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Digital Innocence: Queer Virginity, Painful Histories, and the Critical Hope of Queer Futurity

James Joshua Coleman

University of Pennsylvania, jameco@gse.upenn.edu

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Take a trip into my garden
I've got so much to show ya
The fountains and the waters
Are beggin' just to know ya

And it's true, baby
I've been saving this for you, baby

-Troye Sivan, Bloom

“Troye Sivan Is a New Kind of Pop Star: Here, Queer and Used to It” reads the title of Matthew Scheier’s 2018 *New York Times* article. Heralded as a twenty-first century queer icon, Sivan is emblematic of a new queer present, one in which, as the *Times* article suggests, queerness has been gotten “used to.” For Sivan, queerness has become something altogether normal, habituated through engagement with the digital world,¹ through “watching pretty much every coming out video on Youtube” and “shar[ing] every aspect of [his] life on the internet” (Sivan, *Coming Out*). As Sivan points out, “whether or not that’s a good thing” (ibid.), the digital world is reshaping young people’s relationship to queerness and to knowledge itself. Both what and how we understand the world are undergoing fundamental shifts. Flooding the present, the quantity and rapidity of digital information invites young people to remain in the here and now and to preserve a queerness that feels remarkably normal: all they need do is forget the past.

José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia* condemns such presentism, advancing instead a theory of “queer futurity,” an idealistic temporal relation that draws upon the past and the future in order to challenge “the politics of the here and now... today’s hamstrung pragmatic gay agenda” (10). Such assertions brush up against more anti-relational claims in queer studies that position queerness as an end to futurity and to the figure of Child all together (Edelman, *No Future*). For Muñoz, however, “the future is queerness’s domain” (1). It is something felt, an affective relationship of “critical hope” that “lets us feel that this world is not enough.” For young people, such “critical hope” becomes obsolete in a world where queerness no longer feels “out of joint” (Edelman, “Against Survival”). Pricking, discomforting, even painful, the jostling

¹ Within this article, references to the “digital” and “digital worlds” refers to changes in society linked, primarily, to increased access to digital technology. Relevant to this article, this access has created “participatory cultures” and concurrent epistemological shifts, which have altered how queer youth access community and learn the cultural forms of queerness.

effects of queerness invite young people to long for a world that is otherwise, that offers something beyond that illusory normalcy proffered only to a few.

Critiquing such normalcy within young adult (YA) literature, Derritt Mason in “The Earnest Elfin Dream Gay,” argues that contemporary representations of gay adolescence depict a rather narrow band of queer experience, one quite cleanly personified in an icon like Troye Sivan—that spritely figure whose whiteness, gender presentation, and earnest demeanor open pathways to a normal future. Mason is not, however, alone in recognizing queer YA’s preoccupation with white narratives and in raising questions regarding which queers can afford to jettison that “critical hope” of queer futurity—perhaps White, cis gays alone (Coleman)? Extending such work, this article contends that in present social worlds structured by White supremacist, cishetero-, and homonormative² ideals, now more than ever youth must preserve queerness’ queer feel. They must pursue queer futurity, as it impels the imagining of other worlds and the storying of alternative ways-of-being that, while future oriented, refuse to forget the past. Reconfiguring temporality, Muñoz explains that queerness employs both “past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now” (12). Queerness, therefore, as a future-facing orientation, challenges the digital world’s propensity towards myopic presentism, drawing upon painful histories and imagined futures as hermeneutical resources necessary for the pursuit of queer utopia—what Muñoz describes as a coalitional future of “collective political becoming” (189).

In a present marked by the realization of *It Gets... no It Got Better*,³ it seems—falsely—that queer futurity has arrived, no longer emanating that “warm illumination [as] a horizon imbued with potentiality” (1). Queerness instead seems presently before today’s queer youth, a realized ideality. This article asserts, however, that not only does queer futurity not exist in the here and now but that the “critical hope” it proffers has never been more at risk (ibid.). Digital epistemologies make such risk possible as they create pathways for childhood

² Homonormative refers to the privileging of certain queer subjectivities, typically White affluent gays and lesbians who are cisgender, through limited access to social advancement. The price of such access is adherence to social norms (i.e., traditional family structures, “productive” citizenship, etc.), which often fractures coalition building across lines of difference within the queer community.

³ This reformulating of the popular phrase “It Gets Better” is my own and refers to shifting social relations in which some queer young people inhabit a normalized present in which the painful experiences of queer history become easily erased.

innocence to circulate anew, to enmesh in contemporary representations of queer adolescence and more broadly in narratives of YA literature. However, as these narratives of innocence transfer or surface, they leave behind the histories of pain and oppression that render them legible, recognizable to modern youth readers. Made possible by shifting digital epistemologies, this failure to recognize and learn from painful histories I refer to as digital innocence, and it is seldom revealed in today's literature. Nonetheless, it can be combated, by learning from histories that hurt. Youth must dare a turn to the past, to feeling the contours of theirs and others' painful histories, as they reject the normalization proffered by digital innocence. To preserve pain is to preserve our need to imagine, our need to craft queerer narratives of queerer worlds and to embrace the humming potential of imaginative storytelling: stories invite us to feel backwards (Love), to reach into the past even as we strive towards queer futurity, towards that "potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" ever resting on the horizon (ibid.).

To reveal digital innocence's threat, in this article I trace how tropes and narratives previously unimaginable in relation to queer life manifest in contemporary representations of queer virginity. Boasting long traditions in both YA literature and literary scholarship, virginity provides a useful focus for exploring how digital innocence—that invitation to forget—operates chameleon-like in queer YA literature. Reading Troye Sivan's hit single "Bloom" and Jeff Garvin's YA novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, I reveal how shifting digital epistemologies, specifically rapid access to large quantities of digital information, invite queer youth to inhabit the present, posing great threat to queer futurity as it invites them to forget the painful histories of the past. It is, however, these histories and this pain that secures queer futurity as it urges them to imagine and to write more just worlds into existence.

While this article intended to explore representations of queer virginity broadly, it is important to note the absence of queer women within this analysis. Seeking to understand how literary tropes move across lines of difference, this article highlights the transference of tropes and narratives traditional to womanly lifeworlds onto representations of non-exclusively female identified, queer characters. Notably, spotlighting this transference has led to a lack of

engagement with the role that queer women play in shaping Western conceptions of virginity.⁴ Recognizing this shortcoming, this article does, however, hope that this work will one day be extended to explore queer female sexuality as well as the way digital innocence functions through a range of intersectional representations, including representations of people of all genders and sexualities, BIPOC⁵ folks, individuals with dis/abilities, and intersectional combinations thereof within global YA literature.

The Innocent Child in the Digital World

While literary scholarship has delineated many contours of childhood innocence,⁶ research has yet to consider how the digital world creates new possibilities for such innocence to surface in contemporary YA literature. As Bruhm and Hurley explain, “the story of innocence itself [is] a foundational narrative” (xxxiv); crafted in the romantic era, this narrative subtends modern conceptions of childhood—of an imagined child who is straight, cisgender, and, undeniably, White (Bernstein)—and, furthermore, has given shape to social inequities related to childhood (e.g., queerphobic bullying, gender inequality in schools, and even the school-to-prison pipeline). The digital world, however, applies pressure to that narrative, demanding changes in content and representation through new ways-of-knowing and knowledge about the world. Alan Liu refers to these shifting relations as a digital epistemology, explaining “there was knowledge; and today there are other kinds of knowledge that seem to come foaming up from the zero state of knowability... in the epistemology of the digital.” Born of the digital present, such knowledge creates new narrative potentials for childhood, for innocence, and, most importantly, for queer futurity as it carves pathways for queer young people to imagine themselves otherwise in the storyworlds of the future.

⁴ Sadly, this reality is echoed in even the most comprehensive of anthologies on virginity. For more on this absence see Jonathan A. Allan, Cristina Santos, and Adriana Spahr’s *Virgin Envy*. This reality points towards much needed scholarship on queer women’s relation to virginity.

⁵BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

⁶ For more on defining childhood innocence see Gubar; for the connection between historical relation of childhood to racial innocence see Bernstein; and for connections of sexuality to young adult literature see Matthews.

For queer youth, access to online, participatory communities and multimodal composing platforms creates new means of sharing, creating, and circulating stories. Using Wattpad, Tumblr, and Snapchat (Wargo), queer young people are unweaving and restorying that foundational narrative of childhood innocence, as they generate representations of queer childhood that circulate to the rhythms of digital time (Coleman). Propelled by access and the ease of production, these stories prompt the creation of queer content in quantities and to a temporal rhythm that is unprecedented. Such rapid proliferation of queer content occurs to notable effect; as Liu elucidates, rapid increases in data production have combined with the micro-temporality of digital participation to create an imbalance in data production and consumption. Qualitative and quantitative data no longer exist in equal proportion, and rapid expansions in quantities of information have fundamentally altered both what we know and how we know in the digital era: metaphysical truth has been supplanted by probabilistic thinking. Queer youth sharing their stories with wild abandon propel this epistemological shift as they circulate representations of varying quality and verisimilitude across the digital world, and in their wake, these representations often carry with them narratives of childhood innocence.

Flooding worlds both digital and actual with representations long consigned to the margins, the speed and quantity of their production create, for many, a false impression that change has come, that queerness now exists as a quotidian aspect of contemporary social worlds. Such an impression carries with it the mark of normalization, that tell-tale sign of digital innocence as it invites the belief that representation alone heralds sweeping social change. Innocence, however, proves a more wily narrative than this and when connected to childhood, obscures itself through topological changes to stories. Merely changing representations, from straight bodes to queer ones, obscure the failure to affect deep structural shifts to narratives of innocence. For queer youth, such is often the case, wherein surface-level changes to gender, sexuality, race, and ability fail to alter the fundamental narrative structures of innocence itself. Opening a portal to the past, contemporary representations of queer youth conform to narratives of childhood innocence such that centuries-old stories and their attendant tropes blossom anew. Guised by the queer body, childhood innocence manifests in present YA literature about queer

youth, obscuring the social oppressions it has animated in the past, does animate in the present, and will animate in the future.

In particular, narratives of virginity provide a primary locus for the preservation of childhood innocence in contemporary YA literature and for revealing both the contours and the stakes of digital innocence. As Christine Seifert points out, virginity in YA coheres around a moralistic “purity myth” that manifests through four primary tropes in stories about young women: 1) innocence and naïveté are inexplicably attractive; 2) virgins need virginity guardians; 3) virgins have destined soul mates; 4) danger is sexy and tempting (10-11). When taken together, these tropes fashion YA literature in Western, Anglophone contexts⁷ into what Seifert refers to as “abstinence porn”—a commodified form of young people’s literature in which female characters, fetishized and objectified, imbue texts with a value derived solely from their abstinence (3). In YA literature, women’s bodies, their histories, and their pains—what I refer to as painful histories—become reduced to a limited number of staid storylines, ones that allow narratives of innocence to linger into the present as they limit people’s capacity to imagine stories otherwise.⁸ Drawing upon this premise, in the subsequent two sections of this article, I demonstrate how childhood innocence secures its continued existence through narratives of queer virginity and how digital innocence make this existence possible as it invites young people to forget the past.

Bottom for Sale: Quantified Queer Male Virginity in “Bloom”

Virginity, particularly for young women, has often been expressed through naturalistic imagery, through metaphors of birds and bees and through images of flowers blooming into life. Calling upon such literary tropes, Troye Sivan’s catchy pop hit “Bloom” broadcasted virginity across international radio airways and, in an unprecedented manner, attached virginity to queer male bodies.

Perhaps an odd choice, to analyze Sivan’s work as YA literature is to reveal its narrative functions relative to other literary works addressing young adult concerns as well as to reveal its

⁷ For more on Western conceptions of virginity and its placement in the anglophone world see Kokkola’s *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality*.

⁸ For early work on the commodification of women, see Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women.”

influence upon the lives of countless young people across the globe. While music has become a prominent feature in many YA novels, songs themselves—their lyrical and sonic features—often remain overlooked, despite music’s integral relationship with literary tradition. Drawing upon traditional literary tropes about virginity, “Bloom’s” opening verse beckons, “Take a trip into my garden/ I’ve got so much to show ya/ The fountains and the waters/ Are beggin just to know ya” (Sivan, “Bloom”). The song created an instant stir in queer communities, where speculation ran rampant about the song’s intent: was “Bloom” a song about bottoming? Sivan’s position—pun intended—as a queer icon lent credibility to this potential. It was not, however, until Sivan announced the song on twitter along with the hashtag BopsAboutBottoming and tagged his location as @BikiniBottom that the song’s genesis was confirmed.

Sivan has been lauded as “pretty radical” for creating what has been heralded as a “bottoming anthem” (Brammer), but to what extent does “Bloom” do radical work? While it does seem to usher bottoming into cultural consciousness—perhaps a radical feat—“Bloom” is not merely a song about bottoming. A subtle yet crucial distinction, “Bloom” is a song about the loss of virginity through bottoming: “And it’s true, baby/ I’ve been saving this for you, baby” (Sivan, “Bloom”). Sivan’s catchy hit, while certainly achieving a new vista for bottoming culture, relies upon tropes of virginity that are anything but radical. They are tropes that have been forged through history and, more specifically, through painful histories often attached to womanly lifeworlds. “Bloom” thus serves as a demonstrative case⁹ for studying the threat of digital innocence as it reveals how an author, encountering the unprecedented quantum of digital knowledge, can normalize painful histories and thus allow past oppressions to manifest in the present.

From its opening line, the song’s evocation of a garden summons naturalistic images that echo the myth of purity, of being unblemished and natural. Such images recall the first of Seifert’s four virginity tropes—that innocence and naïvete are inexplicably attractive. This inexplicable attractiveness manifests throughout the lyrics but also surfaces in the song’s accompanying music video—a video in which Sivan’s campy, gender bending performance generates a high camp aesthetic interposed with floral scenery both real and imagined. An echo

⁹ For similar examples in traditional YA novels see Howard’s *Social Intercourse*, Albertalli’s *Simon Vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*, and Berlanti’s *Love, Simon*.

perhaps of the spritely Sivan himself, the video reminds us of the author's relationship with the digital world, one of submersion, in which increased access and quantities of information have altered his relationship to queerness: "I watched pretty much every coming out video on Youtube... [and] those brave brave brave people on YouTube...kind of showed me that it's okay" (Sivan, "Coming Out"). The song's lyrics and video's visual imagery work together to perpetuate the fetishization of virginity and thus reveal the mark of digital innocence upon Sivan's work. Transformed into a commodity, virginity in this YA text imbues queer male bodies with the value of purity.

While Sivan's song seems to transfer virginity tropes seamlessly across representational bodies, that transference does not equally preserve all values, and while myths of virginal purity remain, the painful histories of commodified female virginity fall away when applied to queer male bodies. This disappearance of painful histories recalls Sara Ahmed's warning in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; she cautions, "[Through] the processes of production... 'feelings' become 'fetishes', qualities that seem to reside in objects, [but] only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation" (11). Applied to virginity, Ahmed's framework illuminates how naturalization—the process by which moral values come to be understood as an inherent feature of the social world—allows narratives of purity and its associated imagery to incorporate queer virginal subjectivity. While preserving the moral value of purity narratives, "Bloom's" naturalistic imagery allows for the histories of pain that typically "stick" to that imagery, when representing women, to fall away (ibid.). Those painful histories and its attendant feelings are lost when reading Sivan's work, even as the moral values that gave rise to past oppressions now fixedly attach to queer male virginity. In this instance, the queer male body invites digital innocence as it asks readers to forget histories of women's oppression, both their feeling and their pain, and thus opens pathways for pernicious narratives of childhood innocence to progress into the future.

For "Bloom," oppression persists through the perpetuation of virginity tropes common to YA literature as they, in Seifert's words, "work together to fetishize virginity, slut-sham[ing] *girls* who act on their sexual desires" (12; emphasis added). To similar effect, Sivan's work extends such virginity tropes to queer male bodies, and while these bodies animate the

circulation of values in ways that might seem radical, the persistence of virginity tropes through those representations preserves certain moral values (i.e., the myth of purity), while also erasing negative affective histories that might reveal these tropes' oppressive capacities. Freed from the pains of the past, these tropes become less easily recognizable, less easily felt in the present. A manifestation of Sivan's embrace of digital innocence, "Bloom" invites queer male youth to feel the myth of virginal purity as a normal facet of bottoming and, in doing so, invites these young people to live, myopically, in the comfort of the present. Lost to the allure of digital innocence, neither past nor future *feels* necessary any longer. Contentedly in the present, youth might easily forego the critical hope of queer futurity, now seemingly obsolete, and so too a felt need to imagine and to write worlds otherwise from the here and now.

Temporary Virgins: On the Rapidity of Digital Experience in *Symptoms of Being Human*

Digital epistemologies are also shifting relationships to time for queer young people. Holding implications for virginity and its loss, queer time is a specific model of temporality that does not conform to "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 6). Jack Halberstam explains that queer trans*¹⁰ lives, in particular, exist within these differing temporalities, forging life narratives that operate outside Western taxonomies of space, time, and development (Halberstam, *Trans**). Interestingly, such queer temporalities are finding increased representation in YA novels that foreground trans experiences and are contributing to an illumination of digital innocence's relationship to queer futurity. One such novel, *Symptoms of Being Human*—the first YA novel to feature a self-identifying genderfluid protagonist—demonstrates how queer time can be lost in the micro-temporality of digital technology and thereby reinforce rote narratives of virginal violence better left, yet not forgotten, to history.

Encouraged by their therapist, protagonist Riley begins the novel by creating an online blog so they might "interact with 'people like [them]' in a 'risk-free' way" (Garvin 27).¹¹

¹⁰ My use of "trans*" reflects my discussion of Halberstam's work, exclusively. For more on the controversy surrounding this term, see <http://www.transstudent.org/asterisk/>.

¹¹ When referring to Riley, I use the singular pronoun "they." This choice is intended to reflect Riley's nonbinary gender identity and the ambiguity associated with knowing Riley's preferred pronouns usage within a given textual

Garnering followers rapidly, Riley's initial feelings of isolation quickly dissipate as they realize "Like I matter. Like maybe I'm not so alone after all" (98). This feeling of community reorients Riley's sense of existing in queer time through a cultivated sense of belonging: "Knowing that I have my blog community—even though it's anonymous and online—makes me feel like I belong, like I have a purpose, and that gives me confidence as I walk through the halls" (137). For Riley, to feel like they belong exerts a normalizing effect; it pulls them out of queer time in correspondence with shifts between Riley's digital and material world. However, these shifts do not restructure the foundational narratives at play, ones connected to virginity and to trans lives, and ultimately these shifts, born of a felt sense of belonging, result in violence.

At its base, belonging refers to an affective relationship predicated upon a feeling of normalcy, of being in communion with others like oneself; such communion demands a certain relationality that precludes feeling out of joint, of being in queer time, to varying effect. For Riley, their newfound sense of belonging has initially positive effects. It mitigates the anxieties of what they describe as gender dysphoria and allows Riley to experience positive emotions in the form of confidence: they can at last traverse the hellscape of a high school hallway. However, belonging is neither inherently positive nor inherently negative but hums with potential, and for Riley that potential manifests initially in a powerful, positive affective state which propels them to walk through a hallway unafraid. Belonging is, as stated, rife with potential and, for Riley, a genderfluid person, this normalized sense of belonging engenders a grand potential for harm. Embracing digital temporality's normalizing effect, Riley habituates the sting of their own painful history—those isolating experiences of queer time—and thus opens themselves and others to profound risk.

Such risk manifests subsequent to Riley's aforementioned surge in confidence, when an anonymous blog poster asks Riley for coming out advice. Daunted, Riley's temporary flair in positive affect deflates; they explain "Who am I to give this person advice? For one thing, I don't know anything about coming out" (99). Riley's heart then "physically aches" (ibid.) and, flummoxed, Riley refers the anonymous user to online, trained professionals. This interaction soon progresses, coming to a fever pitch when the anonymous individual posts again, now

moment. For a lovely introduction to transgender terminology and their histories, see Chapter 1 of Stryker's *Transgender History*.

grappling with suicidal ideation. The poster explains that, after coming out to her father as a “trans girl” (115), “he hit me. And I left. And now I keep staring at the train tracks and thinking I should just throw myself down there. Please reply” (ibid.). In this moment, temporal configurations of knowledge, experience, and learning shift and disrupt Riley’s rapidly habituated sense of belonging to the queer/trans community: they once again feel out of joint.

As Liu asserts, the digital era is preoccupied with information “of much shorter durations—time spans plunging down to the diurnal rhythm of blog posts,” what he refers to as “micro-temporarily.” For Riley, the micro-temporality of the digital era allows digital innocence to surface as it invites a forgetting of the past and of the pain it proffers. Interacting with others online, Riley rapidly cultivates a sense of belonging that normalizes the painful sting of their personal history, of the violences experienced in the physical world. The rapidity of Riley’s digital interactions lead them to feel normal such that the sting of theirs and of other queer trans folks’ painful histories become backgrounded and so too those histories’ anticipatory function. Painful histories are loci of learning; they generate the warning feelings that direct us to call upon the past as we interpret and make sense of the present. Furthermore, these histories and their pain teach us to anticipate the future, to be wary of potential violences in both digital and physical spaces, while also inviting us to pursue queer futurity—to imagine and craft new narratives of the future that challenge the injustices of today’s social worlds.

Framing digital innocence in this way calls attention to the importance of learning from the past, from painful histories that would often rather be forgotten. Heather Love cautions against such desired erasure, asserting that “As long as homophobia continues to centrally structure queer life, we cannot afford to turn away from the past; instead we have to risk the turn backward, even if it means opening ourselves to social and psychic realities we would rather forget” (29). Riley’s embrace of digital technology threatens to enact such forgetting as it ushers them out of queer time; embracing the allure of digital innocence, that invitation to forget, they fall prey to the micro-temporarily of the digital era and as a result experience a rapidly cultivated sense of belonging, a feeling of normalcy, that begs them both to forget the past and to cease imagining the future. A vital aspect of digital innocence, electing to forget the past is to open

oneself to present risk as well as to threaten the critical hope of imaginative storytelling that queer futurity makes possible.

When counseling Riley to begin a blog, their therapist characterizes such digital interactions as a “risk free” space. Nonetheless, Riley is constantly besought by epithets, by interpellations as “fag” (42), “dyke” (118), and “fuckin tranny” (167), all of which they quickly learn to habituate. Learning to combat anonymous trolls online does not, however, stem Riley’s ultimate rape in the concluding sequences of the novel—a physical loss of virginity that occurs in the wake of being outed to their congressman father. This sexual assault occurs in a deserted parking lot where Riley has retreated from their father’s rage. As is common in such YA literature, the rape itself goes unnarrated (Kokkola 173), and though unwritten, one can infer what has occurred based upon Riley’s change in affect. In the wake of the assault, Riley begins to blame themselves: “I can’t fight the feeling that this is all my fault...By refusing to just be normal” (277). Despite those earlier feelings of normalcy, Riley recognizes in this moment that, to others, their transness still signifies queerly; they remain a figure out of joint, living in queer time, and are thus jolted from micro-temporality of the digital world.

Living with PTSD, Riley begins their journey as a survivor. They scour the internet and find their experiences reflected in “dozens of websites about violence against trans and genderqueer people—but after half an hour of browsing, [they] end up back on Queer Alliance.org, reading personal stories written by survivors” (281). It is these personal stories, these painful histories, that provide Riley with the armament of the past—a necessary hermeneutical resource for recognizing and challenging the myopia of the present. For as Riley explains, it is not “the numbness, the isolation, the nightmares. The quilt, the shame, the lack of appetite” that is most shocking in the wake of their assault, it is the reality that they are “A statistic who perfectly fits the profile” (28-82). Per their own assessment, Riley recognizes the predictability of their assault, a near statistical guarantee that if heeded might have resulted in an alternative future untouched by the pain of sexual assault. This predictability, while seemingly a gesture towards inevitability, is also a gesture toward the potential for things to have been otherwise, for a new ending to old stories, wherein rape and sexual assault are no longer the narrativized outcome for trans youth: But why was this this outcome for Riley?

While establishing causation in such instances is impossible, historical relations of power and narrative traditions provide clues as to why Riley's experiences were represented in this way. Garvin's novel proves traditional in that it reinforces long-held narratives about sexual assault. As Angela Hubler explains, by leaving the act of rape unnarrated from the first person perspective, YA novels about sexual assault downplay the societal forces that render such acts possible, while placing the onus of recovery on the survivor. This description holds true for Garvin's novel, positioning the text as a typical "narrative of recovery," which, as Kokkola explains, positions sexual assault survivors as needing to "[work] through the traumatic incident moving from silence to voice" (176). True to form, *Symptoms of Being Human* concludes with Riley sharing their story, participating on a conference panel entitled "Building LGBTQ Communities Online" (326). Voicing their support for digital community, Riley insists that "To change something, you have to say things out loud. Do things. Take chances. Take a stand." (328). Reinforcing the narrative of recovery, Riley shares their painful history, moving ineffable feeling into physical speech (Kokkola 176). This is, however, the only space in which Riley raises their voice, and in fact, as the novel concludes they cease to engage in online communities altogether.

While perhaps merely an omission, Riley's retreat from the digital world, I contend, speaks to a desire for removal from the micro-temporality of the digital world and to a return to existence in queer time. A facet of shifting digital epistemologies, the rapidity of interactions in digital communities shape and reshape affectivity with mercurial quickness. While not inherently problematic, such quickness can create dissonance between the temporalities of the physical and digital worlds and, in the case of queer youth, can create an invitation to forget the past, to fall prey to the allure of digital innocence and its normalizing effect. For Riley, feeling normal leads them to forego the armament of the past, those painful histories of themselves and others to violent result—a result, frankly, all too common in YA literature about queer trans youth. In response, queer futurity asks us to imagine narratives otherwise, to craft new stories that expand the possibilities for queer existence in both the real world and the world of stories. Riley highlights the risky potential of digital innocence and need for temporalities that ask us to remember the past, both our own and others, even when it is painful. Removing queer youth from queer time

without the armaments of the past is to render them vulnerable to heightened violence in the present as well as to preclude them the critical hope of imagining more just futures.

A Timely Conclusion

Clinging to representations of queer virginity, childhood innocence proves anything but a story of the past. As this article illuminates, innocence has reworked itself for the digital age, manifesting through narratives and tropes attached to representations of queer virginity. Reading Sivan's "Bloom" next to Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human* reveals the wiliness of innocence and its chameleon-like persistence. In "Bloom," vast quantities of digital information create space for painful histories often attached to womanly lifeworlds to transfer onto queer male bodies, and newly commodified, these bodies reify purity myths that reinforce childhood innocence as a foundational narrative of contemporary society. In a similar fashion, Riley Cavanagh in Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human* reenacts a narrative of recovery typical of YA literature about the seeming loss of innocence due to sexual assault. Disparate in both content and form, together these pieces reveal, however, the continued need for queer futurity, for feeling and imagining towards futures that challenge childhood innocence's influence upon young lives and stories. While future oriented, young people must not, however, forget the past; they must allow the pain of history to shape their narratives and storytelling processes, encapsulating oppressions in memory and in stories and thereby stemming the contemporary invitation to forget.

In a moment when digital technologies are fundamentally reorienting knowledge itself, queer youth possess the potential to compose fundamentally new narratives about queer life, ones that weave together past, present, and future in ways that deny digital innocence and its normalizing effect: it is queer futurity, however, that provides the impetus to do so. Queer futurity is an orientation that locates in painful histories a potential for learning, a locus of critical hope that impells young people to craft more just futures by drawing upon their varied gender, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, their transnational perspectives, their abilities, and other lived experiences to imagine and write new worlds, new stories into existence--doing so while also rejecting the digital present's proffer of a normal life.

“I just wanted to write normal pop songs, and when the time comes to use a pronoun, I’ll use the word ‘he’,” says Troye Sivan, explaining his vision for music and for queer life (Frank). To conclude with this quote is not an attempt to vilify Sivan—in fact his music is undeniably catchy. Instead, this quote is intended as a reminder of what queerness forfeits when normalcy becomes the telos of queer life. To be normally queer is to accept digital innocence’s call to forget the past; to be normally queer is to be satisfied with representational changes that remain on the surface of narratives alone; to be normally queer is to threaten the critical hope of queer futurity and the potential of reimagining the future. Vitaly, queer youth must not fall prey to the siren’s call of normalcy, for to do so would mark the end of queer life altogether. As Heather Love explains, to cease to imagine and to cease to remember—painful though it may be—is “to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (30). Instead, queer youth must write in remembrance and in fantasy, crafting queerer narratives and queerer worlds that restructure that foundational narrative of childhood innocence and thus opens queer YA to the continued pursuit of queer futurity and to the “collective political becoming” of a coalition queer future (Muñoz 189).

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