

Wes anderson's symbolic use of a splash of color in the grand budapest hotel

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Use of Color in The Grand Budapest Hotel

The use of color in Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is a crucial element regarding the audience's visual and sensory perceptions of different aspects within the film. These aspects include, but are not limited to, the portrayal of characters and their associated stance in relationships. This paper will focus centrally on shades of yellow in regards to the parallels mentioned. As Wes Anderson has fastidiously laid out shades of an array of colors quite prominently, this allows the audience to follow each color and its particular function within the film much more easily. There are ten concrete examples of yellow for use in analysis. The main functions of the color yellow within the film are as indicators for relationships, prominently conveying both friendship and trustworthiness between characters. Color is something that can, in some cases, be up to interpretation within films. The way in which this paper will format more concrete claims regarding the use of shades of yellow within *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is to first identify patterns in the scenes which use this color, and then determine what similarities occur within these patterns. Only then may we determine how these motifs of color will serve to create a visual map for the audience, intending to help guide them as directly as possible through the visual nuances of the film. It is important to note that, for the sake of the film analysis paper, not every single instance of the color yellow within the film must be noted. Wes Anderson uses color very directly, it is true, but not every single prop, door, or message is distinctly color coded. Therefore, there will only be mention of the instances of yellow predominance in scene, and other very intentional and distinct uses of the color.

The first instance of yellow is given to the audience within the first ten minutes of the film. The narrator and the aged and willing-to-tell Zero sit at a table in the dining room of the Grand Budapest Hotel, a yellow daffodil between them, sitting upon an equally bright yellow tablecloth, along with subtle, lighter yellow walls to enhance the background of their shot-reverse-shot medium close-ups. This is the very beginning of the use of this color in implications of motivation and relationships between characters, building the foundation for yellow to indicate both trust and friendship throughout the film. This is Wes Anderson's not-so-subtle way to queue the audience in to who their allegiance should lie with while watching *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

The next occurrence of this motif is in the scene immediately following, which begins with the text, " pt. 1 ' M. Gustave' ". Though this scene starts with showing lush pinks and reds as the main color palette, they are simply there to assist in cleansing the palate of the audience, introducing the alignment the audience will have with Gustave throughout the film. After first seeing Gustave, we are brought back to a yellow color palette when Madame D appears, adorned in a mustard yellow dress in this scene, a gold door frame placed directly above her very large hair, with shiny, golden picture frames literally " framing " her character in her medium close-ups. The very yellow-looking " orange " juice placed between them on the table indicates a parallel with the previous scene, serving the same purpose as the daffodil did between the narrator and Zero — showing the connection and trust, both literally and figuratively, between them. If this was not obvious enough, Wes Anderson has Gustave tell Madame D, soon after, that he loves her, for the

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last time before she dies, along with light yellow trim in the background, on the outside of the hotel.

The growing friendship of Gustave and Zero is represented a few times with this yellow color palette as well. It begins after Madame D's funeral. Gustave and Zero become closer after they take Gustave's inherited painting off of Madame D's estate without informing anyone first. Somehow, Gustave senses that he can trust Zero with his secrets, and allows him to assist in his current criminal acts, even though there is the potential that Zero could give him up at any time. This immediate trust can be further expressed through Anderson's use of yellow, when Gustave and Zero are locking "Boy With Apple" away in the safe. Their newfound camaraderie is enhanced in this scene by light yellow walls throughout. Gustave is then informed that he will be questioned by the police. He and Zero quickly agree that they will say nothing about the painting. Then, their friendship is further highlighted, as well as extended, by the color yellow, when Gustave meets Agatha. The walls, along with a few of the props on the shelves are made light yellow, behind both Gustave and Agatha in the shot-reverse-shots. To further this motif, Gustave offers Agatha one-dozen yellow tulips. This is an interesting parallel to not only the first time the daffodils were shown, but also to the time-honored tradition of the offering of yellow flowers as a symbol to indicate both friendship and new beginnings. Gustave is showing his acceptance of her within his new best friend's life, connecting Gustave, Zero, and Agatha in a bond of mutual friendship that will continue to grow throughout the remainder of the film.

One of the most profound examples of the use of the yellow color palette within this film is found with Kovacs. In this case, it is being used to indicate allegiance with certain characters. Watching the film unknowingly, the audience is left for a little while to guess at whether or not Kovacs will be more in support of the quite obvious “good” side, being aligned with both Gustave and Zero, or the “bad” side, which means being aligned with Dmitri and his family. One very large indicator in what the audience should think, in this case, lies with Anderson’s use of the color yellow. The first time we are given the clue to trust him, as an audience, is in the candlelit scene between Kovacs and Zero, as Kovacs explains who the accusers are, who have implicated Gustave in the murder of Madame D. The lighting in the scene is warm and candescent, causing even their skin to have a yellowish hue to it, not to mention the candles, papers, and props shown within the scene as well. Then, the next time Kovacs is shown with these colors is when he sits down with Dmitri and his family. The books behind Kovacs are yellowed and aging, and, again, the lighting is warm, inflicting a yellowed hue on the surrounding objects. Even Dmitri begins to question what side Kovacs is really on at this point, as he says “Who are you working for? I thought you were supposed to be our lawyer,” to which Kovacs responds “... I represent the deceased,” and continues to argue with his supposed employer. Unfortunately, in scenes that follow soon after, Kovacs loses his life for his allegiance and support for the truth.

Further examples of yellow highlighting friendship within the film comes in Gustave’s prison escape scene, as his new friends are provided a background of light yellow walls to indicate their bond with Gustave as they

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all descend the ladder together. Trust, teamwork, and friendship allowed them to reach this point, and ultimately lead to their freedom. This conjunction of yellow and friendship continues with Gustave and Agatha, when she sneaks into the Grand Budapest for him, in order to hide the painting, even with police crawling everywhere. The walls are lined with light yellow, along with the elevator doors as she goes into the room with the safe, which is also yellow — just as the last time that we saw it, when Gustave and Zero had originally hidden the painting. The motif continues on as Agatha eventually hangs from some of the architecture on the front of the hotel. The low-angle shot that tilts up to Zero reveals the yellow trim of the hotel, indicating that Agatha can trust him to come to her rescue and, ultimately, be there for her.

The film concludes its forthright use of this yellow color palette right where the story truly began — with the conversation between the elderly Zero and the narrator. Many shades of yellow are extremely prominent within this last, yellow scene, especially when it begins. The tablecloth is still yellow, they are served drinks that are very similar in color, and even the underbelly of their plates reflect yellow hues. This use of the color seems to bring their new relationship full circle. Zero had begun with trust in sharing his story, and finished it with the narrator knowing him so much better, sharing a new friendship and relationship of sorts, and definitely building upon that original trust that had started it all.

The main function of the yellow color palette within The Grand Budapest Hotel is as an indicator for relationships, conveying both friendship and trust

between characters. Wes Anderson uses color widely within this film, providing a variety of outcomes and opportunities for analyses. Yellow is only one of these examples, though it is one of the most prominently conveyed, with patterns extending beyond just one or two scenes, to a grand total of ten. This use of color serves to guide the audience through the film, clueing them in to who the characters should trust and build relationships with, and, ultimately, who the audience themselves should have trust in.