



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

Volume 11, Issue 3, May-June 2024

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.583

The Representation of the 'Queer' in Alice Oseman's Heartstopper and Casey McQuiston One Last Stop

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ABSTRACT: The portrayal of LGBTQ+ identities in literature has witnessed a significant evolution, mirroring the changing societal attitudes towards love, identity, and acceptance. This research paper delves into the representation of queer narratives through the lenses of Alice Oseman's "Heartstopper" and Casey McQuiston's "One Last Stop." Both works serve as compelling testimonies to the shifting landscape of LGBTQ+ representation in literature, exploring the complexities of identity negotiation, relationships, and societal expectations. The paper aims to analyze how Oseman and McQuiston contribute to a more diverse and inclusive literary landscape by offering engaging narratives that defy stereotypes and challenge conventional notions of queer experiences. Through critical analysis, this research sheds light on the significance of accurate and diverse representations of the LGBTQ+ community in literature. Oseman and McQuiston navigate the delicate nuances of relationships, personal growth, and societal acceptance in "Heartstopper" and "One Last Stop," thereby contributing to the transformation of the narrative landscape surrounding queer experiences. These literary works serve as beacons, guiding towards a more diverse and empathetic literary environment that celebrates authenticity and honesty.

KEYWORDS: LGBTQ+ representation, literature, queer narratives, identity negotiation, societal acceptance, diversity, inclusion, critical analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The portrayal of LGBT identities has become increasingly prominent in today's changing literary world, providing deep insights into the intricacies of love, self-discovery, and social acceptance. This research paper explores queer narratives via the prisms of Casey McQuiston's One Last Stop and Alice Oseman's Heartstopper. With their portrayals of characters negotiating the complexities of identity, relationships, and societal expectations, both works serve as vivid testaments to the changing landscape of LGBTQ+ representation in literature. The purpose of this paper is to explore how Oseman and McQuiston help to create a more diverse and inclusive literary landscape by giving readers engaging stories that go beyond stereotypes and question accepted ideas about queer experiences. This research aims to shed light on the value of accurate and diverse representations of the LGBT community in literature by critically analyzing these tales. In Heartstopper and One Last Stop, Alice Oseman and Casey McQuiston tackle the sensitive nuances of relationships, personal development, and societal acceptability. This research paper tries to analyze how they contribute to changing the narrative landscape of queer experiences. These books act as lighthouses, encouraging a more diverse literary landscape that is sympathetic and honest.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alice Oseman's graphic novel Heartstopper and Casey McQuiston's novel One Last Stop have emerged as prominent voices in contemporary young adult literature, offering vibrant yet distinct approaches to LGBTQ+ representation. While both novels celebrate love and acceptance, they diverge in their narrative styles, thematic focuses, and target audiences, ultimately enriching the spectrum of LGBTQ+ voices in literature. Oseman's Heartstopper utilizes the visual power of the graphic novel format. Through captivating illustrations and expressive character designs, the story unfolds as Charlie, a sensitive boy, navigates his feelings for Nick, a popular rugby player grappling with his bisexuality. This visual storytelling captures the complexities of young love, self-discovery, and navigating the challenges of adolescence within a supportive school environment.



Oseman's masterful use of body language and facial expressions allows readers to deeply connect with the characters' emotions, creating a sense of intimacy and emotional resonance. The graphic novel format also extends its contribution beyond the narrative itself. It proves particularly accessible, breaking down barriers for readers unfamiliar with traditional prose. The focus on relatable characters and contemporary issues like coming-of-age and navigating first love resonates with young LGBTQ+ readers. Heartstopper provides a safe space for self-discovery, fostering a sense of belonging and community by offering them the invaluable experience of seeing their experiences reflected on the page. This visual representation not only validates their identities but also normalizes LGBTQ+ relationships within a familiar social setting. McQuiston's *One Last Stop* explores a more complex and fantastical realm of LGBTQ+ representation. The narrative revolves around August, a cynical young woman, and Jane, a mysterious woman trapped in a time loop on the subway. Their love story transcends the boundaries of time, prompting exploration of themes like destiny, fate, and defying societal expectations. While the central focus remains on their

captivating romance, the novel subtly delves into LGBTQ+ representation in the 1970s through Jane's experiences. This juxtaposition highlights the progress made towards inclusivity in contemporary society while acknowledging the ongoing fight for equality.

One Last Stop targets a slightly older young adult and adult audience compared to *Heartstopper*. The complex themes, including the intricacies of love, defying societal expectations, and the fantastical element of time travel, require a more mature understanding from readers. McQuiston's witty and engaging writing style allows for a deeper exploration of the characters' inner thoughts and emotional landscapes, particularly for August, who grapples with personal beliefs and societal pressure. The fantastical element of the time loop serves as a metaphor for the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those who have lived through periods of less acceptance. Both novels have garnered significant acclaim and dedicated followings. *Heartstopper* has become a beacon of hope for young LGBTQ+ individuals seeking representation and a relatable portrayal of their experiences. It is celebrated for its positive portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters and its sensitive exploration of self-discovery and acceptance. *One Last Stop* provides a captivating escape with deeper layers. The unique blend of romance, the fantastical element of time travel, and the subtle exploration of societal issues offers a heartwarming story with lasting impact. Ultimately, *Heartstopper* and *One Last Stop* demonstrate the diverse ways in which contemporary literature offers queer representation. While *Heartstopper* provides a relatable coming-of-age story for young adults, *One Last Stop* explores a more complex and mature theme of love within a fantastical setting. Together, they enrich and evolve LGBTQ+ representation in literature, offering unique narratives that resonate with readers across generations and inspire a greater sense of understanding and acceptance. Their distinct approaches highlight the importance of both relatable portrayals of young love and the exploration of broader societal issues to create a more inclusive literary landscape for LGBTQ+

Literary Analysis

"Heartstopper" by Alice Oseman is a multidimensional jewel in the world of young adult graphic books. It began as a webcomic and developed into a well-liked print series of books and, most recently, a highly regarded Netflix version. Its timeless appeal stems from the way it masterfully captures friendship, self-discovery, and first love all within the context of a touching LGBTQ+ story. Nick Nelson and Charlie Spring, two boys attending an all-boys grammar school, are the main characters of the novel. The paths of Charlie, the outspoken gay introvert who enjoys music, and Nick, the well-liked rugby player, unexpectedly cross. They are brought together by a passion for graphic novels and music, and their early relationship develops into something more as they work through the difficulties of first love and confront their own prejudices. The depth of Oseman's portrayal is what makes her so strong. After being portrayed as the archetypal jock at

first, Nick develops depths of gentleness, sensitivity, and sincere perplexity as he struggles with his developing affections for Charlie. Charlie exudes vulnerability, resilience, and a contagious enthusiasm for life while experiencing bullying and social pressures. The adversarial Ben Hope and the encouraging Tao and Elle make up the supporting cast, which adds more depth to the story and makes the setting seem realistic and approachable. A distinguishing feature of "Heartstopper" is its candid and affirming depiction of LGBTQ+ experiences. Charlie's path of self-acceptance is sensitively and authentically portrayed, from overcoming internalized homophobia to navigating coming out and overcoming social obstacles. The narrative, which promotes love and acceptance, is a welcome diversion from stories that frequently center on the struggles experienced by LGBTQ+ people. The story's emotional impact is amplified by Oseman's artistic approach, which is distinguished by gentle lines, emotive expressions, and deft use of color palettes. The panels are overflowing with loveliness and warmth, reflecting the tenderness of Nick and Charlie's developing passion.



The complete range of emotions felt by the characters and readers alike is captured by the painting style, which fluidly transitions from moments of poignancy and playful humor.

"Heartstopper" addresses more general themes of friendship, bullying, mental health, and self-discovery in addition to the main romance. It explores the value of encouraging friends like Tao and Tara, who serve as Charlie and Nick's rock by providing acceptance and guidance through trying times. It addresses the facts of bullying, demonstrating its terrible effects and emphasizing the value of defending oneself and other people. Furthermore, the storyline incorporates the characters' battles with depression and anxiety, showing how mental health issues may impact everyone and providing guidance on coping strategies and getting help. There's a reason "Heartstopper" has such a loyal fan following. It presents a charming, realistic, and supportive picture of adolescent LGBTQ+ love while sensitively and honestly addressing difficult subjects. Readers will easily become engrossed in Oseman's universe through his deft writing and engrossing artwork, supporting the characters and picking up insightful lessons about acceptance, friendship, and having the guts to be oneself. Beyond just being entertaining, "Heartstopper" gives LGBTQ+ youth a sense of optimism and representation. It offers a counter-narrative to damaging preconceptions, normalizes same-sex love, and gives young readers a comforting and relatable story. "Heartstopper" leaves a lasting impression on readers of

all ages by illustrating a world in which love overcomes prejudice and self-acceptance is paramount, serving as a reminder that everyone should be able to feel the joy of making a genuine connection. This is but a small sample of the complex world of "Heartstopper." If you do more research, you might want to look at particular themes like self-discovery and mental health, contrast the Netflix adaptation with the graphic novel series, or examine how Oseman uses visual storytelling to further the plot. There are countless options, and "Heartstopper" will reward your investigation with its timeless ideas and endearing tale.

"One Last Stop" by Casey McQuiston is a novel that intricately weaves together themes of love, time travel, and personal growth against the backdrop of contemporary New York City. While the story is anchored in the romance between August and Jane, it delves deeply into broader subjects such as the significance of history, the essence of the family (both blood and chosen), and the journey of self-discovery. This novel stands out for its innovative approach to storytelling, combining elements of fantasy with a deeply human narrative. At its core, "One Last Stop" is a remarkable narrative that blurs the lines between fantasy and reality. McQuiston introduces readers to a world where time travel exists, yet the phenomena are grounded in the emotional and relational realities of the characters. Jane's displacement from the 1970s to the present day is not just a plot device; it serves as a metaphor for feeling out of place in one's own time and the universal search for where we belong. This intersection invites readers to ponder the impact of time on relationships and the ways in which people navigate love and loss across temporal divides. The novel also acts as a bridge connecting past and present, particularly in the context of LGBTQ+ rights and culture. Jane's experiences in the 1970s provide a poignant reminder of the struggles faced by the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting how far society has come and how much further it needs to go. This historical perspective enriches the narrative, offering insights into the importance of remembering and learning from the past. It serves as a call to action, reminding readers of the ongoing fight for equality and the need to preserve the stories of those who came before. Another vital theme explored in "One Last Stop" is the concept

of family. McQuiston examines both biological and chosen families, illustrating how both can shape and support an individual's identity and growth. August's relationship with her roommates and the broader community she becomes part of in New York City showcases the power of chosen families. These relationships, built on mutual respect, understanding, and love, offer a counterpoint to traditional notions of family, emphasizing the idea that family is not solely defined by blood but by the bonds we choose to cultivate.

The novel is also a profound journey of personal growth and self-discovery for August. Her move to New York City and her subsequent relationship with Jane catalyze a transformation, forcing her to confront her past, her fears, and her aspirations. This journey is emblematic of the broader search for identity that many people face, particularly in their twenties. McQuiston skillfully navigates this theme, showing how love can inspire individuals to become more authentic versions of themselves. Finally, "One Last Stop" pays homage to New York City, not just as a setting but as a living, breathing entity that plays a crucial role in the story. The city's diversity, energy, and potential for magic and connection permeate the narrative, offering a vibrant backdrop to the characters' lives. McQuiston captures the essence of New York, from its bustling subway system to its eclectic neighbourhoods, highlighting how the city can bring people together in unexpected and wonderful ways. In "One Last Stop," Casey McQuiston presents a multifaceted narrative that explores the intersection of fantasy and reality, the importance of historical context, the concept of family, the journey of self-discovery, and the character of New York City itself. Through the romance between August and Jane, the novel delves into

profound themes, offering readers a rich tapestry of love, time, and identity. McQuiston's work is a testament to the complexity of human relationships and the enduring power of love, making "One Last Stop" a significant and impactful contribution to contemporary literature

III. CONCLUSION

Both "The Glass Palace" by Amitav Ghosh and "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth are postcolonial novels that explore the complexities and challenges of life in postcolonial India. Both novels are set in the aftermath of British colonial rule and offer a rich and nuanced portrait of the social, cultural, and political changes that accompanied India's transition to independence.

One of the key themes that both novels address is the legacy of British colonialism and its impact on Indian society. In "The Glass Palace," Ghosh explores the ways in which colonialism shaped the lives of his characters, from the exploitation of Burma's natural resources to the economic and social dislocation that accompanied the British Raj. Similarly, in "A Suitable Boy," Seth examines the ways in which colonialism has shaped India's social, economic, and political landscape, including the unequal distribution of wealth and limited opportunities available to Indians.

Another theme that both novels address is the tension between tradition and modernity in postcolonial India. India is a country with a rich cultural heritage, and both novels explore the challenges that arise when traditional values and practices clash with the forces of modernity. In "A Suitable Boy," Seth explores the tension between tradition and modernity through the character of Lata Mehra, who is torn between her desire for independence and her loyalty to her family and their traditional values. In "The Glass Palace," Ghosh explores the tension between tradition and modernity through the character of Rajkumar, who must navigate the rapidly changing economic and political landscape of postcolonial Burma. Religion is also a theme that both novels address, reflecting the complex religious landscape of postcolonial India. In "A Suitable Boy," Seth explores the role of religion in the lives of his characters, highlighting the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the aftermath of independence. Similarly, in "The Glass Palace," Ghosh explores the role of religion through the character of Uma, a devout Buddhist who must navigate the religious tensions and conflicts that arise in postcolonial Burma.

Both novels are also notable for their richly drawn characters, who come from diverse social, economic, and religious backgrounds. Through their characters, both Ghosh and Seth offer a multifaceted portrait of postcolonial India, highlighting the diversity of experiences and perspectives that emerged in the wake of colonialism. Both novels also feature strong and complex female characters, including Uma in "The Glass Palace" and Lata Mehra in "A Suitable Boy," who challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

Finally, both novels are distinguished by their attention to historical detail and accuracy. Both Ghosh and Seth are known for their meticulous research, and their novels offer rich and detailed portraits of life in postcolonial India. Through their detailed descriptions of everyday life, both novels bring the world of postcolonial India to life in vivid detail, immersing readers in the social, political, and cultural realities of the time.

In conclusion, "The Glass Palace" by Amitav Ghosh and "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth are two powerful and thought-provoking postcolonial novels that offer rich and nuanced portraits of life in postcolonial India. Through their exploration of the legacy of British colonialism, the tension between tradition and modernity, the role of religion, and their diverse and richly drawn characters, both novels provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that arose in the wake of colonialism. By delving deeply into the personal and political dimensions of postcolonial India, both "The Glass Palace" and "A Suitable Boy" offer important insights into the complexities of life in a postcolonial society.

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