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B Paper – Comparative Analysis Paper

Romance films are some of the most popular films since the start of the movie industry. While romance movies allow for the telling of beautiful love stories, they can also perpetuate unrealistic standards for what love is supposed to look like. *La La Land* and *Call Me by Your Name* offer different perspectives of individuals and how they work realistically in a relationship within the romance genre and allow for growth within the genre itself. Romance films are typically set up with two individuals who go through boundaries or barriers and ultimately join together in some sort of official or unofficial union in the end. Let's look at how the following two films fit into the romance genre.

The first movie is *La La Land*. Mia Dolan is an aspiring actress in Los Angeles, California. After a traffic incident with a random man (later found out to be Sebastian), Mia's everyday life is shown. When she is walking around the city, she hears a jazz musician playing in a restaurant. She sees the man who cut her off in traffic. After the man gets fired for improvising, Mia tries to compliment him, yet he walks right past her. With a flashback to their encounter on the highway, Sebastian Wilder's P.O.V is revealed. Seb is a jazz musician with a dream of owning a night club. Later on, Mia runs into Seb at a party. The two walk to their cars after the party, revealing that there is some sort of feelings brewing.

Seb visits Mia at work and the two plan a “non-date” date to a movie. The night of the date, Mia breaks up with her current boyfriend and meets Seb at the movie, kissing him and expressing her feelings. After a montage of their relationship, we learn that Seb is encouraging Mia to write a one woman play and Mia is encouraging Seb to join his friends jazz pop band. The band grows in popularity, causing Seb to be gone most of the time. This leads to a fight between the couple that leads to Mia storming out. Later, a photoshoot for his band causes Seb to miss Mia’s one woman play which very few people attend. This causes Mia to break up with Seb and to move back in with her parents, giving up on her acting dream.

When Seb receives a call from a director about Mia, he drives to her hometown to convince her to audition. Eventually, she gives in and goes back to LA to audition. Five years later, Mia is a very famous actress who is married and has a child. On a night out with her husband, the pair wander into a jazz club called “Seb’s.” There, Mia sees Seb. She is instantly reminded of what could have been if she would have accepted the job and stayed with Seb. After her imagination comes back to reality, Mia and Seb make eye contact and Mia exits the club with her husband.

Within this film, there is a major theme of following your dreams. Mia and Sebastian both have their sights set on their futures as an actress and a jazz club owner. This is, until they find each other, which sets both of them into the mindset of what it means to realistically follow your dreams. Both Mia and Sebastian start to experience the advantages of having a partner when following your dreams. For example, when Mia is writing her one woman show, Sebastian listens to her read it and gives her feedback. In return, Mia encourages Sebastian to join the band, in hopes that he could save some money and buy his restaurant. However, there is more to the situation than just support and encouragement.

Later on, in the journey, Mia and Sebastian start to experience the disadvantages of being in a serious relationship and following your dreams. As Sebastian is away on tour, Mia starts to feel lonely and less supported. Sebastian has the realization that the path that he is following is not really his own dreams, but his interpretation of what Mia wants for him, making him question his position in the band. So, how does this realistic depiction of becoming who you have dreamed of being play out compared to other movies within the Romance genre?

Typically, within romance movies, the dreams of the two individuals are not revealed, unless they involve being married or falling in love. If movies do mention the two individuals' careers, the film will usually figure out a way for the two to be together in the end, which does not always result in a realistic love story. For example, *13 going on 30* features both Jenna and Matt's careers but does not say how their interesting love story affects their careers directly, whereas, *La La Land* takes the more human approach and shows the ups and downs, as previously stated. While one of the biggest aspects of *La La Land* focuses on the individual and their career path, *Call Me by Your Name* also focuses on the individual, however, in a different light.

In *Call Me by Your Name*, An American exchange student, Oliver, arrives at the Perlman home in Northern Italy in 1983. Oliver is greeted by Dr. Perlman, his wife, and his 17-year-old son, Elio. Within the first couple of days of Oliver's stay, Elio and Oliver build an unspoken tension between family and friend dynamics. After Elio confronts Oliver about his new relationship with a local, Oliver finally speaks the unspoken tension. On a trip, the two create a truce and start to become friends. Elio explores his relationship with Marzia, his current "fling" as the two have sex for the first time.

Meanwhile, Oliver and Elio start to become closer and more drawn to one another. During an outing, Elio confesses his feelings for Oliver, in which, Oliver is shocked. Later on, the outing, Oliver and Elio kiss. Oliver tells Elio that they have been good and that they can't do this anymore. The two head home. After days of silence, the pair share an intimate moment, setting their feelings in stone. Elio cries out of frustration of his sexuality and the fact that Oliver is leaving soon.

Before Oliver's departure, they travel as they spend time climbing mountains and waterfalls, getting drunk, and dancing in the streets. The day comes when Oliver has to leave, and he does. Elio is broken and calls his mother to pick him up. When he gets home, Dr. Perlman has a discussion with Elio about how he knew about Oliver and Elio and how special what they had was. About 6 months later, Elio answers a call on their home phone. It is Oliver saying how he is engaged. Elio is broken and sits in front of the fire, as his family sets up for Hannukah behind him.

With *Call Me by Your Name,* Elio and Oliver face similar, overarching individual issues like Mia and Sebastian. However, these values involve sexuality and not your dreams for the future. In the film, both Elio and Oliver question their own sexualities and explore what it means to be on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The LGBTQ+ romance genre is slightly different than the normal romance genre. While romances are known for their barriers that lead to a happy ending, LGBTQ+ romance films go through different barriers, which almost always involve the sexualities of at least one of the partners. It is also common for the LGBTQ+ romances to end in tragedy, like *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and most importantly, *Call Me by Your Name*.

While Call Me by Your Name does exhibit many of the common tropes of a LGBTQ+ romance film, it brings something different to the table. One of the ways that it defies these tropes is that we follow every part of Elio's journey in finding his sexuality, even the embarrassing or vulgar parts. Usually, this realistic and awkward depiction of the sexuality journey is not fully exposed, but rather toned down to be more "acceptable" for audiences. Another one of the ways that it defies the typical LGBTQ+ romance tropes lie within Elio's father's monologue after Oliver leaves for America. Dr. Perlman expresses that what Elio and Oliver had was special and gives his son reassurance that what he felt was more than just sexual pleasure or a confusing thought. He assures him that they were in love. This does not usually happen within LGBTQ+ romance movies, especially from parents, but it is a trend that is being seen more and more with the newer LGBTQ+ movies.

While the two films differ in how they address the individuals involved in the relationship, they address the relationships at hand in very similar fashions. At the end of both films, neither of the relationships have a "happy ending." Both relationships end with the two involved finding a life outside of each other. This poses an interesting question that most audience members ask when finishing the films. "Is this a case of soulmates that never end up together or were they ever even soulmates in the first place?"

This question is quite objective depending on the person's definition of a soulmate. For this purpose, Webster Dictionary's definition of a soulmate, which is "a person who is perfectly suited to another in temperament," will be used to analyze this common question. Within the romance genre, there is a common theme of a soulmate. Usually, the couple go through the barriers and end up with a "happily ever after" ending. With the exception of sequels and trilogies, the storyline for these films isn't revisited, causing the audience to see a "perfect" or

"biased" view of the couple's relationship. These opinions influence how we see other couples in media and even our own relationships with others. Obviously, with both of these relationships in these films ending in tragedy, it adopts a different perspective, contrary to the romanticized versions of relationships that you see in the majority of the romance genre.

La La Land shows the "what if" side of the story with the montage of Mia and Sebastian living the life that they wanted to live together. In a normal romance film, this would be the actual storyline. Mia and Sebastian would magically move to Paris for Mia's moving filming, Sebastian would play jazz in France, and after their time overseas, they would come back to Los Angeles and bask in their new fame with each other and their family. However, this is not the case. In the reality of their relationship, that would have never worked. This montage is almost a nod at conventional romance films and how they go about telling the end of a story. Mia and Sebastian both acknowledge this fact that this is not their reality and move on with their lives, accepting the prices that come with being in love with someone, proving that they were not soulmates and not satisfying the "perfectly suited" aspect of the definition.

Call Me by Your Name takes a similar, yet slightly different approach. After Elio takes the call from Oliver and hears of his engagement, the tone flips almost immediately. It is almost like the audience now understands that this is the start of heartbreak. In *La La Land*, it is almost like both Mia and Sebastian come to an unspoken understanding that they were never in each other's cards for the future, whereas with Elio and Oliver, it is more like Elio believed that they were soulmates and Oliver broke his heart. It has an overarching aspect of unrequited love.

This movie walks the line of the soulmate question more than *La La Land*, just because of the fact that Elio still believes in him and Oliver, while Oliver does not. Another valuable question is whether or not Oliver every truly fell in love with Elio or not. Based on the definition

of a soulmate, Elio and Oliver were not soulmates. It is true that they definitely had something special between them, however, Elio is experiencing his first love and first heartbreak, whether or not Oliver feels those feelings as well. But, based on that ending scene of Elio clearly starting to deal with the fact that him and Oliver will never be, there is a sense that he is trying to accept that fact, proving that he could fathom that they are not soulmates, himself.

Overall, *La La Land* and *Call Me by Your Name* individually offer perspectives on multiple topics like sexuality and following your dreams, but both films contribute something new to the romance genre. The films provide the fact that you do not have to be a film about romanticized relationships or soulmates to show a true love story.