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Universitat Autònoma
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**To Speak or to Die: The Importance and Achievements
of Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017)**

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Abstract

In 2017, Luca Guadagnino directed the film adaptation of *Call Me by Your Name*, an original novel by André Aciman, and portrayed a unique coming-of-age journey of self-discovery that is not often offered in cinema. Since its popularization, the summer romance between Elio and Oliver and more concretely the personal growth of the former has generated interest for its subtlety and its careful craft of adolescent sexuality. Moreover, the film has also had an important impact within the LGBT community, offering a representation that is usually ignored in mainstream cinema.

The first section of this dissertation analyses how the film adaptation of *Call Me by Your Name* reads the novel in which it is based. Guadagnino states that in order for him to be faithful to the novel, he has to betray it. The lack of a first person narrator, the adapted screenplay by James Ivory or the use of music as a narrative developer are some of the factors that help the adaptation read the novel while respecting it. Therefore, this dissertation uncovers the ways in which the film interprets the novel as well as the differences between both texts.

The second part explores the impact and importance of this film not only within the audio-visual field but also within the LGBT community, as well as the history of its predecessors. LGBT films rarely reach mainstream crowds and *Call Me by Your Name* managed to break the barrier between LGBT and mainstream audiences while offering a positive representation of what the process of accepting one's own sexuality should be like: one based on support and space to deal with one's own feelings. Finally, by uncovering its influence and legacy, it becomes clear why this adaptation leaves a mark in both the LGBT community and in mainstream cinema.

Keywords: *Call Me by Your Name*, Luca Guadagnino, André Aciman, adaptation, coming-of-age, self-discovery, cinema, sexuality, LGBT representation.

0. Introduction

0.1 Luca Guadagnino's Life and Work

Luca Guadagnino, born in Palermo (Italy) in 1971, is a film director, producer and screenwriter. His family moved to Ethiopia during his early childhood, where his father taught History and Literature, but they were forced to return to Italy in 1977 due to the Ethiopian Civil War. It was soon after this event that he became interested in filmmaking, resulting in his taking a degree in Literature and Cinema History at the Sapienza University of Rome.

Even though he had worked on short films before releasing his first long feature, Guadagnino debuted at the Venice Film Festival with *The Protagonists* (1999), a crime thriller starring Tilda Swinton about an Italian film crew reconstructing a real life crime committed years before. After his debut, he served on the jury of different film festivals, the 2010 Venice Film Festival being the most prestigious one. However, both his presence and his work continued to be independent, with little success outside festivals. It was not until his 2015 release, *A Bigger Splash*, that his European presence as a filmmaker strengthened.

Precisely, this consolidated presence secured the financial backing needed for the production of his next project, the adaptation of André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*, his 2007 novel about the sexual awakening of a teenager after meeting a post-grad student of his father's during their summer holiday in Italy. Different producers were already looking for a director to take over the film adaptation before the novel was released, and after some failed attempts, director and screenwriter James Ivory (*Maurice*, *The Remains of the Day*) started developing the original project. Both Ivory and Guadagnino, who was also originally involved in the project, started working on the

initial ideas. After a year developing a script that represented their vision and interpretation of the novel, the producers gave the green light and asked Ivory to direct the film. However, the original project was pushed back because of financial issues. Finally, after *A Bigger Splash*, Guadagnino's name became big enough to attract investors and financiers to support the project. Even though the budget was still limited, Guadagnino was used to small productions and he got to direct the feature with James Ivory's screenplay.

0.2 Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name*

What is interesting about Guadagnino's view of *Call Me by Your Name* is the way he interprets the story and its characters. As he explains in an interview released about the same time as the film: "It's my task, in order to be faithful to the novel, to *betray the novel*. When you translate any kind of text into a visual storyline, a cinema scene, you have to make sure you don't get crushed and overwhelmed by the weight of the source material." (cited in Hutchinson 2017: 34). These words serve as the starting point of this dissertation in order to analyse and explore how Guadagnino directs a film following his own interpretation of the primary source. Arguably, the differences between the novel and the film, and those betrayals which Guadagnino states are his duties as a director, make this adaptation very interesting to compare and analyse. Guadagnino's vision of cinema and his prevalence of the visual over the verbal and textual mediums are faultlessly portrayed in this specific adaptation, in which the lack of the first person narrator that substantiates the novel is replaced with visual resources that fulfil its function. However, and regardless of the differences between both texts, this adaptation is a work full of respect and admiration towards the original source, since, according to Guadagnino himself, he tried to pay homage to the people that had inspired him, in this case André Aciman.

By the time the film opened in theatres in November 2017, Guadagnino's vision and direction as well as Ivory's screenplay had delighted the critics, who praised almost unanimously the final product. Reviewer April Wolfe praises Guadagnino's careful and emotionally intimate vision of the story: "Guadagnino adeptly captures not just the physicality of a burning love but also the emotional and intellectual components, and the film is all the more salient for that careful, realistic interpretation" (2017: website). The review stresses the importance of the silent, non-physical elements that form this love story and that offer a view different from the primary source. Film critic Justin Chang writes for *Los Angeles Times* that "Guadagnino's storytelling is overpoweringly intimate but never narcissistic. He directs our gaze both inward and outward, toward the treasures and mysteries buried within this Italian paradise, and also toward the unseen, unspoken forces that have threatened bonds like Elio and Oliver's for millennia" (2017: website). Again, what resonates between these lines are the "unseen, unspoken forces" that fill up Guadagnino's adaptation: these little differences and filmmaking techniques that help the director and screenwriter read the primary source are what transform the novel's story into an audio-visual experience.

Concurrently, this film instantly became an important feature both within the LGBT community and the film industry. Reviewer Alonso Duralde writes for *The Wrap* that "First love is as much about hesitancy as it is about exuberance – maybe even more so – and Ivory and Guadagnino perfectly capture that sweet turmoil, aided by a gifted ensemble. This isn't just an instant LGBT classic; this is one of the great movie love stories" (2017: website). Films telling LGBT stories are less likely to reach a mainstream audience, and *Call Me by Your Name* managed to leave a mark and bridge the gap between mainstream and LGBT cinema. The movie did relatively well at the box office, raising \$41.9 million with a budget of only \$3.5 million and had a decent

presence during its award season, receiving a total of four nominations at the 90th Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor for Timothée Chalamet in the role of Elio, Best Adapted Screenplay for James Ivory and Best Original Song for Sufjan Stevens' *Mystery of Love*. It won the category of Best Adapted Screenplay, becoming Ivory's first Academy Award after three directing nominations for *A Room with a View* (1986), *Howards End* (1993) and *The Remains of the Day* (1994), even though he did not write the screenplays.

The first part of this dissertation deals with how the film adaptation of *Call Me by Your Name* reads the novel on which it is based. It examines the differences and similarities between both texts and argues that, in order for the adaptation to be faithful to the novel, it has to betray it, as Guadagnino declared. Then, it analyses the factors that help the adaptation read the novel, providing a closer look at what works and what does not work in both texts, concluding that the film adaptation express much love towards the novel at the same time that it produces a different version of its plot. Finally, this first section explores the different controversies that the film faced regarding the connections and differences with its primary source.

The second part of the dissertation deals with the impact and the importance this film has had since its release. LGBT cinema rarely reaches a mainstream audience, and when it does, it is usually surrounded by criticism and controversy. These data is very telling of how LGBT cinema is perceived by a mainstream audience that since *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) had not had an LGBT film impacting the field. *The Kids Are Alright* (2010), *Carol* (2015) *Moonlight* (2016) and *The Favourite* (2018) are the only films that accompany *Call Me by Your Name* this last decade in the list of Best Picture nominees that focus on LGBT stories, out of 88 total nominees, and with only

Moonlight winning this category. Therefore, it concludes by analysing both the importance of these films and concretely the importance of *Call Me by Your Name*.

1. Adapting a Novel: A Work of Respect

1.1 Differences and similarities

When it comes to comparing both texts, the biggest difference between the novel and the adaptation and perhaps the most significant one is the loss of the first person narrator. Following Guadagnino's assertion that in order for him to be faithful to the novel he has to betray it first, this loss of narrator becomes both a statement and a challenge. The first person narrator in Aciman's novel allows the reader to explore Elio's thoughts and vision of the world, and therefore to connect with him directly through his own mind. It is essential for the reader to know what Elio is thinking in order to understand him. The presence of the first person narrator becomes essential when Elio comes to terms with himself and transmits his feelings to the reader through his own thoughts.

The novel recalls the summer of 1983 as it follows 17-year-old Elio and explores his romantic relationship with Oliver, a 24-year-old doctoral student that his parents take as a guest in their house in Italy during six weeks. The novel starts with Elio wondering when his attraction towards Oliver might have started, only to discover that it had started silently, without him even being aware of his own feelings towards the visitor. Even if unconsciously, Elio's feelings towards him are always clear:

It might have started way later than I think without my noticing anything at all. You see someone, but you don't really see him, he's in the wings. Or you notice him, but nothing clicks, nothing "catches," and before you're even aware of a presence, or of something troubling you (...) How couldn't I have known, you ask? I know desire when I see it—and yet, this time, it slipped by completely. (Aciman 2007: 12).

This realization serves as the starting point of the novel, and therefore also as the starting point of Elio's development after recognizing a desire that had been hidden. However, even if that desire towards Oliver has been unconsciously hidden, it had not

been repressed. Elio's feelings regarding sexual desire seem to be clear, as he himself accepts his sexual attraction towards both men and women from the beginning of the novel, despite the novelty:

I was still under the illusion that, barring what I'd read in books, inferred from rumors, and overheard in bawdy talk all over, no one my age had ever wanted to be both man and woman—with men and women. I had wanted other men my age before and had slept with women. But before he'd stepped out of the cab and walked into our home, it would never have seemed remotely possible that someone so thoroughly okay with himself might want me to share his body as much as I ached to yield up mine. (Aciman: 27).

Since the novel takes place during the summer 1983 in a little town near the coast, with little population, these thoughts of distance between what he feels and what he thinks he is supposed to feel are completely normal and understandable, and his understanding of them is crucial to his development. Furthermore, taking into account his lack of contact with an LGBT environment and the rumours inferred, his thoughts and doubts are more than justified.

Much can be said about Elio's first feelings towards Oliver. For instance, as sure as Elio is about his desire towards both men and women, it is something that he is yet not used to feeling, firstly because he is still young and still discovering himself and secondly because the historical context projects an image of his feelings that is, at least, unusual: "the price of healing the melancholic wound is that the queer subject is here required to exist in a heteronormative world, where queers occupy a minority position and where desires are subject to validation in terms that work to secure hetero- or indeed homonormative relations" (Silverstone 2014: 323). Aciman dedicates the first part of the novel to explore this subject through Elio's voice, exploring his own vision of the world, one that breaks the heteronormative barrier from the very beginning without asking for validation of his desire but at the same time acknowledging the minority position in which he is in.

However, this connection between the reader and Elio is possible because the honest and deep first person narration offers a proximity that is lost in the adaptation. Guadagnino deliberately decides to erase the first person narration, which he could have replaced with a voice-over, in order to avoid cliché storytelling methods that usually compose coming-of-age films, like Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) or Kelly Fremon Craig's *The Edge of Seventeen* (2016). This challenge becomes a statement when Guadagnino also decides to get rid of the traditional three-act structure model that most films follow. This is not the only feature in which Guadagnino has experimented with narrative structures: for instance, his 2018 remake of Dario Argento's horror cult classic *Suspiria* (1977) is divided into six narrative acts and an epilogue, so it is not unusual for Guadagnino to challenge the narrative structure that compose his filmmaking. Still, in *Call Me by Your Name* Guadagnino achieves this narrative coherence through other filmmaking features that go beyond act structure.

Lacks the first person narrator of the novel, narrative coherence is achieved through music. Music is an important element of Aciman's novel, as Elio is a piano player and transcribes classical music, like Joseph Haydn's. It is also an element used by Aciman so Elio and Oliver get to know each other closer: "Music was an easy subject for us to discuss, especially when I was at the piano. Or when he'd want me to play something in the manner of so-and-so." (Aciman 2007: 56). However, these moments of intimacy between them surrounded by music are always cohabited by the rich dialogues of the novel, either between Elio and Oliver or between Elio and his own thoughts.



Figure 1. Elio playing the piano. Timothée Chalamet and Armie Hammer in Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017)

In the adaptation, music goes one step further and becomes a narrative device, working as a unifying thread between Elio and the viewer. Guadagnino wanted to incorporate music into the film in a way that feels like a crucial character to the story, one that narrates the events while providing a more intimate experience to the viewer, similar to Elio's thoughts in the novel: "I like the concept of piano as a dialogue. In fact, in *Call Me by Your Name*, we have extensive usage of piano because those notes, in a way, are the interior and exterior dialogue between Elio and himself, and Elio and Oliver" (in Schnipper, 2018: website). Furthermore, the decision to intersperse classical music, 80's music and contemporary new music written and performed by Sufjan Stevens, usually played in scenes with little or no dialogue, succeeds in creating an effect that substitutes everything that the characters, specially Elio, fail to verbalize.¹ Thus, Guadagnino solves the problem of the narrator through music that substitutes

¹ Complete list of the music that appears in the film: <https://www.sonymusic.com/masterworks/call-me-by-your-name-original-motion-picture-soundtrack-cd-available-november-17/>

Elio's thoughts at the same time that it creates an atmosphere that transforms the unspoken words into electricity.

Furthermore, the minor changes that Guadagnino makes regarding the novel join the narrative methods like the music or the long silences in his mission to achieve a final product that is both distinct and respectful. One of these examples is the tense in which both texts are narrated. The novel is narrated by Elio in the past tense while he recalls the events of that summer and his relationship with Oliver, like a long memory being revisited from a now mature place: "I shut my eyes, say the word, and I'm back in Italy, so many years ago." (Aciman 2007: 7). Again, the adaptation loses this past tense and tells the story from a present point of view, a present set in Italy during the eighties. This way not only does it simplify its narration, but it also sets the tone for the whole film, preparing the viewers for a story that is unknown and unpredictable for everyone involved.

As far as literal scene changes go regarding the introduction and the body of the novel, they are not significantly important or decisive in any way that makes the viewers that have already read the novel question the decisions taken, nor do the viewers that have not read the novel feel any missing pieces. Perhaps the most potentially controversial of these changes between the novel and the film is the change of settings. Even though both stories take place in Italy, the novel sets most of its story in a seaside town referred as *B.*, whereas the adaptation takes place in a small town (Crema, in the region of Lombardy) that happens to be Guadagnino's own town and that does not share the seaside location of the novel. However, what is missing in the film adaptation is Elio and Oliver's crucial trip to Rome. This offers a really close and detailed exploration of their relationship since it takes place during the last third of the novel, once they have already understood the nature of their relationship and they can

spend some time alone, far from Elio's house and parents. Guadagnino had to remove this trip to Rome from the adaptation due to budget and runtime limitations, and instead Elio and Oliver travel to a town nearby where their time together is accompanied by music that replaces the intimacy that this part of Elio's narrative transmits.

Finally, the one change that is significant and that distinguishes both texts is the ending. In Aciman's novel, Elio narrates how after Oliver leaves at the end of the summer, they do not keep in touch regularly. Oliver returns that winter to announce that he is going to get married. Ten years after their summer together, they speak on the phone, and five years later they reunite again after Elio attends one of the lectures Oliver teaches in college. Twenty years after their summer of love, Oliver returns to the house in Italy, and after this final reunion the book ends. This ending gives a closure that connects Elio's memory of their summer together with his contemporary self. However, the movie does not end the same way, and not a year passes from the beginning of the film until its end. In the adaptation, once Oliver leaves at the end of that summer, Elio is left heartbroken thinking of their time together. That same winter, Oliver calls to announce that he is engaged. This happens about the same time that Oliver returns in the novel to announce his imminent marriage. After a short talk on the phone, Elio is left heartbroken again sitting near a fireplace, where he cries in silence while sad music plays; the credits start rolling when, breaking the fourth wall, he looks directly to the camera.

This last image of Elio crying does not weaken him in any way. Instead, it humanizes him and strengthens his development as a person, completing his journey of self-discovery after experiencing his summer with Oliver. However, the last image has been criticised for the suggestion that this experience is too painful. I do not believe so, and I interpret the ending as a necessary one for Elio to grow as a person and

differentiate the person he was at the beginning of the summer and the person he is at the end.



Figure 2. Elio crying near the fireplace at the end of the story. Timothée Chalamet in Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017)

1.2 Controversies while Adapting

Spectators and reviewers discuss which parts of the adaptation work and which parts do not, but it is generally accepted that the film stands out on its own regarding the connection with its primary source. For instance, both texts have the same approach to Elio's coming at terms with himself, but this is not explicit in the adaptation:

In the novel, Elio's voice is as essential as the story itself, but Guadagnino transcends that value by more forcefully confronting a central dilemma posed by Aciman: "Is it better to speak or die?" It's through this question that the book's queerness comes into focus: the coded language and silent pursuits (...) are pondered relentlessly by Elio himself. Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* doesn't reference "Is it better to speak or die?" beyond its initial reading, and yet the question implicitly, directly informs every beat of the film." (Canfield, 2017: online)

The "is it better to speak or die?" dilemma is one of the key concepts of the novel, and it is essential to understand Elio's journey of self-discovery. The novel ends its first part

contemplating this dilemma, and Elio's observation regarding this question is simple: "I'd never even have the courage to ask such a question. (...) That steely look of yours, Oliver, I'd rather die than face it once I've told you." (Aciman 2007: 64). While this dilemma is dealt with in detail in the novel, the movie approaches it in a completely different way: by barely acknowledging it after its initial mention. Instead, Guadagnino deals with it implicitly, silently and slowly, in a subtle way that allows the viewer to go through Elio's mind with ease.

This narrative slowness is precisely one of the identifying traits of the adaptation. For most of it, Elio and Oliver's relationship is built over silences and distance, allowing the viewer to get to know them hesitantly, contrary to the novel, in which the reader gets to know them directly through Elio's mind and eyes. Whereas this slow pace has been criticized by some, Catherine Wheatley highlights it as a virtue: "For much of the film little happens, and we watch Elio and Oliver move in circles while seemingly no closer to making a move. One feels the influence of Eric Rohmer and James Ivory, that great chronicler of repressed desire. The tone is languorous but the pace restless" (Wheatley 2017: 63). Even though audiovisual pace is a matter of personal and subjective opinion, Guadagnino's decision to manifest Elio's desire through a restless distance that matches Elio's growth as a person and that changes concurrently with the story is an effective way to translate the novel's explicit desire.

Specifically, this translation of Elio's explicit desire, which permeates the novel, is one of elements that has received most critiques regarding Guadagnino's decisions in adapting the novel. The novel is unarguably more explicit than its adaptation, especially in terms of sexual desire. Aciman narrates in detail both Elio's sexual thoughts and actions, thus creating an even closer and inevitable link between the reader and Elio. However, Elio's thoughts cannot be explicitly translated for the adaptation without him

narrating them, and therefore they get lost. His acts, on the other hand, can be translated, and so they are, but softened in terms of sexual content. This softening has been criticized, accusing Guadagnino of not daring to portray Elio and Oliver's relationship as explicitly as it is in the novel: "Guadagnino's determination to alloy sex with self-discovery imbues his mature work. In *Call Me by Your Name*, the camera looks demurely out the window at a tree as the male lovers consummate their relationship, a move that earned Guadagnino accusations of homoerotic shyness" (Heller, 2018: website). The film is not shy, and the scenes between Elio and Oliver are delicately crafted not only in order to maintain the overall tone of the adaptation but also in order to show that their relationship transcends sexual desire, especially considering that this desire has been persecuted and marginalized.

Regarding these accusations of homoerotic shyness, Guadagnino, who is himself gay, has stated that he does not feel the necessity to see Elio and Oliver's actual intercourse in order to understand their relationship: "Because I am a voyeur myself, I pride myself on a more dignified and sophisticated sense of voyeurism than a need to stare at other people's sexes" (cited in Buchanan 2017: website). Although we might agree that there is no necessity for uncalled titillation and that this is undeniably a film about Elio's feelings towards another man, some viewers have remarked that the sexual scenes between Elio and Marzia, a girl from the village, and Elio and Oliver are portrayed differently in terms of explicitness, with the former being considerably more explicit than the latter. Elio's desire towards the two of them is evident in both the novel and the adaptation, but Guadagnino surrounds Elio and Oliver's relationship by an intimacy and a complex sophistication that is never shy or indecisive, but that is rather personal and intimate. The scenes with Marzia are not as intimate, and after their

encounters Elio usually boast about them in front of his parents and, especially, in front of Oliver in an attempt to make him jealous.



Figure 3. Elio and Oliver in bed. Timothée Chalamet and Armie Hammer in Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017)

This controversy regarding explicitly and nudity did not stop after the film release. In fact, screenwriter James Ivory, a gay man, spoke about how unhappy he was that there was no frontal male-nudity in the film, especially since he had explicitly written it:

One aspect that does still rankle with him is the absence of full-frontal male nudity. Ivory's screenplay specified that Elio and Oliver would be shown naked, a detail overruled by clauses in the actors' contracts. 'When Luca says he never thought of putting nudity in, that is totally untrue,' says Ivory (Gilbey 2018: website).

However, I argue that it should not matter whether there is explicit nudity or not as long as the film knows what it wants to transmit and how it wants to do so. Most LGBT films deal with sexual desire much more explicitly than *Call Me by Your Name* does, and these films absolutely should acknowledge that desire that has been silenced for so long. However, this adaptation deals for most of its runtime with Elio's internal desire and

with him trying to figure out how to externalize his feelings, and the adaptation succeeds in balancing Elio's internal desire and his actual actions in a way that allows the viewer to witness his personal growth at the same time that his romance with Oliver progresses, even as a result of the actors' limitations regarding what they are willing to do onscreen.

2. A Film with a Legacy

2.1 Importance within the LGBT community

After having compared and analyzed the differences and similarities between both source and adaptation, it is now necessary to focus on the importance that this adaptation has had within LGBT cinema and consequently within the LGBT community. Coming-of-age narratives are a common subgenre of cinema, one that focuses on the growth of a teenager as they enter adulthood, like Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* (2017) or Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous* (2000). These narratives, whether in literature, film or television, are important because they portray adolescence and authenticate the experiences portrayed in them as positive, valid and even necessary. However, LGBT coming-of-age narratives are not that common, and they usually portray the main characters suffering their sexuality as they discover it, and even if true, it inevitably perpetuates the link between LGBT experiences and pain.

Therefore, this is why it is also important to have narratives that allow their characters to understand their feelings with space and support, even if that is not always a reflection to reality. The storyline imagined by Aciman allows Elio to understand his feelings at his own terms, without negative connotations attached to them:

Call Me by Your Name's fabric of compassion enables Elio's journey of self-discovery. Whether he knows it or not, it provides a safety net that allows his contradictions to surface – not as character flaws, but as positive elements of his self- and sexual exploration. Elio is a teenager, after all, and he isn't required to have all the answers all at once, but he's given the space and support to find them. He's free to make mistakes and learn from them. He takes his time figuring out what he wants" (Di Mattia, 2018: 12).

No one other than Elio interfere with his self-discovery journey, meaning that he is the one that processes his feelings and his emotions at his own terms. Both the novel and the adaptation understand that it is Elio who has to set the pace for his growth, and Elio understands that too. At no moment he is asked to rush or repress his feelings, and

because of that, his experience at coming at terms with himself is a positive one. LGBT positive experiences in cinema are rare, like James Ivory's *Maurice* (1987), and even though *Call Me by Your Name*'s ending is bittersweet, the experience remains a positive one for Elio, who by the end of the story has grown as a person and has finished his inner journey.

Positive experiences about accepting one's sexuality without any negative connotations attached are rare in cinema as cinema is a reflection to society and it tends to portray reality, like Matthew Warchus's *Pride* (2014). That is why it is important to rewrite the negative experiences and turn them into positive ones in order to change their acceptability: "queer identity and queer culture must necessarily change as the unacceptable becomes acceptable, however transitory that acceptability might be." (Peele 2007: 7). The objective of this acceptability is not to invalidate or to annul the negative experiences —as they are real and they should be acknowledged— but rather to provide a vision of what that experience can and ideally should be: one based on acceptance, support and personal space to acknowledge ones feelings and accept them without rush, pressure or discomfort.

This acceptability is closely linked to the support Elio receives on behalf of his parents. In many occasions, parents play an important part in the process of self-acceptance, and Elio is lucky enough to have ones that understand him and give him the space and support he needs. It is not always the case in LGBT narratives that the character finds this complete support from both of their parents, and this story again projects an idea that should be the universal norm but that it is still far from reality. Elio's mother seems to be aware of Elio's feelings and seems to know that his relationship with Oliver transcends friendship:

ANNELLA. (CONT'D) You like him, don't you? Oliver?

ELIO. Everyone likes Oliver.

ANNELLA. He likes you too - more than you do, I think.
(Ivory, *Call Me by Your Name*, 2017: scene 58, page 45).

This passage from the screenplay suggests Annella's knowledge of her son's attraction towards Oliver, and the fact that she does not interfere with Elio's feelings and gives him space and silent support to deal with them is proof of her understanding. However, the best exemplification of the support that Elio receives from his parents come from his father. Towards the end of the story, after Oliver leaves, Elio and his father have a conversation about Elio's experience and feelings. His father offers complete support in a scene that understands how important it is to feel and be accepted:

PERLMAN. How you live your life is your business. Remember, our hearts and our bodies are given to us only once. And before you know it, your heart is worn out, and, as for your body, there comes a point when no one looks at it, much less wants to come near it. Right now there's sorrow. Pain. Don't kill it and with it the joy you've felt. We may never speak about this again. But I hope you'll never hold it against me that we did. I will have been a terrible father if, one day, you'd want to speak to me and felt that the door was shut, or not sufficiently open.
(Ivory, *Call Me by Your Name*, 2017: scene 115, page 77).



Figure 4. Elio and Mr. Perlman talking about Elio's feelings. Timothée Chalamet and Michael Stuhlbarg in Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017)

This scene and this dialogue soon resonated and became one of the most representative elements of the film, and that is because it is rare to witness this kind of support and acceptance in LGBT fiction. The sympathy of Elio's father comes from a place of complete love and understanding towards his son that the story does not explore, but that does not need to explore, since this kind of support should not need an explanation or a reason. The lack of support from parents to LGBT children or their negative reactions have been abundant in fiction, and when a narrative in which both parents show unconditional support to their children appears, it feels scarce, almost like an exception.

Another field in which *Call Me by Your Name* stands out as an accepting and welcoming story is the religious one. Both Elio's family —himself included— and Oliver are Jewish, but their religion is not an obstacle in their relationship as it usually is in other LGBT narratives. Some of them, like Sebastián Lelio's *Disobedience* (2017), written by Sebastián Lelio and Rebecca Lenkiewicz, adapts Naomi Alderman's novel about the impossible relationship between two women in an Orthodox Jewish community and uses the religious aspect as an obstacle. Others, like 2017's *Novitiate*, written and directed by Maggie Betts, follows a young nun and uses religion as an instrument to question faith and sexuality. However, *Call Me by Your Name* manages to incorporate religious elements, like the Star of David in the form of a necklace or the Hanukkah decorations in December, without them indicating any prohibition or obstacle in their relationship. In fact, Elio and Oliver briefly discuss their religious identity at the beginning of the story:

ELIO. We are Jewish, English, American, Italian, French... somewhat atypical. Besides my family you are probably the only other Jew who has set foot in this town.

OLIVER. I am from a small town in New England. I know what it's like to be the odd Jew out.

(Ivory, *Call Me by Your Name*, 2017: scene 11, page 6).

Identity seems to be important to Elio, since he remarks that he is Jewish but also American, Italian, and so on. He is not rejecting his heritage, but he is stating that he is not defined by it, even if it is an important part of him. Their discussion seems simple, but it is very significant how their Jewishness creates an unconscious link between them, and even more significant that they both acknowledge its uniqueness in their own context: Elio and his family are the only Jews in their town in Italy and Oliver was probably the only Jew in his New England town. This can be read as a metaphor for homosexual desire, linking religion and sexuality through these characters. However, the most interesting aspect of the use of religion in this particular story is perhaps the fact that it never plays a determining role in their relationship as it usually does in other LGBT narratives, thus subverting the traditional usage of religion and faith in LGBT stories. The religious elements are there, and they are given importance as they are part of the characters, but they are never given more importance than needed. The religious link between them is unconsciously there as well, but the film understands that it cannot play a decisive role in their relationship.

2.2 Impact within the film industry

As it has already been mentioned in the introduction, LGBT stories are present in cinema, but they struggle to reach a mainstream audience. That is why modern LGBT films are principally introduced in film festivals —most of them being specifically LGBT film festivals— but do not even get a theatrical release as it is usually done in cinema. In fact, most LGBT films, regardless of their audiovisual quality, struggle at even finding a distributor, and when they do find it, it is usually limited to a concrete geographical distribution, like LGBT cinemas, are directly distributed on VOD (video on demand) or get lost among the catalogue of a streaming platform: “LGBT cinemas

lie at the intersection of various film cultures and regimes of taste which condition not only their circulation between film circuits and geographic markets but also their availability to LGBT festivals.” (Damiens, 2018: 37). Even though it is my total belief that these spaces that are exclusive for LGBT films and LGBT audiences should be protected and preserved, LGBT films must not be limited to these spaces and should be given the opportunity to expand their audience, to compete in important film festivals and to have big theatrical releases with proper promotions.

With very few exceptions, LGBT films have historically been independent productions exclusively directed towards LGBT audiences. However, this tendency slightly started to change with Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), a film adapting the short story of the same title written by E. Annie Proulx in 1997. The film starred Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as two cowboys who meet during summer of 1963 as they are hired to herd sheep in the mountains of Wyoming. After falling in love that summer and separating at the end of it, the story chronicles their life and their relationship for twenty years. The film premiered at the 2005 Venice Festival and received critical acclaim, with praises for the performances and the direction. It had a limited theatrical release in December 2005, only playing in three cities in the United States. However, over the Christmas weekend it became such a success that it expanded over the USA, becoming the highest-grossing movie of the country during its first month of release. Ang Lee's film had a worldwide theatrical run of more than four months and gained a total of \$178.1 million with a budget of \$14 million, becoming an instant phenomenon. *Brokeback Mountain* had a good award season and managed to score eight Academy Award nominations, winning three of them (Best Music Score, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Director). However, it lost Best Picture to *Crash* (2004) and left many disappointed, leading to an emerging controversy about the

homophobic nature of Hollywood that would go on for years. Still, the pure existence of *Brokeback Mountain* and its acclaim and mainstream success became a huge benchmark for LGBT modern cinema, which finally saw an interest outside LGBT circles: “It wasn’t only gay groups celebrating the film’s release. Ang Lee’s film had crossover appeal with the mainstream audience choosing to embrace it, save for the usual gay-hating Christians and Catholics who found it ‘morally offensive’.” (Davies, 2016: 203). The fact that *Brokeback Mountain* managed to break the barrier between LGBT and mainstream audiences indicated a huge progress towards a more inclusive and accepting industry that saw for the first time in modern cinema an LGBT story that impacted the field and left a legacy that is still present in the business.

The acceptance and impact that *Brokeback Mountain* brought to the industry meant that studios started telling more LGBT stories and celebrities expressed an interest to portray LGBT characters more often than before. In the following years, important names like Sean Penn, Natalie Portman, Olivia Colman, Rami Malek, Mahershala Ali or Alicia Vikander, all of them heterosexual actors, managed to win Academy Awards for portraying LGBT characters. However, LGBT stories started to emerge in mainstream cinema accompanied by the inevitable debate about whether it is necessary to politicise the film industry:

Queer cinema gradually became coopted by mainstream film and also by mainstreaming efforts within the queer world. For a while, it seemed queer cinema was content to generate historical films about gay leaders such as Harvey Milk and gay-themed mainstream dramas (...). In recent years, queer film and media have once again become more political—and politicized. (Grundmann, 2017: 33)

As the film industry became more political and politicized, this brought complaints and resentments on behalf of some, especially conservative circles who refused to accept the cultural, social, and economic circumstances that were changing Hollywood and the film industry. Nevertheless, the fact that there is still a lack of

diversity —either sexual diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity, and so on— both in and out of the screen is proof of the importance of politicizing the media and an industry that still faces a lack of diversity and a lack of opportunities that are not given to people that are willing to tell stories worth-telling. However, this inclusivity has not been as welcoming when it comes to recognizing the achievements and importance that LGBT stories have had. For instance, the Academy Award category for Best Picture, considered the highest and most important film award in Hollywood, has only seen five LGBT-related films in the last decade being nominated for the award out of a total of 88 nominees. Out of the five films that deal directly with LGBT issues or portray important LGBT relationships and that managed to break the barrier between LGBT and mainstream audiences, only one of them received enough recognition and acclaim to become a Best Picture winner.

Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight* (2016) went down in history after winning Best Picture in the 89th Academy Awards, becoming both the first all-black casted film and the first LGBT related film to be recognized with the highest accolade of the industry. The story is a coming-of-age drama based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* that presents the main character during three stages of his life —youth, adolescence and early adulthood— while he struggles and explores the difficulties with his identity and his sexuality. Its win, as every other award, is symbolical, but at the same time it is extremely important to recognize and acknowledge that black and LGBT stories can be good, and are actually good and worth telling. The fact that until 2017 this had not been recognized yet makes the politicisation of the film industry even more necessary, and the recognition of diversity linked with quality and importance is essential in order to establish a permanent presence in mainstream cinema.

With *Call Me by Your Name* something both unexpected and gratifying happened. Even though it started as an independent and low-budget production, a big production company acquired its distribution rights even before its festival premiere, placing their trust in a story portraying a gay romance. Sony Pictures Classics distributed the film after its premiere at different film festivals, including the Sundance Film Festival, where it received a standing ovation and the New York Film Festival, where it received the longest ovation in the festival's history. It started with a limited theatrical release on November 2017 that was followed by a general release on January 2018, doing remarkably good in the box office and becoming the third-highest-grossing film of the distribution company that year. After a universal critical acclaim and a good theatrical run, the film played an important role during its award season, being recognized with four Academy Awards nominations and winning one. However, it lost Best Picture to *The Shape of Water* (2017), projecting a similar trajectory than the one *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) had twelve years before. Regardless its resolution at the Oscars, *Call Me by Your Name* was included in many "best of the 2010s" film lists, settling its presence in the industry permanently. In fact, the film became a phenomenon and received enough support and recognition that the studio production has ordered the development of a sequel, which is in early production, with Guadagnino set to direct.

It is not unprecedented, but it is still uncommon to see an LGBT film get the support of both the critics and the mainstream audience, or at least still uncommon enough to attract attention just for having support and recognition. Most of them go under the radar with the support of the critics, remaining unacknowledged by the mainstream crowds and therefore staying limited to a specific audience, like recent lesbian romance *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), written and directed by Céline Sciamma. However, it has also been demonstrated that LGBT narratives can reach

mainstream audiences and be acknowledged by their quality, therefore leaving a mark both within the LGBT community and the film industry. If it has been proved that LGBT stories can be a success, like *Brokeback Mountain*, *Moonlight* and *Call Me by Your Name* were in the past years, it is alarming that there is still a lack of diversity and opportunities in an industry that has proven to be ready for these stories but that sadly still does not want to take their side.

3. Conclusions and further research

This dissertation has analysed and studied how the film adaptation of *Call Me by Your Name* creates a different version of the story while respecting it. I have argued that the differences between the film and the novel are what make this story such a complex and interesting one to analyse. However, some of these differences and creative decisions have been criticised, creating controversies and debates. Still, the final result of the film projects deep love towards the novel in which it is based, and even if different, the result is a very interesting and unique audio-visual piece that tells a story that until now had not been thoroughly studied within the academic field.

In the second part of the dissertation I have explored the impact and importance that this film has had within the LGBT community and within the film industry, stating that this story projects a positive image of what an LGBT coming-of-age story should ideally be: one based on support and acceptance without negative connotations attached to one's feelings. Furthermore, I have analysed the role that its predecessors have had both within LGBT cinema and mainstream cinema, concluding that there is still an alarming lack of diversity in the film industry and that even if the gap between mainstream and LGBT cinema has been reduced during the last years, there is still a lot to be done so that LGBT stories can be told and perceived with the respect and attention they deserve.

It is my complete belief that there are enough stories worth telling that do not receive the attention they should due to the lack of opportunities inside the film industry. However, this dissertation cannot include them nor study in detail the problems that the film industry faces regarding diversity. Therefore, for further research I would suggest to analyse more in detail the history of LGBT cinema and concretely

the history of modern LGBT cinema in order to get to the bottom of why an industry that has seen success when has sporadically bet for diversity does not do it more often.

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