

Book Review - Call Me By Your Name

Post by "Joshua" of July 10, 2019 at 7:52 PM

Call Me By Your Name

André Aciman, 2007

I wasn't sure whether to do this here, but the novel is too beautiful and heart-breaking to put out of my mind, and too pleasant and relevant not to share.

Call Me By Your Name is a more-than-bi-curious coming-of-age tale set in a lovely Italian villa on the coast of the Mediterranean. A precocious and literary 17-year-old boy named Elio spends his summer days in the back garden, transcribing Bach as he strums the guitar or fingers the piano; or else dips in the pool in the noonday sun, or in the sea just beyond. Or on the tennis court, with friends and cousins. By evenings he dines *alfresco* with his cultivated and scholarly family--the conversation sliding between English, French, and Italian as it suits--while the sun sets, the wine flows and the apricots ripen in the garden orchard.

His father, a professor, hosts one American graduate student each year in a summer residency at the villa. The student this summer, a 24-year old named Oliver, is working on a manuscript for a book he's writing on Heraclitus and the Pre-Socratics. Over his six-week residency, the two young men forge a difficult, sensual and poignant friendship that will change both their lives forever.

Aciman's novel is a protracted study of human pleasures, and the barbs they leave in us after we've known them. The scene is rich with subtle ironies and affinities: a secular Jewish-American family living "discretely" in Catholic Italy; a life of the mind, living in a body that declines--refuses--to be ignored; a world of sepia-toned books and culture and music, and the raw red emotions that bleed inexorably through all the artifice. A world of Lucretius, and Heraclitus, and Giordano Bruno in the Campo Di Fiori; but also of Dante, of Mussolini, of the crowded churches of Rome. Parallel lives.

The novel is intelligent, powerful, raw, brooding, contemplative, and sensual. Highly recommended!

-josh