

Homoerotism in *Call me by your name*, by André Aciman

Homoerotismo em *Me chame pelo seu nome* de André Aciman

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Resumo: É um fato inegável que o número de obras homoeróticas tem crescido nas últimas décadas de acordo com muitas razões que incluem, por exemplo, a Revolução Sexual iniciada nos entornos dos anos 70, bem como a despatologização da atração física e afetiva pelo mesmo sexo e/ou gênero. Além disso, outros aspectos importantes foram os movimentos para enfatizar a chamada “Revolução Sexual”, como parte dos Estudos de Gênero, liderada principalmente pela comunidade LGBTQIA+ e, conseqüentemente, o afrouxamento, ainda que resistente, da represália social contra as formas antes consideradas desviantes de sexualidade. Portanto, objetivamos analisar *Me chame pelo seu nome* (2007), de André Aciman, que narra a atração e desejo entre o narrador-personagem Elio, um rapaz italiano de dezesseis anos, e Oliver, um estudante estadunidense de vinte e quatro. Para tal proposta, consideramos como suporte teórico autores como Bataille (2020), Costa (1992), Barcellos (2006), Foucault (2020) e Richardson e Robinson

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(2020), de modo a compreender como o conceito de homoerotismo pode ser interpretado na obra considerando desejo, continuidade, vontades internas e, especialmente, demonstrará como a morte desempenha um papel principal nos movimentos eróticos.

Palavras-chave: *Me chame pelo seu nome*; Homoerotismo; Desejo.

Abstract: It is an undeniable fact that the number of homoerotic novels has been growing in the last decades according to many reasons that include, for instance, the Sexual Revolution started around the '70s, as well as the despathologization of same-sex and/or gender physical and affective attraction. Besides that, other important aspects were the movements to highlight the so-called "The Sexual Revolution", as part of Gender Studies, led mainly by the LGBTQIA+ community and, consequently, the fleetingness, yet resistant, of society reprisal towards the so-considered deviant manifestation of sexualities. Therefore, we aim to analyze *Call me by your name* (2007), by André Aciman, that narrates the desire and attraction between its narrator-character Elio, a seventeen year-old Italian young boy, and Oliver, a twenty-four year-old American student. For this purpose, we consider as theoretical support of authors as Bataille (2020), Costa (1992), Barcellos (2006), Foucault (2020) and Richardson e Robinson (2020), in order to understand how the concept of homoerotism can be interpreted on this novel considering desire, continuity, internal urges and, specially, will demonstrate how death displays a key role on erotic movements.

Keywords: *Call me by your name*; Homoerotism; Desire.

Pre-coquere¹

It is possible to affirm that the number of literary productions that, despite the most diverse origins and configurations, might belong to the category of homoerotic pieces have grown enormously in the last decades. That is, those within two characters and, in some cases, three or more, considering the fact these individuals are (self)identified with the same gender or sex, engage in whether loving/affective or sexual relationships, sometimes both. Titles such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *Maurice* (1971) as well as recent titles such as *Brokeback Mountain* (1997) and *Aristotle and Dante discover the truths of the universe* (2012) for instance, have surfaced and flourished.

Therefore, in this current context, we have seen André Aciman's masterpiece, *Call me by your name* (2007), emerging. The plot surrounds the subterfuge of young Elio Pearlman, who lives endless summers in southern Italy with his parents in the early 1980s. Every year, Samuel, Elio's father, hosts at their house one graduate student from different countries that can develop academic research and postgraduate works while assisting Samuel on his daily correspondence. They live jumping from one *dinner drudgery* to another until the summer when an American student called Oliver comes in and everything starts to change. Oliver's self-confidence as well as billowy shirts catch Elio's interest since the first sight and, to his and the reader's surprise, Oliver does develop very similar feelings.

In this sense, this research analyzes, reasoned on authors such as Bataille (2020), Costa (1992), Barcellos (2006) and Foucault (2020), how the two main characters, Elio and Oliver, manifest or not their ho-

1. The Latin word that means precocious, in this case, refers to the introductory theoretical discussion as it precedes the main discussion.

moerotism throughout their words and actions towards each other. In order to fulfill this main purpose, we aim to establish parallels between the relationship between the protagonists to the model of Ancient-Greek *pederastia* in accordance to Foucault (2020) proposals related to the *erômenos* and *erastês* relationship; at the same time, the discussions progress in order to analyze, within the context of erotism as proposed by Bataille (2020) as well as Homoerotism as suggested by Costa (1992), how the protagonists' desire movements are strictly connected to death as an epistemological category considering the battle discontinuous creatures develop in an attempt to achieve continuity.

For that purpose, it makes necessary a previous reading of the novel through the lens of analysis, especially homoerotism as set out by Costa (1992). In other means, the data will be collected through reflexive and analytical reading of the novel, in accordance with the theoretical contributions. It will be identified as data to research any and every literary element (character, plot, time etc.) that can support and/or be supported by the theoretical texts.

This analysis, using a qualitative approach, intends to research, analyze and interpret a bibliographical work. Therefore, it manifests a qualitative nature, according to Gerhardt & Silveira (2009) is not concerned about numbers or quantities, on the other hand, and does concern argumentation about ideas. Still to Gerhardt & Silveira (2009, p. 31 apud Minayo, 2001), this type of research aims “the universe of meaning, reasons, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper place in relationships”².

In the first section, we will reflect theoretically on how to create an operational approach to analyze the novel. In the section entitled “If

2. “o universo de significados, motivos, aspirações, crenças, valores e atitudes, o que corresponde a um espaço mais profundo das relações”, in the original.

not now, when?”, we will present the analysis of the *corpus* data. The third and last section concerns final thoughts as well as brief review to this investigation.

The bottom of discussion

This section will be organized in the following manner: firstly, it will be discussed how language produces and affects our perspective concerning a subject to decide (or not) which term would be more appropriate to describe the characters’ relationships; in the second section, we intend to briefly summarize, under the light Battaile (2020) the concept of desire.

Elaborating an operational approach

Many terms have been used so far to address the fact that two men can engage into a relationship and, in other times, even the absence terminology as in “the love that dares not speak its name”, concept introduced by Lord Alfred Douglas, English writer Oscar Wild’s affair, in 1892 in his poem *Two loves* in an attempt to address a type of connection that was considered culturally unpronounceable. As pointed out by Costa (1992), the usage of different words to refer to these relationships produce different types of subjectivities and, yet different forms of identification from the subjects to them.

The author also affirms “we are what language allows us; we believe in what it allows us so and just language can make us accept something as familiar, natural, or the opposite, repudiate as strange, abnormal

or threatening”³ (Costa, 1992, p.18, our translation), namely, language not only voices the subject’s internal worlds, but also produces realities and the world around them. Furthermore, lexical expressions are supposedly a tool that can be used to recognise other individuals and how they behave together to their manner of thinking.

In this sense, what Costa (1992) wants to highlight is that a specific term refers back to the time as context it was created and, therefore, produces an identity that is evoked every time this concept is used to refer to a subject. In the case when the terms homosexuality/homosexualism are utilized, they are evoking the figure of the XIX century “homosexual” depicted by the medical language; a mentally ill person interned in a psychiatric clinic to be “cured” and studied.

This might prove right one of the assumptions of this research concerning the fact neither the *CMBYN*⁴ characters nor its author made it necessary to point out a designation for what Elio and Oliver feel towards each other; it is not necessary to name what they feel because, when we name it, we confine it.

Nevertheless, it is also demanding to mention that the absence of terms also produce realities and subjectivities, therefore, one cannot delimit where this lack of self-designation from the characters is a refusal to decrease their possibility of manifesting desire or if they are remaining it to the “closet”, in this sense, Barcellos (2006) affirms

The “closet” is, therefore, a structure that hides at the same time exposes homoeroticism, in the manner it imprisons in a discursive economy in which silence and speaking, the game of saying or not, knowing and

3. “Nós como ele somos aquilo que a linguagem nos permite ser; acreditamos naquilo que ela nos permite acreditar e só ela pode fazer-nos aceitar algo do outro como familiar, natural, ou pelo contrário, repudiá-lo como estranho, antinatural e ameaçador”, in the original.

4. Henceforth, abbreviation for *Call me by your name* (2007).

being unknown, implicit or explicit, point to complex configurations of identity, subjectivity, truth, knowledge and language, that cross all cultural tissue of modernity and resonate on social and personal life scale (Barcellos, 2006, p. 61 – our translation)⁵.

It is important to mention that, although, in some manner, the main character seems to show awareness of what sort of subjectivity his desire produces, or at least of his own, in passages as, for instance, “that someone else in my immediate world might like what I liked, want what I wanted, *be who I was*.” (Aciman, 2007, p. 24 - our emphasis), he does not seem to bother mentioning a category or concept for it.

The only time their relationship is expressed under a term in the novel is when Samuel, Elio’s father, describes what they had as a “nice friendship” (Aciman, 2007, p. 198) which, despite the fact of reducing the potential of homoerotic relationships, for a very long time was the title used to describe these subjectivities and their interconnections. In this sense, Trevisan (2018) affirms:

If the cultural standardisation of sexuality in many occasions produced the desire for non-interchangeable forms, the nature of every subject might propose the opposite: a desirable universe almost unlimited within its inventiveness. The sublimation of the so-called “perversions” show how desire always finds its ways, even against the tide (Trevisan, 2018, p. 29)⁶.

5. “O ‘armário’ é assim uma estrutura que esconde e ao mesmo tempo expõe o homoerotismo, na medida em que o aprisiona numa economia discursiva em que o silêncio e a fala, o jogo entre dizer e não dizer, saber e não saber, implícito e explícito, apontam para complexas configurações entre identidade, subjetividade, verdade, conhecimento e linguagem, que atravessam todo o tecido cultural da modernidade e têm profundas ressonâncias na vida social e pessoal”, in the original.

6. “Se as padronizações culturais da sexualidade muitas vezes reduziram o desejo a formas não intercambiáveis, a natureza de cada indivíduo pode propor o contrário: um universo desejante quase ilimitado na sua inventividade. As sublimações e as chamadas “perversões” mostram como o desejo sempre encontra seus caminhos, mesmo contra a corrente”, in the original.

By other means, what Trevisan (2018) highlights is that our desires are stronger and move way further than cultural structures prescribe in this attempt to (re)produce commodities in an essentialist perspective, to paraphrase the Marxian thought; therefore, acts in a liberatory as well as potentially subversive movement against the frameworks of each period. In Samuel's, the protagonist's father, words, "Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot" (Aciman, 2007. p. 180). That is, these urges work as force that comes from our subconscious, to recall the Freudian thought, and are more complex than human comprehension might have shed light upon.

Desire as a way to draw the last breath

In his concerns, Bataille (2020) starts by defining the terms he introduced as: discontinuous and continuous creatures. The former, regards the whole group of beings that do not manifest immortality and, consequently, die, this includes all humankind, for example, the latter, the creatures that have the capacity to overcome death, that is, no known form of life has yet achieved so. Thereupon,

The problem emerged face to death, which precedes apparently the discontinuous creature in the continuity of being. This point of view does not oppose the principle of spirit, however death, as destruction of a discontinuous being, does not affect the continuity of being at all, that exists, usually, outside us. I do not forget, in the desire for immortality, what is on the game is the preoccupation to ensure survival in discontinuity – the survival

of the personal matter -, but I put this subject aside (Bataille, 2020, p. 48 – our translation and emphasis)⁷.

It is possible to infer, hence, that death plays an important key in this phenomenon, as it is the drawing line between continuity and discontinuity, functioning like a violent wreck for the desperation of the second for living eternally, as pointed out by Bataille (2020). Accordingly, the reproductive cycles, sexual and asexual, emerge as results of this natural urge of discontinuous life forms for continuity. They do accomplish their aim, yet, partially as long as the survival of the species is guaranteed through the death of the individuals.

In this regard, what is stated about another term, erotism, is very close to the first (desire):

The essence of erotism is, thus, to be transgressive for excellence, once it is the result of human sexual activity as pleasure and, at the same time, awareness of the interdict. [...] That point when human kind is at the same time social and animal, human and nonhuman, beyond themselves (Bataille, 2020, p. 35 – our translation)⁸.

The way discontinuity found to ensure continuity is by reproductive cycles that produce prole in order to maintain life breathing. If we pro-

7. “O problema surgiu diante da morte, que precipita aparentemente o ser descontínuo na continuidade do ser. Esta maneira de ver não se impõe desde o princípio ao espírito, entretanto a morte, sendo a destruição de um ser descontínuo, não afeta em nada a continuidade do ser, que existe, geralmente, fora de nós. Eu não esqueço que, no desejo de imortalidade, o que entra em jogo é a preocupação de assegurar a sobrevivência na descontinuidade – a sobrevivência do ser pessoal—, mas eu deixo a questão de lado”, henceforth translation by Fernando Scheibe.

8. “A essência do erotismo é, assim, ser a transgressão por excelência, dado que ele é resultado da atividade sexual humana enquanto prazer e, ao mesmo tempo, consciência do interdito. [...] Aquele ponto em que o homem é ao mesmo tempo social e animal, humano e inumano, além de si mesmo”.

gress on Bataille's (2020) discussion, it is possible to affirm for its closeness to death, society created many interdicts regarding sexual activity.

Some transgressions, for what he titled interdicts, however, are very common and sometimes even socially conventional. This comes from sexual activity for reproduction itself: a male and female that unite their body and fluids in order to produce offspring. On the other hand, all the other types of intercourse and copulation were socially excluded as a type of transgression that could not be tolerated. As "the mechanisms of discursive constructions, present in social institutions, dominate the individuals and incentive them to interiorize the formula of gender exclusion which are outside the heterosexual norm" (Camargo, 2017, p. 15 – our translation)⁹.

Oppositely, desire, as Bataille (2020, p. 13) affirmed, manifests, as "in order to make it clear within them what is on purpose [of desire] is always to replace the isolation of creature, in its discontinuity, by a feeling of deep continuity"¹⁰. In this context, erotism emerges as the machinery, internal urge, that drives these discontinuous creatures towards sexual activity and, hence, survival despite its transgressive nature.

Methodology

This research has a bibliographical nature, once, according to Gil (2017) this type of inquiry concerns "a material already existing, composed mainly by books and scientific articles. Although almost every research needs some type of work of this nature, there are researches

9. "Os mecanismos de construções discursivas, presentes nas instituições sociais, dominam os sujeitos e os incentivam a interiorizar as formas de exclusão de gênero que foge da norma heterossexual"

10. "a fim de deixar bem claro que nelas o que está sempre em questão é substituir o isolamento do ser, a sua descontinuidade, por um sentimento de continuidade profunda".

developed exclusively from bibliographical foundations” (Gil, 2017, p. 33)¹¹. Yet, to Gil, researches such as these “are also produced specially based on material already published, researches related to the proposals of a certain author and aims to analyze different positions in relation to a certain subject” (Gil, 2017, p. 33)¹². In our case, the material already produced, in Gil’s (2017) words, relates to *CMBYN* which was published in 2007.

In addition, Durão (2020) proposes in his thesis that literary research can “be expressed through the following equation: *literary research = interpretation + academic apparatus*. This formula, however, must be considered in dynamics, once the addition here alters the meaning of the items when taken individually” (Durão, 2020, p. 20 - emphasis by the author)¹³. Still to the author, if the movements of interpretation demand some freedom in order to flourish, on the other hand, it is imperative that these movements be reasoned on previous literature in order to facilitate the interpretation itself.

It is proposed to study André Aciman’s romance *Call me by your name* (2007), it intends to address the novel as well as its elements, from two different perspectives: firstly, we aim to establish parallels between the relationship between the protagonists to the model of Ancient-Greek *pederastia* in accordance to Foucault (2020) proposals related to the *erômenos* and *erastês* relationship; at the same time, the

11. “Um material já existente, composto principalmente por livros e artigos científicos. Embora quase toda pesquisa necessita de algum tipo de trabalho dessa natureza, existem pesquisas desenvolvidas exclusivamente de fundações bibliográficas”, in the original.

12. “Também são elaboradas principalmente com base em material já publicado, as pesquisas referentes ao pensamento de determinado autor e as que se propõem a analisar posições diversas em relação a determinado assunto”, in the original.

13. “Ser expressada pela seguinte fórmula: *pesquisa literária = interpretação + aparato acadêmico*. A fórmula, no entanto, deve ser considerada de modo dinâmico, pois a adição aqui altera o sentido dos itens quando tomados isoladamente”, in the original.

discussions progress in order to analyze, within the context of erotism as proposed by Bataille (2020) as well as Homoerotism as suggested by Costa (1992), how the protagonists' desire movements are strictly connected to death as an epistemological category considering the battle discontinuous creatures develop in an attempt to achieve continuity.

Therefore, the *corpus* data was collected through two means: a) compulsory reading of the novel to be analyzed; b) reading and further interpretation of the novel, in the perspective of Homoerotism within Gender Studies, were made considerations especially under the light of philosophers as Foucault and Bataille, having on the horizon the aim to investigate the web made of desire and death the protagonists build through their erotic movements.

If not now, when?

If one looks back in history, it would be possible to affirm that not always homoerotic relationships were perceived with such negative value as in Judaic-Christian societies of today, instead, in some periods and cultures it has been even emphasized and cultivated.

As proposed by Foucault (2020), the Ancient-Greek civilization had a very distinctive way of dealing with relationships between two men as they “were considered totally normal and even part of their condition” (p. 240). Indeed, homoerotic connections among men were socially common and intertwined with status, power and, even, shaping of new citizens to the Greek polis.

In spite of a strict configuration as well as stylistics: the receptive role usually being frowned upon, disqualification of effeminate men, limited by age, in other words, an older man entitled as *erastês* would court his younger apprentice known as *erômenos* in order to introduce

the later to social and civil life, and, finally, set to last until the *erômenos* becomes a fully grown-up man; an older male cultivating the love of his lad would not be uncommon. To Ancient-Greece civilians, cultivating the love for a subject of the same sex or opposite was a free choice concerning what was beautiful there was to be desirable.

In spite of being a fictional work, it is not possible to go unnoticed how the protagonists of *CMBYN* relationship resembles the Greek model of *pederastia*¹⁴. The narrator is a few years younger than his affair, Oliver, and, through the novel, the latter is responsible for introducing Elio to adult life as long as the protagonist seems not to share much knowledge concerning intercourse and adulthood in general. In his own words, the main character declares “I’m not wise at all. I told you, I know nothing. I know books, and I know how to string words together—it doesn’t mean I know how to speak about the things that matter most to me” (Aciman, 2007, p. 64).

Additionally, for this model of relationship, as argued by Foucault (2020), in the *erastês* and *erômenos* bond, the courtship displays a vital element as:

The first (*erastês*) stands in the position of initiative, he chases, what promotes rights and duties: he has to show his ardour, and also moderate it; he gives gifts, offers services; has functions to execute in relation to his affair; and all of these actions enable him to expect the just reward; the later (*erômenos*), who is loved and courted, must avoid to give way easily; must also avoid accepting too many different honours, accept their favours blindly or moved by interest, without putting to prove the worth of their

14. This term is originally used to describe homoerotic relationships between an adult man and a teenager in Ancient-Greek civilization.

partner; also must manifest recognition for what the lover did for him (Foucault, 2020, p. 242)¹⁵.

It is possible to infer that the novel also manifests this ritual of courtship in a diversity of elements. The main character appears to court his object of desire since the very first exchanges as he expresses in “that I had all along, without seeming to, without even admitting it, already been trying - and failing - to win him over” as well as “we were - and he must have recognized the signs long before I did - flirting” (Aciman, 2007, p. 10 and 13). Although, as long as the model of *pederastia* emphasizes the role the *erastês* displays in this conjuncture, we shall concentrate on the aspects of the narrative that demonstrate how Oliver takes place in this courtship as well as reveals initiative and veiled devotion.

When it comes to that aspect, we should recall the scene where Elio’s object of desire unpretentiously offers him a shoulder massage. Thus:

The next day we were playing doubles, and during a break, as we were drinking Mafalda’s lemonades, *he put his free arm around me and then gently squeezed his thumb and forefingers into my shoulder in imitation of a friendly hug-massage—the whole thing very chummy-chummy. But I was so spellbound that I wrenched myself free from his touch, because a moment longer and I would have slackened like one of those tiny wooden toys whose gimp-legged body collapses as soon as the mainsprings are touched. Taken aback, he apologised and asked if he had*

15. “O primeiro tem a posição da iniciativa, ele persegue, o que lhe dá direitos e obrigações: ele tem que mostrar seu ardor, e também tem que moderá-lo; ele dá presentes, presta serviços; tem funções a exercer com relação ao amado; e tudo isso o habilita a esperar a justa recompensa; o outro, o que é amado e cortejado, deve evitar ceder com muita facilidade; deve também evitar aceitar demasiadas honras diferentes, conceder seus favores às cegas e por interesse, sem pôr à prova o valor de seu parceiro; também deve manifestar reconhecimento pelo que o amante fez por ele”.

pressed a “nerve or something”—he hadn’t meant to hurt me. He must have felt thoroughly mortified if he suspected he had either hurt me or touched me the wrong way. The last thing I wanted was to discourage him (Aciman, 2007, p. 17).

In this sequence, it is possible to state that Oliver’s attitude of squeezing the main character’s shoulder attests his devotion that he shows in small doses in spite of attempts to maintain it veiled. Additionally, it declares that he is also feeling tempted to touch Elio’s body, otherwise, he would not touch the protagonist without prior request. It is important to note that, though, the context these homoerotic relationships flourish determine the possible manifestations of erotism according to Costa (1992) proposes, therefore, Oliver’s courtship seems to receive a veiled character due to the circumstances the story takes place.

The narrative begins with the most vivid memory Elio has of that 80’s summer, which he describes as the harsh, curve and dismissive way Oliver farewells people: “Later!” (Aciman, 2007, p. 7) is the unforgettable expression he uses. To the main character, it seems like this expression portrays Oliver’s unconcern to see somebody again. On the other hand, his way to farewell also makes a strict connection to a pre-orgasmic feeling of something always to come; not now, but maybe later.

Elio feels as a first impression of their guest, in his words, “thoroughly intimidated” (Aciman, 2007, p. 7). Or when he voices “I respected and feared him and hated him for making me hate myself” (Aciman, 2007, p. 40) as he starts to consider that he might like Oliver the same way Chiara, one of Pearlman’s neighbors that develops a brief romance with Oliver, does. It is also possible to affirm that this feeling is a result of desire itself, as discontinuous beings, desire approximates death and this aphorism is always disturbing one’s mind, even unconsciously. Eventually, our wish to survive does not decrease.

This erotic movement of knowing, not knowing, between explicit or implicit, approach and departure of the protagonist's object of desire is clear on how their homoeroticism seems to be clear at times, but completely covered at others. Elio himself utters on how this movement towards his object of desire seems to be non-linear, when he declares "Did I want him to act? Or would I prefer a lifetime of longing provided we both kept this little PingPong game going: not knowing, not-not knowing, not-not-not knowing?" (Aciman, 2007, p.18).

As the story moves forward, in the Monet's Berm scene, when they first kiss and Elio puts his hands on Oliver's genitals he finally admits that something was happening to him too and he was trying to keep it buried as secret as we read

"Yes, would. *I'm not going to pretend this hasn't crossed my mind.*" "I'd be the last to know." "Well, it has. There! What did you think was going on?" "Going on?" I fumbled by way of a question. "Nothing." I thought about it some more. "Nothing," I repeated, as if what I was vaguely beginning to get a hint of was so amorphous that it could just as easily be shoved away by my repeated "nothing" and thereby fill the unbearable gaps of silence. "Nothing." "I see," he finally said. "You've got it wrong, my friend"—chiding condescension in his voice. "If it makes you feel any better, *I have to hold back*. It's time you learned too." (Aciman, 2007, p. 66 – our emphasis).

This is a result of a process Elio had already gone through to admit his feelings to his homoerotic object a few scenes before when they were at the *piazzetta*. The lead character uses the story from a book he had read before from his father's library to produce a dialogue that is known as "If you only knew how little I know about the things that really matter" and borrows a quote from the book when a handsome

knight is attempting to confess to his lover and she asks him if “Is it better to speak or to die?” (Aciman, 2007, p. 60 and 54).

It is crucial to notice that this maximum specifically has a strong connection with Bataille’s (2020) proposal. As long as eroticism is strongly intertwined with death, it is possible to infer that the act of speaking about one’s desires will, eventually, approximate them of coming into full realization. Therefore, for this reason it becomes so dangerous to verbally address our most internal drives, once death seems to be lurking around the corner and waiting for the subjects of desire to slide on its web.

Furthermore, it is important to point out how desire usually manifests interest in body features of the erotic object and with Elio this is not much different. The protagonist seems to be aware of the smallest characteristic of Oliver’s body since the very first glance. Notice, in the following excerpts, how Elio describes in details specific Oliver’s body members,

It might have started right there and then: the shirt, the rolled-up sleeves, *the rounded balls of his heels* slipping in and out of his frayed espadrilles, eager to test the hot gravel path that led to our house, every stride already asking, *Which way to the beach?*

[...] despite a *light tan* acquired during his brief stay in Sicily earlier that summer, *the colour on the palms of his hands* was the same as *the pale, soft skin of his soles, of his throat, of the bottom of his forearms*, which hadn’t really been exposed to much sun. Almost a light pink, as glistening and smooth as the underside of a lizard’s belly. Private, chaste, unfledged, like a blush on an athlete’s face or an instance of dawn on a stormy night. It told me things about him I never knew to ask (Aciman, 2007, p. 7-9 – our emphasis).

These passages reveal how Oliver’s bodily parts become object of the starting process for the narrator to convert him into an object of

his erotic and desire attraction or *vice versa*. In sequence, Elio demonstrates that he is also paying attention to the bodies lounged after lunch and, supposedly, must spend a considerable time eroticizing his affair in bathing suits.

Another aspect regarding the bathing suits is that before bringing his erotism into full realization with his object of desire, the protagonist of *CMBYN*, led by an excitement, goes up to Oliver's room and rifling through his things, finds the red bathing suit that he had worn that morning hanging on a hook with Oliver's smell still clinging to it. In the following passage:

I brought the bathing suit to my face, then rubbed my face inside of it, as if I were trying to snuggle into it and lose myself inside its folds—So this is what he smells like when his body isn't covered in suntan lotion, this is what he smells like, this is what he smells like, I kept repeating to myself, looking inside the suit for something more personal yet than his smell and then kissing every corner of it, almost wishing to find hair, anything, to lick it, to put the whole bathing suit into my mouth, and, if I could only steal it, keep it with me forever (Aciman, 2007, p. 53).

In this excerpt, it becomes clear that the main character is going through a process of anticipation of the fulfillment of his homoerotic desires towards Oliver. It is possible to infer that he looks for the red bathing suit in an attempt to get his body closer to his object of desire and he even looks for a left hair to symbolically represent Oliver's body itself as he declares "on sniffing it, bring him back to life, as naked as he was with me at this very moment" (Aciman, 2007, p. 53). Subsequently, Elio ejaculates inside his affair bathing suit as erotism reaches an orgasmic movement that certainly is taunted by the risk of getting caught as he even states that maybe finding semen inside his bathing

suit would leave Oliver a message. Therefore, to the protagonist, he not only takes the risk of his affair finding the mark, but he wants him to. Few things could be more erotic than finding someone's semen on your underwear; Elio shows awareness of this signal very clearly.

The following extracts Elio reveals how much touch and skin started to be a special subject for him, as he considers his desire we read “when all I really wanted was skin, just skin.” or when he compares what he feels when Oliver touches him for the first time making a shoulder massage to what virgins feel on their first time as “on being touched for the first time by the person they desire: he stirs nerves in them they never knew existed and that produce far, far more disturbing pleasures than they are used to on their own.” (Aciman, 2007, p. 11 and 17).

In this excerpt, when Oliver squeezes his thumb and forefingers into Elio's shoulder, it is also possible to infer from the protagonist words how the smallest touch would make him so spellbound that Elio feels compelled to escape from his touch in order not to slack into small pieces and collapse, feeling that the main character named as “swoon” (Aciman, 2007, p. 19) when registering the event on his diary that night.

Elio later realizes that Oliver had arisen his interest even before he could be self-aware when he declares “[...] that I had all along, without seeming to, without even admitting it, already been trying—and failing—to win him over” or when Oliver admits the same as in “Nonsense. I wanted you from day one. I just hid it better” (Aciman, 2007, p. 11 and 121). This piece demonstrates, how pointed out before, that the protagonist's awareness and acceptance of his homoerotic object of desire do not follow a linear movement reaching high peaks in scenes like the one mentioned above, yet he slowly gives it away instead.

The first quote by the narrator can be understood by considering what he feels towards Oliver, as Bataille (2020) named for desire is already on the beginning of the novel when we read:

You see someone, but you don't really see him, he's in the wings. [...] and you're basically scrambling to come to terms with something, which, unbeknownst to you, has been brewing for weeks under your very nose and bears all the symptoms of what you're forced to call I want. 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, p. 11 – our emphasis).

As it is possible to notice the considerations inflicting the protagonist's thoughts are manifestation of the desire he already feels towards Oliver, even himself recognizes this when he uses the word “desire” in the attempt to describe internal phenomenon tangibly. The character also indicates that this is not the very first time he has felt like this before, however, the present seems to be in a different pattern as long as it was not recognizable easily at a glance, that is, it is the first time his movements of desire are homoerotic.

Another aspect to punctuate is related to the death atmosphere the desire and, possibly, sexual activity together have. When Bataille (2020) affirms

If the lover cannot possess the loved one, sometimes ponders to kill them: many times, they would rather kill than to lose. They want, in other cases, to die themselves. The point in this fury is the feeling of possible continuity apparent on the loved one. To the lover it seems that only the loved one — this is caused by correspondences hard to define, summed up by the possibility

of sensual joint to the joint of two hearts [...] (Bataille, 2020, p. 43 – our translation)¹⁶.

It is important to notice that it is the moment of the story when everyone thinks Oliver is dead by sinking at the sea, and Elio considers the hypothesis of death coming into their house, a fact which also recalls the death atmosphere eroticism and desire bring into one's life. What Bataille (2020) declares can be seen when the character says,

I wanted him gone from our home so as to be done with him. I wanted him dead too, so that if I couldn't stop thinking about him and worrying about when would be the next time I'd see him, at least his death would put an end to it. I wanted to kill him myself, even, so as to let him know how much his mere existence had come to bother me, [...] (Aciman, 2007. p. 41).

Also, when he considers around that time, “until I realized, almost to my shame, that part of me didn't mind his dying, that there was even something almost exciting in the thought of his bloated, eyeless body finally showing up on our shores” (Aciman, 2017, p. 38). It is demanding to point out that what is at stake here is the need of overcoming death and, consequently, reaching continuity by the discontinuous individuals who should deal with this desire as a life-long taking urge.

One unforgettable scene for readers that became unremarkable, even before the 2017 cinematic production, concerns the occasion when Elio, after sleeping in the afternoon, uses a peach to masturbate as an element that represents Oliver's bottom on his bedroom bed. For

16. “Se o amante não pode possuir o ser amado, algumas vezes pensa em matá-lo: muitas vezes ele preferiria matar a perdê-lo. Ele deseja em outros casos sua própria morte. O que está em jogo nessa fúria é o sentimento de uma continuidade possível percebida no ser amado. Ao amante parece que só o ser amado — isto tem por causa correspondências difíceis de definir, acrescentando à possibilidade de união sensual a união dos corações [...]”.

the protagonist, the peach resembled his erotic object's ass in color and texture as we read in the following extract

I saw one of them enter my room and reach for the fruit, and with the fruit in hand, come to my bed and bring it to my hard cock. *I know you're not sleeping*, they'd say, and gently press the soft, overripe peach on my cock till I'd pierced the fruit along the crease that reminded me so much of Oliver's ass. The idea seized me and would not let go. I got up and reached for one of the peaches, opened it halfway with my thumbs, pushed the pit out on my desk, and gently brought the fuzzy, blush colored each to my groin, and then began to press into it till the parted fruit slid down my cock (Aciman, 2007, p. 119).

This passage shows a moment in which the homoerotic tension of the protagonist reaches one of its highest peaks. What is remarkable about this quotation is that the fruit is not the object of desire itself until the moment Elio transfers the image of his object of desire into it as he affirms that the peach "reminded me so much of Oliver's ass" (Aciman, 2007, p. 119).

What is at stake here is that any erotic movement concerns the dissolution of our subjectivities, an attempt to transcend the discontinuous creatures that we are. In this case, for the protagonist, as in many cases, this dissolution comes to its apex when he ejaculates inside the peach. His gust symbolizes reaching what is most intimate in his subjective and, consequently, breaks with this close structure of being in a temporary promise of reaching out of oneself as pointed out by Bataille (2020).

Accordingly, this dissolution of oneself only presents as possible through the existence of the other, once this possibility only emerges due to the desire to share. This fact gets clear on Elio's words when considers moving forward, he declares "I want to know your body, I

want to know how you feel, I want to know you, and through you, me” (Aciman, 2007, p. 102).

All things considered, the main character’s homoerotic movements eventually reach a physical disclosure, as dissolution of himself by sharing experiences with the other, Oliver, gets the highest peak of what physical contact can promote: their first sexual act.

To this event, we will concentrate on two main aspects: firstly, on how one of the the protagonists during their sex scene, Oliver, suggests that they should address each other by their own names, fact that carries out the title of this romance, *CMBYN* (2007); on the other hand, it will be argued that the post-orgasmic sorrow as well as self-aversion Elio feels right after resurfaces this death figure to the equation.

When the night finally arrives, Elio takes part in a battle to move towards his destiny. The main character acknowledges that what is most dear to his heart is to move in the direction of the fulfilling his strongest desire, on the other hand, as proposed by Bataille (2020), he is also aware of the death atmosphere that grows on the horizon when he voices “I loved the boldness that was pushing me forward; it aroused me, because it was born of arousal itself. “*You’ll kill me* if you stop”—or was it: “*I’ll die* if you stop.” Each time I heard these words, I couldn’t resist (Aciman, 2007, p. 105).

Furthermore, the protagonists even recognizes that going to Oliver’s room and facing his destiny will have a deep effect on his self-narrative, that is, how he perceives himself in this world as he mutters “it’s way too late for anything tonight—rising to the major ones—*how will you face the others, how will you face yourself?*” (Aciman, 2007, p. 104 - our emphasis). And, of course, the biggest symbol of this change is the moment when, during sex, Elio and Oliver decide to start addressing each other by their own names as follows.

me and him, the longed-for words from his mouth to my mouth back into his mouth, swapping words from mouth to mouth, which was when I must have begun using obscenities that he repeated after me, softly at first, till he said, “*Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine,*” which I’d never done in my life before and which, *as soon as I said my own name as though it were his, took me to a realm I never shared with anyone in my life before, or since* (Aciman, 2007, p. 110 - our emphasis).

It is possible to state that by this very point *CMBYN* protagonists have shared the highest peak of self-dissolution as proposed by Bataille (2020). They are no longer separated subjectivities, but have turned, by sharing their bodies and guts, to the point where they are not able anymore to define what belongs to themselves or to another; at this point, there is no “other” anymore, but one single experience shared by two subjectivities that used to be closed. It does not matter anymore if during orgasm they are calling for their own name or not, once there are no more split subjects of desire, but one orgasmic encounter that blends them to each other.

Elio’s disgust seems to start right after their semen still fresh over and inside their bodies sparse in bed when he declares

It must have come to me a while later when I was still in his arms. It woke me up before I even realized I had dozed off, filling me with a sense of dread and anxiety I couldn’t begin to fathom. I felt queasy, as if I had been sick and needed not just many showers to wash everything off but a bath in mouthwash. I needed to be far away—from him, from this room, from what we’d done together. It was as though I were slowly landing from an awful nightmare but wasn’t quite touching the ground yet and wasn’t sure I wanted to, because what awaited was not going to be much better (Aciman, 2007, p. 110).

The protagonist's self-aversion as well as guilt emerge as ghosts to disturb his mind and the room's atmosphere of balance as a combination of nausea and remorse. These feelings give birth to another, even stronger, that starts to suffocate Elio, what he describes anxiety and those combined make him want to be away not only from Oliver, but also from himself. He needs time to digest the transgression to an interdict as Bataille (2020) points out and he is right when mutters "I would never be the same." (Aciman, 2007, p. 111). Later, Elio remarks by his own words, that the thing he most wants now is to take a shower expecting that the water will wash away what they just did. Although, he is not able to define clearly what it is, he is aware that what they did is a terrible transgression against discontinuity.

In order to sum up the subversive power of their transgression, we are going to make use of Elio's father, Samuel, own words: "Fear not. It will come. At least I hope it does. And when you least expect it. *Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot.*" (Aciman, 2007, p. 180 - our emphasis). It is demanding to state that in no way the protagonists' homoerotic relationship assumes a transgressive character due to its offensive character to the Judaic-Christian tradition, but to nature desire itself to win and, eventually, to survive.

Final thoughts

It is noticed, thereby, that this analysis, yet implicitly, followed a mishap of this long-lasting battle between life and death which manifests through elements like the existence of human beings, urges, sexual activity and desire.

Our discussions and analysis were scaffolded on the theoretical support used as lenses to comprehend some acts, emotions and even

thoughts of the characters that seemed ordinary. Even though it is patent some aspects were left out due to the length this work should have in order to fit its purpose.

It is possible to proclaim, in short, all literary productions, like Aciman's, as well as academic, like this one, contribute to the advance not only of equity, but also to the respect towards the difference (LGBT-QIA+ included) within society and academy as pointed out by Gender Studies. If on one hand, the former sums up by the representativeness and resonance it shows; on the other, the later contributes to the opening of the door for this discussion in spaces it has not been or, in some cases, has scarcely.

However, despite its reach and relevance, this research is not enough in a sense it does not intend to cover all the aspects of *Call me by your name* and its Elio and Oliver. Yet, even less when it comes to the proportion of Gender Studies and other fields it embraces. In this sense, we do wish for other discussions, researches and spaces yet to come, for desire knows no border or barrier.

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