

The Gay Saint

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I am thrilled (and just a little bit sad) to share the fourth, and final, edition of *The Gay Saint* of this academic year with our readers!

Being Head Editor of this wonderful publication has been an incredibly rewarding experience and I couldn't have done it without our talented team of writers, copy-editors, and designers.

Thank you everyone so much for all of your hard work, and of course, thank you to our readers! Wishing you all the best possible end to this chaotic semester.

I hope this edition can provide you with some entertainment, education, and most importantly, an excuse to procrastinate from your deadlines/exam revision!

– Head Editor, Rebecca Drever

LGBT+ NEWS

Reclaiming slurs – How the LGBT+ community took back our power

Jack Travers.

CW: Discussion of slurs

‘QUEER, FAGGOT, POOF, HOMO...’

All slurs we’ve probably heard yelled at us or our friends from across the road, in a club, or at school. They’re disgusting, right? They burn when they land on us. They get the mind going and the heart racing. Is it me? Did they say that to me? Yes. Yes they did. And it hurts.

These words are powerful, and painful, and ugly, and nasty. But what if they weren’t? What if all of the power that society has had over us for generations was reclaimed? The power is rightfully ours, and ours alone. Nobody should define who we are – that’s for us to decide.

Slur reclamation is an important aspect of our history and our identity. Our community is beautifully diverse and different, and proudly so. In reclaiming these words used to abuse and silence us for generations, we take on the power those words carry, and instead use it to free us from those who would rather push us down.

NB: As always, different slurs mean different things to different people, and it’s totally okay to feel uncomfortable with reclaiming a word that you don’t identify with. You should never have to identify with something you don’t feel comfortable with. The below examples of slur reclamation are common examples, and slurs which I’ve felt comfortable reclaiming. There are many more examples out there, but it’s not my place to reclaim them.

‘QUEER’ – a common one since the 19th century trial of Oscar Wilde for sodomy accused by his lover’s father, labelling

him a ‘snob queer’. This has remained a popular slur, focusing on our ‘sexual deviance’ as something that’s ‘strange’ and ‘out of place’.

Queer has been reclaimed by many in the LGBT+ community, with the famous ‘we’re here, we’re queer, get used to it’ and ‘not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you’ slogans during the AIDS crisis and the development of a radical queer scene in the 1990s which saw groups such as Queer Nation reclaiming queer from its problematic origins. These radical groups fought against assimilationist ideas of blending into heteronormative society, wearing the reclaimed badge of queer as the ultimate fuck you to homophobia.

Nowadays, ‘queer’ remains a core part of our community’s identity, with queer theory being used to encompass all non-straight and non-binary identities.

It reflects the fluidity of gender and sexual identity, as well as all those identities who feel marginalised and often out of place within our own community.

The reclamation of 'queer' provides us with an opportunity to be radical in our hopes and aspirations for the world, as well as truly inclusive of all expressions of sexuality and gender identity.

'FAGGOT/POOF' – probably one of the worst slurs to have yelled at you: 'fag', 'faggot', and 'poof' all lie in the idea that men who love men are somehow less masculine.

This slur appears everywhere in popular culture from the awkward conversations at Christmas when 'Fairytale of New York' is put on by your uncle, to the infamous Westboro Baptist Church's 'God Hates Fags' signs. In reclaiming 'faggot', we take all the anger and hatred bottled up in that word and throw it back in a massive fuck you to those who use it as an insult. As with the reclamation of 'queer', it takes on a

radical activist dimension where we are ready to take up the fight for LGBT+ rights.

'HOMO' – stemming from homosexuality's former designation as a mental illness, 'homosexual' is a label used for us in school classrooms, churches and right wing echo chambers. It feels clinical and forced, and you just know the person using it as a slur is pretty insecure in themselves. For me, 'homo' is one of the more playful reclamations used by friends in a jokey way. We joke about the 'homosexual agenda' coming to corrupt the minds of the youth, but really it's just self acceptance and freedom from the constraints of a conservative, heteronormative, binary world.

Slur reclamation is hard, and it's often painful to reclaim words that have been used to hurt us. I still shudder at the thought of having slurs shouted at me, but through defiance and

un ceasing determination, we can give them new meaning. We take on the power once corrupted by hate and replace it with joyful love and community spirit. We are a strong, beautiful, and diverse community, and no hetero is gonna tear us down.

WE'RE HERE. WE'RE QUEER. GET FUCKING USED TO IT.

Sources

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LGBT+ BOOK REVIEWS

'Burn before reading' – A review of 'This Is How You Lose the Time War' by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone

Taryn Patterson.

There is something to be said about a love story in which the characters never truly meet. The first letter between Red and Blue starts with 'Burn before reading' – an impossible request for the beginning of an impossible romance.

This Is How You Lose the Time War is co-written by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone, each writing one of the two protagonists in this sapphic time-travel romance. While collaborative novels risk feeling disjointed as a result of clashing authorial voices, this is not the case here. Instead, Red and Blue feel alive and unique.

I truly believe the only reason the two protagonists feel so distinct from one another, despite having quite a few similarities, is due to the separation of character creation between the writers. And yet, there is just enough of a blend of the two to give the illusion that they could be written by one person.

Red and Blue live in an extremely complex world and this can make the narrative difficult to follow – which leads me to my one complaint. The readers are thrown into the novel's vast universe, which stretches from deep space to a sinking Atlantis, with little build-up and are simply left to figure out the context of the current war, the separate factions, and the relationship between Red and Blue for themselves. Without spoiling too much, I'll try to explain the world and one of the factors that draws Red and Blue together.

In the world of *This Is How You Lose the Time War* – of

which we know little to nothing – there is an ongoing war between two rival factions. Red's faction is 'the Agency', an incredibly advanced technological civilisation, whereas Blue is a consciousness formed of organic matter from 'the Garden'. The two have both been created to fight for their respective factions and the only life either has known is one of war and loss. Although they never truly meet, they leave behind traces of themselves in each battle and it is these small footprints that connect them.

Blue leaves the first letter to Red, drawn to her by the smallest of tracks left on the battleground, and with this letter Red is in turn drawn directly to Blue. The two know that they should not communicate, that it would mean instant death for them both and that their actions could have consequences across time and space, and yet they cannot get enough of each other.

Their letters are not simply words on a page, they are more than anything one could ever hope to experience. The letters Red and Blue leave for each other are – and this is the only way I can think to describe it – moments. Bee stings, a blossoming seed, a drop of blood. Their letters are not words, they are so much more.

These letters connect them, and they show that Red and Blue truly know each other. This romance is one in which, if you desire to be known, you will ache. I ached. Red and Blue are facing so many dangers

through their love, and yet they know that no one else could truly understand them, as no one else has seen what they have seen or done what they have done.

The structure of the novel is convoluted, yes. But, ultimately, it is all completely simple. It is love. 'I love you. I love you. I love you. I'll write it in waves. In skies. In my heart. You'll never see, but you will know.'

Almost every page of this short story has a quote that will hit you directly in your chest, or at least, it did for me. *This Is How You Lose*

the Time War is a read that will have you screaming or crying or gasping for air (or you'll do all of the above) for more by the end. It is an epic romance unlike anything I have ever read. Not only this, but it is a romance between two women. Although incredibly and beautifully queer, it is easy to imagine any two people as being the main characters. The love between Red and Blue transcends time and space, but to me it also transcends gender and sexuality – in the end, their love is simply a need for one another.



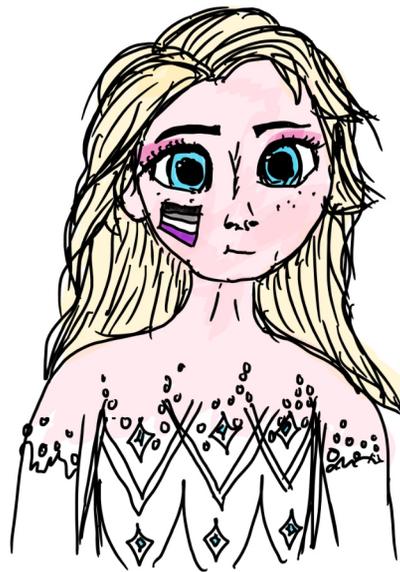
ARTS AND CULTURE

Why Elsa is an Aro Ace Icon

Mia Kellner.

Ever since *Frozen's* release in 2013, Elsa has been claimed as a queer icon by both LGBT+ fans and homophobic parents. The award-winning number 'Let it Go' was viewed as a coming-out song, where Elsa 'let go' of the insecurities and fears she had bottled up for years in repressing her sexuality, and finally embraced her gay identity. Elsa's so-called 'gay anthem' was the reason why many conservative parents didn't want their children to see *Frozen*, lest they be turned homosexual by 'gay propaganda.' But this was 2013, and even if Elsa was queer, Disney wouldn't explicitly say that she was. So, when they announced *Frozen II* for a 2019 release, fans were hopeful that Elsa might be an out lesbian in the sequel and get a girlfriend – having campaigned for this for

years on Twitter and Tumblr. When any female character who wasn't Anna was shown in a trailer, people immediately assumed this was Elsa's would-be girlfriend. And when *Frozen II* was released, and Elsa was shown to share a close bond with a pretty female character in the film,



Honeymaren of the Northuldra, it was immediately assumed that the bond was romantic – and Disney was accused of queerbaiting. The company doesn't have the cleanest track record when it comes to queer characters. However, I never had a problem with the fact that

Elsa didn't have a girlfriend, because I always saw her as aromantic and asexual, like myself. In the first film alone, there were a lot of parallels between Elsa's experience and that of many aro ace fans. For instance, Elsa repressing her ice powers for her entire life is a perfect allegory for the way queer people have had to fit into heteronormative ideals of relationships. Her attempt to isolate herself from her community for fear of hurting them is also similar to how aro ace individuals might avoid people because they don't want to reject a romantic or sexual relationship and look like a terrible person.

The fact that Elsa is perceived as icy and cold is almost identical to the stereotypes about aro and ace people (but particularly aros); that because they don't experience romantic love, or attraction in the same way that others do, they are automatically viewed as unloving robots.

In addition, *Frozen* was also quite revolutionary in its ending. Anna was turned to ice by Elsa losing control over her powers, but the only way to save her and melt the ice shard that was in her heart was through true love – not from Prince Hans or Kristoff, but in the platonic bond of sisters. This was really important to me, as I have never been in a romantic relationship, but I do have three sisters whom I am really close with. Upon *Frozen II*'s release, despite no longer being a child who had Elsa posters on her wall (I had just turned eighteen), I was excited to see the film in cinemas – and I loved it. Unlike those who were disappointed with Elsa's lack of a girlfriend, I was overjoyed that she remained single. There was finally a mainstream character who explicitly seemed aro ace.

Exploring my Trans-masculinity with Zuko from 'Avatar – The Last Airbender'

Toni Andres.

Where 'Let it Go' was Elsa letting go of her repression of her sexuality, her power ballad in the sequel, 'Show Yourself,' let Elsa finally accept and celebrate her queerness. In the song, as Elsa is told 'You are the one you've been waiting for all of your life,' a line many aro ace people need to hear, she embraces her aro ace identity. After hearing this, Elsa sings 'I am found.' This was a powerful moment for me and many other aro ace viewers, especially seeing as some people had assumed the song was about Elsa and her girlfriend before seeing the film—not about her finally accepting her true self. I tear up every time I hear that line in the song, as it's really the first time that I saw being aro ace celebrated within cinema. At *Frozen II*'s end, Elsa does not marry a prince nor get a girlfriend, or any romantic partner, but she learns to live with herself and her powers. I can't think of anything more aro

ace than that. So, in summary, Elsa is not only a wonderful character who many members of the aro ace community have resonated with due to her struggle with isolation, sexual repression, relationships, and being perceived as cold or unloving, but she is also a celebratory, sparkly aro ace icon.

And if I haven't provided enough evidence to support this interpretation so far, and to show how ridiculously obsessed I am with *Frozen*: in *Frozen II*, three of the dresses that Elsa wears are *purple*, the main colour on the ace pride flag. In *Frozen* and its underappreciated mini film sequel, *Frozen Fever*, she wears green dresses, the colour most associated with the aro flag. One of them also has a purple cape and black accents - à la the ace flag. Finally, her main look in *Frozen II* is a white dress with purple details, *two* colours on the ace flag. Need I say more?

This article contains major spoilers for the story of Zuko in the show 'Avatar – The Last Airbender.'

Over the past eight weeks,

I have been watching (and re-watching and re-re-watching) Nickelodeon's animated show *Avatar – The Last Airbender* (2005-2008).

I know, I am very late for the hype. I had only ever watched a few episodes when I was younger, whenever I happened to zap to Nickelodeon. For a while they streamed it at the same time as *The Little Prince* on KiKa (German TV), which had utmost priority. If you don't know the animated show *The Little Prince* yet, please check it out, it's absolutely fantastic. But that is not the point for now.

Over the past four weeks, my flatmates have witnessed my increasing obsession not only with the show, but with the whole *Avatar* universe. A ridiculous amount of fan-fiction and four comics later (yes, I know it's bad) I am now writing this article on what it was that, among the many things that are wonderful about this show, resonated with me so much – specifically now.

Around the same time as I discovered the show for myself, I finally started Hormone Therapy with testosterone – a huge milestone after waging the bureaucratic and medical wars that police access to trans healthcare. As a non-binary person, I have been struggling for a long time with

recognising and re-defining a sense of my own masculinity in non-gendered terms, an introspective journey that I had been rather hesitant to start in the past. I had known for a long time that starting HRT was something I desperately wanted, but for as long as I was being read as a woman by strangers, I found it very difficult and upsetting to indulge in any fantasies about being read in a way that corresponded to my own sense of my identity. At that point, these imaginations were just painfully unattainable.

That being said, the start of my journey of allowing myself to engage with how I wanted to be seen and perceived coincided – and eventually coalesced – with my becoming absorbed by the *Avatar* universe. And while the world-building, writing, the graphics (and generally everything about the show) ticked all the boxes, it was specifically Zuko's character arc that sparked something in me, something that also resonated with my gender identity journey. I will try not to reveal too many details about the overall plot of the show, but be warned that the following

paragraph will include major spoilers concerning Zuko's story.

At the beginning of the show, Zuko is the paradigmatic angsty teenage boy. All his angst and anger are channelled towards finding the Avatar, a quest which (he believes) will help him regain appreciation and love from his father, the lack of which caused him to be banished in the first place. While living in exile later on, this anger deflates into utter sadness. There is a sense of him longing for normalcy and, ultimately, home – a safe space. It is not until his sister grants him access to achieving his dream of returning home and being side by side with his father, the Fire Lord, that he begins to reconsider the conceptual framework of how he views himself as moving through the world – the moral parameters within which he forms a sense of selfhood. Back at what he thought of as his home, his anger creeps up on him again, and he realises that he needs to unlearn entirely what he thought of as given in order to recalibrate the nodes of his reality in a way that corresponds to his own internal sense of self.

While I was originally just intrigued by the creators' choice to make the villain a teenager (a choice that was in fact added retrospectively), I gradually grew attached to Zuko in a way that allowed me to conceive of myself as a trans-masculine person. His development from his initial position of being rejected and his ubiquitous discomfort with his way of being in the world, to learning to identify the dynamics of his anger and the language of introspection, to re-learning within what parameters his identity and sense of personhood move through the world, not only resonated with me but in fact helped me find access to my transmasculinity – and find appreciation for my journey so far. Throughout my first two months of testosterone, Zuko was my body double, my anchor, to navigate all the exciting changes that were happening in my body, but also to finally go on that



mental journey that had been too daunting in the past years. A reference point and, most importantly, company.

After the major success of the show, the creators produced a (still ongoing) series of comics that continues the individual characters' stories and the universe. As the comic narrative focuses on Aang and Zuko's respective attempts to navigate the post-war world of the *Avatar* universe, the writers also zoom in on Zuko's character development after this conceptual recalibration of his position in the world. And what they emphasise is that this recalibration is not a finite, static moment, but in fact an exhausting, never-ending, and sometimes excruciatingly slow process of losing balance, struggling, and experiencing setbacks.

But Zuko does ultimately grow – he receives appreciation, and he experiences joy he did not even

know existed before this recalibration.

I hope it goes without saying how much this portrayal of Zuko experiencing joy meant to me as a trans person. But similarly important was seeing him struggle and unearth fears, thoughts, and emotions he thought he had already sorted into the closed files section. Joy in itself does not erase the struggling; they can in fact co-exist.

Zuko's character arc is often read as a story of redemption – legitimately so. His story is such a wonderfully and appreciatively written narrative. But on that note, I want to finish this piece, once more, with a call for more narratives of trans joy. While Zuko's story is very clearly not explicitly queer whatsoever, it is yet about so many profoundly queer topics: (self-)appreciation, safe space, chosen families, and yes, also sadness and struggle.

And without getting into the lack of media representation of trans people, I just want to express how glad I am that Zuko was and remains to be with me on this journey.

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