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Untimely Desires, Historical Efflorescence, and Italy in *Call Me by Your Name*

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Critics of *Call Me by Your Name/Chiamami col tuo nome* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017) have accused the film of being inauthentic. In venues in Italy and internationally, we find the complaint that the film is not really Italian, does not include authentic gay sex, or that it is not authentically gay at all. For some, its bourgeois class fantasy renders it inauthentic in the sense of not being gritty enough, not a true representation of Italy's class and ethnic diversity. For others, the way Elio's family are open to his sexuality is implausibly liberal. Regardless of what aspect of the film is being attacked, this problem of authenticity seems to center the negative press. This essay uses these questions as a way to interrogate the film's relationship to Italian-ness and its representation of homosexuality. Although cries of inauthenticity often serve simply to bolster a conservative approach to cinematic value, setting up a "real" and "true" identity against which a film might fail to measure up, we think this debate over *Chiamami* exposes a fraught intersection of Italian cinema and gay histories.

KEYWORDS queer cinema, Italian cinema, *Chiamami col tuo nome*, Luca Guadagnino, *Call Me by Your Name*, Italianicity, Homosexuality, Film theory

Critics of *Call Me by Your Name/Chiamami col tuo nome* (Luca Guadagnino 2017) have accused the film of being inauthentic. In its international reception, we find the complaint that the film is not really Italian, does not include authentic gay sex, or that it is not authentically gay at all. For some, its bourgeois class fantasy renders it inauthentic in the sense of not being gritty enough, not a true representation of Italy's class and ethnic diversity. For others, the way Elio's

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family accepts his sexuality is implausibly liberal for the times. Regardless of what aspect of the film is being attacked, this problem of authenticity seems to center the negative press, particularly in Anglophone contexts. Some of these issues will be crucial to this essay – mainly the film's relationship to Italianicity and its representation of homosexuality.[1] But before turning to these particular concerns, we find it noteworthy that authenticity – a rather old-fashioned measure of cinematic value – is being called into play so insistently in responses to this film. Although cries of inauthenticity often serve to bolster a conservative approach to cinematic value, setting up a "real" and "true" identity against which a film might fail to measure up, we think the debate over *Chiamami* exposes a fraught intersection of Italian cinema and gay histories. In this essay, we explore *Chiamami*'s own engagement with Italianicity and ask what this question of national identity reveals about the film's queerness.

In calling the film "inauthentic," critics seem to say that *Chiamami* doesn't adequately represent Italy of the period and that its depictions neglect "real lives" in ways that falsify gay history. Branding the film's representations as inadequate, however, distracts us from the textual role played by history in *Chiamami*. Although we may agree that the history the film tells lacks nuance and could be called exclusionary if it were taken as a simple documentation of the period, nonetheless *Chiamami*'s investment in the details and textures of the past persists. Critical cries of inauthenticity should not distract from acknowledging how *Chiamami* plays with historicity or from interrogating how the film not only narrates the viewer's relationship to a historical past, but also cues us to feel a dissonance between that past moment and our present one. In what follows, we consider how the film's evocation of both an experience of time and a point in time – a *durée* of desire situated alongside the historical disquiet of the 1980s – attempts to give form to the evanescent political and cultural modes of being that were foreclosed upon by Craxismo and by HIV/AIDS. Moreover, we argue that the film does not only attempt to simulate that moment in history. It also uses a form of narration that prompts the viewer to feel their own perspectival hindsighted-ness and to reflect on the period depicted as irretrievable, a time whose political and sexual desires, potentials, and orientations are forever lost.

The first problem of authenticity, then, has to do with whether *Chiamami* is an Italian film. Certainly, it was represented as Italian at a number of queer film festivals, including the globally renowned BFI Flare festival in London. But if it is Italian, then how? Where is Italy in this film, and what version of Italy is represented? Or, if we want to insist that it is not an Italian film, then why does the film need Italy? What does it do with Italy, and what does Italy allow the film to say that another setting would not? At the core of these questions about Italian identity lies another query: why is an early 1980s Italy chosen as a setting for the efflorescence of gay desire? The Italian countryside creates a site of gayness for a film that nevertheless seems unable to offer a representation of Italian queer people or indeed any space for gay Italianness. Thus, the emergence of queer desire and the question of Italian identity and representation are closely

linked in the film, but in a curious way that entails some striking gaps and dissociations.

Guadagnino once called *Chiamami* a mostly American film and has said, "I don't do Italian Cinema."[2] Meanwhile, Italy hasn't done Guadagnino's cinema either, at least up until the international success of this film. *Chiamami* made almost $4 million in Italy, but his earlier films were not wildly popular domestically, often regarded simply as features made for an export market. For instance, *A Bigger Splash* (2015) made only $189,000 in Italy, and *Io sono l'amore* (2009) fared only slightly better with $285,000. By contrast, both films performed strongly overseas: *A Bigger Splash* made a cumulative $7.5 million worldwide, and *Io sono l'amore* made over $5 million in the United States alone and was released across Europe, Latin America, Oceania, and East Asia for a total worldwide gross of almost $11 million. Until *Chiamami*, these two films were Guadagnino's best known works internationally, where they were received as global art cinema. The only one of his earlier feature films to do well at the Italian box office was *Melissa P.* (2005), which provides something of a counter-example, since it made over $7 million in Italy but did not circulate widely internationally. Its popularity could be argued to be less about Guadagnino and more a reflection of the international cultural phenomenon of the erotic novel *100 colpi di spazzola primi di andare a dormire*, by Melissa Panarello, on which it was based. Nonetheless, that film's nexus of sexual awakening, transgression, adaptation, and an Italian setting resonates with *Chiamami* in ways that suggest that Guadagnino's choices of projects cannot be so easily detached from their national location.

On the one hand, Guadagnino has spoken of *Chiamami* as outside of Italian cinema. On the other hand, when asked by *La Stampa* if it was an Italian film, Guadagnino responded without hesitation that it is a "profoundly Italian film [...] 100 percent."[3] He recounts how he was first brought to the project as a cultural consultant on things Italian, including, matching scenes in the script to specific locations.[4] In another interview, when asked in which character he most recognized himself, he responded, "I identify mostly with Anchise and Mafalda."[5] In other words, one of world cinema's most prominent gay auteurs identifies not with the cosmopolitan queer men who center the story, but with secondary characters, Italian domestic laborers who are not shown as same-sex desiring. In this anecdote, Italianicity and gayness appear incommensurate, at least in Guadagnino's self-deprecating self-representation.

So, why would Anglophone critics dismiss the film as not really Italian? Well, from the outside, *Chiamami* proclaims itself as transnational. It was co-produced by Italian, French, and American companies, and these perspectives are strongly felt in the text. Various nationalities are represented in its fictional world, and several languages are spoken. Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker* says that the film is "among other things, an exercise in polyglottery."[6] Elio's family is proudly multilingual, speaking Italian, French, and English with such ease that their national origins are hard to pin down. In one scene, Elio and his

parents snuggle while reading German literature out loud together *in German*, a language we never see them speak in more everyday exchanges. Guadagnino has spoken about the cosmopolitanism embodied in the film as connected to his own coming of age, his being raised by an Algerian-French mother, and we read Italianicity as always in tension with this worldlier perspective.[7] Critics have raised concerns about the film's class-based presumptions around character and audience. Several writers have argued that the film is narrated from the standpoint of privilege, that its cosmopolitanism is associated with wealthy people with significant cultural capital and the capacity to move about the world freely, people accustomed to long summer vacations and the constant presence of servants. In other words, not only is the film set in an atmosphere of grand summer villas, art history post-docs, teenagers without summer jobs, swimming pools, and lazy afternoons spent reading literature, but the film's point of view also takes such a life as a baseline. For example, in his scathing critique of the film in *The New Yorker*, Richard Brody claims that film "treats [its central characters'] intelligence like a club membership, their learning like membership cards, their intellectualism like a password."[8]

The weight granted to the perspectives of these cosmopolitans could be seen to come at the expense of marginalizing more ordinary Italians. Both the family and the film primarily use American English as their lingua franca. Elio's Italian is very good, but he doesn't sound like a native speaker.[9] As comfortable as these cosmopolitan characters are in Italy, the ease with which they inhabit Italian space can only push the film's Mafaldas and Anchises to the sidelines. The narrative's principle agents appear as non-Italian, and indeed no Italian could be nominated according to the Oscars' definition of best supporting actor. The narrative is thus not anchored in an embodied Italian point of view, with one or two momentary exceptions. If we think of *Chiamami* as an Italian film, one that performs Italianicity, it is nonetheless one that does not provide significant narrative space for Italian subjectivity to be staged through characters. Rather, we propose that its Italianicity emerges through the film's setting, style, and how its narrative deploys historicity.

A great deal of criticism of the film from US critics has emphasized that it participates in a tourist logic, one in which Italy primarily functions to provide an escapist backdrop for fantasies of sexual longing and conquest. Brody, for instance, likens its use of landscape to the "superficial charm of picture postcards," while suggesting that the film never gets close to the characters because it is too focused on "the expensive architecture, the lavish furnishings, the travelogue locations."[10] All that's missing, he quips, is "a website offering Elio-and-Oliver tours through the Italian countryside."[11] According to this critique, such a backdrop distracts us in the same way that heritage film uses landscape, working to suspend what might otherwise be our discomfort with the class-based pleasures it depicts. The film surely does provide a fertile ground for touristic subjectivity, as is illustrated by the fact that there are actual tour packages for wealthy Britons wanting to experience the movie's locations firsthand, or by the

fact that when you buy the film on iTunes in the UK it is accompanied by an extra entitled "Snapshots of Italy: The Making of Call Me by Your Name."[12] Some sense of the touristic is undoubtedly at play in the film's pleasures, as these marketing strategies demonstrate.

Yet our aim is not to defend *Chiamami*'s bourgeois pleasures against some hypothetically more realist vision of Italian cinema, but rather to dislodge that framing and the inevitability of the failings that such a framing produces. By viewing the film as inauthentic, the film's critics appear to conjure an authentic alternative that should be championed, a politically progressive representation, perhaps of those working-class Italians excluded from the film's view. Although there are many examples of such realisms in internationally celebrated contemporary Italian cinema (from *Gomorrah* [Matteo Garrone, 2008] to *Fuocoammare* [Gianfranco Rosi, 2016]), a textual politics based solely on rendering visible the problems of social marginalization cannot account for *Chiamami*'s historical expressivity.[13] Nor does the class position of the characters depicted onscreen insulate a text from being bourgeois spectacle. What would it mean to consider the critical potentialities of *Chiamami*'s middlebrow vision of Italian history rather than to evaluate the film purely in the terms of social realism?

Returning to the question of touristic vision, there's something illuminating in the film's use of locations, and specifically its evocation of Italy. If we simply read its Italian locations as "touristic" and hence as imposing an outsider perspective, then we miss several ways in which the film deploys the pleasures of place to more complicated ends. Its locations are not always obviously touristic. For some critics in Italy, the film exemplifies a kind of cinema that Italy should be making: outward-facing but without pandering to a touristic gaze, that is, "un cinema che riesce a essere internazionale senza puntare sull'Italia cartolinesca."[14] To foreign eyes, the film lacks the iconic monuments, attractions, and buildings that can easily be located on a map, on a tour, or in the imagination, like Florence's Duomo in *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1985). The shooting of *Chiamami* carries a located-ness, but its camerawork does not frame locations as specific tourist views. Like the novel, the film refrains from naming locations; the book merely identifies places with initials. The villages may appear typically Italian, but they don't repeat the mode of tourist appropriation that *A Room with a View* was so key to cementing in the minds of foreigners who came in droves to Northern Italy in the late 80s, throughout the 90s, and into the 00s: a period bookended by *A Room with a View*, on the one hand, and *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Audrey Wells, 2003) and *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy, 2010), on the other. A few tropes of the tourist imagination of Italy exist here, but there are no steaming bowls of pasta or cappuccino, epiphanies in front of Renaissance masterpieces, or Fiat 500s speeding through Tuscan hills.[15]

Moreover, to perceive this film as simply instantiating the tourist gaze is to overlook the subtlety of one of the world's most nuanced cinematographers of

landscape, Sayombhu Mukdeeprom, who is best known for his work on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), and *Blissfully Yours* (2002), as well as Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights* (2015). Mukdeeprom's cinematography frequently deploys camera movements that have an apparently deliberate direction but are not motivated by the attention or activity of characters. These movements mark a clear trajectory across places without plotting or mapping in the service of narrative disclosure. In this mobile framing, the film cues its audience to consider a non-diegetic source of narration. Setting—and in particular rural landscape—takes on a significance that is not easily reducible to narrative motivation. In *Chiamami*, Mukdeeprom's camerawork evades a nostalgic and touristic framing of the Italian countryside to use setting in unconventional ways. Take, for instance, the much-discussed sex scene, in which the camera pans away from the lovers to look out of the window at the garden. Prominent Italian film critic Paolo Mereghetti describes this pan as part of the film's delicacy. Although Mereghetti attributes the movement to Guadagnino instead of Mukdeeprom, he captures something crucial about its hesitancy and its almost overt anachronism:

> Quello che colpisce e affascina in queste vicende è l'assoluta mancanza di scabrosità o compiacimento, è la delicatezza con cui Guadagnino fa muovere la macchina da presa, quasi esitante di fronte ai corpi che si spogliano: una volta si concede anche una "anacronistica" panoramica dal letto alla finestra aperta sugli alberi, quasi fossimo in un pudico film hollywoodiano degli anni Quaranta.[16]

Rather than viewing this movement as a gesture of turning away, closeting, or repression, as some critics have suggested, we could understand it as a wandering contemplative camera. Like similar camera movements in Mukdeeprom's films made with Apichatpong, this pan enacts certain radical instabilities of queer looking. Its wandering is inattentive or coy only in relation to the impulses of the patriarchal desiring gaze, with its probing compulsion toward revelation, declaration, fetishism, and reification. Mukdeeprom's cinematography allows the film to summon a particular moment without making it retrievable as a commodity of global tourism. In fact, the specificity of *Chiamami*'s "localization"—by which we mean its attitude toward landscape more as site, locale, or community space than as tourist destination—is also key to the film's particular recalling of a historical period. We will return to the question of historicity, but for now we note that *Chiamami* is set in the moment just before hyper-tourism hits Italy.[17]

Closely connected to the criticism of *Chiamami* as not authentically Italian is a claim that its heritage aesthetic is also not queer enough. Spencer Kornhaber says that the film has been rebuked for its "prettiness," which he connects to a failure to be politically queer.[18] D. A. Miller makes an expansive critique of the mainstream gay movie in general for being "a thing of beauty."[19] He calls this beauty an "aesthetic laminate"—that is, something shiny and superficial that covers up the thing itself. Here, he is using a rhetoric that Rosalind Galt's work

has critiqued as "anti-pretty," assuming that an aesthetic that is rough and ugly, or austere and simple, is intrinsically superior to one that is beautiful, carefully composed, and decorative.[20] Miller goes on to identify a tendency in recent gay cinema. He argues that in many films, a cinematic look at landscape or architectural setting is, in and of itself, an avoidance of gay bodies or sex. Miller sees this as an international problem—he cites American films like *Moonlight* as well—but he also sees something particularly Italian in it. He switches momentarily into Italian to complain about Chiamami's "*bella vista*," linking a cinematic beautiful view—a long shot—to a beautiful life. (Although the latter phrase is written in English, it retains a ghost of the assonance with *bella vita*.) For Miller, the film's so-called "beautification campaign" is not only bad in aesthetic terms but is also actively homophobic. In its avoidance of showing gay sex, Miller argues, *Chiamami* understands the beautiful life as fundamentally repulsed by queerness and demanding of a closet. Miller switches momentarily back to Italian to name what he sees as the opposite of *la bella vista* according to the logic of the film: *la via rettale*. These are terms, for him, of beauty and ugliness as defined by a homophobic aesthetic.

The pan during the sex scene and a later dissolve exemplify, for Miller, the film's homophobic impulses: to banish the details of same-sex desire from the field of vision, to erase the disturbing brute facts of male bodies penetrating each other, and to cleanse any apparently messy evidence of homo sex.[21] However, for some other critics, the film's use of off-screen space is precisely what gives it weight and affective power. Dominique Widemann argues that, "The frames never reveal the complete field of vision. The garden, the salon, the bedroom seem like emotionally overwhelming memories, very precise and incomplete, unbelievably alive."[22] For her, what creates that sensation of emotion remembered is a formal mechanism in which framing excludes as much as it reveals. By refusing to show a complete field of vision—in this instance, by refusing to stage the sex scene directly—the film creates a particular relationship between absence and presence. Writing in *Positif*, Adrien Gombeaud also considers the film's use of off-screen space to be important. He suggests that the film's originality lies in not placing obstacles between the lovers, such that, "homophobia remains off screen, since the parents are tolerant. The spectre of AIDS has not yet arisen over the era."[23] Gombeaud's use of off screen (*hors champ*) here is important: there is a difference in cinematic terms between something that is simply not represented at all and something that remains off screen. Film constantly asks us to imagine off-screen space (the classic example is the terrifying off-screen monster), and *Chiamami* excludes aspects of both individual experience and public history from direct view, but not from the spectator's awareness. For both of these critics, the film activates off-screen space as a way to evoke the weight of times and places unseen.

Debates around leaving the central sex scene off screen reveal a persistent anxiousness about the monstration of gay sex, a demand and sometimes a pressure for queer films to show sex acts in a declarative fashion. This anxiousness

coexists alongside an irresolvable instability in the image's capacity to represent queer desire in history. We have written of this tension in relation to queer world cinema, arguing that although the act of showing queer sex on film can be liberatory and radical, in some cultural contexts, not showing entails an equally radical force.[24] In fact, Guadanigno has spoken about how the camerawork in the scene was an attempt to maintain "the urgency of intimacy" that had been building to this point. One can detect in his comments a rejection of the political compulsion toward monstration, a monstration that appears to burden in particular a gay director depicting gay sex: "The shot is like from a McCarthy era film. We were free to show everything, and we decided not to. And in a way, it was a very liberating experience."[25]

These burdens and the instabilities of visual representation have a particular valence in the Italian context, as Sergio Rigoletto insists in his tracing of the unstable visibility of queers in Italian film history.[26] With the apparent rise of mainstream images of LGBT people in Italian visual culture, it may be easy to forget this history. Rigoletto urges us to ask "what conditions underpin the present regime of queer visibility, and what queer experiences have been simultaneously either obscured or marginalized"?[27] For Rigoletto, this question challenges us to make demands not only of the present in Italy but also of the past and of how we represent its queerness. Writing just before the release of *Chiamami*, Derek Duncan similarly surveys the contradictions and discontinuities in thinking about queer visibility in Italian film history.[28] Building on Teresa de Lauretis's influential definition of queer representation, he writes that we should "appreciate the value of de Lauretis's proposition, which envisages sexuality as a sphere of possibility rather than prescription. Queer is not about the reiteration of the already known, but rather the apprehension of what has not yet been articulated."[29] For Duncan, de Lauretis enables us to read texts as queer precisely because of their ability to imagine something beyond mere visibility: "From [de Lauretis's] perspective, then, queer functions as the 'heterotopic' space of the drive: 'it is the space of transit, a displacement, a passage and transformation, not a referential, but a figural space' (246)." In a moment that we have also found to be crucial, Duncan notes, "Also missing from [de Lauretis's] definition is any direct invocation of sex itself. For de Lauretis, 'a queer text carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex' (244)."

In such a theoretical context, the refusal of what could be termed "queer monstration" in this pan shouldn't be taken as a turning away from queerness. In fact, quite the opposite: the shot prompts a confrontation with the heterotopic and anti-reifying forces of queer desire, where queerness resists any stable mapping of bodies to identities. Moreover, it presents us with the sheer difficulty of writing those desires into history, and perhaps accounts for the simultaneously delicate, historical, and anachronistic hesitancy that Mereghetti notes. We would argue that the strange trajectory of this shot, in its progression from the referential to the figural, forms a kind of allegory of queer desire for historical

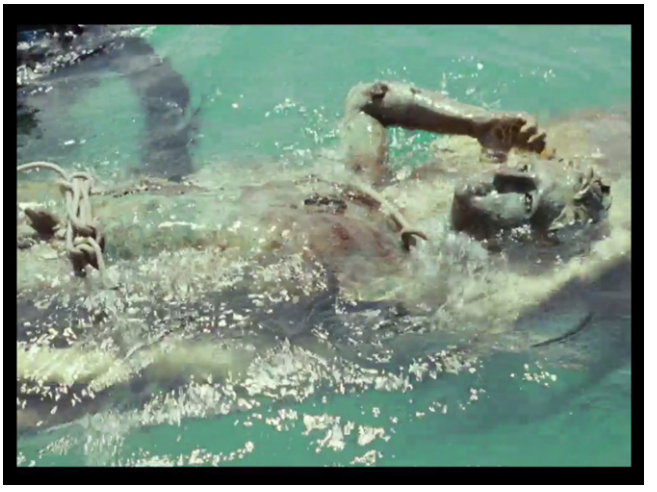

FIGURE 1.
In the scene in which archaeologists pull a classical sculpture from a lake, Guadagnino echoes Ingrid Bergman's famous encounters with classical figures in Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1954) and simultaneously evidences the homosexual desire of Roman society. With the rhyming of these bodies across millennia, the film links contemporary longing to ancient queer desires.

representation. In David Greven's response to Miller, he accuses the critic of a certain numbness to the emotional tenor and tension built by the film.[30] For Greven, the film is about gathering and maintaining a sense of restless longing, and the pan is crucial for keeping the spectator in the affective register of this longing. Parceled out anticipation dominates many contemporary world filmmakers' descriptions of queer desire, including those of Apichatpong but also Tsai Ming-liang, Zero Chou, and Julián Hernández. One of the most prominent proponents of this trend is Marco Berger, whose films maintain this gradual unfolding of anticipation without evading the explicit depiction of the naked body. In two of his most recent films, *Taekwondo* (2016) and *Hawaii* (2013), pent-up desires simmer in the intimate bodily spaces of homosocial rituals. However, the films never seem coy, and they refuse the narrative of the closet that characterized an earlier period of gay cinema. These corollaries ask us to think differently about *Chiamami* and about this pan in particular. Is it possible that a more overt description of sex would diffuse the longing we feel and threaten to empty out the anticipatory force of desire that the film goes to great lengths to make palpable? And in the pan's extension of longing, might we find a deferral that reflects the larger stakes of historical representation and the film's ability to speak of a moment ripe with potentialities that would be so soon foreclosed? It is hard from our historical perspective to do justice to the contingency of queer sex in that moment. This pan, and how it directs our attention to the film's mode of narration, thus capture our relationship to the evanescence of

queer desire, in a moment sealed away from us by HIV/AIDS. It asks whether the experience of pre-AIDS sex can be visible to us at all.[31]

This question of queer representation leads to issues of genre and, in relation to the heritage film, thereby back to questions of class. The problem of visibility and figuration, exemplified above in the debate between Miller and Greven, repeats the way that arguments against the heritage film historically rejected the prettiness of this feminized and often-queer genre. Andrew Higson's influential dismissal of British heritage films such as *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987)—also written by Ivory—illustrates how the desire for worthy working-class narratives, which we also see in Brody's review, can only see gay films as superficial and apolitical.[32] Left-wing French newspaper *Libération*'s review of *Chiamami* explicitly draws on this history, contrasting the film unfavourably with Ivory's earlier work. Whereas "Ivory made Marxist melodramas about sex, based on the mores of a dominant class in decline, Guadagnino makes a liberal sentimental drama about the initiation into happiness in a wealthy milieu: nostalgia isn't what it used to be."[33] For Luc Chessel, looking back with his own nostalgia, Ivory's earlier heritage films can be understood through a Marxist lens, but *Chiamami* cannot do such radical labor.

So what would it mean to flip the script of this rejection and to see the film's pretty and picturesque aesthetic as part of both its Italianicity and its queerness? Consider the film's navigation of queerness, a journey that posits the origins of gay desire in the Italian landscape and in the sunken history of the peninsula. In the scene in which archaeologists pull a classical sculpture out of the bottom of a lake, Guadagnino echoes Ingrid Bergman's famous encounters with classical figures in Roberto Rossellini's canonical meditation on Italianicity and the touristic gaze, *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), the film Guadagnino claims influenced him most.[34] Italy's heritage here includes a sculpture of a beautiful male body, one that simultaneously evidences the homosexual desire of Roman society and bears an immediate and striking resemblance to Elio (Figure 1). With the rhyming of these bodies across millennia, the film links contemporary longing to ancient queer desires, while simultaneously raising the specter of a violently heteronormalized history in the intervening centuries, all through a particularly Italian cinematic idiom.[35]

One way to reposition this intersection of Italian cultural heritage and queer desire might be to consider the middlebrow pleasures of the heritage film—with its evocation of both the Italian landscape and the bourgeois romance—as having a place in queer cinema and, moreover, as articulating something otherwise inexpressible about the politics of representing historical desires. As we have argued elsewhere,

> Reference to national culture is one recurring mode of accessing middlebrow textuality, through literary adaptations, stories about high cultural forms and biopics [...] However, there are relatively few possibilities for queer narratives in national literary, political and cultural histories, and so queer films often find their

> cultural capital elsewhere. One of the places they do this is via concepts of worldliness or cosmopolitanism – queer films garner middlebrow status by purporting to provide insight into foreign cultures through conventionally individualized queer stories.[36]

Here we can see the queerness of the film's adaptation of heritage style. Although *Chiamami* is based on a novel, it doesn't have the high cultural capital of an adaptation of a canonical work of literature, and although it circulates romantic ideas about Italy, it doesn't quite construct a tourist gaze. Instead, the queer subject is inserted into the middlebrow as a transnational figure, like a member of Elio's family, never quite at home in national narratives. If we reread Chessel's critique with the queer middlebrow in mind, we might find that *Chiamami* does after all offer some of the same potential as Ivory's earlier films. For Chessel, the political friction in heritage films comes from the historicity of representing a class in decline, and we see a comparable process at work in *Chiamami*. The film poses a moment of queer potential, replete with desire, but it does not and could not construct a lazy utopia for wealthy gays. To see the film's depiction of the 1980s Italy as frictionless nostalgia is to occlude how the film dynamizes the history offscreen and the future to come for its characters.

Moreover, even if we were to agree that there is something picturesque and touristic about this version of the middlebrow, we would argue for the political potential of such representations. Both the picturesque and the touristic describe forms of representation based on the overtness of looking relations; the picturesque image is like a picture, framed for the perspective of the spectator, and the touristic similarly conjures a geographical image shaped for the eye of the foreign visitor. But where more radical accounts of self-reflexive visuality are culturally prized (including, for instance, modernist strategies of distanciation), these pleasurably self-conscious images are historically attached to less sophisticated viewers. The consumer of the picturesque postcard or the touristic view is semiotically imagined as sentimental, often feminized, and without the authenticity of the real traveler. However, we understand the pleasurable, sentimental, inauthentic, and spectacular as terms consistently associated with feminist, queer, and other politically engaged readings of film. Considering the popular but critically reviled Italian films of the 1990s such as *Il postino* (Michael Radford, Massimo Troisi, 1994) and *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1994), for example, it could be argued that their sentimental nostalgia evoked the political losses of the Italian left, both in the postwar moment of their narratives and in their contemporary moment of the early 1990s. How might we view *Chiamami*'s version of historical Italy with this potential in mind?

One response is to think about what it means to set such a beautiful and romantic gay story in the year 1983. While the novel was set in 1987, Guadagnino moved the film back a few years, explaining that "'83 is the year—in Italy at least—where the '70s are killed, when everything that was great about

the '70s is definitively shut down."[37] Setting the film in 1983 allows it to evoke for Italian audiences in particular a moment on the brink of significant changes. It is, as we mentioned, right before mass tourism brings radical transformations. In 1987, Franco Bruschi, Elisabetta Pagnini, and Paola Pinzauti theorize the rise of a "cultura turistica" in Italy, the emergence of a new kind of space in which large numbers of tourists interact with locals, changing the character and use of public space. By the end of the decade, geographers are examining "the large scale development of international tourism" in Italy in relation to environmental impact and irreversible transformation.[38] The film proposes Elio and Oliver's mode of inhabiting Italian space as profoundly of its time, increasingly unfeasible as the number of foreign tourists visiting Italy doubled over the next two decades. The film allows us to feel this absence of *la cultura turistica* in scenes such as the one set in the disco in the small town, which is not staged with foreigners in mind. In this very carefully evoked Italian historical location, Elio and Oliver's desires can emerge in embodied form.

Chiamami places its protagonists in a particular moment in the social, sexual, and political history of Italy, but it does so not to transport its viewers seamlessly into the past. Rather, the film's silent but overt narration makes the audience see the past through the lens of what is about to come next. In other words, the film never lets us forget the fragility of this moment, its finality, and the impossibility of its return. The Italy that we see is haunted by a future that will come to destroy it.

It is beyond the scope of this short essay to account for the historical complexities of Italy in the second half of the twentieth century, but to begin to understand the film's use of history requires a broad sense of popular conceptions of this period. From the perspective of a commonly received history, the mid-1980s bookends two major periods of turmoil and compromise. It follows the protest, instability, and violence of 1970s, culminating in the neofascist Bologna Massacre of 1980. Meanwhile, the film represents the final era before the First Republic fell and before the scandals of the early 1990s. In fact, 1983 is the year that the PSI comes to power for the first time, with Bettino Craxi becoming Prime Minister and a new formation of coalition politics, coinciding with the demise of a certain vision of left potential. This shift facilitated the emergence of Berlusconi as a major force in Italian society, allowing for his 1984 acquisitions of the television stations Italia 1 and Rete 4. 1983 also saw Craxi's de facto legalization of the national transmission of regional and privately held stations, which enabled Berlusconi's subsequent rise to power and consolidated his political and cultural purchase on Italian national life.[39] When asked about the decision to shift the period in which the film is set from the novel's 1988 to 1983, Guadagnino replied: "'83 in Italy is probably the last year before the rampant hedonism of the Reagan era poisoned the well of the world. […] It was a catastrophe that we are paying [for] now. […] We thought it would be interesting to see what was probably the last summer to be like that. Maybe, it's never going to be like that again."[40] In another interview, the director returns to this

question, describing the film's periodicity as "almost at the end of a great freedom […] representative of [something] that was just finished."[41]

Although it is undoubtedly a partial account, the film's evocation of the period and its narrative positioning of the viewer ask not only that we look back to the end of a period of political and sexual radicalism in Italy, but also that we anticipate the beginning of a period of reaction.[42] The latter is referenced with strategic historical allusions within the world of the film, but these references are easily missed. Instead, the visual narration cues us to feel the imminence of political transformation as foreclosing on certain political, cultural, and personal affiliations. In other words, the film describes its own historical situatedness not simply through contextual details but also by positioning its viewer on the precipice of a completely new epoch for Italy, giving that viewer the sense that something is about to shift, about to happen. Consequently, the film makes the coming of the Second Republic felt to us narratively. Emiliano Morreale's review of the film for *La Repubblica* describes the film's relationship to history as a mode of suspension:

> i segni del tempo (Sammy Barbot, *Paris Latino* e *Words*, Craxi e … Beppe Grillo) rimangono quasi sempre sullo sfondo. Questa educazione sentimentale, piana e fatta di piccole increspature, si svolge in una giovinezza mitica, senza rabbia e senza ombra di rivolta. Ma forse proprio questa sospensione, questa lunghissima estate, finisce con l'essere metafora di un'epoca che si sognava fuori dalla Storia.[43]

Writing on Guadagnino's next film, *Suspiria*, Morreale again identifies the director's asestheticized historicism, drawing on metaphor and myth: "qui la Storia preme da tutte le parti (come spesso in Guadagnino)." Later in this same article, when Morreale asks Guadagnino about cinema's capacity to speak to history and to the present, the director responds, "Il cinema batte il tempo ma non segna l'attualità."

Of course, 1983 also locates the story during the beginning of the AIDS crisis, and some critics have commented on the historicity of the film's setting in a moment just before it would become impossible not to mention it. Spencer Kornhaber writes that

> The queer utopia Elio and Oliver built is poignantly temporary and limited—both for reasons that the movie spells out, and conceivably for historical reasons that go unmentioned but perhaps not unconsidered. In his sermon, Mr. Perlman invites his son to live his truth, but emphasizes that doing so inevitably means opening oneself up to pain. […] "When you least expect it," he says, "nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot."[44]

Although nobody in the film seems to be thinking about HIV-AIDS, the film itself is keenly aware of its historical setting, and so are its spectators. Consider the Mapplethorpe poster in Elio's bedroom, which Gary Needham has pointed out is a strange historical anomaly.[45] It is extremely unlikely that such a poster could have found its way into a teenager's bedroom in Italy in 1983, but the audience can be

touched by the queer history to which it refers. We know the world that Elio will come of age into, and the ending of the film is melancholic precisely because Elio looks forward into a future that is completely unknowable to him but replete with historical knowledge to us. In the film's extended final shot, Elio stares into a fireplace, and the spectator is asked to pay attention to his gaze, to watch closely the process of his looking but not seeing. Unbeknownst to him, he is on a precipice, and the anticipatory structure in which we look back at him looking forward is heart-breaking because we can imagine what will happen to the people, the spaces, and the utopian possibilities of his youth.

This temporal shuttling involved in looking back at looking forward, like the process of looking without necessarily seeing the object of desire, is replicated throughout the film. The film looks back directly at 1983, but it also invites the spectator to look at Elio as he looks forward to a future that he cannot yet imagine but which we, crucially, can. We know about another historical moment, just beyond the film's vision, in which the Mapplethorpe print would not be anachronistic, and in which both Italy and Elio's world would change dramatically. In the same way as the film evokes sex without showing it directly, it also evokes the later 1980s and 1990s without representing them onscreen. Its mode of historicity is precisely not that of realist depiction, but a melancholic future anterior that asks us to look, like Elio, beyond the frame. The film's last shot feels haunted by the future. In other words, it carries the awareness that a contemporary perspective provides on the intervening years. The shot asks us to relate to Elio's present with melancholy, since this moment is showing us an ending, an endpoint, a limit point, one past giving way to a more proximate past, that is, Elio's future of being gay in the early 1990s. We feel both the moment taking place onscreen and what will take place in the coming years, what happens later.

In his early days with the Perlmans, Oliver is mocked by the family for his repeated use of the word "later" as a salutation, and with this word, and the film's attention to it, he sets the tone of a projective temporality. *Later* there will be AIDS, *later* there will be Berlusconi, *later* there will be hetero marriage. That there is such a looming social, cultural, and legal apparatus of pathologizing homosexuality in Elio's immediate future does not, we would argue, invalidate the film's romantic vision, but forms a crucial part of its historical view.

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Notes

1 A note about language: we have opted primarily to use "Italianicity" over "Italianness," as the former evokes the Italian word *italianicità*, bringing with it a history of semiotically inflected cultural studies and discussions of what is now referred to as "Brand Italy." We understand Italianicity to be about discursive constructions of Italy, circulating both within and outside the nation. For a canonical example of this usage, see Roland Barthes' analysis of an advertisement of Panzani foods in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image/Music/Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32–51, especially 33–37.

2 "*Call Me by Your Name* press conference with Armie Hammer, Timothee Chalamet, Luca Guadagnino," October 9, 2017, The *Upcoming* channel, accessed August 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Daw1fLvvdlI.

When asked whether Italian audiences will see the film differently from American audiences, Guadagnino responds, "I have a very spiky relationship with the Italian industry and audience. Probably they will think this is a sort of dream of an American, but I am Italian."

"The Guardian at Tiff 2017: cast and crew of Call Me by Your Name"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NQrUgehtro GuardianNews

Published on 11 September 2017. Accessed 8 March 2019.

3 "Guadagnino: 'Chiamami col tuo nome è un film profondamente italiano,'" *La Stampa*, January 24, 2018, accessed August 18, 2018, http://www.lastampa.it/2018/01/24/multimedia/spettacoli/guadagnino-chiamami-col-tuo-nome-un-film-profondamente-italiano-AolKgTQXtfSRfg8MaMfl7L/pagina.html.

4 Guadagnino describes how nearly 15 years before the film's release producers Peter Spears and Howard Rosenman, who were in the process of adapting the novel, approached him to help to find a village that would fit the story. "NYFF Live: Making 'Call Me by Your Name' | NYFF55" Film Society of Lincoln Center, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCJquKusENs&feature=youtu.be, Published on 7 October 2017. Accessed 12 March 2019.

5 "Luca Guadagnino on His Tender New Film 'Call Me By Your Name'", Olivia Dennis, *Lindsay Magazine*, http://lindsaymagazine.co/luca-guadagnino-call-me-by-your-name/, 10 July 2017, Accessed 12 March 2019.

6 Anthony Lane, "'Call Me by Your Name': An Erotic Triumph," *The New Yorker*, December 4, 2017, Accessed March 12, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/call-me-by-your-name-an-erotic-triumph.

7 In one interview, Guadagnino talks about the idea of cosmopolitanism alongside his family's multi-ethnic background and his mother's mixed heritage, "It's almost normal [because of my upbringing, for a family] to switch from one language to another."

"The Guardian at Tiff 2017: cast and crew of Call Me by Your Name"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NQrUgehtro. Guardian News channel.

Published on 11 September 2017, Accessed 13 March 2019.

8 Richard Brody, "The Empty, Sanitized Intimacy of 'Call Me by Your Name'" *The New Yorker*, November 28, 2017, Accessed March 12, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-empty-sanitized-intimacy-of-call-me-by-your-name. At the same time, Emiliano Morreale's review for *La Repubblica* sees the film's constant referencing of works of high culture as so excessive as to be ironic, stating, "Guadagnino ha anche un certo distacco ironico, e gioca con un profluvio di riferimenti sul filo della parodia." Emiliano Morreale, "L'educazione sentimentale secondo Guadagnino," *La Repubblica*, 25 January 2018: 37.

9 One Italian review refers to the Perlmans as a "famiglia ebrea italoamericana." Nicola Falcinella, "Un'estate liquida in una ricca villa padana," *L'Eco di Bergamo*, 26 January 2018: 66. *Il Messaggero* identifies Chalamet as simultaneously raised in "una cosmopolita famiglia d'art" and "il nostro" Antione Doinel, referring to the iconic star of François Truffaut's coming-of-age film *The 400 Blows* (1959). Gloria Satta, "Guadagnino 'Vince la compassione,'" 25 January 2018: 23.

10 Brody, "Empty, Sanitized Intimacy."

11 Brody, "Empty, Sanitized Intimacy."

12 Rob LeDonne, "Explore the Italian Film Locations of 'Call Me by Your Name,'" *Marriott Traveler*, Apple News, accessed August 18, 2018, https://apple.news/AFe4raKF2RsyuaQrCEDGOkA. This same feature appeared on Apple News on March 30, 2018 under the title "See Northern Italy

Through the Enchanting Lens of 'Call Me by Your Name.'"

13 It should be noted that *Chiamami* as text and paratext enabled the character of Mafalda to gain a great prominence in the discourse about the film, despite her limited screen time. Her point of view shot is one of the most noticed examples of camera work in the film. At the same moment that Guadagnino was proclaiming his identification with her over either Elio or Oliver, GIFs, memes and other online modes of fan worship around her as a figure flourished on social media. "Call Me By Your Name – Luca Guadagnino and Timothée Chalamet Q&A", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDeGozuvQQo&t=71s, Landmark Theatres

Published on Mar 13, 2018. Accessed 13 March 2019.

14 Mariarosa Mancuso, "Guadagnino non è un fuoriclasse ma è un professionista," *Il Folgio*, XXIII: 21 (25 January 2018): 1. This review comes from a right-wing newspaper whose founder, Giuliano Ferrara, had deep ties with Craxi and the Catholic lobby in this period. Hence, it should be noted that although it is representative of a mainstream critical reaction to Chiammi's aesthetic, this source comes to us refracted by the echoes of a mainstay of 80s Italy political culture.

15 Surveying the critical reception of Guadagnino's films in the United States, Damiano Garofalo and Dom Holdaway identify the two opposing trends: a fetishization of their Italianicity and a celebration of their universalism. Included in the allusions to things Italian, they catalog references to exoticism, food, design, art, and the traditions of auteur cinema. Interestingly, Garofalo and Holdaway argue that there has been a historical shift from an emphasis on Italianicity in the earlier films to increased emphasis on the universal that culminates in *Chiamami*. "Tra italianità e universalità: La ricezione critica statunitense di Luca Guadagnino," conference presentation, American Association for Italian Studies Annual Conference, Sant'Anna Institute, Sorrento, June 2018.

16 Paolo Mereghetti, "Il fascino della scoperta del sesso nel racconto di una dolce estate," *Corriere della Sera*, 22 January 2018: 31.

17 The number of foreign tourists visiting Italy almost doubled from 22 million in 1980 to 41 million in 2000. See Bill Bramwell, ed. *Mass Tourism, Diversification and Sustainability in Southern Europe's Coastal Regions* (Cleveden: Channel View Publications, 2004), 7; and the European Environment Agency's Fact Sheet 2001, https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/tourism-intensity/tourism-arrivals, accessed 8 December 2018.

18 Spencer Kornhaber, "The Shadow Over *Call Me by Your Name*," *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2018, accessed 25 May, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/the-shadow-over-call-me-by-your-name/549269/.

19 D. A. Miller, "Elio's Education," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed 16 August, 2018, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/elios-education/.

20 Rosalind Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

21 Miller has similar concerns about *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) and suggests both films represent prominent examples of an "exasperating tradition" of recent films that mainstream queer desire "by averting our eyes from the distinctive gay male sex act".

22 "*Les cadres n'ouvrent jamais le champ au complet. Le jardin, le salon, la chambre paraissent à l'instar des souvenirs bouleversants, très précis et incomplets, incroyablement vivants.*" Dominique Widemann, "Cinéma. Un été qui ne sera jamais semblable aux autres," *L'humanité* 28 February, 2018, https://www.humanite.fr/cinema-un-ete-qui-ne-sera-jamais-semblable-aux-autres-651206.

23 "*Le film a l'originalité de ne dresser aucun interdit entre les deux personnages pour les abandonner â leur seul désir. L'homophobie reste hors champ, tant les parents sont tolerants. Le spectre du sida ne flotte pas encore sur l'époque.*" Adrien Gombeaud, "Appelle-moi par ton nom," *Positif*, 685 (March 2018): 43.

24 Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, *Queer Cinema in the World*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 14, 17. We should also point out here that *Chiamami* was censored, otherwise cut, or banned from release in several countries. What constitutes representational timidity or boldness is culturally specific, and this film still represents aberrance in many places in the world.

25 "NYFF Live: Making 'Call Me by Your Name' | NYFF55" Film Society of Lincoln Center, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCJquKusENs&feature=youtu.be, Published on 7 October 2017. Accessed 12 March 2019.

26 Sergio Rigoletto, "Against the Teleological Presumption: Notes on Queer Visibility in

Contemporary Italian Film." *The Italianist* 37:2 (2017): 212–227.

27 Ibid, 214.

28 Derek Duncan, "The Queerness of Italian Cinema." In *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, ed. Frank Burke (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017) 467–483.

29 Ibid, 478.

30 David Greven, "Unlovely Spectacle: D. A. Miller on *Call Me By Your Name*," *Film International* (March 13th, 2018) http://filmint.nu/?p=23937. Accessed 26 January 2018.

31 The recent French film *120 BPM* (Robin Campillo, 2017) wrestles with this same historical period and the problematic of representing gay desire, sex, and AIDS in a very different way.

32 Andrew Higson, "Re-Presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film," in *British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester Friedman (London: UCL Press, 1993): 109–129.

33 "*Mais Ivory faisait des mélodrames marxistes sur le sexe, à partir des moeurs d'une classe dominante en déclin, quand Guadagnino fait un drame sentimental-libéral sur l'initiation au bonheur en milieu aisé : la nostalgie n'est plus ce qu'elle était.*" Luc Chessel, "Call Me By Your Name: L'éphèbe papillonne," *Libération,* February 2, 2018.

34 "NYFF Live: Making 'Call Me by Your Name' | NYFF55" Film Society of Lincoln Center, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCJquKusENs&feature=youtu.be, Published on 7 October 2017. Accessed 12 March 2019.

35 Many Italian reviews of the film mention Bernardo Bertolucci. Garofalo and Holdaway document how frequently the press refer to the canon of Italian cinema as an inspiration for the director, as in references to Rossellini and Bertolucci but also Luchino Visconti, Marco Bellocchio, and Michelangelo Antonioni. The novel's author André Aciman has said that Pasolini's film *Teorema* (1968) served as inspiration for the story. "Luca Guadagnino and André Aciman with Hunter Harris: Call Me By Your Name | NYPL Author Talks" The New York Public Library, Published on 27 November 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGJcC2StRcc&feature=youtu.be, Accessed 12 March 2019.

36 Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Hypotheses on the Queer Middlebrow," *Middlebrow Cinema*, ed. Sally Faulkner (London: Routledge 2016): 202.

37 Andre Aciman, *Call Me by Your Name* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Stephen Garrett, "Director Luca Guadagnino on Why 'Call Me by Your Name' Is Making Everyone Cry," *Observer.com*, October 13, 2017, accessed 16 August, 2018, http://observer.com/2017/10/interview-luca-guadagnino-on-why-call-me-by-your-name-makes-people-cry/.

38 Franco Bruschi, Elisabetta Pagnini, and Paola Pinzauti, *Cultura Turistica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1987); E. Bevilacqua and E. Casti, "The Structure and Impact of International Tourism in the Veneto Region, Italy," *GeoJournal* 19/3 (1989): 285–287.

39 Detailed accounts of this history include Stephen Gundle and Noelleanne O'Sullivan, "The Crisis of 1992-1994 and the Reform of the Italian Broadcasting System," *Modern Italy* 1(1) 1995: 70–81; Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth-Century Italy: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2002) 197–234; and Paul Statham, "Television News and the Public Sphere in Italy: Conflicts at the Media/Politics Interface," *European Journal of Communication* 11.4 (1996): 511–556.

40 "The Guardian at Tiff 2017: cast and crew of Call Me by Your Name" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NQrUgehtro *Guardian News* Published on 11 September 2017. Accessed 8 March 2019.

41 "Luca Guadagnino and André Aciman with Hunter Harris: Call Me By Your Name | NYPL Author Talks" The New York Public Library, Published on 27 November 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGJcC2StRcc&feature=youtu.be, Accessed 12 March 2019.

42 There are other ways of reading this historical trajectory of social, sexual, and political change in this era, including arguments that the 1980s and Craxismo were a culmination of 1970s leftism rather than its betrayal. See for example, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See in particular Virno's essay, "Do You Remember Counterrevolution?" in this volume, 241–260.

43 Emiliano Morreale, "L'educazione sentimentale secondo Guadagnino," *La Repubblica*, 25[t]January, 2018, p. 37.

44 Kornhaber, "The Shadow."

45 Gary Needham, "Youth, Contemporary Queer Cinema, AIDS," lecture, "Retrenching/Entrenching Youth" conference, University of Liverpool, June 5, 2018.

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