones have evolved since 2008 to include a wider range of applications and uses which young adults practice in their daily lives. The ability to send on messages through a variety of formats gives a broader definition to the epistolary communication. In this passage from Shepard, Emily not only forwards a message, she includes the full prom invitation and sends it out to a wider audience through Twitter. Her desire to be heard exceeds her immediate, intimate group of friends to include anyone who follows her on a social media site. The use of a wider variety of formats shows a higher level of sophistication in the use of electronic communication than just abbreviated words or short texts. The ease of composition of several media shows mobility between and among a variety of

websites, images as well as texts, and a relatively anonymous audience. The need to be heard is underscored by the last clause: she felt satisfied. The reader needs to understand how many steps were involved in the transaction, the message, the purpose, and the audience in order to comprehend what Emily did. This type of reading involves activating schema of electronic communication while following the arc of the story and character development.

*Crushed* consistently incorporated a wider variety of epistolary messaging that mimics more sophisticated methods currently practiced by 21<sup>st</sup> century American youth. The cell phone is used less for conversation and more as a tool to connect to the Internet through a variety of formats other than text messaging or email. The characters often use group texts to stay connected. They demonstrate savvy understanding to avoid detection from prying eyes or eavesdroppers. The diction and style of the email messages had a formal tone that differed from the telegraphic style of text messaging or Twitter. The sending of images through Instagram or other newsfeeds also demonstrates a common practice of multimedia communication. The cryptic style of communication through notes common in classic thrillers by the likes of Agatha Christie or P.D. James echoes through the sharp epistolary electronic messaging of *Crushed*. Electronic communication in *Crushed* can easily bring characters to the inside of the story or completely shut them out. The characters demonstrate their expectation of access to the Internet and each other and express frustration when they experience a dead battery for a phone (p. 255), joy when the WiFi signal is strong to receive a slideshow message (p. 283), and panic when characters realize one of them is in danger and they need to send warnings to her (p. 294). These characters expect to be connected and interact with each other at any given moment.

### **What Happens After the Interruption**

I followed the same methodology of recording the page number and a short synopsis in a notebook. I followed this entry with the code for the interruption (i.e. HW, TXT, email) and a brief description of the content of the interruption. I next read the narrative beginning before the interruption, skipped the interruptive text, and then began where the narrative restarted, the following paragraph. I wrote in my notebook what happened in the following paragraph by describing the action in the text.

In order to understand how the epistolary messages functioned in *Crushed*, I had to take into consideration not only the narrative of the current novel but also the characters sending and receiving the messages and if the information within the messages was new or connected to the storyline that covered the arc of the series of books. Some of my notes included comments such as “returns to narrative of past event” or “narrative of previous crime”. These comments explained how the following paragraphs functioned as transitional paragraphs that connected the present with the past (p. 35, 164, 244, 283). This type of narrative was unique to this book. A new reader to the series could begin later in the series and pick up the threads of the overarching storyline through these transitional paragraphs.

Another difference in *Crushed* was the use of the epistolary interruption to close a chapter, and I noted this as “E”. But the text message didn’t simply close the chapter, these text messages added suspense to the narrative. These messages added tension and built the rising action through the taunting nature of the message from A to one of the protagonists. I added another label of “E (RA)” to denote the epistolary interruption as more than an ending to a chapter or section. These interruptions did not connect to the beginning of the next chapter nor were they referenced by the characters. Their sole purpose was to taunt the recipient and deepen the intrigue about this mysterious character, A.

I used the same coding system to label the role of interruption: return to narrative as RN, end as E, internal dialogue as ID, detail as D, rising action as RA, then added E (RA) to include the variation of the epistolary interruption as an ending to a chapter (Table 12). I noted 59 different interruptions across the novel.

**Table 17. *Quantified types of interruptions in Crushed***

Return to Narrative	End	Internal Dialogue	Detail	Rising Action
9 times	3 times 6 times (RA)	1 time	17 times	23 times

### **The Impact of the Interruptions**

The chapter organization in *Crushed* was similar to *Dash & Lily’s Book of Dares* in that each chapter took on the point of view of a different character and shifted the setting and action to reflect the



change. The interruptions allowed the characters to maintain contact with each other and share information about their predicaments without stopping the action of the scene with conversation of flashing back and forth between characters. This type of contact epitomizes the Radical Change Theory of connectivity, interactivity, and access. The characters maintained contact though separated by great distances, sometimes even continents. The characters interacted with each other, newsfeeds, and Internet searches whenever they needed information no matter where they were. They demonstrated exasperation if the Wi-Fi were weak or their devices lost power so they were unable to connect or access what they needed. What made these connections different from the other novels was the use of message history. In *Falling for Hamlet*, the message history was a point of contention between Ophelia and the Denmark Department of Investigation. In *Crushed*, the message history was a way to hook back to previous books in the series and thicken the plot for the current book.

By connecting to previous novels in the series, Shepard used the epistolary interruptions as a means to add rising action and detail to the novel.

### **The Epistolary Texts and What Followed**

The quantity of epistolary texts across the three novels was small, 136 in total, and was generally simple in language and usage. The texts revealed tension between characters. “I am connected to the Alison DiLaurentis case. I can’t tell you my name right now, but I will if we talk. I’m eager to know if you have more information about her” (Shepard, p. 98). The texts added detail to the storyline. “Lily Bear: My co-worker Marc needs to go upstate to tend to his mother...Do you have room in your client list for his dog, Boris?” (Cohn & Levithan, p. 202). The text added qualities to a character. “What I want for Christmas is to believe. I want to believe that, despite all the evidence to the contrary, there is reason to hope” (Cohn & Levithan, p. 73). The page layout and the text features are designed to set these sections of text apart from the narrative, to draw attention to the separateness of the message. These messages appear out of context, yet can be braided back into the narrative through hermeneutic turn of the larger context to add complexity to the plot or to a character.

The interruption is announced through the use of signifiers and enhanced through changes to text

features such as style and layout. The reader knows to anticipate a shift. What happens *after* the interruption? After the break, the reader needs to move back into the narrative arc of the story to decide the value of the interruption to the plot. The text features return to the style and layout consistent with the previous narrative, so the reader has a cue that the interruption has concluded and the main story with its narrative point of view has returned.

#### *Return to the Narrative and Detail*

Though the text features return to the style of the main narrative, the following paragraph may require the reader to integrate a new voice, new information, new or old information into the narrative thread in order to create meaning. The following paragraph requires the reader to adjust reading rate and the hermeneutic turn in order to appreciate the value of the interruption into the overarching narrative structure. In essence, the reader performs a type of adjustment that an airplane pilot performs: looking closely at the instrument panel to take in new information and then looks out ahead to apply the minute information into the flight of the plane in relation to the horizon. Readers zoom in to read the epistolary interruption and zoom out to place that information into the big picture. The result is a complex reading technique. What appears to be an isolated text, separated by white space and differentiated by font or style, is an overlay of information sent by an outside source with a different voice. The interruption reflects the Radical Change of connectivity, interactivity, and access of modern epistolary interruptions. Recipients of such messages zoom in to read the message and then zoom out to apply the message to their current positions.

Here the question of authenticity of the interruption to the setting of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is answered. The novels studied contained 136 epistolary interruptions. The majority of these interruptions, 59, were followed by a simple return to the narrative. When I read the text *without* the interruption, the interruption functioned as added detail.

An innocent looking Jenna Cavanaugh as next to them, a trapped expression on her face.

Spencer had seen this photograph before: Real Ali-as-A had sent it to Emily along with a note that said, *One of these things doesn't belong. Figure it out quickly...or else.* They'd never

quite figured out why Ali had sent it to Emily. To frame Jenna, perhaps—she'd died shortly after and probably knew way too much for her own good. (Shepard, 2013, p. 175)

The passage without the epistolary message reads smoothly; it returns to the narrative. The addition of the old handwritten message adds detail from a previous book in the series to tie them together. The reader is able to read fluently without adjusting reading rate or zooming in too closely to appreciate the information from the epistolary interruption. At this point of the novel, the reader knows that Ali/A torments and taunts the four girls. The added detail through the epistolary interruption offers another example of that torment over time.

### *Rising Action*

In contrast, the epistolary interruption shifts the action and adds complexity to the text when the message breaks from the narrative arc and adds a new voice and new information in one passage. The preceding paragraph and the following paragraph do not connect except when including the epistolary interruption. The preceding paragraph marks the interruption with a signifying verb to alert the reader what shape the separated text will take. The following paragraph picks up information from the epistolary message and builds on it. This connection to the interruption may create tension between characters, create intrigue in the narrative, or bring in totally new information to the plot.

Then I saw it. One name. It jumped off the screen and burned itself into my brain. Jonathon Glenn. It was dated twelve days ago. I hadn't seen my dad in four years, hadn't talked to him on the phone I eighteen months.

I opened it and began reading.

Di,

It's taken care of. Don't worry, no paper trail.

And you thought I was good for nothing...

Jonathon

Of course. Of course, of course, of course. The money came from my father.

(Martinez, 2011, p. 242)

This interruption confirms a suspicion that the protagonist has about the bribing of the judges of the violin competition. It builds rising action by introducing an absent character, revealing the subterfuge perpetrated by her mother, and increasing the psychological pressure on the antagonist. In order to create meaning from this interruption, the reader must connect the clues from the preceding paragraph to the conclusion in the following paragraph before moving forward in the narration.

The text, though a series of short fragments and simple sentences, becomes complex because it pulls together motivations and actions by three different characters. The passage exemplifies the heteroglossia of the dialogism of the text. In the passage, the narration originates from the point of view of the protagonist, interrupted by a by a dyadic message between the protagonist's parents, followed by the thought process of the protagonist making sense out of the new information. The reader performs several hermeneutic turns to create meaning: large narrative arc, narrow focus on message, shift point of view, finally reintegrate new information into the larger narrative arc. The text is complicated.

#### *Epistolary Message Ends the Scene*

Authors used the epistolary message to end a chapter or a scene. It has a rhetorical function of putting a final stroke to a section of the text. Shepard added additional purpose to her endings by giving voice to the antagonist in the final lines of a chapter as a way to build tension and add a sense of mystery to the work. By ending the chapter with A's voice, the reader understands how embedded the antagonist is in the protagonists' minds. The antagonist always gets the last word.

A figure slipped behind a fountain in the courtyard. The door to the kitchen swung shut fast, swallowing up a shadow.

Bracing herself, she pressed READ.

Only losers campaign against losers. Make any effort to win,  
and not only will you lose my respect—I'll tell Agent Fuji  
about all your naughty little lies. —A (Shepard, 2013, p. 31)

By ending the chapter with A's antagonistic text message, the reader carries over the fear that the protagonists feel, the fear that guides their decisions, the fear created by a seemingly ever present enemy.

In these examples, the heteroglossia of the novel becomes clear. According to Bakhtin, the context gives meaning to the utterance and the context is a result of “a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological” (1981, p. 428). The message seems benign, yet through the context of the utterance, it becomes terrifying to the recipient. This context complicates the text, which requires the reader to move between the narrative of the scene and the psychology of the characters.

### **The Role of the Epistolary Interruption**

These interruptions via epistolary messages are examples of messages in which a receiver has the option to attend to or ignore which models actions made by users of this type of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. An event happens. People from a variety of locations want information from people in other locations. Immediately. Short, tight, specific text messages go out. Recipients choose whether to respond. The message and the interaction between sender and receiver interrupts the activity both had previously been engaged in. Sender and receiver now have details about the other they would not have had without the benefit of electronic, epistolary communication. They must decide how to act or react to the new information. In the epistolary novel, the reader is placed in the position of determining the value of the interruption. The reader must determine how to integrate the information of the interruption into the narrative arc by deciding what the interruption does to the text (Table 11). The reader must decide whether to attend to the information and fold it back into the narrative or to decide if the message is simply adding detail to information they already hold.

**Table 18. *What Happens after the Interruption***

	<i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i>	<i>Virtuosity</i>	<i>Crushed</i>
Return to Narration	11 times	1 times	9 times
Ends Chapter	6 times	5 times	3 times E(RA) 6 times
Adds Detail	14 times	3 times	17 times
Causes Rise in Conflict	16 times	2 times	23 times
Functions as Internal Dialogue	7 times	2 time	1 times

The interruption appears in a different form and different voice. The narrator is removed and the voice another character appears. The voice may be the internal voice of a character or the voice of a character outside the scene. The reader must decide if the detail added by this new voice advances the action of the plot or alters a character's perspective on the events of the novel. Sometimes, as in the case of Lily, (Cohen & Levithan, 2010, p. 161), the interruptions may just be a distraction. She hits "ignore" and goes back to her current conversation. Other times, the interruption steals the scene and takes the character's full attention. In *Pretty Little Liars*, the protagonists are often distracted by the interruptions and focus all their attention on incoming messages. So much so, that they begin to lose their composure and change their behavior that is noticeable to other characters in the scene (Shepard, 2013, p. 257).

Twenty of the 136 interruptions were the final note of a chapter that created a "cliffhanger effect" or brought in a new detail to the plot. Universally, this particular type of message came from a character outside the scene. The use of "outside of scene" character resulted in a new point of view, a different voice, and additional information for the arc of the story. It is this type of interruption that forces the reader to question the reliability of the narrator while making the hermeneutic turn to incorporate the new text into the overarching plotline. Shepard used this technique to build the suspense of her mystery story by creating a sense of foreboding in the protagonists who often felt that they were under constant surveillance by their nemesis A. "Wait until I tell Agent Fuji that you and your GF are perfect for each other—you're both cold-blooded criminals.—A" (Shepard, 2013, p. 39).

The other uses of the epistolary interruption are to function as a detail to the plotline. Some may work as an epistolary dialogue between characters, much like a verbal exchange, to increase tension in the rising action of the story or to add depth to a character. These exchanges often require the receiving character to remain in the setting. By remaining, these epistolary exchanges include internal dialogue by the protagonist in reaction to the incoming messages from a character outside the scene. In *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* (Cohn & Levithan, 2010), Dash has the notebook and uses it to hold his thinking; the epistolary message, though sent to Lily, is really Dash talking to himself (86-87). He is exploring his belief system regarding how he chooses his friends. This type of character development adds to the

complexity of the text. Readers need to determine the reliability of the speaker and the value of the information shared to understanding that character.

Characters are frequently developed through the use of the epistolary exchanges and interruptions. This type of character development harkens back to the women's novels of the 1700s. The protagonist is isolated socially or psychologically and has found an avenue to express her desires. This type of exchange allows the protagonist to develop a voice and a position.

Did you believe that? Of course not. Me neither. That's the problem here, or one of the problems. Neither of us can trust the other's motives. I think we will both be happier with ourselves if we let our violins do the talking, meaning I don't think we should see each other before the Guarneri. Focus on your music. I need t focus on mine. May the best violinist win, and maybe next week after the finals we can talk. Or whatever. (Martinez, 2011, p. 214)

For the first time, Carmen the protagonist has stood up for herself and announced that she has what it takes to win a premier competition. The dialogic exchange carries more weight since previously she often edited and revised her messages. This one came immediately without reservation. She has found her voice.

A variation on this type of interruption occurred in *Crushed* (Shepard, 2013) when the interruption was specifically used to deliver background information, intensify the conflict, and add further complication to the plotline. The background information came in the form of an article that explained the trouble one of the liars got into while in Iceland (93). The additional complication appears in a short, handwritten message: *Look in your closet* (93). The protagonists are called "liars" because of their history of bad decisions and keeping information from the adults (and law enforcement) in their lives. By using epistolary messaging, Shepard introduces a flashback. The flashback underscores how these four girls became estranged from their families and experience social and psychological isolation.

The interest in these novels is not contained within the epistolary messages. Rather the interest lies in the text as context for the interruption, or around the *interruptive* text: what happens before and what follows. The consistency of the language that precedes each message is significant; hence, deserving

the specific term *signifier* to understand it. The language *within* the messages holds nothing new.

### **Mechanics and Rules of Grammar**

The invented spelling from *Falling for Hamlet* was the only consistent example of that spelling shortcut often employed in the early days of text and instant messaging. In table 3, the list is extensive and consists of terms that were used only once in the entire novel. For example, Ophelia texts Horatio about something rotten in the state of Denmark.

Me: Strnge things r afoot @ the circle K

Horatio: ?

Me: Go hm. H wl need u. (Ray, 90)

The lack of vowels in texting has fallen out of practice and now has a feel of quaintness to it. This does not provide any type of evidence for consistency of use nor anything beyond a particular style used by people who send and receive text messages (Table 12). I hypothesize that a reason for spelling of complete words in text messages is because of the evolution of texting devices that now hold full keyboards. Users no longer have to press keys repeatedly to choose a particular character, and users have access to the full complement of characters and can use all conventions of Standard English.

One difference was consistent across the three novels: punctuation was limited to end marks of full stops, question marks, and exclamation points. Simple sentences dominated the syntax used in text messaging, email, and blog posts. The type of sentence structure was truncated to verb or noun phrases or simple sentences of subject/verb or subject-verb-object. This change may be significant and worthy of further study.

To compare the epistolary style of the four novels for mechanics, usage, grammar and spelling in order to identify any consistencies or rules, I used the style of the messages from *Falling for Hamlet* (Ray, 2011), the original case study as a foundation for categories. The style used by Ray differed from the other books in the study. Though all the authors used minimal punctuation and short, simple sentences, Ray was the only author who consistently used invented spelling or abbreviations in text messages.



**Table 19. Selected Comparison of Mechanics Across the Three Novels**

	<i>Virtuosity</i>	<i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i>	<i>Crushed</i>
Full Stops	It's taken care of. Don't worry, no paper trail.	I am trying to embrace danger. A good stalker doesn't need to ask.	Only losers campaign against losers.
Question Marks	Are you still looking for a tour guide?	Why is it so much easier to talk to a stranger? Why do we feel we need that disconnect in order to connect?	Isn't seeing good art truly liberating?
Exclamation Points	None used.	(third edition!) HARK! You there, closet caroler!	Don't forget to buy a ticket for the Rosewood Senior Prom!
Missing Marks: apostrophes, commas	Commas and apostrophes followed conventional usage	What do you really really really supercalifragiwant?	Commas and apostrophes followed conventional usage
Abbreviations or Invented Spelling	None used.	Hipster wannabe. R U a stalker? pervert	I'm sure your BFF Graham thinks so too.
Truncated Clauses	An ass? Wow. Bold of you.	Very resourceful. Snarky.	Your house, 4 PM.

An interruption requires a return to the narrative; however, the characters are now changed. They have new information or are reminded of some past action that requires them to synthesize these new data into their actions or thoughts. Authors use the interruptions as convenient tropes to insert a character outside the scene into a scene to build tension, confirm/affirm information, or add detail to the plotline. This type of interruption may suggest that characters who use electronic epistolary communication are rarely, if ever, alone as were the women in the original epistolary novels. The characters in young adult epistolary novels are products of the modern age who are accustomed to connectivity, interactivity, and access of electronic communication in all its forms.

## **General Observations Learned from Analysis of the Three Young Adult Novels**

Epistolary young adult novels demonstrate a complexity of text that requires readers to actively employ a variety of reading practices in order to create meaning. Readers need to attend to the context clues in the preceding paragraph, the physical features of the text, the shift in the speaker of the epistolary interruption, and then synthesize the text presented in these different spaces on the page into the following paragraph in order to understand the story.

Authors embed clues about the upcoming interruption through specific, rhetorically important verbs. The context clues given by these specific verbs prepare the reader for a change in the narrative voice and an explanation for the different layout of the page.

The physical layout of the text changes between the narrative arc and the epistolary interruption. The reader's eyes have to adjust to a different position of the text on the page and different text style. The epistolary interruption is set apart from the text that forms the overarching narrative. The additional white space surrounding the interruption forms a break in the layout by framing the interruption in white space. The font change denotes a shift away from the narrative.

The context clues of the anticipatory verbs coupled with the change in layout prepare the reader to anticipate the shift in point of view and voice of the epistolary interruption. The actual text originates from another character outside the scene. The information from the interruption will add detail to the narrative by giving background information or will intensify the rising action by adding conflict to the plot. The epistolary interruption carries the voice of the sender which tends to build characters.

Considering the information from the preceding paragraph and the new information in the interruption, the reader now must synthesize these pieces of information into the following paragraph where the narrative resumes. In order to create meaning, the reader employs a hermeneutical turn by adjusting reading rate and focusing on the small part and how it relates to the whole. The ability to move smoothly and easily from big picture narrative to small interjected detail and synthesize it back into one story exemplifies the type of sophisticated reading practices needed by readers of epistolary young adult novels.

## Rules of Synthesizing the Text of Epistolary Young Adult Novels

Looking across these three works, consistent rules emerge:

1. Text signals act as signs to alert the reader of an imminent change in text, point of view, and shift in narrative. Every electronic epistolary break was preceded by an onomatopoeic verb, such as “bing”, “buzz”, or “bleep” that denoted an alert from an incoming message. An outgoing message was denoted by “text” or “send”.
2. The visual space surrounding the epistolary text, partnered with the change in font or style of the text, gives weight to the small piece of text that consists of the message or epistolary communication. The novels studied segregated the epistolary message by additional white space above and below the text and centered it on the page. This white space requires less description by the author to explain an upcoming shift in the narrative. Shepard (2013) used the least amount of white space but changed the font or style to italics as did all the works. The epistolary messages were all identified throughout all the novels by these changes to make them appear different from the overarching narrative text.
3. The piece of text announced by the text signals, coupled with the changes of text features, introduces a different voice to the narrative. The incoming epistolary messages were sent by a character outside the scene of the narrative arc. All of these messages were tangentially connected to the scene in which they appeared.
4. The new voice adds conflict or detail to the plotline while interrupting the trajectory of the story. Because the messages were tangentially connected, they interrupted the narrative with additional information to inform a character or to add new detail to introduce a complication or frustration to the recipient. *Pretty Little Liars* (Shepard, 2011) used this method frequently throughout the novel to heighten the mystery of the narrative.
5. The epistolary texts break the thought patterns of the protagonist(s). Like the protagonists in the epistolary novels of the 1700s often wrote alone in their rooms, the protagonists in these first person narrative novels would have their thoughts broken by the alarm of an incoming message.

The message frequently caused a shift in perspective by the character to reconsider an event or another character.

6. The epistolary interruptions give an elasticity to the narrative allowing authors to move time as perceived or not perceived by the character rather than according to the chronology of events.

Carmen, the protagonist in *Virtuosity* (Martinez, 2011), demonstrated this elasticity of time during her episodes of insomnia. She would compose text and revise text over long stretches of time which was not apparent until the narration of the story revealed a shift in time of day.

These rules reflect the dialogics of the characters. The conversations between characters exemplify the “intersecting planes” created by the author to “overcome the superficial ‘literariness’ of moribund, outmoded styles and fashionable period-bound languages; it strives to renew itself by drawing on the fundamental elements of *folk language*” [emphasis added] (Bakhtin 1981, p. 49). The everyday language of young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be a style of folk language that observes and follows rules created by the users of the epistolary methods popularized by technology. The rules also construct and impact the heteroglossia within the novels, such as the privileging of one style of message over others. Bakhtin (1981) views the conflict between languages within the novel as “centralizing tendencies” or “decentralizing tendencies” that either serves to centralize “a new literary language in the process of taking shape” (the technological epistolary communication of the young adult novel) or the fighting off of the “antiquated literary language...established by the dominant literary language” (p. 67). The voices emerging from young adult literature synthesize the traditions of epistolary literature with the modes of modern electronic communication to create complex text that requires the reader to braid together multiple voices and points of view into one narrative.

## Chapter Five: Findings

This hermeneutic study focused on the use of epistolary communication in young adult literature, its effect on the narrative of the plot, and the demands made on readers of this type of complex text. Through constant comparison analysis (Leech, 2007) and Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987), a coding system evolved for marking the text and identifying specific text features used by authors to denote upcoming interruptions to the flow of the narrative and what followed the interruption. The analysis began with the case study of *Falling for Hamlet* by Michelle Ray (2011). The findings from the case study were then applied to three other young adult novels: *Virtuosity* by Jessica Martinez (2011), *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* by Rachel Cohn & David Levithan (2010), and *Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel* by Sara Shepard (2013).

Several themes emerged. The author informs the reader of an imminent interruption through specific verb choices that denote a type of epistolary message. The variety of epistolary messages, though short and infrequent, represent the heteroglossia of current usage and require the reader to make hermeneutical turns in order to create meaning and place value on the messages in relationship to the overarching plot. After preparing for the interruption through context clues and reading the interrupting text, the reader must synthesize what preceded the interruption and the interrupting text with the following paragraph in order to continue the narrative arc of the story. The reader plays a larger role in creating meaning from the text since the author does not fluidly connect the three spaces of the page: the preceding paragraph, the interruption, and the following paragraph. The reader decides the value of the interruption to the story while reading the following paragraph. In the following paragraph, the reader will recognize the interruption as detail, rising action, or an ending to a section or chapter. Epistolary texts are complex texts that may have pedagogical value in the classroom beyond literary analysis and study of literature. Students that read this genre of novel employ a variety of reading strategies in order to create

meaning and synthesize information. Creating meaning and synthesizing meaning are elements of higher order thinking that current students need to utilize and practice in the communication age.

### **Signaling Words in New Epistolary Fiction**

The authors in the selected works for this study have consistently employed specific verbs to signal a change in the upcoming text. Lorch (1989) focused on non-fictional, academic texts that require the reader to retain information for understanding and recall. Unlike the signaling devices defined by Lorch that trigger memory of a text, the verbs in these works of fiction function rhetorically to denote a shift within the text. The shifts may introduce new information, a different voice, a plot twist, or a different point of view into the narrative. These verbs have the potential to grab the reader's attention because they are the verbs often used in current parlance to describe the noise produced by electronic communication systems such as cell phones. The authors of the novels in this study used verbs to denote incoming messages through electronic means such as "bing", "bleep", or "buzz". These verbs have a unique quality to them that sets them apart from "ring" or "knock" that denote a telephone or rap at the door. Ringing or knocking signal a forthcoming conversation. Bing, bleep, or buzz signal the arrival of a message (image or text) through a cellular device or computer. Therefore, the term for these verbs must be more specific and stronger to represent the important role they play in developing a text from "text signals" to "text signifiers". This is in distinction from Myers' (1975) "signaling devices".

If Lorch (1989) is correct when he states: "a distinction may be made between those aspects of a written text that communicate the semantic content of the underlying text base vs. signals, which emphasize particular aspects of the content or structure of a text *without communicating new semantic content*" (p. 210, emphasis added). Therefore Lorch's "pointer words" function as active rhetorical agents in the text, but without inherent content meaning. "Several of the devices may be used to make aspects of a text's organization more explicit" (Lorch, 1989, p. 211). In contrast, the "text signifiers" isolated in this study *do* communicate (and *intend* to communicate) explicit and new information. These strong, specific verbs "communicate semantic content". The content also has rhetorical value to the work.

The words identified in this study perform heavier lifting than simply pointing to content; they act

as signs to alert the reader of an imminent change in the text, a change in point of view, or shift in the narrative. In young adult literature, they explicitly direct the reader's attention to a new text rhetorically. The incoming text is composed by a different party rather than the narrator of the scene. The change alters the rhetorical triangle by switching the speaker from the narrator to the author of the epistolary message. Though this may be perceived as a modern trope, it does reflect the Radical Change Theory of connectivity, interactivity, and access. The characters use electronic methods to communicate and, just like the readers of young adult literature, keep their mobile devices with them at all times. Sending and receiving messages is common practice that lends an air of authenticity to the text. The use of strong specific verbs underscores the notification systems of this type of epistolary communication.

According to Barthes (1975), verbs are "equipped with signifiers of their own" (241) and the verbs used for announcing an incoming message in the epistolary young adult novel signal a shift in the narrative. If, as Barthes suggests, the sentence is "the outline of a little narrative" then the little narratives that break the overarching plotline (narrative) require the reader to perform the hermeneutical turn in order to capture the value of and significance of the epistolary message. If the reader chooses to ignore and place less value on the interruption and attend to the overarching narrative, the interpretation of the plot will continue from the perspective of the dominant voice of the first person narrator. Should the reader attend to the heteroglossia of voices presented through the epistolary interruptions, the interpretation of the plot will take on a more nuanced understanding of characters and the narrative through multiple perspectives as presented by the author of the narrative. By attending to the multiple points of view presented through the variety of textual interruptions, the reader may connect more closely with the lived experiences of the adolescent, as presented by the authors of these young adult novels.

This is not to mean that the reader will not fully understand the narrative of the work by attending only to the first person narrative as presented as the foundation of the plot. As a point of reading comprehension, readers often jump over or dismiss facts or elements as presented by the author through fatigue, inattention, distraction, misunderstanding, or any other actions that pulls the reader away from the text psychologically while still gleaning the gist of the work and overarching structure of the narrative.

English teachers and book club leaders see this often during discussions of a work. Yet this returning to the work with another reader can often be a most enjoyable experience, the social sharing of the “aha” of a story.

It is the interpretation of the role of the epistolary interruption through the recognition of the signifiers, beeped, checked, texted, that brings complexity to the young adult novel. The information contained in the interruption could be presented through dialogue between characters or through an explanatory paragraph by the author. Introducing information in this way is the traditional format of the novel. The voices of the individual characters can show the heteroglossia of a language by the use of dialect in the tradition of Twain, Dickens, or Morrison. Authors develop the dialogism of the novel by alternating voices in chapters in the style of Faulkner. In the epistolary young adult novel, the authors break the narrative plain with short, telegraphic, epistolary electronic interruptions that change the appearance of the page and the text. The reader needs to understand the type of text (text message, email, or instant message) and how and why it is sent. The reader then must shift reading rate and audience position to interpret the interruption. The audience position changes hermeneutically from broad focus to narrow focus and back to broad again.

“In order to understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also recognize in it a number of ‘strata,’ to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative ... is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from level to the next” (Barthes, 243). The format of the young adult epistolary novel is non-linear and requires the reader to understand the plot from different points of view and voices. The variety of voices presented through the varying points of view presented through the epistolary interruptions are examples of the levels described by Barthes. The reader must discern the value of the level of the text presented in the epistolary interruption in order to understand the effect on the narrative. As this small sample of research demonstrates, the infrequent interruptions by other characters through epistolary methods of texting, emailing, or handwriting, outside the flow of the narrative shift the plotline and create tension in the evolving narrative.



The shifts in narrative may turn out to be red herrings for the protagonist, thus causing angst or unnecessary conflict. The novel *Virtuosity* (Martinez2011) exemplifies this. Carmen, the protagonist, has been groomed to distrust all other competitors, so when Jeremy, her primary competitor, emails her in good faith, she becomes suspicious. The evolution of their relationship depends upon the epistolary interruptions. Their email chats often occur late in the evening when Carmen is most vulnerable because she is alone with her thoughts. Jeremy's messages break into her thoughts forcing her to reconsider and review how she views the world and the influence her mother has over her and her perspective. So, what begins as "red herrings," intended to derail Carmen from performing her best in the violin competition, become opportunity structure for another voice, another level, ultimately altering the evolution of her character. The tone of the initial epistles creates the first impression that Jeremy emails Carmen to unsettle her undermining her confidence during the competition thus giving him an edge. However, the messages lay the foundation for a friendship that shifts Carmen's point of view and understanding of her mother's manipulations.

The protagonists in *Pretty Little Liars* (Shepard, 2013) also often face the interruptions as red herrings. Since the plot is a mystery to uncover the identity of "A", the protagonists are often given erroneous information or taunting messages after a major event. These messages often appear at the end of chapters to draw the reader and the protagonists into another rabbit hole that will not solve the mystery but intensifies the protagonists' need to unmask "A".

The interruptions often function as shifts in point of view. They may startle the protagonist(s) into action, like Ophelia in *Falling for Hamlet*, agreeing to fake her death in order to escape. They may disrupt the protagonist(s) self-identity, like Dash and Lily, who learn that people change and that their actions have consequences, both good and not as good. After protagonists learn of alternative points of view through the epistolary methods, they often return to that message for comfort or reminders. The message remains. Conversation dissipates. The message has staying power. Can the characters delete these messages? Absolutely. Do they? Rarely. The messages become an archive to which they can return to clarify or reminisce. This ties back to the behavior of 21<sup>st</sup> century users of epistolary communication

and the connections young adults create with this literature.

The interruptions may also function as plot twists. In *Virtuosity*, Carmen uncovers her mother's subterfuge to manipulate the outcome of the competition through bribing the judges while discovering her mother's lack of confidence in Carmen's ability to perform at the highest level. The real competitor in the novel is not other violinists, but Carmen herself. Carmen needs to face her own demons and believe in herself—a classic trope for coming of age stories. She learns this not through confrontation, which ultimately does happen, but through electronic messages that give her the opportunity to read and re-read them in order for their veracity to sink in.

This type of truth-finding is consistent across the works in this study. Just as Shakespeare revealed the deception of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern through Claudius's letter, so do all the authors in this study. This is not new. What *is* new is the method and the length of the epistles that reveal a deception or a manipulation perpetrated by the adults in the story. The messages add weight and gravity to the betrayals because they are tangible and not carried on the wings of gossip as oral language is. The characters hold the facts in their hands just as Hamlet did on the ship when Shakespeare crafted that scene 500 years ago.

Authors use specific language to signify the shift in point of view of the text to follow. They consistently use strong verbs to identify the type of interruption to follow. This is how the text signifiers differ from the text signals identified by Lorch (1989). Text signals set the text to note that something will appear rather than announce a change. The text *signifiers* authors use mark a shift to a different type of text and speaker. Unlike the strong verbs used to connote and describe how a character delivered a line in a dialogic exchange (for example, yelled, whispered, or said), the text signifier is embedded in the text to operate like a road sign that alerts a driver to prepare for an alteration in the road ahead. The text signifier is a sign that guides and alerts the reader to a different type of text and point of view. In dialogue, the point of view is maintained from the author's perspective. The interruption brings in a voice from beyond the scene that adds layers to the storyline.

## **Interruption and Readers' Interpretation of Texts**

In general, the epistolary interruptions are few in number, yet play important roles in the plot. Often they function as a transition in the story, or as a break in the narrative. This fracturing of the narrative denotes a change that forces the reader to shift gears and integrate new ideas or swing into the hermeneutical circle to create meaning. These interruptions create more complexity in the text by braiding in alternate points of view from other characters. The text signifiers that mark the shift include onomatopoeic verbs or white space to separate the message from the narrative. The use of white space is consistent for messages that rupture the narrative and take it in a different direction or present an alternate point of view.

Since the reader has the option to interpret the epistolary interruption in a variety of ways, it may simply function as additional detail. The author may have chosen to incorporate information to frustrate a character or complicate the narrative through the trope of the message not unlike a phone call or text in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While people are in face-to-face social settings, they receive phone calls or text messages from friends or acquaintances outside the physical setting. These messages interrupt the focus of the recipient who may or may not choose to share the incoming information with the people in the physical setting. The information is just that: information. A reader of any text makes choices about what to carry forward from the text and what to leave behind as described by Baddeley & Hitch (1994). In their working memory, readers toggle between short and long term memory in order to create meaning from the text. They bring in new information from the text and hold it in short-term memory while drawing from the information stored in long-term memory. The reader of an epistolary novel makes similar decisions and may therefore choose to skim over the messages as “fluffy” or fold them into the narrative as a vital piece of the narrative. Just as in lived-experience, the recipient of a text or other epistolary message chooses to attend to the message or dismisses it to deal with it at a later date. The reader of epistolary young adult literature makes the choice of attending to the message announced by a text signifier while creating meaning from the text as presented by the author.

This toggling between short and long-term memory is tested in the paragraphs that follow the

epistolary interruption. The reader not only chooses what is necessary to carry forward but must include the hermeneutical turn of the larger narrative with the narrow narrative of the epistle into the arc of the plotline. This shifting and toggling exemplifies the complexity of the text in epistolary young adult novels. The narrative does not follow a traditional Aristotelian plot structure. Rather the plot has intersections and stop signs that the reader must navigate to create a meaningful tale. The author, whether reliable or not, is not the only storyteller. The reader must create meaning alongside the clues and information the author adds in the breaks in the text.

A common practice in young adult literature is the first person narrative structure. Koss and Teale (2009) note, “contemporary realistic fiction has traditionally employed a first person, teenage narrator, narrative structure” (568). Three of the four novels in this study had distinct, first person narratives. Yet, *Pretty Little Liars* that had four protagonists still revealed the narrative from the point of view of the girls and not from an omniscient view. This first person perspective allowed the authors to engage in “reception-oriented authorial reading” to craft the text by “disassociat[ing] from the text and read it through the eyes of potential readers [by] judging the meaning they would make in transaction with a pattern of signs” (Rosenblatt 2004 p. 1382).

### **Epistolary Communication in New Narratives and Old Letters**

Text signifiers act as signs to alert the reader of an imminent change in text, point of view, and shift in narrative. Each epistolary message in all the texts in this study was accompanied by specific terms that cue the reader about the change in the narrative. These terms are predominantly verbs that represent the sounds made by electronic devices such as cell phones or computers. These verbs, such as bing, beep, buzz, click, beep, or bleat, signify the next piece of text will be in an epistolary form sent from another character not included in the current narrative scene. Therefore, the message will carry the voice of another character with a different perspective from the point of view of the current narrative context, much like the lived experience of 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents who receive unsolicited text messages from friends and family at any hour of the day.

In addition to the cue of the onomatopoeic verbs, the epistolary message is physically set

aside from the text of the controlling narration. The message is surrounded by additional white space and deeper margins and the font changes to italics, a different font also in italics, or simply a different font. The text features used often mimic the layout of text on a smart phone or other electronic device such as email. The added text features further signify the changes the author has made in the narrative to alert the reader to adjust reading rate or prepare for a change in the narrative.

Further, the piece of text announced by the text signals and features allows the author to introduce a new or different voice to the narrative. By adding a voice from a character outside the scene, the reader must adapt to the heteroglossia of the language through the wide options of usage choices that are available in electronic medium such as invented spelling, short sentences, or warnings to the recipient of the message. For example, in *Crushed: A Pretty Little Liars Novel* (Shepard, 2013), the antagonist A sends cryptic messages to the protagonists to antagonize or trick them:

You can run, but you can't hide, Spence! Kisses, A (255).

or in *Falling for Hamlet* (Ray, 2011):

Horatio: o gd. all r dead (316)

These messages are outside the narrative, which intensifies the conflict or adds detail to the scene while interrupting the trajectory of the story. In *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* (Cohn & Levithan, 2010), the protagonists interrupt the events of their day to write in a Moleskine notebook to someone they have yet to meet, each other. The plot and subplot weave together and require the reader to pivot in the hermeneutical circle in order to know which part of the story is necessary to understand the overarching plot. At times, the reader is challenged to determine which storyline is the interruption. For example, Lily is planning her holiday parties and events with family yet is drawn away from her plans to read the new entries in the notebook and respond as cleverly as she can. In *Virtuosity* (Martinez, 2011), the protagonist learns through a saved email that her mother has bribed the judges of the competition in collaboration with her father whom she hasn't seen for four years.

Just as the protagonists gather detail from other voices, they also have their own thoughts interrupted by unexpected messages. These messages can introduce contrary perspectives to the

protagonist and disrupt the protagonists' self-identity. In *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* (Cohn & Levithan, 2010), Lily considers herself an eccentric and a bit of a loner. Yet at the end of the novel, she learns that she has to respect of her fellow soccer teammates through a YouTube video they had created celebrating her. She now views herself as a part of the team and learns that their video has accumulated 845 comments.

The character whose thoughts are interrupted by and challenged by electronic epistles is Carmen of *Virtuosity* (Martinez, 2011). Because of the quality of musicianship, her mother keeps very tight control of her every move and every person she knows. Her mother is highly suspicious of other violinists while harboring doubts about Carmen's psychological strength. It is during the wee hours of the morning when Carmen is truly alone and able to think on her own. During these insomnia-induced episodes, she has her thoughts interrupted by email messages. It is during these quiet times that Carmen begins to piece together her mother's deception. The Liars from *Crushed* (Shepard, 2013) have their plans and thoughts broken into through electronic epistles. Some of these messages come from their friends while others come from their nemesis: A.

The final element created by these epistolary messages is the elasticity of time. A character may begin a conversation in a face-to-face setting that is then continued by email or text messages some time in the future. Messages are crafted over time with the protagonist blending the composition of the message with internal dialogue that shows the elements of the writing process. The amount of time that passes during this process ebbs and flows, without any real sense of quantity. The reader then must piece the time clues together to appreciate what the effect the passage of time has on the character and the plot. These passages of time may embolden a character or diminish the character's sense of identity.

### **It's Complicated: Literary and Literacy Skills**

Young adult literature continues to dominate book sales. Characters from young adult novels have become part of American culture from Jo March to Katniss Everdeen. The genre of epistolary young adult literature carries a complexity in text features and voices that require a sophistication by the reader to understand and interpret the text. Young adult literature is much more than "pleasure, escapism, juicy

plots, and satisfying endings” as stated by Graham (2014). The ability to understand and appreciate the heteroglossia of multi-voiced young adult literature requires a sophisticated reader. This sophistication is not unique to adult readers as Graham believes: “mature readers also find satisfaction of a more intricate kind in stories that confound and discomfit, and in reading about people with whom they can’t empathize at all” (2). Contrary to current pedagogical beliefs that young adult literature is easy to read, the skills needed to read and appreciate young adult literature can be applied to understanding primary documents and textbooks. These text competencies transfer across different texts.

The layout and format of textbooks include a variety of fonts and images that does not depend upon one featured text. Many textbook publishers include electronic forms of their textbooks for schools to distribute to their students. These electronic formats go beyond the pages of the book by including hyperlinks to other texts, video clips, audio clips, and outside websites which may appear as a parenthetical interruption to the narrative. This requires students to make rhetorical choices about which element of the “textbook” to attend.

These multilayered texts demand a higher level of literacy skills of synthesis of information into a unified understanding of a topic. For example, the 2015 edition of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s English Language Arts textbooks have listed on the cover their connection with The History Channel, A & E Television, and Biography. Within the pages of this textbook, students are instructed to connect to an outside website for additional information to add context to the reading selection or historical background. The electronic textbook is interactive so students may click on words for definitions, pull up textboxes to take notes, copy and paste passages from the text into an essay, and submit assignments to the teacher or turnitin.com. Do all these connections expect students to have access to the Internet? Indeed. This type of text carries an expectation that all students will be comfortable with the technology, will understand the connections, and can synthesize the information. It also lays an expectation on teachers that they have the willingness and understanding to blend all these levels of interactivity into their lessons.

## **Adding Epistolary Young Adult Texts to the Classroom Canon**

Pedagogically, literacy includes much more than reading or writing text. Teachers and students navigate beyond the written page of one textbook written from one perspective. Teachers need to include rhetorical purposes and point of view and reliability of the texts they choose for their classrooms.

Students need to choose format of delivery: text, audio, visual, or film, and then discern reliability. These textbooks expect the readers to move seamlessly between media and point of view; the reader must understand the wide variety of heteroglossia that makes up current composition.

Readers of epistolary young adult literature consider more than the linear narrative. These readers synthesize multiple points of view through a variety of entry points into a narrative much like historians use when reading about and studying an historic event through government documents, diary entries, newspaper articles, and letters. Young adults move between varieties of electronic platforms to communicate with friends about what they are experiencing. Information arrives through a news source like BuzzFeed or social media sites like Instagram or Facebook or through an individual text message. Any of these formats require the recipient to choose whether to focus on the interruption or to ignore it for the moment. The recipient of these messages must consider the reliability and validity of the source. Readers of epistolary young adult literature consider reliability of the narrator and minor voices much like scientists use when reviewing field notes and observations submitted by fellow scientists. Complex text can be much more than big words and long sentences. Complex text demands work of the reader to use schema, discern reliability, and braid together disparate ideas into one narrative co-created with the author.

As the novels in this study show, the style of text within these epistolary communications have specific rhetorical purposes and have shifted from the longer expansive letter writing of earlier centuries to the shorter, concise writing of electronic communication. Teachers guide and facilitate students through a variety of texts and media to synthesize information and understand content. Teachers need to move beyond the five basic text structures of comparison/contrast, problem/solution, narration, cause and effect, chronology to show students how other media and texts work together. This type of instruction



includes awareness of signifiers and text signals so students can adjust comprehension and synthesize information into a comprehensible whole. Using the hermeneutical turn as a reading method will allow students to move between and among the parts of information to understand their connection to the larger work.

If Radical Change as described by Dresang were integrated into classroom instruction, teachers and students would expect to be connected during real time, interact with a variety of sources—both physical and cyber—to access information to optimize the teachable moment. Teachers would model this method of real time inquiry using technology for a variety of purposes from a variety of sources. Students would develop habits of mind of conducting research in the moment to integrate it with exemplar texts in order to create meaning within the context of the classroom and intellectual curiosity.

All of these elements together create a challenge to readers crafted by authors. The young adult epistolary novel includes the elements of heteroglossia with the variety of voices merged into one work. The voices do not drown out the voice of the author; rather they create a chorus performing a fugue that weaves a theme through all points of view. The authors of these works place more demands on their readers to create meaning through the understanding of the individual parts that make a greater whole.

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**Appendix B: Request to use pages from *Falling for Hamlet***

Request for using pages from *Falling for Hamlet* by Michelle Ray.

Falling for Hamlet email sent to Hachette Book Group at: [www.hachettebookgroup.biz/contact-us/](http://www.hachettebookgroup.biz/contact-us/)

Good evening,

My name is Betty Herzhauser, a doctoral candidate in Literacy Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

For my dissertation study, I used the novel "Falling for Hamlet" by Michelle Ray as a case study of epistolary writing in young adult literature. I would like permission to copy pages 3 and 47 in my dissertation as examples of font styles and layout of text.

Thank you for your help,

--

Betty J. Herzhauser  
Graduate Assistant Literacy Studies  
College of Education  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, Florida

+++++

4:17 PM (2 hours ago)

Customer Service <[ContactUs@hbgusa.com](mailto:ContactUs@hbgusa.com)>

to me

Hi Betty,

If you would like to use or reproduce part of a book, please send the details of your request either by email to [permissions@hbgusa.com](mailto:permissions@hbgusa.com) or by fax to (212) 364-0926.

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Subject: A message from Betty Herzhauser

A comment was received from: Betty Herzhauser

Email address: [herzhaus@mail.usf.edu](mailto:herzhaus@mail.usf.edu)

Phone number is: [727-823-8698](tel:727-823-8698)

Company: University of South Florida

The message is intended for: Customer Service

Good evening,

My name is Betty Herzhauser, a doctoral candidate in Literacy Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

For my dissertation study, I used the novel "Falling for Hamlet" by Michelle Ray as a case study of epistolary writing in young adult literature. I would like permission to copy pages 3 and 47 in my dissertation as examples of font styles and layout of text.

Thank you for your help,  
Second request to Hachette Book Group

October 21, 2013

Good evening,

My name is Betty Herzhauser, and I am a doctoral candidate in literacy studies at the University of South Florida. My research focuses on the literacy practice of young adults and its influence on young adult literature. I would like permission to reprint two pages from Michelle Ray's novel, *Falling for Hamlet*. The pages in question are 3 and 47. Page 3 will show the three major font styles that represent the three perspectives of the storytelling. Page 47 shows the spacing of the layout for text messaging, an important element to guide the reader. The full reference for the book is:

Ray, M. (2011). *Falling for Hamlet*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

--

Betty J. Herzhauser  
Graduate Assistant Literacy Studies  
College of Education  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, Florida



**Permission for use in dissertation**

Inbox X

10/21/13

**Betty Herzhauser** <herzhaus@mail.usf.edu>

to permissions

Good evening,

My name is Betty Herzhauser, and I am a doctoral candidate in literacy studies at the University of South Florida. My research focuses on the literacy practice of young adults and its influence on young adult literature. I would like permission to reprint two pages from Michelle Ray's novel, *Falling for Hamlet*. The pages in question are 3 and 47. Page 3 will show the three major font styles that represent the three perspectives of the storytelling. Page 47 shows the spacing of the layout for text messaging, an important element to guide the reader. The full reference for the book is:  
Ray, M. (2011). *Falling for Hamlet*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.



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