Color My World:  
The Color of Sin, Guilt, and Purification in *Pleasantville*  

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Abstract  

*Pleasantville* was an entertaining and moderately successful feature length film released in 1998. It broke a long-standing convention in film comedy when it began by using black-and-white instead of color. Color is symbolically added to indicate movement away from the idyllic perfection of the black-and-white television world to color-filled reality. As the characters begin to see colors of reality, they experience guilt and often shame at seeing things as they could be. Kenneth’s Burke’s concepts of sin, guilt, scapegoating, and purification are used to analyze the motivations of the characters as they move from the clear-cut black-and-white world of television to the colorful reality of the real world with its accompanying disruption (change), to guilt from breaking the rules and the attempts at scapegoating, to its final resolution and purification in the two youth from reality discovering their own truths. The synthesis shows that Burke’s methodology could be augmented with Brummett’s concept of transcendence to better explain the restoration of order in Pleasantville. The paper concludes by summarizing symbolic messages for the viewing audience.  

Introduction  

"It's not just a stylistic conceit, it's part of the story. The first five times that it happens in the movie, people go, 'Oh my God, look at that color.' A character stares at the rose, he's blown away. There's constant reaction to the bits of color… It's like a virus that spreads. It's done in part to keep the viewers off guard and give them a sense of surprise and wonder, because this world of predictability is breaking down." (Gary Ross in *Kronke, 1998*, pp. 4-5)  

*Pleasantville* is a story about two different worlds, two different color schemes, two different social orders, and two different people who just happen to be twins. The matrix of combinations provides for some very interesting and complex contrasts. David and Jennifer live in the same world. That world “teenage David is told in school, is not a user-friendly place. The job market is shrinking, the chance of getting AIDS rising, and global drought and famine are practically here” (*Turan, 1998*, p. 1). He is a “nerd” in every sense of the word. He has few friends, is socially inept, and lives primarily for his favorite television show *Pleasantville*, a utopian vision of family and community life. He even lives out a fantasy of talking to one of the popular girls on his high school campus. His goal in life is to win the *Pleasantville* marathon trivia contest that Friday evening on television when his mother is out of town.
His sister, Jennifer, a totally with-it and sexually active would-be “cool” girl on campus, has no use for her “geek-ridden” brother, David. Smoking, drinking, and partying are her ways of being part of the “in” crowd. She is a party animal who will do anything to be popular. In one scene she actually talks to one of the popular guys on campus in one-word sentences. Later, in a conversation on the phone she embellishes the interaction far beyond reality. She sets up a date with him that Friday evening to watch a television concert at her house when her mother is going to be out of town.

While David is watching *Pleasantville*, which exemplifies the “perfect” nuclear family, his real mother is on the phone with her ex-husband. The conversation reveals that the twins’ mother is leaving town for a rendezvous with a man nine years her junior. The argument revolves around who is “stuck” with the kids for the weekend. The discussion is very bitter with no resolution, and the mother determines to leave for her weekend. The telephone conversation is in stark contrasting parallel to the scene and dialogue in the *Pleasantville* episode. Of course, the television show is monochromatic while the real life scene is in full living color.

The scene is set for the mother leaving for the weekend with the two teenagers both having plans for Friday evening which involve the television. When the evening arrives, both teens engage in elaborate and contrasting preparations for their respective evenings. Given their diverse approaches to dealing with reality, it is ironic and even appropriate that they clash when they both arrive at the television and attempt to gain control of the remote control at the same time. In the course of their struggle, the remote control is smashed against the wall, destroying both the remote and the evening plans. Naturally, the television doesn’t work without a remote control.

Fortunately a television repairman from “Reliable TV” (played by Don Knotts) somehow has the omnipotence to know about the problem and just happens to come to the door at that precise moment. He learns that David knows *Pleasantville* trivia better than anyone else he has met before. David even beats him on a trivia question.

“This one has a lot more oomph,” the repairman says, handing over a shiny silver remote. “You want something that’ll put you right in the show.” And, sure enough, a pushed button places Jennifer and David literally inside the black-and-white world of *Pleasantville*. It’s not possible, is it possible, it can’t be possible,” they moan (Turan, 1998, p. 2).

Thus, the saga begins. David has finally entered his perfect dream world, and Jennifer has entered her worst nightmare. There is no color in Pleasantville. There is no fire, rain, cloudiness, sex, or crime. Everyone is polite and follows a very “scripted” routine daily. Both teens attempt to return to their realities, but are told by the television repairman that he has given them an opportunity that should be seen as a privilege. David (who is now Bud) tells Jennifer (who is now Mary Sue) that they must follow the script or they may never get back. Their individual actions inevitably lead to major changes in this “perfect” society. They are the unwitting catalysts that disrupt the established order in this society creating guilt and the resulting attempts to remove that guilt.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the movie *Pleasantville* using Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic analysis of human motivation to discover the motives of the characters in the film itself as well as the message the film attempts to convey to its viewing audience. In doing so, the concepts of hierarchy, mystery, division, guilt, mortification, scapegoating, redemption, and purification are applied.
Burke's theory of the dramatistic analysis of human motivation is based on the concepts of mystery and hierarchy (Burke, 1965). He used the term mystery to refer to differences between people that divide them from each other. In a society, hierarchies help control the mysteries by grouping individuals in the society. Of course there would still be mysteries between groups. In other words, the establishment of hierarchies does not remove mystery. It just helps control the differences. It was Burke's contention that any disruption of the established social order or hierarchy would create division, which leads to a feeling of discomfort or guilt. "Guilt is an awareness that the carefully woven fabric of identifications upheld in hierarchy has been torn through what one has done or thought." If guilt is not expiated, mystery will be uncontrolled, and society cannot exist. "Guilt must be expiated, and the person or group must achieve redemption that leads back to a secure hierarchy (reinstatement of the old or establishment of a new one)" (Brummett, 1981, p. 255)

Analysis

From the very beginning, the twins contribute to the disruption of the society. No sooner had they arrived when Bud yells “What the hell...!” to the Reliable TV repairman on the television screen and is told, "You can’t talk that way here.” David, as Bud, had already begun testing the strength of the established order in Pleasantville. Jennifer, as Mary Sue, challenged the dress she was wearing and strongly resisted the fatty high calorie breakfast prepared by their new TV mother, Betty. “If I don’t dress like this for mom, I sure as hell won’t do this for you.” Jennifer tells David. “I knew we’d pay a price for this. I knew you couldn’t be so hopelessly geek-ridden without suffering some tragic consequences.” Jennifer refuses to go along with the “scripting” of Pleasantville until she meets Skip, the boy who is scripted to ask her out in this episode. Once she realizes that there may be some advantages to being in this society, she decides to go along with the script, at least temporarily. Her view of the male-female relationship will show itself to be a major challenge to the established social order in this scripted society.

In school, the contrast between the reality of the twins and the reality in Pleasantville, where they find themselves as Bud and Mary Sue, becomes evident. Jennifer challenges the assumptions of the society. Everyone is healthy, optimistic, and perfectly content in their town. Jennifer disrupts perfection and contentment when she asks, “What’s outside of Pleasantville?” No one had ever asked this question before, and it was met with stunned silence. A follow-up question was given a circular answer, “The end of Main Street is just the beginning again.” In this society of episodes and reruns, the end would naturally be the beginning again. However, knowledge, or the search for knowledge as later exemplified in the quest for real books, is just the beginning of the disruption of the Pleasantville hierarchy.

At this point Jennifer is struggling against the hierarchy established in this society while David seems quite content to play and intent on playing along with it. However, even David begins to disrupt the hierarchy in Pleasantville when he discourages Skip from asking Mary Sue out on a date. Up until that moment, no one on the basketball team had ever missed a basket, even in practice. They hadn't even lost a basketball game. When Bud (David) tells Skip that asking Mary Sue out might not be a good idea, Skip responds by saying he wouldn't know what to do if Mary Sue wouldn't go out with him. He throws the basketball at the hoop and misses. The rest of the team stares at the missed ball and moves out of its way. The coach warns everyone not to touch it. The carefully woven script of this society is slowly unraveling.

Increased knowledge and the change in sports are soon followed by another disruption at Bud's place of work. Bud is late for work, and Mr. Johnson (Bill) "didn't know what to do" when
Bud came in late, so he continued wiping the counter in the same spot until the paint was rubbed off. Bud calmly explains that Mr. Johnson could do things that he hadn't done before. Bill seems pleased at the prospect. Later that night (because Bud had run out of work to find Mary Sue and Skip), Mr. Johnson goes to the Parker's house to tell Bud that he had closed up all by himself and that he didn't even do it in the same order. More importantly, Bill "really enjoyed it." He also meets the gaze of Betty Parker, Bud's mom, and the electricity is noticed by Bud.

The next disruption of the fabric of this society, a major one, is when Mary Sue goes out with Skip and decides that holding hands isn't quite what she has in mind. She suggests that they go to lovers' lane. They go and have sex in the car. This is significant for two reasons. First, Mary Sue was the initiator and the aggressor in this scenario, which was unheard of in 1958 Pleasantville. Second, no one had ever had sex in Pleasantville. They even had twin sized beds. Skip even thought something was physically wrong with him when he was aroused. The first real physical indication that change is occurring in Pleasantville is the appearance of the real red rose seen by Skip after he dropped off Mary Sue at her house. These two events, Bill Johnson's change in routine and the color red in the rose, mark the beginning of the real change that was beginning to occur in Pleasantville. Skip didn't understand the change in Mary Sue and himself. Bill didn't understand the good feeling he had after doing his routine alone and differently. The mystery and division in the monochromatic society is increasing, and the hierarchy is slowing and visibly being challenged.

The next day, visible evidence of the shaken hierarchy in Pleasantville becomes abundantly clear at basketball practice. Skip, like most teenage boys, tells his friends about his encounter the previous evening. When they all shoot for the basket, everyone misses. The social structure of the hierarchy in Pleasantville has been disrupted. David confronts Jennifer and accuses her of messing with their "God damn universe." Jennifer response by pointing out that maybe that universe needs to be messed with. More color is added to Pleasantville in the form of pink bubble gum and the red taillights on the cars parked at lovers' lane as the young people engage in sexual activities. The basketball team also loses its first game ever, and a double bed appears in a storefront window.

Citizens of Pleasantville are becoming concerned. A mother takes her daughter (who has a pink tongue) to the doctor who says that it will go away. He's ignoring what is happening and hoping it will go away. David sees more color appear with a green T-Bird, utters profanity, "Jesus Christ," and sees the jukebox in full color. When he enters the soda café, rock and roll music can be heard, boys and girls are kissing in public, and hair styles (comb and all) have changed. When he approaches his sister, Jennifer, she smiles at him and slowly plucks a red cherry from her sundae and devours it. The teenagers of Pleasantville have experienced the joys of change and the new life that can come with it. Older residents are ignoring the change and hoping that it will "just go away."

However, Bill Johnson, the owner of the soda café is also experiencing the change. He didn't make cheeseburgers and laments, "What's the point? It's always the same." He asks, "Why?" David tries to impress upon him that cheeseburgers need to be made because people want cheeseburgers, "that's why!" Bud's mother is also experiencing change as she is playing bridge with her friends and her cards are all red hearts.

The bridge between youth and the older generation is crossed when Mary Sue (Jennifer) talks to her mother (Betty Parker) about sex. Betty experiments with self-sex in the bath. The tree out front of the house bursts into flames (burning bush) as she exclaims, "Oh, my goodness!" over and over. This is the first time that anything has burned in Pleasantville. Bud has to yell,
"Cat!" to get the firemen to respond to the fire and then must show the firemen how to use the water hose. One fireman exclaims, "So that's what this thing does!" The burning tree has brought fire and color as well as danger from burning.

The color blue is added and jazz music is heard in the soda café. Knowledge and curiosity are spreading like wildfire. As Bud enters the café, Mary Sue greets him and says she didn't know how to handle "it." Others wanted to know how he knew how to deal with the fire. Bud says that he learned it from where he used to live outside of Pleasantville beyond the end of Elm Street. Someone refers to the mighty Mississippi in the book *Huckleberry Finn*. Part of the book had filled in as Mary Sue related the part of the story she had read (as Jennifer in the 1990's). As Bud tells the rest of the story, the book fills in the rest of the words and a colored picture. The selection of this book is very important to the disruption of the hierarchy in Pleasantville. The story of Huckleberry Finn and Jim is about freedom from the establishment and is also a book that was banned in some areas of the country. Once these youth heard this story and gained knowledge of the world outside Pleasantville, the library was flooded with youth borrowing books with real words and real stories in them.

It is at this point that the establishment realizes that it must respond. The town elders are sitting across the street and are saying to each other that something ought to be done about that as they all stare and crane their necks to watch a girl walk by in a bright red sweater. Bud is seen smiling. He likes the change, but the leaders don't. The mayor, very concerned about the changes in town, especially the lost basketball game, approaches Bud's father about joining the Chamber of Commerce. They discuss the changes in the hierarchy and agree that something must be done.

During this conversation, George Parker's wife, Betty, is in the kitchen and won't come out to serve cookies. Bud goes to the kitchen only to find that his mother had become colored. He helps her "cover it up" with makeup so that she can be seen in public. The disrupted hierarchy has become shameful for Betty, and she engages in self-mortification to help relieve the guilt she feels for disrupting the normal order of things in her relationship with her husband and her community. By using make-up to cover her changes, she is attempting to conform to the old hierarchy.

Later, Bud takes an art book to show to Mr. Johnson, who has always looked forward to the Christmas mural he paints on his window each year because every year it is different. As Bud opens the book, the first painting is Massaccio's "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve." They are naked and being expelled from paradise. The parallel is obvious. David and Jennifer entered the paradise of Pleasantville and have broken its rules causing guilt and conflict. Bud continues turning the pages, showing Bill different types of art. Bill is fascinated and continues paging through the book.

As Bud leaves he runs into Margaret and begins to rerun the opening scene of the film in which he imagines asking the popular girl in the school out on a date. He stops his speech and just asks her out. She says, "Yes," and the music of Elvis is now heard playing in the café. When he gets home, the television is on. The Reliable TV man demands that he stop what he is doing and return to his real home saying, “Those are not your cookies, Bud” in reference to Margaret giving him the cookies that she should have baked for Whitey in the original script. David turns off the television. He, too, has become a part of a new hierarchy. He is changing and liking the change. He deals with the conflict and guilt raised by the Reliable TV man by breaking off communication with him. He ignores the fact that he has changed the reality in Pleasantville.

Upstairs Jennifer is reading a book by D. H. Lawrence (another author banned in some areas). Because she has had more sex than most people have had in Pleasantville, she is confused
that she has not turned color yet. Bud points out that maybe it's not just about sex. Up to this point it certainly seemed that sexual awakening was the primary change agent. Clearly it was not, but it was visibly associated with the coloring of people in the town. To further emphasize this point, Skip comes over and wants to do “you know what,” and Jennifer turns him down because, “I need to study.” She then puts on the sweater worn in the show, finds the glasses, puts them on and has been transformed into Mary Sue. When she wakes up the next morning she, too, is in color. Jennifer has established a new hierarchy for herself in Pleasantville. She has faced her fear of being a “geek” or a bookworm. She has come to a new understanding of herself beyond the physical side to the intellectual side.

Reese Whitherspoon notes, “In Pleasantville, she realizes that she doesn’t have to base her identity on her sexuality and constantly trying to conform. She’s always seen herself as a sexy young woman but when she starts reading books and really opens her mind, she finds that much more exciting. After spending so much of her life being objectified, it’s really liberating to be defined by her intellect instead” (Bruce, 1998, p. 4).

Bud goes on a date with Margaret, and the music in the background is "I found a place to call home." As they drive, the pink blossom petals are falling around them, the grass turns green, and the car becomes yellow by the time they reach the park. The scene is clearly symbolic of the Garden of Eden. It becomes even more obvious when Margaret runs to a tree and plucks a red apple from the branches revealing the full moon watching over the entire scene. She offers it to Bud, and he eats of it. The full moon, a strong symbol of God, is verified when the Reliable TV man stops Bud later and reruns the scene of picking the apple and eating it. Bud is told, “You don’t deserve to be in this paradise.” Clearly the parallel to the Garden of Eden is intended. By partaking of the forbidden fruits of sexuality and knowledge, the characters have forever changed Pleasantville’s hierarchy and themselves along with it.

However, Bud has not changed color because he is yet to discover himself fully by facing reality rather than escaping from it in television. This happens when some of the boys in the town are harassing his mother, Betty Parker, on the street. Bud’s transformation occurs when he faces his fear and takes action on his feelings by defending his mother when he hits one of the boys (whose blood, incidentally, is red). His action is in direct contrast to his inaction in dealing with David’s real mother earlier. Instead of passively retreating to a fantasy world, he takes responsibility for protecting his family. Hitting someone is something that David would never have done. In the self-discovery process, Jennifer becomes more like Mary Sue, and David becomes less like Bud.

Ironically, the one individual who was most threatened to the point of immobility by any change in routine, Bill Johnson of the Soda Cafe, actually precipitates the first major reaction to the disruption of the hierarchy. His relationship with Betty and his depiction of her in the naked painting on his Soda Cafe window are physical manifestations of the major disruption of the social structure in Pleasantville. It is this physical manifestation that also brings on the first major reaction by the established hierarchy.

This reaction takes the form of scapegoating the painting and Bill himself for disrupting the hierarchy. An individual in the crowd that gathers around the window casts the proverbial first stone by throwing a brick through the window. Paradoxically, a park bench, the symbol of peace, tranquility (and the garden?), is the next object thrown through the window. The crowd riots and destroys the cafe that has become the symbolic center of the disruption. In this way, the cafe has been sacrificed to purge the guilt resulting from the breakdown of the hierarchy. Other
manifestations of the purging of guilt include a “No colored” sign in a store and the burning of the books that brought new knowledge to the town. The destruction ends here.

However, this attempt at purging the guilt to restore the hierarchy is not the Pleasantville way. The town elders meet with the other townspeople to develop a “code” of conduct for the town so that the restoration of the hierarchy would be more orderly and controlled much as in a script. The townspeople knew that violence was not the answer to the disruption of their social order. It would be antithetical. The purpose of the meeting is to separate the “pleasant from the unpleasant.” Their code of conduct or “8 Commandments” separates the order from the disorder. This was their way of identifying the members of the old hierarchy from the guilty members who are disrupting the hierarchy. It ended the destruction and places the blame.

This now leads to a major moral and ethical turning point in this film. The “colored” people have gathered in the Soda Cafe to discuss the actions and reactions of the established society. They review the code. At this point they have to decide whether they will abide by the new code and re-establish the old order or to defy the code and establish a new order. In other words, would they allow themselves to be scapegoats for the guilt resulting from the disruption of the hierarchy? In Burke’s model this scapegoating would re-establish the old hierarchy by purging the guilt through punishing those responsible for the attempt at change. However, the “colored” citizens break with tradition, reject the new code, and decide to build their own hierarchy. The playing of “rock and roll,” specifically prohibited by the code, is the first defiant move toward the rejection of the old order. This is also symbolized by the cooperative rebuilding of the Soda Cafe, and to further emphasize this resolution, Bud and Bill paint a new mural depicting all the transgressions of the new code. This mural is not made of glass but of brick, the very bricks of the town hall. It is also symbolic that the new mural should be painted on that which originally destroyed the glass mural, a brick. Bud and Bill further show their defiance of the hierarchy and the fact that they are not accepting the guilt by standing in front of the mural as other townspeople voice their objections. Bud and Bill are put in jail as a form of shaming and punishment.

Mirroring the larger conflict is the relationship between Betty and George Parker. George tries to re-establish his authority in the family and its structure with an edict much as the town council had done. However, where he tells Betty that “it goes away,” she responds by saying, “I don’t want it to go away,” challenging unashamedly the old order. The conflict moves to the courtroom.

In the courtroom resolution toward re-establishing the old order is attempted once again by edict without the need for lawyers. Everything was to be “pleasant.” Of course this was true only if one agreed with the code. Bill begins to recant and acquiesce by accepting guilt and limits in the use of colors. He is trying to find a solution by using the old system of rules, but he doesn’t realize that the old rules won’t work in the new hierarchy being established in Pleasantville. Bud stops him by telling the mayor, “You don’t have a right to do this!” Bud refuses to accept punishment for the guilt and once again asserts that the new hierarchy doesn’t allow this. He tries to convince the court that everyone has been unalterably changed by the events leading up to this “first ever trial” in Pleasantville. Bud focuses on his father because his father now represents the old hierarchy coming to grips with the new hierarchy. While Bud was in jail, he and his father talk:

George: Geez, everything is so cockeyed! I didn’t even know it was Tuesday... What happened? One minute everything’s fine, the next... What went wrong?
Bud: Nothing went wrong. People change.
George: People change?
Bud: Yah, people change.
George: Can they change back?
Bud: I don’t know. I think it’s harder...
George: It’s not fair you know. You get used to one thing...
Bud: I know. It’s not.

Bud does not get through to his father in the jail conversation and continues in the courtroom.

Bud finally gets his father to recognize the goodness of the change in Betty when he asks him to look at how good she looks right now.

Bud: I know you miss her. You told me you did. But maybe it’s not just the cooking or the cleaning that you miss. Maybe it’s something else. Maybe you can’t even describe it. Maybe you only know it when it’s gone. Maybe it’s like a whole piece of you that’s missing, too. Look at her, dad. Doesn’t she look pretty like that? Doesn’t she look just as beautiful as the first time you met her?

George: [Nods]
Bud: You really want her back the way she was? Doesn’t she look wonderful?
George: [Nods]
Bud: Don’t you wish you could tell her that?
George: [Nods]

George tears up and turns to color along with many in the courtroom. In one last desperate and feeble attempt to maintain the old hierarchy, the mayor ironically says, “You’re out of order!”

Bud: Why am I out of order?
Mayor: I won’t let you turn this courtroom into a circus
Bud: Well, I don’t think it’s a circus, and I don’t think they do either. [He points to the townspeople who have all changed color.]
Mayor: This behavior must stop at once.
Bud: That’s just the point. It can’t stop at once because it’s in you and you can’t stop something that’s inside you!
Mayor: Well, it’s not inside me!

But, of course, the mayor does have it inside him. The mayor is very angry at Bud, and these are unpleasant thoughts. The mayor turns color and, in fear rather than anger, runs out of the courtroom unable to accept or face the new hierarchy.

The new hierarchy isn’t just about Pleasantville. It’s about the people who make up any social order. It is interesting that the twins make two very different and very surprising choices. Jennifer decides to stay in the Pleasantville world to go on to college. “I did the slut thing. It got kind of old,” she says. She is on the first bus that leaves Pleasantville on its way to Springfield. The new color television sets are introduced in the appliance store, and the pictures show scenes outside of Pleasantville.

Even though Bud has saved the day and has gotten the girl of his dreams, he has gained his own sense of maturity and decides to go back to face his former reality with his real mother.
in the 1990’s. The television repair man smiles approvingly, knowing that his mission is accomplished, and drives away. In a scene that is reminiscent of the earlier scene with Betty and the makeup, Bud wipes the tears from his mother’s eyes and accepts the responsibility of caretaker and helps his mother feel better about her life.

Mother: When your father was here, I used to think this was it. This was the way it always going to be. I had the right house. I had the right car. I had the right life.

Bud: There is no right house. There is no right car.

Mother: God, my face must be a mess.

Bud: It looks great.

Mother: Honey, that’s really sweet of you, but I’m sure it does not look great.

Bud: Sure, it does... Come here. [He wipes the makeup.]

Mother: ...It’s not supposed to be like this.

Bud: It’s not supposed to be anything. Hold still.

Mother: How’d you get so smart all of a sudden?

Bud: I had a good day.

Appropriately enough for a world that is no longer scripted, the final lines of the film are “What’s going to happen now. Do you know?” “No I don’t.” “Me, neither.”

**Synthesis**

David and Jennifer as Bud and Mary Sue were the catalysts for change in the hierarchy of Pleasantville. While David knew that he should not disrupt their routine because “it might destroy their whole universe,” Jennifer thought that maybe they didn’t really want their universe to be the way it was and that they only needed to find what was inside themselves all the time. Both David and Jennifer were projecting their own needs into Pleasantville. He wants the stability and predictability of the perfect social hierarchy that he does not have at home. Jennifer has rejected all structure and order of the established hierarchy in her own reality and certainly isn’t going to accept it in Pleasantville. Ironically, they act in opposite ways because they don’t have a stable family hierarchy in their own lives.

In disrupting the stable hierarchy in Pleasantville, both David and Jennifer learn more about themselves and their own potential, which was being misdirected by the hierarchy back home. They were as much victims of their own reality as were the people in Pleasantville. So, when the people of Pleasantville react to changes in their society, both David and Jennifer are surprised because they don’t recognize how trapped they themselves have been. Once they recognize the positive aspects of change in Pleasantville, they begin to change themselves. David, in his efforts to resist change, actually promotes change in Pleasantville. His attempt to keep Jennifer away from Skip is the first instance of his own disruption of the hierarchy. Jennifer’s attempts to disrupt the hierarchy actually make her realize how shallow and false her own reality was. “I’ve done the slut thing. It got kind of old,” she says.

In the responses of the people of Pleasantville to the changes, both David and Jennifer find themselves defending that which they had opposed in the beginning. The attempts at restoration of the hierarchy by the townspeople bring out different characteristics in David and Jennifer. David finds self-confidence and behaves more assertively. Jennifer finds that the real her is on the inside rather than on the outside in appearances and friends. She did not recognize
that she didn’t need approval from others but only from herself.

The resolution of the conflict through scapegoating did not work. Even the townspeople soon learned that once it gets started, what is inside each of them has to come out. “You can’t stop it once its started.” Individuality overcame conformity.

However, what does the viewing audience take from this film? Each person must engage in his or her own self-discovery in order to become a “fully functioning self.” While the “grass may look greener” on the other side, one must still deal with oneself regardless of the circumstance in which he or she finds themselves. Is each individual in control of their destiny or does society dictate what one is or is not to become? There is no right answer just as there is no “right house, no right car, no right...” There is something more important than that. What really counts is what each individual does with what he or she is given. This seems like a very humanistic approach to living, and in some ways it is. Each character in *Pleasantville* found within themselves the strength to be different. The approach is clearly on the New Age edge. However, the Judeo-Christian symbolism and messages found in this film cannot be ignored.

Interestingly enough, in the collision of the old hierarchy and the new hierarchy, several *Old Testament* symbols permeate this film. With the first real change comes the red rose (Rose of Sharon, prophetic of Christ). With the second change comes the burning bush. Other symbols include the plucking and eating of the apple, the renewal and new life with rain. After the rain comes the rainbow or the promise of new life. There is talk of a flood coming if the change is resisted.

These symbols clearly send the message of renewal and forgiveness after the breakdown of the old order.