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A New Yorker Film Critic Should Be Fired!

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, December 6th, 2017

Richard Brody's November 28, 2017 review "[The Empty, Sanitized Intimacy of 'Call Me by Your Name'](#)" is an exercise in morbid vengeance. Although he has nothing particularly good to say about anyone associated with the film, the main focus of his venom appears to be director Luca Guadagnino.

It offers, in theory, a sort of melancholy romantic realism. But, as rendered by Guadagnino, it remains at the level of a premise, a pitch, an index card.

... Guadagnino has no interest in showing a broad view of the location, because of his bland sensibility and flimsy directorial strategy, because of his relentless delivery of images that have the superficial charm of picture postcards...Guadagnino rarely lets himself get close to the characters, because he seems to wish never to lose sight of the expensive architecture, the lavish furnishings, the travelogue locations, the manicured lighting, the accoutrements that fabricate the sense of 'order and beauty, luxury, calm, and sensuality.' All that's missing is the Web site offering Elio-and-Oliver tours through the Italian countryside, with a stopover at the Perlman villa.

Brody is a philistine impervious to emotional encounter. The reality is quite different! This film is an exquisite evocation of "summer love," an experience that some of us have been fortunate enough to recall – sometimes with embodied ecstasy. It generally occurs in romantic or exotic locations: Tuscany, Greece, Provence, Maine, Vermont, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Big Sur, Bali, and other places around the globe where it is possible to become detached from daily affairs and to concentrate on the intimacy of personal interaction in an environment that evokes a celestial paradise.

From its inception, it is understood by both parties that this is an intense, but temporary affiliation and that on its conclusion, both parties return to their previously unaffiliated lives. However, this, in no way, can diminish the intensity of emotions shared by the partners in this episode.

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Ordinarily, "summer love" has been an experience shared by adolescent males and females. In this film, we are presented with a male to male romance in which the participants are not necessarily

gay. Elio shuttles between male and female lovers and Oliver informs Elio that he is getting married. As a footnote, we now know that summer love is not restricted to adolescent males and females, but that it is also a practice in gay and lesbian communities.

Summer love requires an earthly paradise as its background. Guadagnino and his associates have managed to create such glorious, sensuous and comfortable physical environments in which the film unfolds whether it be the lush interiors of the Perlman's house, the surrounding fields and the town center with its cathedral and associated commercial enterprises. Although the film was shot in Lombardy not Tuscany, we are afforded a full scale adaptation of Frances Mayes' *Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life* with the Perlman's house and gardens as our Tuscan simulators.

Brody continues, "Near the end of the film, Professor Perlman delivers a monologue to Elio that concentrates the movie's sap of intellectualized understanding and empathy into a rich and potent Oscar syrup. The speech is moving and wise; Stuhlbarg's delivery of it, in inflection and gesture, is finely burnished. Here, Guadagnino's direction is momentarily incisive, in a way that it has not been throughout the film, perhaps because the professor's academicized liberalism toward matters of sex is the one thing that truly excites the director. The entire film is backloaded—and it's nearly emptied out in order for him to lay his cards, finally, on the table."

What a concession from Brody! Disregarding Brody's minimizing its import. Perlman offers a quasi parental sermon laced with intellectual comprehension and emotional stability. Like the blaring horns in a symphony, It provides a fitting grand finale for the film.

Call Me by Your Name is a stunning tribute to the director and his collaborators. Unquestionably, this is a visually rich, emotionally laden, wonderful film supported by the convincing performances of its leading characters that deserves all of the praise that it has already been accorded.

I am perplexed by a subsequent review in *The New Yorker* by Anthony Lane dated November 24, 2017, "['Call Me by Your Name': An Erotic Triumph](#)." Its subtitle reads "Luca Guadagnino's latest film is emotionally acute and overwhelmingly sensual." Although Lane's review antedates Brody's, the later appeared on my screen on November 30, for the first time – two days after Brody's. Perhaps some managing editor at *The New Yorker* wanted to compensate for Brody's gross insensitivity and evident irrationality?

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