

GREEN THE SPLIT PERSONALITY COLOR

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Like a badly painted copy of a Lautrec come to life, Nora Driggers Dinsmore hisses, "Chick-a-boom!"

Green is really a dichotomous color. It's the color of fresh vegetables and spoiled meat. Perhaps its duplicity comes from our earliest times on this planet when green signaled both food and danger. It is a simple fact that green, in its plant manifestation, signals life itself. Green in the atmosphere, however, can signal a low-pressure system that can spawn a tornado, and "Beware of the green water" is a sailor's warning. So green can signal health and vitality or danger and decay.

Precisely because of its positive associations in the plant kingdom, green can be used as a powerful tool for irony. In *The Thin Red Line* when murdered young men disappear into a sea of exquisitely alive undulating grasses, it is the very freshness of those grasses that moves us to remember that moments ago they were alive. In *Saving Private Ryan* it is a quieter, contemplative irony when we see the hundreds of gravestones marking the dead underneath a sea of vibrant green grass. In both instances it is the color that provides the visual context within which the story takes on a fuller emotional meaning.

Our association with green in slime-covered swamps filled with snakes and alligators, however, has given birth to the look of dragons, demons, and monsters. It may also play a role in our aversion to green in liquid form. It's obviously impossible that David Hand, the director of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); Sofia Coppola, director of *The Virgin Suicides* (2000), and Kasi Lemmons, director of *The Caveman's Valentine* (2001) met and decided unanimously to choose green liquid as a metaphor for poison. But choose it they did. Liquid green poison infused the apple in *Snow White*. Green became a metaphor for a corrupt and literally poisoned society in the asphyxiation party drinks in *The Virgin Suicides* and in the lime rickeys in *The Caveman's Valentine*. Try drinking a clear green liquid (other than beer on St. Patrick's Day) and see for yourself that there is something about green drinks that you'd rather stay away from.

When associated with the human body, green's clue is often illness or evil. How often have you heard, "Are you okay? You look green." When we first see the Wicked Witch of the West as Miss Gulch in *The Wizard of*

Oz, she is in black and white. We know she's bad, but when the film turns to color and we see her in green, she becomes virulent.

Because of green's ambivalent nature, it is important to base your decision on which green to use in a particular scene on how the audience is going to respond to it. It is crucial to have a very clear vision of what it is you want and even then, to test it on a potential audience.

Think About This:

**The grass is green. Would you hesitate to sit in it?
The liquid is green. Would you hesitate to drink it?**

