

**REPRESENTATION OF CONSUMMATE LOVE THROUGH CHARACTERS OF  
JOSEE AND TSUNEO IN *JOSEE THE TIGER AND THE FISH* (2020) BY SEIKO  
TANABE**

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**ABSTRAK**

Cinta adalah sesuatu yang selalu ingin dipahami dan diungkapkan manusia, dan hal tersebut kerap muncul dalam berbagai narasi media. Berdasarkan gagasan tersebut, studi ini mengkaji bagaimana jenis cinta tertentu ditampilkan dalam film animasi Jepang *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan memanfaatkan teori Segitiga Cinta dari Robert Sternberg untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara dua tokoh utama. Penelitian dilakukan melalui beberapa tahapan, yaitu pengumpulan data berupa gambar dan dialog dari adegan terpilih, pengelompokan data ke dalam tema-tema sesuai indikator teori (keintiman, gairah, dan komitmen), analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola representasi cinta, serta penarikan kesimpulan mengenai bagaimana pencitraan diri tokoh dibentuk melalui ekspresi cinta dalam film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hubungan antara Josee dan Tsuneo mencerminkan bentuk cinta sejati sebagaimana dijelaskan oleh Sternberg—cinta yang mencakup keintiman emosional, gairah fisik, dan komitmen jangka panjang. Kedekatan mereka tergambar melalui percakapan yang jujur dan hubungan yang suportif, sementara gairah dan komitmen hadir secara seimbang dalam interaksi mereka. Film ini menunjukkan bahwa animasi dapat menjadi medium yang efektif untuk merepresentasikan dinamika cinta yang utuh dan bermakna, serta memberikan pemahaman lebih dalam tentang esensi cinta dalam hubungan manusia.

**Kata Kunci:** *Cinta Sempurna, Hubungan Romantis, Film Animasi, Josee The Tiger and The Fish, Analisis Tokoh*

**ABSTRACT**

Love is something that humans constantly seek to understand and express, and it frequently appears in various media narratives. Based on this idea, this study explores how a particular type of love is portrayed in the Japanese animated film *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020). This research adopts a qualitative approach and applies Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love to examine the relationship between the two main characters. The research process involves several stages: collecting data in the form of images and dialogues from selected scenes, categorizing the data into themes based on Sternberg's three components of love (intimacy, passion, and commitment), conducting thematic analysis to identify patterns in the representation of love, and drawing conclusions on how the characters' self-image is shaped through expressions of love in the film. The findings reveal that the relationship between Josee and Tsuneo exemplifies what Sternberg defines as consummate love—a complete form of love that includes emotional closeness, physical affection, and long-term commitment. Their bond is illustrated through honest communication and a supportive relationship, while passion and commitment are portrayed in a balanced way. This film demonstrates that animation can serve as an effective medium for representing deep and meaningful aspects of human relationships, offering a richer understanding of the essence of love.

**Keywords:** *Consummate Love, Romantic Relationship, Animated Film, Josee The Tiger and The Fish, Character Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Representations of love is one of the contexts that is often explored through various media, including songs and movies. Representation also means using language to say something meaningful or describe a meaningful world to others. Representation itself is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and changed by members of the culture (Hall, 2017). Moreover, love is often portrayed not only in positive aspects, but also includes the conflicts and challenges faced in relationships, highlighting its complexity. Through these representations, love becomes a universal theme, evoking thoughts and feelings, and inspiring many creative works that reflect deep human experiences.

Love can be manifested in literary works, Literary works with the development of technology make it have a new type of film, namely animated films. Animation comes from the Latin word *anima*, which means soul, life, life and spirit. Animation is a two-dimensional image that seems to move. Anime is a typical Japanese animation, which is usually characterized by colorful images featuring characters in various locations and stories, aimed at various types of audiences (Aghnia, 2016). Animated films are often associated with imagination or fantasy that cannot be realized in real life. However, this type of film is favored by audiences because it can represent certain values or principles. *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020) is one of the animated films produced in 2020 that inspires its audience. This movie tells the story of a Japanese novel entitled *Josee to Tora to Sakana-tachi*. Recent studies have shown that anime films are effective in conveying emotional depth and promoting empathy among viewers through visual storytelling and character development (Miyazaki & Tanaka, 2023).

*Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* tells the story of Tsuneo, a student who takes up diving and aspires to continue his studies in Mexico. Tsuneo befriends Josee, a physically disabled woman who lives with her grandmother. The interactions between Josee and Tsuneo broaden their horizons about life, love, struggle, and dreams. One of the good messages that emerges in this movie is about love. Josee, as the second main character, tries hard to show her love for Tsuneo, even though Tsuneo does not realize it directly. She initially hesitates to express her feelings because she doesn't want to burden Tsuneo, but then becomes determined to help Tsuneo rise from his difficult time. Kotaro Tamura acted as the director in *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020), directing both the story and the visual aspects. Based on information from the website [myanimelist.net](http://myanimelist.net), the movie *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020) placed 44th in the Japan Institute Grant for Fabulousness in Movement. Yamamoto and Saito (2023) emphasizes how romantic anime such as *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* can foster emotional intelligence in adolescents, particularly in understanding compassion, vulnerability, and resilience.

The strength of *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* lies not only in its visual artistry, but also in how it presents love as a transformative journey. The film offers a nuanced portrayal of romantic connection that develops gradually through empathy, shared experiences, and mutual respect. Unlike typical romantic tropes that rely heavily on grand gestures or idealized fantasies, *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* highlights the emotional growth of its characters as they navigate personal limitations, loss, and dreams. This slow-building connection mirrors real-life complexities of love, where vulnerability and trust play central roles. Maharani (2022) emphasizes that love in visual narratives often grows through character development and personal transformation, as seen in various literary adaptations. In a broader context, Hasrun et al. (2024) also explain that structural analysis in visual storytelling—including manga and anime—allows audiences to grasp deeper meanings behind character relationships and emotional dynamics. Through its depiction of characters with emotional and physical challenges, the film invites viewers to reflect on how love can empower individuals to accept themselves and others more fully. Thus, anime as a medium is not merely a form of

entertainment, but a cultural text that speaks to universal human experiences through symbolic and emotional layers.

The reason the author conducted this research is because there is depiction of love in the storyline presented which is considered as consummate. It is a perfect form, where people can love without sacrificing themselves. The author feels that this anime successfully impresses the story of their journey. Therefore, the author is interested in examining the romantic relationship reflected through Josee and Tsuneo's relationship in this anime story with the theory proposed by Robert Sternberg.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative approach, which is characterized by interpretive and naturalistic methodologies. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding phenomena in their natural context, often through non-numeric data such as images, dialogues, and narratives. This approach aims to uncover the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to their experiences and actions. In this study, the researcher examines the animated film *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* to explore how personal branding is reflected through the characters, with a particular focus on how love is portrayed in relation to the Triangular Theory of Love.

The research follows a systematic process divided into several stages to ensure thoroughness and depth in the analysis. First, data collection is conducted by selecting key scenes from the film that vividly illustrate aspects of personal branding and love. The images and dialogues from these scenes are extracted and saved in JPEG format to allow for clear, organized analysis. The selection of images is based on indicators that align with the characteristics of ideal love as outlined in Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, which includes intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Second, the collected data are categorized into themes based on the indicators from the Triangular Theory. For example, scenes that emphasize emotional connection, physical attraction, or dedication are categorized under the respective components of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Each theme is carefully labeled and organized to allow for clear identification of patterns in the portrayal of love within the narrative.

Third, data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The researcher critically examines the selected images and dialogues to determine how the characters' behaviors, expressions, and relationships reflect the three dimensions of love in Sternberg's theory. Each scene is scrutinized to see how it visually and textually communicates these dimensions, and how the characters' personal brands are shaped through these expressions of love.

Finally, interpretation and conclusions are drawn from the analysis, with a focus on how the film's portrayal of love serves as a reflection of the ideal love model. The researcher evaluates how the characters' personal branding is influenced by their ability to embody the elements of love described by Sternberg, and whether these portrayals align with broader societal expectations of romance and relationship dynamics. Additionally, the secondary data—literature and written sources—are incorporated to provide a deeper understanding of the Triangular Theory of Love and its application in popular media.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter analyzing a film titled *Josee the Tiger and the Fish* (2020) by Seiko Tanabe, researchers will analyze in depth how the anime depicts aspects of consummate love. By following the story of Tsuneo and Josee who went from being coworkers to becoming a couple. Tsuneo's presence in Josee's life makes Josee feel like she has a free life. Likewise,

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Tsuneo has dreams but with Josee's presence, Josee does not hinder her dreams but helps her to achieve Tsuneo's dreams.

### Intimacy

In Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, intimacy signifies the feelings of closeness, connection, and a profound emotional relationship with another person. This aspect is evident in partnerships that feature shared understanding and transparency, allowing individuals to freely express their feelings, aspirations, and dreams. In the film *Josee the Tiger and the Fish* (2020), the aspect of intimacy is prominently displayed; initially, Josee is portrayed as shy, hesitant, and skeptical, causing her world to feel restricted because of her personality, and their first meeting is awkward as a result of Josee's desire to retreat. However, Josee gradually begins to open up to Tsuneo, particularly at the timestamp 24:50 to 25:38, where Tsuneo encourages Josee by carrying her closer to the ocean so she can experience the sensation of the salty seawater.



**Picture 1. Josee Starts to Trust Tsuneo**

*Josee : Uh, what are you doing?! Put me down, pervert! Stop it! Hey!*  
*Tsuneo : You wanted to make sure of yourself, didn't you?(Tsuneo's feet are already touching the seawater, her torch splashes on Josee)*  
*Josee : Salty, it's really salty! Why is it so salty?*  
*Tsuneo : That's good then.*

In this conversation, Josee's character is initially skeptical of Tsuneo, but over time, she begins to trust and open up. Josee initially wants to be taken down from Tsuneo's arms, but after feeling the sea water, she chooses to stay in the arms. This moment depicts their happiness and the moment Josee begins to forget her refusal to accept help. She shows her weak side and their relationship transforms from mere friends to a stronger emotional bond. Tsuneo looks at Josee with respect and affection, trying to make her feel comfortable without feeling awkward. The emotional transformation seen in this scene resonates with the idea that love in anime is often portrayed through vulnerability, self-acceptance, and the courage to connect with others despite limitations, as also emphasized by Arbi (2023) in his analysis of *Your Lie in April*.



**Picture 2. Start to Open Their Hearts to Each Other**

- Josee : Go home! No one needs a fool like you! What are you doing?*  
*Tsuneo : It's pretty good, right?*  
*Josee : You made this, servant?*  
*Tsuneo : It's made by your servant.*  
*Josee : It deserves to be so ugly. what is the name of this fish?*  
*Tsuneo : When I was a kid, the fish shop near my house had one and I liked it immediately. i always went to see it every day after school. when i found out that this fish was far from his group, i was even more attracted to him. he must also miss his family, i thought.*  
*Josee : Him too?*  
*Tsuneo : My parents are divorced, my dad left home, my mom is always busy working.*  
*Josee : I don't think it's lonely, this Clarion Angel. Because you see it every day.*  
*Tsuneo : I've been wanting to see him swim with his group for a long time. I've been working hard and earning money. They're hard to find so a vacation isn't enough.*  
*Josee : That's a nice dream, I hope it comes true soon.*

This scene shows the development of the closeness between Tsuneo and Josee. At first, Josee is angry, but her demeanor begins to soften as she accepts the Clarion Angel fish given to her by Tsuneo. Despite being somewhat rude, Josee retains the gift, showing that she appreciates the attention given by Tsuneo. The gift symbolizes Tsuneo's attempt to touch Josee's softer side. In addition, Tsuneo begins to share stories about his childhood, showing the growing trust between them. This moment displays the beginning of an emotional closeness built on empathy and understanding of each other. As Clardy (2013) explains, emotional connections in romantic relationships are often rooted in reasoned acts of care, small gestures of attention, and mutual vulnerability, all of which are reflected in the way Tsuneo and Josee begin to bond.

### Passion

In the concept of the love triangle proposed by Sternberg, passion includes desire, physical attraction, as well as the emotional drive to unite. In the movie Josee, the Tiger and the Fish (2020), the element of passion between Tsuneo and Josee is expressed in a gentle and emotional way, rather than through a physical approach. The passion between them develops through emotional connection, such as when Josee shows jealousy when meeting Tsuneo's coworker Mai Ninomiya at 35:40 - 37:13. This moment illustrates the emergence of Josee's deeper sense of ownership and possessiveness towards Tsuneo. This aligns with Sternberg's



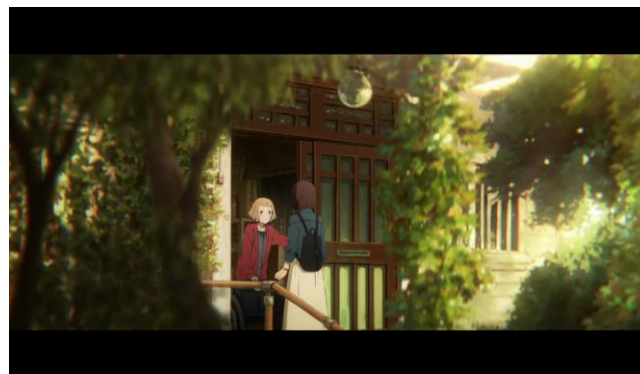
triangular theory of love, in which jealousy is often an emotional indicator of romantic passion and attachment (Firmansyah & Indarti, 2022).



**Picture 3. Josee's Unexpressed Jealousy**

- Mai* : Why are you here?  
*Tsuneo* : I happened to be nearby, so I stopped by here first.  
*Mai* : Hello, I'm Mai Ninomiya, Tsuneo told me a lot about you, if there's anything needed don't hesitate to say it. (with that may immediately divert the conversation because Josee seems to be avoiding her)  
*Josee* : Let's go home  
*Tsuneo* : We just arrived. Josee? Sorry. What's wrong with you?  
*Josee* : shut up, you idiot.  
*Tsuneo* : You're the one who wanted to see my workplace, right?  
*Josee* : I don't like places like that.  
*Tsuneo* : That kind of place? I don't know why you hate it.  
*Josee* : You won't understand.  
*Tsuneo* : Yes. I will not understand.

In this passage, it is clear that Josee is unhappy with Mai's presence. When Mai tries to initiate a dialog, Josee is cold and withdrawn, showing indications of jealousy and emotional attachment to Tsuneo. When the discussion turns to Tsuneo, Josee's behavior becomes more defensive, wanting to take Tsuneo home immediately to avoid any possible threats. Josee's move reflects a subtle but deep jealousy, an expression of emotional arousal that often occurs in a new and vulnerable relationship. This jealousy is also evident at 1:09:10 - 1:11:06, when Mai visits Josee's home to explore her honesty about her feelings for Tsuneo.



**Picture 4. Start to Confidently Admit Feelings**

*Mai : You're inside right? Come out! If you don't come out-*  
*Josee : Leave me alone! Don't come back!*  
*Mai : Tsuneo gave up on studying abroad. So, I'll make him mine. I'll give him enough love to make him forget the ocean. I never want him to go to Mexico. I pray that he'll forget his silly dreams and stay by my side. I want to always be by his side. I know him much better than you, his love for fish, the way he sings badly, the way he plays suit badly. he loves pudding hates cucumber and always has ice cold hands, I can list a hundred more, I know him much better, just say something!*  
*Josee : My servant never gives up, no matter what happens, he won't forget the fish or abandon his dreams! That's what he is! You know that, right? I can't say much about him. But you can't beat my feelings for him.*  
*Mai : If it's true then show it!*

In this emotionally charged dialog, Mai conveys her feelings to Josee, not with the intention of hurting, but to motivate him not to give up. Josee responds honestly, admitting that she doesn't know as much about Tsuneo as Mai, but emphasizing that her feelings are just as strong. This confession reflects Josee's courage to love and fight for Tsuneo, despite her inexperience. This moment marks an important change for Josee, showing her emotional development from being introverted to being more assertive in fighting for love. The representation of Josee and Tsuneo's emotional transformation in the anime also supports the findings of Israelia and Zuliastutik (2021), who interpret their bond as a form of self-actualization, where both characters grow individually and relationally through emotional challenges.

In the film, an emotional connection through physical interaction is depicted, particularly in the scene from 1:30:48 to 1:32:44, where Tsuneo searches for Josee and ultimately finds himself in a similar situation as during their first encounter. At that moment, Josee is the first to notice and quickly wakes up, concerned for Tsuneo, who is resting on the street amidst a heap of snow.



**Picture 5. Tsuneo Has a Passion to Meet Josee**

*Josee : Y-You okay? Your leg. You just got out of the hospital.*  
*Tsuneo : Because of your absence I ran without realizing it. Why?*  
*Josee : I've decided to become a picture book illustrator, I plan to start on my own. You've pushed me enough from behind.*

*Tsuneo : Not for you! Not for your sake. I'm the one who wants to be your servant!*  
*Josee : What about Clarion Angel, don't you want to go to Mexico?*  
*Tsuneo : I would still go but, I love you, Josee!*  
*Josee : I... I... love my servant too*

In this soulful dialog, Tsuneo openly states that Josee's departure has created a void in his life that no one else can fill. He emphasizes that his feelings are genuine, not for Josee's sake, but because of his deep desire to be with her. In an emotionally charged silence, Tsuneo kisses Josee as a symbol of long-held desire. Josee is surprised, but warmly accepts the kiss, showing that she has similar feelings. The passion in this moment is gently conveyed, filled with sincerity, longing, and courage, which strengthens the emotional connection between them. This depiction reflects what recent research by Nakamura and Hoshino (2023) describes as "quiet passion"—an emotionally intimate expression of love commonly found in Japanese romantic anime, where restraint and vulnerability become the foundation for meaningful relationships.

### Commitment

In Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, commitment represents a facet of love characterized by a deliberate choice to care for someone and to uphold the romantic bond over time, despite challenges and transformations. Commitment encompasses two crucial elements: the initial choice and the ongoing resolve to nurture this love and sustain the partnership. In the film *Josee, The Tiger and the Fish* (2020), commitment is not evident at the outset but gradually emerges, paralleling the emotional evolution of the two protagonists.

At first, the interactions between Tsuneo and Josee are based on curiosity and concern, but over time, through various challenges and hardships, their bond begins to build. They both learn to accept each other through thick and thin. This bond became apparent when Josee's grandmother passed away. Josee stated that her life would be fine even though she could no longer pay Tsuneo. However, Tsuneo feels lost without Josee, so at 55:19, he decides to see Josee again. Upon arrival, Tsuneo realizes that many changes have taken place in Josee's room. This moment marks a shift toward deeper commitment, echoing what Demarco (2010) describes as love's healing dimension—where emotional connection helps individuals overcome grief and hardship. Similarly, Shinta Dyah (2018) emphasizes that in anime narratives, commitment often emerges through emotional trials, reinforcing Sternberg's theory by showing how lasting love is built on shared experiences and growing trust.



Picture 6. Tsuneo Who Still Visits Josee



*Tsuneo : Josee I brought taiyaki*  
*Josee : What did you come for?*  
*Tsuneo : Josee? .... your room*  
*Josee : I told the janitor to clean it once a month.*  
*Tsuneo : Your picture?*  
*Josee : Discarded*  
*Tsuneo : But why?*  
*Josee : It's none of your business. if that's all you have to do, you can leave now (Josee slowly climbs up the bed and rushes to turn on the radio, but it doesn't turn on at all)*

In this dialog, we can see the discomfort that comes with Josee's transformation. Josee tries to push Tsuneo away because she feels that she is only a liability, especially since she can no longer afford to pay Tsuneo's salary. However, at 56:58, when Josee asks him to complete his last task as a servant, Tsuneo firmly states that he expects nothing in return. Although Tsuneo initially worked to earn money, his attitude shows that their relationship has turned more sincere and dedicated. This moment reflects not only Tsuneo's emotional maturity, but also Josee's internal struggle as she navigates her self-worth and growing affection. As Maulana (2022) notes, Josee's persistence and emotional growth represent a shift in character identity—illustrated through semiotic cues that reveal her evolving perception of independence, vulnerability, and love.



**Picture 7. Tsuneo Who Chose to Stay With Josee**

*Tsuneo : To the beach?*  
*Josee : Here is enough*  
*Tsuneo : Want me to buy you a hot drink?*  
*Josee : No need. Salty (when Tsuneo turns to Josee, Josee is seen crying here while looking at the sea)*  
*Tsuneo : Josee... (Josee quickly wipes her tears and turns around in her wheelchair) I don't need to be paid, don't tell me this is my final task!*

In this dialog, we see that commitment is central to the relationship between Tsuneo and Josee. Josee, who is crying softly while looking out at the sea, is trying to end their time together not because she doesn't love Tsuneo, but to protect him from the heavy burden of responsibility. She wanted to free Tsuneo from feeling pressured. However, Tsuneo emphasized that he chose to stay by Josee's side not out of a sense of obligation or pity, but out of genuine love and awareness of his own decisions. When Josee tries to move away out of guilt, Tsuneo shows that true commitment means persevering and choosing to stay together, even in difficult situations. This moment emphasizes that love is not just about feelings, but also about the spirit to keep fighting for the relationship. As Djunaidi and Mintarsih (2022) explain in their semiotic study

of the anime *Violet Evergarden*, the expression of love often carries layers of meaning—extending beyond verbal declarations to acts of emotional resilience and commitment in the face of adversity.

Commitment is also seen at the end of the story, when Tsuneo and Josee try to realize their respective dreams - Tsuneo to Mexico and Josee to start living independently as an illustrator. At 1:37:19, in spring, Josee sits in a garden surrounded by cherry blossoms. Although Tsuneo was supposed to stay in Mexico, he secretly returned during spring break to see Josee without giving any prior notice. This action shows that despite the distance, Tsuneo's commitment to Josee remains strong. This is in line with research by Ananda and Wulandari (2023) which shows that commitment in long-distance romantic relationships is often demonstrated through consistent actions and sacrifices that are not always expressed verbally, but through symbols and sincere emotional attention.



**Picture 8. Tsuneo Returns to Meet Josee**

*Tsuneo : Really raining cherry blossoms*  
*Josee : Are you dead?*  
*Tsuneo : Huh?*  
*Josee : Are you a ghost?*  
*Tsuneo : I'm going home for spring holiday*  
*Josee : You didn't tell me*  
*Tsuneo : I wanted to surprise you*  
*Josee : You're quite insolent for a Tsuneo!*

The closing scene of Josee, the Tiger and the Fish (2020) underscores the bond that has been forged between Tsuneo and Josee through a long emotional journey. After facing various challenges, wounds, and separation, they choose to support each other despite being far apart. Tsuneo, who is studying in Mexico, returns secretly during spring break to meet Josee, as a symbol of sincere commitment. Meanwhile, Josee has developed into an independent and confident illustrator. Their meeting shows that despite being separated by physical distance, emotional closeness is maintained. The casual conversation between them reflects the maturity of a love built not on possessions, but on loyalty and a conscious decision to be there for each other. This scene emphasizes the true meaning of commitment in Sternberg's theory of love. This aligns with the findings of Nuraini and Sari (2023), who stated that love in Japanese films is often depicted through the symbolism of simple yet meaningful actions, reflecting deep emotional commitment. Furthermore, a study by Pratama and Lestari (2022) showed that long-distance relationships in romantic anime narratives often emphasize the power of emotional communication and trust as the primary foundation for maintaining intimacy without physical presence.

## CONCLUSION

The research shows that love is made up of three key parts: intimacy, passion, and commitment. These elements help people understand and reflect on the kind of love they share with someone. This idea is clearly seen in the Japanese animated film *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020), through the relationship between the main characters, Josee and Tsuneo. Their story represents what Robert Sternberg calls “consummate love”—a complete form of love that includes all three parts. The closeness between Josee and Tsuneo is shown through their honest conversations and the way they open up to each other emotionally. Their bond grows in a way that feels natural and supportive, with neither one feeling forced or pressured. Passion comes through in their affection and physical connection, while commitment is shown in their promise to stay by each other's side, even as they chase their own dreams. This film is a great example of how animated stories can explore deep and meaningful aspects of human relationships, helping us better understand what real, balanced love can look like.

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