

Lovers to Strangers: The Dynamics of Intimate Relationship Loss in *André Aciman's* *Call Me by Your Name*

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Abstract

Grief and loss are inextricably interconnected. Every major heartbreak or life-altering loss contributes to an anguished sense of grief. This study, therefore, draws on Bowlby and Parkes's theoretical paradigm of grief to delineate the dynamics of intimate relationship loss experienced by Elio Perlman – the protagonist of Aciman's novel, *Call Me by Your Name* – following the ending of his relationship with his beloved, Oliver. The trajectory of loss experienced by Elio after Oliver's departure, can be traced through the four phases of grief outlined by Bowlby and Parkes. These stages involve: numbing, longing, disorganization, followed by reorganization and recovery. Since grief is a complicated, non-linear phenomenon, it seldom unfolds in a sequential manner. Thus, in the aftermath of the breakup, the painful longing, nostalgia, and melancholy experienced by Elio, emerge in an overlapping fashion. As time progresses, Elio traverses the stage of shock and denial, but keeps wavering between the phases of yearning and despair. This study argues that the sorrow of the dissolution of his relationship with Oliver, intensifies every other sorrow for Elio, and becomes the painful pivot around which his life revolves. Thus, the abiding anguish experienced by Elio till the end attests to the fact that his grief remains unresolved, and despite experiencing an enhanced degree of self-awareness, Elio attains: no closure, remains fixated on Oliver's memory and becomes preoccupied with the fact that Oliver has transformed from a lover to a potential stranger.

Keywords: Bowlby and Parkes; complicated grief; melancholy; relationship dissolution; reorganization and recovery

1. Introduction

Sensual, idyllic, nostalgic and emotionally evocative are some of the adjectives that come to mind when one thinks of Aciman's novel *Call Me By Your Name*. This poignant, coming-of-age novel deals with the retrospective journey undertaken by the protagonist Elio Perlman

who revisits the short-lived romance he experienced during an idyllic Italian summer. The object of his abiding affection is the twenty-four-year-old Classics student, named Oliver. The novel chronicles the irrepressible loss that engulfs Elio following Oliver's departure from Italy.

Since Oliver and Elio are not separated by death, the novel delineates the emotional and psychological ramifications of grieving the loss of a person who is still alive. This form of grief inevitably accompanies the dissolution of any intimate relationship. Although Elio is only seventeen when the separation occurs, the repercussions of the breakup are experienced long after he crosses the threshold of teenage years. The sense of loss, emptiness and grief haunt him well into adulthood. In Elio's case, the sense of loss is exacerbated by the fact that it is Oliver's presence and his memory that offers some semblance of meaning to his existence. At several instances in the novel, Elio adamantly asserts that he exists because of, and through Oliver. After reuniting with Oliver years later in his adulthood, Elio passionately confesses to Oliver:

You're the only person I'd like to say goodbye to when I die, because only then will this thing I call my life make any sense. And if I should hear that you died, my life as I know it, the me who is speaking with you now, will cease to exist (Aciman, 2019).

Essentially, Elio is never able to renounce the memory of the sensually sweet summer that he and Oliver share. It is because of this profound intimacy and its loss thereafter, that Elio's life becomes clouded with dismalness and a sense of irrevocable despair. Reflecting on the aftermath of the relationship dissolution with Oliver, Elio remarks, "Maybe every other sorrow I'd known in life suddenly decided to converge on this very one" (Aciman, 2019). Perhaps the most painful consequence of Elio's prolonged separation from Oliver is that Elio is never able to form a deeply meaningful romantic unison with another individual. Reminiscing about his endearing relationship with Oliver, Elio professes that, "We had found the stars, you and I. And this is given once only" (Aciman, 2019). This once-in-a-lifetime connection is something that Elio replays in his mind ad infinitum and is unfortunately never able to recreate or re-experience.

This paper attempts to trace the trajectory of grief that plagues Elio following the breakup. The aim of this study is to determine whether Elio experiences any resolution of grief. To understand the depth of intimacy experienced by Elio and Oliver, this research integrates the triangular theory of love proposed by Sternberg. Furthermore, the emotional void that unsettles Elio following the breakup has been briefly analysed with respect to Bowlby's premise regarding attachment. For the most part, the current study relies on the theoretical paradigm of grief offered by Bowlby and Parkes. The pivotal focus of this research, therefore, is to explore the four stages of grief i.e. numbing, yearning and searching, disorganization and despair, and reorganization and recovery in relation to Elio's heartache.

1.1. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

To highlight the anatomy and underlying denominators of intimate relationships, Sternberg (1986,1988) proposed a triangular theory of love (as cited in Erber & Erber, 2018). According to this theoretical model, “love consists of three basic ingredients: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment” (Sternberg 1986, 1988, as cited in Erber & Erber, 2018). The intimacy factor implies “feelings that promote bondedness, closeness and connectedness”(Erber & Erber, 2018). Profound regard for the well-being of the other, “support, mutual understanding, and intimate communication” are also essential components that reinforce intimacy (Erber & Erber, 2018).

In *Call Me By Your Name*, the relationship between Elio and Oliver is evocative of powerful intimacy. In the section of the novel entitled, *Monet's Berm*, there is an incident where amid lunch, Elio and Oliver caress each other's bare feet under the table. The mutual intimacy, bondedness, closeness and the exclusivity of their mutual understanding, is clearly reflected in this emotionally moving line uttered by Elio: “...softly, gently, suddenly his foot moved over to mine and began caressing it, rubbing it, never holding still...this had nothing to do with others and would remain strictly between us” (Aciman, 2019). This silent communication – pronounced with unspoken understanding – is an unexplainably deep realm that neither of them shares with anyone else. Moreover, Elio is so overwhelmed by Oliver's aforementioned gesture, that a certain giddiness overtakes him (Aciman, 2019). Oliver's caresses send “chills down” Elio's “spine” and the latter has a nosebleed (Aciman, 2019). It is stated that after the nosebleed incident, Oliver is genuinely and profoundly concerned about Elio's well-being and lavishes gentle attention on him like a compassionate nurse (Aciman, 2019).

The “passion component” implies “sources of arousal...that promote sexual needs and needs for self-esteem, affiliation...and self-actualization” (Erber & Erber, 2018). The novel is replete with incidents that reinforce the palpable passion that sets alight the souls and bodies of the two lovers. For instance, after kissing Oliver for the second time on Monet's Berm, Elio maintains that “I'd kissed him...the second time and given him my spit in his mouth because I so desperately wanted his in mine” (Aciman, 2019). This sensual awakening experienced by Elio in many ways, ignites the “erotic undercurrent that” has been “years in the making” (Aciman, 2019).

In many ways, the passionate encounters between Oliver and Elio and their lovemaking, serve to magnify Elio's self-esteem, self-concept and help him attain a certain degree of self-actualization. This is evident from the following realization made by Elio during one of his intimate encounters with Oliver: “He was my secret conduit to myself – like a catalyst that allows us to become who we are...” (Aciman, 2019). At another point in the novel, Elio acknowledges to Oliver that “ I want to know how you feel, I want to know you, and through you, me” (Aciman, 2019). Perhaps the greatest degree of self-awareness is experienced by

Elio when he and Oliver make love for the first time. While reminiscing about that time, Elio makes the following quintessential observation:

Something unexpected seemed to clear away between us, and, for a second, it seemed there was absolutely no difference in age between us, just two men kissing, and even this seemed to dissolve, as I began to feel that we were not even two men, just two beings. I loved the egalitarianism of the moment. I loved feeling younger and older, human to human, man to man, Jew to Jew...It made me feel snug and safe (Aciman, 2019)

It is because of the instinctual, deep-rooted trust they share, that Elio and Oliver surrender themselves to each other with unabashed recklessness.

Commitment is the final component in the triangular model proposed by Sternberg (as cited in Erber & Erber, 2018). It is noteworthy that “commitment component refers to the decision that one is in love with the other and the commitment to maintain that love” (Erber & Erber, 2018). Elio is a paradigmatic example of a lover who shows unwavering commitment to his beloved. The ultimate manifestation of Elio’s commitment to Oliver is the fact that Elio holds onto Oliver’s shirt *Billowy* like a grieving mother holds onto the garment of a child she has lost. *Billowy* is the name given to the shirt that Oliver wore on the first day of his summer stay in Italy. Emphasizing his strong emotional affiliation with the shirt, Elio wistfully acknowledges that, “On certain nights, I’d remove *Billowy* from its bag...flap its long sleeves around me, and breathe out his name in the dark” (Aciman, 2019). Even fifteen years after their first meeting, Elio still clings onto *Billowy* like a prized possession which is emblematic of his unflagging devotion for Oliver.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it can be asserted that Elio satisfies all three criteria required for the establishment of an intimate bond or relationship. Amongst the three components, passion and intimacy are reflected through Oliver’s behaviour as well. However, commitment is not a hallmark of Oliver’s personality since unlike Elio, he marries, has children and moves on. Nonetheless, the passion, intimacy and commitment exhibited by Elio attest to the fact that he shares a deeply personal and incomparable bond with Oliver. Hence, the dissolution of their relationship has a deeply unsettling impact on Elio. In essence, Elio is deeply attached to Oliver and it is the severing of this attachment that gives rise to the harrowing grief that eclipses his life.

1.1.1 Attachment and Grief

Sperling and Berman (1994) define adult attachment as:

the stable tendency of an individual to make substantial efforts to seek and maintain proximity to and contact with one or a few specific individuals who provide the subjective potential for physical and/or psychological safety and security.

The aforementioned definition pertaining to adult attachment can be applied to attachment experienced by adolescents and teenagers as well since psychological and physical safety are the common denominators underlying all secure attachments. In *Call Me By Your Name*, both Elio and Oliver derive a sense of psychological and physical security and safety from each other. The most beautiful expression of their unflinching trust in one another is the fact that in the midst of their lovemaking, Oliver softly whispers in Elio's ear, "Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine" (Aciman, 2019). This wilful abandonment and interchange of identities highlights the deep appreciation for the core of otherness in another person that forms the basis of Elio and Oliver's romantic bond. Moreover, it reinforces that in a truly unadulterated romantic equation, the barrier between the self and one's beloved disappears.

In a moment of passionate contemplation, the attachment and safety that Elio associates with Oliver is revealed in the following admission: "The light of my eyes...light of my eyes, light of the world, that's what you are, light of my life" (Aciman, 2019). Elio also refers to Oliver as his "homecoming" and during their trip to the bookstore together, Elio states, "This felt special. Like showing someone your private chapel, your secret haunt...This is where I dreamed of you before you came into my life" (Aciman, 2019). Based on the aforementioned analysis, it can be asserted that Elio and Oliver exhibit a strong attachment toward each other.

Bowlby (1980), "viewed grief reactions at the loss of an attachment figure (e.g., anger, disbelief, searching) as natural responses that are understandable from an... evolutionary perspective" (as cited in Ripoll-Núñez and Carrillo, 2016). Losing an attachment figure, gives rise to a sense of uncertainty that threatens one's existence. One feels lost and tethered without one's beloved. Feeling lost and abandoned are some of the emotions experienced by Elio following his separation from Oliver. These disturbing emotional states will be further explored in the next section.

2. *Call Me By Your Name* and Bowlby's Four Phases of Grief

After witnessing individuals who undergo life-altering losses such as the death of a loved one or a prolonged separation or divorce, Bowlby (1980) deduced that the pattern of mourning or grieving experienced by bereaved individuals, can be classified into four phases. However, Bowlby (1980) argued that "these phases are not clear cut, and any one individual may oscillate for a time back and forth between any two of them." Parkes (1970) also examined the phenomenon of grief extensively. In his 1964 landmark study, Parkes analysed the myriad manifestations of grief exhibited by widows who loved and consequently mourned their deceased husbands. In addition to his own findings, Bowlby relied heavily on Parkes's observations to elicit a somewhat comprehensive pattern in relation to grief and mourning.

Bowlby's research on grief therefore, led him to conclude that an individual in mourning inevitably confronts the phases of numbing, yearning and searching, disorganization and despair followed by a triumphant sense of reorganization and recovery. As asserted earlier

however, a linear trajectory does not necessitate each of these phases. Different phases may intersect or overlap depending on the nature and intensity of loss. Each of the four phases will be examined in relation to Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name* in the proceeding discussion.

According to Bowlby (1980), the phase "of numbing...usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger." Initial denial of the loss followed by shock and distress are some of the defining attributes of the phase of numbing.

Elio's first impulse after the separation is to forget it all – to let an all-consuming forgetfulness envelop him. His initial denial of loss becomes pronounced when Anchise, the groundskeeper, asks Elio about Signor Ulliva, and he replies "I avoided his eyes. I did not want to encourage him to say anything or even to bring up the subject" of Oliver (Aciman, 2019). Following Oliver's departure, Elio purposefully takes measures to resist any reminders about him. He mournfully states, "To avoid entering my bedroom from the balcony and finding him" i.e. Oliver "missing, I used the inner stairwell" (Aciman, 2019). Elio even surrenders himself to a wilful, uninterrupted afternoon slumber to ward off any thoughts about Oliver.

Oftentimes, mentally rehearsing the pain one might inevitably experience at the loss of a beloved, is a coping mechanism to make oneself immune to the actual pain or loss. This rehearsed pain either acts as a deterrent to actual anguish or considerably reduces the intensity of loneliness or the aching loss that afflicts one following a heartache. Elio adopts this coping strategy to deal with the distress that besets him in the aftermath of Oliver's departure. He states, "I had rehearsed losing him...just to ward off suffering by taking it in small doses beforehand...Rehearse the pain to dull the pain" (Aciman, 2019). Thus, when the actual moment of parting comes, Elio decides not to feel anything. He exclaims, "Think of the pain before the pain...Trying to immunize yourself, that's what you're doing" (Aciman, 2019).

A slight degree of anger is also experienced by Elio after he and Oliver part ways. When his mother and Mafalda rearrange his room as it was prior to Oliver's summer stay, Elio is "instantly saddened and infuriated" (Aciman, 2019). There is a twofold reason for the infuriation that afflicts Elio – the rearrangement of the room without his permission, and the unsettling fact of Oliver's absence. Thus, for Elio, the first phase of numbing entails denial, distress and anger.

Yearning for the beloved is the second phase of grief and involves pining and "searching for the lost figure" (Bowlby, 1980). This phase can last for a few months or years (Bowlby, 1980). "Pangs of intense pining" and "spasms of distress" are some of the hallmarks of the phase of yearning (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby (1980) emphasizes that:

...restless searching, intermittent hope, repeated disappointment...anger, accusation...are all features of the second phase of mourning, and are to be understood as expressions of the strong urge to find and recover the lost person.

The frantic search for Oliver and the chasm left by his absence, torment Elio indefinitely. Referring to Oliver, Elio thoughtfully acknowledges that, “He came. He left. Nothing else had changed. I had not changed. The world hadn’t changed. Yet nothing would be the same. All that remains is...strange remembrance” (Aciman, 2019). In effect, this strange, bittersweet remembrance of Oliver, gives rise to a nostalgic longing in Elio. The phrase “He left” epitomizes the realization that Oliver has indeed left – left the life he briefly shared with Elio and his parents.

During this phase of yearning, Elio instinctively recalls moments with Oliver that were blissful and complete and reinforced the authentic connection that these two shared. Riddled by heartache, Elio acknowledges that “I look back on those days and regret none of it, not the risks, not the shame, not the total lack of foresight...I knew that our days were numbered, but I didn’t dare count them” (Aciman, 2019). In the midst of one of his retrospective musings, Elio declares, “All I knew was that I had nothing left to hide from him. I had never felt freer or safer in my life” (Aciman, 2019). This longing for a bond that once offered unparalleled understanding and acceptance gradually surfaces within Elio and magnifies to a perplexing degree over time.

Intermittent hope highlighted by Bowlby (1980) is an integral feature of the phase of longing as well. Deep down, Elio nurses a hope that the aching agony and impatient longing he feels for Oliver be mutual. This hope is expressed in these lines uttered by Elio, “To find him...waiting for me...Yes, both our lives on the same artificial respirator, waiting for that time when we’d finally meet and scale our way back” (Aciman, 2019). When Elio and Oliver reunite after years, an iota of hope is sparked in Elio’s heart in relation to Oliver’s desire for him. This hope is rekindled during the scene when after introducing Elio to his colleagues, Oliver surprises him by citing instances of his professional accomplishments (Aciman, 2019). Oliver exhibits “total familiarity with every aspect of” Elio’s career (Aciman, 2018). Elio admits that Oliver “knew everything, had kept abreast of the most insignificant details...It moved me. I’d assumed he’d totally forgotten me” (Aciman, 2019). This occasional shimmer of hope also resurfaces when Elio observes the “framed postcard of Monet’s *berm*” hanging on Oliver’s office wall (Aciman, 2019). For Elio, the postcard signifies albeit momentarily that Oliver still cares; has deep-seated affection for Elio and above all, still remembers the tranquil Italian summer.

Repeated disappointment is a crucial factor underlying the stage of yearning as well. During the first phone call following Oliver’s exit from Rome, several emotions simultaneously emerge and overlap within Elio who states that “I wished” Oliver “had never called. I had wanted to hear him say my name again” (Aciman, 2019). Since Elio cannot profess his true

feelings to Oliver, the first reaction following the phone call is one of bitter disappointment. Moreover, it almost seems as if there is a split within Elio – part of him is desperately aching to hear Oliver’s voice yet another part dreads hearing it. Therefore, desire, longing, sadness and disappointment all intertwine in the aforementioned scene of the phone call.

As the novel progresses, repeated disappointments give way to melancholy and an irrepressible sense of sadness. Bowlby iterates that “underlying these strong emotions,” of dissatisfaction and fruitless search “which erupt episodically and seem so perplexing, there is likely to coexist deep and pervasive sadness, a response to recognition that reunion is at best improbable” (Bowlby, 1980). This overwhelming sadness tears apart Elio and Oliver as is evident from this admission made by Elio: “I knew that he was filled with grief when he finally kissed me one last time...I hated thinking of him sad, just as I knew he’d hate to see me sad” (Aciman, 2019).

Anger and accusation coupled with betrayal are some of the pronounced emotions experienced by Elio as well during the phase of longing. When Oliver comes to stay for Christmas and New Year’s, he turns down Elio’s advances. This refusal of physical intimacy on Oliver’s part, infuriates Elio who remarks that “how angry I was. I’d love nothing better than to take” Oliver’s “clothes off and at the very least hold” him “...I put my arms around his head and held it...things became officially chilly” (Aciman, 2019). During Oliver’s Christmas stay, there is also an element of unexpressed betrayal felt by Elio at the realization that Oliver is getting married and ready to embark on a new life.

When he writes to Oliver after Vimini’s death, Elio iterates that “Writing to him about her was like crossing the last footbridge between us, especially after it became clear we weren’t ever going to mention what had once existed between us, or, for that matter, that we weren’t even mentioning it” (Aciman, 2019). Hence, after their initial separation in Rome, things are never the same for both lovers. In fact, Elio’s search for the Oliver who once was, ends in futility; Elio’s yearning remains unquenched. Their subsequent meetings lack the passion of the initial encounter. Pondering this irreparable loss, Elio exclaims that as far as Oliver is concerned, his “heart and his shirt were all I’d ever have to show for my life. A heart and a shirt” (Aciman, 2019). Sadly, Elio feels as if Oliver has lost the affection, he formerly had for him. Based on the above discussion, it can be asserted that, Elio’s pining and searching for Oliver lasts more than a decade. A failed attempt to reclaim the relationship that once existed, is the essence of the phase of yearning.

After a “seemingly endless examination of how and why the loss occurred,” an aggrieved individual traverses to the next stage i.e. the phase of disorganization and despair (Bowlby, 1980). Complicated grief and emotional loneliness are the two paradigmatic attributes of the phase of disorganization and despair. According to the Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (2021), complicated grief is characterized by the following: “strong yearning, longing and sadness...lessening of interest in daily activities and feeling

disconnected from other people.” In *Call Me By Your Name*, complicated grief sets in when Elio realizes that Oliver will perhaps never respond to him in the manner that he craves. The prolonged grief that disturbs Elio lasts more than fifteen years.

Amongst the above-mentioned symptoms, yearning, longing and sadness have already been discussed. Soon after Oliver leaves Rome, the daily activities that Elio ordinarily engages in, seem to lack charm. Elio acknowledges that “I no longer wanted to play tennis, just as I had absolutely no desire to work on the Haydn” (Aciman, 2019). Moreover, long after his separation from Oliver, Elio feels as if he cannot authentically connect with other people. He admits that “Oliver, who for so long had loomed like a fulcrum on the scale of life, eventually acquired successors...” (Aciman, 2019). However, none of Oliver’s successors can hold Elio’s attention for long. There is no indication that he forms an abiding connection with another man or woman after the dissolution of his relationship with Oliver. This lack of a long-lasting romantic companionship magnifies Elio’s sense of loneliness.

Bowlby (1980) observes that the bereaved “commonly suffer” from “a deep and persisting sense of loneliness and which remains largely unalleviated by friendships” (Aciman, 2019). Elio suffers from pangs of loneliness following the dissolution of his intimate relationship. Echoing Bowlby’s premise, Weiss (1975) “defines emotional loneliness as loneliness that can be remedied only by involvement in a mutually committed relationship, without which he found there was no feeling of security” (as cited in Bowlby, 1980). Since Elio does not commit himself to a devoted, long-lasting relationship, his loneliness does not lessen as time progresses. On the contrary, Elio’s loneliness mingles with a sense of despair when he realizes years later, that perhaps Oliver no longer feels the same way about him.

One summer Elio receives a phone call from his parents who tell him that Oliver is staying over and he repeats “Elio” to spark the “old game” and to show that he had forgotten nothing (Aciman, 2019). However, Oliver fails to reciprocate and repeats his own name instead, which leaves Elio understandably crestfallen. He painfully remarks, Oliver “had forgotten” (Aciman, 2019). This is the pivotal moment in the novel- the moment that triggers and foreshadows the disorganization and desolation that interminably govern Elio’s life. From this moment onwards, a wave of profound hopelessness sweeps over him as is evident from the following reflective assertion:

All I was likely to discover at this point wasn’t just how distant were the paths we’d taken, it was the measure of loss that was going to strike me- a loss...which would hurt when stared at in the face, the way nostalgia hurts long after we’ve stopped thinking of things we’ve lost...(Aciman, 2019)

The overwhelming stage of disorganization and despair is subsequently followed by reorganization and recovery. This is the final stage of the grief trajectory according to Bowlby (1980) and Parkes (1970). As the name implies, reorganization and recovery involve experiencing a sense of closure, resolution and a degree of self-compassion on having

experienced and lived through a loss. When it comes to closure, Elio's father makes a thoughtful attempt to dissuade Elio from numbing or suppressing his actual feelings. The father, Mr. Perlman, states, "you were both lucky to have found each other...Right now you may not want to feel anything. Perhaps you never wish to feel anything...But feel something you did" (Aciman, 2019). It is almost as if Mr. Perlman is stressing that the only way to overcome pain is to experience it in its entirety. Highlighting the healing impact of surrendering to pain, he advises his son not to rush the process of healing - to let it take its natural course. He exclaims:

We rip out so much of ourselves to be cured of things faster than we should that we go bankrupt by the age of thirty...But to feel nothing so as not to feel anything - what a waste...remember, our hearts and our bodies are given to us only once...Right now there's sorrow. I don't envy the pain. But I envy you the pain. (Aciman, 2019)

Essentially, Mr. Perlman is emphasizing that Elio view his pain and heartache from an entirely new standpoint; he should view pain and grief as an ally rather than a barrier to self-awareness and reconstruction. Moreover, Mr. Perlman envies the pain experienced by Elio since it is a manifestation of having desired and fully loved someone - something that Mr. Perlman was reluctant to do in his youth (Aciman, 2019).

The phase of reorganization and recovery can attain meaningful completion if the bereaved individual discards "old patterns of thinking" and strives for "a redefinition of himself as well as of his situation" (Bowlby, 1980). "This redefinition of self and situation is as painful as it is crucial, if only because it means relinquishing finally all hope that the lost person can be recovered and the old situation re-established" (Bowlby, 1980). After his separation from Oliver, Elio experiences disordered mourning, to use a phrase by Bowlby (1980). In this distorted mourning, attempt at redefinition of self and enhanced realization is interspersed with moments of intense yearning and longing.

In the third section of the novel entitled, *Ghost Spots*, Elio meets Oliver when both are well into their adulthood, living separate, "parallel lives" and realizes that once they had "belonged to each other, but had lived so far apart that" they "belonged to others now" (Aciman, 2019). However, this realization is soon followed by an aching desire and longing to "kiss each and everyone" of Oliver's sunspots (Aciman, 2019). Elio is so consumed with desire for Oliver that he cannot get the sunspots out of his mind.

In a similar vein, while analysing the status of their relationship in the concluding pages of the novel, Elio attains a newfound realization that both he and Oliver found "much happiness for a few weeks" and will "have to live the remainder of their lives dipping cotton swabs into that bowl of happiness" (Aciman, 2019). However, this profound moment of heightened awareness is also short-lived. Furthermore, Elio is unable to experience a redefinition of self or recovery because he fervently adheres to the conviction that "going back is false. Moving ahead is false" (Aciman, 2019). He feels as if his and Oliver's "life is like a" muddled "echo

buried for all time in a sealed Mithraic chamber” (Aciman, 2019). Thus, Elio is almost suspended in a state of limbo. There is no closure or resolution for him since moments of realization and brief epiphanies experienced by him are accompanied by an irrepressible longing for the lost person – Oliver. Hence, instead of undergoing self-reconstruction, Elio keeps wavering painfully between brief episodes of self-awareness, and an insatiable longing for Oliver.

3. Conclusion

Elio is unable to ward off the memory of the sensuous Italian summer he shares with Oliver. In his retrospective narration, Elio remarks that he and Oliver share an unparalleled bond which is unlike any other relationship they have experienced. It is not something they can “undo”, “unwrite”, “unlive” or “relive” – “it’s just stuck there like a vision of fireflies” (Aciman, 2019). From Elio’s perspective, he and Oliver have intertwined identities. One cannot thrive in the absence of the other. This is evident from the underlying implication of the novel’s title - *Call Me By Your Name*. It is because of their interchangeable identities that Elio’s agonizing longing for Oliver is transfixed in time. It is a longing and love that dare not seek its closure.

Till the end, Elio is unable to extricate himself from Oliver’s love and influence. Writing in the first person Elio confesses that Oliver “was more me than I had ever been myself...he was and would forever remain...my brother, my friend, my father, my son, my husband, my lover, myself” (Aciman, 2019).

In the final analysis, Elio wavers back and forth between an incessant longing for the rekindling of spark between him and Oliver, and his frantic desire to reconcile with the emptiness in his life. Elio’s repetitive attempts at self-consolation are also in vain, since he desperately tries to make peace with the love that could have been, but unfortunately fails. His instinctive response to sorrow involves resorting to numbing. Yearning, disorganization and despair can be regarded as by-products of the grieving process. However, for Elio, the grieving ordeal does not come to an end. There is no recovery. He feels as if Oliver has transformed from a passionate lover to a distant stranger and while replaying this loss he feels as if “Twenty years was yesterday, and yesterday was just earlier this morning” (Aciman, 2019). The memory of the loss remains vivid and forever imprinted on his mind.

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