



# Beyond the Silver Screen Cinema and Color

A Book Proposal by  
Bob and Emma Hambly

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

Movies. It seems that no matter where you go or who you're with, conversation often turns to movies. "What have you seen lately?" "What would you recommend?" People are quick to talk about the films they like and even the ones they don't. There's so much to discuss—acting, directors, plot, themes, locations, cinematography. But, there's one subject that very rarely comes up: color.

When I point out how important color is to a particular film, people give me a blank stare. They sheepishly admit that it was something they weren't unaware of. And, when I share some of my ideas on various films, they want to see the movie again to catch what they missed.

That brings us to *Beyond the Silver Screen: Cinema and Color*, a book that will explore the variety of ways color plays an important role in film, from its production to a recurring motif to character development. The book will cover a wide range of movies, from classics like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Vertigo* to recent hits like *The Shape of Water* and *The Favourite* and will touch on all genres of film—from animated movies to blockbusters and period dramas, spanning the history of filmmaking.

The design of book will be contemporary and magazine-like, suitable for easy browsing or for longer reading. It will be organized into sections: some entries will look at a single movie, some compare two or more movies, while others investigate larger groupings. Several entries (Wes Anderson films and 1950s musicals, for example) will be largely visual presentations to avoid an overly formulaic and predictable structure. Sections such as a history-of-color-in-film timeline and iconic colorful costumes will also be included. Many entries will include color-related movie trivia and a feature we call "Be on the Lookout," where we encourage readers to revisit movies to identify certain color treatments and trends, to help them hone their own observational skills.

*Beyond the Silver Screen: Cinema and Color* will be co-written with my daughter Emma Hambly. Emma and I have been watching and talking about movies her whole life and we both find the subject of color fascinating. Together, we love analyzing movies to understand the role that color plays. Emma is a perfect partner for this project. She studied English and Classics at McGill University and went on to earn her



MA in English Literature from Toronto's Ryerson University. She has also worked as a researcher on three documentaries, and currently she is a communications officer at the University of Toronto.

There are numerous heavy, academic texts about color in cinema. And plenty more approachable books about movies. But there is not a book out there like this. It will invite readers who already love film to engage with the medium in new ways. The book will illuminate the subtle but powerful directorial tool of color in an accessible way. Written by two authors passionate about movies, *Beyond the Silver Screen* will foster curiosity and reinforce a love for the art of filmmaking.

Attached, you will find writing samples and layouts with some ideas for a design direction. I would very much appreciate discussing this book with you further.

Sincerely,



Bob Hambly

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### Proposal / Table of Contents

5	Film List
7	Writing Sample: <i>The Wizard of Oz</i>
15	Writing Sample: <i>The Shape of Water</i>
25	Writing Sample: <i>Days of Heaven &amp; The Revenant</i>
27	Author Biographies

# Beyond the Silver Screen

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## Cinema and Colour

### Film List

Below you'll find a list of the films we are planning to include in *Beyond the Silver Screen: Cinema and Color*. Color plays an important role in all of them, whether it's used to reveal character, highlight themes, enhance emotion, create an aesthetic, or underscore another cinematic technique. We've chosen these movies not only because we can tell an interesting story about the way they use color, but also for their variety. We've been careful to include films from around the world and throughout film history, and to make sure that people of color, women, and queer people are represented both on screen and behind the camera.

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### Single Films

1939	The Wizard of Oz	2000	In the Mood for Love
1940	Fantasia	2000	O Brother, Where Art Thou?
1949	The Third Man	2001	Amélie
1954	Johnny Guitar	2002	Hero
1956	The Red Balloon	2006	Marie Antoinette
1958	Vertigo	2006	The Fall
1965	Pierrot Le Fou	2007	Zodiac
1968	2001: A Space Odyssey	2014	Whiplash
1969	Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid	2016	Moonlight
1972	Cries and Whispers	2017	Get Out
1977	Star Wars	2017	The Shape of Water
1986	Manhunter	2018	If Beale Street Could Talk
1985	Ran	2018	The Favorite
1988	Akira	2019	Color Out of Space
1989	Do the Right Thing	2019	Little Women
1993	Schindler's List	2019	Parasite
1998	Pleasantville	2020	Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
1999	But I'm a Cheerleader	2020	Promising Young Woman
2000	American Psycho	2021	The Green Knight



**Multiple Film Essays**

**Warm Tones and Cool Tones:**

Days of Heaven (1978) &  
The Revenant (2015)

**Hyper-stylized Comic Book Adaptations:**

Dick Tracy (1990),  
Sin City (2005),  
Thor: Ragnarok (2017),  
& Birds of Prey (2020)

**Unlikely Horror Palettes:**

Suspiria (1977) &  
Midsommar (2019)

**Neo-noir in Neon:**

Blade Runner (1982) &  
Blade Runner 2049 (2017)



**Visual Essays**

Wes Anderson Films  
Fantasy Sequences  
Supersaturated 1950s Musicals  
1980s Recolors of Black and White Classics



**Other Sections**

Timeline of Color Film Technology  
Color in Costumes

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### The Wizard of Oz (1939)

**Director:** Victor Fleming

**Starring:** Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr, Margaret Hamilton, Billie Burke

The wind stops, so does the noise, and without warning the farmhouse crashes to the ground. Cautiously, Dorothy opens the front door, clutching her dog Toto close to her side. All at once, the nostalgic sepia glaze that coats the modest room vanishes. This is the moment where the narrative changes course. The screen fills with sunshine as the outside, brimming with enchantment, beckons Dorothy to investigate. The harsh reality of the Great Depression disappears as we step with Dorothy into a fantasyland full of life and promise. This move from monochrome to color makes for one of cinema's most famous and memorable moments.

#### From Paper to Celluloid

If you've read *The Wizard of Oz* you'll understand why MGM thought this was such an ideal novel to adapt to the big screen. It's as if this classic American fairy tale was written explicitly for the movies. But L. Frank Baum wrote his novel in 1900, back when the motion picture industry was in its infancy. Seeing that it would be another decade before silent films hit their stride, it's hard to imagine that he was writing his book with a movie in mind. MGM was more than likely enticed by the story's whirlwind pace, its cast of peculiar characters, imaginative locations and a plotline that just happened to align with a new color technology the studio was anxious to promote.

In 1935, an innovative form of color film was all the rage in Hollywood. It was called Technicolor and people found it mesmerizing. This revolutionary film process produced richly saturated colors unlike anything seen to date, colors that dazzled movie-goers. The effect, however, came at a cost. Technicolor was expensive to implement, requiring multiple cameras, specially trained cameramen, exacting scene preparations and frequent tests. But now the studio owned the rights to a story that made all of this trouble worth the effort.

As you might imagine, the movie's screenplay did not follow the plot of Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* to the letter. Writers rearranged, embellished and outright eliminated scenes from the book. However, the essence of the story remains intact. It is clear that the screenplay capitalizes on the many references to color that the novel presents – from the overwhelming greyness of the early farm scenes to the Land of Oz and its colorful regions, Emerald City, Dorothy's shimmering slippers and the yellow brick road.

When watching the film you will notice that three colors dominate the screen – green, yellow, and red. These colors have not been chosen arbitrarily. They draw the viewers' attention to pivotal moments in the film, enhance iconic objects and clarify themes presented within the story. *The Wizard of Oz* makes excellent use of music, lighting and plotline to manipulate our emotions. Let's take a close look at how the film's clever treatment of color adds to that overall impact.



## Red Alert

We are introduced to the color red early in the movie, when the bewitching ruby slippers appear. These are not the kind of shoes a young farm girl from Kansas typically wears. What better way to announce change than to add a shock of red? It's one of the best colors to attract attention and signal power. Our heroine may be clothed in modest country attire but now the constant sparkle of her red pumps leads her every move. Dorothy's shoes symbolize the positive aspects of red: passion, determination and desire. Elsewhere, the color is used to emphasize negative forces, namely, the Wicked Witch of the West.

The Wicked Witch arrives in Munchkinland amidst a puff of red smoke, which quickly dissipates to reveal her nasty disposition. After casting Dorothy and her fellow travelers under a hypnotic spell from the field of red poppies the Wicked Witch speaks of her true desire: "When I gain those ruby slippers, my power will be the greatest in Oz." Over the course of the film we are introduced to the terrorizing red tones that emblazon the tools of her trade – a jar of poison and the sand in her oversized hourglass. Even her crystal ball glows an ominous crimson. In each of these situations the color signals aggression, defiance and danger.

## Greener Pastures

Like red, green plays a dual role in the film. It seems befitting that the Wicked Witch should have green skin, a color associated with ghouls and monsters. The sickly shade enhances her pointy nose and claw-like fingers and brings out the whites of those darting, hateful eyes. Is the Wicked Witch green from an excess of bile? Or has her desire for Dorothy's ruby slippers made her green with envy?

Not far from the poppy field sits the Emerald City. This is a place of happiness and prosperity, reminding the audience of green's positive characteristics. The prominence of green in nature helps to align the color with the ideas of growth and harmony. Emerald City is where Dorothy, Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion come to be restored – literally and metaphorically. This encouraging color revitalizes their sense of purpose, much like when Dorothy first encounters the Scarecrow. The green of his jacket and the tall corn stalks add to an atmosphere of hope.



### Golden Means

The color yellow is also prominent in the scene with the Scarecrow. It is here that the journey along the Yellow Brick Road begins. They are on the path that will lead them to the one person who will grant their wishes – the Wizard of Oz. Yellow brings with it warmth, energy and optimism. What better color of brick for a pathway that leads to happiness? For a short time, while travelling through the forest, the Yellow Brick Road darkens and falls into disrepair. It's preparing the viewer for the introduction of the golden-colored Cowardly Lion, whose false bravado soon gives way to expose his gentle soul. In short time, the foursome, arm-in-arm, skip along a sun-lit Yellow Brick Road with the glow of Emerald City before them. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention here that yellow is also a color used to signal caution. Is the color of the road a warning of things to come? Can yellow possibly be taking on a dual role here by telling those heading to the Emerald City to be cautiously optimistic of what lays ahead? As we soon learn, the Wizard of Oz is not quite all that he's been made out to be.

Red shoes, a yellow road and a green city, each a symbol indicating a better future, each a beacon of good in a film so full of setbacks and disappointments. The Wizard of Oz embraces many themes and, arguably, the time-honored message of good and evil stands above them all. So it's no wonder each of these colors reinforce this overriding theme by showing both their good and not-so-good qualities.

Opposites play an important role in the development of this popular children's tale. Good vs. evil, the powerful vs. the powerless, friends vs. enemies, the known vs. the unknown. And color is there, throughout the entire movie, reinforcing these themes –sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly. But, as with all great movies, it is masterfully executed.

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### Sidebars

#### ***The Wizard of Oz: An Alternative Interpretation***

In 1964, twenty-five years after the release of MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*, Henry M. Littlefield, a history teacher and wrestling coach from New York State's Mount Vernon High School, set about writing down his thoughts on the film to share with his students. Shortly thereafter, his essay, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," appeared in the highly regarded academic journal *American Quarterly*. Up until that time, people viewed L. Frank Baum's novel as the archetypal American fairy tale, an adventure enjoyed by children and adults alike. But along comes a Vietnam Marine turned educator and his interpretation of the story causes fans of the book to reconsider that fabled journey to the Land of Oz.

In his essay, Littlefield suggests that Baum's novel is a comment on the social and political upheaval that troubled America during the 1890s. Baum had witnessed the depression of 1893, deflation of the dollar and the rise of the national debt. Farmers, in particular, were concerned about the switch from a bi-monetary (silver and gold) standard to the gold standard. Due to this unrest, the U.S. witnessed the creation of the Populist political party. Representing the interests of both farmers and factory workers, the party fought the growing power wielded by industrialists and the government, especially those in Washington, DC. According to Littlefield, *The Wizard of Oz* is awash with symbols echoing these trying times. Here's a brief summary of what his paper proposes:

DOROTHY GALE: "Miss Everyman"

– easy to identify with, levelheaded and approachable

SCARECROW: Farmers

– sense of inferiority and full of self-doubt

TINMAN: Industrial Workers

– hard working and once independent

COWARDLY LION: William Jennings Bryan

– the 1890s Democratic presidential candidate and the underdog

WIZARD OF OZ: President of the USA

– a figurehead with no real power

EMERALD CITY: Washington, DC

– a city the color of greenbacks



Littlefield's essay makes for fascinating reading and provides a perspective on American history that many may not be familiar with. He argues, "The allegory always remains in a minor key, subordinated to the major theme and readily abandoned whenever it threatens to distort the appeal of the fantasy. But through it, in the form of subtle parable, Baum delineated a Midwesterner's vibrant and ironic portrait of this country as it entered the twentieth century."

Color surfaces as an important element within the parable outlined by Littlefield. Quite simply, it represents money. Emerald City (Washington) is the living manifestation of the mighty greenback U.S. dollar and its buying power. Upon entering the city, one is overwhelmed by its presence and influence. As Baum writes, "Even with eyes protected by green spectacles Dorothy and her friends were at first dazzled by the brilliance of the wonderful city. The streets were lined with beautiful houses all built from green marble and studded everywhere with sparkling emeralds, set closely and glittering in the brightness of the sun. The window panes were of green glass; even the sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of sun were green." The countryside in the Land of Oz connects to the Emerald City by means of the Yellow Brick Road, a pathway constructed of gold colored bricks—representing the U.S. government's switch to the gold standard. And although Dorothy's shoes are red in the movie, they are silver in the book. The farmgirl from Kansas wears footwear symbolizing the abolished silver standard that the working class whole-heartedly supported.

Historians have come to dispute some of Littlefield's references, but mostly, they endorse his basic interpretation. Remarkably, it took sixty-five years for someone to uncover Baum's camouflaged comment on Populism. When asked if hidden meanings could be found in his books Baum always answered by saying his stories were written to "please children." Hidden meanings add intrigue and depth to any narrative. It comes down to how discreetly the author wants them to function and whether or not they enhance a book's themes. Decades after *The Wizard of Oz* debuted, a high school teacher removed those green tinted glasses, helping us look at this American classic with a fresh set of eyes.

# Beyond the Silver Screen

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## Cinema and Colour

### Sidebars

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#### Ruby Slippers

Within the exhibits at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC visitors will see George Washington's uniform, the original Star Spangled Banner and the shoes worn by Judy Garland in movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

However, for many years the Ruby Slippers in their collection were not a matching pair. Both were size 5, but the two shoes had different studio identification markings, and the right one exhibited considerably more wear and tear than its counterpart. Gilbert Adrian, MGM's chief costume designer working on the film, created five pairs of the Ruby Slippers for Judy Garland to wear during the course of filming. In 2005 a pair of Ruby Slippers on display at the Judy Garland Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan were snatched from a plexiglass case. Thirteen years later, the FBI recovered the stolen goods and experts soon determined that, along with the Smithsonian shoes, the group made for two identical pairs. With a budget of US \$350,000 and 200 hours of extensive repairs the Smithsonian was able to restore the treasured silver screen relic to their original state.

The Ruby Slippers produced by MGM's costume department in 1939 used basic white pumps covered with red fabric and red sequins, topped with bows decorated in rhinestones and beads. Orange felt cushioned the soles of the shoes to muffle the sound during Judy Garland's dance scenes on the Yellow Brick Road. Currently, four pairs of the original shoes are known to exist – estimated to be worth upwards of \$5 million a pair.

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#### The Tin Man

Jack Haley was not the first person selected to play the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*. After several weeks of filming, actor Buddy Ebsen was rushed to the hospital complaining of shortness of breath and cramping. Ebsen was found to be highly allergic to the aluminum dust used in the silver makeup being applied to his face. After spending two weeks in the hospital recovering from a lung infection, he convalesced for one month in sunny San Diego. Meanwhile, a safer aluminum compound helped transform Jack Haley, his replacement, into the beloved Tin Man character. Although Ebsen went on to star in several hit television shows: *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–71) and *Barnaby Jones* (1973–80), he complained of breathing problems the entire time.



### **Out of the Blue**

Watch closely and you will see that very little blue is evident in *The Wizard of Oz*. A blue sky appears in Munchkin Land for a short period of time and a smattering of the Munchkins are dressed in deep blue costumes. But for the most part the color is limited to one person: the star of the movie, Dorothy. The gingham pattern of her pinafore, which she wears throughout the entire film, is a classic symbol of simple country living. Blue is considered to be a passive color. Storytellers often use blue to represent something or someone who is non-threatening. In this instance, the blue and white squares of the dress create a soft, pastel-like effect that mimics Dorothy's demeanor. Blue is a color that connotes confidence, stability and trustworthiness. That's why so many large companies include it in their corporate branding. Dorothy and her blue garb convey calmness and rationality throughout a movie teeming with a wide spectrum of unpredictable situations.

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### Text Features

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#### Be on the Lookout 1

Towards the end of the movie the Wizard of Oz presents the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion with gifts. The three objects have two colors in common. What do you suppose these colors signify?

#### Be on the Lookout 2

While visiting the Emerald City, Dorothy and her friends take a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. The “horse of a different color” changes its appearance four times during the short ride. Four separate horses were used to create this effect. The ASPCA would not allow the studio to dye the horses, so what do you think the crew used to color them? Hint: the horses tried to lick the coloring off.

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### Trivia

- > Judy Garland’s white dress was actually pink as it was easier to shoot in Technicolor.
- > The green face paint used on the Wicked Witch of the West (played by Margaret Hamilton) was so toxic that, while filming, she had to eat all of her meals through a straw.
- > The Yellow Brick Road originally showed up as green in Technicolor, so it had to be repainted.
- > In the movie, both Glinda the Good Witch of the North and Dorothy have red hair.

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### The Shape of Water (2017)

**Director:** Guillermo del Toro

**Starring:** Sally Hawkins, Doug Jones, Octavia Spencer, Michael Shannon, Richard Jenkins, Michael Stuhlbarg



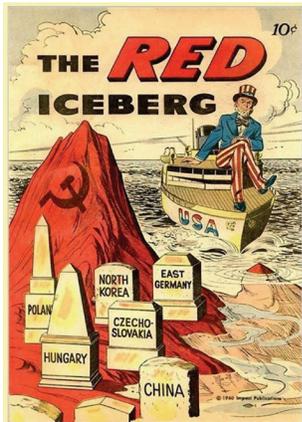
“That’s the future now. Green.”

“...in that shade of green – that should come with a warning label.”

At its heart, Guillermo del Toro’s film *The Shape of Water* is a monster movie reimagined as a romance. Taking inspiration from the horror classic *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), del Toro transforms the fish/human hybrid—webbed hands, gills, and all—into a leading man. And instead of falling victim to a bloodthirsty amphibian, the leading lady saves and falls for an intelligent and caring creature.



Del Toro originally wanted to shoot the Cold War-era picture in black and white to heighten its connection with the early 1960s time period. But the director later opted to make the movie in full colour, and it’s clear that this element was a deliberate part of the storytelling from that point on. And just like every other aspect of *The Shape of Water*, its use of colour is anything but conventional.



### Outsiders looking in

One of the main subversive elements of *The Shape of Water* is its heroes. They are outcasts turned heroes. Meanwhile, the villain of the film, is the head of the all-American nuclear family that society upheld for so long as its ideal.

Elisa, and her friends Giles and Zelda would have faced discrimination and systemic inequalities in the early 1960s. And yet, these characters that haven't had much empathy shown to them see the humanity in the Creature and band together to save him. Their unexpected ally is Dmitri, a.k.a. Dr. Robert Hoffstetler. This is the very beginning of the Cold War, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a time when no American would have seen a Russian spy as a good guy. But in *The Shape of Water*, this "Red" is just that.



### A twisted fairy tale

*The Shape of Water's* opening narration sets us up to view the film as a fairy tale. Del Toro subverts expectations, however, by presenting the audience with an unusual female lead. Elisa is "the princess without a voice," and she is certainly no damsel in distress content to wait for her prince from her tower. There are clear parallels between *The Shape of Water* and the fairy tale "The Beauty and the Beast," if seen through a mirror. In this story, it's the Beast who is imprisoned, and the Beauty who does the rescuing.



And the transformation sequence sees Elisa growing gills instead of the creature changing into a human. The heart of the film, truly, is in the line: “The tale of love and loss, and the monster who tried to destroy it all.” The monster in *The Shape of Water* isn’t the creature with webbed hands, scales, and huge glistening eyes. The monster is the cruel man in a suit.

**Red means go and green means stop**

*The Shape of Water* overflows with shades of red and green. The costumes, set design, lighting, props, and art direction all highlight these two colors far more than any other. And contrast between red and green is at the core of the story.



Red can connote love and desire—red roses and red lighting are the typical stars here—but filmmakers more often than not use red as a negative symbol. It’s a visceral, charged color. The colour of blood, warning lights, and stop signs. Red in a film is usually the warning or the result of something going terribly wrong. Just think of the torrent of crimson blood pouring out of the red elevators in *The Shining*, the ominous red glow of a Terminator’s eye, or the red balloon held by Pennywise in the *It* films, a symbol of innocence turned sinister.

Green, on the other hand, usually stands for growth, renewal, and peace in film. Green is the most common color found in nature, the color of new life and healthy abundance. We speed ahead when we see a green light. There’s tranquility and hope in the green hills in *The Sound of Music*. The good guys’ lightsabers and wise master Yoda are green in the Star Wars films.

As we should expect by now, *The Shape of Water* takes an unexpected approach to colour meaning. Its red and green images don’t fall into the usual categories. In *The Shape of Water*, green is a bad thing. It’s not natural, it’s artificial. It’s the color of inedible key lime pie, of the lab Elisa needs to rescue the creature from, the color that pervades the villain’s entire life. Red, in comparison, symbolizes hope, desire, and connection. We see important touches of red at the beginning of the film, in the red shoes Elisa covets and the cinema she and Giles live above, but the colour becomes more and more prevalent as the story’s romance blooms. If we look at all the examples of red and green in *The Shape of Water*, they take on a



series of connected but opposite meanings. Red stands for all that the film sees as good and green stands for the reverse:

**Red (+)**

- > Togetherness
- > Communication & connection
- > Authenticity
- > Desire & romance
- > The past
- > Cinema
- > Breaking the rules
- > Mystery & the unexplained

**Green (-)**

- > Isolation
- > Silence & suppression
- > Artificiality
- > Indifference & detachment
- > The future
- > Television
- > Following the rules
- > Dissection & analysis

Elisa and Giles’s hallway is a clue to the way color unfolds throughout *The Shape of Water*. There are three sections of decoration in the hall: green wallpaper, a pattern of intermixed red and green, and then all red paint. The film progresses in the same way. We start immersed in green, and then begin to see more and more red as the story moves forward.



**Elisa’s world**

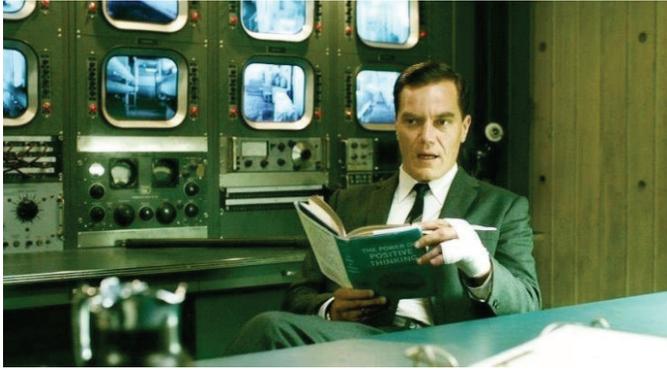
*The Shape of Water* opens with an almost overwhelming expanse of green. As the story wakes up with Elisa from her underwater dream sequence, we can see that she is surrounded by and covered in green. Her couch, her blanket, and her pillow are green. Her housecoat, nightgown, and sleep mask are all different shades of the colour, from forest to jade to sage. The walls behind her are filled with boxes and tins and dozens of pairs of shoes—again, all green. If you start to look for all the green objects in her apartment, you’ll be astounded by how many there are.



The lab where Elisa works is similarly awash in green. The facility exterior is decorated with a mosaic made of green tiles. She travels there in an army green bus, and clocks in with a mint green punch card. The coworkers she cuts in front of, in that first scene in the lab, are all wearing at least one green item of clothing. Elisa and Zelda's uniforms, their lockers, the trays in the cafeteria: all green. In our introduction to this world, we see Zelda dusting a teal green engine while Elisa scrapes a piece of green gum off the floor.

All of this colour underscores what the beginning of the film is telling us—that Elisa is stuck in a routine. The signs that she longs for something beyond her egg timer, same meal every day, clock-in-clock-out, existence appear in red. We see her longing when she gazes at a pair of red shoes in a store window. Her main outlet, apart from conversations with Zelda, is watching and sometimes acting out old movies with Giles. It's only appropriate that the two live above a cinema covered in red paint and draped in red velvet. The one spot of red in her morning habits is the hot stove burner she uses to hard boil eggs—a hint of what is about to unfold.





### **Hunter green**

Richard Strickland is a villain in every sense of the word. His cruel, bigoted, and violent interior pair with his literally rotting flesh to make for a true monster. And almost every time we see him on screen, we see him associated with the colour green.

His house is filled with green decorations. His wife and children wear green. At one point, we see him reading *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which has a green cover. The cheap candy he eats is emerald green, and comes packaged in a paler green box.

*The Shape of Water* romanticizes the past and questions a future built without empathy. When Strickland examines the teal green Cadillac he ends up buying, the salesman says, “You’re the man of the future. You belong in this car.”

### **Painting the town red**

The first sign the audience sees of the Creature is a small pool of red blood, dripping off Strickland’s cattle prod. This is part of del Toro’s message of empathy: he might not look like us but he bleeds the same color. But the amphibious man is kept chained in chemical green water, subject to torture and waiting to be vivisected. He needs to get out.

After Elisa and her crew of outsiders free the Creature, more red starts breaking in to the picture. Elisa buys a stack of red-labeled salt canisters to keep the Creature breathing. And she writes his open water release date on her calendar in red wax pencil.

There’s still some disconnect though. Elisa still dresses all in green after the heist, and is wearing an all-green outfit when she recoils from the Creature’s touch. She’s freed him, but she’s still holding back. After she decides to be intimate with the Creature, she starts wearing red. Red lights flash across her face when she takes the bus, and she buys the red shoes in the window. Elisa wears red when Strickland interrogates her. It shows that something has shifted—that Elisa’s broken out of her rut and asserting power over her own life.



Elisa's all-red outfit (headband, coat, bag, and shoes!) in the movie's final scene shows that red, and all it stands for in the film, has triumphed. At the very end of the story, the scars on Elisa's neck blossom into red gills that allow her to breathe underwater. She gets to live happily ever after with her unusual prince, and so this twisted fairy tale comes to a close.

With *The Shape of Water*, del Toro is asking us to re-examine our prejudices and look for the connections, rather than the differences, between ourselves and others. He creates a world where monsters are not what they seem and where empathy is stronger than hatred. Unconventional reds and unexpected greens help bring this vision to life.

**Be on the Lookout 1**

Red and green are everywhere in *The Shape of Water*. What colourful props can you spot?



**Be on the Lookout 2**

One of the standout scenes in the film is Elisa's fantasy musical sequence. Why do you think this scene is in black and white instead of color?



### **Anatomy of a Scene: Dixie Doug Pies**

The Dixie Doug Pies diner set is filled with red and green. The contrasting colors highlight all the conflicting themes and emotions under the surface of this scene. Giles is trying to reveal his authentic self and sexuality by opening up to the man at the counter. But there are so many artificial elements at play. Giles is wearing a toupee and pretending to like the pie he finds revolting. Meanwhile, the pie guy is putting on a fake accent. He denies service to African American customers, then sarcastically tells them to “come back.” There’s maybe no better scene that highlights the discord between what red and green symbolize in the film.

When you re-watch this part of the movie, how many red and green items can you find?

### **Trivia**

- > Inspired by salamanders and Japanese engravings of koi fish, the design team chose to paint the creature’s skin black instead of blue or green.
- > The film’s costume designer describes Zelda’s wardrobe as having a “bruised fruit” palette. The muted colours hardly match her vivacious personality, which shows how she would have been constrained by the racism and sexism of the era.
- > The production team expected to need to paint a vintage car teal to match the script, but when they sourced a 1962 Cadillac in upstate New York, it was already the perfect color.
- > The costume team dressed Dr. Hoffstetler / Dimitri in cool tones or warm tones depending on whether he was in the lab or meeting the other Russians to underscore his double agent identity.
- > Scene artists repainted thousands of tiles in the lab bathroom location gray-green from off-white to match del Toro’s color palette for the film.



**SIDEBAR: Guillermo del Toro, a colorful director**

“Color is the symphonic and rhythmic component of a film, as any note would be in a symphony or a song. Color gives you the key of a film, in the same way that some songs are better in one key than another, and the keys define the genre of the song.” – Guillermo del Toro

Color is no afterthought for Guillermo del Toro. It’s an integral part of his creative process as he writes and directs. Colour symbolism has been part of del Toro’s worldbuilding and storytelling since the beginning of his career.



**Crimson Peak** (2015)  
Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
The titular crimson haunts this Gothic Romance, standing for, as del Toro puts it, “the past...sin and secrets.”



**Hellboy II: The Golden Army** (2008)  
Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
See if you can discover all the red and gold underscoring the plot of this fantasy-tinged superhero tale.



**Pacific Rim** (2013)  
Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
Neons and bioluminescence shine in this monster movie’s nighttime scenes, while blue signifies memory.



**Pan’s Labyrinth** (2006)  
Written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
This dark fable contrasts warm gold scenes with melancholy, mysterious blue ones.



**Hellboy** (2004)

Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
This superhero story's supernatural characters, vivid in red and blue, pop against their world's dark, grim backgrounds.



**Mimic** (1997)

Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
Look for bright, hopeful yellows contrasting the blue tones that swarm throughout this sci-fi horror.



**Blade II** (2002)

Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
Primary colours red, blue, and yellow are the stars of this comic book adaptation.



**Cronos** (1993)

Written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
Del Toro coded his first feature film, about the horrors of an alchemist's invention, with the four colors of the alchemical process: black, white, red, and gold.



**The Devil's Backbone** (2001)

Co-written & Directed by Guillermo del Toro  
Watch out for ominous, rusty oranges and eerie, cold blues in this ghost story.

**"I use color very carefully." – Guillermo del Toro**

# Beyond the Silver Screen

## Cinema and Colour

### Warm Light vs. Cool Light

Natural light can enhance the mood, atmosphere and emotional impact of a film.

### Days of Heaven (1978)



**Synopsis:** A young couple (circa 1916) escape troubles in Chicago for seasonal work on a Texas wheat farm. A love triangle develops between them and the farm owner, causing deception and strife.

**Themes:** Survival / Deception / Man vs. Nature

**Director:** Terrence Malick

**Cinematographers:** Nestor Almendros, Haskell Wexler

**Starring:** Richard Gere, Sam Shepard, Brooke Adams, Linda Manz

**Location:** Alberta, Canada

*Days of Heaven* was filmed during the Magic Hour – a time of day when the sun is low in the sky. This phenomenon creates an atmosphere of intense golden light. Humans are attracted to warmth, be it from the sun or fire, for the warm tones are both comforting and relaxing. Initially, the cinematographers capture the energy of this ethereal light to establish a mood of optimism. Later, when the grass fires occur, the warmth suddenly becomes alarming and threatening. These golden tones fuel a range of emotions – from contentment and complacency to anxiety and vulnerability. Director Terrence Malick cleverly uses warm light to reinforce the unfolding narrative and the ever-changing dynamics between the main characters.

“Generally speaking, the most beautiful moments of light in nature are in extreme situations; those moments when you think you cannot shoot anymore; when every photographic manual advises you not to try. Malick wanted a major portion of the film photographed during one of these extreme situations, a period of time he called “the magic hour”. The time between when the sun has set and the fall of night—when the light seems to come from nowhere; from a magic place. It is a time of extraordinary beauty.”  
—Nestor Almendros

## Warm Light vs. Cool Light

Natural light can enhance the mood, atmosphere and emotional impact of a film.

### The Revenant (2015)



**Synopsis:** A legendary frontiersman is left to die by his hunting team after being attacked by a bear. Revenge drives the wounded man to track down his former confidant, who betrayed and abandoned him.

**Themes:** Survival / Revenge / Man vs. Nature

**Director:** Alejandro G. Inarritu

**Cinematographer:** Emmanuel Lubezki

**Starring:** Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Hardy, Will Poulter

**Locations:** Canada, USA, Argentina

The cinematographer allowed himself plenty of time to research possible locations for the filming of *The Revenant*. The goal was to keep the overall tone of the movie within a spectrum of blue-grey hues. This colour palette makes outdoor spaces look more remote and expansive. At the same time, cool tones keep a viewer alert and focused. Also, scenes were filmed during the fall and winter when the sun is low in the sky and the days are short. The cold colours emphasized the unforgiving landscape and harsh weather. They also reinforced the icy demeanour of the main character and his unwavering resolve. Director Alejandro G. Inarritu uses natural wintery light to keep the viewer uncomfortable and on edge. He wants you to feel the bitter cold as you follow along on this journey of reckoning.

“We wanted to make a movie that was immersive and visceral. The idea of using natural light came because we wanted the audience to feel, I hope, that this stuff is really happening. And while natural light is very complex because it's constantly changing – which can be a problem for continuity – it's beautiful.”  
—Emmanuel Lubezki

# Beyond the Silver Screen

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## Cinema and Colour

### Author Biographies

Hi, I'm Bob Hambly. I'm a founding partner of the award-winning Toronto-based graphic design firm Hambly & Woolley. In 2019, I decided it was time to devote my attention to my own personal projects involving art and design. My years as a creative director at H&W led me to research, write and lecture on three topics: curiosity, colour and design — subjects I continue to be intrigued by. Prior to starting Hambly & Woolley I worked as a freelance illustrator, creating images for clients like Atlantic Monthly, Martha Stewart Living and Nike. I illustrated the weekly "Lives" column of the New York Times Sunday Magazine for twelve years and Time Magazine's "Numbers" column for five years. I have lectured on design throughout North America, including the RGD DesignThinkers Conference in Vancouver, Canada, UCDA's conference in Phoenix, Arizona and the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. In 2019, I was awarded the Ico-D Lifetime Achievement Award for recognition of "outstanding and consistent achievement in the practice, education or promotion of design." I enjoy cryptic crosswords, reading, jazz and winter sports. And some days, if I'm lucky, I manage to indulge in all of them.

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Hello, I'm Emma Hambly. I am a communications professional at the University of Toronto, and I previously worked in publishing and film production. My career and my personal projects all center around my lifelong fascination with the interaction of words and images. Probably the best example of this interest is my Master's thesis, which I wrote on the use of Romantic poetry in contemporary comics and graphic novels. Today, I write a webcomic about demon roommates and design zines about modern takes on Greek mythology. In 2017, I received, as part of a team, the Canadian Screen Award for Best Editorial Research on the documentary *Painted Land: In Search of the Group of Seven*. In my free time I sew, paint, collage, sculpt, and wonder if I should look for more hobbies.

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