

# "where rainbows end": a story about what was felt but left unsaid

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## A Story About What Was Felt But Left Unsaid: The bridge/barrier

### Ambivalence

There is one occasion at the beginning of the novel where Rosie writes a letter to Alex but never sends it. This is the first sign we get as readers that she has pent up feelings for him but does not know how to communicate them and regrets it immediately, thus ending up not sending it to him. Both main characters behave similarly in the sense that they hold back this crucial information about how they feel about each other and that leads to frustration with the impossibility of the plot. This “tragic isolation” as Altman calls it, allows for the reader to very early on see what kind of internal turmoil Rosie has regarding her feelings, which is going to become recurrent throughout the novel.

“Given the letter’s function as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the bridge.” (Altman 1983: 13) Ahern utilizes different media through which the characters communicate with one another. It is also polylogic given that most characters in the schema communicate with one another and on top of that in different ways across time.

Focusing on Rosie and Alex, communication flows almost uninterrupted between the two of them. Sometimes more often, sometimes a bit less due to their adult lives. There are only two distinct periods, first one being after she returns from Boston the first time knowing he is engaged to Sally and on the second one being after she was not invited to his wedding to Bethany

without Alex knowing that this is the case, where they build a wall and stop talking apart from exchanging the occasional formal pleasantries for birthdays and Christmas.

Bridge/barrier (distance breaker/distance maker). The letter's mediatory property makes it an instrument that both connects and interferes. [...] As an intermediary step between indifference and intimacy, the letter lends itself to narrative actions that move the correspondents in either direction.

(Altman 1983: 187)

Thanks to Katie the bridge is once again built and the misunderstanding cleared so that they can resume their friendship and build from them.

The distance is even stronger when one thinks about the fact that the novel takes place in the era of email and messaging. It is not a matter that it takes them time to receive letters what keeps them apart, but their desire not to talk to one another because they are hurt, it is a deliberate distance that they construct, because suddenly making the effort to sustain the bridge became overwhelming.

Between Rosie and Stephanie as well as between Phil and Alex this poses a difficulty. They rely on one another in difficult times and on the important topics, but they do not communicate as much. The nature of their relationship is different than the one between the protagonists. On the other hand, there is no room for doubt that they appreciate their siblings and feel them close even if they are at a distance.

Nevertheless, it is thanks to this constant flow of communication through different media and between different characters what allows the reader to understand the protagonists better and to grow along with them. They are apart but they keep each other close and never miss to make the other a crucial part of their lives, even if they are not physically there. This is what leaves room for the tragic irony of what was felt by them all but left unsaid to be so poignant, having the reader look forward to the next letter, email or text so that they can know if anything will work out.