

## **Queer Time on the Q train**

Love, Belonging and Chosen Family in Casey McQuiston's *One Last Stop*

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This thesis explores how Casey McQuiston's *One Last Stop* (2021) portrays queer time, belonging and chosen family. The emphasis is on how the novel manipulates time and setting, and how these factors influence the identities and connections of the characters. The novel serves as the primary focus of the study, supported by queer theory and academic discussions and papers about temporality, community and queer history. The research relies on a theoretical literary analysis, combined with concepts of queer theory that help in understanding the novel's themes. Concepts, such as queer temporality, help in explaining how the novel uses the Q train not only as a physical setting but also as a place where the usual flow of time is disrupted. The thesis additionally explores how the Flatbush community and August's friendships foster a sense of belonging that differ from traditional, family-focused structures.

The analysis suggests that *One Last Stop* depicts queer time as something that opens alternative ways of living and connecting with others. The novel highlights the importance of chosen family, not only as emotional support, but also as a way of preserving and respecting queer heritage. Ultimately, the thesis argues that McQuiston's novel shows how queerness can reshape relationships and experiences of the past, present and future through alternative forms of belonging and connection.

Key words: queer time, queer temporality, chosen family, belonging, identity, queer theory, *One Last Stop*

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## 1 Introduction

While often categorised as a romance, Casey McQuiston's *One Last Stop* (2021) is additionally a layered exploration of queer life and community. The novel tells the story of August Landry, a 23-year-old student who moves to New York City for her studies at Brooklyn College. While travelling on the Q train, August encounters Jane Su, a mysterious woman who is later revealed to have been stuck in a time loop on the Q train since the 1970s. Their connection develops despite temporal challenges, which illustrate the ways trauma can trap a person in place both literally and metaphorically. The novel is dedicated to "queer communities past, present, and future" (McQuiston 2021), which sets the novel right in the context of queer literature.

Besides romantic elements, *One Last Stop* explores chosen family and non-linear time, especially in the context of queer people. Jane being stuck on the Q train acts as a metaphor for unresolved trauma. The novel indicates that past experiences can interrupt emotional growth and self-development. As August connects with Jane, the reader sees not just affection, but also a gradual sense of freedom as Jane starts to get control back over her life. *One Last Stop* shows how historical struggles still affect present-day queer people when it talks about 1970s punk culture and Stonewall riots.

This personal journey that August goes through mirrors the chosen family she meets in the Flatbush commune, introducing the reader characters such as Niko, a transgender part-time psychic and bartender; Myla, an artist with a degree in electrical engineering; and Wes, a nocturnal tattoo artist. Because of this odd mix of people, August experiences acceptance and support unlike anything she has known earlier in her life. This thesis explores *One Last Stop* through frameworks such as queer temporality and found family, shedding light on how McQuiston ties romantic and personal stories into broader queer history. The novel's overlap of time, love and community reveal what it means to live authentically as a queer individual.

The aim of this thesis is to examine how Casey McQuiston's *One Last Stop* uses a time loop in order to explore the historical continuity of queer identities and experiences. Specifically, the analysis aims to understand how the novel portrays August Landry's journey toward belonging and the formation of a chosen family, and how queer relationships help her with her personal growth.

This thesis examines *One Last Stop* through the lens of queer temporality, queer belonging and chosen family. The analysis is guided by three research questions:

1. How does the novel represent queer temporality and challenge linear, heteronormative ideas of time?
2. How are spaces, such as the subway, portrayed as queer places where belonging becomes possible?
3. How the romance plot and chosen family contribute to a hopeful vision of queer life?

These questions structure the analysis across three thematic chapters focusing on temporality, space, and community.

*One Last Stop* is a particularly relevant book for this study since it blends accessible storytelling with core ideas from queer theory. While writers like Halberstam, Muñoz and Weston have discussed concepts such as queer temporality, queer spaces and chosen family, *One Last Stop* explores these themes in mainstream fiction with nuance and depth. Because of these elements, the novel becomes a useful tool in analysing how identity and community form outside heteronormative timelines. Even though the story is familiar to many readers, scholarly work on it remains scarce. Applying established theories on a recent, widely loved book helps close that gap.

## 2 Background and Theoretical Framework

The concept of queer temporality is most notably theorised and brought into wider academic use by Jack Halberstam. Halberstam published a book called *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* in 2005, in which Halberstam described “queer time” and “queer space” as alternatives to heteronormative and linear constructions of life events. Halberstam’s perspective emphasises how queer people often live according to different timelines than those who are not queer. These timelines do not necessarily follow expectations of heterosexual relationships, reproduction, or traditional milestones of adulthood. (Halberstam 2005, 1) This way of understanding time opens possibilities for studying how queerness reshapes experiences of past, present and future.

The framework of queer temporality has since been expanded by scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman and José Esteban Muñoz, who expand queer temporality into questions of memory, affect and futurity. Muñoz’s concept of queer futurity is especially relevant here. In *Cruising Utopia* ([2009] 2019) Muñoz argues, that queerness is oriented toward a horizon. It is a sense of potential shaped by fleeting present moments (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 24). According to Muñoz, queer experiences leave behind “ephemeral traces” that connect personal encounters to collective queer history (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 51). These traces allow the past to surface in the present and create a sense of continuity that does not work according to strictly linear time.

These theories are a part of an ongoing conversation, which has continued to expand the ways in which queer temporality and futurity are understood. Vitor Blanco-Fernández argues in their article “Thinking the Future Otherwise: Queer Futures and Queer Utopias” (2024) that queer futures should not be reduced to a simple opposition between anti-futurism and queer utopianism. Blanco-Fernández’s perspective highlights that queer engagements with time and the future are ongoing and evolving, rather than settled theoretical concepts.

Izzie Atkinson has also studied queer time in her article “Against Chrononormativity: How May a Concept of Queer Time Challenge Traditional Ideas of Historical Progress?” (2024) Atkinson argues that queer temporalities challenge assumptions of chronological progression, showing that queer futures are constantly evolving.

Questions of time are closely connected to questions of belonging and kinship in queer theory. Kath Weston’s book, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* ([1991] 1997)

provides a foundational understanding of how queer communities form chosen families based on care, support and shared experiences, rather than biological ties. Kath Weston's research is important in shaping how we view non-traditional families in LGBTQ+ contexts. In her book Weston questions heteronormative definitions of family, highlighting instead how queer groups build bonds rooted on support and care rather than blood and genetics (Weston [1991] 1997, 61). According to Weston, during the AIDS crisis, many queer individuals had to form their own families through intentional relationships and effort. Weston presents kinship as adaptable and socially produced, instead of something automatic or inherited. Kinship comes from living together, acknowledging each other and looking after one another.

A central idea in Weston's theory is that chosen family is not just a backup when blood relatives do not fulfill what one would expect from a family (Weston [1991] 1997, 167). Chosen families stand as real kinships, sometimes offering even greater security, closeness and trust. These families function through what she describes as "kinning", meaning daily efforts which build connection, cultivate belonging and affirm identity (Weston [1991] 1997, 24). Weston emphasises that chosen families are formed not only due to systemic rejection, but also from the desire to create affirming communities where queer people can live openly and be understood without explanation. Weston's studies show that queer communities are more than just social ties, thus emphasising their emotional properties. By focusing on personal connections and chosen bonds, Weston's view helps interpret stories such as *One Last Stop*. In the Flatbush commune August experiences precisely the kind of kinship Weston describes. They find belonging through routines and being there for one another.

The idea of socially constructed belonging is further explored by Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006). Ahmed argues that belonging is not a fixed state, but an ongoing process. It is shaped and influenced by the spaces and bonds that allow an individual to feel "oriented" toward others (Ahmed 2006, 13). For queer people belonging often happens through friendships and shared living or caring, not blood relations or standard systems.

Together these theoretical perspectives offer a framework for studying how time, belonging and kinship operate in queer narratives. They make it possible to analyse how spaces can hold together different moments in history, how communities form through care and how queer lives imagine futures outside normative timelines.

### 3 Queer Time and the Q Train

The connection between time, history and queer experience forms one of the central thematic structures of *One Last Stop*. This section looks at how the novel represents queer temporality through literal and metaphorical disruptions of linear time. The Q train, where different times overlap, becomes a crucial place where past meets present through Jane Su's time loop and August's search for meaning. By analysing the ways in which time pauses or shifts within the narrative helps examine how LGBTQ+ experiences challenge and resist normative expectations of continuity and progression.

The novel effectively uses the Q train as a symbol of temporal and historically continuous queer identity, as the train serves as a literal and metaphorical passageway between queer life in the past and the present (McQuiston 2021, 134–135). While the novel incorporates elements of science fiction, the Q train itself is not extraordinary, but an ordinary subway train. The science-fiction aspect stems from Jane's time loop, which takes place on the train yet affects only her experience of time. The Q train is the anchor point for her entire existence. Jane comes from the 1970s and finds herself in “the in between”, (McQuiston 2021, 134) a temporally nonlinear space tied to the electric current of the subway line. It is revealed that Jane ended up in this state as a result of an electrical event, in which a massive discharge of electrical energy threw her out of linear time (McQuiston 2021, 322). Due to this, she has lost her memory and has no idea she is in a time loop.

The train becomes a literal and metaphorical symbol of the love and connection between Jane and August. August soon notices that Jane feels warm and even “static” to her touch (McQuiston 2021, 88). Later, August and Myla, one of August's roommates, realise that August's feelings and attraction to Jane create electrical impulses that anchor Jane to the present moment (McQuiston 2021, 236). August is Jane's “constant” (McQuiston 2021, 235). This means that August is the force that prevents Jane from detaching from time (McQuiston 2021, 308). Jane's ability to stay in the present and remember things improves through her feelings for August, their touch and their kiss (McQuiston 2021, 236). The novel makes this concrete: when Jane and August share an intimate moment, it can literally cause electrical disturbances on the train itself (McQuiston 2021, 236), which is more elaborated in the following excerpt of August's realization:

“It’s feedback loop between her and the line. That’s how she knows when the emergency lights are gonna come on and when they aren’t. That’s why the lights go crazy when she’s upset. It’s all interconnected.” (McQuiston 2021, 236)

The train is, in fact, a space where queer love is not just a feeling, but an electrical force that helps Jane get her memories back.

Jane’s memory loss is a meaningful element in the novel’s exploration of queer temporality. Jane exists in a state where time does not move forward, and without her memories, she is unable to place herself within any personal or historical timeline. Jane’s fragmented memory is tied to the temporal anomaly that binds her to the Q train. She is not experiencing amnesia in a medical sense, but it rather seems like her memory is in fragments due being trapped in a moment in time that does not let her move forward.

The Q train serves as an archive for queer connections from the past, highlighting the invisible but ongoing search for community among queer people over the decades (McQuiston 2021, 84). This is better explained through the recurring references to “Missed Connections” advertisements, and later social media posts in which different people describe noticing a butch-presenting woman in a leather jacket on the train (McQuiston 2021, 269). These posts are significant, because they show that Jane has been seen and remembered by queer passengers across generations, even though she herself remains trapped outside of linear time.

Jane’s memories are tied to the queer and punk scenes of 1970s New York, activism such as the Gay Liberation Front, and the struggles and persecution experienced by lesbians (McQuiston 2021, 288–289). August uses her stories to find historical pamphlets, which in turn help Jane recover the rest of her memories (McQuiston 2021, 124). The train serves as a place where this history of the past and its struggles are literally passed on to the current generation.

For August, who has lived her life without permanent roots and searching for her place, the Q train offers a surprising sense of home. She no longer sees it as just a means of transportation, but as “time, place, and person” (McQuiston 2021, 159). The train becomes a safe, permanent and reliable environment for August. On the train, Jane and August build a community, even if only temporarily. Jane is skilled at forming bonds, and August destroys her principles (McQuiston 2021, 56) in order to trust Jane and create lasting love in this unlikely space.

Ultimately, the Q train is the space where August finds her home in Jane, and she understands that love can be real, even if it does not come natural to her.

### 3.1 Queer Temporality and Disrupted Linear Time

McQuiston's *One Last Stop* turns Halberstam's idea of broken timelines into something more approachable through Jane Su's time loop, where she is stuck between the 70s and the present day. While stuck on the Q train, Jane stays fixed in body but unlinked from real-life events, such as aging. This disturbance in time is a metaphor for trauma and displacement.

Jane's situation resembles the way traumatic experiences can interrupt a person's sense of time. Trauma often creates a feeling of being stuck in a moment that cannot be fully processed (Grisham et al. 2022), and similarly Jane is unable to move forward from the violent incident that occurred on the train in the 1970s. Jane fell onto the subway's electrified third rail at the exact moment of the 1977 New York City blackout, which was an accident linked to the violent chaos around a protest and hate-crime-related attack she was caught up in that night (McQuiston 2021, 303). Her not being able to remember clearly who she is mirrors how trauma can fragment memory and disrupt a coherent sense of self. Instead of moving ahead, Jane is stuck in repetition. Jane's presence on the Q train blurs time, thus showing an example of queer temporality that does not work the way people expect.

August and Jane have different, but still somehow connected ways of experiencing time as queer individuals. August lives without clear plans, always drifting, never committing. She moves to New York without a clear goal and avoids forming close attachments that might require long-term commitment. She does not have a clear vision of the future. Her path does not follow the usual timeline, thus lining up with Halberstam's idea that queer lives often skip traditional milestones, such as steady careers or starting families (Halberstam 2005, 2).

This disruption of linear time reflects what Atkinson describes in her article. Atkinson argues that queer temporalities challenge the assumption that life follows a predictable chronological order (Atkinson 2024). In *One Last Stop*, August and Jane's situations give good examples of these alternative temporalities.

Halberstam describes in his book that queer adulthood is sometimes delayed or non-progressive (Halberstam 2005, 2), which is embodied in August. Jane, on the other hand, is

completely outside the flow of time, stuck without being able to move forward. Time loops around her, trapping her. Yet still, despite their different experiences, August and Jane can come together and find understanding in this most unusual situation. This produces a queer space where connection becomes possible outside of chronological constraints, and they are able to relate in ways regular timelines would not allow.

The bond between August and Jane shows how queer temporality brings together the past and the present. Jane remembers what it was like to be queer in the 70s, and the activism, dangers and communities that came with it. August, however, represents a contemporary queer generation. Together they show the reader that queer time is not linear but layered. Instead of the past staying fixed, it reappears in current identities, and in turn present struggles reinterpret historical events. Jane's memories do not remain confined to her own experience but begin to shape how August understands queerness and community. Similarly, August's perspective recontextualises Jane's past, allowing it to be seen as the foundation for current forms of queer belonging, rather than it being merely just a struggle. The past informs the present, while the present gives new meaning to the past.

*One Last Stop* uses time in a unique way to show a queer view of it, one that disrupts linearity, honours the past and creates alternative forms of connection. Through Halberstam's framework, the story shows how feelings, history and community shape LGBTQ+ lives. Jane is stuck in repetition, and August moves unpredictably through life. Both experiences suggest that queerness often takes shape through moments when time works in an unexpected way.

### **3.2 The Q Train as a Site of Emotional and Historical Continuity**

The Q train in *One Last Stop* acts as a real location, as well as a metaphor, thus shaping how the story examines non-linear time in queer life. Although subways usually stand for motion and passing moments, here it turns into a place where time stalls. The time looping around Jane offers her and August a possibility to connect and grow closer. Their interactions transform the Q train into a place where new bonds come from shared emotions, instead of chronological order.

Muñoz's idea of queer futurity offers an essential framework for understanding this dynamic. Muñoz argues that queerness is aiming toward a horizon, a distant promise that is shaped by fleeting present experiences (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 24). In this framework, the Q train becomes

a shared space of hope. It is an everyday environment where the possibilities of alternative futures can flourish. While Jane feels out of time and cut off from what comes next, her bond with August brings glimpses of what Muñoz calls queer utopia (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 49). According to Muñoz, queerness is not fully realised in the present, but something we move toward (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 24). Queerness is therefore utopian, because it exists as potential, as a way of imagining a better world.

Jane and August's interactions produce what Muñoz describes as "ephemeral traces" (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 51) of queer history: fleeting but significant moments that link personal experience to collective queer memory. Jane and August reflect different times, but on the Q train, those different times meet and somehow fit together. The Q train therefore functions as a bridge between individual emotion and broader queer heritage, allowing the past to resurface within the present, thus shaping a sense of belonging that exists somewhere beyond strict timelines.

In this sense the Q train is not just a backdrop or a narrative setting, but a core location where alternative time experiences are formed. Emotional bonds formed there reflect Muñoz's idea that queerness "is not yet here" (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 45). Instead, it is always arriving, constantly unfolding through feelings and interactions. Because of the Q train's time loop, the train creates a place where queer past is visible, as well as visions and hopes of better tomorrows.

## 4 Found Family: Building Belonging in Queer Communities

Queer communities in fiction often give the characters a place to belong, grow, and feel supported. *One Last Stop* follows this pattern by giving August a chosen family in the Flatbush commune, the place where August moves when she starts her new life in New York. This section focuses on the Flatbush commune and other queer spaces in the novel where August begins feeling seen and safe. These places shape personal growth, thus making them matter deeply. Through daily interactions at home or during meals at Pancake Billy's, the novel constructs belonging as something created rather than inherited. Found family is not just practical, but also meaningful. In the novel community is a safe place, but also a source of joy where people can be themselves.

### 4.1 The Dynamics of a Found Family in the Flatbush Commune

Queer belonging is a helpful framework for understanding August's place in the Flatbush commune. The Flatbush commune functions as August's home and social foundation in her life in New York, but also as one of the most significant places in her transformation. At first sight, the household feels intense. Its warmth is at first intimidating and unrecognisable to August, whose childhood was full of loneliness. Her mother was obsessed with solving the disappearance of her older brother, which left August feeling as if she was deprived of a normal childhood (McQuiston 2021, 45). The commune's dynamics contrast August's previous experiences, showing her how queer belonging is created through recognition, support and shared everyday life.

Weston's theorisation of chosen family provides a framework for understanding how Flatbush shapes August. Weston argues that queer relationships are built on completely different things than bloodlines, and the Flatbush commune lives out this concept. Niko, Myla and Wes each have unique roles that anchor August. Niko gives her someone she can trust in, Myla offers her a sense of comfort and inspiration, and Wes's guarded but loyal nature offers August a model of vulnerability. Each character provides a different form of support for August, showing her what queer kinship is all about.

The commune also symbolises a wider kind of LGBTQ+ solidarity beyond personal bonds. Drawing from theories of queer belonging, such as Ahmed's work on orientation and

affective spaces, the Flatbush commune can be read as a space that allows August to become a new, improved version of herself. Living in the commune gives her the possibility to live in a space where queerness is ordinary and accepted. With her roommates, August learns how the atmosphere of the space itself encourages openness, trust and mutual support. The commune is not only a home, but a living example of a queer community that embodies the possibilities of chosen family and collective belonging. August realises that the commune loves her very early on, which can be noticed on the following inner monologue:

August has, however dubiously, stumbled into this tangle of people that want her to be a part of them. She's lived for a long-ass time on less love than this. She's been alone in every way. Now she's only alone in *some* ways. (McQuiston 2021, 73)

When August settles into the commune and grows more comfortable with the people she shares space with, she starts to understand that belonging is constructed through being present, taking part and sharing openly. The relationships in the Flatbush commune show how LGBTQ+ people form bonds that are like a family, giving each other support that blood relatives do not always give. To August, the commune is a turning point. It is a place where she learns how to love and to be loved in a way she would have wanted in her childhood.

## 4.2 Pancake Billy's: Activism and Preserving Queer History

Pancake Billy's is not just a diner in *One Last Stop*. It acts as a meaningful queer space tied to cultural memory, past challenges and resilience of earlier queer generations, for example through hosting drag shows and fundraisers that celebrate queer joy. In queer studies spaces such as Pancake Billy's are often seen as places of community-building, historical continuity and political visibility. Pancake Billy's is like an informal record that maintains group identity over years, keeping queer lives, names and histories accessible. This matches with Muñoz's view that queer culture is kept alive through collective practises and a shared hope for a better future (Muñoz [2009] 2019, 34).

Spaces such as Pancake Billy's have always been an important part of queer history. Especially in the 1950s and 60s, gay bars were places for community building (Arriola 2020, 58). LGBTQ+ people went to these places not only in hopes of finding a lover or to drink, but to form friendships and connections with other queer people (Arriola 2020, 58). Socialising in these gay bars was nowhere near safe, since the police often organised raids to clear the city

of “moral filth” (Arriola 2020, 61), and the continuous police raids were one of the reasons for the Stonewall Riot. Queer people wanted to feel safe, and with the system in place it would have never been possible. This just goes to show how important queer spaces have always been to the LGBTQ+ community, and why Pancake Billy’s serves as such important setting in the book. It is a place where queerness is accepted and celebrated, instead of something to only show in the darkness of an underground gay bar. It is a sign of positive progress.

Because Pancake Billy’s is a diner, it is also a space where queerness exists openly in daylight settings. It demonstrates how queer history is preserved through ongoing communal rituals, and not only through dramatic historical events. Pancake Billy’s links present-day queer community to the activism of previous decades. Since Jane once worked at the diner, it acts like a bridge connecting August’s contemporary experience to the queer political struggles of the past. August learns how present queer lives depend on bold actions taken years ago, helping her in realising that her sense of belonging comes from those who built safe spaces for meeting, resisting and supporting each other a long time ago.

The longer August spends at Pancake Billy’s, the more she starts to see herself as a part of an ongoing queer tradition. Through this she starts seeing queer history as something she is actively a part of and connected to, instead of just something abstract from the past. In the diner August learns more of Jane’s past, but also how queer communities have built places of safety, joy and resistance. Rather than keeping history locked away, Pancake Billy’s lives it daily through community, spoken stories and shared values across generations.

## 5 Identity and Permanence

Questions of identity, self-perception, and emotional permanence shape the personal journeys of both August Landry and Jane Su. This section explores how shared environments and learning about earlier experiences help shape who people become. August's gradual emotional development and Jane's confrontation with trauma and lost history both highlight that identity is fluid and grounded in connection. By analysing August and Jane's overlapping stories, this section reflects on how personal sense of self connects to wider queer history. It also questions what truthful and authentic living looks like when the future feels uncertain.

In August's case, who she becomes unfolds slowly through contact with others. Her role in the Flatbush commune as well as her deepening feelings for Jane help her feel connected, rather than alone. This helps August stop insisting on doing everything herself, and she begins to value mutual support, which then contributes to her personal growth.

Jane's plot offers a different viewpoint. Her memories are broken and time is not concrete, which indicates that trauma breaks up her personal identity. When Jane slowly starts to remember her past with the help of the community around her, her sense of self becomes more grounded again. The narrative views identity as something that can be rebuilt through collective memory and the emotional bonds that support it, instead of something that is built in isolation.

The paths of August and Jane show how queer identity is shaped by relationships and does not follow a straight line. Instead of traditional timeframes, Halberstam's idea of queer temporality helps explain the characters' development. Weston's view of chosen family, on the other hand, highlights how bonds with others give individuals support and validation. Lastly, Muñoz emphasises future possibilities, showing that identity gains strength when it is connected to history and what might come. August and Jane, in different ways, show that identity shifts, but despite that stays connected through bonds with people. Stability does not come from fixed self-definitions, but from the consistent support of loved ones.

### 5.1 August Landry: Discovering Identity through Connection

August Landry's identity develops alongside her ability to form close connections. Early in the novel she sees herself through detachment. She expects things will not last, avoids

emotional risks and values being self-reliant. Her mindset blocks emotional connections with others and slows down her personal growth. Without lasting relationships, who she thinks she is ends up being shaped more by what is missing than what is there.

A warning light flashes somewhere in August's brain. Her mental field guide to making friends is a two-page pamphlet that just says: DON'T. (McQuiston 2021, 10-11)

This shows, how uncomfortable August was with human connection in the beginning of the novel. She wanted so to survive alone, and she was, at least in her own opinion, good at it. Her move into the Flatbush commune, however, marks a turning point. August starts to believe that she deserves affection and can maintain bonds through the support from the people around her. The connections she builds challenge her belief that closeness always ends in pain. Through the emotional safety she gets from people around her, she is able to reconsider how she understands her own needs and vulnerabilities.

With the help of the commune, August realizes that identity is co-constructed through relational experiences, and not just merely something that is fixed or isolated. Her connections with others reflect back aspects of herself that were previously hidden and maybe underdeveloped. In the Flatbush commune August can exist in an environment where she feels safe to experiment with new ways of being, as well as internalize the possibility of support. Through her new connections she is able to construct a sense of self that is resilient and connected to others, as well as authentically and unapologetically queer.

August's bond with Jane pushes her further along this path. She loves Jane which forces her to face her dread of fleeting things, while also having to lower the walls she has built around her emotions. What she has with Jane gives her stability, which is something she did not know possible. When life throws challenges at them, August chooses to stay and struggle instead of pulling away. This shows she is now capable of commitment. At the end of the book this capability culminates in her inner monologue, when she is lying next to Jane in the commune, on their bed:

It makes August feel trusted and powerful and capable and admired – basically the whole list of things she's spent twenty-four years trying to figure out how to feel. (McQuiston 2021, 410)

August's realization that she is deserving of love and capable of building committed relationships with others represents a of development that can also be understood through

recent discussions of queer futurity. Blanco-Fernández suggests, that queer futures should be seen as open-ended (2024). In the Flatbush commune August is not only recovering from her past, but actively participating in imagining a different kind of queer future through connection and belonging.

The novel shows how August builds her sense of self through relationships. Her progress aligns with Weston's argument that queer relationships create spaces where individuals can be their truest selves outside heteronormative expectations. In similar ways August breaking free from loneliness ties into Halberstam's view of queer time. Her development is not fixed, but it happens through emotional moments that open new forms of belonging. At the end, August learns that identity is not built solo, but something that grows stronger through trust and community.

## 5.2 Jane Su: Trauma, Liberation and the Continuity of Queer History

Jane Su's identity is shaped by her past and the political context of the 1979s. That was a time filled with police violence and homophobic legislation (Arriola 2020, 61), and being stuck in a time loop makes her pain feel ongoing. Jane struggles to grasp who she is since she is cut off from the community and activism that used to ground her. Her loss of memory becomes a metaphor for the broader erasure of queer history. Histories have been attacked and ignored, even actively wiped out (Freeman 2007, 162; Freeman 2023). Jane's inability to remember her past mirrors the systemic silencing of queer lives and struggles. Even though she has this disconnection to her memories, traces of her former self persist, thus reflecting José Esteban Muñoz's idea of ephemeral traces that connect past, present and future. These fragments of memory allow Jane to reconstruct a sense of identity, and her trauma becomes intertwined with liberation.

“It's like I *died*”, she cuts in. Her voice cracks in the middle. “I died, except I have to *feel* it. And on top of that, I have to feel everything else I've ever felt all over again. I have to get the bad news again every day, I have to deal with the choices I made, and I can't fix it. I can't even run from it. It's *miserable*, August.”  
(McQuiston 2021, 293)

This excerpt shows the sorrow and annoyance Jane experiences about the fact that the world and people close to her kept on living, leaving her alone and stuck between the past and the present.

When Jane starts to gain an access to her memories, the novel portrays trauma as something that must be confronted both emotionally and historically. Once she reconnects with the political and personal conditions that shaped her, Jane's sense of self grows clearer. The 1970s backdrop matters, since her past is tied to queer activism and to the dangers LGBTQ+ people faced before present day's recognition existed. This shows the reader how queer identity cannot be detached from the broader cultural and political currents that shape it. Jane's background as a queer woman from the 1970s places her within a generation that is deeply shaped and affected by the Stonewall Riots in 1969. Stonewall marked a turning point in queer history, shifting LGBTQ+ existence from secrecy toward visibility and activism (Halkitis 2019), and it without a doubt shaped Jane's character as well. The novel also mentions punk as a safe space for queer and feminist people in the 1970s, which goes on to show that safe spaces can be created not only in literal locations, but also through music (Lohman 2022). This is shown in the following excerpt, said by Jane in the novel, which gives a good idea how queer people found and keep finding community in the most unpredictable places:

“Anybody who says punk isn't queer doesn't know what punk is.” (McQuiston 2021, 111)

Jane's eventual freedom from frozen time and connecting with her past shows that recovery comes through keeping stories alive instead of erasing them. Her relationship with August and the Flatbush commune restores this continuity by listening to her and supporting her. They do not treat Jane as just a forgotten moment in history. Through them, Jane's past is not only remembered but honored, helping her adjust to life in the present day while still holding on to the past that shaped who she is. Jane's story embodies the continuity of queer history, showing that despite systemic erasure, the past shapes queer experiences and gives hope for the future.

*One Last Stop* uses Jane to show how queer experiences and history move from one generation to another. Jane is like a walking, breathing archive, who holds the memories of protests and strength from the 1970s. Her role connects with Muñoz's view on queer futurity and the idea that past desires shape future possibilities. Jane's presence on the Q train represents this continuity. Through her, the struggles and feelings of the 1970s travel into contemporary queer communities. However, it is also beneficial to realize, that not all the queer people from the 1970s are gone, though a lot of them are due to the AIDS crisis. In *One*

*Last Stop* Jane still represents that era and those people, and she is a great example of that history being passed on, while also being a part of that collective memory.

Jane's experience shows how identity is inseparable from historical context. Her trauma does not shape her entirely, and instead of that recovering her past helps her regain control and rebuild bonds with others while she re-enters the flow of queer time.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis has examined how Casey McQuiston's *One Last Stop* (2021) portrays queer temporality, queer spaces and the dynamics of chosen family. The novel challenges fixed ideas of identity and belonging by mixing nonlinear time with historical continuity and emotional relationships.

The analysis shows that the novel challenges heteronormative timelines through queer temporality, showing how queer lives often differ from linear, heteronormative norms. Jane and August's experiences show a queer way of life that redirects attention from typical life events to growth that is rooted in relationships and shared history. In the novel, time does not flow steadily. It circles back, halts and sometimes breaks, thus implying that queer existence relies more on emotional connections than chronology.

Space works in *One Last Stop* in a similarly meaningful way. Instead of just being backdrops, the Q train and other queer spots act as environments where belonging can happen. These spaces create safety, and they give the characters a possibility of fitting in and being recognized, thus making such bonds possible that would not be forged elsewhere. The novel shows how queer communities have long relied on public and improvised spaces to find each other and to stay linked.

In these time-space settings, the romance plot and the dynamics of chosen family provide emotional permanence. August and Jane's connection interrupts the loneliness both of them felt in the beginning of the novel, and the Flatbush commune shows how support and care can build strong non-biological families. These relationships show that hope in *One Last Stop* does not come from certainty or stability, but from the connections and relationships people choose to actively sustain even when the future is unclear.

Ultimately, *One Last Stop* implies queerness thrives through connection. Through keeping history alive, creating shared spaces and forming chosen families that help individuals imagine futures for themselves. The novel's initial message is that queer survival and happiness rely on the communities and relationships individuals create instead of fitting in standard life schedules.

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