

**The Many Faces of the Unreliable Narrator:
An Analysis and Typology of Young Adult Novels and their Narrators**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the style of unreliable narration, through the analysis of three young adult novels: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart, and *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman. Drawing on Theresa Heyd's theories on detection and classification of unreliable narration using the Gricean maxims, this study sets out to demonstrate how unreliable narration is defined and to highlight the degree of intentionality each narrator possesses. This study also gives attention to the real author of each text, in order to combat the outdated and over studied 'implied author' previous research has focused on. This research highlights the narrative technique, while adding to the limited number of resources available on unreliable narration within children's literature.

Lay Summary

Unreliable narration is a narrative technique that is comprised of the narrator lying or omitting the truth in his or her recount of the story he or she tells. Using Theresa Heyd's theories, I examine three teen novels: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart, and *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman. In my thesis, I outline the ways by which to detect a narrator's lies, as well as the various reasons why the narrator may be lying, including limited life experience and mental illness. I also credit Chbosky, Lockhart and Shusterman for constructing each narrator, in an attempt to recognize the real author behind each work.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Lacey Hall, as a partial requirement of the Master of Arts in Children's Literature program at the University of British Columbia. Figures 1, 2 and 3 are used with permission from applicable sources and are cited from Heyd, Theresa. "Understanding and Handling Unreliable Narratives: A Pragmatic Model and Method." *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies/Revue de l'Association Internationale de Sémiotique*, vol. 162, no. 1-4, 2006, pp. 217-243
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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Lay Summary	iv
Preface	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Dedication	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Motivation for the Study	11
1.2 Purpose of and Questions for the Study	3
1.3 Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection	5
1.4 The Significance of the Study	8
1.5 Overview of Chapters	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
2.1 Detecting and Defining the Unreliable Narrator	13
2.1.1 Grice’s Cooperative Principle and Maxims	21
2.1.2 The Many Forms and Faces of the Unreliable Narrator	23
2.1.3 Intentionality	30
Chapter 3: Methodology	34

Chapter 4: <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	36
4.1 Violating the Quantity Maxim	36
4.2 The Downside of Being a Wallflower	41
4.3 Sam	44
4.4 The Struggle Between Child and Adult	51
4.5 Mental Health	58
4.6 Intentionality and the Real Author	65
Chapter 5: <i>We Were Liars</i>	72
5.1 Post Traumatic Amnesia	73
5.2 Literal Writings	82
5.3 Family Dynamics	84
5.4 Intentionality and the Real Author	91
Chapter 6: <i>Challenger Deep</i>	97
6.1 Reality: Paranoia, Delusions and ‘You’	98
6.2 Oh Captain, My Captain...of my Hallucinations	101
6.3 Blending of Worlds	107
6.4 Intentionality and the Real Author	110
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussions	114
7.1 Summary of Findings	114
7.2 Limitations and Areas for Further Research	117
7.2.1 Lack of Scholarship	117
7.2.2 Reader Subjectivity	117

7.2.3	Fluctuation of Unreliability	119
7.2.4	The Reliable Character	119
7.3	Concluding Thoughts	121
Works Cited	123

List of Figures

Figure 1. Communicative Model Depicting Dual Framework (Heyd)	19
Figure 2. Outline of Communicative Structure of Unreliable Narration (Heyd).....	23
Figure 3. Scale of Intentionality and Unreliability (Heyd)	31

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I also wish to thank my family and friends who have stood by throughout this process and allowed me the chance to submit ideas, vent, or cry, regarding this thesis – you each got me here, without even knowing it.

Dedication

To Alex, who held my hand throughout.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Motivation for the study

“Liberty is one of the rights that a child above all needs; every possible liberty in thought, word and deed” – E. Nesbit

There was a time during my undergrad when I believed that I wanted to become a lawyer. I went to my criminology courses, attempting to trick my brain into believing that paperwork and court case research would be thrilling, and that late nights spent attempting to prove someone innocent would be my way of living like Nancy Drew.

My degree was in English and so I also took creative writing courses, each allowing me a moment to breathe deeply and escape from the rigid, fact-driven nature of criminology. I’ve always loved children’s books, choosing to browse through the brightly colored corner of the bookstore upon each visit, and leaving the store, each time feeling as though I was walking out with treasures that no one understood the value of but me.

When I finally took a creative writing course focused on children’s literature, I suddenly started to question myself and the path I was taking. It was in that course that we looked at the unreliable narrator in Ellen Potter’s book, *The Kneebone Boy*.

The first thing that intrigued me about the novel is the fact that the narrator does not reveal their true identity — it is up to the reader to determine which Hardscrabble sibling is recounting the events. Second, the clues to certain discrepancies in the narration left for the reader by the author spoke to me. I was intrigued by the nature of the writing, and its unconventional format. I found myself wondering what the significance of this would be in terms of a child reader deciphering the story, recounted by someone they can’t entirely trust. What is

this experience like for the child reader? Furthermore, is it okay to have children read a book that seeks to deceive them? At what age are children equipped to understand this form of narration?

Immediately I changed directions and pursued the honours degree option, in order to write a focalized paper on the unreliable narrator in children's literature, looking at Potter's *The Kneebone Boy* and E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, both of which have child narrators. My research brought me to Greta Olson's paper, *Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators*, in which Olson defines a 'fallible' narrator as most often being a child, whose limited life experience causes them to misread or misregard situational circumstances and adult statements. In looking at both Potter's and Nesbit's novels, I found them both to fit seamlessly within this category. With this guiding source, I furthered my research to touch on the inclusive experience the child reader would have while reading both novels, giving them agency and purpose within the narrative, unlike many other novels.

Upon finishing that paper, I had revealed only a small portion of the mystery surrounding the unreliable narrator and its presentation in children's books. Throughout the course of writing, I had found the scholarly work available on the topic to be lacking most prominently in the area of children's literature. Wayne Booth, being one of the most notable figures on the topic, for he coined the term "unreliable narrator" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 158–159), has written much on the function of this narrator; however, his statements are vague and dated to the 1960s. Others after him have sought to interpret and reinterpret his views, while bringing their own to the table, all the while using adult classic literature, such as Henry James' 1898 novel, *Turn of the Screw*, and Vladimir Nobokov's 1955 novel, *Lolita*, as exemplary of the device. Yet, in today's world, we now have many children's and young adult novels that use this style of narration in different forms.

Nesbit's quote, at the beginning of this chapter, has stayed with me as inspiration from the first moment I became interested in the unreliable narrator. Children's literature is a realm where topics can test the status quo and where the reader is allowed to explore controversial situations, coming to a set of conclusions they have devised all on their own. I believe that texts that use the unreliable narrator help to further this type of literature and succeed in allowing children the liberty Nesbit speaks of.

My intrigue has led me to read more novels, looking this time at young adult fiction and specifically forms that are not only fallible, but, perhaps, could be classified as even more deceitful. Young adult narrators who have a secret they can't share; who struggle with mental illness; who have knowingly done something wrong — these are all examples of unreliability and each has characteristics that allow us to clearly outline them. My research interest lies in examining and defining these categories. Through an examination of three young adult novels, I aim to give examples of the defined categories, as well as bring attention to this underexamined and underexplored area of both children's literature and the device itself. I am motivated to analyze the various elements that make up the style of narration, while also seeking to understand the author's role in the construction of this form of writing, for many choose to remove the author from the equation entirely.

1.2 Purpose of and Questions for the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine three young adult novels that use unreliable narration, in order to bring new examples into the range of available scholarly work, to examine the way categories of unreliable narration are realized and to further our understanding of how the device is presented in young adult fiction.

Other areas of exploration include the real author and the implied author in terms of both the unreliable narrator and YA fiction in general. As it will be shown in the literature review, there is much debate about whether the real author deserves acknowledgement in writing the story purposefully in this way, or whether there is only room for the implied author, the author the narrative text implies based on his or her moral values (as defined by Booth). Yet Booth states:

Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least a part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. (qtd. in Olson 94)

Most often the person excluded is indeed the narrator, for they aren't seeing something that the reader can. I wish to explore the real author's influence on readers through the narrators they create. Furthermore, while the notion of an adult writing a young adult novel can in itself be an entire thesis, it is relevant to the topic of the unreliable narrator. Mike Cadden states, "novels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent's voice are inherently ironic because the so-called adolescent voice is never — and can never be — truly authentic" (146). Cadden's suggestion is intriguing to me, for I argue that unreliable narration is a device with the power to create the ultimate authentic adolescent voice — when executed successfully by the author.

Based on the above observations, in my study I will ask the following questions:

- How can we define and categorize the unreliable narrator?
- What role does the author play in terms of the unreliable narrator?
- What are the literary merits of the device? How do the primary texts exemplify these literary merits of the device?

1.3 Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection

As is evident from the topic of this study, the first and most important criterion for text selection is that all texts have an unreliable narrator. While this is an obvious requirement of the texts, it was not a simple task to locate novels that would fit within this category, simply because of the lack of knowledge of the term. Websites such as Goodreads proved a valuable tool in offering readers pre-curated booklists on a given topic. I looked through these lists, making note of titles that might prove to have a true unreliable narrator and then located them in libraries and bookstores in order to read through. The other evident criterion is that the texts be classified as young adult fiction. Being that I have previously looked at novels geared towards a younger audience (ages 8–12) that used unreliable narration in the form of the fallible child narrator, I wished this time to look at a slightly more mature narrator whose unreliability preferably did not only stem from their limited life experience. I also chose not to use crossover novels (novels that originally were intended for an adult audience but over time have been deemed young adult fiction due to their content or popularity among young adults) for the purposes of this study, as I wished to look at stories that were created with specifically young adult readers in mind. Based on my research of unreliable narration, I felt it important to choose texts that would represent those categories I have not studied yet: the narrator that lies intentionally, the narrator that lies subconsciously, and the narrator that lies unintentionally. Based on these three categories, I chose a respective text for each.

It is important to note that while there were the above general guidelines in place as criteria, much of my selection process was subjective, as I wished to choose novels that I personally felt the unreliable narrator had been executed exceptionally well in. While reading, I found myself considering these questions:

- Is this too “easy” of a rendition of the unreliable narrator? (for example, dream sequences or choppy continuation)
- Am I second-guessing the narrator’s POV as well as my own conclusions throughout the story? (i.e. what I view as the mark of a successful unreliable narrator)
- Is what happened in this story evident early on in the narrative despite the unreliable narrator?

For the category of mental health, I did consider *Going Bovine* by Libba Bray. The main character, Cameron, is diagnosed with Mad Cow Disease and is hospitalized. His hallucinations make up the resulting story. While this novel is definitely told through an unreliable point of view, I felt that, because the entire story was a dream sequence, I was able to form solid undoubting conclusions about the story within the first chapter, ultimately creating an experience that didn’t feel entirely unreliable. Instead, for this category, I settled on *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman.

In *Challenger Deep*, Caden Bosch, a teenage boy, begins acting peculiarly. Slowly his mind deteriorates and he is hospitalized for mental illness. In Caden’s head he is on a ship out at sea, heading for Challenger Deep, the southern part of the Marianas Trench. On this ship are many characters — characters that seem vaguely reminiscent of those in Caden’s real life. As the novel progresses, it becomes difficult for the reader to pull reality from fantasy, in the ultimate unreliable landscape that is Caden’s brain. *Challenger Deep* won the 2015 National Book Award and has been reviewed numerous times for its important focus on mental illness and its effects.

For the category of the intentional liar, I considered *Dangerous Girls* by Abigail Haas. Anna, along with her boyfriend, Tate, best friend, Elise, and the rest of their friends, head to Aruba for Spring Break. Shortly after their vacation has begun, Elise is found murdered. Anna is

accused and sent to prison to await trial, all the while claiming her innocence despite the court's beliefs. The story leads you to believe that Anna is innocent as well, until a final reveal in the very last chapter. While this novel did fulfill the requirements of the category, it felt as though the last chapter was the only portion indicative of the unreliable narrator. I also felt that the reveal in the end seemed a bit too "easy" in that there weren't many points to refer back to in the novel that would allow the reader to feel as though they did indeed miss important clues. Instead it felt as though the author had decided in the final moments of the story to make Anna guilty of her friend's murder. For these reasons I felt it better to pursue a novel that remained unreliable throughout its entirety and chose *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart.

In *We Were Liars*, the Sinclair family, being extremely wealthy, has vacationed on their island for all of Cadence's childhood. Along with her cousins, Cadence has spent much time playing and growing up around those who are extremely interested in keeping up appearances. But Cadence Sinclair has gone through a traumatic experience on her family's island, one that she can't tell the truth about. Lying to herself and the reader, Cadence's tale is one riddled with unreliability. The novel won the 2014 Goodreads Choice Award for Best Young Adult Fiction, and in 2015 was listed on the ALA Top Ten Fiction for Young Adults. It has won numerous other reading list awards and *School Library Journal* says "the story saves its biggest punch for the end, and listeners will not see the twist coming" (Acosta 54).

For the third and final category, it proved more difficult to find a suitable text that showcased the subconscious liar. I briefly considered *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, however I had already determined that I did not want to use a crossover novel and so instead I chose Stephen Chbosky's *Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* the main character Charlie navigates his first year of high school, while making new friends and having first time adolescent experiences. The novel, told in an epistolary style, details Charlie's musings and deep questions of life in general, while hinting to the reader that there is something Charlie hasn't fully grasped about his past. Chbosky's thought provoking novel has gained considerable popularity since its publication in 1999, and its film adaptation in 2012. It has won many awards including the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults and Best Book for Reluctant Readers, both of which were awarded in 2000. It has also been banned, as well as challenged many times over, appearing on the American Library Association's list of Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books in 2004, 2006, 2009, 2013 and 2014.

I would like to point out that many of the novels I looked at had aspects fitting of multiple categories — for example, some might prefer that Chbosky's novel be considered under the mental health category. My process for determining where each novel fit was simply based on the traits I felt came across most strongly, and when comparing the texts to each other, it became easier to form concrete decisions about their typology.

1.4 The Significance of the Study

In the 18th and 19th centuries, children's books were prescriptive, told through an adult omniscient narrator's point of view, and "considered mainly as vehicles of moral instruction" (Deemers et al. xii). Children were seen as completely separate from adults and "artists and activists were eager to establish and preserve the child's difference, whether by passing laws aimed at marking off childhood from adulthood or by constructing fictions that fix the child in place as an emblem of innocence" (Gubar 4). The juxtaposition between what children's literature once was and what it is today is intriguing in itself. Since the conception of *The*

Outsiders we've now come to an age of young adult literature that allows for such narratives as the teen hero's plight to save their world, like that of Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen; the teen victim of racism and bullying like that of Arnold Spirit Jr. in *The Absolutely True Diary of Part-Time Indian*; and the teen cancer patient, who has finally found love only to have it taken away, like that of Hazel Lancaster in *The Fault in our Stars*. Our popular young adult literature landscape is filled with novels such as *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Divergent* all of which have intriguing plotline, pacing and characters. These books dominate the market today, and, while they are fascinating stories, they do not necessarily exercise the brain in the same way that many other novels have the power to do.

Many have proclaimed certain rules or characteristics of YA literature, most of which are obvious: first person POV, teen voice, adults in positions of authority etc. Most often "fictional young adults are ... often configured by their adult authors as awkward, rebellious, unhappy, presenting loci of suffering, injustice, of unfilled longings and deviant sexualities" (Hilton et al. 1). The reader usually follows an adolescent on his or her journey towards something, while highlighting the period of development they find themselves in.

The YA novel is a form of literature that carries with it a weight, unlike that of adult fiction. It is a form of literature that has the ability to weave itself within the young reader's developing personality and beliefs about the world, "fostering brain development in those frontal lobes or deepening empathy through identifying with characters and situations" (Hill 34) — all while being produced by an adult, an irony in itself.

It is for these reasons that there is a need for exploration of unreliable narration in young adult fiction. This way of writing is a form that adolescent readers should be able to detect and

understand, especially as the device becomes more and more popular¹. The current examples in scholarly literature regarding the subject are outdated and refer almost solely to classic literature, giving little substance relating to children's literature. By studying the device, three new examples will be brought to the forefront and its function specifically in young adult literature will be explored. Furthermore, because adolescent literature is targeted towards an age group undergoing much development, there is always a need to further expand our knowledge of the types of literature available to young adults, as well as changing methods of defining these types of literature.

Another point of significance is the role of the author in the creation of the narrative. Authors are most often meant to remain the silent creator, leaving no trace of their own voice within the story they write. Yet, when we look at a young adult novel more closely, the concept of an adult "simulat[ing] an authentic adolescent voice" (Cadden 146) does seem an odd one in itself. Cadden feels that "the YA novelist often intentionally communicates to the immature reader a single and limited awareness of the world that the novelist knows to be incomplete and insufficient" and speaks of this as essentially a breach of their "ethical responsibility" (146). Cadden takes Linda Hutcheon's definition of this ethical responsibility, from her book, *Irony's Edge*, stating it is "the responsibility to guarantee the comprehension of irony (and the avoidance of misunderstanding)" and that the author "must coordinate assumptions about codes and contexts that decoders will have accessible to them and be likely to use" (146). In the *Narrator's Voice*, Wall, argues "writers who view the experience of life through ironic eyes, and who use

¹ There are also many crossover novels that use the unreliable narrator. For the purposes of this study, I wanted to look at true young adult novels that would be found classified as such in a bookstore.

irony in the presentation of character, must develop a special relationship with their readers” (111). This special relationship is extremely important when looking at the function of the unreliable narrator in a text, for if the relationship is not cultivated correctly the text will not succeed. Cadden points out that this relationship “might include making available to readers the codes Hutcheon points to above and offering multiple and ideologically contrasting perspectives in the narrative, or even making visible narrative unreliability” (146). He feels these codes are offered in the form of Bakhtin’s “double-voiced discourse” which is a “dialogic or double-voiced text” that “represents voices as equal and provides alternative interpretations that offer ... no single and final answer for the reader” (147). In concrete terms, “two or more ideological positions share the text without any one being in obvious control. Though the reader may come to some decisions about the ‘rightness’ of a particular perspective” (147). Although this theory does look closely at the literary use of multiple voices within the narrative (i.e. multiple narrators), it still carries many characteristics that can be applied to the texts chosen for the purposes of this study. The weight placed on the author’s ethical responsibility to give multiple ideologies within a young adult narrative plays a significant role within my research, and will serve as a frame through which to view the unreliable narrator.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

Beginning with the literature review in the following chapter, I describe the first conception and evolution of the term “unreliable narrator.” The literature review demonstrates the debate among scholars in relation to how we can define the term, as well as the ways in which we can categorize different types of unreliable narration. In the next chapter, methodology is reviewed and the theoretical frameworks used to present my thesis are presented. Chapters 4,

5, and 6 present my individual findings on the three chosen young adult novels. In the final chapter, I revisit the research questions, and present suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Detecting and Defining the Unreliable Narrator

Dating back to 1961, Wayne Booth coined the term “unreliable narrator” in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, famously stating, “I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (158–159). In order to fully understand this statement, we must backtrack slightly to Booth’s conception of the “implied author,” also explained in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth criticized the demand that authors remain objective, claiming that no author can ever remain purely neutral. Instead, he felt that:

the author as he writes should be like the ideal reader described by Hume in “The Standard of Taste”, who, in order to reduce the distortions produced by prejudice, considers himself as “man in general” and forgets, if possible, his “individual being” and his “peculiar circumstances.” ... As he writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal “man in general” but an implied version of “himself” that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men’s works. (70–71)

In other words, Booth claimed that when an author writes a text, they create a “second-self” that may or may not share the same views. No matter how neutral or impersonal the author attempts to be, the reader “will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner” and “his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms” (71). Returning to Booth’s initial definition of the unreliable narrator, he does not explain fully what a deviation from the implied author’s “norms” might look like, simply stating that these deviations can differ (159), although it is evident that he considers these norms to be of a moral standard.

In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth elaborates slightly on what is meant by “norms” stating that when we read a fictitious text we learn the “notions of how the world in which we find [ourselves] works, [and] the norms of causation and behavior that can be expected.” Using the story of *The Goose* he states that there are “nonce beliefs” which are beliefs the “narrator and reader embrace only for the duration” (142). For example:

the implied author and the implied reader are much too sophisticated to expect geese in real life to lay golden eggs; they both know that the story is made up and that some of its norms apply only within the story itself. (142)

In a narrative there can also be found what Booth calls certain “fixed norms” which are “beliefs on which the narrative depends for its effect but which also are by implication applicable in the “real” world” (143). For example the belief that “overweening greed threatens destruction” (143) is the notion of being greedy leading to one’s downfall. This is a moral normative that both the implied author and the implied reader share in the real world and the structure of the narrative. It is the implied author’s deviation from these “real” world beliefs that Booth suggests shows unreliability.

In 1977, Peter Rabinowitz delivered his concept of the four different audiences at play in a narrative literary text. They are:

1. The *actual audience* — the real, live people that purchase or read the book
2. The *authorial audience* — the audience for whom the author writes the text, for he or she “cannot write without making certain assumptions about his reader’s beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions” (126). This category can also be thought of as the market the author is writing for.

3. The *narrative audience* — the audience that the narrator tells his or her story to.

Rabinowitz explains this in terms of the question the reader asks him or herself:

“what sort of person would I have to pretend to be – what would I have to know and believe – if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?” (128). In choosing to pretend, the reader becomes part of the narrative audience; however, this audience still forms their own judgment and opinions about the story and its narrator.

4. The *ideal narrative audience* — the ideal audience from the narrator’s point of view.

This audience “believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, [and] laughs at his jokes even when they are bad” (134).

While Booth looked at the unreliable narrator in terms of how he or she related to the implied author, Rabinowitz’s model gives credit to the narrative audience for they are the audience that adopts the beliefs needed to feel the story is truly taking place, while forming opinions about the narrator and the way the story is being told to them. Rabinowitz states:

all fictional narrators are false in that they are imitations; but some are imitations of people who tell the truth, some of people who lie. The narrative audience believes the narrator is a real, existing historian. But it does not automatically assume that he is an accurate historian. (134)

It is this statement that highlights Rabinowitz’s overarching hypothesis that the reader is in the best position to determine unreliability, for “an unreliable narrator is one who tells lies, conceals information, misjudges ... that is, one whose statements are untrue not by the standard of the real world or of the authorial audience but by the standards of his own narrative audience” (134).

In *The Company We Keep*, Booth uses Rabinowitz’s audience model to further his point on fixed norms and nonce beliefs, stating that we:

easily perform acrobatic leaps back and forth between our roles as “narrative audience,” credulous about golden eggs, and our implied roles as “authorial audience,” sophisticated about how eggs are laid but willing, whenever a tale is fully successful, to embrace its fixed norm. (143)

Yet, Booth looks at Rabinowitz’s “authorial audience” as the mate to his implied author, and so the element of having to decipher what the implied author may have intended is still present, where Rabinowitz’s model is driven by a deviation in the narrator’s and the *reader’s* beliefs, which is ultimately much more straightforward.

Seymour Chatman, author of *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, keeps in line with Booth’s initial concept of the relationship between unreliable narrator and implied author, stating the implied author is:

not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images. Unlike the narrator, the implied author can *tell* us nothing. He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn. (231)

He feels that “what makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author’s ... the unreliable narrator is at virtual odds with the implied author; otherwise his unreliability could not emerge” (149). Chatman views the *domain of unreliability* as “the discourse, that is, the view of what happens, or what the existents are like, not the personality of the narrator” (234), meaning the expressions given by the narrator, as opposed to their intrinsic nature. And yet again this notion of the implied author’s values or norms is

brought forward. Chatman defines “norms” as “general culture codes, whose relevance to the story we have already considered” (149). Because the implied author is the author that the reader perceives or envisions, the reader also envisions a standard by which the implied author values things. In this regard, it is up to the reader to determine whether a “culture code” that the implied author would hold, has been violated by the narrator, causing them to diverge from the implied author’s values, thus causing unreliability.

Chatman also elaborated on the different roles within a narrative, creating a diagram of narrative-communication. Within this diagram, the role of “narratee” is introduced. Chatman states that he or she can be a character within the narrative, “or there may be no overt reference to him at all, though his presence is felt” (150). The concept of the narratee is more easily understood when explained by Barbara Wall, in her book, *The Narrator’s Voice*. She states, “the narrator’s is the ‘voice’ we hear as we ‘listen’ to the story being told, and the narratee is the more or less shadowy being within the story whom it can always be shown, the narrator addresses” (4). Chatman also supposed that the counterpart to Booth’s implied author was the implied reader — similar to Rabinowitz’s *authorial audience*, in that it is the audience that is “presupposed by the narrative itself” (150).

Peter Krogh Hansen questions Chatman’s interpretation of the implied author in his article “Reconsidering the unreliable narrator.” He claims that Chatman’s description is at odds, for he describes the implied author as an “it”, attempting to deanthropomorphize, yet “on the other hand, [it] ‘acts’ like a human being able to ‘invent,’ ‘stack cards,’ ‘have things happen,’ ‘instruct,’ and ‘let us learn’” (231). He concludes that the various attempts by theoreticians “to formulate the implied author do not solve any problems regarding the unreliable narrator” (232).

Ansgar Nünning's research is vast on the topic of unreliable narration; however, many of his articles are only available in German. For this reason, Greta Olsen's translated synopsis of Nünning's *Unreliable Narration* will be used.

Much of the research available on the unreliable narrator goes hand in hand with the theory of the implied author. Olsen states, "in Nünning's view the vague, pseudo-anthropomorphic concept of the implied author serves as a repository for all the open questions about the relationship between the author and the reader but fails to answer any of them" (97). Nünning felt that people assumed the "normative validity and universality of their 'moral philosophy.' Yet notions such as 'human decency' are highly culturally dependent" (97). He proclaimed, "attributing unreliability is solely a function of reader reception" as "the divergence between the reader's worldview and that of the narrator —rather than inconsistencies between the narrator and the implied author – causes the reader to classify a narrator as unreliable" (97). Nünning's model stands apart from much of the research, discrediting the implied author entirely and placing the responsibility solely on the reader. In this sense, he does give a much more realistic, clear-cut view of how readers come to determine unreliability. Hansen points out though that "this does open up a whole series of problems, among the most urgent of which are the difficulties today, in a multicultural society, to determine a shared value-set for all readers" (236). Nünning acknowledges this in his article, "Unreliable, compared to what?" stating, that no "general accepted standard exists which can serve as the basis for impartial judgment ... a narrator may be perfectly reliable compared to one critic's notion of normal morality but quite unreliable in comparison to those that other people hold" (64). In later years he goes on to say "the narrators' unintentional self-incrimination ... presupposes an intentional act by some sort of higher-level authorial agency, though it may be open to debate whether we should attribute the

constructive and intentional acts to ‘the implied author’ or ‘the real author’”

(“Reconceptualizing” 100). According to Hansen, “narrational unreliability can but does not always depend on an intentional act by a higher level authorial agency; and whether it does is a discussion very seldom worth raising” (240).

Theresa Heyd, another scholar who does not acknowledge the implied author, feels that there should be a focus on the real author’s role within the layers of narrative and in relation to the unreliable narrator. In her paper, “Understanding and handling unreliable narratives: A pragmatic model and method”, she argues that the Cooperation Principle (CP) by Grice is the best methodology to use when analyzing the style, for unreliable narration is “a case of pragmatic deviation that is situated within a dual communication framework” (219), meaning deviation from the norms of standard conversational behavior.

In Heyd’s framework, there are four beings grouped together in twos, forming the “dual” nature of the name. There is the intrafictional level, made up of the *narrator* (enunciator) and *narratee* (audience), and there is the extrafictional level hosting the *author* and *reader* (220). It is these two that “constitute the actual communicative act — the author through making a literary utterance, and the reader through engaging with it” (220).

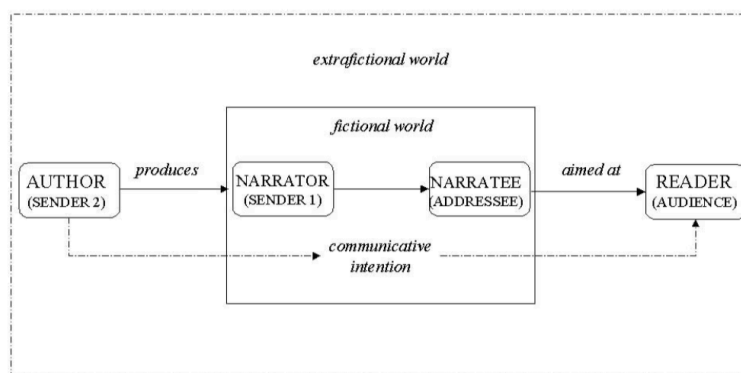


Figure 1. Communicative model depicting dual framework (Heyd 221)

In Figure 1, a communicative process that does not use unreliable narration is highlighted. Heyd comments on the idea that readers are always aware of an “extrafictional text producer” while also being aware of the narrator telling the story — it is this “duality, and its awareness in the reader, [that] is the fundamental mechanism that creates fictionality” (221). In order to understand how unreliable narration is layered into the communicative act, Heyd uses Sperber and Wilson’s (1981) discussion of irony, which “hinges on the semiotic dichotomy of the *use* and *mention* of utterances” (221). In their model, they state that “**use** of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to; **mention** of an expression involves reference to the expression itself” [emphasis added] (221). Their interest lies in the latter, for to *mention* something is to “*echo* previous utterances” which inform “the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what so-and-so said, and has a certain attitude to it” (222). On these grounds, then, Heyd suggests that narrative fiction itself is an “echoic utterance ... through its dual nature, it is a case of simultaneous use and mention” for the:

author *mentions* a discourse that someone could have made in a fictional (that is, possible) world. At the same time, the narrative utterance is *used* by the narrator on a fictional level. For the audience, the message of such speech acts is similar to the one above: ‘Imagine someone telling such a story.’ The various aesthetic effects ... arise out of the *attitude* with which the mentioning is done. (222)

Heyd goes on to state that unreliable narratives are “echoic utterances with a distancing attitude” using irony which the author creates and the reader identifies (223). She states:

Once a reader has made out a narrator to be unreliable, the illocution of the utterance will be perceived as ‘How could someone tell a story in this (deviant) way? If the deviance

cannot be resolved on the fictional level ... the reader will look for an extrafictional motivation — and find it in the author's critical or mocking attitude. (223)

Of course the question then we must pose, is how do we detect the author's true attitude when reading a text? Heyd's answer is that "no such stylistic analysis is necessary for the detection of UN: the deviance of the utterance is at its very hub, namely the pragmatic and cooperative makeup of the text" (223). This concept will be dealt with in the next section.

2.1.1 Grice's Cooperative Principle and Maxims

Speaking about Jacob Mey's Communicative Principle, Heyd quotes: "when people talk, they do this with the intention to communicate something to somebody" (224). To cooperate in communication is to take turns in natural discourse. However, in story-telling the turn-taking is not present, and, instead, the narrator is "granted unique access to the floor for a considerable time span by other participants, who thus voluntarily take on the role of an audience" (224). Because of this power the narrator has, our expectations of him or her increase and it becomes a question of the "so what?" factor (224). It is this factor that allows a story to have great "tellability" for if the "so what?" cannot be answered the story will fall flat (224). Heyd claims that it is this tellability standard that the speaker, or narrator, is held to that "forbids a storyteller to make false claims, leave out salient facts, be vague or evasive, or relate only irrelevant information — in other words, to violate the Gricean maxims" which is, to Heyd, the core of unreliable narration (224–225).

Paul Grice, a philosopher and linguist, felt that "people engage in communication in the expectation of achieving certain outcomes ... this mutual pursuit of goals results in cooperation between speakers" (Chapman 90). He imagined this cooperation to be categorized in four different ways: quantity, quality, relation and manner. Grice also determined four types of

maxim violations, which Heyd summarizes as “quiet deception, opting out, maxim clashes and blatant flouting” (225), with the latter being of most concern. Heyd argues that it is by “virtue of violating the CP [cooperative principle] and its maxims” that narrators are classified as unreliable (225). Heyd recognizes that some might suggest unreliable narrators are simply trying to make implicatures (implied meanings); however, she argues that isn’t so, stating “there are manifold ways in which the CP and its maxims can be violated” and that “the narrators themselves can be more or less aware of their violations, yet what these violations have in common is that they are not meant as implicatures *on the fictional level*” (225). In unreliable narration, the narrator usually “does not even want his or her audience to register [these] violation[s], and therefore cannot be flouting the maxims” (225). Heyd does acknowledge that “fictional narrators can make implicatures, and do so constantly — by exaggerating, making allusions, speaking figuratively, etc. But in such cases, narrators want their narratees to be ‘in the know’” (225) which is not the circumstance with unreliable narration. Instead “here the implicatural force cannot be attributed to the narrator, and is instead transferred to the extrafictional level” in the form of the author, and in this way “the echoic distancing described earlier sets in” (225). Booth’s quote on irony provided earlier in this thesis fits well with this notion — the collusion created between author and reader stems from the *author’s* implicatures, as opposed to the narrator’s.

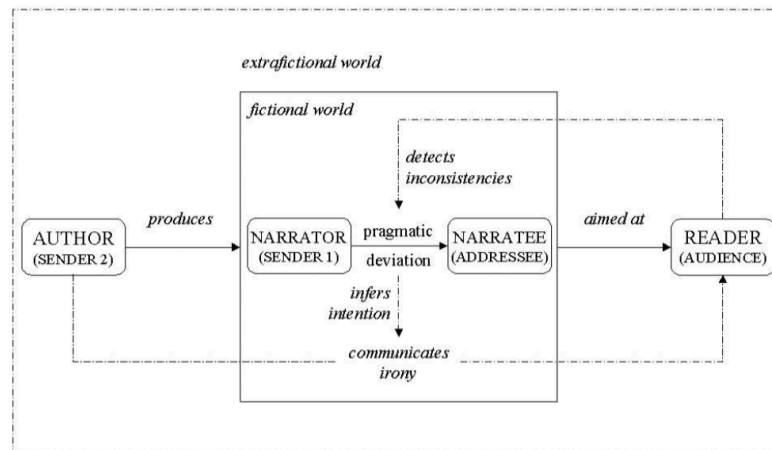


Figure 2. Outline of Communicative Structure of Unreliable Narration (Heyd 226)

In summary, Heyd argues “a narrator is unreliable if he violates the CP without intending an implicature” (225). Much like Nünning’s statement on reader reception, Heyd’s research places the powers of inference on the reader also. To some, her research conclusions may seem obvious; however, by using Sperber and Wilson’s “echoic utterance” and Grice’s CP and maxims to explain the communicative process involved with unreliable narration, she is able to create a deeper understanding in her readers, for the pragmatic approach speaks to the everyday person. Where Booth and Chatman’s models were much more convoluted and weighed down by the presence of the implied author, Heyd’s model allows for a realistic analysis.

2.1.2 The Many Forms and Faces of the Unreliable Narrator

Hansen’s critical analysis of much of the research available on the unreliable narrator led him to create a taxonomy for unreliable narration, in which he develops four distinctive forms of unreliable narration. These are:

1. Intranarrational unreliability

This form is “unreliability established and supported by a large stock of discursive markers ... small interjections and comments that hint at an uncertainty in the narrator’s relating of the event — or unresolved self contradictions” (241).

2. Internarrational unreliability

This form “designates the situation in which a narrator’s version of incidents is contrasted by another or several other narrators’ versions” (241). This narrator includes stories where the narrator is an adult reflecting back on their childhood, thus changing the point of view. While intranarrational unreliability focuses on comments and verbal tics, this form instead “comes into being by the framing of other voices and a non-correspondence with what is taking form as the factual story on their behalf” (241).

3. Intertextual unreliability

This form is:

based on manifest character types that, on behalf of their former existence ... already direct the reader’s attention towards their reliability. In this aspect, Booth’s idea of the moral deviating character-narrator can play a role, since there is a large stock of types that recur in different texts from different times. (242)

Hansen refers to stereotypical characters we as readers may automatically question, such as rogues, or jokesters. He also notes that some would discount this form, for the text will carry “intranarrational unreliability markers” which may be deemed more important than “preconfigured narrator-character-type[s]” (242). However, he claims this conclusion would overlook the fact that genre has been creating “expectations for the reader, that, in large part, predetermines the meaning of text” and so when a reader identifies a type of character that he or

she may deem unreliable, they will continue on this vein for the rest of the story, allowing them to “pursue this aspect in the reading” (242).

4. Extratextual unreliability

The final form “designates unreliability depending on the reader’s direct implementation of own values or knowledge in the textual world” (242–243). Hansen remarks that this is the most ambiguous of the forms, and is “contextually determined” (243).

Hansen makes the distinction that intra- and internarrational unreliability are both based on “textually observable issues” and can be “considered as intratextual relations” yet each can be identified by the root of the contradiction — “internal contradictions (intranarrational unreliability)” or “contradicted by other narrator’s/focalizer’s discourses in the same text (internarrational unreliability)” (242). Hansen compresses his four forms, stating they will:

often function together in a text so that the unreliability both is marked *in* the narrator’s discourse (intranarrational), *by other* narrators relating (internarrational), *by virtue of* the type the narrator as character is modeled over (intertextual), and in relation to the knowledge *the reader* brings to the text (extratextual). (243–244) [Parentheses added]

By stating this, Hansen hypothesizes that it is not one single who or what, such as Booth’s implied author, Chatman’s implied reader, or Nünning’s empirical reader (244), but is instead a combination of all three categories that forms unreliable narration.

Hansen’s forms and their associated characteristics are all helpful in leading the reader to detect and determine unreliability. In particular his thoughts on intertextual unreliability and narrator-character type play a large role in unreliable narration, for almost any unreliable narrator can be classified as a standard typology. Heyd’s research in her article “Understanding and handling unreliable narration” also delves into typology of unreliable narration in terms of broad

categories that cover the degree to which a narrator is lying and, therefore, how their unreliability is presented. We have determined that as readers, we most often detect unreliability from lack of information, contradicting stories or view points, vagueness etc. While these narratorial discrepancies are all key to unreliable narration, they can be manifested in different ways, dependent on the narrator's character. From my own reading and studies, I've come to determine the four main personalities of unreliable narrators that are most often encountered: the willful liar narrator, the in-denial narrator, the mentally unstable or ill narrator, and the child narrator. These personalities fit within the confines of Heyd's typologies. Using research from her article as support, I will outline each typology with its fitting personality. I will further expand on the category of "the child" using examples from Barbara Wall and Greta Olsen's research. In each, I will discuss the parameters for the category and how to identify the typology.

Heyd uses three well-known classic adult novels to depict the categories of the willful liar, the self-deceiver and the mentally unstable. Her category terminology is slightly different and will help to further illuminate the meaning behind each. As it was stated previously, Heyd argues that a violation of Grice's CP and maxims indicates unreliable narration. By determining whether the violation is of the quantity or the quality maxim, different typologies are easily identified.

The first example Heyd gives, she calls "quiet deception" (227) — this is the willful liar, most often a criminal narrator or someone lying for self-serving purposes. Using Agatha Christie's, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, as her example, Heyd shows how the character of Dr. Sheppard, the narrator, gives an account of what he did the night his friend, George Ackroyd, died, yet leaves out that he was the one who stabbed Ackroyd. Heyd states, "quite obviously, the narrator is aware of the facts he is omitting, and even more importantly, he is aware of the high

relevance of the omitted information” (228). It is a breach of the “quantity” maxim: “make your contribution as informative as is required (for the purposes of the current exchange)” (Chatman, 90) and, therefore, “constitutes a drastic deviation from pragmatic standards, but also breaches a social taboo” (Heyd 228). This form of unreliability is the least common, and may not always be extremely successful. Cases where the narrator is discovered to be a criminal, such as Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, Abigail Haas’ *Dangerous Girls* or E. Lockhart’s *We Were Liars*, prove to be more successful than narrators that lie or give false information for no purpose, such as dream narratives.

The second type Heyd calls “self-deception” (228). Heyd uses Steven, the butler, from Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* as her example, stating that his constant “half-truths and euphemisms” show ““semi-conscious unreliability””(228). This is a violation of the “quality” maxim: “Do not say what you believe to be false” (Chatman 90) — Stevens uses “hedgies, admissions and long-winded sentences” in his accounts and Heyd goes on to state that in this form of unreliability “a further qualification to the cooperative framework is necessary, namely linguistic strategies of politeness and face-saving” (230). She goes on to state, “in other words, face-saving strategies may be made accountable for seemingly irrational language use and CP violation” and these strategies may include “self-humiliation, self-contradiction and admissions of guilt or responsibility” (230). In this regard, “Stevens’s maxim breaches can be analyzed as face-saving strategies of a narrator, who is propelled to reveal unpleasant or difficult issues to his narratee, yet feels the need to weaken the impact of his utterances” (230–231). Examples of YA narrators who use this form include Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger and Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky.

Heyd's final type of unreliable narrator is called "unintentional unreliability" — this is where the mentally unstable and child narrators fit, and "unlike other cases, these narrators do not engage ... with the moral entanglements of CP violation. Instead, their maxim breaches can be explained as deviations from fundamental cognitive and intellectual norms ... often marked by naiveté, lack of education, or even mental illness" (231). Hansen's intranarrational unreliability would fall in line with this typology, as it is based on discursive markers. Heyd uses Edgar Allen Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* as an example, stating, "the narration ... contains violations of the quality maxim. With this narrator, the unreliability appears to be rooted in mental impairment" (232) for we know the narrator has murdered someone, and his guilt is causing him to believe he can still hear the victim's heart beating. The quality maxim states, "do not say what you believe to be false" (Chatman 90); yet in this case, how can we hold the unintentionally lying narrator accountable? Heyd states:

This problem can be solved with regard to the cooperative nature of communication. If communication is to be a cooperative act, its participants will require a basically rational mindset. ... For unreliability, this means that speakers who display severe cognitive, intellectual, or information deficiencies fall outside the scope of the CP — they do not fulfill the felicity conditions for cooperative utterances. (232)

Narrators that fit into this category include Cameron Smith from *Going Bovine* by Libra Bray and Caden Bosch from *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman — both suffer from mental illness and their stories are extremely representative of this.

While Heyd's final term can represent mentally ill narrators and child narrators under one umbrella, it is worth paying specific attention to each, in terms of how they present their

unreliability. Although both personalities unintentionally give falsities, one stems from mental impairment, while the other stems from lack of information or intellect.

In her book, Barbara Wall uses E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* as an example of unreliability from a child narrator. She comments on Oswald, the main character, and his misuse of certain words throughout the story. The malapropisms are used to emphasize that Oswald is indeed a child, and "they are in fact jokes directed towards young readers, to be shared with them at once if they already have the necessary knowledge" (153). In this sense, Oswald is the "butt of the ironic point," as the real author and real reader both understand the mistakes he's making, and see the humour, while Oswald himself does not. In comparing this to the "norms" or "culture codes" that both Booth and Chatman speak of, Oswald breaks or mishandles the meaning of a word the real reader knows to be true, and that the implied author knows to be true — hence he strays from the "norms" of his implied author and so can be deemed unreliable by Booth's standard.

In her article "*Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators*" Greta Olsen points out that many unreliable narrators are simply "somewhat untrustworthy or simply fallible" (99). She summarizes Phelan and Martin's research on six types of unreliability stating, "the first three types ... are grouped together on the basis of how the reader responds to them ... narrators may falsely report fictional events ("misreporting"), or make mistakes of perception ("misreading"), or falsely evaluate events ("misregarding")" (100–101). The second group of three consists of unreliability coming from the narrator "not telling enough about what is happening ("underreporting"), their failing to grasp events completely ("underreading"), or their making incomplete value judgments ("underregarding")" (101). Olsen takes this research and further differentiates between what she calls "fallible" narration and "untrustworthy" narration,

claiming, “fallible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased. Fallible narrators’ perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience” (101) and, by contrast, “untrustworthy narrators strike us as being *dispositionally* unreliable. The inconsistencies ... [they] demonstrate appear to be caused by ingrained behavioral traits or some current self-interest” (102). Olsen, like Wall, acknowledges the child in the realm of unreliable narrators, making the statement that they, too, have a role to play within the narrative form.

2.1.3 Intentionality

It is evident that an important aspect of unreliable narration categorization is the degree to which the narrator intends their unreliability.

Heyd states:

The scale runs from utterly intentional CP violations, which are particularly morally deviant, through semi-conscious unreliability, which is the most ‘life-like’ rhetorical strategy, to unintentional unreliability, which amounts to a canceling of the cooperative basis of communication. Two central parameters, then, appear to regulate the phenomenon of UN: the existence of clearly identifiable *maxim breaches* (of quantity and quality) produces *unreliability* in a literary narrative; depending on the *narrator’s stance*, a qualitative distinction can be made along the axis of *intentionality*. (233)

Heyd does mention various other scholars’ models or scales on intentionality, noting, “most of them focus on a distinction between whether the narrator’s discourse concerns

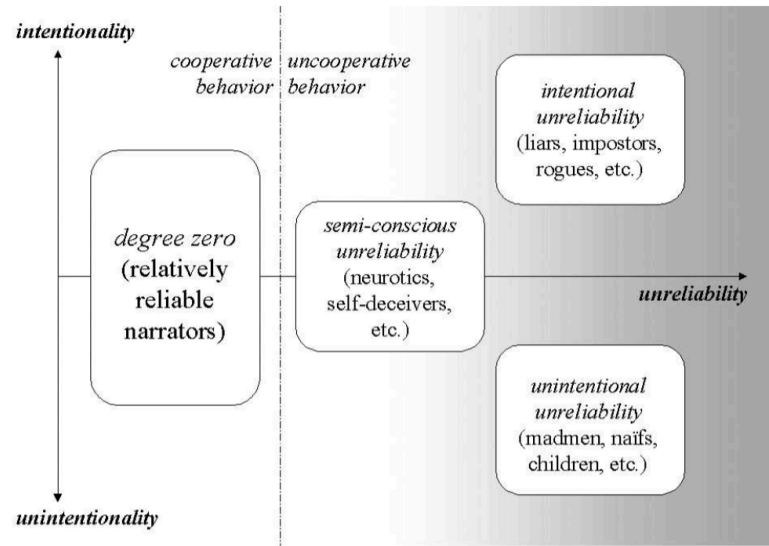


Figure 3. Scale of Intentionality and Unreliability (Heyd 235)

facts and events or opinions” (233). In her pragmatic model, this distinction is of no importance as Heyd feels that “the more unreliability is intentional, the narrator will mislead about facts and events; the more unreliability is unintentional, it will be attributed to the narrator’s worldview or perception” (234). Heyd provides figure 3 above, which demonstrates this scale. As we have already seen Heyd establish, unreliability stems from a violation of the Cooperation Principle, therefore, this scale relies heavily on the line between cooperative behavior and uncooperative behavior. It can be seen here that Heyd’s second typology — “semi-conscious unreliability” sits in the middle of the scale, while intentional and unintentional unreliability fall to their respective sides. Of course this works well for narrators who fit nicely within the character types seen in figure 3 – neurotics, madmen, liars etc. However, as University of Helsinki professor, Bo Pettersson states, “different kinds of unreliability can also be combined in intriguing ways” (“Kinds of Unreliability” 113). Pettersson divides unreliable narrators in to three categories — fallible, deluded and deceptive, and uses the novel, *Shroeder*, by Amity Gaige as an example of a narrator who demonstrates all three of these forms of unreliability, through abducting his

daughter and lying to many people, yet still believing he is a good father despite the obvious occurrences that show he is not. It is for this reason that Pettersson states, “a central way of viewing literary narrators and characters is on a scale of intentional agency, which is dependent on the knowledge and skills they have” (114). He gives the example of Shroeder not having the skill set to be the “good father he would very much like to be” and so his “intention is undercut” (114). However, it is not evident where a narrator who demonstrates all three types of unreliability would fall on a scale such as Heyd’s. Furthermore, Heyd points out that “what this framework describes ... is different types of unreliable *utterances* — not types of unreliable *narrators*” (234) and so perhaps this is the best way to view narrators who seem to represent a myriad of unreliable characteristics.

Some may say that in order for a narrator to be truly unreliable, they must have some degree of intention behind their actions, and thus, an unintentionally unreliable narrator, as we have seen, would not be considered a typology. Greta Olsen states:

“Unreliable” and “untrustworthy” suggest that the narrator deviates from the general normative standards implicit in the text. For this reason the narrator cannot be trusted on a personal level. By contrast, “*inconscience*” and “fallible” imply that the narrator makes mistakes about how she perceives herself or her fictional world. (96)

This fallible nature is then seen as “situationally-motivated” and it is “external circumstances [that] appear to cause the narrator’s misperceptions rather than inherent characteristics” allowing for the reader to “justify the failings of the fallible narrator — just as they would justify their own similar mistakes” (102). Looking at a text such as *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* by E. Nesbit, we see Oswald go through many instances where he reads a situation with extreme confidence, such as his stating that he wishes Albert-next-door’s uncle could come treasure

hunting with them all the time for “he must have very sharp eyes” (31). In each instance we know he is still too young to have acquired the skill set needed to understand the truth behind each occurrence and so it becomes obvious that the intention is not there. The question is do we simply chalk this story up to fallibility and not true unreliability? Is Oswald’s limited life experience enough to forgive the discrepancies? Can we say Oswald is untrustworthy? The decision ultimately becomes that of the reader.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this study, I will analyze closely three young adult novels that use the unreliable narrator as a device for narration. These chosen texts are *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart, and *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman.

I will be doing a close reading of each text in order to define how each character presents as unreliable and why they present this way, thus categorizing the narrative style. My theoretical lens is a pragmatic approach that seeks to determine *how* the unreliable narrator works in terms of construction and execution. Because “Pragmatic study rests on the assumption that language is used to interact purposefully with others” (Pershey 299), it is the methodology needed to explore the unique landscape of unreliable narration, in order to determine the motivations behind each narrator’s interactions.

The second portion of my analysis focuses on the role of the author in regards to the unreliable narrator. Structuralism “replaces the author with the reader, as the central agency in criticism” (Abrams 383) and because of this, within literary theory there is little or no attention given to the real author, but instead the authorial focus rests on the implied author. Yet, the unreliable narrator is a type of narrative that demands attention be given to the real author, for they are the creator of the irony Booth speaks of:

Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point....

In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker’s back. (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 304)

I am intrigued by this collusion, for I see it as mandatory in unreliable narration.

In order to frame my research on both unreliable narration and the author's role, I will use selected theoretical elements from the critical writings of Theresa Heyd, who uses a pragmatic approach to unreliable narration. Pragmatism believes that "the meaning of a doctrine is best understood through the practices of which it is a part" (Blackburn), and as narration is in itself a form of communication, Heyd's use of Grice's Cooperation Principle and Maxims will prove useful to demonstrating how each narrator is unreliable.

Structuralism uses a rigid method of systemizing a text, while poststructuralism seeks to dehumanize the creation of a text, and instead put extreme focus on the experience of reading a text, and still narratology is concerned specifically with the narrative itself. It is my hope that by taking a pragmatic approach that draws on real life concepts of social communication, my research will pay much deserved and overdue attention to both the texts themselves, as well as the authors of unreliable narration, highlighting their significant role in its creation and success.

Chapter 4: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

The Perks of being a Wallflower, by Stephen Chbosky, is a story about a boy named Charlie, who is fifteen years old and transitioning into high school. *Perks* is an epistolary novel, told through letters written by Charlie, and addressed to “Friend” — a narratee that we do not learn the identity of and that we are told Charlie himself doesn’t even know personally. The novel follows Charlie’s school year and, throughout, the reader learns, through Charlie’s writing, of the new people he meets, including two seniors, Patrick, who is gay, and Sam, Patrick’s step-sister, who become his best friends. We also learn of the new things he experiences in this period of transition. Not only does the reader see Charlie’s interactions with his family, friends, and the world around him, but the reader also hears Charlie’s blunt, sometimes naïve, and sometimes very enlightened insights in his letters. As the novel progresses, it becomes apparent to the reader that Charlie suffers from mental health issues, and it is the struggles associated with this, in combination with his wallflower tendencies that cause him to violate the Cooperative Principle and the Gricean Maxim of “quantity” as outlined by Heyd, thus making him unreliable. In order to understand this claim, I will lay out the many ways through which Charlie creates unreliability, as well as how they factor in his level of intentionality.

4.1 Violating the Quantity Maxim

In *Logic and Conversation*, Paul Grice defines the category of “quantity” as relating: to the quantity of information provided, and under it fall the following maxims:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (45)

Charlie is guilty of breaking both of these maxims on numerous occasions in both over-sharing and under-sharing information often throughout the novel. These constant quantity maxim breaches are the first clue to the reader that Charlie may be an unreliable narrator.

Charlie's is the only voice we hear throughout the entire story, and we only have his account of what is happening on which to base our conclusions. The first maxim violation of quantity comes on the first page of the novel, when Charlie starts his first letter, writing:

Dear Friend, I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn't try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have. Please don't try to figure out who she is because then you might figure out who I am, and I really don't want you to do that. I will call people by different names or generic names because I don't want you to find me. I didn't enclose a return address for the same reason. I mean nothing bad by this. Honest ... I need to know that people exist. I think you of all people would understand that because I think you of all people are alive and appreciate what that means. At least I hope you do because other people look to you for strength and friendship and it's that simple. At least that's what I've heard. (2)

Thus, from the start of the novel the reader can make note of the following:

- Charlie is writing to someone who (we gather) he doesn't know personally. We also don't know who the "she" is.
- Charlie isn't actually "Charlie" and is instead using pseudonyms for himself and the people in his life to remain anonymous.
- Charlie gives a lot of information, and much of it comes from digressions from the topic or situation at hand.

With only these small pieces of information, there is not enough for the reader to determine whom Charlie is talking to, or the purpose of his letter to this unnamed person. Following this letter, Charlie immediately launches into a story about his friend, Michael, who committed suicide a few months earlier, giving vivid details of the day he and his classmates were told. This is the first time the reader experiences what appears to be an over-share of information and at this point in the novel the reader is wondering how Michael's story pertains to the present letter. It isn't until the end of Charlie's first letter that we finally see Charlie acknowledge his over contribution of information, stating, "I don't know why I wrote a lot of this down for you to read". He then goes on to say, "the reason I wrote this letter is because I start high school tomorrow and I am really afraid of going" (6), and so we are given the first piece of concrete information that relates to the immediate future, and the focus is brought back to Charlie himself. The reader can see at this stage that Charlie must be fairly young, and nervous at this upcoming transition.

As Heyd says, the narrator is "granted unique access to the floor for a considerable amount of time" and it is because of this power that our expectations as a reader increase (224). The first six pages show the reader that Charlie is not a narrator who will be delivering his story in a concise and direct manner, but, instead, is someone who says exactly what he's thinking and when he's thinking about it, whether it relates to the overall story or not. For example, Charlie describes his family and tells us how his maternal grandma would always have candy and his paternal grandma would always have cookies, stating, "My mom told me that when I was little, I called them 'Candy Grandma' and 'Cookies Grandma.' I also called pizza crust 'pizza bones.' I don't know why I'm telling you this" (85). These moments where Charlie acknowledges his digressions continue throughout in other over-shares such as where he is talking about a school

report he is very proud of and wants to share with his brother and his brother's girlfriend, whom he's never met, stating:

maybe if they had time, they could read it, and we could talk about it ... Even if we didn't get to talk about it, I would still love to meet my brother's girlfriend. Even on the phone. I did get to see once on a VCR tape of one of my brother's football games, but it's really not the same thing. Even though she was very beautiful. But not in an unconventional way. I don't know why I'm saying all this. (131)

As well as where he states:

My sister's boyfriend showed up in his Buick, and he was wearing a white "tails" coat over a black suit, which looked wrong for some reason. His "cumberbunn" (I don't know how to spell this) matched my sister's dress, which was powder blue and low-cut. It reminded me of those magazines. I have to stop spinning out like this. Okay. (173)

These moments not only show episodes of over-sharing, but also Charlie's tendency to let his mind wander, in almost a romantic way. He often wonders about the feelings and thoughts of those around him, and has a child-like tendency to closely observe, analyze and speculate. Yet he also demonstrates an awareness of this tendency to over-share, which may be relatable to young adult readers.

Throughout the novel there is also little effort on Charlie's part to make his "contribution as informative as is required," (Grice 45) for while he occasionally over-shares he also often under-shares. The most significant example of under-sharing relates to his Aunt Helen. Early in the novel Charlie relates that she is his mom's sister and lived with the family for a period of time. Charlie speaks of Helen in the past tense, so the reader can, for now, only assume that she is no longer alive. Charlie states that his aunt:

lived with the family for the last few years of her life because something very bad happened to her. Nobody would tell me what happened then even though I always wanted to know. When I was around seven, I stopped asking about it because I kept asking like kids always do and my Aunt Helen started crying very hard. That's when my dad slapped me, saying, "You're hurting your aunt Helen's feelings!" I didn't want to do that, so I stopped ... I don't remember much more than that because I started crying really hard and after a while my dad had my mom take me to my room. It wasn't until much later that my mom had a few glasses of white wine and told me what happened to her sister. Some people really do have it a lot worse than I do. They really do. (5-6)

In this letter, Charlie does not say anything else about his aunt, and the reader is left to wondering what the "very bad thing" that happened to her was. Early on, we are told explicitly that Aunt Helen is buried in a cemetery, and Charlie goes on to reminisce about how his aunt would let he and his siblings stay up and watch *Saturday Night Live* "when she was babysitting or when she was living with [them] and [his] parents went to another couple's house to get drunk and play board games" (16). Charlie also says, "we loved Aunt Helen, especially me" (16), making it clear that he looked up to his aunt, and holds a special place for her in his heart.

Another example of under-sharing also occurs at the beginning of the novel when Charlie is reflecting on what caused Michael to commit suicide, and wonders if it was "problems at home", stating, "I wish I know. It might make me miss him more clearly ... it makes me wonder if I have "problems at home" but it seems to me that a lot of other people have it a lot worse" (4). Charlie does not allude to why he wonders if he has "problems at home" and what this euphemism means to him, leaving the reader to wonder, yet again, what kinds of issues might be happening with Charlie and his family.

Each of these examples hints to the reader that “salient facts” (Heyd, 23), are missing especially where Aunt Helen is concerned, and that while Charlie can be vague, at other times he provides too many details. Just as “Dear Friend” (the recipient of the letters) “is in a position to challenge and question Charlie’s words ... the implied MTV reader/viewer, by implication, is invited to do the same from an equal position of authority” (Cadden 145–150). The reader has to approach Charlie’s story now with slight skepticism and tread carefully in order to discover what reasons there might be for Charlie to tell his story in this way. Thus, it can be argued that quantity maxim breaches are evidence that Charlie is an unreliable narrator, yet the question remains: Why is Charlie at times vague and at other times overly informative? The following section will explore Charlie’s mental health and wallflower tendencies as the root of this habit of under- and over-reporting (quantity maxim breaches).

4.2 The Downside of Being a Wallflower

Early in the novel, Patrick describes Charlie by saying, “he’s a wallflower,” to which all their friends agree. Patrick says to Charlie: “You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand” (37). While this is a big moment for Charlie, I wonder if I agree with Patrick. Does Charlie really understand? Or is it simply that Charlie’s passivity keeps him a step back from where the action is, always observing and following along. In short, is Charlie only acting in a way that suggests he understands the world around him? In the article, “*Writing through Growth, Growth through Writing*,” Charlie is described as “a wallflower: a passive participant in his environment who observes and learns from the people around him, yet who avoids becoming an active member of his community” (Matos 87), and we see this countless times in the content of Charlie’s letters. We see him *attempt* to understand himself, his life, and the people around him, as well as *attempts* to participate at times; however, ultimately he remains passive and in

doing so Charlie doesn't understand what most readers will — that his wallflower nature is oppressing him and those around him.

First, the very fact that Charlie writes letters — “itself an isolating endeavor” (Matos 93), shows us that Charlie keeps the world at arm's length. Many of the beginning letters contain observations about his family, and the only friend he has mentioned, Michael, who we know has passed away. He chooses to tell us other people's stories more often than his own – about his family and how they feel about certain things; however, Charlie does not reveal much about himself, apart from the occasional thought about situations he describes. For example, near the start of the novel, Charlie witnesses his sister's boyfriend hit her, after she continuously scolded her boyfriend for not “[standing] up to the class bully when he was fifteen or something” (11), and Charlie says:

here was this guy hitting her, and she didn't say anything. She just got soft and nice. And she asked me to leave, which I did. After the boy had left, she said that they were “going out” and not to tell mom or dad what happened. (11)

Charlie does not tell his parents at all, despite the fact that he admits he “froze because [he] couldn't believe [his sister's boyfriend] did it” (11). Instead, Charlie simply reflects on it in his letter, stating, “I guess he stood up to his bully. And I guess that makes sense” (11). Most readers understand that a relationship with any hint of physical violence is not healthy; however, here Charlie's remark causes an unsettling feeling. He doesn't run to tell his parents, nor does he seem to be extremely shaken by the exchange he just witnessed. Some might say that Charlie's innocence is the cause of his passivity in this case; however, the final passage of Charlie's letter lets the reader know that he does understand that this situation isn't okay:

I could see this boy at home doing his homework and thinking about my sister naked.

And I could see them holding hands at football games that they do not watch. And I could see this boy throwing up in the bushes at a party house. And I could see my sister putting up with it. And I felt very bad for both of them. (12)

Despite Charlie admitting this, he does not actively try to deter his sister from seeing this boy again, nor does he explicitly make it known that he's not okay with seeing this boy and his sister together.

Charlie is constantly and obsessively "focusing on the development of internal thoughts and ideas" (Matos 87) when it comes to the world around him. This obsessive focus is evidenced in the anxious tone of his letters. We see a slight shift following Bill, Charlie's English teacher's question, "do you always think this much, Charlie?" to which Charlie replies, "Is that bad?" Bill's response is spot on: "Not necessarily. It's just that sometimes people use thought to not participate in life" (24). Matos states, "this remark pushes Charlie to further assess his own life and the degree to which he participates in events, talks with other people, and tries to make friends" (93) and we begin to see Charlie make reference to the idea of participating:

I'm sorry I haven't written to you in a couple of weeks, but I have been trying to 'participate' like Bill said ... I am trying to go to social events that they set up in my school. It's too late to join any clubs or anything like that, but I still try to go to the things I can. (28–29)

Although he understands the importance of participation, Charlie can't help but remain over-analytical, as "the very process of writing down his thoughts obliges him to become introverted and pensive, and he continues to write letters as a way of assessing his own life" (Matos 93). He states, "When I write letters, I spend the next two days thinking about what I figured out in my

letters. I do not know if this is good or bad” (28) and so we see that “so much effort is invested in trying to understand life that there is little room to actually live and enjoy it” (Matos 93).

4.3 Sam

We see Charlie’s passivity often where the character of Sam is concerned. Sam is Patrick’s stepsister and is also a senior at their school. In most scenes that involve her, we see the two themes of “Passivity vs. Participation” and “Coming of Age” converge, for Sam is in a sense Charlie’s guide as he navigates new territory, but also simultaneously the object of Charlie’s affection, and someone he looks up to. She becomes almost like a care provider for Charlie, as there are many moments where she offers him advice or takes him under her wing, and we see how Charlie follows Sam’s words with extreme literalness. Through this, the reader observes how Charlie’s silent willingness to follow whatever Sam suggests is a detriment to his social life; however, for Charlie his wallflower nature blinds him to this fact.

Charlie develops a crush on Sam from the first moment of meeting her, and that same night he tells us he “had a weird dream” where he was naked with Sam (21). He feels ashamed of the dream and decides he has to admit to Sam that he “saw her naked without permission” (21). Charlie shares his dream with her, and Sam tells him that he is too young for her and goes on to say, “I don’t want you to waste your time thinking about me that way” (22). Charlie, without hesitation, says he won’t think of her that way any longer (22) and then, throughout the course of his letter writing, clings to this wish from Sam, making an extreme effort not to think of her in a romantic way, saying things such as, “I never think of Sam when I [masturbate]. Never. That’s very important to me” (27) and “Sam did look very pretty in her dress, but I was trying not to notice because I’m trying not to think of her that way” (38). These confessions show us how literally Charlie takes things, especially when Sam is the one telling him them, despite the fact

that he can't help but like her, nor the fact that it's his own body and mind and, if he so chooses, he can think about whomever as he pleases. The reader can plainly see that Charlie still has feelings for Sam, and wishes to be with her, yet his passivity keeps him from taking "direct action that affects the exterior world" (Matos 87), at least in any large capacity.

Another instance of Charlie taking literal direction from Sam is when she gives him advice regarding Mary Elizabeth, a girl who asked him on a date to the Sadie Hawkins dance. He states:

She even told me how to treat a girl on a date, which was very interesting. She said that with a girl like Mary Elizabeth, you shouldn't tell her she looks pretty. You should tell her how nice her outfit is because her outfit is her choice whereas her face isn't ... and she said that I should ask a lot of questions and not mind when Mary Elizabeth doesn't stop talking. (112)

Sam is Charlie's go to for advice in most aspects of his life. He takes her advice to heart and so when he goes on his first date with Mary Elizabeth he lets her do all the talking. He tells us that at the end of the night she asked him if he wanted to go on a date again in the future and then muses, "which Sam and I hadn't discussed, so I wasn't prepared to answer it ... how many dates can you go on and still not be ready to kiss? ... I'll have to ask Sam about this" (114). Here, Charlie feels he needs to check in with Sam for most of his decision-making, and so the role of "social guide" is reinforced. This lack of directness gets him into trouble as he does go out with Mary Elizabeth one more time and then comes to find himself passively swept into exclusively dating her without having really chosen to. Throughout all their interactions together, the reader can see that Charlie does not really like Mary Elizabeth, nor does he really want to date her, yet regarding his feelings he states:

maybe I was lying by not telling her that it was hard to listen to her all the time without getting to say anything back. But I was just trying to be nice like Sam said I should. I don't know where I went wrong. (131)

Because of his need to take Sam's advice and remain "nice" he avoids telling her how he truly feels or what he wants, instead choosing to bear through his dislike of Mary Elizabeth's personality and the way she speaks to him, in an effort not to hurt her feelings or have to deal with confrontation. The reader can see that "rather than tackling external issues directly, he focuses on the internalization of his problems" (Matos 87) by using his letter writing as an outlet for all the feelings he stores inside of himself. Only by writing it all out in his letters does he allow himself to continue down this path, using his writing as a method of "soothing the tension between the pressures of the outside world and his inability to cope with them" (Matos 87).

The moment where we begin to see Sam really become a care provider for Charlie comes when Charlie recounts a story to her and Patrick about a party his brother and sister had at their house once when he was younger. He describes how his siblings told him he had to stay in his room and how a couple came in and began to fool around, despite him still being in the room. He goes on to describe how the girl protested at each stage of the couple's foreplay, telling them that she said, "Please. Dave. No." but still the boy "just talked soft to her about how good she looked and things like that ... [and] after a few minutes, the boy pushed the girl's head down and she started to kiss his penis. She was still crying" (30-31). Charlie then tells the recipient of the letters, "I had to stop watching at that point because I started to feel sick ... and they kept doing other things, and she kept saying "no." Even when I covered my ears, I could still hear her say that" (31). Later on, he tells us that his sister came into the room and the couple quickly left. She asks him if he knew they were in there and why he didn't stop them, to which Charlie replied, "I

didn't know what they were doing" (31). After relaying the story to his friends he looks at Sam and says, "He raped her, didn't he?" He then says in his letter, "[Sam] just nodded. I couldn't tell if she was sad or just knew more things than me" (32). This entire exchange is a reminder to the reader that Charlie is still young — he is only a fifteen-year-old boy, who has made friends with seventeen or eighteen year olds, and he is still trying to understand his experiences. Even Charlie can see that Sam has the potential to understand more than he does.

While Charlie overall remains very passive, there are small moments of action on his part, including letting the air out of Dave's tires, as a retaliation for raping his girlfriend (32), as well as during the holiday break, where Charlie and his friend have a Christmas party. Sam gives Charlie "an old typewriter with a fresh ribbon" and:

Inside the typewriter was a piece of white paper. On that piece of white paper, Sam wrote, "Write about me sometime." And I typed something back to her, standing right there in her bedroom. I just typed.

"I will."

And it felt good that those were the first two words that I ever typed on my new old typewriter that Sam gave me. (69)

These are very active words from a passive person, yet again in the presence of Sam. The last instance where Charlie shows perhaps the most active participation throughout the novel comes during Easter break, when Charlie, who is still dating Mary Elizabeth, and his friends are all hanging out at Craig's house. Patrick suggests they play truth or dare and then proceeds to dare Charlie to "Kiss the prettiest girl in the room on the lips" and Charlie tells us "that's when I chose to be honest. In retrospect, I probably could not have picked a worse time" (135). He

chooses that moment to walk across the room and kiss Sam, despite the fact that he is dating Mary Elizabeth and she is sitting right beside him. Charlie tells us:

I could say that it was the wine or the beer that I chugged ... But I would be lying. The truth is that when Patrick dared me, I knew that if I kissed Mary Elizabeth, I would be lying to everyone. Including Sam ... and I just couldn't do it anymore. (135)

When Charlie does choose to be active, he tends to choose moments that do not make sense to the reader. Rather than telling Mary Elizabeth privately that he no longer wishes to date her, he makes it clear to her by kissing another girl, and in turn also makes it clear to everyone that he still has feelings for Sam. In addition, when Charlie writes the words "I will" on his typewriter, it gives me pause as a reader. I can't help but wonder at the very active word choice from a character who so far as shown little initiative in his own life.

Charlie's passivity comes to a head when Brad, Patrick's secret lover, is discovered as being gay by his parents. After his parents discover his secret, Brad distances himself from Patrick and this causes Patrick to go through emotional turmoil, turning to drinking and skipping class. He seeks comfort in Charlie's presence and throughout the few weeks he deals with his grief, by bringing Charlie out with him each night to drink and talk to. On the first night, when they say goodbye, Charlie tells us, "We hugged good night, and when I was just about to let go, he held me a little tighter. And he moved his face to mine. And he kissed me. A real kiss. Then, he pulled away real slow." Patrick apologizes but Charlie tells him it's okay, and then says:

so, he said "thanks" and hugged me again. And moved in to kiss me again. And I just let him. I don't know why. We stayed in his car for a long time. We didn't do anything other than kiss. (160)

Charlie finishes the letter by saying, “And I just let him. Because that’s what friends are for” (160). Charlie believes he’s being a good friend by allowing Patrick to kiss him, and by listening to Patrick talk while remaining silent; however, the reader can see that Patrick is hurting and ultimately needs some sense talked into him rather than being permitted to continue on the bender he is on. Charlie’s attempts at “being nice” or “being a good friend” remind us “of a young boy who is attempting to create a metaphorical jigsaw puzzle without possessing all the necessary pieces” (Matos 87) for he truly doesn’t see how the actions or lack of actions he takes are leading himself and his friends astray.

The climax in terms of where we see someone finally share this knowledge with Charlie comes when he’s helping Sam pack for her trip to college. Sam asks Charlie why he never asked her out when she and her boyfriend, Craig, broke up. Charlie replies:

I thought a lot of things. But mostly, I thought that your being sad was much more important to me than Craig not being your boyfriend anymore. And if it meant that I would never get to think of you that way, as long as you were happy, it was okay. That’s when I realized that I really loved you. (200)

Sam replies:

Charlie, don’t you get it? I can’t feel that. It’s sweet and everything, but it’s like you’re not even here sometimes. It’s great that you can listen and be a shoulder to someone, but ... You can’t just sit there and put everybody’s lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can’t. You have to do things ... tell people what you need. Or what you want. Like on the dance floor, did you want to kiss me? ... what about when Patrick’s hurting himself? ... Or when he was kissing you? Did you want him to kiss you? (200–201)

Charlie responds by shaking his head no and Sam asks why he let Patrick kiss him then, and Charlie tells her he was only trying to be a friend. Sam replies:

But you weren't, Charlie. At those times, you weren't being his friend at all. Because you weren't honest with him ... I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to be who I really am. And I'm going to figure out what that is. But right now I'm here with you. And I want to know where you are, what you need, and what you want to do. (201–202)

In this exchange with Sam, Charlie is finally clued in to what the reader has known all along. Sam has allowed Charlie to remain passive up until this point, perhaps in the hopes that he would come to this understanding himself; however, by this point she can no longer allow him to hurt those around him as well as himself unknowingly. In a post on the website, perksofbeinganFJAKid.wordpress.com, Ernst writes about Sam's characterization, stating, "From the very beginning Sam has always been easy going and laid back and I never saw her change in any way, she has always stayed the same to me throughout the book," which I find interesting. I would agree that Sam's character doesn't change; however, I argue this is intentional on Chbosky's part, as it is really Charlie that needs to undergo change. In order for Charlie to truly understand his weaknesses, Sam has to remain the static character that is always there to provide the advice and support he needs along his journey — Sam is the key to helping Charlie understand what it means to "participate" in life. However, "Charlie's progressions from a passive to an active participant is not an overnight change" and although he does have "small victories" throughout, "Charlie still remains a wallflower in the later letters of the novel" (Matos 94), and thus the reader is still left wondering at the choices Charlie makes.

4.4 The Struggle Between Child and Adult

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a coming of age story, where we often see Charlie in adult situations that serve to highlight his child-like innocence and naïve statements. Charlie is always in this transition period, caught between what he knows as his young self, and what he still is in the process of learning as he grows up. It is a combination of his “voice” in terms of how he speaks in his letters, along with the new experiences he faces throughout that tells the reader he is unreliable, for there are many moments that the mature reader comprehends and that Charlie, due to his lack of understanding does not. In this sense, he is a fallible narrator, which Olson describes as someone whose “perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience” (101).

In terms of Charlie’s “voice,” the first example is shown in his tendency to put quotation marks around words or slang throughout the entire novel including terms such as, “cut and hunky” (48), “knocked up” (56), “bitchy dyke” (81), and “erection” (145). Charlie’s innocence also shines through when he tells us about his friends’ discussions, and then adds “I really had to quote that one even though it has a swear” (33). Each time he references vocabulary, it shows the reader that these are words he hasn’t come across before, doesn’t entirely understand, or feels he isn’t old enough to use.

Charlie’s interactions with his family also reinforce the child-like perception of him. He is the youngest in his family, with an older sister, who is also a senior at his school, and an older brother who has gone off to college, and so Charlie’s family often treat him like a child. For example, while the family is driving to Ohio on Christmas day, his brother calls his sister a “bitchy dyke” (which Charlie puts in quotations) and then Charlie tells us, “my mom told my

brother to not use such language in front of me” (81). Another instance is when Charlie decides to take a break from reading his book and tells us:

I went downstairs to watch television with my sister.... I tried to talk to her, but she just told me to shut up and leave her alone.... So, I tried to help my mother in the kitchen, but I dropped the casserole, so she told me to read in my room until my father came home ... Luckily, my father came home before I could pick up the book again, but he told me to stop “hanging on his shoulders like a monkey” because he wanted to watch the hockey game. I watched the hockey game with him for a while, but couldn’t stop asking him questions about which countries the players are from, and he was “resting his eyes,” which means he was sleeping but didn’t want me to change the channel. So, he told me to watch television with my sister, which I did, but she told me to go help my mother in the kitchen, which I did, but then she told me to go read in my room. Which I did. (107–108)

In this passage, Charlie’s family treats him as the annoying, energetic kid who wants to be entertained, but who they have no time for. Charlie’s voice while relaying the story is fast and he takes hardly any pauses, giving the text the quality of an excitable child telling a story. This passage also demonstrates yet again how Charlie violates the quantity maxim, with long-winded stories that have no real meat to them.

Finally, “Charlie’s vulnerability is palpable from the very beginning” (Cadden, 150) because Charlie is writing to someone he has never met yet states has chosen because “other people look to... for strength and friendship” (2). In this statement we see his craving for understanding and companionship, and his trust that “the narratee ... be someone fixed” (150). He is the lonely boy reaching out to share his thoughts with someone, in the hopes that he may receive the guidance he’s looking for.

Despite the fact that Charlie is clearly still very young in mind and experience, we see him consistently caught between childhood and adolescence and between being blissfully unaware and painfully in-the-know. We see this represented physically through his family interactions. For example, at his mother's family gathering, Charlie tells us, "this was my first time sitting at the big table with all the grown-ups since my brother wasn't here to take his seat" (60) and then at his father's family gathering he tells us, "I had to sit at the little kids table because there are more cousins on my dad's side of the family" (86). Charlie is only allowed at the "grown-ups" table on his mom's side, because his brother was absent; however, despite this, we still witness a moment of change for Charlie. He has never been allowed to sit at this table before and for one brief period he is equal to those around him. However, it is short-lived for Charlie quickly is made to sit back at the kids' table at his father's family dinner. At his mother's gathering for Thanksgiving, the guests at the table are asked to share what they are thankful for and when it's Charlie's turn he says, "I'm thankful that my brother played football on television so nobody fought" (60). This statement shows a very honest moment from Charlie — one that many adults would never express, regardless of whether they're thinking it or not. The reader is quickly reminded that although in this moment Charlie sits as an adult among other adults, he still carries the uncensored voice of a child.

The fact that Charlie is a freshman, while all of his friends are seniors, further exemplifies his struggle. Because Charlie has entered into new territory that he is unfamiliar with — high school — the reader sees him begin to experience new things, possibly sooner than he might had he not become friends with only seniors. We learn that Charlie has never been to a party before (29) and so, now having new friends that invite him to gatherings, he begins experimenting with drugs, drinking and sexual encounters. At one party, Sam and Patrick leave

Charlie on his own for a moment and one of their friends, Bob, offers Charlie a brownie. Charlie tells us, "I ate the brownie ... it tasted a little weird, but it was still a brownie, so I still liked it. But this was not an ordinary brownie. Since you are older, I think you know what kind of brownie it was" (35). The older reader who has gone through this point in their life will understand that Bob is taking advantage of Charlie's inexperience and offering him a drug-laced brownie. Charlie even reinforces this fact by stating that the recipient of his letters will understand because they are older. Because Charlie has never been to a party, nor been around drugs, he doesn't understand the feeling that takes over him. He says, "the room started to slip away from me ... I started blinking a lot and looking around, and the music sounded heavy like water" (35). Again, it is Sam that comes to take care of Charlie, and admonishes Bob for giving him a brownie in the first place. This entire scenario depicts to the reader a young, naïve, boy being taken advantage of (although innocently), and then directly after taken care of by a motherly figure, showing to the reader that Charlie needs guidance and help, like any child would while growing up.

When the time comes at the end of the year that all of his friends are graduating, Charlie becomes extremely sad, stating, "I started crying because it suddenly hit me that they were all leaving" (194). Charlie has experienced many things by this point with his friends, and as we know, Sam has been his steady guiding force. When faced with the fact that they are all moving on and Charlie is staying behind, we see again a moment where Charlie is caught in the crosshairs, for he has spent a year growing up, largely due to the group's influence, and we cannot know for sure what will become of his progress when he is left on his own.

We also see this tug-of-war in serious situations that test Charlie's innocence, including both helping his sister with her accidental pregnancy and the death of his friend Michael. From

the start of the novel, we are told that Charlie had a friend named Michael who committed suicide, stating “Michael never left a note or at least his parents didn’t let anyone see it” (4). Charlie holds on to Michael and his death throughout most of the novel and when Christmas comes, Charlie gives Patrick a poem as his last Secret Santa gift stating:

It was a poem that Michael made a copy of for me. And I have read it a thousand times since because I don’t know who wrote it. I don’t know if it was ever in a book, or a class. And I don’t know how old the person was. But I know that I want to know him or her. I want to know that this person is okay. (66)

We see a copy of the poem in the novel and the final verse reads:

That’s why on the back of a brown paper bag
he tried another poem
And he called it “Absolutely Nothing”
Because that’s what it was really all about
And he gave himself an A
and a slash on each damned wrist
And he hung it on the bathroom door
because this time he didn’t think
he could reach the kitchen. (72–73)

Charlie tells us, “Nobody knew who wrote it, but Bob said he heard it before, and he heard that it was some kid’s suicide note. I really hope it wasn’t because then I don’t know if I like the ending” (73). When Charlie gives the poem to Patrick, it seems he doesn’t understand that it is about suicide. The fact that Michael is the one who gave him a copy tells us that perhaps Michael did, in some way, leave a note for Charlie, or leave a sign that he was feeling suicidal, yet

Charlie did not pick up on those signs and did not come to even understand the poem was about suicide until Bob's statement. Later on in the novel, when Charlie spends the night at Bob's he states, "the thing is that I can hear Sam and Craig having sex, and for the first time in my life, I understand the end of that poem" (96). This is a big shift for Charlie, and also an alarming one. He moved from cherishing a poem that he innocently misinterpreted, to, what seems to be, his way of telling the reader that he can understand how someone could feel suicidal. Charlie's imprecise confessions throughout the novel often "leav[e] the readers, as the recipients of his letters to access the value and meaning of his words" (Matos 87), and how they relate to the situation he's in. Charlie has only just begun to face the pains of growing up and so heartbreak (in terms of romantic love) and longing are, perhaps, two emotions he has not experienced up until meeting Sam. His reaction, while unsettling, may simply be amplified by it's being the first of its kind for him.

Charlie turns sixteen in the novel, and so acquires his driver's license — another shining moment of growth. His sister confides in him that she is pregnant and will be going to get an abortion, with his help. While waiting for his sister at the clinic, Charlie begins thinking about her, stating:

I thought about ... how different her face looked when she realized boys thought she was pretty. And how different her face looked the first time she really liked a boy who was not a poster on the wall. And how her face looked when she realized she was in love with that boy. And then I wondered how her face would look when she came out from behind those doors ... When I thought that, I started to cry. But I couldn't let anyone see me because if they did, they might not let me drive her home, and they might call our

parents. And I couldn't let that happen because my sister was counting on me, and this was the first time anyone ever counted on me for anything. (118)

As Charlie says, this is the first time someone is counting on him, not just to follow through with a task, but also to be responsible and take the lead in a very adult-like situation. His reaction is laced with the panicked feeling of a kid in over his head, and we see maturity tugging at Charlie's innocence, pushing him to experience serious issues sooner than he may be ready to.

Ultimately, Charlie teeter-totters between the youthful and clueless boy he begins the novel as, and an experienced teenager who has participated in many advanced situations. Yet, his voice throughout reminds us that he is still growing and learning:

I even got out my old sled and my old scarf ... I walked over to the hill where we used to go and sled. There were a lot of little kids there ... And all of those little kids are going to do the things that we do ... but for now, sledding is enough. I think it would be great if sledding were always enough, but it isn't. (74)

These moments of spot-on insightfulness, such as wistfully contemplating a time where playing was all that one needed, show us how Charlie "constantly faces occurrences and issues that force him to leave behind the ideologies and viewpoints that he held as a child" (Matos 87). These are the moments where small steps of growth occur within Charlie, for they appear to be moments of understanding. At the same time, these moments of articulateness further his unreliability, for "those flashes force us to read all of his observations with a critical eye" and cause "us to doubt his reliability in ways he does not realize" (Cadden 150). The constant shifts between "the naïve and sophisticated ... argues for the lack of guile in the telling and the respectful wariness of the reader" (151).

Charlie's passivity and journey to come of age go hand in hand; by being passive more often than not he essentially creates a lot of the situations he finds himself in, and by being in a transition period between child and adult he can't fully *understand* these situations. Overall, his collection of letters are "coated with the honesty and naiveté of a teenager who does not completely understand society or the people living in it" (Matos 87) but still attempts to, over and over again, just as any curious child would.

4.5 Mental Health

Throughout the course of the novel, there are many significant clues to the reader that something isn't right in terms of Charlie's mental state. It is never explicitly said what Charlie suffers from throughout the narrative, and so the book has created large debate among speculating readers and scholars. While the purpose of this thesis is not to provide a diagnosis for Charlie, I do wish to highlight some of these cues, and how they may be interpreted, as well as how they in turn serve to create unreliability.

In the beginning of the novel, we hear Charlie make many allusions to his tendencies — between pages three and eight, Charlie relays a story that has him mentioning crying six times, as well as showing aggressive behavior in which he seriously hurts another boy who was taunting him. He tells us, "I guess I'm pretty emotional" (8) and makes references such as, "I used to play sports when I was little ... but the problem was that it used to make me too aggressive, so the doctors told my mom I would have to stop" (52), without elaborating on why he has these emotional responses, nor what he saw doctors as a child for. As I stated earlier in this chapter, this tendency to give small pieces of information happens often, and in turn violates the maxim of quantity, as the reader is not being given adequate information to follow along.

As the story moves forward, we begin to see Charlie's anxiety become more apparent. We know that he has recently gone through two traumatic experiences: recently losing his friend, Michael and at the age of eight, losing his Aunt Helen. As we've discussed earlier in this chapter, Charlie is struggling to come to terms with his friend's death, stating, "As much as I feel sad, I think that not knowing is what really bothers me" (4). Yet, Michael's death is not the forefront of the novel (although we do hear of Michael sporadically throughout). Charlie refers most often to his Aunt Helen, telling us snippets of the life she lead, and endured, including that she is his favorite person in the whole world; that she lived with his family for "the last few years of her life" due to the fact that something "very bad happened to her" (5); and that she and Charlie's mom were both beaten as children by their father (58).

Later on, over the holiday break, while Sam and Patrick are away on a family trip, Charlie tells us that he can't wait for his birthday (which is on December 24th) and Christmas to be over, because, as he states, "I can already feel myself going to a bad place I used to go. After my Aunt Helen was gone, I went to that place. It got so bad that my mom had to take me to a doctor" (74). This is the first time we hear him reference the "bad place" and we are given a clue as to why he went to a doctor when he was younger. Charlie continues, stating:

But now I'm trying not to think about it too much because that makes it worse. It's kind of like when you look at yourself in the mirror and you say your name. And it gets to a point where none of it seems real. Well sometimes, I can do that, but I don't need an hour in front of a mirror. It happens very fast, and things start to slip away. And I just open my eyes, and I see nothing. And then I start to breathe really hard trying to see something, but I can't. It doesn't happen all the time, but when it does, it scares me. (74)

This is also the first time we've seen Charlie begin to write in a way that is hard to follow, letting his emotions take over in almost a nonsensical fashion. At this point, we still do not understand why Charlie wants the holidays and his birthday to be over, or why this time of year is causing him anxiety. Charlie continues, stating:

It almost happened this morning, but I thought of Sam's kiss, and it went away. I probably shouldn't be writing about this too much because it brings it up too much. It makes me think too much. And I am trying to participate. It's just hard because Sam and Patrick are in the Grand Canyon. (74)

This is the first time that his friends are away from him since the beginning of the school year, and we start to see how Charlie almost physically needs them around to soothe him, especially in the way he uses the thought of Sam's kiss as a calming mechanism.

On his birthday, while searching for a gift for his dad, Charlie begins to have a breakdown, and tells us "I felt so sad. I didn't know what was going on" (78). Later on that night, his mom enters his room because she can tell he's upset:

"Is it your aunt Helen?"

It was the way she said it that started me feeling.

"Please, don't do this to yourself, Charlie."

But I did do it to myself. Like I do every year on my birthday.

"I'm sorry."

My mom wouldn't let me talk about it. She knows that I stop listening and start to really breathe fast. (79)

Charlie alludes to the fact that every year on his birthday he feels this way and his mom's reference to Helen allows the reader to wonder if this may be a reference to the day Helen passed

away. At this point, we haven't seen Charlie's siblings or parents act in this same anxious way regarding Helen, so we can assume that Charlie had a deep connection and bond with Helen unlike anyone else in the family.

It isn't until almost half way through the novel that the reader finally learns about the "very bad" thing that happened to Helen. Charlie tells us, "I will not say who. I will not say when. I will just say that my aunt Helen was molested. I hate that word. It was done by someone who was very close to her" (89–91). He continues, stating:

She took care of us, so my parents could go out and drink and play board games. She let us stay up late. She was the only person other than my mom and dad and brother and sister to buy me two presents. One for my birthday. One for Christmas ... She always bought me two presents ... On December 24, 1983, a policeman came to the door. My aunt Helen was in a terrible car accident. It was very snowy. The policeman told my mom that my aunt Helen had passed away. (90)

In this passage we finally learn about Helen's passing, and we are told that it happened on Charlie's birthday. This letter becomes the missing puzzle piece to deciphering Charlie's emotions leading up to his writing it. He goes on to tell us that he remembers the last thing Helen said to him before she left: "I'm going to buy your birthday present" (91). Charlie's anxiety is even further explained, as he states, "I know that my aunt Helen would still be alive today if she just bought me one present like everybody else. She would be alive if I were born on a day that didn't snow" (91) and so it becomes "evident from this revelation that Charlie experiences an intense feeling of guilt" and that this may "explain the emotional stress that required Charlie to be kept out of school and might have necessitated his prolonged visits to the doctor, which he references earlier" (Monaghan 37). This revelation has given us, what appears to be the full story

from Charlie. As Monaghan states, it's here that "the reader finally believes that she has enough of the puzzle pieces to reconstruct a chain or cause-and-effect for Charlie's current emotional state and evolving sadness" (37), yet as time goes on we do see his health deteriorate further. We hear from Charlie when he is high on LSD, and his letter is steeped in unreliability, for the reader can tell something isn't right about the way Charlie writes, and the statements he makes, such as "I was looking at this tree but it was a dragon and then a tree, and I remembered that one nice pretty weather day when I was part of the air" (94–95). In January 4th's letter he tells us that he remembers mailing the previous letter, and that when he did "it felt final. And calm" but then he began thinking about everything and his mind "played hopscotch" and "the trees kept moving ... they wouldn't stop moving" so he "laid down and made a snow angel" (98–99). This entire portion of the letter is very disconnected and jumps from thought to thought quickly. After, Charlie tells us that the police found him lying in the snow, "cold and blue", and that his family took him to the emergency room, because these things used to happen to him when he was younger (99).

Later on, we see again how Charlie's friends influence his mental state, when he chooses to kiss Sam in front of everyone, while dating Mary Elizabeth. When this happens, Patrick tells Charlie to keep a low profile and leave Sam and the group alone for a while. There is a period of approximately three weeks that Charlie does not see or speak to his friends, and his anxiety soars to uncontrollable heights: he begins going to the mall to observe people as his own "personal project" and sees "Old men sitting alone. Young girls with blue eye shadow and awkward jaws. Little kids who looked tired. [And] Fathers in nice coats who looked even more tired" (144). This passage shows "Charlie's deteriorating mental health to the reader simply by having him see sadness where he goes" (Nic) while in a seemingly dissociative state. This sadness is further

defined when Charlie shares that he has not spoken to anyone over the last few weeks; and that while driving he's pretended his friends are there with him, talking aloud to them as if they were in conversation (148). We truly see Charlie's mental anguish when he states:

I know that I brought this all on myself. I know that I deserve this. I'd do anything not to be this way. I'd do anything to make it up to everyone. And to not have to see a psychiatrist, who explains to me about being "passive aggressive." And to not have to take the medicine he gives me, ... And to not have to talk about bad memories with him ... I just wish that ... someone would just tell me what's wrong with me. Just tell me how to be different in a way that makes sense. To make this all go away. (139)

Up to this point, Charlie has made comments about something being "wrong" with him; however, this is the first time he makes a clear acknowledgement of the situation he finds himself in. He has been cut off from his friends for a while, and we know from the time Sam and Patrick went to the Grand Canyon that he does not do well when they are away. This is further shown in the fact that his spirits were uplifted in between the two periods of time where his friends are not around: "I feel great! I really mean it" (103). In the latter half of the novel, Charlie appears extremely depressed and it's clear that he does not like the feeling of being alone, despite his wallflower personality. His disposition when at the mall appears very disconnected from his normal, child-like character, and at many times throughout the novel he seems to be floating through moments in a comatose state: "I stared at my reflection and the trees behind it for a long time. Not thinking anything. Not feeling anything" (137). These instances "suggest that Charlie is experiencing mental trauma more severe than unhappiness and loneliness. The fact that Charlie is currently seeing a psychiatrist ... further challenges the idea

that his mental anguish is situational” (Monaghan 37) and instead, reinforces the idea that Charlie suffers from something deeper than depression.

There are many moments in the novel that Charlie mentions his discussions with his psychiatrist, stating multiple times, “he keeps asking me questions about when I was younger, and they’re starting to get weird” (173). Charlie does not share with us what the exact questions are, but the reader can make guesses on what these questions might pertain to. Once we near the end of the novel, where Sam and Charlie become intimate with each other, the reader — and Charlie — finally learn the truth behind much of his emotional stress. The moment Sam reaches down his pants, Charlie immediately feels as though something’s wrong. He becomes very distressed and Sam helps him lie down and fall asleep. He then has a dream, where he tells us, “My brother and my sister and I were watching television with my Aunt Helen. Everything was in slow motion. The sound was thick. And she was doing what Sam was doing” (204). The next day, Charlie states, “I’m starting to feel like what I dreamt about her [Aunt Helen] last night was true. And my psychiatrist’s questions weren’t weird after all” (205), and he ends the letter in the air of a suicide note, thanking the recipient for listening and ending the letter with a “goodbye” (206). Afterwards, in the epilogue, we learn that Charlie has been receiving help for the last two months in the hospital, due to having repressed the memories of his aunt molesting him for all this time (208). Both Helen’s and Michael’s deaths have caused extreme trauma and grief in Charlie, and he has also been “exposed to, either personally, or as a witness, sexual, substance, and emotional abuses, rape, homophobia, anxiety, depression” and therefore “very likely post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)” (Monaghan 39). The only people Charlie has ever been really close to before meeting his new friends, are Michael and Helen. Both of these people are gone from his life now, and so “Charlie is the conduit through whom these painful experiences and

feelings flow; with the physical absence of both Michael and Helen, Charlie is the one who offers up his tears in response to their pain” (Monaghan 36).

While the reader may not be able to deduce the fact that sexual abuse occurred before Charlie does, the reader is still able to understand that something isn’t right due to Charlie’s post-traumatic stress disorder and mental state in combination with a feeling of unease that he unknowingly creates when telling his recollections and anecdotes of his aunt. For example, on Goodreads.com, in the discussion forum, one reader stated:

to me the whole book was leading up to the discovery of the fact that his aunt molested him. All of the clues about him freaking out when sam touched him and then talking about the dreams and the psychiatrist visits. The author threw subtle little hints in that there was something big that he really didnt want to face or discuss. (Cayla)

while another reader stated:

It is pretty clear the he was molested several time, it's the whole point of his nervous breakdown and also of his strong shyness and naivety. He had probably blocked all the memories for years but it had affected the way he grew up and related to other people. (Valetta)

As Valetta states, the reader can begin to see how his sexual abuse affects everything the reader has heard or seen up until the point, and sheds light on one aspect of Charlie’s unreliability (his mental health) and how it relates to the other pieces (his naiveté and wallflower personality).

4.6 Intentionality and the Real Author

As we have seen so far, Charlie has been established as an unreliable narrator, and so now we must ask, to what degree is Charlie intentionally lying to his audience? Looking at Heyd’s three typologies, I argue that overall Charlie is the “self-deceptive” narrator, for he

ultimately lies to himself, unconsciously, regarding his aunt Helen. Amit Marcus in his article, “The Self-Deceptive and the Other Deceptive Narrating Character: The Case of Lolita,” gives a definition of self deception, which I will use for the purposes of this thesis:

self-deception is a mental state in which the subject is *motivated* (as opposed to harbouring a conscious intention) to believe in a specific proposition or state of facts. This motivation causes the subject to enact certain *mental strategies* and *behavioural patterns* that convince him or her of the *truth* of P, despite his or her exposure to information that tips the scales towards accepting the truth of the proposition (or state of facts) not –P. (187)

Using this definition, we can see that Charlie (as the subject) is motivated to believe (based on his limited memories and naïve personality) that his aunt Helen was good to him. He therefore speaks dearly of her to his audience, feels extreme guilt in relation to her death, and develops behavioural patterns such as extreme emotional reactions, and, depression, which all serve to reinforce in his mind that his aunt Helen was good to him and that he is at fault for her death. Charlie continues on this behavioural trend for the majority of the novel, *despite* the “exposure” to clues, such as his psychiatrist inquiring repeatedly about Helen, and his background knowledge of Helen’s own experience with sexual abuse.

Marcus states, “self-deception is apt to come about in the course of a gradual, prolonged process and to become a behavioural pattern (which is expressed, of course, in a series of discrete acts)” (188). As we know, Charlie’s aunt passed away when he was eight years old, and eight years have gone by since, giving Charlie plenty of time to feel the guilt of his aunt’s passing, and to develop the behavioural patterns we see now in his letters. The “discrete acts” we see are in the times that Charlie mentions his aunt — when he tells us about Helen’s past, his

memories of her, or his trips to visit her grave — and these references make it clear that she is the direct link to much of his anxiety, as can be seen after he's visited her grave on his own for the first time:

I read the book again that night because I knew that if I didn't, I would probably start crying again. The panicky type, I mean. I read until I was completely exhausted and had to go to sleep. In the morning, I finished the book and then started immediately reading it again. Anything to not feel like crying. Because I made the promise to Aunt Helen. And because I don't want to start thinking again. (93–94)

In addition, Charlie refers to, in many of his letters, is mental state. For example, when his sister says to him, “You’re a freak, you know that?” Charlie replies “I’m trying not to be” (26) and often Charlie makes statements such as “I don't know what's wrong with me” (75) or “the something that's wrong with me might even be worse than I thought” (148). As Marcus states in regards to the character of Humbert in *Lolita*, these admissions (both referencing his mental state and telling the letter recipient about his emotional moments) present Charlie “as aware of his faults both as a character and as narrator and show him as unafraid of exposing these faults to his audience” (193). We can see that Charlie sees that something isn't quite right with him, but we also understand that Charlie is chalking this up solely to his guilt and sadness at losing his aunt.

At the end of the novel, when Charlie has his sexual encounter with Sam, he begins to have a mental breakdown, stating:

I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like all I can do is keep writing this gibberish or keep from breaking apart. Sam's gone. And Patrick won't be home for a few days. And I just couldn't talk with ... my brother or anybody in my family. Except maybe my aunt Helen. But she's gone. And even if she were here, I don't think I could talk to her either.

Because I'm starting to feel like what I dreamt about her last night was true. And my psychiatrist's questions weren't weird after all. I don't know what I'm supposed to do now. I know other people have it a lot worse. I do know that, but it's crashing in anyway.

(205)

Finally, in this moment, Charlie's repressed memories are returned and he comes to realize that his aunt sexually abused him. This letter is written in a very fragmented and panicky manner, with an ending reminiscent of a suicide letter — Charlie ends it stating, "I'm so sorry that I wasted your time because you really do mean a lot to me and I hope you have a very nice life because I really think you deserve it. I really do ... Okay, then. Goodbye" (206). This seemingly self-destructive response could be due to the fact that Charlie is now in the process of attempting to "realize the unrealizable, to close the gap" (Marcus 192) between what he thought he knew and what he now knows. Because Charlie has repressed these memories, and has remained "unaware of the strategies [he] employ[ed] in order to convince [himself] of the veracity of the lie" we can deduce that the unreliability that stems from his aunt and his mental health is "not a consequence of an intentional act of deception" (Marcus 188). As Cadden states, "What would be Charlie's motivation for fooling someone he does not know about these matters? None really." (150). In fact, Heyd states that, "the more unreliability is unintentional, it will be attributed to the narrator's worldview or perception" (234) and we have seen how Charlie's perceptions are limited not due to just his repressed memories, but also due to little life experience. This limited life experience creates fallibility, which implies "that the narrator makes mistakes about how [he] perceives [himself] or [his] fictional world" (Olson 96). The reader sees this in Charlie's need for companionship (which causes an eager-to-please outlook on friendship), driving him to unknowingly make these mistakes about his world and with those

around him, including Mary Elizabeth, Sam and Patrick. The reader sees this in his passivity and his wallflower tendencies, which cause him to avoid participation, and therefore avoid obtaining more experience and information about the world he finds himself in. And the reader understands what Charlie does not — that he will have to deal with the consequences of these mistakes and learn from them.

As Heyd reminds us, once a reader has labelled a text as unreliable, he or she will question why the story is being told in a “deviant” way. Because we have determined we cannot attribute this “deviance” to Charlie, it therefore “cannot be resolved on the fictional level” and so “the reader will look for an extrafictional motivation” (223). As “readers of literary narrative [we] are conscious of a shaping force with a certain communicative intention” (Heyd, “Unreliability” 9), and so we look to it — the author — for the answers we seek. We know that Chbosky, having created Charlie, has a better understanding of the circumstances that have shaped his character, and, we can presume, has a complete understanding of how the many sides of Charlie create unreliability.

Cadden states that Chbosky “manages to provide the reader with access to multiple points of view (though indirectly), and ... creates doubt in the reliability of the narrator in order to achieve double-voiced discourse” (147). This double-voiced discourse, as was discussed in the literature review, is what Cadden feels all authors of young adult literature should strive for in order to provide “the reader with a host of unjudged concrete specifics that in their totality enable the reader to keep any single conclusion in doubt (or “unfinalized”) over the long term” (147). Essentially, by writing a narrative that provides different points of view, with “two or more ideological positions ... without any one being in obvious control” (147) the author develops choice for the reader and they are able to interpret critically. This quality allows for the reader to

understand that “Charlie’s is a story that needs to be considered rather than just swallowed” (149). In fact, Chbosky hints to this in *Perks* itself, by having Charlie’s teacher, Bill, tell Charlie to “try to be a filter, not a sponge” (165) in regards to his reading. Cadden states that it is Charlie who “provid[es] the reader with the tools to doubt his perspective” such as his naiveté and his memory gaps, that essentially press “the reader to think through the dilemmas Charlie faces with him rather than wonder at his cleverness or wonder which persona is “really” Charlie” (Cadden 151). However, I argue the credit is due to Chbosky, for he created Charlie in this way, thus equipping Charlie with the tools that Cadden speaks of, as well as creating a novel that speaks to people. And this is seen in the plethora of readers that reach out to Chbosky year after year to thank him for writing *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. In an interview with complex.com, Chbosky was asked what pushed him to write the novel, and he states:

Every time people come up to me, they let me know that the book made them not feel alone, and all that does for me is make me not feel alone, because there was a time when there was me ... wondering if anyone got it. And then to see how many people understand — now I feel far more connected to people than I ever did. (Aquino)

In another interview with *The Guardian*, Chbosky states:

From the moment I published it [*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*] and began getting letters, people have ... thanked me over and over for “understanding them”. What I say back to them is: If I understood you that means that you understood me and you have validated my experiences and my point of view as much, if not more than I have validated yours. (Kasperkevic)

Cadden tells us that “the narratee has nothing to offer but sympathy, or empathy, which can never be communicated, as is the case with the implied reader” (150), and while that may be true

of both of these entities, the *real* reader *can* communicate with the real author and these reflections from Chbosky demonstrate exactly this. Having touched so many lives through his words, Chbosky's unreliable narrator allowed for a deeper exploration and, it seems, a deeper sense of connection among many readers.

Charlie's story is one that leaves much room for reader interpretation; however, Charlie's character remains consistently unreliable throughout the narrative for the very fact that he is still a boy, learning about the world around him. His tendency to violate the quantity maxim, combined with his passivity and wallflower personality all lead him to make confusing storytelling choices; poor decisions, most often regarding his friends; and to remain observant, as opposed to participatory in many aspects of his life. All of these traits give the reader pause and call into question who Charlie really is and why he doesn't understand what we understand. As time wears on, Charlie's mental health becomes the answer to this question, for his rapidly worsening condition sends warning signals to the reader, specifically where his Aunt Helen is concerned. Upon the discovery of his sexual abuse, the reader is able to understand how Charlie's unreliability is rooted in his repressed memories, and how this in turn suggests a low level of intentionality in the form of self-deception. Although Charlie does come to discover the truth about his Aunt Helen, at the close of the novel he remains a child, still on the path to complete understanding, with plenty of growth still ahead of him. Because Charlie is "never "completed" as a project in identity" (151), we can assume that there will be more moments ahead which Charlie may not have the tools to understand; however, the end of the novel gives us hope that, with time and age, Charlie will grow out of his unreliable tendencies, due to the fact that he "might be too busy trying to participate" (213).

Chapter 5: *We Were Liars*

We Were Liars, by E. Lockhart, is a story told from the point of view of main character Cadence Sinclair Eastman, (or Cady for short), a seventeen-year-old girl, who is part of the elite Sinclair family. Cadence has grown up summering on the Sinclair's private island, Beechwood, in Massachusetts, along with her cousins, Mirren and Johnny, as well as a boy named Gat, who is Johnny's mom's boyfriend's nephew and also of Indian descent. Over the course of the novel, the reader learns that two years prior, in "summer fifteen" as she calls it, Cadence was in an accident of some kind, and that since then she suffers from amnesia surrounding the details of the accident and that specific summer. As the story progresses, memories resurface for Cadence, and the dynamics of the Sinclair family are exposed. When Cadence finally visits Beechwood, two years later, the details of her accident, and the truth of what has come to pass, are slowly revealed. With each reveal the reader can see that much of what Cadence recounts in her story was not true or misleading, thus making her an unreliable narrator. By highlighting her violations of both the Gricean maxims of "quantity" and "quality" within the Cooperative Principle as outlined by Heyd, we can see how Cadence creates this unreliability throughout the various aspects of her story.

In order to understand the story Cadence tells, one must understand the dynamics of the Sinclair family, as well as the island itself. Throughout the course of this chapter, I aim to communicate the personalities of the Sinclair family, through the examination of Cadence as an unreliable narrator. On the island, each family possesses a named house, each of which I will refer to throughout this chapter — "Clairmont" belongs to Cadence's Granddad and deceased Granny Tipper; "Red Gate" belongs to Aunt Carrie (Johnny's mom); "Cuddledown" belongs to Aunt Bess (Mirren's mom); and "Windemere" belongs to Cadence's mother.

It is also important to note that *We Were Liars* is just over three years old and as such is still a new piece of literature, within the realm of unreliable narration. There are few to no scholarly sources available in regards to it, and therefore this analysis seeks to simply open discussion of the text, while taking into account online reader responses.

5.1 Post Traumatic Amnesia

As we've already learned; the maxim of "quantity" is a balancing act, where the speaker must ensure their "contribution [is] as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)" while also ensuring that the contribution is not "more informative than is required (Grice, 45). In Cadence's case, this maxim is violated right away, for she begins her story by subtly mentioning an accident — "It is true I suffer migraines since my accident" (4) — but providing no further details. The reader isn't informed of the details of the accident until the chapter twelve, and even then Cadence can only remember small fragments of what happened. She states:

One night, late July of summer fifteen, I went swimming at the tiny beach. Alone. Where were Gat, Johnny and Mirren? I don't really know ... In any case, I went into the water wearing a camisole, bra, and underwear. Apparently I walked down to the beach wearing nothing more. We never found any of my clothes on the sand. No towel, either. Why? Again, I don't really know. I must have swum out far. There are big rocks in off the shore ... I must have had my face in the water and then hit my head on one of those rocks. Like I said, I don't know. I remember only this: I plunged down into this ocean ... and I could see the base of Beechwood Island and my arms and legs felt numb but my fingers were cold ... Mummy found me on the sand, curled into a ball and half underwater. I was shivering uncontrollably. (31)

Cadence goes on to explain that she was taken to the hospital for tests, and all tests came back clear. In the weeks after her accidents, she began to experience painful headaches and after “needles, machines. More needles, more machines” and tests for “brain tumors, meningitis, you name it” they eventually diagnosed her with “post-traumatic headaches, also known as PTHA. Migraine headaches caused by traumatic brain injury” (33–34). Due to this state that Cadence’s brain is in, she doesn’t recall many details from not just her accident but the entire summer that the accident took place, two years prior. Shortly after her accident, Cadence tells us that she would often ask her mom what happened, and despite being told many times she was never able to remember the next day. It was decided by her mom and the doctors that it would be best if Cadence remembered on her own and so her mother and family no longer reminds her of what happened (49–50).

It is evident that Cadence’s unreliability ultimately stems from her amnesia and therefore a lack of information, causing a violation of the quantity maxim. However, because Cady is unable to recall the details of her accident, her unreliability also manifests itself in the many simple anecdotes or background stories shared throughout the course of the story that seem insignificant, but upon further inspection raise questions in the readers’ mind. Much like Charlie’s mentions of his Aunt Helen left readers with a suspicious aftertaste in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Cadence’s references to the Liars and her vague memories of “summer fifteen” leave the reader wondering how everything adds up. Early on we are told of the few details from the summer that she remembers:

I can see Mirren’s hand, her chipped gold nail polish, holding a jug of gas for the motorboats ... Johnny’s feet, running down the stairs from Clairmont to the boathouse. Granddad, holding on to a tree, his face lit by the glow of a bonfire. (49)

But these are only fragments, and there is no context for each occurrence. As the story progresses, Cadence tells the reader that in the summers since her accident she has attempted to contact the Liars by email and text, but none of them have responded. This does not alarm her; however, as she tells us that they “never kept in touch over the school year” and also states, “I wasn’t entirely surprised they didn’t answer. Besides the fact that to get online you have to go to the Vineyard, Beechwood is very much its own world” (35). The fact that all four of these teenagers have spent every summer together, growing up and enjoying each other’s company, leaves the reader wondering why they wouldn’t stay in touch, or at least respond to Cadence’s messages. Further to this, upon her arrival back to the island, after being away for two years, Cadence tells us, “The Liars don’t come to the dock when we pull in” (65), which also seems odd, as one would think they would have been waiting patiently to see her after so much time has passed. Later on when Cady finally finds the Liars, she notes that they look the same and that Gat is even “in his worn green T-shirt from two summers ago” (69). The Liars then tell her that they have the Cuddledown house to themselves, as her Aunt Bess and the younger children are staying with Granddad (68). In fact, the Liars tell her they won’t be taking any meals with the rest of the family for the summer, and Mirren comments, “Granddad. He’s lost his mind, you know? ... It’s too much togetherness. I just want to be happy with you guys, down here” (71). Throughout the rest of the novel, the Liars are never with the rest of the family — Cadence is always alone when she spends time with them and none of the family makes any comments on the Liars not being present. As time goes on, Cady also tells us often about Mirren’s health, stating things such as, “Mirren start[ed] choking. Gagging, like she might vomit” (117); “Mirren has a sore throat and body aches” (122); “Mirren has been getting ill more and more often” (130); and “Mirren is seasick, though we were only in the kayaks for a few minutes. She is sick

so often now, it's no surprise" (139). Although we hear numerous times of Mirren's sickness, we never see Bess (Mirren's mom) come to take care of her, or anyone else comment on her health. Another instance comes when Cadence spots her Aunt Carrie in the middle of the night, heading down the walkway in her nightgown. When they meet paths, Carrie asks her if she has seen Johnny (79). The next day when Cady asks her aunt if she found Johnny, Carrie replies, "I don't know what you're talking about" (90), leaving Cady confused. Later on in the story, Cadence has a memory of Aunt Carrie "bent over with snot running down her face, not even bothering to wipe it off ... wearing a white cotton blouse with a wind jacket over it — Johnny's blue-checked one" to which Cady wonders "Why is she wearing Johnny's wind jacket? Why is she so sad?" (143).

Throughout the novel we are shown how Granddad holds the Sinclair fortune over the heads of all three of his daughters, and how, in turn, this slowly caused volatile relationships between the women and in the way they use their children (The Liars) as pawns to gain favor by their father. However, upon Cadence and her mother's return to the island, Cady notes the way the women act with each other now, stating, "You guys are so huggy all of a sudden ... you never used to be so huggy" (62) and "Look at the aunties now ... Here in the Japanese garden of New Clairmont, Mummy has her arm around Bess, who reaches out to slice Carrie a piece of her raspberry tart ... I do not know what has changed" (99). Because Cadence is not sure what caused this shift in her family, the reader is also left to make guesses. Ultimately, each of these small moments act as signals to a larger picture, and it becomes evident that the Liars play a large role in the missing pieces of Cady's memory.

There are other changes on the island that surprise Cadence also. When she arrives on the island, she sees that her Granddad's home, Clairmont, has been completely remodeled into "a sleek modern building perched on a rocky hill" with "a Japanese garden on one side, [and] bare

rock on the other” (63). They refer to the house from then on out as “New Clairmont.” Later on, Cady comments on the absence of her Granddad’s two pet dogs, Fatima and Prince Philip. When she asks where they are, her Granddad says, “They passed on a while back.” Cady then asks if they suffered and he replies, “not for long” (79). When Cady comments on all of his normal interior décor missing from New Clairmont, such as his *New Yorker* cartoons, and embroidered dog pillows, her Granddad simply tells her “That old life is gone ... Stop telling me what’s not here!” (89–90), taking Cady aback. The reader can tell by this point that her Granddad is not entirely mentally stable; however, this moment still causes pause, as we wonder why Granddad is so upset by the reminder that many of his valuables are not present.

Eventually though, Cadence remembers a large piece of the puzzle, stating:

A fire. There on the southern tip of Beechwood Island ... The house is alight. The flames shoot high, brightening the sky. There is no one here to help ... Gat, Johnny, Mirren, and me. We set this fire and it is burning down Clairmont. Burning down the palace, the palace of the king who had three beautiful daughters ... On a night when Granddad and the rest had taken boats across the bay, when the staff was off duty and we Liars were alone on the island, the four of us did what we were afraid to do. We burned not a home but a symbol. We burned a symbol to the ground. (151–152)

Having grown tired of being used as pawns by their mothers for financial gain and security with their Granddad, the reader learns that the Liars took matters into their own hands, and set a fire to Clairmont. Cadence realizes that the memory of her “Granddad holding on to a tree, his face lit by the glow of a bonfire” (49) was in reality “the glow of his house, burning to the ground” and that the image of Mirren’s “chipped gold nail polish, holding a jug of gas for the motorboats” was actually from when they were carrying the gas in to start the fire (153). In this sense, we

begin to see how Cady's early thoughts previously lead us to see occurrences in the novel as innocent, much as she did. Yet, once Cady's memories begin to return we realize the innocent moments are actually much more sinister. With the reveal of the fire, New Clairmont and Granddad's anger at the absence of all of his personal belongings now makes sense to the reader.

Upon remembering the fire, Cadence talks to Gat about it. While speaking with him, she realizes that Fatima and Prince Philip were killed in the fire, stating, "the dogs ... we killed the dogs." Gat confirms that they were, and then asks if that's everything Cady is upset about to which she replies, "God forbid there's more" (192). The text then reads:

He is silent.

And still silent.

"Oh hell, there is more," I say, and my chest feels hollow and iced.

"Yeah," says Gat. "There is more."

"More that people aren't telling me. More that Mummy would rather I didn't remember."

He takes a moment to think. "I think we're telling you, but you can't hear it. You've been sick, Cadence."

"You're not telling me directly," I say.

"No."

"Why the hell not?"

"Penny said it was best. And — well, with all of us being here, I had faith that you'd remember." (192–193)

In this moment, we realize, along with Cady, that the fire and the dogs passing is not the main tragedy of the story. There is more for her to remember, and for the reader to understand. Cady tells us:

Here is the truth about the Beautiful Sinclair Family. At least, the truth as Granddad knows it. The truth he was careful to keep out of all newspapers.

One night, two summers ago, on a warm July evening,

Gatwick Matthew Patil,

Mirren Sinclair Sheffield,

And

Johnathan Sinclair Dennis

Perished in a house fire thought to be caused by a jug of motorboat fuel that overturned in the mudroom. The house in question burned to the ground before the neighboring fire departments arrived on the scene. (201–202)

After learning that the Liars have been dead all this time, the reader recalls the moments, as I stated before, that signaled to something being not quite right — the fact that Gat is wearing the same shirt as the last time Cady saw him; the fact that the Liars have never taken a meal with the rest of the family, or that no one in the family has mentioned them; Aunt Carrie wearing Johnny’s coat and crying in despair — all of these markers now make sense. In addition, we can understand now, along with Cady, that the “aunties hug one another not because they are freed of the weight of Clairmont house and all it symbolized, but out of tragedy and empathy” (210) and for the simple fact that they have suffered and continue to suffer through extreme despair at the loss of something far more important than the financial objects they coveted before — their children.

As I stated earlier, it is evident that the breadth of unreliability in this novel stems from the simple fact that Cady cannot recall past events. One might claim that as her memories return, her unreliability as a narrator dissipates, yet I would argue that even with these small events

resolved, there are still other events that at the end of the novel leave the reader with a sense of uncertainty of the truth of Cady's present summer. Upon remembering the Liars are dead, Cady goes to Cuddledown. Her exchange with Johnny reads:

"You've remembered," he says.

I nod...

"I didn't know if you would still be here," I say ...

"We can't stay much longer," Johnny says. "It's getting harder and harder ... Mirren's got it the worst, but Gat and I are feeling it, too."

"Where will you go?"

"When we leave?"

"Uh-huh."

"Same place as when you're not here. Same place as we've been. It's like —" Johnny pauses, scratches his head. "It's like a rest. It's like nothing, in a way. And honestly, Cady, I love you, but I'm fucking tired. I just want to lie down and be done. All this happened a very long time ago, for me." (215–216)

This exchange leaves room for interpretation by the reader. Presumably we are to understand that the Liars have been there, perhaps as ghosts or spiritual beings, in order to help Cady come to not only the realization of what has passed but to also to terms with it. Johnny's comment on Mirren's health touches on the sickness we've heard much about throughout the novel and so it seems that the longer they attempt to remain with Cady, the sicker Mirren has become. Soon after this discussion, the Liars says their goodbyes to Cady and leave:

The Liars swim out, past the edge of the cove and into the open ocean. The sun is high in the sky and glints off the water, so bright, so bright. And then they dive—or something — or something — and they are gone. (219)

This ending is, in my mind, the most prevalent cause of unreliability in the entire novel, for the single fact that it is left to the reader to really decide whether they believe the Liars were truly there at all, in any form of being, or whether they were simply entirely in Cady's head. It is true that there are some events that support the latter. For example, Cady finds a tire swing hanging from a tree in front of Windemere, "the same way one used to hang from the huge old maple in front of Clairmont" (145). When she looks closely, she finds that "inside the tire is an envelope. [With] Gat's handwriting: *For Cady*" and inside the envelope is "more than a dozen dried beach roses" (146). It would seem this is evidence to a real physical entity (by physical, I mean in the sense that despite being a ghost or spiritual form, their actions are still able to cause reactions in the mortal world), but it is left to the reader to determine whether he or she believes that Gat put the tire swing up and left a real envelope for Cady. The fact that Johnny states that when they are not with Cady they go to another place that is "like a rest" gives me pause as a reader — this line encourages me towards believing Cady has imagined the Liars in her head all this time, for if they go to the resting place when she isn't there, how can tire swings and envelopes appear also in her absence? Yet, another moment causes uncertainty still when we refer back to Cady's interaction with her Aunt Carrie in the night. Carrie asked if she had seen Johnny, stating, "he's up when I'm up, sometimes. Do you see him?" (79). At the place in the novel where this occurs, Cady, and the reader, assume that Carrie is asking this question in a way that means "have you seen Johnny, because I am looking for him" — yet once the Liars are revealed to have passed away, this scene can now be read in an entirely different way. We could guess that Carrie speaks

also with Johnny when he not at the resting place and that she is asking Cady if she sees him too (perhaps to reassure herself that she isn't going mad). And so again, we are presented with the question of whether we trust these minor incidents to point us to the belief that the Liars truly were there, or if, instead, we feel that Cady's amnesia and the trauma to her mind at having lost her closest relationships has caused her to hallucinate every occurrence related to the Liars. In this dilemma, the "quantity" maxim is again violated, for there is evidence to support both claims, yet not enough evidence to refute either.

5.2 Literal Writings

Cadence is not only unreliable by nature of her amnesia, but also from the many times throughout the novel that she writes with metaphor, in a literal fashion. For example, right at the beginning of the novel, when Cadence tells us about her father leaving them she states:

My father put a last suitcase into the backseat of the Mercedes ... and started the engine.
Then he pulled out a handgun and shot me in the chest. I was standing on the lawn and I
fell. The bullet hole opened wide and my heart rolled out of my rib cage and down into a
flower bed. Blood gushed rhythmically from my open wound,
then from my eyes,
my ears,
my mouth. (5)

This description is jarring, as it is the first time Cady uses this device. Only after reading through do we see that it is actually Cady's flair for the dramatic, rather than something that is occurring in real time. As the story progresses, Cady uses this method to describe often, especially where Gat is involved. She states:

Every time Gat said these things, so casual and truthful, so oblivious — my veins opened. My wrists split. I bled down my palms. I went light-headed. I'd stagger from the table or collapse in quiet shameful agony, hoping no one in the family would notice ... Gat always saw, though. When blood dripped on my bare feet or poured over the book I was reading, he was kind. He wrapped my wrists in soft white gauze and asked me questions about what had happened. (29–30)

We hear often of Gat cleaning up the blood that pours from her wrists — a metaphor for Gat understanding Cady's sorrows and attempting to help make them go away. We also hear often about her PTHA and the migraines she endures, including such descriptions as "Welcome to my skull. A truck is rolling over the bones of my neck and head. The vertebrae break, the brains pop and ooze" (33); "A witch has been standing there behind me ... She holds an ivory statue of a goose ... she swings it with shocking force ... Blow after blow she lands, until tiny flakes of bone litter the bed ..." (77); and, "A giant wields a rusty saw. He gloats and hums as he works, slicing through my forehead and into the mind behind it" (107). Although we can clearly see that each of these descriptions is a metaphor for the way Cadence feels when she's going through a migraine, the way that she presents the description comes across again literal, as if she believes these are the entities that are causing her pain, and so while the "quantity" maxim is violated through the facets of Cady's amnesia, the "quality" maxim is violated by these metaphors. Where the "quantity" maxim focuses on level and length of detail, the "quality" maxim focuses on the quality of the words being told — "Try to make your contribution one that is true" (Grice, 45). The audience has put their trust in Cady, as she is the storyteller and so their expectations are set on her delivering a comprehensive and honest recount of events. Yet it is this method of writing literally that quickly introduces the audience to the fact that they can't trust these

statements, and even perhaps *any* of the statements made by Cady throughout the entire novel.

This in turn also contributes to the doubt of the Liars true presence for me as a reader. If Cadence can lie so boldly and dramatically in this way, I suggest that her mind can unconsciously manifest that which she so desperately wants to have back in her life — her cousins and her true love.

5.3 Family Dynamics

As we get to know Cadence, it becomes evident that she is a teenager caught between two worlds. The one she has grown up knowing is full of privilege and upper class, where keeping up appearances is just as important as the money that allows them to lead their lifestyle. Through Cadence's memories of past summers, it is evident that she has lived most of her life oblivious to the good fortune she and her cousins have, but also oblivious to the silent dictatorship that is her Granddad, reigning over the Sinclair family as well as the effect of this dictatorship on her aunts and mother, and therefore the Liars. Once Gat enters her life, and as the Liars grow older, Cadence slowly begins to awaken to this dictatorship, and there are moments where, because of these realizations, we see her leaning towards the other world — one where materialism is not valued; where she and Gat can be together; and where the Liars are not used as pawns to further their parents financial gain with Granddad. Throughout the novel we see both sides of Cadence, yet even at the close of the story, it is hard to determine whether she has declared one world over the other. In fact, this dichotomy between the privileged world and the renounced world remains even after the "accident", and contributes to Cadence's untrustworthy nature.

One of the first times we see Cady and the Liars careless attitude appear is in a memory, when Gat attempts to make conversation about real issues in the world, including India, to which

Johnny replies “We all know you went to India ... You told us like forty-seven times” (18).

Cadence tells us:

Here is something I love about Gat: he is so enthusiastic, so relentlessly interested in the world, that he has trouble imagining the possibility that other people will be bored by what he’s saying. Even then they tell him outright ... He wants to make us think — even when we don’t feel like thinking. (18)

After this, the Liars poke fun at Gat, and Cady, in an attempt to joke, says, “I’ll give you more chocolate if you shut up” (18). In this exchange we see three young people who are not interested in world affairs or in being reminded of the fact that they have things that other people do not. Gat even points out that they “have a warped view of humanity on Beechwood” (18), and yet this falls on deaf ears, as the Liars would rather push these thoughts aside and enjoy the island.

Another moment with Gat comes in the present, when he and Cady are speaking. Gat tells Cady:

You feel like you know me, Cady, but you only know the me who comes here ... It’s — it’s just not the whole picture. You don’t know my bedroom with the window onto the airshaft, my mom’s curry, the guys from school, the way we celebrate holidays. You only know me on this island, where everyone’s rich except me and the staff. Where everyone’s white except me, Ginny, and Paulo.

Cady replies by asking who Ginny and Paulo are, to which Gat says, “Ginny is the housekeeper. Paulo is the gardener. You don’t know their names and they’ve worked here summer after summer. That’s part of my point” (103). Gat is a crucial character in this novel, as he is the only variable in the Liars world — someone they look at as the same as them, but whom Cady comes to find, slowly, is very different. It is through these small statements by Gat, that he reminds

Cady she leads a privileged life. While in the first exchange there was no acknowledgment, in this one, Cady flushes at the fact that she did not know the staff on the island, which shows she felt embarrassment, and therefore is beginning to understand the issues Gat is attempting to shed light on.

Throughout the flashbacks, we see many moments where Cady follows her mother's orders, especially when it comes to playing the Sinclair "game" as it were — the game where all moves are calculated in order to achieve the Sinclair inheritance when Granddad eventually passes away. For example, after her Granny Tipper has passed away, Cady recalls her mother pushing her to reach out to her Granddad:

Spring before summer fifteen, Mummy made me write to Granddad. Nothing blatant.

"Thinking of you and your loss today. Hoping you are well." I sent actual cards — heavy cream stock with *Cadence Sinclair Eastman* printed across the top... "Just remind him that you care," said Mummy. "And that you're a good person. Well-rounded and a credit to the family." I complained. Writing the letters seemed false... "He's very impressionable right now," said Mummy. "He's suffering. Thinking about the future. You're his first grandchild."

"Johnny's only three weeks younger."

"That's my point. Johnny's a boy and he's only three weeks younger. So write the letter."

I did as she asked. (155)

Despite the fact that Cady doesn't want to write the letter and has a feeling that it doesn't seem authentic, she still follows what her mother tells her to do.

There are also moments though where we do see Cadence come to realizations about the nature of her family. For example, in summer fifteen, she recalls visiting her Granddad in his kitchen in Clairmont and noting a goose statue, which she is told is made of ivory:

You can get it, he said, about the ivory. One of his mottos: Don't take no for an answer. It had always seemed a heroic way to live. He would say it when advising us to pursue our ambitions. When encouraging Johnny to try training for a marathon or when I failed to win the reading prize in seventh grade ... Now at the breakfast table, watching him eat my toast, "Don't take no for an answer" seemed like the attitude of a privileged guy who didn't care who got hurt, so long as his wife had the cute statues she wanted to display in her summer houses. (111)

Upon her Granddad telling her that though ivory is illegal in most places you can still get it Cadence sees him in a different light. She now understands that his life motto of "don't take no for an answer" is not the motto of an ambitious person but instead a spoiled and abrasive man who takes what he wants, and it causes her such anger that she has "the urge to snatch the goose and fling it across the room" (112).

In another memory from the past, Cady recalls her Granddad asking her mom if the two of them were lonely in their big house (Windemere). Her mother replies, "We adore Windemere, don't we Cady?" (160) to which Cady tells us:

I knew what I was supposed to say. "I'm more than okay there, I'm fantastic. I love Windemere because you built it specially for Mummy. I want to raise my own children there and my children's children. You are so excellent, Granddad. You are the patriarch and I revere you. I am so glad I am a Sinclair. This is the best family in America." Not in those words. But I was meant to help Mummy keep the house by telling grandfather that he was the

big man, that he was the cause of all our happiness, and by reminding him that I was the future of the family....

“It’s too big for us,” I told Granddad.

No one spoke as I left the room. (161)

Here Cady actually retaliates externally, in front of her aunts, mother and Granddad. Rather than keeping her emotions inside, she chooses to go against what is expected of her and in doing so both spites her mother and stifles her grandfather, so that neither has the satisfaction of Cadence playing into their game.

After the accident, Cady also remakes herself. She tells us “I used to be blonde, but now my hair is black,” (4) and when her Granddad sees her he states, “I didn't recognize you” to which Cady replies, “that’s okay” (5). We can see that Cady is consciously choosing to erase her identity as a Sinclair as much as possible. She also states, “I own a well-used library card and not much else” (4) and we soon learn that she has been giving away her possessions; her pillow, her paperback copy of *King Lear*; a photo of her Granny Tipper — all to Goodwill, less fortunate people, or her family (46–47). At first this seems an act of rebellion — it would appear that Cady is rejecting material objects, in an effort to distance herself from the Sinclair attitude. Yet, there is also an element of self-pity, for having gone through the last two years with no contact with the Liars, and extreme head pain, as well as amnesia, Cady is, in some way, choosing to detract value from her quality of life (she chooses to sleep without a pillow and chooses to give away her photo of her grandmother, whom she loved etc.).

We know that due to the Liars feeling oppressed by the very fact that they are a part of the wealthy Sinclair family, whose primary concerns are of materialistic gain, they started the fire in Clairmont in an attempt to bring down “the seat of patriarchy” in the hopes that it would

be “a purification” (178). When we learn that the Liars caused the fire, we also come to find that Cady was the one who suggested the idea to begin with (179). Based on this knowledge, along with the times we’ve seen Cady rebel against her family in flashbacks, we expect to find her as a changed woman after the fire — one who renounces all things Sinclair, as we’ve just examined, but also someone who does not follow orders from her family any longer —yet, in many scenes set in the present this isn’t necessarily the case. When arriving on Beechwood, Cady begins to have a slight panic attack:

“Cadence?” Mummy is leaning over me.

I reach and clutch her hand.

“Be normal now,” she whispers. “Right now.”

“What?”

“Because you are. Because you can be.” ...

I do what she asks as soon as I am able, just as I have always done. (64)

While we know that her amnesia plays a role, Cady still follows her mother’s orders, even after her accident, and even in a moment of stress. Further to this, despite having gone through immense loss in the family, as well as having almost lost her own child, Cady’s mother is still just as concerned with appearances.

In the present time, Gat makes conversation with Cadence, and after she makes another joke regarding her accident, Gat gets upset stating:

You say we shouldn’t feel sorry for you ... but then you come out with these statements.

My boyfriend is named Percocet. Or, I stared at the base of the blue Italian toilet. And

it’s clear you want *everyone* to feel sorry for you. And we would, I would, but you have no idea how lucky you are. (128)

He then goes on to say, “[Granddad] sent you to Europe for eight weeks. You think he’ll *ever* send Johnny or Mirren? No. And he wouldn’t send me, no matter what. Just think before you complain about stuff other people would love to have” (128). Here we see that even after her accident and recalling memories of her aunts bickering over money, Cady still takes her life for granted. She often makes negative comments about her previous summer spent in Europe, and is insensitive to the fact that she received an all expenses paid trip — something that Gat would never receive, and most likely will not be able to afford himself. The fact that Cadence still follows her mother’s orders, and that she still speaks about certain things as if they are not a luxury, shows that she still possesses naïve and careless qualities — the mark of a Sinclair.

I’ve discussed the fire as a marking point — one that signals a before and after — yet the fire itself, while intended by the Liars as an abdication of all that the family stands for, could ironically be considered the most prominent way to mark themselves as true Sinclairs. We know the Liars snuck wine out of the fridge that night, as teenagers do (177). We also know that Cady and Gat sat together on the beach, drunk, fantasizing of ways to end all their woes (179). With the threat of their family’s collapse, and the fear of losing Gat, Cady suggests the fire and at that moment she genuinely feels as though they would thereafter be looked to as “heroes” (181). In believing that the fire would solve all their problems, Cady shows her naiveté at its strongest. She’s finally become “aware of carelessness, of greed, of exclusion — of the ugly pillars supporting the life she’s always taken for granted. And ... when trying to break free from it, she goes for a forceful and overblown solution; for a dramatic grand gesture” (Ana, “We Were Liars by E. Lockhart”). Once Cady learns of the Liars’ death, she does come to realize this:

We did not, after all, save the idyll. That is gone forever, if it ever existed. We have lost the innocence of it, of those days before we knew the extent of the aunts’ rage, before

Gran's death and Granddad's deterioration. Before we became criminals. Before we became ghosts. (210)

Although Cady admits that the "idyll" they strove for may never have existed to begin with, and has moments of mature understanding, regarding both her family and the world, her tendency to "flip-flop" between choosing to be an ignorant, rich teenager, and choosing to be a socially aware advocate for what is right, leave the reader to constantly form a new opinion of her as a character with every page turn. It is true that in young adult novels we expect to find teenagers going through periods of growth and learning, and Cady is no exception. She is in the process of being awoken to "privilege, inequality, and her own role in upholding an unfair social system" (Ana, "We Were Liars by E. Lockhart"). It is this phase of learning that creates the tug of war between her personalities, and ultimately adds to her unreliability as a narrator.

5.4 Intentionality and the Real Author

Upon my first reading of *We Were Liars*, I wanted to classify Cadence within Heyd's "Quiet deception" category, or in other words, the willful liar, a true criminal who knowingly lied to us throughout her story. However, upon closer examination, as we have seen, Cadence is not as easy to typify into just one category.

In his article, "Kinds of Unreliability in Fiction: Narratorial, Focal, Expository and Combined," Professor Bo Petterson states, "different kinds of unreliability can also be combined in intriguing ways" (113), and I suggest that Cady has both the qualities of a self-deceptive narrator and willful liar narrator. Using Marcus' theory on self-deception, we can see that Cadence (the subject) is motivated to believe that the Liars are on the island with her due to seeing and speaking with them at Cuddledown. This motivation pushes Cady to experience things such as the tire swing appearing with the envelope of dried roses, and to behave in a way

that suggests the Liars are still there, such as visiting Cuddledown often. She continues in this way *despite* the occurrences that should signal to her they are not truly there, such as their not taking meals with everyone, their only being present when Cady is there, and their appearance being the exact same as the last time she saw them two years ago. Just as Charlie's mind had blocked out his Aunt Helen's abuse, Cadence's mind is protecting her from the fact that she set a fire that killed her closest family and friends. Having gone two years with no contact from the Liars at all, and all the time believing that they were ignoring her, it makes sense that her mind would manifest their presence, especially upon returning to the last place she saw them. Some may argue that Cadence could instead be classified within Heyd's "Unintentional Unreliability" category, due to her amnesia. In this theory, it could be claimed that because she cannot recollect the events of her accident or much of the summer that year, she cannot be convicted of intentionally creating any lies; however, I argue that there is enough evidence to discredit this claim. As we saw with Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Cady has also suffered a traumatic experience and, I argue that consequentially her mind is attempting to both protect and enlighten her, by producing the Liars on the island. By seeing the Liars upon her return, her mind protects her from a truth that could shock her entire system into shutting down, and by allowing her to spend time with the Liars, clues are slowly revealed to her in an attempt to remind herself of what has happened. For example, after being away from her cousins due to a few days of head pain, Cady visits them at Cuddledown and asks what they did over the time she was in bed. They tell her that it was the Fourth of July and they participated in "supper at New Clairmont and then ... went out in the big motorboat to see the Vineyard fireworks" (134). They also tell her that they went to the doughnut shop, "Downyflake," and got glazed twists, Boston cream and jelly donuts. Cady tells us "they never go anywhere. Ever. Never see anyone. Now while I've been

sick, they went everywhere, saw everyone?” (134) and “I know Downyflake only makes cake doughnuts. No glazed. No Boston cream. No jelly. Why are they lying?” (135). We can see Johnny’s, Gat’s and Mirren’s lies as Cady’s mind trying to tell her something, in an attempt to break the news gently. This can also be seen through Mirren’s increasing illness, the longer the Liars remain within Cady’s mind. Because all of these instances are occurring in Cady’s mind, it can be argued that she is intentionally lying — to herself, and therefore is self-deceptive. However, I would like to note that because we see many versions of Cadence throughout the novel, she does become a difficult and more subjective character to classify. Petterson touches on the idea of “dissonant narration” using the example of Michael Frayn’s novel *Spies* (2002) which “is for most of the novel fallibly focalised by the protagonist Stephen Wheatley as a boy, whereas as the adult narrator, he is deceptive in not letting on what he knows and is thus misleading”. In this way, the dissonant narration is “the narrating self separated from his experiencing self” (121). Although *We Were Liars* is a story that involves action in both the present and past, and therefore means Cady is not necessarily separated from her “experiencing self,” the mark of the dissonant narration is still there in the way that Cady has learned from her experiences in the past, and slowly reflects back on them. As a reader, we learn more about Cady through this parallel of her younger selves and her present self. Petterson describes the fallible narrator as “intelligent or intellectually challenged, moral or immorally acting naïfs and picaros, who may or may not develop during the course of the story” (110). While Cady’s younger self is not intellectually challenged per se, she is still ignorant to the privilege she possesses, and her choice to set a fire in the hopes it would solve her problems could indeed be seen as the immoral act of a naïf. However in the present time, Cady errs to the side of self-deceptive, as we’ve seen.

In the present time, Cady also becomes a willfull liar, through her use of metaphor. For example, upon discovering the Liars have died, Cady tells us:

I crawl indoors and up to my bedroom on hands of cracked ice, trailing shards of my frozen body behind me. My heels, my kneecaps. Beneath the blankets, I shiver convulsively, pieces of me breaking off onto my pillow. Fingers. Teeth. Jawbone. Collarbone. (209)

The reader knows that her hands are not literally cracked ice and that she is not literally falling apart in her bed. While metaphor is of course used in literature, this persistent and dramatic way that Cady divulges her feelings causes more distrust than sympathy as stated earlier. In these moments, she becomes a willfull liar, for she intentionally describes events that are not truly happening. Ultimately, there are many sides to Cadence, and when viewing each of them, we can see how Pettersson's statement on the overlap of unreliable narration does indeed make for intrigue.

In fact, this intrigue is crafted by the “extrafictional motivation” Heyd speaks of — E. Lockhart. In his book, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Richard Walsh states, “The need for a concept of unreliable narration arises when we wish to explain inconsistencies in the narrative without blaming the author” (78), yet I propose we attribute these inconsistencies to the author (rather than place “blame”), for unreliable narration, in my mind, is a conscious act. Cadence is not a conscious, tangible being, and her story is not a “self-existing thing” (Booth 73), so therefore, we have to assume these inconsistencies came into actuality from an outside force.

As discussed, there are many moments and questions throughout the novel that give the reader pause. Blogger Kristopher states, “this is no accident — E. Lockhart has intentionally structured her novel in such a way as to engage the reader as an active participant in the

excavation of memory” (“We Were Liars – The BOLO Books Review”). I do agree the reader becomes Cady’s partner as the novel goes on, for the reader is experiencing the same uncertainties and spotting the same clues Cady does, in an effort to determine what happened, yet the interesting word choice by this particular reader is *intentionally*. In an interview on *WHSmith Blog*, the Zoella Book Club asked Lockhart if it was her *intention* to create many “different theories about where the story was going.” She replies:

It was my intention for readers to have a number of theories about what Cadence will uncover as she returns to Beechwood Island to confront her past, but my intention doesn’t matter. The text is there to be interpreted however readers see fit. I believe that’s true of all texts. The meaning doesn’t reside in what the author thinks. It resides in what is on the page. (“E. Lockhart: An Exclusive Interview”)

At the end of the novel, the reader is left to decide what they believe happened — were the Liars really present, or was it all in Cadence’s head? The Zoella Book Club commented on Lockhart’s choice to leave “some of the story to the reader’s imagination” and asked why she took this approach, to which Lockhart replied, “I am interested in stories that open themselves up to multiple interpretations” (“E. Lockhart: An Exclusive Interview”). In my mind, this is the heart of unreliable narration — a narrative that allows itself to be seen through many different lenses, experiences and viewpoints, both from the narrating side and reader response side.

We Were Liars is a critically acclaimed novel, with many blog posts, comment forums, and online posts surfacing from keen readers. Some may feel that amnesia is “a device certain to cue groans and eye-rolls from jaded readers” (Rosoff, “‘We Were Liars’ by E. Lockhart”), and it is true that I, myself, tend to view amnesia in the same way I view the “dream” narrative — a conduit for easy and unimaginative manipulation of the reader. However, in this case, Lockhart

succeeds “thanks to the freshness of the writing and the razor-sharp metaphor amnesia provides for the Sinclair family habit of denial” (Rosoff, “‘We Were Liars’ by E. Lockhart”). Lockhart’s statements on her intentions remind us that, while there are those of us that believe the author is an important component in bringing the text into existence, it is the way readers choose to view the text that matters the most. In her tendency to wave her own thoughts on the topic away, in preference of acknowledging the reader’s response and interpretations, there is a reinforcement of the power an author’s voice has and how their words effect the creation and promotion of the literature they write.

Chapter 6: *Challenger Deep*

Challenger Deep, by Neal Shusterman, is the story of Caden Bosch, a fifteen-year-old boy who is dealing with early onset schizophrenia. The story is narrated by Caden and shows his descent into mental illness, beginning at home and then in a hospital for juveniles struggling with mental illness. Caden's story jumps back and forth between reality and the version of reality he sees inside his mind, dividing the novel into four sections: reality as the reader knows it; sailing on a ship at sea (a representation of the hospital in Caden's mind); Caden's life musings; and moments where the real world and Caden's imagined world blend together into one another. For the purposes of this thesis, I am most interested in the ways by which Caden's skewed version of the world due to his mental illness classifies him as an unreliable narrator, and more specifically as Heyd's "mad monologist" — the unintentionally unreliable narrator.

In order to examine *Challenger Deep*, I will focus on three out of the four sections: "Reality," "The Ship," and the blending of both worlds. The sections that indicate Reality are defined here as the moments Caden spends in the world as we (the readers) know it. In other words, when he refers to or spends time with characters that we know are in his real life (for example, his parents, sister, Dr. Poirot or Callie), as well as referring to and describing locations such as his house, school, or, most often, the hospital. It is important to note, however, that although these instances take place in what we consider *our* reality, Caden is still struggling in those moments with his own reality (for example with delusions and paranoia). The sections that signify "The Ship" are defined here as full chapters that may include conversations with characters such as the Captain, Calliope, the parrot, the bartenders, etc., as well as descriptions of said ship, the creatures that inhabit it, and the ocean surrounding it (i.e. Caden's hallucinations). Finally, the sections that indicate the blending of both worlds are the instances where the reader

is grounded within Reality, yet Caden makes references to characters or experiences from The Ship.

6.1 Reality: Paranoia, Delusions and ‘You’

Reality as we know it is difficult to pinpoint in the first chapters of *Challenger Deep*, as the reader is not given concrete details on who is speaking, where they are, or what the purpose of the story is right away. In fact, the details of Caden Bosch’s life do not surface in tangible descriptors until page nine. Within the moments he spends with his family, at school, or walking, the reader is able to see that something isn’t stable in Caden’s mind; his mental illness is growing increasingly detrimental to his health. In this section I will focus on the cues to Caden’s unreliability given to the reader within Reality.

The first clue to Caden’s mental illness is his paranoia. Caden’s father asks Caden if anything is wrong, to which Caden answers, “Well, it’s just that ... there’s this kid at school ... I think he wants to kill me” (9). As this is early information, the reader has no reason to believe Caden might be lying; however, later on, Caden’s dad asks what exactly the kid at school said to him, and Caden replies, “It’s not what he said, it’s what he *hasn’t* said ... I don’t have any classes with him ... I pass him in the hallway sometimes” (11–12). This gives Caden’s dad, as well as the reader, pause, for we can’t help but wonder why Caden might feel his life is threatened from someone he’s never spoken to, or interacted with. Seconds after this exchange with his father, Caden tells us:

Mom is still on the phone downstairs talking to Grandma, and I start to wonder if it really is Grandma, or if mom is just pretending — talking to someone else, maybe about me, and maybe using code words. But why would she do that? That’s nuts. (11)

In some early moments, such as this one, Caden recognizes that the thoughts he's having don't necessarily make sense and it is this recognition that keeps the reader grounded for a period of time, as we can see that Caden also realizes something is happening to him — in other words he understands that his thoughts and behavior are not normal.

In addition to the paranoia, Caden suffers from delusions. They start out small at first. For example, Caden tells us:

Today I start a game. The signs I see will tell me what to do.

LEFT TURN ONLY!

I make a sharp left turn and cross the street.

DON'T WALK!

I cease walking and count to ten before moving again....

There are so many signs out there! I'm out until the sun sets. I never make it to the movies.

I can't recall when it stops being a game.

I can't recall when I begin to believe that the signs are giving me instructions. (85–86)

In this early scene, Caden sets out walking in the morning. At this point, the reader knows he enjoys walking and the game he creates doesn't seem alarming; however, the last few lines indicate there is a larger issue looming. The fact that Caden admits he believes the street signs are speaking to him directly is one of the first delusions we see him suffer. These delusions grow into full-scale misconceptions:

I know it's going to happen. I know it will be bad. I don't know what it's going to be or what direction it's going to come from, but I know it will bring misery and tears and pain ... I know things will calm down if I'm not in the middle of it. Whatever they're planning

to do won't happen if I leave. I can save everyone if I leave ... I have to warn them before it's too late, but when I take out my cell phone, the battery is dead. They drained my battery! They don't want me warning my family! (102)

In this episode, Caden believes that an unknown force is going to attempt something horrible against his family, yet he has no proof. Caden's use of the pronoun "they" remains vague and is a direct indicator to the reader that something in Caden's mind speaks to him, as we know that nobody is really out to harm him or his family, and that it is, simply, his increasing delusions playing tricks with his mind.

The second person point-of-view is used intermittently through portions of the novel that are centered in Reality. This point-of-view immediately causes unreliability, as we know what is being described isn't truly happening to us:

It's like this: You know the answers to everything. Your head is so full of answers, it's bursting. It's ready to explode and pour killing radiation on everyone ... The lines, the *connections* you see between all things.

And you have to share it.

So you walk the streets, and spout out randomness at people, knowing there's nothing random about it all ... "I can see inside you," you tell a woman carrying a bag out of the supermarket. "There's a worm in your heart, but you can cast it out." She looks at you and then turns away, hurrying to her car, afraid of what you've told her. And you feel good. And not. (119)

In this passage, readers are told facts about themselves, told of actions they're in the process of completing and also told how they feel. Of course, it's understood that these moments are really what Caden is experiencing, and that the purpose of this point-of-view is to demonstrate what

he's feeling, yet the jarring "you" still creates an unsettling tone for it *imposes* these feelings onto the reader, and makes the assumption that the reader would feel the same way given the same situation. Essentially, the second person point-of-view feigns knowing the reader on an intimate level, which we know can never be true, and thus adds another layer of unreliability to those already present within Reality.

6.2 Oh Captain, My Captain...of my Hallucinations

Right at the very beginning of the novel we are introduced to the most important plot device in *Challenger Deep*: The Ship. In order to break down this storyline, I will focus on three key aspects — Grounding, Parallels with Reality and Time — and how each fits together.

At the start of the novel, we know nothing about Reality yet — we haven't been introduced to Caden's family, or the paranoia and delusions he's been experiencing. Instead we are given this small piece of information at the beginning: "waiting in that moment is the Captain. He's patient. And he waits. Always. Even before there was a ship, there was the Captain. This journey began with him, you suspect it will end with him" (2). Right after, the reader is thrust into the first scene, where Caden discusses the trench with the Captain, where the reader has no context for what they are witnessing as he or she does not know Caden yet and certainly does not understand why a teenage boy is at sea with an old captain. On The Ship we are given descriptions of areas on the boat as well as scenes where Caden has odd interactions with various characters. For example, Caden and some of his other crew members are called to a meeting in the Captain's quarters to discuss their journey to the Marianas Trench. When it is Caden's turn to speak, he states:

It was first explored by Jacques Piccard and Lieutenant Don Walsh in 1960 in a submersible called the *Trieste*. They didn't find any monsters or treasures. And if there

are treasures, you'll never get to them. Not without a heavy-duty diving bell — a bathyscaphe made of steel that's at least six inches thick. But as this is a pre-industrial ship, I don't think that's going to happen, because you don't have that kind of technology, do you? So this is a waste of everyone's time. (62)

The Captain then replies, "How very anachronistic of you ... and you believe this because...?" When Caden answers that he did a report on it in school, the Captain responds by sentencing him to receive an "F" branded on his forehead (63). In this interaction, we see Caden presenting a valid argument and point; however, on *The Ship* "reasoned, rational complaint[s] with the Captain [are] met with often irrational and baffling retorts." In our world as we know it, "lapses of clarity are punished through social shunning, but on the ship, cogent arguments are punished" (Alia, "Close Reading 11 of 12") showing that *The Ship* is not a space for sensibleness and the Captain is no purveyor of logic. In essence, this dismissal of logic, coupled with no background on how the ship and its crew relates to Reality, causes the reading experience to be disorienting. It isn't until page eight that we are introduced to Caden's family and his true Reality, and even then there is no indication of whether the scenes that have taken place on *The Ship* up until this point have really passed or not.

Yet, as the story progresses, there are clues left for the reader, in order to see the parallels between what has passed on *The Ship* and what we see happen in Reality. For example, on *The Ship*, it's suggested to Caden that he visit the crow's nest. Caden states:

Finally I pull myself over into the small wooden tub that hugs the mast — only to find it's not small at all. Like the crew's quarterdeck, it may look small from the outside, but once inside, the circular space appears to be a hundred feet in diameter. There are members of the crew reclining in velvet chairs, sipping neon-bright martinis with faraway

eyes, and listening to a live band that plays smooth jazz.... “Are you a jumper?” asks a pale man sitting in the next chair, drinking something blue and possibly radioactive. (24–25)

In this moment Caden is confused about how there can be a host of people sipping cocktails inside a small crow’s nest, just as the reader is. Then, later on, a sentence stands out among others, when Caden recounts his family trip to Vegas. He states:

See, every hotel in Las Vegas has a gimmick, and the biggest gimmick of all is the Stratosphere Tower ... the four-story circular crown has a revolving restaurant and a lounge with *live music*. People sit in red *velvet chairs* and drink *neon-bright* drinks that appear to be *radioactive*. [emphasis added] (38)

In this passage from Reality, there are key words such as “live music,” “velvet chairs,” “neon-bright” and “radioactive” that the reader has seen before, in the previous passage regarding the crow’s nest. The Stratosphere is a circular shaped area, where people are enjoying libations, just like the crow’s nest. Once this connection is made, other instances where Caden’s mind manifests areas of The Ship as areas within Reality become easier to spot.

As the novel goes on, we learn more about The Ship, including the characters that inhabit it. We are told early on that there is a parrot on the ship, which wears “an eye patch and a security badge around his neck” (5). We also witness one of the other kids on the ship tell Caden, “Don’t tell the parrot anything. That’s how they get you” (6). While on The Ship, Caden takes notice of a sign above the main hatch that reads, “*You are not the first and you will not be the last.*” When the parrot notices him reading it, he asks, “Does it speak to you?” (*Challenger Deep* 13). We also witness Caden become friends with Calliope, the “wooden maiden carved into the bow, beneath the bowsprit pole” (75) of the ship and who is alive and able to speak. She

questions Caden, asking, “There are things going on behind my back, aren’t there?...Do they speak ill of me?” (57). The parrot and Calliope both spend a lot of time with Caden at different times on The Ship; yet in the early chapters of the book, the reader isn’t sure of their significance, nor what their conversations with Caden are truly saying.

It isn’t until approximately the middle of the novel that we are finally able to gain our footing in the story. In Reality, Caden’s father tells Caden that they are going on a trip, to which Caden asks if it’s a cruise. His father replies, “If you like ... But we’ve got to go; the ship sails soon” (*Challenger Deep*). They then arrive at “Seaview Memorial Hospital” (131) and once inside the lobby Caden spots a fish tank. In the second person point-of-view, Caden tells the reader:

you begin to wonder, Am I on the outside or inside of that tank? Because the rules of “here” and “there” don’t have a clear place in your head anymore. You are as much the objects around you as you are yourself. Maybe you are in the tank with them. The fish may be monsters, and you may be afloat on a doomed vessel — a pirate ship, perhaps — unaware of the breadth and depth of the peril it sails upon. And you hold on to that, because no matter how frightening that is, it’s better than the alternative. You know you can make that pirate ship as real as anything else, because there’s no difference anymore between thought and reality. (131–132)

This passage provides a moment of realization for the reader, for it becomes apparent that every moment spent on The Ship has simply been a hallucination in Caden’s mind. In Reality he is a patient at Seaview Memorial Hospital, and his experiences in Reality have been reinterpreted within The Ship. This realization becomes the grounding point for the entire novel — without this realization, the reader would be lost. With this knowledge, moments that have passed and

characters from *The Ship* are both now easier to spot in their true form within Reality. At one point, Caden is called to the crow's nest where the bartender tells him, "This cocktail shall be yours and yours alone," and when Caden tells him he can't pay for the drink, the bartender replies, "We'll bill your insurance" (44–45). We can see a parallel appear through the use of the word "cocktail" where Caden states in one of his "life musings," "You come to know the pattern of your chemical bombardment. The numbness, the lack of focus, the artificial sense of peace when the meds first hit your system.... Sometimes you can see why you need the cocktail" (154). This paired with the "bartender" on *The Ship* mentioning "insurance" all add together to indicate that the crow's nest is the equivalent of the medicine dispensary in Seaview Memorial Hospital, although for Caden it manifests itself as reminiscent of the Stratosphere, as we saw earlier.

The parallels also serve to deduce character representations. For example, Dr. Poirot, Caden's therapist and the head of the Seaview Memorial Hospital, is the real life version of the parrot, for he "has a glass eye" and "wears bright Hawaiian shirts" (147). This is further reinforced in other parallel moments, such as the moment where Caden notes the quote on the ship. In Reality, Caden observes a poster in the doctor's office, stating, "It's an Olympic runner bursting through the tape at the end of a race. The caption reads, "'You may not be the first, you may not be the last, but you will cross the finish line'" (168). When Dr. Poirot spots him looking at it, he asks, "Does it speak to you?" (169). We also come to find that the ship's figurehead, Calliope, is in Reality another patient at the hospital — Callie, a girl that Caden takes a friendly, and possibly romantic, interest in. Callie's mental illness consists of being unable to stay away from staring out of the large window in the hospital lounge day and night, envisioning things happening outside that aren't. Just as the figurehead is described as having "wooden waves of ... hair" (57), Callie is described as having "silky brown hair and rich skin the color of polished

oak” (165). Further to this, Callie’s need to remain in front of the window reinforces this parallel as the ship’s figurehead, for just as Calliope is an entity that can’t move, and is forever left to stare straight ahead, Callie’s illness keeps her immobile and on the lookout for danger or bad omens. Calliope asked Caden about the crew speaking ill of her behind her back (57), and Callie asks him, “The others talk about me, don’t they?...I know they do. They say terrible things behind my back. All of them” (167).

With each of these parallels, it becomes easier to make connections between hallucinated characters and events and their realistic counterparts. Yet, Time also plays a role in the story, and despite having found grounding at the realization that Caden is actually a patient at a hospital, the order of events serves to keep the story rocky, as if it were itself on choppy waters. For the first half of the novel, every experience on The Ship is an experience Caden has in Reality; yet what we do see of Reality in this half is only the lead up to his being admitted to the hospital, rather than the hospital itself, making the order of events unchronological. Due to this, when the parallels finally surface, they most often are seen first on The Ship and then quite some time later within Reality, in the second half of the novel. The amount of reading time that passes between parallels can be seen as potential periods of confusion for the reader, while he or she waits to see what may have actually passed. In addition, Caden has no sense of time passing himself. We see this both in one of his own “life musings” chapters, in which he states:

I can't remember when this journey began. It's like I've always been here, except that I couldn't have been, because there was a before, just last week or last month or last year. I'm pretty certain that I'm still fifteen, though. Even if I've been on board this wooden relic of a ship for years, I'm still fifteen. (4)

And then, we witness a concrete example later on, when his parents visit him, Caden asks them, “Is it Christmas?” to which his Dad replies, “It’s almost summer, Caden” (227). Caden’s concept of time, and the disorder of events as they unfold both play a large part in causing unreliability for the novel becomes a time warp, which gives entire novel the feeling of being set in an alternate universe — one where Caden’s hallucinations take over all aspects of the story that’s unfolding. Despite the grounding the reader finds within the realization of these hallucinations, time serves to throw this grounding off balance over and over again throughout the novel. The thread then that is left for the reader to hold on to, in order to navigate Caden’s worlds, are only the parallels between both.

6.3 Blending of Worlds

With the realization that all the time spent on *The Ship* has been a manifestation of Caden’s mind, Caden’s unreliability is evident. However, the true moments where his unreliability becomes unquestionable appear in times where we see both worlds blend together — in essence, when we see *The Ship* creep into Reality, both representationally and literally. We’ve seen that both the parrot and Calliope have counterparts within Reality; however, what about another integral character on *The Ship*? The Captain doesn’t seem to have a counterpart within Reality, yet he is also not a part of the story simply because a ship always needs a captain. His interactions with Caden often come out riddle-like and it becomes the reader’s task to determine what exactly is being said, in order to determine who he is. Early on we hear often of how the Captain detests his crew visiting the crow’s nest to partake in a cocktail, and he advises Caden, “Mark my words, those unholy concoctions will rot you from the inside out.”... “Best thing to do is pour it overboard when no one’s looking” (64–65). Having learnt that the crow’s nest represents the medicine dispensary at the hospital, we know then that the Captain doesn’t

like Caden taking his medication or “concoctions” and would prefer he dispose of it. We learn that the Captain doesn’t like the crow’s nest because he “doesn’t like anyone messing with sailors’ minds but him” (185), which hints that although he doesn’t like the medicine warping the minds of those who are on the ship, he doesn’t mind doing it himself. In addition we witness Caden ask a crewmate for information on the Captain, to which the reply is: “He’s your captain. Anything worth knowing you already must know” (23). The use of the word “your” is a clue that this captain is particular to Caden, and as we’ve seen the Captain dictate Caden’s actions, it can be said that he represents Caden’s mental illness itself — his schizophrenia. The Captain truly is *Caden’s* captain, in that he is most concerned with pushing Caden to make a choice, especially where the parrot is concerned.

At points in the novel, both the parrot and the Captain ask Caden to kill the other for them, and this ongoing battle solidifies the representation, for, as we know, the parrot is Dr. Poirot’s counterpart. The parrot’s asking for Caden to kill the Captain (125) is a metaphor for Dr. Poirot extending his hand, to ask that Caden choose to fight his illness, while the Captain demanding he kill the bird (128) signifies his schizophrenia attempting to eliminate all threats against it. And so it is Dr. Poirot against Schizophrenia with Caden in the middle — “both make demands of him that would result in the annihilation of the other, and this struggle externalizes Caden’s internal battle—which is whether to go off his medication or not” (Alia, “Close Reading 11 of 12”).

We have seen how aspects of *The Ship* bleed into Reality, representationally, and we also can see this happen literally in many moments. For example, in a group therapy session, the patients are asked to draw themselves. Instead, everyone asks Caden to draw him or her, as he is known for his artistic abilities. Despite being in Reality, Caden states, “Even the *crew members*

[emphasis added] who are totally out of it look to me like somehow what I draw is going to save their lives” (193). After the session, he goes to Carlyle, the therapy session leader, and concernedly asks, “Do you think the captain will approve of this?” to which Carlyle responds, “Let’s just be here in the moment, okay?” (193). In another instance, Caden’s family visits and they attempt to make a house out of cards, only to have it fall. Caden tells them, “It’s a tough thing to do, even when the sea is calm” and then thinks to himself “the captain must be somewhere, listening to every word I say” (226). In these moments, Caden understands that he is at the hospital yet still references *The Ship* solidifying his unreliability as a narrator. Caden says it best in a crucial part of the novel:

How do you explain being *there* and being *here* at the same time?...You have to remind yourself that you’re not there anymore. Now imagine being like that all the time — never knowing for sure when you’re going to be here, or there, or somewhere in between. The only thing you have for measuring what’s real is your mind...so what happens when your mind becomes a pathological liar? There are voices, and visual hallucinations when it’s really bad — but “being there” isn’t about voices or seeing things. It’s about *believing* things. Seeing one reality, and believing it’s something else entirely. Don Quixote — the famous literary madman — fought windmills. People think he saw giants when he looked at them, but those of us who’ve been there know the truth. He saw windmills, just like everyone else — but he *believed* they were giants. The scariest thing of all is never knowing what you’re suddenly going to believe. (162–163)

For Caden, although he *sees* the hospital, he *believes* he is on a ship headed to Challenger Deep. This constant mixing of Caden’s hallucinations with what is truly happening in real life, prove that his *beliefs* are the key to ultimately deciding whether he is an unreliable narrator or not.

Although his medicine at times helps to tame these beliefs, the journey the reader is privy to shows that Caden struggles with them throughout the entire course of the novel. At the end of the story, despite having been released from the hospital, even Caden is aware that these struggles are never really over, for he says it himself:

the captain is still waiting, his eye fixed on me. He will always be waiting, I realize. He will never go away. And in time, I may find myself his first mate whether I want to or not, journeying to points exotic so that I might make another dive, and another, and another. (308)

Caden's acknowledgement of this truth ultimately shows that the influencer of his beliefs — his captain, his mental illness — will never truly be gone, and therefore his reliability is in flux forevermore.

6.4 Intentionality and the Real Author

Uri Margolin states, "All cases of narratorial unreliability may be divided into intentional and unintentional, according to the narrator's awareness (or lack of it) of the unreliable nature of his performance" (53). As we know, throughout the entire novel Caden suffers from a mental illness and is aware that many of the things he's experiencing throughout the novel don't make sense. Because of this, his unreliability can be classified as *unintentional* and fitting within Heyd's third category, the "mad monologist" (231). We've examined the violations of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims present in both *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Were Liars* by nature of the categories their respective narrators fall into. However, Heyd argues that the "mad monologist," cannot be convicted of any violations of the Cooperative Principle, for their "breaches can be explained as deviations from fundamental cognitive and intellectual norms" (231). Heyd uses Edgar Allen Poe's, *The Tell-Tale Heart* in order to offer an example of

a narrator who understands that his audience doubts his sanity. Despite the fact that he is aware of this, it “does not prevent him from continuing on” (231) with his madness, much in the same way that Caden makes remarks about his illness to the audience, showing he knows that he is suffering hallucinations, yet still continues on *believing* his hallucinations to be real.

It is true that many of the occurrences Caden describes violate the CP and both the quantity and quality maxims. For example, many details are missing; many characters within the narrative have no introduction or back-story until further into the novel; and most of what is being described we know isn't actually taking place. Yet, Caden is not in control of his own mind, thus his “CP violations are embedded in the irrational discourse” he projects (Heyd 232). As Heyd asks, “Can a speaker who produces his or her utterances with the best of intentions, and whose violations are due to cognitive, intellectual, or other deficiencies, be said to be uncooperative?” (232). In order for an act of communication to be deemed cooperative, “its participants will require a basically rational mindset” (Heyd 231), in order to follow the proper rules of social conduct, yet as we journey with Caden through his experience, we can see he does not possess such a state of mind currently. In fact, as a reader it is easy to feel our own rational mindsets dwindling, having been thrust immediately into this unstable narrative also. In an interview with National Book Foundation, Shusterman states this was his intention:

Since the goal was to make the reader feel the same type of disorientation and confusion inherent in schizophrenia — to basically put the reader through their own psychotic episode — I decided that I couldn't take the reader by hand. Readers would have to make sense of things themselves — which would make them active participants in Caden's story. (Manley, “Interview with Neal Shusterman”)

As we are active participants, having experienced simply a taste of what it feels to lose control of

our own minds, we can sympathize with Caden, we can understand his conversational disconnects and we can see that his unreliability is merely a side effect of his mental health.

For Neal Shusterman, the side effects of schizophrenia are all too real and extremely personal, as *Challenger Deep* is based on his experience with his son Brendan Shusterman's mental illness. His goal in producing the novel is to "help remove the stigma that surrounds mental illness, and open a dialogue on a subject that, for too long, has been misunderstood" (Manley, "Interview with Neal Shusterman"). Because of Shusterman's understanding of how this disease affects the mind, Caden's experience comes across as very authentic and has touched many readers, since its release in 2015. On Goodreads, one reader comments:

This book is a blue puzzle piece of emotional genius. I am affected. I AM VERY AFFECTED. At first I felt like I was sliding headfirst and upside down through a tunnel...the prose was so very *woah*. Like Alice in Wonderland but making LESS sense. I panicked for a moment that I wouldn't like this book, but come on! IT'S NEAL SHUSTERMAN. I trust him. And oh, gosh, it paid off. **This is the kind of story that gets lodged in your throat until you shout about its marvellousness.** SO HERE I AM. SHOUTING. (C.G. Drews, "C.G. Drews Reviews")

As Drews states, *Challenger Deep* does cause readers to feel this disorientation while reading, by "focus[ing] on the interface between reality and delusion — and how blurred that line gets when one is struggling with a debilitating mental illness" (Manley, "Interview with Neal Shusterman"). Yet, it's within this interface that Shusterman plays with unreliable narration, shaking the reader into paying close attention, for otherwise they won't survive the story...for otherwise they can't become the active participant he hopes for. When an author chooses to use their novel as a platform to better educate on a topic, and to challenge the boundaries of a genre of fiction, we

can't help but be affected. And upon closing the book, it becomes evident that Shusterman best exemplifies the literary merits of the device he chose to represent mental illness — its ability to stand for something.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussions

7.1 Summary of Findings

In his book, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction*, Richard Walsh states:

To be interpreted as unreliable, a narrative must provide some logic by which its inconsistencies can be explained — some means of accounting for the narrator's self-contradictions or manifest distortions. That is, unreliability cannot simply be attributed to an impersonal narrator: it must be motivated in terms of the psychology of a narrating character. (79)

When reading a novel that utilizes an unreliable narrator, we can't help but attempt to look for the logic within the inconsistencies, as Walsh describes. We understand that to lie or to become untrustworthy are both motivated actions, and therefore as a reader it becomes our job to determine what these motivations are. For many years, the research has pointed to the implied author being the integral piece to discovery — to recall Chatman, “what makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author's” (149). Yet this concept of the implied author paired with outdated literary examples make the history of the unreliable narrator most convoluted, in turn bogging the device down, where instead, research should lift it up.

In my examination of the three primary texts, I aimed to answer the following questions:

- How can we define and categorize the unreliable narrator?
- What role does the author play in terms of the unreliable narrator?

My first research question is one that many have asked and offered answers to. This study simply aims to offer a down-to-earth approach by using Heyd's pragmatic model and method as a guide,

taking into account the standards we all subconsciously uphold within social communication. Each narrator is defined as unreliable due to their violating the Cooperation Principle and its maxims — in other words, by violating these standard everyday social rules involving the quantity or amount of information that's given, as well as the quality or truth of what's discussed in conversation. Charlie, Cady and Caden each break these social constructs in different ways. Yet, the “why” of unreliable narration comes back to the motivations mentioned before — each character's psychological motivations categorize them respectively, and divulge the level to which they lie knowingly or not.

At the onset of this study, I felt that Charlie best exemplified the narrator lying out of self-denial, that Cadence best exemplified the wilfull liar, and that Caden best exemplified the unintentional liar. While I still hold the belief that each text truly does showcase their main typology brilliantly, I also came to find that both Charlie and Cadence carried characteristics of the other classifications. Despite my attempts to leave the fallible narrator out of this study, Charlie has a child-like persona and due to this he does present in some ways as a fallible narrator, and therefore the unintentional liar. Cadence, although the culprit of the twist at the end of the novel, cannot be found completely willful in her lies, and so, as we've seen, she carries a mix of all three categories, dependent on the portion of the novel under examination. The blending of typologies within a single narrator is an interesting aspect of my findings, but not completely unexpected as a truly dynamic character will possess many different personalities traits, just as any living person does. I find the blending of typologies to have created a richer reading experience, and overall examination.

This pragmatic analysis also seeks to argue against the implied author, by choosing to focus on the words of the real authors themselves. Chbosky, Lockhart and Shusterman are all

referred to often by touched readers in the forums and reviews looked at throughout the course of the research here. It is true that the argument can be made for the concept of the implied author and its validity due to readers not being able to know the real author of each text on a personal level. However, in our current social scene, readers are able to connect with authors in a way that wasn't true of the mid- twentieth century. Authors are giving more interviews and insights into their work, both in print and online, through media outlets such as YouTube and Goodreads, than the researchers of Booth's age would have thought possible. It's for this reason that readers feel connected to these authors, and speak of the many ways they've influenced their lives through these primary texts. Readers are aware of the fictionality of a text, and therefore are always aware of the "extrafictual text producer" (Heyd 221) providing us that fictionality. One reader states, "E. Lockhart makes it clear very early on that she may not be the most reliable of narrators" (Kristopher), while another tells us, "The disorientation Shusterman evokes through the first-person narration requires some patience, but it's an apt, effective way to bring readers into nightmarish anxiety and despair — and out of it" (Baker). Lockhart, Shusterman and Chbosky are not the narrators in the stories they've produced; yet readers still refer to them as the intentional creators — and voices — within each work. All of this is to say that it no longer matters if the implied author stands as a construct, nor does it matter if the authors set out with the intention to deceive — readers will continue to make claims about the authors' intentions regardless, for as Pettersson states, "all such manipulation is of course due to the author in the first place, even though it may be channeled by narrators" (116). It's for this reason that it's becoming more important than ever to recognize the people who make these discussions possible within our research to begin with.

7.2 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

A study on unreliable narration would not be without its limitations and possibilities for further exploration. As the two are so closely intertwined, I will highlight both the aspects that inhibit the findings offered in this thesis, as well as how these limitations point to the avenues available for further research.

7.2.1 Lack of Scholarship

Throughout my literary examination, it became evident that there is not a wide breadth of literary sources written on two of the primary texts — both *We Were Liars* and *Challenger Deep*. As both novels are relatively new, their findings chapters in comparison with *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a novel that has not only been in existence for fourteen years, but has also been critically acclaimed and widely popular, allows for perhaps an uneven examination. In addition, there were few scholarly sources available on current popular fiction using the unreliable narrator, especially within the realm of children's literature. While this study aims to add to the small amount of literature available specifically regarding unreliable narration in children's literature, as well as the three titles examined, its other aim is to offer an updated view of unreliable narration by examining three current novels. Despite the fact that the primary texts are young adult novels, the analysis here adds to all scholarship on unreliable narration itself and seeks to draw attention to the growing list of titles available that use unreliable narration — we no longer have only *Lolita* or *The Turn of the Screw* available to us and it is time the literature we use in our research reflects this.

7.2.2 Reader Subjectivity

The readers I refer to throughout this study, it can be said, are those who view the texts in the same way I do. I recognize that not every reader will interpret the texts in the same way, or

agree with my findings. For this reason, the principal limitation to a study on unreliable narration is, in fact, reader subjectivity and is often discussed in the literature surrounding unreliable narration. Vera Nünning states, “Following Booth, most theorists reserve the term ‘unreliable’ for those narrators whose story is re-interpreted by readers in a way that deviates decisively from the tale the narrator intends to tell” (90). Looking at Charlie, Cadence or Caden, from the three primary texts, it’s easy to find ways to support this claim. Charlie intends to tell a story about his experience becoming a new high school student, yet the reader re-interprets it to become a story about how his aunt molested him. Cadence intends to tell a story about spending the summer on her family island, two years after being away due to an accident, yet the reader re-interprets it as a story about how she spent time with the ghosts of her deceased cousins and lover. And, Caden intends to tell a story about time spent on a ship at sea, yet the reader re-interprets it as hallucinations due to his mental illness. In all three of these cases though, I’m the reader, and these are *my* re-interpretations. What it truly comes down to in terms of “the identification of an unreliable narrator” is “both textual information and extratextual information located in the reader’s mind” (A. Nünning 99). The knowledge and experience we bring forward from our own lives will dictate how we view these texts — while I may view Cadence as a self-deceiver, some readers may stick to their opinion that she’s the mad-monologist, and is just unintentionally unreliable, and someone who suffers from schizophrenia may feel that the ship Caden sails on is entirely authentic. In essence, “the interpretation hinges upon the question of untrustworthiness” (V. Nünning 90), for each reader has their own guide to use in their choice to trust. Heyd argues “cooperation is such a strong cognitive pattern that its violation remains relatively stable across time and space (240). While I agree that it is difficult to argue against unreliability when looking at the evidence within the violations of Grice’s CP and maxims in each of the texts, I also can’t

deny the fact that each reader will bring their own “extratextual information” as supporting materials for the story he or she embarks on, and this knowledge may influence their view of the text.

7.2.3 Fluctuation of Unreliability

While reader subjectivity is a limitation, it also becomes an interesting area for further research. In all three primary texts, the story ends with each narrator coming to a realization — Charlie realizes his aunt molested him all that time ago, Cady realizes the Liars are dead and therefore were never truly there, and Caden realizes (with the help of his medication) that his captain represented his mental illness, and that his health caused him to see the things he saw. From a reader’s perspective, can we say each narrator walks away from their story as a reliable character? Or is their unreliability a permanent attribute, attached to them despite their end? I define the unreliable narrator as a narrator who tells their story in an unreliable way, due to the nature of their personality, situation, or experience. Charlie, Cady and Caden all *tell* their story unreliably, and made me feel as though I could not trust them throughout the reading process — therefore they remain unreliable forevermore. Yet, for some a “characters’ frankness about their misdemeanor may override their unreliability. That is, they gain some sympathy — in Phelan’s (2008) terms, bond with their readers — in rather candidly confessing their horrid deeds” (Pettersson 113). The question of whether a narrator can ever truly be called “unreliable” is one that will unremittingly leave room for further exploration.

7.2.4 The Reliable Character

Throughout my analysis of each of the three primary texts, I noted a common thread — the presence of a “reliable” character. In other words, each text has a character that has a close relationship to its narrator, and whom I felt, as a reader, was the rational voice in its respective

story. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Sam, is an influential voice for Charlie; In *We Were Liars*, Gat is Cady's voice of reason; and in *Challenger Deep*, Callie is the voice of experience for Caden. Each of these characters brought forward a subtle level-headedness that is required, in my mind, to balance out the unreliable narrator. For example, Sam's defining moment is when she tells Charlie, "You can't just sit there and put everybody's lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love" (Chbosky 200) — this statement touches on a large reason why Charlie is unreliable, that being his passivity and naïve concept of love. For Cady, Gat challenges her entitlement and status by pointing out the many luxuries she's been afforded in her life, something that no one else in the novel acknowledges. In each of their conversations, he consistently attempts to lead Cady to understanding, to the point where he says, "I think we're telling you, but you can't hear it" (Lockhart 193). Cady's unreliability stems from her self-denial, which is exactly what Gat's statement encapsulates. For Caden, his mental illness is new and this is the first time he's in a psychiatric hospital. Unlike Caden, Callie is a seasoned patient who knows what to expect. Although, Caden's schizophrenia is the reason for his unreliability, Callie tells us that we do "find ourselves. Although it's a little harder each time. Days pass. Weeks. Then we squeeze ourselves back into the skin of who we were before all this. We put the pieces back together and get on with things" (Shusterman 181), and in this enlightened moment, we are reminded that what's happening to Caden's mind is out of anyone's control. In each of these instances, Sam, Gat and Callie call attention to each narrator's unreliability by stating aloud what the reader is thinking, yet what no other character will say, making them a steady and true thread within their story. It would be interesting to analyze other novels that use the unreliable narrator, in order to see if the "reliable" relationship is present within all stories told this way.

Unreliable narration is an area that has many avenues available to explore, both within children's literature and outside of it. A study comparing multiple novels that use unreliable narration due to mental illness may be the next step, for, as we've seen, mental health plays a large role in all three primary texts, and I suspect is used most often in young adult novels. There is also a need for further research on unreliable narration within children's novels ages 9–12, as this area is widely understudied, and as mentioned earlier, the child's voice provides a wealth of possibility for unreliable narration. Having always had an interest in the unreliable narrator and its ability to invoke an interactive reading experience, I would be curious to see research that takes into account multiple readers through a quantitative study, rather than qualitative. It would be most interesting to be able to witness the reading experience and to be able to see if this "sense of collusion" Booth claims exist between reader and author is present for all readers or only some.

7.3 Concluding Thoughts

The final question posed in this study, asked:

- What are the literary merits of the device? How do the primary texts exemplify these literary merits of the device?

An apparent literary merit of unreliable narration is the power it has to touch on and discuss difficult topics without hitting readers over the head. Its subtlety is its defining quality — the ability to move through the narrative, quietly, in order to bring the light of revelation at the end. It becomes then, a platform to stand on, as seen in *Challenger Deep*; a hand to hold in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*; and a magnifying glass by which to examine in *We Were Liars*. Each text uses the device to highlight deep issues the narrator is going through, many of them issues that are difficult to talk about.

As Caden states:

We always look for the signs we missed when something goes wrong. We become like detectives trying to solve a murder, because maybe if we uncover the clues, it gives us some control. Sure, we can't change what happened, but if we can string together enough clues, we can prove that whatever nightmare has befallen us, we *could* have stopped it, if only we had been smart enough. (*Challenger Deep* 129)

In many cases, as a reader of unreliable narration we haven't realized the clues laid out for us until the book is near finished. It's a form of reading that sometimes requires flipping back through pages, connecting the dots and seeing the story through a different lens. The way the text invites readers to backtrack and look at what they may have missed makes for an interactive reading, one that requires active participation. When we discover a clue in the text, we regain control — we're back on the same playing field as the author. But when something slips by us (maybe Charlie's sexual abuse, or Cady's ghosts), we are in the dark, along with the narrator. It's this process that becomes the overarching literary merit the text possess — the way it makes you think, and the way it makes you feel, and the way it pushes you to see things you may not have seen at first.

In *Challenger Deep*, Caden asks the Captain if the ship has a name. The Captain replies, "To name her is to sink her ... That which we name takes greater weight than the sea it displaces. Ask any shipwreck" (13). In this study, there has been much placed on the shoulders of unreliable narration, and as I've sought to define the many aspects of the device it has indeed taken on further weight. Yet, my hope is that unreliable narration will continue to be an area that intrigues researchers and readers alike, and that we do not let it sink within the vast sea of narratology, but rather remain afloat to be explored once more.

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