

From Epistolary Novels to Chat Fiction:
A Comparative Study of Narrative Order and Duration
จากนวนิยายรูปแบบจดหมายสู่นิยายแชต:
การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบลำดับและระยะเวลา ในการเล่าเรื่อง

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Abstract

This study compares the narrative forms in epistolary novels, a story in letters, and chat fiction: a story that is being told through text messages, using Gerard Genette's narratology (order and duration) to compare the narrative structure between them. The samples are collected from four literary texts based on three-step media timeline: *Dangerous Liaisons*, *TTYL*, *Private Chat*, and *WHO #KraiEekKhon*. The study shows an epistolary novel's arranges narrative order using a nonlinear, complete analepsis. At the same time, chat fiction may cause the narrative order to be more chronologically arranged with the combination the structural fragmentation of partial analepsis. In the case of narrative duration, a letter can cause the narrative duration of an epistolary novel to be comprised of "summary" and "descriptive pause". Conversely, transitional print chat fiction (TTYL) simulates a typographical "scene", whereas chat fiction platform enforces a dynamic "scene", and "pauses" generated by simulated pace configuration and typing indicators (...). Furthermore, while both types of novels frequently use ellipses in their narratives,

the structural delivery varies from the ellipsis between or implicitly within letters to the ellipsis between or within the chat box, introducing internal temporal skips within a continuous scrolling thread that simulates a state of “connected presence”. Finally, the observation shows that communication tools as a narrative medium significantly influence the construction of the narrative discourse, especially narrative order and time, which significantly cause different dramatic effects and shape the exploration of narrative themes such as love, affairs, gossip, friendship, and psychological horror.

Keywords: narrative structure, epistolary novel, chat fiction, Gerard Genette, narratology

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเปรียบเทียบรูปแบบการเล่าเรื่องในนวนิยายรูปแบบจดหมาย และนิยายแชต (chat fiction) โดยใช้แนวคิดสัญศาสตร์การเล่าเรื่องของ Gerard Genette ในส่วนของลำดับการเล่าเรื่อง (Order) และระยะเวลาการเล่าเรื่อง (Duration) เพื่อวิเคราะห์เปรียบเทียบโครงสร้างการเล่าเรื่องระหว่างวรรณกรรมทั้งสองประเภท โดยคัดเลือกข้อมูลจากตัวอย่างวรรณกรรม 4 เรื่อง ได้แก่ Dangerous Liaisons, TTYL, Private Chat และ WHO #ใครอีกคน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า รูปแบบจดหมายมีลักษณะการย้อนอดีตแบบ “Complete analepsis” ในขณะที่นิยายแชตมักเรียงลำดับเหตุการณ์ตามลำดับเวลามากกว่า โดยมีการแทรก “Partial analepsis” ในด้านระยะเวลาการเล่าเรื่อง หน้าที่ของจดหมายส่งผลให้ระยะเวลาการเล่าเรื่องในนวนิยายประกอบไปด้วย “Summary” และ “Descriptive pause” ในทางกลับกัน chat fiction ในรูปแบบสิ่งพิมพ์ (TTYL) จำลอง “typographical scene” ในขณะที่แพลตฟอร์ม chat fiction ทำให้เกิด “dynamic scene” พร้อมทั้งเกิด “pauses” ที่สร้างขึ้นจากการระบบตั้งค่าการอ่านและสัญลักษณ์แสดงการพิมพ์ (...) (typing indicators) อย่างไรก็ตาม นิยายทั้งสองรูปแบบมีการใช้ “Ellipsis” ในการเล่าเรื่องอย่างสม่ำเสมอ ท้ายที่สุดผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า เครื่องมือสื่อสารในฐานะสื่อกลางการเล่าเรื่อง ส่งอิทธิพลอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อการเล่าเรื่อง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในด้านลำดับเวลาและเวลาของการเล่าเรื่อง ซึ่งก่อให้เกิด dramatic effects ที่แตกต่างกัน ตลอดจนหล่อหลอมการสำรวจแก่นเรื่อง อาทิ ความรัก, ความสัมพันธ์คู่สาว, การค้นหา, มิตรภาพ และความสยองขวัญเชิงจิตวิทยา

คำสำคัญ: โครงสร้างการเล่าเรื่อง นวนิยายรูปแบบจดหมาย นิยายแชต Gerard Genette ศาสตร์แห่งการเล่าเรื่อง

Introduction

Storytelling has fundamentally evolved alongside the advancement of communication media, changing from oral traditions and written manuscripts to modern technological devices. One of the most compelling intersections of technology and narrative happens when people use everyday communication tools for creative expression such as the handwritten letter served as the foundational medium for the 18th-century epistolary novel, which provided an early template for media-driven storytelling.

An epistolary novel is a narrative written in the form of a series of letters or correspondences between characters, occasionally integrating diary extracts. This narrative form gained immense cultural prominence in 18th-century English and French literature. Famous epistolary novels include Richardson's *Pamela* (1740–41) and *Clarissa* (1747–48), Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) (Baldick, 2001, p. 85). Crucially, the epistolary genre is not restricted to works written entirely in letter form. It may include any narrative that is partially driven by correspondence. However, the plot is established, developed, and resolved through this narrative device (Campbell, 1995, p. 333).

In the 21st century, the widespread use of smartphone text messaging has affected a literary shift. A novel digital medium known as chat fiction has emerged, offering a new approach to storytelling. Chat fiction is a type of electronic literature in which readers piece together the plot entirely through simulated text messages, without the use of the traditional author voice regarding setting, physical situation, or character descriptions (Kawaguchi, 2021, p. 163). By mimicking real-world social interfaces such as Messenger, Line, and WhatsApp, chat fiction presents a storytelling format where the narrative is presented and unfolds as a series of text messages progressively. On interactive applications, users can even actively shape the plot direction by adopting the persona of a specific character (Pavarini et al., 2023, p. 732).

The transition from the 18th-century epistolary novel to 21st-century chat fiction represents a significant shift in narrative communication. In both cases, correspondence tools, whether physical letters or digital text messages, function as the primary narrative medium,

defining the structural manipulation of time and shaping the reader's experience. This study compares these two seemingly different forms by applying Gérard Genette's narratology, specifically focusing on narrative order (the relationship between story sequence and narrative sequence) and narrative duration (the pacing or speed of the story). By examining how communication tools influence these structures, we can better understand how media transformation affects storytelling.

To provide a deeper comparative analysis, this study utilizes Genette's specific concepts: analepsis (flashbacks) and prolepsis (flash-forwards) to measure order and summary, scene, ellipsis, and descriptive pause to measure duration. These tools allow for a precise calculation of how the postal delay of 18th-century correspondence compares to the digital immediacy of modern text messages. The analysis is based on four selected texts that best represent their respective media. Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) is chosen as the definitive model of the epistolary novel, which utilizes multiple narrators to create complex temporal overlaps. For the digital transition, Lauren Myracle's *TTYL* (2004) represents the remediation of instant messaging into a print format. Finally, to represent simulated instant-messaging interface digital fiction, the study analyzes two popular works from Joylada, a prominent Thai chat-fiction platform that simulates a mobile messaging interface: *Private Chat* and *WHO #KraiEekKhon*. This platform's distinct features create a narrative environment in which real-time communication dominates. By contrasting the slow, reflective narrative of Laclos's letters with the seemingly real-time narrative of Myracle's work and Joylada's chats, this study aims to demonstrate how communication media significantly impact the construction of narrative discourse and shape the exploration of contemporary storytelling.

Review of Literature

The transition from the 18th-century epistolary novel to 21st-century chat fiction represents a structural evolution in narrative communication, in which correspondence tools like letters and text messages dictate the handling of time sequence (order) and narrative pacing (duration). This global shift is also reflected in localized literary contexts, such as chat fiction,

which emerges during the Thailand 4.0 era, which marks the country's transition from analog to digital society. According to Ruenruthai Sujjapun (2019), chat fiction in Thailand emerged as a response to the Thailand 4.0 and the crisis in traditional Thai print media in 2016 and 2017, when long-standing publications such as *Sakul Thai* and *Kwan Ruen* closed, leaving serialized novels in a dead-end crisis (pp. 7-8). However, digital platforms filled the gap, allowing writers to write novels that are accessible online (p. 19). *Joylada*, in particular, has been noted for reaching 2 million monthly users in just over a year since its launch. The platform's popularity has been driven by female readers aged 13-24, who are mostly fans of Korean idols, resulting in 70-80% of chat fiction on Joylada being fanfiction (pp. 33-35). Moreover, Joylada's storytelling style, which is influenced by social networks, is a key feature that distinguishes it from other fiction applications. The narrative structure is based on the conversational language used in the Line app's chat rooms (Chaladthanyakij, 2018, 64)

To understand this shift, we must also engage with Marshall McLuhan's (1964) foundational media theory, which famously states that “the medium is the message.” McLuhan argues that the true impact of any new technology or medium stems not from the specific content it contains, but from the “new scale that is introduced,” which results in a restructuring of human association. (McLuhan, 2003, p. 19). In a literary sense, the medium's structural technique influences the reader's relationship to the text, not just the specific plot that a character communicates, but also how people use a new medium to do storytelling. McLuhan's concept implies that a communication tool is never a neutral medium. Instead, the physical or digital features of the medium determines the narrative structure. This process is further expanded by Bolter and Grusin's (1999) concept of remediation, in which new media are defined by how they refashion older media and how older media adapt to meet new challenges (p. 15).

Narrative Order

From the Impossible Present to the Synchronous Now

Narrative order concerns the relationship between the sequence of events in the story and their arrangement in the discourse (Genette, 1980, 35). According to Janet Altman (1982), this

epistolary discourse is grounded in a “pivotal present of narration” in which the past moment only intervenes when it is necessary to explain the letter writer's current state to explain the background and why a character has become what they are, which emphasizes the current moment of communication in which the future is still unknown and the writer's present is often unstable or frustrated (p. 123). In a letter, the past only matters in how it relates to the present (p. 123). However, Altman argues that the traditional epistolary sense of the present is never truly a present because of the three impossibilities: the impossibility of being perfectly simultaneous with events, the precariousness of the written present remaining valid, and the fact that the writer's “now” moment is never the same as the addressee's “now” moment. Thus, the meaning of any epistolary statement is determined by many moments: the actual time that an act is performed; the moment when it is written down; and the respective times that the letter is mailed, received, read, and reread. (p. 129).

As a result, remediation of 21st-century chat fiction fundamentally collapses these three impossibilities. Instant messaging makes the sender's “now” moment and the receiver's “now” moment synchronous, transforming the impossible epistolary state of the present into a valid state of the present.

Non-Linearity through Fragments

Altman (1982) introduces the concept of an epistolary mosaic or narrative discontinuity, in which a narrative structure is made up of discrete letters, each defined by the blank space that surrounds it, and each letter has a distinct characteristic and context. The letter maintains its own coherence while remaining a unit within a larger narrative (p. 167). Altman argues that narrative discontinuity reaches its maximum degree when a text breaks chronological rules in four distinct dimensions:

1. The use of multiple plots,
2. The disruption of the temporal line through non-chronological delivery (of letters)
3. The presence of multiple correspondents who shape the discourse with their subjectivities

4. The strategic use of narrative gaps, where intervals between communications shape the narrative meaning (p. 170).

Altman also notes that the layout of the printed page frequently creates an illusion of temporal continuity, which contrasts with the inherent discontinuity of the epistolary form (p. 171).

While Altman formulated these criteria to explain the fragmented architecture of the epistolary novel, the 21st-century digital landscape also reflects the concept of epistolary mosaic. Chat fiction presents stories in multiple conversations, resembling the fragmented nature of 18th-century novels in which the reader must analyze the plot solely from the dialogue. According to Suwannee Kruaphung and Sutita Singsawasd (2024), this structural phenomenon is identified as an “interspersed narrative” (ตัดสลับเหตุการณ์) which is a common technique used by Thai chat fiction writers where the chronological order is broken across different chat rooms and the writer arranges chatrooms for characters to engage in conversation, perceive different stories, and take turns telling the reader a story (p.78).

This fragmentation creates a narrative of discontinuity, requiring readers to interpret the narrative plot from isolated, polyphonic, dialogic threads in the absence of a central authorial narrator.

Narrative Duration:

Postal Pacing vs. Digital Immediacy

Narrative duration involves the relationship between the time of the story and the time taken to read it (Genette, 1980, pp. 35, 86). Altman (1982) claims that the letter form affects the pace and experienced time of a story. In an epistolary work, the letter itself serves as the primary marker of duration. When no letters are written or received (or omitted from the narrative), there is effectively no experienced time for the characters (p. 172)

Ellipsis (unnarrated time) further complicates duration in epistolary fiction. Altman argues that the blank spaces between letters (leaps between letters) are “dead time.” They represent

intervals where characters choose not to write, omitted events, or periods where one character is anxiously awaiting a response. For the reader, the only durational sequence that exists is the sequence of the letters (p.182). As discussed in the previous section, because the author groups separate letters together, he or she can telescope time and compress massive chronological intervals into a quick, reader-friendly sequence. For example, a series of letters could last a year in the story but only be twenty-five pages long, making the narrative duration shorter for plot developments that maximize emotional impact (p.171).

In contrast, chat fiction makes use of connected presence. Authors frequently use platforms that resemble popular apps such as Line, Twitter, and Instagram as storytelling tools (Kruaphung & Singsawasd, 2024, p.79). This creates a real-time experience, connecting the characters' experiences with the reader's own daily life. Furthermore, presenting a story in a chat or conversational format gives readers the impression that they are reading a dialogue between characters. The dialogue, which switches back and forth between characters and uses short sentences or phrases, like a chat format, stimulates interest, makes it easier and faster to read, and is more enjoyable than reading something extremely long, such as a long traditional narrative. This aligns with the natural behavior of people in the contemporary world, who tend to have a shorter attention span (p.80). This phenomenon also updates Altman's (1982) paradox of epistolary mediation, in which the medium functions as both a bridge (distance breaker) and a barrier (distance maker) (p. 186).

Thus, Kruaphung and Singsawasd's argument provides the structural context required for a comparative study of narrative order and duration by demonstrating how the digital medium significantly shapes narrative structure. While Thai scholarship has previously mapped Joylada's general narrative shifts, there is a significant gap in understanding about the structural manipulation of narrative order and duration across these mediums, particularly in chat fiction. To address this issue, the methodology outlined below provides a systematic structural analysis of how communication tools (letters vs. text messages) shape the reader's perception of narrative sequence and time. This study builds on that work by applying Genette's concept of order and

duration to determine how a medium like letters and text messages shapes narrative order and time.

Methodology

The most suitable approach for this comparative analysis is Genette's narratology. In the book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), Genette proposes one of the most important concepts of his narratology, in which he explains the narrative element using five main concepts: order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. However, the analysis focuses on the two primary aspects of temporal narratology relevant to mediated communication: “order” and “duration.” Genette's concepts of order can be highly valuable when studying the effects of temporal shifts in epistolary novels or chat fiction, as these often employ complex temporal structures due to the nature of their form. Additionally, since letters and text messaging inherently revisit certain events, Genette's concepts of duration will be a suitable focus for this research objective.

Genette's narrative elements emphasize the study of syntactic characteristics rather than the narrative's interpretive quality. To clarify, the concept can be explained as follows:

1. Order:

This concept explains how the narrative is arranged. Genette explores the relationship between the chronological order of events and their narrative arrangement (Genette, 1980, p. 35). The study primarily focuses on “analepsis,” a narrative technique that is also known as “flashback,” where the narrator recounts the story that happened before the main point of the story (p. 40). Genette further clarifies that there exist various categories of analepses. However, “partial analepses” and “complete analepses” seem to be the most significant elements in this study. These two types of analepses are both flashbacks, but they have distinct purposes. A partial analepsis presents the temporary revisiting of a previous moment before rapidly transitioning to the present event. It allows for the description of a past moment that is kept separate and distant from the main story. This technique offers the reader a necessary piece of

information that is important for understanding a specific moment or context in the action or event. On the contrary, a complete analepsis serves as a flashback that allows the reader to revisit a previous moment in time and continue the narrative until it reconnects with the main story, covering the entire period between the past and present (pp. 61-62). The study employs Genette's formula to demonstrate the sequential connections between the appearance of events in the narrative and their chronological order. For the purpose of explanation, the sequential occurrence of events in the narrative will be defined using the alphabet letters A, B, C, D, and E. The research will simultaneously employ the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on to represent the sequential positions (p. 37).

2. Duration

It is a narrative movement concept that discusses the narrative rhythm or how long the event takes. It talks about the “time of the narrative,” which may not match the actual time when the event happens (p. 87). This research observes the narrative duration through four narrative movements: “ellipsis,” “descriptive pause,” “scene,” and “summary.” To clarify, an ellipsis is a narrative movement that progresses at infinite speed, where the event in the story that is omitted from the narrative represents a certain amount of time in the story. A descriptive pause, on the other hand, moves at an infinitely slow pace, giving the impression that time is either standing still or not existing at all (pp. 93-94). While a scene typically takes place in dialogue form and devotes the same amount of time to both the narrative and the story, and a summary refers to a form with variable movement that can cover the whole range between scene and ellipsis. The narration can span a few paragraphs or a few pages, covering several days, months, or years of existence, without providing details of action or speech (pp. 94-96). Furthermore, the study uses Genette's formula to show the temporal values of narrative duration, where “ST” stands for story time, “NT” for narrative time or pseudo-time, and “n” stands for a variable positive quantity (a non-zero number).

According to Genette, the structure of the narrative duration of each movement is as follows:

1. Ellipsis: $NT = 0$, $ST = n$. Thus: $NT < \infty ST$
2. Descriptive pause: $NT = n$, $ST = 0$. Thus: $NT^\infty > ST$.
3. Scene: $NT = ST$
4. Summary: $NT < ST$ (p. 95).

Text Selection Method

This study selects texts based on specific theoretical criteria to ensure formal representativeness, rather than simple popularity.

1. **Epistolary novel (letter):** Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) is the most complex form of polyphonic epistolary structure (multiple characters and correspondence, each with a distinct date and addressee), providing the most data for testing Genette's concepts of frequency and order.
2. **Chat fiction (printed text):** Lauren Myracle's *TTYL*, a story about three high school girls who frequently text each other, is regarded as a bridge between traditional prose and modern chat fiction, demonstrating how the digital chat interface is translated into a traditional print medium while retaining specific temporal markers such as time stamps.
3. **Chat fiction (Joylada application):** Parkmin's *Private Chat*, a short horror story about a girl who creates a replica account to communicate with herself, and rabbitnie's *WHO #KraiEekKhon*, a longer horror story about teenagers encountering their friend's doppelgänger. The selection of Parkmin's *Private Chat* and rabbitnie's *WHO #KraiEekKhon* is based on an alignment between genre conventions and media affordances. While *Private Chat* offers a condensed analysis of a short-form narrative centered on the psychological uncanny, where a protagonist communicates with a replica account of herself, *WHO #KraiEekKhon* offers multiple perspectives through a longer narrative following a group of teenagers' experiences with their friend's doppelgänger (an evil twin). Crucially, both texts utilize the **horror genre**, which this study believes is uniquely optimized to maximize the structural capabilities of the text message medium. The fundamentals of a horror story are suspense, anxiety, isolation, and delayed revelation. The chat interface limits the reader's view to line-by-line text bubble exchanges by

removing a traditional third-person omniscient narrator. The features of the medium, such as sudden messaging silences, unread indicators, and the lack of visual environmental context, directly supports the characteristic of the horror genre. As a result, these texts were chosen not only as popular platform samples, but also because the horror genre actively utilizes the technical limitations of the digital interface to create maximum affective tension and psychological immersion.

This research project focuses on a comparative analysis of narrative forms that have emerged from two different modes of social communication, from the 18th-century epistolary novel to chat fiction in the 21st century. As shown in the list, it is noticeable that chat fiction outnumbers epistolary novels. Rather than treating all selected texts as structurally equivalent case studies, this study employs a baseline-comparative approach, with contemporary chat fiction serving as the primary object of analysis. Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) is explicitly used as a historical and narrative baseline, serving as a structural reference point for the formal conventions of the paper-based epistolary tradition. By framing this classic work as a base model, the study can clearly define the precise directions of formal remediation, mapping how the postal system's baseline constraints have been collapsed, pushed forward, or fundamentally restructured by the technical affordances of 21st-century medium.

Results and Discussion

This comparative analysis examines the structural evolution of mediated narratives using Genette's framework and four notable works chosen for their representation of medium-specific constraints. By establishing a comparative bridge between 18th-century letters and 21st-century chat fiction, the study demonstrates how these communicative tools shape the temporal arrangement of the narrative. The chosen texts are *Dangerous Liaisons* (epistolary), *TTYL* (printed chat fiction), and Joylada application works: *Private Chat* and *WHO #KraiEekKhon*. These case studies illustrate the transition from postal mediation to text message immediacy.

Comparative Analysis of Narrative Order

This section explores the various narrative orders that may appear in the epistolary novel and chat fiction. The features of the communication tool primarily determine the narrative structure of these works. In the epistolary model, the delay between a message and its response creates a recollective structure. In contrast, the digital interface of chat fiction is typically linear, present-oriented, and fixed in the present time.

Narrative Analepsis: From the Reflective Past to a Fixed Present

Epistolary: The Recollective Past In the paper-based epistolary baseline established by *Dangerous Liaisons*, the order of narrative in the letter is a complete analepsis, recounting the story before the main part of the story. Narrative order is fundamentally determined by the recollective nature of physical letter-writing. Because the act of writing occurs at a distinct temporal remove from the actions being reported, the past must be continually imported into the writer's present through complete analepsis. For example, in letter 1, Cécile Volanges writes to Sophie Carnay (Laclos, 1961, pp. 23-24) using Genette's formula below:

$$A3 > B1 > C2$$

According to the formula, it shows the connections between the appearance of events in the narrative and their chronological order. The structure or primary discourse time is the physical completion of the letter (A3). To communicate her situation, Cécile uses a complete analepsis, systematically stepping backward to recount her historical life within the convent (B1) before shifting forward to detail the immediate past of her current marriage arrangements (C2). This recollective structure becomes significantly more layered when utilized for interpersonal manipulation. In letter 2, the Marquise de Merteuil uses a partial analepsis inside the larger context of complete analepsis as follows:

$$A4 > B2 > C3[D1] > E5$$

In this letter, Merteuil initiates the discourse in the letter (A4) with a direct request for assistance but immediately destabilizes this timeline by introducing a recent past event, the wedding plan of Gercourt and Cécile (B2). To provide the necessary psychological justification for

her wicked action, she must recalls a distant past in which her ex-lover (Gercourt) wrongs both her and Valmont (D1) to manipulate Valmont into an act of revenge. (pp. 25-26). This nested analepsis (C3[D1]) functions as an internal narrative engine. The letter serves as an archive, allowing the character to systematically manage and arrange historical grievances in order to influence the addressee's future behavior (E5). In this epistolary form, the past is never a live scene, but rather a highly calculated retrospective construction made possible by the physical page's expansive, uninterrupted authorial control.

As Altman argues, the present in an epistolary form is fundamentally impossible because the moment of writing can never coexist with the moment of reception. This point is vividly demonstrated in Valmont's letters to his huntsman, Azolan, to blame him for not informing him about the departure of Présidente de Tourvel, his target. Then he instructs Azolan to watch Tourvel and steal her letters (1961, pp. 238-240) using a formula of A2 > B1 > C3. He writes a letter (A2) only recounting one major event (B1) to scold his man before giving instructions (C3). This type of letter's order seems to be less complex and give the reader a sense of chronological order. However, the sense of present of the letter is dead on arrival. By the time Azolan reads Valmont saying, *"Do, in short, all that you must do as being honoured by my confidence"* (p.240) that present has already become the past.

Thus, it is evident that the narrative analepsis is frequently caused by the nature of the letter in the manner of recounting the events, either to provide more context of the event or to answer the letter that the character received earlier. From all the examples, the narrative order in the epistolary can include both complete and partial analepses. However, though written in an imperative, immediate tone, the material constraints of the postal system ensure that the text functions purely as a retrospective narrative.

The Chat Fiction Paradigm: The Fixed Present with Temporal Reporting. In contrast, 21st-century chat fiction fundamentally shapes narrative order while operating within a simulated instant messaging interface. The platform enforced a fixed present. In this medium, text messages do not reflect on a distant past action. Instead, the physical appearance of the text bubble

represents a live event. As seen in *TTYL* (2014), on September 21st, at 5.34 p.m., Zoe texts Maddie about the personality quiz that Maddie sent her. They talk about the results and tease each other (Myracle, p. 43). There is no mention of the past event in this conversation. The conversation clearly presents the present time of the event. However, the use of partial analepsis still exists because characters must continue to communicate external plot information to one another. It is functioning as a tool for conversational reporting to provide more context to the conversation. In *TTYL*, Zoe and Maddie's instant messaging exchange on September 21st, at 5.34 p.m. The narrative basically uses a formula of A3 [B1,C2] > D5 [E3], showing that Maddie texts Zoe to ask about Angela, who leaves a voicemail (A3) and Zoe briefly narrates what happened with Angela and her boyfriend (B1). Maddie then continues to gossip about the math class she had earlier with Angela (C2), to which Zoe frequently responds and comments with a short response (A3). The conversation then shifts to Zoe asking Maddie about her driving practice (D5), and Maddie recounts how it goes (E3) (pp. 40-43). While the conversation takes place in strict real-time, the narrative employs a combination of partial analepsis [B1, C2 and E3] because the inherent nature of the text messaging platform lacks an external environment to provide more information to the narrative, which in this case is to execute social gossip about a math class and a subsequent driving practice session experience.

To generate suspense, this partial analepsis is dramatically intensified in Thai chat fiction with a simulated instant messaging interface. In Chapter 1 of the horror chat fiction *WHO #KraiEekKhon*, the use of partial analepsis here contributes to the unsettling narrative tone. Faye recounts seeing a mysterious figure that looks like Pleng standing on a balcony earlier that evening, but Phu believes Pleng was in her room the entire time because when she opens the door, she appears to have just gotten out of bed (rabbitnie, 2024). The narrative appears to be unsettling and not truly predictable. Because *WHO* does not use an authorial voice to describe the ghost/doppelgänger (or explicitly state that it is a ghost), the reader's perception is limited to the chat box. The haunting can only manifest if it is conveyed through the immediate partial analepsis, as reported by a chat box.

Similarly, in Chapter 2 of *Private Chat*, the protagonist, “Me” uses partial analepsis at the beginning of the conversation with her own replica account, “Another Me,” leaving messages in the chat box throughout the day out of boredom and loneliness but receiving no response before briefly recount the details of a best friend's boyfriend's fatal car accident that occurred prior to the chat log opening later in the evening (Parkmin, 2022). This pattern repeats throughout Chapter 3. Me floods the chat box with messages throughout the day (presumably at school), then she begins cursing another classmate named 'Rin'. This time, the replica shows some support, and the conversation indicates that Rin borrows her money again, while the replica asks her why she lent Rin money, Me cuts it off by saying it is her stupidity. Later, the conversation continues when Me found a money banknote covered in blood in front of her house (Parkmin, 2022). Here, the use of partial analepses effectively creates suspense in the narrative, providing the reader with fragmented information and suggesting that Me may become involved in the gruesome events occurring outside the chat box. In both digital instances, the text-messaging medium collapses the expansive, reflective space seen in Laclos's letters. The past is no longer presented as a detailed organized record, but rather as fragmented, urgent information appears to provoke an immediate, real-time emotional response from both the conversational partner and the chat fiction reader.

Interestingly, a cross-textual analysis of *TTYL*, *WHO #KraiEekKhon*, and *Private Chat* reveals that the vast majority of primary plot advancements are structurally mediated through partial analepsis. Because the text message-simulated interface is formally limited to immediate conversational exchanges, major physical actions eventually take place in an “off-screen,” or external environment outside the chat box.

As a result, these events must be brought into the active discourse through prompt, retrospective reporting. These partial analepses serve as fragmented but high-impact pieces of information. They not only provide necessary exposition by abruptly disrupting the fixed present's chronological line, but they are also systematically utilized to deliver sudden narrative revelations and emotional shocks, effectively transforming the traditional literary plot twist into an immersive intense reading experience.

Comparative Analysis of Narrative Duration

Narrative duration is directly involved with the speed of the communication tool. While the 18th-century postal system heavily relied on “summary” and “descriptive pause” pacing, digital platforms simulate a synchronous “scene” where the duration of the reading matches the duration of the story.

Postal Pacing: Summary

In an *Dangerous Liaisons*, the geographic distance and 18th-century postal system causes the extensive use of narrative summary ($NT < ST$) and descriptive pause.

As previously stated in the “order” section, the narrative order in the epistolary novel is not typically arranged chronologically but rather as a recollection of an event. As a result, recounting the event will be like summarizing what happened, ranging from a few hours to days, or weeks in a few pages or lines. To demonstrate, in letter 21, Valmont compresses a detailed account of his three-day journey and an elaborate series of rural interactions into three pages of letter (Laclos, 1961, pp. 56-59). This radical speed allows Valmont, the epistolary narrator of the letter 21, to prioritize only the data that advances his seduction plot ($NT < ST$).

The Reflective moment of descriptive pause

Furthermore, the non-synchronous nature of the letter allows for **descriptive pauses** ($ST = 0$, $NT = n$), which are the writer's thoughts and emotional reflections, or even commentary on the event and surroundings. In letter 23, this movement pauses the progression of the story completely, time seems to stand still as the letter writer immerses themselves in contemplation and reflective thought of their emotions or current surroundings, which can only happen briefly in actual time ($NT^\infty > ST$). Here, Valmont engages in a lengthy, self-indulgent philosophical boast regarding his seduction methods and emotional state of happiness, such as helping the impoverished man to impress his target, Madame de Tourvel (p. 58) and the reflection of his action when he restrains himself from getting a sexual advantage from Madame de Tourvel, as he claims that it is not worth his effort. This intellectual contemplation not only expresses his

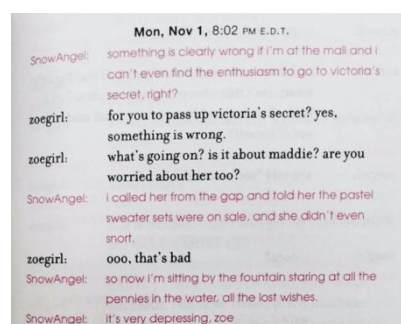
principle but also to boast with the addressee (Merteuil) (p. 63), in which requires a medium that protects the writer from interruption. Valmont can compose a multi-page essay on his own ego precisely because his addressee (Merteuil), cannot text him back mid-sentence to disrupt his flow.

Digital Immediacy: The Evolution of the “Scene” Technique

The Typographic Scene in Transitional Print Chat Fiction (TTYL) In Lauren Myracle’s *TTYL*, the narrative completely shifts away from the summary and descriptive pause of the epistolary tradition, establishing Genette’s scene (NT = ST) as its primary duration baseline. Because chat fiction abandons standard prose paragraphs and uses simulated instant messaging logs, narrative duration becomes synchronous with story events wherein the narrative unfolds through dialogue, giving the impression of equal time to both the narrative and discourse. To demonstrate, in each chat box within *TTYL*, the display time of the conversation is shown, representing when the dialogue happens, as illustrated in the image below:

Figure 1

An Example of Chat Fiction in TTYL



Note. From *TTYL*, by L. Myracle, 2014, Amulet Paperbacks

The layout creates a strict textual equivalence: one line of dialogue equals one unit of story time. However, while *TTYL* achieves a scene movement, it is limited to the material constraints of the traditional print medium. The image does not specify the exact duration of

each conversation. From Figure 1, a conversation between Angela and Zoe on November 1st begins at 8:02 a.m., has no indication of time progression throughout the dialogue (Miracle, 2014, p. 139). Nevertheless, the narrative flow suggests that Angela and Zoe actively engaging in the conversation, with neither of them refraining from responding. It still conveys the impression of real-time communication. In this sense, the reader still controls the narrative speed manually by physically turning static pages, meaning that the real-time experience is purely a typographical simulation. This is precisely where Thai chat fiction platform goes completely beyond Genette's classical framework. Though Gerard Genette claims that it is impossible to indicate the narrative duration (Genette, 1980, p. 87). In a chat fiction platform like Joylada, the presentation of the real-time communication is more evident, works such as *Private Chat* and *WHO #KraiEekKhon* make use of the platform's ability to manipulate time to match the reader's scrolling speed with the simulated typing and reading speeds of the characters. The text completely strips away the author's compression as there are no summaries stating like "they talked for an hour." Instead, the reader must experience every single word, every typo, and every emoji exchange in real time. The scene is no longer just simulated. It is textually performed. As the user taps the screen, chat bubbles slide into view, mimicking the precise real-time pacing, typing delays, and message reception speeds of actual modern communication apps. Moreover, not only manually tapping the screen, users can also adjust the pace of the conversation themselves, as illustrated in the image below:

Figure 3

Example of Reading Pace Configuration on the Joylada Platform



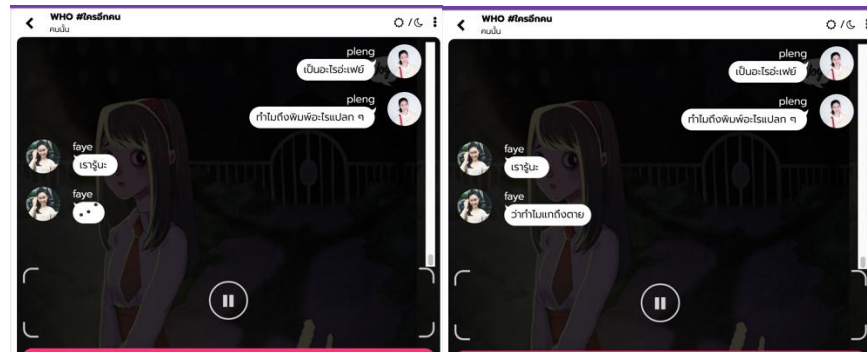
Note. Screenshot by the author, May 21, 2026, from the Joylada mobile application.

This technical capability enables authors to manipulate duration in ways that Genette could never have predicted, and the platform can enforce a reading speed. When a character stops responding or continues typing, the reader is stuck staring at a blank screen or a simulated typing indicator. In this sense, the narrative duration is no longer dependent on the reader's scanning speed, as in the *TTYL* (printed text.). Instead, the software interface controls the duration, transforming the reading experience into a live, anxiety-inducing event that removes the boundary between story time and narrative time. This pure scene format builds intense psychological anxiety. In chapter 1 of *WHO*, the narrative splits its order across a simultaneous simulated instant messaging interface. Faye messages Pleng at 10:30 PM desperately begging to enter her home, while simultaneously, Phu messages Pleng at 10:58 PM with a terrifying revelation that Faye died in an accident a week ago (rabbitnie, 2024).

The digital scene immerses the reader in the same terrifying, immediate timeframe as the characters by removing the descriptive paragraphs from traditional horror novels and replacing them with abrupt fragmented texts. Suspense is no longer generated by descriptive paragraphs or omissions of information, but by frantic, synchronized text message threads unfolding text-by-text on the reader's own screen, which plays an important role in shaping the theme of psychological horror in chat fiction, which can only be achieved through text messaging and is not possible with traditional letter correspondence.

The Typing Indicator as a Engine of Temporal Deceleration. Rabbitnie's *WHO* #ใครอีกคน brilliantly utilizes Joylada's, a chat fiction platform's duration control. In one of the most intense conversations in Chapter 3, the text completely abandons traditional prose pacing to make use of on the duration configuration of the Joylada user interface, as illustrated in the image below:

Figure 4



Note. From WHO #ใครอีกคน, by rabbitnie, 2024, Joylada
(<https://www.joylada.com/story/5d94b57c229f67f41ae335cc>).

The dialogic exchange begins within a synchronous scene format (NT = ST):

PLENG: เป็นอะไรอะเพ้ย (What's wrong, Faye?)

PLENG: ทำไมถึงพิมพ์อะไรแปลก ๆ (Why are you typing weird things?)

FAYE: เรารู้นะ (I know...) (rabbitnie, 2024)

At this critical moment, the narrative appears to be delayed, not by verbal description, but by a chat fiction graphic material: the animated typing indicator bubble (...). By replacing immediate textual delivery with this simulated typing indicator delay, the interface creates an uncomfortable time gap which disrupts the flow of communication. For the anxious reader, story time (ST) continues to advance in real-world seconds, while narrative text (NT) is temporarily set to zero. This chat fiction typing indicator delay takes away the reader's autonomy (unless they manually click to continue, in which case the typing indicator remains). They can no longer skim forward or look ahead on the page. They are stuck in a forced state of suspense, staring at the moving dots, until the platform moves forward to reveal the text, which pushes the reader into a sudden and shocking revelation, as illustrated in the second image of Figure 4:

FAYE: ว่าทำไมแกถึงตาย (...why you died.) (rabbitnie, 2024)

The interface structurally heightens the terror of this plot twist, which is the sudden revelation of Pleng's own death (though she is still alive at that moment), Faye's supernatural knowledge, or even Faye's out-of-character action (the reader may also not believe the speaker is Faye). The chat fiction medium does more than simply report on the suspense. It directs the reader's real-time visual experience, transforming a static literary revelation into an immersive and intense one.

The Elasticity of the Ellipsis:

Both genres rely on the structural fragmentation of ellipsis to manage the gaps in mediated communication. In *Dangerous Liaisons*, the ellipsis often shifts time by several minutes or hours in a single letter or even several days between correspondences. This means that an ellipsis can exist between letters as well as implicitly within the summary, which we refer to as a “implicit ellipsis.”

Altman's epistolary mosaic or narrative discontinuity is built upon and sustained by Genette's ellipsis. According to Genette, an implicit ellipsis may refer to the dead time that is not announced in the text and which the reader can only infer from some chronological or gap in narrative (1980, p. 108). Valmont recounts his activities in letter 21 but omits some unnecessary events or actions from the letter. The omission choice reflects the use of ellipsis to shift time to another time without presenting the intervening event ($NT < \infty ST$). That is, there is an unrepresented narrative gap between his journey from his residence to the village, the length of which is unknown to the reader. Within the summary, he utilizes implicit ellipses to filter out anything that doesn't serve his ego. The reader understands that time is passing continuously, but Valmont is actively cutting out the unnecessary gaps during his journey.

In terms of the time between each correspondence, the ellipsis becomes even more evident. In *Dangerous Liaisons*, the bottom of each letter also writes the date that the letter is composed. For example, Valmont writes to Merteuil in letter 21 on 20th August (Laclos, 1961, pp. 56-59), and Merteuil responds in letter 33 on 24th August (pp. 78-80). The ellipsis indicates an

immediate shift into the next four days. The narrative between the two letters appears to be absent because it is excluded from the epistolary format, which focuses solely on the content of the letters. Any events that occur outside the context of the letters, regardless of how long the story takes, are omitted from the narrative as if they never existed ($NT < \infty ST$).

In chat fiction, however, the ellipsis functions as a break in linearity between narrative scenes. In *WHO*, chapter 1, Faye texts Pleng to chat at 10.30 p.m., followed by an ellipsis that shifts the narrative to another conversation in which Phu texts Pleng at 10.58 p.m. (rabbitnie, 2024), creating a sense of heightened urgency and rapid progression that is not possible with traditional letter correspondence.

While both transitional print and simulated instant messaging chat fiction utilize ellipsis ($NT = 0, ST = n$) to bypass narrative dead time, ellipsis in chat fiction can be strictly occurred between two different chat or conversation. In Myracle's *TTYL*, Angela texts Maddie on September 18th at 6 p.m. to talk. When the conversation ends, the ellipsis occurs, switching the narrative to another conversation at 6.23 p.m. (Myracle, 2014, pp.36-38). As well as in *WHO*, chapter 1, Faye texts Pleng to chat at 10.30 p.m., followed by an ellipsis that shifts the narrative to another conversation in which Phu texts Pleng at 10.58 p.m. (rabbitnie, 2024), making time shifts occur between isolated message logs. However, in some conversations in *TTYL*, the narrative may shift immediately into the next few days, such as when Angela texts Zoe on October 12th at 5.45 p.m. to talk, and then the narrative shifts to October 14th at 10.42 p.m., when Angela texts Zoe to start another conversation (Myracle, 2014, pp. 87-90). All of these examples demonstrate that the use of ellipsis is common across all conversations and that the time shift can possibly range from minutes to days, resulting in conversations that can be short which appropriate for advancing the narrative using merely the dialogue. This dead time or discontinuity represents the narrative fragmentation of the traditional epistolary baseline, with a gap drawn between interactions to indicate complete communicative disconnection.

While both transitional print chat fiction and chat fiction platforms use ellipses between conversation chat boxes, Joylada allows authors to use an ellipsis within the same chat box, executing temporal jumps through internal timestamps within a single continuous scrolling thread. For example, in *Private Chat*, Chapter 2, the protagonist, Me, frequently leaves messages in the chat boxes of her and her replica accounts beginning at 12.15 p.m., at which point the ellipsis occurs, shifting the narrative to 3.55 p.m. and 10.40 p.m. and then to the next day at 10.30 a.m. (Parkmin, 2022), as illustrated in the image below:

Figure 5

The ellipsis in a single chatroom



Note. From Private chat แชนด์บูต, by Parkmin, 2022, Joylada (<https://www.joylada.com/story/59717d7bdeb77f0001178310>).

This chat fiction capability transforms the ellipsis's function from structural fragmentation to a simulation of connected presence. The media environment is never closed, but the persistent chat interface shows that characters remain in the chat box. A jump of several hours within the same thread does not signify that the communication has ended, but rather that it has entered a state of anxious suspension, transforming the ellipsis from a transitional device between events into an active representation of modern digital anxiety and urgency.

Conclusions

This study has compared the narrative forms of the 18th-century epistolary novel and 21st-century chat fiction to demonstrate how communication tools, as narrative media, significantly influence the construction of narrative discourse. By applying Gérard Genette's framework of order and duration to *Dangerous Liaisons*, *TTYL*, *Private Chat*, and *WHO #KraiEekKhon*, the research reveals that the transition from the letter to the text message is not only a change in format but a systematic reconstruction of narrative structure that significantly shapes the temporal experience of the reader.

The findings show that the delay in the 18th-century postal system allows for a highly complex narrative order, characterized by a “complete analepsis” and complicated further by the use of a “partial analepsis”. This postal delay facilitates a narrative duration to be a retrospective reflection and a sentimental narrative tone, as seen in *Dangerous Liaisons*. Within this framework, a “summary” is utilized by the letter-writer to compress large temporal gaps and prioritize significant events, while a “descriptive pause” provides a non-synchronous space for characters to analyze their moral and emotional positions without fear of interruption.

In contrast, the features of chat fiction result in a shift toward digital immediacy, which unfolds in a three-step media evolution. In chat fiction, narrative order is structurally fragmented through both conversation and brief “partial analepses” used to report off-screen actions, a technique later optimized for the horror genre to distort and omit information while heightening psychological suspense. While the printed chat fiction (*TTYL*) successfully establishes Genette's “scene” (NT = ST) typographically through conversational logs and timestamps, it remains bound to the static page. However, simulated instant messaging chat fiction (*Private Chat* and *WHO*) surpass Genette's duration and completes this evolution by presenting the scene dynamically and simultaneously through a simulated instant messaging interface. Furthermore, chat fiction features and constraints, such as timestamps, the simulated typing indicator (...), which functions as a platform-enforced dynamic pause, and the smartphone interface, not only deliver the story but also actively control its duration.

However, both genres use the ellipsis to bridge communication gaps, though the structural delivery varies from the ellipsis between or implicitly within letters (implicit ellipsis), which is the fundamental element that allows a summary to exist, to the ellipsis between or within the chat box. While the length of an epistolary novel is determined by the number of physical days required for postal delivery, chat fiction can range from a few minutes to several days. Chat fiction also introduces internal temporal skips within a continuous scrolling thread. This structural update changes the function of the ellipsis; instead of representing a clean narrative break, it simulates a state of connected presence in which conversational gaps represent emotional desperation or anxiety.

In conclusion, the evolution from the handwritten letter to the digital chat screen shows that as our communication tools become more instantaneous, our storytelling becomes more scene-driven and urgent. By situating these findings within the context of digital age, especially Thailand's digital transformation (Thailand 4.0), this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional narratology can be adapted to explain modern, simulated instant-messaging interface literature. Ultimately, the fluidity of narrative structure reflects the tools we use to connect with one another, proving that the medium continues to be a primary determinant of the narrative message.

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