



IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Luca Guadagnino in Conversation

The deeply humanistic films of Luca Guadagnino, films that seem able to seize the most visceral, indescribable feelings out from the air, have traversed many subjects, though he is perhaps most beloved for his lush, sun-dappled tale of summer love, *Call Me by Your Name*. *Bones and All* is also an immersive, youthful romance – yet one forged in an almost opposite world. It is Guadagnino's first film made in America, and a riff on the American tradition of the transformative road trip. But this is an America with a mythic twist, one in which two people cursed to be 'others', and with no clear future, pursue a shimmering dream of escape and acceptance.

Guadagnino first came upon the story in a screenplay adaptation by one of his favourite writers: David Kajganich, who previously wrote Guadagnino's romantic comedy *A Bigger Splash* and his remake of the horror classic *Suspiria*. The director found himself magnetised by this very different tale, one that left room for more than one interpretation. 'David's scripts are so outside the mould and so organic to human behaviour, they are always a treasure. He never second-guesses the audience. Very quickly, I felt myself unconsciously pulled into this world,' says Guadagnino.

That world was inspired by, though different from, Camille DeAngelis' 2015 YA novel of the same name, which utilised the concept of a teenager born with a genetic need to consume other humans in order to completely disrupt a coming-of-age-story.

Says Kajganich, 'As someone who lived a closeted rural, adolescence in the 1980s Midwest, reading Camille's novel for the first time touched me in an unexpected and bracing way. Too many people know what it is to be cast as the "other" in someone else's eyes, and adolescence is a time when a lot of this "othering" happens, so the book felt noble to me in trying to articulate something of that experience, but from a completely new vector.'

For Guadagnino, it was all the characters Kajganich drew – vagabonds, drifters, and lonesome souls leading invisible lives off the beaten path – and not their potent cravings, that inspired most. He saw in it a wide-ranging exploration of difference, of solitude, of unseen America, but especially of what binds human beings together when so much threatens to pull us apart.

'I'm drawn to those who are, maybe wilfully, not at the centre of things. For me, *Bones and All* is a story of two people who must live on the margins of the social world,' Guadagnino says. 'I never saw it as scary. I wanted people to love these characters, to feel for them, to root for them, and not judge them. I wanted them to see in Maren and Lee a cinematic reflection of all the possibilities that build us as people.'

Kajganich was not surprised to find Guadagnino so aligned with the themes of his screenplay and could not wait to see where he took it on the screen. 'I thought this story could really be emboldened by Luca's unflinching attitudes about desire and identity, and it absolutely was,' the writer says. 'I knew he

wouldn't shy away from the script's insistence on inviting audiences to begin their relationships with Maren and Lee in tough, even appalling, contexts, before starting to move closer and closer to them on the unexpected ground of a young love story. Luca isn't afraid of anything on the page, except perhaps untruths.'

The cannibalism of it all didn't strike Guadagnino as a provocation, more an atmosphere. He notes that the eating of flesh and blood has long been a religious and literary metaphor. But he decided to approach the characters' unsettling appetites as simply a fact of their lives, a requirement as real and pressing as sleep. More importantly, it's a malady that imposes fear, shame, compulsion, and prejudice, rendering them outcasts, and forcing them to confront, constantly and palpably, the primal side of human nature, the damage we're all capable of. When they feed, Guadagnino emphasised that it is 'difficult and sad for them', necessary and satiating, but always leading to regret.

That only adds to realism. 'This is a story of people who are subjected to a certain condition that they can't control, and that is something that can suggest many other conditions,' Guadagnino reflects. 'But, from the beginning, I simply believed in the existence of these people. And I wanted the audience to also believe in their existence without bringing in any elements of the fantastic.'

Always drawn to strong women characters, Guadagnino endeavoured to unpack the rich complexity of how Maren, not quite an adult, approaches her unwanted destiny. She never just accepts her impulses, but grapples at every turn with the ethical conundrum of not being able to get out of this life without harming others. He was interested in the fact that she not only tries to come to terms with who she is but goes a step further – pushing against the boundaries of who she might be, inside a reality that wants to confine her, that wants to cut off her choices, that makes her unsafe.

'I always saw Maren as a wanderer and a seeker in the great tradition of American literature,' the director explains. 'She has the iconic quality of someone who becomes an agent of discovery – yet with the specificities of being an isolated, disenfranchised young girl in the 80s.'

Equally, the project presented a gift to Guadagnino: the chance to reunite with Timothée Chalamet, who he knew beyond a doubt had the ability to channel Lee's mix of innocence and turbulence, while making the tale feel part of our times. 'We had such a beautiful experience on *Call Me by Your Name* and since then, I've watched the blooming of Timothée's path in cinema, of his wonderful persona,' he says. 'I said right away, I will do this film so long as Timothée does it. He loved the script, so we began to work on it together with David to allow certain elements to shine even more.'

He was also exhilarated by the idea of filming as an outsider in parts of the USA he'd never seen before, and to recreate an 80s America. 'The 80s were a time of great contradictions,' he observes, 'when parts of the American economy were booming yet others were impoverished, when optimism was soaring, but some were left out of the picture. I felt the period paralleled the internal contradictions of these characters, their quest for settlement and also the impossibility of such.'

***Bones and All* production notes**

LUCA GUADAGNINO

Born in Palermo, Sicily, Italy

Selected filmography

Film

2022 **Bones and All**
2019 **The Staggering Girl** (short)
2018 **Suspiria**
2017 **Call Me by Your Name**
2015 **A Bigger Splash**
2013 **Walking Stories** (short)
Bertolucci on Bertolucci
2012 **Here** (short)
2011 **Inconscio italiano**
2010 **Chronology** (short)
2009 **I Am Love**
2007 **Part deux** (short)
2005 **Melissa P.**
2004 **Cuoco contadino**
2003 **Mundo civilizado**
2001 **Au revoir** (short)
2000 **L'uomo risacca** (short)
1999 **The Protagonists**
1997 **Qui** (short)

TV

2020 **We Are Who We Are**

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Preview: She Said + Q&A with screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz
Thu 24 Nov 18:00

Preview: The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse + Q&A with directors Peter Baynton and Charlie Mackesy and producer

Cara Speller

Fri 2 Dec 18:15

Missing Believed Wiped Session 1: World Preview Lost and Found: Spike Milligan: The Unseen Archive + intro

Sat 3 Dec 11:45

Missing Believed Wiped Session 2: oddities and rarities

Sat 3 Dec 14:20

Preview: Tori and Lokita + Q&A with director-screenwriters

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Sat 3 Dec 17:45

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 5 Dec 18:30

Preview: Enys Men + Q&A with director

Mark Jenkin

Mon 5 Dec 20:45

TV Preview: Happy Valley Final Series Episode 1 + Q&A with

Sally Wainwright, James Norton & Siobhan Finneran

Tue 6 Dec 18:15

Book Launch Event: The Shining

(Extended Version) + Q&A with Lee Unkrich

Thu 8 Dec 18:40

Peter Greenaway in Conversation

Fri 9 Dec 18:20

The Precious Things:

BBC Centenary Special + intro

Sat 10 Dec 14:20

TV Preview: His Dark Materials + intro with

cast and crew

Tue 13 Dec 18:00 BFI IMAX

TV Preview: Ghosts Christmas Special + Q&A with cast and crew

Thu 15 Dec 18:20

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