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The Unreliable Narrators of E. Lockhart's *We Were Liars* and *Family of Liars*

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This thesis argues that the unreliable narrators of E. Lockhart's novels *We Were Liars* and *Family of Liars* are utilized to hide information from readers and create suspense. *We Were Liars* follows Cadence Sinclair Eastman, who is trying to restore her memories of the accident that happened two years prior. The unreliability of the character-narrator is evident at the start of the tale as Cadence's fragmented memories prevent her from forming a coherent narrative. The thesis also analyzes the novel's prequel, *Family of Liars*, in which Cadence's aunt, Carrie, narrates the story of her worst mistake to her deceased son. In contrast to Cadence, Carrie's unreliability is addressed explicitly at the beginning of the story as she explains that she might not be able to tell the story truthfully.

The thesis uses elements of the rhetorical approach and cognitive literary studies to analyze the use of unreliable narrators in the primary material. The rhetorical approach is used to examine the story-level of the narratives and the textual clues of unreliability, which the author has encoded into the narrative. For this purpose, the thesis applies James Phelan's framework of six different types of unreliable narration to analyze this textual evidence. Moreover, it uses Greta Olson's taxonomy of the fallible narrator and the untrustworthy narrator to express how the narrators differ from each other. The cognitive approach will be used to discuss the effects of unreliable narration on the reading experience. To explore these effects, the thesis builds on the theories of Lisa Zunshine and Vera Tobin to address how Lockhart's narrators are used to evoke tension that eventually releases in the climax of the stories.

The thesis shows that the narrators are utilized differently to maintain the element of tension in the novels. Cadence's fallibility and partial memories make it difficult for the reader to be certain of her version of the events throughout the story. On the other hand, Carrie's unreliable nature is clearly stated to the reader at the start of the story, but it is deeply buried by the author to build tension and surprise the readers with the plot twist.

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1 Introduction

Thrillers tend to keep us on the edge of our seats with their unexpected twists and turns. The genre offers readers a chance to explore the more sinister side of human nature in a controlled environment, which can evoke intense feelings such as suspense or even anxiety. This feeling of unease is created with the help of different literary devices, for instance, an unreliable narrator. Unreliable narrators are commonly featured in thrillers as they can fool the reader by hiding the truth about the narrative's events (Pinborough 2017). These kinds of narrators also engage readers as they are left wondering what is true or false. The thriller genre has been popular for years because readers tend to seek comfort in books in which good triumphs over evil (Sutton 2018). In recent years, the popularity of YA thrillers has spiked as younger readers yearn for the comfort of thrillers due to them growing up in complex global circumstances (O'Sullivan 2023). One of the most popular thrillers aimed at a younger audience is E. Lockhart's psychological thriller *We Were Liars* (2014), which quickly rose to the *New York Times* bestseller list when it was first published. After its initial release, the book propelled back to the bestseller list in 2020 when the members of the online community, BookTok, began to recommend it on the platform (Murray, 2021). The book's popularity led to the writing of its prequel *Family of Liars* (2022). The novels share similarities as they are both told from the perspective of an unreliable narrator who knowingly or unknowingly misleads the reader. This thesis argues that E. Lockhart utilizes unreliable narrators in *We Were Liars* and *Family of Liars* to obscure information from the reader and create suspense.

The previous discussions concerning these novels have predominantly emphasized the characterization in the stories instead of addressing the effects of unreliable narration in the novels. As there are no academic articles written on the novels, I will refer to reviews from the *New York Times* to examine how the novels have been previously analyzed. For instance, in her review of *We Were Liars*, Meg Rosoff (2014) comments on Lockhart's flat portrayal of the characters. In a similar vein, the discussions on *Family of Liars* have focused on the portrayal of the protagonist as a character rather than her unreliable nature. MJ Franklin (2022) follows the same pattern by stating that: "Carrie's journey is more of a character study than a follow-up thriller." This thesis, on the other hand, will offer a further nuance to the analysis of these novels by examining the use of unreliable narrators and their connection to the thriller genre. In addition, the analysis aims to deepen our understanding of the use of

unreliable narrators in YA literature and explore how unreliable narrators can be deduced as such based on textual evidence.

To examine the credibility of Lockhart's narrators, I will utilize elements of rhetorical theory and cognitive literary theory to analyze both how the narrators' deviations from the truth can be identified, and what the effects of that deviation on readers might be. Firstly, as both novels contain figurative and misleading language, the thesis analyzes the story-level of the narratives and the textual signs of unreliability with the help of the rhetorical approach. I will examine the textual markers by applying James Phelan's framework of six different types of unreliability, which he introduces in his book *Living to Tell About It* (2005). His taxonomy will be explained in more detail in the theoretical section of this thesis. The cognitive approach to unreliability will be used to address the effect of unreliable narration in these novels. As the duology utilizes the narrators to maintain an element of suspense in the novels, I will analyze how their unreliability builds up tension, which eventually leads to the climax of the stories. To discuss this effect, I will utilize Vera Tobin's book *Elements of Surprise* (2018) and her different strategies for creating a successful surprise. In addition, I will refer to Lisa Zunshine's book *Why We Read Fiction* (2006) to explore the concept of source monitoring and how readers can forget to pay attention to their sources during reading. These theories will be introduced in depth in the theoretical section as well. The thesis combines these approaches in order to gain a detailed view of the unreliability of Lockhart's narrators and the effects of unreliable narration on the reading experience.

As both of these narrators have different motives for withholding information, it is important to categorize them to understand why their unreliability might generate surprises for the reader. For this reason, I will delve into their characteristics to provide evidence on why their unreliability is crucial to the mystery of the novels. According to Greta Olson's article "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" (2003), there are two types of unreliable narrators: fallible and untrustworthy. Fallible narrators tend to mislead the readers because of their lack of knowledge and untrustworthy ones are motivated to lie due to their self-interest or dishonest nature (Olson 2003, 96). In *We Were Liars*, Cadence provides an example of fallibility as her naïve nature influences her narration. On the other hand, the narrator of *Family of Liars* intentionally lies to her narratee to better her image, which is a prime example of the untrustworthy narrator. As both narrators represent a different type of

unreliability, I will compare them to analyze whether the textual signals of their unreliability differ and how each of them creates suspense in the novels.

The two novels analyzed here were written by Emily Jenkins, who writes under the pen name E. Lockhart. For the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the author by her pen name E. Lockhart in this thesis. Lockhart has published various works of literature from children's picture books to YA romance novels, but she is best known for her young-adult thrillers such as *We Were Liars*, which made the shortlist for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (Drabble, 2014). Most of her YA thrillers, such as *We Were Liars* (2014), *Genuine Fraud* (2017), and *Family of Liars* (2022), are told from the point of view of an unreliable character-narrator who obscures important information from the readers to maintain the element of suspense in the novels. In an interview, Lockhart addresses the similarities between these novels, as they all feature a morally ambiguous heroine who commits a crime over the course of the story (Lockhart, 2022). As her narratives explore these kinds of ethical dilemmas, they allow the reader to scrutinize human conditions and what we are capable of in the right circumstances. In addition, the novels provide readers with mental stimulation as they have to figure out the true events of the storyworld by themselves without the help of a trustworthy narrator.

We Were Liars (2014) tells the story of Cadence Sinclair Eastman, who struggles with recalling the events of the summer two years prior. The unreliability of the character-narrator is evident throughout the story as Cadence's fragmented memories and addiction to painkillers make it difficult to trust her version of events. At the beginning of the narrative, Cadence recounts past childhood summers and explains that she formed a deep friendship with two of her cousins Johnny and Mirren, as well as Gat, the nephew of her aunt's partner. Towards the end of that summer, she suffered a serious head injury and lost most of her memories of the events leading up to the accident. The readers are led to believe that her friends survived the aftermath of the accident, but in fact, they all perished. Two years after the incident, Cadence decides to return to the island to recover her lost memories and reconnect with her friends, with whom she has not been in contact since the accident. She notices that they look exactly like they did two years ago, but their demeanor has changed significantly. As the narrative progresses, Cadence starts to get her memories back and eventually realizes that she convinced her friends to burn down the family mansion in an attempt to reunite their shattered family. The narrator learns more details about the fire at a

slow pace and finally recalls that her friends died from smoke inhalation and realizes that she has been interacting with their ghosts. The story ends with Cadence wishing farewell to her friends for the last time, as she now continues to live her life free of survivor's guilt.

Family of Liars (2022) is a prequel to *We Were Liars* in which the narrator, Carrie, tells the story of the worst mistake of her life to the ghost of her deceased son (Johnny from the earlier novel). Before delving into the story, the narrator acknowledges that it is difficult for her to tell this story truthfully due to her tendency to lie. At the beginning of the tale, the teenage version of Carrie travels to her family's private island and is surprised to find out that new guests are spending their vacation on the island. As the narrative progresses, Carrie becomes infatuated with one of the guests, Laurence "Pfeff" Pfefferman, who is not looking for a serious relationship, much to Carrie's dismay. According to the narrator, the pair do start a romantic relationship, which suddenly ends due to Pfeff cheating on her with her sister, Penny. After this, the narrating Carrie reports that Penny accidentally killed Pfeff that night, and how together they hid his body in the sea. This narrative goes on for a couple of chapters until Carrie finally reveals that she was the one who murdered Pfeff. In the aftermath, Carrie also reveals how she got away with the murder due to her privilege and the help of her family. The story ends with her admitting how she has finally received her punishment for the murder with the loss of her son, and that she will be trying to live a more truthful life from here on.

I open my discussion in this thesis by exploring the theoretical background of the concept of an unreliable narrator. I will introduce Wayne Booth's original model and how it has been criticized and updated by other scholars. In this chapter, I will also address the characteristics of the two approaches – the rhetorical and the cognitive – and discuss the central scholars of the thesis in more detail. In addition, I will explain the necessity of combining the cognitive approach and the rhetorical approach to analyze the credibility of Carrie and Cadence. The third chapter focuses on the textual markers, which indicate how the narrators deviate from the truth. I will utilize Phelan's framework of six types of unreliability and analyze the similarities and differences of the narrators based on textual evidence. Moreover, I will use Olson's taxonomy to demonstrate how the particular types of unreliability used for Cadence and Carrie influence their narration. The fourth chapter concentrates on how Lockhart utilizes the narrators to build tension in the story, which eventually releases in the reveal of the plot twist. I will utilize Tobin's strategies for generating surprises and Zunshine's source monitoring to explore the effects of Cadence's partial memories and the knowledge of

Carrie's unreliability for maintaining the element of tension in the novels. In addition, I will discuss some of the thriller genre conventions that are used to create suspense in Lockhart's novels. The chapter will end with a comparison of the narrators to explore how they differ from each other. Finally, the conclusion will consist of a summary of my findings and provide further suggestions for studying the topic.

2 Theoretical background

The literary device of the unreliable narrator was used by authors to mislead readers well before Wayne C. Booth first coined the term in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) and provided different kinds of methods for reading unreliability in literary texts (Pettersson 2005, 59). Since Booth created the original theory, it has been the basis of many academic papers on the subject. Scholars discussing the effect of unreliable narration tend to explore it through either a rhetorical or a cognitive lens. Similarly to Booth's original model, the studies on the rhetorical approach view unreliability as a rhetorical device encoded by the author (Shen 2013). Notably, scholars such as James Phelan and Greta Olson have refined the classic theory, expanded on its ideas, and even provided their taxonomy on how to detect an unreliable narrator. On the other hand, the cognitive approach emphasizes the reader's role in determining the narrator's credibility (Shen 2013). For this reason, scholars such as Ansgar Nünning have criticized Booth's model for not accounting for the reader's engagement in the reading process. In what follows, I will explain the original model in more detail, examine some of the updates scholars have made to it, and outline the combination of the rhetorical model and cognitive theory that I will myself take in my analysis of the two novels.

2.1 The Origins of the Concept

Wayne C. Booth's definition for the unreliable narrator in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) highlights the role of the implied author, who purposefully inserts textual clues for the reader about the unreliability of the narrator. According to him, a narrator is "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" (Booth 1961/1983, 143). In other words, the narrator and the implied author should be regarded as two different beings who do not share the same characteristics. Booth (1961/1983, 258) views unreliable narration as a form of irony that the implied author has encoded into the text. If attentive readers recognize this irony, they experience a narrative distance between the narrator and the implied author, and a secret communication occurs between the reader and the implied author behind the narrator's back (Booth 1961/1983, 258). This means that the implied author is sending a secret message about the unreliability of the narrator to the reader that the narrator does not understand as his values differ significantly from those of the implied author and the reader. Booth's view implies that the reader and the implied author share the same moral principles, therefore, the reader will understand the implied author's hints of the unreliable narration. However, the reader and the

implied author do not necessarily share similar values, which I argue complicates how the reader comprehends the unreliability of the narrator. For this reason, not all readers manage to enter the position of the implied reader and understand every detail that the implied author has encoded into the narrative.

Booth's view, therefore, does not fully take into consideration how it can be difficult for the reader to separate the narrator from the implied author as the implied author communicates with them through the narrator. As the implied author does not directly address the reader, the readers form their perceptions of him based on the textual signs that he leaves for them. For this reason, readers from different backgrounds could have varying perceptions of the values of the implied author, which could make it more difficult to determine the narrator's unreliability. Misreadings of texts are common, as readers do not necessarily understand the irony of the unreliable narration. Booth himself did address the fact that many of his students have failed to comprehend the intention behind these kinds of stories, which feature an unreliable narrator (Booth 2005, 76–77). The original model does address the importance of authorial intention, but it ends up diminishing the subjectivity of the reading experience because readers do not necessarily share the same opinions about the unreliability of the narrator.

Booth's model has garnered critique from scholars, who have attempted to update it, either to include elements of cognitive theory or give it a more rhetorical nuance. These critiques will be further addressed below as I introduce both of the approaches and the scholars that I will be referring to in this thesis. As I will combine the rhetorical approach and the cognitive approach to scrutinize the use of unreliable narrators, I will explain the differences between these two approaches and what aspects of them I will be using to analyze Lockhart's narrators. The following sub-sections will show how scholars have updated the original model through the years and present the theories that I will utilize to analyze Lockhart's novels.

2.2 Rhetorical Approach to Unreliability

Following in Booth's footsteps, the literary scholar James Phelan emphasizes in his book *Living to Tell About It* (2005) the role of the implied author in determining the narrator's unreliability. Similarly to Booth, he considers that narratives are being carefully designed by the implied author to convey certain ideas to the reader (Phelan 2005). In comparison to Booth, Phelan (2005, 48) acknowledges the significance of readerly engagement in detecting

unreliability by stating that “readers often differ and that accounting for that can be a valuable critical enterprise.” Phelan (2005, 49) revises the original theory by introducing his model of unreliability, which combines the activities of the narrators with the activities of the audience to thoroughly analyze the effect of unreliable narration. He established the model initially in his article “The Lessons of ‘Weymouth’” in which he explores the unreliable narration of *The Remains of the Day* with the scholar Mary Patricia Martin (Phelan and Martin 1999, 93–95). In the model, narrators typically perform three roles in the narrative, which are called reporting, interpreting, and evaluating (Phelan 2005, 50). These roles can occur simultaneously or in different parts of the narrative if the narrator deviates from these narrator functions, the readers should then realize that the implied author is hinting at the unreliability of the narrator (Phelan 2005, 50). The narrator’s inability to perform the functions influences the audience to perform one of the following roles: they either reject the words and reconstruct a more plausible explanation, or they accept what the narrator says but supplement the account (Phelan 2005, 50–51). The approach differs from Booth’s as it also takes into consideration the functions of the audience in analyzing the textual features of unreliable narration and highlights how the implied author and the audience influence each other. For instance, readers can supplement the story based on their views of the events based on the textual signals, which could differ from the original intention of the implied author (Phelan 2005, 51). As I will be examining the unreliability of Lockhart’s narrators through a rhetorical and cognitive lens, I utilize Phelan’s model in my analysis of the story-level of the novels as it takes into account the authorial intention of leaving textual markers of unreliability for the reader and considers the audience’s role in determining unreliability.

Phelan’s model also refines Booth’s original theory by identifying six different kinds of unreliability that occur on different axes of unreliable narration (Phelan and Martin 1999, 95). In comparison to Booth, this model allows us to distinguish different kinds of unreliability, as it combines the activities of narrators and audiences (Phelan and Martin 1999, 94). These six types are called misreporting, misinterpreting/misreading, misevaluating, underreporting, underinterpreting/underreading, and underregarding (Phelan 2005, 51). Phelan utilizes the terms misinterpreting/misreading as well as underinterpreting and underreading interchangeably in his book, but this thesis will solely utilize the terms misinterpreting and underinterpreting to avoid any confusion. Phelan’s (2005, 51) first three categories of unreliability signify that narrators express something untruthful in their narration (misreporting), come to the wrong conclusion on matters (misinterpreting), or their values

differ from those of the implied author (misregarding). The other types of narration that he introduces occur when the narrator leaves important information out of the narrative (underreporting), fails to fully comprehend the events of the storyworld (underinterpreting), or does not manage to thoroughly conform to the values of the implied author (underregarding) (Phelan 2005, 52). These elements of unreliability are present in both of Lockhart's novels as the narrators have their own specific reasons for failing to tell the story truthfully to their narratees. I will use these categories to examine the story-level of the narratives and analyze the textual clues, which indicate that the narrators should be deemed unreliable. The thesis will also consider how the six types occur on different axes of unreliability as they can be present only one at a time or simultaneously with other types of unreliability (Phelan 2005, 50). In other words, unreliable narrators can be reliable on some axes of the story despite their tendency to dishonesty on others. According to Phelan and Martin (1999, 94), Booth's model only assesses the narrator's unreliability on the axes of events and values. The original definition did not focus on the axis of facts or the axis of knowledge and perception, which Phelan analyzes in his model (Phelan 2005, 34). The inclusion of more axes provides evidence of different kinds of unreliability and allows me to scrutinize if Lockhart's narrators deviate from the truth consistently or whether they are truthful in some parts of their stories.

As Cadence and Carrie have different reasons for misleading the readers, their characteristics should also be examined to analyze how these narrators are utilized in the narrative. The rhetorical approach has broadened the concept of unreliable narration by introducing different kinds of personality characteristics for unreliable narrators. Greta Olson (2003, 96) points out in her article "Reconsidering Unreliability" that Booth uses different words in his book, such as "fallible" and "untrustworthy", to describe different types of narrators. According to Olson (2003, 96), Booth does not examine this idea further and her own typology for identifying different types of unreliable narration refines Booth's concepts of the fallible and untrustworthy narrator and defines them more clearly. The fallible narrator type refers to a narrator who is mistaken about their worldview or whose perceptions are biased (Olson 2003, 101). In *We Were Liars*, Cadence is fallible, as her reporting of the storyworld's events is clouded by her subjective views and emotions. On the other hand, Lockhart's novel *Family of Liars* provides a prime example of the untrustworthy narrator, which means that the narrator is purposefully lying to the narratee due to current self-interest or an ingrained behavioral trait (Olson 2003, 102). For instance, in *Family of Liars*, the narrating Carrie alters the story to suit her best interests as she aims to present herself positively to her narratee/son. As the

motivations of Cadence and Carrie to hide information from their audience differ significantly, I will be utilizing Olson's typology to address how their narrator type can lead the reader to make wrong assumptions about the mysteries of the novels.

2.3 Cognitive Approach to Unreliability

One of the main reasons why Booth's model has been criticized by scholars is that his view of unreliability does not account for the reader's response to the narrative. The cognitive approach highlights the reader's role in deeming the narrator unreliable and tends to disregard Booth's idea of the implied author's involvement in the creation of an unreliable narrator (Shen 2011). For instance, Ansgar Nünning (1999, 35) has argued in his article "Reconceptualizing the Theory, History, and Generic Scope of Unreliable Narration" that Booth's definition of the implied author is quite vague and theoretically incoherent. I agree with Nünning that it can be difficult, especially for non-academic audiences, to recognize how the implied author differs from the narrator. I do, however, disagree with Nünning's view of preferring a new concept – the inferred author, which readers construct in their minds when they are reading – to the implied author as it dismisses the author's role in the creation of the narrative. Booth (2005, 77–78) defended the concept of the implied author later by arguing that the actual author creates the implied author, who is a better version of the real author. This suggests that the authors choose to represent themselves in a certain manner in novels and show the reader what they want the reader to see. However, readers can also form their own impressions of the actual authors based on the text and that impression may not be what the author intended. This could even hinder their capability to recognize the unreliability of the narrator. For instance, Booth (1961/1983, 324) discusses how readers do not necessarily deem the narrator of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) unreliable when they do not comprehend the irony behind his narration. If the readers do not understand the implied author's signals, they can misinterpret the narrative and the message of the implied author. Booth (2005, 86) does acknowledge that the text is divorced from its creator and that the creator cannot control how others view the authorial intention once the text is "out there". As the concept of the implied author is problematic in this way, cognitive literary theorists have revised Booth's theory to address how readers can recognize an unreliable narrator.

The task of figuring out the key elements of finding an unreliable narrator is quite difficult as we have no way of knowing how different readers react to narratives. The responses of readers are influenced by multiple factors, for instance, the reader's age, knowledge, mental

constitution, and nature (Pettersson 2005, 71). The readers' perception of unreliability could also be affected by the worldviews of the time. Vera Nünning (2004, 239) determined in her study of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) that readers born in different times view the reliability of the narrator differently. For instance, the readers of 1766 viewed the narrator as unreliable as the behavior of the narrator deviated from the norms of society, but more modern readers tended to misinterpret the novel (Nünning 2004, 238–239). As the rhetorical approach does not account for the differences of readers in determining unreliability, scholars such as Ansgar Nünning (2005, 92–93) have argued that the approach provides unclear evidence on how unreliability is apprehended in the reading process. The engagement of readers is significant to the cognitive approach as every reader interprets the text differently based on their background information.

The cognitive literary approach suggests a few ways to discuss how readers can unmask an unreliable narrator. In this thesis, I will refer to Lisa Zunshine, who argues in her book *Why We Read Fiction* (2006) that readers practice source monitoring if they start to suspect that the narrator is trying to fool them. Zunshine (2006, 78) combines elements of cognitive theory such as the Theory of Mind and metarepresentation with Phelan's (2005) model of unreliability to examine the readers' reactions to unreliability. Theory of the Mind refers to "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires. Thus, we engage in mind-reading when we ascribe to a person a certain mental state on the basis of her observable action" (Zunshine 2006, 6). In other words, readers tend to ascribe mental states to characters based on their behavior. Metarepresentation consists of tagging the source of representation to the content of the representation (Zunshine 2006, 47). The tagging specifies who is stating this information, for instance, "I think..." and the content of representation refers to the content, for example, "that it was going to rain..." (Zunshine 2006, 47). The capacity for metarepresentation allows us to keep track of our sources and consider if the narrator might be misleading us. Zunshine (2006, 51) specifies the concept of metarepresentation and introduces specific tags such as time-, place-, or agent-specifying source tags for figuring out the true events of the storyworld. These tags include agent-specifying source tags, which can help the reader accept the false representation as it is presented to us by an apparently trustworthy source (Zunshine 2006, 104). As Lockhart's narrators cannot be considered reliable sources of information, the reader has to rely on the other characters to determine the truth. For instance, the narrator of *We Were Liars* may report on details of the storyworld that did not occur according to other characters (Lockhart 2014).

This generates suspense in the novel because readers cannot be certain of what truly happened in the narrative. In addition, the readers should remember that the narrator is the only source of the readers' representations of other characters, therefore, they can easily adopt the narrator's perspectives of others and accept them as the truth. This is clear in both of Lockhart's novels as the author attempts to build tension in the novel by presenting the other characters as suspicious through the lens of the narrator. For these reasons, I will be utilizing Zunshine's theory of source monitoring to examine how the unreliable narrator maintains an element of suspense in Lockhart's novels.

To explore how Lockhart generates tension and aims to surprise the reader with the plot twist of these novels, I will be analyzing the texts with the help of Vera Tobin's strategies which indicate how to generate a successful surprise. Tobin presents these five categories in her book *Elements of Surprise* (2018), which focuses on the reader's reactions to surprise plot twists and unreliable narration. The categories are called frame shift, the managed reveal, finessing misinformation, burying information, and pleasures of the text (Tobin 2018, 89). In this thesis, I will be discussing all the concepts as they are all utilized in Lockhart's novels. Frame shift means that stories lead the reader to draw conclusions based on partial information and later on reveal the correct framing (Tobin 2018, 89). For instance, Carrie of *Family of Liars* first presents her sister as the killer of Pfeff and expresses that she decided to protect her and help her get rid of the body. When Carrie reveals that she was the one to commit the crime, the perspective shifts as the reader recognizes that the narrator is only covering for herself rather than protecting her sister (Lockhart 2022, 263). The managed reveal refers to stories "in which important new facts or meanings come to light that are not merely startling but give us the impression that we are recognizing new truths about what went before" (Tobin 2018, 89). This kind of reveal is utilized in *We Were Liars* as Cadence finds out that their beloved family dogs died in the fire, which explains how the rest of the family reacted when she asked about them (Lockhart 2014, 79–80). The third strategy finessing misinformation means that stories feed false information to readers to later correct it (Tobin 2018, 89). In *Family of Liars*, the reader is encouraged to believe that the Sinclairs do not care for the narrator, Carrie, as she is not related to them by blood. The information is proved to be false when her adoptive father protects her from getting incarcerated (Lockhart 2022, 274–275). Tobin's (2018, 89) strategy of burying information occurs when stories attempt to hide important information from readers, which in retrospect can be seen as being available the whole time. In *Family of Liars*, the narrator admits to being unreliable at the

start of the narrative and Lockhart tries to get readers to overlook this information to surprise them with the plot twist (Lockhart 2022, 5). The final strategy, pleasures of the text, refers to source monitoring and how immersion in the story can affect the reader's ability to keep track of the sources (Tobin 2018, 119). For instance, in *We Were Liars*, the narrator expresses her distrust of her friends, who seem to be hiding information from her, which could influence readers' views of the group if they forget to monitor their sources. These categories will help me to analyze how these narrators and novels generate tension, which engages the reader to keep their interest in the stories.

3 Unveiling the Unreliable Narrator: A Rhetorical Approach to Unreliable Narration

Before analyzing how the reveal of an unreliable narrator can be utilized to generate suspense, it is necessary to discuss the textual clues regarding the unreliability of Carrie and Cadence. As the thesis will examine both the cognitive and the rhetorical approaches to unreliability, this chapter focuses on the rhetorical model and addresses the textual evidence that indicates how these narrators deviate from the truth, whereas the following chapter will discuss more in detail the cognitive model and the ways that readers are likely to react to those deviations. As discussed in the previous chapter, I will refer to James Phelan's framework of six types of unreliable narration, which consists of concepts such as misreporting, underreporting, misinterpreting, underinterpreting, misregarding, and underregarding (Phelan 2005, 51). These categories will be explained in depth in the subchapters below. In addition, I will use Olson's taxonomy to categorize Lockhart's narrators and demonstrate how Cadence and Carrie's narrator type influences their narration. First, I will discuss how the narrators fail to report the events of the narrative reliably, then I will move on to analyzing the interpretations of the narrators, and finally focus on the morals of the narrators. At the end of the chapter, I will present concluding remarks on the results and review the narrators' similarities and differences.

3.1 Misreporting and Underreporting

The purpose of narrators is to report the events of the storyworld to their audience. If the narrator fails to perform the task reliably, they are considered to be misreporting or underreporting to the reader. Misreporting signifies that the narrator has told something untrue to the audience and underreporting means that the narrator has left crucial information out of the narrative (Phelan 2005, 50–51). As both of the narrators in the *Liars* duology often fail to report the events truthfully for different reasons, it is essential to first examine their unreliability in the context of their individual stories before comparing them with one another.

We Were Liars begins with the narrator, Cadence, exhibiting misreporting as she downplays the dysfunctional family dynamics of the Sinclairs and chooses to present them in a positive light to the unnamed narratee. At the beginning of the narrative, Cadence informs the narratee that the Sinclairs should be considered a perfect family by uttering: "Welcome to the beautiful Sinclair family. No one is a criminal. No one is an addict. No one is a failure. The Sinclairs

are athletic, tall, and handsome. We are old-money Democrats. Our smiles are wide, our chins square, and our tennis serves aggressive” (Lockhart 2014, 3). This may paint a naive reader an idyllic picture of the entire family, as on the surface, it suggests that there are no tensions within the family. However, attentive readers recognize Cadence’s fallibility because she is allowing the perceptions of others to influence her views (Olson 2003, 96). This is clear as her grandfather and mother constantly remind her of how perfect their family is, and the narrator even reminisces about hearing the stories of “the legendary Sinclairs” (Lockhart 2014, 26). For this reason, the narrator is seemingly oblivious to the dictatorship of her grandfather, who reigns over the family and affects their relationships with each other. Over the course of the story, Cadence recognizes that the façade of unity does not exist as she comes to remember how her grandfather encouraged her mother and aunts to fight over their future inheritance (Lockhart 2014, 160–161). Cadence is herself instructed to beg for her grandfather’s support in order to help her mother keep the private island: “I was supposed to make Granddad feel in control when his world was spinning because Gran had died. I was to beg him by praising him — never acknowledging the aggression behind his question” (Lockhart 2014, 161). The passage indicates that Cadence has finally become disillusioned by her family towards the end of the narrative. Of course, attentive readers may deduce the troubled family dynamics through Cadence’s stories, which she writes to an unnamed narratee throughout the novel. The stories are variations of different fairytales, and they often help her express her emotions about her family. These tales do not explicitly state her feelings regarding the Sinclairs, but they often feature three princesses who are willing to do anything to please their father in order to inherit the entire kingdom (Lockhart 2014, 43–45). The variations of fairytales are a coping mechanism for the narrator to come to terms with her tumultuous family. The narrator omits crucial information about her family, but the reader can realize the true dynamics of the family by reading these variations of fairytales, which truthfully depict the events and characters of the storyworld.

Cadence’s family dynamics have even influenced her ability to process her emotions, which causes her to underreport certain events. The narrator has been taught from a young age to suppress her emotions; therefore, she has never learned how to face her feelings. For instance, she cannot explicitly express her sadness over her father’s decision to divorce her mother and describes her sadness by stating: “My veins opened. My wrists split. I bled down to 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. Especially not Mummy” (Lockhart 2014, 29–30).

The metaphor could initially confuse the readers as the situation occurs suddenly and no one else in the room seems to notice anything unusual. I will discuss this imagery in detail and how it is used to evoke suspense in readers in the fourth chapter of the thesis. Cadence underreports these emotional moments as she is not allowed to show any signs of emotion due to the Sinclairs' unwritten rule of repressing painful memories. If she does react emotionally, her mother quickly corrects her behavior. For instance, when the narrator is having a visibly emotional reaction to her parents' divorce, her mother orders her to "be normal now" and "don't cause a scene" (Lockhart 2014, 5–6). For this reason, Cadence underreports details of the accident as she finds it painful to recall the traumatic memory of what happened to her two years ago. The narrator even seems to subconsciously remember the fate of her friends but chooses to underreport it as the truth is too agonizing for her. For example, she appears to recall the accident as she is briefly overcome by sadness and anxiety when arrives on the island and ponders:

It all seems so sad, so unbearably sad for a second, to think of the lovely old maple with the swing. We never told the tree how much we loved it. We never gave it a name, never did anything for it. It could have lived so much longer. I am so, so cold. (Lockhart 2014, 64).

Evidently, the narrator is subconsciously remembering the accident and mourning the loss of her friends as the maple tree is still alive despite her claims in the passage. The narrator underreports her distressing memories and encounters to shield herself from remembering the horrific details of the fire as she struggles to overcome her grief and guilt over the fire.

In comparison to Cadence, the narrator of *Family of Liars* misreports purposefully to further her aims. In this novel, the present-day version of the narrator presents the "earlier life events of an experiencing self" (Cohn 1978, 145). The narrating Carrie tends to spread misinformation to portray herself in a positive light to her son, the narratee. Thus, the narration is influenced by the narrator's knowledge of her audience, which affects her ability to be truthful in her narration (Sternberg and Yacobi 2015, 357). For example, the narrating I obscures crucial information regarding her involvement in Pfeff's murder as it could have an impact on her son's view of her. In the story, the narrating Carrie decides to misreport that her sister, Penny, killed Pfeff instead of her (Lockhart 2022, 202). The narrator presents herself as the hero of the story on purpose, which highlights the untrustworthy nature of the narrating I as she is misleading the narratee due to her current self-interest (Olson 2003, 97). The narrating Carrie continues this narrative by claiming: "I am choosing my sisters. I am

choosing their safety. I am their protector, and I can see the best way to protect them” which suggests that she is covering up the murder to protect her sisters from imprisonment when she is only protecting herself (Lockhart 2022, 205). Neither version of Carrie seems to be bothered by the consequences of her dishonesty as she has the tendency to keep pretending rather than accept her own failings. For instance, her experiencing I refuses to admit to anyone that she is drunk even though – as reported by her narrating I – her intoxication is very perceivable to others (Lockhart 2022, 148). In a similar vein to the narrating I, the experiencing Carrie seems to want to paint herself in a certain light to the other characters of the inner story as she wants to be considered a credit to the family. Carrie misreports to hide the imperfect details of her life, which would reveal her to be anything other than impeccable to her audience.

As the narrating Carrie misleads the reader by claiming her sister murdered Pfeff, she underreports her encounter with Pfeff’s ghost to conceal her involvement in the murder. Before the true version of the events is revealed to the reader, the experiencing I comes face-to-face with Pfeff’s ghost, who apologizes to her and argues that she should do the same for him: “You owe me an apology too” (Lockhart 2022, 250–251). The experiencing I refuses to do this as she feels that she did nothing wrong and that Pfeff should be the only one with feelings of regret over their unsuccessful summer fling (Lockhart 2022, 251). The exchange might seem strange to the reader because why Carrie should apologize to him as they do not yet know that she committed the murder. Moreover, the narrating Carrie has also presented Pfeff as a horrible human being prior to this conversation by uttering: “He was capable of rape. He was cruel. False-hearted. Untrustworthy” (Lockhart 2022, 233). The information leads the readers to take Carrie’s side and view Pfeff as the villain of the story if they have taken her words as the truth. As the reader learns that the narrating I was lying about Pfeff’s fate, they also come to question the way Pfeff is portrayed by Carrie and how justified it was to kill him. The narrating Carrie is purposefully leaving her involvement in the murder out of the narrative and making her narratee feel that she was in the right for murdering Pfeff.

The narrating I also attempts to justify his murder by presenting herself as the savior and downplays how estranged she is from her sisters. For example, the narrating Carrie depicts herself as her sisters’ trusted confidant by telling the narratee how her sisters often seek her guidance while uttering the words “We need you” to Carrie and leaving out the crucial information that she is not as close with them at the moment of the story (Lockhart 2022, 41).

This implies that the experiencing I knows her sisters fully and would do anything to keep them safe. However, the true state of their relationship is brought to light as her sister, Bess, accuses the experiencing I of being a narcissist, who has not paid any attention to Bess for most of the narrative (Lockhart 2022, 178–179). Bess states: “You never think of me, never talk to me. You basically try to get rid of me, any time you can” which provides the reader with more accurate information about the relationship between the sisters. The claim rings true for the experiencing Carrie as she has spent most of the summer chasing Pfeff around the island instead of paying attention to her sisters. This could make the reader question the narrating Carrie’s perspective of the storyworld as the instance indicates that she has been omitting crucial information in her narration. The narrating Carrie seems to highlight the close bonds between them to get the narratee to view Pfeff’s death as acceptable because the experiencing I was only trying to protect her immediate family.

3.2 Misinterpreting and Underinterpreting

Phelan’s (2005, 51–52) strategies of misinterpreting and underinterpreting are used to analyze how narrators can miscomprehend situations and present false information as a fact to the reader. According to his model, misinterpreting means that the narrator misunderstands something and comes to the wrong conclusion due to her limited knowledge and underinterpreting signifies that “the narrator’s lack of knowledge or perception yields an insufficient interpretation of an event” (Phelan 2005, 51–52). As the readers can adopt the perspective of a first-person narrator, these wrong conclusions can make it more difficult for them to uncover the mystery of the narrative.

Cadence’s fallible nature in *We Were Liars* often leads to her misinterpreting situations as she often does not recognize the true nature of certain situations because of her lack of knowledge. This is evident as the present-day Cadence narrates a situation that occurred when she was fifteen years old. At that time, she misinterpreted a conversation between her grandfather and her love interest, Gat, in which her grandfather warned Gat to stay away from Cadence by stating: “Watch yourself, young man” (Lockhart 2014, 25). The reader recognizes the situation as threatening because Cadence’s grandfather has been plainly racist towards Gat due to his skin color throughout the narrative. For example, when Gat first visits the island as a child, Cadence’s grandparents are displeased to see him even step onto the island and make him aware that he is an outsider in this family because he cannot even borrow their boat without the presence of one of their grandchildren (Lockhart 2014, 9). As Cadence has never

had to experience racism herself and was still young at this moment, she did not realize what her grandfather meant and thought that he was only trying to warn Gat of hitting his head on the slanted roof of the attic. This confrontation is also an example of Cadence underinterpreting the situation due to her fallible nature as she does recognize the tension between her grandfather and Gat but fails to realize the racial undertones behind her grandfather's warnings. As Gat explains his discomfort during this situation, Cadence is shocked over not comprehending their conversation and says: "I hadn't seen Graddad's interruption that way. I'd imagined he was embarrassed walking in on us" (Lockhart 2014, 165). The narrator does not even consider that Gat's skin color could be an issue to her grandfather and only thinks about her feelings of embarrassment because her grandfather has walked in on her having a romantic moment with a boy. Cadence's privilege and limited knowledge about the world influence her to draw wrong conclusions about events that she does not fully understand.

In *We Were Liars*, the narrator also misinterprets situations as she does not remember all the details that happened earlier. For instance, Cadence misinterprets the aftermath of the fire and tries to convince herself that starting it was the right thing to do to end the family feud. When she recalls that she and her friends started the fire, she utters: "We saved the family. They started over" (Lockhart 2014, 183). She naively concludes this without knowing the full extent of the consequences of the fire. As Cadence cannot remember the demise of her friends and is on a quest to discover the truth about her accident, she only sees that family members are no longer fighting for their inheritance and fails to realize how they all mourn for their dead family members. For instance, she underinterprets the reasons for her aunt's sickly appearance and nightly walks (Lockhart 2014, 79). As the narrator does not know of her cousins' deaths, she imagines that her aunt is only missing her partner. The narrator does not even listen to her friends, who attempt to make her see the drawbacks of the current situation. For instance, her cousin, Mirren, points out how: "My mother's scrubbing clean sinks till her hands are raw. Penny watches you sleep and writes down what you eat. They drink fuckload. They're getting drunk until the tears roll down their faces" but the narrator does not care about this as "peace" has come to the family, and she even highlights the benefits of the fire by stating: "It doesn't matter if I have headaches or Mirren is sick. It doesn't matter if Will has nightmares and Gat hates himself. We have committed the perfect crime" (Lockhart 2014, 183). As Cadence eventually realizes the negative consequences of the fire, she cries over the loss of her friends and views the fire as a crime. The narrator even says:

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. The aunts hug each other not because they are freed from the weight of Clairmont house and all it symbolized, but out of tragedy and empathy. Not because we freed them, but because we wrecked them, and they clung to one another in the face of horror (Lockhart 2014, 210).

The passage demonstrates the narrator's newfound understanding of how the fire did not solve their problems and only brought more pain to the family. The initial inability to recall the accident and her fallibility lead her to misinterpret situations, but as she realizes the consequences of her actions, she finally takes accountability at the end of the story.

In *Family of Liars*, Carrie differs significantly from Cadence as she tends to misinterpret her family's reactions to her sister's death because she is still coping with her own grief. At the beginning of the story, the narrating Carrie expresses that her family members do not care about the death of her youngest sister, Rosemary, because she does not see them mourn for her (Lockhart 2022, 134). The narrator seems to think that there is only one way of grieving and disregards the idea that others might mourn differently than her. When Carrie finally confronts her sisters about not feeling sorrow for the death of their younger sister, she accuses them of lying because she has not seen any of them shedding tears for Rosemary (Lockhart 2022, 218). As Carrie is still trying to come to terms with her sister's untimely passing, she does not notice how other family members reacted to the loss of their sister. For this reason, she also struggles to comprehend that her family members might be suppressing their painful memories regarding Rosemary's death as Sinclair do not typically express their emotions explicitly in the company of others. The experiencing I is surprised to hear that her sisters and parents do care for Rosemary as she hears them talk about how much they miss her (Lockhart 2022, 218, 237–238). The experiencing I misinterprets the feelings of others, which could initially influence the readers' perceptions of other characters, who do not appear to be distressed over the loss. The readers could initially view Carrie more positively than the rest of the family if they are convinced by her perspective of being the sole mourner of Rosemary. As the family's true emotions are revealed to readers, they could be surprised by their misconception of the characters and reconsider Carrie's narration.

The narrating Carrie also tells her narratee how the experiencing Carrie misinterprets the nature of her relationship with Pfeff and his intentions towards her, which ultimately leads to

her murdering him. Carrie is instantly fascinated by Pfeff when she experiences her first kiss with him during the Lemon Hunt (Lockhart 2022, 89). After this event, Carrie is convinced that they are meant to be with each other despite his reluctance to start a committed relationship. This is evident as Carrie and Pfeff visit a nearby island, where Pfeff focuses more on flirting with cashiers and spending time with his former girlfriend than deepening his connection with Carrie (Lockhart 2022, 106–107). The experiencing I does not seem to realize that Pfeff is only looking for a summer fling as she is trying to convince herself that he would be interested in starting a serious relationship with her. For example, Carrie even believes that Pfeff was simply biking around with his ex for a few hours because she does not want to accept that he would be interested in someone else than her (Lockhart 2022, 112). The views of the experiencing I could be clouded by Pfeff being the first boy to show any interest in her as the narrating I describes her non-existent love life as a teenager by uttering: “I already knew that boys didn’t think I was pretty” (Lockhart 2022, 14). As this is her chance to finally start a relationship with someone, she does not want to let go of her idea of him. When the characters finally get together, their relationship ends suddenly as she catches him cheating on her with her sister, Penny (Lockhart 2022, 169). If the reader had adopted Carrie’s perspective, he could have seen the relationship as more serious and been surprised by Pfeff’s deception. However, Carrie has clearly come to the wrong conclusion about the relationship as Pfeff never tells Carrie that he is searching for a serious relationship and argues after his entanglement with Penny that he has always been honest about who he is (Lockhart 2022, 195). The situation proves to the reader that the experiencing I has been misinterpreting their relationship and the other characters have been truthful in their warnings of Pfeff’s nature.

3.3 Misregarding and Underregarding

The final categories of Phelan’s taxonomy revolve around the moral values of the narrators and how they align with those of the implied author. Misregarding occurs when the narrator’s values differ from the ones of the implied author and underregarding “occurs when the narrator’s ethical judgment is moving along the right track but simply doesn’t go far enough” (Phelan 2005, 52). The implied authors of these narratives suggest that seeking power and wealth eventually leads to turmoil and destruction which the narrators do not often comprehend as they both come from a wealthy background.

In *We Were Liars*, the implied author is trying to convey that the atmosphere of extreme wealth and privilege can create a sense of entitlement and detachment from reality. Before the accident, Cadence mostly misregards this message as she recalls her conversations with her friends prior to the accident. For instance, one of these discussions relates to her grandfather's right to own the private island, which Gat challenges by stating: "Maybe land shouldn't belong to people at all. Or maybe there should be limits on what they can own" after which he brings up the poverty in India (Lockhart 2014, 17). The narrator is not as interested in the topic as it does not directly concern her and says: "I'll give you more chocolate if you shut up" (Lockhart 2014, 18). This shows how detached from reality the younger version of the narrator is as she does not want to empathize with those facing poverty and decides to move on to a more positive topic of discussion. The narrator's misregarding of the implied author's message is also evident in the present-day narrative as Cadence reveals that she does not know any of the staff members, who have been working for them for years, by name (Lockhart 2014, 103). As the narrator knows the names of every person who has visited the island, it is quite disrespectful that she has not cared enough to learn the names of their workers. The values of the implied author differ from those of the implied author, which suggests that she deviates from the truth.

The implied author also emphasizes the value of charity, which the narrator underregards throughout the story as she discusses the matter of donating. This is clear when Cadence starts to give away her material possessions that she no longer needs (Lockhart 2014, 46–47). She seems to agree with the implied author about the destructive nature of greed and gives away her possessions to purge her connection to the rest of her family. As she donates most of her things, she starts to recuperate her memories and heal from the traumatic event. However, she is partly doing this to subconsciously punish herself for indirectly causing the deaths of her friends. Her mother even suggests that she is trying to erase herself by donating so many of her things (Lockhart 2014, 75). This is essentially what she aims to accomplish by dying her hair a different color and trying to get rid of anything that would carry significance to her, such as the picture of her deceased grandmother (Lockhart 2014, 47). Cadence seemingly agrees with the implied author that one should not seek extreme wealth but does not donate her possessions out of the goodness of her heart but to punish herself for setting the fire.

The message of the implied author is similar in *Family of Liars* as the novel highlights the narrator's immoral actions. The moral values of Carrie are questionable throughout the story as neither version of the narrator appears to feel remorse over taking someone's life. For instance, the experiencing I is almost celebrating Pfeff's death with her sisters by telling stories around the bonfire immediately after getting rid of his body (Lockhart 2022, 223). In the present-day, the narrating I still does not want to take accountability for her actions that summer and tries to justify killing Pfeff to the narratee. She expresses that "Guys like him go to prison or run the country, and in neither case do they become anything more than rapists who fancy themselves rogues" which implies that Pfeff's death was rightful as he would not have changed in the future (Lockhart 2022, 271). As the implied author does not accept murdering someone, it is easy to determine that Carrie's difference in values from the implied author signifies that she should be considered unreliable.

Both versions of Carrie also reject the implied author's message of the destructive nature of wealth. The narrating I expresses the thoughts of her teenage self, who underregards the message of the implied author when she talks about her possible future. She explains on multiple occasions that she wants to start fresh in another environment without her family's fortune (Lockhart 2022, 278). This supports the implied author's message of the dangers of greed, but the idea does not go far enough as Carrie still rejects this at the end of the tale by deciding to stay within the family. Ultimately, the experiencing I and the narrating I misregard the narrator's message as both versions of her want their share of the "dirty money and unearned privilege" (Lockhart 2022, 279). As the narrating I recognizes that she got away with murder because of her social status, she wants to continue living her life with the advantages of wealth. At the end of the story, Carrie even explains that she stands behind her choice to remain with the Sinclairs as she chose this family and accepts the consequences of that choice (Lockhart 2022, 296). The narrator does not share the implied author's views that power corrupts as she seems to have forgotten what truly matters in life due to her greed.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

The textual signals of the narratives present that both narrators should be regarded as unreliable for various reasons. For example, Cadence and Carrie frequently misreport the events of the storyworld, however, their motivations differ significantly. In *We Were Liars*, Cadence tends to misreport the family dynamics of the Sinclairs because her perceptions are clouded by her fallibility as a narrator. Cadence is not being unreliable on purpose as she does

not recall what truly happened to her. However, the narrative implies that she subconsciously remembers the accident, but suppresses her emotions about it, similarly to the rest of her family. One example of this occurs when she chooses to forget about her questions regarding the accident in order to spend a relaxing day with Gat (Lockhart 2014, 114–115). Moreover, Cadence's unreliable narration is influenced by her tendency to underreport her emotions. This could confuse the readers at first since her way of metaphorically describing her emotions blends elements of fantasy and fiction. In a similar vein to Cadence, Carrie underreports her relationship with her family members. However, her narration is not influenced by fallibility but by her untrustworthy nature as she purposefully wants to misreport the events of the storyworld to her narratee. It should be noted that the narrating Carrie is aware of her audience throughout the story, and she can decide what parts of the story she wants to omit or change, which influences her narration as she aims to paint herself in a better light to her son. This is a significant difference from Cadence, who does not have the same control over the narrative, as she is narrating the story from the present. Both of the narrators are unreliable on the axes of facts as they present misinformation to the audience for most of the narrative. Carrie's narration does become more reliable at the end of *Family of Liars*, but Cadence's perspective cannot be trusted throughout the narrative. I will discuss this more in the following chapter of the thesis. Both of the narrators report inaccurate information to the reader, but their motivations for being unreliable differ significantly.

These narrators also tend to come to the wrong conclusions about the storyworld and the other characters. For this reason, they are unreliable on the axes of knowledge and perception as they frequently fail to perceive the intentions of others correctly. For example, in *We Were Liars*, Cadence's privileged background and naïve personality often influence her inability to recognize the racism behind her grandparents' actions toward Gat. Moreover, her fallible nature influences her perceptions about the fire as she truly does not recognize the drawbacks of the fire due to her inability to remember the events accurately. The narrator believes that she has united the family by burning the family mansion as she has not noticed how broken her family is because of the accident. When she remembers everything about the fire, she instantly feels remorse for her actions and comprehends how naïve she was. In comparison to Cadence, the experiencing Carrie fails to understand that her family members also grieve for Rosemary because she has not seen them mourning for her sister. The experiencing I also misconceives her relationship with Pfeff, which is one of the reasons why she kills him. I will further address how Carrie's mindreading of other characters creates suspense in the narrative

in the following chapter. Cadence admits her misconceptions and feels sadness over her mistakes, while Carrie does not take accountability for her misunderstandings and tries to justify her actions.

These narrators do have some similar qualities, for example, their moral values do not mostly align with those of the implied author. This also indicates that the narrators tend to be unreliable on the axes of events and values because they do not comprehend the message of the implied author. Cadence appears to agree with the implied author that excessive wealth corrupts when she starts to give away her material possessions. However, she does not appear to practice charity for the right reasons as she only donates her things to punish herself. This is clear when she tries to change every aspect of herself, such as the color of her hair, to subconsciously erase every detail of herself due to the survivor's guilt. In *Family of Liars*, the experiencing Carrie fully embraces her privilege as she recognizes the benefits that wealth can bring to a person. For instance, she only recognizes the positive sides of having excessive wealth as she has gotten away with murder because of her privileged past. Moreover, the narrating I does not appear to feel much remorse for murdering Pfeff as she implies that he would not have changed his ways and therefore the world is a better place without him. Carrie does doubt her family values at times, but she still wants to be a part of the Sinclair legacy despite their flaws. The morals of both narrators differ significantly from those of the implied author as they do not truly understand the underlying message of the story. They still seek to pursue their lifestyle even though they might have a better chance of healing from their trauma if they let go of their greed.

4 Unreliability and The Effect of Suspense: A Cognitive Approach to Unreliable Narration

Plot twists are an integral part of the thriller genre as they create suspense and surprise readers in order to keep them engaged in the story. These narratives build up tension until the end of the story when the implied author unveils the mystery of the narrative and presents the true version of the storyworld's events to the reader. This chapter will focus on the cognitive approach to unreliability and analyze how Cadence and Carrie's unreliability creates suspense in their stories. To explore this, I will use Vera Tobin's strategies of creating a successful surprise and the concept of source monitoring to discuss the buildup to the surprise and the reveal of the plot twist. In addition, I will discuss the genre conventions of thrillers that are used to maintain this element of tension in the novels. As the narratives arouse suspense in different ways, I will first discuss the literary works separately. First, I will analyze how Cadence's shattered memories evoke anticipation in readers and then move on to examine how the author buries the knowledge of Carrie's unreliability. Finally, the chapter will end with a comparison of the two narrators.

4.1 Questioning Cadence's Narrative

E. Lockhart creates an atmosphere of unease in *We Were Liars* by making the reader doubt Cadence's narration from the start of the narrative. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the character-narrator combines elements of fantasy and reality to express her feelings. This is a result of her upbringing because her family members have instilled a belief in her that showing emotions is a sign of weakness. For example, Cadence expresses her views of the Sinclairs' capacity to express their feelings by uttering: "We do not believe in displays of distress. Our upper lips are stiff, and it is possible people are curious about us because we do not show them our hearts" (Lockhart 2014, 38). As a consequence of suppressing her emotions, she is not used to explicitly expressing her feelings and tends to describe them through the use of metaphors. These parts of the narrative create tension as they often revolve around common thriller characteristics such as acts of violence as well as the appearance of supernatural beings. This is evident as Cadence reports the day her father left the family by stating:

Then he pulled 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. It tasted like salt and failure. The bright red

shame of being unloved soaked the grass in front of our house, the bricks of the path, the steps to the porch. My heart spasmed among the peonies like a trout” (Lockhart 2014, 5).

Readers are taken aback by the statement as none of the other characters seem to react to Cadence falling and bleeding profusely on the ground. As readers recognize that Cadence’s father did not really shoot her, they realize that they should not take the narrator’s words literally. The frame of the narrative shifts as we come to understand that these thoughts are the result of the narrator’s active imagination rather than a description of what truly happened in the narrative. As a result, readers comprehend Cadence’s unreliability and start to pay more attention to the narrative, which increases their engagement with the story.

The narrative highlights that readers can never truly trust Cadence’s memories of the events of the storyworld. The narrator’s fragmented memories and a severe addiction to strong painkillers make the readers practice source monitoring when they are faced with an ambiguous statement or presented with partial information about interactions. For example, Cadence’s narration of a conversation between her and her aunt Carrie requires the reader to pay close attention to source monitoring. In the story, the narrator sees her aunt taking a walk during the night when she is under the influence of painkillers (Lockhart 2014, 78–79). Later on, the aunt refuses to admit that they saw each other, which could make the reader doubt the narrator’s capability to be reliable (Lockhart 2014, 90). As Cadence’s narration emphasizes her struggles to form a coherent narrative, it is difficult to believe her tale. For instance, she expresses feelings of paranoia during an intense migraine as she doubts that someone has been stealing her medicines or whether she has lost track of time and taken more of them than she should (Lockhart 2014, 133). For this reason, the reader is more likely to trust the other character’s views of the events as – as far as we know – her aunt has no reason to lie about not taking a nighttime stroll due to her being barely present in the story at this point. Zunshine (2006, 104) states that readers tend to apply an agent-specific source tag in these kinds of situations, which means that we rely on the opinion of the other character if we have determined the narrator as unreliable. As readers know of Cadence’s incomplete memories and narration, they presumably take the aunt’s side. However, if the readers have read *Family of Liars* first, they could think twice before trusting the statements of Carrie as she is quite untrustworthy in the prequel. The encounter evokes tension in the readers as they are left wondering if they can trust the narrator's perspective.

The narrator's unreliable descriptions of the setting of the story also amplify the tension of the novel. As the events of the novel take place on a private island, savvy readers could already utilize their preexisting schemas to perceive the setting. Ansgar Nünning (2005, 98) argues that readers bring their frames of reference and background to the reading experience. These schemas influence how readers interpret the secluded island of the Sinclair Family as an isolated manor or a self-contained location is often utilized in thrillers to evoke suspense (Ciocia 2014, 110). In the novel, Cadence's narration and the other character's views of the island emphasize the mysterious aura of the island. For instance, the narrator describes the island as a cold place that often rattles due to the windy weather conditions (Lockhart 2014, 78). This already creates a scary atmosphere as the sound of rattling is often quick and unsteady, which cannot be immediately explained or identified. It can evoke fear because it suggests the presence of the unknown, which emphasizes the horror qualities of the novel. The possible presence of the supernatural is also highlighted in Cadence's narration to keep the reader on edge while they are reading. For instance, Cadence's cousin describes one of the estates as "haunted" and is concerned about the possibility of a ghostly presence living there (Lockhart 2014, 58). The claims are not confirmed by other characters, but the idea of an abandoned haunted mansion does evoke feelings of tension in readers. The horror-like qualities of the novel make the readers feel anxiety over the location of the story, which increases the suspense quality of the story.

The implied author does also attempt to hide certain aspects of Cadence's unreliability by making the reader doubt the motives of other characters. As the readers see the events of the narrative from the limited perspective of Cadence, they can easily adopt her views and question why every member of the Sinclair family attempts to hide information about the accident from her. According to Tobin's (2018, 119) strategy of the pleasures of the text, the more readers are immersed in stories, the less likely that they will pay attention to source monitoring. In other words, readers forget about attending to the details of source monitoring and their perceptions become inclined with the ones of the narrator. Cadence's views of other characters are influenced by her subjective opinions of them, which is one of the markers of a fallible narrator. This is evident as the narrator questions the behavior of her friends, whom she has not seen in two years. Her suspicion stems from their secret meetings, which the narrator witnesses throughout the narrative (Lockhart 2014, 71, 134). She is confused by this behavior as they do not always want to spend time with her, regardless of the group not seeing each other for two years. This is clear as her friends even suggest that the narrator should not

go kayaking with them, which is highly unusual behavior for them, according to the narrator (Lockhart 2014, 139). As her friends used to tell her everything, she is confused by their apparent refusal to share their secrets with her. The aura of suspense increases when it is revealed that one of these friends has even purposefully lied to the narrator about the state of their love life (Lockhart 2014, 132). The readers become skeptical about her friends' motives to hide information from the narrator, which leaves them wondering whether the members of the friend group know something horrible about the accident. As Cadence's limited perspective may lead readers to view her friends as suspicious, they could overlook source monitoring and doubt the motives of her friends instead of focusing on the unreliable narration of Cadence.

The tension gradually releases towards the end of the novel when the details of the fire and the plot twist are unveiled to the readers. Cadence could be seen as the "detective" of the story as she is trying to figure out the central mystery of the story. One of the common features of detective stories is that the narrator does not comprehend all of the events of the past in favor of suspense (Ciocia 2014, 111). At the start of the story, Cadence states that during that summer she went swimming alone and suffered head trauma, which is the cause behind her amnesia (Lockhart 2014, 32). As the narrative progresses, the narrator learns more and more information about the true nature of the accident, which constantly alters her and the reader's view of the events. This is an example of the managed reveal which means that "stories can present revelations in a way that leads the audience to accept them as more convincing and more accurate interpretation of the events of a story than the one they had before" (Tobin 2018, 90). The twist is easier for readers to accept as they have been convinced that the clues were in sight all along. In *We Were Liars*, the revelation of the accident is uncovered piece by piece as Cadence first learns that she and her friends were the ones to start the fire, burning down the old family mansion (Lockhart 2014, 151). As the readers slowly come to terms with this revelation, they find out that the fire killed the family's beloved dogs (Lockhart 2014, 190). The narrative constantly implies that the reader still does not know everything about what happened during that night, which builds suspense as the readers try to figure out what might be revealed next. Towards the end of the narrative, the frame shift occurs as the final details of the fire come to light and it is revealed that the narrator's friends have been dead for most of the story, and she has been talking to either ghosts or the figments of her imagination in the present-day narrative (Lockhart 2014, 201). The possibility of the existence of ghosts may evoke suspense from readers as ghosts do not necessarily have the best intentions in

mind in thrillers, especially if they haunt the person who has caused their demise. It is never disclosed in the story which of these interpretations is the correct one as the readers can deduce their understanding of the ending by themselves. However, the author does imply on her website that they were ghosts by asking the readers to reread a chapter that suggests that Cadence's aunt also saw one of the ghosts (E. Lockhart, n.d). After the mystery is revealed, the novel no longer evokes feelings of unease as all of the secrets have been uncovered. Moreover, the narrator seems to be more at ease as she appears to trust the members of her family again and not punish herself for inflicting the fire (Lockhart 2014, 219–225). At the end of the narrative, the narrator seems to be healed from the traumatic experience and starts to move on with her life.

4.2 Burying Carrie's Unreliability

In comparison to *We Were Liars*, the prequel builds up the tension in a different way as the unreliability of Carrie is explicitly stated to the reader in the first chapter of the novel. In the first chapter, the narrating Carrie outright admits her inability to tell the truth to her narratee by stating: "Telling this story will be painful. In fact, I do not know if I can tell it truthfully, though I'll try. I have been a liar all my life, you see. It's not uncommon in our family" (Lockhart 2022, 5). If the readers are aware of the narrator's untrustworthiness early on, they are not surprised by the plot twist, which could influence their enjoyment of the story. For this reason, Lockhart utilizes Tobin's strategy of burying information to manipulate readers to overlook this important piece of information through various backgrounding techniques (Tobin 2018, 113). For instance, this kind of information can be hidden by mentioning it as little as possible in the text or placing the information in a position where the reader is not yet interested in the narrative (Tobin 2018, 114). This is clear in *Family of Liars* as Carrie's confession of dishonesty is only mentioned briefly in the first chapter of the novel when readers do not most likely pay that much attention to the narration due to it being stated at the beginning of an approximately 300-word novel. The real author seems to rely on the fact that readers eventually forget about the unreliability of the narrator and become immersed in the perspective of the narrator. If the readers doubted the narrator's intentions to present the story, the novel would not generate suspense as they would know to suspect the narrator's views of the events.

The narrator guides the reader's perceptions of the other characters as she emphasizes how the members of her family are trying to hide information from her. As the narrating Carrie

initially wants to present herself in a better light to her narratee, she purposefully gives out false information about other characters. This strategy of finessing misinformation signifies that stories can attempt to fool their audiences by “slipping an incorrect interpretation into the reader’s understanding of the events” (Tobin 2018, 104). The thriller genre tends to contain unsavory characters, who are an essential accessory to creating the dark atmosphere of the novel (Ciocia 2014, 114). As all the characters of *Family of Liars* belong to a higher social class, the narrative seems to suggest that evil can lurk everywhere even within the members of high society. In the novel, the experiencing I often doubts the behavior of her family as they seem to be hiding something crucial from her. This is clear when Carrie finds a photograph hidden beneath her mother’s drawer and is surprised that her mother refuses to answer who the man in the picture is (Lockhart 2022, 33–34). This builds suspense in the novel as readers doubt the intentions of Carrie’s mother for hiding this picture. As the experiencing I finds out that the person in the picture is her biological father, she starts to ponder about her place in the family. For example, Carrie I expresses her feelings of the revelation by uttering: “I spin, and cry, feeling I have lost my place in this small world I’ve always lived in, sobbing until my body feels like it can’t possibly sob anymore” (Lockhart 2022, 150). This generates tension especially at the end of the story as readers cannot be certain of whether the family members will reveal her involvement in the murder of Pfeff to the authorities as she is not their blood relative. For example, the experiencing I is clearly nervous as Carrie describes her throat closing when her adoptive father confronts her about the crime towards the end of the story (Lockhart 2022, 273). The narrator seems to try to paint her family in a negative light to initially present herself as the best one of them. As the narrating I reveals herself as the murderer, she also starts to depict the rest of her family members in a better light as well. For instance, she explains how her adoptive father fully accepted her as a part of their family and protected her by lying to the police about Pfeff’s death (Lockhart 2022, 275). The narrator builds tension initially by describing the other characters as suspicious, but eventually paints a more positive picture of them as she recognizes that she should not lie to her son anymore.

The presence of danger in the novel is emphasized by the narrator’s descriptions of the private island. Similarly to Cadence, Carrie reports on the menacing atmosphere of the setting of the story. For instance, she tells the story of how she and her sisters heard the voice of their dead sister, Rosemary, coming from a cave which frightened them (Lockhart 2022, 46–47). This suggests to the reader that the island could be haunted, which is later emphasized by the presence of Rosemary’s ghost. As other characters confirmed to have heard the voice of

Rosemary, the readers are more likely to believe Carrie's narration due to applying the agent-specifying source tag. Moreover, the dangerous surroundings of the island also create suspense in the novel as Carrie provides descriptions of the island's dangerous cliffs. For example, she notes how menacing the rocky ledge of the island is by expressing that she can see how: "over the edge, far below, waves hit dark rocks" which Pfeff also comments on by acknowledging that: "This is a dangerous spot" (Lockhart 2022, 88). This creates a feeling of unease as readers can expect something dangerous to happen on the island. The setting creates tension in the reader as it emphasizes the unease of the supernatural presence and how easy it would be for the characters to die due to the perilous conditions of the island.

The paranormal features of the novel maintain an element of suspense until the end of the story. The prequel addresses the presence of ghosts more explicitly than *We Were Liars* as Carrie's ability to see them is revealed at the start of the story. According to Ansgar Nünning (2005, 98), readers tend to "determine reliability according to the narrator's behavior in relation to the norms of that world", therefore, they could think that the existence of ghosts could be possible as Cadence also sees them in, *We Were Liars*. However, some readers could deduce that Carrie's addiction to strong painkillers and fragile state could imply that she was imagining the ghost of Rosemary to properly say goodbye to her. Regardless of the authenticity of Rosemary's presence in the novel, her character evokes suspense in readers as she appears to lie to the narrator occasionally despite their close bond. When she first visits the narrator, she expresses that she has come to the island to visit Carrie and their mother, but their mother refuses to see her (Lockhart 2022, 52). However, the narrator comes to find out that Rosemary never visits their mother as their mother says: "Rosemary's not here. We all wish she were, but I don't know what you're talking about when you say I sent her away" (Lockhart 2022, 135). As Carrie's mother will not confirm the ghost's presence on the island, the reader is unlikely to believe the protagonist due to the lack of the agent specifying tag (Zunshine 2006, 114). Moreover, it is difficult to believe Carrie's narration regarding the presence of Pfeff's ghost as no other character has seen him. The ghost of Pfeff is also utilized to evoke tension in the novel as his statement "You're going to wish you'd said sorry. You're going to wish we'd made up" has some violent undertones due to narrating Carrie's descriptions of his malevolent nature prior to this conversation (Lockhart 2022, 252). When the readers learn that Carrie was the one to murder Pfeff, his statement during the confrontation builds suspense and could make readers feel anxious about whether he will take

revenge on the narrator. The ghostly presences of the story are utilized to build suspense and make the readers doubt the narrator's credibility.

The frame shift of the narrative slowly lessens the suspense of the story by reminding the reader of the unreliability of the narrator. Tobin (2018, 89) argues that readers are encouraged "to interpret the narrative in one way, only to reveal later that a different framing is the right one." This is evident in *Family of Liars* as Carrie initially leads the readers to believe that her sister, Penny, was the one to kill Pfeff (Lockhart 2022, 203). If the readers have forgotten about the unreliability of the narrator, they adopt her perspective and are eventually surprised when the actual framing is revealed. The correct framing is presented when the narrating Carrie comes to regret her decision to lie to the narratee and states that she was the murderer all along (Lockhart 2022, 266). At this part of the story, readers are now reminded of the narrator's statement in the very first chapter that she might be unable to narrate this story truthfully (Lockhart 2022, 263). According to Tobin's (2018, 89) concept of burying information, readers can now in retrospect see that the information of the narrator's reliability has been available for them all along. This helps the readers to accept the surprise reveal as the clues have been present throughout the narrative. As the first reading experience can be focused on the chain of enigmas in the narrative, the rereading of the novel can help us realize the complexities of the character-narrator better (Toker 1993, 67). The revelation of Carrie's unreliability also demonstrates the common element of crime fiction where the story is told from the perspective of someone who has committed a crime (Malmgren 1999, 127). Once the readers know that Carrie is responsible for murdering Pfeff, they wait in suspense about whether she will face consequences for her actions. Malmgren (1999, 128) argues that in these kinds of crime fiction narratives "readerly interest shifts from Truth to Justice." In other words, the suspense effect is evoked by the readers' need to know if the protagonist will implicate herself at the end of the story. However, one of the common characteristics of modern thrillers is the inconclusiveness or the absence of a solution (Ciocia 2014, 116). Even though the mystery of Pfeff's murder is revealed to the readers, the ending is quite vague as we have no way of knowing whether Carrie plans to confess the murder as she claims to be starting a more truthful life from here on (Lockhart 2022, 296–297). For this reason, the suspense does not completely release at the end of the story as Carrie never meets her "justified" end.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

There are similarities in the ways how Lockhart's narrators evoke suspense in readers. For instance, the novels attempt to evoke suspense by utilizing the threatening aura of the private island. Both of the narrators describe the dangerous setting of the story and suggest that there could be some paranormal activity to keep the readers on the edge of their seats. *Family of Liars* does explore these elements of fantasy more explicitly as the presence of ghosts is evident to the reader from the start of the tale. However, the reader cannot be certain of the existence of ghosts due to Carrie's drug addiction and untrustworthy nature. For the same reasons, it is difficult to deduce whether the existence of ghosts is possible in *We Were Liars* as Cadence uses strong painkillers frequently, which affects her narration. Moreover, her inability to process the loss of her friends could be the reason why she would imagine them alive and well on the island. However, neither the reader nor the narrator can be certain whether certain events or interactions even happened. Both novels use paranormal elements to build up the tension in the story, which helps the readers to maintain their curiosity in the novel.

In certain aspects, Lockhart attempts to hide the unreliability of both narrators by making the readers doubt other characters' motives. Cadence and Carrie question the intentions of their close ones, who are evidently hiding important information from them. In *We Were Liars*, Cadence suspects her friends and their reasons for leaving her out of the conversation. This seems suspicious to the reader as the friends do not discuss their meetings without her or suddenly change the topic when the narrator enters the room (Lockhart 2014, 134). These events could make the reader skeptical of their reasons for excluding the narrator from these conversations as her friends appear to intentionally hide important information from her. Cadence doubts their behavior but does not try to present them in a negative light on purpose to her unnamed narratee. In comparison to Cadence, the narrating version of Carrie does attempt to make her family members appear worse than the experiencing I in *Family of Liars*. The narrating I portrays her family members as suspicious to paint herself in a better light, but she eventually ceases to narrate these kinds of descriptions of them when she realizes that she does not need to lie to her narratee. Both of the narrators hide their unreliability if the readers adopt their perspective which evokes suspense in them as they wonder why the other characters would be hiding something from the narrators.

One of the main differences between the stories is how the frame shifts of the stories are executed. In *We Were Liars*, Cadence's unreliability is not explicitly stated in the text, but it is evident through her use of metaphorical language in describing her emotions and how she cannot form a coherent narrative about the events due to her partial memories of the accident. In addition, the title of the novel heavily implies that the narrator will deviate from the truth. Despite these indicators, the revelation of her friends being dead for most of the narrative can surprise the readers if they have immersed themselves in Cadence's perspective. Similarly to detective stories, the narrator and the readers are figuring out the mystery together and the readers do not have any more information than Cadence due to the limited and unreliable first-person narration. This builds suspense in the story as we learn each detail concerning the accident gradually and wonder constantly what is to come next. The surprising plot twist of the novel happens towards the end of the story when it is revealed that the narrator has been interacting with ghosts for most of the narrative. This raises the question of who Cadence was communicating with on the island, but there is no definitive answer provided by the story. This renders the ending unreliable as it depends entirely on the interpretation of the reader. In *Family of Liars*, the frame shift is just as sudden as Carrie outright admits that she has been lying to us about absolutely crucial events. The twist does come off well as the narrative utilizes Tobin's strategy of burying information and the story uses several techniques to hide the unreliability of Carrie from the reader. There is no other interpretation of this story as the narrator has no reason to lie at this point of the narrative as she wants to be truthful at last due to her son already being dead. The ending of both narratives is quite similar as it implies a chance of redemption for the narrators as they seem to want to start anew and find their path towards healing.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed the unreliability of Lockhart's two narrators from the perspectives of the rhetorical and cognitive approaches. I have demonstrated the similarities and differences between Cadence and Carrie by examining the textual signals of their unreliability with the help of Phelan's framework of six types of unreliability. The results indicate that both of the narrators tend to misreport the events of the storyworld for their own reasons. Cadence's fallible nature gets her to omit information about her family dynamics, which would be crucial to know in order to uncover the mystery surrounding her accident. She is not misleading on purpose as she initially cannot recall what truly happened that summer. On the other hand, the narrating Carrie knowingly presents false information to her narratee in order to paint herself in a better light because she does not want her son to know that she has killed someone. Both narrators come to the wrong conclusions occasionally as the naivety of Cadence and of the experiencing Carrie tends to cause them to interpret situations incorrectly. The analysis of textual evidence also reveals how the narrators' values mostly differ from those of the implied author. In both narratives, they seem to comprehend the message of the dangers of greed in some way as Cadence donates her things to charity, and the experiencing Carrie thinks about starting anew away from her family. However, the experiencing Carrie eventually chooses to stay within the family as she comprehends the advantages of her social status, and the narrating Carrie in fact fully embraces the Sinclair family lifestyle at the end of the story. In *We Were Liars*, Cadence's stance on the matter is a little vague as she did give away most of her material possessions but did not do it for the right reasons. As the narrator was subconsciously punishing herself for indirectly causing the deaths of her loved ones, she was not donating her belongings out of the goodness of her heart. The rhetorical approach allowed me to analyze the story-level of the novels and view the narrators' motives for lying to their audience.

Utilizing the cognitive approach, I provided evidence of how these narrators are used to generate suspense in the novels. Tobin's strategies of creating a well-made surprise allowed me to show how differently Cadence and Carrie maintain the element of tension in the stories. Cadence's unreliable narration makes the readers pay attention to source monitoring as they cannot be certain of credibility. For instance, her fragmented memories and tendency to blend elements of fantasy and fiction may make readers question her narration from the start of the tale. As the truth is finally revealed to the reader, the unreliability of her narration remains

unclear due to the fact that the final plot twist is based on the existence of the ghosts – or, alternatively, the depth of the narrator’s state of delusion – finally left for the reader to decide. In *Family of Liars*, the unreliability of Carrie is revealed at the start of the narrative. As this knowledge could lessen the impact of the plot twist, Lockhart attempts to bury this information by utilizing various techniques. For instance, her unreliability is only explicitly referred to briefly, and this could make the readers forget her untrustworthy nature and even consider her narration as reliable. The reliability of the narrating Carrie changes to be more truthful at the end of the story as she realizes that she wants to tell his son the true version of the storyworld’s events. There are also similarities to the narrators’ ways of building up tension, for example, they both provide unsettling descriptions of the private island, and they are quite open about how their narration is influenced by their addiction to strong painkillers. As I mentioned in the introduction, Lockhart frequently utilizes an unreliable character narrator to maintain an element of suspense in her novels. Her decision to tell a story from this perspective could be related to keeping the readers interested in the story as they question the narrative and attempt to uncover the true story before it is revealed to them. Moreover, the use of unreliable narrators leads to surprising plot twists, which could make these twists more enjoyable for readers. The cognitive approach highlights how these narrators engage the readers and even surprise them at the end of the novel, when the correct framing of the tale is revealed.

For further study, it would be useful to examine the reactions of real readers and analyze in which ways they think of these narrators as unreliable. This research could provide more evidence on the surprise effect of the plot twists and express how, for instance, the knowledge of Carrie’s unreliability at the start of the story influences, or does not influence, their reading experience. Moreover, it would be fruitful to study how the use of unreliable narrators in YA literature differs from their use in literature aimed at adults. For instance, these narrators seem to undergo some character development towards the end of their stories as both Cadence and Carrie promise to live their lives more truthfully. As these thrillers feature the coming-of-age theme that is common in YA literature, it would be interesting to explore whether any of the adult thrillers also include some kind of character development for the unreliable protagonist of the story. Moreover, the textual evidence that indicates the narrator as unreliable could be compared as YA literature tends to contain more straightforward language than adult literature, therefore, readers could detect the unreliable narrator more rapidly in YA thrillers. As the thriller genre continues to gain popularity among younger readers, it is important to

consider the effects of unreliable narrators on the reading experience as analyzing these kinds of texts can foster critical thinking skills and prompt important discussions regarding the value of truth.

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