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Nuance and Intimacy

One part of adolescence is figuring out the self and the future self, but another part of adolescence is learning to explain and understand emotions of intimacy. *Call Me By Your Name* directed by Luca Guadagnino is a coming of age tale in which, a teenager, Elio learns to love for the first time. In this process, he discovers not only his sexuality but also how to be intimate with a partner. The person Elio falls in love with for the first time is Oliver, a graduate student who stays at Elio's house over the summer in order to help Elio's father, Professor Perlman, in his studies. Unlike other cliché films that deal with the subject of queer sexual orientation in which the protagonist and his lover has to fight through obstacles of discrimination, Elio and Oliver face no such difficulties despite the fact that the film is set in 1983. Through the depiction of Elio and Oliver in a queer utopia, the film takes the focus away from the performative roles of gender in expressing emotions: the film calls the readers to question the previously gendered narratives on love and focus on the conveyance of affection itself. **Through presenting indirect expressions of love through music, language, clothing, and silence, *Call Me By Your Name* illustrates how nuance can be an effective way of communicating feelings of intimacy.**

One way through which nuance is used to convey Elio's feelings towards Oliver is through the use of music. Through playing different variations of the same song, Elio is able to

convey his feelings. As Elio and Oliver are in the pool, Bach's Capriccio in B flat minor plays in the background. After they get out of the pool, Elio plays the song on the guitar, but in a way that is slower, more melodramatic, more poignant. Oliver then asks him to play the song again.

Instead of playing the song the way he first played it, Elio alters it twice: first in the way that Liszt would have played it, then in the way Busoni would have played it. His alterations are a lot louder, firmer, and faster than he played it the first time. Only when Oliver pretends to walk away does Elio finally play the song the way he played it originally. This scene is symbolic of the way in which Elio finally gives up the facade of apathy and starts to acknowledge the way he really feels about Oliver. The transition of the nondiegetic sound to diegetic sound is metonymically associated with this disclosure and further reinforces the way Elio feels towards Oliver. The realization of Elio's affection towards Oliver is epitomized in the following scene in which Elio watches the Oliver dance. In the scene, the camera cuts back and forth between Oliver dancing and Elio staring intensely at Oliver. When the song "Love My Way" comes on, the shot shows Elio staring at Oliver, and it is slightly out of focus; then, it cuts to Oliver dancing and then back to Elio staring at him as Elio slowly comes in to focus. This scene illustrates how Elio grows to acknowledge his feelings towards Oliver. After this shot, Elio moves into the frame with Oliver, representing his attempt to get closer to him emotionally and physically. Through playing different variations of the same song, the film shows how nuances in music is used to, not only express but help Elio realize the way he feels about Oliver as can be seen through the scenes that follow.

***Call Me By Your Name* uses nuance in language in addition to nuance in sound to highlight Elio's affection towards Oliver.** To be specific, nuance in meaning across different languages is used to hint at the way Elio feels. An example of this can be found when Elio's mother reads *Heptameron* out loud to her son and husband, but the only copy she has is in German so she decides to translate the book for Elio. She reads, "Despite the friendship—*freundschaft*—that blossoms between them [...] the young knight finds himself so humbled and speechless that he is totally unable to bring up the subject of his love." When she says the word friendship, she locks eyes with her husband and they both say the German word *freundschaft* at the same time because they know that the word can stand for both romantic and platonic relationships. This shade of ambiguity that does not exist in the connotations of the word friendship in the English language is analogous to Elio and Oliver's relationship at that point in the film. This parallel to their relationship is further solidified when Elio says "I'd never have the courage to [tell her how I feel]" through which he expresses how he is unable to let Oliver know about how he feels. As can be seen, the film illustrates that subtle shades of meaning that is exhibited in different ways across different languages can be used to communicate the complex feelings of intimacy that is difficult to articulate properly.

Another way in which subtle variation is used to convey meaning is through the lower angle shots of Oliver combined with the way that Elio dresses. Unlike the other characters, most if not all of the close-up shots of Oliver are filmed from a low angle. As the film is very much Elio's narrative, this angle depicts Elio's sense of admiration and desire to be like Oliver. This idea highlighted by the metonymy that is further developed as Elio starts to dress

like Oliver. Elio not only starts to wear the necklace with David's star after he notices Oliver wearing it, but he also starts to dress more like Oliver as the film progresses and Elio even goes so far as to ask Oliver for his shirt. This icon is a code of Elio's idolization of and identification with Oliver. This sense of identification with each other is obviously a central theme in the film as can be seen through the film's title *Call Me By Your Name* which is taken from the iconic line in the film: "Call me by your name, and I'll call you by mine." Through this single sentence, Oliver is able to summarize their relationship: this request should be read as an allusion to the Greek mythology that humans were created as four-legged, two-faced creatures that were split apart by Zeus and condemned to spend life searching for one's other half. Oliver intimates that the two are soulmates, two parts of a whole, one identity as opposed to two, another example of intimation in delivery of intimate feelings. This idea is underscored through another scene in which Oliver mimics Elio's perversion. Soon after he has his first sexual experiences, Elio digs the pit out of a peach and proceeds to masturbate. He then falls asleep. Oliver finds Elio sleeping and kisses his body and genitals. Very quickly, Oliver figures out what Elio has done and Elio shamefully mutters "I'm sick aren't I?". In response to Elio, Oliver asks "You want to see something sick?" and takes a bite out of the peach that Elio masturbated with. By reciprocating Elio's action that may have been considered to be "sick" or perverted, Oliver is also able to express his identification with and connection Elio. As can be seen, without directly expressing their feelings, the two characters are able to portray how they feel that they complete one another. Through these diverse and subtle ways of expression, Oliver and Elio are able to communicate their feelings towards one another.

The most compelling way through which *Call Me By Your Name* uses nuance to deliver emotion is through the nuance of silence. Through silence, the film effectively sheds light on Elio's facial expressions, showing how extended silence can be so pregnant of emotion despite the lack of any spoken words. In the last scene, Elio gets a call from Oliver in the winter, and Oliver without much hesitation tells him that he is getting married to someone in the spring. After wishing him congratulations Elio sits down by the fire. In the close-up last shot of the film, Elio cries silently while staring into the burning fire for almost five minutes. The cackling sound of the fireplace further highlights the lack of dialogue in the scene. This silence is accompanied with an expressionistic soft focus that allows the audience to better concentrate on the Elio's facial expressions and empathize with the emotions that he is experiencing. At first, he smiles weakly towards the fire; then, the smile slowly fades as he bites his lip and grimaces. His facial expressions convey his shifting emotions of remembrance, heartbreak, grief, and acceptance. The length of the shot allows the audience to witness the sequence of emotions that fills the silence, illustrating the ways through which emotions that come at the end of a relationship, as a result of emotional and physical intimacy can be expressed through a lengthy, pregnant, and nuanced silence.

As illustrated previously, *Call Me By Your Name* portrays the love story of Elio and Oliver in which Elio learns how to be intimate with someone and how to express that feeling of closeness. By the construction of the film through concise, and borderline curt, dialogue, the film explores alternative ways through which emotions can be expressed, much unlike the hackneyed, much explored ways of the delivery of feelings through direct expression

of dialogue. Despite the fact that the two characters never confess their love towards one another, the audience is left with a strong belief that the two are in love. This illustrates how powerful nuance is as a mechanism through which emotions of intimacy can be portrayed. Through the expression of their emotions through music, nuanced words, clothing and silence, Elio and Oliver are able to show not tell each other how they feel. At the same time, Elio spends so much time wondering if what he wishes to convey to Oliver is delivered properly. Elio's relatable innocent and unskilled attempts in delivering his emotions is further encourages the readers to empathize with the difficulties of an individual first learning to deal with the enigma of nuance: nuanced deliveries of emotion are always up to interpretation and hence is always up to misinterpretation. The film displays the beauty of subtlety in the expression of love: the uncertainty, the detail, the ambiguity, and the strength of nuance, ultimately calling upon its audience to pay more attention to the subtle nuances that may exist in their lives.

Work Cited

Call Me By Your Name. Directed by Guadagnino, Luca, Performances by Timothee Chalamet and Armie Hammer, Farrar, Frenesy Film Company, Warner Brothers, 2017.