A Brief Exploration of Green in Lesbian Films

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Abstract: *Over the past decades, there has been a notable increase in feminist-themed films. The inherent feminist characteristics of sexual minorities, especially the lesbian community, provide valuable insights for the study and creation of feminist cinema. The color green acts as a bridge, firmly linking lesbian with feminism. The article begins with a review of the artistic application and symbolism of red and green, tracing their historical connections. Subsequently, it conducts an in-depth analysis of five films - Carol (2015), The Handmaiden (2016), Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019), Beanpole (2019) and Green Night (2023), examining them from three screenplay perspectives: subject, character, and structure, identifying their commonalities. Finally, this article concludes that, in addition to the traditional role of green in painting where it neutralizes red and highlights mutual contrasts, green in these films also functions to catalyze the relationship between the two female protagonists, imbue characters with both positive and negative color symbolics, and intensify conflicts in storytelling.*

Keywords: Green; Lesbian film; Screenplay; Feminism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between green and lesbian-themed films is grounded in numerous inherent factors, and the depiction of female solidarity in these films has gradually crystallized into a relatively fixed screenplay pattern. Understanding this screenplay pattern can provide artists with a practical set of guidelines for color usage. An individual color is a product of history and culture, which cannot exist in isolation, thus the identity of green is established through its historical interplay with other colors, most notably red. The symbiotic relationship between red and green forms the foundational palette of lesbian-themed films.

2. THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RED AND GREEN

2.1 Art History

2.1.1 Classical Art Period - Using Overlay to Harmonize Each Other

Italian painter Cenino Cenini, who lived between 1390 and 1437, compiled the work < The Book of The Art > , in which he described the technique of creating skin tones in tempera paintings. He recommended "Take a little verde-terra, and a little well-tempered biacca, and go twice over the face, hands, feet, and all the naked parts. But this first bed of colour must, when painting the faces of young persons with fresh complexions…."[1]German artist Max Doerner also referenced the importance of green earth(verde-terra) in medieval and early Italian painting in his renowned work, which noted green earth served as an intermediate tone and shadow color for skin tones [2]. Artists used this technique to neutralize the pinkness of skin tones, as applying pink directly onto a white base could result in an unnatural appearance. The durability of green earth, primarily composed of aluminum silicate, made it permanent compared with red pigments like vermilion and lead red, which were less stable. Consequently, many artworks from this period characterizes with "greenish" skin tones (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Figures with greenish skin tones from Medieval to Renaissance, to Baroque.
From left to right: < Madonna and Child > (Duccio di Buonisegna, ca.1290-1300), < The Manchester Madonna > (Michelangelo, ca.1497), < Girl with a Red Hat > (Johannes Vermeer, ca.1669)

Classical oil painting is an art of materials, strictly adhering to generational painting techniques from tempera to the early Renaissance, all aimed at avoiding chemical reactions between materials and mitigating the displeasing appearance of mixed pigments. Early classical art achieved realism through this methodical process of optical blending, balancing and harmonizing the harshness of red tones, ultimately striving for lifelike representation.

2.1.2 Modern Art Period-Using Juxtaposition to Highlight Each Other

Thanks to advancements in chemistry during the 19th century, from 1860 onwards, Viridian Green replaced all previous green pigments that were toxic, prone to fading, or not vibrant enough. Additionally, the invention of aluminum tube paints allowed modern art to move outdoors and engage with the vibrant colors of nature. French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul's seminal work, < The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors > , first published in 1839 and later translated into English in 1855, introduced the theory of "Simultaneous Contrast" on an academic level. This theory posits that "whenever the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colours, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in their hue and in their tone" [3]. This theory, combined with American physicist Ogden Rood's 1879 theory of "Additive Color Mixing," was adopted and developed by Neo-Impressionist painter Georges Seurat into the technique known as "pointillism." Seurat would apply a bright white undercoat to his canvas [4], believing that colors applied in dots on this pure white base would mix optically in the viewer's retina, producing more vibrant and luminous hues than those mixed on a palette. However, Seurat and his followers somewhat misinterpreted the scientists' theories. In fact, his understanding seems both crude and flawed [5]. Retinal additive mixing does not produce white but rather gray, and the saturation decreases with the density of the dots and the viewer's distance from the painting. This kind of art constrained by scientific principles began to lose its vitality within a decade.

Later artists increased the emphasis on artistic expression. From Post-Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin depicting the indigenous people of Tahiti, to Expressionist painter Edvard Munch portraying the journey of life, to Fauvist painter Henri Matisse illustrating the spiritual essence of a rocking chair, and to Color Field painter Mark Rothko focusing on the color, scale, and shape of the canvas itself-artists began to frequently and extensively juxtapose complementary colors, especially red and green, to highlight strong color contrasts and emotions. This trend was certainly influenced by the commercialization of cadmium red in 1919. With technological advancements, modern art has enhanced the sense of conflict between red and green through the juxtaposition of large color blocks. The goal evolved from the Impressionists' representation of outdoor light to the expression of emotions.

2.2 Symbolism

Based on the 1969 "Berlin and Kay Hypothesis," the large-scale sample validation of the < World Color Survey > (2009), and the paper < On the Origin of the Hierarchy of Color Names > (2012) using computer-simulated training models, it is evident that red is the third color term to appear in human languages after black and white. This is followed by green or yellow, and finally blue, brown, pink, etc. Thus, excluding black and white, red is the foremost color term across various cultures and languages worldwide, with green as a plausible second contender,

justified by the fact that red and green cone cells constitute 90% of our photoreceptors. All societies have a specific system of symbols, with color playing a central role: historical and religious traditions, mythological figures, and moral and behavioral norms [6]. The author summarizes the symbolic meanings of red and green across six dimensions: life and experience, pigments and dyes, religion and mythology, folklore and culture, nation and politics, and science and technology. As color historian Michel Pastoureau states in his < Biographies of Colors > , " the issues of color are first of all issues of society... color is defined first as a social phenomenon, not as matter or fragment of light, still less as sensation", and "Color is essentially an interdocumentary and interdisciplinary area " [7]. Faced with the vast historical record of human memory, it is impossible to enumerate all instances, so the common symbolic meanings of red and green are summarized in the following table (Table 1), and their origins will not be further elaborated.

Table 1: A brief summary of red and green's symbolic meaning

Hue	Life & Experience	Pigments & Dyes	Religion& Mythology	Folklore & Culture	Nation & Politics	Science & Technology
Red	Blood: life/death Fire: creation/destroy/warmth Fruit: sweet Genital: lust/sex Others: danger/safety/strength/charm/confidence/anger	Vermillion/lead-red: power red orchre/madder lake/carmine: rich cadmium red: rebellion-hero-justice	Seth: power/war/evil Ares/Mars: war/violence/chaos Hephaestus / Vulcan: creation Dionysus / Bacchus: irrational Helios /Apollo: rational/ brightness Adonis: love Jesus: love-sacred pope: martyrdom others: devil/summer/sex/arrogant	auspicious/happiness/ unlucky/south/ Red-light district	Socialism RMB	HIV red cross: remedy traffic lights: forbidden/danger iron
Green	plant: reborn/life force/health/hope/nature mould: decay/devouring power/illness/despair/dead water fruit: sour bile: disgust	verdigris/ organic green: fickle/ camouflage/opportunity/fate Scheele's green/paris green: poisonous	Osiris: reborn-hope-harvest demon/devil: evil Aphrodite /Venus: love/youth/beauty eden: fertility Pope Inocent III: ordinary Mary Magedalene: reborn islam: sacred others: spring/envy/greedy	St Patrick: luck goblins: wealth/gamble Alien: unknown/mystery others: newly-married/pregnance/spirits/east/dragon/deceive	environmental -friendly the green book: equality others: dollar/military /the statue of liberty	computer: virtual world Shrek/Hulk/Frankenstein: supernatural traffic lights: approval/safety copper health: good for the eyes

It is essential to point out that the symbolic meanings in history are inevitably influenced by various factors. For instance, the color green symbolizes evil, partly due to associations with sewage and decay-derived aquatic life, and partly due to the dominance of Christian narratives in ideology. Therefore, these meanings should be considered comprehensively.

In comparison, the symbolic meanings and characteristics frequently appearing in the films discussed in this paper can be summarized as follows:

(1) Red, as the primary symbol of life, and green, as the secondary symbol of vitality. The former emphasizes the essence of life itself, while the latter underscores the beginning of new things, analogous to childhood, imbued with a sense of expectation for the future.

(2) Red, as the foremost color, also symbolizes power, whereas green, as the secondary color, symbolizes freedom and equality. This phenomenon is akin to the complementary relationship between red and green, representing two opposing forces.

(3) In Western astrology, red is associated with Ares/Mars, the god of war, who embodies traits of impulsiveness, bravery, and strength but lacks strategy, representing the aggressive and combative aspects of human nature. In contrast, Athena/Minerva, also a war deity, occupies almost entirely positive attributes-wise, courageous, and strategic.

(4) Green, in Western astrology, represents Venus/Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. She is full of charm, independence, and confidence, attracting many admirers. She is also a manifestation of a part of Zeus, representing primal desire and embodying female power.

(5) Regardless of whether red or green, as colors themselves, they possess both positive and negative qualities, depending on the director's intention. When we wish to express the positive side of red, green can represent the negative, and vice versa. For instance, confidence (red) versus insecurity/despair (green), danger (red) versus safety (green). Both colors can also simultaneously represent positive or negative aspects, such as wealth (red) versus wealth (green), hell (red) versus demon/dragon (green). Thus, the mutual neutralization and highlighting of red and green are evident in their symbolic meanings.

Red, representing masculine power, and green, representing feminine power, are not in absolute black-and-white opposition. The key lies in balance:

(1) When red/green has a positive/negative connotation, negative/positive green/red can neutralize and counteract it.

(2) When red/green has a positive/negative connotation, the negative/positive meaning of green/red becomes more apparent. In films, the contrast and highlighting of colors require further consideration of the proportion and duration of colors, these colors must be grounded in the characters and plot.

3. THE SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE OF LESBIAN-THEMED FILMS

3.1 Subject

The author has selected five representative lesbian-themed films from the past decade. Before analyzing the use of green in these films, it is necessary to clarify the subjects conveyed by such films. "Homosexual friendships often become a space to showcase women's resistance to a patriarchal society and their emotional aspirations, which is also one of the typical modes of feminist literature and art" [8]. Zhang Bo also mentions in his article, "In focusing on 'lesbian relationships,' the films reveal Li Yu's reliance on a feminist narrative stance" [9]. Therefore, it can be said that lesbian-themed films inherently carry feminist undertones. It's not that the characters choose to become lesbians, but rather, in their pursuit of self-realization, they happen to fall in love with those who share similar circumstances or can empathize with their situations. The subjects conveyed by lesbian-themed films typically revolve around female solidarity in the context of a patriarchal society.

3.2 Character

"A subject is defined as an action and a character. An action is what the story is about, and a character is who the story is about" [10]. Even when men appear to be 'harmless,' they still construct an invisible and solid prison for women [11]. Through comparison, it becomes evident that such films require dual female leads, with one character (Character A) representing someone imprisoned by a patriarchal society, and the other (Character B) who drives Character A towards change and self-redemption. We find that < Carol > , < The Handmaiden > (hereafter referred as "Handmaiden"), and < Green Night > (hereafter referred as "Night"), are typical representations of female solidarity in the face of a patriarchal society. In these films, the dual female protagonists are not purely lesbians in the conventional sense; the relationship between Character A and B, apart from their intimate connection, resembles a "mother-daughter" dynamic. Therese's father died when she was young, and her mother sent her to study abroad, making Therese feel abandoned. Hideko's mother died in childbirth, causing Hideko to feel responsible for her death. Jin feels guilty about her mother's departure and becomes a security officer in a foreign land, hoping to see her mother again. All three characters deeply crave maternal love. Carol, Sook-hee, and the green-haired girl are all characters imbued with maternal strength. Carol's encounter with Therese happens while buying a toy for her four-year-old daughter, leading Carol to ask Therese, "What was your favorite doll when you were four?" Upon learning that Therese never played with dolls, Carol shifts her question to, "So what did you want when you were this age?" Sook-hee enjoys caring for babies and treats Hideko as her "doll." Upon learning of Hideko's guilt over her mother's death, Sook-hee tenderly supports her and reassures her, saying, "A baby born into the world is not guilty... She must be grateful to give birth to you before she died." She even expresses a wish for breast milk twice. Although < Night > provides limited background on the green-haired girl and does not even name her, she perceives Jin's unspoken pain and gently soothes her, touching her head three times. This mother-daughter dependency creates a strong sense of complementarity between Characters A and B.

In < Portrait of a Lady on Fire > (hereafter referred as "Fire") and < Beanpole > , while the protagonists do not share a mother-daughter relationship, they are united in their shared experiences within a patriarchal society, allowing them to understand each other's circumstances more deeply. Héloïse, as an aristocratic descendant, cannot control her destiny, which was sealed after her sister's death. Despite her anger, she is powerless to change her fate for the sake of her mother and family. Marianne, being the daughter of a painter, is free from marital constraints but faces societal barriers that lock her career opportunities. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is reinterpreted in their story. Marianne suggests that Orpheus made a choice to look back to remember his lover's face, while Héloïse proposes that perhaps Eurydice herself prompted Orpheus to turn around. Marianne eventually reimagines this story on canvas, capturing a moment of farewell and mutual gaze between Orpheus and Eurydice. As director Céline Sciamma notes in an interview, "A successful love story is not about eternal possession but liberation." Genovese and Paige mentioned in their paper "their relationship has a lasting impact on who they are when apart" [12]. Marianne and Héloïse plant seeds in each other: Héloïse, carrying Marianne's seed, goes alone to hear Antonio Vivaldi's < Four Seasons > , while Marianne, carrying Héloïse's seed, understands the equality between artist and model and reinterprets Orpheus's story in her painting. The relationship between Iya and Masha in < Beanpole > is the most unique among the five films. War is typically seen as a male-dominated frontline, but the film focuses on a female-dominated home front. Iya, suffering from post-concussion syndrome, needs Masha's companionship. Masha, who lost her uterus due to the war, needs Iya to bear a child for her. "Sasha and the hospital director Ivan are merely tools out of necessity" [13]. In a metaphorical sense, the two women engage in an intimate act together to conceive. They share a common goal-to rebuild their lives.

Now that the essence of character is defined by action, and the action results to conflict, which stems from differing beliefs and desires held by the protagonists and antagonists. The antagonists faced by the dual female protagonists in these films are not just their husbands or boyfriends, and also their own beliefs and desires. For instance, Carol cares more about her daughter than Therese, which creates a dilemma with Harge, leading Carol to abandon Therese twice. Hideko and Sook-hee initially follow the script, but when Sook-hee tries to continue deceiving Hideko, their intense conflict reveals that the real enemy is The Count and uncle. Marianne's arrival is initially refused by Héloïse, who resists being painted. It is only after Marianne's true identity is revealed that they begin to unite. Iya wishes to be with Masha, but Masha is focused solely on having a child and is even willing to rely on men for survival resources. The green-haired girl repeatedly encourages the reserved Jin to step out of her comfort zone, leading to a fierce confrontation after the girl kills the husband a second time.
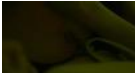
3.3 Structure and color

Yang Jian states that "narrative films are structured into four parts: the opening, development, climax, and the ending, along with the prologue and epilogue" [14]. I have adopted this theory to further analyze the structure of the aforementioned five films. Typically, the climax section of the film includes significant conflicts. While analyzing the use of a particular color in film, it is essential to first catalog all the carriers where that color appear. Richard Misek categorizes colors into five main types based on their carriers in his book < Chromatic Cinema > "Film Color, Surface Color, Absent Color, Optical Color, and Digital Color" [15]. Building upon this framework, I list the primary green-object screenshots from the five films and locate its coordination in the narrative structure to further identify the function of green in narrative (Table 2).

Table 2: The general screenplay structure and green-objects of the five films.

Name	Prologue	Opening	Development	Climax	Ending	Epilogue
Carol	（flashback）Therese and Carol's conversation is interrupted	Therese and Carol first meet when Therese sends back Carol's gloves, and Carol decides to thank Therese by inviting her to have a lunch	Carol invites Therese to her villa for dinner Conflict 1: Harge takes away their daughter, and Carol "abandons" Therese — Carol apologizes and invites Therese to go on a trip together — Carol and Therese's relationship deepens during their trip	Conflict 2: After the hotel conflict, Carol "abandons" Therese again	Carol relinquishes custody of her daughter and invites Therese to live with her	Therese forgives Carol

			together.			
Hand-ma iden	Before departing for the mansion, Sook-hee says her goodbyes to her family	（flashback）Sook-hee's plan with the Count	Sook-hee meets Hideko for the first time	Conflict 2: Sook-hee and Hideko join forces to retaliate against the Count	The Count is caught by uncle	Sook-hee and Hideko leaves for Shanghai
			Sook-hee meets formally with Hideko			
			Sook-hee assists Hideko in bathing, helps her polish her teeth			
			Sook-hee starts feeling jealous. They have their first intimate contact			
			The Count urges Sook-hee to accelerate the plan			
			Conflict 1: Hideko feels disappointed in Sook-hee, but later the two decides to join forces			
Fire	Marianne poses as a model for her students. A painting triggers her thoughts to the past.	Marianne travels to Héloïse's villa. Upon arrival, she meets the maid Sophie for the first time and inquires about Héloïse	Day 1: meet at the cliffs	Conflict 2: Marianne finishes the portrait and she feels jealousy	the farewell	Marianne "meets" Héloïse again
			Day 2: sit by the beach			
			Day 3: chat by the beach			
			Day 4: introduce music			
			Day 5: finish the painting			
			Conflict 1 Day 6, Héloïse does not like the portrait, Marianne destroys it. The Duchess leaves.			
			Day 7: help Sophie			
			Day 8: mutual stare			
			Day 9: Orpheus and campfire			
			Day 10: fall in love			
			Day 11: help Sophie			
			Day12 : keep painting			
Beanpol e	Iya's post-concussion syndrome	Iya takes care of Marsha's son Pashka, but he dies unfortunately	Masha comes back and finds out that her son is dead	Conflict 2: Masha visits Sasha's parents	Masha is afraid that Iya is hit by a bus	Iya and Masha still have to reconstruct their lives
			Masha and Iya meet Sasha			
			Masha works in the hospital and asks Iya to give her a child			
			Conflict 1: Masha force the dean to have sex with Iya			

			Iya becomes jealous of Sasha's intimate relationship with Masha and finds that she is not conceived Iya kisses Masha			
Night	Jin meets the green-haired girl	Jin discovers the secret of her chief, and decides to go with the girl	the girl faints in accident, Jin calls her husband for help Jin and the girl have the first intimate contact in the bathroom Conflict 1: the husband raped Jin, the girl recues her, but later Jin abandons the girl for the sake of her life Jin is reconciles the girl Jin and the girl find comfort in each other at the hotel	Conflict 2: the girl kills the husband for the second time, Jin Xia abandons the girl again	Jin seeks revenge for the girl	Jin takes away the girl's dog, and embraces her fate

Setting aside minor conflicts, such as Therese's arguments with her boyfriend, Hideko's childhood helplessness against her uncle, and Iya's confrontations with Sasha, it can be observed that the aforementioned films generally include two major conflicts. In < Carol > , the first major conflict occurs when Therese visits Carol's home for the first time. Harge unexpectedly arrives to take the daughter, leaving Carol unprepared. Despite Therese's attempts to help by suggesting take a cab home or buy cigarettes for Carol, Carol dismisses Therese's gestures. Carol silently drives Therese back to the station, which Therese, sensitive to abandonment, perceives as a form of rejection akin to being abandoned by her mother. Therese's tears express her sense of betrayal. The second major conflict occurs the morning after their intimate encounter. Harge's detective reveals his presence, causing Carol to become agitated and even draw a gun. Eventually, Carol decides to leave Therese a goodbye letter through her friend Abby while Therese is still asleep, marking the second time Carol abandons Therese. In < Handmaiden > , the narrative structure is divided into three parts, with the first two focusing on Sook-hee's and Hideko's perspectives. The first conflict arises after their intimate connection. Under pressure from The Count who threatens Sook-hee's family, she continues to feign loyalty. However, Hideko breaks the façade, leading to a confrontation that reveals their true enemy. The second conflict is the film's climax, where Sook-hee and Hideko join forces to fight against The Count and Hideko's uncle. In < Fire > , the two major conflicts align with the completion of two portraits. The first conflict occurs when Héloïse is dissatisfied with her portrait, prompting Marianne to erase Héloïse's face from the painting. The second conflict arises when Héloïse expresses satisfaction with the portrait they worked on together, but Marianne insists on destroying it. In < Beanpole > , the first major conflict involves the complex dynamics between Iya, Masha, and the hospital dean. This triangle is fraught with tension over their respective needs and desires. The second conflict peaks when Masha visits Sasha's home, undermining her own past and causing their relationship to end abruptly. In < Night > , the first conflict occurs when Jin is raped by her husband, and the green-haired girl helps her subdue him. The second major conflict and climax of the film happen when the girl kills Jin's husband for the second time, leading to a confrontation between the two women. Jin abandons the girl again, and the broader conspiracy involving public authority comes into play.

In each of these films, the two major conflicts significantly advance the narrative and deepen the characters' development, reflecting the inherent tension in their relationships and the overarching subjects of struggle against patriarchal constraints.

4. GREEN NEUTRALIZES RED AND HIGHLIGHTS EACH OTHER

4.1 Green Neutralizes Red

In the film < Fire > , the director faithfully portrays the painting process of the mid- to late-19th century. Due to the need to complete a portrait within a week, Marianne uses Alla Prima on a brownish ground. Compared to the traditional green earth base, the brown base provides a warm undertone, dries faster, cheap, and has a semi-transparent quality. The colors Marianne subsequently uses-flesh tones, grays, and greens-are actually cool tones used to balance the warm tones of the ground. Similarly, in < Beanpole > , green paint is applied over red wallpaper, akin to the layering technique in classical oil painting. However, the neutralization in films occur across different scenes in the timeline. For instance, Hideko has twice recitation: the first time in red attire, mechanically completing the task like a puppet; the second time in green before a blackout, fully embodying the character, wiping her forehead with a handkerchief afterward. The latter instance of green's neutralization, occurring in separate shots but easily associated by the audience due to consistent settings and characters. < Night > also features similar scenes. When Jin nearly raped by her husband, the green-haired girl helps her strike the husband down, illuminated by the red light of a Christmas tree. Later, Jin kisses the green-haired girl under a shimmering green light reflects from the outside. These scenes evoke a contrast between red and green: red symbolizes the existing male-dominated order where women passively accept, while green represents a female-led reconstruction of self-identity. In < Handmaiden > from passive performance in red attire to active participation in green (Figure 2), and in < Night > , from violent intrusion under red light to mutual support under green light, green helps women reclaim autonomy over their bodies (Figure 3).
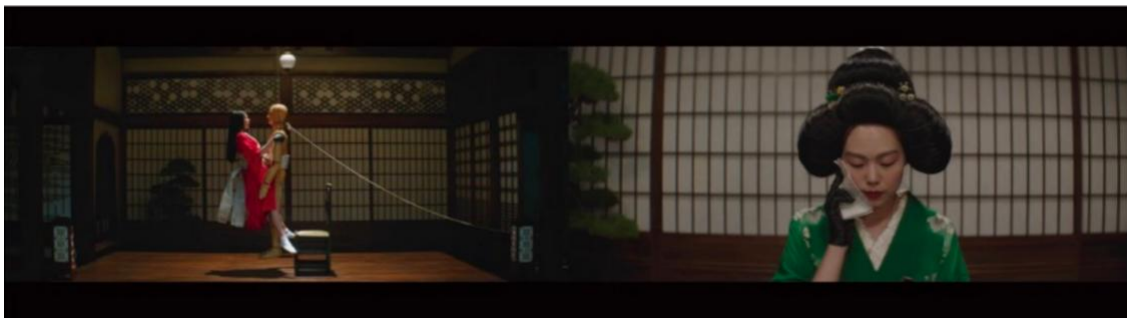

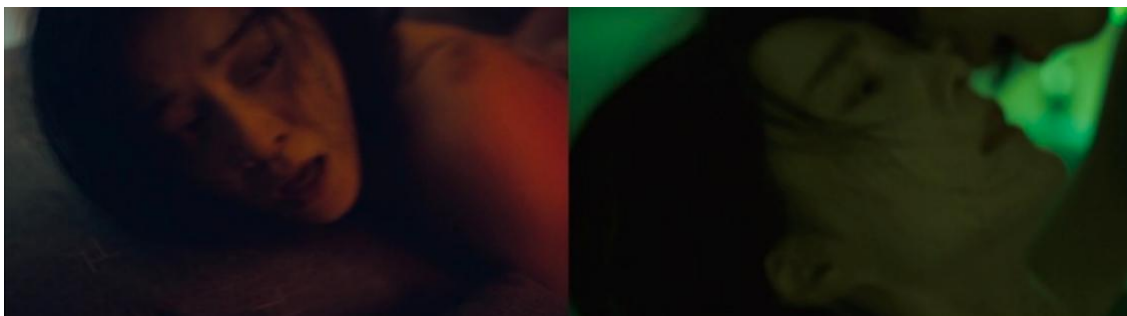**Figure 2:** Hideko's passive performance in red to active participation in green

Figure 3: Jin's passive acceptance under red to active participation under green

4 2 Green Highlights Each Other

In neutralizing red and green, we consider red as the male power that women attempt to overcome. In this section, however, red and green are equal. We can highlight a small area of red within a large area of green, or highlight a small area of green within a large area of red. Lastly, we can balance the areas of red and green equally to emphasize the complementary relationship between the two female protagonists. One of the most famous works that use red and green to highlight each other is Jean-Pierre Jeunet's film < Amelie > (2001). "In color films, hue

contrast is the most fundamental contrast that cinematographers must grasp. The saying 'a touch of red in a sea of green' illustrates this principle. Amelie, dressed in red, stands in a green environment, embodying the unity of harmonious contrast in colors" [16]. I will discuss the mutual highlighting of red and green from the following three aspects:

Large areas of green with small areas of red to highlight red: In < Carol > , cinematographer Edward Lachman uses noticeably grainy 16mm film to recreate the visual style of 1952. He explains that while achieving a film look is possible through post-production today, the different grains in each frame cannot be replicated. Real film has smaller grains with sufficient exposure and larger grains otherwise, giving a texture that fits the characters' liveliness, as if something vibrant is flowing under the image. Regarding color, Lachman uses magenta, green, and yellow physical filters, making the entire film exude a retro green that perfectly matches the Christmas atmosphere. From the opening credits, director Todd Haynes begins his meticulous color design, with cyan-green fonts echoing the film's green tone. Amidst the vast green, Therese spots Carol with her red hat at a glance. The film gives red to Carol and black to Therese, with Carol's red acting as a lighthouse in Therese's aimless life. As they embark on a road trip, Therese finally dons a red sweater. This red hint runs throughout the film, suggesting character arcs and plot directions. For instance, in the flashback at the beginning, Therese takes a taxi to see Carol, with the vast green outside gradually turning red. At the film's end, as Therese arrives at the restaurant and walks toward Carol, the red lights behind her externalize their inner excitement and joy (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The use of red and green in < Carol >

Large areas of red with small areas of green to highlight green: In < Beanpole > , during New Year's Eve, everyone gathers under orange-red lights to celebrate the New Year. Masha dances with Ivan, using illegal euthanasia to threaten him into having a child with Iya. Amid this joyful scene, Iya sits silently in a corner, dressed in green. Although she remains out of focus, her body language reveals her inner torment. She feels guilty towards Masha but is also unwilling to give herself away.

Equal areas to mutually highlight: Both Marianne and Héloïse in < Fire > , and Masha and Iya in < Beanpole > feature costume designs with equal amounts of red and green contrast. The film pairs the protagonists with complementary colors, symbolizing not only the contrast in colors but also their beliefs and desires (Figure 5). Marianne faces societal suppression of female painters, choosing to secretly paint and exhibit under her father's name, while Héloïse, despite her resistance to her mother's arranged marriage, merely refrains from cooperation. Their conflicts stem from differing beliefs: Marianne is independent and confident, desiring to possess Héloïse, whereas Héloïse longs for the egalitarian life of a convent. "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" allows Héloïse to break free from merely being observed, granting her equal status with Marianne [17]. Director Céline Sciamma aims to depict their equality, often composing shots to evenly divide the frame between the two characters. "Sciamma proposes a new bond based on equality, acknowledging the artistic merit of the model and conceiving the creation of the work of art" [18]. Iya and Masha's personalities are even more contrasting: the former is passive and reserved, having never given birth, while the latter is proactive and lively, having undergone a hysterectomy. Their complementary personalities and physical conditions drive their desire to form a family of three, seeking hope for survival amidst chaos. The film concludes with a color exchange between the two, symbolizing their reconciliation.

Figure 5: Green and red highlights each in < Fire > and < Beanpole >

4.2 Positive Symbolic Meanings of Green

Earlier, we summarized the common themes in lesbian-themed films, particularly the motif of female solidarity in patriarchal societies. Female solidarity often involves three phases: self-discovery, confrontation with authority, and escape from predicaments. The positive connotations of green, such as the budding of love, new beginnings, hope, rebirth, and vitality, act as catalysts during the self-discovery phase. Green symbolizes the first step in resistance, allowing these women to experience freedom and happiness they never had before, but this is inevitably followed by conflict. In < Carol >, the story's development mainly revolves around the gradual establishment of an intimate relationship between Therese and Carol, with green marking both the beginning and end of this phase. At the start, Therese sits in the passenger seat of Carol's car as they drive to Carol's country villa, passing through the Lincoln Tunnel illuminated by green lights. Here, the director uses subjective close-ups, slow-motion, and sound design to let the audience feel the burgeoning gaze and desire between the two. After exiting the tunnel, Therese secretly photographs Carol buying a Christmas tree. Reflecting on her previous conversation with Dannie, she sees photographing people as an invasion of privacy. Carol, noticing Therese taking her picture, does not shy away and later encourages Therese at night to be brave and not doubt herself. This segment ends with their first meaningful intimate contact in a hotel room with green walls. Both the tunnel and the room are highly private spaces: the former represents spiritual admiration, with green symbolizing the budding of love, while the latter elevates this to physical interaction, embodying vitality. After these two "green encounters," Carol and Therese confirm their relationship. However, each "green encounter" comes with conflict: the first with Harge's unexpected return, and the second with the detective's exposure. Similar self-discovery and "green encounters" are depicted in < Handmaiden >, < Beanpole >, and < Night >. In < Handmaiden >, after Hideko reads aloud in her green kimono, she has a genuine physical interaction with Sook-hee, immediately followed by a trust crisis. In < Beanpole >, after dancing in a green dress and recalling the devastation of war, Masha collapses emotionally, leading to comfort and a kiss with Iya. Similarly, in < Night >, Jin Xia has physical contact with the green-haired girl at the end of their development phase, but soon abandons her as the climax approaches. Notably, green used at the beginning serves to imbue characters with color attributes and aid in character development. For instance, Héloïse and the green-haired girl's colors are deliberately chosen to represent vitality and equality, as explicitly stated by director Sciamma. The usage and symbolism of green in these instances are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: The positive use of green

Name	Green	Structure	Symbolic Meaning	Function	Consequence
< Carol >	Tunnel light/ motel wall	in the beginning and ending of Development	budding of love/new beginning/hope/reborn/vitality	catalyze relationship	two conflicts brought by Harge

< Handmaiden >	kimono	In the middle of Development	budding of love/new beginning/hope/reborn/vitality	catalyze relationship	one conflict brought by the Count
< Fire >	dress	Opening	equality/hope/vitality	imbue attributes	/
< Beanpole >	dress	ending of Development	hope/vitality	catalyze relationship	one conflict brought by Sasha's mother
< Night >	hair	Opening	equality/hope/vitality	imbue attributes	/
		ending of Development	budding of love/new beginning/hope/ reborn/vitality/equality	catalyze relationship	two conflicts brought by Jin's husband

4.3 Negative Symbolic Meanings of Green

The negative connotations of green are rarely used in lesbian-themed films. Unlike its positive connotations, which are used to shape character and bring the two female closer, negative connotations appear during the climax to highlight the conflict between power and differing beliefs, as shown in Table 4. For example, in < Handmaiden > , Hideko and Sook-hee's plan requires Hideko to leave the Count. Hideko wears a green-black kimono, actively seducing the Count into drinking wine laced with opium. Here, the green kimono serves as Hideko's armor against authority. Another example is the climax storyline of < Fire > , where Marianne teaches Héloïse to mix colors. The story is set in 1760s France, during the Rococo and Neoclassical periods, a hundred years before the invention of high-quality and affordable Viridian Green. Thus, painters typically mixed Prussian blue and orpiment/lead-tin-yellow to create green. Once the painting is complete, Héloïse senses Marianne's reluctance and jealousy, feeling that Marianne cares more about her artwork than her. Marianne would rather destroy the painting than let it stay with Héloïse. Now, Héloïse is no longer angry but submissive, and this submission is out of love for Marianne, which misunderstands by Marianne. Blue represents Marianne's sadness and Héloïse's initial upset after leaving the convent. Yellow symbolizes Sophie's brightness and Héloïse's current positive outlook. Green, a mix of blue and yellow, represents understanding sadness and bridging it. Mutual understanding and an equal gaze are the primary messages conveyed by green. Starting from jealousy and ending in equality, the second conflict between Marianne and Héloïse finally resolves.

Table 4: The negative use of green

Name	Green	Structure	Symbolic Meaning	Function	Consequence
Hand-maiden	kimono	Climax	poisonous/deceive/ camouflage	counter authority	the end of the Climax
Fire	paint	Climax	jealousy	counter faith	the end of the Climax

5. CONCLUSION

Green has practical value in lesbian-themed films for character development, advancing relationships between the two female protagonists, and highlighting conflicts. Creators can strategically incorporate green into their color design from the scriptwriting stage to achieve these effects. Of course, these color principles are not rigid rules. It is worth exploring whether there is another color that may better suit this genre or other colors that could be effectively used in lesbian-themed films.

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