

EAT OR BE EATEN: *BONES AND ALL* (LUCA GUADAGNINO, 2022)

MIRANDA HAWS



our high school girls laze at a sleepover. Sherry paints “Cinnamon Glaze” on Jackie’s nails. “Copper Fever” is the shade swiped onto the adjacent girl’s fingernail. The rusty color is “too orange” for Kim’s liking, but not for Maren, who quickly inserts Kim’s freshly copper-painted finger deep in her mouth as she clenches down and pulls, ripping all the flesh from her finger, nonchalantly chewing on skin, muscle, tendons, and blood. Kim lets out a blood-curdling scream as her unsuspecting peer cannibalizes her hand, with Maren escaping the house in seconds, running into a black field, enveloped by the night. Luca Guadagnino introduces the audience to Maren Yearly (Taylor Russell), his protagonist, during an innocent high school sleepover gone awry. This scene transforms a timid midwestern high school student into the cannibalistic protagonist that *Bones and All* will follow throughout her transition into adulthood as she comes to terms with her identity as an “eater”, a word first coined by the perplexing Sully (Mark Rylance), whom Maren meets after traveling to Columbus, Ohio; the first stop on her trek across the rural United States.

Sully’s very first moment on screen frames him as someone untrustworthy. After her father left her on her own, with nothing but

her birth certificate, an envelope of cash, and a pre-recorded tape, Maren lands in Columbus via bus. As she attempts to find comfort on the stoop of what appears to be a municipal building - its thick white columns adorning its stately facade - Sully makes his presence known to the eighteen-year-old from afar. As thunder rumbles, she spots him motionless in the street staring at her, framed in an extreme wide-shot as he stands to the far left of the screen.



His figure is so small and out of center that he could easily go unnoticed by any passive viewer; he is a master at silently lurking.



When Sully declares himself to the lone girl, the frame is split down the center in two halves.

The left side of the screen frames Sully in a wide shot as he begins to approach Maren from the road, with the right half of the screen being taken up by the backlit out-of-focus column in the foreground that Maren has protected herself behind from the strange man ambling toward her in the darkness. Guadagnino uses the camera in this shot to act as Maren's eyes, literally hiding the camera behind the pillar as though we are peering with her, showing the audience her perspective as a trepidatious onlooker to the impending presence of Sully. While there is a large physical distance between the two, his echoing voice is sharply directed at Maren, who is both emotionally and physically isolated from any other human in the diegesis. Her fear is palpable: A woman alone, traveling across states without an anchor - no family or friends or a roof over her head - until the sixty-something man in the shadows advances toward her directly at an undisclosed hour of the night - an hour when it seems that no one but the two are awake. "When was the last time you fed?" Sully asks the young girl in the vacant, echoing streets. "Many months, I'll say", the old man states confidently, now framed in a medium-close shot, the details of his craggy face accentuated by the stark, cold moonlight, his features contorting as he inhales her scent from meters away on the barren road. At this moment, Maren meets another cannibal - an eater - for the first time. And for the first time in her life, someone's acknowledgment of her affliction does not incite fear in them or isolate Maren.

Sully's attire is the second thing notable about him, after his initial leeringness in the shadows. He wears a tan cargo vest, adorned with pins and tools, reminiscent of how a boy scout proudly dons his accolades on his chest. This attire has an inferred connotation with youth, so Sully's age confuses his outfit. His vest also appears to be that of a fisherman, denoting his relationship with the outdoors and catching fish and other animals. Fisherman usually eat their catch, Sully affirming this, though his hunting and eating rely more on the human race. His aquatic consumption is likely purchased from the grocery store. The man is no stranger to holding onto memorabilia for decades. Instead of pins and buttons, or even antlers mounted on a wall, it's revealed that the experienced eater keeps unique trophies

from his decades of cannibalism. After feeding, Sully chops off some of the hair of each victim, attaching it to a hefty, multicolored braid that spans roughly ten feet in length, disclosing to Maren that he began creating this artifact when he was close to her age. "It helps me to remember each one" Sully states fondly about his braid of victims as he hands one end to Maren and tugs on the other end. He boasts about the strength of the braid taking pride in his creation. With each victim, the braid grows longer, thicker, and stronger. This woven keepsake ages and transforms with Sully as he becomes older and more experienced. The physical strength of the braid is a symbol of Sully's control and maturity as an eater. His years of practice have made him adept at eating and being able to identify other eaters in his vicinity through his acute olfactory sense. Keen sense of smell is a cannibalistic trait in the film. The braided evidence of his feeds is folded up neatly in a hidden cloth sack that he decides to disclose to Maren after their feast of the dying old woman. Her name was Mrs. Harmon. To Sully, the bond they formed by feeding together warranted a candid gesture - a confession - to the young girl who is only a novice eater. His feeds hold memory. They are not hapless moments, but significant instances of transaction and intimacy.



Not only does Sully fixate on his trophy of braids, holding onto the bundle of human hair in a sentimental cloth sack, but the man himself has a long salt and pepper braid, falling about six inches past his shoulders. Culturally, growing long hair has a deep spiritual significance, typically associated with power and connection to one's heritage. The longer a person's hair, the more memory and resonance the strands hold, and the cutting of the long hair is a severe act - an act of violence even - severing emotional ties preserved through the growth of healthy hair. The act of braiding is a common hairstyle among wide-spanning cultures to keep the locks from tangling. Sully's braid on his head, along with his decade-spanning rope of anonymous victims, denotes his acknowledgment of the significance of hair. A way to remember them, a way to mourn, a way to relive the thrill of feeding or a personal spiritual practice? His true intentions aren't made explicitly clear but his character's intricacies offer hints to the audience.

An aspect notable about Sully's appearance is his fedora, adorned with a large, upright feather. A white man with a fedora is not atypical, but the addition of the feather is not usually sported within their wardrobe. Feathers are strongly associated with Native American culture, as are long braids. His hat, if not for an odd personal style choice, appears to have ties to Native American culture - the feather is quite striking against Sully's presence. Moreover, he speaks in a sing-songy Southern drawl. His inflections are thick, relaxed, and elongated, as though he hails from the Southernmost United States. Modern Native peoples in the United States do not typically inhabit the deep South but rather live in the Midwest or West, where their ancestors once were. This is another aspect of his identity that confuses Sully's character and his undisclosed history.

Maren has her second encounter with an eater, Lee (Timothée Chalamet), in Indiana. In a grocery store, Lee witnesses Maren stealing tampons as she's hunched over in an aisle of the grocery store. Instead of addressing her, he baits an aggressive drunk man out of the store who had been yelling about Lunchables and harassing a mother shopping with her young child. When Maren exits the store and walks toward an abandoned building, Lee appears from the property, covered in blood and wearing the man's fedora, quickly

dousing himself in water to try to scrub off the man's blood. Through this action, Guadagnino lets the audience know that he has done this many times before. He allows Maren, a stranger, to see him post-feed, as he was able to identify her through her scent in the grocery store aisle as a fellow eater. She announces that she was able to smell him too, "I didn't know I could do that" Maren states, realizing her status as an eater was increasing with experience. When the two are alone for the first time, they are framed in a wide shot.



Maren enters the frame and stops in her tracks, remaining at the far left of the screen with Lee standing at the far right, facing each other. They both tote large bags on their shoulders stocked with their personal effects, a visual indication of their life as vagabonds. While there is still distance between the two, Maren is closer in proximity to Lee than when she met Sully. The two are physically equal in the frame as they stand on the far sides of the screen. With this blocking Guadagnino makes it known to the audience that Lee is not a threat to Maren. Lee actually tries to move away from Maren until she advances toward him in this shot. Upon meeting a second eater,

Maren has already gained the confidence to approach another one of her kind, instead of hiding herself like she did with Sully.

Lee takes Maren back to his victim's home, he still wears the fedora while playing the unnamed man's Kiss *Lick It Up* record. In some ways, this scene mirrors her first introduction with Sully. In both of Maren's encounters with the other eaters, the men invited her into the home of their already dead or soon-to-be dead prey. Both men oddly sport a fedora. Through the context of his first and only on-screen appearance, along with the imagery and sounds of his home, Guadagnino identifies Lee's unnamed victim as somewhat of a creep. After the audience witnesses his harassment in the grocery store, the only other context offered to the audience is the interior of his home, which Lee and Maren invade. Starkness is a hallmark of Guadagnino's visual style; unadorned rooms with the bare decorations being antiques or humble belongings denoting the characters' identity. In a medium shot, the man's dimly lit house offers an insight into the random Indiana man through the sparse information in the frame. He indulges in heavy metal music with pornographic images of women taped to his wall. Quite the gentleman.



The importance of homes and how color is used is a notable facet of the film, as the central Maren and Lee are drifters without a fixed home for the majority of the runtime. Before essentially becoming a fugitive, Maren's life was displayed in warm yellowy-tinged spaces. At first, it was the home she shared with her father, then the sleepover that she ruined. Guadagnino engulfs these homes in rich color which contrasts the stark Midwestern landscape. This is depicted in a wide shot when Maren sneaks out of her house in the beginning of the film, the yellow interior of her home is framed in the center of the screen, while the blue-toned environment juxtaposes the view in the window. While those spaces were wrought by her affliction, they were safe for the young girl; a home base. It's only with Lee that for the first time since being orphaned that she inhabits a house that is lit warmly. Illuminated sparsely by tungsten lamps, deep hues of ochre and yellow fill the space, colors which emotionally connect to one's safety, warmth, and security.

Though Sully has disclosed to Maren that his locks of hair are his souvenirs from his feeds, the mirroring of the fedora begs the question: is this his own style or are these garments from previous victims? Lee takes his own trophy from the aggressive man whom he killed - a fedora - but instead of honoring the keepsake, he casually wears the hat. Rather than a piece of memorabilia, it's because he has limited supplies and doesn't even own a hat. He takes what he can get. Lee and Sully both navigate life as eaters in starkly different manners.

When Sully is first introduced to Maren, he proclaims his morality through the fact that he only feeds on those who are freshly dead or on the brink of death, so he is essentially just speeding up the course that nature will imminently take. He does not exactly hunt the layman, deciding to eat more ethically - he tries to be somewhat selfless in his acts of indulgence. Lee does not act with such tact. After Lee and Maren land at a carnival in Wisconsin, Lee is on the prowl for someone to eat. He sets his sights on Lance, a young man working one of the booths. In a close-up shot, Lee's face is illuminated by a bright red light while his gaze locks in on Lance, who is unaware that he is being hunted by an apex predator. By feigning sexual attraction to the unsuspecting carnival worker, Lee's manipulation is visually indicated through Guadagnino's use of color.



This is the first time in the film that red light has been used in such a manner. The red color of his face denotes maniacal power and cruel intentions. Again, Guadagnino uses saturated color on screen to communicate the characters' state of being. By the end of the film, Sully's murder of the youthful Kayla disrupts his life-long feeding pattern. His jealousy and vendetta against Maren for abandoning him after their first intimate encounter led him on a path of stalking Maren and Lee throughout the country, and eventually killing Lee's younger sister out of spite. Maren escapes the home of Mrs. Harmon after their intimate first feed together. To Sully, this was an act of cruelty and dismissal, as he didn't often share such moments with other eaters. Killing Kayla was completely out of character for the old man. Her golden blonde hair the newest addition to his braid of death, invigorating the dull braid with youthful strands. Instead of coining this braid a braid of death, Sully considers this more of a braid of memory, or even necessity.

The eaters like Sully find a way to circumvent admitting to what they do as criminal activity by romanticizing the feasting on human flesh. This will become apparent by the end of the film.

Ultimately, *Bones and All* is a love story. The coming of age romance is interrupted by the anger that Sully held toward the lovers. Their modern approach to being young eaters is not easily digestible for the old man whose feather and braid are a visual indication of his preference of nuance and tradition during his feeds. Even though he tears through human flesh to quell an insatiable hunger, Sully experiences hurt feelings which leads to obsession and murder. This is because cannibalism is the modality through which love is expressed in the film. After Sully and Maren shared the body of Mrs. Harmon, her subsequent abandonment was too cruel for him to let go of. He let his affliction as an eater remind him of his predatory instincts. His stalking was because an act of love was ripped out from under him. Maren is still beginning on her journey as an eater and is able to share other moments of cannibalistic love and passion. This is apparent at the end of the film when Maren enacts her most grand gesture of love, eating the dying Lee, bones and all.