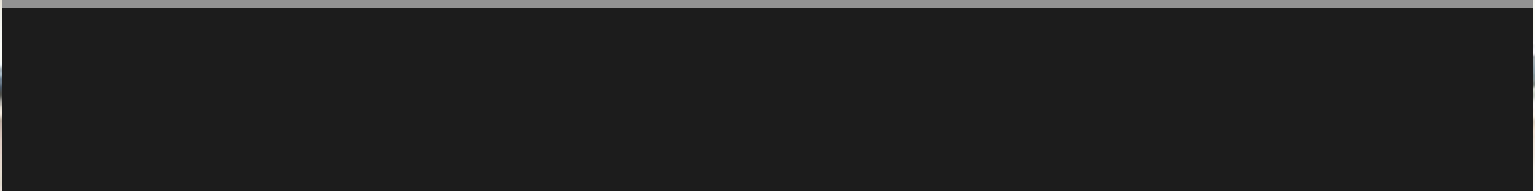


Monday, November 4, 2019

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FICTION

Love, Awfully

Call Me By Your Name...Again!

October 29, 2019 Michael Giltz

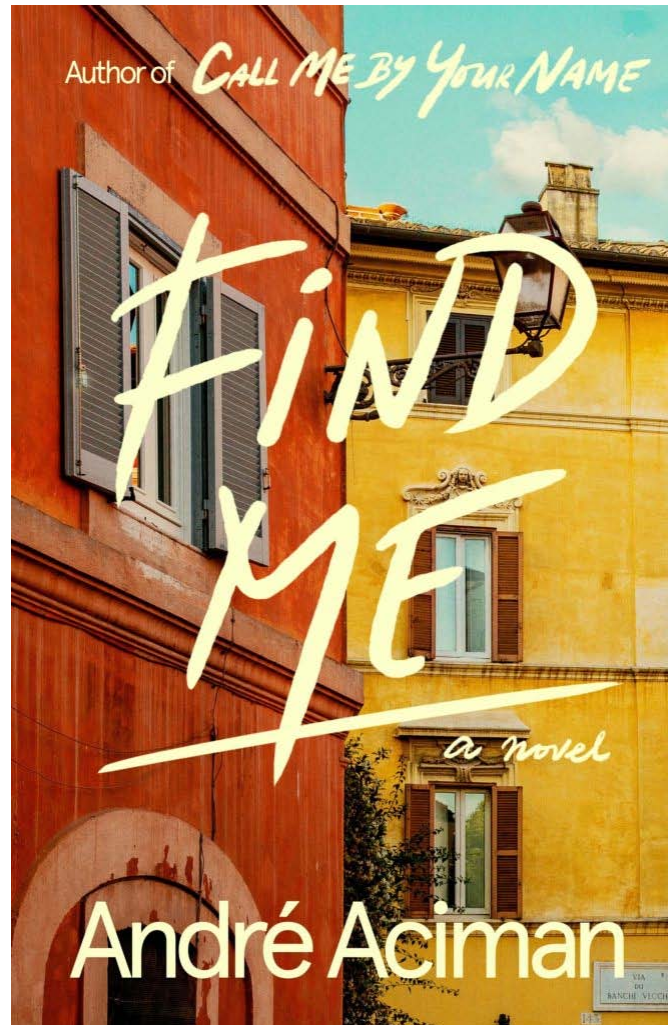
A sequel to the literary sensation *Call Me By Your Name*? That sounds like a bad idea, I thought. I was wrong. It turns out to be a positively dreadful idea. André Aciman's new novel *Find Me* manages to be terrible in its own right *and* make you question your appreciation of the earlier book.

I saw the film version of *Call Me By Your Name*, starring Timothée Chalamet as the precocious and fawn-like 17-year-old Elio and Armie Hammer as Oliver, a supremely handsome 24-year-old grad student. Oliver takes Elio to his bed but is too afraid to take Elio to his heart. Also, Elio has sex with a peach. It's a bittersweet tale and while I didn't like it nearly as much as others, I enjoyed it well enough.

Then I read the novel. It's superior to the film in every way. Subtler and clearer at the same time, the novel accomplishes everything at which the movie clumsily hints. While the film was wise to focus the action on Elio's symbolic summer of '42, the book extends well into the future.

Aciman leaves us in no doubt about how to see this romance. The novel *Call Me By Your Name* is not a story of first love. It's an earthshaking story of *true* love, a story of two people who should be together. But, alas, Oliver lacked the courage and it will never be.

Exciting and New



Well, forget all that! In a Jane Austen-like orgy of happy endings, *Find Me* doles out feel-good moments for all the men we cared about in the original novel. We nostalgically visit landmarks from the earlier novel and reminisce, which is just as embarrassing as it sounds. Characters who proved just this side of believable now turn into caricatures. People passionately in love become the sort of bores everyone else finds annoying. No one else has ever experienced such bliss, they insist, which is obnoxious whether they're right or wrong. And with each plot twist insistently pointing towards joy and happiness, we grimace.

Aciman breaks up *Find Me* into four sections with pretentious musical titles. He titles the first "Tempo", which in this case is quite slow, taking up nearly half the book. Here we follow Elio's supremely understanding father Samuel. He divorced Elio's mother because once their brilliant son left home, they realized the child was all they had in common.

Samuel is heading to Rome to visit Elio. On the train, he sits by an attractive but unhappy young woman who could be his daughter, or even granddaughter. Needless to say, they begin to chat and fall hopelessly in love.

Truly, it's a miracle any novel depicts people in love with satisfaction. Here the annoyance trebles because Samuel is such a cliché—a much older man bewitched by a young woman. She's so mature for her age, he

marvels! She, in response, insists no one has ever understood her so completely the way he does!

In one whirlwind day, they meet, go to her ailing father to celebrate his birthday (needless to say, he's delighted to meet a man as old as himself about to ravage his daughter), eat and drink and talk and talk, make love—her vagina is like a ripe fig; she dubs his erect penis “my lighthouse”—and threaten to get matching tattoos.

This is where I quote some risible dialogue to make you laugh at the awfulness of the text in *Find Me*. They're making love and Aciman writes this very typical passage:

“She smiled and after touching herself, brought her damp hand to my face, to my cheek and my forehead: ‘I want you to smell of me.’ And she touched my lips, my tongue, my eyelids, and I kissed her deep in the mouth, which was a signal we both understood, for it was, from time immemorial, the gift of one human to another human.

“‘Where did they invent you?’ I said when we were resting. What I meant to say was I didn’t know what life was before this. So I quoted Goethe again.”

Love, European Style

Find Me gets worse. Aciman dubs the second section *Cadenza*, though it lasts almost as long as *Tempo*. We watch as a 30-year-old Elio heads to Paris where he falls in love with an older man twice his age. Their romance takes days rather than minutes and involves classical-music concerts and lovely weekend getaways to homes maintained by discreet servants. Still, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

Capriccio, in which Elio's eternal love Oliver dallies with a younger man and woman at his going-away party, briskly follows. He's barely spoken to them before this party but they implicitly understand he'd gladly bed them both. Each, of course, feels honored and finds the idea delightful. Yet all the while Oliver is hypnotically hearing the voice of Elio calling to him. The book ends emphatically with *Da Capo*, where every possible plotline is tied up neatly and wrapped in a bow.

As each impossibly joyful revelation followed the next, I winced. As Aciman turned a bittersweet story into the rom-com movie *Love, Actually*, I looked away in embarrassment. *Maybe you enjoy Love, Actually*. But if they made a sequel and everyone ended up divorced, addicted to drugs, homeless or committing suicide, you might just wonder what the hell was going on.

(Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, October 29, 2019)

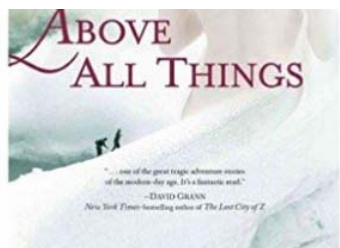
Tags: Andre Aciman, *Call Me By Your Name*, *Find Me*



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Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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