

EXPLORING HOW VISUALITY IS USED IN ANDRÉ ACIMAN'S *CALL ME BY YOUR NAME* (2007) COMPARED TO IN THE FILM ADAPTATION.

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Abstract:

There are a range of visual options to choose from when comparing a book and a film, however when the film is an adaptation of a modern, best selling Young Adult LGBTQIA+ romance how much can be different?

This article looks at the visual concepts that are used to make the film adaptation as successful as the book while keeping plot point and perspectives that seem crucial out. It looks at the Directors and actors compared to the bias perspectives and extra information in the book.

Keywords:

André Aciman, Adaptation, Novel, Visuality, Perspective.

Call Me By Your Name (2017) is a very visual film,

from the director's dispute over the casting to their

choice to change the ending. At the end of the film the

main character's call one another a last time yet the book

had an in-person meeting, this changes the depth and

connection between the characters along with our view,

what's more this phone call is only a few months after

Oliver leaves while the meeting is twenty years after.

The book by André Aciman is also imaginative, it

displays through Elio's eyes what it is like being a queer

Jewish boy struggling with his feelings and emotions.

The book gives us more sympathy towards Elio as it is

from his perspective, shows his back story and his

internal turmoil, allows for his bias to change our opinion. This article will discuss and compare the visuality of the book 'Call Me by Your Name' by André Aciman and the film by Luca Guadagnino through meaning, language and choices in the production.

The focus on LGBTQIA+ characters as they navigate a new and exciting relationship under Elio's roof in Moscazzano is shown through a visual and literary lens. In the film, Elio (the main character, a seventeen year old Jewish boy from Italy in the 17th century) has big, dramatic and child-like actions to portray his feelings as a moody teen. Timothée Chalamet (playing Elio)

portrays this through his body language and facial expressions, as multiple times in the film what is supposed to be a 'plain teenage face' shows the audience just how Elio should be feeling. In the scene where Oliver and Elio go swimming in the lake Elio's actions are big, clumsy and child-like which portrays the freedom he feels with Oliver and the freedom their love brings him. Contrastingly, at the beginning of the book Elio and Oliver share water but Elio uses to subtlety of drinking before and after Oliver to show his desire to kiss him, "I took a long swill from a large bottle of mineral water, passed it to him, then drank from it again"¹. The phrase "long swill" shows how big of a sip he took initially, meaning that he would not need any more water after, yet he still took another sip because his desire and desperation to kiss Oliver compelled him to. This indirect kiss, or more accurately putting his lips where Oliver's were, shows his shame and longing to not believe his own feelings.² Showing the power of what can and cannot be shown, like in old indie movies characters cannot kiss so it is not shown but here it is used to tease the audience and foreshadow the relationship. What's more, Oliver's actions also seem different when he is with Elio, Armie Hammer does this in a more subtle manner, as Oliver is older and wiser than Elio he moves slowly and calmly in the scenes until he and Elio are alone where he is fast, passionate and practically giddy with excitement.

Looks and actions can change how a character is perceived from good to bad, a basic film structure of making a cold protagonist likeable is by making them save a cat.³ This is relevant in this film as well, Oliver is unlikeable through his "Laters" and distance which seems to be leading Elio on, but both the novel and film make the reader like him. The director Luca Guadagnino and James Ivory followed their guts as they fell out over choosing actors but did not go back to work together as Guadagnino took control and kicked Ivory out of it, which made the film beautiful.⁴ This led to tension behind the filming, but the outcome was the visual, deep and emotional film we have today with its naturalism and innocence behind the confessions scene where Elio tells Oliver how he feels.⁵ Guadagnino took control of the set and chose the actors which cast Ivory's useless. What's more, this decision affected the visuality of the film, as Chalamet and Hammer brought their own to the characters. In the novel the characters are all described through Elio's eyes, which creates room for distrust and reliability issues. Contrastingly, the movies do not have this issue which was a bold move for the directors, as they lose Elio's side of the story but gain the view of other characters to let us see it from other sides. At the beginning of the novel Elio is talking about what he felt when he first met Oliver, in this we get the first description of him "billowy blue shirt, wide-open collar, sunglasses straw, skin everywhere".⁶ The focus on Oliver's clothes, although descriptive and imaginative, also tells us how Elio felt

unable to look at him due to his beauty and rejection of his own feelings. The adverb “everywhere” conveys the extent of skin that is exposed, that is the most prominent feature described which foreshadows Elio’s lust. The visuality of looks and actions make the novel and book immersive.

The novel is from Elio’s perspective as he looks back in time on that summer he spent with Oliver. Due to the detail and pathos behind his narrating it makes this memory and the meaning behind that summer feel even more special to Elio and us as readers . What’s more, this forbidden love that we encounter holds an air of mischief which the novel portrays through the constant back and forth banter between Elio and Oliver; such as “What did one do around here? Nothing. Wait for summer to end. What did one do in the winter, then? I smiled at the answer I was about to give. He got the gist and said, “Don’t tell me: wait for summer to come, right?”.⁷ This extract from the novel is brief, Elio and Oliver are joking around but the verb “smiled” truly makes it seem even more personal. Although smiling is common, the way Elio is smiling at himself seems like an inside joke, Oliver catches onto this inside joke to make the moment have a secret meaning between them. We cannot see Elio and Oliver, but the idea of this secret helps us visualise them close together and wrapped up as if in their own little world. By not seeing them we have the ability to imagine more with the language Aciman uses whereas, in the films we can see them

which detracts from the personal and intimate atmosphere that we have in the book. Seeing and not seeing affect the visuality through many ways; our imagination, the emotional pull and sharing how we feel with others around us - it also allows us to play around with other ways to provoke a visual attachment to the scenes. In the film this forbidden yet all-encompassing love that we see comes from Hammer and Chalamet acting skills and Guadagnino’s directing. Elio sneaks around his family and friends to be alone with Oliver while Oliver attempts to hide his feelings behind a false front of sophistication and professionalism.

Lastly, the visuality at the end of the novel and film are different; in the film Elio calls Oliver at Christmas time. We are given a sweet scene of them talking happily as they long for one another, at the end they whisper their own name to link to the title which provides the audience with a clean but open ending. Whereas in the books, Elio begrudgingly meets up with Oliver to reminisce, Oliver has a family and is a professor which Elio and the reader find heartbreaking. To add another sting to the scene Elio explains that his father has just passed away but they make light, here Oliver makes comparisons about their lives as if they live “parallel lives”. The choice to change the ending was a beautiful one as the film’s ending gives a well rounded and cyclical completion to it, as they say each other’s names (which is similar to introducing themselves) while leaving what happens next and the chance for them to

be together up to the audience. The book, although equally satisfying in its ending, allows for a more rigid idea of the characters' lives moving forward and a realistic feeling of wishing to go back and change what had happened.

In conclusion, both the book and the film use visuality to help entice emotions from the audience and bring the

characters to life. The book makes us feel more for Elio, especially because he ends up without his love but mostly because it is from his view and bias. The film, although still providing sympathy for Elio, gives us a more rounded view of all of the characters and lets us see Oliver's side more clearly.

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⁷ Aciman André, *Call Me by Your Name*, fifth edition, (New York : Farrar & Giroux, 2007)