



Color as a Vital Force: A Posthumanist Approach to the Color Narrative in John Hawkes' *Second Skin*

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Abstract: *This paper examines the color in Hawkes' Second Skin as a subjectivity of zoe that possesses vitality and interacts dynamically with its environment and other entities through the lenses of posthumanism, especially a famous Neterland posthumanities theorist Braidotti's zoe theory. Color is not a lifeless tool used by authors to embellish the text but an active force that interacts with the characters, predicting or influencing their actions. It guides readers in understanding the plot and themes while fostering an anti-anthropocentric worldview that challenges traditional distinctions between life and non-life. Thus, color in Second Skin embodies Rosi Braidotti's concept of zoe. This new thinking mode expands human understanding of non-human things and facilitates the construction of non-anthropocentric standpoints.*

Keywords: posthumanism, color narrative, *zoe* non-anthropocentric standpoints.

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1. Introduction

Since the mid 20th century, rapid advancements in technologies, medicine, economy, etc., have reshaped the relationship between humans and the material world. The posthuman turn has gained increasing prominence in both popular media and academic discourse. Posthumanism is a historical moment that begins by deconstructing the foundational humanist concept of the “human” and challenges anthropocentrism and the notion of human superiority, dismantling the arrogance of humanity (Chen 212). Moreover, it is also a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms and a new mode of thought (Cary xvi). The concept of posthumanism is rooted in the ideals of human perfectibility and rationality that originated from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment (Wolfe xviii). Humanism is spoiled by its own dogma, prejudices and assumptions which take “man is the measure of all things” for granted. Humanists determine the position of all things on the map of life according to their relatedness to human beings. Animals, plants, bacteria, and viruses are located in a center around human beings. Lifeless things are put far behind, though they make up a majority of the earth (Yang 68). As Foucault said, “... man is an invention of recent date, ...then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387). In the face of the vast sea of lifeless existence, life appears so incredible that it would be hard to be discovered in the observable universe. The storm rose by inanimate objects can engulf life easily. Thus, people have to rethink the relationship between non-human things around them, and Braidotti's *zoe* theory provides an entry point.

Rosi Braidotti in her 2006 work entitled “Transpositions: on nomadic ethics” proposed the concept of *zoe* and pointed out that *zoe* refers to “the generative vitality of non- or pre-human or

animal life” (Braidotti 37). Rosi Braidotti defines humanlife as bios, and all kinds of life as zoe that reconnects previously segregated categories and domains. In *Posthuman Critical Theory*, she points out that *zoe*-centred egalitarianism is the core of the post-anthropocentric critical turn and she also makes a further explanation of *zoe*: “The relational capacity of the post-anthropocentric subject is not confined within our species, but it includes non-anthropomorphic elements: the nonhuman, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*” (22). Braidotti shifts away from a human-centered perspective, treating life as a subject and a transversal force rather than an object of social and discursive practices (Li 89). By doing so, Braidotti reimagines the boundary of life, proposing that people should pursue a way of understanding the world as co-constructed by all forms of life. Her idea catalyzes a series of positive theoretical, political, and social outcomes. This more open and inclusive posthumanism stance embeds both humans and non-humans within an equal status.

Second Skin (1964) is a novel written by an avant-garde writer, John Hawkes, known for his bold, experimental, incomprehensible, and rebellious writings. According to Thomas Leclair, *Second Skin* is Hawkes’ most widely known book and, in his opinion, one of the best American novels of the last 30 years (33). This novel is narrated by a man, Skipper, who will reach the age of fifty-nine. Skipper’s story mainly takes place on two separate islands: the Gentle island, which is not “gentle” as its literal meaning and echoes endless pain for Skipper, and the tropical wandering island, which lights Skipper’s hope for survival and love. Color permeates in John Hawkes’ novel. Through color words, abstract expressions are transformed into visual experiences, greatly enhancing the vividness of language and the graphic sense of narrative and producing strong emotional resonance in the readers’ minds. Although the concrete meaning of color may vary as plot moves forward generally speaking, each color has its fundamental connotations. Color in the *Second Skin* interacts with characters and environment, functions as a presenter of figures’ characteristics, a revelator of the author and character’s emotions, and a predictor of destiny. Thus, this article explores how color serves as a subject and inseparable link between human and non-human environment to construct a harmonious *zoe* community grounded on Braidotti’s *zoe* theory.

Rejecting traditional methods, Hawkes used imaginative techniques to express ideals and create novels. Hawkes was quoted in the journal *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* in 1965 as saying, “I began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme, and having once abandoned these familiar ways of thinking about fiction, ... And structure, verbal and psychological coherence, is still my largest concern as a writer” (Jiang 1). Readers must be prepared for the narrator’s sudden shifts in locale, for this story is not told chronologically. However, the novel’s structure is not as fragmented as it appears. Hawkes’ novels “highlight the subterfuges in language which we ordinarily ignore as we bravely insist on meaning, intention, and idea” (Robertson 429). *Second skin* is permeated with colors. Through color words, abstract expressions are transformed into visual experiences, greatly enhancing the vividness of language and the graphic sense of narrative and producing strong emotional resonance in the readers’ minds. Although the concrete meaning of color may vary with the development of the plot, generally speaking, each color has its fundamental connotations. Color word like “black” appears almost 310 times, “white” appears 300 times, “green” appears 91 times, “red” appears 91times, “yellow” appears almost 60 times, etc. Since Hawkes puts much emphasis on structure and language, he can’t repeat the words irrelevant to the novel’s structure and plot. Although “the utterance meanings of color words are subjective, the meanings of the same color word may be various under

different contextual conditions” (Greiner 400), in Hawkes’ novels, most of the connotations of colors can be inferred from the context. Having a close reading of *Second Skin*, readers may find out the color narrative implies the plot development, contributing to the well-rounded portrayal of characters. Moreover, colors like road signs guide the reader towards the spiritual world of the characters to understand them and foretell the fate of different characters. Thus, color is an inseparable element in Hawkes’ *Second Skin*. It is not a tool but an active *zoe* which interacts with its surroundings. It is worth analyzing the colors in the *Second Skin* in detail.

Vivid characterization is one of the prerequisites for novels to have artistic charm. Color is indispensable for the depiction of characters. According to *Literary Chromatics*, “since color is a physical form of subject’s psychology, thus, color is naturally a manifestation of the subject’s self” (Huang Hao 35). This environmentally bound subject, color, “moving beyond the parameters of classical humanism and anthropocentrism” (Braidotti 41), enriches and vivifies character’s characteristics, embodies the character’s identity, and unique traits.

As an ex-naval lieutenant, Skipper always wears scuffed regulation white navy shoes, socks, a white cap, a white duck coat or the black and white checked shirt of the lumberjack, and white pants or dark blue woolen trousers. The colors white, black, and blue are the dominant tones of the color in Skipper. Skipper always wears blue and white clothing that symbolizes his career, the navy. Even when moves to the wandering island, he still keeps the yellowed cap. This act suggests that he has never escaped the shadow of his naval experience. The most striking event during his sea experience is the mutiny at sea that Tremolw held on the U.S.S. Starfish. Tremolo and his accomplices attack the ship’s commander, Skipper, in that mutiny. This astonishing event nearly costs Skipper’s life. Though several years pass, Skipper cannot break free from the hovering shadow of this mutiny, the violence conducted by the devil, Tremlow, and the brittleness of the ruthless war. The trauma comes into his mind repeatedly. When Skipper’s daughter Cassandra requests her father sit in the tattoo parlor and tattoo her dead husband’s name on his chest, Skipper remembers this situation in every detail. The tattooer punctures the needle on Skipper’s chest, printing the green tattoo, a sudden outraged helplessness hits him. The exquisite torture suddenly reminds Skipper’s painful memory of Tremlow. “Blind and baffed, sick with the sudden recall of what Tremlow had done to me that night” (Hawkes 19), Skipper feels a “helpless abomination” (Hawkes 19). On the way to the gentle island, Skipper glances at the night sky. For some reason, once more, he finds himself thinking of Tremlow “as he looked when he bore down upon me during the height of the Starfish mutiny” (Hawkes 37). Again, he feels that he lives in the moment of his painful memory, which takes root in his mind. And whenever this thought flashes across, a stinging cold shiver will traverse his body. After Skipper settles down on gentle island and even moves to the wandering island, a paradise for him, still, he cannot forget what Tremlow has done to him. Dreams and memories about Tremlow frequently haunt him, as if he experiences the same event repeatedly. Though Skipper finds love on the wandering island, his “old white sneakers with the rubber soles worn thin and without laces” (60), “white trousers torn, old rakish and rotting white cap, shreds of once-white shirt plastered” (166), he still wears them, which signifies though he has left the old haunt, the painful past has become the indelible part of him.

Although it is hard to dismiss the tortured experience from his mind, like the words Skipper uses to appraise himself, “tiger” (Hawkes 3), “courageous victim” (Hawkes 19), etc., he never forgets his capacity for love and struggles onwards with great burden. “And later, much later, I reported the group of them to be missing in action and told the old man we lost the boats in a

storm” (Hawkes 148). He hates Tremlow, but he does not report the crime of Tremlow, giving Tremlow a gleam of hope of survival. When he goes to the wandering island, Skipper starts work as an esteemed artificial inseminator, unlike his first career as a naval lieutenant. Instead of fighting and killing to deprive life, he inseminates the cows to give life. Thus, “a hero of romance” (Cantrell 284), an positive figure who can be destroyed but not defeated is shaped. If the ex-naval lieutenant, Skipper features colors of white, black, and blue, Miranda is a “black butterfly” (Hawkes 5) as Skipper calls her. Miranda is a widow living on the wandering island. Under Hawkes’ pen, Miranda sometimes wears canary yellow slacks and white shirts, but black is the color that best represents her temptation and fatalness. To Skipper, Miranda is a “black butterfly” (Hawkes 5), a Cleopatra who keeps seducing and hurting him, and a woman with a “black heart” (Hawkes 58) who induces his daughter Cassandra to die only because she wants Skipper.

Skipper’s first confrontation with Miranda is not with her person but with her flag she never wears-- a “black brassiere that dangled as large and stark as an albatross” (Hawkes 52), which is present at each disaster (Greiner 394). For example, the black brassiere is like a black curse haunting Skipper’s mind. Nothing can save him, “at least for a while, from the thought of the black brassiere” (Hawkes 72). When Skipper and Cassandra board the *Peter Poor*, he notices it “swaying right and left from a hook screwed into the cabin ceiling” (Hawkes 183), which disturbs his mind. On the *Peter Poor*, Skipper is assailed by Red and his fellows and relapses into a stupor. Moreover, when Skipper and Cassandra have been styled and go downstairs to join the party, he sees Miranda is “dressed in black, of course-her totem was still hanging in the bathroom-and around her throat she wore a black velvet band. Her bosom was an unleashed animal” (Hawkes 75). Her dancing partner, Captain Red, is also dressed in a black double-breasted suit. When the two start to dance, the “two tall black figures locked length to length” (Hawkes 80). The description is appropriate, for the two conspire to deceive Skipper and to push Cassandra to her death.

The black butterfly would seem to drip venom on anyone close to her, festering their souls. Every time Miranda sits in front of the fire to knit, Cassandra is always with her, “always kneeling at her feet and holding the yarn. Black yarn” (Hawkes 69). Like endless and maddening chains and umbilicus, the black yarn connects Cassandra and Miranda, inducing Cassandra to depravity. Cassandra’s suicide is inevitable due to her continuous contact with Miranda. The only remaining question is how and when. The black color on Miranda shows her madness and malice. The black butterfly has a fatal attraction to the people around her. She tempts others to let things move in the direction she wants, regardless of the pain and suffering she brings to others.

After experiencing a series of tragic events beset Skipper’s life: his father (a mortician) commits suicide; his mother could not continue to relieve the agony of losing her husband and one morning commits suicide regardless of little Skipper; his wife, Gertrude suicides in a cheap motel after she is challenging Skipper’s smothering love with her infidelities; his son-in-law Fernandez is killed after abandoning his wife Cassandra and daughter Pixie; and his daughter Cassandra, though Skipper tries his best to prevent her from death, she is enticed by three crude fishermen, Captain Red and his sons Jomo and Bub who is enlisted by sultry and sadistic “black butterfly” (Hawkes 5) Miranda, and finally commits suicide. It is the innocent platinum child Pixie’s companionship, and Skipper’s responsibility to care for Pixie and his capacity to love support Skipper in going through his heavy times.

Pixie is Cassandra and Fernandez's premature daughter, Skipper's granddaughter. Pixie has silver hair, like a platinum child. According to the communication between Cassandra and Fernandez on their way to their honeymoon, "Silver is the precious metal of the church, the metal of devotion, ceremony, candlelight" (Hawkes 120). The innocent Pixie represents the existence of human natural truth and goodness in *Second Skin*.

Silver is a divine color that can kill away the darkness and evil. For example, the black yarn of Miranda though connects Miranda and Cassandra like a black umbilicus and chain, as the black entanglement which wrapped Cassandra to suffocate, "it lived in the cave of Miranda's sewing bag—not a black sweater for some lucky devil overseas, nor even a cap for Pixie" (Hawkes 69). The silver color on Pixie is like a precious talisman to protect her from evil and light hope for others.

During the darkest time for Skipper, it is Pixie's innocence and purity, and his responsibility to care for Pixie supports Skipper in going through it. When he is lonely on the gentle island, taking care of Pixie and playing with her seems to be the most lighthearted thing for him. When every family member of Skipper has gone, Pixie, like little Skipper, becomes "the final accident in this long line of what I shall call our soft and well-intentioned bastardy" (Hawkes 120) and Skipper's source of happiness. As the only survivors in the family, "In the mirror our two heads—the bald one, the little silver one—would make faces together, reflecting for our innocent amusement the unhappy expressions worn once by those whom she and I—Pixie and I—had survived" (Hawkes 2). Were it not for Pixie's companionship, it is hard to imagine how Skipper can carry himself through the sorrow-stricken days. Maybe wanting Pixie to keep away from the shadow of death hovering over his family, Skipper carries Pixie off to Gertrude's cousin in New Jersey. Until then, he pulls through life's most challenging time, moving on to the next step of life.

Pixie, the platinum child, shines the darkness of Skipper's life. She has been abandoned like the little Skipper but still keeps and encourages others to have as strong vitality as platinum, reflecting brilliant light in the dark tone of the *Second Skin*. Thus, as the concept of systems theory implies, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Cary 3). Colors, like zoe, not only interact with surroundings but also work together, vividly describing objects; without one color, the whole would not become so full of variety.

As Braidotti said, "living 'matter' is a process ontology that interacts in complex ways with social, psychic and natural environments" (22), alongside exhibiting the unique personalities, color performs in visual organs of human beings which connected with other sensory organs, conveying special meanings under the influence of people's sensations and life experiences. Thus, though there are various ways to externalize emotion, color is one of the most effective ways (Huang Hao 34). In *Second Skin*, some colors, like pink, are consistent with traditional view on them. For instance, pink will be reminiscent of a sense of romance. However, some colors, like yellow and green, which generally represent cozy and vigor, represent opposite meanings in some cases in the novel.

In *Second Skin*, pink always represents tenderness and tolerance. Even if it occurs in a situation related to death, the intended meaning has no relation to suffering and pain.

Gertrude, Skipper's wife, has affairs with her Skipper's sailors. She has motorcycle orgies with members of Skipper's own crew, "half a season on a nearby burlesque stage, the strange

disappearances” (Hawkes 130-131). Gertrude writes letters to Skipper with aggressive and insulting words, hoping Skipper hates her, which may help her reduce any guilty feelings, but Skipper says, “But she was wrong. Because the further she went downhill the more I cared. Gertrude was no match for my increasing tolerance” (Hawkes 131). Whenever in the U-Drive-Inn, the cheap motel where Gertrude suicides, “her camel’s-hair coat, her pink mules” (Hawkes 12) or Gertrude’s pink negligee which later rinsed by Skipper and hung “on a fluffy beribboned hanger hooked to the top slat of the Venetian blinds” (Hawkes 130) that reminds Skipper of Gertrude, he shows his understanding and scorn to instead of hatred or irritation toward Gertrude. Growing up very familiar with the seed of death, Skipper has “a special taste” (Hawkes 12) of death. However, when he sees the scene of the death of Gertrude, for that moment, he “understood her poor strangled solitude, understood exactly what it is like to be one of the unwanted dead” (Hawkes 12). He confesses, “Poor Gertrude. I could never hold a grudge against Gertrude” (Hawkes 130), and “the further she went downhill the more I cared. And Gertrude was no match for my increasing tolerance” (Hawkes 131).

The main reason Hawkes wrote *Second Skin* is that one of his best friends committed suicide, leaving his only child behind, which left him in endless pain. Thus, the fact of his friend’s departure becomes one motivation for Hawkes to write this novel. Throughout the novel, Hawkes gives a repudiation of the act of suicide, recognizing that living, not dying, is a meaningful act. Similar thoughts on death also appear in the narrator, Skipper. He does not support the meaningless suicide. He says, “I would not have matured into a muscular and self-willed Clytemnestra but rather into a large and innocent Iphigenia betrayed on the beach” (Hawkes 131). Iphigenia is the eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. In Greek mythology, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, has to sacrifice Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis for the Greek fleet he was leading to sail successfully to siege Troy. That means Skipper would not become the persecutor or the man who pointlessly self-harms. He would have matured into a large, innocent Iphigenia who sacrifices for her country and dies on the worthy path. However, though he disagrees with Gertrude’s meaningless suicide, which brings endless pain to the people alive, he understands her. It shows his tenderness and tolerance and his capacity for love.

Pink also appears on other characters, such as black Sonny, and platinum Pixie. Sonny is Skipper’s sailor who companies Skipper through risky conditions and difficulties until the end of the story. He perceives the world with “his pink and white shell-rimmed sunglasses” (Hawkes 25), which may filter the pain and let in the beauty in Sonny’s mind so that he can always notice the goodness and feel passion towards life. His hands have “shiny knuckles, long black bones and tendons, little pink hearts for fingertips” (Hawkes 21), radiating an overall warm. He will adopt his most intimate voice to lull the people around him in times of trouble. Pixie “poked her little nose into the world” (Hawkes 129) at a “rose and silver and royal blue dawn” (Hawkes 129). On the bus driving to the gentle island, Skipper finds “Pixie was sleeping on, dreaming the little pink dreams” (Hawkes 30). It creates a cozy atmosphere and implies that Skipper, Pixie, and Cassandra are in a the safe situation. After a long time of exposure to miseries, the three can release their nervousness for a while. Thus, the pink reveals the warmth and tolerance between people.

Unlike the feeling of warmth as pink showed through, yellow has opposite meanings in *Second Skin*. Before Skipper goes to the wandering island, yellow often occurs together with the death scene or emerges as a waning of disaster, showing Skipper’s helplessness and melancholy.

Meanwhile, yellow also relates to Skipper's triumph and delightful feelings on the wandering island.

As Skipper explains, he “knew that my father had begun my knowledge of death as a lurid truth but that my mother had extended it toward the promise of mystery” (Hawkes 8). At that time, Skipper loses not just his mother but his only consoling spirit after his father's death. His mother's painful suicide, who put melted wax into her ears, seriously traumatizes him for a second time. He consoles himself with a romantic fancy of his mother's painful death: Death arrives with its face hidden, driving a yellow machine, and as the mother climbs aboard, “the vehicle, severe and tangled like a complicated golden insect” (Hawkes 9), gains speed and carries his mother serenely away (Greiner 391). Facing his mother's departure, little Skipper can do nothing to stop her. The same helplessness and melancholy emerge after Cassandra's death. Skipper tries his best to combat death and avoid the family curse happening to Cassandra but in vain. The black butterfly Miranda, who often wears her yellow slacks, conspires with her accomplices, inducting Cassandra on a journey towards death. After leaving Miranda's house, Skipper carries Pixie and the flight bag to Cassandra's cemetery. He goes through “the grove of pines and onto the yellow promontory” (Hawkes 204) and sees “the yellow stubble, crumbling iron enclosure, tall white grizzled stones and names and dates creeping with yellow fungus” (Hawkes 204). Such desolation is burnt into Skipper's soul. His family members once again abandon him. The damage is done, and he becomes “only an old bird in an empty nest” (198).

Yellow is also the medal's color, representing triumph and delight. When he wins the tournament, Uncle Billy leaves his heavy chain with “a big gold bouncing crucifix” (Hawkes 91) to Skipper as a gift of victory. At the end of the story, he gives it to Kate, the woman with all the virtues. He thinks she deserves it.

Moreover, yellow also represents his triumph over Miranda. Skipper survives Miranda “into this very moment when I float timelessly in my baby-blue sea and lick the little yellow candied limes of my bright green tree” (Hawkes 48). Miranda will always be a black butterfly struck on the scum-washed black island, and never knows what a contented adversary Skipper has become on this “sun-dipped wandering island in a vast baby-blue and coral-colored sea” (Hawkes 48). On the wandering island, Skipper finds people he loves, and it is the first time he has a real home with no sufferings and pains but warm and sweet. Skipper has virtuous Kate, their “good as gold” baby (Hawkes 200). To celebrate his baby's birth, he, Kate, and Sonny go to the cemetery to have a fete with the dead. Under the peaceful night, Sonny and Skipper have candles, like “the gems of the crude diadem took fire, swayed, gave off their yellow light” (Hawkes 209). The little flames of candles pop up all over the grave, lighting up the smiles of the three.

As Skipper says, “Gold was my color” (Hawkes 97), his life is a mixture of melancholy and mirthfulness. After struggling against daunting odds, he finally sees the hope of life. He says: “Thanks to the wind, the gold, the women and Sonny and my new profession, am more in love than ever” (Hawkes 47). After every misfortune, there is mirthfulness in his life.

In Western culture, red is an eye-catching color that “stimulates the nerves and produces excitement” (Cao Youping 15). The color red is often given a meaning of brutality and horror in literature, as well as in *Second Skin*.

Red in Skipper's childhood memory is associated with death and unfortunate things. Skipper's father is a mortician. Skipper remembers that in his childhood, "the thin mother of infant twins, three beautiful members of the high school graduating class decapitated in a scarlet coupé" (Hawkes 6) once comes to his house. The black limousine of his father is "shabby, upholstered in red velvet except for the stiff black patent leather of the driver's seat, and often smelled of invisible flower" (Hawkes 6). The red velvet decorated the car like the blood of the dead, thus creating an uneasy and grotesque atmosphere.

On the day of Cassandra's boarding on *Peter Poor*, the color "red" occurs repeatedly in that circumstances: "Red sun in the morning, sailor's warning" (Hawkes 174), "Dawn bleeding from half a dozen wounds in its side and the wind blowing and my old bird fighting its slow way across the sky" (Hawkes 176). On a red dawn in the month of March, Cassandra wears an orange skirt, a color mixed with yellow and red, borders on *Peter Poor*. Its owner is also named Red. Captain Red, who has a red seagoing face, long red bony fingers, and eyes like "pale translucent grape in a wine-dark sea" (Hawkes 174), assails Skipper with his son, and two months later, Cassandra dies. Based on the timeline of Miranda's sadistic behavior, she gives Cassandra's two-month-old fetus dead fetus wrapped in white tissue paper and done up in red, white, and blue ribbons; it is possible for Red and his companions to do some inhumane things to Cassandra. Cassandra knows she is playing with, again and again gets hurt, again and again suffers from pain, and finally, she commits suicide.

According to Skipper's description of Fernandez, he is a man with "a breath smelling of hot peppers, ...and in his hand a bunch of somber crimson flowers" (Hawkes 4). The bright-colored crimson immediately reminds people of the appalling, bloody death scene of Fernandez. Red is closely related to violence and the uneasy mental state of people.

Except for showing the inner quality and physical appearance of characters, in *Second Skin*, the relentless generative zoe, color, as an indispensable part of the environment, signifies the destiny of characters. Its variation shows what circumstances characters are situated in, and implies that what actions they need do to adapt to it and struggle to survive, which serves as a human–nonhuman linkage. Thus, color is no longer regarded as a subordinate things recognized by human, but put in an equal position with human beings and expanding the subaudition of the work.

Black and white are two high-frequency colors in *Second Skin*, which have complex meanings. The meaning of these two often changes with the place and people they describe. If the color black on "the black butterfly" Miranda implies its dangerousness, white, the color of the skull and bones, sometimes joins with black as a prevailing signal of death" (Greiner 394).

In Skipper's fancy about his mother, his mother "appears from a doorway in a large white house on a hill" (Hawkes 195). The house is blanketed by the white cloud, with white chimneys and shuttered windows. Then, a driver who wears a white cap and driving coat, "a black muffler wrapped about his throat and hiding his mouth, nose, chin" (Hawkes 8), squeezes the black bulb of the horn, taking his mother away.

Miranda's old worm-eaten clapboard house on the black Atlantic island is also white, like an old freezing white skeleton. It has "cracked masonry, warped beams, sway-backed floors and tiny old fusty fireplaces packed with the rank odor of urine and white ash" (Hawkes 52), filled

with “the noxious odor of grief, death and widowhood” (Hawkes 68), suggesting something terror and unusual would happen. Miranda’s old worm-eaten clapboard house on the black Atlantic island is also white, like an old freezing white skeleton. It has “cracked masonry, warped beams, sway-backed floors and tiny old fusty fireplaces packed with the rank odor of urine and white ash” (Hawkes 52), filled with “the noxious odor of grief, death and widowhood” (Hawkes 68), suggesting something terror and unusual would happen.

On the day of Cassandra, the black butterfly wears her black turtle-neck sweater and a Spanish dancer’s short white ruffled skirt, like a “pile of fresh white roses” (Hawkes 189) presented to unfortunate Cassandra. To prevent Skipper from saving Cassandra, Bub drives his black car to fool Skipper. Skipper arrives at the lighthouse too late. With slow motion and a slogging and painful trot, Skipper sees the “lighthouse coming down the beach to meet me, was moving, black cliff and all, in my direction” (Hawkes 195). He shouts the name of Cassandra, only “the cough and lap and barest moan of the slick black tide rising now at the bottom of the cliff” (Hawkes 195) answers him. Below the white lighthouse, Cassandra’s white oval face, “the small white plastic face of the BVM” (Hawkes 199), is on the black rocks. At that moment, color dies away from Skipper’s world, leaving a sad black-and-white sight for him. Thus, there are often some crises lurking in black and white.

Moreover, black and white represent people of two skin colors in the novel. Skipper often has unhappy memories with the white. Family members who abandon him and have a miserable fate, such as his parents, his wife, daughter, and people who torture Skipper, like Miranda, Red, Jomo, and Bub, are all white people. Skipper even calls flattering little waiters in the café “white-slaves” (Hawkes 11). Thus, in most cases, evil figures in the novel are white, and colored people are kind. However, there are some exceptions like Skipper’s innocent granddaughter Pixie, the angle-like child. Generally speaking, the colored people in the novel, like Sonny and Kate and other natives on the wandering island, are kind. Skipper wouldn’t embrace the new future and start a new life without the help of the black. The baby, as Skipper describes as “good as gold” (Hawkes 200), has dark skin. Skipper himself is also tanned by the sun. The evil tattoo on his chest is covered by his dark skin, suggesting his misfortune is diluted under the help of colored people.

Green is the most common color in nature. Instead of hope and vitality, in most cases, green has a reversed connotation in *Second Skin*, which is the incarnation of misfortune, evil and torture (both psychologically and physically). Moreover, it suggests that the characters who relate to the color will go through misfortunes. It is even a color equals to death.

Out of complex psychology, Cassandra demands the tattooer print Ferdinand’s name on her father’s chest in “a nice bright green...like the guitar” (Hawkes 17). The tattooer persuades: “Green’s a bad color. ...Green’s going to hurt, lady. Hurt like hell” (Hawkes 17). However, it fortifies Cassandra with the thought. The needle bites as the stinging bees. The scream struggles and wrestles in Skipper’s bloated mouth as a strenuous black bat. Blind and baffled. Jerking in outraged helplessness. He resists the pain and suddenly recalls Tremlow.

The porthole on Starfish is always open because Skipper enjoys catching the first pink edges of the tropical dawn. However, on the day of mutiny, when Skipper comes out with a light in his eyes and dead ahead is an “enormous field of shoal water emerald green in the dawn” (Hawkes 137), indicating a negative thing will happen. Before he arrives at the place with “sudden green

pools” (Hawkes 142), where Tremlow holds the “party”, he notices “my palms and the backs of my hands, I saw, were green. I was covered with green perspiration” (Hawkes 142). Thus, the color green symbolizes Skipper’s fear and anxiety. On the desk, there is “Moonlight. Green brass binnacle. Green brass binnacle” (Hawkes 145). A series of green stuff strengthens the tension. In the climax part of the plot, Tremlow, who wears the grass skirt, hits and abuses Skipper nearly to death with his accomplices, though Skipper also resists with all his strength. The green tattoo, as Sonny said, turns a man’s breast into “a tombstone full of ache and pain” (Hawkes 22). The physical pain, together with psychological torture, suffer Skipper.

Fernandez, whose name is tattooed in green, also implies he brings sorrow to others and experiences unfortunate things himself. The green car drives Fernandez and Cassandra on their way to honeymoon, suggesting their marriage will fail. After saying, “That’s all you are, Papa Cue Ball. The father of a woman who produces a premature child. The husband of a woman who kills herself. I renounce it” (Hawkes 129), Fernandez abandons his wife and little daughter, tries to keep distance from the family Shrouded in death. However, his betrayal and irresponsibility accelerate his death. Finally, He is strangled with his green guitar strings. Furthermore, Cassandra burnt the green guitar. Both the instrument and its owner cannot escape from the fate of death.

The green lizard is also a symbol of misfortune, whether on the wandering island or gentle island. On the gentle island, a thirty-pound iguana once stuck to Kate’s back, with “gorgeous bright green feathery ruff running down the whole length of him” (Hawkes 106). He fails no matter how hard he tries to move it from Kate’s back. He is unable to pull the lizard loose or move him an inch. The iguana drags its claws down deeper into the flesh of Kate’s back with every tug Skipper pulls. The iguana gets him licked. On the way to the gentle island, three soldiers of Company C in “a silent dark green” (Hawkes 40) like three deadly lizards” (Hawkes 40), and the leader has “lizard eyes” (Hawkes 40). The three infringe upon Cassandra, deepening the shadow of misery.

In addition, before attending the dance, Miranda gives Cassandra a present, a green taffeta dress with an “outrageous bow” (Hawkes 40), a symbol of the black butterfly Miranda. Though delights Cassandra at the beginning, at the dance, Cassandra is teased by Jomo and Red, their “dark design” (Hawkes 84). The two begin “cutting in on each other, spitting on their hands or giving her up without a word, standing by and serving as outriders for each other” (Hawkes 84). They are also the precursors who directly cause Cassandra’s death. Thus, in general, rather than rebirth and life, green suggests the extreme psychological or physical pain associated with torturers and death in the novel.

Brown is often reminiscent of dust and dirt. For example, the three soldiers of soldiers of Company C’s paratrooper boots are dark brown with oil, or “the brown paper stained with the mysterious dark oil stains of mayonnaise” (Hawkes 29). Nonetheless, it is also the color of iodine, which can clean wounds and speed scars healing. On the bus to the gentle island, “Pixie who at lunchtime added smears, little doll-finger tracks and blunt always smudges of Nestlé’s chocolate to my white naval breast already so crumpled and so badly stained” (Hawkes 33). Instead of waning or stopping Pixie’s naughty behavior, Skipper only smiled, letting Pixie smudge his uniform. And toward sundown, “more chocolate, more smearing” (Hawkes 33). Silently, Skipper picks at the chocolate, dried like blood, on the old sailcloth or cotton or white drill of his uniform. It is also an implication for Skipper’s capacity of tolerance and self-healing,

without which he could not endure the heart-tearing pain of losing almost all of his family members and experiencing torture and misfortunes.

Leaving the gentle island seven years after Cassandra's death, Skipper now lives on the wandering island with his love. He is "brown from walking to the cows in the sun, so brown that the green name tattooed on my breast has all but disappeared in a tangle of hair and in my darkening skin" (Hawkes 47). Brown heals the evil green scars, and the green tattoo's horror is covered under Skipper's darkening skin. As the novel title suggests, the old and scarred first skin is flaked from Skipper. The "second skin" suggests his bright future: he has gone from danger to love, from the island of death to the island of life. In fact, life is a blend of sadness and delight. As Hawkes said: "A rose without its thorns loses the meaning of its existence". The darkness, the horror, and the nightmarish things that bring us pain cannot be eliminated. They stay with people until the end. However, with time going by and the accumulation of various life experiences, the suffering things would be more than miserable memories we do not want to look back, but become thought-provoking and alarming memories (Fu 45). Skipper's never-say-die spirit inspires everyone to think about how to live their life.

Colors, as vibrant matter *zoe*, show the self-organizing vitality in predicting the character's destiny. When colors like white, black, and green appear, readers are cautious of the miserable events that will happen. When colors like brown are present in the plot, except exhibiting the dirty environment, it suggests the healing power for characters to help them overcome misfortunes. Compared with other narrative methods, colors are more vivid signs, inviting readers to join in the maze-solving games organized by the author Hawkes.

In one of Hawkes' earliest published commentaries on the writing technique of fiction he writes detachment is the center of the novelist's creation: "The writer who maintains most successfully a consistent cold detachment toward physical violence ... is likely to generate the deepest novelistic sympathy of all" (Greiner 15). Thus, through a cold and bystander's view, Hawkes eliminates the design trace of the author, let color play an active role in the fiction. Distinguishing from the traditional understanding of the meaning of colors, the color intertwines the plot, reveals the character's personality, expresses emotions, predicts the character's destiny, transforms abstract words into visual experiences, greatly enhancing the vividness of language and the graphic sense of narrative and producing strong emotional resonance in the readers' minds. Although the concrete meaning of colors may vary with the development of the plot, generally speaking, each color has its fundamental connotations. Through the color narrative, readers can follow Skipper to experience his life mixed with tribulations and joy and get inspiration from Skipper on how to move forward and positively spend days. Thus, posthumanism shows a historical moment in which the decentering of the human, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms, and offers us a new mode of thought (Cary 12). Those phrase of color employed by the novel serves as indispensable clues and offers a non-anthropocentric standpoint in understanding the connotation of the fragmented and complex *Second Skin* and inspiring readers that nonhuman exists like color can be lively *zoe*, continuously communicating and interacting with surroundings around it, as it contradicts any assumed superiority of the human over the nonhuman *zoe*.

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