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Mind-Reading The Romance Novel

Effects of Single Perspective and Dual Perspective in Christina Lauren's *The Unhoneymooners* and Julie Olivia's *The Fiction Between Us*

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how romance novels can create different reading experiences through distinct setups for mind-reading. I analyze one novel offering a single perspective to the events, Christina Lauren's The Unhoneymooners (2019), and another with two perspectives, Julie Olivia's The Fiction Between Us (2022). Both novels feature a couple who share an antagonistic past that is based on a misunderstanding.

To compare the effects created by the variety in perspectives in such plots, this thesis uses Liza Zunshine's work on Theory of Mind in fiction. In addition to this, it looks at how Alan Palmer's concept of doubly embedded narratives and knowledge of characters' own mental events affect how the characters view their relationship. To make sense of the development of the romances, it looks at the structure and barriers of romance novels as explained by Pamela Regis as well as how Patrick Colm Hogan sees these plot patterns being tied to patterns in characters and how these can be altered to create a unique novel.

This thesis shows how the inclusion or omission of the love interest's perspective creates different demands for readers' mind-reading actions. In novels with one perspective, mind-reading acts as a way to create tension and is a necessary way to gain information about the hidden perspective, while in novels with two perspectives, it is used to show the characters' uncertainty of each other's feelings as well as to create feelings of satisfaction for the reader. Although the information the reader possesses varies between the novels, both present the women as the ones struggling with their feelings and careers and the men as the sources of either delayed or immediate confirmation for the women's feelings.

Due to alternative perspectives becoming popular only during the recent years, there has not been much academic discussion on the inclusion of more than the female character's perspective. This thesis looks at the changes in the expectations of romantic relationships and how these are reflected in the male love interest's involvement in heterosexual romance novels, resulting in shifts in the perspectives of the novels.

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1 Introduction

“I got this crazy feelin' deep inside / When you called and asked to see me tomorrow night / I'm not a mind reader, but I'm reading the signs / [...] That you can't wait to see me again” (Cyrus). By exploring the idea of wondering about a crush’s feelings and their perspective, Miley Cyrus’ song “See You Again” is an example of mind-reading from a single perspective, mirroring the way protagonists in romance novels try to understand the love interest’s feelings. Romance, the subject matter of Cyrus’ song, is an extremely popular topic for songs, novels, and other media, often appearing in the form of a story in our culture (Weisser 11). This is because “we crave the sensation of extraordinary phenomena, but we also want the artifice of narrative” (Weisser 13). The study of romance novels has focused mostly on gender and sexuality, and in the ways plot conventions are used to express these themes in romance novels. Studying these topics is important because our understanding of them has evolved since central scholarship in the field, including works by Pamela Regis, Susan Weisser, and Corinne Saunders, were published between ten and twenty years ago. In addition to this, the perspectives of romance novels have experienced considerable shifts after the turn of the millennium, but there has not been much academic discussion about them. For this reason, this thesis focuses specifically on mind-reading and the differences in perspective in romance novels.

Even though romance is the most popular genre in the United States, and the study of romance novels is thriving, even having its own peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal *The Journal of Popular Romance Studies,* the genre is misunderstood by critics and left out of reviews despite spending weeks on the bestsellers lists (Regis xi). In mainstream literary culture it is seen as “silly and empty-headed” (Regis xiii) and among the literary critics as “women’s bondage” (Regis xiii). Susan Weisser attests that women have been associated with “silly” novels for a long time and that this idea is “not only predating mass-market romance but perhaps as old as the genre of the novel itself” (131). Pamela Regis responds to the criticism of romance by stating that these novels are about women’s freedom, and the genre’s popularity can be explained by the fact that “it conveys the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings” (xiii). This is even more apparent in modern romance novels; since the introduction of the genre, it has undergone developments following the changes in gender roles and the expectations of marriages. This means that the idea of finding the right husband is no longer “the only golden ticket to the good life” as women have gained independence and the ability to keep their own money (Weisser 2). Yet, the importance of romance is still tied to personal

identity, and the idea of being chosen by the "right guy" holds influence on many women's lives (Weisser 2). One of the reasons for this is that love and marriage still act as "the major context for the social and material realities of women's lives" and as the "currency by which their value is judged" (Weisser 143). Even though women do not face as much pressure to get married as they used to, they are still depicted as "the ones who are centrally concerned with and invested in romantic relationships, if not marriage", meaning they are the creators as well as primary audience of romantic fiction in films and novels (Weisser 4). There is then a discrepancy between the notions that women are expected to be invested in finding romance, and novels dealing with such topics being labelled as frivolous.

These lingering expectations regarding love and marriage are accompanied by other reasons that have ensured the romance genre's continuing popularity, such as the idea that reading or watching about love helps us understand the motives of others (Weisser 188). Weisser argues that watching *The Bachelor* offers the same pleasures as reading Jane Austen, as the viewer or reader can use these opportunities to sort out "the worthy from the unworthy" and to learn to understand others' intentions (188). Romance literature also helps us "discern hierarchies of value, follow, rules of behavior, parse out popular ideas about men and women" (Weisser 188). Therefore, even though the expectations for romantic relationships as well as the way they are represented in romance novels have changed since the emergence of the genre, these novels still provide crucial information about the behavior and intentions of potential romantic partners. These motives of other people are even more at the forefront when looking at the effects of romance novels that feature more than one perspective. Yet, since the shift in the default perspective in romance has occurred only a few years ago, there has been little discussion on the effects of different perspectives.

The novels I have chosen in order to explore perspectives in romance novels are *The Unhoneymooners* (2019) by Christina Lauren and *The Fiction Between Us* (2022) by Julie Olivia, which are both contemporary romance novels about a heterosexual romance. Their plots have similar qualities, since they both follow a man and a woman who have known each other before the events of the novels and who have begun to hate each other due to a misunderstanding, which is revealed as such later in the novel. *The Unhoneymooners* is told from the woman's perspective, apart from the epilogue, which is told from the man's point of view. However, the epilogue occurs only after the couple has ended up together and thus does not give the reader information on the love interest's feelings during the development of the romance. *The Fiction Between Us* alternates between the man's and the woman's perspectives

in different chapters, giving the reader access to both of their thoughts and motivations. Thus, in *The Honeymooners*, the reader knows as little as the protagonist, while in *The Fiction Between Us*, the reader knows more than either of the characters.

In novels with one perspective, the reader constructs their knowledge of the love interest's feelings through the protagonist's view of them as well as through their own mind-reading of the love interest. The reader is likely affected by the protagonist's assessment of the love interest since all the information about him is narrated from her perspective. That being said, knowledge of genre conventions gives the reader information about the progression and eventual ending of the novel that the characters naturally do not possess. In novels with two perspectives, the reader does not need to perform mind-reading on either of the characters since they are let in on what the characters are feeling. The element of suspense regarding the love interest's feelings is thus removed because they are shown to the character from the start. Instead, the suspense in the novel is created by not knowing when the characters will confess their feelings to each other, or if the characters will misunderstand them even after this moment. However, while the reader possesses all of the knowledge of the characters' thoughts, the characters themselves must perform mind-reading on each other throughout the novel. The reader then reads about these – often failed – attempts while having to remember that they know more than the characters.

In this thesis I argue that romance novels with one point of view engage the reader in trying to ascertain the love interest's feelings regarding the protagonist, while novels with two points of view do not offer this opportunity. In contrast, the latter gives the reader a unique opportunity of gaining information from both sides in a relationship, which is not possible in real life. These novels can also illustrate the extent of the characters' understanding of the other's feelings as the reader can hear the thoughts directly from the person thinking them. In novels with a single perspective, the reader can be informed about the specifics of the barrier without losing the element of suspense, whereas in novels with a dual perspective, the suspense that is taken away from revealing the other perspective can instead be created by withdrawing the details of the barrier for the romance or the characters' pasts. The latter method makes the reader engage in trying to discover the barriers and whether the characters want to conquer them. I will be analyzing how *The Unhoneymooners* and *The Fiction Between Us* present the love interests' feelings to the reader, and how one of the approaches creates an opportunity for mind-reading by withholding the other perspective, whereas the other creates an environment

where the reader can create an image of the relationship that is not accessible to the characters themselves.

The thesis builds on genre studies, cognitive narratology, and theories of fictional characters. As I am dealing with romance novels, genre studies aid in looking at the specific conventions of romance novels and the readers' expectations of them. I look at the plot structure and barriers of romance novels established by Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) as well as at the character types associated with them and how these functions can be altered, as explained by Patrick Colm Hogan in "Characters and Their Plots" in *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (2010). Additionally, I will draw on other works in romance novel studies, such as Katherine Roach's *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture* (2016) and Susan Ostrov Weisser's *The Glass Slipper: Women and Love Stories* (2013). In order to examine how the conventions regarding perspectives in romance novels have shifted since the previous century, I will look at Laura Kinsale's "The Androgynous Reader: Point of View in the Romance" in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance* (1992). To analyze the effects of perspective on romance novels, I will refer to work in cognitive narratology, particularly the concept of Theory of Mind and metarepresentations in Lisa Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006) and *Theory of Mind and Literature* (2014) as well as Alan Palmer's work on doubly embedded narratives and the difference between private feelings and outward emotions in *Fictional Minds* (2004) and *Social Minds in the Novel* (2010). No critical readings of my chosen novels exist at present, and my interest in them has to do with these works as case studies of the phenomenon of perspective in romance novels.

After a description of the plots of the novels, the next chapter goes over the theoretical background, which is divided into two sections: the first will go over elements of the romance genre and the second mind-reading in narratives. The former will look at plot structure and barriers in romance novels, character patterns, and how these prototypes can be altered. In addition to these, it will go over the ways different perspectives have been used in romance novels and what effects they might have on the reading experience. The section on mind-reading in narratives will examine Liza Zunshine's work on Theory of Mind in literature, including metarepresentations and its challenges and failures as well as Palmer's doubly embedded narratives and the division of public and private thought. The next chapter looks at how the aforementioned elements present themselves in *The Unhoneymooners*, and how the

novel's single perspective highlights some elements in certain characters while de-emphasizing them in others. In addition to the elements mentioned in the theoretical background, the chapter will also look at the moment in the novel when the actual embedded narratives are revealed and how it affects the characters' mind-reading. The final chapter before the conclusion will examine the same elements in *The Fiction Between Us* with the added subchapter of "mirror moments", which are instances where the perspectives of both characters are shown to the reader. These moments give the reader valuable information about the characters' feelings for each other, and the reader is able to witness the connection or disconnection between the characters and compare their own knowledge to the knowledge possessed by the characters.

1.1 The Unhoneymooners

The novel with a single perspective is *The Unhoneymooners* (2019), an adult contemporary romance by Christina Lauren, the combined pen name of Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings. They have written nineteen *New York Times* bestselling novels, and their works have been translated to over 30 languages ("Bio"). Their novels have also been nominated for several awards, and they have won the Seal of Excellence and Book of the Year from *RT Magazine* ("Bio"). *The Unhoneymooners* was nominated for the Best Romance of 2019 in the Goodreads Choice Awards and was included in Amazon's Best Romances of 2019 ("The Unhoneymooners"). It has also been optioned for film by BCDF (D'Alessandro).

The novel is told from the perspective of Olive Torres, whose twin Ami is getting married at the beginning of the novel. At Ami's and Dane's wedding, Olive has to endure the company of Ethan Thomas, Dane's brother and the best man, who she detests. When the whole wedding party, excluding Olive and Ethan, gets food poisoning, they end up pretending to be the wedding couple to make use of Ami's booked and paid honeymoon in Hawaii. Olive and Ethan plan to avoid each other as much as possible during the vacation, but when Olive runs into her boss and Ethan into his ex-girlfriend, they must pretend to be in love in order to keep up with their lie. The reason for Olive's hatred of Ethan is told to the reader at the beginning of the novel; however, it is later revealed that she had misunderstood his previous actions and thus her reason for hating him turns out to be unfounded. Since the novel is told from her point of view, the reader does not know of his true feelings and view of the situation until he confesses them to her. The epilogue of the novel is told from Ethan's perspective, but it takes

place after the couple has ended up together and thus does not help the reader in ascertaining the love interest's feelings as they have already been revealed at this point.

1.2 The Fiction Between Us

The novel with two points of view is *The Fiction Between Us* (2022), which is the second installment in a contemporary romance series by Julie Olivia. Despite being a part of a series, the novel can be read on its own as each book tells the story of a different couple. Julie Olivia is a self-publishing author and a more recent name in the romance genre than Christina Lauren. She is not as well-known as the writer duo, but she does have a loyal fanbase. She published her debut novel *In Too Deep* in 2019, and her most popular novels are the books in The Honeywood series, of which *The Fiction Between Us* is the second part. Her newest novel, *If It Makes You Happy*, which was published independently in 2024, has recently acquired a publishing deal with Berkley Books, and will be republished in 2025 ("Books").

The series is set in Cedar Cliff, a fictional small town famous for its theme park Honeywood. *The Fiction Between Us* is told from two points of view, with Quinn Sauer's and Landon Arden's perspectives alternating every other chapter. She is the best friend of his sister, Lorelei, and all of them work together at the theme park. Quinn and Landon used to be friends when they were younger, but she has despised him ever since his friends bullied her for liking him. What she does not know is that he liked her back and is in fact still in love with her. Quinn plays the character Queen Bee at their theme park, and when their park needs to acquire new customers in order to prevent it from being sold, Landon, the head of security, steps into the role of Queen Bee's love interest, Ranger Randy. Quinn has her guard up with him as she believes that he was a part of her bullying, and when the truth is revealed to her, she has to reassess the basis for her hatred. The specifics of their past are slowly exposed to the reader from the perspectives of both Quinn and Landon who withhold a few crucial pieces from the reader at the beginning, resulting in surprise when the whole picture is revealed.

2 Theoretical Background

This chapter is divided into two parts, with the first dealing with elements of the romance genre, and the second Theory of Mind. The first part begins with the structure and character roles of romance novels and how these create a clear frame for the romance. Within the confides of this structure, the components can then be altered to suit the particular story the author wants to write. This makes it possible for romance novels to retain the structure and ending that is expected of them while also providing suspense and surprise for the reader. Connected to character roles, I will then discuss how the roles of the female protagonist and the male love interest in a heterosexual romance have undergone changes throughout decades, coinciding with the developments of gender roles and expectations regarding marriage. Next, I will examine perspective and how the choice of one perspective over another affects the story as well as consider the conventions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the love interest's point of view. This recently normalized idea of including both perspectives of a romance novel creates new opportunities for the inclusion and comparison of the characters' feelings while removing other aspects of the reading experience. In the second part, which focuses on Theory of Mind, I will first explain the theory and then how it connects to the concepts of doubly embedded narratives, metarepresentation, as well as private feelings and outward emotions.

2.1 Elements of the Romance Genre

2.1.1 Plot

Romance often occurs as a story, and while the specifics of the narrative change throughout time, the structure and basic elements of it stay the same (Weisser 11). Katherine Roach summarizes this structure as "find somebody to love, work through problems, be happy" (Roach 4), while Patrick Colm Hogan offers a more detailed one by describing it as "two people who fall in love, but whose union is blocked by some representative of social order, typically a parent", adding that "In the full version, the lovers are separated, sometimes with suggestions of death, but are ultimately joined" (Hogan 135). By having a specific structure, romance novels create certain expectations for the reader about the characters, their relationships, and the endings to their stories.

Janice Radway, who interviewed romance readers in the 1980's, argues that because the readers of romance novels are familiar with the basic plot of them, the novels are reminiscent

of myths in oral cultures as they "*retell* a single tale whose final outcome their readers always already know" (198). The function of romance novels can be therefore seen as "the ritualistic repetition of a single, immutable cultural myth" (Radway 198). Readers even go as far as reading the ending before they begin reading the novel to confirm that it follows the expected formula (Radway 205). In fact, the ending is a central aspect of the structure of a romance novel; it could even be said that the "Happily-Ever-After ending" is what defines the romance story (Roach 165). The Romance Writers of America define this ending as the "emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending" where both the internal and external conflicts are resolved (Roach 165). The readers purposefully look for authors who they believe will deliver on such an ending, and the authors often view the writing of one as part of a contract with their readership (Roach 166). The predetermined ending creates a safe space for examining the uncertainties of love as the reader can expect an ending where the problems are resolved (Weisser 11). When looking at *The Unhoneymooners* and *The Fiction Between Us*, the reader's expectation to see the couples ending up together affects their reading in each step as they know that feelings of love either already exist or will exist by the end of the novels.

In the context of a romance novel, these uncertainties are known as "barriers," and they are often what makes up the conflict in a romance novel (Regis 32). The barrier prevents the characters from being together until the obstacle is overcome, which is why it acts as the driving force of a romance novel (Regis 32). As the characters often do not desire a relationship with the other person at the beginning of the book, or they have reasons to believe it would not work, the purpose of the narrative is to solve these barriers (Regis 114). According to Regis, there are two types of barriers: external, referring to a circumstance outside of the minds of the characters, and internal, which relates to a complication stemming specifically from their minds (32). Contemporary romance novels are more likely to contain an interior barrier as they are rarely about love at first sight, and knowledge acts as a vital part of the courtship (Regis 37, 60). Miscommunication is a frequently seen internal barrier, which once recognized by the characters, makes them notice the importance of communication (Regis 14). This specific type of internal barrier can be seen in both *The Unhoneymooners* and *The Fiction Between Us,* and even the novels' external barriers turn out to be internal in the end. Regis states that such cases are explained by the fact that the external barriers only matter if the characters view these challenges as deal-breakers (Regis 81). The reader of a romance novel can also stand in the way of the characters ending up together and must "engage in a process of self-renovation", or they risk participating in the barrier (Regis 81). The reader thus

has to be on the side of the characters and root for them to end up together, the likelihood of which depends on the author's skills as a romance writer.

2.1.2 Character

As the romance novel has a specific structure that it follows, the characters featured in it also have particular patterns (Hogan 134). Hogan explains that these patterns are connected to each other, and thus "genres (e.g., love story) imply roles or character functions (e.g., lovers)" (134). The plot of the love story includes a barrier for the romance, and this obstacle is often connected to character as it often stems from a parent or a rival or even the protagonists themselves (Hogan 137). Alan Palmer notes that these genre conventions are useful for the reader as they can "use previously existing knowledge of other romances to interpret the various genre-related textual cues that invariably arise" (42), thus benefiting from the genre conventions creating similarity between novels.

The author can choose to use these prototypes included in the patterns or alter them to suit the particular narrative they create (Hogan 139-140). The alteration of these prototypes can create suspense or curiosity in a novel, so that while the character roles themselves stay the same (e.g., lovers in romance novels), the story the characters enact can be altered to an extent. Hogan states that the ways of altering prototypes are called "alteration principles," which can be enacted, for example, by increasing or deleting prototype elements or even including non-prototype elements (Hogan 139-140). Another alteration principle is discourse manipulation, which can affect any main component of the story. Examples of these include presenting story events in a non-chronological manner as well as temporal alteration in character, which refers to "when an important fact about a character – a fact that both explains and contextualizes his or her action – is concealed from the reader until the end of the story" (Hogan 140). This can be seen in writers deliberately choosing to not disclose information about a character "for manipulative rhetorical purposes" (Sanford and Emmott, "Scenarios" 397) or in writers creating suspense when they withhold an event for a time before unveiling it (Sanford and Emmott 224). This is especially seen in *The Fiction Between Us*, where aspects of Landon's narrative are hidden from the viewer.

As prototypes can be altered, there are several ways a character's arc can develop. Readers can rarely predict characters' actions in a text, but their "category-based mental models affect the way in which they assimilate new character information as a narrative unfolds" (Gerrig 364). Readers therefore make fast judgments about characters' actions and whether they seem

to be in congruence with their knowledge of the characters (Gerrig 364-365). If the actions seem inconsistent, "text processing is disrupted providing, presumably, a context for them to learn something new about a character (if nothing more than that the character is inconsistent)" (Gerrig 365). This can be seen in a scene in *The Fiction Between Us* when the reader's knowledge of Landon's perspective is not consistent with his behavior. Moreover, readers allow the author to keep them in the dark during the novel because they know from their previous experience that they will be provided with an explanation by the end of the novel (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 122). Therefore, even when the specifics of a romance novel differ from novel to novel, the reader knows to expect the characters to end up together and achieve a happy ending due to their knowledge of the genre.

As many of the central works of romance novel studies were written at a time when queer romance novels were published in much smaller numbers than now, if at all, the studies and frameworks generally include a man and a woman as the characters in a romance novel. In these cases of a heterosexual romance, the roles of the male and female characters will be established as the lovers, but the expectations of the individual characters' arcs and the perspective from which the story is told can vary. The expectations for both the man and the woman in romance novels have changed throughout history due to the expectations of gender roles and how they play in a romantic relationship having undergone changes. In addition to interior barriers becoming more common in modern romance novels in the 20th century, the man's part in a narrative has undergone changes as well. In the older romance traditions, the male love interest's role was to be the target of the female protagonist's desires, while in contemporary works the male character may have a much larger role (Regis 111). This can be explained by the fact that the modern romance novel does not need to show the woman's journey to maturity or "trace her coming to believe that she should marry the partner she chooses" (Regis 111). The reason for this is that in contemporary romance novels these aspects are often in place at the beginning of the novel and not a part of the courtship, and the novel thus has more room to focus on the hero (Regis 110-111). This also allows the final characteristic of modern romance; as there is less need for the heroine's journey to maturity and a bigger role can be placed on the hero, the courtships focus more on the emotional aspects of the characters' relationship (Regis 111).

2.1.3 Perspective

In addition to these changes seen in the roles of characters in romance novels, or perhaps even due to them, the accustomed way to write perspective has also experienced changes. Perspective is analyzed in narratology, which explores questions such as “why a certain point of view has been selected over the others, how it is realized linguistically, and what its impact is on interpreting the work” (Krasniqi and Tahiri 133). Ivdit Diasamidze acknowledges that perspective affects novels to a great extent as it “colors and shapes the way in which everything else is presented and perceived”, and thus by altering the perspective, the whole story is altered (160). Gerard Genette set out to enhance the previous term “point of view,” coining the term “focalization,” which refers to “the perspective, angle of vision, or point of view from which events are related” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 48). It differs from narration in the way that focalization focuses on questions of “Who sees?” or “Who thinks?”, whereas narration is about “Who speaks?” and “Who narrates?” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 48). Focalization is crucial for studying fictional minds as it is concerned with readers deciphering which consciousness is being presented in the text (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 48).

Both of the novels I will be analyzing use first-person narrative, which are described as “necessarily subjective” as “the only thoughts and feelings that first-person narrators experience directly are their own” (Diasamidze 162). Some novels have multiple first-person narrators who are “each conveying a personalized way of looking at reality” and “challenging the notion of objective truth”, thus showing how different ways of seeing the world connect within the fictional work (Krasniqi and Tahiri 133). Despite these multiple narrators having the ability of collectively giving the reader knowledge from multiple points of view, the narrators themselves “can only report information that falls within his own first-hand knowledge of the world or what he comes to learn second hand from others” (Diasamidze 162). This subjectivity implies that the characters and events can be expected to be shown only in the way they appear to the first-person narrator, which is why in order to measure the reliability of a first-person narrator, it is important to pay attention to the character in question and their “built-in biases, values and beliefs; and degree of awareness and perceptivity” (Diasamidze 162). Moreover, while these narrators cannot report thoughts from the consciousnesses of other characters, they are “free to speculate” (Disamidze 162), making the analysis of their use of Theory of Mind compelling. As they are limited to their own thoughts, any speculation about the thoughts of other characters “requires the use of modal expressions”, such as "It seemed to me," or "She looked angry” (Edmiston 739).

The selection of perspective is thus an important choice affecting the novel, but this choice can be dictated by genre conventions. Laura Kinsale states that although it might be easier for romance writers to invoke the reader's stake in the male character with the use of his perspective, until the 1980s, publishers of Harlequin romance novels forbade their writers from doing just so (35). The reasoning behind this might have been the publishers' idea of the reader always identifying with the female character (Kinsale 35). Even so, Kinsale reports readers asking for more books from the man's point of view and demonstrates this by Carol Thurston's early- and mid-1980s survey results about the topic, which show a desire for a male perspective as well as a "mixed" point of view (Kinsale 34). Thurston adds that "Readers are no longer satisfied with seeing only how the New Hero responds, they now want to look inside his head" (qtd. in Kinsale 34). This "mixed" point of view usually includes the first-person narrators of both sides of the couple, a narrative style that readers longed for during Thurston's time and which can now be seen in the majority of romance novels.

The accustomed way to write romance novels from the woman's perspective changed drastically after the turn of the millennium. In a web article published in 2021, Winter St James notes that when she began reading romance novels more than thirty years ago, it seemed to her that they were told exclusively from the woman's point of view; however, the majority of romance novels that are being published now include a "dual perspective", meaning that both of the couple's perspectives alternate in the novel (St James). Similarly to Kinsale and Thurston, she acknowledges the desire for the man's perspective: "somewhere along the way, readers decided they liked the idea of getting some insight into the male perspective, and the tide turned in favour of dual POV [point of view]" (St James). As for the reasons behind this change, Kinsale suggests sexual admiration (Kinsale 37), while Radway points out that as the reader gains more knowledge of the love interest than the protagonist possesses, they could be offered an explanation of his behavior which has not been in concordance with the protagonist's assumptions (Radway 140). Moreover, the double perspective offers a space for the reader to identify with the woman's frustrations while also relying on the knowledge they have of the man's intentions (Radway 140).

Despite the clear shift in the use of perspectives throughout the development of the romance genre, there are still many readers who prefer novels with only one perspective. The advocates for each alternative present distinct reasons for preferring or disliking the options, demonstrating in their answers that changing the perspective affects the reading experience of a romance. The readers who prefer to read from only one perspective emphasize the

importance of the tension that arises from not knowing the feelings of the love interest (St James). This can naturally only occur when the perspective of the other side of the romance is hidden from the reader. Megan Mabee comments in a web article that romance novels with one perspective "mirror falling in love in real life", since reading other people's thoughts is not possible in reality (Mabee). She also brings up how she wishes to learn of the love interest's feelings but does not want them to be disclosed explicitly, instead wanting to "read between the lines" and ascertain their feelings from their actions (Mabee). A Reddit discussion on commenters' preferred perspective echoes the above statements of finding the mystery as well as the act of mind-reading a pleasurable part of romance novels; one commenter pointed out how they enjoy not knowing what the other character is thinking, as being unaware of whether the feelings are reciprocated "makes everything more exciting" (pale-atlantis). Mabee's point of mirroring real life is brought up by another commenter of the thread, stating that single perspective "feels the most authentic to me, like a real romance" (rotipom). Despite being the preferred perspective for many, as well as the predominant perspective for a long time, single perspective has been criticized for not creating a feeling of connection to the other character (St James) as well as for creating the impression that the characters are not equally important, making it more difficult to accept their romance (smutreportteam).

Connected to this criticism, the advocates for dual perspective emphasize the idea that showing both perspectives makes the characters seem equally important (smutreportteam). This perspective also makes it possible to write scenes from one character's point of view without the other being present, and it aids in creating "a bond between the reader and the couple" (St James). This bond creates intimacy as "like a close confidant, you're privy to just exactly how thrilling each lingering look and accidental touch really is" (smutreportteam). Another point in favor of dual perspective is the fact that not having to guess the characters' thoughts makes it is easier to see the motivations behind their behavior (smutreportteam). Having said that, the guesswork is precisely what some readers appreciate in single perspective novels. Some readers, as one commenter on the Reddit thread, want to "hear everything straight from the source", and when they are not offered this possibility, the reading experience feels unbalanced as they do not know what both characters are thinking (trisstessa910). The dual perspective is critiqued in the Reddit thread on the basis of, for example, feeling frustrated when the characters will not communicate their feelings while the reader knows that they would be reciprocated (Sarah-cophagus). Another criticism is about

the fact that the authors, who are often women, are not always able to write the man's perspective satisfactorily (rotipom), or they might struggle with writing two distinct voices (canquilt).

2.2 Mind-Reading in Narratives

2.2.1 Theory of Mind

Both single perspective and dual perspective romance novels have to do with characters' thoughts, thus dealing with the concept of "Theory of Mind". It is closely related to perspective as it determines who the reader, as well as the focalizer, must perform mind-reading on throughout the novel. Keith Oatley notes that "Because of the opacity of others, human beings need a theory or model, or simulation, or *image* (Proust's term) of mind to infer what a real human being might be thinking and feeling" (13). A major scholar in the study of Theory of Mind in literature, Lisa Zunshine, defines it as "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (*Why We Read Fiction* 6). According to her**,** we use Theory of Mind, or mind-reading, when observable action of others is used to ascribe mental states to others or when interpreting our own feelings (*Why We Read Fiction* 6).

Although mind-reading is an important part of our daily lives, and we use it to navigate in our social lives, the attributions we make are often incorrect (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 65). Moreover, being mistaken about an attribution creates an opportunity to improve it which is "engaging in fiction but usually painful in real life" (Oatley 16). Even though our model is sometimes faulty, we can predict the actions of other people better when we know them well, as over time, we "build mental models of them" by gathering information from their speech, behavior, and what is being said about them (Oatley 15-16). The act of mind-reading can therefore occur in various different ways; it can be reciprocal, when the sharing of thought is both "conscious and fully intended", and the people involved in it are aware of others knowing what they are thinking, or inadvertent, when one's thoughts are revealed unintentionally and sometimes even without them realizing that their minds have been read by the help of, for example, their expressions (Palmer, *Social Minds* 47).

In addition to our daily lives, Theory of Mind is a crucial aspect in reading novels. Zunshine's main thesis statement of her book *Why We Read Fiction* is the fact that we "read fiction because it engages, in a variety of particularly focused ways, our Theory of Mind" (*Why We*

Read Fiction 162). Readers enjoy the simulation provided by mind-reading which also helps us with our daily interactions (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 25). Zunshine adds that if we look at mind-reading in fiction in this context, "even the act of misinterpretation of the protagonist's thoughts and feelings does not detract from the cognitive satisfaction allowed by the reading of fiction" (*Why We Read Fiction* 25). Moreover, when it comes to mind-reading, we do not distinguish between real people and characters in novels, and readers will want to speculate about characters' "past, present, and future states of mind" despite understanding that these "'airy forms [and] phantoms of imagination' do not deserve such treatment" (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 19). The reader is therefore interested in finding out more about the characters, although the characters only "exist" during the duration of the novel.

Furthermore, when comparing mind-reading in real life and fictional novels, while imprecise attributions are admissible in our daily lives, authors are less satisfied with them (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 69). This is because the instances of mind-reading that fail are crucial to the development of fictional plots (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 70). Another difference between real life and novels is the fact that we know that real people are "worth 'reading' for signs of potential threat or benefit" while a fictional character's mind is created with every sentence, with the reader being able to skip parts of the novel without much danger (Phillips 108). Literature must then create narrative strategies that make readers believe that they are reading about real people (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 10). Moreover, Theory of Mind does not only affect the reader's ability to understand fictional characters better as they also must "follow the attempts that characters make to read other characters' minds" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 20-21). Mind-reading can therefore occur between two real people, a real person reading about a fictional character, or a character trying to understand another character's mind. What shapes these different acts of mind-reading is the fact that there are differences in how much the reader and the characters comprehend of the other characters' minds as readers can initially comprehend less than the characters, or they can comprehend more than them (Palmer, *Social Minds* 111). In *The Unhoneymooners*, the reader comprehends more than Olive and less than Ethan, and in *The Fiction Between Us,* they at first understand less than Quinn and Landon before they then comprehend more than them due to having access to both perspectives.

An aspect that can affect one's mind-reading abilities is the curse of knowledge, which has to do with "overascribing one's personal knowledge and beliefs to other people" (Tobin 58-59). People believe that others possess the same amount of information as them and often believe

their intentions to be obvious to other people (Tobin 57). Furthermore, curse of knowledge not only affects our ideas of what others are thinking but also alters our "surmises about the present and intuitions about the future" (Tobin 77). It influences our memory in different ways: "We forget things we once knew, conflate or distort past experiences, and even remember events that never happened" (Tobin 77). When it comes to remembering an event, "Our beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and preoccupations in the present shape the memories we construct", meaning that our stored information is heavily influenced by the circumstances of the moment we thought about it (Tobin 77). The curse of knowledge affects the characters of both of the novels, especially Ethan and Landon.

2.2.2 Doubly Embedded Narratives

When examining Theory of Mind, the concept of doubly embedded narratives both helps in illustrating what one does with their assumptions, and how one's act of mind-reading can be affected. The term is defined as "a character's mind as contained within another character's mind" (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 230-231). A character's identity consists, therefore, of both their own embedded narratives as well as their place in the doubly embedded narratives that others have constructed of them (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 231). In *The Unhoneymooners*, the reader is aware of only Olive's doubly embedded narrative of Ethan before learning about Ethan's own for Olive later in the novel, while in *The Fiction Between Us,* the reader learns of both doubly embedded narratives during the beginning of the novel. Moreover, these doubly embedded narratives are created through mind-reading even when the characters are not "guided by the specific cues of observable behavior (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 233). When a character learns that the doubly embedded narratives they have constructed are incorrect, the reader also must abandon their earlier understanding of the character and create the "'actual' embedded narrative" (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 191). According to Palmer, what makes many novels interesting is seeing how these various doubly embedded narratives "interweave, merge, conflict, become reconciled, and so on" (*Fictional Minds* 233). A narrative can also be analyzed by looking at the distance between the doubly embedded narratives that a certain character is involved in as well as their view of their own embedded narrative, in other words, how others see them versus how they see themselves (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 233).

Two assumptions are connected to a person's knowledge of their own feelings in their embedded narrative: the first being that "the workings of our own minds are never accessible to others" and the second that "the workings of our own minds are always and

unproblematically accessible to ourselves" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 44). Colwyn Trevarthen disagrees with both of these by pointing out that in a normal setting we are more correct in our assumptions about the mental states of others than our own (Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, 138). One of the reasons for this phenomenon has to do with our unconscious mind; as we cannot access it directly, our behavior is a better indicator of its contents, which is something that we cannot witness as much as the people around us can (Palmer, *Social Minds* 59-60). Thus, we are not as aware of our thoughts as we would like to believe and must perform mind-reading on ourselves at times (Palmer, *Social Minds* 59-60). Moreover, these limitations in understanding our own mental events can also affect how we perceive our own behavior (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 125).

Palmer goes over the various ways that people can be mistaken about their mental events as described by Searle; these include self-deception, misinterpretation, and inattention (*Fictional Minds* 125-126). Self-deception has to do with the moment when one has a reason for not admitting their actual mental states to themselves, misinterpretation with the act of interpreting our feelings incorrectly, for example, later discovering that we were wrong in interpreting our feelings as love, and inattention with later noticing that our states of minds are not the same as they were before (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 125-126). The first of these, self-deception, is something that characters have a propensity to, according to narratologists (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 128). Another reason for not noticing our mental events has to do with "feeling rules," which refer to "personal and cultural prescriptions about how one is *supposed* to feel" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 61). These rules might make us not pay attention to feelings that do not align with them and thus make perceiving our unconscious feelings more difficult (Palmer, *Social Minds* 61). Especially *The Unhoneymooners* features these feeling rules as Olive's recognition of her feelings for Ethan is affected by her ideas of appropriateness and viability. They also affect Quinn in *The Fiction Between Us*, however, she is mostly affected by her doubly embedded narrative of Landon.

2.2.3 Metarepresentation

Whether it is the reader or another character who is analyzing the mental state of a character, the concept of "metarepresentation" aids in understanding where a thought or a reported thought is coming from. Metarepresentation consists of two parts: the source of the representation and the content of it (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 47). When reading a novel, understanding the source of a thought is crucial in order to understand the scene and

the novel itself, and in real life, to be able to perform mind-reading on others (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 47). Zunshine illustrates this connection between mind-reading and metarepresentations by stating that "our metarepresentational ability allows us to discriminate among the streams of information coming at us via all this mind-reading" (*Why We Read Fiction* 61). Yet, only certain types of memories are stored with their metarepresentations. Episodic memories, which are concerned with specific experiences, are saved with their metarepresentations, while semantic memories, which refer to general knowledge without a specific experience attached, are not (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 51). This is an important notion when a character is reweighing information that has been presented to them as they are able to keep track of "*who* thought, wanted, and felt what, and *when* they thought it" (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 61). This allows them to reconsider the truth-value of beliefs, an act which is central to most fictional narratives (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 61).

Despite being an important aspect of deciphering the information we receive, it is suggested that human memory is not particularly good at keeping track of the source, nor the type of content of the metarepresentation (Tobin 78). The failure to remember details of the memory could have to do with the time of the utterance, whether it came from ourselves or someone else, and whether it was fact or fiction (Tobin 78). A persistent error that people make has to do with misattribution, which refers to: "ascribing information to one source when we actually encountered it somewhere else" (Tobin 78). This provides problems for real people, as well as characters in fiction (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 89-90). Cosmides and Tooby provide an explanation for why it is hard to keep track of the source of the representation, as they explain that source tags are "costly to maintain, and so we let them expire from memory when we can" (Tobin 80). One of the ways this can present itself is when a character takes "what really is a *meta*representation *with himself as a source tag* […] as a representation *without any source tag*" (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 89-90). This ties in with the concept of unreliable narrators and their failures to keep track of the metarepresentations, resulting in the reader's inability to recognize what is true in the narrative (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 124). Both of the novels in my analysis focus heavily on misattribution of metarepresentations, which have then affected the characters' doubly embedded narratives of each other.

The importance of metarepresentations in romance novels can be seen in the metarepresentational challenges that occur when one has a crush on someone, as explained by

Zunshine. One must keep track of various different versions of the other person and their thoughts, for example, one's wishful thinking of the situation, one's friends' opinions on them, and the crush's own statements about their feelings, which might be different from the feelings they had a week ago (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 145). Zunshine adds that even with these complicated ways of thinking, she suspects that "the cognitive reality of this process is much more complicated" (*Why We Read Fiction* 45). In addition to concerning the feelings of infatuation experienced in real life, these layers also illustrate the mind-reading challenges faced by characters in romance novels.

2.2.4 Public and Private Thought

The last aspect I will mention of aspects that can affect mind-reading abilities and their accuracy has to do with whether one is in the presence of feelings or emotions. Palmer quotes Damasio and Doležel when describing these terms: according to Damasio "the term *feeling* should be reserved for the private, mental experience of an emotion, while the term *emotion* should be used to designate the collection of responses, many of which are publicly observable", while Doležel comments that emotions are "often accompanied by spontaneous physiological events", and that events turn into signs of emotions when they are "observable (blushing, sparkling eyes, gestures) or audible (laughing, crying, exclamation of pain, tone of voice)" (qtd. in Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 115). A private thought is therefore made public by, for example, facial expressions, looks, and other nonverbal communication (Palmer, *Social Minds* 109, 113, 111).

A moment when a character's inner feelings are unveiled to others through outward emotions is called "embodied transparency", referring to instances where protagonists are put in situations "in which their bodies spontaneously reveal their true feelings, sometimes against their wills" (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 70). These provide the reader with an opportunity to directly access the character's mind through their behavior as there is a difference in having a narrator tell about the character's feelings and making the characters themselves show their true feelings (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 70). The characters often do not register this in other characters; however, the reader is made aware of them (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 72). This adds another layer to the knowledge of a character's thoughts, making it possible for the reader to witness characters misinterpreting the others' feelings. The narrator can also leave room for misinterpretation of someone's feelings by using language such as "seemed" and "as if" (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*

23). If the narrator employs this technique, the reader is forced to balance the narrator's reports and their own observations of the actions performed by the characters in order to reconstruct the feelings (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 23).

Between private feelings and outward emotions, the latter is an easier and more reliable source for making third-person ascriptions about states of mind (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 138). This is because public thoughts can be seen in the character's behavior more easily than private ones. Nonetheless, there is a complex relationship between the notions that characters' thoughts are available to others in the storyworld while also being difficult to read (*Fictional Minds* 174). This can be seen "when a character is anticipating, speculating on, reconstructing, misunderstanding, evaluating, reacting to, and acting upon the thought of another" (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 174). Moreover, reading other characters' emotions is made more complicated by the fact that humans often conceal their emotions (Palmer, *Social Minds* 163). Reasons for these include the fact that characters might not be sure of their precise feelings and their causes and are therefore careful about expressing them, "social constraint", and the possibility of their actions led by the emotions being misinterpreted (Palmer, *Social Minds* 163). In the novels, especially the men tend to conceal their emotions as, despite being sure of their own feelings, they do not yet know whether they would be reciprocated.

3 The Unhoneymooners

The Unhoneymooners (2019) by Christina Lauren is told from the perspective of Olive Torres, apart from the epilogue, which is told from the perspective of Ethan Thomas, the love interest. The novel begins with preparations for Olive's sister's Ami's wedding, who is getting married to Dane, Ethan's brother. Olive and Ethan have known each other for a few years because of this connection, but they have never seen eye-to-eye. As the novel features mostly Olive's narration and the reader has direct access to only her feelings, everything the reader knows of Ethan's feelings comes from his dialogue or the way Olive regards his actions. Thus, the reader's experience of Ethan and his potential feelings is constructed solely through the mind-reading performed by Olive and the reader.

Despite being denied access to Ethan's thoughts, if the reader is aware of the conventions of romance novels, they will know that Olive and Ethan, the two main characters of a romance novel, are going to end up together. This is why as the novel progresses, the reader becomes suspicious of Olive's mind-reading abilities and tries to discern his feelings on their own. Although the reader is restricted in the sense that they often only get access to the thoughts Olive is aware of or allows herself to have, she is shown to slip up at times. In these moments, the reader learns of her attraction and emerging feelings for Ethan although she is not willing to admit them to herself yet. Ethan's feelings, on the other hand, must be ascertained while only getting access to his outward behavior, such as his mannerisms and speech. To make the mind-reading of him even more complicated, she is constantly attaching negative assumptions to his actions. Yet, the reader's possible previous knowledge of romance novels mean that they likely anticipate that some of the perceived hatred is either an act or based on a misunderstanding. Even so, the reader does not get access to Ethan's private thoughts for the majority of the novel, which creates curiosity for his actual feelings; if Olive's perceived hatred seems to be crumbling when the novel progresses, is the same happening to Ethan?

The barriers for their relationship are mostly internal ones as they come from their own doubly embedded narratives of each other. In Olive's case, her doubly embedded narrative of Ethan is constructed by misattributing metarepresentations with her as the source as ones coming from him. In the first half of the novel, his doubly embedded narrative of her is created by metarepresentations with Dane as the source, adding an element of external barriers, while in the second half, Ethan believes that the metarepresentation that acts as a barrier is coming from Olive, when it is actually coming from himself. Although the novel is

a modern romance novel, and she does not need to trace her rights to her maturity or to the belief that she can choose who she is going to end up with, some of the themes in the novel are reminiscent of the features in older romance novels. For instance, a large part of the novel deals with her struggles with finding employment and later losing it as well as her inability to let go of her view of him, making her the one experiencing inner turmoil throughout the novel. As older romance novels dealing with similar themes were also written with a single perspective, the choice of perspective leaves more room to explore said themes.

3.1 *"[…] I feel like I've built a pretty accurate picture of Ethan in my head*": Doubly Embedded Narratives

As the reader does not get access to Ethan's perspective or his doubly embedded narrative of Olive until he reveals them to her and the reader, the majority of the novel focuses on her view of him. From the first time Ethan is mentioned in the novel's discourse, Olive regards him in a resentful manner, calling him "the surliest man alive" (Lauren 14) and "a prickish, judgemental asshole" (Lauren 13). It is clear to the reader that there must be a distinct reason for her hatred, which is then presented to them almost immediately through her memories. As the reader is relying on her view of the situation instead of an actual flashback, and she is relying on her own memory of it, it is possible that her retelling of the event is already altered. Olive acknowledges that, at the time, she was excited to meet Ethan, something that she now finds hard to believe (Lauren 18). She noticed his good looks immediately, but believes that Ethan was repulsed by her eating too much food at the party:

> Ethan looked at me, then down to my delicious basket of fried cheese, frowned, and immediately turned away, mumbling some excuse about needing to go find the homebrew competition. *I didn't think all that much of it at the time*, but I didn't see him for the rest of the afternoon, either. From that day on, he's been nothing but disdainful and prickly with me. *What am I to think?* That he went from smile to disgust in ten minutes for some other reason? (Lauren 18-19; emphasis added)

Despite this event being an episodic memory with a specific moment attached to it, thus making it easier for Olive to recognize the source of the metarepresentation, she ultimately fails to recognize that the idea of him having a problem with her eating habits comes entirely from her, not him. She even admits that she "didn't think all that much of it at the time" (Lauren 19), thus coming to this conclusion retrospectively by attaching new information to a previous event. Her doubly embedded narrative of Ethan is heavily coloured by their first interaction, and her view of him continues to affect all their following interactions. Olive then

believes that Ethan has a problem with people, or women in particular, eating "too much" food; "I've always thought the basis for Ethan's coldness toward me was just that I'm curvy and physically repulsive and he's a bigoted, garbage human[…]" (Lauren 26) as well as seeing him as a daredevil who drags his brother on vacations at the cost of her sister's feelings. Olive states that her view of Ethan as being wild comes from Ami and Dane, thus recognizing the source of the representation; "[...] from stories I've heard from both Dane and Ami, I feel like I've built a pretty accurate picture of Ethan in my head. Daredevil, adventure hound, ambitious, cutthroat…" (Lauren 60). Despite this, even as Olive believes that she has formed a correct interpretation of him, she states that she finds it hard to put together the different sides of him she has encountered; "It's always hard to reconcile the restrained, biting Ethan I get with the charming one I've watched make his way through a room, and even the wild one I've heard Ami complain about for years" (Lauren 25). Therefore, from the beginning of the novel, Olive understands that Ethan's behavior differs when he interacts with her and other people, and that some of the stories she has heard do not seem to mesh with her perception of him, therefore creating a conflict between representations coming from Ami and Dane and her own experiences.

Based on romance novel conventions, the reader might read Olive's difficulty in understanding Ethan's true nature as a sign that his behavior towards her is either a misunderstanding or a facade. They are presumably familiar with the internal barriers in other romance novels and can correctly assume that these feelings of hatred will either be replaced by attraction or are already acting as a cover for their real feelings. Moreover, the reader is not likely to share her idea of him as "Satan's errand boy" (Lauren 23) as they know that such a person is highly unlikely to be the love interest of a romance novel. The reader is then shown her keeping track of the different ideas of him, which mirror the different ways to regard a crush as presented by Zunshine (*Why We Read Fiction* 145). These include the way Ethan has acted with her, how he has acted with others, what her sister and his brother have told about him as well as how they view him, how Olive viewed Ethan during their first meeting and how that has changed over time, and how she describes her feelings about him to others. Throughout the novel, these representations change and continue to affect each other: his changing behavior towards her affects her view of him, which then makes her begin to differentiate between the different sides and representations of him. Before she is informed of his doubly embedded narrative halfway through the book, the reader is unaware of its contents

and must either trust her assumptions about it or try to construct their own view of it with his behavior and their knowledge of genre conventions.

3.2 *"I am not charmed by him. I am not"*: Knowledge of Feelings

It quickly becomes clear to the reader that Olive is not skilled at recognizing her own feelings for Ethan. By fighting her attraction to him, she participates in all of the ways one can be mistaken about one's mental events as mentioned by Palmer; she self-deceives by not admitting her feelings to herself, misinterprets her feelings of attraction as feelings of hatred, and is inattentive when her attraction turns into a crush and then love (*Fictional Minds* 125-126). In addition to these, the recognition of her feelings is made more difficult by a possible "feeling rule" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 61), perhaps recognizing that having a crush on one's sister's husband is not the most favorable position to find oneself in. Even though she tries to hide her feelings from herself, the reader gets to see every conscious as well as unconscious development of them and learns to read them despite her attempts to conceal them with animosity.

One way that Olive tries to mask her attraction to Ethan is to claim that his attractive qualities are excessive: "I tell myself that his thick, dark brows are obvious overkill—*settle down, Mother Nature*—but they do look undeniably great on his face. I really don't like him. I've always known Ethan was handsome—I'm not blind—but seeing him dressed in black tie is a bit too much confirmation for my liking" (Lauren 20). This commentary becomes humorous when she reminds herself that she does not find him attractive or notice the features that she then proceeds to describe as such: "I definitely do not notice how long and defined his throat looks as he swallows" (Lauren 90). She even has to resort to reminding herself that she is not affected by his good looks: "I am not charmed by him. I am not" (Lauren 151) and "A small set of fireworks—only a sparkler, I swear—goes off beneath my breastbone, because he is so goddamn pretty" (Lauren 138). These moments are fitting for a comedic romance novel as they simultaneously create humor and showcase her inability to recognize her feelings.

Despite trying to suppress her feelings and being annoyed at her body's reactions, after spending more time together with Ethan, Olive begins to notice her attraction to him increase. In addition to her doubly embedded narrative of him, and the fact that he is the brother of her sister's husband, she tries to reason with her feelings by reminding herself that he is not someone she should be attracted to: "Dear Olive Torres: This is Ethan. He is not swoony" (Lauren 135), and that she should not "[...] slide into liking this guy who has only been quasi-

friendly to me in paradise but never in real life— […]" (Lauren 158). It is true that his behavior has changed as they have spent more time together; however, she sees this as him relaxing on a holiday instead of him unveiling his true character, while the reader is more likely to assume the latter option.

Olive begins to report physical signs of being attracted to Ethan during the dinner with her new boss, who they have run into and consequently must pretend to be newlyweds to. She finds him showing affection towards her "debilitating", and she describes her physical response to this as follows: "My stomach is in knots, my heart is lodged in my windpipe, and there's something very aware happening along every inch of my skin" (Lauren 104). These feelings of attraction can be regarded as private feelings instead of outward emotions since they are not "observable or audible" as Doležel described the latter and thus are most likely not visible to Ethan (qtd. in Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 115). The reader must remind themselves that only they are privy to her feelings as Ethan is not granted access to her thoughts where these feelings are confided to. Even though only the reader and Olive herself can know the contents of her thoughts in these moments, due to her propensity to self-deceive and suppress her feelings, even she has to guess at her own mental events, as if she truly does not register her attraction. This can be seen when Ethan compliments her appearance, and she wonders why she is flushed (Lauren 144), and when she asks herself why she wants to laugh at his practical joke even though she thinks "he is the worst" (Lauren 147). Additionally, as they are about to begin their couple's massage, she wonders why she does not tell the masseuse that they do not want to participate, wondering whether she actually wants Ethan to touch her (Lauren 190).

The more time they spend together, the more she begins to feel tender feelings for him, finding herself smiling at him and realizing that "staying firmly on Team I Hate Ethan Thomas is going to be more work than it may be worth" (Lauren 158). The best she can do is admit that she likes the two of them together, even though she is still harboring resentment towards him: "And I get it. As much as I hate him… I think I'm starting to like us" (Lauren 145). She, therefore, keeps reminding herself of her doubly embedded narrative of him because she is so confident in its validity even as she notices that she is beginning to like her interactions with him. What is interesting is that even though she has been so confused about her feelings, when they do kiss for the first time without pretending, she feels she has been waiting for that moment: "it's almost as if, in hindsight, I've known this moment was coming forever" (Lauren 219). It is as if she later gains access to her subconscious mind, realizing that

the feelings that she has misattributed as hate have been feelings of attraction in her subconscious mind: “My anger toward Ethan has melted into fondness and attraction[…] Maybe every time I wanted to smack him in the past, I really just wanted to press my face onto his” (Lauren 235). She has not had access to these feelings previously due to her persistent doubly embedded narrative of him and her propensity to self-deceive and misattribute her emotions. She is, therefore, able to recognize her true feelings for Ethan only after she learns of his actual embedded narrative, which forces her to abandon her earlier assumptions and examine her repressed thoughts.

3.3 *“He sighs like I am the most irritating person alive”*: Mind-Reading

Because Ethan does not act as a narrator before the epilogue, the reader has only his outward behavior and Olive’s narration to go by when trying to determine his feelings. As the reader gets access to his state of mind solely through his speech and actions, the reader knows that these should not be trusted blindly as his private thoughts remain concealed. Moreover, due to the genre conventions, the reader is also aware of the fact that he will at some point be attracted to her, if he is not already. When Ethan is introduced to the reader, he seems to act indifferent, sometimes even mean, towards Olive. He seems to share her feelings of dislike, but he rarely initiates the insults, instead going along with her contempt by replying in a way that supports her ideas of his hatred.

Even with Olive and Ethan talking about their mutual animosity openly, there are clear signs that he has different reasons for his behavior than she assumes. During the wedding, she informs him of her theory that he might be resenting Ami for taking his brother away from him (Lauren 28). Olive believes that Ethan takes this out on her, stating that it is clear that his reason for hating him must be deeper than aversion to her eating habits. When expressing this theory, he only repeats what she has said with a creased brow, and when she asks whether he is going to repeat everything she says, he answers with: “Olive. You sound legitimately insane” (Lauren 29). He does not agree with her, nor does he deny his hatred of her. His comment suggests that her theory is not correct; however, including the insult in his speech does help in maintaining the perception of contempt. By leaving his answer to her allegations ambiguous, the reader has an opportunity to make their own theory about his true feelings in the situation.

Ethan is certainly not always hostile towards Olive, but she tends to interpret his behavior that way. This comes from her persistent doubly embedded narrative of him, which she clings

onto despite being confused about his true character. When seeing her bright green dress, he smirks and remarks that "So few people can pull off that color [...]" (Lauren 20). It is possible that he meant it as a compliment, but she claims to tell from his tone that she is not one of these people. Although Ethan's behavior starts to show signs of not being as awful as Olive believes, the reader is being presented with her read of the situation, showing a disparity in his actions and her narration. Some of his amiable actions are easy for the reader to interpret as acts of kindness and attraction, while the more ambiguous ones are susceptible to her pessimistic narration. As the reader gets to see the couple interact more, they learn to read their behaviors and question her assumptions, and by being familiar with the genre conventions, the reader knows that the hatred between Olive and Ethan cannot remain as the only emotion tying them together.

By knowing that the love interest of a romance novel must either already like the protagonist, or begin to like her throughout the novel, the reader is suspicious of how Olive regards Ethan's actions. That being said, as the novel begins with her persistent idea that he hates her, the reader has to decipher her comments about his actions as coming from herself, not him. In other words, they must recognize Olive as the source of her metarepresentations, even when she has not made the connection yet. At times it is clear that she is supplying his actions with her own commentary: "He gives me the same perusal. He starts with my hair—m*aybe he's judging me for wearing it clipped back plainly*—and then looks at my simple makeup—*he probably dates makeup-tutorial Instagram models*—before slowly and methodically taking in my dress" (Lauren 20; emphasis added). And when Olive states that she has gained some weight due to stress baking after losing her job, Ethan looks at her body admiringly, yet she narrates that "*If I didn't definitively know better*, I might think he was hoping I'd keep up the baking just a little while longer" (Lauren 136; emphasis added). She is once again basing this idea on her doubly embedded narrative of him as having an issue with bigger women even though it is clear to the reader that he likes her the way she is.

The ambiguity of Olive's judgments can be seen especially with the use of words such as "like" and "seemed", which leave room for the possibility that her interpretations might be incorrect (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 23). This can be seen in her narration after Ethan presses a quick kiss to the side of her head: "Stunned, I watch as he turns back to the valet and looks *like* he's resisting the urge to wipe his lips with his hand" (Lauren 68; emphasis added), or in her interpretation of him sighing "*like* I am the most irritating person alive" (Lauren 76; emphasis added). At other times, it is trickier to separate her own commentary from his actual

behavior due to her narrating her perception of his thoughts as fact, for instance, when she is describing her new job to him, she narrates how: “He nods, already bored” (Lauren 88). Olive’s negative assumptions, which the reader might be able to recognize as speculation, are sometimes even followed by a stated fact: “Ethan raises a single brow, and *I’m wondering* if the tension in his expression is because he cannot fathom having sex with me once, let alone continually for an entire afternoon. *Pulling himself out of the mental hellscape*, he presses a swift kiss to the tip of my nose” (Lauren 116; emphasis added). This ambiguity makes it easier for the reader to forget the possibility that she might be reading him incorrectly.

Even with claiming to have a clear idea of Ethan’s character, Olive spends a considerable amount of time trying to guess his thoughts. These attempts at mind-reading can be seen for the first time when she teases him about being unhumorous, and he repeats her slight with a face that Olive is unable to read: “Right now his face is so controlled, so comfortably blank, that *I can’t tell* whether I’ve genuinely offended him or he’s baiting me into saying something worse” (Lauren 22; emphasis added). When she continues the joke, she reads from the twitch of his eyebrow that her second read of the situation was correct. Moreover, she explains that she wants to understand his doubly embedded narrative of her and the reason for his contempt: “I realize why I hate him—he food- and fat-shamed me, and has always been a monosyllabic prick—but what is his deal with me?” (Lauren 127) and admits that she is “vainly curious” (Lauren 99) about how he views her.

In addition to wondering about his state of mind, Olive also anticipates his actions, assuming that he is going to do something mean before he has had the chance to say anything: “There is nothing in the world I wanted less in this moment than for Ethan to show up, ready to mansplain how to swipe a hotel key” (Lauren 42). Although this thought is meant to provide humor in the novel, it shows her inclination to see him as arrogant, which is something that the reader might believe to be true until they are given enough evidence to the contrary. She is also often reminded of her pessimistic nature and propensity to read people in a negative way; this can be seen when waiting for their paintball game to begin, she asks whether he has shot a gun before, to which he replies in the affirmative (Lauren 163). She then begins to imagine him as someone who keeps heads of animals as trophies before he clarifies that he has only accompanied his brother at a shooting range a few times. She explains to him where her mind went, to which he replies with: “Just get to know me, then. Give me the benefit of the doubt” (Lauren 164), providing the reader with yet another instance of why her doubly embedded narrative of him is incorrect. This pessimism works well for an “Enemies to Lovers” romance

trope since she is easily clouded by her assumptions despite evidence of them being incorrect, evidence which is slowly becoming easier for the reader to decipher despite her commentary.

During the novel, Olive slowly begins to understand Ethan's behavior and stops seeing his actions through a negative lens, assuming that he hates her. For example, when she tells a joke when they are speaking to his ex, she narrates that "Ethan looks down at me, and I realize he's not glaring; he's fighting a laugh" (Lauren 116), and when he tells Olive that he finds arguing with her fun, she realizes that he is not mocking her but rather complimenting her (Lauren 205. These instances give the reader more reason to be suspicious of her doubly embedded narrative of him as it is clear that she sees him in a more hostile light than he actually is. She regards these positive moments as anomalies when they in fact turn out to be more in line with his actual embedded narrative, which is something that the reader must already suspect based on genre conventions.

3.4 *"Color blooms high on his cheekbones […]"*: Emotions

Since the reader gets access to Olive's inner monologue and gains knowledge of her feelings that way, there is no need to spend time describing her observable behavior in extreme detail. But because Ethan's state of mind is not accessible to the reader, his behavior, which is the only way to show his feelings, is much more in focus. Because of this, there are only a few important moments where Olive's behavior, usually her speech, exposes her feelings for him. These moments differ from her thoughts in the way that the latter can only be seen by the reader, while her behavior can also be witnessed by Ethan, giving him a glimpse into her feelings about him. This is, therefore, another layer of mind-reading and doubly embedded narrative that the reader must keep track of as they have to separate their knowledge from his knowledge. The first example of Olive's behavior being in focus occurs at the wedding when Ethan tells a joke in his speech, and she narrates how: "Shocking myself, I let out a deafening cackle. Ethan pauses and glances over at me, wearing a surprised smile" (Lauren 30). In this moment her private feelings turn into outward emotions, which are observable and audible (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 115). In addition to acting as a moment of embodied transparency, this moment also reveals him being affected positively by her letting her guard down. Furthermore, the first time she verbally expresses her attraction to him occurs after they have had dinner with her new employer. During the dinner, Olive is charmed by Ethan's behavior, but since she is not used to this side of him, she is confused about her own feelings and his actual personality (Lauren 111). She scolds him for being too agreeable because she wanted

him to act “sociopath charming” (Lauren 124) and not “self-deprecating and cute” (Lauren 124). This makes him smile and ask if she really finds him cute, to which she answers with “In a gross way” (Lauren 124). Her finding him physically attractive is not new information to the reader, but her expressing it to him marks one of the first times he has been made aware of her attraction.

Because behavior is the only way to show Ethan’s mental events and his attraction to Olive, it is described in greater detail. The recurring ways his feelings are shown include blushing and smiling unintentionally (Lauren 118, 144, 145, 154). These can be seen as moments of embodied transparency, since he might not want to show his emotions, but his body is doing so anyway. For example, when Olive jokes about them being intimate with each other as a married couple, “color blooms high on his cheekbones, and he looks like he’d be happy if the cables snapped and death swallowed us whole” (Lauren 101). Even when he is showing signs of attraction by being flustered, she adds a comment that guides the reader into reading his behavior as being mortified. She is therefore aware of the occurrence of an embodied transparency moment, but she cannot connect these emotions to the correct feelings, making it more difficult to register his attraction to her. Moreover, when she touches him innocently, he “stiffens a little beside me” (Lauren 142), and when he smiles during an unusually enjoyable day together, she assumes that his smile straightens because he seems to “remember that we don’t like each other’s faces” (Lauren 135), while it is more likely that he is attempting to conceal his true feelings.

Approximately half-way through the novel, just before Ethan confesses his feelings for Olive, they have dinner and drinks together and when he asks whether she is having fun, she hears “a sincere tenor to his words” (Lauren 212). During the last chapter before the epilogue, it is revealed that this was the moment he believes he fell in love with her (Lauren 375), and even though the reader is not yet made aware of this, Olive catching something in his tone suggests that there is a reason for his changed demeanor. This same dinner is also the moment when his embodied transparency becomes so noticeable that it is being noticed by other guests of the restaurant: "Blue eyes twinkle when he smiles, the dimple makes an appearance, and I look away, noticing that others are noticing his smile, too” (Lauren 213). It is comical that when she finally begins to notice signs of his attraction, she is quicker to register that others are noticing his behavior than his feelings behind them.

Ethan's fondness for Olive can also be seen in the dialogue when he expresses his feelings, surprising even himself. Sometimes he attempts to withdraw his show of vulnerability, demonstrating that he is perhaps used to concealing his true feelings. An example of this happens as they are talking about a margarita place that is located in their hometown, and he suggests going there together after the trip. She notices that "it's clear he's done it without thinking because we both immediately let out the ha-ha-ha of the *Oop, that's not going to happen!* laugh" (Lauren 146). It is likely true that he suggested it without thinking about the implications, but she does not consider the possibility that he might have been sincere. Since she is accustomed to seeing his every action through her doubly embedded narrative of him, it takes her a while to accept the moments when he is not being hostile toward her: "I don't know why I always expect an argument from him, but it continually surprises me when I get agreement instead" (Lauren 134). As Olive's view of him is not in concordance with his actual embedded narrative and his actual feelings, only after reconstructing her doubly embedded narrative of him can she make herself notice and accept behavior that indicates that he is interested in her. Before that happens, these moments that are at odds with her idea of him only confuse her further.

Furthermore, the reader is presented with signs that her interpretation of their past is incorrect; when preparing for the massage, she tells him not to make fun of her body, clearly shocking him. He responds that he would never do that, and she continues with "I mean sure, […] except when you have" (Lauren 190). The masseuse returns, preventing them from sharing their perceptions of their past, but Olive notices that Ethan is trying to signal that her assumption about him is incorrect: "When he meets my eyes again, I hear what he's trying to tell me: *I like what I see*" (Lauren 190). By now, she seems to understand that he finds her physically attractive, but she finds it extremely difficult to accept that he might be interested in her personality as well. In all likelihood, the reader is reconstructing their idea of Ethan and his feelings for Olive by now, but it takes his actual words for her to be able to accept that her doubly embedded narrative of him is incorrect.

3.5 *"It's so exhausting pretending to hate you"*: Actual Embedded Narratives

The moment when both Olive and the reader get certain confirmation of Ethan's feelings happens after the dinner where his embodied transparency was being noticed even by strangers. During dinner, he drinks enough alcohol for her to describe him as "a really cute, happy drunk" (Lauren 214). The fact that he is under the influence of alcohol is both what

gives him courage to confess his feelings and her reason for not taking his actions seriously. When they return to the hotel, he divulges his feelings for her to an employee, both inadvertently letting Olive know of his feelings and creating comedic relief, since the couple is supposed to be married. Olive's reaction to his confession is to blame it on the alcohol: "And boom goes my heart. *He's drunk*, I tell myself. *This isn't a* thing *he's saying, just drunk words*" (Lauren 218). By this point the reader is likely fully convinced of his feelings for her and frustrated by her obtuseness. Ethan then lets go of his inhibitions completely by exposing his actual embedded narrative, including his feelings for her, in a way that forces her to finally listen:

> 'It's so exhausting pretending to hate you.'
> This pulls me up short—even though I know it now, the truth of it still blows through me—I ask, 'So you *don't* hate me?'
> 'Nope.' He shakes his head dramatically. 'Never did.' (Lauren 219)

Olive claims to have known that Ethan does not hate her presently; however, she is shocked to hear that this is not a new development, and that he has in fact never hated her. She then argues that it seemed as though he did, and he reveals that it his behavior was a result of her antagonism. This makes Olive engage in mind-reading of his perspective as she goes through their history "trying now to see it from his perspective" (Lauren 219), asking herself whether she was in fact mean to him.

Their rest of their actual embedded narratives come into light the following day as they discuss Ami and Dane's relationship timeline and notice that their siblings have given them different information; it turns out that Dane has told Ethan that he and Ami have been exclusive for a much shorter time than what he has communicated to her (Lauren 225). Olive then presents a theory that Dane has purposefully kept Olive and Ethan away from each other so that his previous infidelity would not be revealed. This theory, which later turns out to be true, drives a wedge between her and Ethan, who wants to believe the best of his brother. Their following argument acts as a reason for them to finally reveal the doubly embedded narratives they have created of each other as well as their actual embedded narratives. She learns that his idea of her as a bitter person is a representation coming from Dane; however, Ethan states that her behavior after their first meeting did not contradict this idea (Lauren 227, 229). After telling him of her view of their first meeting, he informs her that her assumption about him judging her eating habits was incorrect as he has liked her since their first meeting. However, due to Dane urging him not to act on his feelings, him pretending not to be

interested in her must have appeared as dislike. Both Olive and Ethan are struggling with the realization that their behaviors have resulted in mistaken doubly embedded narratives of each other. As the reader is now finally aware of his actual embedded narrative, they, as well as Olive, must abandon their earlier understanding of Ethan and create the "actual" embedded narrative (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 191).

The reader is naturally aware of Olive's actual embedded narrative as they have followed her narration throughout the novel, but Ethan's actual embedded narrative is new information to the reader and therefore acts as a surprise in the novel. Because of the genre conventions, the reader has known that there is likely to be a reason for his behavior and that he has feelings for her, but the specifics of his thoughts have not been accessible before this moment. Ethan explains that he now understands why she has always been so dismissive of him and why she assumed that he would make fun of her body, while Olive, as well as the reader, have to come to terms with the fact that the catalyst for their hatred was Dane, not Ethan. Olive did hate Ethan for a while; however, it was a result of her failing to mind-read him correctly, and the fact that she misattributed a metarepresentation of their first interaction. She then describes her difficulties with rewriting her doubly embedded narrative of him:

> I don't even know what to do with this information because it is *so at odds* with my mental history of him. Until the past couple of days, *there has never been a hint* of Ethan wanting anything to do with me—not even a flash of softness or warmth. Is he making that up? I mean, why would he do that? So does that mean he's right about me? *Did I misinterpret everything* in that first interaction, and carry it with me for the past two and a half years? Was a single ambiguous look from Ethan enough to send me into this place of no return, *where I decide* we're bitter enemies? (Lauren 230; emphasis added)

This passage shows the complexity of Olive's rewrite of their embedded narratives; she recognizes that his account does not mesh with her previous idea of him, while still questioning the truth of his statement as she has truly not registered these flashes of "softness or warmth" (that even the reader has been made aware of. She then wonders whether he is lying to her and what his motivation for that could be, concluding that the only reasonable explanation for all of this would be that she has misinterpreted their first interaction, initiating the idea of them as enemies. Because Olive is aware of the exact moment that resulted in her creating this view of Ethan's thoughts and is finally able to recognize it as a metrarepresentation coming from herself, she is able to adjust the metarepresentation with the information she has learned, even if it takes some work: "Ethan admitting that he wanted to ask me out. It's genuinely a rewrite of my internal history, and it takes a lot of mental

maneuvering" (Lauren 232). Although it is difficult for her to rewrite these ideas and recognize the role she has played in constructing them, she is able to adopt these lessons into her later interactions: "[...] it hits me that just because I think I know what's going on, it doesn't mean I really do. [...] I thought I knew exactly who he was, and I was completely wrong" (Lauren 278). It can be assumed that Ethan is experiencing the same difficulties as he is also forced to rebuild his doubly embedded narrative of Olive with the information he learned, but the reader only gets access to this through his speech since his perspective in the epilogue occurs after the conflict has already been resolved.

A few chapters later the reader learns of another aspect that has prevented Ethan from being more forthright with his feelings as he tells Olive that he has always assumed that his attraction to her was obvious (Lauren 268). His behavior has thus been affected by the curse of knowledge as he has believed that the information he possesses matches the information of the people around him (Tobin 57). This reveal provides the reader with an opportunity to examine "the distance between a character's view of their own embedded narrative and the doubly embedded narratives of others relating to that character" (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 233). Moreover, Ethan explains that he wanted to find out the reason for her negative view of him as he truly was not aware of it (Lauren 268). These assumptions that both of them have had of each other are tangled together and have further affected their doubly embedded narratives of each other as they have accepted and expanded these assumptions instead of questioning them aloud.

3.6 *"I know him well enough now [...]"*: Mind-Reading After the Reveal

During the latter part of the novel, Olive oscillates between being able to read Ethan's behavior correctly and finding him impossible to read. As she begins to regret the night they spent together, surmising that he only wanted to make his ex-girlfriend jealous, he calls her out for assuming his feelings: "'What makes you think I don't have feelings for you?' It's my turn to hesitate. 'You didn't say you did.' 'I didn't say I didn't, either'" (Lauren 254). Nevertheless, after confessing their feelings to each other and deciding that they want to continue seeing each other after the holiday, she is suddenly able to read his behavior better. Therefore, it seems that her ability to read the mental events behind his behavior is dependent on whether she has been reassured of his feelings; when she believes that there is enough proof of her doubly embedded narrative of him or they are actively quarreling, she reads his behavior in a negative light or is not able to read it at all, whereas when he has expressed his

feelings, she is able to read his behavior correctly. She herself believes that her ability to understand him is due to her knowing him better: “Behind me, Ethan shrugs, and *I know him well enough now* to imagine the expression he’s making: unconvinced but unconcerned” (Lauren 268; emphasis added). This is partly true as she has been able to observe his behavior for a while, but she fails to recognize how much her confidence in his feelings affects her mind-reading ability.

After returning from their trip, their relationship is immediately put to the test, resulting in Olive going back to not being able to read Ethan’s behavior. They reveal their relationship to Dane and Amis (Lauren 282), and despite having agreed on not letting their differing opinions on Ethan’s brother impact their relationship, it is precisely this that pushes them to a conflict that is only resolved at the end of the novel. Moreover, Olive loses her job after telling her employer that she and Ethan only pretended to be married during the vacation (Lauren 299). When having drinks with Ethan and Olive as an attempt to cheer her up after her layoff, Dane secretly makes a pass at her (Lauren 305). She immediately declines his advances and leaves the bar without Ethan being aware of the reason. As Ethan runs after her and hears of the situation, he insists that she must have misunderstood Dane’s intentions. As him siding with his brother gives Olive a reason to question his opinion of her, she goes back to not being able to read his behavior; when they are discussing the situation, she describes that his face is “unreadable” (Lauren 312), and that he is shaking and she is not sure “if it’s from cold or anger” (Lauren 313). After the argument, they decide to spend some time apart and Olive tells about her suspicions to Ami, who also sides with Dane (Lauren 332).

In a confusing twist, when Olive and Ethan see each other again, she is once again able to read his behavior. As she tries to smile at him, she is able to notice that “he registers the failed effort, and it clearly makes him sad” (Lauren 340). Tragicomically, the moment she is totally tuned into his thoughts is the following one: “[...] and *I know what he’s going to say* before he even gets the words out. ‘I think we should probably break up, Olive. I’m sorry” (Lauren 344; emphasis added). When this conflict occurs, the reader is aware of his feelings for her, but they have also seen evidence of his strong doubly embedded narrative of his brother as a good person and might not be sure of how he decides to resolve their conflict. During the first part of the novel, the reader was likely frustrated with Olive for not being able to understand the feelings and intentions behind Ethan’s behavior, while the second part of the novel switches this around with the reader being anxious for him to understand her perspective and to let go of his idea of his brother as a good person.

After their breakup, Dane's affairs are revealed, and Ethan is there to witness the evidence. Olive is able to read his behavior accurately when he understands what he is hearing: "It's like an invisible fist punches him in the chest, and he takes a step back before looking up at me with the clarity he should have had two weeks ago" (Lauren 363). He tries to apologize to her, but only when he shows up at her new job does she hear his apology (Lauren 374). This is when he shares a glimpse of his perspective during the trip to both her and the reader, revealing her the moment when he fell in love with her. This peek into his perspective works as a set up for the epilogue that happens almost immediately after they have reconciled and confessed their love to each other, ending Olive's narration.

The epilogue takes place two years later and does not give any revolutionary information about Ethan's perspective, but it does show glimpses of his thoughts from their first meeting. He remembers that Olive's freckles were the first thing he noticed about her and that "adrenaline pumped into my veins" (Lauren 387) when she smiled at her for the first time and that "she didn't smile like that at me again for years" (Lauren 387). During the epilogue, they travel back to Hawaii where he is trying to find the perfect moment to propose to her. His chosen moment at a beach is ruined by her joking about the many people who must have gotten engaged there (Lauren 390). His struggle with his proposal finally gives the reader an opportunity to see how he reads her behavior; as he tries to convince her that she did not ruin the moment, he imagines that he can "sense the skepticism lingering in her posture" (Lauren 391), and before that, how she is "oblivious to my internal mayhem" (Lauren 388). Fitting well with their earlier dynamic, they struggle with mind-reading during the proposal as they ask for confirmation about whether the other one wants to get married, and Ethan states that he regarded her earlier comment as her not wanting to be proposed to (Lauren 394). The novel ends with Olive trying to hide her happy tears resulting from the proposal and Ethan teasing her and trying to make her admit to showing such emotions (Lauren 395). Therefore, even as she continues to hide her feelings from him, albeit in a joking manner, he can see through her attempts at pushing her feelings away.

3.7 Conclusion

To conclude, by being a single perspective romance novel, *The Unhoneymooners* engages the reader in trying to mind-read the love interest together with the first-person narrator, as his perspective is not accessible to either of them. The reader knows from romance genre conventions that the couple will end up together, making the reader suspicious of Olive's

mind-reading abilities and knowledge of her own emotions. However, the reader's attributions are guided, at least in the beginning, by her narration insisting that they both hate each other. As she is not able to recognize herself as the source of the metarepresentation that he hates her, she uses it to create a false doubly embedded narrative of him that she is extremely reluctant to let go of. This idea of him continues to affect how she sees their interactions together and whether she believes that he is interested in her.

Moreover, Olive is not very skilled at recognizing her own feelings and is thus constantly mistaken about her mental events. She reports signs of attraction but attempts to deny these, and interprets Ethan's actions in a way that supports her doubly embedded narrative of him. As his actions and outward emotions are the only way to gain access to his mental events, they are presented in more detail than hers. The reader is made aware of his embodied transparency moments, but it takes his actual words for her to understand his attraction to her. This is because she needed to hear about his actual embedded narrative and reconstruct her doubly embedded narrative of him to be able to accept his feelings for her. After they have disclosed their actual embedded narratives to each other, the rest of the novel deals with Ethan's inability to let go of his doubly embedded narrative of his brother as a good person. After his idea of Dane is shown to not be true, Ethan is able to see Olive's intentions more clearly. The reader then finally gets a glimpse of his perspective during the epilogue, showing his side of their first meeting and how some of their struggles to mind-read the other are present even two years later.

4 The Fiction Between Us

By alternating between the perspectives of the two central characters in a romance novel and thus removing the suspense regarding their feelings, *The Fiction Between Us* (2022) by Julie Olivia creates a reading experience with different mind-reading expectations than *The Unhoneymooners*. The reader has more information on the feelings of the characters than the characters themselves and thus does not need to perform mind-reading on the love interest to find out their real feelings for the other character. This added perspective creates an opportunity to see the feelings of both people in a couple, which is not possible in real life. Tt also means that the reader must keep track of both characters' actual embedded narratives as well as their doubly embedded narratives of each other while also remembering that they know more than the characters. The curse of knowledge therefore adds a layer to the reading experience that is not present in novels with one perspective.

What is interesting is that even though the novel includes the perspectives of both characters in the romance, the characters do not seem equal. The synopsis on the back cover of the book is told entirely from Quinn's perspective and does not give any indication that the novel would include Landon's point of view as well. This means that if the reader has not heard of the setup of the novel or has not flipped through the pages, they will learn of his perspective only when they get to the second chapter. This is a peculiar choice since one of the reasons for preferring dual perspective romance novels included the idea that the characters feel equally important, and the novel's success in this is immediately affected by the omission of his perspective from the synopsis. What is more, the mind-reading in the novel centers around her inability to come to terms with her feelings, whereas he has been sure of his since the beginning. It is also Quinn and not Landon who faces struggles with her mental health and employment. Therefore, even though the novel features both characters' perspectives and is an example of a dual perspective romance novel where the characters are said to be equally important, the main purpose of his perspective seems to be to provide the reader answers to her questions and to show his yearning for her.

Even though mind-reading of the love interest is not used to create suspense in this novel, surprise is created by the reader not knowing the time and manner of when the characters' feelings are confessed to each other, as well as by withholding crucial information about their past before unveiling them gradually. The novel thus uses alteration principles to delay the reveal of information, managing to conceal aspects from the readers and creating surprise

even as they have access to both perspectives. That being said, withholding the events in their past only affects the way the reader views the characters and the possibility of their future relationship, and not the knowledge of their feelings, as the characters have always been transparent about them in their narration.

4.1 *"With life-altering events, you only remember pieces"*: Doubly Embedded Narratives

The interpretations both Quinn and Landon have of their shared past act as the main barrier for their romance, making the barriers in the novel internal ones. The moments they shared fifteen years ago are told through both of their perspectives, revealing new details as the novel progresses. The novel thus employs alteration principles, more specifically discourse manipulation, as it is "presenting story events in a non-chronological manner" (Hogan 140). In the first few pages, she describes how he used to be her old high school bully and that his friends used to taunt her at school (Olivia 3). Since the novel begins with Quinn's perspective, her account of Landon affects the readers' view of him before they get to read from his perspective in the next chapter. It is possible that he in fact used to bully her; however, it is more likely that the reader is interpreting it as a misunderstanding as they expect the love interest of a romance novel not to be a horrible person. His first chapter shows that he has had feelings for her since they were young, but he does not go into detail about his possible involvement in the bullying.

The reader gets Quinn's account of their past first as she looks back on the moment they met when she had dinner at Landon's childhood home for the first time. He calls her "Barbie," upsetting her at first before letting her know that the nickname comes from her blonde hair (Olivia 23-24). She remembers admiring his confidence and how this interaction was "all it took for me to fall desperately in love with my best friend's twin brother" (Olivia 24). They establish a secret friendship where, during her sleepovers at the Ardens', they read books together after Lorelei has gone to sleep (Olivia 56-57). This friendship is cut short after Quinn's diary is found and her writings of "*Mrs. Landon Arden*" (Olivia 24) are seen by Landon's friends who then begin to bully her about it. She does not, however, confess the details of how the diary was found or how he was involved, leaving the reader wondering for a while longer about his actual involvement in the bullying, as this tactic of withholding an event for a time before revealing it creates suspense (Sanford and Emmott 224).

Landon soon recounts their past for the first time and informs the reader that it was he who found the diary and that it was then ripped from his hands by his friend (Olivia 32). He also discloses that in addition to bullying Quinn, his friends also taunted him about the diary and her crush. Landon describes that he and Quinn were not the same after that, but he continued to have feelings for her. She then looks back on the event again, and this time she both reveals crucial information that was not mentioned before and demonstrates that she is aware of the unreliable nature of memories: "With life-altering events, you only remember pieces. I couldn't tell you what day of the week it was or even what class I was walking to" (Olivia 57). This is a crucial point to bring up since their main conflict in the novel has to do with memories and the curse of knowledge. She then discloses what his response to his friends' questions about the diary was, which was omitted from his own retelling of the memory; she comments on how after seeing her "notebook full of *Mrs. Landon Ardens*" (Olivia 60), he "scrunched his nose, and said, 'Not a chance, Barbie.' *Not a chance*. The moment that solidified everything. From that day forward, Landon Arden wasn't my friend anymore" (Olivia 60). Both of their narrations of the event have previously left out his cutting comment, which can be seen as an instance of an author deliberately not disclosing certain information about a character "for manipulative rhetorical purposes" (Emmott et al. 397). This is because the emission of his comment has painted him in a more favorable light than would have been possible if the reader had been told every detail from the start.

Until this moment the reader must have felt sympathy towards Landon and thought that Quinn is being unreasonable in her hatred of him. The reader therefore did not have as much information about the characters' pasts as they do, and the reveal of the details results in the reader gaining information about the barriers for the romance gradually while having to decide which narrative they judge as the more objective one. What is interesting is that Landon does not include the "Barbie" nickname when he later narrates the same scene from his perspective: "My whole body froze under the pressure of belonging. […] What was I supposed to do? Not what I ended up doing. 'Not a chance,' was what I said to Quinn, and my gut twisted in every way possible as I watched her face fall in betrayal" (Olivia 89). It is therefore clear to the reader that their recollections of the same event have differences.

Landon also describes how he told his friends to end the teasing, believing that "Everything ended right then and there. My and Quinn's secret friendship. Our late-night reading together. But also the bullying. At least, I thought it'd ended. Unless … unless she is haunted by more bullying I wasn't even aware of" (Olivia 90). The reader is finally given the full picture of the

barrier for their romance, and they are now more aware of the intricacies of it than the characters as they have the knowledge of both perspectives. Although the reader has been made aware of the characters' feelings for each other from the beginning, they lacked the necessary knowledge of the reasons behind Quinn's hatred. The issue, therefore, has not been about not knowing whether the feelings are reciprocated, but rather what barrier is blocking their communication and possible relationship. Moreover, as Landon is finally considering the fact that his view of the past might differ from Quinn's experience, the reader knows that the characters must somehow be made aware of each other's perspective. Meanwhile the characters, especially Quinn, lack the reader's knowledge of why revisiting their past would be crucial. When comparing *The Fiction Between Us* to *The Unhoneymooners*, the former unveils the doubly embedded narratives and the actual embedded narratives of the characters close to the beginning of the novel as opposed to the middle of it. Without the decision to delay the reveal of Quinn and Landon's past for a while, there would not have been any surprise regarding the barrier for their romance.

Because of their past and Quinn believing that Landon was a part of the bullying, she does not hold him in high regard or consider him liking her as a possibility. Her doubly embedded narrative of him therefore includes the belief that he was aware—as well as a part of—the bullying and is choosing to act as though it did not happen. His doubly embedded narrative of her is reminiscent of how she views him because he also has false assumptions about her knowledge: he believes that she is aware of his attraction to him and that her hatred of him is solely due to his "not a chance" comment and not her belief that he was involved in the bullying.

4.2 *"I do not want to kiss him again. What. A. Lie"*: Knowledge of Feelings

Although the reader quickly recognizes that Quinn is attracted to Landon, most of her inner monologue is coloured by her annoyance of him, similarly to Olive in *The Unhoneymooners*. Even when she is thinking about how she does not like him, she contrasts her feelings with love or infatuation, as if she subconsciously associates him with these feelings: "My blood pressure spikes, and it's not because I'm overwhelmed by stomach butterflies or dreamy, lovey-dovey thoughts vignetted in peachy pinks and creams. No, it is due to stress from the other voice coming over the walkie's line—Landon Arden" (Olivia 1-2) and "My heart pounds in my ears—once again, and very notably, *not* from love" (Olivia 2). This is reminiscent of the humorous way Olive is fighting her attraction to Ethan, highlighting the

contrast between the reader's knowledge of the characters' true feelings and the characters' ignorance and denial of them. In addition to associating Landon with feelings of attraction, Quinn cannot separate herself or him from their characters. When they are considering the possibility of their characters playing love interests, Quinn declares that she does not want to date Landon, to which Lorelei replies that Quinn would not date him, Queen Bee would (Olivia 60). She therefore cannot see his character as just a character but rather as a part of the man she is attracted to. She also uses her character as a humorous cover for her feelings: "It's Queen Bee that breathes in his vanilla and cedar scent. Totally not me" (Olivia 129). Most of the feelings that she is struggling to suppress are private feelings instead of outward emotions as her heart pounding in her ears and her breathing in his scent are not "observable or audible", as Doložel characterized outward emotions (qtd. in Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 115).

Quinn also thinks about Landon in an adoring way without mentioning her negative feelings about him as she admires his appearance and compares him to Prince Charming (Olivia 8). Even though she does not censor her thoughts about his attractiveness, she is often surprised and irritated at how her body reacts to him or how she acts around him: "My face heats. My jaw tenses. And it isn't until after the shame from my unbroken stare washes over me that I realize I've been gripping the curtain tight in my fist" (Olivia 8) and "I scoff to cover the annoying heartbeat ringing in my ears. I forget how irritatingly perfect his face is" (Olivia 23). The former is also an example of an embodied transparency moment as her body reveals her feelings against her will and without her even recognizing it (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 70). She also tries to stop herself from laughing at his jokes and sometimes tries to avoid him so that she would not have to confront her emotions. After they have kissed for the first time in character during a rehearsal for the play, she states how "[…] all I can keep telling myself is, *I do not want to kiss him again.* What. A. Lie" (Olivia 192), attempting to conceal her feelings from herself.

Because it is clear to the reader that Quinn is attracted to Landon and does not want to admit it to herself, it is comical and perhaps even frustrating for the reader to read about Quinn asking herself whether she likes him; however, learning to understand her own mind and feelings is an important part of her journey. It is as if the mystery for her and the reader is not about whether he likes her, but about whether she can remove her mental blocks that are preventing her from seeing her attraction to him, even if the reader can see it. There are moments when she is asking herself whether she is attracted to him, perhaps knowing the answer on a physical level but not on an emotional one: "*Is he going to kiss me?* And then the worst

thought of all pops into my head. *Do I want him to?*" (Olivia 106). She also acknowledges how asking these questions does not mean that she is ready to hear the answers: "My heart catches in my throat, and something passes between us. What? I don't know. But I don't want to find out. My stomach is already dead on the floor" (Olivia 127). Her unwillingness to confront her feelings goes as far as looking for any explanation for them, however silly: "Did he actually poison the fries? Am I now sedated around him, brainwashed by his good recipe? […] My face flushes, and I fake smile, but something in it isn't so fake anymore. *What is happening to me?*" (Olivia 129-130). Her real feelings sometimes slip out when she is not careful, for example, when Landon's friend asks whether she will tell Lorelei when she ends up liking sharing a kiss with Landon on stage: "'No,' I say. 'I'm not gonna tell anybody.' Then, I sputter out, 'And I'm not gonna like it!' (Olivia 184). Similarly to Olive, Quinn also partakes in all of Palmer's ways to be mistaken about one's mental events (*Fictional Minds* 125-126). She mostly uses self-deception as she does not admit her feelings to herself; however, she does also misinterpret her feelings of attraction as feelings of hatred as well as feelings relating to her acting as his love interest in the play. She participates in inattentiveness the least as she does mention her emerging feelings in her narration quite often.

If Quinn's physical attraction to Landon is evident from the beginning, the reader has zero doubts about the fact that he is in love with her: "Both my heart and my knees sink onto the wooden stage, [...] But it's hard to stay composed in the presence of royalty—under the eyes of my sister's best friend, Quinn Sauer" (Olivia 14). He reflects on how she has "held my heart for far too long" (Olivia 32) and how he has missed her even while admitting that he has avoided her during the two weeks he has been back in town. He also states that even though his crush began when he was young, nothing has changed, and he cannot seem to be able to fall for anyone else. His yearning for her fits into the popular trope in romance where the man in a heterosexual relationship falls first for the woman, where "this unbalanced awareness and emotional investment often lead to a complex interplay of longing, secret admiration, and internal conflict as the story unfolds" (Tarryn). Despite being confident of his feelings and wanting to be with her, he sometimes takes a step back from his emotions. This can be explained by the fact that her actions could be regarded as her not being interested, which would naturally make him act warily. He tries to avoid her at work but is drawn to her each time, and he thinks about how he could tell himself that he is only acting but admits to himself that he actually wants to spend time with her (Olivia 107).

From his first chapter, Landon's perspective both provides information to the reader about his feelings for Quinn and answers her questions about them. Moreover, since he is at no point confused about them, the reader does not need to decipher these as they need to do with Quinn's feelings. Most of the mind-reading that Landon performs has to do with him trying to understand Quinn's thoughts and feelings, especially since she tries to hide them any way she can. On the other hand, the reader does not have to participate in this mind-reading since they already know of the mental events behind her actions. Despite the novel being narrated in dual perspective, the set up and roles of the characters seem reminiscent of the ones in *The Unhoneymooners*: the woman having to work through their complicated emotions regarding the love interest while the man has always been sure of their feelings but is unable to express them in a satisfactory way.

4.3 *"With Quinn, I never know"*: Mind-Reading and Emotions

Compared to Olive and Ethan, there is not as much need to portray Quinn and Landon analyzing the other's behavior since the possible interpretations are provided with an answer in the other perspective almost immediately. There is, however, a different reason for them to wonder about each other's feelings: if novels with one point of view use the focalizer's mind-reading as a way to guide or mislead the reader into making certain assumptions about the love interest's thoughts and feelings, novels with two points of view can use it to demonstrate the characters' uncertainty of each other's feelings, and create feelings of satisfaction when the readers are able to answer the characters' questions.

Quinn's view of Landon's feelings for her seems to be contradictory at times since she does not spend much time wondering about them and one time even jokes that he wishes there was something more between them (Olivia 127), but is surprised when he confesses his feelings for her. She is more likely to assign false meanings to his behavior than to ask herself why he is acting in a certain way, an example of which can be seen when they are performing as their characters: "He probably thinks he's being funny, testing my limits, seeing what will make me break character. At least, I think that until I see his eyebrows stitch in, as if he's in pain by it all. As if *I'm* the one making him suffer" (Olivia 75). She reads his actions based on her own doubly embedded narrative because she is confident in its accuracy; however, there are a few moments when she does wonder about his feelings: "I haven't hung out with him since the script was revealed. No dinners. No milkshakes. Part of me wonders if we're avoiding each other, and it puts me on edge, especially after our last conversation. Does he feel guilty?"

(Olivia 181). Despite attempts at mind-reading him, she often provides her own answers to these questions: “Is *he* nervous? There’s no way he’s nervous with a smile like that. Flirting is old hat for him, I’m sure” (Olivia 118). Beyond her comments about him stealing glances at her, she starts to notice signs of attraction once they get more comfortable with each other: “I notice the dip in tone. Raspy. Rough. Filled with something that wasn’t there a few seconds ago” (Olivia 196). The author does not have to linger in these moments where a character dissects the other’s behavior since the reader already knows the answers to their questions.

Landon, however, is more prone to wondering about Quinn’s intentions and behavior. This could be due to the fact that his behavior is much more straightforward than hers as he does not try to hide his feelings from himself or from her. There is a clear disparity between Landon’s awareness of his feelings and Quinn’s awareness of hers as well as between his knowledge of his feelings and his struggle to understand her thoughts. Sometimes these contrasts are made apparent by presenting them together: “She runs a hand over her shorts. *I wonder* if she’s relieving stress or if her hands are clammy. I stretch my fingers out. *I know* I’m tense. I feel my heart pounding, just watching her” (Olivia 85; emphasis added). Moreover, she is not aware of how her doubly embedded narrative of him is affecting her interpretation of his actions, whereas he is aware of the possibility that he could be reading her behavior through the lens of his desire: “I think I see a twitch of a smile, but maybe I’m just looking into it” (Olivia 109) and “All business now. Except I feel her body shift. Her exposed thigh rests against my forearm, almost as if she relaxed into me. Or am I imagining it?” (Olivia 109-110). These moments are both preceded and followed by Quinn’s perspective, and when presented with similar moments, the reader often gets to hear about the thoughts behind the exact behavior that the other character has been trying to interpret.

4.4 *“I’m terrified by how much I want this”, “[...] she looked at me with terror in her eyes”*: Mirror Moments

The act of later revealing the thoughts behind a character’s previous actions that occurred in the other’s perspective could act as a way to create suspense, but as these reveals in the novel often happen immediately in the next chapter, they do not leave much room for speculation. Many readers do nevertheless find satisfaction in seeing both sides of a moment and being able to read about the love interest’s yearning for the other character as real life does not offer opportunities for such. These moments can also act as a way to show the characters’ ability to understand the other’s feelings or as evidence that they are misunderstanding something and

are not being indifferent on purpose. I use the word “mirror moments” to refer to these scenes that are seen two times throughout the novel from both perspectives as well as instances where both characters share an almost identical thought about each other.

The first way of using these mirror moments, as creating moments of affection, occurs when Quinn and Landon describe their affections in similar ways or notice coinciding moments. The possibility for this is naturally only present in dual perspective and is an effective way of showing the connection between characters. At times, their thoughts are almost identical, as is the case when Landon narrates that “my heart pounds so loud that I wonder if she can hear it” (Olivia 16) and when Quinn can feel her heart “trying to beat its way out of my chest. I wonder if he can hear it” (Olivia 193). He also describes “a dart to my heart, right on the bull’s-eye” (16), and when referencing the movie *Old Yeller*, he is joking that he will not shoot her, and she comments to herself that it is “*Debatable*” (Olivia 170) as she is “*getting shot right to the heart*” (Olivia 170). Before it is established that their characters will act as love interests in the theme park, Landon states that he said “the only thing that makes sense in my mind at that very moment. ‘Anything for you, My Queen’” (Olivia 18), and later Quinn explains how sentences like this are “swoonworthy lines that will drive the audience wild. That drive me wild” (Olivia 177). What is interesting is that in these mirror moments, Landon thinks about the thought considerably earlier than Quinn does, reflecting the order in which they accept and become aware of their feelings for the other.

The use of these moments to show the characters’ ability to understand each other’s feelings can be seen when Landon reads Quinn’s desire to protect herself accurately. This moment occurs when she reflects on her younger self after making the decision to establish physical boundaries in their performance so that she does not have to pretend to be unaffected by him: “I couldn’t protect the pink-braces girl back then. But this time, she’s getting wrapped in armor” (Olivia 81). When they see each other in the following chapter, he reads her behavior as such: “She looks like she’s thinking for a moment before tilting her chin up with all the determination of a soldier on a battlefield” (Olivia 85). The convenient mirroring of the metaphor is naturally achieved by both of their perspectives being written by the same author, but it does illustrate him being able to read her behavior correctly. The use of these mirror moments to show the opposite effect, that the other has misinterpreted a situation, are much more common. Since the reader already knows of the characters’ feelings, these moments often do not add suspense, but they most likely create feelings of frustration as the reader has to witness the resulting conflicts and misunderstandings without being able to intervene. An

example of this can be seen when Landon goes on a date with another woman to get Quinn out of his mind, and she thinks about how "I bet he went home with her. I bet I was the last person on his mind" (Olivia 75), while it is disclosed that he dropped his date off quickly after the date ended and compared her to Quinn in his head (Olivia 83). Another similar moment occurs when she wonders whether he is nervous about pretending to play a couple but comes to the conclusion that he must be used to flirting (Olivia 118). Later, as they are flirting as themselves, he laughs to "cut the finely woven string of tension between us" (Olivia 84), showing that he does get flustered around her.

If these moments act as a way to show the characters', especially Quinn's, tendency to assume the other's feelings, there are a few moments that are presented in a way that create suspense for the reader because their previous knowledge is not enough to help them read the situation. This happens when, after having spent time alone together for the first time, Quinn's read of Landon's behavior is inconsistent with the reader's knowledge of his feelings: "I have every intention of giving Landon the cold shoulder this morning because *how dare he trick me into having fun with him last night*, but I don't have to. Landon says hi, throws me a casual side-smile, then continues talking to Lorelei and Honey. It's like we're strictly coworkers instead of newly formed secret hang-out frenemies. He acts like nothing changed" (Olivia 158). The reader is likely wondering why he is acting indifferent towards her, and his perspective in the previous chapters does not offer enough information for the reader to deduce the answer. It is soon shown that she was correct in noticing his changed behavior: "I wanted to be casual today, trying not to draw attention to the fact that Quinn and I weren't fighting as much anymore. Trying not to scare her off. I'm not even sure it was a good decision" (Olivia 163). The reader is provided with an explanation for his behavior, but Quinn is left to wonder about the possible reasons behind it.

The most dramatic of the moments when the character's behavior deviates from their usual behavior occurs in a scene where both read the other's behavior incorrectly, resulting in a conflict which forces them to be honest about their feelings for each other. Before this moment, Landon has become aware of the extent of Quinn's bullying, and she has learned that he was not as involved in it as she previously thought. These realizations will be explored in the next chapter with the reveals of actual embedded narratives. Even with Quinn and Landon knowing these pieces of information, they are still not aware of the other's true feelings. This particular moment happens as they are about to share their first kiss out of character. Told from Quinn's perspective, her inner monologue shows how she panics before

the kiss: “I’m terrified by this moment. I’m terrified by how much I want this [...]” (Olivia 198). When Landon suddenly pulls away before the kiss, she interprets the action as him playing with her emotions: “’*Not a chance*,’ echoes in my brain. I’m just a game to him. And I lost” (Olivia 198). During this scene, the reader does not know his reason for pulling away and might be shocked as his earlier perspective has shown that he has been looking forward to kissing her. The reader then finds that this action is not in congruence with their knowledge of him and thus “text processing is disrupted” (Gerrig 365). After Landon pulls away from her, Quinn leaves his house quickly despite him calling after her (Olivia 199). The shock does not last long for the reader as he explains his side of the events in the following chapter: “I wanted her. I wanted her so bad that I could barely breathe. But when Quinn didn’t make any moves forward and *when she looked at me with terror in her eyes*, I assumed she didn’t want to kiss me” (Olivia 200; emphasis added). He was therefore unable to read her behavior correctly, resulting in him misinterpreting her apprehension as fear. Yet, he is quick in understanding her true feelings: “But then I saw her face contort into anger, and I knew I’d made a mistake. She wanted to kiss me” (Olivia 200). Even so, him pulling away from her resulted in her misreading his initial misread of the situation, causing a ripple effect in which neither is sure of the other’s true feelings.

4.5 *“Everything I thought up to this point is crumbling down”*: Actual Embedded Narratives

The chapter that follows Quinn leaving Landon’s house includes a reveal of some of their actual embedded narratives as Landon gets Quinn to explain her side of the event. Even though the reader has already learned of both of their perspectives, the characters are still in the dark about the reasoning behind the other’s behavior. They uncover their sides of the situation in Quinn’s chapter:

> “Talk to me. Last night. You left. Tell me why.”
> Last night hasn’t left my mind for a second, so I say exactly what I remember.
> “You didn’t want to kiss me,” I say. “But you pretended you did.”
> […] Landon shakes his head, slowly at first, then quick. “No. I didn’t think you wanted me to kiss you.” (Olivia 204)

After Landon explains that he panicked in the situation and read Quinn’s apprehension incorrectly, he reveals that his doubly embedded narrative of Quinn includes the assumption that she is aware of his feelings: “You make me panic. How are you surprised? I’m a mess for you” (Olivia 205). As was the case with Ethan, Landon is affected by the curse of knowledge, as they believe that their feelings are obvious and that others possess the same information as

them (Tobin 57). Quinn then tells him that she did want to kiss him, making both characters finally aware of the other's thoughts in the situation (Olivia 207). Unlike in *The Unhoneymooners*, the reader is already aware of both characters' actual embedded narratives and their doubly embedded narratives of each other and thus does not need to do as much work in reconstructing their ideas about the love interest. Because they have followed Landon's perspective throughout the novel, they do not need to abandon their earlier views of his feelings and do not need to create the "actual" embedded narrative (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 191).

At this point, Quinn is able to recognize her feelings for Landon because she has been made aware of his actual embedded narrative regarding her bullying before this moment. For a long time before this, she has not felt the need to revisit her doubly embedded narrative of him and thus has not seen him liking her as a possibility. It is, however, Landon, who needed to learn about Quinn's past in order to reveal his actual embedded narrative as he has not been aware that their accounts of the past differ. This reveal is crucial since without it she would not have been able to rethink her doubly embedded narrative of him, which then allows her to recognize her feelings for him. He learns from their mutual friend that even after Landon urged his friends to stop, they continued to bully Quinn without his knowledge (Olivia 165).

Landon then asks her to explain what happened after his friends found the diary, and she tells him about the bullying, finding it difficult to believe that he would not be aware of it (Olivia 172). She assumes that he is familiar with his friend's nickname of "Bridezilla" for her and that he left taunting notes to her, but he was not aware of either: "I blink as his eyebrows stitch in. As he transforms from anger to sadness to desperation. To hurt. He's serious. He wasn't involved at all, was he? (Olivia 172-173). This is the moment where they both learn about the other's actual embedded narrative as Landon was unaware of the fact that the bullying continued and Quinn was under the assumption that he knew about it: "I feel like my world, my beliefs, everything I thought up to this point is crumbling down. For years, I thought he was part of their jokes, and … he wasn't?" (Olivia 173). This scene occurs in her perspective, and he later wonders about this revelation's effects on him: "I'm still reeling over what she told me. How she was bullied and I had no idea. I feel like an idiot" (Olivia 178). This conversation makes both of them aware of each other's actual embedded narrative, showing him that she was bullied after he told his friends to stop and her that he was not part of the bullying or even aware of it. These revelations naturally affect how they view each

other, with Landon realizing the reason for her animosity, and Quinn learning that the idea of him being involved in the bullying was a metarepresentation with herself as the source.

After learning about his actual embedded narrative, her attraction to him gradually deepens and she begins to consider the possibility that he is different from the image she had of him: "It's hard to think he could be so different from who he was. But, God, how hypocritical of me. Aren't I different? Haven't I changed? After junior year of college, I am arguably *not* the same person. So, if I feel changed, why wouldn't he?" (Olivia 184). Similarly to *The Unhoneymooners*, Quinn finds out about Landon's feelings for her before learning how long he has had them. After their first kiss, she discovers that he bought the same fairy tales they used to read together, prompting her to ask him how long he has liked her (Olivia 220). He confesses that his feelings go back to the time he was fourteen, the time they first met. Even though Quinn has learned that he is attracted to her in the present, he has now finally revealed to her how these feelings are nothing new.

4.6 *"You don't seem fine"*: Mind-Reading After the Reveal

After the reveal of their actual embedded narratives, Quinn and Landon begin a sexual relationship but they have not yet discussed whether they are interested in pursuing a romantic one as well. Even though they are now familiar with the other's actual embedded narrative and what their doubly embedded narratives of each other consisted of, they continue to be unsure of whether the other wants to explore a romantic relationship. The rest of the novel focuses on her struggling with being honest to him about her previous mental health problems and her difficult relationship with her mother as she is worried about his perception of her. Complicating matters, she finds out that she needs to step out of her 10-year role of Queen Bee (Olivia 261). At first glance, these added barriers resemble external ones as they deal with her mother and her employment; however, these turn out to be internal ones as Quinn herself decides that they would be too much for Landon. Another aspect adding stress to their budding relationship is them running into one of his old friends who used to bully her (Olivia 246), complicating her attempts at replacing her old doubly embedded narrative of Landon with his actual embedded narrative of which she is now aware. Therefore, even with them uncovering important aspects of their embedded narratives, the rest of the novel has a similar set up as it did before the reveal: Quinn hiding her thoughts and feelings while Landon is trying to mind-read her to get her to open up to him.

Before Quinn begins to pull away from Landon, he understands that she is having difficulties with this transition. While reading about his attempts to understand her behavior, only the reader knows that there are still aspects of her actual embedded narrative she has not disclosed to him, and they have to continue following his inner turmoil. After they have confessed their feelings to each other, he wonders why she did not come to see him after work: “I wonder if she doesn’t want anyone to know about us. I wonder if it’s her own personal hell. I wonder if she’s fighting to make room in her heart for the guy she resented for so long” (Olivia 211). Quinn is in fact having trouble with reconstructing Landon’s actual narrative, but she is also letting herself notice him fully for the first time now that her misconstrued doubly embedded narrative of him has been dismantled: “Because I feel like Sleeping Beauty rising from the depths of a dark slumber. I notice everything about him now. [...] Every memory fills me in a Landon-filled stupor, and all I can do is walk down the midway and hope he stops invading my thoughts soon” (Olivia 229). In addition to these feelings, she also begins to pull away due to her conflicting thoughts about letting him in and guarding her past self who was hurt by him.

As was the case with Olive in *The Unhoneymooners*, Quinn and Landon also seem to get better at reading the other’s behavior after they have revealed the narratives that have prevented them from seeing the other person fully. As was mentioned, Olive oscillates between understanding Ethan’s behavior and struggling to read him, determined by whether she has confirmation of his feelings. What is interesting is that when struggling with their connection to the other character, Olive and Landon share the tendency to notice changes in the other’s behavior without being able to explain them. The fluctuation between Quinn’s accurate and Landon’s deficient perceptions of the other’s behavior can be seen throughout the latter part of the novel, with her finally letting herself notice his attraction, and him observing her changed behavior as she begins to pull away. An example of the former can be seen when she reads him looking at them holding their hands as if he is “admiring them together” (Olivia 239), while the latter is shown when he is perceptive of her withdrawing without being able to explain the reasoning: “When I touch her waist, she’s stiff. When we tell jokes, her laugh is stilted. And when we kiss, when I finally have her in my arms after so many days, my heart sinks, as the kiss feels forced. It feels too much like an obligation, like it’s our job” (Olivia 255). Landon is therefore very perceptive of these changes in Quinn’s behavior, but he still needs her to explain her thoughts behind them.

Without Quinn's explanation for her behavior, Landon is only able to notice vague changes; he notices the change in her tone after she tries to reassure him that she is fine: "I don't like the way she says my name. Harsh. Professional. Pointed. 'You don't seem fine,' I say" (Olivia 256), and when he asks whether dancing together was too much for her, she replies that perhaps it was, but he notes to himself that "That's not it. Her voice is too forced" (Olivia 258). He also narrates how he is not "exactly an expert on Quinn Sauer's thoughts" (Olivia 257), showing how he continues to struggle with mind-reading her even after their discussion about their past as he has no reason to believe that she is still hiding parts of herself. The differences in their abilities in understanding the feelings behind the other's behavior could thus be explained by the fact that Quinn is aware of Landon's actual embedded narrative while she is still hiding a part of hers without his knowledge.

Quinn's unsuccessful attempts of pushing Landon away and his unwillingness to let her go without explaining her behavior result in an argument, after which he finally learns the reason for her dismissive behavior. She tells him about her past struggles with depression as well as her difficult relationship with her mom, and he is able to connect these with the information he has learned previously of her dropping out of college during her junior year: "It's like glass shatters in front me – a realization" (Olivia 287). She describes how she has feared revealing everything about her embedded narrative to him as she fears his possible negative reaction (Olivia 287). This is the moment when they finally admit their feelings to each other, and she is able to realize how similar they turn out to be under her attempts at concealing her real character: "It's taken me too long to realize how similar we are. That all either of us truly wants is to feel like the world is being honest with us. That we are safe" (Olivia 295). Even their declaration of love echoes their mind-reading struggles:

> "I want you," she says. "If you want me."
>
> "*If you want me*," I echo with a breathy laugh. "What a silly sentence" [...]
>
> "Of course I want you. It's always been you" (Olivia 328)

This shows that even at the end of the novel, they are still struggling with putting together their doubly embedded narratives of each other and the actual embedded narratives.

4.7 Conclusion

By being a dual perspective romance novel, *The Fiction Between Us* creates a different reading experience with different expectations for the reader than a single perspective novel

does. Yet, despite these differences, the set up and roles of the characters do not deviate much as both *The Unhoneymooners* and *The Fiction Between Us* feature a woman who works through her feelings regarding the love interest, while the man, despite unable to express his feelings, has always been sure of them. The reading experiences are then made different through their unique needs for mind-reading and the reconstruction of doubly embedded narratives. As both of the perspectives are shown to the reader in *The Fiction Between Us*, mind-reading of the love interest is not needed in order to get access to their perspective. Removing the need for mind-reading also removes the possibility of using it to create suspense in the novel. Instead, the novel creates moments of surprise by withholding crucial information about the characters' pasts as well as the exact time and manner of the characters confessing their feelings to each other. These aspects are able to remain hidden for a while with the use of alteration principles even as the reader has access to both perspectives. Unlike in *The Honeymooners*, the reader's interpretations of the love interest are not being guided by the woman's narration as they have the possibility to read from both perspectives. The feelings of both of the characters are clear to the reader from the beginning with Quinn attempting to fight hers and Landon being honest about his.

Moreover, as the reader has been following both perspectives throughout the novel, they do not need to reconstruct the doubly embedded narrative of the love interest with the female protagonist as they are already aware of his actual embedded narrative. Even though the reader gets access to both characters' perspectives, mind-reading is used to demonstrate whether the characters are certain or uncertain of each other's feelings. This is naturally only possible for novels with two perspectives, and it is a major aspect of the appeal of such novels as real life cannot offer possibilities for it. I referred to these moments that show both perspectives of a moment as mirror moments, and they are an effective way of creating connection between the characters. As the reader does not need to ascertain the love interest's feelings, the focus is on how differently the characters view their own feelings as well as the feelings of the other person.

5 Conclusion

Even with the genre of romance experiencing major shifts in the last few decades alongside the developments seen in gender roles and equality, it has remained an extremely popular genre. Even though women's finances and role in society are no longer dependent on finding a suitable husband, women are still seen as the ones who should be interested in the pursuit of love and are thus the ones reading and watching media about it (Weisser 2, 4). With the romance genre's popularity extending to the 21st century, it has developed to reflect the modern roles in romantic relationships and marriage, making the external barriers in the plot less relevant. This has meant that internal barriers have become more popular, and by accentuating the role of the man in a heterosexual romance and freeing the female protagonist from the pressure to get married, the modern romance novel focuses more on the emotional aspects in the relationship (Regis 37, 111). Despite the man having a much more prominent role and often even his own perspective in the novel, there has not been much academic writing about perspectives in romance novels, which is why I wanted to explore this topic in my thesis.

In my theoretical background section, I used analyses by Pamela Regis, Susan Ostrov Weisser, Janice Radway, and Katherine Roach to examine the structure and features of romance novels and how they have developed in the past few decades. Regis' definitions of internal and external barriers and the importance of a romance novel's ending enhance Janice Radway's interview results from the 1980's which show that romance novels can be seen as the retelling of a singular myth (Radway 198). Tying these plot patterns in romance novels to the patterns in characters, I employed Patrick Colm Hogan's explanation of how this connection, as well as the connection between barriers and characters, gives the opportunity to alter these prototypes, creating a unique romance novel that still follows the strict structure of the plot that the genre is known for (Hogan 139-140). As my aim was to examine modern romance novels, I went over the changes seen in the expectations for the characters' arcs and their perspectives during the last few decades, which make the alteration of these elements possible within the genre.

In order to analyze how the choice of one first-person narrator versus two first-person narrators affects the reading experience of romance novels, I explored Ivdit Diasamidze's description of first-person narration adding subjectivity to the novel as well as Laura Kinsale's portrayal of Carol Thurston's 1980's survey about the desire for a male point of

view. In order to look at the shift in perspective in romance novels, I looked at Reddit discussions and web articles on the subject since there has not been much academic writing on the topic. These helped me get an understanding of what readers enjoy as well as find lacking in novels with a single perspective and a dual perspective. The main finding of the discussions was that the former option creates tension and mimics the knowledge a person has when falling in love in real life, while the latter adds a dimension which is not accessible in real life and makes the characters seem equally important to the story.

With the aim of looking at how readers gage characters' thoughts and feelings as well as how characters within a novel perform this task, I used the concept of Theory of Mind, as explained by Liza Zunshine, who is a major scholar in the concept's relation to fiction. Connected to Theory of Mind, I considered Vera Tobin's explanation of the curse of knowledge and how it hinders our mind-reading abilities and affects our memories. To understand how characters within a novel regard each other, I used Alan Palmer's concept of doubly embedded narratives. In addition to fictional characters, this also affects the reader: when being presented with the character's own view of themselves, the reader might have to reconstruct their doubly embedded narrative and create the actual embedded narrative of them (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 191). I then went over ways that people can be mistaken about their mental events, as explained by Palmer, including self-deception, misinterpretation, and inattention (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 125-126). Connected to this, I looked at the concept of metarepresentations which helps in understanding where a thought originates from and how the failure to keep track of these often results in unreliable narrators (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 124). They relate to romance novels in the metarepresentational challenges that occur when one has a crush on someone, as explained by Zunshine (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 145). The last area regarding Theory of Mind and how characters gain knowledge of each other's thoughts and feelings is the difference between private feelings and public emotions, as defined by Palmer. The latter is easier to access by other people (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 138), which sometimes results in moments of embodied transparency which Zunshine defines as moments when a character's feelings are inadvertently turned into emotions (Zunshine, "Embodied Transparency" 70).

My aim in this thesis has been to use these theories to analyze the differences in reader's knowledge of the love interest's feelings in romance novels with one perspective and two perspectives. The former, I have suggested, engages the reader in ascertaining the love interest's feelings for the protagonist while the latter does not, instead offering the reader a

unique opportunity to gain access to the perspectives of both sides of a relationship. In novels with one perspective, revealing the barrier for the romance does not remove the element of suspense, while in novels with two perspectives, some type of alteration principle is needed to conceal information from the reader. In order to compare the effects of novels with one perspective and two perspectives, I chose *The Unhoneymooners* by Christina Lauren for the former and *The Fiction Between Us* by Julie Olivia for the latter. I chose these novels for their similar setup as both novels feature a couple that has an antagonist history, the catalyst for which turns out to be a misunderstanding. This misinterpretation results more from the women understanding the men's behavior incorrectly as they did not have all of the necessary knowledge at the time. These misunderstandings thus originate from faulty metarepresentations resulting in false doubly embedded narratives, which then act as internal barriers for the romance.

In my analysis, I employed the theories relating to the structure of romance novels as well as Theory of Mind and showed how even though the perspectives create a distinct setup for mind-reading and different reading experiences in both novels, a lot of the features in the characters' roles stay the same. As the reader begins reading the novels, they are being guided by genre conventions and know that the couple is going to end up together. This knowledge affects the novels in different ways: in *The Unhoneymooners*, the reader becomes suspicious of Olive's mind-reading abilities as they can read Ethan's behavior better through their understanding of romance tropes and the knowledge of their eventual "Happily Ever After", while in *The Fiction Between Us*, once the whole picture is revealed to the reader during the beginning, they are aware of both perspectives as well as the necessary actions required for them to end up together without being able to communicate this to the characters. When looking at the differences created by the perspectives, a feature that is claimed to be more prominent in dual perspective, the idea that the characters are more equal, seems to be at part missing from *The Fiction Between Us*. In this novel, the woman is still the one working through her feelings and struggling with her career with the perspective of the man acting mostly as confirmation for the woman's feelings.

Therefore, despite the information the reader has about the feelings of the characters varying between the novels, the women's inability and men's ability to understand their own feelings turn out to be almost identical. In both novels, the women's understanding of their own feelings bears a strong resemblance to each other; both Olive and Quinn are mistaken about their own mental events and are not skilled at reading and understanding their own emotions.

Moreover, both try to hide their feelings from the love interest as well as themselves, which creates comedy in both novels. Their feelings are more often private feelings as opposed to outward emotions as they are not observable or audible. The knowledge of the men's feelings also resemble each other, as both turn out to be in tune with their emotions and believe that the women are aware of them as well. Both Ethan and Landon are thus affected by the curse of knowledge, which makes them unable to see the importance of communicating their actual embedded narratives to the women. It could then be said that both novels focus on the woman admitting their feelings to themselves while the men hope that the women accomplish this, while at the same time believing that the women are already aware of the men's feelings.

I showed how despite these similarities in the knowledge of own feelings, the omission or inclusion of the love interest's perspective creates different demands and environments for mind-reading. In *The Unhoneymooners*, mind-reading of Ethan as well as Olive is a necessary part of the narrative as the former's perspective is not shown to the reader, and the latter's feelings can only be accessed through her subjective narration. In *The Fiction Between Us,* there is no need to mind-read either of the characters as they are either forthright about their feelings or the answer can be deduced by seeing the whole picture from both perspectives. The different perspectives also affect what showing the characters attempts to mind-read each other accomplishes: novels with one perspective use it to create tension as the reader does not have access to the other perspective, while novels with two perspectives use it to show the characters' uncertainty of each other's feelings, creating feelings of satisfaction for the reader when they are able to answer the characters' questions.

The differences in perspective also create distinct layers of mind-reading in both novels which the reader must keep track of in order to remember the knowledge that the different characters possess. In *The Unhoneymooners,* the reader needs to remember that even though they get to read about Olive's perspective and share her knowledge, Ethan gets information about her only through her outward behavior and therefore knows less than the reader. These layers are much more complicated in *The Fiction Between Us,* as the reader needs to remember that by getting access to both characters' thoughts, they can answer both of their questions unlike the characters themselves. Therefore, not only does the reader know what the characters are thinking and feeling as individuals, after reading one character's mind-reading attempts, they are immediately able to answer these questions based on the other's perspective. The novel also features instances where a specific moment is shown from both perspectives. Referring to these as mirror moments, I showed how these are an effective way to show the connection or

disconnection between characters, and as the reader is aware of both of the character's feelings, the novel is able to focus on the instances of how the characters view each other's feelings and how they might differ from the reader's knowledge. Moreover, as the unique situation created by the dual perspective, of getting a peek behind the curtain of a crush's thoughts, is not possible in real life, the reader must keep in mind that the characters themselves exist in a real-world situation with only their perspectives guiding them. The curse of knowledge can therefore affect the reading experience if the reader is not able to keep track of these layers.

I also demonstrated how metarepresentations and the doubly embedded narratives created through these are at the center of both novels; however, the different perspectives create a different effect when these are revealed. In *The Unhoneymooners*, Olive's incorrect view of her metarepresentation regarding Ethan as having no source creates an incorrect doubly embedded narrative of him. In *The Fiction Between Us*, Quinn similarly does not see that she is creating an incorrect doubly embedded narrative of Landon with not being able to recognize herself as the source tag in her metarepresentation regarding him. The difference in the reveals has to do with the time the reader learns of the actual embedded narrative; in *The Unhoneymooners*, the reveal happens to the reader and Olive at the same time, while in *The Fiction Between Us*, the actual embedded narrative is unveiled to the reader almost immediately with Quinn learning about it much later. The latter parts of the novels deal with Ethan's strong doubly embedded narrative of his brother as a good person, making him see Olive as a source for the altercation instead of Dane, and Landon trying to mind-read Quinn and incorrectly assuming that she has revealed her actual embedded narrative in its entirety. In both cases, the reader already knows of the actual embedded narrative of the women, while the men do not.

My analysis has shown that by establishing distinct setups for mind-reading, romance novels with a single perspective and novels with a dual perspective create different reading experiences with different focuses. These findings help in filling the research gap that exists in perspective in romance novels, the work of which still needs to be continued due to the changes these perspectives have seen in the past decades. Looking at the perspectives in romance and their different expectations for mind-reading could be used in further research, for example, by choosing novels with queer couples to examine how gender and queer romances affect the roles of the characters performing the mind-reading or by analyzing novels whose barriers are more external.

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