

Dramaturg's Note

This version of *The Last Five Years* was always meant to be heartbreaking. It started with a gender-swapped version of “If I Didn’t Believe in You”. When we saw how Jamie’s dynamic with Cathy completely shifted, we knew we had something really special on our hands. Jamie no longer necessarily has so much more power over Cathy; they’re on a much more even playing field. This opened up so many more possibilities to explore their relationship.

Every choice we made for *The Last Five Years* went through a two-step qualifier. First: What is the most interesting choice? Second: What is the choice that will most painfully stab the audience in the heart? I can’t tell you how many times we would realize a terribly tragic way to frame a scene and elicit horrified/excited screams from everyone else in the room. We made a game out of it. As dramaturg, my goal from the beginning was to make sure that the sad choices never fell into the oh-so-easy trap of preying on the characters’ identities.

There is a long and colorful history with queer characters being subjected to tragedy. As far back as *Richard II*, and probably further, we can find examples of gay characters — both openly and implied — being left behind, rejected, institutionalized, or even killed off. When we proposed a queer casting of *The Last Five Years* we were acutely aware of this. We were also acutely aware of queer culture over the (actual) last five years. There were some big victories: the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015, celebrities like Lil Nas X, Sam Smith, and Sarah Paulson publicly came out, and queer-centric media like *Moonlight* and *Queer Eye* debuted to great acclaim. There were also tragedies: The senseless shooting at Pulse Nightclub in 2016. Record high numbers of transgender people were murdered. A lesbian couple killed themselves and their six children in 2018. Bigotry, violence, fear, and hatred. The sensationalized stories stick in your head and are easier to remember, but so much everyday joy was happening right alongside that.

Take, for instance, the story of a Salt Lake City couple working in the courthouse in June 2015 when they heard the news and rushed to the wedding registration window. Young LGBTQ people have more queer characters than ever to look up to. I can’t stop watching videos of queer couples inadvertently proposing to each other at the same time. Every time I see a same-sex couple quietly existing in the background of a network TV show, my heart soars. We’ve come so far.

The Last Five Years as a queer story seeks share the banal reality of queer couples post Obergefell v. Hodges — things don’t always work out, and that’s okay. My hope is that this becomes more commonplace. I’m not saying every queer story has to be sunshine and rainbows — because life sure isn’t! — but a sad story doesn’t have to involve death or discrimination in order to be sad. I’ve always liked sad stories because they make the contrasting joy that much more fantastic. I hope this story makes you sad, and I hope it brings you joy.