

## Representing Queer in Popular Literature: Reader Analysis on Casey McQuiston's *Red, White & Royal Blue*



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**ABSTRACT:** Following the increasing public awareness of gender issues nowadays, this also has an impact on the increasing frequency of topics that arise regarding gender in popular literary works, one of which is the queer representations in the LGBTQ+ community as shown in Casey McQuiston's *Red, White & Royal Blue*. How the queer community presented in this novel is also related to how the reader ultimately forms perceptions about the people in the community itself. This study aim to see how readers respond based on their interpretation and judgement of queer representations that appear in the main characters of the novel *Red, White & Royal Blue*. This study uses a qualitative approach, main data source in this study are in the form of readers' comments on the novel *Red, White & Royal Blue* taken from the Goodreads website. Specifically, this study uses the Encoding-Decoding reception theory model by Stuart Hall to see how readers respond to queer representations that appear in the novel, and what aspects attract readers that have an impact on the popularity of the novel. From the analysis conducted, it was concluded that (1) readers of Casey McQuiston's *Red, White & Royal Blue* regarding their response to queer representations that appear in the novel, are divided into 3 groups namely the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position, and the oppositional position, (2) the queer representation that appears in the two main characters of this novel is the main factor that makes this novel so popular, besides that there are several aspects that are criticized by readers, but these do not really have an impact on the popularity of the novel.

**KEYWORDS:** Queer representation, popular literature, reader response

### INTRODUCTION

Movement and struggles voiced by the LGBTQ+ community are topics that have been well known in society, responded with pros and cons, yet members of the community continue to fight for their existence to be acknowledged and visible. Then, gradually the efforts made by the LGBTQ+ community resulted justice they aspired for, several countries have been legalized same-sex marriage and laws for their rights and protection as citizens. Currently, the situation in society being more welcomed LGTBQ+ community's existence that leads opportunities for queers to work and prove their quality. Then, one of the spheres develops along with the acceptance of LGBTQ+ is literature.

Stated by Byrdsong, "according to sales numbers obtained from NPD Group, queer book sales this year have surpassed those of 2021 to the tune of 39%. This indicates a change in generational attitudes towards the genre, which could be attributed to Gen Z attitudes towards the LGBTQ community" (2022). Data sales of queer books have increased, it proves that people, especially generation Z are increasingly awake towards the LGBTQ+ community, acceptance of this community increases sales and recognition to queer writers, that their work being recognized and accepted as a book option. Brydsong also added if there is an additional sale of 1.3 million units for queer books in the Young Adult genre, it indicates that more publishers are investing in queer writers who write about queer stories in that genre.

Market demands and enthusiasm expressed by readers who adore queer books, reveals that Young Adult novels with queer stories are the instance of popular literature. There are several aspects that determine that a work is popular literature, including the theme, the way of presenting language techniques, and the author following a general pattern that is being

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favored by the public, then it becomes popular throughout the world (Adi, 2016: 20). Thus, there are various types of popular literature, which can be in the form of writing such as essays, and in the form of fiction such as novels or films (Adi, 2016: 19). The instance of popular literature Young Adult genre novel with queer representation is Red, White & Royal Blue, published in 2019, this novel was written by a queer writer, Casey McQuiston, who is a non-binary. The novel is about US president's son named Alex who did not like the existence of British prince named Harry, but they were forced by circumstances to be friends in order to avoid the media spotlight and diplomatic crisis protecting Alex's mother position in the next presidential election. As their relationship grew closer, Alex and Henry began to open up and accept their sexuality, and in the end of the story it was explained that they had decided to come out to their families, and were accepted. Then, this novel is the epitome of queer novels that are on demand in the market and become a popular topic around book readers, it also has seven printings with 100,000 copies in circulation (Leach, 2019). These large numbers of sales also led to McQuiston entering the list of New York Times Bestseller writers in June 2019, and the novel selling would surely keep increasing.

Therefore, the discussion of literature work's popularity, especially in queer books, would not be separated from how readers perspective on queer representations in the work. Through these perspectives it could be seen the response given by the reader to the novel. Furthermore, this study would discuss how readers respond to the novel Red, White & Royal Blue through reception analysis with Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding model.

As stated by Rahima, reception theory is concerned to reader responses that emerged after the reader interpret and judge a literary work (2017:1), The quote means that reception is a theory that not only interprets messages contained in the text, but also the audience as producers who are active in responding to the results of a mass media, such as a novel. Then, according to Hall (1980), there are three forms of meaning between the writer and the reader, and how the message is read between the two: First, dominant-hegemonic position, a code or message that is generally accepted. Second, negotiated position, a code or message conveyed by the producer, then the message would be generally accepted, but there is still a process of interpreting or selecting again for the code or role. Third, the opposite position, the meaning of the code or message that occurs when consumers understand and signify in a different way the code or pose conveyed by the producer, through the ideology and conceptual framework that has been created.

Previously, there have been several researches discussing and applying same approach to different novels. The first research is Respon Penonton terhadap Drama Serial My Lecturer My Husband Karya Gitlicious by Steanie Putri Widya, Syafrial, and Elmustian. This research focuses on audiences' response to drama My Lecturer My Husband by Gitlicious. The conclusion of this research is from 80 data that conducted by the researchers, it divided into 15 transparent, 14 referential, 23 mediation, and 28 discursive. From the four types of responses, the most dominant response obtained by the researchers through audience comments on social media Instagram is discursive, signifies the audience gets messages from the drama. The second research is Resepsi Pembaca Terhadap Cerpen Hashire Merosu Karya Dazai Osamu by Fajria Noviana. This research aims to find readers' response on Dazai Osamu's short story Hashire Merosu. Therefore, the conclusion of this research is from the 8 questions of resracher's questionnaire, there are only 2 questions that the respondents gave the same answers, meanwhile the other 6 questions were answered differently, it can be concluded even though the respondents might have different levels of interest in literature work and literary research, but they have the same level of understanding theory and simplify analytical methods of a literature work. The third research is Estetika Resepsi dalam Novel Cantik Itu Luka Karya Eka Kurniawan: Kajian Hans Robert Jauss. This research focuses on describing the response of readers and reader reception aesthetic of Cantik Itu Luka by Eka Kurniawan. Thus, the conclusion of this research is the highest criterion lies in the criteria for emotional involvement with a standard deviation of 0.999. While the very lowest criterion lies in the criteria for universality with a standard deviation of 0.685. The total standard deviation is 15.742 and the overall standard deviation is 0.787. The criteria of excitement, characteristics, character, imagination/image, believability, plot, conflict, simplicity and narrative technique are in the high categories assessed by the readers. Ironic criteria, interest, understandability, structure, style of language, new perspectives, advanced interest in moderate category. The criteria that are rated low are the main ideas/themes based on the aesthetic assessment of the reception, the previous readers (diachronic readers) and present readers (synchronous readers) were found. Therefore, the novel Cantik Itu Luka by Eka Kurniawan that readers' assessment, meaning and understanding have different responses. Based on the previous studies, beside Red, White & Royal Blue has never been studied before, especially using reception, researcher has also not found study that attempts to see how readers response in queer representation in a literary work and how it attracts readers' interest to gain its popularity. Furthermore, this research aims to (1) How the readers response to queer representation on Casey McQuiston's Red, White & Royal Blue? and (2) What aspects attract the readers that effect on Red, White & Royal Blue popularity?

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### METHOD

In order to reveal how the readers perspective on queer representation conveyed in the novel, the researcher applied qualitative method. Therefore, the primary source of this research is comments given by readers to *Red, White & Royal Blue* obtained from Goodreads, this platform was chosen by the researcher because they accommodate reviews related to a literary work directly from the readers. Furthermore, the researcher applied the theory of reception from Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding to find the results for three viewers' positions of decoding: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position, and the oppositional position on the queer representation portrayed in the novel.

### ANALYSIS

#### *Readers Response to Queer Representation on Red, White & Royal Blue*

*Red, White & Royal Blue* is the instance of a queer book written by a queer author, and presents the predominance of LGBTQ+ characters in the story, it indicates this novel is supposed to meet the readers' expectations towards queer representation in a literary work. There is even a movement called "Own Voices" around Young Adult readers and writers, as explained by Kheraj the concept of this movement is simple, rather than majority group authors, such as cisgender, male, straight, white, and abled to write about marginalized group, it is better if the people in the groups writing their own perspective to encourage the publication of diverse characters written by authors from the same diverse group (2018). The statement clearly states the importance for queer writers to dominate the production process of queer literary works so that the book would have appropriate perspective and representation of the LGBTQ+ community, because it is often to see if queer literary works written or produced by cisgender and straight writers would leave negative impression because the misleading images of queer and sometimes only focused on oversexualizing the queer characters. In the fact that *Red, White & Royal Blue* was written by queer writers and represents those queer characters in the story, yet the researcher still finds that the opinions on *Red, White & Royal Blue* are divided in response to queer representation, it would be discussed further in this section.

#### *a. The Dominant-Hegemonic Position*

As stated by Hall, the dominant-hegemonic position is a situation where "the viewer is operating inside the dominant code" (1999: 515). It means the readers are able to decode message as it was decoded by the procedure. In *Red, White & Royal Blue* presents the representation of LGBTQ+ as the main characters, it mostly becomes topic of discussion among readers who have their own impressions regarding how queer characters are presented and how their stories are developed. These reviews below are taken from the Goodreads page, it manifests readers' impression of queer representation that is able to see intended message by the producer.

i just read a review where someone said they didn't like this because it was too idealistic and happy. and like...honestly isn't that what the world kind of needs? this book dares to dream of an america that could have and should have been after the 2016 election. this is the kind of story this world needs more of, not less of, because it shows that this kind of love story - one where two men can fall in love and still be world leaders and changers- doesn't have to be tragic. part of what makes this book so important is that it dares to dream that dream boldly. it dares to look in the face of staunch tradition and say, "yes, you can change. and i will accept nothing less." i read this in one sitting. i meant to just start it before bed but then ended up just...not going to bed lol. it's adorable and fun and i'm very happy i picked it up.

(Goodreads, Monica Kim, May 16, 2019)

Reader on the above alludes to comments from other readers who criticize story ideas that are considered too 'idealistic' and 'happy' indicating that stories about queer couples like what happened in this novel most likely could not happen in real life, but according to the reader, this kind of story needed more to be written, because it is important to convey message that this kind of queer representation doesn't always have to end tragically. In addition of the story idea, readers are also able to reflect on how the individual representation of queer characters in this novel is presented. It can be seen in the following review.

Alex you bisexual icon. Truly an inspiration. The timing of me reading this when I was having my own bisexual panic is so comforting.

This is one of those books that leaves you hopeful while at the same time has you wishing that someone could send you love letters that represent the overarching themes of your romance. The characters are complex and vulnerable, and the world represented within is one that at times can seem removed, but all together possible. I can say, without a doubt, that this is the first contemporary romance I've read that shows all the different sides of getting to know, and ultimately falling for another person. That love is a conscious choice we make everyday in who we choose for a life partner. Casey McQuiston ties all this up in a rivals-to-lovers story between First Son Alexander Claremont-Diaz and Henry, the Prince of England. A story that encompasses personal growth, reevaluating one's initial impressions, and the legacies we leave behind. I can't even begin to thank Casey

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McQuiston for putting this story forth into the world. It has meant so much to me as a queer individual, and I know others in the lgbt+ community feel the same. A true beacon of light. Now if we could just bring letter writing back as a form of romantic correspondence that would be great.

(Goodreads, Robin, May 14, 2021)

From the reader's review above, it stated that the reader feels represented and understood by the presence of the character Alex as a bisexual character who goes through the same experience as the reader. As the same goes to what happened to Alex who should learn the fact that he is actually a bisexual and accept his sexuality, the reader feels related at a certain stage that how the representation of queer in the novel could help him to face his struggle and be the safe zone for the minority. This statement is supported by Professor Janet Alsup's writing in *The Critical Merits of Young Adult Literature*, "increasingly complex narrative depictions of emotional, social, and cognitive change in teen protagonists can help teenage readers better understand themselves in a fast, turbulent world" (2014). Therefore, this novel can be an inspiring reading and bring comfort to readers who should face the same circumstances such sexuality or gender nonconformity through the personal identity in today's queer books.

Based on the reviews discussed in this section, it can be concluded that readers who are in the dominant-hegemonic position agree that this novel succeeds in presenting queer representations by highlighting queer characters or figures that are relatable within the LGBTQ+ community.

### **b. The Negotiated Position**

Therefore, the negotiated position is a circumstance where "the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements" (Hall, 1999: 516). Readers who are in the negotiated position have two kinds of views in addressing the queer representation shown in this novel, that consists of; there are aspects that they agree with, and at the same time there are aspects that they feel do not represent the queer community. The reviews in this analysis were chosen because they meet the criteria of readers in the negotiated position that stated the strengths and weaknesses of this novel in relation to queer representation.

Things I Liked:

The first 100-150 pages of this book were great: I honestly thought this was going to be a 5 star read. In the beginning of the novel, Alex, the protagonist, realises he's actually bisexual and not straight as he always assumed to be, despite having done things that don't really fit in with that sexual orientation (I know I'm being quite vague here, but I'm trying to keep this review as spoiler-free as possible). I have to say that I've never, never related so much to a character before. For the first time, I felt truly represented in a book and this is the main reason why it didn't get a lower rating. I'll give props to Casey McQuiston for the spot on representation.

Things I Disliked:

I've seen a lot of people say that this was a slow-burn romance, but I'll have to disagree. For me, it seemed as they got together rather quickly, even though I'm pretty sure it took a few weeks in the actual storyline.

In my opinion, the plot became very dull as their relationship seemed to just be them having sex every time they were together. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind smut, I even enjoy it most of the time, but I just got bored of them having sex every godamn time they saw each other and it was like that was all their relationship was.

(Goodreads, Susana July 6, 2019)

Susana's review clearly praised the portrayal of Alex characters as a bisexual who becomes a 'spot-on representation', the reader feels represented by the presence of his character, and feels relatable to what Alex experienced in the novel. Aside from that, this comment also criticizes the portrayal of the two main protagonists' sex intercourse scenes is presented. According to readers, sexual intercourse is brought up too often in their relationship, as if this is the main aspect of their relationship. Other comments also allude to the excessive focus on aspects of sexuality in this novel, as in the following reader's review.

It has LGTBQ + rep and lots of diversity which was explored in a fun but touching way too me. I also loved the friendship this book focuses on and that it focuses on family relationships also this book is so Smutty like wow what. I didn't expect it be too smutty.

(Goodreads, Krista April, 27 2021)

Similar to the previous review, the reader agrees with the representation of LGBTQ+ and diversity offered by this novel, yet at the same time deplore the relationship between the main characters who are described as 'too smutty'.

Then, it can be concluded that the readers who are in the negotiated position already agree with the accuracy of queer representation shown in the novel, such as stories that connect queer characters with readers' experience and reflection of

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diversity in LGBTQ+ community, yet on the other hand they also criticize how the author depicted main characters' sexual intercourse oftentimes, this aspect is considered excessive for the reader.

### c. The Oppositional Position

According to Hall the oppositional position is "the point when events which are normally signified and decoded in a negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading" (1999: 517). The statement can be interpreted if he categorized the readers who disagree to the idea within the novel in the oppositional position, that there is possibility for the readers to reject the idea, and decode the message in a contrary way it was encoded. Furthermore, these reviews were chosen by the researcher because they vividly show their opposition.

Felt like I was reading tumblr fanfic from 2014 written by a straight woman who thinks she knows what gay sex is. I know a lot of people liked it but I was just cringing the entire time.

(Goodreads, Ellis Hyman, February 8, 2021)

Similar to what the researchers found in the review of the negotiated position, the majority of the oppositional position also disagreed on the same thing, it is how the execution of the queer man relationship seemed bland and did not have a good chemistry depiction, as if the novel was written by a straight woman author. Ellis expressed her opinion on the representation of queer in the novel *Red, White & Royal Blue* which seems banal and shallow.

I wish m\m fiction written by gay men got as much of a push and hype as m\m fiction written by non gay men. Many times in this book it felt like all the author did was change the pronouns to make it gay. The intimacy scenes were not how men are together. I am so over m\m books written for women.

(Goodreads, Shawn, April 19, 2021)

Then, the explanation from Shawn described further about the chemistry that exists in the two main characters in the novel which seems forced. The reader expresses his opinion that the intimate scene that occurs between Alex and Henry is such a misrepresentation of queer man, from this review reader opposed the novel because it is inappropriately presenting an unrealistic queer man relationship.

Another thing that irked me was how the characters were in a constant state of...to put it lightly, horny. Like okay once or twice some sort of smut scene in a closet during a public is fine, I guess. But their relationship felt very oversexualized and it was a bit disappointing. This seems to happen to a lot of m\m relationships in media which is something that needs to be toned down.

I also thought that Alex's bisexuality was approached in a very straight way. Like it seemed to be catered less to queer readers and more to straight readers, especially with the way he talked about it as he was coming to terms with his identity. There could have been a lot to explore there but it felt a bit flat.

(Goodreads, Ariel Mehmeti, December 2, 2022)

Thus, Sabrina's review provides an instance of inappropriate queer man representation in the novel, the characters of Alex and Henry do not show their emotions like other couples who are falling in love, the relationship that exists between them seems blatantly only to satisfy lust and have sexual intercourse. It appears from the given review that this novel gives a misleading depiction of queer romance, especially for queer men couples. Then, this statement is supported by Kaur that said, "Representation is a nuanced topic, not just because diversity is difficult to depict, but also because different forms of representation can achieve very different outcomes" (2021). From the reviews, reader seems deplore about the queer depiction because there are still many aspects that can be explored in queer romance in queer books, such as the process of the characters struggle in embracing and accepting their sexuality, or realistic romance progress between two queer men, which it would differentiates them from queer books that written by straight cisgender authors.

Based on the explanation that has been presented, it can be concluded that readers in the oppositional position think that the writer has misinterpreted the representation of queer. There is a tendency that writer only highlight the intercourse between Alex and Harry, rather than focusing on building a romance story with emotion. This is considered a misleading depiction of queer, and it feels shallow.

### ***The Aspects Attract the Readers that Effect on Red, White & Royal Blue Popularity***

In this part, through reviews written by readers, researchers would look for aspects that influence the reader's attractiveness to the novel *Red, White & Royal Blue* because it affects the popularity that the novel gains. As quoted from the dictionary website, "A review is a report on a book, short story, poem, movie, play, piece of music or art, or exhibition. The purpose of a review is to introduce the reader to the piece, express the reviewer's opinion about it, and finally persuade the reader that the piece is (or is not) worth reading, seeing, or hearing" (2023). Then, the researcher would present several reviews given by readers on the novel that explain aspects related to the novel. From the aspect that is credited through the comments that the reviewers provide, we can take it as our reference for giving comments or expectations of a novel.



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### **a. *The Dominant-Hegemonic Position***

Furthermore, these reviews below were written by the readers on the dominant-hegemonic position.

I loved challenging, poignant, sincere story-telling and of course the characterization is so good than I expected. I don't know which hero I loved the most. But I think Alex stole my heart from the first pages.

Well done Casey McQuiston! The author honestly knows how to create a soul brushing, heart stealing harmony! It was fantastic debut journey! Cannot wait to read more from the author's work!

(Goodreads, Nilufer Ozmekik, June 23, 2022).

According to Ozmekik, *Red, White & Royal Blue* is an instance of a queer book that has good story telling and characterization writing. Intrinsically, Ozmekik gives a positive assessment of this novel, even though it is Casey McQuiston's debut novel, yet they are able to present queer stories the same as readers' interest

On top of that, I've never read about a main character questioning their sexuality in their 20s in a way so similar to my own experience. I will honestly admit, this had me in tears reading it, because it made me feel so seen.

Aside from this representation, this book has a lot of seemingly effortless diversity. And it's a hilarious read as well. Overall, this book had me laughing and crying and loving these characters so fucking much.

(Goodreads, Anniek, November 27, 2022)

Almost the same as what was reviewed by Ozmekik, Anniek enjoyed the characterizations in the novel, he even thought that he felt relate to one of the characters in the novel. Beside this novel presents the representation of queer that readers expect, it also raises race diversity topic in the LGBTQ+ community which is an additional point that supports *Red, White & Royal Blue*'s popularity. In addition, the storyline contained in the novel is also able to make the readers feel the emotion of the story.

Therefore, it can be concluded that readers in the dominant-hegemonic position besides savoring the queer representation in the story, they also favor the way the story is built up and the characterization built by the author. This causes the readers to feel represented by the characters, and the addition of diversity topic in the LGBTQ+ community which captivate the reader's interest more.

### **b. *The Negotiated Position***

In this section, the researcher would present a review written by the readers in the negotiated position.

To be honest, I wasn't expecting to love *Red, White & Royal Blue*. I mean, this Casey McQuiston's first book. And it's written in present tense (ugh), but love it I did. I loved it HARD.

*Red, White & Royal Blue* was everything I was looking for and more. My reading experience was simply me laughing, crying, or swooning in a continuous cycle. Sometimes all three at once. It's been a long, long time since I've wanted to melt into a puddle of goo on the floor because the romance!!! Holy god, this story was the romancey-romance of your dreams.

(Goodreads, Heather K, June 22, 2021)

As stated by Heather, she formerly felt skeptical about *Red, White & Royal Blue* because this novel is McQuiston's debut, and the writer also made grammatical mistake in writing the novel because they used present tense. However, Heather added that this novel provides a reading experience that she likes, just like what the reviewer said on the dominant-hegemonic position, she savors the storytelling and plot of this novel. Heather said that *Red, White & Royal Blue* has met the expectations of readers of romance in queer novel.

Is this worth the hype...? No. Are there better romances out there...? Definitely. Did I end up shipping Henry and Alex so hard that my heart burst...? Maybe. What I will say is that I have little to no interest in American politics, and I found the British characters to largely be caricatures of English stereotypes. But the relationship between Henry and Alex feels sweet and quite genuine, and it develops nicely. The added tension from keeping their relationship a secret also

Helped ramp up the entertainment. And the more, er, secy scenes were also pretty steamy.

In conclusion. It was alright. Could have done without all the election stuff though.

(Goodreads, Sara, June 25, 2020)

Therefore, Sara's review revealed that the romance between Alex and Harry's relationship was not fit her interests, as well as the political aspects between the US and the British in the novel were not interesting, then she highlights the stereotyping of English characterization is also an aspect that is not adored by her. Regardless of the aspects of the novel that were criticized by Sara, she considers *Red, White & Royal Blue*'s story development of Alex and Harry's relationship is good, this novel is considered entertaining for readers.

Then, it can be inferred that the readers in the negotiated position, firstly felt skeptical because the novel is McQuiston's debut, then the grammatical mistake and the political aspects between Britain and US negatively effect on readers'

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reading experience. However, the readers could still enjoy the novel because of the plot, especially the story of Alex and Harry's relationship is developed well and entertains the reader.

### c. *The Oppositional Position*

Then, the review that would be explained below is written by the reader in the oppositional position. This review explains detail aspects of the novel that readers opposed.

This book was such a disappointment for me and honestly I don't see the appeal. I felt like it was someone's political ideals disguised as a romance. I felt like this book was a bit of a "soap-box" there was so many political digs thrown at the reader. And this is a personal observation, I really don't like politics so obviously this is going to annoy me. The story follows a romance between the first son of the United States and the Prince of England. I had went into the book thinking that it would be charming and cute. I can't really say that it was either.

Nearly every person in the story is just a caricature with no character development. I had no connection to Henry (the Prince) and did not care what happened to him at all. Alex (the first son) I liked a bit more but I still couldn't care less about him either. (Goodreads, Theo M, May 14,2019)

Theo said that behind the romance between Alex and Henry which becomes the main idea of this novel, yet he found political agenda included by the author that did not necessary to be explored, Theo felt that it bothers him in relishing the story. Then, he also said that almost all of the characters in the novel have no significant development. Same as what was conveyed by some other reviews from readers that have been discussed before.

Book is too long for what it is too much politic talk and not enough romance. (Goodreads, Bookity, April 24 ,2022)

According to Bookity, who also agrees that the political aspects in the story make this novel seem tedious. She complained that the writer telling the story with immoderate number of political narrations, and forgetting that the novel is about romance.

From the explanation above, it can be inferred that the readers in the oppositional position almost the same opinion as the readers in the negotiated position on the minus aspects in this novel, they state that the political agenda in this novel is considered unimportant and causes boredom. Then, the reader feels that the characters in this novel have no significant development.

## CONCLUSION

As stated in the previous section, popular literature is literature that follows theme, the way of presenting language techniques, and general pattern that is being favored by public, then it becomes globally popular, and one of them is the representation of the LGBTQ+ community. *White Red & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston is one of the popular queer literary works, their debut book is success that sold up to 100,000 copies and became frequently discussed topic, in fact that this novel still creates different opinions among its readers. In general, using the concept of Encoding-Decoding by Stuart Hall, readers' responses regarding queer representation in *White Red & Royal Blue* can be divided into three groups. The first group, The Dominant Hegemonic Position feels represented by the depiction of queer representation in the main characters and side characters of this novel. The series of events experienced by the characters and how they react to it, succeeds in appealing readers' emotion, especially if they experience the same as those characters. Slightly different from the first group about the queer representation in the novel, The Negotiated Position added their disillusionment towards the main characters' relationship, it is explained that the writers oversexualized the romance, as if the novel assures with stereotypes of same-sex relationship is dominated by sexual intercourse. The last is the Oppositional Position, strongly opposes and considers *White Red & Royal Blue* do not represent LGBTQ+ community or particularly queer relationship, this novel makes impression of a fantasy that was constructed by majority group authors, who do not understand the essence of queer relationship.

*White Red & Royal Blue* mainly focuses on the relationship development of Alex and Henry, who are identified as bisexual and gay respectively. The queer representation in the two main characters also appears to be the main factor that makes this novel popular among its readers. Apart from that aspect, on the research through Hall's Encoding-Decoding, this novel has several aspects that attract readers' attention, such as the dynamics between the two main characters which are considered refreshing and entertaining, the light storyline, the characterization of the character Alex who initially has difficulty identifying his sexual orientation that considered familiar to reader's experience, and the diversity of LGBTQ+ community that appear throughout the story. In addition to the aspects that have been mentioned as the biggest attractions for readers that make this novel popular, there are also several aspects that criticized by the readers, such as the description of political activities which is considered immoderate and unnecessary. Other readers also highlighted the development of several characters who

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were considered stagnant and did not experience significant changes until the end of the story. The extrinsic aspect of this novel cannot be separated from the highlight, which can be found some readers who criticize the grammatical structure errors that cause discomfort. However, besides the flaws in the novel, yet White Red & Royal Blue's readers savor and feel represented by the presence of queer representation that attracts numerous readers that popularize the novel. Even though there are several aspects criticized by readers, but it still does not affect on the popularity of White Red & Royal Blue as a whole.

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