The First Time and the Mourning After: On Love, Loss, and Virginity

by

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Abstract

In “The First Time and the Mourning After: On Love, Loss, and Virginity,” I consider the question, mythology, and importance of the first time. My study opens theoretically and polemically with a concern for the meanings of the first time, why we reify the first time, why we mythologise the first time, and why we narrate the first time. In this opening, I also develop an argument for, what I call, “the flirtatious method,” a method, which pays little attention to commitment, but instead finds productive comfort in flirting with various theoretical postures, textual examples, and varying belief systems. The goal, thus, of the flirtatious method is to consider a problem, like the first time, from a variety of, and at times, competing discourses. In the chapters that follow, I begin to theorise one of the most important first times: the loss of virginity, and more specifically, male virginity. I argue that all first times must include paranoia, jouissance, hysteria, and mourning. In the next chapter, “On the First Love and First Loss,” I begin to theorise the first time in Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time and J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan. In this chapter, I further establish the theoretical framework that was presented in the opening chapter by demonstrating the ways in which the first time is theorised and experienced within the text; additionally, I also develop Jane Gallop’s notion of “anecdotal theory.” In the following chapter “Popular Romance and Virginity,” I begin to study the popular romance novel. My
theorisation of the first time is dependent upon it being true in a variety of “literatures”; accordingly, I move to the most optimistic treatment of love to consider the place of mourning. If my theorisations of the first time and the mourning after are true then surely they must also appear in the most optimistic, hopeful, and utopian manifestations of love. I begin initially by providing a reading of *Last Virgin in California* by Maureen Child, which narrates the first time of its heroine. Once this first time has been considered and explored, I move to the specific site of interest: narratives about male virginity. In “His First Time, His Mourning After, His Virginity,” I provide readings of popular romance novels and how the male exhibits each of these tendencies and experiences his first time. Finally, after concluding these readings, I move to the perhaps obvious question that has been lurking in the background: what about the second time? In my closing chapter, “The Second Time and the Morning After,” I consider the question of how we experience the second time in relation to the process of the first time and the mourning after.
Acknowledgments

Dissertations are funny things, for they are as much labours of love as they are tumultuous journeys of mourning and melancholia, and this dissertation is no exception. But, perhaps the strangest part of any dissertation is the page in which the author acknowledges his precursors, his mentors, his colleagues, his family, and his friends. So often the author begins by acknowledging the work is dependent upon these people but all mistakes and errors are his own, a nice inversion of “to err is human, to blame it on someone else even more human.” In many ways, as many dissertators surely know, the most difficult part of the dissertation is the least exciting—the acknowledgements, where no argument is made, no thesis proven.

I am grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to write a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Eva-Lynn Jagoe and Dr. Jonathan Hart. They have both provided intellectual support in times when it seemed as if there was no end in sight (or too many ends in sight). I am especially delighted to have had the opportunity to take Dr. Jagoe’s course on Marcel Proust, and that she agreed to share her lecture, “Technologies of Extended Perception: Psychoanalysis and the Long Novel as Expanded Forms,” which has been thoroughly inspiring and refreshing. Dr. Bolus-Reichert joined this project late, when it became clear I was writing about love and romance, and her input has been invaluable. Dr. Hart graciously agreed to join this project when it was about Northrop Frye, but as ideas changed, and focus shifted, he agreed to stay on and advise from afar. Drs. Jagoe, Hart, and Bolus-Reichert provided engaging critiques of the work marked by their own intellectual curiosities. Dr. Carol Mavor provided a thorough engagement with my dissertation and offered a critique that was challenging and fair, and one that I am certain I shall return to often. Dr. Mavor’s work has been stimulating and I look forward to engaging with it further in the future. Though not a part of the dissertation committee, I must recognise the tremendous efforts of Dr. Goldenson, who has somehow managed to keep my head clear enough to write.

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helped me to refine ideas, has always been a good critic and a passionate defender, and above all an amazing friend. Though distance separates us, email unites us.

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Finally, I wish to thank the University of Toronto, the Centre for Comparative Literature, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance, McDaniel College, Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts at Brock University, the Canadian Comparative Literature Association, and the Romance Writers of America for their financial support.
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First Words and the Affinity of Influence

“The First Time and the Mourning After: On Love, Loss, and Virginity” is written from a self-reflexive, metacritical position, which considers the authority of subjectivity in the experience of reading text. This authority should matter because the writers that I find most provocative are those who begin from the position of the self and move outwards, and I hope that this study contributes to that body of knowledge. In this regard my dissertation questions the bounds between the authorial subject and the subjects reading the study. Throughout the thesis I oscillate between “I” and “we,” a rhetorical device that allowed me change points of view and to ask and encourage the reader to ask: for whom is “the first time” not important? As far as I can tell nearly every medium has considered the question of the first love, the first loss, and the first sexual time, ranging from the tragedy of the first time to the entirely farcical exploration of finally achieving the first time, the damning depression of losing the first love to the thrilling excitement of finding (and hoping) that the first love is the love, the happily ever after.

In this study, I position a series of theorists alongside one another who often have little in common, chief among them are: Roland Barthes, Sigmund Freud, Eva-Lynn Jagoe, Carol Mavor, Adam Phillips, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. These theorists along with the literary texts I consider – In Search of Lost Time, Peter Pan, and a series of romance novels may not seem like obvious choices, but here I would like to show that this selection makes more sense than might first appear.

At bottom, my method is one that braids together theorists and texts that seem very different from one another to see what happens when they do come together despite their
differences. Indeed, in my reading of Proust, I aim not to read into the fetishised Madeleine and see if there is yet another way through the text, an ultimately narcissistic exploration of Proust. The theorists I engage with are theorists whom I have found to be inspiring and thoroughly engaging and productive. It seems logical enough that other scholars offer similar methodological frameworks. Judith Halberstam, for instance, offers “queer methodology” which is “a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior” (13). While I argue that romance novels have largely been “deliberately excluded” (I don’t think it is an accident), the same cannot be said for Marcel Proust and J. M. Barrie. Likewise, the queer methodology is committed not only to the queerness of its methodology, but also to its theoretical backing, its texts, and its contexts. Closer to my methodology might be the notion of “play,” which relates to my use of the flirtatious in this thesis. As D. W. Winnicott writes, “play is immensely exciting” (Playing and Reality 64), and I find this sense of immense excitement in the work of these theorists and texts when put together, when they play with one another. But play is not necessarily just “child’s play.” Michael Moon—in his very recent book, Darger’s Resources—writes, “play isn’t simply fun, and neither are the intenser reaches of pleasure” (4). Flirtation, like play, is not simply fun and joy though it is certainly fun and joyful; instead, as Moon explains, “[t]he seriousness (as well as the great energy and joy) that children sometimes bring to their play and pleasure [...] can demand engagement with some of our own and other people’s most disturbing feelings, memories, and desires, and can invite and withstand rigorous analysis” (4). The issue for me here is that play and pleasure are serious concepts and notions that can lend themselves to academic inquiry.
Flirtation does this: it flirts with danger and recognises the possibility of its failure, but it does so with a sincerity and seriousness that cannot be dismissed.

Because I recognise the possibility of misreading, I want to suggest clearly here that flirtation does not aim to be simple, nor does it intend to be dismissive. I realize now that to suggest Barthes, for instance, is flirtatious as a critic is problematic, particularly in light of Helen Vendler’s anecdote about being asked by an eminent literary critic, “[h]ow can you like that silly homosexual?” (58). This sort of dismissive language is not my goal. I hardly wish to be dismissive of Barthes or any other critics that I engage with.

Barthes, for instance, in his essay “Myth Today,” which appears in Mythologies, theorises the questions of race and does it with significant force. The difference at play in my consideration of Barthes as flirtatious can be considered in light of this example. Barthes is by no means a theorist of race; instead, Barthes speaks smartly about race, contributes to discussions of race and identity, and yet is not going to be categorised or recognised as a theorist of race. It is this difference that seems flirtatious to me. Barthes is a flirtatious critic precisely because he touches so many aspects of his world, and, perhaps more importantly, the world of his readers. What I admire about Barthes is what I admire by Sedgwick: they are flirtatious critics because they cannot be easily pigeonholed to a theoretical school. Paul Kelleher, for instance, explains:

Sedgwick’s distinct rendering of the literary history of sexuality teaches us how the intimate connections between reader and writer, writer and text, text and canon, are no less eventful than the dramatic crossings among sexes, genders, and sexualities. One can hardly think of a moment in Sedgwick's
work when she doesn’t gesture simultaneously to theory and practice of both sexuality and literature. Neither sexuality in the light of literature, nor literature in the light of sexuality: Sedgwick does just to both, rather, by reawakening our sense of what sexuality and literature do – together for one another, to one another. (143)

Sedgwick braids together two very different ideas so as to create a stronger relation and a more expansive theory to uncover the complexity of literature and sexuality. Sedgwick is certainly a theorist of sexuality and literature. Flirtatious critics, like Sedgwick and Barthes, “exploit the idea of surprise” (Phillips, On Flirtation xix), by which I mean that the flirtatious critic is always able to render something new, write about something that does not seem immediately available, is able to braid together competing or contrary ideas. The flirtatious or playful critic considers new terrain, explores new affects, and provokes excitement in his or her reader.

Flirtation, however, also lends itself to a critique of commitment and monogamy. The problem is that literary studies, despite many attempts to the contrary, remain very monogamous, and this is, at core, likely an institutional problem. (The Academy is interested in interdisciplinarity, but only up to a point.) My dissertation is fundamentally concerned with the relations between theory and text, and one that is interested in both theory and text, and especially theory as text.

The thesis is not given over to monogamy. As Phillips has written, “monogamy is a way of getting the versions of ourselves down to a minimum” (Monogamy 7). Authors are to be monogamous so as to help the critic locate their work, to recognize without difficulty
where the author’s work fits, and to what the author’s expertise pertains. In this study, I am very careful not to call Sedgwick a “queer theorist.” While this approach does cause some difficulty, I believe that it behooves the literary critic to avoid these categories, which all too often essentialise authors, or reduce them (and their work) “down to a minimum.” This method is, however, not without its risks. It is risky to distance oneself from “disciplinary coherence,” which presupposes that staying inside the confines of a sanctioned discipline (like comparative literature) somehow avoids the appearance of infidelity.

Flirtation, however, is not by default an ideology, theory, or method of anti-commitment. Flirtation necessarily includes, for it must, the possibility of commitment, at one point or another, the flirtation might be successful and one would then have to follow through. What I mean to suggest is that commitment forecloses the possibility of flirtation. My dissertation openly flirts with psychoanalytic criticism, and it is likely with psychoanalysis that I come the closest to a commitment, but at the same time if I were to adopt psychoanalysis as a methodology, I would likely have to exclude some of my central theorists, who are helpful for a fuller understanding of the central concerns of the thesis as well as the fiction it discusses. Roland Barthes, for instance, writes: “[d]on’t say Mourning. It’s too psychoanalytic. I’m not mourning. I’m suffering” (Mourning Diary 73). Sedgwick refers to the “helping professions” (in her scare quotes) when discussing psychoanalysis and psychiatry in “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay” (155). Both critics are cautious of a criticism committed to psychoanalysis, and yet both are keenly aware of and contribute to dialogues with psychoanalysis. Thus, to my mind, these theorists flirt with psychoanalysis (as I do) even though they are hardly “psychoanalytic critics” (and I am not convinced that I am a psychoanalytic critic).
The flirtatious method, in this regard, affords the critic the opportunity to engage with critics who often have very different research agendas and to consider how one might “braid” together a variety of critical positions to consider a common theme. To put it another way, Phillips has suggested, “our descriptions of sexuality are tyrannized by various stories of committed purpose – sex as reproduction, sex as heterosexual intercourse, sex as intimacy – flirtation puts into disarray our sense of an ending” (On Flirtation xix), and I would add that flirtation also puts into disarray our sense of understanding and coherency. Flirtation is remarkably liberating precisely because it does not demand commitment to an idea; instead, it recognises the importance of being caught off-guard, being surprised, and looking beyond the coherency of discipline.

All of this being said, an additional and important level to the flirtatious methodology needs to be accounted for and one that answers to a question of influence. Before providing this discussion, I provide some background to this level. When I came to the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, I was interested primarily in the question of influence, and specifically, I was committed to one idea, “the anxiety of influence.” Everything I was writing at the time was informed by Harold Bloom’s monumental theory of poetry, The Anxiety of Influence and Bloom’s subsequent books on the subject. I eventually did publish an article that considered Bloom’s relation to Northrop Frye. My dissertation, in its present form, is not about Harold Bloom (indeed, the phrase “anxiety of influence” does not even appear in the study). Still, there are the “hauntings” of the origins of the thesis that can be found throughout, and I take this opportunity here to speak about the Bloomian ghost that lurks in the shadows of this study.
The flirtatious method, on the one hand, is a paranoid methodology. Peggy Phelan writes, “[p]aranoia is a defence against connection; it multiplies potential connections so feverishly any single one becomes impossible” (11). If this is paranoia (a key term in my own study), I am guilty of being paranoid. Flirting seems less experienced, less authoritative. But the haunting side of the flirtatious method is that it is about an “anxiety of influence” because of “potential connections” between the theorists I consider. The “potential connections” that Phelan speaks of are particularly interesting – at least for me – in this dissertation.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom draws on Oscar Wilde’s notion that “every disciple takes away something from his master” (9) and this is certainly, I think, at the core of the dissertation. I have loved this notion of influence since reading Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, but almost as often critics learn that Bloom’s theory is “a theory of psychic poetic engender and literary father-killing” (179) as Emily Apter summarized Bloom’s work. For a long time, I wanted to find a less violent understanding of influence and I think that my dissertation, especially in light of its “hauntings,” begins to answer this question.

Bloom further elaborates “the anxiety of influence” in terms of the swerve. The poet “swerves” away from his precursor:

poetic misprision or misprision proper; I take the word from Lucretius, where it means a “swerve” of the atoms so as to make change possible in the universe. A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor’s poem as to execute a clinamen in relation to it. This appears as a
corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but the should have swerved, precisely in the direction the new poem moves. (The Anxiety of Influence 14).

In his subsequent book, A Map of Misreading, Bloom argues, “[t]o live, the poet must misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father” (19, Bloom’s emphasis). While Bloom is talking about strong poets and I am surely not a strong poet, I cannot help but understand this notion in the space of the dissertation, the relation between a “disciple” and his “master.” Unfortunately, I am not comfortable with adopting the notion of “anxiety of influence” to explain my dissertation and its multiple connections with theorists because Bloom demands violence and I am not yet ready to be violent, I do not feel the need to kill off my intellectual precursors precisely because I still believe there is much that I can learn from my precursors. Even though I have argued elsewhere (2009) that the anxiety of influence absolutely extends beyond poetry and to the act of literary criticism and theory, I cannot in practice extend this same violence to my own dissertation, at least not with my immediate critics and writers (there are, however, ghosts lurking in the background).

As much as I might like to explain away this relationship as merely an exercise in the anxiety of influence, an attempt to kill off the precursor, I would, in so doing, however also actively be trying to kill of my precursor’s precursor. This violence does not ring true, at least not for me, because I think that these precursors, now wholly mine, are inspiring critics and readers of literature and from whom I want to continue to learn. So then how do I come to understand this relation? The answer is found in flirtation, I believe, a flirtation
that admits its desire to read and read more of these critics, to somehow join their community.

There is to be certain, regardless of our attempts to the contrary, an oedipal pull to all dissertation writing because the dissertator, presumably, wants to please those for whom he is writing, and yet, he knows that he is likely never going to fully please the mentor, just as one can never fully please one’s parent. Jane Gallop, a wonderfully complicated and flirtatious critic, writes about this polemic:

a dissertator is, by definition, at the very edge of student identity. Literally at the end of her studies, the dissertator is no longer simply a student, already within the rite of passage to professor. Dissertator is a liminal identity: a dissertator is a student who cannot be comfortable with being a student. The student who is no longer quite a student works within an unusual pedagogical relation. Whereas the common pedagogical relation lasts for a few months, with teacher and student meeting only in the company of dozens of other students, this is a long-term, one-on-one relation. Dissertator and supervisor commonly work together for several years and normally tête-à-tête. If we take as the norm the relation between a student and the instructor whose course she takes, the relation between dissertator and supervisor is exorbitant. (Anecdotal Theory 73)

The way Gallop theorises the relation is important—and it is an area of concern where a great deal of research remains to be done—precisely because it recognises the complexity of this relation. The student’s identity as student is fraught and fragile; the professor’s
identity is equally perplexing because of the student’s liminal identity. This is a complex relation.

It is in this regard that I have trouble imagining the intellectual connection as Bloomian in all of its violence. My relation is instead one that is fraught with the other side of Oedipus, the flirtatious crisis. Throughout this dissertation I confront critics whom I deeply admire and respect, and one of whom happens to be the co-supervisor of this dissertation. To repress the anxiety of influence is a key component of this dissertation, and instead, looking back on the dissertation and in light of its hauntings being noted, I think of this project as more of an “affinity of influence.” I know who the most influential voices are (or at least I think I do) and Harold Bloom – even in hiding – is most certainly one of those influential voices lurking in the background.

Flirtation is an anxiety of influence, a desire to be recognised by the other as an equal, a desire to be welcomed into a community of scholars. My dissertation never commits to these theorists precisely because of its respect—my respect—for their work, something with which I can only ever flirt. Barthes, Freud, Jagoe, Mavor, Phillips, and Sedgwick are influential theorists and writers because they have provided a way to think about texts that is not reduced to agon (though it is there, for it must be) but instead probably shares more in common with loving criticism. I therefore swerve away from Bloom’s “anxiety of influence,” not in a violent spirit in which I kill off Bloom, but in a more generous and transferential way.

“The First Time and the Mourning After: On Love, Loss, and Virginity” is a study of “the first time,” but it does so from a theoretically informed lens that attempts to
understand how writers write about these times. While my dissertation is primarily concerned with love, loss, and virginity, I think that many of the observations can translate to other first times. The first time, as I understand it, is about the experience of some thing, action, idea for the first time, all other times become second times, third times, other times.

The texts considered in this dissertation are perhaps strange and do not seem to go together, but there is a thematic question that unites all of these texts: first love, first loss, first sexual time. My aim has been to speak about a part of “literature” that is all too often removed from literary studies: the popular romance novel. Northrop Frye, another ghost haunting this dissertation, writes that popular literature is “neither better nor worse than elite literature, nor is it really a different kind of literature” (CW XVIII.23), and moreover that, “only the archetypal critic can be concerned with its [the text’s] relationship to the rest of literature” (CW XXII.93). Guided by these claims, it seems to me that there is much to be gained from positioning popular literature alongside “elite literature,” particularly when the concern is thematic or archetypal. The figure of the virgin, an archetype of romance, transcends the boundaries between the “elite” and the “popular,” and the same is true of the more thematically informed concerns of first love and first loss. My study therefore positions Proust and Barrie alongside popular romances, all of which speak about virginity, love, and loss in interesting ways. In particular, I was interested in romance novels that spoke specifically to the hero’s love, loss, and virginity. The matter of male virgin heroes in romance novels significantly reduced the possible corpus I could use to about a few dozen novels. I further reduced the corpus by focussing solely on category, name-brand romance novels. This category arguably holds the lowest rank on the hierarchy of literature, but it also is structurally and formally quite interesting because it is strictly limited to a given
number of pages by the publisher. Thus, the romance novel, like the sonnet, has a limit that it must adhere to, which, of course, presents a stark contrast with the expansive and seemingly without end *In Search of Lost Time*.

I hope that readers of this dissertation will find that I engage fairly and justly with the theorists who have must inspired me to write this study. The flirtatious method, still in development, is one that works to move away from anxieties of influence and towards affinities of influence. The flirtatious method, considered throughout this dissertation, is one that works to explore the “strange braids” (a term for which I am indebted to Carol Mavor) that inform intellectual work.
The First Time

First impression, first kiss, first love, first crush, first steps, first words, first job, first period, first failure, first apartment, first graduation, first communion, first ticket, first reading, first child, first time...these are firstly important times because of the influence they hold on our lives. I am writing this study from a self-reflexive position wherein I hope that readers will consider the ways in which they are inculcated, interpellated, and integrated in these ideas. Ideas like “first kiss” or “first failure” are ideas that are lived with (temporally expansive) rather than always lived in a specific moment (temporally limited); that is, these moments become key moments in the lives of those who experience them or imagine them hypothetically. I recognise that interpellating the reader may very well be off-putting and cause a sense of discomfort because the claims seem to concern unique experiences, but ultimately, I believe that I am talking about very universal experiences (even if they have not yet happened; they are imagined, their stories are told in the news media, the cinema, the stage, and, of course, the page) though we will all likely experience our first times in different ways. We have made the first time important and it has been made important for us. We have mythologised the first time in such a way that we cannot escape the importance of whatever first time we are about to embark upon. Indeed, as Adam Phillips writes in “Two Lectures on Expectation”: “the word ‘first’ is used in Strachey’s Standard translation [of Sigmund Freud’s work] 3,766 times (‘pleasure’ by way of comparison is used 1,088 times)” (227). Sigmund Freud, of course, is firstly known as a theorist of pleasure; and yet, as Phillips notes, it is the word “first” that appears most in Freud’s oeuvre. Thus, even when we presume to speak about one thing, we are often speaking back to the first time that thing took place, was consumed, or was experienced.
But, why does the “first time” capture so much of our critical and imaginative capacities? What makes the first time the most important time, the most mythologised, the most narrativised time?

Eva-Lynn Jagoe in her hitherto unpublished paper, “Technologies of Extended Perception: Psychoanalysis and the Long Novel as Expanded Forms,” considers the question of the first time:

Firstly, dans un premier temps, a fact about how we read. For the most part, as academics, we read in private. The first time, it remains hidden so that we can come across as knowing something about the text. This only happens once. The first time is an important time. It’s more prone to mistakes but also to flashes. We retain our surprise, and no one can imagine what we will think. Not even the author, who cannot know what it is like to read his book for the first time because he’s never had that kind of ignorance about it. (TS 4)

Jagoe’s negotiation of the first time is provocative.1 Though she is speaking specifically about the first time of reading and first analysis (a point to which I shall return below), I cannot help but misread her writing so as to speak less about the specificity of a given first time and more about the theoretical and generic tug-and-pull between her theoretical enterprise and my own concerns: first love, first loss, and first time as virginal time. While these first times—reading, psychoanalysis, virginity—have affinities with one another, there are surely differences between them and this dissertation will work to understand

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1 I must extend, immediately and without reservation, my sincerest and most excessive gratitude to Eva-Lynn Jagoe for presenting this lecture at the Centre for Comparative Literature and for sharing the lecture with me (and the many discussions of the lecture that have followed).
the first time and virginal time. The point that I will consider in this dissertation is how the first time has always already been mythologised for us insofar as it is invested with a meaning. Roland Barthes writes: “myth is not defined by the object of its message, but the way in which it utters its message” (Mythologies 109). As such, meaning is ascribed to the object through the ways in which we speak, enunciate, and narrate the event or the thing being mythologised. The first time is an important time because of the hold it has over all other times. It is a time that we will remember regardless of the success or the failure of the first time. Indeed, Barthes writes (this time in his seminar The Preparation of the Novel): “[t]he Novel Fantasy: starts out from a few novels and to that extent rests on (takes as its starting point) something like the First Pleasure (of reading) → and, from our knowledge of erotic pleasure, we recognize the force of that First Pleasure, which traverses a lifetime” (13). Barthes is talking as much about reading and writing as he is about the sexual lifecycle of the human. The first pleasure, according to Barthes, is something that will be a moment, perhaps, the moment, which will be recalled throughout the entire lifetime of the subject. Thus, it follows that one does not—perhaps cannot—forget one’s first time and that memory will reside within the self, haunt the self, and trouble the self indefinitely. In this dissertation, I will consider the question of the first time and how we might theorise and conceptualise these instances.

Thus far, I have begun to outline the theoretical question and framework from which this study will depart. My theoretical concern is informed by theorists who are heavily involved in literary analysis and, as Phillips might say, theorists who “flirt” (On Flirtation) with psychoanalysis and queer theory. Throughout this study, I will draw heavily on theorists who “flirt” rather than “commit” to one theoretical school; and as such, my models or exemplars are critics like Roland Barthes, Adam Phillips, Carol Mavor, Eva-
Lynn Jagoe, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, precisely because they provide a way to think about issues that are very immediate, but ones that have not yet been adequately theorised, problematised, or considered within literary analysis. That is, Jagoe, Barthes, Mavor, Phillips, and Sedgwick are not arguing from predetermined ideological positions, already knowing the answer, but rather from a perspective of introspection, retrospection, and inspection wherein they are able to engage deeply and affectively with the textures of the notions they are considering. Thus Phillips, though a trained psychoanalyst, draws on literature to explore a given psychoanalytic phenomenon he is considering. Literature, for Phillips, flirts with psychoanalysis and psychoanalysis flirts with literature. My negotiation with psychoanalytic criticism, for instance, is flirtatious rather than committed because, as Phillips writes, “people tend to flirt only with serious things—madness, disaster, other people—and the fact that flirting is pleasure, makes it a relationship, a way of doing things, worth considering” (On Flirtation xvii). In this dissertation, I flirt with a variety of theorists and theoretical positions in hopes of understanding the first time. Each of the theorists named above are flirtatious with the first time in their writings and throughout this dissertation, I will flirt with them and the texts I am studying.

For Phillips, flirts (as opposed to flirting or being flirtatious) “are dangerous because they have a different way of believing in the Real Thing. And by ‘believing in’ I mean ‘behaving as if’ it exists” (On Flirtation xvii). This is the problem with the notion of the first time: we behave as if it exists, and by its “existence” I mean that it is readily, easily, and quickly defined and discerned. To talk, think, and write about the first time requires that one flirt with a variety of discourses because it is a negotiation between the “believing in” and “behaving as if” that needs to be accounted for by the author. The first time requires a negotiation with both the imagined—the mythologies that inform it—and the real, the very
real actions involved in experiencing the first time. While I acknowledge there is a very real first time, I also recognise a very imagined mythology associated with that first time. In this regard, the critical flirtation is one that recognises that the first time could and often does become all too real, but at the cost of the mythology. For Phillips, flirtation allows for one to engage with the real without ever letting it become too real, too present. As Phillips writes: “[f]lirting creates the uncertainty it is also trying to control; and so [it] can make us wonder which ways of knowing, or being known, sustain our interest, our excitement, in other people” (On Flirtation xviii). Flirting has both “positive” and “negative” potential and this is why I think that flirting is the critical method that needs to be adopted in this study.

This is a dissertation that is not, nor does it pretend to be, monogamous in its theoretical marriage; rather, this dissertation is a flirtatious one that is true only to its desire to understand the first time.

Flirtation, as a critical method, may cause some to believe that this study is not aptly or sufficiently engaging with the theoretical models with which it intends to flirt. However, this is not the case. Flirting provides a way of thinking that allows for things to, as Roland Barthes might suggest, “shimmer” (The Neutral 51). In that Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978), he writes that, “the Neutral is the shimmer: that whose aspect, perhaps whose meaning, is subtly modified according to the angle of the subject’s gaze” (51). In this regard, flirtation, as I understand it, allows the subject to look at the image or concept, from different angles. Thus, in this study I adopt a methodology that allows for the problem of virginity and the first time to shimmer because of the various ideological starting points that I consider to be essential to the problem. The first time cannot, I would argue, be understood from a singular perspective of ideological dogmatism or disciplinary rigidity; instead, I want to flirt with the various angles that can be used to understand the
first time. As such, I draw on flirtatious critics who disavow dogmatism in favour of curiosity and a hope to understand even if, in the end, more questions remain than are answered.²

This negotiation of “flirtation” rather than “commitment” is akin to what Sedgwick calls “weak theory” versus “strong theory.” Strong theory, in essence, demands adoption and commitment so as to attempt to avoid the surprises of paranoia; whereas “weak theory” or “reparative reading” will expect the unexpected, embrace the surprises. Sedgwick explains: “to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic to experience surprise” (“Paranoid Reading” 146). In contrast to reparative reading, Sedgwick describes a paranoid reading practice, which is to say, a strong theory that works to predict and avoid all possible surprises. Fredric Jameson’s dictum “Always historicize!” (Political Unconscious 9) is, for instance, a strong theory because it works to avoid any pitfall, any surprise; but as Sedgwick astutely, if not with a flirtatious sarcasm, points out: “[w]hat could have less to do with historicizing than the commanding, atemporal adverb always?” (“Paranoid Reading” 125) What makes Jameson’s theoretical work “strong” is not that it historicises (and often uncovers innovative readings that may be filled with surprise), but rather that it demands

² Another methodology that might prove useful is Judith Halberstam’s “queer methodology,” which, “in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (13). I appreciate Halberstam’s notion of queer methodology but I am less interested in the politics of exclusion (deliberate, accidental, or otherwise); where I find agreement with Halberstam is in embracing “methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other” (13). However, my own methodology also embraces a self-reflexivity, which while present in Halberstam’s Female Masculinity, finds it has (or, at least hopes to have) greater affinities with critics like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Carol Mavor, and Eva-Lynn Jagoe.
an always, which will uncover the surprises, a way of pre-empting surprise by demanding that surprises be sought.3

Flirtation certainly flirts with paranoia. Paranoia, in my work, at its core, requires a looking forward. The paranoid asks: “will I (do something)?” and thus, paranoia points toward the future. Of course, this is different from the paranoid question: “will this happen to me?” My intention here is to draw on Sedgwick’s paranoia that attempts to avoid surprises—bad surprises—and to delineate a theory in which the paranoid is as worried about something happening to him or herself as he or she is worried about being the agent of that thing. Unlike the fully paranoid, strong theory of the always, flirtation (with paranoia) still allows for itself to be surprised (rather than seeking out surprises and rid itself of those surprises). The paranoid works to avoid surprises by fearing what will happen if he or she were to do something, to take those first steps towards the first time.

Flirtation as a critical method flirts with danger, with paranoia, and paranoia and danger flirt back with flirtation. The theoretical framework for this study is a flirtatious one insofar as it makes no commitment to any particular theory. Rather, this study looks for and hopes to encounter connections between various theorists who each represent

3 Jameson’s “always” is, of course, problematic, at least from my perspective. Indeed, my own study is perhaps equally problematic insofar as mine contains the “always” of the “first time,” which might seem antithetical to the Sedgwickian critique. My point, however, is less about finding the first time and more about understanding the first time. However, the historicising impulse of the first time is not without merit. Tim Dean, in his book Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking, for instance, writes: “Through HIV it is possible to imagine establishing an intimate corporeal relation with somebody one has never met or, indeed, could never meet—somebody historically, geographically, or socially distinct from oneself. What would it mean for a young gay man today to be able to trace his virus back to, say, Michel Foucault? By thinking in genealogical terms, we start to appreciate how HIV can become a basis of authority and pride rather than of merely stigma and shame” (88-89). This seems to me to be about a different “time” than I am configuring it in my study, but it is implicitly also a historical gesture towards understanding. What if one were able to “always historicise” one’s virus and to locate one’s connection to Michel Foucault? I’m not interested in this sort of historicising gesture. Instead, the first time, as I conceive of it, is one that is already always known.
different theoretical frameworks. In this regard, there is a weak theory at play in this dissertation, and the theory is flirtatious while, at the same time, very much engaged with an already constructed—less flirtatious, perhaps not even flirtatious at all—strong theory of virginity,4 one marked by, as we shall see and as I shall argue, anxiety, hysteria, and paranoia. This dissertation therefore, like flirting, is duplicitous and does not negate the strong theory or the weak theory; instead, there is an attempt to draw on both weak theory and strong theory, to be surprised but not to uncover all surprises in advance of the exercise.

While I have outlined above a variety of “first times,” this study is predominantly concerned with those first times of love and sexuality. I am interested in the first time that we have mythologised in our romance novels, our romantic comedies, our tragedies: virginal time and the time of love, because, as Barthes writes, “[t]he events of amorous life are so trivial that they gain access to writing only by an immense effort” (A Lover’s

4 The question of virginity will be further developed below, but for the time being, what I mean by this is that virginity has been theorised and given meaning in a large number of contexts already. My dissertation will address male virgins, which are not present in much of the critical and academic scholarship on virginity. Perhaps the only “study” to date to seriously consider the difference between male and female virginity is Kate Monro’s The First Time: True Tales of Virginity Lost & Found (Including My Own) (2011). There are many valuable studies of virginity (primarily female virginity), for instance: Marie H. Loughlin’s Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage (1997); Medieval Virginities (2003) edited by Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, Sarah Salih; Laura M. Carpenter’s Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences (2005); Corinne Harol’s Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature (2006); Hanne Blank’s Virgin: The Untouched History (2007); Anke Bernau’s Virgins: A Cultural History (2007); Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Inexperience in Film (2010) edited by Tamar Jeffers McDonald. Studies with an emphasis on abstinence and purity include: Jessica Warner’s All or Nothing: A Short History of Abstinence in America (2008); Jessica Valenti’s The Purity Myth: How America’s Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women (2010). One additional book worth mentioning here is a recent publication by Mark Regernus and Jeremy Uecker, Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think About Marrying (2011), which in many ways focuses on the tension between abstinence, virginity, marriage, and sexuality. Many of these studies inform my work, most especially Kate Monro’s The First Time, which provides a strong consideration of more than the female, heterosexual virgin; Laura M. Carpenter’s Virginity Lost, is also instrumental in thinking at a socio-cultural level, particularly within the American context; and Anke Bernau’s Virgins: A Cultural History because of its worldview of virginity rather than the more historically-specific projects.
Discourse 93). It is this paradox of triviality and this immense effort that strikes me as fundamentally worthy of consideration. But this observation is about more than just “amorous life”; in a way, Barthes provides the answer to the implicit question “why do we mythologise the first time?” The solution is that it is both trivial—for we will have many times after the first times—and it is an immense effort, since we have to be courageous enough, like Barthes’ “immense effort”—to take the first steps in our first times.

Despite the fact that we must tell these stories of love, that we see these stories repeated ad infinitum, and that we continue to devour these stories, I believe that there is something, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might call it, of “the freshness of slow learners” (A Dialogue on Love 22) in each of the narratives to be considered in this dissertation. Most readers of this dissertation and readers of stories of love will have experienced love, desire, and first times in their lifetime, and thus there is a necessary flirting with their own experiences as they read and reflect. But, above all, I think there is a desire, however repressed, to relive the beautiful “freshness of slow learners,” to reimagine or imagine anew the first time. Mari Ruti explains that:

Those we have loved ardently leave a lasting legacy. Our inner world will forever hold their trace. We will forever feel their presence. And the course of our future is in some ways influenced by that presence. Even though our lost lover is no longer a part of our everyday reality, he has a role to play in the overall direction of our lives. (The Case for Falling In Love 212)

While it is true that Ruti is giving advice, indeed arguing for “falling in love,” the point remains that we cannot escape our past loves, and nowhere is this more potent than with our first love. Stories of love and the first time, I contend, require that we reflect on our
own stories of love and the first time. In an attempt to understand these moments, we continue to talk and write about them.

Our inability to overcome the first love and the first time provokes a sense of hysteria that motivates our desire to tell our stories. There is a belief, however ill-conceived, that if we tell a story repeatedly, we will be able to overcome it (or, conversely that by retelling the story, we make it strong, so as to retain it); instead, I am going to argue throughout this dissertation that we continue to tell the stories simply because it draws us closer to a full process of mourning. Ruti writes: “one must even say that a psyche that has not experienced loss is not a fully developed psyche” (The Case for Falling in Love 214). Ruti’s point should be read as an indication of why loss is important, and moreover, I would add, why loss should be coupled with our need to tell these stories either by means of literature or during psychoanalysis or psychotherapy. It is for this reason that we continue to read the story of love.

In the coming sections of the dissertation, after considering the current purity movement—a movement which encourages sustained virginity until marriage and which is funded by all levels of government in the United States of America—I will work to theorise virginity as a “state of paranoia” as defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I will then argue that the post-virginal identity is a “state of hysteria” that subsequently transforms into a process of mourning. The experience of the first time and the mourning after will unfold in the following fashion:

Richard Terdiman has recently published what will surely become an important piece of writing on a growing body of scholarship in the field of “love studies” in which he asks the question “Can We Read the Book of Love?” (2011). He observes, “[p]eople love being in love, and when they are they talk and write about it with an expansive intensity” (478). I am fully in agreement with Terdiman; however, I think there is a fundamental difference between a first love and a second or third or any other time love and that this difference needs to be accounted for in considering the greater question of love in general.
1. **Paranoia** is the moment in which the subject asks: "Will I (do something)?" **Paranoia** points toward the future.

2. **Jouissance** is the moment in which the subject recognises: “I am (doing that thing).” **Jouissance** is the lived in moment of the present.

3. **Hysteria** is the moment after jouissance in which the subjects asks: “Did I (just do that thing)?” **Hysteria** renders the present now past.

4. **Mourning** is the culmination of everything and the subject recognises (and reconciles) and says: “I did (that thing).” **Mourning** is a looking back, a turning toward the past.

Admittedly, these are not the “standard” definitions of these key terms and I am actively engaging in a re-reading of these terms. My aim is to work with these terms in recognition of their more typical meanings and in relation to my project of the first time and the mourning after which is, perhaps, introspective and requires a predominance of the subject and the actions involved in the first time as experienced by the subject. The intention is to position virginity as the starting point—degree zero—of the first time and to show how the first time will always move through a series of stages: paranoia, jouissance, hysteria, and mourning. These notions are encountered in the literary texts to be considered and we must therefore consider them together (not in time as chronology per se but in recognition of their place in the first time), flirtatiously, so as to understand how we come to understand the entire possibility of love, the love story, and most importantly the love of the first time.
The New Sexual Revolution

North American society and culture, particularly American (USA), has seen a renewed discussion and interest in virginity, its uses, and its various meanings.\(^6\) The title of this section refers to “The New Sexual Revolution is Here” which is taken from Chastity.com and serves as the movement’s motto. Chastity is now the focal point of the “new sexual revolution” rather than sexuality itself. Virginity, chastity, and abstinence, these are the concepts that inundate American culture.\(^7\) As I write this study, fathers are taking their

\[\text{6}\] To speak of a specific time moment wherein this discussion becomes “confirmable” is difficult; however, there are varying dates that could be marked as paradigmatic in discussions of virginity. It seems that the year of 1984 will have a permanent place because of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the 2008 preface to Epistemology of the Closet writes: “What’s equally hard to reconstruct [about the writing of Epistemology of the Closet] now is the uncertainty about what kind of response to AIDS might crystallize from the state and other public sphere. This was the time when, despite the many dead, the words ‘AIDS’ didn’t cross the lips of the U.S. president throughout the early years of the epidemic, while legislators and pundits busied themselves with devising more or less frankly punitive schemes for rounding up, classifying, tattooing, quarantining, and otherwise damaging men and women with HIV” (xv). However, it is to be noted that there was not a quick push for sexual education with regards to the HIV/AIDS crisis as Sedgwick has noted in her important essay “Queer and Now,” “I’ve heard of many people who claim they’d as soon their children were dead as gay. What it took me a long time to believe is that these people are saying no more than the truth. They even speak for others too delicate to use the words. For there is all the evidence. The preponderance of school systems, public and parochial, where teachers are fired, routinely, for so much as intimating the right to existence of queer people, desires, activities, children. The routine denial to sexually active adolescents, straight and gay, of the things they need – intelligible information, support and respect, condoms – to protect themselves from HIV transmission. (As a policy aimed at punishing young gay people with death, this one is working: in San Francisco for instance, as many as 34 percent of gay men under twenty-five being tested – and 54 percent of young black men – are now HIV infected)” (2). I am perhaps over-stretching Sedgwick’s lessons, but the point that I want to be making here is that there is likely a correlation to the rise of purity movements – the catchy phrase of the best protection is abstinence, or say no to drugs, of the Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidencies – and the HIV/AIDS crisis. Indeed, this point seems all the more clear, when one considers sex education in the American education system during the Clinton and George W. Bush presidencies, a point considered at length in Jessica Valenti’s The Purity Myth: How America’s Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women and Jessica Warner’s All or Nothing: A Short History of Abstinence. The more general point being that the rise of purity and virginity discourses can historically be tied, I should imagine, to the HIV/AIDS crisis, and fully manifested during the 90s and continued through to the present. Academic scholarship on virginity in literature, though a theme certainly considered often enough, begins to take hold in the 90s. For further information, see note 2 above.

\[\text{7}\] The question of virginity has become quite complicated in contemporary culture because of the category of “technical virgin” which refers to almost all sexual acts outside of vaginal intercourse. Jereny E. Uecker, Nicole Angotti, and Mark D. Regernus write: “[a]lthough oral sex and anal sex are far more common among those who also have vaginal intercourse, significant media and social scientific attention has been paid to those who abstain from vaginal sex while engaging in these other forms of sexual activity – a group dubbed ‘technical virgins’” (1200), however, they also note that “[t]here is little evidence that this practice of sexual
daughters to purity balls where the daughter pledges her virginity to her father until she
marries, at which time, her father will give his daughter, and presumably her virginity, to
her bridegroom. Likewise, boys and girls wear silver rings to symbolise their desire to
remain pure until marriage (the Silver Ring Thing movement), or other forms of purity
rings. The rings allow for the youth to declare his or her virginity without ever really
verbally announcing it. At Harvard, students are joining a club called “True Love
Revolution,” which espouses the virtues of abstinence. Virginities are pledging their
virginities to God in the “True Love Waits” movement:

Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my
family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of

substitution is anything new. In the early 1980s, about 15% of adolescent girls and 25% of adolescent boys
had engaged in oral sex but not vaginal intercourse” (1200-01). The observation that this trend is hardly new
is interesting because we often see reports in the social media (magazines, news programmes, literary and
cultural texts, etc) that will allude to the fact that indeed this is something quite new and in youth culture this
“new” trend has found its way into young adult literature (virginity and virginity loss are hardly new themes
in young adult literature). In Kate Brian’s The Virginity Club (2004), characters deal with the polemics of
defining virginity all in hopes of winning a scholarship which requires that the winner “must exemplify purity
of soul and body” (4); likewise, in Paul Ruditis’s Rainbow Party (2005), young readers learn that indeed oral
sex does have consequences when some of the characters contract gonorrhoea (indeed, thirty-nine members
of the sophomore class). However, in another study, by Melina M. Bermasin, Deborah A. Fisher, Samantha
Walker, Douglas L. Hill, and Joel W. Grube, definitions of sexuality in adolescents are further polemicised
when they observe that “[I]nterestingly, 60% [of those surveyed] did not think that oral-genital contact
constituted having sex, whereas 81% believed that penile-anal intercourse did count as having sex. Males
were more likely than females to indicate that less risky sexual behaviors (e.g., genital touching) counted as
having sex” (182). It is intriguing that males are more likely to consider so-called “less-risky sexual behaviors”
as sex while females are not; of course, this likely has to do with the social requirement that females protect
their virginities while males lose it as quickly as possible. Additionally, there are other complicating factors in
defining virginity, for instance, how does one account for masturbation? This question will be considered
below. There is a great deal to be said about how the male fits into these discourses and socio-cultural
concerns. This dissertation, though speaking explicitly about male virginity in romance, is also quite
cconcerned with the notion of male virginity in culture in general.

8 The club webpage is available online at: http://trueloverevolution.wordpress.com (December 20,
purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a
biblical marriage relationship.9

This pledge is fundamentally Christian and part of an ever-growing Evangelical movement
in the United States of America; but not only does the virgin pledge virginity but also his or
her “future children” and “a biblical marriage relationship.” In this movement, virginity is
manifestly heterosexual. Rebecca St. James, a Christian musician, wrote a song simply titled
“Wait For Me” with a chorus that declares:

I am waiting for you
Praying for you, darling
Wait for me too
Wait for me as I wait for you
I am waiting for you
Praying for you, darling
Wait for me too
Wait for me as I wait for you
Darling, wait. (Wait for Me: Rediscovering the Joy of Purity in Romance xvi)

One must recognise the constant repetition of the word “wait” and that the virgin is to
“wait” until, as the song tells the listener, “I’ll be yours and you’ll be mine / And darling,
when I say / ‘Til death do us part,” which once again, like the True Love Waits pledge,
reinforces heterosexual ideas of biblical marriage. But in the St. James song, it is an anxiety
and stress that causes repetition and hyperbole. The virgin must wait and wait and indeed,
wait for the saying of “Til death do us part” which allows the virgin to part—at last!—with his or her virginal identity.

Rebecca St. James is not alone in the music industry. The Jonas Brothers are perhaps the best-known members of the abstinence club, proudly wearing their purity rings until they marry and switch the purity ring for a wedding band. Jordin Sparks of American Idol fame released a song titled “Worth the Wait.” Again, one cannot help but recognise the ways in which meaning is attached to waiting and virginity. Britney Spears publicly pledged to keep her virginity until marriage—although we later learned through Justin Timberlake that she did not keep her pledge.

Virginity and discussions of it have become a central part of popular culture in new, and at times, strange ways. While abstinence and the notion of saving oneself for marriage are hardly new, the commodification and economy of virginity are presented in new ways. Christian groups, such as the Silver Ring Thing, are marketing virginity and abstinence as “cool” things for young people despite the reality that these youth are subsequently engaging in risky behaviours,\(^\text{10}\) which allow them to be sexual but at the same time to remain technical virgins. Indeed, Hayley DiMarco has written a book for girls on this very subject; *Technical Virgins: How Far is Too Far?* (2006), which open with a prayer:

Dear Papa God,

I do have sexual thoughts about guys. I want to be loved and touched.

I just don’t know how far is too far. But I am willing to learn. I want to please,

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and I want to remain pure as you ask me to be pure. Please help me to see where I have slipped up and to get back on track. I want to please you, and I know that I can do that with your help. I promise to consider everything in this book, including the hard parts, and to study your Word along with it, I want to be holy as you are holy.

Amen. (17)

The book with its glossy cover, which sexualises the girl (her body is clothed though with bare stomach, she lacks a head of her own, cut at the shoulders, long blond hair flowing over shoulders stopping at the breasts, and fingers tugging at the bottom of her shirt, and below the shirt at the level of hips, we read: “Sexy Girls Book”), almost immediately opens with prayer that reinforces a number of sexual paradoxes: desire and repression, that what is desired must be repressed for the glory of God. Likewise, one cannot help but note that the word “sex” itself is almost non-present in this prayer, rather it is referred to in the ambiguous and seemingly innocuous “it.” This prayer alludes to, hints at, and does not speak the name of the very thing it is addressing: sex, lust, and desire. It flirts with the first time. The prayer “creates the uncertainty it is also trying to control” (Phillips, On Flirtation xviii).

The medical profession now is able to help women to return to a virginal state by reconstructing the hymen, and women can now lose their virginity a second time, or perhaps a third or fourth time. These surgeries allow a woman to have sex, and then, before her wedding night, she can have her hymen reconstructed so that her husband can deflower a “virgin”, or so he would think. Jessica Valenti writes:

The real disservice to women here is that despite the fact that the plastic-surgery industry frames vaginal rejuvenation as “freeing” and benefiting
women, the procedure’s real purpose is rarely for women’s pleasure—it’s almost always done for men’s physical pleasure or aesthetic acceptance. Most of the personal stories on surgeons’ website and in media coverage recall women’s getting the surgery as a “gift” for their husbands or male partners. (74)\(^1\)

It is worth noting that virginity, particularly—if not exclusively—female virginity is also regarded as a gift given to men and lost by women. Indeed, Laura M. Carpenter in *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences* writes: “[t]he women I interviewed were considerably more likely than the men to have compared their virginity to a gift at the time they lost it (or ever)” (61). All of these movements and components associated with virginity and purity are part of an ideological project that would seem to hold liberal values (the right to choose) whilst promoting a conservative agenda (the right to purity).\(^2\)

However, the truest challenge in understanding these questions of virginity is not so much with the certifiability of one’s virginity, but rather the female focus of this discussion.\(^3\)

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1. Echoing Valenti, in the *International Journal of Genecology and Obstetrics*, R. J. Cook and B. M Dickens write: “[h]ymen reconstruction appears to be a generally benign medical intervention that patients request for social reasons. Such reasons invoke the social dimensions of health, and often have profound implications for women who seek the procedure, affecting their future in fundamental ways. They also affect communities, however, in that they challenge and subvert the culture that requires unmarried female’s virginity. The procedure exposes the conflict between the ethics of cosmetic misrepresentation or deception, and the discriminatory ethics of requiring virtue in women not required of or enforced upon men” (268).

2. Some might see this less as a right to purity and more an obligation, duty, or injunction; however, these movements are very much about the agency of the virgin. Emily Maguire highlights the agency of the virgin in her article “Like a Virgin” (online: http://www.themonthly.com.au/print/2365): “abstinence education sites sell T-shirts bearing slogans like ‘I’m sexy enough to keep you waiting’” and yet at the same time, Macguire recognises that many might see it as a duty, while speaking with Kelly, “A girl I know did the pledge thing […] but I know for a fact she’s had sex, because she did it with one of my friends and he’s not the type to lie … I don’t judge her. If my family and everyone were there watching and expecting me [to take the pledge] I probably would.”

3. The question of “certifiable virginity” is indeed a concern to be accounted for. In The European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care Jean-Jacques Amy (2008) writes: “[t]he inspection of the hymen is thus frequently unrevealing with regard to the sexual history of the woman concerned. Submitting her for the benefit of others to the examination of her genitals for the purpose of ascertaining her
course, male virgins are part of the movement—otherwise this would be a virginity that is
dependent upon some sort of female separatism—but they are almost always at the
periphery or they serve as “token” male virgins. It is true one of the key moments of this
movement was when one of the Jonas Brothers was married and various websites
commented on the new ring and the morning after; one headline, for instance, reads:
“Kevin Jonas Says Goodbye Purity Ring, Hello Marriage.”

This dissertation, on the other
hand, works to expose the male virgin, to show him in all of his complexities. Yet, while the
discussion of virginity necessarily ought to include both female and male virginities, this is
not always the case. This dissertation is, thus, in a sense, a corrective measure insofar as it
works to explore male virginity, male purity, and how men’s first times are experienced
and represented in fiction.

Virginity is a hot commodity and is a central part of the culture in which we live.
Teens have taken to reading a series of novels about a century-old-virgin, Edward Cullen,
and his adolescent girlfriend who apparently cannot decide between Edward, and his
nemesis, an always-topless-half-man-half-beast-virgin, Jacob Black. These readers align
themselves with “Team Edward” or “Team Jacob”, or for the undecided, “Team Jakeward.”
Likewise, these same readers are probably listening to the Jonas Brothers, Demi Lovato,

chastity is a transgression of her intimacy and an insult to her dignity. The examination is so unreliable, that
the certificate of ‘virginity’ – supposedly written after the completion of said examination – should be
considered devoid of any objective value” (112).

14 The above quotation is taken from a website called Buddy TV (http://www.buddytv.com/articles/
jonas-brothers-living-the-dream/kevin-jonas-says-goodbye-purity-29733.aspx). Readers can Google search
this further to find all sorts of reports about the marriage and many (not all) mention the transition from the
purity ring to marriage or the marriage ring/wedding ring.
Miley Cyrus (also pledged virgins) and Justin Bieber (his mom confirmed and pledged his virginity for him). This is the culture in which this dissertation is being written and this brief opening does not even begin to account for the Judeo-Christian traditions from which this culture is arising nor does it attend to the remnants of the George W. Bush presidency that have found their way into the Barack Obama regime, the persistence of abstinence-only education, the reinfused debates about Victorian moralities (or debates that seem to recall Victorian moralities surrounding sexuality). Virginity floods the cultural imaginary.

The Male Purity Movement and Male Virginity: A Case Study

In the Gospels, Jesus tells his followers: “But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). This verse is, in many ways (as we shall see), the marching call for young Christian men in pursuit of purity, which becomes part of, I argue, male virginity discourses. There is, to be certain, a slippery slope between virginity and purity for many evangelical thinkers writing about issues of male sexuality.

The question of male virginity is perplexing because it does not quite sound right. How is a male a virgin? What marks male virginity? Can one be a male and a virgin? Are men not celibate or chaste? In this section of the dissertation I want to provide a brief case study of male purity movements and the contemporary evangelical cultural movements in the United States of America (though this purity trend is spreading to other countries, such as, Canada and the United Kingdom). This case study also highlights the very slippery

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15 As I concluded writing this dissertation, Bieber was accused of having fathered a child. Throughout all of these discussions (which, of course, have played out in the media), he has denied that he is the father, but he has not denied that he has lost his virginity. It would seem a rather quick way to dismiss the claims would be to admit that he is a virgin.
terrain of “purity” and “virginity.” Moreover, this case study will work to demonstrate many of the problems that will later be confronted in the textual examples to be considered, ultimately showing that none of the texts to be considered could ever be called “pure” by the logic espoused by evangelical education.

There is a tension about virginity that runs throughout this dissertation, in large part because it is dealing with male virginity. Male virginity is sometimes defined in contradistinction to female virginity, or it may be defined unto itself; however, what is certain is that its definition is a work in progress. Defining male virginity, I contend, is far more complex than defining female virginity precisely because we lack a body of scholarship on the subject. As such, this case study will consider how male purity is initially established in the evangelical framework and will then take its cue from this movement to consider male virginity writ large. In this consideration of male purity movements (which I constitute as different from purity movements at large because they address and speak to a specific demographic), I want to also establish part of the theoretical framework that will come to inform this study.

On October 16, 2010, fathers and daughters congregated at Trinity Home Cool’s Depot in Powder Springs, Georgia, to attend a Purity Ball. The name of the purity ball was “Pursuing the Pearl: Diving Deep.” There is something terribly uncomfortable about this insofar as daughters continue to pledge their purity—which is to say, their virginity—to their fathers (let alone the overly sexualised name of this purity ball). What, however, can be said of sons? To whom do sons pledge their purity and what precisely do they pledge?

The Purity Movement is a Christian-Evangelical movement aimed at young girls, primarily (though not exclusively), and as Jessica Valenti writes: “[m]ore than 1,400 purity balls, where young girls pledge their virginity to their fathers in a promlike event, were
held in 2006 (the balls are federally funded)” (10). In the preface to his book, Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World, Joshua Harris begins to make the question of purity more universal (though he is a theologian who often speaks to and writes for young men):

Part of the challenge Christians face in a lust-filled world is remembering that neither sex nor sexuality is our enemy. Sex is not the problem—lust is the problem. It’s the enemy and has hijacked our sexuality. We need to keep reminding ourselves that our goal is to rescue sexuality from lust so we can experience it in the way God intended. (12)

For Harris, “[l]ust is craving sexually what God has forbidden” (20). There is nothing particularly outstanding or extraordinary about this passage—at least within the realm of Christian writings and theology—but there is something, from my perspective, about Harris’s writings that is interesting and worthy of consideration and allows for an aperture, an illuminating moment, on a more broadly conceived of study of virginity. Unlike many books about catchall terms like lust, sex, virginity, and purity, Harris is a man writing for men about men’s issues. Harris is part of what is called “Men’s Ministry,” which addresses the specificity of the male experience in the secular, sacred, and religious worlds. The first chapter of Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is) opens with a personal story—for there is often a confessional moment, which presumably gives the authorial voice a less authoritative tone and rather a more conciliatory one (“I am not perfect either”)—in which Harris tells the readers about “The Stallions”:

I was eighteen years old. The other six guys ranged in age from seventeen to twenty-four. That summer we were working as counsellors at a Christian leadership camp in Colorado. Carlos, Clint, and I washed dishes. Don, Brook,
Jon, and Scot shuttled students in vans. We called ourselves “The Stallions”—named after a cabin several of the guys lived in.

I can’t remember exactly when the idea for the contract came up. I guess we wanted rules. We wanted to know we were pleasing God. The whole process of becoming holy seemed complicated to us, so the idea of reducing our faith to a manageable list of promises and prohibitions was appealing.

So there we were in Jon’s parents’ living room signing our names. After we were done, Jon took the piece of paper, placed it on the floor in the centre of the room, and knelt beside it. “C’mon guys,” he said. “Let’s seal our vow with a prayer.” (18-9)

Some “rules” that the Stallions considered imperative include that they “wouldn’t watch any movies” and “wouldn’t kiss a girl” and “wouldn’t drink alcohol” and, as Harris explains, “I distinctly remember that the vow to refrain from masturbation was number ten on the list” (18). This contract is fundamentally homosocial—men talking to men about men—and is concerned uniquely with the male experience: only men are part of this contract.16

My understanding of “homosociality” is taken from Sedgwick’s Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire in which she considers the “strangeness” of the homosocial scene. Sedgwick polemises (almost immediately) the homosocial: “When Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms get down to serious logrolling on ‘family policy,’ they are men promoting men’s interests. (In fact, they embody Heidi Hartmann’s definition of patriarchy: ‘relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.’) Is their bond in any way congruent with the bond of a loving gay male couple? Reagan and Helms would say no – disgustedly. Most gay couples say no – disgustedly. But why not? Doesn't the continuum between ‘men-loving-men’ and ‘men-promoting-the-interests-of-men’ have the same intuitive force that it has for women?” (3). She goes on to observe further that “[w]e can go further than that, to say that any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some combination of the two” (25). Sedgwick’s point is worth noting that both homophobia and homosexuality as ideological structures may function at the same time (not in harmony) and still promote men’s issues. For instance, in the space of these male purity movements, we see a rabid disavowal of homosexuality, and yet there is, more often than not, a celebration of

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Evidently, despite the homosociality of this scene—they acknowledge together a sexual practice common to all of them—the scene must necessarily remain heterosexual. In this moment, Harris is negotiating the terrain between the homosocial and the homoerotic that is outlined by Sedgwick in *Between Men*: the bonds of this experience, though about desire, must only be expressed through the position of an amorous other, for instance, the men agree they “wouldn’t kiss a girl.” The point being that even though they are talking about sexuality, their sexualities, everything must always return to the fact that they are heterosexual men. Sedgwick has noted that, “there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (*Between Men* 25). If we look closely at the relationship Harris describes, it is, ultimately, homosocial and patriarchal, “[a] few days later, we all left for home. I was still basking in the euphoria of our religious zeal. Every generation needs men of courage, men of conviction, men of strength—men of God. I was one of those men” (*Sex is Not the Problem* 19). The hyperbole of masculinity, and thus patriarchy, at play is astounding and yet the sincerity that is incorporated into this discussion is seemingly real (as though there is no recognition of the political power being explored in the reification of men speaking to men about men’s issues.). In a sense, we are seeing the paradoxes of flirtation (as we did in the prayer considered above): flirting with the dangers and flirting with the pleasures of sexuality (both things at once). Harris’s treatise deals openly with fundamentally homosocial spaces: men being men together. Thus, in the same spirit as the example of Reagan and Helms, it seems necessary to see the homosocial space as, at best, a conflicted space of erotic, amorous (“brotherly love”), religious space.
sexuality only so far as the goal is to control and repress sexuality. There is no pun at play, nor is there any indication of sarcasm, parody, or irony. The author is speaking about the transformative importance of this event in his life and the lives of his fellow Stallions. In a moment that reads as though it were taken from the infamous “Contest” episode of *Seinfeld* (in which the main characters all agree to abstain from masturbation to see who can last the longest), Harris acknowledges, “[t]he illusion lasted about two weeks. That’s when I broke rule number ten of the contract” (19). Harris is speaking to men about the purity of men and more importantly the difficulties involved in being pure.

It is important to note here, and this point will be repeated throughout this dissertation, that Harris undercuts the argument proposed by Valenti that the purity movement is predominantly concerned with girls. For Harris, purity runs both ways. However, purity and virginity are admittedly different for each sex. Purity, at least in Harris’ book, includes abstaining from masturbation, which is “self-centred sex” (Harris, *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)* 97). In his book, *If You Really Loved Me: 100 Questions on Dating, Relationships, and Sexual Purity*, Jason Evert takes up the problem of masturbation which “does not get rid of temptations any more than prostitution does” (125). But one must ask: is the aim of masturbation ever merely to reduce temptation or is it about the pleasure of the body? Evert continues:

Both [masturbation and prostitution] may relieve sexual desires, but our goal as Christians is not simply to get rid of temptations but to glorify God with our bodies. The idea that masturbation be used to decrease sexual desires is like saying that lighter fluid can be used to extinguish a fire. If anything, masturbation incites lustful thoughts and teaches a person that he or she deserves—and needs—sexual gratification whenever the desire arises. (125)
Purity, then, is a complete rejection of the potential sexual gratification to be found within the body and accordingly also highlights the very complexity of the nature of male purity and virginity.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, this very point is emphasised when Evert writes, “[a] person who does not have his own purity when alone will have a difficult time remaining pure with another. If he lacks self-control when alone, he will be unable to properly give himself to his spouse when the time comes” (126, emphasis mine). This example demonstrates that there is a need to think about, at least within this particular cultural framework, what male purity might look like, and, moreover, how various writers within this Christian-Evangelical tradition are already defining it. In the above quotation it is very clear, notice the repetitions of the masculine, that Evert is speaking to and addressing men and men’s sexualities. Evert is not utilising the masculine as the neutral (or neutered) language of “one,” but rather, he is speaking to the male reader.

To return to Harris, I want to pick up on the theme of purity in his book, \textit{I Kissed Dating Goodbye: A New Attitude Toward Romance and Relationships}, in which he writes:

\begin{quote}
We have to understand purity as a pursuit of righteousness. When we view it merely as a line not to cross, what keeps us from going as close as we can to the edge? If sex is the line, what’s the difference between holding someone’s hand and making out with that person? If kissing is the line, what’s the difference between a goodnight peck and fifteen minutes of passionate liplocking?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, at its most literal level, any indulgence in excess has the potential to be sinful, and this could include sleeping, eating, or exercise because these actions become, like masturbation, “self-centred” (Harris, \textit{Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)} 97)
If we truly want to pursue purity, then we need to point ourselves in God’s direction. We cannot simultaneously explore the boundaries of purity and pursue righteousness—they point us in opposite directions. True purity flees as fast and as far as it can from sin and compromise. (90)

Harris is working through the hermeneutics of purity and what precisely this definition—if such a thing can exist—would look like. Harris’ language about purity seems to mimic, in inverted manner, the way that Bernau describes virginity in her book, *Virgins: A Cultural History*, as being “not so much a fixed state or condition, as a journey one must undertake” (63). Both Bernau and Harris appear to position the loss of virginity and purity as teleological journeys. Virgins work toward the eventual loss of their virginity. Male purity would imply that there is a border where purity is lost, but the articulation of that precise moment, when purity is lost, is never quite determined by Harris. If, for instance, masturbation is sufficient to lose purity, then when does one lose virginity? Purity and virginity become enmeshed for the male virgin or male purist. Indeed even within the writings of evangelicals on this very question of purity or virginity, the slippage is overwhelming and it seems, at times, that the two go hand in hand and at other times there seems to be a clear delineation between the two (one can have lost virginity but reclaim purity, for instance). In this regard, we can begin to see how hysteria—affective and anxious—is a key part of virginity and identifying oneself as a virgin or as virginal. Hysteria thus, as I conceive of it, is not limited to the sex/gender dyad but rather must encompass sexuality as well (indeed, while my question is about virginity and non-virginity or post-virginity, it seems to me that there remains a great deal to say about the hysteria of sexuality in general, and the correlation between heterosexuality and homophobia: the need to constantly reaffirm heterosexuality through disavowal). Meanwhile, Bruce Fink has
suggested that the hysteric in Lacanian psychoanalysis has one fundamental question: “Am I a man or a woman?” (122). The hysteric does not know the answer to essential questions about “its” identity. Hysteria questions identity, and, in this regard, so too does the virgin question his or her identity. At what point does the virgin surrender his or her virginal identity? Does one lose his or her virginity with a peck on the cheek or is it “fifteen minutes of passionate necking” (Harris, _I Kissed Dating Goodbye_ 90) or is it the masturbatory impulses of the adolescent teen who signs a contract with his friends not to do it? In this latter example, is not the thought of masturbation—that is the utterance in and of itself—already risking purity and imperfection? Here then, I argue hysteria is beginning to manifest itself within the discourses of purity and virginity.

For many of the evangelical writers, the question of masturbation is central to their theologies of male purity, and Harris is adamant about this point:

Masturbation is built on a self-centred view of sex. This wrong attitude that sex is solely about you and your pleasure. Your body. Your genitals. Your orgasm. This is the natural tendency of sin. It isolates us from others and makes pleasure self-focused. When our lustful desires are given free rein, sex is pushed into a corner and made a completely self-centred, isolated experience that reinforces a self-centred view of life. (_Sex Is Not the Problem_ 103)

One cannot help but note the implicit references to the Augustinian concerns regarding masturbation; and furthermore, that these references appear in perhaps the “most self-centred view” (103) of life (the introspective, if not narcissistic, turn of the autobiography), that is, Augustine’s _Confessions_. The matter of masturbation appears early in the _Confessions_, as Augustine confesses:
I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God. It is from love of your love that I make the act of recollection. The recalling of my wicked ways is bitter in my memory, but I do it so that you may be sweet to me, a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content. [...] At one time in my adolescence I was burning to find satisfaction in hellish pleasures. I ran wild in the shadow of erotic adventures [...] by pleasing myself and by being ambitious to win human approval. (24)

Augustine must confess his past mistakes so as to regain, in a sense, his purity and righteousness in his movements towards and in search of God. Indeed, Augustine exemplifies the Foucauldian discussion of confession wherein confession is figured as a power relation that allows for a confession, punishment, and subsequently purification.¹⁸

In the first volume of The History of Sexuality, Foucault writes:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone,

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¹⁸ For a larger discussion of Foucault and Augustine, see: Jonathan Dollimore's Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (1991) and Cholē Taylor's The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy (2009).
independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.

(61-62)

In the Foucauldian and Augustinian examples, the confession allows for the recognition of past sin and the removal of such sin. Thus, once one has confessed, one can be absolved of sin and move forward towards purity and salvation. However, in the discussions being presented by Harris, these “confessions,” though promising salvation, often lead merely to hysteria and the need to overcome it.\(^{19}\) That is, Harris leaves the reader with more questions than answers (at what point have I gone far enough to have sinned enough to no longer be pure?) and thus complicates the pursuit of purity and subsequently salvation.

Barthes, however, articulates the problem of confession more fully by recognising that it necessarily puts many things into discussion and thus, perhaps, allows for less closure and more confusion: “[l]et’s remind ourselves of St. Augustine’s three *libidos: sentiendi, sciendi, dominandi.* The libido of knowledge is in conflict with that of the senses (desires) and that of domination, thereby introducing, as it were dialectically, the possibility of *calm,* that is to say *non-libido*” (*Preparation of the Novel* 154). This is certainly one possibility, but I would contend that this “calm,” as Barthes calls it, is necessarily where we shall begin to see the site of hysteria. The problem is fundamentally one wherein “real” purity and “imagined” purity are put into contrast and negotiation with one another and allow for what Barthes calls “crisis.” Barthes argues that “the imaginary of the self has a rhythmic structure, it

follows a temporal organization: time as the field of the flammable: first is a particular mode of time: the time of the crisis” (*The Neutral* 103). It is within hysteria that this crisis is permitted to burn away at the subjectivity of the subject pursuing purity precisely because he can never seemingly be certain—in any real sense—of whether or not what he is doing is truly pure. Likewise, even the absolving of sins cannot erase the memories of the sin as Augustine demonstrates: he does not return to the memory of sin for the sake of remembered pleasure but to be cleansed of those sins.

Let us return to Harris, who argues that “[i]f you cultivate a habit of masturbation, don't assume it will end once you're married” (*Sex Is Not The Problem* 106), reminding us here that purity movements are as much about purity as they are about marriage. He explains:

That's why my wife, Shannon, and I have committed to each other not to substitute masturbation for sexual intimacy even if we're away from each other. We want sexual pleasure to be something we're dependent on each other to experience. We want sexual desire to be something that draws us together as a couple. (*Sex Is Not the Problem* 106)

While this is certainly no longer a discussion of virginity, but rather purity, it does raise a series of new questions, which further provoke sensations of hysteria (for the reader). What happens if the husband masturbates whilst thinking about his wife? What if they masturbate in each other’s presence? The persistence of questions that appear in discourses of male purity are important and perhaps help to explain why female purity is so much “easier” to teach, capitalise upon, and value. Female virginity seems so much easier to define because of the hymeneutic principle: where there is a hymen, there is purity. Sexual expression, accordingly, is further legislated as “pure” if it is contained within
the confines of legalised and biblically sound marriage. This, however, does not address the matter of the ways in which men are becoming part(s) of the purity movement beyond the role of the father who requires that his daughter pledge her virginity and pre-matrimonial purity to him.

The question of male purity, it would seem, precedes the question of sexuality; that is, male purity—and by extension virginity—does not require the presence of another (in this definition, sexuality depends upon the presence of another, but as the Christian writers have shown, and as Sedgwick shows, sexuality does not require another, sexuality can be singular). Male purity can be lost through thought alone. Thus in the oft-quoted passage from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ says: “But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). The question of purity is further problematised when Robert Daniels, in his book *The War Within: Gaining Victory in the Battle for Sexual Purity*, begins to attend to the matter of sexual orientation:

If you are a homosexual, take courage. “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified…” The congregation in Corinth included homosexuals. They left that lifestyle, and you can too. That may mean severing friendships that cause you to stumble. It certainly means reprogramming your mind to think God’s thoughts about masculinity, purity, gratefulness, obedience, discipline, and much more. Perhaps you have tried again and again in your strength to leave a homosexual lifestyle, and you may feel change is impossible. But through God’s help and the power of the Holy Spirit you can be free! (173)
Unpacking this paragraph sheds light on the discourses of purity that have penetrated the consciousness of the American evangelical virgin. Daniels argues that homosexuality is limited by temporality (one is a homosexual in one moment but can overcome and return to heterosexuality) and, to some degree, by choice; that is, a man is a homosexual in one moment and can in another moment, perhaps with some struggle, turn off his homosexuality. This same temporal circumscription (the idea that sexuality is defined by a moment in time in which an action is completed that confirms sexuality)—with a struggle of will-power (as though one can pray away the gay, or that one can be “cured” of his or her homosexuality through reparative therapy)—is the essence of the hysteria that dominates discourses of virginity and purity in the evangelical tradition, but it also highlights the fundamental hysteria of sexuality.

This idea of converting sexuality has been called “reparative therapy,” which is absolutely not the same reparative that is found in Sedgwick’s work. When using the word “reparative,” Carol Mavor, who takes the term from Sedgwick’s use of Melanie Klein’s reparative, cautions her reader:

While the term “reparative” is currently (and destructively) used in psychoanalytic practice to cure what some practitioners deem as pathological, perverted (the homosexual, the transsexual, et al), my reparative work embraces the texts and textures of Sedgwick (who has already pulled the threads through the hettles), in order to usurp “reparative” to repair not the gay body so pathologized by psychoanalysis itself but by the body of psychoanalysis, so responsible for this initial pathologization. (Reading Boyishly 73)
Psychoanalysis, at least in my flirtation with it, is less about the “cure” and more about the journey towards some ideal\(^2\); however, the point I am interested in discussing here is the reparative practices of some therapists.\(^1\) Daniels (and certainly not Daniels alone) is telling the homosexual to repair himself, to overcome his homosexuality as though this is merely a “stage” in one’s development, or an anomalous sexual expression that is a choice. In this rendering then, one has the ability to oscillate between two sexualities (perhaps more) and then one can finally choose the right sexuality. Homosexuality can be “cured” because the homosexual can begin by “reprogramming [his] mind” (Daniels 173). Indeed, Daniels goes so far as to write, “I encourage you to follow the principles in this book. Everywhere that lust for women is mentioned, just put ‘men’ in place of ‘women’” (173). Homosexuality, thus, is merely a choice and one can choose another sexuality, at least according to Daniels and other reparative thinkers (however, a question that most certainly remains unanswered, indeed unasked, is: when did Daniels choose heterosexuality?\(^2\))

With this reparative practice in mind, I want to now provide a brief queer reading of a particular scene in Daniels’ narrative:

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\(^{20}\) This discussion of therapy and the ideal will be returned to and developed in the closing chapter.

\(^{21}\) Numerous articles in academic and mainstream presses have been published that discuss “reparative therapy” from a wide-range of perspectives. Some Christian therapists have incorporated reparative therapies into their work and patients do seek out reparative therapy; as such, this is an important debate that, like virginity, extends beyond the confines of the Church. “Reparative therapy” is, in certain regard, a part of mainstream discussions, particularly in light of the recent Republican debates. Michele Bachmann’s husband practices “reparative therapy” in his practice. For a larger discussion of the history of reparative therapy, see: “I’m Your Handyman: A History of Reparative Therapies” by Jack Drescher (1998).

\(^{22}\) Leo Bersani in *Homos* considers this question: “In a recent volume of essays on the controversy between social constructionism and essentialism, Edward Stein defines constructionism as ‘the view that there are no objective, culture-independent categories of sexual orientation – no one is, independent of culture, a heterosexual or homosexual.’ As this suggests, the most radical element in constructionist studies is to question the given or natural status of heterosexuality” (35).
The next day while sitting in a hot tub, David, Bradford, Chris, and several others started reviewing verses they had memorized. It seems as if all the fellows who were with me had ten to fifteen verses memorized. I didn’t have any memorized yet. So they asked me to go to the other end of the pool and learn a few verses before rejoining them.

I really wanted to be accepted by these fellows. I saw that Chris and Rusty, one of the other midshipmen there, showed brotherly love for each other. I didn’t have anyone who enjoyed my company like that, who loved me like that. However, when I was sent to the other end of the pool, I felt rejected by the very folks I wanted to love me. (32)

This excerpt is fundamentally homosocial; and perhaps we could further elaborate upon a Sedgwickian reading of this passage insofar as there is at least one closet at play here (the queer closet and also the closet which reveals this subject as not knowing sufficient verses of biblical prose). The homoerotic nature of this scene—men bathing together reciting bible verses about sexual purity—is obvious. For the queer reader, how can this eroticism be anything but recognised as such? Queer culture has long incorporated public bathing and bathhouses into its cultural identity, and I would argue this facilitates a queer(er) reading of the scene being described. Allan Bérubé, for instance, has noted that “gay bars and baths are an integral part of gay political history” (34) insofar as these spaces are, in many instances, the very first places where queer men can explore their sexualities. Thus, it seems rather queer—to say the least—that Daniels would narrate a situation in which a group of men bathe together, talk about sexuality together (even if it is about how to avoid sexuality), coupled with the desire to belong to the group, to be loved, are placed centre-stage. Again, we are reminded of the ways in which Phillips speaks about the dangers of the
flirt, “[t]he generosity of flirtation is in its implicit wish to sustain the life of desire; and often by blurring, or putting into question, the boundary between sex and sexualization” (On Flirtation xvii). This is precisely what is happening in these books and in the scenes being narrated; they flirt with sex and the erotic only for the purposes of deferring it, in a way that “cultivat[es] wishes” (Phillips, On Flirtation xvii).

As has been demonstrated here, male virginity and purity are perhaps even more complicated than female virginity and purity precisely because unlike the female virgin, the male has no particular “marking” or “demarcation” that can prove or testify to his virginity or its loss. Bernau, for instance, writes: “[a]lthough people hesitate initially when asked how one can tell whether a woman is a virgin or not, they usually end up remembering the hymen with a relieved smile” (Virgins 1). On the other hand, the male virgin—which is not the focus of Bernau’s Virgins: A Cultural History and most other studies of virginity—must contend with his “lustful” thoughts as “proof” of his purity and concomitant virginity. There is, of course, a series of problems with male purity because of its relation to female purity; for instance, many of the books that speak to the concerns of masturbation seem to imply that this is a male-only action, as though women simply do not know about it, or cannot be imagined to be doing it. Some of the writers recognise the benefits of masturbation but almost as quickly distance themselves from these apparent benefits; Daniels, for instance, writes: “[m]asturbation releases inner tension. However if to accomplish this a man has to conjure up lustful thoughts or use pornography as a form of stimulation, it cannot be a holy act” (186). There is a near constant hysteria in these writings; again, the male is at risk of losing his purity by thought alone.

The male thinks and therefore he sins. The female in these discourses, on the other hand, must engage in some physical activity that renders her less pure. Male purity is
fundamentally a thoughtful purity, whereas the concern for females is almost wholly—though not exclusively—physical purity. Indeed, Ted Roberts writes: “[t]he key to sexual fulfilment is not found in our glands but in our heads. Therefore the roots of sexual bondage are found in the way we think” (31). Likewise, Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker write:

   Let us say it clearly: Masturbation is primarily a symptom of uncontrolled eyes and free-racing thoughts. When you create new habits of guarding your eyes and taking fantasy captive, masturbation can cease. Until then, it probably won’t. Masturbation is like the low oil warning light on the dash of your car. If it goes on, the problem is not with the light; the real problem is under the hood. (129)

There is so much discussion about thinking in men’s theologies of purity that one cannot help but ask, indeed, one cannot help but ask hysterically: how then does the male avoid sexual thoughts, or perhaps even more openly, thoughts that have the potential to become sexual?

**Paranoia and Hysteria: The Discourses of the Virgin**

In the above section on male purity movements, we have seen how male purity in the Christian-Evangelical tradition is largely defined in terms of thought and less so in terms of specific acts. If specific acts are mentioned, they are, by and large, accompanied by a series of “impure” thoughts. If this is how male purity and, by extension, virginity are defined, then it is hardly surprising that questions of paranoia and hysteria should surface in any critical study of male virginity.
In her recent book, *The First Time: True Tales of Virginity Lost and Found (Including My Own)*, Kate Monro works to figure out just precisely what is “virginity lost.” How do we define “virginity loss” and what does its “loss” mean in our culture? She begins by rightly acknowledging—though this is changing—that, “[i]n a world that celebrates sex on every street corner, every advertising hoarding and every television set, there is very little written—or said—about this very private sexual moment. [...] As I found out, there is a first time for everything, including the telling of a very secret story” (7). One of the recurring revelations in her book is that defining virginity—as we have seen above with regards to Christian-Evangelical theologies—is not an easy task and what precisely makes one a virgin or not remains unknown. For instance, Monro tells the story of a househusband whose wife took his anal virginity (98-105); and she tells the story of “a young man who had lost his virginity because he was too scared to put a stop to it” (126).

The book is fascinating precisely because it delves into territory that, though we have all, for the most part, experienced and thought about, we ultimately fall short in defining when trying to pinpoint a specific action, moment, or pleasure that qualifies as “virginity loss” (especially when the discussion is not focussed solely on penetration: at what point does a lesbian lose her virginity?). It is this question of a defining action, moment, time, or

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23 Nowhere is this discussion more prevalent than in Kate Monro’s *The First Time: True Tales of Virginity Lost & Found (Including My Own)*, which often includes the “standard” narrative (vaginal penetration) but also includes competing definitions, for instance, the husband who loses anal virginity to his wife (98-105). Likewise, Anke Bernau writes: “[a] rather different understanding of the relationship between virginity and male penetration is offered in Kevin Smith’s screenplay to the film *Chasing Amy* (dir. Kevin Smith, 1997). In one scene, the main characters, Holden and Alyssa, have a discussion about what it means to be a virgin. Because Alyssa is a lesbian, Holden insists that she is still a virgin, exposing the heterosexist assumptions that underpin his understanding of virginity. In turn, Alyssa, who keeps questioning his definition, forces him to modify it, thereby showing its arbitrariness. Finally, Holden falls backs on the hymen: ‘Okay, I’ll revise it. Virginity is lost when the hymen is broken.’ Alyssa tells him that this would mean: ‘I lost my virginity at ten, because I fell on a fence post when I was ten, and it broke my hymen’, concluding with the quip, ‘Now I have to tell people that I lost it to a wooden post I’d known all my whole young life?’ [...]
pleasure that needs to be considered. I want to argue for a virgin’s discourse that begins with Sedgwick’s ideas surrounding paranoia, and then progresses to hysteria and the mourning after. The virgin is initially paranoid before the first time and subsequently, following the “loss of virginity,” becomes hysterical immediately following the loss and then mourns when reflecting on that loss.

The virgin is paranoid and this is because there are so many questions, imaginings, concerns, and ideas surrounding the first time that his or her only option is paranoia. The virgin attempts to avoid bad surprises and thus prepares for the first time. Monro aptly demonstrates this point:

All this time spent listening to men talking so honestly about their lives began to have an effect on me. I felt I was beginning to really understand life from the perspective of a bloke. It was impossible not to, because men’s virginity loss is fraught with a whole host of considerations most women don’t even think about. Will I get an erection? Where do I put it? Will she even like it? I had never considered for even one moment just how nerve-racking an event this must be for the opposite sex. Men are road-testing a highly visible piece of equipment for the very first time. Can you imagine how petrifying that must be? What if it all goes horribly wrong? (121)

Penetration with a penis remains for him the defining sex act, which means that, despite their discussion, Alyssa is still a virgin for him – a woman untouched by man” (104-105). Another example that is often called upon in questions of definitions of virginity is the victim of rape: has the rape victim lost his or her virginity? In this question, we are concerned about the agency of the person in deciding when he or she loses her virginity (a point that is considered in the books by Bernau, Monro, and Carpenter, all of whom consider modern virginities).
Monro is speaking about the paranoia that floods the virginal imagination before the male virgin is about to lose his virginity. How many possible things can go wrong? There is a fundamental trepidation before the first time that causes paranoia. Sedgwick brings out the notion of paranoia in her wonderfully titled paper, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.” In this paper, Sedgwick argues that “paranoia knows some things well and others poorly” (130) and then works to outline five forms or modes of paranoia: Paranoia is anticipatory; Paranoia is reflexive and mimetic; Paranoia is a strong theory; Paranoia is a theory of negative affects; Paranoia places its faith in exposure (130). With regards to the first mode—paranoia as anticipatory—Sedgwick writes, “that paranoia is anticipatory is clear from every account and theory of the phenomenon. The first imperative is that There must be no bad surprises, and indeed, the aversion to surprise seems to be what cements the intimacy between paranoia and knowledge per se” (“Paranoid Reading” 130). This notion of paranoia closely relates to the experience of the virgin, especially in the fashion Monro has explained, because the virgin knows that he must endure any number of surprises at the moment he is about to shed his virginal identity. The virgin must literally reveal himself and then lose himself. He must prepare for his first time and think through all of the possibilities of what may or may not happen. Here we can think for instance of the ways in which pregnancy has been used and continues to be used as a fear associated with sexual intercourse; additionally, one can think of the ways in which illness, disease, and infection have also become associated with sexual intercourse. Pregnancy, illness, failure are all bad surprises, which cause the virgin to be paranoid. The virgin knows that these are all possibilities and these become, in addition to the other concerns as noted by Monro, part of the paranoia before the first time. As Sedgwick says, “because there must be no bad
surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would constitute a bad surprise, paranoia suggests that bad news be always already known” (“Paranoid Reading” 130). However, the “bad surprise” that is most often misunderstood with regards to virginity is the post-coital question of the worst kind: did the virgin actually lose his or her virginity? Or, had the virgin already lost his or her virginity? Admittedly, thus far, I have been discussing particular examples with their own specificities. The reason these questions appear is because the first time can never live up to the mythologies attached to the first time. In this regard, this paranoia is then matched by hysteria.

Jacques Lacan’s theory of the hysterical has been wonderfully summarised into a single question, one that I have already mentioned, “Am I a man or a woman?” (Fink 122). The fundamental question, thus, is about the hysterical’s sex and subsequently or intrinsically its existence and essence. If one is incapable of answering what is presumably the most basic of human questions—one’s sex, something that must be declared at every public washroom24—then one is dealing with the matter of hysteria. But the overarching question is one of essence. In terms of virginity and hysteria, the question thus becomes: Am I a virgin or not a virgin?”

Thus, to summarise briefly at this point: I am arguing that the virgin is a necessarily paranoid subject before his or her first time—however defined by the virgin-soon-to-be-not-virgin—and subsequently following this first time begins a stage of hysteria wherein the subject must work to determine whether or not he or she has truly or in reality lost or given (up) his or her virginity. The virgin must decide for him or herself if his or her actions

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24 Sheila L. Cavanagh has considered this question in her recent book Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination (2010). Further consideration of the space of the water closet, washroom, bathroom will be developed below, see: “On the First Love and First Loss.”
constitute a loss of virginity. While it seems that there should be an obvious moment when virginity is lost, this does not always seem to be the case (how does a queer virgin conceive of his virginity in light of the purity discourses found in the evangelical church? If virginity is defined in terms of penetration, what can be said of lesbian virginities? If virginity is about the penis penetrating the vagina, what can be said of technical virgins who have penetrated everything but the vagina?). The purity preachers have complicated matters. Moreover, the mythology and the actual experience are hardly every the same. At what point in the first time was virginity lost? And, furthermore, whether or not he or she can accept this loss. The question to be considered throughout this dissertation then becomes one in which we ask how paranoia and the subsequent hysteria are presented in narrative.

The Overwhelming Mythology of the First Time

Throughout this chapter, I have referred to an idea of the first time as a myth or to the mythology of the first time. I am choosing the words myth and mythology because the first time has taken on a symbolic meaning that though situated in the real is also very much imagined. Additionally, one cannot help but recognise the incredible amount of pressure and value that is placed upon the idea of the first time. Jagoe has called it an “important time” (TS 4) and Roland Barthes has written, “from our knowledge of erotic pleasure, we recognise the force of that First Pleasure, which traverses a lifetime” (13). Likewise, Monro notes that: “[i]t is almost as if [the interviewee] acknowledged deep down, ‘the first one’ could be the blueprint for all subsequent lovers. If you get it right the first time, do you have a better chance of succeeding further down the line?” (86-87).

It seems to me that in the light of Jagoe, Barthes, and Monro’s writing that we need to be thinking about the mythology of the first time; that is the moment, the singular
moment, in which “I”, as a subject, come to some thing, some action, some experience with a limited preunderstanding insofar as I have yet to experience this specific moment, its pleasure, and its time. This does not suggest that I do not come with a certain cultural baggage; that is, I may know about the first time in terms of the way it has been previously narrated, discussed, mythologised. Paul Ricoeur writes:

the simple mentioning of an action brings into play the preunderstanding common to the poet and his or her reading public of what action, or rather acting, signifies. It is this familiarity, this prior acquaintance with the order of action that, by way of mediation of fiction, will be intensified, magnified, and, in the strong sense of the word, transfigured. ("Mimesis and Representation” 180)

Ricoeur’s notion here, though about fiction, like the thoughts of Barthes on the novel fantasy and Jagoe on reading and psychoanalysis, works very well within the context of this study. That is, in the experience of the first time, there exists something of a preunderstanding of the first time through the ways in which it has been mythologised, which enables and encourages paranoia; but because it has not yet been experienced it cannot be known in any real or tangible sense. That is, “I” (as the subject) am not yet afforded what Wolfgang Iser calls “advance retrospection,” which is to say, “during the process of reading, there is an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection, which on a second reading may turn into a kind of advance retrospection” (282). As such, there is a fundamental difference between the first time and the second time, whether it be reading, writing, or any number of experiences. I am writing here about the moment in which “I”, as the subject, am a virgin (so to speak) before the act about to take place whether it is
reading, writing, or the carnal act. This time, this virginal time, the first time “is an important time,” because it “is anticipatory” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading” 130).

Jagoe, unlike Barthes, seems more anxious before the first time, at least in terms of the way she speaks about reading the long novel in relation to living the long process of analysis. In Jagoe’s writing, I recognise the contours of the mythology of the first time (though she is speaking of the first time of reading and psychoanalysis). I am struck by the excitement of the first time and also the paranoia that begins to appear and creeps into the discussion; the first time is “more prone to mistakes,” but what are the mistakes of the first time and how are they determined? I want to suggest that part of the reason the first time contains anxiety is simply because we prepare for it (because we are paranoid), which helps to reinforce its importance and yet undercuts our experience of the first time doing whatever we are doing.

Even when we approach a literary work for the first time (which is Jagoe’s concern, especially with regards to the “long novel,” novels like Ulysses by James Joyce, The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann, Daniel Deronda by George Eliot, and, of course, In Search of Lost Time by Marcel Proust, to which I shall devote my attention25), I would argue, there is

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25 Jagoe’s “Technologies of Extended Perception: Psychoanalysis and the Long Novel as Expanded Forms” was presented at the Explosive Past, Radiant Future conference at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the same time she was teaching her first course on Proust’s In Search of Lost Time. I was a student in Jagoe’s class at the time and had the fortune of introducing her lecture. In my introductory remarks I spoke about the experience of studying Proust with Jagoe and many of these remarks are included here; however, her work, though about psychoanalysis and reading, is also a very committed discussion of the space of teaching (in ways, I think, the space of analysis and reading are like the space of teaching because of the ways in which each space is ultimately about knowledge and learning): “In the classroom, Professor Jagoe has created something of a utopian space in which Proust is read, discussed, and in many ways dreamt into the living. In these moments, Proust becomes real, or we become Proustian and from here the text is no longer studied in and of itself but in relation to the greater problem of the imagination of subjectivity. [...] In many regards, to conclude, and to conclude with something of a paradox, I want to quote Eve Sedgwick who writes: ‘the teaching situation, evidently, thrives on personality and intimate emotional relation. At the same time, it functions as a mysteriously powerful solvent of individual identity’ (“Pedagogy of Buddhism” 160). I’m not sure that Professor Jagoe would fully agree, but her classroom seems to have this similar teaching
a necessary paranoia that resides within the reader. For instance, let us take the example of the reader about to embark upon a reading of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*: the reader prepares a plan of some sort of how he or she will manage to read these 1.5 million words; or, if it is in the context of a classroom—as was the case during my first time with Proust in which we initially followed Roger Shattuck’s plan—we prepare by reading scholarly, critical, biographical, and theoretical writings which are read in advance or alongside Proust’s masterpiece (the purpose for reading these materials, presumably, is so that the reader can come with a better preunderstanding of what he or she is about to read and attempt to understand). Then, of course, there is the matter of the fact that Proust’s work is

situation, and when the individual is washed away in her classroom it is only because a collective identity has managed to emerge as we work our way through a long novel, the novel of life.” I highlight this because it seems imperative to understand where this discussion is coming from and how my discussion diverges and takes inspiration from Jagoe’s lecture; and because I cannot imagine talking about Proust without also talking about the experience of having been a student in Jagoe’s teaching space (these two notions are always relational, always in discussion). Reading and writing about Proust, for me, cannot be excised from the actual experiences that were found in Jagoe’s utopian and reparative classroom, doors closed, shame, insecurity, and anxiety revealed and revelled in.

Shattuck provides one reading plan: “The following is one suggestion, which any Proustian could criticize: Swann’s Way (the first three-quarters: “Combray” and “Swann in Love”); Within a Budding Grove (Part Two: “Balbec”); The Guermantes Way (II, Chapter 1: “The Grandmother’s Death”); Sodom and Gomorrah (first thirty pages and the last thirty pages: “Charlus and Albertine”); The Captive (first thirty pages and two hundred pages on the concert at Verdurins’ arranged by Charlus); The Fugitive (omit); Time Regained (the last two hundred pages: the last reception and reflections on writing)...” (25). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her courses on Proust offered another reading plan, as Bill Goldstein explains: “The biggest surprise Eve had for us came at the beginning, because she asked us to start reading *In Search of Lost Time* not at the beginning, but with “Swann in Love,” almost three hundred pages into the first volume, Swann’s Way. I think most of us had either not read the novel or had read just a bit of the Overture – and gotten no farther. And that was the crux of it. Eve explained that she wanted to avoid “Combray” – and the Overture – because with its narrator so famously going to bed early and waiting for that good-night kiss from Maman, ‘it is so common to see “Combray” isolated and fetishized in discussions of Proust, often with disastrous results for the critical assumptions and proceedings that then get applied to the rest of the novel.’ She hoped that what she called ‘this rather drastic intervention’ would ‘at least ... deroutinize our sense of how “Combray” is related to the other sections of the novel”’ (264). Goldstein explains that, “[i]n Eve’s and our reading of the novel, to return to ‘Combray’ after ‘Swann in Love’ and then move onto ‘Place Names: The Name’ was a way of revealing the many kinds of novel *In Search of Lost Time* actually is” (264). The question of how to read Proust’s masterpiece is an important one and as Goldstein notes, the first part of *In Search of Lost Time* has become something of a fetishised narrative: the story of the mother’s kiss and the tea-soaked madeleine (an aspect of the text to which I shall devote attention in the next chapter).
a “masterpiece” and thus, I must attend to it and read it with a certain amount of respect and admiration—even, if, in the end, I do not care for it.

The experience that I am discussing here is a personal experience (one to which I shall refer again in discussing Proust) that was a source of anxiety for the students in Jagoe’s Proust class. She writes:

After about four weeks into the Proust seminar, the students and I, overwhelmed by reading *In Search of Lost Time* and needing even more time to talk about it, decided to drop all the critical readings. Perhaps the most incontrovertible reason for jettisoning Shattuck and Jameson and Sedgwick and Benjamin is that we needed them too much. “Please relieve our anxiety of reading, of not knowing how to read this huge text.” But that didn’t help anyway. (TS 4-5)

To read these novels is to engage with and recognise our anxiety, a profound anxiety. The beginning pages of Proust are dense and we are thrown into a narrative about a boy about to sleep and we know, at that moment, we have six volumes waiting for us. And yet, each of these critics, in a way, tried to spoil the surprises of Proust—they told us what was coming,

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27 The invocation of the self, the authorial self writing this dissertation, is not to dissuade the reader from criticism, but rather, because the personal side of this story, the intimacy of reading alone and communally in the context of the classroom cannot be extracted or divorced from my understanding of Proust. Adale Sholock provides a defence for the autobiographical in literary and academic criticism: “Despite the difficulty of such discussion [critiquing the personal but not the person], it is imperative to realize that, far from being exempt from academic and political consideration, the autobiographical within criticism is in full conversation with the vicissitudes of critical exchange. In other words, these moments not only interest us but also very much influence knowledge production and reception” (130). I cannot think about Proust without Jagoe’s classroom and teaching, and in many regards, I cannot understand Jagoe’s classroom and teaching without Proust. This same realisation holds true in my response to and engagement with her lecture “Technologies of Extended Perception: Psychoanalysis and the Long Novel as Expanded Forms.” I introduced that lecture as a student in Jagoe’s Proust class at a time when we were all confessing together our various anxieties, preoccupations, and insecurities about Proust (and in many ways about life questions). For a larger consideration of the first person, academic autobiography, see Sholock’s “Queer Theory in the First Person: Academic Autobiography and the Authoritative Contingencies of Visibility” (2007).
what a thing might mean. Jagoe writes: "[I]nstead of addressing our ignorance, our fear, our very intense experience of anxiety, they obviated it by using a knowing voice, one that transmits information to a reader that is already ‘in the know’, part of the club of those who have always already read Proust" (TS 5). There is, as Jagoe knows, a profound difference between the first time and all other times. To read Proust the first time was haunting, riddled with anxiety, and stuck in a sense of unknowing, to read Proust and his critics after reading the novel through, is to engage in a different type of reading.

For Jagoe, the space of therapy, the space of reading, the space of teaching, are “in some ways, reparative. Let's fill the gap that so hampers us, even shames us as scholars of literature” (TS 5). Each of these spaces is a productive space, a strongly theorised space, and yet a space in which we must admit our own weaknesses, our anxieties, our sources of shame. To read Proust the first time is to be overcome. The same anxiety and process of reading can be said of psychoanalysis and therapy: the first time one prepares for analysis or therapy, there is a great deal of thought, energy, and consideration put into it. I believe that we prepare for the first time because of the meanings—the myth—attached to it and in this preparation we feel paranoia and a sense of excess and we are overwhelmed by the forthcoming or already started but not yet finished first time. To read Proust is not to merely read the opening sentence, but rather to struggle through the excesses of the long novel and to reach its closing sentence.

Phillips in “Five Short Talks on Excess” notes that: “[a]fter all, inspiration, falling in love, conversion experiences, a sense of injustice—the most radical transformations that can occur in life—are traditionally, overwhelming, excessive experiences” (9). Phillips is right, but what happens when these excesses happen for the first time? Each of these
experiences—inspiration, falling in love, conversion, and injustice—have all been adequately—if not excessively—mythologized for us. We prepare ourselves consciously and unconsciously for each of these scenarios. But at what point does something or someone become excessive? or, at what point do I, as a living subject, realize that I have prepared too much for the first time? Phillips, through William Blake, writes: “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough” (10) and the only way that one can ever truly know that one has had more than enough is through the lived experience, which means, through retrospection. This point, however, does not invalidate the myth of the first time nor does it somehow make us prepare just enough or perhaps less for whatever experience, sensation, feeling, that we have yet to experience, sense, feel.

The Mourning After

Excess, anxiety, paranoia, hysteria, and the first time come together when one reads Roland Barthes’ Mourning Diary, in which he accounts for his reactions, feelings, sentiments towards a first time that, like all first times, can only be lived and experienced once: the death of the mother. Throughout his diary, Barthes often speaks of the first time in relation to mourning. There is an interesting paradox, at least at first glance: death is a last event and yet the subject who lives with the death of someone experiences it for the first time. How does one prepare for the death of the self and the death of the other?28 While death is

28 The question of the death of the other has recently been taken up by Jane Gallop in her book The Deaths of the Author, which begins with a discussion of Roland Barthes’ famous essay “The Death of the Author” and Michel Foucault’s polemic “What is an Author?” Following this discussion, and or particular interest to this study, she considers Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “essays in honor of Craig Owens and Michael Lynch, both gay writers who died of AIDS” (88). Sedgwick’s essays are remarkable discussions of death and mourning, particularly potent is her essay “White Glasses,” which she describes as follows: “[f]our months ago when I decided to write ‘White Glasses’ for this conference I thought it was going to be an obituary for Michael Lynch. The best thing about writing it is that it isn’t – it’s an homage to a living friend – but someday it will be. I thought I would have to do the speaking of it, and probably the thinking and writing for it, after
the metaphor at play here, every first time is necessarily a birth and a death: it is the birth of the post-first-time identity and it is a death insofar as one is no longer inexperienced, lacking in knowledge of that time, and that all other times are just that: other times. We are never truly prepared for the first time—despite the anxiety, excess, and paranoia attached to the myth of the first time—precisely because the first time is so unpredictable, so unexpected, so “prone to mistakes” (Jagoe, TS 4). All first times require preparation and it is because of this preparation that we mourn—we must mourn, we will mourn—the first time.

The very first words of Barthes’ *Mourning Diary* demand—of their reader—recognition and consideration of the first time and the mourning: “First wedding night. But first mourning night?” (3) Indeed, the idea of the first time and mourning appears well over a dozen times in these short entries which often run no more than a sentence or two. What we must now ask is: what is lost that must be mourned? In the case of Barthes’ diary, the Michael’s death of AIDS-related infection. Which seemed imminent” (254). Her essay is beautiful precisely because it is a meditation on death that is confronted by, at the time, the very real and very alive Michael Lynch. For Gallop, “[t]he repetition of this phrase [“I thought”] makes it sound like a criticism of thinking, a self-criticism of someone who thinks too much; Sedgwick’s past naiveté would seem to be a form of intellectualism. The irony directed at Sedgwick’s past self is unrelenting” (106). In this regard, what is remarkable (at least for our purposes) is the recognition of the past in writing from the present: we anticipate death, we think about death in a way that is similar to the way, I believe, we theorise, mythologise, narrate the first time. We anticipate and then following the first time we say, we think, “I thought” as Sedgwick says about the writing of her obituary for Lynch. For Gallop, this is “the queer temporality of writing,” the title of her chapter on Sedgwick (87-114). It is interesting to note that the final words of this chapter read, “April 2009: As I finished what I thought were my final revisions on this chapter, I learned that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick had died” (114). In many ways, Sedgwick’s death – an untimely death – haunts Gallop’s chapter and I imagine that many readers long for Gallop to speak – anecdotally perhaps – about the death of Sedgwick and the act of writing about Sedgwick’s writing of memorials. Gallop’s chapter is, in a sense, a Barthesian desire for the author: “[a]s institution, the author is dead ... but in the text, in a certain way, I desire the author” (in Gallop 53, Barthes’s emphasis), which Gallop reads exegetically, “[d]espite the death of the author, despite the institution, Barthes insists on his desire for the author” (53). There is, as Gallop asserts, a “gay particularity” at play in Barthes’ desire and the phrase “in a certain way,” and it seems this same queerness is found in Gallop’s reading of Sedgwick’s memorial essays (particularly when confronted by the death of Sedgwick).
author is mourning the loss of his mother, and yet, as I read the diary for the first time, I could not help but see and imagine the ways in which a variety of ideas and discourses surrounding a question of the first time and our need to mourn are brought together. More specifically, I am arguing that only through the first time can we begin to mourn (and suffer the hysteria) of the loss of the first time. In his diary, Barthes writes: “when maman was living (in other words, my whole past life) I was neurotically in fear of losing her” (Mourning Diary 129). He has only ever imagined her loss as one can only ever imagine one's first time. In other words, even though he likely does not wish or desire her death, he spends a lifetime—however consciously or unconsciously—in paranoid preparation for her death. But it is only through the actual loss that Barthes is able to begin to mourn fully the loss of the first time.

While I recognise that there is a strong psychoanalytic thread running throughout this dissertation, I want to note that I am not committing to psychoanalysis, but rather, like Barthes, flirting with it. In his Mourning Diary Barthes writes: “Don’t say Mourning. It’s too psychoanalytic. I’m not mourning. I’m suffering” (73). The point to be taken from this is that while one can recognise a theory with which the critic might be pigeonholed, that is not precisely what the critic is interested in. Indeed, Barthes in Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, writes, “[h]is relation to psychoanalysis is not scrupulous (though without being able to pride himself on any contestations, any rejection). It is an undecided relation” (150, Barthes’s emphasis). Like Barthes, I am uncomfortable with my relation to psychoanalysis, as a mode of criticism, and thus the relation must be “undecided” (150). While it is imperative to recognise that there is a theoretical fabric that holds this project together, it is equally important to allow for the study to develop outside of the rubric of strong theory that works to predict each and every question and surprise.
Returning to those first words of Barthes’ diary—“First wedding night. But first mourning night?” (3): the first, first words refer to, in many ways, the first pleasure noted in his seminar, The Preparation of the Novel. The first time is given so much meaning, as I have demonstrated above, that we often no longer speak of it as “a” first time, but rather we ascribe the definite article to further reify its importance. And yet, despite all the glory and magic attached to the first time, we know that it includes surprises precisely because it is the first time. We are surprised by the ways in which we have thought about and imagined that first time (and how it has been imagined for us). Frank Churchill, in Jane Austen’s Emma, quips, “Why not seize the pleasure at once? how often is happiness destroyed by preparation, foolish preparations?” (203) and in many regards this is precisely the challenge being attended to in this dissertation. Churchill is akin to the weak theorist and the reparative reader in this particular example.

To further consider the task of mourning, I briefly want to consider Ian McEwan’s On Chesil Beach in which the characters are not afforded a first pleasure with their first time on their wedding night; rather they endure quite the contrary. It is for the reasons to be elaborated upon that I think we can begin to think—critically and theoretically—about the first time and the mourning after.

The novella spans just over one-hundred-sixty pages and the bulk of it, the first hundred pages, accounts for the ways in which the protagonists have prepared for their first time. The opening line of the novella immediately calls attention to virginity, “[t]hey were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time in which conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible” (3). Readers are told “between Edward and Florence nothing happened quickly” (22) and in a certain regard, the narrative and the reader must reside in and embody what Sedgwick calls “the
freshness of slow learners” (A Dialogue on Love 22). The two have prepared for this first time and readers are reminded that this occasion will, as Barthes suggests, “traverse a lifetime” (The Preparation of the Novel 13). Both Edward and Florence have, of course, considered the journey toward virginity loss. Florence has anxieties that “were more serious” and that “[w]here he merely suffered conventional first-night nerves, she experienced a visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness” (7). Her anxieties are more corporeal, “a word that suggested to her nothing but pain, flesh parted before a knife: penetration” (8). Both Edward and Florence suffer from anxieties before the first time in which both will surrender their virginal identities to one another. Her fears are enveloped by the loss of being a virgin (as an identity): “[i]f only she could, like the mother of Jesus, arrive at a swollen state by magic” (8). Virginity loss is positioned alongside pregnancy here (a condition of a paranoid discourse of cause and effect, in the same way that virginity loss leads to disease in some abstinence education).

For Edward, we learn, “[l]ike most young men of his time, of any time, without an easy manner, or means to sexual expression, he indulged constantly in what one enlightened authority was now calling ‘self-pleasure’” (20). The narrative makes a key point of highlighting masturbation (a point to which we shall return in our readings of Proust), “Edward’s single most important contribution to the wedding arrangements was to refrain, for over a week” (20). Edward has defined sexual impulses to allow for, presumably, a heightened or more complete experience of the first time. Indeed, we must recall (for how could we not?) Barthes’ definition of the first time, “from our erotic knowledge, we recognize the force of that First Pleasure, which traverses a lifetime” (The Preparation of the Novel 13). The entire myth of the first time is that it is a moment, the
moment, that one will never forget, and thus, from thenceforward, he will reside (like we all do) in the shadows of that First Pleasure, the first time.

The actual virginity loss in this novel is hard to discern. Virginity is, as we likely know, a hermeneutic nightmare because of the first time and the mourning after: the process of losing virginity and recognising it as such. We learn:

She trailed her fingers about its length, noting with interest its silky texture, right to the tip, which she lightly stroked; and then, amazed by her own boldness, she moved back down a little, to take his penis firmly, about halfway along, and pulled it downwards, a slight adjustment, until she felt it just touching her labia.

How could she have known what a terrible mistake she was making? Had she pulled on the wrong thing? Had she gripped too tight? He gave out a wail, a complicated series of agonised, rising vowels, the sort of sound she had heard once in a comedy film when a waiter, weaving this way and that, appeared to be about to drop a towering pile of soup plates. (105)

In this moment, we are left trying to discern what precisely has happened: is Edward in pain or in the throes of ecstasy? Even with the prose, lurid prose, vividly detailed (almost rivalling the prose that is so often critiqued in romance novels), we are still not quite certain what has just happened. McEwan, I think, manages to weave together all of the nervous threads, which have littered the text: “[i]n horror she let go, as Edward, rising up with a bewildered look, his muscular back arching in spasms, emptied himself over her in gouts, in vigorous but diminishing quantities, filling her navel, coating her belly, thighs, and even a portion of her chin and kneecap in tepid, viscous fluid” (105). Edward’s fears of failing, all of his anxieties, their anxieties, her fears of disappointing are now confirmed
when her light touch leaves Edward in an earlier than desired for orgasm. She ultimately blames herself for this failure, “[h]ow typical, her overconfident meddling in matters of awesome complexity” (105).

The first time is pathetic and a miserable failure that does not live up to the expectations of the over-prepared virgins. Readers are told that “in a frenzy of anger and shame she sprang from the bed” (106), she ran toward the beach, and “even when she reached the beach at last, she did not stop running” (107). The failure of this scene is important because it allows for the “first mourning night” (Barthes, Mourning Diary 3) and also recalls Jagoe’s point about the first time being “more prone to mistakes but also to flashes” (TS 4). The question becomes: what, if anything, went wrong? Was this really a failure or was this simply what Barthes, and more specifically Jagoe, call the first time? Following this scene, the two are divorced, and readers are left with Edward’s character: “he was feeling the pull of contrary emotions, and needed to hold on to all his best, his kindest thoughts of her, or else he would fold, he would simply give up” (McEwan 130) and we are reminded throughout of the “ruins of the wedding night” (McEwan 133).

The first time is, as this narrative makes clear, the moment after which we cannot return. In this particular narrative both characters lay blame on the other in an attempt to overcome the first time (whether or not it was successful in terms of satisfying some definition of virginity loss, for instance penetration, is, in a sense irrelevant; the first time was attempted and it was, if penetration is our definition, not successful). For Edward the first time becomes nothing more than a trauma, which eventually overwhelms him and he is unable to overcome the first time. Indeed, what makes it the first time is the way that it impresses itself upon him: “[e]ven in his sixties [...] When he thought of her, it rather
amazed him, that he had let the girl with the violin go” (165). The first time has become the embodiment of the myth of Orpheus and it is music that reminds him of her.

The loss of virginity, or at least the attempt at its loss, becomes, for Edward, a site of trauma and one that will, as every first time must, haunt him. The narrative inverts the Barthesian “first pleasure” (The Preparation of the Novel 13) into the first displeasure. Edward spent so much time preparing for the first time that in the end, as will become evident, the first time can never live up to expectations. Edward must mourn the first time precisely because it was a trauma that must be overcome so as to move forward, to move toward the next time.

The first time in McEwan’s novella was not a failure because there is so much value ascribed to and attached to the first time that we are all, like Edward, susceptible to what we might call a paranoid excess of preparation for the overwhelming first time. There is, as I have suggested, excess that overwhelms the narrative. In a very human moment in this text, a moment that does not seem terribly out of the ordinary, the first time does not become the first pleasure but rather the first displeasure. Edward is left to mourn his first time. As Barthes would have it: “[f]irst wedding night. But first mourning night?” (Mourning Diary 3). The answer to Barthes’ question is that there must be mourning. But what does one mourn? What needs to be mourned here is not the failure, but rather, the first time and its loss. That time can never be taken back, never repeated, never reclaimed: it has escaped time.

In the end, what we mourn in the first time is that excess, that preparation for the first time precisely because it was not everything we had imagined it would be. Phillips writes:
Perhaps the road of excess, through the very disillusionments it produces, is a source of wisdom; that it is not the alcoholic but the recovering alcoholic who has something to tell us. Perhaps as part of our growing up we need to be excessive—to try to break all the rules just to be about to find out what, if anything, the rules are made of, and why they matter. Perhaps only the road of excess can teach us when enough is enough. ("Five Talks" 9-10)

In excess and recognising excess, we begin the work of mourning. So much energy is spent on cultivating our ideas of the first time, whatever that first time is, that we are in the end being nothing more than excessive. This excess is, of course, necessary; but the excess of the first time can and often does lead to a sense of despair in that all that preparation did not, in the end, prepare us. It is in this regard that we have over-prepared only to realise that one can never truly prepare oneself for the first time; rather, it must, however unfortunate, be lived in all of its excessiveness. Phillips writes:

We talk about the fear of teenage pregnancy, but not of the intense excitements of discovering sex and being able to experiment with it. Nor do we talk much about the fear and confusion and grief that sexuality brings in its wake because it is so pleasurable, or not pleasurable enough; because it is such an essential part of who we happen to be. ("Five Talks" 37)

I have previously noted the fear of pregnancy when I discussed hysteria and paranoia. The point, however, to be noted here is the revelation of the first time as a trauma, which is, as Phillips writes, “when the past is too present; when unbeknownst to oneself the past obliterates the present” ("Making It Old" 146), and it is this that must and will be mourned. Barthes writes: “[t]here is then, in mourning (in this kind of mourning, which is mine), a radical and new domestication of death; for previously, it was only borrowed knowledge
(clumsy, had from others, from philosophy, etc.), but now it is my knowledge. It can hardly do me any more harm than my mourning” (Mourning Diary 119). There is something very productive in the first time when conceived of as a time to mourn precisely because it allows, hopefully, for one to come to terms with knowledge, the moment in which borrowed, objectified knowledge becomes wholly consumed by and embodied in the living subject. Ruti in her book, A World of Fragile Things: Psychoanalysis and the Art of Living, writes:

More specifically, it may be that mourning “well”—if I may express things so awkwardly—is a matter of knowing, on a deep level, how to meet the ephemeral character, the always potentially devastating fragility, of our existence, for once we recognize that absolutely nothing about our lives is permanent, it becomes possible to relinquish objects, ideals, and modes of being more gracefully. (121)

Likewise, Carol Mavor suggested in a recent lecture that “to know enables mourning” (“Blue is the Color of Impossible Mourning”) and it is precisely this movement from ignorance to knowledge that must be rendered as a mourning time. This is not to suggest that we must reside solely within mourning, but we must see it as an opportunity to, as Ruti writes, “relinquish objects, ideals, and modes of being more gracefully.” What we are mourning is as much the first time as it is the realisation that everything that preceded the first time, in a very Proustian sense, is now lost time for we cannot return to it but can only remember it, recall it, retell it, relive it, reimagine it.
**Structure of Study**

This dissertation will focus its discussion on instances of the first time—first love, first loss, first time—in narrative, chiefly, popular romance novels. Initially, I wish to locate the discourses of hysteria and paranoia, as established above and as will be amplified below, with regards to stories about love rather than romance novels proper; thus, in my first chapter I consider Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and, though to a lesser degree, J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* to demonstrate how the first time and the mourning after—paranoia, hysteria, mourning—function in these narratives. From this perspective, in the subsequent chapter I turn to the more specific function of virginity in romance novels, initially by exploring the structure of romance and then by providing a close reading of *Last Virgin in California* by Maureen Child. In this chapter, I also develop a definition of the romance by drawing on Pamela Regis’s work on the popular romance novel and moreover elucidate the role of the virgin in popular romance. Once this has been completed, I will show why romance is an ideal locus to consider the question of virginity and how romance enables critics to begin to further problematise and consider virginity outside of the realm of standard definitions of defloration. From this vantage point, I will then turn to the more immediate concerns of this study: male virginity. Accordingly, I will draw upon and reflect back on the examples of female virginity to see how male virginity is different from female virginity but how both are necessarily engaged in a discussion of the first time and the mourning after.
On the First Love and the First Loss

To study the first time as a theoretical trope\(^29\) (let alone as a lived experience) is to theorise from a position of subjectivity, for there can be no objective understanding of the first time; it is far too overwrought with the self. The first time is intimately connected with how all other times are experienced, and the first time is, as we likely know (and if not as we shall see), a formative time that cannot be undone. Therefore, it should hardly be surprising, at this point, that I am privileging the presence of the self in theorising the first time. The first time is both universal and intrinsically subjective, but I argue that there are commonalities that link the subjective to the universal (and vice versa).

In her book Anecdotal Theory (2002), Jane Gallop theorises how the self might be incorporated into theoretical work. The introduction of the personal of the self into theoretical work has long been the purview of feminist criticism: “the personal is political.” But the introduction of the personal as the site of inquiry, is perhaps, not as readily recognizable. Gallop breaks theoretical ground when she begins theorising with her own experiences, beginning with her work A Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment (1997)

\(^{29}\) My use of “trope” is different from Hayden White’s, which “is a quintessentially meditative enterprise. As such, it is both interpretive and pre-interpretive; it is always as much about the interpretation as it is about the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration” (4). However, even under these conditions, I can envision the “first time,” at least the sexual one, as tropological insofar as it functions as a “turning point” in the life of the subject. I think here of the way White speaks of tropes in relation to the cognitive development of the child through to adolescence. White via Piaget speaks of “preadolescent logic,” which is about “the genetic basis of the trope of synecdoche,” (8) and with adolescence we see the ascendance of the ironic trope. While I may be guilty of misreading White’s reading of Piaget, I assume that intrinsic to these tropological developmental changes must surely also be an already contained first time: the first ironic time, for instance. Moreover, inherent to the first sexual time, I imagine, is also a re-reading of these tropologies: before the loss of virginity (or the acquisition of sexual knowledge) there is a sort of synecdoche at play wherein a part of the whole represents the self (virginity is itself an identity), whereas following virginity’s loss, the subject might realise just how ironic the “whole” is.
and moving through her fascinating study on her relationship with Dick Blau in *Living With His Camera* (2003) and (the more theoretically complete) in *Anecdotal Theory* (2002). Gallop explains “[a]necdotal theory drags theory into a scene where it must struggle for mastery [over the subject being theorised]. Theorizing in explicit relation to the here and now, theorizing because the subject feels the need to” (*Anecdotal Theory* 15). I recognise that for many, the anecdotal as a barometer of critical inquiry is problematic because it seems to rely wholly on the subjectivity of the author, thus rendering it difficult to critique (without appearing to be an ad hominem attack). However, it seems to me that the other side, the entirely objective side, is equally problematic because it renounces the subjectivity from its modes of consideration. Regardless, I am struck by the need—my need—to theorise the first time, which, in the end, may be nothing more than a feeling about the need to theorise it. There is, I believe, an impulse to theorise that which affects us profoundly because of a need, desire, or wish to understand what precisely has happened.\(^{30}\) Gallop’s work reads through a given problem that is not lived just in textual examples, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the real life of the living, breathing author. I find it difficult to divorce the two—fiction and life—in my own work here; a real life story informs the theorisations, and the theorising, like the space of therapy, is an attempt to figure “it” (the first time) out, to understand (in the case of Gallop’s work it is the fact that she was accused of sexual harassment\(^ {31} \)). Accordingly, this difficulty is what

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\(^{30}\) For some, writing can and does serve a therapeutic end (and there is a growing body of scholarship on narrative and psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and therapy; some of which will be attended to in this study) and there is much to be said about this. The writing of a dissertation, it seems to me, is a therapeutic venture because of all the emotions, ideas, and ruminations that are invested into the document and its ideals.

\(^{31}\) Indeed, much of Gallop’s *Anecdotal Theory* attempts to theorise her own pedagogy while facing a sexual harassment charge (more fully articulated in *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*), for instance, she writes: “Although ‘The Teacher’s Breasts’ is the first essay [in the book], I have saved it till last in this
pushes me toward a flirtatious method rather than one of commitment (and stale monogamy) to an idea, an ideology, and/or a theoretical framework.

The first time—as a loving time, as a losing time, as a virginal time—seems problematic and it seems that it can and cannot be understood because of the paradox of its rapidity and its lasting effects of its time. In this chapter, I want to think about and work through the problems of loving and losing for the first time in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* because they are narratives that I cannot escape, account of part 1. I deferred discussion of this 1992 essay because its place in “The Incident” is odd and seems hard to explain. ‘The Teacher’s Breasts’ was written before I was accused of sexual harassment. Later it became entangled in the incident. I wrote it in the summer of 1992 for a conference I was organizing on Pedagogy and the Personal for April 1993. By April, the students who had accused me of harassment and their supporters were protesting that conference. As I faced an audience aware of my accusation, reading a paper written before I was accused, I found the paper’s bold playfulness around the erotics of pedagogy scary and dangerous. I was afraid my writing made me look guilty” (21). Readers have also been told earlier, in the introductory matter, “[t]he second essay in part 1, ‘The Lecherous Professor,’ was written in 1994, immediately after my experience of being investigated for sexual harassment. It is a close, symptomatic reading of a feminist text, the sort of critical reading, I’d been doing for two decades, the kind of which upon I had built my scholarly reputation. Written for an academic conference, the essay was an attempt to bring the topic of sexual harassment into the domain of my expertise. Turning my methodology on a text which represented the discourse under which I had been accused was an attempt in theory to reassert the mastery the investigation had taken from me” (16).

Throughout this dissertation, I use the translations completed by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terrence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright. In his book *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, Jonah Lehrer notes the importance of the title: “Proust’s epic *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* has actually been given two different titles in English. The first title, *Remembrance of Things Past*, was given to the novels by their translator C. K. Scott Moncrieff. It is not a literal translation (Moncrieff borrowed it from a Shakespeare sonnet [Sonnet 30: “When to the sessions of sweet silent thought / I summon up the remembrance of things past”]). While this title effectively evokes the content of Proust’s novel, it fails to capture either Proust’s obsession with time or the fact that his fiction was a search for something else. Proust himself took the title very seriously, considering everything from *The Stalactites of the Past* to *Reflections in the Patina* to *Lingered Over Days* to *Visit from a Past That Lingers On*. After a few months of considering these options, Proust settled on *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. In 1992, the translator D. J. Enright gave Proust’s novel the far more literal English title *In Search of Lost Time*” (75).

Eve Sedgwick in her late work noted that there is a possible pun in the title, that works well with her last book *The Weather in Proust* (forthcoming with Duke University Press, December 2011); *temps*, of course, meaning both “time” and “weather.” For a discussion of the late work of Eve Sedgwick (including particular emphasis on her work on Proust), see Jonathan Goldberg’s “On the Eve of the Future” (2010), which is an expansion of an identically titled paper published in *PMLA* 125.2 (2010).
narratives that I simply cannot understand enough, narratives that I cannot stop reading, even if I am only ever reading the same sentence over and over again. Proust and Barrie are excessive writers: Proust’s length seems to be unmatched, and Barrie’s sentimentally childish narrative is as complex as it is haunting. Proust and Barrie overwhelm their readers: “[t]he thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity” Virginia Woolf writes in her diary; she continues, “[h]e searches out these butterfly shades to the last grain. He is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly’s bloom” (III.7). We, like Woolf, marvel at Proust’s excesses. And in Peter Pan it is “the erotics of tininess” (Jagoe in Reading Boyishly Mavor 21333), it is the smallness of the narrative, “smallness governs Barrie’s writing” Mavor writes, and indeed “[e]ven his actual handwriting was very, very tiny” (213). The excess in Barrie is not in terms of his novel being “too much”, but rather in terms of “too little” in terms of length. Moreover, both Proust and Barrie’s works are, in a sense, wholly anecdotal. It feels difficult to treat the text as a text in and of itself without the presence of the author, that person who lived in a real world (or a cork-lined room, a room that I find myself dreaming of and longing for in the noise of Toronto: phones ringing, children screaming, car-horns blaring, sirens wailing) and wrote a narrative that has managed to captivate readers, listeners, and viewers for generations.

33 Mavor explains the origins of the phrase as follows: “Now fully grown up, Eva-Lynn Jagoe was once a graduate student of mine, and the phrase comes from her doctoral written exam, Duke University 1993” (487 n. 109). As such, the phrase was never put into print (beyond the exam) by Jagoe. Mavor also speaks about “the erotic of tininess” in her book Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photography.

34 Mavor discusses the erotics of tininess in terms of eroticism and photography: “But like Carroll’s pictures, one only has to open one’s eyes to see sex and sexuality in [Julie Margaret Cameron’s] androgynous pictures. Looking at Spring, one is struck by the charming and seductive looks on the faces of the children – flirtatious really. And how their beautiful skin, their unkempt precious hair (to be cut and saved later) and their tiny shoulders, soft and round? It is an ‘erotics of tininess’” (Pleasures Taken 22).
In the opening chapter of this dissertation, I flirted with the first time and opened with a list of firsts that are important for one reason or another. In the current chapter, I will focus on first loves, first losses, and first times in the works of Proust and Barrie because they lay the theoretical groundwork for the study of first times. In particular I want to theorise how notions of anxiety, paranoia, and hysteria are intrinsic aspects of first love stories, and then, latterly, to focus on the matter of mourning. Each first time that we consider will contain paranoia, *jouissance*, hysteria, and ultimately, mourning. This chapter will play with and come to understand these terms, especially paranoia and mourning, in the work of Proust and Barrie. My discussion of paranoia will focus largely on Proustian sexuality and the prevalence of masturbation in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*; I argue that for Proust masturbation is anticipatory. Following this discussion, I consider mourning, particularly the mourning of the first love and the first loss. Albertine represents Marcel’s first love and first loss, and it is in *The Fugitive* that Marcel fully mourns the loss of love and Albertine. Of course, *In Search of Lost Time* is a mournful book filled with many losses, but I am particularly interested in Marcel’s story of Albertine.\(^{35}\) Paranoia and

\(^{35}\) The question of the first time in Proust is difficult because there are many first times that one might consider; I privilege Marcel’s relation with Albertine. Roland Barthes in “An Idea of Research,” notes that “pleasure once found, the subject knows no rest until he can repeat it” (283); this notion is particularly important to this thesis because never is the first time unique and singular; it is always repeated. With respect to the particularity of the first time in Proust and what the first event of the novel might be, we have many options to consider. As said, I privilege Albertine; however, one could just as easily consider the opening pages of *Swann’s Way* in which Marcel waits longingly for the kiss goodnight from his mother. Barthes has suggested, “Inversion—as form—invasates the entire structure of *La Recherche*. It inaugurates the narrative itself. The first scene—from which will emerge, through Swann, the entire novel—is articulated around the reversal of a despair (that of having to go to sleep without the mother’s kiss); here, in fact, are inscribed characteristics of Proustian inversion: not only will the mother, finally (temporality), come to embrace her son against all expectation (surprise) but, moreover (climax) out of the darkest despair, the most overwhelming joy will appear; the stern Father unexpectedly turning into the kindly father” (“An Idea of Research” 273-74). This, of course, has much to do with the first time in Proust whereby it is imagined and subsequently inverted into the real, lived experience – longing (for) fulfilment. In many ways, this “first
mourning are integral to Marcel’s story and they are excessively presented in the masterpiece.

It is important to recognise that the love story (which does not require a happily ever after as the romance novel does) can and often does stand apart from the first time (virginal time); after all, not everyone will have their first sexual time with their first love, or their first love may not be their first sexual partner. These stories have long been the locus wherein we find first loves. First loves and their stories are also found in other, if not all, “genres”: the bildungsroman, the autobiography, the tragedy, the romantic comedy, the comedy, the novel, literary fiction, and so on. Maria diBattista has observed that “[i]n our time, First Love has ceased to be a term designating a novelistic theme and has gained the repute of a subgenre, compiled in ‘anthologies’ of First Love narratives” (3).

Slippage—between the first time and the first love—is like flirting; it allows us to peak over the fence, permits us to imagine briefly what it would be like if a thing were a certain way and to narrate how things could be if the conditions afforded it to be that way. We can slip between two similar things and make them one. This is generally a rhetorical negative (one should not slip into another idea that is tangentially related but nonetheless different), but what if we render this as something more positive, more productive? What if we recognise that indeed ideas do slip into one another, or collapse into one another,
instead of reinforcing binaries? Slippage therefore works to destabilise similar but different ideas and consider how these ideas may come to influence one another. To these ends, we need to consider what happens when two competing ideas come into contact with one another. Thus, while it is true that “first time” and “first love” or “first loss” are different ideas, it is equally true that they seem to fall into one another, they slip, and I slip when I write about them. I think this is the critical work of flirting, which is a way of doing things without ever having to commit to them, a dangerous and pleasurable activity. Flirting is the critical labour of love and to demonstrate that love through action; to flirt is to work towards loving, which need not mean that one achieves love. This labour ought to happen in all critical and literary pursuits (even if, in the end, we realise that this was nothing more than flirtation and that no love could genuinely come from it). I want to consider these flirtatious moments when things slip into one another, for instance, the first time and the first love, or, the ways that In Search of Lost Time and Peter Pan seem inseparable, and the ways that Barrie and Proust almost seem to flirt with one another.

My negotiation of Proust and Barrie, and my contention that they seem to “slip” into one another is due, in part, to my reading of Mavor’s Reading Boyishly. Outside of the obvious connections, Proust and Barrie are both writers, they are contemporaries, and they are both their mother’s sons, mama’s boys, there is something that draws the two together—at least for me (and Mavor). In the famous “Proust Questionnaire,” at 13, he answered that “to be separated from Mama” would be the lowest depth of misery. Seven years later, Proust answered, “Not to have known my mother or my grandmother” as his idea of misery. J. M. Barrie, of course, wrote a book about his mother, Margaret Ogilvy. Mavor quotes Barrie: “If readers discovered how frequently and in how many
guises...[Mother] appeared in my books—the affair would become a public scandal” (246). Barrie and Proust are writers devoted to their mothers and for whom the mother cannot be separated from their own work.

It seems difficult now, after reading Mavor, Proust, and Barrie, to imagine how these writers—all three—could be separated. But, what seems irrefutable is that Barrie and Proust “are neither man nor boy, neither little nor big: they are boyish” (5) as Mavor tells her reader. Maybe I am too convinced of Mavor's treatment of Proust and Barrie alongside one another, but—for me—Proust and Barrie are intimately connected to one another because of their boyish exploration of boyhood, growing up, and the fear of forgetting, the fear of loss. To read Proust and to read Barrie is to return to boyhood, not because these are memories of my own childhood, but because they allow for their reader to return to childhood, to search out what were lost memories. I slip between Proust and Barrie, and they slip into my readings.

In this chapter, I develop my theory of the first time and the mourning after by focusing on the first love and the mourning of the loss of the first love. Additionally, I develop the “boy-wish” and the desire to grow up while still worrying about becoming a grown up. I am interested in the desire to keep something, to hold onto something that is irrevocably lost and this process of mourning without forgetting. To these ends, I explore paranoia in Proust’s In Search of Lost Time by demonstrating the importance of masturbation (a theme already discussed in relation to evangelical literature) to Proustian sexuality. I argue that paranoia is an attempt to control the future, avoid surprises as Sedgwick would have it (“Paranoid Reading” 130), and therefore masturbation acts to understand the sexual experience with another before it can happen; as such, the
masturbator is a paranoid subject, precisely because the act is anticipatory. Following this discussion, I move to J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, which, while very much about love, childishness, and innocence, is also, at times, a rather hysterical story, cluttered by senses of knowing, not knowing, and unknowing. The hysteria being considered is the question of being overwhelmed by suddenly having acquired knowledge through action. Finally, this chapter returns to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* to focus on the ways in which the end, the loss of the first love is considered. This chapter plays on and embraces the slippage between the first time and the first love and recognises—flirtatiously, anecdotally—how these stories are often confused, how they often become one, and how these stories are a prime locus to understand our desires. What is ultimately essential to these readings is the boyish, child-like reading at play in each; they narrate how things *should be* and I argue this is part of the mythology of the first time.

**First Time Reading *In Search of Lost Time*: On Madeleines and Masturbation**

In my first *complete* (or complete enough) reading (after all, how many common readers and literary scholars have opened the first pages of *In Search of Lost Time* and given up or fallen asleep?) of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, I was not struck by the famous madeleine scene in which Marcel bites into the tea-soaked madeleine and is flooded by

37 I want to note here that I do not mean that one does not have to read all of Proust, but rather I am interested in the possibility of ever finishing reading Proust. Thus, the question that might be asked is: Can one finish reading Proust? I am reminded here of Rachel Bowlby’s introduction to Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer’s *Studies in Hysteria*, “Never done. Never to return” (vii). One is, I imagine (or I imagine of myself), “never done” reading Proust, and one can never return to what one was doing (to what one was) before reading Proust. I find myself often returning to Proust; for instance, after reading Eve Sedgwick’s *The Weather in Proust*, I returned to Proust in search of “temps perdu,” and after reading Michael Snediker’s interview (2008) with Sedgwick, reading once more, but this time, for “queer little gods.”
memories of the past. This is the moment that is most often talked about when discussing In Search of Lost Time; it is the canonical moment of the text. The madeleine is the linchpin—the thing that holds everything together—or the harbinger—the thing that announces all that is forthcoming—of so many interpretations of Proust. I had, in this moment, missed the madeleine and made the “mistake” that Jagoe speaks of with regards to one’s first reading (TS 4). Jagoe does not see this mistake as a negative; instead, she sees it as a productive: “I, we, make connections that may be false, we interpret without full knowledge of the text, we risk error of repetition” (TS 5). There is, to be certain, a shameful position to be found in reading, particularly when one, when I, miss the central moment of the text. This particular notion of shame is prevalent in reading Proust precisely because we know so much about Proust’s novel without ever having read it. One need only look so far as any dictionary of quotations to find nuggets of Proustian wisdom. Any reading of Proust, I think, is bound to be caught up in this idea of looking forward to the Proust quotation one knows, or to the moments, like the madeleine, that one ought to know about. Reading Proust is an exercise in humility.

I am no longer writing from the joyous and mistake-riddled position of ignorance that was found in that seminar room (in a class in which only one person had read Proust previously), and in a way, I am allowing my reader into a space that was sacrosanct, doors closed, wounds bound in hopes of being healed. And yet, I am still confused by the fact that

Because of the intimacy of In Search of Lost Time, when I refer to Proust, I am speaking about the author of the novel; when I refer to Marcel, I am speaking about the character and narrator of Proust’s novel. Of course, this novel is notoriously slippery because Marcel and Marcel Proust seem to be, at least at times, the same person. The question of the “contested Marcel” is an important one, particularly since he is as much a character as a real person, for a discussion of this problematic see: Joshua Landy’s “Les moi en moi: The Proustian Self in Philosophical Perspective” (2001) and “Proust, His Narrator, and the Importance of Distinction” (2004).
I missed the canonically most important moment of the entire Proustian project: the madeleine. I am a trained reader and I missed the most obvious, the most important, the most canonical, the most noted, the most imagined, the most considered, and the most written about part of Proust’s novel. This is a shameful experience precisely because as Jacqueline Rose explains shame is about “the ideal you like to nurture about yourself, that you betray (psychologists describe shame as the only affect which works internally, passing from one to another part of the self)” (On Not Being Able to Sleep 4). Missing the madeleine was shameful because it was a betrayal of everything that I had believed I was—in that moment—a literary scholar who had been trained to read literary texts, pay attention to the words, read hermeneutically, decipher symbolism, acknowledge foreshadowing. Why was something so benign—a cookie—the “important” part of the novel and not the fact that the book opens blissfully? This question is my paranoid response, and yet, also an arrogant response in that I wanted—and, in a sense, still want—to privilege my own reading over the madeleine. How did the madeleine not—until recently—become a fully loaded sign in my reading? By the same token, why had the madeleine not had its full effect and affect during my reading of Swann’s Way? That is, why did the madeleine not correct my mistake? And here, I am becoming a hysterical reader. This is the central moment in one of the most canonical novels of the Western Tradition and World Literature, and I had not noticed it. This moment did not register. I had failed at reading Proust.39

It is worth noting that Jacqueline Rose positions shame alongside guilt, she explains that “[p]eople feel guilty when they violate other people, shame when they fails themselves or the group” (On Not Being Able to Sleep 4). In the context of the classroom setting, in which I was shamed for not having noticed the madeleine, I am certain that I also experienced a sense of guilt for having introduced the topic of masturbation, particularly given the fact that this would have taken place in the first or second class. I had, in
The question that must be confronted (or asked), whether we are paranoid or anxious, is likely also the seemingly simple question: how does one read Proust? How could most readers recognise the importance of the madeleine, and I had not? I look at my copy of *Swann's Way*, hoping that I have noted somewhere the madeleine, and I find that the page is blank, not a single mark (as though the page had not even been read), and yet, the passage stares back at me:

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, except what lay in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in the winter, on my return home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, and a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called “petites madeleines,” which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked the morsel of cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestions of origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its
disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had the
effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this
essence was not in me, it was me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre,
contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I
sensed that it was connected with the taste of tea and the cake, but that it
infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same
nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I seize and
apprehend it? (1.60)

Proust does not hide this scene. Literary scholars did not have to scour the text and
discover it (at least not in the same way as they did when they searched for the narrator’s
name, Marcel, which appears only a handful of times) and then explain its profundity. And
yet, I had missed it. Not a marking on the page. I recognised it in the moment it was pointed
out in the course on Proust (to me, as though I were the only one in the context of the
classroom of colleagues and friends not to recognise its immediacy, its importance, its
canonicty). I recognise it now, but not then, not in my first reading.40

The subject matter of Proust’s novel is overwhelming and in many ways this
sensation leads readers to cling to different moments of the text, a thread that they can
follow (or attempt to follow) throughout the novel. I already have alluded to the problem of
reading Proust above through a confessional anecdote, a source of continued anxiety.

40 I could argue that it is not the madeleine that provokes the memory at all but rather the tea that
soaks the crumbs of the madeleine: “No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate
than a shiver ran through me” (1.60, emphasis mine). In such a reading, it is the tea that becomes central to
the narrative and not the madeleine. Indeed, perhaps there is much more to be said about tea and reading tea
leaves in terms of interpreting Proust’s masterpiece; however, this is a task for another time. Or, better, as
Proust’s narrator might tell us: “be quiet and let me go on with my story” (IV.70).
In Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, readers, if reading closely and sensually (or, if made aware), will find there is a significant amount of time spent masturbating.\(^4\) For Proust, masturbation is the first step in what Bernau calls “a journey one must undertake” (63). Likewise, Murat Aydemir observes through Malcolm Bowie\(^2\):

Bowie’s reading signals the “touristic” significance of ejaculation (“itinerary,” “exploratory”) in accordance with the images of travel and journey that balance the lack of movement in the opening pages of Combray. This bedside tourism partakes of the typical Proustian attitude of mobile immobility, a bodily sedentariness supporting frantic movement of the mind and imagination. (250)

As such, my reading works to situate masturbation and the masturbator (as virginal identity) within the realm of sexuality studies and moreover to suggest that the masturbating virgin begins an exploration of sexuality, regardless of the fact that “the ejaculation” as Aydemir argues “must remain suspended at its threshold” (251).\(^4\) If there is to be a distinguishing characteristic between my reading of Proust and Aydemir’s it is that I

\(^{41}\) I am dealing specifically here with *In Search of Lost Time*, however, it should be noted that masturbation appears more completely in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, as Carol Mavor notes: “When reading *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, I am delighted by parts that I recognize from *Swann’s Way* (the first book of the many-volumed *Search*). Amid the heated attacks on its so-called subject (Sainte-Beuve), I find elements of the *Search*: the memories of the bedrooms that the Narrator had slept in; the water closet that smells of orrisroot (but with a more focused masturbation scene in *Sainte-Beuve*); and a taste of magic madeleine (served up as dry toast with tea in *Sainte-Beuve*)” (Reading Boyishly 2).

\(^{42}\) Aydemir is referring to Bowie’s study, *Proust Among the Stars* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998) in which he argues in part, “[f]rom the threshold of an orgasm that did not occur, there extends an interminable desiring itinerary” (212, in Aydemir 250).

\(^{43}\) Aydemir’s notion of “suspended at the threshold” (251) recalls Lacan’s writing on *jouissance*: “[k]nowledge is what brings life to a halt at a certain limit on the path to *jouissance*.” (Other Side of Psychoanalysis 18).
am less interested in ejaculation and more in masturbation: ejaculation, in a sense, serves as masturbation’s endpoint, which renders the journey less complicated and more direct. Masturbation is like flirtation; its endpoint and meaning are not yet determined. Additionally, I am interested in deflating the importance of the madeleine, which has become an all-encompassing and over-loaded, over-determined symbol of the Proustian project. The correlation, thus, between the masturbatory and the madeleine is that the one’s endpoint has not been determined, while the other has been fully determined. The madeleine’s meaning exists almost before the text has been read at this point in time and becomes the vehicle through which interpretation is made possible. Instead, I am interested in displacing (at least momentarily) the madeleine so as to allow for a reparative reading, one caught by the surprises of reading (or failing at reading) Proust.

Sedgwick in one of her most famous—if not infamous—papers, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl,”⁴⁴ writes:

The identity of the masturbator was only one of the sexual identities subsumed, erased, or overridden in this triumph of heterosexist

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⁴⁴ At the very opening of the paper Sedgwick begins: “The phrase itself is already evidence. Roger Kimball in his treatise on educational ‘corruption,’ Tenured Radicals, cites the title ‘Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl’ from an MLA convention program as if he were Perry Mason, the six words with a smoking gun. The warm gun that, for the journalists who have adopted the phrase as an index of depravity in academe, is happiness – offering the squibby pop (fulmination? prudence? funniness?) that lets absolutely anyone, in the righteously exciting vicinity of the masturbating girl, feel a very pundit” (“Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” 133). This critique of Sedgwick’s work was happening at the very height of the culture wars when Lynne Cheney was the Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. An obituary entitled “The woman who wrote: ‘How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay’” that appeared in the Toronto Star (April 18, 2009) reports: “If Sedgwick did not exist, social conservatives might have had to invent her. [...] As a professor at Duke University, which hired her the year prior as part of an effort to transform its moribund English department into a bastion of cutting-edge thought, she produced a paper called ‘Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl.’ Time called her a ‘nutty professor;’ Lynne Cheney, wife of Dick [Cheney] and head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, cited her in a panicked report.”
homo/hetero calculus. But I want to argue here that the status of the masturbator among these many identities was uniquely formative. I would suggest that, as one of the very earliest embodiments of “sexual identity” in the period of progressive epistemological overloading of sexuality, the masturbator may have been at the cynosural centre of a remapping of individual identity, will, attention, and privacy along modern lines that the reign of “sexuality,” and its generic concomitant in the novel, and in the novelistic point of view, now lead us to take for granted. It is of more than chronological import if the (lost) identity of the masturbator was the proto-form of modern sexual identity itself. (140-41)

I agree with Sedgwick insofar as it seems to me that there is a lot to be said about the “subsumed, erased, or overridden” identity of the masturbator in fiction. While it is certainly true that I run the risk of reinforcing “heterosexist homo/hetero calculus,” I want to suggest that it is true that masturbation is, at its core, a sexuality that defies the homo/hetero. The virgin, like the masturbator, complicates the equation precisely because there is too often an awareness of the presence of an amorous other. Masturbation can be entirely self-centred and defy the homo/hetero calculus, but the masturbator can also establish him or herself within the equation. My intention is not to reify the calculus but rather to work with it and against it and to recognise the complexity of identities like virgin and masturbator within the “heterosexist homo/hetero calculus.”

45 For larger discussions of masturbation and the arts, see: Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism (1995), edited by Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario. Masturbation, of course, has also been studied from historical perspectives, chiefly, Thomas W. Laquer’s seminal Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation (2003).
To these ends, with Sedgwick’s “masturbator” as “uniquely formative” and as a sort of hidden voice in literature, I want to explore Marcel’s earliest explorations of his sexuality in the novel. There is a desire, on my part, to unpack and uncover these masturbatory moments precisely because they allow us to understand the (lost) identity—the masturbator—in Proust’s work. There is a reason Marcel spends so much time seeking out privacy, seeking out pleasure, and the reason, from my perspective, is a boy-wish (a term I shall return to below) reason of growing up and being stunned, shocked, and shattered by maturation. The identity of Marcel, of the boy, is “lost” not by virtue of having been misplaced or misplacing, but because that identity slips away from time and in time—like Salvador Dali’s blue clocks in The Persistence of Memory (1931) which seemingly still tell time as they melt away—and we are left with this temporally present identity.

In the above paragraph, I introduced a term that deserves some explanation: my contention is that within Marcel (or, to slip, Proust) is a boy-wish by which I mean that intrinsic to his boyhood, indeed embodied in and by his boyhood, is a wish. The wish is to grow up, but that wish means that he must surrender his cherished boyhood. Phillips writes that, “to frustrate one version of the self is always to gratify, to promote, to re-find another version” (“Clutter” 64) and this is what I mean by the boy-wish. The boy-wish is

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46 Though not the goal of this dissertation, I am reminded here of early work in gay criticism (as well as women’s/feminist, race-based, disability, etc., criticism) wherein, the goal was to identify a canon of key works in the given identity politic. Peter Barry writes in a section titled “what lesbian/gay critics do” that they “identify and establish a canon of ‘classic’ lesbian/gay writers whose works constitute a distinct tradition” and that they “identify lesbian/gay episodes in mainstream work and discuss them as such (for example, the relationship between Jane and Helen in Jane Eyre), rather than reading same-sex pairings in non-specific ways, for instance, as symbolising two aspects of the same character” and that they “foreground homosexual aspects of mainstream literature which have previously been glossed over, for example the strongly homo-erotic tenderness seen in a good deal of First World War poetry” (148-49). I think that there remains a great deal of critical labour to take place in the area of virginity studies and that this work could flirt with ideas from earlier identity-politic literary and cultural theories.
able to frustrate and gratify at the same time. It is both/and, like flirting; the boy flirts with growing up because he knows that he can return to boyhood, but, like flirting, he knows that he could cease to be a boy and the flirting could become real and dangerous. The boy-wish gratifies Marcel in a very sexual sense, but the recognition of this gratification is a frustration, the very real sense of growing up that is so confusing, so riddled with mysteries, so “cluttered.” “Clutter,” Phillips suggests, “may be a way of describing either the deferral that is a form of waiting, or waiting that is a form of deferral” (“Clutter” 71)—with loss, and both waiting for and deferring of that loss.

The search for lost time in Proust’s novel is really a search, I will argue, for the beginnings of the virginal journey. The novel is very much about a return to innocence, a moment just before knowledge is found and innocence lost. A way to return to before the first time, a time just before the moment in which all first times are lost. The infamous biting of the madeleine (which has caused me great anxiety, which I have only flirted with and around, and to which I shall return in the latter sections of this chapter) is not a recollection of the past, but rather a longing for that which is lost, is to be lost, a mourning and a regret that cannot be repressed. The search is a (hysterical) search for boyhood, a way to return and, of course, a way to grow up. Marcel longs for boyhood. Proust’s In Search of Lost Time and its narrator are the definitive boy-wish.

Marcel’s Dreams
Thus let us turn, return, to the most private space of Marcel’s childhood. At the very beginning of Swann’s Way, Marcel speaks about his trouble falling asleep, his dreams and
daydreams, and his room. In this scene, I argue that we are witness to the paranoid masturbator coming to terms with sexuality and recognising that he must too be a sexual subject like everyone else. Marcel says:

Sometimes, too, as Eve was created from a rib of Adam, a woman would be born during my sleep from some misplacing of my thigh. Conceived from the pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that pleasure. My body, conscious that its own warmth was permeating hers, would strive to become one with her, and I would awake. The rest of humanity seemed very remote in comparison with this woman whose company I had left but a moment ago; my cheek was still warm from her kiss, my body ached beneath the weight of hers. If, as would sometimes happen, in waking hours, I would abandon myself altogether at this end: to find her again, like people who set out on a journey to see with their eyes some city of their desire, and imagine that one can taste in reality what has charmed one’s fancy. And then, gradually, the memory of her would fade away, I had forgotten the girl of my dream. (I.3)

These opening sentiments set into play masturbation as a virginal trope in the novel (a trope we have already seen in our reading of Ian McEwan’s On Chesil Beach) because so

47 Dreams are an integral part of Proustian thought. In his early story “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania,” which appears in The Complete Short Stories of Marcel Proust, one can see Proust thinking about how dreams work: “Three days later, around five o’clock, he woke up as if from a bad dream for which the dream is responsible yet which he barely remembers” (26). Here then, Proust is considering the dreamer’s agency and responsibility for the dream. In many regards, if it is the case that dreams are culpable, then these readings of dreams in In Search of Lost Time become all the more masturbatory and less products of the unconscious (un-willed for) dreamworld.
much attention rests upon the imagination and subjunctivity. This is a very confessional moment, at almost the earliest possible moment in the novel (his first words during our first reading); but what do these words mean and what does the reader do with this moment? It seems, at the very least, that Proust (the author) and Marcel (the narrator) are negotiating the difference between masturbation and nocturnal emission (a debate that has plagued Christian and Evangelical writers from Augustine to the purity pastors that were considered earlier). Readers are being introduced to an adolescent or a boy, who, as William C. Carter notes, “felt isolated and misunderstood” (4). I contend that there is a doubling problem here about the nature of arousal and the erotic in relation to this sensation of isolation. For Marcel—the adolescent and the narrator—the erotic is confusing because of what it arouses. Why are some things erotic and not others? Is there a universal “erotic” or is the “erotic” particular? These are misunderstandings that alienate and isolate Marcel (and likely the adolescent in general). How do knowledge, arousal, and the erotic inform one another? What is the difference between the masturbator and the sleeper when both (can) exist in dream-like fantasy spaces? Or, more precisely, what is the difference between a daydream, a night-dream, and a wet dream? Read closely, the wet dream is facilitated by the misplaced thigh that allows for Marcel to imagine a woman “who offered [him] that pleasure” (I.3, emphasis mine); incidentally, a pleasure that cannot be named. Everything is occurring in a state of slumber—the sleeping male, the sleeping Marcel, is like Adam. We have a description of coitus, “my body ached beneath the weight of hers” (I.3), which incidentally does not follow the typical script of the missionary position, but rather in which Marcel is in the “submissive” position, so to speak (this is also perhaps the earliest moment of inversion in the novel, wherein Marcel inverts the normative roles in the sexual episode, positioning the female in the dominant position, and positioning himself in a
submissive position). He is, thus, thinking through (or dreaming through) another possibility, another sexuality which runs counter to dominant discourses regarding sexuality.

The question of desire and agency is thus presented to readers in the space of Marcel’s dreams. Very early in the novel, Marcel addresses the problem of masturbation and his lack of self-control: “Alas! I did not realise that my own lack of willpower, my delicate health, and the consequent uncertainty” (I.14). Likewise, Proust notes how this lack of willpower had become a genuine problem. In a letter to Jacques Bizet (son of Georges Bizet) he writes that his mother feared that he and Bizet might share “the same faults … independent spirit, nervousness, a disordered mind, and perhaps even masturbation” (in Carter 4). The concern being that masturbation causes all sorts of maladies—paranoia, hysteria and hairy palms—and if there is one thing that is certain when reading Proust’s life and Proust’s work, illness (like desire) overwhelms the pages.\footnote{In women, masturbation (if a husband was not available) was prescribed as a cure to hysteria. Freud, for instance in his essay “Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)”, observed that: “[h]ysterical symptoms hardly ever arise as long as children are masturbating, but only during abstinence. They express a substitute for masturbatory gratification for which a yearning remains in the unconscious while other, more normal gratification has not yet begun and while masturbation remains a possibility. The latter condition determines the possibility of hysteria being cured through marriage and normal sexual intercourse. If gratification in marriage is removed once again, through coitus interruptus, physical aversion, and so on, the libido seeks out its old river bed and expresses itself once more in hysterical symptoms” (499).}

\footnote{It is perhaps worth noting, as well, that many biographies of Marcel Proust speak about masturbation. In Proust: A Biography, for instance, Ronald Hayman writes: “[i]n [sic] was in Illiers, at the age of twelve, that [Proust] discovered how to masturbate. He locked the door of the lavatory, but the window was always pushed open, and a lilac, rooted in the wall, had pushed a bough into the room” (22). What is interesting about Hayman’s biography of Proust is how novel he presents the masturbatory scenes in Proust’s work: “[t]he account of masturbation in Swann is probably the first in any novel. The scent of the lilac is replaced with the mixed scents of orris root and wild-currant bush. The reason for the change is that both plants contain trimethalymine; present in both semen and urine, the substance helps to give them their characteristic smell. Virtually none of Proust’s readers would be aware of this, and the change indicates a compulsion to find connections between private life and the natural environment” (23). I find Hayman’s explanation of the “orris root” to be perplexing insofar as there does not seem to be textual or biographical evidence to support the claim. Hayman explains that “at age twenty-five, he’s asking himself whether time is}
It is important to understand that while masturbation was suggested as a “cure” to female hysteria, the same was not true for male masturbation. During the period of 1790-1860 (the latter years being the time of Proust’s father-doctor50): “[a]ny deviation from the prescribed norm of sexual moderation—virginity, masturbation, overindulgence, sterility, prostitution—was interpreted as a possible cause of nervous collapse” (Micale 58).

Marcel enjoys and longs for, throughout the novel, the privacy and solitude afforded to him only by “private” rooms, like the water closet and his bedroom.51 John Coyle, for

irretrievably lost, but the debate is still coloured by the guilty belief he is mediocre, lazy, sterile, weak-willed. Though masturbating less, he has abused himself so much in the past he has little faith that enough strength is left for him to fulfil his artistic potential or to act in accordance with his most intense feelings” (96). Edmund White’s short biography mentions masturbation, but in relation to voyeurism (136); Jean-Yves Tadie’s biography includes Proust’s habit of masturbation in his youth (48, 49, 69); and also, William C. Carter’s Marcel Proust: A Life (60, 67, 69).

50 The relationship between Proust and his father, Adrien Proust, is a rather fascinating one because they very much represent two different notions of sexuality, gender, and generation. Mark S. Micale in Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness writes: “Is it a coincidence that Proust – like Gosse, Wilde, Symonds, and Strachey – was gay and that his celebrated text features a spectrum of sexualities – the heterosexual Swann, the bisexual Odette, and the homosexual Charlus? Certainly as a writer, aesthetic, decadent, homosexual, neurasthenic, Proust stood outside of conventional masculinities of his day. In fact, the major dichotomies of the age – Victorian/Modern, science/art, positivism/subjectivism, straight/gay, healthy/hysteric – all map directly onto Proust and his father. Adrien Proust’s Hygiène du nerasthénique (1897) and Marcel Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu are alternative representations of male neurosis emerging a generation apart from the same family. But whereas the physician-father produced a practical, moralizing medical manual, the literary son created a masterpiece of early European modernism” (215). Roy B. Lacoursiere in his article “Proust and Parricide: Literary, Biographical, and Forensic-Psychiatric Explorations” (2003) also considers the relation between Proust and his father, as well as Proust and fathers. Lacoursiere observes that: “Proust also exhibited some degree of paternal identification, though against not without ambivalence. He emulated his father’s ‘work ethic’ above all by his assiduous labor on In Search of Lost Time. However, he rejected his father’s profession, as well as much standard medical treatment throughout his lifetime and in his final illness, choosing to medicate himself, which unfortunately led to his becoming addicted to drugs. In both Proust’s life and In Search of Lost Time, the father is ultimately in the background. His presence is most often implied by the oedipal theme of jealousy and competition for a loved one and Proust’s insecurity in important relationships, though this latter clearly also has preoedipal determinations” (188).

51 The function of the water closet (in cultural studies) has been considered recently by Sheila L. Cavanagh in her fascinating book Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination. The bathroom as a locus of privacy is complicated by the idea that one, at least in the public sphere, has to routinely declare his or her affinity and allegiance to one sex over another. In her study she argues, in part, that “[t]he management of the body and its modes of evacuation in the modern lavatory are part and parcel of
instance, has observed that these “private rooms” are “where the three practices of reading, masturbation, and observation are thematically linked” (32). In solitude, as in dreaming, we are afforded what Northrop Frye calls “imaginative rewards,” (CW XXVI.203) and this is precisely what is found in reading, masturbation, and Marcel’s observations. Mavor argues:

Like the bite of tea-soaked madeleine cake that prompted so many memories of home in Swann’s Way, “so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds”, there are many crevices in Proust’s novel which covet places of private childhood solitude: from his bed to his grandmother’s garden to the kitchen to the stairwell to the pages of a book. But the one place that is especially significant to Proust’s childhood as fantasy was the only place that he was allowed to lock himself into: his precious bathroom, “which smelt of orris-root” (a musty, woody, earth scent). Upset by his family’s teasing of his beloved grandmother, the Narrator is prompted to lock himself up in the only room where he can partake in privacy: that special room necessary for dreams, reading, and sexuality. (89)

For Mavor, the solitude of these private spaces is like the madeleine because of the ways that it allows for, I believe, excessive thought, feeling, and sensation. Mavor recognises the immediate importance of this fundamentally solitary space, which allows Marcel the time
and space that he needs, desires, and longs for so as to negotiate his own identity, and to
my mind, how his sexual maturation folds into his search.

The earliest masturbatory scene occurs in the very opening pages of *Swann’s Way*: “it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude: reading or daydreaming: tears of sensual pleasure” (I.14). Of course, we are reminded of the fact that the opening line of the novel reads, “[f]or a long time, I would go to bed early” (I.1). The question becomes (at least for the retrospective reader aware of the place of masturbation in the novel): why is he going to bed early: to read, to daydream, or both?

Throughout Proust’s novel masturbation is associated and intimately linked with his “search” or “research,” which is to say that there is an affinity between reading and masturbation. Reading and masturbation allow Marcel to defer the future, to displace his reality for an imagined reality, another time, another place. In his book, *Solitary Sex*, Thomas W. Laquer writes:

But reading as a physically powerful act, one that engaged the imagination, one that invited a sort of pleasurable, secret, potentially addictive self-absorption that contemporaries identified as the core of the private vice, was certainly something women did. The rise of silent reading did not, as I said, cause the dramatic new exigency of solitary sex. But solitary sex was the exemplary case of the moral challenges they represented. (304)

Masturbation has been associated with reading for centuries precisely because both are, as Marcel well knows, solitary vices. Marcel seeks “out an inviolable solitude” for the purpose
of, “reading or daydreaming: tears of sensual pleasure” (I.14). Reading becomes a sentimental act that allows him to explore his dreams (dreams, of course, often being directly associated with Marcel’s sexuality). Indeed, in the final volume of Proust’s novel, *Time Regained*, reading and masturbating are once again brought together when Gilberte explains her own sexual awakenings and recognition of her sexual identity:

“The first time at Tansonville. You [Marcel] were going for a walk with your family, and I was on my way home. I’d never seen such a pretty little boy.” [...] As I was allowed to go out by myself, whenever I was able to get away, I used to rush over there. I can’t tell you how I longed for you to come there too; I remember quite well that, as I had only a moment in which to make you understand what I wanted, at the risk of being seen by your people and mine, I signalled to you so vulgarly that I’m ashamed of it to this day. But you stared at me so crossly that I saw you didn’t want to.” (VI.4-5)

Gilberte speaks of Marcel in desiring terms—“I’d never seen such a pretty little boy” or “I can’t tell you how I longed for you to come there too.” These desiring terms are the language of bliss and pleasure, but Marcel cannot satisfy Gilberte’s longings. Marcel misreads her signs, her flirtations. This scene, accordingly, becomes entirely productive for my theorisations of the first time and thus within the realms of this dissertation because it elucidates the matter of paranoia—the misread sign and the cross look afterward—and the process of mourning. Masturbation is, as we have seen, a paranoid sexuality, which attempts to anticipate the future, but, of course, can never prepare the paranoid virgin for the very shocking realities of a sexual future, a future with an amorous and/or sexual other.
Flirting with Virgins and the Mourning After

I want to begin here with the site of Gilberte’s flirtation and the ways in which flirtation is about the self. Flirting is, I have suggested previously, about knowledge, and the particular knowledge being considered here is knowledge afforded to the other about the self. By flirting, the flirt acknowledges that he or she is ready to be known through the process of love. Phillips writes, “we have to watch out for the ways people invite us—or allow us—to know them; and also alert ourselves to the possibility that knowing may be too tendentious, too canny, a model for loving” (“On Love” 41). In a sense, what is happening is a “yearn[ing] for the kind of intimacy that inspires our true self” (Ruti, The Summons of Love 68), and for Marcel, “[o]ne wants to be understood because one wants to be loved, and one wants to be loved because one loves” (Proust, V.670). But in this moment, Gilberte longs for a certain intimacy and Marcel misreads the cues, the signs, the flirtation. How, then, does one read the other, let alone the amorous other, the flirtatious other trying to indicate that he or she is ready to love and be loved? This is what is at stake in flirting, precisely what Gilberte is describing, a misread cue and a disciplinary look from the object of flirtation. When we flirt we admit, to a certain degree, that we long for an intimacy that we do not yet have.

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52 Alain de Botton in his discussion of Arthur Schopenhauer in The Consolations of Philosophy inverts this question, he writes: “One of the most profound mysteries of love is ‘Why him?, and ‘Why her?’ Why, of all the possible candidates, did our desire settle so strongly on this creature, why did we come to treasure them above all others when their dinner conversation was not always the most enlightening, nor their habits the most suitable? And why, despite good intentions, were we unable to develop a sexual interest in certain others, who were perhaps objectively as attractive and might have been more convenient to live with?” (189). In this discussion, the lover must return his gaze to himself and ask himself the questions as to why he loves this particular amorous other and not another. These questions of love are, of course, present in Proust (as we shall see in this chapter when the discussion focuses on Albertine).
Misreading, thus, becomes a central part of *In Search of Lost Time* precisely because so much time is spent reading clues and cues. In a sense, the problem with Marcel is that he has both an incredible amount of knowledge and yet at the same time, he seems to know very little about the sexual arena. Throughout the novel he witnesses sexuality, but he has not genuinely explored sexuality in his own life. Marcel, instead, relies on masturbation to understand his own sexuality. Thus, in the scene at Tansonville, he misreads Gilberte’s flirtation, not because he does not know that sexuality and flirtation exist, but rather that he himself has yet to experience these cues and clues. Misreading is essential to flirtation precisely because so much of flirting is about saying what cannot be said, or not saying that which one desires to be said.

Phillips observes that, “[l]overs, of course, are notoriously frantic epistemologists, second only to paranoiacs (and analysts) as readers of signs and wonders” (“On Love” 41). What does each flirtatious sign mean and was that sign even flirting at all? The paranoid discourse of the lover is about someone who thinks he might be in love because she, maybe, perhaps, just might have been giving a sign, a fully-loaded sign, an excessive sign packed with erotic, seductive, amorous meaning, or, maybe it was nothing at all? Alain de Botton calls the victim of this type of paranoia, “the romantic paranoiac” (*Essays in Love* 21). Misread cues and clues are important to the idea of flirting (and psychoanalysis) precisely because they provide an ambiguity that allows for the flirter to admit and yet not admit his or her desire. Gilberte is flirting with Marcel and he, she believes, misreads the signs. There is no doubt that Gilberte is amorous, but there is a necessary mourning (for her) that continues to mark her (this memory resides within her and haunts her), “[a]n impression of love is out of proportion to the other impressions of life” (Proust, V.666). The
A noteworthy point is that Gilerte flirts with Marcel as a potential lover and these flirtatious signs (as is all too common with flirtation) are read, misread, and endowed with a variety of meanings, meanings that were not the original intention.

This misreading of signs leads to the matter of regret and mourning, precisely because of the fact that Marcel's misreading means that the flirtation can never move beyond mere flirting. Flirting is an invitation to love, but one must be prepared to receive the invitation. Ruti, though speaking about an actual lover rather than a wished-for-love, writes:

Few things in life are more agonizing than giving up a person who feels irreplaceable to us. [...] We may do our best to repress it. We may refuse to think about him. We may bury ourselves in our work. We may move to a different city, or even a different country. We may honestly feel that we have been able to get on with our lives. But then, one day, we catch a familiar note of music. Or we remember how Vermont smells after a summer storm. The memories come flooding back. Even when we have poured all of our strength into fleeing the past, it has a way of catching up with us whenever our defences are down. (The Case for Falling in Love 211-12)

Ruti’s prose, in this moment, embodies the power of the madeleine—that one thing, “how Vermont smells after a summer storm” (212), that sparks a memory that floods and
swallows us. But Gilberte has not been able to repress fully this memory (and perhaps no memory can ever be fully repressed) and this memory continues to haunt her.\textsuperscript{53}

To return to the particular quotation from Proust (VI.4-5), it highlights a discourse of virginity that runs alongside what Sedgwick might call the “epistemology of the closet” (Epistemology of the Closet) because it is a revealing of oneself to another and moreover a “coming out,” which is a very sexual coming out, a recognition of one’s sexual self in search of an amorous other. In the case of Gilberte, the references to her virginity or virginal nature are manifested in the language of “the first time” (VI.4) which is aligned with virginity and later her discussion of having acquired sexual knowledge at Roussainville. These indications are coupled with a past tense that recall “lost time,” a “virginal time;” that is, there is a looking back upon a moment in time rather than a lived time in the present or a hoped for but still hitherto yet to be experienced time. It is moreover worth noting:

The tower of Roussainville is indeed phallic, not only because the protagonist gazes at it from the window while masturbating and yearning for a girl but also because years later he learns that the tower had been the scene of sexual experimentations by young people of the village and that he had mistaken for Gilberte’s obscene gesture of repulsion on first seeing him had in fact been intended as an invitation to join her in the games at the tower. (Carter 5-6)

The tower of Roussainville becomes the door out of the virgin’s closet; however, Marcel does not recognise the signs and misreads Gilberte’s desire, precisely because of his lack of

\textsuperscript{53} I will return to the matter of mourning with respect to Marcel (and to the larger project of the first time and the mourning after) later in this chapter.
knowledge. Had he recognised these signs, these flirtatious signs, he could have begun to explore sexuality with an amorous other and perhaps completed his erotic and sexual journey rather than reside in the stranglehold of masturbation. I do not want to appear to be dismissing the importance of masturbation as a sexuality, but I do want to recognise that masturbation—often enough—is but a step towards normative inter-personal sexuality, insofar as we define our sexual identities not in terms of masturbatory predilections but in how we relate to others sexually. I am, however, not suggesting that masturbation leads to normative inter-personal sexuality. Sedgwick has made this point clear in “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” and in “A Poem is Being Written,” but also anecdotally in her A Dialogue on Love. Sedgwick writes: “the practice of constant masturbation had actually succeeded in keeping my anxiety under control” (A Dialogue on Love 75) and that she is very protective of “that child’s privacy to masturbate” (81). In these instances, masturbation is not about a sexual step forward, not about a future sexual life with another. Indeed, Shannon Van Wey’s notes of therapy with Sedgwick read: “we move to spanking as the intro to sex” (173). Regardless of the initial steps of sexuality and if masturbation (or spanking—though spanking requires someone else) is the first required step towards inter-personal sexuality, Marcel is—at least thus far— a masturbator who is not yet sexually determined by the role others play in affirming his sexuality.

**Inversions: Reality and Imagination, Public and Private, Inside and Outside**

Proust's novel negotiates—back and forth (like a pendulum swings)—the slippery slopes dividing reality from imagination. Teresa de Lauretis makes an argument about slippery narratives in Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema: “Proust’s title A la recherche du temps perdu, epitomizes the very movement of narrative: the unfolding Oedipal drama as
action at once backward and forward, its quest for self-knowledge through the realization of loss, to making the good of Oedipus’s sigh and the restoration of vision” (125). “I will read Proust I think” Virginia Woolf writes in her diary, “I will go backwards and forwards” (III.209). These pendular swings that critics and writers have noted help Marcel and his reader negotiate—or at least try to—the slipperiness and the slippage between similar but competing notions.

The slipperiness of time in Proust’s novel is particularly fascinating when one begins to consider the Proustian theorist, someone like, for instance, Mavor. In a recent article, Mavor writes: “I may have written a book entitled Reading Boyishly, but time flies faster than Looking-Glass bread-and-butter-flies, who live on weak tea and cream. Today, I am advocating for reading not youthfully, but geriatrically” (“Alicious Objects” 48). While Mavor’s focus has shifted from Proust to Carroll, from the youthful to the geriatric, it seems to me that these critical slips are inversions. They are not opposites, but rather they are inversions because of the intimacy between them. Proust’s novel, though very youthful, is by the end, geriatric, but it can never be just one of these. It is both geriatric and youthful. Inversion is not about choosing one or the other, but about acknowledging that like a pendulum swings from one side to the other, both are part of the whole.

Reality and imagination are dependent upon one another and for Marcel these two notions do not rebel against one another but rather invert themselves. In her article, “Impressions: Proust, Photography, Trauma,” Rebecca Comay is transfixed by the problems of inversion: “redoubling renders undecidable the difference between traumatic inscription and expiating or idealizing expression” (93). For Comay, the discussion of inversion is fundamentally established within the possibility of memory and forgetting: “if the
involuntary memory is determined thus as the traumatic incursion of the Other, there would appear to be little left to distinguish the ‘joys’ of remembrance from the familiar agonies of *temps perdu*” (95). Comay’s exploration recognises the polemics of inversion and ultimately, to my mind, inversion becomes the governing logic of the first time and first love in Proust.

Marcel never denies the potency of reality; instead he recognizes that reality and perceptions of reality are flawed: “[p]eople who learn some correct detail about another person’s life at once draw conclusions from it which are not accurate, and see in the newly discovered fact an explanation of things that have no connexion whatsoever” (V.2). Marcel is critiquing reality but not denouncing reality; these are the slippery aspects of text. The genius of inversion is that it does not renounce possibility, but instead, already contains possibility. Comay argues that “[i]nside and outside thus form a chiasmus: the lost object forms a ‘container that is greater than that the contained’ in which it simultaneously finds itself, such as the self is cast as an ‘empty apparatus’ that is structurally equivalent to the container of its own container” (87). Inversion does not separate its diametrically opposed object from its essential character; instead, the diametrically opposed object is already contained.

Nowhere is the matter of inversion more explicitly considered than in the opening pages of Sodom and Gomorrah: “[s]o true it is that life when it chooses to deliver us from suffering that seemed inescapable, does so in different, at times diametrically opposed conditions, so much so that it seems almost sacrilegious to note the identical nature of the consolations vouchsafed!” (IV.2). What interests me about inversion is that it renders the
binary both more potent and less potent: more in the sense that it ensures that one requires the other, but that the other is endowed with as much power as the one.

The poetics of inversion, which are “dizzingly impossible” (Epistemology of the Closet 220) as Sedgwick might have it, will likely overwhelm the reader of Sodom and Gomorrah. If one is not convinced by these poetics being present (and not), Marcel reaffirms them when speaking of Gomorrah: “[i]n leaving Balbec, I had imagined that I was leaving Gomorrah, plucking Albertine from it; in reality, alas Gomorrah was disseminated all over the world” (IV.20). When we confront inversion, we recognise that competing notions in a binary are ultimately bound together by a shared commonality, for instance, in the case of heterosexuality and homosexuality (the case most germane to Sodom and Gomorrah) what is shared between both is desire though the direction of that desire may be inverted, it may swing from one extreme to another.

The realm of sexuality throughout Proust is ultimately a series of inversions, and perhaps nowhere are these inversions more clear than in Proust’s treatment of masturbation. Masturbation is often accused (not by Proust) of inversion because it is sex but not quite sex. The oft-cited, though unreferenced, Marxist aphorism, for instance, “masturbation is to sex as philosophy is to reality” of Sedgwick’s more precise argument that “unstable dichotomies between art have persisted, culminating in those recurrent indictments of self-reflexive art and critical theory themselves as forms of mental masturbation” (“Jane Austen” 135). Masturbation is thus both a rhetorical negative for being entirely unproductive and yet it is productive enough to be self-reflexive. Indeed, Marcel seems to recognise the instability of the binary:
And how many art-lovers stop there, without extracting anything from their impression, so that they grow old useless and unsatisfied, like celibates of Art! They suffer, but their sufferings, like the sufferings of virgins and of lazy people, are of a kind that fecundity or work would cure. They get more excited about works of art than real artists, because for them their excitement is not the object of a laborious and inward-directed study but a force which bursts outwards, which heats their conversations and empurples their cheeks; at concerts they will shout ‘Bravo, bravo’ till they are hoarse at the end of a work they admire and imagine as they do so that they are discharging a duty. But demonstrations of this kind do not oblige them to clarify the nature of their admiration and of this they remain in ignorance. Meanwhile, like a stream which can find no useful channel, their love of art flows over into their calmest conversations, so that they make wild gestures and grimace and toss their heads whenever they mention the subject.

(VI:293)

The question becomes, at least for Marcel, where masturbation fits into the schema of things. Even while recognising the experience of viewing art, the narrative draws on masturbation to explore the contours of art and artists. Marcel is frustrated by the viewers who are more interested in the works than the “real artists.” Marcel recognises the instability of binaries (imagined/real) and metonymies (art/artist). Masturbation requires more imagination than the actual sexual experience (just as viewing art is different from producing art) because unlike the sexual experience it does not depend upon the physical presence of a participating, sometimes amorous, other. Masturbation becomes real through
its imagining and its dreams, at least for Marcel. The problem, of course, is that masturbation is only ever able to exist within the private space for Marcel, the amorous other has yet to join the scene and make it less imagined and more real.

Masturbation is inverted in another sense. It is a sexuality that is about desire but unlike heterosexuality and homosexuality (as though there are two poles), the direction of desire is less determined, less essential. With masturbation desire is not rendered as an either/or, but perhaps better as an inversion of the either/or, thus neither/nor. Masturbation is neither heterosexual nor homosexual. This neither/nor is what makes Proustian sexuality so difficult to understand, rendering it “dizzingly impossible” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 220). Sedgwick, throughout her work, sees masturbation as intrinsically queer insofar as it is ultimately sexual but never adhering to a given or particular sexuality. Jason Edwards observed that:

Masturbation provides a useful queer case study for Sedgwick, first, because it is a pleasurable *auto*-erotic pastime that crosses the supposed dividing line between homo- and heterosexuality, *allo*-erotic sexualities that are presumed to be primarily interested in enactment with others. [...] In addition, because it focuses primarily on a pleasurable self-relation, and even if our fantasies are profoundly *allo*-erotic, objectifying or sadistic, masturbation does not cause harm to those others by requiring their sexual, economic or political exploitation. Masturbation’s erotic self-relation is also, Sedgwick reminds us, necessarily same-sex and therefore shares a certain *homo* quality with homosexuality. (66)
To my mind, in light of Sedgwick’s observations, masturbation is perhaps one of the more complicated inversions being theorised and explored in Proust’s work. Masturbation renders all sexual and erotic imaginings possible without requiring participation of an erotic or amorous other. Masturbation is intrinsically sexual for Sedgwick. For Proust and readers of Proust, the question becomes: how is masturbation understood as both a sexuality and not a sexuality? Inversion is, I argue, the linchpin to answering this question.

In her article “Love-Love, Ni-Ni: Roland Barthes and Bernard Faucon, A Butterfly Effect,” Mavor begins the critical work of inverted-inversion, which will help to unpack the problem of Proustian masturbation. While I may be guilty of over-reading, I am reminded of anecdotes about inversion: the sock can be inverted, its structure holds, its inside becomes outside; the same principle is true for the squid. For Mavor, the example is velvet: “[h]aving a crush is like wearing velvet: scratchy on the inside against the wearer’s skin; and, soft on the outside for the touch of others. Velvet is neither soft, nor itchy” (38).

Mavor’s negotiation of the neither/nor becomes, I want to argue, yet another form of inversion: “[t]he adolescent is neither adult, nor child. Often androgynous, the adolescent is neither masculine, nor feminine” (“Love-Love, Ni-Ni” 38). Is this inversion, this third thing, not precisely the advantage of inversion? The invert is thus, as I position, neither this nor that but the space in-between. The invert is “in-between men” as is the case of Marcel in the opening pages of Sodom and Gomorrah as he watches two men sexually engaged with one another. Proustian desire (and masturbation) is neither heterosexual nor homosexual, it is merely sexual—the term inversion, is less about being “inverted” and more about being another version of oneself, a whole which already contains its own inversions, reversions, perversions.
This discussion of inversion is likely “dizzying” (Epistemology of the Closet 220) as Sedgwick might have it. But, let us consider another brief example of inversion, outside of Proust, though intrinsic to Proust. Mavor describes the “ni-ni” (neither/nor) in relation to Barthes:

As Barthes “ni-ni”s about himself as neither object nor subject in Roland Barthes By Roland Barthes (1975), a text that is neither novel, nor non-fiction, neither biography nor autobiography, but rather a neither-nor gestured in the spirit of his beloved Proust’s long philosophical musings on childhood, memory and time sold as a novel. (39)

The challenge that Mavor provides is a way to think with and through the ni-ni, which I position alongside the Proustian inversion. Inversion is both/and, neither/nor. It becomes a third space. It becomes what Barthes calls the “neuter.”

Barthes writes in his seminar that “the Neutral is the shimmer: that whose aspects, perhaps whose meaning, is subtly modified according to the angle of the subject’s gaze” (The Neutral 51). I want to suggest here that the water closet—a room that we have seen throughout In Search of Lost Time—allows for things to shimmer, things to be(come) neutral. In Proust’s work and world, reality is what is made ambiguous and confusing, not sexuality. Consider the following early description of the water closet:

I ran up to the top of the house to cry by myself in a little room beside the schoolroom and beneath the roof, which smelt of orris-root and was scented also by wild currant-bush which had climbed up between the stones of the outer wall and thrust a flowering branch in through the half-opened window.
Intended for a more special and baser use, this room, from which, in daytime, I could see as far as the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, was for a long time my place of refuge, doubtless because it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude: reading or day-dreaming, tears or sensual pleasure. (I.14)

From this room Marcel is able to clearly locate a distant image (the site of desirous and sexual exploration). The window is “half-opened” and thus is both visible and invisible to the subject viewing and the subject being viewed.

This trope of the water closet’s window returns when Marcel and Albertine are finally living together. In this scene the water closet continues to function as a site of desire:

The windows of our respective bathrooms, so that their occupants might not be visible from without, were not smooth and transparent, but crinkled with an artificial and old-fashioned hoar-frost. All of a sudden, the sun would colour this muslin glass, gild it, and, gently disclosing in my person an earlier young man whom habit had long concealed, would intoxicate me with memories, as though I were in the heart of the country amidst golden foliage in which even a bird was not lacking. (V.3)

It is not the madeleine that brings back memories—at least not the madeleine alone—but the water closet that allows for a flooding, “all of a sudden” of memories. In the current room (V.3), the window clutters and makes reality ambiguous, but this time instead of being half visible, half invisible, things begin, I argue, to “shimmer” (Barthes, The Neutral 51). The window is not perfectly clear and it obscures the view, but in doing this, it also
shimmers enough for Marcel to view things anew, from a different angle. This shimmering is also, I believe, the earliest sense of shattering (like a window shatters) and a new vision becomes clear (for Albertine is now in Marcel’s life, she is his captive, she will become his fugitive).

The other window is a way to look out and see the phallic tower (I.14), the site to which we return in *Time Regained* (VI.4-5), where we will remember things past. From the window, Marcel is able to gaze upon the tower from afar. In this space, in the space of the water closet, there is a narrative push and pull with regards to Marcel's sexuality and it is only in the moment when his desires seem most complete—when he is living with Albertine—that he can no longer see clearly through the window. Marcel’s sexuality is clear and transparent in the youthful and geriatric water closets of *Swann’s Way* and *Time Regained*, but it is in the water closet of fulfilled desire that everything becomes cluttered and blurred. In the water closet Marcel is able to know desire.

The water closet is the inversion of Proust’s narrative world is the one space in which both reality and imagination fall into one another, they slip and fall into the masturbatory, fantasy, and the beginnings of a shattered love. In this one space, this unique space where the subject is both the subject and object to the subject, things collapse into one another. The poetics of inversion reach their totality when the real and the imagined are no longer distinguishable by the subject to whom they matter. Marcel’s water closet strangely becomes less inverted when he is most close to his fulfilled desires. If reality is blurred because of the “old-fashioned hoar-frost” (V.3) window, so too then must sexuality be blurred and ambiguous. And this is precisely what the water closet allows for, the complete inversion of sexualities—homosexuality and heterosexuality—and it is only in
the water closet with the “half-opened” (I.14, VI.4-5) window that the masturbatory becomes fully sexual insofar as it is neither homosexual nor heterosexual.

Indeed, it is the “old-fashioned, hoar-frost” window (V.3) that becomes the most problematic window because though it shimmers, though it is the Neutral, it is also the site in which Marcel is most confused by his reality. Marcel is held captive in the water closet. The water closet allows for Marcel to return to things lost and to achieve things desired for. In this one space, Marcel is held captive by his imaginations, fears, anxieties, and his inability to come to terms with sexuality, desire, and love.

But such a phobia is capable of assuming as many forms as the undefined evil that is caused. [...] But the slightest pretext serves to revive a chronic disease, just as the slightest opportunity may enable the vice of the person who is the cause of jealousy to be practiced anew (after a lull of chastity) with different people. (V.18)

The “phobia” allows for a return to the “undefined evil” or the “chronic disease” that is like the “misplacing of [a] thigh” (I.3), which is akin to “the slightest pretext” that returns him to a practice, “after a lull of chastity” (IV.18). Marcel's jealousy—Albertine makes Marcel jealous—allows for him to return to lost time in the water closet, to those times in which he was not jealous because of Albertine. This “slightest pretext” that “serves to revive a chronic disease,” returns us—and Marcel—to the boy-wish that runs throughout the novel: this is about a search for beginnings, a longing for boyhood, and yet growing up, and indeed, the dream, the paranoia, the misplaced thigh all function like, as we shall see, the madeleine, which is about a longing for that which is lost and is to be lost.
**Intermission: To Neverland**

The power of the *boy-wish*, the fear of growing up and yet still growing up (for it cannot be stopped), is perhaps nowhere more clearly established in literature than in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, which has rightly become a central text in the study of boyhood because it so emphatically imagines the boy in his own context and that moment in which he recognises that he is no longer a boy but now must become (which is to say not yet) a man. The above reading of Proust’s novel, I hope, has shown the importance of masturbation to Proustian sexuality and moreover, I hope to have deferred and displaced the dominant madeleine cookie as totalising sign which renders the novel about memory. I do not think that Proust’s novel is so much about memory as it is about mourning and loss. In my first reading, it is a desire to return to a childhood that is lost. Proust longs for his lost boyhood. Proust is not merely interested in remembering aspects of childhood, as may be the exercise of memory making, but rather longs for and desires these moments. *In Search of Lost Time* is less about memory and more about nostalgia for “lost time.”

Accordingly, while positioning Barrie alongside Proust—and at this juncture—may not make “chronological” sense, it does make thematic sense and I am surely not the first to see them as fraternal in their pursuits of boyhood. Indeed, the critic with whom I am most clearly flirting is Mavor who has devoted large sections of her wonderfully boyish book, *Reading Boyishly*, to both authors. This section is an *intermezzo* situated between my initial reading of Proust and a still forthcoming reading of Proust.

Barrie’s *Peter Pan* provides the context for the challenge of boyhood and virginity—a challenge that has been established above in the reading of Proust. Mavor writes, “worried about growing up, it was as if Barrie willed himself not to grow” (238); this is the
boy-wish. There are two things to note: the first is the obvious, that anxiety of growing up runs through Peter Pan, and, the second is the way Barrie falls, like falling in love, into Neverland as Proust falls into the adventures of Marcel. More specific to my pursuit, however, is the fear and anxiety of growing up, the boy-wish. This fear will most clearly be articulated in one specific scene, to which we shall devote some attention, wherein Peter Pan fears growing up while Wendy, it would seem, embraces growing up insofar as she takes on a maternal and wisely role in Neverland.

Barrie’s novel begins, “[a]ll children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, the way Wendy knew she was” (7). The novel seems to open with a threat, an impending death, a near certain loss of innocence and youth. The novel flirts with its story all in this one sentence: “all children, except one, grow up” (7). Who is this “except one”? Am I (the reader or the listener) the “except one”? Thus, the certainty of “all children” is immediately undercut by the “except one.” The novel continues:

One day when [Wendy] was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs Darling put her hand to her heart and

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54 For an important discussion of children, growing up, and queer theory, see: Kathryn Bond Stockton’s The Queer Child, or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century (2009). Stockton writes, “[c]hildren grow sideways as well as up – or so I will say – in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it’s time” (6). This is certainly a useful book in terms of understanding gay or queer childhoods but only insofar as gay and queer are essential identities to the subject, that is, it serves the function of an identity politic and forms the basis for such an identity. I am not interested in this study in arguing that Marcel or Proust, or Peter Pan or Barrie, or any other fictional figure and an author are gay or queer. I simply do not care as it makes no difference to the goals of my study if they are gay or queer or any other identity; instead, I am interested in (within the realm of this chapter) boyhood, or (within the realm of the dissertation) the first time. All this being said, Stockton’s book is an important invention in the fields of queer studies and childhood studies and in many ways, its strength is in the ways in which it flirts with both of these areas of study and seemingly does not commit to either field. Stockton is not making the child queer anymore than she is infantilizing the queer; she is interested in them both, at the same time.
cried, “Oh why can’t you remain like this for ever!” This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.

From this vantage, we can recognise the anxiety and paranoia caused by growing up for Barrie, and, as we shall see, Peter Pan. Peter Pan and J. M. Barrie are almost reflections of one another; while one shimmers, the other shatters. I am struck by Barrie’s prose in that I am constantly jumping back and forth between how I imagine a younger version of myself reading Peter Pan and how I am now reading Peter Pan. The realisation that we all, in the end, must grow up haunts us—it is this boy-wish realization that as soon as it manages to shimmer, shatters us.

Is this not precisely what happens in children’s fiction? Jacqueline Rose writes “[c]hildren’s fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in” (2). The child reader must be able to identify with the child in the novel. The child in children’s fiction, however, challenges us, adults, as readers of children’s fiction: “[s]etting up the child as innocent is not, therefore, repressing its sexuality—it is above all holding off any possible challenge to our own” (Rose 4). The child in children’s fiction must be desexualised so as to not threaten the adult reader’s sexuality.55 This desexualisation of the child is what makes the In Search of Lost Time so

55 For an important – because of the influence it had and continues to have – discussion of children’s sexuality in fiction, particularly Victorian fiction, see James Kincaid’s Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture. In a review of the book, Walter Kendrick notes that Kincaid speaks of “we” throughout, “We theoretical pedophiles – Mr. Kincaid speaks confidently of us throughout Child-Loving – prefer the ‘wretched cultural narrative’ about the stranger with the candy and by the constant peril in which he puts our children. Mr. Kincaid maintains that the terrible truth is that we like this story because it turns us on: ‘By creating
difficult to read, Marcel is sexual. Peter Pan, on the other hand, does not explore sexuality to the degree of Proust. To these ends, it is important to note that when we read children’s fiction, I would argue, there is an attempt to return to a sense of innocence, the moment in which one was a child. The harsh realisation is that the child (we) was not quite as innocent as the reader had hoped or imagined itself to be; likewise, the child was never truly as young as the reader had hoped for. What we learn from children’s fiction is the impossibility of innocence, naïveté, and youthfulness. We realise that all our fighting against aging has not helped us because we have, ultimately (despite our best attempts against it), grown up.

When Wendy meets Peter Pan in the bedroom, the reader notes that there is a concerted effort on Barrie’s part to draw differences between Wendy and Peter. Wendy notes, over and over again (excessively), how young and foolish Peter is; for instance, when trying to attach his shadow with soap: “[h]ow exactly like a boy!” (39) Wendy admonishes, “[y]ou’re dreadfully ignorant” (39). His ignorance is, of course, due to the fact that he is reluctant to grow up (like the virgin who delays sexuality). Peter thrives on and embraces Gothic melodramas, monster stories of child molesting, and playing them out periodically (often), we provide not just titillation but assurances of righteousness,” he writes. “Demonizing the child molester … we can connect to a pedophile drama while pretending to shut down the theatre. Most pointedly, we use the legal system to provide us with access to these guilt-free forms of scapegoating pornography” (New York Times, January 24, 1993). For Kincaid, the narrative is less about the child being molested (which is a problem) and more about the “we” who receives this story, tells this story. “Mr. Kincaid’s main concern, however, is not merely to indict the present. He wants to show how we go this way, or at least that we got this way, that we have not always been snared in a deadly web of lewdness and hypocrisy. He wants to mark some escape routes, to point out other ways of looking at children and ourselves, to suggest better stories to tell” (New York Times, January 24, 1993). Indeed, in many ways, this is the problem of children’s fiction as Rose conceives it, “[t]he problem [of children’s sexuality] is not, therefore, J. M. Barrie’s – it is ours. Ours to the extent that we are undoubtedly implicated in the status which Peter Pan has acquired as the ultimate fetish of childhood” (4).
his ignorance and childishness. Peter Pan explains to Wendy the importance of remaining childish: “No, you see, children know such a lot now, they soon don’t believe in fairies, and every time a child says, ‘I don’t believe in fairies,’ there is a fairy somewhere that falls down dead” (42). The cost of growing up, for Peter Pan and his author, is the death of the fairy-tale and imagination. This is precisely the point for Marcel; he is stuck negotiating the difference between reality and imagination. For Peter Pan there is no difference; the two must slip into one another.

Peter Pan and Wendy, along with John and Michael, leave London for Neverland, whereas Peter returns to his boyish role and his boyish otherworld. Wendy, while entering this world in which time does not exist, oddly enough, is forced to “grow up” (and embraces the idea of “growing up”). In the novel, there is a scene (the scene in my reading) that involves Wendy telling the lost boys a story. This scene becomes our site of concern because it explores the anxiety of growing up, the perpetuity of childishness, and we see a brief allusion to the virginal Peter Pan:

And then at last they all got into bed for Wendy’s story, the story they loved best, the story Peter hated. Usually when she began to tell this story he left the room or put his hands over his ears; and possibly if he had done either of those things this time they might all still be on the island. But tonight, he remained on the stool; and we shall see what happened. (148)

The story, of course, is about a family, which is really “Wendy’s story” (148), which is to say the story of Wendy (both being about Wendy and the property of Wendy). At one point, a child asks if the story has a happy ending, to which Wendy responds: “[i]f you only knew
how great is a mother’s love, [...] you’d have no fear” (151). These boys do know a mother’s love because Wendy has taken on this role to all of the lost boys and to her brothers, Michael and John. Wendy speaks of “tak[ing] a peep into the future” (151), and thus demands a recognition that a time will come when they have all grown up, which, as we have seen, is a source of anxiety. Wendy is flirting with the reality that “all children, except one, grow up” (7) and for some in the audience the flirtation becomes all too real. Flirting, like growing up, is, as we already know, a possibility of things to come.

“Children” Wendy says, “I hear your father’s step. He likes you to meet him at the door” (143). Wendy is a surrogate mother. Mavor, for instance, has noted that: “Wendy was a little mother who flew back to Neverland two times to do Peter’s spring cleaning, but she eventually had too many growing pains (despite her efforts not to grow) and grew too much for Peter’s liking, so she never saw him again—until Peter flew back to pick up her daughter, Jane, for spring cleanings” (Pleasures Taken 5). In her maternal role, Wendy is also “married” (at least within the logic of heterosexist calculus as Sedgwick might have it) and the patriarch of the family is, of course, Peter Pan.56 For Peter Pan, this is the traumatic revelation because it means that he has—despite his unwillingness —grown up. Peter’s boyish past has been entirely displaced by the harsh realisation that perhaps he has grown up. This scene negotiates the family romance and all the anxieties of aging for Peter Pan (but not, at any point, for Wendy): “[a]h, old lady,’ Peter said aside to Wendy, warming himself by the fire looking down at her as she sat turning a wheel, ‘there is nothing more

pleasant of an evening for you and me when the day's toil is over than to rest by the fire with the little ones near by” (144). We note that Peter Pan has adopted a vision of the family wherein he and Wendy are parents. He acknowledges the passage of time, “old lady” (144), and moreover there is a degree of pleasure to be found in this scene. The *boy-wish* must now be acknowledged:

“I was just thinking,” he said, a little scared. “It is only make-believe, isn’t it, that I am their father?”

“Oh yes,” Wendy said primly.

“You see,” he continued apologetically, “it would make me seem so old to be their real father.”

“But they are ours, Peter; yours and mine.”

“But not really, Wendy?” he asked anxiously.

“Not if you don’t wish it,” she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief. “Peter,” she asked, trying to speak firmly, “what are your exact feelings for me?”

“Those of a devoted son, Wendy.” (145)

The scene is haunting, powerful, and shocking. Peter Pan has become hysterical about the possibility that he has grown up and he and Wendy are parents of now no longer lost boys. Peter is comfortable with being the son of Wendy but certainly not her husband. In this regard, there is a strange play of the Oedipal myth that is so central to familial stories. If
Peter Pan is married to Wendy and these are his children, this would function as a sort of proof of sexuality. He will, then, have completed his virginal voyage and moreover will have (produced, or, at the very least participated in the production of) children. When he insists that his role is as son rather than father, he is able to reverse this course, and, indeed, in this reading he has yet to take even some of first steps towards growing up. For Peter, his innocence, ignorance, and virginity are consolations for his fear of maturation. Indeed, it is his boy-wish that recognises the delights of marriage but ultimately pushes him back to what would become a “lost time” if he were to take steps towards growing up, towards marriage, towards children of his own, towards the evenings spent sitting around the fire with the little ones near by.

**From Lost Boys to Lost Love: Albertine**

Let us leave Neverland for Proust. The boy-wish of an amorously defined relationship dominates much of the narrative of *In Search of Lost Time*. Indeed, much of our youth, like Marcel’s youth, is spent “plotting” (Phillips, “Plotting for Kisses” 93) for an impossible love, the first love. For Phillips, “plotting” is akin to Ricoeur’s notion of emplotment: we develop stories about the first love, the first time. Ricoeur explains that emplotment replies to “this enigma of the speculation on time” (*Time and Narrative* 1.21). We spend our time, as children, imagining just what the future, which is to say time, might be like. This first love for Proust is also the first time loving an amorous other. The fulfilment, however, of the amorous relation will never be achieved because the relation ends. The ending of the relation, its failure, however, may also function as the fulfilment of the relation—its ending is its completion.
In *The Fugitive*, we are presented with one of the most traumatic, to my mind, examples of a relationship falling apart and the complete process of mourning that follows when Marcel is thrown out of love, rejected, and left abject. I do not want to conflate virginity with the first love, but in the case of Marcel, this is very much what happens when he begins to speak about Albertine. Thus while Wendy longed for the stability of marriage and being coupled, Albertine flees that possibility. Both Marcel and Peter want and do not want to be coupled because that coupling would mean to have grown up, to have become something they are not, to have lost time, the time of innocence. There is a romanticisation of the first time and the first love being unified, and I imagine that many of us have fallen prey to this romantic myth of falling in love and living happily ever after (however, even in romance novels, the most felicitous and optimistic treatment of love, there is almost always an acknowledgment of a past love, a bad romance, or a love gone wrong). Despite knowing that the first love does not always lead to the first time or to the first marriage or to the happily ever after, we continue to believe in the myth. The romantic myth of the first time as all encompassing continues in literature and culture. This is the problem of Albertine and Marcel.

I am overwhelmed by Marcel’s reactions to the ways in which Albertine abandons him because it seems so prescient to my own lived (or living) experience as I attempt to write a dissertation, which, at one time, was what I thought to be the embodiment of love and work. The dissertation which was about the happily ever after, for at that time I was living the romantic myth, newly discovered love, a first love, so many first times, all culminated together in a first marriage with the first love (this Quixote had found his Dulcinea); whereas, today, I am living—in this here and now—the first time and the
profound and overwhelming (for it can hardly be superlative enough) mourning after. My hopeless belief in romantic love was confronted by (and continues to confront) the damning reality of being abandoned, discarded, and rendered wholly abject, destroyed, ruined. I am theorising because I feel the need to, as Gallop might have it since “[a]necdotal theory drags theory into a scene where it must struggle for mastery. Theorizing in explicit relation to the here and now, theorizing because the subject feels to need to” (Anecdotal Theory 15). But my need is less about introspection and imagination and more about the experience and its relation to the literary text, and in this rendering The Fugitive represents this theoretical and lived conundrum.

To these ends, I want to focus specifically on The Fugitive, the penultimate book of Proust’s novel. All that remains is Time Regained, in which one imagines that knowledge will be found, answers encountered as to why the reader has spent so much time reading In Search of Lost Time (and, perhaps, there is an argument to be made that all time is regained if knowledge is found, but, it seems—to me—that the greater point of Proust’s novel is merely to read it, learn from it, and repeat. When we, as a classroom of colleagues, affectionately known as the Proustitutes, finished, we all vowed, in a sense, never to return. Many of us have returned, for we cannot overcome Marcel’s story, to the narrative he weaves because we, unlike Albertine, are never fugitives—though we may try to escape—of In Search of Lost Time).

Proust’s The Fugitive is the book to read for the broken hearted and for the lover of love; the opening line pains the reader: “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!” (V.563). The amorous other is gone, has gone, and now Marcel (we?) must come to terms with the loss of the amorous other (and dare I say that anyone who has been abandoned and rejected
will find this narrative often hitting too close to home; at times, Marcel is a source of help and consolation for the reader\textsuperscript{57}, at other times, an irritant).

Marcel is alone, and he is, as readers are now accustomed to, suffering once more: “these words: ‘Mademoiselle Albertine has gone,’ had produced in my heart an anguish such that I had felt it could not endure it” (V.563). Albertine, for me, is the first love precisely because Marcel is so overwhelmed by the romantic myth of total absorption into the amorous other, and where the amorous other consumes all time of the lover. Albertine is the one who is made so perfect that only through loving her and responding to her loss can Marcel’s story exist. Throughout this study I have argued and will argue that all first times—his first orgasm in text, of course, is not with Albertine but within the space of the dream—involve a process of mourning (and moreover, that I do not consider mourning as necessarily, essentially, rhetorically negative, but rather, I contend, that it can be a productive and positive experience). There is no example of mourning and the first time (and the slipperiness of the first time and the first love) that could be more complete, more fully suffered than that of Marcel: “[o]ne is cured of suffering only by experiencing it to the full” (V.722).

\textsuperscript{57} Alain de Botton (who seems like another boyish writer, not yet fully cynical about the pleasures of life, the sorrows of love, and yet, still, a prolific writer on all too human subjects) has written a book for a reader in search of meaning, \textit{How Proust Can Change Your Life} (1997). I am adequately convinced that Proust will change one’s life; one need only look so far as Roland Barthes, for whom, Proust’s novel is always present. However, I am less convinced that Proust’s novel is a pedagogical tool to discern how to live one’s life. Regardless, de Botton positions \textit{How Proust Can Change Your Life} as a sort of self-help book; incidentally, when I went to purchase the book, it was not shelved in “literary criticism” or “essays” but rather, embarrassingly so, in “Self-Help.” However, there is much to be said about this section of our local bookstore and Eva Illouz has written a defining study on therapy and self-help, \textit{Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help} (2008).
Marcel recognises that there is, in his loss, a loss of purity and innocence. In a letter to Albertine, following her departure, he writes: “You remember—it’s the poem that begins: ‘The lively, lovely, virginal today.’ Alas today is no longer either virginal or lovely” (V.614). The loss of the first love is like the loss of purity, like the loss of virginity, and for some, those of us who are excessively romantic (or, perhaps, just romantic enough) the loss of life itself (one need only think so far as the hopelessly romantic and sentimental hero of Goethe’s The Sorrows of Young Werther). Indeed, as Emily Dickinson says: “to love is so startling it leaves little time for anything else.”58 One can only thus imagine what the loss of love is to the lover. In losing the amorous other, one is suddenly overwhelmed by time, a time spent thinking and mourning the loss of love.

But the first love (like the first time) is a childish moment of being and this is precisely what is so traumatic: the first time and the first love are the boy-wish par excellence (they are desired, longed for, and they are lost): “People leave you for a reason. They tell you the reason. They give you a chance to reply. They don’t run away like that. No it’s perfectly childish” (V.580) Marcel is told. Loves that end abruptly (or seem to end abruptly) are childish loves and this is precisely the case in The Fugitive. Whether Albertine has loved before is irrelevant. What matters is not the past experience of the amorous other, what matters to the lover, to Marcel, is her departure, which remains childish. Albertine is, as she well knows, a “coward” (V.565), and to leave Marcel and give

58 This quotation is attributed to Emily Dickinson, though the source of its origin is unknown. In Daria Snadowsky’s Anatomy of a Boyfriend, for instance, while the narrator is writing a paper on Emily Dickinson, we read: “Even Emily Dickinson wrote, ‘To love is so startling it leaves little time for anything else.’” (68) This quotation also appears in Fiona Robyn’s A Year of Questions: How to Slow Down and Fall in Love With Life (2006); Steve Deger’s The Nightly Book of Positive Quotations (2009); Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith (2006) by Martha Beck. Dickinson’s quotation has found a way into popular culture, but it remains unsourced.
no particular reason is childish, which, to her mind, is an act of cowardice—but the cowardice is not leaving (for this takes some courage) but rather not giving a reason for the departure. But this is what the first love is, it is all about the insanity of love, the completely irrational excessiveness of discovering love for the first time, and believing that this love, this first love, is a forever love, only to learn: “love does not last forever” (V.729).

The first time becomes—for Proust and for Marcel—a measure for all subsequent times; thus, in the above cowardly departure of Albertine, there is a creation of a first love completed insofar as it has now ended due to the cowardice of Albertine. But Marcel has given the reader indications of how we are to theorise the first time. Very early in the novel, during a piano recital we are told:

The little scene, which was re-enacted as often as the young pianist sat down to play, never failed to delight the audience, as though each of them were witnessing it for the first time, as a proof of the seductive originality of the “Mistress” as she was styled, and of the acute sensitiveness of her musical “ear.” (I.291)

Marcel knows that this first time is an illusion and that we will always to return to the first time, which, as I argue is why we must mourn it: “[a]nd just as, before kissing Odette for the first time, he had sought to imprint upon his memory the face that for so long had been familiar, before it was altered by the additional memory of the kiss” (I.538). For Marcel love is a trump card, the sought-after goal, and love will always change our impression of things, of people, as is the case for Swann and Odette, whose face changes in his mind and memory once it has been kissed. The same change is true for Marcel who cannot quite remember
where the mole on Albertine’s face is, as it is all over her face throughout the narrative. Marcel knows this and speaks of this before arriving at the most pained part of the narrative, the loss of Albertine.

**Remembrance of Madeleines Past**

The first time is the original time, the time to which we shall always (and never) return. What we mourn in the first time is “the seductive original” (I.291), which can never be reclaimed but must live in our memory for perpetuity, and it is for this reason the madeleine is so essential to Proust and Marcel. It is not memory that is key to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, but rather the experience, the person, the thing that is “imprint[ed] upon [our] memory” (I.538) that is essential to the tea-soaked madeleine. Proust’s novel, in this rendering, is less about the madeleine and more about the stories that are told (that we tell, because is not the madeleine moment the one moment in the text that most of us cling to as the key to understanding the novel?).

In “Grieving and Forgetting,” the section accounting for the immediate moments following the loss of Albertine, Marcel grieves and tries to forget Albertine (of course, forgetting is far more difficult than grieving; forgetting in a sense is a liberation from a memory that forces us to grieve, to mourn, to cry). I have been arguing not toward or in favour, but away from the madeleine (as the cataclysmic symbolically loaded sign of the novel) throughout this chapter, and this point is made with reference to Albertine: “[t]he fact is that her person itself counts for little or nothing; what is almost everything is the series of emotions and anxieties which chance occurrences have made us feel in the past in connexion with her and which habit has associated with her” (V.582). For Marcel, it is not Albertine that matters, but rather the memories, the emotions, the anxieties that matter,
that have an influence on his day-to-day life, and the madeleine is what provokes the memories that matter. The madeleine, like Albertine, does not matter, but the effect it causes does:

What proves this clearly is (even more than the boredom which we feel in moments of happiness) the extent to which seeing or not seeing the person in question, being or not being admired by her, having or not having her at our disposal, will seem to us utterly irrelevant when we no longer have to pose ourselves the problem (so otiose that we shall no longer take the trouble to consider it) save in relation to the person herself—the series of emotions and anxieties being forgotten, at least so far as she is concerned, for it may have developed anew, but transferred to another. (V.582)

The first time is impressed upon him and he cannot overcome these impressions, and even when he does, the impressions are merely “transferred to another” (V.528). The first time will always haunt our experience of all other times like “those words uttered by her concierge [that] had marked in my heart as upon a map the place where I must suffer” (V.636). And this map, this blueprint, this impression is what marks us, stains us, haunts us, causes us to suffer and every new love becomes “merely a variant of the first” (V.619). It is for this reason that we mythologise the first time, that we want the first time to be perfectly defined and executed. We will never overcome the first time and this is why it is endowed with such a profound meaning and influence over the life of the lover.

The problem with the first time as a theoretical concern (or, what is at stake in this theoretical concern) must be the realisation that every time that follows the first time will
always and forever be “a variant of the first” (V.619). Every new love is going to be a variant of the first love, every new sexual encounter a variant of the first encounter, because we are never able to forget and instead those impressions of the first time are forced, pressed, transferred upon another time, a new time. Marcel knows that this transference is the problem:

I knew that one can never read a novel without giving its heroine the form and features of the woman one loves. But however happy the book’s ending may be, our love has not advanced an inch and, when we have shut it, she whom we love and who has come to us at last in its pages, loves us no better in real life. (V.610)

Transferring our love from one person to another, from one object to another, cannot work, at least not all of the time, precisely because it always recalls the love that matters, the first love, the love and the time of the first love, by which all other times, all other loves are, and forever will be, measured.

The subsequent loves as “variant[s] of the first” (V.619) are a concern for Marcel throughout *The Fugitive:* he later observes his affections for Albertine’s friends, as though their affiliation to her could replace her.

Whether or not I could learn anything from them, the only women towards whom I felt attracted were those whom Albertine had known or whom she might have known, women of her own background or of the sort with whom she liked to associate, in a word those women who had in my eyes the
distinction of resembling her or being of the type that might have appealed to her. (V.743-44)

In the popular discourses of love, we might call this the “type” of person that the lover is attracted to; but the “type” here is the “type” of person who resembles the first love, who has (or had) something in common (relationally) with the first love. Thus, for Marcel, the “type” is not a physical attribute or description, but rather a conduit through which to remember Albertine, the first and forever (in the sense that she continues to appear regardless of her presence) love of Marcel’s life. All other loves are merely madeleines for Albertine.

But, there must be a reprieve from the first time, the first love. Indeed, this seems one of the challenges that Proust tries to remedy with the death of Albertine. The death of Albertine is almost archetypal in that she is yet another romantic heroine, in the tradition of Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina, who dies when her story is, in a sense, at its most interesting, its most provocative. The question, I think, that is provoked by this aspect of the text is: does the death of the heroine, the loved one, change the lover’s discourse? Does death free the lover from his mourning?

She never came back. My telegram had just gone off to her when I myself received one. It was from Mme Bontemps. The world is not created once and for all for each of us individually. There are added to it in the course of our lives things of which we have never had any suspicion. Alas! it was not a suppression of suffering that the first two lines of the telegram produced in me: “My poor friend, our little Albertine is no more. Forgive me for breaking
this terrible news to you who were so fond of her. She was thrown by her horse against a tree while she was out riding. All our efforts to restore her to life were unavailing. If only I had died in her stead!” No, not the suppression of suffering, but a suffering until then unimagined, that of realising that she would not come back. (V.642)

In this moment, Marcel learns that Albertine will “never come back” because she is now dead, and yet, at the same time, for all but a brief moment, he calls this suffering “unimagined” (V.641). I would argue that it is not the death of Albertine or the loss of Albertine that is unimaginable, but rather that she should be thrown off of her horse that is unimaginable; after all, what lover has not imagined losing his or her beloved? Marcel has spent time thinking about Albertine’s death, long before her death,

Jealousy is thus endless, for even if the beloved, by dying for instance, can no longer provoke it by her actions, it may happen that subsequent memories to any event suddenly materialise and behave in our minds as though they too were events, memories which hitherto we had never explored, which had seemed to us unimportant, and to which our own reflexion upon them is sufficient, without any external factors, to give a new and terrible meaning. There is no need for there to be two of you, it is enough to be alone in your room, thinking, for fresh betrayals by your mistress to come to light, even though she is dead. (V.107)

Death does not stop the presence of the amorous other—lover in Proust’s words—in the life of the lover, but the freshness of “retrospective jealousy” (V.106) continues after her
death. When, in The Fugitive, Albertine abandons Marcel, it is her departure that is initially traumatic, and it is her death that closes everything, or so it would seem. We think of death as a closure, it forecloses possibility of a reunion, for instance, but death does not afford closure. Though the lover may even desire death for his amorous other, the lover knows that death, like abandonment, leaves questions unanswered.

The point is not that her death is unimaginable, but rather that how she dies is not imagined (either consciously or unconsciously). When we love, we always imagine (for we must) that in a moment love could fall apart, we fear that we might be a victim of a philandering loved one, or that perhaps the loved one might die suddenly. What is less concerning to us in this paranoid state is the manner in which something would happen (the how) and more the possibility that something could happen. Marcel, of course, knows this: “But had I not told myself many times that she might not come back? I had indeed done so, but now I saw that I had never believed it for a moment” (V.641). Indeed, this is precisely the point: he had imagined it; he had, in a sense, prepared himself for her death. However, he had not believed (for what lover could admit this?) that her death would actually happen.

When this “unimagined” thing happens, we are, I think, overwhelmed by the veracity of the unimagined (or the recognition that what we call unimagined has, of course, been imagined). Alain de Botton in Essays in Love writes,

Whenever something calamitous happens to us, we are led to look beyond everyday causal explanations in order to understand why we have been singled out to receive such terrible, intolerable punishment. And the more
devastating the event, the more inclined we are to imbue it with a significance it does not objectively have, the more likely we are to slip into a brand of psychological fatalism. Bewildered and exhausted by grief, I suffocated on question marks: “Why me? Why this? Why now?” I scoured the past to look for origins, omens, offences, anything that might count as an explanation for the wound I had sustained. (177)

This “psychological fatalism” is the trauma of love, the moment in which it ends, for whatever reason (abandonment, betrayal, death). This moment, particularly the first time (as only a lover wallowing in the pity, self-pity, of the first love’s betrayal, can know) is very much cluttered with fatalistic thoughts and questions (many of which will drive us to a therapist to help us locate and understand the things that are most consuming our time and attention). This fatalism may, as Barthes and de Botton know, lead to suicide (Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse, 218-19; de Botton, Essays in Love, 182-87). Proust teaches us that death is not the answer that we must seek out or long for, we must, in other words, not fall in love with death.

What Marcel learns (and what we learn with Marcel) is that death is not a solvent that washes away all of the memories of the loved one.59 The lover’s discourse, the lover’s

59 Indeed this point is confirmed in Proust’s own life, Lehrer explains, “the love of Proust’s life, Alfred Agnostelli, tragically crashed his plane into the sea. Proust lavished his grief on a whole new plot line in which the character Albertine, Alfred’s doppelganger in the novel, also dies” (87).

If as Lehrer has it Proust was a neuroscientist (2007), then, too, must Proust also be a narrative psychiatrist; for a fascinating discussion of narrative psychiatry, see: Narrative Psychiatry: How Stories Can Shape Clinical Practice (2011) by Bradley Lewis. In his work Lewis shows how narrative, the short story in particular (78-82), can function in clinical practice. Thus, instead of relying on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which provides “highly abstracted clinical stories ‘thin’ stories,” instead, narrative would provide “thick” stories; he explains: “In the example from the DSM-III Casebook, the story ‘the 50 year-old woman’ first told her clinicians would no doubt be much thicker than the thin one
mourning is just refreshed and cleansed by that solvent, in such a way, that the mourning of her death becomes “merely a variant of the first [time]” (V.619). And is not this precisely what Barthes means when he writes that “the (reading) subject is exposed to the “scandal”: the fact that death and love co-exist” (The Preparation of the Novel 106)? Indeed, it is Marcel who has to admit, however regretfully, “[o]n the whole, I did not understand any better than before why Albertine had left me” (V.837). Albertine’s death like her abandonment does not provide Marcel with the answers as to why she left. Thus, the novel confirms that death does not extinguish love, it cannot; instead, it returns the lover to love and to loving. In this regard, the death of Albertine functions like the tea-soaked madeleine: a return to lost time (lost in the sense that it has now been found).

represented in the DSM-III. The woman would have likely given a wealth of information about her troubles. Just listing the elements she might have discussed can seemingly go on forever. They might include her feelings about her neighbours, how they are out to get her, what started the tensions between them, what it is like to be a widow, her feelings about her husband and his death, what killed him at such an early age, what kind of grief she went through, what’s going on with her family, children that she did or did not have, her attempts to date again and find companionship and intimacy, how she spends her time during the days, what she cares about, what she watches on television, a commercial she saw for antidepressants, how she supports herself, the struggles she has had to finding meaningful work, the society that she lives in and how it supports her or does not, whether she has made an attempt to get involved in politics, the state of her apartment, her diet, her aches and pain, the economy, her financial situation, sexism, racism, how people at the community mental health center have treated her, how she ended up in the medical center, just to name a few” (76). What is fascinating about Lewis’s work is the way in which he does not argue against competing models of psychiatry and psychotherapy (he notes there are over 400 types of therapy; “[a]dditional alternatives that gained ground in the 1970s and 1980s included a variety of family therapies, group therapies, interpersonal therapies, feminist therapies, creative therapies, and spiritual therapies, just to name a few. This proliferation has continued up to the current moment, with more than four hundred competing systems of the therapy now being practiced” (36)), but rather that he theorises – anecdotally in Gallop’s sense (15) – the ways in which narrative can enhance and, as his subtitle indicates, shape clinical practice. However, I read this book as a literary scholar with an interest in psychoanalysis and the experience of therapy or analysis, and thus, I am coming from a different side of the argument than Lewis; that is, while his discussion of narrative is fascinating (almost always inspired by Ricoeur), I am interested in how clinical practice can and does shape narrative. As such, I would be less likely to restrict myself to the short story, which become known as “the literary case” or “literary case history” (Lewis 78-82) and would consider Proust to be an ideal starting point to theorise narrative psychiatry.
But the problem that we, as lovers, are forced to deal with is that we are always returning (even if the loved one has died, has moved on, has disappeared), with every new love, to the first love. The lover will often—too often—be nattering on about his first love in a vain attempt to overcome the first love and its time (at least so it seems in the immediacy of the first time and its loss). The first time is the time by which all other times will be measured should the first time come to an end (surely the first time will always be recalled even if the excessive romantic is fortunate enough to find the romantic myth and always be in love with the first love) and should the lover be forced to deal with abandonment: “[a]ssociated now with the memory of my love” (V.745). In the fundamentally present “now” is the always already “memory” of the past, “my love,” who happens to be Albertine. Or, the problem of the lost love is that one is no longer engaged in the lover’s discourse but rather in the act of narration: “[h]ow gladly we, when we are in love, that is to say when another person’s existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator!” (V.742). When we are in love there is no narrator to warn us of the forthcoming events, there is no foreshadowing that we are made aware of, all of this will only become true (which is to say later) in a temporal moment located beyond “now.”

To love and to lose, especially the first time, is the traumatic occasion, which cannot be overcome precisely because it holds a special distinction from other loves, it was the first time (which does not mean that the first love was, as is seemingly the case for Marcel, the one\textsuperscript{60}) and the problem is one of return, of regret, of lost time. Marcel explains,

\textsuperscript{60} For an interesting discussion that draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis and phenomenology of the first love as the one, see Jöttkandt’s \textit{First Love: A Phenomenology of the One} (2010).
And once again I discovered, first of all that memory has no power of invention, that it is powerless to desire anything else, let alone anything better, than what we have already possessed; secondly that it is spiritual, in the sense that reality cannot provide it with the state which it seeks; and lastly, that stemming from a dead person, the resurrection that it incarnates is not so much that of the need to love, in which it makes us believe, as that of the need for the absent person. So that even the resemblance of her tenderness, if I succeeded in winning it, to Albertine’s, only made me the more conscious of the absence of what I had been unconsciously seeking, of what was indispensable to the revival of my happiness, that is to say, Albertine herself, the time we lived together, the past in the search for which I was unwittingly engaged. (V.748)

Paradoxically, thus, her absence is her presence, and thus, the first love and its absence is the presence that haunts all other times, all other loves. As terrible as all of this likely now sounds, and as likely as my reader is rebelling against this reading, I am struck by the seeming veracity of the Proustian claims, which filter their way through my seemingly static position of attempting to overcome the first time. Thus, a proposal is needed wherein this haunting and horrible presence of the first time can and does serve a purpose beyond the misery of the first time and the mourning after.

**Good Enough**

Thus to work towards a conclusion: what are we to do with the first love and the first loss? How precisely do we theorise (anecdotally, if necessary) these moments? I want to suggest that the answer to these questions may very well be found in mothers, like Wendy, and
more specifically what D. W. Winnicott calls “good-enough mothers” \textit{(Playing and Reality} 13). What I mean by this is that the first love and the first loss are integral parts of the development of the lover, just as the mother’s absolute attention is integral to the development of the child. The lover who loves and then loses for the first time completes a love cycle for the first time and must endure and live through the affective power of this love cycle over the course of his or her life. The amorous other, I want to suggest, is, like the lover’s mother, good enough.

My understanding of the good enough mother, though derived from Winnicott, is informed by Mavor’s writings on the good enough mother in \textit{Reading Boyishly}. Mavor writes:

Gradually, as the child begins to be able to tolerate any “failure” of maternal adaptation, the mother lessens her constant presence and this role of nearly satisfying Baby’s ever need. Her necessary “failure” makes space for what Winnicott refers to as disillusionment. Hear the infant fill in these first pangs of loss (the loss of the mother and breast) with cooing sounds (Baby’s first music), rubbing his thumb and forefinger in the satin trim of a “blankie,” clutching onto a soft toy: song or blanket or both, these transitional objects are the first inklings of creative life. (61)

The first love thus functions like the transitional object, which replaces the love for the mother, and the first loss is good enough because it allows for the development of the lover. While not wanting to renounce the romantic myth of the happily ever after, I want to acknowledge that a great deal is learned in love’s failures, love’s loss. Thus, for Marcel,
Albertine allowed him to distance himself from his mother, but Albertine only becomes good enough when she leaves Marcel.

In Playing and Reality, Winnicott describes the good-enough mother as follows:

There is no possibility whatever for an infant to proceed from the pleasure principle to the reality principle or towards and beyond primary identification, unless there is a good-enough mother. The good-enough ‘mother’ (not necessarily the infant’s own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant’s growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration. (13-14)

In my rendering, the amorous other functions like the mother precisely because she puts into play the phenomenon of love, but unlike the mother, the amorous other enables a vision of love that is freed from the biologically mandated love of the family. Phillips explains that “[t]he mother makes what is in fact a dialogue between her and her infant appear to him as a monologue born of desire” (Winnicott 101). Albertine, thus, allows for Marcel to imagine, however playfully, a romance outside of the family romance, even if, in the end she ultimately betrays and abandons Marcel (a point to which I will return). Albertine, as an amorous other, becomes the object, which the mother does not provide the child with, the child must acquire it for himself. The child must leave family love to find the love of an amorous other.

Subsequently, Albertine removes herself from the relation (like the mother who removes herself) and the child must therefore reach for and pursue objects that he desires.
The first love, at least for Marcel, functions like the child’s relation to his mother: “[a]s the infant grows from a state of absolute dependence on the mother to a state of relative dependence, the mother begins to emerge from her Primary Maternal Preoccupation, the infant begins to experience disillusionment” (Phillips, Winnicott 103). The first love is one that is absolutely dependent upon the amorous other and her presence precisely because it is immature—not yet comparable to other amorous relations. The first love lacks a point of reference to which it can compare and thus transcend; the point of reference of the first love thus becomes the mother. The first love, in this rendering, resembles the love the child has for his mother for he believes that his mother cannot abandon him. The trauma of the first love is that the amorous other will, like the mother, abandon the child/lover and he will be required to fend for himself, to come to terms with himself inside and outside of the amorous relation. What is important to recall here is that for Winnicott, “development was not a progressive mastery, an overcoming of earlier stages, but a process of inclusive combination” (Phillips, Winnicott 114).

What I am arguing is that the first amorous other—when loving the lover—is the transitional object away from the bonds of maternal love. The first amorous other thus allows for the child to separate himself from his mother (and by extension his family for another new family), as such, Albertine becomes the transitional object that will allow for Marcel to imagine (for himself) a relation outside of his family. In other words, it is necessary to speak of the first time in relation to the process of growing up and the ability for the child to separate himself from his mother. The good enough mother, as we shall see, allows for the child to grow up and become himself.
While there are practice loves, for instance Gilberte (about whom I’ve said very little), in Marcel’s life, it is, I believe, Albertine who provides the fullest embodiment of what Marcel desires and requires. The love between Gilberte (about whom I should say something) and Marcel is incomplete. In *Swann’s Way*, Marcel longs—reluctantly so—for Gilberte: “[a]ll the time that I was away from Gilberte, I felt the need to see her, because, constantly trying to picture her in my mind, I ended up being unable to do so, and by no longer knowing what precisely my love represented” (I.568), Marcel tells his reader. The “love,” if there is to be love, between the two is misunderstood. The love does not take form because Marcel cannot figure out to what or to whom the love corresponds. Indeed, “she never yet told me that she loved me” (I.568) to which Marcel responds, “I myself had not yet ventured to declare my feelings toward her” (I.569). The love between Marcel and Gilberte is a love that dare not speak its name. I am not doubting that there was some notion of love between Marcel and Gilberte, but I am suggesting that it does not reach the same quality as the love Marcel feels for Albertine. Marcel learns—as we learn—“it was I alone who loved [Gilberte]” (I.585). The love is incomplete because it is not reciprocal: “Gilberte’s feeling for me [...] was indifference” (I.585). The child longs to be loved. He is not, however, loved.

Returning to the particular love that concerns me, Albertine and Marcel, Phillips explains, “the Transitional Object is here a bridge where otherwise the child would have to jump; and it bridges for the child what might seem, without this connection, to be two incompatible worlds” (*Winnicott* 118). The problem, however, is that it is the transitional object that renders the process of separation so difficult and traumatic.
Albertine—more than Gilberte—allows for Marcel to imagine a romance outside of the family romance, even if, as I have suggested, in the end she ultimately betrays and abandons Marcel. The betrayal does not invalidate Albertine, but it does re-write her role. The first loss thus can only ever be “good enough.” The first loss is the realisation that indeed the mother can and will abandon the child, the way the grandmother and Albertine abandon Marcel. Albertine, thus, like the grandmother, is there in one moment and lost the next. Each woman teaches Marcel about different notions of love (as did Gilberte) and the fragility of this love, and by extension the complete and total fragility of life itself. This is, I believe, what the first love and the first loss do. The first love allows for lovers to understand an amorous relation outside of the structure of the family. Marcel can only ever become whole through love's loss.

Thus, we return to the notion of “good enough.” The first lover (who now no longer loves) functions like the good enough mother precisely because that love can only ever be good enough. It cannot be absolute. It cannot be complete. The first loss allows for adaptation and moreover tolerates, if not encourages, results that are frustrating. All first times, in the end, are, to my mind, successes because they are successful failures, which are frustrating.

The first love and its loss therefore allows for the lover “to tolerate the results of frustration” (Winnicott 14). It is only through loss that the amorous other is able to become akin to the “good-enough mother”; consider the following misreading: “the good enough [amorous other], as I have stated, starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her [lover’s] needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with her failure” (Winnicott 14). Is this not
what happens between Marcel and Albertine, when she fails him is when he is able to fully mourn that failure? Indeed, we are reminded that "If all goes well the infant [the lover] can actually come to gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved" (Winnicott 14, emphasis his). Only through the loss of Albertine is she ever able to truly become real for Marcel, before, when he merely loved her. The relationship fails, but it fails successfully.

Successful failures are not oxymoronic nor are they paradoxes. In her recent work, The Queer Art of Failure, Judith Halberstam offers a defence of failure. My understanding of failure, though informed by her work, is less politically queer. She writes:

Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique. (89)

While her project recognises the politics of queer failure, I want to see failure in relation to an earlier—less political—definition in her work. Halberstam argues that “[u]nder certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing, may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). In this more optimistic treatment of failure, I see the “successful failure” as a necessary component of the first love. While I recognise the possibility of the romantic myth in which the lovers live happily ever after, I also recognise that for most this is not the case. Failure, thus, is more reparative, less paranoid. The paranoid, of course, fears failing,
but what is learned through failure is often more productive than what is learned through success. In this regard, the “successful failure” frustrates the mythology of the first time. The successful failure is the antidote for paranoia.

If the lover accepts failure as an integral part of love, then the failure is successful. But the idea of failure in love is what is frustrating and the lover attempts to avoid these bad surprises. What I am suggesting is that Albertine can only ever be good enough; she can never be perfect. Just as the perfect mother is not the Winnicottian ideal, so must the same be true of Albertine. In his article, “The ‘Good-Enough’ Music Teacher,” Keith Swanwick suggests, “good-enough music teachers” are “able to immerse their students in the ‘potential space’ of musical activity” (17). Just as the mother and the teacher can only provide for the “potential space” in which the child or student may flourish, so too must the amorous other only ever provide a space for “potential.” The problem with this space is that the child can be abandoned and the child can fail.

The first time loving and losing, thus, can only ever be good enough. The perfect romantic myth of the first time will always fail for it cannot live up to the ideals, and if it does live up to the ideal, then it cannot be the ideal. We love, we lose, and we learn and develop from these experiences. The first time, however, is the most shocking time because of its potential to shatter the subject who has no way to understand the experience, no point of reference.

We are frustrated by the first time because the mythology of the first time does not, for it cannot, live up to expectations. The first time fails. To return to Phillips, “[t]he first moment is shocking because it betrays an uncanny experience; a taking in of something
when there is seemingly no time to take anything in” (“Two Lectures on Expectations” 219). There is simply no time to take in what is happening the first time—whether it is love, loss, or virginity—because it is a time that has never been experienced. The first time is radical in all of its newness, a newness that is recognised only in the fleeting moments of its time, now lost time. We search for and long for that lost time in an attempt to understand that which can only ever be understood by the ephemeral moments of the first time. It is, however, “[r]epetition” Phillips informs that is “the self cure for the trauma of the first moments” (“Two Lectures on Expectations” 219). The first time must be mourned and will be mourned in every return to love, loss, and virginity.

The remainder of this dissertation will consider the first time, more specifically with regards to virginal time, in the narrative space of the romance novel. In the romance novel we are always guaranteed happiness at “the book’s ending” (Proust, V.610). To these ends, I want to further theorise the first time by reading romance novels and show that they too follow and will allow us to further develop my theorisations of the first time. The romance novel is notorious for its happily ever after endings—which does, as we now well know, run counter to the love story of Marcel and Albertine—but I believe that even in this narrative space we will find that all first times are mythologised and marked by aspects of paranoia, jouissance (which will be developed in the next chapter), hysteria, and mourning. Accordingly, in the next chapter, I address Maureen Child’s Last Virgin in California, which narrates the first time of a female virgin. In that particular chapter, I show how jouissance and hysteria function in the space of romance. In the following chapter, I focus on three romance novels, all of which address the first time of the virgin male and demonstrate that male virginity has its own nuances, but still represent the first time and the mourning after.
**Popular Romance and Virginity**

In the previous chapter, I placed the discussion of first love and the first loss alongside negotiations of hysteria and paranoia in relation to *In Search of Lost Time* and *Peter Pan*. While Barrie and Proust, especially Proust, have benefitted from significant critical attention, the texts to be studied in the remainder of the dissertation have been almost wholly unstudied. In their introduction to the forthcoming *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction*, Eric Selinger and Sarah Frantz write that as late as the 1990s and into the early 2000s, “[b]y and large, scholars of popular romance fiction worked in isolation, divided by national and disciplinary boundaries” (8). Scholarship on popular romance fiction has remained on the periphery of literary studies, though it has benefited from the rise of interdisciplinary studies and cultural studies, as Selinger and Frantz write of the field now, “[a]cademics of many disciplines take part in this field, as do authors, expert fans, and editors” (10). Accordingly, this dissertation intends to contribute, at least partially, to the small but growing body of scholarship on popular romance fiction. In what follows, I continue developing the notions of paranoia and hysteria (terms which I shall define below) but I locate this discussion in the context of romance novels.

In the opening sections of this dissertation I wrote that I would be looking at the first time and the way in which the first time is experienced. To these ends, I posited a four part process, which, I believe, is worth repeating (if only to remind the reader of the task being considered): paranoia, *jouissance*, hysteria, and then, finally, mourning. In the previous chapter, I addressed paranoia and mourning in the work of Proust primarily. In this chapter, I will study *jouissance* and popular romance novels, those novels known for multiple and simultaneous orgasms, overwhelming sentimentality, and happily ever after
endings that have made so many readers, particularly academic readers, cynical. How in stories that end perfectly, stories with coupling, betrothal, and ultimately marriage, could these questions of paranoia, hysteria, and mourning (seemingly negative notions) arise? Would not the appearance of paranoia, hysteria, and mourning undercut the laws of the genre? If my theorisations about the first time are correct, then surely they should appear even in the most optimistic treatments of love.

This dissertation oscillates between studies of popular culture, religious culture, the literary canon, and literary and cultural theories. All of these notions will be brought together in the forthcoming pages. Ultimately this dissertation is arguing that the first time is, like flirtation, “dangerous” (Phillips, On Flirtation xvii) and, of course, also pleasurable. One can, in the end, only ever really flirt with the first time, since if one has experienced the first time one is no longer “flirting” with it, but quite simply “doing” it.

Although there are have not been many academic studies of popular romance, such as the Harlequin romance, or Mills and Boon, Silhouette, or Avon romances,61 this study will avoid debates of literary or aesthetic hierarchies, and instead will recognise that popular romance fiction contains valuable material for study, particularly as the novels relate to the idea of virginity and the first time. Not only does this study acknowledge and

61 Eric Selinger and Sarah Frantz in their Introduction to New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction observe that, “[d]octoral theses on popular romance were written, but never published” (8) and they note a series of doctoral dissertations written on the popular romance. Currently, and anecdotally, I only know of one other colleague working on romance in her doctoral dissertation. An Goris of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven has recently written her dissertation, “From Roberts to Romance and Back Again. Genre, Authorship and Textual Identity,” which was supervised by Eric Selinger and Theo D’Haen. Thus, Selinger and Frantz’s observation that “scholars of popular romance worked in isolation, divided by national and disciplinary boundaries” (8) was certainly true then and it seems to continue to be true today; however, popular romance scholars have benefited greatly from the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance and its journal, Journal of Popular Romance Studies.
embrace its seeming irreverence, it also spends a great deal of time studying popular romances precisely because, as Selinger writes: “[that] romance novels, themselves, display intelligence, worthy politics, and aesthetic accomplishments remains one of the best-kept secrets in literary study” (308-9).

Let us begin with the critical labour of defining our terms, in this case, romance and more specifically the popular romance novel. Romance, as a generic category or marker, is remarkably translatable, malleable, adaptable, evolutionary, rebellious, progressive, and yet, paradoxically, it is also resistant to fundamental change. Northrop Frye goes so far as to write that “[r]omance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction” (CW XVIII.14). In essence, romance is, for Frye, a natural mode of story telling that is intrinsic to the human condition because, I contend and add to Frye, we must tell our stories of love found and love lost. Indeed, Richard Terdiman recently observed that, “[p]eople love being

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62 The most concise and enduring definition of romance comes from Northrop Frye and his theory is the starting point from which this study departs (though, it ultimately will favour the work of Pamela Regis). Frye’s theory of romance is convincing because of its malleability and its translation across literary traditions, national traditions, and the, in my mind, erroneous concepts of “high” and “low” literature. Frye’s structuralism and archetypes are useful because they so often lend themselves to literary examples beyond his own writings and imagination precisely because he never reduces himself to one or two case studies. However, as a point of reference it does seem necessary to demonstrate the persistence of Frye in discussions of romance. Fredric Jameson writes: “Frye’s theory of romance [...] is the fullest account of the genre” (110). Regis in her magisterial, A Natural History of the Romance Novel, almost immediately turns to Frye: “the conventions of romance” she writes “are very stable; the basic story, as Frye notes, has not changed in the centuries that followed its advent in ancient times” (20). Corinne Saunders, in her introduction to an anthology on the romance, writes: “[m]ost influential in developing a grammar of romance has been Northrop Frye” (2). David Fuller, echoing Saunders, refers to Frye as “one of the most influential critics of the mode” (166) and Raymond H. Thompson writes that Frye is “the most influential among theoreticians” (456). Even in disagreement, critics like Doris Sommer have to admit that “Frye’s observations about masculine and feminine ideals are to the point; they point backward to medieval quest-romance where victory meant fertility, the union of male and female heroes” (49). Lois Parkinson Zamora recognises that “twentieth-century magical realism is a recent flowering of the more venerable romance tradition that Frye describes” (520). It would seem Frye’s definition of romance is the one from which studies of romance should depart. Accordingly, this study continues in that tradition.
in love, and when they are they talk and write about it with an expansive intensity” (478).

Of course, being in love is excessive and proves difficult to treat analytically and critically. In his book, *Love’s Executioner*, Irvin Yalom writes (and repeats):

> I do not like to work with patients who are in love. Perhaps it is because of envy—I, too, crave enchantment. Perhaps it is because love and psychotherapy are fundamentally incompatible. The good therapist fights darkness and seeks illumination, while romantic love is sustained by mystery and crumbles upon inspection. I hate to be love’s executioner. (17)

While, I certainly respect Yalom’s position, I am not yet wholly convinced that psychotherapy and romantic love are fundamentally incompatible (as though they are merely in need of a few sessions of couple’s therapy). Rather, I think what is problematic about love is, as Yalom notes, that to speak about it critically means to reveal a “mystery” and perhaps that mystery then “crumbles upon inspection.” Indeed, I think for literary critics and scholars, it is perhaps easier to speak about failed love—love lost—rather than successful love, in the same way that Phillips finds “no one is famous for his sanity” (*Going Sane* 19). Irrespective of the apparent incompatibility of romantic love and psychotherapy, I do think that bringing these two ideas into discussion with one another can be productive and offers new insights. My study, therefore, will continue its flirtation with queer theory, affect, and psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

Additionally, I believe that literary scholars and academics must begin to reconsider the popular romance as both essentially defined in terms of its generic structure and remarkably fluid in terms of its content. That is, while we may want to dismiss the romance
for any number of reasons, we must recognise that the romance is a form that has rules. A successful romance is thus not about how realistic it is, but rather how well it conforms to the rules of the genre. As such, the romance is a generic form that is essential, but its contents and forms of storytelling can be varied. To these ends, it seems impossible not to agree with the assertion of Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, the Smart Bitches, known their irreverent and humorous style: “[s]aying that you read romance novels is like saying you like food. Just as there’s a world of difference between home made panang curry and an Egg McMuffin, there’s a mind-boggling variety in the romance genre” (8).

The dominant quality that all romances must have is the happy ending, the happily ever after, or, in some recent discussions, “happy for now” (which, perhaps, reflects a culture of various marriages and divorces where the happily ever after seems but a distant and nostalgic memory that may never have existed at all). Wendell and Tan, for instance, quickly summarise the romance novel: “[b]oy meets girl. Holy crap, shit happens. Eventually, the boy gets the girl. They live happily ever after” (11). Though this definition is

63 Studies of readers have often shown that readers generally stick to one “type” or “subgenre” of romance novels; see: Radway’s Romancing the Reader (1984), and Lynn S. Neal’s recent Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction (2006), which considers the “evangelical” or “inspirational” romance novel and its readership. Many scholars of romance have taken issue with Radway’s conclusions and thus have dismissed her book; however, Neal’s work provides an example of how Radway’s work was important in establishing a field of study and a methodological approach, which, however flawed, is worthy of reconsideration. Additionally, Beth Graybill has recently considered the popularity of Amish romance novels in her article, “Chasing the Bonnet: The Premise and Popularity of Writing Amish Fiction” (2010) in the Journal of the Center for Mennonite Writing.

The interests of readers have been facilitated well – as we have seen – by publishers of romance fiction. Harlequin, for instance, has managed to make use of the formula of romance in multifarious ways to allow for novels in the city, in the country, at NASCAR, and everything in between; the American reader can almost always find a romance novel that reflects their own desires. Likewise, these romance novels can take place in just about any temporal moment ranging from the distant past, to the ever-popular Regency romance novel, to the contemporary setting, to the future (thanks to time-travel romances, which go forward and backward temporally). And finally, readers can find varying degrees of sexuality and eroticism in their romance novels, from the sweet romance to the erotica of ménage romance.
quite true and to the point, it lacks a certain academic rigour; however, it should be noted that it is not written for an academic audience, which would demand some sort of ideological underpinning (which more than likely dismisses romance novels or refers to its readers as “cherishing the chains of their bondage” (202) as Germaine Greer so eloquently put it in The Female Eunuch). Regardless, the Smart Bitches echo Frye’s early argument about comedy, “[i]n all good comedy,” Frye writes, “there is a social as well as an individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible” (CW XXVIII.5). Wendell and Tan, like Frye, recognise that the romance demonstrates challenges, which require “reconciliation,” which, of course, “makes the final marriage possible.” Indeed, this point is made all the more clear by Pamela Regis, the leading academic scholar of the romance novel, who argues: “[a] novel that ends with the hero and heroine not in love, not betrothed, is simply not a romance novel” (A Natural History of the Romance Novel 114). In her definition, Regis outlines eight key requirements:

64 If we dismiss the Smart Bitches out of hand because they are not academic enough (or at all), we are silencing an important critical voice in romance scholarship and an important component of the romance community: engagement between writers and readers. It is a false belief that only academics are capable of solid literary criticism and it is important to remember that one of romance’s greatest critics, Northrop Frye, never earned a doctorate (he was, however, a member of the academy).

65 In their discussion of “The Argument of Comedy,” Troni Y. Grande and Garry Sherbert write that, “[t]he resolution of New Comedy therefore turns out to be a ‘realistic foreshortening of a death-and-resurrection pattern,’ for in its fuller mythic shape, the resolution involves not marriage but the struggle and rebirth of a divine hero” (CW XXVIII.xxxix). Their summary of the article finds that Frye’s argument has affinities with Freud, “Frye begins by describing Greek New Comedy as ‘a comic Oedipus situation’ or ‘wish-fulfillment pattern.’ It’s plot centres on a young man who desires to ‘possess the girl of his choice’ but must first outwit the blocking characters, usually the father of senex” (CW XXVIII:xxxviii), in this regard, then, the New Comedy is focused primarily on the hero while the romance novel is generally focused – though not always – on the heroine. Accordingly, it seems that the popular romance may be an inversion of the New Comedy, as described by Frye because of the narrative perspective.
Eight narrative events take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free. In one or more of the scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which the heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by the heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. These elements are essential. (A Natural History of the Romance Novel 30)

Meanwhile in her seminal study, Janice Radway identifies thirteen key requirements in “the narratives structure of ideal romance” (134), which must be present in the historical romance novel. Radway is concerned specifically with the historical romance novel made famous by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss’s The Flame and the Flower (one can note for instance the way Radway highlights class in her work while Regis suggests that romance’s “values are profoundly bourgeois” (207).). Regis, unlike Radway, is speaking about all romances, regardless of subgenres, and the eight rules that they must follow. Radway and Regis both mimic the method of Vladimir Propp in his Morphology of the Folktale in which he establishes functions of narrative; however, unlike Propp’s method, which demands a

Radway’s thirteen key points are as follows: “1. The heroine’s social identity is destroyed. 2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male. 3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine. 4. The heroine interprets the hero’s behavior as evidence of purely sexual interest in her. 5. The heroine responds to the hero’s behavior with anger or coldness. 6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine. 7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated. 8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly. 9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero’s act of tenderness. 10. The heroine reinterprets the hero’s ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt. 11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness. 12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally. 13. The heroine’s identity is restored” (134).
collection of some but not all thirty-three functions, Regis and Radway require these elements in defining the ideal romance. Regardless of the number of functions or elements, both Radway and Regis agree that there must be a marriage or conjoining of hero and heroine by the novel’s end.

The romance novel also boasts its idiosyncrasies—virginal heroines, the alpha male, femme fatale, the bodice ripper, forced seduction and rape, to name but a few—and it is virginity that becomes the focus of this study. Almost every major criticism of romance novels—and probably most minor ones too—notes that in the romance novel—canonical, popular, high, low, etc.—readers will undoubtedly encounter the virgin heroine. In one of the earliest pieces of academic criticism on the romance novel, in 1979 Ann Snitow writes: “[t]he heroine is not involved in any overt adventure beyond trying to respond appropriately to male energy without losing her virginity. Virginity is a given here; sex means marriage and marriage, promised at the end [of romance novels], means, finally, there can be sex” (309). For Snitow, virginity is always a “given” and it is always necessarily there. These aspects of text, for instance, virginity, of course, will change during the history of the popular romance novel, but for Snitow, virginity is a requirement of the romance novels that she considers. However, Snitow does not, for instance, consider the possibility that the maintenance of virginity can be re-written or re-focused so as to provide a rather overt adventure-quest narrative. Marriage is an end goal; it must be pursued. In these

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67 For a brief history of the name-brand romance novel, see Pamela Regis’ “Female genre fiction in the twentieth century” (2011); for a large-scale treatment of the history of the Mills and Boon romance, see: Jay Dixon’s The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909-1990s (1999); Joseph McAleer’s Passion’s Fortune: The Story of Mills & Boon (1999); for an analysis of Harlequin romance, see: Margaret Ann Jensen’s Love’s Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story (1984), Paul Crescoe’s The Merchants of Venus: Inside Harlequin and the Empire of Romance (1996).
readings, then, the adventure of the romance novel would be marriage itself. Indeed, Snitow would seem to allude to this very possibility: “[t]he heroine gets her man at the end, first, because she is an old-fashioned girl (there is a code for no premarital sex) and, second, because the hero gets ample opportunity to see her perform well in a number of female helping roles” (310). Snitow reaffirms the importance of the virginal heroine and how her virginity allows for marriage to serve as the teleological endpoint of the romance novel. Likewise, in a 2004 study, Jocelyn Wogan-Brown notes that “[f]or the modern romance heroine, virginity too, is a cultural performance” (246); and she further contends that: “[n]o longer making heroines compulsorily intact and reifying a hymenal virginity, Harlequin romances (within the many subgenres) represent virginity not as an essentialized and mystical anatomical condition, but as an interior state, produced by volition and emotion” (346-47). It is important to realise that Wogan-Brown, like others, recognises that virginity has been a trend in romance fiction but that recent romance fiction has allowed for a progression away from the reification of hymenal virginity. However, this progress should not be understood as a fait accompli; consider the following randomly selected titles recently released by Harlequin: The Timber Baron’s Virgin Bride (Clair, 2009), The Spaniard’s Virgin Housekeeper (Hamilton, 2009), The Playboy Sheikh’s Virgin Stable-Girl (Kendrick, 2009), Rescuing the Virgin (Rosemoor, 2009), His Convenient Virgin Bride (Dunlop, 2010), Virgin on Her Wedding Night (Graham, 2010). Moreover, the virgin is made into a festive commodity during the holiday season, His Christmas Virgin (Mortimer, 2010). Clearly, the virgin is still present in the Harlequin romance. Likewise, Wendell and Tan observe that the virgin is found in most subgenres of the genre: “[o]ne of the peculiar constants of most romance novels, from historicals to contemporaries to paranormals to even erotica, is the sexually unawakened heroine. She’s relatively innocent,
as proven by her inexperience or her outright virginity” (37). Ultimately, it seems the question that must be asked is: why is virginity so central to romance fiction?

Virgins are female by nature. The logic behind this statement is that there is nothing more than a physical difference that exists in most, though not all, women that marks them as virgins or not. The hymen defines virginity (at least from a physiological point of view). Virginity, of course, has also been commodified in our culture, as we have seen previously in terms of chastity clubs, purity movements, and teen-stars announcing their intentions to save their virginity until marriage. Virginity is big business. The commodification of virginity is hardly new or surprising and if one were to survey the culture in which we live, one could easily find virgins selling their virginities to the highest bidder for any number of reasons: college tuition or a new technological toy. Cristina Santos in her hitherto unpublished paper, “Virgin Envy: Sacrificing the Female Virgin to Male Sensitivities of (Im)potency,” observes that:

Regardless of sexual status of the female there is an obvious commodification of female reproductive “parts” and a disintegration of the female body from the self. As early as the use of the Roman vestal virgins we have seen ritualized control of female sexuality as a method of resolving issues of social deterioration even though women were not the authors of said problems but rather the expendable commodity for their resolution. These rituals of social purification vis-à-vis the sacrificing of the virgin (vestal or otherwise) can be
seen as a reaction of male dominated society of protecting male sensibilities of social and familial potency. (TS 3)\textsuperscript{68}

In her paper, Santos is interested in developing a genealogy of the commodification of female virginity and from the beginning of her work considers the question of purity balls, virginity clubs, and so on. Her point is important and indeed, the commodification of virginity is precisely what is in question in a novel such as Maureen Child’s \textit{Last Virgin in California}, which draws heavily on the norms of virginity and yet presents virginity from different angles. Santos further argues that the commodification of virginity is caused by “man’s desire to possess what has not been possessed” (TS 5). While it is true that this may be the cause or result of commodification, it seems that one could easily invert this argument and demonstrate that all virginities are always already commodified. Moreover, with regards to romance, if virginity is purely about “man’s desire,” then why does virginity appear so often in a genre consumed by a largely female audience? Accordingly, the intention behind this reading is to understand the place and representation of female virginity in romance. Indeed, Child’s novel openly critiques the overarching role of virginity in the romance and this aspect of the text will be considered so as to show how the ideology functions and is undercut (particularly with regards to the apparent commodification of virginity as being about “man’s desire” as Santos would have it). Presumably, from this vantage, the critical work of unpacking and defining male virginity can commence. Moreover, I will show that the first time will embody paranoia and hysteria,

\footnote{I am quoting from the typescript of Cristina Santos’ forthcoming paper and I am grateful that she has granted me permission to quote from it. A draft copy of the paper is available online: http://www.interdisciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Santos-paper1.pdf, retrieved on October 30, 2011.}
precisely because there is a fear before the first time about doing it right and there are questions that follow the first time about its success even if done correctly.

The story of *Last Virgin in California* is simple enough: Lilah goes to a military base to meet her father, Colonel Forrest, who has something of a penchant for finding some lower-ranking marine to take care of his daughter while on base; this time, it is Kevin Rogan. Rogan, of course, fits the archetypal definition of the hero—almost as though he were cut from the same cloth as the most famous of romance heroes, Mr Darcy—and Lilah fits most of the requirements of the heroine, especially since she is a virgin at twenty-six: “[t]his was ridiculous. She was twenty-six years old. The last living virgin in California. She had a pretend fiancé and absolutely no business being swept away by a good-looking Marine with a bad attitude and a glorious smile. And yet...” (62).

Lilah is preoccupied by her virginal status and this will be the focus of our reading. Sedgwick has suggested that, “paranoia is anticipatory is clear from every account and theory of the phenomenon” (“Paranoid Reading” 130), and this anticipatory paranoia is certainly found in the novel insofar as the “pretend fiancé” provides an illusion and a possible solution to any surprise that may arise. That is, were someone to be interested in Lilah, she could simply displace the advancement by referencing her pretend fiancé and thus the fiancé solves any problem before it can arise. Moreover, the entire ambiguity of the hero further illuminates the paranoia that would ensue should the heroine lose her virginity. To these ends, I will focus on the virginity loss and, in particular, the scene in which the hero does not even realise that she is a virgin. Virginity loss is supposed to be a monumental moment, but what happens if the other person in this loss does not even take account that anything has been lost, or if the other person is upset, angered, or hurt by not
knowing that the heroine is/was a virgin? Ultimately, the governing question becomes: is virginity loss important, and if so, for whom? It is the fact that the hero does not recognise her virginity that becomes, I want to contend and will show, the site of hysteria, the site wherein we can begin the critical labour of further understanding how virginity loss works and functions both within this narrative and, perhaps, within the social conditions around us.

Given this is a category romance, readers are not taken aback or surprised by the emphasis on the heroine's virginity. However, this novel does provoke questions, such as those above, and some of these are answered throughout the novel. Were this novel not a Harlequin romance, one might begin to wonder about the meaning of her virginity, for instance, why so much attention is given to her virginity. This novel does help us to understand the process of the first time and the mourning after insofar as she is paranoid before the first time and we see instances of surprise appear:

She wanted more. Wanted to feel his hands on her. Wanted to slide, skin to skin and relish the experience of having Kevin Rogan be the man to finally broach her body’s last defenses.

She felt as though she’d been waiting all her life for this one moment. Here in the moonlight, with the patch fog drifting like gossamer threads around them, she’d found the skyrockets that all romance novels she’d ever read had promised.

The question was, what was she going to do about it? (64-65)
This moment of anticipatory paranoia—"what was she going to do about it?"—is for the most part eased and reduced by a recognition that she has accepted her virginity and its loss and that she will experience her first time with Kevin. Things are changing and Lilah knows this, but she also knows that she has not yet acquired knowledge. We are reminded of Lacan's observation, "[k]nowledge is what brings life to a halt at a certain limit on the path to jouissance" (Other Side 18). She has begun the virginal journey as Bernau (63) might have it, and thus she is now acquiring knowledge, a new set of ideas and experiences. Lilah's recognition of the reality that she may very well lose her virginity reflects the various discourses that are being put together in this study, and a new question arises: where does jouissance fit into our discourses of paranoia and hysteria?

This question is exacerbated by the growing erotic tension of the narrative. There can be no doubt that eroticism is present—within the militarised language that renders her body nearly defenceless from the advances of a sexual conqueror—but this eroticism also comments on the generic norms of the romance, after all, "she'd found the skyrockets that all the romance novels she'd ever read had promised" (65). Romance novels, in and of themselves, make no promises, rather the reader—in this case, the heroine—demands these promises. She is, as I argue the first time requires, paranoid before the first time and is attempting to avoid surprises (as Sedgwick's theory of paranoia would dictate) by reifying the romance novel as indicative of all first times.

Another commentary that is unfolding in the novel (particularly given Child is playing with the conventions of virginity in romance) is with regards to the virginal struggle. Despite Lilah's desire and her availability she remains a virgin: "she'd long ago
accepted her unofficial title of the Last Virgin in California” (75). Her virginity is dependent upon the excessiveness of time past; after all she is not just one of the last virgins, she is quite literally (to her mind at least), superlatively so, the one and only remaining virgin. Additionally, she is, in this moment not yet hysterical (for she cannot be for having not yet experienced the first time which will provoke a sense of knowing and not knowing) because the narrative tells readers that she has, in a sense, for the time being, “accepted” her virginal identity. One can only begin to question, doubt, or hystericise his or her virginal identity (or lack thereof) in the post-first time moments. Indeed, this point is confirmed by the fact that we speak now in terms of “technical virgins” and yet, as so much literature has shown (in the evangelical tradition), what precisely “technical enough” is remains ambiguous or always in question. Accordingly, there is an argument to be made about whether or not the first time was sufficiently completed or whether it was with the “right” first partner (as is the case in Wogan-Brown’s argument that in romance virginity always happens twice: the first time and the right or perfect time).

Desire runs both ways throughout the narrative and the hero seems to desire her as much as she desires him: “[s]he’d only been on base one lousy week and Kevin’s world was pretty much shot to hell. He wasn’t even getting any sleep. Every time he closed his eyes, he

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69 It could be argued that it is because of Lilah’s desire and availability that she remains a virgin. In this scenario, then, the rendering would be that her “stand-in fiancé” allows for a pseudo-relationship, wherein, the stand-in replaces the father, who, of course, cannot fulfil the necessary role, and thus, she is constantly in search of someone who will fit that role, who is enough like her own father so as to replace (or better repeat) the father (and this could be confirmed, for instance, by the professional similarities between Kevin and her father). Indeed, early in the novel, the stand-in fiancé is what her father calls an "artsy-fartsy type" (8), which is to say, as Lilah knows, “a marine” (8). The stand-in fiancé is a momentary rebellion from the father, which will only be, at least within the novel, corrected once she falls in love with a marine, like her father, who will thus take on the official role of fiancé, lover, and then, subsequently, husband. There is, of course, something uncomfortable about this rendering of the novel – the incestuous desires of a child – however, there is certainly, at least in popular mythology, the belief that the child seeks out a partner like his or her opposite sex parent.
saw her face, heard her voice, listened to the faint sound of those blasted bells that were as much a part of her as that long blond hair” (76). The question of desire and subsequent confusion becomes part of the humoristic or silly tone of the novel with its various, indeed deliciously pathetic, attempts at double entendre: “[d]o you know I’ve never seen you out of uniform” (80), Lilah says at one point. The surprise of the double entendre is a fear for the paranoid: something going not quite right (and yet, in the erotic discourse it goes quite well, this is, in Phillips’ terms, flirtation). Naturally this question brings into focus the ascendant problem of erotic tension, which runs wildly throughout the romance structure. Readers learn the whole notion of virginity is problematic for the heroine and that she must come to terms with her identity as a virgin, or, conversely, as most can recognise, she must abandon this identity:

Heck, Lilah’s never been at the top of the dating food chain. Even in high school, she’d been just a little too weird in a world where everyone else was trying to fit in. College had been no better. She’d actually gone to class rather than the latest fraternity bash, so she’d pretty much been on the outs there, too.

Which really explained the whole ‘virgin’ issue.

Hard to lose something nobody wants. (81)

There is something of a “girlishness” to invert the Mavorian method of reading boyishly at play here. Lilah is presented as an oddity and thus her virginity is ensured; but the problem here is that she must come to terms with either her prolonged adolescence or the next step on a virginal journey that will allow her to become fully sexual. As this novel has had a self-
reflexive tone throughout, it is important to note here the use of "scare quotes" when her virginity is spoken of. Formally her virginity embodies self-awareness, which is contradictory and undermining precisely because of the virginal discourse, which is fundamentally paranoid and hysterical. Linda Hutcheon explains in The Politics of Postmodernism the importance of the “scare” quote:

In general terms [postmodernism] takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statements. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or “highlight,” and to subvert, or “subvert,” and the mode is therefore a “knowing” and an ironic—or even “ironic” one. (1)

The self-contradictory quality to Lilah’s virginity and her being a virgin (or “virgin”) becomes as much part of the humour of the novel as it does part of the forthcoming hysteria that will cloud and consume the paranoid’s discourse. Moreover, though I do not want to argue that Child’s work is postmodernist (for this is a larger argument that would have to take into account the competing discourses of aesthetics and capital and whether or not postmodernism is a style or a product of late capitalism, for instance), I do, however, want to suggest that it flirts with postmodernism in its uses of irony and even, as we shall later see, its metacritical considerations of virginity and romance in general. The double entendre embodies, in a sense, the postmodern; “[p]ostmodern texts,” Hutcheon writes, “paradoxically point to the opaque nature of their representational strategies and at the same time to their complicity with the notion of the transparency of representation—a complicity shared, of course, by anyone who pretends even to describe their ‘de-doxifying’
tactics” (17). Child is very much playing with notions of representation and moreover, she wilfully plays with them in a critical fashion at the level of genre. Virginity is a trope of the genre, and Child plays with virginity in her novel.

The issue being considered and narrated in the novel becomes one of losing virginity or maintaining virginity, and at this point in the novel, Lilah is preparing to lose her virginity: “Lilah nodded, and slid onto the seat. He closed the door after her and as he walked around the back of the car toward the driver’s side, she told herself that this was her chance. With this man. At this moment. She was finally going to lose her title as Last Virgin in California” (92). This discourse is strange and yet familiar because, while there is a poetics of loss, there is very little recognition of it as such; instead it is something that one wants to lose. The idea of wanting to lose one’s virginity surely makes sense, particularly when a stigma is so often attached to it (being the last virgin, for instance), but it is only through loss that the virgin can become hysterical. She is, for the time being and up until the actual loss, oscillating between paranoia and hysteria. Undoubtedly the reader’s curiosity (particularly about her virginity loss) grows when Kevin denies her the opportunity to lose her virginity (with him).

And after another long silent minute passed, he added, “I’m taking you back to your father’s house.”

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70 For a larger discussion of virginity and stigma, see Carpenter’s chapter “An Unendurable Stigma” (101-40) in Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences, in which she argues that “[m]ore than the simple converse of the gift metaphor, the stigma frame gives rise to a specific and complex set of expectations, concerns, and practices, all of which are rooted in social understandings of stigmas generally. […] My analysis explores points of similarity and difference between women and men who see their virginity as a stigma and considers how virginity loss helps them fashion their identities not only as gendered beings, but also as possessors of particular sexual and racial/ethnic identities” (103).
A small curl of disappointment unwound inside her. Going back to the base and her dad’s house meant that nothing was going to happen between them. He had given in to his second thought. He had decided that the two of them surrendering to the fire building between them would be a colossal error in judgment. (96)

Initially, the reader notes how the virginity discourse has been inverted insofar as it is the man who is doing the “giving” and she who is, apparently, doing the “taking.” He is able to control himself, and thus, he erases the possibility of virginity loss. Moreover, he is now protecting her, in a sense, from virginity loss, or, if we were to read in a more sceptical light, he is asserting his power over her. But more to the point of this study, there is a fundamental paranoia insofar as she has once again been surprised by a turn of events that she had not anticipated.

The novel provides further instances wherein the two edge closer and closer to the metaphorical line in the sand between virginity and non-virginity. To be certain, romance novels are known for their efforts to slowly put into narrative the growing relationship between two characters as they progress toward a happily ever after (and nowhere is a slow narrative more clearly defined than in evangelical romances, which culminate in the first physical touch between the hero and heroine with a brief kiss). Finally, the first time is upon them and wrapped up in all sorts of paranoia, hysteria, and, mythologies of the first time.

Lilah felt the first tremor rock her soul and it was more, so much more than she’d felt that day in his arms. [...] She luxuriated in the feel of his body
actually *inside* hers and silently told herself to remember it all. This night would be etched in her memory for all time. Even when she was old and gray, she would be able to reach back and remember exactly what it had been like to feel Kevin’s body pushing into hers. (150)

The most striking aspect of this scene is that if the heroine waits for the right man, she will be rewarded with an amazing sexual experience, which unlike most deflorations will not involve any instant of pain or discomfort. Following the virginity loss, her identity is transformed and the virginity discourse shifts toward the virgin gaining knowledge rather than losing virginity: “once the whole virgin thing was behind you, a person could really catch on quickly” (151-2). Throughout, there has yet to be any utterance by Lilah to Kevin of her virginal and now non-virginal identity (though she has uttered it to herself). The first time readers have any indication she has admitted that she was a virgin to Kevin is when she says: “[b]e inside me. Complete me again” (154).

But like Lilah’s virginity loss, there is “more, so much more” (150) to this narrative and it is the culmination of varying discourses finally coming together: paranoia meets hysteria through *jouissance* (the most overwhelming and excessive of feelings, experiences, affects). *Jouissance* is as Barthes might have it the blissful moment in which, I argue, things begin to collide into one another, where there is no choice but slippage. In her essay, “Uses of the Erotic”, Audre Lorde writes that,

> The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced
the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and
self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. (278)

While Lorde sees a more political goal in the erotic, I am interested in the ways in which
she deploys the paradox of a sudden ordering of things (a sense of a self) and the clash with
“the chaos of our strongest feelings” (278). For Lorde, these feelings are nearly chthonic,
throughout her essay she makes use of words like: deep (4 times), deepest (7 times), depth
(3 times), and deeply (3 times).71 She emphasises that these chaotic and strongest of our
feelings are internal, hidden deeply, and then uncovered by the erotic, which I take to be
akin to jouissance, which refers, in theory, to notions of orgasm, pleasure (and pain), and
bliss. In particular, the moment in which jouissance is achieved things begin to collide with
one another paranoia falls into jouissance out of which we become hysterical because of the
rupture of our “strongest feelings” (Lorde 278). We cannot quite understand these
excessive feelings (Lorde often uses superlatives) and thus we are confronted by an
attempt to understand understanding. If jouissance allows for “[k]nowledge [which] is what
brings life to a halt at a certain limit on the path to jouissance” (Lacan, Other Side 18), what
then do we do with the moment when that knowledge has been acquired, the other side of
jouissance? And, as always, what do we do with the first time?

71 The chthonic nature of the erotic is not unique to Lorde; in Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from
Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson, Camille Paglia writes: “[e]roticism is society’s soft point, through which it is
invaded by chthonian nature” (15). Moreover, Paglia clearly links the chthonian with questions of the female
body and sexuality: “[t]he woundlike rawness of female genitals is a symbol of the unredeemability of the
chthonian nature” (17). While Lorde does not speak in terms of the chthonian, her use of words describing
depth, do seem to return to the notion of the chthonic, by which, of course, we mean, “from the earth,” which
implies a sense of depth that is found in Lorde’s discussion of the erotic. I am not suggesting, however, that
Lorde and Paglia would agree or are of the same school of feminist thought.
The above scene accords with Barthes’ idea of the first pleasure “travers[ing] a lifetime” (The Preparation of the Novel 13). Thus, it follows, one does not—perhaps cannot—forget his or her first time and that memory will reside within the self, haunt the self, and trouble the self. There can be no doubt, in a sense, that all these discourses are coming together and in many regards, what readers learn is that this time, this virginal time, this first time is “an important time,” and, of course, “it’s more prone to mistakes but also to flashes” (Jagoe, TS 4). Paranoia becomes hysteria through jouissance and hysteria is embodied in a sense of knowing and not knowing, and a new set of questions being asked. We are no longer asking about what it will be like or what will the first time mean; instead, it is a regressive questioning: what was it like or what did it mean? These questions are caught up in a new set of excesses because they are, like paranoia, about trying to understand, but no longer an understanding of what is forthcoming but what has come.

I argue that the first time is subject to excess and that we talk about our first time excessively; consider the ways in which Lilah’s narrative includes phrases like “it was more, so much more” (Child 150) and “this night would be etched in her memory for all time” (Child 150). While it is true that one might simply disregard these excesses as symptomatic of the romance novel, I think that these excesses are productive in thinking about the first time. I have already noted these excesses in the work of Adam Phillips: “inspiration, falling in love, conversion experiences, a sense of injustice—the most radical transformations that can occur in life—are traditionally overwhelming, excessive experiences” (Phillips, “Five Short Talks on Excess” 9). Phillips, of course, is right about excess, but what happens when these excesses—falling in love for Lilah—happen for the first time? Does the first time become even more excessive than the already excessiveness
of the first time? Even when we fall out of love, or worse are pushed out of love, we are excessive. Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse* provides an explanation of the experience of love, loss, and its excesses; he writes:

> Every amorous episode can be, of course, endowed with meaning: it is generated, develops, and dies; it follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to causality or finality—even if need be, which can be moralized (“I was out of my mind, I'm over it now” “Love is a trap which must be avoided from now on” etc.): this is the love story, subjugated to the grand narrative Other, to that general opinion that disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must “get over” (“It develops, grows, causes suffering, and passes away” in the fashion of some Hippocratic disease): the love story (the “episode,” the “adventure”) is tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it. (7)

For Barthes, the point is that the love story is given meaning; and moreover, it is, I argue, fundamentally excessive, “I was out of my mind.” To love is to be excessive and to lose love is to be equally—if not more so—excessive (as we have seen previously with Marcel). When reading Barthes talk about love, one cannot help but find oneself suddenly convinced of Laura Kipnis's polemical *Against Love*. If love is dependent upon so much misery and pain (despite the wonderful literature which may follow), why not be against it? Indeed, Kipnis tells her reader, “please read on in an excessive and mournful spirit—or at least with some patience for the bad bargains and compensatory forms that the discontented
classes engineer for themselves in daily life” (50). Love, and especially when it happens for the first time, is an excessive story that is given meaning because we insist upon telling its story—even if it is in an “internal monologue (talking without sound)” (Mavor, Reading Boyishly 371).

This internal monologue is important because it tells us something about the function of language and the story insofar as language is essential and comes to mean something; for instance, the words we choose to describe our love stories have power and affect their meaning. It is perhaps, for this reason, that in psychoanalysis or therapy we tell the same story at a number of sessions, but each time we tell it in such a way, that we hope, we will come to understand the central concern. But Barthes offers an important observation about language in this moment: “speech is irreversible; that is its fatality. What has been said, cannot be unsaid, except by adding to it: to correct, here, is, oddly enough, to continue. In speaking, I can never erase, annul; all I can do is say ‘I’m erasing, annulling, correcting,’ in short speak some more” (“The Rustle of Language” 76). For Barthes, this moment or this type of speech is “stammering” (“The Rustle of Language” 76) and in a sense, this is what happens in the love story and in psychoanalysis: “stammering (or the motor of the subject) is, in short, a fear: I am afraid the motor is going to stop” (“The Rustle of Language” 76). In the case of love stories, the fear is that we will have no story to tell, thus we tell the story repeatedly and we read and listen to other stories because they help us to understand our own story.

There is, of course, another side to this discussion which relates more specifically to the first time: the first time functions like language, insofar as it is “irreversible; that is its fatality” (Barthes, “The Rustle of Language” 76). We can only ever lose our virginity once.
What we can do, and what we often do do, is rewrite the ways in which we speak about the first time, so as to change its meaning. The greater point is that virginity, once done, cannot be undone, and this is what makes us paranoid before the first time, and this is precisely what unfolds in the first time. The paranoia is that if the first time is not the way we have imagined it, what happens? And this is precisely what the romance novel has to offer: it provides a first time and a happily ever after, that is its guarantee.

Despite the fact that the reader is consuming a romance novel and knows through advance retrospection (Iser 282) that the story will end perfectly, which is to say, happily ever after, I cannot help but return to the Barthesian love story that may not end well: the falling out of love, the being thrown out of love, that most miserable of first times. For Barthes, the ending of that love allows us to narrate “the love story” (A Lover’s Discourse) so that “we must be cured” (A Lover’s Discourse) and we must “get over” it (A Lover’s Discourse) by telling this story. But how precisely can one be expected to do this when it is all too much, when it is so damn overwhelming because of all the excessiveness that is built into the first time (which makes the explanations of Barthes and Phillips seem not excessive enough)? After all, “the first one’ could be the blueprint for all subsequent lovers” (Monro 86). The first time is the time that will colonise and dominate over all times that follow. It is for this reason during the first time Lilah tries to “remember it all” (Child 150). All times following the first time are just that time. We have spent a great deal of time “plotting” (Phillips, “Plotting for Kisses” 95; Mavor, Reading Boyishly 371) and now the plot

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72 For a more specific discussion of Iser’s “advance retrospection” and the romance novel, see Tania Modleski’s Loving With a Vengeance, pp. 32-33; additionally, please refer to “Introduction: Playing for Time” in this dissertation for earlier discussions of “advance retrospection” and the first time vis à vis Paul Ricoeur’s notion of “preunderstanding.”
has been completed: it becomes the story we must tell, we must live with, we must “get over” (Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse 7) so as to be able to move onto the next story, the second time. And in many senses, this is precisely what Lilah means when she says: “[b]e inside me. Complete me again” (Child 154). She wants to relive the experience, the complete jouissance of that moment.

In speaking about jouissance and feminine sexuality (when male virginity is discussed, a great deal of this will become problematic, and I will show that while female sexuality and virginity loss undoubtedly influences our discussions of male virginity loss, it must be revisionary), Lacan observes that: “[a]nalytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic jouissance, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as “not whole” (pas-tout) with respect to phallic jouissance” (Encore 7). Is this not how Lilah is describing her experience? She is “not whole” (Lacan, Encore 7) until she is made “complete” (Child 150). That is, for Lilah, her virginity loss is dependent upon a jouissance, which, by means of the phallus, will make her whole. But this jouissance is not enough for the romance novel because “jouissance of the Other—the Other I said to be symbolized by the body—is not a sign of love” (Lacan, Encore 38) and the romance novel depends on love and the admission of love by the protagonists. But, the moment to note here is that Lilah is desperately trying to cling to every moment of, as Barthes might call it, “bliss” or, more specifically, the moment in which “everything is lost” (Barthes, Pleasure of the Text 39), so as to be able to control the love story, the first love story, that will come to dominate all love stories to follow in her life, even if the only love story she ever knows is the one with Kevin (and we have said nothing of Kevin’s own love story/stories). The hard lesson to learn, of course, will be that jouissance, because it is a
lack of control—it is what Northrop Frye called the “orgasm mystique”\(^{73}\)—cannot be controlled and that for the paranoid virgin, though jouissance is desired, it is jouissance that surprises. Jouissance becomes the embodiment of paranoia and leads to hysteria—the ultimate state of not knowing.

Jouissance demands mourning precisely because paranoia merely led to “everything [being] lost” (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 39) regardless of all the preparation, all the stories heard about first times, and the reality that though some things are known, even more are not yet known. When Lilah says: “[b]e inside me. Complete me again” (Child 154), what she is trying to do is recapture the moment. Lacan writes that “[w]hat necessitates repetition is jouissance” (*Other Side* 40) and it is precisely this desire for repetition that causes the mourning after the first time. The first time can never truly be repeated. Lacan further argues that, “[b]y virtue of being expressed and as such repeated, of being marked by repetition, what is repeated cannot be anything other, in relation to what it repeats, than a loss” (*Other Side* 46) and this is precisely the point. Only through repetition—either the act itself, for instance, “[c]omplete me again” (Child 154, emphasis mine), or by means of trying to make the memory a petrified part of the soul, or by means of telling the story—can one ever understand; and as Lacan would suggest, “[t]his is where the work begins. It is with knowledge as a means of jouissance that work that has a meaning, an obscure meaning, is produced. This obscure meaning is the meaning of truth” (*Other Side* 51). This “obscure meaning” is, I believe, what provokes the sense and non-sense of hysteria that

\(^{73}\) For Frye, the orgasm mystique refers to “the search for the spontaneous or immediate moment, one of the main Eros themes” (*CW* IX:106).
follows this first time, this attempt to repeat the *jouissance* of the moment, which is to say, to repeat the unrepeatable.

Though in the romance novel she is able to repeat partially these blissful moments, she ultimately becomes hysterical because she must reconcile what has happened with who she is, or rather, was.

She shifted just far enough so that she could rub one foot up and down his leg, enjoying his closeness. “It’s just that, I waited a long time for this night and I want you to know that you made losing my virginity a real event.”

“What?”

She sensed the change in him more than felt it. He hadn’t moved. Hadn’t even shifted position, and yet, it suddenly seemed that he was far out of reach.

“Well heck,” she said, “I didn’t mean that as an insult.”

“You were a virgin?”

She blinked at him, “Yep. You and me. The Drill Instructor and the Doomed Virgin. Well, until tonight, that is. You mean you couldn’t tell?”

“No, I couldn’t tell.”

“Well that’s disappointing.” In every book she’d ever read, the hero *always* noticed a thing like that. (156)
This passage seems to undercut the dominant discourse of critics like Snitow, and even to a lesser degree Wogan-Brown, precisely because it is a rather pointed critique of virginity in romance. For the hero, her virginity was unimportant; indeed, it was of so little importance that he did not even realise that she was a virgin. We might go so far as to ask: if the hero of romance does not recognise the virginity of the heroine, why does the romance (as a generic manifestation) continue to demand and reify virginity? This is yet another meta-critical moment within what has already been defined as a meta-critical romance precisely because of its negotiation of self-reflexivity. Lilah even goes so far as to think, “the hero always noticed a thing like that” (156), but this hero did not realise that she was a virgin. Kevin says after finding out that she was a virgin, he laments that he has “[p]icked up another woman who was ready to lie and cheat to get what she wanted” (158). There are questions that arise and perhaps need to be attended to in this scene because it is such a problematic moment. Does the virgin have a responsibility to tell her partner that he or she is a virgin? This is an overwhelming moment in the text—it is excessively excessive—precisely because it provokes so many hysterical questions.

Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer summarised hysteria in a rather quick turn of phrase: “hysterics suffer for the most part from reminiscences” (Studies in Hysteria 11) and this is precisely what happens in the post-coital moments. During the coital moments, Lilah strives to remember everything, to repeat (hysterically?):

She luxuriated in the feel of his body actually inside hers and silently told herself to remember it all. This night would be etched in her memory for all time. Even when she was old and gray, she would be able to reach back and
remember exactly what it had been like to feel Kevin’s body pushing into hers. (Child 150)

She is wilfully attempting, in a sense, to follow Jagoe’s dictum “always hystericise” (TS 9), precisely because there is a need to “[m]aintain the desire for knowledge but also the constant awareness of the endless proliferation of signs” (Jagoe, TS 9). My study, like Jagoe’s, does not attempt to “cure” or “end” hysteria but rather works to flirt with hysteria, embrace hysteria, in a fruitful and fruitless attempt to understand and un-understand because hysteria is as much a search for knowledge as it is an admission of not knowing. In this regard, while Bernau speaks of “virginity not so much a fixed state or condition, as a journey one must undertake” (63), I would argue virginity represents a journey that never completes and rather it is a journey that must be repeated, repeatedly. Every new sexual encounter will always be a repetition of the earliest journey, which may very well seem like an infinite regression to the first time.

Why, for instance, is Kevin disappointed, angered, or upset that he has now slept with Lilah who has undertaken the virginal journey, the first time? The answer, in a sense, is simple enough: he will forever be repeated in her mind during every moment of jouissance because jouissance necessitates repetition and repetition moreover necessitates that one reminisce, which is to say, one must always hystericise. Sex is hysterical because it demands a repetition of virginity. Indeed this entire reminiscent nature of repetition is fully inscribed when Lilah says, “[c]omplete me again” (Child 154, emphasis mine). What, after all, could be more hysterical that this desire to do it over again, to try to cling to the first time again? Reverse, repeat. “Never done, never to return” (Bowlby vii).
While this is one side of the discussion, the other side is very much about what it means to be a virgin and the specificity of the moment when virginity is lost. If the hero does not recognise that he has been part of a virginity loss, has she genuinely lost her virginity? It is this question that provokes the greater hysteria (by this, I mean that hysteria is present in both, but that it is possible that one side of the equation may have more weight than the other). Her entire relationship to virginity has been one in which she has reified her virginity, she has endowed it with meaning, and that meaning is entirely lost when she loses her virginity. The endowed meaning is lost for two reasons: the hero does not even realise she is a virgin—“you were a virgin?” (Child 156)—and because he does not realise this the meaning of her virginity has been further denied or displaced: “the hero always noticed a thing like that” (Child 156).

However, the post-coital can hardly be the first moment in which she has doubts or thoughts about her virginity. Early in the narrative, readers are provided examples of virginal sexuality, “[h]e slipped a finger into her warmth and she almost came undone. [...] He dipped in and out of her body, teasing, taunting, pushing her back to the edge of sanity and then pulling her back, refusing to let her find the release she was chasing” (111). In this instance, the erotic tension is being relieved, but controlled. She is clearly arriving at a moment of jouissance but he always leads her to the “edge of sanity,” and thus denies her the full potential of jouissance, a full shattering of the virginal identity. This moment might be understood as “a point on the horizon, an ideal point, a point that’s off the map, but one whose meaning reveals itself to a structural analysis. It is revealed perfectly by the fact of jouissance” (Lacan, Other Side 46). She is led to the “point on the horizon” but is not permitted to chart new territory; she is not permitted to enjoy a “point that’s off the map.”
Everything about this scene is about a certain type of sanity, a controlled sexuality, wherein no borders, so to speak, are crossed. The plotting on the map, like her virginity, is contained. This point is made all the more clear when she says to Kevin: “No problem. [...] I bend, I don’t break” (128). At a literal level this is fine; and it is nothing more than a collection of words between two confused people. However, at a more literary level, this is a very interesting and important choice of words. Her virginity is intact, it may be bent but it is surely not broken—at least not yet. This is once again reaffirmed when later readers are told, “[s]he gasped and let her legs fall apart, opening for him, welcoming him. She wanted to feel it again. Experience the wild rush to completion that he’d shown her just a few days ago” (146). She is “bent” but still intact. And yet, she is hysterical insofar as she is already reminiscing about the past sexual episode. Of course, the continuation of the scene elaborates the virginity loss proper (which we have already considered), but the point to be noted is that she has flirted with losing her virginity previously. As such, the question becomes: at which point did she genuinely lose her virginity? While the specificity of penile-penetration is important and recognizable as the point of loss, there is also something to be said about this “sane sex” (Phillips, Going Sane 88), this jouissance that, as Lacan might suggest, “n’arrive pas” (Encore 7). Thus, while it is true she would declare her virginity lost at the moment of phallic jouissance, there is much to be said about the previously almost arrived at moments of jouissance. Virginity loss, thus, is complicated and moreover, once it is, officially, lost (at least according to an utterance), there remains a sort of melancholy and mourning that must be considered. Lilah knows, thus, that she is never done and that she can never return to that virginal state. Hysteria overwhelsms paranoia. Mourning must follow.
In his seminal essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud observed that "[m]ourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on" (310). I am not certain if Freud was thinking about virginity here, but virginity is a loss that we must all, at one point or another, endure (and even not experiencing virginity loss is something of a loss. One is not part of a community, for instance, and feels that he or she may have lost his or her opportunity to be a part of that community; or, perhaps, one feels lost insofar as all of his or her colleagues are losing that which he or she has not yet lost; and so on), and I think that mourning is necessarily a part of this process precisely because virginity loss is, as we have seen above, an experience that is overwhelming. The mythology of the first time has been displaced and destroyed and yet we are destined to repeat it, repeatedly. Indeed, Freud makes this point in his essay, “The Virginity Taboo”: “after the first act, indeed, after every new act of intercourse, the woman manifests her unconcealed hostility toward the man by curing him” (270). The specifics of this are not what I want to focus on, but rather the recognition that the first act and every new act carry the same requirement. Every time following the first time is a repetition of the first time, even if ultimately the action is hostile, as is the case in Freud. I would argue it is because of the first act and its effect on the virgin that these sentiments re-appear.

The fact that there should be, however, hostility, I think brings about the important discussion of mourning, to which I shall pay attention in this final aspect of our consideration of virginity in *Last Virgin in California*. The hostility of the virgin has to do specifically with the fact that there has been a loss, which now must be mourned. Phillips defines trauma as the moment “when the past is too present; when unbeknownst to oneself
the past obliterates the present” ("Making it Old” 146), and it is this moment that must be mourned. When the past identity has become all too present and when that past obliterates the present, despite our best intentions to “remember it all” (Child 150). In his Mourning Diary, Barthes provided, as we have previously seen, a revealing notion of mourning that has come to influence this moment that I am working to understand, that moment which “sheds no longer on the particular prescriptions set down for the first sexual act with the individual virgin” (Freud, “Virginity Taboo” 268). Barthes writes: [t]here is then, in mourning (in this kind of mourning, which is mine), a radical new domestication of death; for previously, it was only borrowed knowledge (clumsy, had from others, from philosophy, etc.), but now it is my knowledge. It can hardly do me any more harm than my mourning” (Mourning Diary 119). This moment is the moment in which the virgin realises that he or she has acquired knowledge and that knowledge is, in many ways, unsatisfying. Freud writes: “reality-testing has revealed that the beloved object no longer exists, and demands that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 311) and this is precisely what happens in the very real space of the mourning after. Our bonds with that object, our virginity, have been lost.

However, mourning should not be understood as a rhetorical negative (so long as mourning does not become a perpetual melancholia); rather, mourning should be read as emancipatory and liberating. Freud writes: “mourning impels the ego to renounce the object by declaring its death, and offers the ego the reward of staying alive, each individual battle of ambivalence loosens the fixation of the libido upon the object by devaluing, disparaging and, so to speak, even killing it” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 324). Although virginity is a journey (63) as Bernau writes, it is also something else. Virginity is a process
that requires a fundamentally profound psychic experience precisely because the virgin must move—journey—through so many stages of shattering. Mourning is the most essential aspect of the journey precisely because it allows for another journey. Phillips writes: “[i]nability (or unwillingness) to mourn leads to fear of love, which amounts for Freud to an inability to live” (Darwin’s Worms 27). It is very easy to fear love, particularly after a tragic love story, but this refusal to mourn is, as Phillips writes, also a “refusal to live. Mourning is necessary suffering that makes more life possible” (Darwin’s Worms 27).

Mourning must take place and mourning, though miserable, must not be understood as the rhetorical negative that I referred to above. Mourning must be seen as the ultimate affirmation of the journey forward, the moving forward, the living fully.

The virgin is paranoid, then the virgin is in search of jouissance, which is the fulfilment of her (in this case) or his paranoia, but this jouissance causes a profound sense of questioning and desire for repetition, which calls upon the necessary hysteria, and then finally, and only then, begins the labour of mourning. When Freud speaks of “each individual battle of ambivalence” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 324), I would argue that we could read this ambivalence as being about the fundamental nature of what I am calling the hysteria of virginity loss: did the virgin lose it or not? Was there anything to lose in the first place? And if it was lost, when was it lost? Each time a question is asked, a doubt enunciated, a fear acknowledged—and they must be (even if only in the realm of the dream-world, the unconscious, the internal monologue)—the stranglehold over one’s own virginity is lost and it is, in this work of mourning, that one is able to “loosen the fixation of the libido upon the object” (Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” 324).
The loss of virginity marks the moment in which the subject recognises that there has been a radical shift in his or her subjectivity and yet he or she cannot fully understand this moment. It is only through attending to mourning that one is ever able to “overcome” that loss. Hysteria and mourning must come together so as to permit the possibility of overcoming, Barthes writes: “[t]he indescribability of my mourning results from my failure to hysterise it: continuous and extremely peculiar disposition” (Mourning Diary 84). I am not certain that Barthes ever fully overcomes the loss of his mother; but I want to take the lessons described above as necessary steps in recognising the difficulty of virginity loss. We cannot merely describe virginity loss as an act or a performance dependent upon two bodies coming together; rather, we must understand loss in its fully profound psychic influence over the body, the mind, and the subjectivity of the self. Virginity loss is “continuous and extremely peculiar” (Barthes, Mourning Diary 84) because we must relive it each and every time we engage in an act that recalls, will recall, and must recall the first time (and the mourning after).

In the above discussion, I have focused on Maureen Child’s Last Virgin in California and I have continued my flirtation with psychoanalysis and theories of sexuality in an attempt to define the experience of virginity. While I have begun this study with a consideration of female virginity, this study is manifestly not about the specificity of the female experience; instead, I chose to begin in a more familiar locus before moving to the less explored—chronically underexplored—terrain of male virginity.
His First Time and the Mourning After

This dissertation has worked to provide theorisations of the first time in the context of literary and romantic fiction, by which I mean love stories (which may or may not end felicitously) and romance novels (which demand a “happily ever after” ending). I have argued—and will continue to argue and develop the idea—that the first time must be understood in relation to paranoia, jouissance, hysteria, and mourning. I position these ideas as necessarily in relation to one another and argue that there is an order of things that must be followed. The first time, more specifically as a virginial time, is what motivates this study precisely because of the ways it has been mythologised (in fiction, in culture, in society, in religion as this dissertation has demonstrated). In what follows I consider the first time of male protagonists in popular romantic fiction.

Readers do not generally expect to encounter a male virgin in their romance novels. Indeed it can be argued (and I have argued elsewhere) that the male virgin challenges the generic norms of the romance (“Theorising the Monstrous and the Virginial in Popular Romance Novels”). The male virgin in romance is anomalous, and when he appears his virginity is often the focus of the novel. In this chapter, I attend to three category romance novels, all published in the 90s: First and Forever (1991, Harlequin Temptation #360) by Katherine Kendall, Secret Admirer (1992, Harlequin Presents #1554) by Susan Napier, and Galahad in Blue Jeans (1999, Silhouette Intimate Moments #971) by Sara Orwig. Each novel presents virginity in differing lights and also appears—historically speaking—when we begin to see a “rise” in male virgin characters in the popular romance novel. Each novel demonstrates my argument about the first time and its intricacies. The first time is never merely a quick exercise that one does with no recognition of the act, the thoughts involved,
and the time after. In each novel studied here, the first time is rendered in each novel as complex, complicated, and filled with emotional and psychic excesses.

Male virginity, of course, offers its own challenges. Readers do not expect to read a novel about a male virgin and male virginity was not and continues not to be a standard part of discussions about virginity, as we have seen previously. These novels open up a textual space in which representations of male virginity are not just for comedic effect as is so often the case of Hollywood blockbusters, nor is the male virgin a pitiful tragic hero. Instead, the male virgin is positioned alongside the archetypal treatment of the hero in the romance novel: a loving, sometimes alpha, sometimes sentimental, but always manly hero. His masculinity is never denied or questioned because of his virginity.

Initially, let us begin here with a textual example not from the three case studies before moving to more complete analyses of texts. In her 2011 novel, Virgin, Cheryl Brooks writes:

His mind was being bombarded with erotic images; what she would look like naked was first and foremost—her full breasts and softly rounded hips were easy to imagine, considering the low-cut red shirt and tight black slacks she wore. His breath quickened at the idea of being close enough to inhale her scent, to feel the soft warmth of her skin pressing against his own, the touch of her hands on his body. No woman had ever touched him sexually, and though he tried to imagine her licking his stiff cock, sinking her teeth into his flesh while his own cock tasted the sweetness between her thighs, the unfortunate truth was that he had absolutely no idea what to expect. And to
plunge his shaft deep inside her... What would that feel like? He knew she’d be tight, hot, and slick around his dick—he couldn’t help knowing that, just from the descriptions he’d heard others give—but he had always suspected that sexual union was one of those things you had to experience for yourself in order to fully appreciate it. It was difficult to understand the sheer ecstasy of orgasm when you’d never had one. (2-3)

This extract from the novel clearly illuminates and exemplifies the first time. The hero, Dax, has yet to experience his first time, but he has a rather vivid idea of what the first time will be like. The first time has been adequately mythologised, and there is the telling question: “What would that feel like?” Even though he is able to imagine the entire act, he is ultimately unable to fully understand it because of his lack of experience. The hero is like Marcel, insofar as he is able to imagine the full mechanics of the act and yet there is a naïveté at play, because of that lack: “the unfortunate truth was that he had absolutely no idea what to expect.” How could he know what to expect when everything remained in the realm of the imagined, the dreamed about, the masturbatory? Indeed, even when imagining the act, he is able to make some claims—“he knew she’d be tight”—but this is only based on “the descriptions he’d heard others give.” What or whom the others had described remains unknown, and what is ultimately certain is that “he had always suspected that sexual union was one of those things you had to experience for yourself in order to fully appreciate it.” In this one passage we are presented with the myth of the first time, which Dax believes will translate—at some point in time—into reality. The experience being described is and can only ever be a machination of the imagination (entirely masturbatory), and it will only become real after the first time. The novel reifies experience as integral to understanding
the first time; one cannot, we are told, understand the first time except through experience. What is to be noted, however, is that Dax has managed to construct a narrative of what the first time will be like. Dax has been “plotting” (Phillips, “Plotting for Kisses” 95) for much more than a kiss as Phillips might have it, and has been plotting instead for the first time.

At the time of actual virginity loss (in the novel), we read, “[y]ou feel so good. I never knew how good it could be, and I’m so very glad I waited for you—for lots of reasons...” (158-59). Shifting perspectives, the narrator explains, “[o]pening his eyes, he watched it unfold. Within seconds, Ava’s pupils had dilated completely, obliterating each iris until it was no more than a thin rim to the windows of her soul. Dax would never forget her expression until his dying day: It reflected sheer amazement, ultimate pleasure, and profound bliss” (160). This passage is the mourning after, he has now realised that he has lost his virginity. The first time has become a part of him “until his dying day” (160), which surely recalls the example found in Child’s Last Virgin in California, “[t]his night would be etched in her memory for all time” (150). The first time is an imagined time and the mourning after is the moment in which the imagined becomes real.

These passages recall what Roland Barthes describes as “the novel fantasy” which “starts out from a few novels and to that extent rests on (takes as its starting point) something like the First Pleasure (of reading) → and, from our knowledge of erotic pleasure, we recognize the force of that First Pleasure, which traverses a lifetime” (The Preparation of the Novel 13). What I mean by appropriating Barthes’ notion of “the novel fantasy,” which for Barthes is about writing the first novel, is that within the novel there is always, for there must be, a fantasy of something (whether it be writing the novel or the sexual fantasy). For Barthes, however, even in the fantasy of writing the novel there is
necessarily a sexual element, most explicitly related to the first pleasure (which is what the popular texts that I will consider are about). While the passage speaks about the “First Pleasure” it also allows for my study to embody “the novel fantasy” insofar as these passages function as the opening to our study, which will subsequently move to and from other novels in pursuit of an understanding of the first time and the mourning after.

My dissertation treats canonical and popular fiction together rather than isolating one from the other; as such, I refer to Proust while discussing a category, name-brand romance. The Barthesian “novel fantasy” is predicated on intertextual relations insofar as all novels “start out from a few novels.” No one singular novel can exist in a vacuum or ex nihilo. It seems to me that even the most popular of fictions must have relations to earlier novels, other novels, canonical novels, and popular novels. It is hardly surprising to scholars of romance that Pamela Regis in her seminal *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* begins with canonical fiction like Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel Regis called “the best romance novel ever written” (75) and concludes with the oeuvre of Nora Roberts. Austen and Roberts are masters of the genre. But, this is not just about authorial influence. Readers are constantly engaged in a process of comparison. Readers compare novels. Readers make value judgments about novels in relation to other novels. Readers have prejudices and preferences that are dictated by or informed by what novels the reader has previously read. In an age of Amazon, Chapters/Indigo, and Barnes and Noble, the bookseller helps readers determine what they should read next based on what they have read in the past. As such, though my dissertation began with a consideration of Proust and now moves to popular romance fiction, the goal is
less about showing a series of differences and more about a series of confluences and affinities.

But there is still another reason for drawing on both popular and canonical fiction: because neither has a monopoly on love stories. In her superb essay, “The End of the Novel of Love,” Vivian Gornick writes:

Oh yes, we in the Bronx knew that love was the supreme accomplishment. We knew it because we, too, had been reading *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* and *The Age of Innocence* all our lives, as well as the ten thousand middlebrow versions of those books, and the dime-store novels too. We knew it because we lived in a culture soaked through with the conviction that love had transforming powers: to know passion was to break the bonds of the frightened, ignorant self. [...] The very meaning of human risk was embedded in the pursuit of love. (154)

While Gornick is speaking about the novel of love writ large, what strikes me as notable and noteworthy is that canonical fiction is placed alongside “middlebrow” and “dime-store” novels. These stories of love transcend the value judgments and canons that we institutionalise as academics (whether we are constructing a canon or we are complicit in teaching a canon). The canon becomes problematic not because of the value judgments it makes, but because it fails to recognise that the thematic concerns of the canon are not limited to the canon. Of course, we should not simply excise the canon either, precisely because as Gornick notes, low-fiction is influenced by high or canonical fiction. I see the relation between the high and the low not as binaries to be treated separately, but rather
together and in the complexity of the relation that ensues. High fiction, low fiction, canonical fiction, and popular fiction are all thematically interested in questions of love, loss, and virginity.

In what follows I continue developing my theory of the first time and the mourning after by focussing specifically on romance novels. I will discuss the ways in which they explore and exhibit the first time and the mourning after and continue to polemicise the attending notions of paranoia, *jouissance*, hysteria, and mourning. If my theorisations are correct, then it stands to reason that these notions should appear even in the most felicitous of treatments of the first time. However, given the focus here on male first times, I should further note that all first time narratives of men will follow a tripartite process in addition to the first time and the mourning after: the hero will announce his virginity, commence his journey to lose virginity, and ultimately lose his virginity.

This chapter will focus solely on name-brand popular romances. My reason for choosing name-brand romance is because, in part, they are the most stereotyped examples of the genre. It is, in many respects, the Harlequin (or Mills & Boon) that defines the genre precisely because of its iconic cover, size, and shape. The Harlequin romance novel is readily available, for instance, to the viewer/reader of Janice Radway's landmark study of the romance novel, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. The cover of the second edition (1991) of Radway's book portrays a woman, seated comfortably, reading a Harlequin novel (indeed, though not of immediate relevance, the image is authentic insofar as the woman is reading *Glory Days* (1990) by Marilynne Rudick, a Harlequin Temptation (no. 308), which incidentally is not the type of novel (long historical romances à la Woodiwiss) that interests Radway).
Radway’s study also marks a point of departure and allows for a *natural* movement towards Pamela Regis’ *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* and, more specifically her study of heroes, which allows for a more complicated hero (than that afforded by Radway’s study). For instance, in considering the hero, we can do away with—and yet return to—Radway’s position that the hero represents “spectacular masculinity” and moreover that “every aspect of his being, whether his body, his face, or his general demeanour is informed by the purity of his maleness” (128).

When Radway speaks of “spectacular masculinity,” (128) she has in mind the early romance novels, particularly historical romances, like Kathleen E. Woodiwiss’s *The Flame and the Flower* (1973), which initiated the rise of popular romance. Woodiwiss, describing the hero of her novel, writes:

> Very slowly and carefully, so as not to awaken him, she drew the covers over his chest, but she soon realized her mistake with thinking him chilled. It didn’t take long for him to kick the covers away completely, making her blush profusely.

> His body lay bare to her gaze now, but she did not turn away though her face flamed with her own temerity. Instead she let her eyes roam over him slowly and with much interest, satisfying her curiosity. There was no need of others to tell her what she could see herself—that he was magnificently made, like some wild, grand beast of the forest. Long, flexible muscles were superbly conditioned, his belly flat and hard, his hips narrow.
Her hand slim and white, appeared out of place upon his brown and hairy chest.

Disturbed by the strange stirring within her, she eased from him and moved toward her side of the bed. She turned away, trying not to think how her eyes had lingered on his body, and she saw a leaf fall to the floor of the balcony. She huddled under the covers, wishing she were as warm-blooded as the man beside her. (113-14)

In Woodiwiss’ text, Brandon, the hero is described in very physical terms; his body is explored, documented, and visualised. What is immediately recognisable about this passage—aside from the obvious titillation—is the way in which the male body becomes a site upon which desire can be found. Indeed, we might argue—in accordance with Sarah S. G. Frantz (2011)—that Woodiwiss begins to establish a theory of the female gaze as the heroine looks upon the male body, which in turn is being used to define the hero. Laurence Goldstein, for instance, notes that “[w]hen an author depicts the male body he or she constructs a meaning for it” (xi) and this is certainly the case here. It is not the hero’s ideas, for instance in this moment, that define him, but rather it is his “body [which] lay bare to her gaze” (114). But there is more than just a body being viewed here, the body is, of course, also a naked body, “she saw a leaf fall to the floor of the balcony” (114). The symbolically loaded fig leaf, which had covered his nakedness as so many fig leaves have

74 Sarah S. G. Frantz has provided an exceptionally thorough close reading of this passage in her lecture “The Rapist Hero and the Female Imagination” (2011). Her reading is focussed on the development of the alpha male (as rapist hero) and the female gaze, while my reading is more concerned with the question of nudity (particularly in theoretical terms). My gratitude to Frantz for sharing her paper and for being an engaging and supportive interlocutor.
done previously in the history of art, has fallen to the floor. He is made nude and his body is
rendered naked; after all “you are only fully naked if your genitals are exposed” (Carr-Gomm 248). The falling leaf allows for the “fully naked” body to be seen and becomes a site for the exploration of her own desires, “wishing she were as warm-blooded as the man beside her” (Woodiwiss 114). More to the point, it is the phallus that ultimately determines the meaning of Brandon’s body and the visual pleasure of that body, “the sign of the male body is” as Goldstein notes “of course the penis, or the ‘phallus’ if one wishes to speak symbolically” (x). His body only ever becomes fully naked once the leaf is removed.

The leaf, of course, returns us to the history of nudity, since as Giorgio Agamben notes, “[n]udity, in our culture, is inseparable from a theological signature. Everyone is familiar with the story of Genesis, according to which after their sin Adam and Eve realized for the very first time they were naked” (57). The leaf’s fall is revelation. The body is made naked. The naked body, in and of itself, is not erotic, nor is it sexualized; however, it can be made erotic or sexualized (likewise, a clothed body can also be made erotic precisely because of what it is not showing). Naked bodies, of course, are not uncommon to the romance novel; one needs only think so far as Sally MacKenzie’s series of “naked” heroes (all of her novels including “naked” in the title, for instance, The Naked Duke or The Naked King). But what stands out, for our purposes, is that the alpha hero is determined, at least in part, by his corporeality, particularly within the context of the archetypal alpha male found in Woodiwiss’s novel.

I cannot help but appreciate Radway’s use of the word “purity,” (128) as well, though I am quite certain she does not mean sexual purity (in the ways it was described earlier in relation to Evangelical movements). Radway explains via the Smithton women—
the group of women she studies, a group of midwestern women “nearly two thousand miles from the glass-and-steel office towers of New York City where most of the American publishing industry is housed” (46)—that “the ideal romantic hero has had sexual experiences before his encounter with the heroine” (130), which would not allow for a virgin hero. Radway continues:

In fact, in these romances, the heroine’s innocence is often contrasted explicitly with the hero’s previous promiscuity, behavior that is made tolerable to both the heroine and reader because it is always attributed to his lack of love for his sexual partners. His exclusive preoccupation with them as tools for achieving sexual release is never blamed on his callousness or lack of respect for women, but rather on his virility and his fear of emotional involvement with calculating women. (130)

Radway, though one of the first scholars to write romance criticism, makes conclusions about the hero of romance that do not allow for any deviations from the stereotype that she has established. In her view, readers require a heroine’s innocence and moreover that the hero have some sexual history. This sexual history of protagonists likely has much to do with the fact that the Smithton women are interested in historical romances, often referred to as “bodice rippers,” which is essential to the history of the popular romance novel. Novels like Sweet Savage Love by Rosemary Rogers and The Flame and the Flower by Kathleen Woodiwiss are very much about the sexual awakening of the heroine, and at least in the case of Woodiwiss, the eroticisation of the male body and the development of the female gaze as Sarah S. G. Frantz has argued (2011). Radway does not attempt, even as a mere theoretical exercise, to problematise the hero or seek out anomalous heroes. Indeed,
this is precisely what I set out to do in this chapter: find anomalous heroes who are not sexually promiscuous, but who are virgins.

In her more recent study, Regis considers the historical development of the romance novel. What distinguishes Regis from Radway is that Regis is less interested in the readers of romance and more interested in the genre as a stable form and structure. Because Regis is less interested in the phenomenology of reading, she is able to take note of deviations from the stereotypes that Radway develops. Regis identifies two types of heroes: the alpha male and the sentimental hero. Regis explains:

If he is an alpha male and the heroine does not tame him, he will regard courtship, wrongly, as merely the actions he needs to go through to get a woman into bed. If he is a sentimental hero and the heroine does not heal him, he will regard courtship, wrongly, as something that he is exempt from: he is not good at it, is not ready for it, or it will merely hurt him. Untamed or unhealed, the hero will not truly appreciate the role of the heroine in his life; he will not engage with her emotionally. (A Natural History of the Romance Novel 114)

Regis' definition is more open than Radway's and thus is the preferred definition from which to depart. However, Regis' definition, like Radway's, does not consider the virgin hero. The virgin hero, at first consideration, is not generally an alpha male, nor is he a sentimental hero. He is a character who oscillates between identities and at times will appear to be more of an alpha hero than sentimental and vice versa.
Sentimental Virginity

Katherine Kendall’s First and Forever (1991) is a Harlequin Temptation, which means that this is not a "sweet" romance, in which the hero and heroine do nothing more than, perhaps, kiss, nor is it an “erotic” romance wherein the exploration of sexuality is essential to the narrative. The novel instead will feature both a kiss and sexuality, but it is the relationship’s exploration of these issues in a teleological fashion of working toward—following the metaphorical game of baseball—that helps to determine the narrative. Accordingly, the hero and heroine will meet, then kiss, then have sex, all of which happens, in a sense, in an orderly fashion. In First and Forever, we are introduced to a “mature” heroine, Laura Daniels, who is thirty-five years old, and a business executive in marketing. The novel makes a point, repeatedly, of addressing her age:

“Those days are long past, my dear. Need I remind you that I am rapidly approaching my middle years?”

“Give me a break,” Rhoda snorted. “Thirty-five is not exactly retirement age. Besides, you look twenty-five.” (10)

The point to be noted here is the way that the novel portrays the heroine as concerned about her age, as she approaches her “middle years,” and yet Rhoda assures her that she is not yet ready for retirement (but this does not mean that she is young; instead it works to reinforce the anxiety of aging). These sorts of discussions continue throughout the novel; later, on the same page,

Rhoda shook her head, her expression grave. “A nursing home in Miami. How’s your shuffleboard?”
"I'm serious, Rhoda."

"So am I. Laura, you're in the prime of your life."

"Tell that to my gynecologist."

"Oh yes—" Rhoda nodded, "—the ol' biological time clock." (10)

The reason these statements of chronological time and aging are noted is because Laura has been desiring a young(er) man, Alex Shaw, twenty-two years old, who happens to be, as we shall learn, a virgin. In the narrative he will announce his virginity (one of the requirements I have established of all virgin narratives). However, before we arrive at the moment of loss, let us first consider the ways in which Alex is presented and given meaning within the context of the romance novel.

Alex is introduced as a young man, and he is anything but the Alpha Hero of earlier novels and other novels of the same time, as we shall see in Secret Admirer. The physical body still figures prominently:

His features were hard-edged: strong chin, Roman nose, full, sculpted lips. It was a confident face; still something about it advertised that it was mainly the confidence of youth. There wasn't a laughing line to be seen, but it was more than that—something intangible. Maybe the way his smile curved down at the corners a bit—a smile that reminded her of that secret certainty that you're going to own the world someday. The feeling you take for granted at nineteen and ache for by twenty-nine.
And yet, there was also in those eyes a hint of something older—a hint of melancholy. A memory, perhaps. She couldn’t meet his gaze. (17-18)

The hero certainly seems different from the way Radway describes the hero as a “spectacular masculinity” and that “every aspect of his being, whether his body, his face, or his general demeanour, is informed by the purity of his masculinity” (128). It is true that he is initially described in corporeal terms, but almost as quickly as his masculinity is determined, it is undercut by his youthfulness (which is to say, not quite fully grown, like Peter Pan and Marcel). There is a correlation between his physical body and his state of mind: “[t]he feeling you take for granted at nineteen and ache for by twenty-nine” (Kendall 18), which, of course, recalls the fact that the heroine is older than the hero. One of the more peculiar descriptions of his body is that melancholy seems to emanate from the body, as though there is a melancholy-look. This look or this aspect of melancholia will find its way into the narrative when readers learn of his virginity.

In First and Forever, Alex’s melancholy is not akin to Freud’s melancholia, but rather is about a romanticisation of Alex, a pained genius. Melancholy has become akin to what Phillips calls “the theatricality of madness” (Going Sane 4); thus Alex’s melancholy functions like “Hamlet’s madness [which] makes people suspicious, incites their curiosity, gets them talking” (Going Sane 4). Kendall’s usage of the word “melancholy” appears very early in the text, notably in the moment when she is describing the hero. The hero’s “melancholy” is thus not a clinical description of a hero reducing “the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 311) as Freud would have it.
Instead it is melancholia as madness that renders the curiosity in the reader. Freud explains this notion of madness, “[i]t is this sadism that solves the mystery of the inclination to suicide which makes melancholia both so interesting and so dangerous” ("Mourning and Melancholia" 318-19). The melancholic Alex is akin to Goethe’s Werther. Kendall’s use of melancholia is intended to arouse the reader’s interests in Alex. Indeed, Phillips rightly observes, “[a]ccounts of sanity are likely to remind us of the banality of virtue. Sanity, in other words—and there are very few other words for it or about it—has never really had a vocabulary, has never made a name for itself” (Going Sane 18-19). Sanity is not interesting to the reader (and likely not interesting to write about for the author) precisely because it is entirely balanced; there are no extremes to sanity. Alex’s melancholy, on the other hand, is far more tantalizing and exciting than his sanity; after all, “no one is famous for his sanity” (Phillips, Going Sane 19). Accordingly, while this dissertation engages itself with psychoanalytic theory, I do not intend for Alex’s melancholy to be understood in a clinical sense. Melancholic heroes are part of a tradition of sentimental heroes who are defined less in terms of their physical bodies and more in terms of their emotional availability.

As in all romances, she becomes enamoured with the hero and some reflection is given to her previous relationships and compared to the current one (which at this point is nothing beyond imagined):

Take Gerald, her former “significant other,” for example. In the two years they’d lived together, he’d degenerated from being her knight in shining armor to a tedious hypochondriac with a compulsion for student nurses. After throwing him out, she was certain she could soon do better. Since then,
however, the only man she’d met who was neither married nor gay, had been
that overgrown adolescent from the deli. (27)

That “overgrown adolescent” is who we expect to become the hero of the novel, Alex.75 We
later learn that Alex (who is slowly unravelling and certainly not our typical Alpha male) is
a pianist: “Um, I play piano in a jazz club in Greenwich Village” (43). Alex is certainly not
our corporate executive, exotic millionaire prince, or ruthless (but nonetheless finally
loving) sheik; he is an artistic pianist who plays in a jazz club and has a bit of money put
away. I stress this aspect of the text because in Secret Admirer, to be considered below, we
are presented with someone who is much more in line with alpha male heroes of romance.

To these ends, having determined that Alex is not our standard alpha male (a
distinction that will become all the more clear when considering Secret Admirer), I want to
move now to the specific site of concern: the moment Alex tells Laura that he is a virgin:
“I’ve never been with a woman, Laura. I’m a virgin” (136). He has made the announcement
and thus his virginal journey begins with Laura taking the lead. As is so often the case, we
are presented with a narrative as to why or how he is (still) a virgin.

“I was seventeen. Guy hit me head-on. He crossed the line and hit me. When I
woke up...” He walked over to the window and blindly stared out. After a few
minutes, he turned around and continued. “It’s impossible for me to convey
the pain, the horror—the goddamned fear.” He forced himself to take a

75 The idea of the “overgrown adolescent” has been taken up in Michael Kimmel in his book, Guyland:
breath. He wiped tears from his eyes with the back of his hand. “The fear,” he repeated.

“They told my parents I wouldn’t make it. That they should prepare themselves for the worst.” (135)

The hero provides reasons for his virginity. He is a virgin because he was in an automobile accident, which rendered him too weak for sexual pursuits and conquests.76 There is moreover another reference to his age, which is further emphasised by the presence of the parents. But there is more to this narrative, the hero cries and trembles with fear. This character is more “emotionally available” than his alpha male archetypal counterpart (while the sentimental hero is emotionally mature, the alpha hero is erotically mature; however, of course, there is slippage between these categories as we will see with the virgin hero). Alex further explains that “[w]hile I learned a lot during that time, I managed to miss a few things about the real world. I feel so...different, so ignorant of life...I never really had many friends. I fell behind other people my own age” (136). If there is to be a flaw in this novel, I would contend it is in the way that the author infantilises (makes young, perhaps even too young) the hero. The youthfulness of virginity is, in a sense, emphasised and the virgin is consequently made innocent due to his youthfulness.

Throughout the rest of this narrative, the reader is treated to varying reactions to his virginity (from Alex himself, from the heroine of the novel, and from the perspective of

76 In my article “Theorising Male Virginity in Popular Romance” (2011), I explore the reasons why a male is still a virgin in popular romance; for instance, the hero is too intellectual, too caught up in ideas; or, the hero has been away for a given period of time (historical romances or time-travel romance); or, the hero has been sick or disabled for a given period of time (as is the case for Alex in First and Forever).
the narrator): "[b]ut Alex was a boy. He should be making out with girls in the back seat of a car at a drive-in. *His first time* should be a joyful adventure. Not a self-conscious performance where the only thing on his mind was the review he’d receive *the next morning*" (140-41, emphasis mine). The narrative mythologises the first time for Alex, indicates what it should be (rather than what it is), and recognises that identity changes based upon temporality (in one moment the virgin is a virgin and in another not a virgin). Thus, what we have read here is that the first time is supposed to be one way (which is to say, with another virgin who would presumably not be reviewing the performance in a comparative fashion). Carpenter observes that “[s]exual partners are uniquely well situated to identify and publicize virgin’s sexual ineptitude and, by extension, their virginity—this is doubly true in the case of experienced partners” (121); the latter being the case we are presented with in *First and Forever*. There is a sense of paranoia that dominates over the entire loss to be considered in the novel, and the review that he will receive will surely only provoke a sense of insecurity, which is to say, hysteria (was I good at it or not?).

What is remarkable here is that paranoia runs both ways; he acknowledges a lack of experience (thus enabling an admission of likely failure or mistake) and she worries about his first time being the way it is supposed to be. Laura is worried about his first time being a “self-conscious performance” (140-41) given it is a first time (presumably there is a self-conscious performance at play in any first time with a new partner, or perhaps even an already familiar partner). But what other option could there exist for Alex the first time, how could he not be “self-conscious”? In this moment, his virginity is situated in the realm
of a journey, which is very much part of a ritual that all of us must undergo (even if we decline). This particular scene will conclude with Alex being sent home in a cab, as a virgin.

The actual virginity loss does not come for another twenty pages, which leaves the reader in a momentary state of paranoia (well, is he going to lose his virginity?). Laura arrives at his apartment and tells him, “[t]ime for night school” and she begins to elaborate a series of lessons, “Lesson three,’ she managed at last, opening her eyes, ‘Female anatomy.’” And Alex responds, “I think I’m going to like this class’” (163). In the novel, the paranoia is found in the moments of jouissance (movements toward knowledge), “‘What?’ Alex stopped instantly. ‘Did I hurt you?’” (166). Here then, the fear of hurting his lover has caused a momentary pause on the blissful course. It is a way of acknowledging that he does not know (for he cannot) the intricacies of the sexual arena. Even as they are making love he asks, “‘Am I doing okay?’ She answered with a blissful, awestruck smile” (167, emphasis mine). He is not quite sure of what he is doing and he is trying to avoid any bad surprise.

When we arrive at the actual sexual act—the penetrative act that defines virginity loss (in the context of normative heterosexuality)77—the movement toward jouissance is already marked by instances of the mourning after. I have argued previously—in our reading of Last Virgin in California—that there is an attempt, because of the mythology of the first time, to capture in one’s mind every aspect of the first time. Readers will recall the importance I gave to the line: “She luxuriated in the feel of his body actually inside hers and silently told herself to remember it all. This night would be etched in her memory for all

77 I have been and continue to be reluctant to adopt the equation that penetrative sex equals virginity loss; however, this is how it is almost always (if not always) framed in the context of heterosexual virgin romances.
time” (Child, Last Virgin in California 150) and we will find a similar line in First and Forever, but the narrative functions differently:

Alex moved with tortured slowness, forcing restraint, clinging to what little self-control remained. Laura dug her fingers into his back, moaning. He stopped moving then, stopped breathing, even. “Shh,” he rasped. “Don’t move. Give me a minute.”

Laura. He thought only of Laura, willing himself to hang on. She was everything. She was all that mattered.

Again he began the slow, even stroking that seemed to give her so much pleasure.

“Alex,” she whispered, “I’m so close.” Her eyes were shut, her breath coming in little rasps.

He kissed her softly.

“It’s so perfect,” she said, opening her eyes to reveal a shimmer of tears.

“Of course,” he told her with gentle confidence. “It’s love.”

She cried out then, and he lost himself in her, letting go at last to something beyond both of them.

It had all been so easy. If only he’d known. (169)
Firstly, it seems impossible not, at the very least, to recognise the excessive sentimentality of this narrative (and I do not think we should forget it, after all this is a romance novel); however, while this is not the focus of this study, it is important that the reader acknowledge the excessive prose as a necessary component of romance writing. This scene seemingly embodies Lacan’s observation that “knowledge is what brings life to a halt at a certain limit on the path to jouissance” *(Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 18). On the path to *jouissance* there is a stop, a limit, which would stop the defining act of virginity loss. Indeed, it is as though the hero stops to take account of what is happening here: “[d]on’t move. Give me a minute” (Kendall 169). While it is possible that this “minute” may refer to a fear of premature ejaculation, at least in an all too realistic sense (and/or in the comic mode of Hollywood blockbusters), it is important to remember that the romance novel very rarely undercuts its hero’s masculinity and virility (Allan, “Theorising Male Virginity in Popular Romance Novels”). Premature ejaculation is not a common occurrence in the popular romance. This moment, before they have reached orgasm (together), is the moment in which he recognises that he is departing his boyhood and becoming a man. Like the heroine of Child’s novel who wants to “remember it all” (*Last Virgin in California* 150), Alex is “clinging” to what remains of his boyhood, before he is made into a man, finally, and fully. And then, following this moment, we have *the mourning after*: “It had all been so easy. If only he’d known” (169). The myths attached to the *first time* have proven *not true*—and in this moment, we are, via the narrator, seeing the beginnings of mourning and regret, “[i]f

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78 When I speak of romance novels and “excessive prose,” I do not intend to imply that the romance’s excesses are “negative” or “bad,” quite the contrary; instead the excessive prose is essential to the genre. It may seem as a shock to readers of literary fiction to read such “purple prose,” but it is imperative that the prose is central to the reader’s expectations.
only he’d known” (169). What might have been known is that all of the mythologies attached to the first time are simply not true—though sex may very well be enjoyable, everything imagined about the first time is never really matched in reality. Once the virgin realises that these mythologies are deflated there is a process or an attempt to understand how the mythology could be so wrong, and I believe that this is when the process of mourning begins. Mourning is an attempt to understand what has happened from a position of temporal distance. The first time had previously been un-experienced but it has now been experienced and therefore a new meaning must be ascribed to the experience, as is common to the first time. The narrative returns:

“Laura?” He kissed her again, wiping away her tears.

“Yes, love?”

He smiled transfixed, unable to find any words. At last he knew what to say.

“Wanna do it again?” (169)

The question that seems interesting to ask is why do it again? Of course, an obvious answer might be: why not? Or, why not for further pleasure? But, there is more to this than merely pleasure. This is the hysterical moment. It is not hysterical in the Lacanian sense of “am I or am I not?” (as Bruce Fink summarises the hysteric’s question as being one about being a man or a woman), but rather it is about a need to reconfirm what has just happened. Indeed, as we saw in Last Virgin in California, the virgin, it seems, always repeats the defining act of his or her virginity loss almost immediately after the first time. This should
not be read negatively as though I am suggesting that it was not a completed act (or that the reason for doing it again is not just to have pleasure again); rather it is about the temporal immediacy of needing and desiring to do it again.

The next morning, we return to the notion of “[i]f only he’d known” when the narrator provides an account of how Alex wakes up:

A grin broke out on his face. No, he didn’t feel tired at all. He had just spent the greatest night of his life.

He reveled in the memories of last night—the point at which Laura had...And when she did...Life was good. His life had taken a turn for the good as unexpectedly as it had taken a turn for the worse, five years ago.

If there had been no accident, no pain, no confinement, there might not have been a Laura. If you’re happy today, Alex, then you can’t regret any part of what brought you to this point. And if Laura would be his—not for a night, but forever—then he’d gotten a damn good deal. (170)

Certainly at first glance, there is no mourning after, but he seems rather content with his performance: “the greatest night of his life” (170), “Life was good” (170) and so on. All of this is fine, and all of this is in line with the way Regis has theorised the sentimental hero of popular romance. The hero has, in a sense, been rehabilitated or healed.

There is recognition of the past and the things that may have been missed, or things that did not happen. Immediately, the discussion is about memories and remembering not only the night itself, but also all the traumas, which delayed the first time. He is mourning
that time, lost time (and in many regards he is repressing that time so as to embrace the current time and future time with Laura). His virginity loss is about overcoming his lengthy virginal status (as well as the previous traumas, which ostensibly were the cause of his delayed loss of virginity). And, in the end, virginity loss allows him to overcome (or, perhaps further repress) the past and to embrace, apparently, a new identity that needed to be repeated—hysterically—almost as quickly as the old identity was lost in a moment of bliss. Only through an acceptance of a new identity, found in a process of mourning, can one ever truly move forward, and in the case of Alex, the mourning allows for him to move from boyhood to manhood.

Indeed it is the desired ending that causes the next narrative conflict and she cannot accept that he wants to spend “forever” with her: “‘You say you want me now—‘ she bit her lower lip, ‘—but I’m only your first.’ ‘First, twenty-first. What’s the difference, Laura? I thought we were forever” (190). They cannot determine what the relationship is or is not. His virginity loss and her being his first and only is a problem for Laura. This, perhaps, speaks to a larger cultural convention—sowing wild oats—however, there is something fundamentally important to recognise here: one need not have twenty-one partners to determine if one is the right partner; rather, one could be satisfied and thrilled with the first partner. This is inconceivable for Laura (and perhaps many readers), but is entirely conceivable for Alex (perhaps due to his youthful naiveté).

Alex nodded, waiting for more.

“And,” Laura continued, fighting to control her sobs, “you’re kind, sweet, thoughtful and...a wonderful lover. But...”
'But, what?'

Laura shook her head. "But you’re so young. How can you make decisions that will last? You’re just a—"

"Just a boy," Alex finished icily.

"No. No. Just...a young man." (192)

The question is about whether or not Alex is the right age to make a decision, such as marriage or commitment. The question however seems to be one about the ways in which the two are different: he is/was a virgin while she is/was experienced. The relationship is based upon, to her mind at least, a starting point of inequality insofar as she knows more than he does; however, Alex remains unconvinced and declares: “And whatever my age, Laura, remember this: I am a man” (193). The two part ways and readers are left in a state of suspense (and hoping that there will be a happy ending!).

Even though he has declared that he is a man, not a boy, following a piano performance, we read: "Pity applause, he thought sardonically. Some in the audience just didn’t know enough about music to realize how bad he was; and the others were being kind. But the guys in the band had been giving him looks lately. Looks that said: ‘Hey, boy, we’re carrying you’” (201). While this is about the music and his career as a musician, it is also very much alluding to his sexual past. He is just a boy—despite declaring that he is a man—and he is really an amateur in his love (of music and of Laura). There is still much to be learned along the blissful/virginal path. Laura has abandoned him, and this point is reiterated in this scene when the band members ask if he and Laura have broken up: “‘No,'
Alex answered silently. It was Laura. Laura. But he couldn’t bring himself to say her name out loud.” (202) It is in this scene, following the loss of not only his first time but also his first love, that we clearly see that Alex has arrived at the mourning after: “Before Laura. *Now?* He labored his way through a complex passage. *Now, in the world after Laura?* He shook his head. There was no world after Laura” (204). This is, without doubt, the fullest embodiment (at its most depressed and miserable state) of the mourning after.

Following this brief mourning period (after all the conventions of the genre would not permit for a sad ending), we are presented with the scene in which Alex and Laura realise they should be together and he proposes marriage. But the greater point to be noted here is that he undergoes the process that I have elaborated throughout this study. He is paranoid before virginity, he is hysterical afterwards (he needs to repeat the action to confirm), and there is a period of mourning. What is mourned is as much the loss of virginity as it was the loss of Laura in that moment. When the virgin loses his first love, this affects him doubly: he not only loses his lover but also the lover who “took” his virginity, with whom and from whom he acquired knowledge, and from whom he gained a new sexual identity. When the virgin loses his first love, the loss of the love is a reminder that he has also lost his virginity to a lover who no longer desires to be near him. He is doubly wounded. Of course, unlike so many real-life stories of such traumas, this story, *First and Forever*, ends happily: “‘Yes, love,’ Laura whispered back. ‘We’ve got forever’” (220); but the point remains: the first time came with its mourning after (which did not last *forever*, like the, we hope, happily ever after).
Alpha Virginity

Susan Napier’s *Secret Admirer*, which is part of a Harlequin Presents series known as “A Year Down Under” (novels that take place in Australia and New Zealand), presents another virgin hero, though quite different from Alex. The heroine of this novel is a typical heroine of the contemporary romance novel; she has had sex previously (with her deceased husband) and is, as is to be expected, beautiful (having previously been a model). The hero of the novel is an alpha male hero insofar as he is successful in business and flirtation, and has an aggressive personality; however, he has not yet been successful in the bedroom. Unlike many virgin heroes who give “clues” as to their virginity, Scott Gregory gives few clues or indications of his virginity (precisely the opposite seems true). Much of the novel revolves around the typical story of hero meets heroine; however, our hero here is trying to acquire the heroine’s late husband’s business (all of which is ultimately an attempt to destroy his father’s business).

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79 In the novel, we are told: “Grace had had no other lover but Jon, and Jon had been wonderful, but they had loved each other and he had always been tender and very concerned for her pleasure” (85).

80 Sarah S. G. Frantz is currently writing a book-length history of the “alpha male” in popular romance, *Alpha Male*, which will undoubtedly provide a larger and more in-depth understanding of the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the alpha male and his history in popular romance. In her work (presented at the IASPR conference, Brussels, August 5-7, 2010), she argues that in the 1970s, readers find the “rapetastic hero”; in the 1980s, the “emotionally charged hero”; in the 1990s, the “convention-defying hero”; and in the 2000s, “the erotic hero.” What is interesting from our perspective is that the rise of the male virgin in romance begins in 1989 (with foreshadowing in the mid 80s), but really takes off during the 2000s, or the period Frantz refers to as the time of “the erotic hero.”

81 As a reader of *Secret Admirer*, it is difficult to accept that Scott Gregory is indeed a virgin because he is so forceful, so aggressive; indeed one review at Amazon.com reads: “The hero is a virgin until he sleeps with Grace, the heroine. This was a definite shock for me, interesting but shocking. The problem is, upon reading the whole book I’m a little unsure if I can truly reconcile the ‘forceful’ persona of this 29 year old man with someone who’s never had any sexual experience because of a teenage trauma” (www.amazon.com/Secret-Admirer-Harlequin-Presents-Napier/dp/0373115547 retrieved July 6, 2011). Part of the problem here is the juxtaposition between the virgin male and the alpha male.
There can be no doubt that our hero is an alpha male, he exhibits and embodies every gesture of “spectacular masculinity” (128) as Radway terms it. His masculinity is confirmed when the two are trapped in an elevator (along with his date for the evening):

He was dressed, as was the woman, for an evening out, his dark suit superbly tailored to wide shoulders and lean hips. His olive skin wasn’t the result of an unseasonable tan. His black hair, broad high cheekbones and deep-set black eyes hinted at a Latin heritage—Spanish, perhaps, or Italian. His suit and gleaming black shoes were certainly Italian, thought Grace, studying them with a knowledgeable eye. His male chauvinism was probably as much a product of his heritage as of the natural arrogance indicated by the aggressive title of his jaw and his clipped manner of speaking. With a little nudge of spite Grace noticed his nose was by no means unobtrusive. Definitely a noble Roman nose, although to her chagrin she had to admit that it perfectly balanced those heavy-lidded eyes and finely arched brows. (8-9)

As we find in various treatments of the alpha male, his body figures heavily here and we have received very little indication as to his personality (though much of his personality is figured out from his body). He is an exotic male (Spanish, Italian, Latin, or Roman); presumably wealthy given the repeated references to his clothing (Italian) and, his male chauvinism is “as much a product of his heritage as of the natural aggressiveness indicated by the aggressive jaw and his clipped manner of speaking” (8-9). While I am certain there is much to be said in terms of exoticism, the point that I want to be noted here is the way in which the character is figured as “spectacular masculinity” (Radway 128). In our previous consideration of First and Forever, we were presented with a more sentimental hero, while
in *Secret Admirer*, we are introduced to an alpha hero who is defined almost entirely, at least initially, in terms of his body.

The matter of paranoia does not figure prominently in this novel; however aspects of fear are certainly present: “[s]he wasn’t aware of the rip he made in the back of her dress when *his shaking hands* wrenched the zip down, only of the molten sensuality of his gaze as he steered her into a shaft of light near the window and studied her breasts, nestled in their cups of pure white lace” (125-26, emphasis mine). He is clearly nervous, though she (like most readers) is unaware of why he is nervous, why his hands were shaking. This is one of the few physical indications we have of a sort of paranoia or fear attached to the first time—he is simply unprepared insofar as he has not yet experienced an encounter such as this.

The idea of the *first time* becomes a concern of the narrative. Additionally, we should note the possibility of Scott being a virgin is not in Grace’s thought process (after all the male virgin is an anomaly). We read:

“I’ve never made love on a table before,” she whispered with her relative inexperience. No doubt he was used to women who were terribly adventurous and sexually sophisticated. She thrust the jealous thought away and linked her arms around his neck, reminding herself that *she* could make him shake with passionate need. She could make up with enthusiasm for what she lacked in experience and he would never know the difference! (127)
Making love on the table would be a *first* for Grace, though, as far as she can tell, it would *not* be a first time for Scott. Moreover, at this point in the narrative, she believes that he shakes because of his “passionate need.” Indeed, while this may be partially true, it must also be acknowledged that his inexperience is also working against him here. But the paranoid virgin’s discourse appears shortly after this scene: “‘No, not here,’ he said hoarsely. ‘*The first time* should be in a bed...’” (127). The mythology of the first time appears and the way the first time should be: one *should not* have sex for the first time on a table; instead, it *should* happen in the familiar (and productive if we recall the opening of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*) locus of the bedroom and on the bed.\(^{82}\)

The first time has been imagined, predetermined, and sentimentalised long before it has happened (which, of course, we are now realising is common in the romance and perhaps extends quite far beyond the romance novel); the first time *should* be this way and not that way. Indeed, this notion of right-ness is repeated, “[h]e began to move with Grace in his arms and she turned her hot face against his broad chest, adoring him for caring enough to make this exactly right for them” (127). There is a “right” way to have one’s first time, even if only with a new partner (as is the case for Grace). Grace reinforces and confirms the paranoia of the first time (even though she does not yet realise that it is Scott’s first time, despite the fact that he has, at the very least, flirted with his virginal identity).

\(^{82}\) In the opening pages of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes that: “Sexuality was carefully confined [during the Victorian period]; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom” (3). Of course, Foucault’s vision of Victorian sexuality and eroticism has provoked considerable debate, for a recent addition to this debate that provides an introductory overview of Victorian sexuality, see: *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism* (2011) by Deborah Lutz.
The course of *jouissance* is, of course, authenticated in all of its passionate and erotic glory:

The moment when he took her would live vividly in her memory forever. The shocking reality of his first thrust stilled them both. He lay, his chest shaking, half across her body, his head buried in the curve of her neck. Surely, he wasn't going to stop now, thought Grace hysterically as her body slowly adjusted to the agonising fullness, and she felt the involuntary ripples of tension begin to absorb him even more deeply into her being. She plunged a hand into his sweat-drenched hair, and pulled his head back. (129)

Admittedly, this scene is described in an excessive fashion (as is the convention of the romance novel), but the greater point to be noted is that there is a movement towards *jouissance* and that Grace has already achieved a certain level of hysteria through bliss. But, more to our point of concern, Scott, like Alex in *First and Forever*, takes a moment—however brief—to consider and think about what he is doing. She fears he will stop, he stops (or slows down) so as to take note of what is happening, the first thrust. As well, like Alex, Scott and Grace have sex a second and third time (131), as though there is a need to affirm—through repetition—what has just happened between them.

And then, as readers, we are provided with the shocking revelation (at least in terms of what we are, as romance readers, expecting):

“Oh, are you so confident of your prowess?” she snapped defensively, feeling suddenly restless and argumentative. "You can turn any woman into your personal love machine?"
He seemed unruffled by her irritable crudity, a strange smile still playing around his lips. “On the contrary. I’m afraid I have no basis for comparison.”

“What?” Grace stared at him blankly.

He scooped up a slice of toast and bit into it. “Couldn't you tell, Grace? Was my gift such a paltry thing? I thought one’s partner could always tell.”

(133)

The “gift” that he is speaking about, of course, is his virginity and like the heroine in Last Virgin in California, he is stunned that Grace did not realise he was a virgin.

In terms of virginity discourses, the notion of gifting one’s virginity is not common to the ways that men describe their virginity and its loss. Carpenter writes: “[t]raditionally, the gift metaphor has been associated with femininity and Christian morality. Not surprisingly, more young women reported being urged to perceive virginity as a gift than did young men” (98). This does not mean however that men do not perceive their virginity as a gift; indeed, Carpenter writes that: “when men [...] approach virginity as a gift, [...] they are rejecting a traditional style of masculinity for a more relational, less aggressive alternative. [... It] is not yet wholly acceptable for men to treat their virginity as a gift; gender unorthodoxy still carries the threat of sanctions” (100). I note this here because the presentation of virginity as gift is problematic at least within the context of research on virginity insofar as men did not and still often do not consider their virginity as a gift; instead, I would contend the author is feminising the virgin story here so as to relate it back to the more common story of a virgin heroine. The author is consciously inverting the
codes of the genre that would require a virgin heroine and thus renders the male’s virginity as being akin to female virginity.

Another idea at play in the above quotation from the novel (Napier 138) is that even if virginity is not acknowledged, surely it will be recognised in the performance that he was a virgin. This is fundamental to the paranoid discourse: that one’s virginity is known because of the performance of the virgin. He worries about being good, about not hurting her, and so on.

“Why, that it was my first time, of course.” And, as she continued to stare at him uncomprehendingly over the top of the cup, his smile gentled into a tender warmth.

“You were my initiation, Grace. I gave you my virginity; you gave me my manhood.”

And, leaving her gasping and choking with shocked disbelief, a pool of hot coffee soaking into the sheets around her, he calmly turned and walked out of the house. (133)

Grace is likely as surprised as the reader (for the male virgin was certainly not a regular character in the romance novel, let alone an alpha male virgin!) by the revelation that she was his first time, his first love. This revelation and confession closes the chapter and the narrative of the first time proper; everything that now follows will be about the first time and how it affected Scott (a narrative position of reflection and retrospection).
Scott’s words open the next chapter and confirm my theorisation that hysteria follows the first time: “I thought one’s partner could always tell...it was my first time...” (134). The immediate concern is that Scott thought one could always tell when his or her lover was a virgin. But, read closer, the sentence begins with the indefiniteness of “one’s partner” and closes with the definiteness of “my first time.” Scott’s own subjectivity is being put into question: is he/am I an anomaly? This is the very thought process that we previously saw in Last Virgin in California, the shocking realisation that one might not be recognised as a virgin. This is the mourning after, the complete shock, the surprise that paranoia could not prevent. But the surprise works both ways: “[i]t was a joke, it had to be! Either that, or he had intended it as a distraction from any guilt she might start to feel about giving herself to someone other than Jon. If so, tasteless as it had been, it worked admirably!” (134). She cannot believe it is possible that he could have been a virgin and thus presumes that he says he is a virgin so as to alleviate any guilt she might have following sex with someone other than her (dead) husband. She ultimately convinces herself that he must have been joking: “Why was she even entertaining the thought that he might have been serious?” (135)

Following this moment of uncertainty, we are introduced to the greatest source of mourning insofar as we are told about Scott’s adolescence, a period in which his mother died and his father remarried. His father married Monique Redman, who, as we will learn, was a destructive force in Scott’s life, particularly while he was mourning the death of his mother. We learn quite quickly:

Taking her cue from her husband, Monique Redman had treated the grief-stricken boy even more confusingly, frightening him with the
unpredictability of her moods, either ignoring him or fawning embarrassingly over him. When his body had begun to show the first signs of manhood she teased him mercilessly about it in front of her glamorous friends, pointing out the changes, touching him and making jokes and remarks that, at twelve, he didn’t fully understand and yet which he sensed were deeply wrong within the context of their enforced relationship. (151-52)

I do not want to cite exhaustively here, but I do want the reader of this study to gain an appreciation for the type of relation he has had with Monique Redman. Her relationship to Scott has been predicated by the ways in which Scott relates to his father and the loss of his mother. This sort of narrative continues and we learn of various abuses of trust and responsibility on the part of the parent. But more specifically, because he has had sex with Grace (he has revealed himself), he feels comfortable enough to begin to fully reveal himself to her. The pain of this situation overwhelms the narrative and its reader, “[Grace] put out a hand” we are told “to stop him torturing himself with needless details but the bitter words spilled on” (154). He feels a need to tell this story so as to overcome the traumas associated with his childhood and he only feels he is able to do this because of the intimacy between himself and Grace. In this narrative, the mourning after is a liberating moment because it allows him to come to terms with his sexuality and his history, as we shall see.

The following scene establishes the source of anxiety and trauma for the young virgin because it is a moment in which his stepmother tries to rape him; however, his father, who interrupts the action, misreads the signs of this scene:
“She timed it very neatly...one day when I was changing out of my school uniform. Unfortunately, life isn’t always so obligingly neat. My—Lincoln had cut short a business trip and walked in to find me naked, clutching his semi-clad wife as I was trying to mount her rather than fight her off— [...] And the fact that I was erect utterly condemned me.” (154)

This is a rather polemical scene because it would appear that things are a certain way, but the reality of the situation (at least from Scott’s perspective) is quite different. We are reminded here of a situation that Monro describes, “[w]hen I did a late-night radio phone-in show, listeners were invited to call in with their stories. One of the most memorable, for all the wrong reasons, was that of a young man who lost his virginity because he was too scared to put a stop to it” and she further notes, “[h]is body might have given the green light, but his mind had not” (126). The erection is not a sign that grants permission to have sex with it, there is still a person attached to that erection that may or may not desire to have sex.

In their study “Male victims of rape and sexual abuse,” Adrian W. Coxell and Michael B. King make this very point,

Unfortunately, the belief that a man cannot obtain an erection if he does not want one or is in a state of fear and anxiety has been found to be shared by lawyers, (Sarrell & Masters, 1982). However, this (probably common) belief is not supported by Kinsey, et al. (1948) whose work on the sexual responses of young males led them to conclude that ‘The record suggests that the physiologic mechanism of any emotional response (anger, fright, pain, etc)
may be the mechanism of sexual response’ (qtd in Sarrell & Masters). […]

Thus there is evidence that high levels of physiological arousal can lead to involuntary erection and/or ejaculation on the part of survivors. (381)

I point this out because there is at play an important discussion about issues of rape and how we understand rape in Napier’s novel. To these ends, it should be noted that, “an interesting and important fact about sexual assaults on adult males is that it is a relatively new area of scientific inquiry” (Coxell and King 380). The point that should be noted here is that men can be raped within the contexts of heterosexuality and that it is being considered and explored in the space of romance fiction. Within this particular scene, everything would seem to read or imply that Scott was in the wrong, which is to say he was guilty (and this is how his father reads it), but for Scott everything was simply wrong. Following this attempted rape—let’s call it what it is—Scott is sent away to a boarding school.

As is so often the case in the virgin hero narrative, there must be a reason for why the man is a virgin and in the case of Secret Admirer it is more traumatic than in most novels. He was the victim of an attempted rape, and this has shattered his ideas and feelings about sex (which previously may have been attached to a notion of a loving relationship, rather than as an affirmation of power). It is his sexual experience with Grace, as he himself will admit, that allows him to overcome earlier traumas; but it is also these earlier traumas that cause his paranoia about sex. He knows that sex can be painful (physical and psychic pains) and he knows that sex does not require love, and thus, if we re-read the first time, these moments become all the more pronounced. The rest of the novel attends to these moments of trauma and his sense of abandonment: “‘I should go,’ she
said, but weakly, courting danger” and he responds, ‘How can you abandon me now, when I need you so much...?’” (162).

Ultimately, as is required of the romance novel, he says in response to her question about why her and not another woman: “[b]ecause I’m in love with you, of course...” (165).83 The point to be noted here is that while it is true the genre demands this confession; it is perhaps more noteworthy that a man who seemed incapable of love at the beginning of the novel has now been tamed (and “cured” of a traumatic past). The point that I think is most important to note here, particularly within the framework of this study, is that the virgin does undergo a process of paranoia (this time in a doubled sense: fear of the first time, and fears caused by an attempted rape), jouissance, hysteria (he thought a

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83 Romance novels have often been compared to pornography and recently, Catherine Roach (2011) has argued that the “I love you” line in romance would be akin to “the money shot” in pornography. Additionally, Lisa Fletcher has discussed the importance of “I love you” in her book, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*, in which, she argues: “this book takes ‘I love you’ as a synecdoche of heterosexuality’s insistent and compulsory repetition. ‘I love you’ is uttered as the clarifying conclusion in the paradigmatic narrative of sexual intelligibility which ties a line of causality through the points of sex, gender, and sexuality (a male who is masculine desires a female who is feminine and vice versa.) To this extent heterosexual romance fictions can be read performatively as an incessant rendition of heterosexuality’s promised but never fully achieved absolute intelligibility” (34). Pamela Regis has recently provided a lengthy review and critique of Fletcher’s book in the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*. Regis provides an important intervention at the end of her review, when she writes: “[w]hat, though, shall one make of the fact that romance novelists—both historical and contemporary—have also repeatedly imagined alternatives to heterosexuality that carry through to the end of the novel? The world of gay, lesbian, and other non-hetero romance fiction includes texts as generically and tonally diverse as *Maurice* by E.M. Forster (written 1913-14; published 1971) which depicts the betrothal of two heroes, *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith (1952) which depicts the betrothal of two heroines, and *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* by Ann Herendeen (2005), a Regency-era historical romance novel which depicts the betrothal of two heroes and a heroine. Each novel includes a declaration—everyone says ‘I love you.’ Indeed, f/f, m/m, ménage, and other non-hetero unions are increasingly widespread in the romance genre. At the very least, the existence of these books points to a serious, unanswered challenge to Fletcher’s claims about the heteronormative significance of the ‘I love you’ speech act and the genre it defines” (no pagination, online: http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/JPRS1.1_Regis_ReviewFletcher.pdf). There is still much to be said about the importance of the “I love you” in romance fiction; to these ends, I have recently argued (2011) that we need to also focus on the matter of “flirting” and “kissing” wherein, “the kiss if the performative utterance that concludes and ‘seals the deal.’ You may now kiss the bride. The kiss is the affirmation of flirting” (Allan, “Too Much and Too Little: On Flirting and Kissing”)
virgin was always noticed), and then mourning (because of the first time he is able to come
to terms with the presumed impossibility of love due to a sexually violent past and accept
that love is possible in a loving relationship). And readers happily learn that she is given a
“marriage contract and it contained a bride price. Fifty percent of Scott Electronics” and
later Scott says, “Aren’t the terms favourable enough, Grace? Do you want more? Sixty
percent? A hundred” (187) and she replies, “I don’t want your money, Scott. I just want
you” (188). For Scott his material possessions, which have been so important to his own
sense of self, are rendered worthless, and it is Scott who is full of worth for Grace. Here is
the confirmation of love, and the novel, as is expected, ends happily. But, even though this
novel follows the conventions of formula fiction, we can surely recognise that it is tackling
difficult issues and working through these issues in a fashion that demonstrates their
complexity.

Throughout this chapter, I have provided readings of two popular romance novels
and attempted to demonstrate how precisely the first time and the mourning after unfolds
in each. The question of mourning and its affects is a problematic one, because, I imagine,
there is a reluctance to see the first time in relation to what I constitute to be a necessary
mourning after. I have argued that mourning is the culmination of everything and the
subject recognises (and reconciles) and says, utters, admits: “I did (that thing).” Mourning
is a looking back, a turning toward the past. I do not, however, mean to suggest that
mourning is akin to nostalgia, which would be less a looking back and more a longing for
the past. In this scenario, nostalgia would render the process of mourning as a desire to
return to the time before the first time. I do not believe that this is the experience of the
first time that I am describing, nor am I interested in it. If there must be nostalgia then I
would locate it within the realm of hysteria wherein the subject attempts to understand if he or she has actually completed the first time.

Mourning is a productive labour that is intellectual, emotional, and psychic; mourning, which is neither negative nor positive (at least not necessarily so), is, in this formulation, a response to the first time. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud observes that “[m]ourning is more commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on” (310). At its base, my understanding and utilisation of mourning shares much in common with this Freudian definition.

Mourning, as I posit it, is about understanding loss: a loss of a particular facet, which in turn, participates (through its loss) in the constitution of the self. In the above novels, Secret Admirer and First and Forever, both heroes lose their virginity and these losses come to affect the narrative as a whole, both in the temporal moment of chronological reading (from start to finish) and upon a reflexive and reflective reading. When the reader learns of the hero’s first time, the narrative begins to make sense; things are re-covered precisely because a new meaning has been established in the text.

But more to the intellectual, psychic, and emotional labour of mourning: the matter is that the hero must mourn that which has now been lost, his virginity, his first time. Both Alex and Scott are, in a sense, impressed by these losses precisely because a new identity must now be negotiated. To deny the importance of the first time and its loss would be tantamount to a failure to mourn, “inability (or unwillingness) to mourn” Phillips writes, “leads to a fear of loving, which amounts for Freud to an ability to love” (Darwin's Worms
Thus, if we choose to deny the importance of the “mourning after” to the first time, I argue, this means we are not yet prepared to move beyond the first time towards a second time. Mourning is essential to the narrative we construct for ourselves. There is, in this regard, a difference between mourning and melancholia, though there is certainly as Freud notes a “correlation” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 310). Freud explains that

> Melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment. (“Mourning and Melancholia” 311)

It is clear that there is a categorical difference between mourning and melancholia and, I would suggest, aside from the recriminations of self, it is a sense of permanence and stasis. The subject becomes immobile, cannot move forward or backward. Instead, the subject lives in a sort of circular or spiralling introspective position of self-abuse. Mourning is recognition of loss and a moving forward and from the melancholic feelings that may be found in moments of mourning.

In both novels and in the one I will discuss next there are mentions of melancholy, but at no point does the narrative genuinely situate itself in the pathology of melancholia. Melancholy within the structure of romance is most commonly associated with a romanticised vision of the poet, or a genius toiling with the muses, or someone for whom sadness seems to clutter his notion of self. Alex appears melancholic but he is certainly not suffering, at least not in any clinical sense, from melancholia. Instead, if we are to use
Freud’s correlation, our focus must be on mourning and moving beyond the first time and toward a second time, “mourning is” as Phillips declares “the necessary suffering that makes life more possible” (Darwin’s Worms 27). Indeed, the point that must be insisted upon is that “[m]ore life is only possible if we let ourselves mourn; and yet, [Freud] says, those who renounce life (and love) are in a perpetual state of mourning” (Phillips, Darwin’s Worms 28). Mourning is a productive labour that allows us to live forward and to love forward and each of these novels demonstrates this very point. Alex and Scott live forward precisely because they have come to understand their first times and the idiosyncrasies and minutiae of their lives, which have informed that experience.

**Galahad’s Virginity**

In what follows, I attend to my last textual example, Galahad in Blue Jeans, which is a Silhouette Intimate Moments romance and is set “way out west: because there’s nothing like a cowboy” as the back-cover tells the reader. The very title of the volume alludes to its virginal potential, Galahad, of course, being one of medieval literature’s most famous virgins (and his story is once again made famous in the nineteenth century by poets like Lord Tennyson and William Morris and continues to be present in the twentieth century).

The story of Galahad, taken from the medieval Arthurian romances, is fairly well known and for practical purposes serves here as the first literary virgin with the tradition of romance (admittedly, there are likely others, Jesus Christ seems an obvious enough example and Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh); however, Galahad’s fame seems consistent and his name has become synonymous with virginity. Galahad is the illegitimate son of Lancelot: “[m]any said unto the queen he resemble much unto Sir Launcelot” (Malory 661) and his mission or quest is to “enchieve the Sangreal” (Malory 661). The illegitimacy of
Galahad is a point that is repeated and readers are told: “for he is of all parties come to the best knights of the world and of the highest lineage; for Sir Launcelot is come but of the eighth degree from Lord Jesu Christ, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, therefore I dare say they be the greatest gentlemen in the world” (Malory 664). Much is made of Galahad’s relationship to Lancelot, and, within the tradition of romance, we can see that Galahad is being described in a rather heroic fashion. We are not to doubt his heroism—though we may doubt that he is a “legitimate” child. In a certain fashion, Galahad functions as Lancelot’s sexual inversion insofar as Lancelot is evidently quite sexual (and potent as evidenced by his productivity) while Galahad is virginal. Indeed, this point is reiterated when Galahad has completed a series of quests, “and Sir Galahad is a maid and sinned never” (681, emphasis added). Galahad becomes a prototype for the male virgin hero insofar as there can be no doubt of his heroism; however, his sexuality is entirely absent (unlike his father). Indeed, in the nineteenth-century, poets like William Morris and Alfred Tennyson turn to the story of Galahad and re-invent his character and story. Tennyson’s poem, for instance, plays with this question of virginity and heroism: “My strength is as the strength of ten, / Because my heart is pure” (ll. 3-4) and in the second stanza this point is elaborated further, “Me mightier transports move and thrill; / So keep I fair thro’ faith and prayer / A virgin heart in work and will” (ll. 22-24, emphasis added).

In Galahad in Blue Jeans, we are presented with a rural American environment, which highlights the intimate moments and simplicity of country life. The hero of the novel, Matt Whitewolf, is part of the alpha male tradition in that his virility is never really in question, he is modestly successful, and he does save the life of the heroine, Vivian Ashland and her daughter, during a storm. However, he will also be presented in a rather
sentimental—if not pitiful—fashion: he is not “school” smart as he is illiterate and must overcome his illiteracy (which, as we shall see, serves a symbolic function). We learn throughout the narrative that Vivian has been running away from her abusive husband and then encounters the virginal hero. As this is a romance novel and as the heroism must be defined and established, he is very clearly defined as heroic when he helps Vivian give birth to her child (a second child) following the initial accident (where he saved Vivian for the first time). This novel thrives on its country background and thus a doctor or midwife cannot arrive in time and instead, as the back-cover reads, “rancher to the rescue” (which may very well reflect the interests of a reader who is less interested in the city and instead desires a “country” feel to their novels).

Throughout the novel, we are forced to decide whether or not Matt is a virgin or virginal. There are various “clues” or “oddities” in which the virginity discourse begins to unfold and readers can speculate about his sexuality. The predominant question in readers’ minds will be whether or not the hero is a virgin, especially if they are aware of the cultural contexts of the name Galahad (the most obvious clue). At one point, quite early in the novel, we learn, “[h]e dated, but he wasn’t into commitment and he had never taken a woman home to his bed. Vivian in his big four-poster bed was unique” (Orwig 34). This is,

84 Sedgwick in Epistemology of the Closet pays particular attention to the figure of the bachelor: “I want to suggest here that with Thackeray and other early and mid-Victorians a character classification of ‘the bachelor’ came into currency, a type that for some men both narrowed the venue, and at the same time startlingly desexualized the question of male sexual choice. [...] In the work of such writers as [George] Du Maurier, [J. M.] Barrie, and [Henry] James, among others, male homosexual panic was acted out as a sometimes agonized sexual anaesthesia that was damaging to both its male subjects and its female non-objects” (188). I note this because there seems to be an implied queer reading of this text (indeed, a reading that will take place in footnotes here). However, I am not comfortable with the absence of sexual activity rendering the subject gay or queer (this is, after all, something I have been arguing against; indeed, to require a classifiable sexuality is detrimental, I think, to the category of virginity which will only help to define sexuality).
perhaps, the epitome of the flirtatious method that I have been arguing for in this dissertation—the novel *flirts* with the possibility of him being a virgin. The statement, “he had never taken a woman home to his bed” (34), can be read in at least two fashions: the first is that he is a virgin; the second is that he has *only* never taken a woman to his bed (perhaps he has been to other beds). Moreover, the narrative seems to imply and privilege the flirtatious since “he wasn't into commitment” (34).

These types of lonely moments re-appear throughout the narrative, for instance at one point he is taking “stock again of his own solitary life” (37). But the question that must be asked is: why is he living a solitary life? The narrative tells us, while with the heroine and her daughter, “[h]e stroked the child’s hair lightly and thought about going through life without children. He had never given it a thought before because he intended to go through life without marrying. It stood to reason there would be no children, but now he suspected he might be missing what was really vital” (37). There are a series of confluences that can be unpacked here: the dominant discourse of heterosexual reproductivity being chief among them (marry and produce children) and how this influences the question of virginity. To have never worried about children seems to have a non-sexual implication given that almost every heterosexual relation would, at the very least, posit, an unexpected outcome, however remote (we might call this paranoia). We are later told, after a series of minor epiphanies (surprises for those who are paranoid), “for the first time in his life he wanted a woman in his house, and the idea *surprised* him” (39, emphasis mine). I think, however, that this paranoia helps to reinforce my argument about the first time and the

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85 In a queer reading (for it seems hard to deny this critical possibility, at least at this point in the narrative), another outcome is that he has shared his bed with men.
mourning after. Matt is a virginal paranoiac who is now having a series of minor epiphanies—surprises!—about his own identity and how his sexual affinities and desires are starting to influence these epiphanies.

As with the novels discussed above, there are indications and announcements of virginity, for instance, “I do get lonesome sometimes. Most of the time, I’m happy to be out here by myself” (48). In this brief moment he allows for the possibility that “his own solitary life” (37) is perhaps not always the best option. When Vivian begins to think about Matt, she, like the queerly informed reader, asks: “You don’t like women?” (55), to which Matt responds that indeed he does like women but that he is reluctant to marry. These questions and consternations become the barrier of this novel and eventually the hero and heroine realise that they do indeed love one another and incidentally have fallen in love with one another.

These questions of doubt about sexuality run rampant throughout the novel and at one point Vivian says to Matt, “[y]ou were Sir Galahad to the rescue the other day” (80). Indeed, Matt is very much a Galahad-type hero. He is noble and pure of heart (as Malory might have it), he is masculine and virile, and he is virginal. However, the scene to which I shall now devote attention is the admission of his weakness, as it were, in which Matt admits, “I don’t know how to read” (109). However, I would ask that we pay close attention to this admission because I will argue this is the virginal confession, “[h]e had never admitted to anyone that he couldn’t read” (111, emphasis mine). It seems that his inability

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86 It is worth noting that each of the romance novels studied in this dissertation make a point of asking if the hero is gay. In this regard, a male must either be a performing heterosexual or he must be gay – thus the possibility of male virginity is difficult for the heroine to grasp, understand, and consider.
to read is serving metaphorically as an acknowledgement of his virginity (in the same fashion that readers and Vivian are unable to read his sexuality). Virginity is like a novel to him: untouched and unread. He is a virgin to reading and he has thus never completed a narrative (readerly) journey. Quite literally, for this hero, reading becomes like sex. Indeed, this possibility is partially confirmed when pages later we learn, “he had never had a serious commitment in his life” (126) and “[h]e was like a fifteen-year-old kid with raging hormones” (127). Both of these qualities are given meaning (we are now able to begin reading) as he begins to realise that he is attracted to and in love with Vivian. The inability to read coupled with the rising desire to be with Vivian is the flirtatious site of virginity precisely because there is no immediate and direct discussion taking place but rather an alluding to, a hinting at, a talking around.

It seems worth repeating an earlier discussion of flirting. Phillips has argued that “[t]he fact that people tend to flirt only with serious things—madness, disaster, other people—and the fact that flirting is a pleasure makes it a relationship, a way of doing things, worth considering” (On Flirtation xviii) and he further writes that “flirting is fine, but to be a flirt is not [...] Flirts are dangerous because they have a different way of believing in the real thing” (On Flirtation xviii) wherein the difference is at the level of merely performing an act (flirting) or quite literally becoming and being a “flirt.” To be a flirt means that the acting has become wholly consuming and has become a way of not only believing but also a way of being. I have argued (2011) that flirting, like loving, is a dangerous adventure that one can find to be entirely pleasurable, and yet, at the same time, entirely dangerous. But, in Galahad in Blue Jeans, the flirting is more than just a matter of pleasure. Flirting is a way of revealing without ever having to admit. That is, he is able to
flirt with his virginity without ever having to fully admit his virginity. Men do not want to admit to being a virgin because of the stigmas attached to male virginity. Vivian, likewise, flirts with the possibility that he is a virgin, he is like Galahad and she tells him this; however, this flirt is lost to him as he admits he cannot read (and likely has not read Malory, Tennyson, or Morris). Flirting is a productive way (and entirely unproductive way) to talk about sexuality because there is only a touch of danger involved (only if one is recognised as being a flirt or if the flirtation is returned).

But flirting, as I have defined it, also allows for the possibility of danger. For Vivian, she must flirt with the possibility of allowing a man to be close to her again and throughout the narrative we see this negotiation unfold. Vivian has been a victim of abuse and has subsequently grown distrustful of men (in a fashion similar to Scott in Secret Admirer). As such, Matt must earn her trust and respect and this is precisely what happens throughout the narrative. It is one thing to flirt with someone, another to become enamoured and enter into a relationship with someone. This is a point the novel makes quite clear. We flirt with many things, as Phillips would say: “madness, disaster, other people.”

Flirting, of course, demands recognition of it as such and it also hopes that everyone understands that it is just flirting. Vivian is able to question flirtatiously his virginity, they are able to flirt with the possibility of a relationship, and he is able to flirt with his virginity (instead of announcing it). Flirting is, in a way, a safe (or, at the very least, safer) form of paranoia. Flirting knows that secrets and surprises can happen; but flirting is a sort of insurance insofar as even if the signs are read incorrectly, which is always possible given the duplicitous nature of flirtation, he can playfully admit it was just silly flirtation. To flirt is to expect and not expect surprise (all at the same time). This novel, unlike First and
*Forever* and *Secret Admirer*, is overwhelmingly flirtatious, to the point that the reader begins to wonder if anything will come of the relationship when, two hundred pages in, the characters have not yet confirmed their love for one another.

*Galahad in Blue Jeans*, I have suggested, is more flirtatious than *First and Forever* and *Secret Admirer*, but all romance novels are intrinsically flirtatious because they are about a building a relationship from the ground up, so to speak. But flirting is another aspect of negotiating the first time in *Galahad in Blue Jeans*, which perhaps was not as important in other novels. Flirting allows for the characters to hint at things rather than speak to them directly. In other words, there is no need to literally announce one’s own virginity (nor is it essential for the author to do it); rather one can hint, allude, nudge at the matter. The author openly flirts with the hero’s virginity when she includes Galahad in her title. Flirting in *Galahad in Blue Jeans* is not about enticing the amorous other, but rather it about talking about issues without directly addressing the issues. The hero’s inability to read functions in relation to his hitherto incomplete first time.

Indeed, in continuing with Phillips’ psychoanalytic ruminations on flirting, it might be useful to consider Freud’s notion of “psychic impotence.” In his essay, “Concerning the Most Universal Debasement in Erotic Life,” Freud begins, “[i]f the psychoanalyst asks himself for which illness he is most frequently approached for help—apart from various forms of anxiety—he must reply: psychical impotence” (250), which is a,

strange disorder [that] affects men of a highly libidinous nature, and is expressed in the refusal of the executive organs of sexuality to perform the sexual act, despite the fact that they can be demonstrated to be intact and
properly functioning both before and after, and that there is a strong psychical inclination to the performance of the act. (250).

The matter being considered in *Galahad in Blue Jeans* is one wherein Matt is, it would seem, capable of performing a given act and there is, as we come to learn, a desire to love and be loved; however, there is an impediment in the way, a metaphorical impotence, his inability to read. This inability or impotence is what prevents Matt from completing the first time. The novel and its characters flirt precisely because it is an admission without admission. Freud further contends that, “[i]f he [the patient] has repeatedly experienced such a failure, by making a familiar erroneous connection [between the internal obstacle and the sexual object] he will probably conclude that the memory of the first occasion has prompted repetitions as a disturbing anxiety” (250). His inability to read has thus caused a sort of “anxiety,” which clutters the subject’s understanding of himself. The novel, of course, does not speak in terms of “psychical impotence,” but it does speak about the potency (which is to say abilities) of the hero: he is, in a sense, made weak (less potent) because he cannot read, which, accordingly, stands in, metaphorically speaking, for his virginity and sexuality, and thus renders him impotent. However, once he is able to read, he is able to begin to imagine a potent and thus sexual and loving relation with Vivian.

This moment of erotic tension—the rising libido of the narrative—is a radical shift for the hero insofar as he has had no affirmative thoughts of marriage (as he has thought about marriage insofar as he has expressed a desire not to marry), and now he is incapable of imagining life without Vivian, “[h]e groaned and pushed her away. “Let me love you, Vivian” he said, stroking her breasts. “You’re beautiful. How many nights have I dreamed of you! I can’t tell you. I can’t work for thinking about you—”” (196). Within this moment there
is, as we have seen previously with Alex and Scott, recognition of this being the first time: “[i]f only he knew he was succeeding beyond measure” (196). Presumably, had he had experience, he would be able to know he was pleasing her, “she felt like a woman, desirable, needed, complete in his loving” (196). He is unable to read Vivian and her reactions to his touch, his love, in the same way he was unable to read a novel. The correlation between his virginity and flirting via reading (something she has taught him to do) is later confirmed:

She was naked, beautiful. All woman with all of a woman’s mysteries, yet she was also part of his heart in a way no one else had ever been. She had changed his life, brought companionship and children into it, given him a new world with his reading. Now he wanted to pleasure and give and do everything he could for her. (197)

The erotic episode is compared to his new ability to read. She had given him the ability to read and this is brought up in the space of the erotic moment, the movement toward completion. His inability to read, like virginity, was shameful and now he has managed to overcome this shame (with, of course, the assistance of Vivian) and now he wants to give her something and “do everything he could for her.” Moreover, we should note that “she was also a part of his heart in a way no one else had ever been” (197), which is as much a reference to the fullest potential of love as a confirmation of his virginal experiences.

This scene continues and we see the rising climax and also the moment of recognition when it is all about to change: “Matt was on fire, his fingers locked in her hair. He wanted to pleasure her, but momentarily, he was lost in what she was doing to him.
Deep down, he knew this was a *once-in-a-lifetime moment* (198, emphasis mine). The theory that I have been arguing is once again confirmed insofar as the first time is a “once-in-a-lifetime moment” and I would further argue that this recognition is the beginning of the mourning after. The two have sex. And during their path towards bliss, the hysteria begins to appear: “[h]ad they been rushing headlong to this moment all evening?” (200). Obviously there was a certain amount of desire between the two and even a certain amount of “plotting,” as Phillips might have it (“Plotting for Kisses” 95), given the fact that there are condoms ready for use: “[h]e picked up the small packet and removed the contents. She reached out to help him, taking over the task and putting the thin sheath in place while his dark eyes devoured her” (Orwig 199). The condom speaks to the fundamentally paranoid nature of sexuality insofar as it works to ensure that there be no ‘bad surprises,’ but it also can speak to his virginal nature insofar as she “helps him” with the condom.87 While there

87 A recent article published in the *Journal of Family Planning & Reproductive Health Care* made the bold claim that romance novels are dangerous to women’s health because, as the author, Susan Quilliam, writes: “There’s a final, worrying difference between sexual health professionals and the producers of romantic fiction. To be blunt, we like condoms – for protection and for contraception – and they don’t.” In one recent survey, only 11.5% of romantic novels studied mentioned condom use, and within these scenarios the heroine typically rejected the idea because she wanted ‘no barrier’ between her and the hero” (180). This article was published in a highly regarded British medical journal. The survey to which Quilliam refers as being “recent” is indeed dated by well over a decade; the survey was completed in 1999 by Amanda B. Diekman, Mary McDonald, and Wendi L. Gardner and published as “Love Means Never Having to Be Careful: The Relationship Between Reading Romance Novels and Safe Sex Behavior” (2000) and was published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. The survey: “[a] total of 86 romance novels were selected; 8 novels were excluded from coding because intercourse between the main characters was merely stated as having taken place, without a description of the interaction. In the remaining 78 novels, the average description of the first instance of intercourse between the main characters lasted four pages. […] The sampled novels represented the work of 46 authors and 21 publishers. Publication year ranged from 1981 to 1996, with 54 (69.2%) of the novels published after 1990, when awareness of HIV and other STD among heterosexuals was relatively high. […] In all, only 9 (11.5%) novels portrayed condom use” (181). However, Quilliam, like Diekman, McDonald, and Gardner, concludes that because of romance novels women readers are victim to this apparent anti-condom agenda presented in these novels (as though women cannot think for themselves, realise they are reading fiction, or even imagine the possibility of pregnancy or illness); Quilliam writes: “I may be a party-pooper, but I would argue that a huge number of issues that we see in our clinics and therapy rooms are influenced by romantic fiction” (181, emphasis added). No other literary genre, including literary fiction, would ever be summarised as having such an effect on readers (indeed, were literature this powerful, one would want to be very cautious around readers of murder mysteries). I would argue that this condemnation
is an argument to be made, perhaps, that the woman can put the condom on the male so that the experience is shared, or that it helps to build eroticism, it is interesting that in this virginal narrative, in which she has helped him learn to read, she is now assisting him with the condom.88

The hysteria in this narrative is less pronounced and the only indications we have about the possible confusion of the moment is that she refers to him as Galahad following their first sexual encounter and that they then have sex again: the importance of repetition to virginity loss cannot be denied. But this may, as we are slowly coming to realise, be a mere convention of the genre. However, the “mere convention,” as I have just termed it, is of the romance genre (as a whole) is partly, if not wholly, due to the fact that its audience is, by and large, women. But, I digress, even if this is not the case and even if Quilliam’s concern is genuine, she still has an obligation to fully research her topic fully (and the Journal of Family Planning & Reproductive Health Care has an obligation to ensure this through its peer review process, even if as is the case of Quilliam’s article, it is an internal peer review). In 1999, in his Passion’s Fortune: The Story of Mills & Boon (which is to say, one year before the “recent survey” that Quilliam speaks of), Joseph McAleer writes: “In the age of AIDS, condoms are now common, with the hero ‘turning away to attend to certain matters’ before resuming his conquest of the heroine” (287). In 1999, McAleer recognised that condoms are now “common” in the Mills & Boon romance, and yet, in 2012, Quilliam relies on a study published in 2000 that shows that only 11.5% of romances written between 1981 (before the HIV/AIDS crisis) and 1996 included mention of condoms. However, it should be noted that Galahad in Blue Jeans includes a condom but never mentions the word explicitly. It is also worth noting that Quilliam does not cite or refer to a single romance novel in which there is no condom use or there is condom use; she does wax poetic about having read Georgette Heyer as a child, who predominantly wrote Georgian and Regency romances (most of her contemporary romances have been out of print). As is so common in scholarship of the romance, the critic (in this case Quilliam) infantilises the reader, which is to say, the female reader of silly romances and escapist fantasies that do not advocate safe sex. It is this kind of research – research that was quoted in a wide variety of international media – that continues to damage the scholarly pursuits and reputation of the romance novel within the academy. Genuine scholars of the romance novel are often spending a great deal of time defending their genre of study, precisely because it is perpetually a victim of intellectual violence.

88 It is worth noting here that in the 1992 edition of Alex Comfort’s The New Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking for the Nineties, almost all mentions of condoms refer to “risky” sex or to the rise of HIV and AIDS, and not about a joint sexual experience. Indeed, before the reader reaches the Table of Contents, the reader is advised that: “[t]his book discusses Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other medical conditions that may be sexually transmitted. The advice and/or information included in this book should be considered in the light of the present understanding of such health risks. The reader is advised to consult a physician about these risks.”
important because it works to demonstrate the constant nature of the first time and the mourning after. Thus, even in romance, even with the happily ever after guaranteed, the first time must include these various notions (paranoia, jouissance, hysteria), including the seemingly negative sides of the first time. What we mourn in the first time may be any number of things as we have seen: in First and Forever, the hero mourns a lost adolescence, in Secret Admirer, the hero mourns a loss of innocence, and in Galahad in Blue Jeans, the mourning is less pronounced, but it is a loss of an idea (in this case, a mourning what could have been, like Marcel mourning Albertine and all that could have been had that relationship continued into a fully blossomed loving relationship). The hero mourns what could have been had it not been for some sort of impediment to his success, in this particular case, the inability to read and its affect on his notion of self.

Throughout much of the novel, Matt has been reluctant to commit, to accept love, and finally, as the novel closes this notion seems to crumble: the comfort of solitude is replaced by the joy of love: “[h]e wasn’t going to change or propose or make a commitment. If he had been ready to establish something, last night would have been the time. Everything he had done conveyed love except the spoken words” (205). The narrative and heroine begin to wonder:

Was there love in his heart? Was it because of old inadequacies that he couldn’t declare his love? He had told her about his past—that he had never known love before, never known what it meant to be a family. She knew he was sensitive about his country ways, too, and he viewed her as far more educated and sophisticated. Did he still feel their differences were so great, and was he misjudging the depth of her feelings? (205-6)
His fears are kept within the narrator’s view, reflecting off of Vivian’s own thoughts, and his past, like the previous heroes, is what haunts him. He is now reading, he is now having sex, and yet, there is a part of him that still needs to be overcome. These initiations provide him the means for these repressed identities to reappear and to be attended to, finally. The greater inability here is the impossibility of love, this is the final barrier to be overcome, “I like to love you—” (211), Matt says to Vivian. He is not yet capable of fully admitting his love for Vivian. His solitude and its causes are being addressed here. In this novel then, regret is the primary form of mourning. What we regret—the lost opportunity of love or the lost opportunity of a different (perhaps better) first time—is what we mourn.

Mourning is not necessarily about mourning something that was had and then lost, but rather, mourning can be about what could have been if the conditions were right. Vivian ultimately leaves the comforts of Matt’s home and we are left with Matt’s story: “Matt sat alone on the porch, sipping a beer, and thinking about Vivian. He heard an owl’s lonesome hoot somewhere off in the distance and there was a hollow echo of emptiness in his heart” (215, emphasis mine). What could have been has now been, and he is now once again alone—notice that words like lonesome and emptiness reappear—and it is in these moments that he is able to realise that what he misses (and what he missed before Vivian) is commitment and relationship (the one thing he believed he did not want or desire). It is only through his time with Vivian that he is able to realise what was missing and now is fully mourning the loss of love (which was only made available through Vivian and only made notable following the physical—though still unspoken—affirmation of love): “[w]hen an hour passed and she hadn’t returned, he decided she wasn’t coming and disappointment filled him. He sat lost in memories of the night before, wanting her” (215). He mourns, to
repeat but to re-emphasise, what could have been had it not been for some sort of roadblock to his success. The novel closes with the two marrying once he has been able to fully acknowledge his love for Vivian. But the point to be noted here is that it is only through the fullness of the first time that he is able to ever fully overcome that which was not allowing for his own success.

Throughout this chapter I have been working through the issue of the first time and the mourning after and attempting to demonstrate the ways in which paranoia, jouissance, hysteria, and mourning come together. In some novels one aspect is more pronounced than others and this stands to reason because quite often the differences between paranoia and hysteria or hysteria and mourning are difficult to discern. Moreover the ways in which mourning is experienced are quite different ranging from lost youth to lost innocence to a lost sense of self and love. This should not, however, be read as an indication of weakness or flaw in the theoretical question being considered; but rather, it should point to the complexity not only of the first time but also the ways in which we speak about the first time, particularly in the framework of such a controlled genre (happy endings are demanded in romance). I would never demand that a romance novel encompass and embody the full pronouncement of mourning that we see in Proust’s The Fugitive (which does not include a happy ending per se but rather one of the most vicious and cruel betrayals of love). Instead, I want to recognise that the theorisation of the first time and the mourning after is still found in the romance novel and presented in a similar fashion: there can be no doubt that each of these novels has exhibited aspects of paranoia, hysteria, and mourning, all of the novels, however, have exhibited excessively the jouissance of the first time. What is important to the first time is that these aspects are part of the way we put
into words the first time and some of us will focus on one aspect rather than another. If we think back to the very beginning of this study, I spoke about male purity movements; these movements are fundamentally about paranoia (ways to maintain purity) and hysteria (not losing enough purity to be deemed soiled). In Proust we are confronted by mourning, excessive mourning; and in the romance novel, we are presented with *jouissance*. But the greater recognition is that every one of these examples allows for and includes each of these factors, discourses, and aspects of the first time.

If this study is to be successful I argue that the first time and the mourning after have to have been sufficiently demonstrated in even the most felicitous treatments of the first time. The *first time*, as a theoretical trope, is worthy of significant consideration because it is such an essential part of the human experience (even when it is denied). We will all experience the first time (even when we do not because we will still have imagined what the first time would be like) and the romance novel demonstrates the specificity of this moment in the most optimistic of renderings because it guarantees love at the end. But, in our own experiences of the first time, we are not guaranteed love; indeed we were not guaranteed anything beyond the first time and the mourning after.
The Second Time and the Morning After

The first time and the mourning after, in many ways, may feel to the reader hopelessly negative, pessimistic, depressed, and perhaps, even dark. And in many ways it is. But there are echoes, glimmers, dots of hope throughout this study, and it is these that I want to address here in the closing chapter. I want to provide a reading of a text, which is not about a virginal first time, but rather about another sexual first time that further works to assist in my development of the first time and the mourning after. In Maureen Child’s Lost in Sensation (2004) we are introduced to Dr. Sam Holden, who meets Tricia Wright, the woman who will become his first lover after the death of his wife. In this reading, I will demonstrate the importance of his first time and how it allows for a return to the first time when confronted by a possible future.

Child’s Lost in Sensation is a fascinating novel, because, as the cover reads, it is told “from his point of view.” Thus Child adopts the man’s perspective to tell the story rather than the more traditional and typical perspective of the heroine. This marks a pronounced shift in the genre insofar as it is an overt and blunt attempt to understand the other side of the story. What is most remarkable about this novel, at least for the purposes of this study, is the way that it embodies the idea that “‘the first one’ could be the blueprint for all subsequent lovers” (Monro 86). His wife and the memory of her, as we shall see, mark him so profoundly that he must overcome her memory (and her presence in his life) in a new way so as to be able to achieve the second time.

In Lost in Sensation, the question of mourning figures heavily because the hero is still mourning the loss of his wife—not because she left him or divorced him, but rather
because she has died. The profound loss to be accounted for here is one in which the presumed *true love* has departed, and thus the hero is like Orpheus constantly searching, through a mourning process, for Eurydice. Our hero is described in romantic and sentimental terms, rather than as the alpha male of earlier romances, such as the archetypal hero of Kathleen E. Woodiwiss’ *The Flame and the Flower*, which I briefly explored in the previous chapter.

In *Lost in Sensation*, the hero is described less in terms of physicality and more in terms of character (which may be read as sentimental, less physical and more affective). Physically, “[a]t thirty-two, Sam was tall, leanly muscled and too impatient for his own good. A black-haired, blue-eyed doctor, he had more female patients than male but much to their dismay, Sam never noticed more about the women than the symptoms they were presenting” (8). Readers are also told: “[h]e’d been interested in nothing but medicine since he was a kid. At five, he’d borrowed his grandfather’s stethoscope, listened to his dog’s heart and found an irregular beat. Even the vet had been impressed. And that rush of discovery had pretty much sealed his future” (8-9). His childhood is later considered: “[a]n only child, he’d been raised in quiet civility. His parents were older than his friends’ folks and they’d treated him like a short adult. They’d included him in family decisions, fostered his love for books and school and taken him on vacations to the great museums of the world” (21). More time is spent developing his childhood and how he became the man he is than is spent discussing his physicality. If anything, we are presented with an interior view of the hero. This interiority is further constructed (and recognised) when the narrative focuses on his past relationship:
He shifted in his seat, a little uncomfortable with all of this sudden self-examination. Sam had never really stopped to consider the way he spent—or wasted—his time. Now that he did, he asked himself if he’d planned to become so insular or it had just happened... after Mary.

But then life itself had changed after Mary, hadn’t it? The way he saw things, what he thought, felt, experienced. Nothing was as it had been...

*before.* (27, Child’s emphasis)

This is a sentimental moment in the text, particularly in relation to *the first time and the mourning after*. There is a poetic chiasmus being constructed which establishes that identity is anticipatory insofar as it determines the future from its past experiences. He realises in this moment how his life can change in an instant. His life is determined by the time with Mary and the time after Mary. We, as readers, are made aware of the immediacy of temporality. He has been living in a perpetual state of depression—an important theme in the novel as the heroine, Tricia, describes her family’s worry that she is depressed (41). In clinical terms, he exhibits isolation, solitude, and “insomnia” (27), which are all commons signs for male depression and living with and within a traumatic experience.89 But what can be gleaned from this moment is the recognition of the second time, “coming out of it now” (27). He must overcome and move forward, there must be a morning after

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89 For a useful discussion of male depression written for a largely popular audience, see: Terrence Real’s *I Don’t Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression* (1997). I am not making a clinical argument in this study or attempting to diagnose the character; rather, I am merely noting that many common representations of depression seem to coincide with the construction of Sam’s character. For instance, the question of introspection, therapy, and depression, Real writes: "[i]f you had asked David what was bothering him, before the session, it is uncertain that he would have answered, or even if he would have given an answer at all. Like a lot of the successful men I treat, David was unpracticed in, even wary of, introspection" (31).
the mourning after. This is the productive moment that reminds the reader that there can be another time after profound, destructive, and utterly depressing loss.

Sam falls in love with Tricia, and, predictably, his past relationship with Mary will be the barrier that they must overcome. His first time, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, will come to haunt, trouble, and in this case, shatter the self. In a therapeutic sense the hero must be cured of what ails him and it is only through love that he can be cured. As Freud once wrote to Carl Jung on December 6, 1906, “[p]sychoanalysis is in essence a cure through love.” In romance novels, love is often the “cure” to a traumatic past. In many regards, this returns us to an earlier discussion about the incompatibility of psychotherapy and romantic love, in which Yalom argued that, “[t]he person who has fallen in love, and entered a blissful state of merger, is not self-reflective because the questioning lonely I (and the attendant anxiety of isolation) dissolve into the we. Thus one sheds anxiety but loses oneself” (12). It is only because the lover has lost romantic love that the lover is able to think about his life and lack of love. The problem that Yalom establishes is whether or not there is a “cure through love” as Freud might have it, and moreover, where love is to be found. Is the cure for an old love, a first love, a new love, a second love?

Before moving further (and back to the text), I do believe that it is necessary that this “slipping” of ideas—therapy and romance, love and psychoanalysis—be considered further. I am likely guilty of misreading Freud’s comment that “[p]sychoanalysis is in essence a cure through love,” but the reason, undoubtedly, is because I want to find a productive relation between literature, therapy, psychoanalysis, and romance. However, the relation between each of these concepts is fraught, particularly the relation between therapy and romance, and romance and psychoanalytic literary criticism. “A huge number
of issues that we see in our clinics and therapy rooms are influenced by romantic fiction,” writes Susan Quilliam and she then offers the following advice to fellow therapists, “sometimes the kindest and wisest thing we can do for our clients is to encourage them to put down the books—and pick up reality” (181). When I first read Quilliam’s article, “He seized her in his manly arms and bent his lips to hers…” The surprising impact that romantic novels have on our work” published in the Journal of Family Planning & Reproductive Health, I was taken aback and offended by the article (I was also confronted by the fact that Quilliam’s article received extensive coverage in the press). How could therapy and romantic fiction be categorically opposed to one another? Indeed, I initially drafted a series of questions: Why should therapy and romance be exclusive to one another, especially when in reality many of us seek out therapy precisely because of our romantic relations? Why should romance not have a space or role in therapy, either as a clinical setting or as a space for learning, if it is such a problem? Should therapists, if romantic fiction is indeed the cause of many scenes in the therapy room, inform themselves about the history of romantic fiction so as to be able to relate to their clients? If, as Quilliam asserts, romantic fiction is powerful enough to teach readers not to use condoms, then why should romance not be endowed with the same power to teach readers about love and how to relate to an amorous other? Simply put, I began to realise, my question was becoming: what can romantic fiction teach about relating, reading, talking, and loving? Romance can teach us things to reject as well as things to desire precisely because the generic structure of romance is polarised and provides clear indications of the ideal and the non-ideal, the good and the bad. The romance, of course, can also teach us something about our desires and dreams, and why we yearn for these fantasies in our real lives.
Many romance novels, it seems to me, are ultimately about tackling these very questions. Indeed, Sarah Wendell has recently devoted a book to this very question, *Everything I Know About Love I Learned from Romance Novels*, in which she argues “If you’re a romance fan [...] you know that reading romances can teach you a great deal about love, sex, and relationships” (xii) and moreover that “romance reading probably already has taught you more than you realized” (xii). In a sense, Wendell is agreeing with Quillian that romance novels have an affective power over their reader. To be fair, Quillian and Wendell offer polarised arguments, but the point that I take from both is that reading does affect the reader. To my mind, then, it should not be surprising that romance novels often tackle serious issues—like depression, domestic violence, rape, the death of a significant other or death of a child, sibling, parent, illness, a second time or chance, to name but a few issues—that readers may very well be facing in their own lives (though within the space of fiction, the characters are guaranteed their happily ever after, which may not—and more than likely will not—translate to the real lives of readers.)

Admittedly, these questions are big questions that deserve a larger study; however, the point that I want to be noted is an affective one. Romantic fiction, by which I mean romance novels with happily ever afters and love stories that may end tragically, affects readers. To these ends, it is, I think, important to think about therapy and romance. Pamela Regis concludes that:

> The story of courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines is, finally, about freedom and joy. In the twentieth century, for the most part, romances are stories written by women and read by women. They feature women who have achieved the ends fostered by affective individualism, control over their
own property, and companionate marriage. In other words, romance heroines make their own decisions, make their own livings, and choose their own husbands. I admit, unapologetically, that these values are profoundly bourgeois. I assert that they are the impossible dream of millions of women in many parts of the world today. To attack this very old genre, so stable in its form, so joyful in its celebration of freedom, is to discount, and perhaps even to deny, the most personal hopes of millions of women around the world. (207)

To be fair, Regis is perhaps waxing poetic here and perhaps is over-reaching (and one cannot help but recognise the American call to freedom, which so dominated the context in which she was writing, a post-9/11 America); regardless, these words are the final words of Regis’ *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. The point to be noted, here, is that these novels are ultimately, at least for Regis, about dreams of freedom, dreams of another possibility, and the desires of readers, writers, and literary heroines. We may very well be uncomfortable with Regis’ assertion for any number of reasons, but what is important to note is that Regis is speaking affectively about the value of romance.

With Regis’ conclusion in mind, let us turn our attention to the other concept: therapy. I have been attempting here to outline a relation between therapy and romance, while recognising that the relation has been, at best, contested. In *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*, Eva Illouz writes, “[t]he therapeutic is a site within which we invent ourselves as individuals with wants, needs, and desires to be known, categorized, and controlled for the sake of freedom” (3). Does Illouz’s definition of therapeutic not share much in common with Regis’ definition of romance? Romance, Regis
writes, is about “affective individualism” (207) while Illouz writes that “we invent ourselves as individuals with wants, needs, and desires” (3) within the therapeutic space. It seems to me that Regis and Illouz are both, in this instance, speaking about the constitution of the individual and his or her desires for selfhood, a desire to understand aspects of his or her subjectivity and how said desires come to define him or herself as a subject. Accordingly, surely there must be a relation to be found and considered between therapy and romance, since they are both about subjectivity and self-definition.

Therapy and romance are, I believe, both an attempt to reach some sort of harmonious ideal (wherein the ideal and the real are reconciled). We read romance because it provides us with a way to imagine what an ideal relationship would consist of, even though most romances include barriers, conflicts, and points of ritual death, and often enough, the back story to the romance novel is that the hero or the heroine, or both (as is the case in Child’s *Lost in Sensation*) has been wounded, hurt, abused, etc., and now must be healed. On the other hand, therapy involves the admission of a given problem and an attempt to solve, which is to say, work through the problem—and ideally provide a “cure.” These—the cure and the relationship—are the ideals. Ideally, in our own romances we will find the perfect love, and in therapy we will somehow be cured of whatever ails us. Both romance and therapy are teleologically bound to and by an ideal that may or may not be achievable. Yet I would argue that the point of romance and the point of therapy are less about the teleology, which is to say an ideal endpoint, and more about the journey towards the goal. This is the argument that Fredric Jameson makes with respect to utopia. “The desire called Utopia must be concrete and ongoing, without being defeatist or incapacitating” (84) Jameson writes and further suggests that, “the Utopian text reflexively
charts the impossibility of that achievement and the ways in which the wish outtrumps itself” (84). While the wish of therapy may be to be cured and while the wish of the romance reader may be to find their own ideal romance, the reality is that therapy and romance will show that the journey is, ultimately, the trump card.

Romantic fiction, like utopian fiction, presents a wish that may very well be fulfilled within the textual space or the fictional world, but this does not mean that the wish will be able to transcend the page and alter our lived realities. Instead, utopian fiction presents the reader with another political possibility for social configuration, romantic fiction, thus and likewise, presents us with another relational possibility for romantic configuration. Thus, if romantic fiction is dangerous because it divorces us from reality, as Quilliam asserts it does, than so too must utopian fiction. But, Jameson recognises, as does Regis, that the space of wish-fulfilment fiction is not about the fulfilment of the wish, but rather the wish. In this rendering, then, we can return to Illouz who argues, “[t]he discourse of psychoanalysis is thus a ‘political technology of the self,’ an instrument used and developed in the general framework of political rationality of the state; its very aim of emancipating the self is what makes the individual manageable and disciplined” (3). Accordingly, I argue that therapy, romance, and utopian fiction, in this rendering, all strive toward an ideal notion of self, romance, and society. The greater argument here is not that we need less therapy, romance, and utopia, but rather we need more therapy, romance, and utopia. Or, “if a little dreaming is dangerous” as Proust writes, “the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all of the time” (II.577).

As such, let us return our attention to the novel at hand, Lost in Sensation, in which love can be seen as a part of a therapy through the first time and the mourning after. The
point to be noted here is that romance novels do have an affective power, which often speaks to very real traumas that readers have had to deal with in their own personal lives. While the romance novel may seem like pleasurable and trivial reading material, the reality is that these novels can and do attend to very real scenarios and issues, such as trauma, depression, loss, and the possibility of moving forward to another love (even when the ideal love has, to one’s own perspective, already been achieved). However, what we must remember is that this is not just a love narrative; instead it is an attempt to find a second profound, deep, romantic, and true love.90

In *Lost in Sensation*, the narrative is not about the first time but rather moving forward to a second time. The hero does not need to be tamed, as is so often the case of romance, rather he is too tame: “[h]er eyes were wide and clear as she watched him and he knew that he’d be in trouble if he stayed around this woman for any length of time. She was a woman who said too much, laughed too often. And made him feel...hell, made him feel” (34). Since the time of his wife’s death, he has not been feeling anything—Tricia, the heroine, is able to awaken Sam’s slumbering sensations. Additionally, we cannot help but note that these now-awakening lost sensations trouble him, and the reason for his fear is that he is afraid of losing his fidelity to Mary. He must overcome his loss so as to be able to begin anew, to overcome his mourning process. What the hero learns is that overcoming mourning does not mean forgetting the past.

90 Within the structure of the romance novel, it is generally the heroine who will overcome a past fraught with trauma; however, in *Lost in Sensation* the roles are reversed. This is likely due to the fact that Sam is a sentimental hero and that the novel is being written from his perspective.
Throughout the novel, we learn that people have tried to help Sam overcome his mourning: “[m]ost of [Sam’s] friends had drifted away, but Eric had stuck. He’d tried to pull Sam back into the world of the living, but it hadn’t worked. Sam had been determined to suffer. Determined to wallow in the rubble of his world” (55). Sam is suffering and mourning loss in a fashion similar to Barthes in his *Mourning Diary*, or in the way Proust speaks of suffering: “[w]e are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full” (V.722). Suffering and mourning are a process that we must experience fully so as to know that we are able to overcome. We must have explored the deepest regions, the most unexcavated spaces of our suffering and mourning, and then, and only then (which is to say perhaps never), are we ever able to truly overcome. The lesson that *Lost in Sensation* will teach is that mourning is not about repression or forgetting.

The romance novel requires a certain period of flirting towards courtship and union, where the hero realises that he is *in love* with the heroine. In *Lost in Sensation*, this period is narrated in relation—always—to his previous relationship with Mary: “[e]ven now, he felt his blood pump a little faster, his heart beat a little harder, knowing that Tricia was just inside. He hadn’t felt this sort of... expectation in too many years to count. Had never expected to feel it again. He’d had his shot at happiness with Mary. And then he’d lost her. Regret crawled through him” (75). His entire life, at this point, is colonised by the memory of Mary. He cannot escape her—or the memory of her—and as such he is forever mourning that loss. The challenge we are told is that “he couldn’t claim a life for himself, when he hadn’t been able to save hers” (76). The trauma resides in the fact that as a medical doctor he was not able to save the life of the person who mattered most to him, his wife.
In what follows, I want to focus on a pivotal scene that brings about the entire notion of the first time and the mourning after. More specifically, in the pages to be considered here, we are presented with the first time between Sam and Tricia. The desire overflows on the pages. We are overwhelmed by the now no longer lost sensations. And yet, we will have to confront the question of the first time and the mourning after, in a new, disrupted, revised understanding: the second time, a repeated time, a returning time. Ultimately, the two have sex and then, and in this pivotal moment there is a discussion about this being Sam’s “first time” (Child, *Lost in Sensation* 106). I have intentionally ruined the surprise (the forthcoming narrative) here for the reader, but I want to ensure that the reader sees the relevance of this moment to this study. The study is dependent upon mourning after, but what precisely comes after mourning? Thus in what follows I will read through two chapters of the novel, in which the first chapter considered (Chapter 6, pp. 83-101) narrates the first time, and the second chapter (Chapter 7, pp. 102-13) narrates the mourning after.

Chapter six begins: “Sam reached for her” (83), and immediately we recognise that the climactic moment is forthcoming. This opening sentence is filled with erotic tension, and the tension is calmed (or desire fulfilled) when we read: “[s]he moved closer” (83). The returning sensations are once again highlighted, “[b]lood rushed in his veins, his head pounded and his heartbeat thundered in his ears like the roar of dozens of hungry lions” (83). Every word indicates a rising desire, the slumbering libido has been awakened, and its “hunger” must be satisfied. In contradistinction to Sam’s reactions, we have Tricia who “looked up at him and, not *for the first time*” (83, emphasis mine). Unlike Sam who is confronting his first time, a point that has been alluded to, Tricia is not seeing Sam in this
light for the first time. She has desired Sam for some time already, and he is just being made aware of this desire (and indeed his desire for her).

Sam’s paranoia is different because it is not his first sexual time, he has lost his virginity; consequently, his paranoid nature takes on a different tone, a sort of paranoid hysteria. The second time requires a different rendering of emotions and thoughts; he knows what sex is like, but he does not know what it is like the second time. We read: “[h]e lifted his head and stared down at her through eyes hazy with passion. His breath shuddered in his lungs and an inner battle raged between what he should do and what he so wanted to do” (85). There is a moral conflict here that is met by an equally demanding eros. This is the conflict that must be overcome.

His initial response is one in which he begins to speak about what Tricia deserves rather than what she wants, “Tricia deserved better than getting involved with him. She deserved a man who was whole. A man who was looking for the same things she wanted. A man who could love her. That wasn’t him” (86). He cannot love because he is still confused about how to move forward following the death of his wife. He believes that his love has a limit, an endpoint that has been exhausted. But his definition of love is being challenged by his desire for Tricia. His seeming incompleteness is part of the paranoia that floods this chapter. Like a virgin who is not quite sure what is on the other side of virginity, he is trying to understand everything that is happening (in the present) and may happen (that which is forthcoming).

Even when he tells her that he is not married, “not anymore” (87), he is still paranoid. Tricia assures him, “Sam, we’re two adults. Neither one of us is committed to
anyone else. We want each other... don’t we?” (87-88). For Tricia, this is merely sex—indeed we will be later told, “[t]his was sex. Great sex, but sex” (106)—but for Sam this is the first time after the loss of his wife. We are told, “[s]urrendering to the inevitable, Sam grabbed her hard, using his arms to pin her to him. His hands slid up and down her back, possessively exploring every line, every curve. He had to feel her. Now” (88-89). There is urgency to the narrative, much like the urgent need that is felt during that first time to complete the act. And it is in this moment that we, as readers, are able to experience the jouissance of the hero and it is in this moment that we—via advance retrospection—can begin to imagine the mourning after. Unlike earlier narratives, Lost in Sensation requires a reading that positions all of these discourses—that I have theorised as being integral to the first time and the mourning after: paranoia, jouissance, hysteria, mourning—be treated in an almost simultaneous or multiple fashion.

During the “orgasm mystique” (Frye, CW IX.106) of this scene, which is to say the rising climax, readers are able to understand how pleasure unfolds within the narrative, if only later to understand how this pleasure will be displaced so as to allow for mourning. Thus, before turning to the mourning, let us consider the ways in which jouissance is experienced differently and how the narrative makes a point of noting these differences: there is a difference between Mary and Tricia.

She leaned into him and he took more of her weight, lifting her off her feet. Tricia moaned and went with him, lifting her legs to lock them around his waist, and suddenly, she was all around him, surrounding him with sensation and a pulse-pounding desire he’d never known before. Ever.
This was different.

This was more than anything he’d experienced. (89)

The difference between his wife and Tricia is now articulated and the difference is one that is measured in terms of excess. It was different but it was “more than anything he’d experienced” before. Something is different, but as readers we do not know what is different. What is, however, to be noted, beyond difference, is that he is comparing the two experiences. He is constantly aware of the presence of Mary on his perception of these sensations.

Sam and Tricia make their way to the bedroom and we read, “[h]e grabbed the doorknob, gave it a twist, then shoved the door wide. The walls were blue. Almost as blue as her eyes” (89-90). Blue, as Carol Mavor has so wonderfully argued, is a duplicitous colour that is fully charged with uncontainable meaning. I want to argue here that it is the blue room that comes to explain the notion of the second time and all of its confusion, its mixed emotions. In Reading Bovishly, Mavor observes, “[blue] is the color of pleasure (blue skies forever more) and the color of cost (too blue to go on)” (423) and moreover, “[b]lue is the color of affect” (424). Mavor establishes a binary of blue insofar as it may very well be about pleasure but also about cost. Cost, I believe, is about affect, affects that may be rendered negative, sad, or depressed. Thus blue may speak to jouissance and pleasure or it may speak to mourning, precisely because it is an ambiguous colour. Is this not precisely what is happening in this very moment in the text? Everything is about pleasure, cost, and affect. What is the cost of pleasure for Sam?
I may very well be guilty of over-reading here, but in the flirtatious method, which I have adopted throughout this study, the colour blue—as it is presented in Lost in Sensation—cannot be contained or ignored. The colour blue, as we shall see, is repeated on various occasions throughout the novel. The author willingly makes use of the colour blue. And for the reader it is difficult not to take note of this fact. For Mavor (from whom I draw many ideas), blue is an important colour. Thus to be presented with a blue bedroom in which Sam will have his first time after the loss of his wife is an exciting and serendipitous moment for, at the very least, this particular reader. But even if the reader ignored the blueness of the room, readers are essentially told to note this: “And that’s all he noticed as he walked into the room he somehow knew they’d been headed for since the first time he saw her” (90). The colour blue dominates this scene and blue is, I agree with Mavor, both the colour of pleasure and cost, but also the colour of affect, and as Mavor recently argued in her “Blue Mythologies” lectures at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto (March 2011), “blue is the colour of impossible mourning.” Sam is confronted by pleasure, cost, affect, and mourning, and now all of these are located within the confines of a blue room. But I want to add to Mavor’s work: blue is the colour of pleasure, the colour of affect, the colour of cost, the colour of impossible mourning, and now the colour of the first time, precisely because the first time will be all about pleasure, and it will be all about cost.91 Something will be gained, something will be lost: “[t]he walls were blue” (Child, Lost in Sensation 90).

91 Mavor is certainly not alone in thinking about the particularity of the colour blue, Brian Massumi explains that, “[t]he colour blue figured in [David] Katz’s experimental situation in divergent capacities. It was a differential object” (184) and he further explains that, “there is more the objects than attributes and contents. There was the Sinatra dimension: ol’ too-blue eyes. This was the axis of escape, along which the
In the blue room he begins the work of remembering; but now the remembering is about “the first time she’d smiled at him” (90) and not just about Mary. These sensations of colour are, in a sense, reinforced by the recognition that “[m]oonlight slanted through the open curtains hanging in front of the window that faced the backyard. Its pale light suffused the room with a soft glow that seemed to shimmer all around her as she levered herself up into a sitting position” (90). The light of the moon, perhaps a blue moon, illuminates the blue room, allows for the room to radiate upon Tricia and with this she begins to shimmer.

The narrative then moves to the titillating moment of the two making love, and Sam’s paranoia returns, only to ultimately be calmed down: “[a]nd with the last of his doubts eased, Sam cleared his mind, banishing all thoughts that weren’t directly related to this moment. Until he’d had his fill of the woman currently torturing him” (94). There is no denying the presence of Mary in these thoughts, but he is focussing only on the pleasure of the moment, no longer the cost (for Mary has been momentarily displaced). Indeed, the narrative continues, “[t]an lines, creamy against the warm honey skin, told him that her bathing suit was even tinier than the panties she now wore, and he suddenly hungered to see her in a bikini, kissed by sunlight” (95). The reader will surely note the “honey” of this scene, which stands in contrast to the moonlit blue room, which works to reinforce the differential object ‘blue’ slipped quietly away from its own growing objectivity. The ‘too’ of the blue was an excess marking the certainty that a line of experiential self-activity or impersonal subjectivity that has made ingress into the situation will overspill it, going on to enter other situations, across other thresholds of indeterminacy. The excess was a reserve recurrence in the situation, vaguely palpable but not definable or confinable. It was the direct presence, in the collective experience, of a ‘more’ of experience: the presence of process” (184-85). Mavor’s work, unlike Massumi’s, focuses more on the literary, artistic, and cultural texts, and thus draws on her work in visual and literary culture, but also in terms of theory of affect and queer theories. Mavor is, as I’ve argued throughout, a flirtatious critic who draws on the widest possible range of sources to advance her argument, whether it be reading boyishly or blue mythologies.
blueness of this scene (and perhaps lends itself to illuminating blue as pleasure, a sort of foreshadowing of the sunny morning that floods the room the morning after).

The colouring of this scene is important and the blueness must be noted and recalled, and if we have not yet been convinced of this, the blue room, the locus of the first time, has been featured heavily and yet it is not yet, perhaps, convincing for the reader. We are then told: “[r]unning his palms up and down the length of her legs, he watched her eyes roll back and her hands drop helplessly to the pale blue sheets” (96, emphasis mine). The pale blue sheets mirror her eyes, which are rolling back, and to the blue room in which he will have his first time since the death of his wife, all of which will take place upon a bed with “pale blue sheets” (96). This scene is blue: blue in its pleasure, overwhelming pleasure, but blue in its cost, blue in its affect, and blue, of course, in its forthcoming and impossible mourning.

Indeed, blue becomes the colour of jouissance in this narrative. After she has climaxed for the first time, we are told: “[h]eat shot through him like a flash of lightning, and the resulting thunder pounded inside of him. Staring down into her impossibly blue eyes, he saw magic and need and knew his own eyes mirrored hers” (98, emphasis mine). Brian Massumi, speaking about David Katz and certainly not about popular romance, writes that, “[t]he remembering of a colour is not effectively a reproduction of a perception, but a transformation or becoming of it” and he continues and observes that “[w]hat the subject does, it turns out, exceeds the standard. [...] He or she is exaggeratedly conveying an ‘absolutely striking peculiarity of colour’. The memory of a friend’s eyes is in some ways too blue: excess” (180). In speaking about her “impossibly blue eyes,” (Child, Lost in Sensation 98) Sam is remembering the eyes and moreover creating excess. The author, of
course, has made these “impossible blue eyes” (98) all the more excessive because of her repeated use of the colour blue throughout this scene.

The reader must now surely note the persistent presence of blue from the “flash of lightening” to her “impossibly blue eyes,” but all of this now seems predestined because “his own eyes mirrored hers” (98). If readers have forgotten, this returns readers to the very first physical description of Sam: “[a] black-haired, blue-eyed doctor” (8, emphasis mine). Blue is the colour of jouissance, the colour of a near perfect love: “[h]unger raged, passion blossomed. And in the moonlit night, they raced in tandem toward oblivion and together, fell into the magic awaiting them” (101). In the orgasm—the embodiment of jouissance—the colour blue reappears, we are reminded of the blue room that is moonlit and moreover, the repetition of the word “magic” recalls the way that her eyes are described as “impossibly blue” and that while looking into the “impossibly blue eyes, he saw magic” (98). Blue is the colour of pleasure.

But blue is also the colour of impossible mourning, as Mavor has taught us (2011). In the aftermath of sex mourning, regret, and loss are figured: “[w]hen the madness lifted, Sam groaned and rolled to one side. His body humming, his mind racing, he fought for breath and stared up at the moonlit patterns on the ceiling” (102). This sentence follows the magical blueness of the orgasm and now the blueness, recalled through the use of the word “moonlit,” takes on a different meaning, the colour of cost and mourning. In this moonlit room, “throwing one arm across his eyes, he blocked out her room, her, what had just happened, and retreated into darkness. Guilt nibbled at him, gnawed at the edges of his soul and taunted him with knowledge that he’d forgotten all about Mary in those moments with Tricia” (102). He tries to erase or displace the blueness of the room and the blue eyes,
and memories and mourning appear. But in this moment, the duplicitous nature of the blue is enforced: “How could he have forgotten? Even for a moment? And how could he not?” (103).

Following the erotic episode, we read about the thoughts about and guilt over what has happened, “Tricia went up on one elbow and looked down at him. Her eyes looked even bluer than usual and glittered with confusion and something else he didn’t even attempt to identify” (104, emphasis mine). In these moments of guilt, in these moments where he recalls mourning the loss of Mary (while at the same time recognising that sex is better with Tricia), her eyes appear “even bluer than usual” and they “glittered with confusion and something else.” Is not this something else the essence of the blue, that indefinable moment and that lost sensation that has suddenly reappeared, a feeling that is both too much and too little? Mavor speaks of colour “as a feminine language (as in the case of Bellini’s Madonnas and Giotto’s blue walls, where color sings its own song beyond figuration and narrative)” (Reading Boyishly 417). The blueness of her eyes—a blueness that is even bluer than before—is simply that he cannot figure out or put into words what has happened.92 He is conflicted (he is made blue!) by the pleasure of Tricia and the memories of Mary that are provoked by that pleasure.

92 Mavor also speaks about this phenomenon of blue eyes being too blue: Mavor writes, “Gilberte’s eyes are the sign of Marcel’s crush, which are not blue at all: they are black. But, because Gilberte had such an affect on young Marcel, they shine as memorably “too blue.” Memory and affect had exaggerated their true, object color” (Reading Boyishly 423). Then Mavor quotes a passage from Proust that demonstrates this very point, and I shall, for the sake of my reader, quote the same passage: “Her black eyes gleamed, and since I did not at the time know, and indeed have never since learned, how to reduce a strong impression to its objective elements, since I had not, as they say, enough ’power of observation’ to isolate the notion of their colour, for a long time afterwards, whenever I thought of her the memory of those bright eyes would at once present itself to me as a vivid azure, since her complexion was fair; so much so that, perhaps if her eyes had not been quite so black – which was what struck one most forcibly on seeing her – I should not have been, as I was, especially enamoured of their imagined blue” (I.198; in Mavor, Reading Boyishly 423).
The blueness returns, and as he is about to tell Tricia the cause of his thoughts, we are reminded that this is a post-coital scene that took place upon blue sheets in a blue room: “[m]oonlight played over her skin and danced in her eyes” (105). The moonlight plays upon her body, which lays upon blue sheets and dances in her blue eyes. And then he confesses (and we should be unsurprised at this point to see, once again, blueness): “Sam pulled in a deep breath and mentally searched for the right words. When they didn’t come, he settled for anything that happened to fall out of his mouth. Meeting her eyes, he blurted, ‘Look. Believe it or not, it really is me. It’s the first time—” (106). In the moment in which he confesses to it being the first time since his wife—a first time she mistakes, initially, as virginity: “A virgin? You’re trying to tell me I seduced a virgin?” (107).

The colour blue is present throughout this scene: their blue eyes meet in a moonlit blue room as she sits upon blue sheets and he, like the moon, looks down upon her. And the narrative continues with Sam telling her (and they move through a discussion of how), “It’s the first time I’ve been with anyone since my wife died” (107). This is the last instance of colour in this narrative, until “the next morning” (112), after they have had sex again.

The next morning—the mourning after and after mourning—we learn that “[n]aturally, it all came back in a roaring flood of sound and color. He sat up, avoiding that particular spear of light, and rolled off the bed” (112). The spear of light is the sunlight. Though he is flooded (a rather fluid and blue word) by sound and colour, the mourning after and the morning after are marked by sunlight and radiance. Indeed it is in this moment where the colour blue reaches its full duplicity, as Mavor writes, “blue skies forever more” (Reading Boyishly 423). Sam has managed to experience his first time after Mary and has experienced it in all of its blueness.
From the outside, from the position of the reader, this blueness is almost hysterical—it is there and not there. And yet, as I hope I have demonstrated here, the blueness is essential to this narrative. Things must be blue because “blue is the color of affect” (Mavor, Reading Boyishly 424). I do not believe that it is an accident that the room is blue; after all, it could have been any number of colours. The author makes repeated and pointed notes on the blueness of the room, the blue walls, blue eyes, pale blue sheets, and, of course, the moonlight, which illuminates all of these things.

Indeed, the most important part of any romance novel, the Happily Ever After ending, is marked by blueness. After he proposes to Tricia—at she has convinced him that she is “not asking [him] to stop loving Mary” and she says, “You'll always love her. And you should. I just want you to love me too” (176)—we read: “[h]is gaze swept up and down her quickly, thoroughly. Her blond hair was pulled into a high ponytail at the back of her head. Flour dusted her nose and forehead and her blue eyes looked impossibly beautiful” (180). The colour blue reappears and readers are reminded that her eyes are blue, and Sam says:

“I did love Mary and she'll always be a part of my heart—but,” he said, swallowing hard as he said the words it had been so hard for him to accept, “she's my past. You're my future.”

Her eyes filled with a sheen of tears and she blinked frantically, trying to clear them. (181)

Her blue eyes, impossibly blue eyes, are the colour of his future, their future. Blue is the colour of the second time, another time, a future time. We learn in perhaps the most
sentimental moment of the novel, “[h]er smile warmed him down to the bone and chased away any last traces of the shadows that had held him in their grasp for too many years. Sam stared down into her eyes and saw the future stretch out in front of them. He saw his heart. His life. His love” (183). The sunlight is able to chase away any of the dark blue shadows that may remain and replace the scene with bright blue skies. And shortly thereafter the novel closes.

Maureen Child’s *Lost in Sensation* is very much about the problem of the second time, the time after the first time, when one is confronted by the impossibility of loving after the persistence of mourning and melancholy. The intention behind this reading is to show that even in the second time, the traces of the first time are always present and will always be present. The second time is a repetition of the first time because, as only Sam can recognise, it is so fully charged by and with the memories of the first time. Sam’s persistent mourning is cured by love—a love that can only be achieved through the sensations it provokes and the memories it recalls.

Mavor’s theorisations on the colour blue are a particularly worthy source of inspiration when concluding “The First Time and the Mourning After.” It is the duplicitous nature of the colour blue that fascinated me and continues to fascinate me: how can a colour be both/and throughout? In many ways, as I hope I have demonstrated in my reading of *Lost in Sensation*, “blue-ness” is akin to how I have been conceiving the love story, loss and virginity: it is all too much in one moment and simply not enough in another. Barthes writes that “[t]he events of amorous life are so trivial that they gain access to writing only be immense effort” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 93), and it is this immensity and triviality that seems blue to me because there is so much affect involved.
However there is more to these blue aspects—this blue unconscious—of my dissertation, those moments where the reader can find the possibility of an optimistic reading, a weaker theory. These moments seem like the critical work of punctuation. Adam Phillips explains:

Now it is, as Lacan has shown, an interesting literary analogy for the practice of the analyst to say that she punctuates the sessions—with verbal interventions, or their omission, and by the endings of the sessions. “The punctuation,” Lacan writes, “once inserted fixes meaning”; “changing the punctuation renews or upsets” the meanings and the patient asserts in his speech. (“Poetry and Psychoanalysis” 14)

Like punctuation, thus, these moments, these blue glimmers, echoes, dots allow for a fixing of meaning and, perhaps, more appropriately, more bluely, they renew and upset meaning. There can be no doubt that this reading—my reading—of the first time, at times, seems bleak, sad, depressing, but there is, for there must be, another possible reading, a weaker and more reparative reading.

The title of this conclusion—The Second Time and the Morning After—speaks to this very possibility: the vowel “u” has been dropped, however silently or abruptly, a single letter and the entire tenor of this study has lost meaning, or rather, its meaning has been renewed and upset. That letter, that letter that functions like the structure of romance—narrative entry, dénouement, the bottomless dream, ascendance, and redemption—is entirely potent throughout this dissertation and has been made impotent by its omission, made absent, ruined. The morning after is now the hopeful dream of tomorrow, where the
mourning is complete, completed, and completing. Life has been accepted for what it is. We begin the process of living forward.

There can be no denying that the “taboo of virginity,” as Freud might call it, which is so essential to the human, is a powerful myth. It is this myth that has occupied, troubled, monopolised, colonised, capitalised, and haunted an incredible intellectual, religious, mythical, creative, psychological, political, and imaginative space. And yet there is reluctance—despite all sorrow, all the power, all the joy—to let go of virginity. Virginity loss is, as we have seen and as I have argued, a “blueprint”—blue again—for the sexual continuity of the subject. We cannot erase or repress, no matter how much we try (and we will try!), the first time. We are tainted by it and made whole through the first time and the mourning after.

Mourning and the morning after are important because they require, demand, and encourage the subject to become fully that which he or she is destined to become. D. W. Winnicott in Playing and Reality speaks about the notion of sexual maturation, which I place alongside the idea of “to become”:

It is sometimes taken for granted that boys and girls who ‘hop in and out of bed,’ as the saying goes, and who achieve sexual intercourse (and perhaps a pregnancy or two), have reached sexual maturity. But they themselves know that this is not true, and they begin to despise sex as such. It’s too easy. Sexual maturity needs to include all unconscious fantasy of sex, and the individual needs ultimately to be able to reach to an acceptance of all that
turns up in the mind along with object-choice, object-constancy, sexual satisfaction, and sexual interweaving. (200-201)

This is an instructive moment in Playing and Reality because it is the end point of my dissertation on the first time and the mourning after. Mourning allows for and demands that we are able to fully mature. Only through this process—this lived process and all of its psychic excesses—can the virgin ever accept his new identity. Sex alone is not enough as Winnicott has observed.

The First Time and the Mourning After represents a contribution to the growing body of scholarship on virginity, popular romance, and the affect of temporality. While there is a certain depressive theory at play throughout the dissertation, I ultimately believe that the first time and the mourning after must be understood as an integral experience to the constitution of the subject. Our first times—first impression, first kiss, first love, first crush, first steps, first words, first job, first period, first failure, first apartment, first graduation, first communion, first ticket, first reading, first child, first time—are central parts of our psychic beings. We are formed by these experiences and we repeat these experiences precisely because we must, so as to understand the initial experience and its loss: a loss of innocence that forces a search for lost time, the time just before the first time. What is remarkable about the first time is precisely that it seems to escape time. In The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard writes, “in the domain of scientific observation that is absolutely objective, the ‘first time’ doesn’t count. Observation, then, belongs in the domain of ‘several times’” (156). Indeed, while I am inclined to agree with the latter observation about ‘several times’ being essential to understanding a given experience, I am less inclined to agree with the idea that “the ‘first time’ doesn’t count” (156). It does count and it matters a
great deal to the subject precisely because of all the mythologies associated with the first time, with the amount of time the subject has spent plotting for the first time, whether it be the first kiss or the first love. Bachelard, of course, ultimately admits that, “[w]hen we have forgotten all our habits of scientific objectivity, we look for the images of the first time” (156, Bachelard’s emphasis). The first time becomes, regardless of the subject, a myth of origins, “[i]f we were to consult psychological documents in the history of science—since the objection may well be raised that, in this history, there is quite a store of “first times”—we should find that the first microscopic observations were legends about small objects, and when that object was endowed with life, legends of life” (156). The first time, particularly with respect to virginity, is, as we have seen, a rather small object—indeed, metaphysically there is a question that remains about whether or not virginity, for instance, exists at all—and as such, it becomes, in many regards, a “legend of life.” The first time is the progenitor of mythologies.

What remains certain, at least to my mind, is that it is imperative that we recognise that “the first time and the mourning after” (as a concept unto itself) is not a rhetorical negative, but rather is fully liberating, emancipatory, and freeing. The mythologies we create about the first time are essential to our lives as lovers (and, probably, losers) and yet the surprising deflation of that mythology is as important as the original myth. “The first time and the mourning after,” thus, is filled with duplicitous excesses, for it is both a traumatic experience and a revelatory experience, which grants the subject a new understand of itself. The first time will never, for it simply cannot, live up to all the expectations of its mythology. We as lovers have spent a great deal of time plotting for the first time and in the end all of this plotting is caught off guard, surprised by the excesses of
the first time. The first time is filled with epiphanies and shocks and it is precisely because of these revelations that we mourn a lost time, a time just before knowledge was acquired, a time when we imagined and thrived in the mythology of the first time. These myths or “legends of life” as Bachelard might have it, are integral, essential, and intrinsic to our being, to our lives. Phillips writes that “[n]othing reassures us more about who we are—even when they disturb us, or particularly when they disturb us—than our life stories. Nothing makes us more intelligible to ourselves” (“Foreword” ix). Indeed, I believe that it is our stories of the first love, the first loss, and the first time that are so essential to the life stories we create for ourselves. Of course, as Phillips observes, “a life story may be a myth we hide our lives in, or hide something about our lives in; not a cover-up, which would suggest there was something essential to be revealed, but a fixation” (“Foreword” ix-x). The first time functions like the myths that are hidden within us. The first time can hardly ever be truly hidden away, but we must take the time to understand our first time. This understanding is found, I believe, in the act of mourning. The moment in which we recognise something has changed, something has happened, the first time has been experienced and its mythology made all too real. But the mourning after and the morning after offer the promise of another mythology, the next time.
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