

# THIS WEEK'S CLASSIC MOVIE

by Madeline Pritchard



'But to make yourself feel nothing, so as not to feel anything – what a waste...'

## Call Me By Your Name



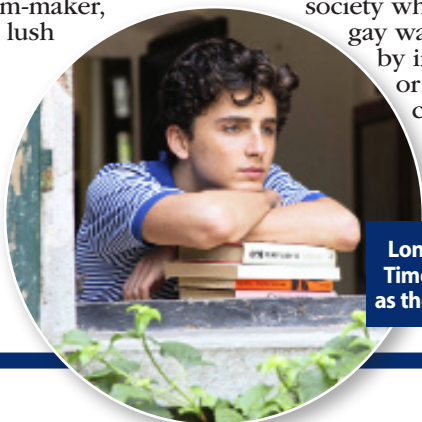
Set during a long summer in northern Italy, *Call Me By Your Name* stars Timothée Chalamet as talented teenager Elio, who falls into a relationship with Oliver (Armie Hammer), a student of his father's who comes to stay in the family home. The pair dance around each other – literally and figuratively – and are drawn together in spite of themselves.

James Ivory, who wrote the screenplay and was initially supposed to co-direct the film with Luca Guadagnino, became the oldest-ever winner in any category at the Oscars for his script. Though he is a legendary film-maker, known for the lush period dramas he directed as one third of Merchant Ivory Productions, Ivory had previously written only one film without

the company's resident screenwriter, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala – *Maurice*, the 1987 adaptation of novelist EM Forster's landmark story of gay longing in Edwardian Britain.

His two solo films make a perfect counterpoint to each other, situated as they are as pinpoints on a hundred-year timeline of LGBTQ+ experience and representation – *Maurice* was written in 1913 and the film was released in 1987; *Call Me By Your Name* is set in 1983 and was released in 2017.

In *Maurice*, the title character by turns explores and resists his sexuality in a repressive society where being gay was punishable by imprisonment or even chemical castration. Negative public attitudes



Long, hot summer: Timothée Chalamet as the precocious Elio

Prodigal son: Chalamet with Armie Hammer, above and below; Michael Stuhlbarg, above right



towards homosexuality continued well into the 1960s – homosexual acts, even in private, weren't decriminalised until 1967 – and for this reason Forster avoided publishing the novel during his lifetime. Societal acceptance is an impossibility for Maurice, but he is able to eventually find peace in the arms of a lover. Forster's determination that the story should have a happy ending was remarkable for its time, and remained so when the movie was produced, over 70 years later, in the midst of the Aids crisis.

In spite of its 1980s setting, *Call Me By Your Name* makes no explicit mention of the

epidemic, although Ivory had referenced it in an early version of the script. This absence allows the later movie to escape the tragic tone that necessarily hovers over *Maurice* – there's a light touch, a joyful feeling of liberation running through Elio and Oliver's relationship. As Ivory told *Hollywood Reporter*, when he was asked about the two films as a pair: 'The worst thing that could happen to them probably would be some sort of parental disapproval, and even the parental disapproval wasn't there. One is a story of stress and the other is a story of desire.'

Other than making the name of its star, that lack of parental disapproval is perhaps the film's most significant legacy. As the film is drawing to a close, after Oliver has returned the States, leaving a heartbroken Elio behind, Professor Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg) gives his son some comfort. Gently indicating his awareness and acceptance of the relationship between Elio and Oliver – and perhaps alluding to gay experiences in his own past – Perlman encourages Elio to experience the pain he is feeling, to sit with it rather than ignore it.

Stuhlbarg described the response he'd had to this scene in *Interview Magazine*: 'Often people have said that they wish that they had had an opportunity like this, to hear some of the things Professor Perlman shares with his son from their own parents. It seems to have struck people in a very private and profound place in regards to their own upbringings. They wish that these words had been said to them.'

Sunday ■ GREAT! movies ■ 10.45pm