

BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND MELANCHOLY: THE SYMBOLIC INTERPLAY OF BLUE WITH RED AND GRAY IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH POETRY

МІЖ ЩАСТЯМ ТА СМУТКОМ: СИМВОЛІЧНИЙ ДІАЛОГ СИНЬОГО З ЧЕРВОНИМ ТА СІРИМ У СУЧАСНІЙ АНГЛОМОВНІЙ ПОЕЗІЇ

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This study examines the role of color symbolism in contemporary English poetry. The analysis focuses on how blue interacts with other colors, red and gray, and how these relationships express complementary and contrasting psychological and emotional states. By tracing these interactions, the study shows that color functions not only as a descriptive detail but also as a structural device through which poets convey intense emotions and inner conflicts.

The findings reveal that blue and red consistently emerge as archetypal opposites, embodying two divergent modes of experience. Blue signifies indifference, tranquility, and the unattainable, while red represents love, passion, and sometimes pain. Their opposition enhances the poet's message and highlights the irreconcilable gap between two radically different emotional planes.

The interplay between blue and gray broadens the emotional spectrum of the poems. Gray symbolizes dullness and sadness, and its relationship with blue can either reinforce melancholy or stand in contrast to it. When gray and blue converge, they create a unified register of sadness, where external oppression mirrors inner despair. When set against each other, gray embodies sorrow while blue represents eternity and happiness, revealing the cyclical nature of existence: after darkness, light inevitably breaks through, and even in profound melancholy there is always a glimmer of hope for brighter days.

Thus, in the poems under analysis, blue is the structural constant, while red and gray are variables that expand and diversify its expressive range. Red intensifies blue's impassiveness by contrasting it with passion, while gray embodies sadness and its interaction with blue either deepens that melancholy or highlights blue's alternative meaning as a symbol of peace and happiness.

Key words: symbolism, color psychology, blue, red, gray.

Дослідження присвячене аналізу символіки синього, червоного та сірого кольорів у сучасній англійській поезії. Синій постає незмінним елементом усіх розглянутих віршів, створюючи відчуття єдності та формуючи основу для інтерпретації. У центрі уваги – його взаємодія з червоним і сірим, яка відображає різні психологічні стани та емоційні реєстри. У цьому контексті колір функціонує не лише як художня деталь, а й як структурний елемент, що дозволяє поетам передавати глибокі почуття, внутрішні суперечності та сильне емоційне напруження.

Результати показують, що червоний і синій послідовно протиставляються як архетипові опозиції. Синій символізує пасивність, спокій, меланхолію та недосяжне, тоді як червоний – активність, енергію, пристрась і подекуди біль. Їхнє протиставлення підсилює поетичне послання та окреслює дистанцію між двома різними психологічними площинами.

Взаємодія синього й сірого розширює емоційний спектр віршів. Сірий уособлює монотонність і смуток. У поєднанні з синім він поглиблює виражену ним меланхолію, а у протиставленні – відкриває здатність синього символізувати спокій та щастя, що стає можливим завдяки його зв'язку з небом, нерозривно пов'язаним із вічністю та незмінністю. Діалог цих кольорів розкриває циклічність буття: після темряви завжди проривається світло, і навіть у найглибшій меланхолії живе надія на щастя. Таким чином, поезія показує, що досвід болю й смутку вплітається у ширший шлях до гармонії, а світліші дні є не примхою долі, а внутрішньою закономірністю.

Отже, у проаналізованих віршах, синій виступає структурною константою, тоді як червоний і сірий змінюють та урізноманітнюють його значення. Червоний посилює відчуженість синього через пристрась і напруження, а сірий уособлює смуток, водночас відкриваючи можливість для синього постати символом радості й спокою.

Ключові слова: символізм, психологія кольору, синій, червоний, сірий.

Introduction. Color plays a vital role in human perception of the world, serving as a nonverbal communicator that shapes moods, conveys symbolic meanings, and influences decisions. It has a profound, long-lasting effect on our emotional and psychological states, evoking memories and associations as well as strong positive and negative feelings [12, c. 193].

The *aim* of this article is to explore the symbolic meaning of blue, red and gray in contemporary English poetry, with particular emphasis on the recurring presence of blue as a structural constant.

Literature review. Although the main aim of this study is to analyze the symbolism of color in contemporary English poetry, the theoretical

framework begins with an overview of color psychology. This choice is deliberate: psychological properties of colors provide the foundation for understanding why certain colors carry emotional weight and cultural significance.

Color psychology has become a popular area of color theory that assigns emotional and psychological connotations between colors and emotions. Many of these meanings are universal because they have an effect on the brain but some are only cultural [5]. One example of the link between color and emotion is the common perception that the red, orange, and yellow hues are said to induce excitement, cheerfulness, stimulation, and aggression; the blues and greens security, calm, and peace; and the browns, grays, and blacks sadness, depression, and melancholy [10].

According to Lüscher, a Swiss psychotherapist and psychologist best known for developing the Lüscher Color Test in the mid-20th century, the four basic colors – blue, green, red, and yellow – represent fundamental psychological needs [9, c. 28]. In his framework dark-blue is a chromatic representation of a basic biological need – physiologically, tranquility; psychologically, contentment ... Blue represents [...] unification and the sense of belonging. It is a prerequisite for empathy, for esthetic experience and for meditative awareness. Blue corresponds symbolically to calm water, to the quiet temperament, to femininity. It is truth and trust, love and dedication, surrender and devotion. Blue is the timelessness of eternity, representing tradition and lasting values, and so tends to perpetuate the past [9, c. 55-56].

Jonauskaite and Mohr's comprehensive study on the links between colors and emotions revealed that BLUE was mainly tied to positive, low arousal (i.e., calming) emotions (e.g., *comfort, happiness, relaxation*), yet it was also linked to *sadness* [7].

Moving forward, we can see that Lüscher indicates that red provides the "force of will" that desires action and effectiveness. It is the urge to achieve results, to win success; it is the desire to obtain all those things which offer intensity of living and fullness of experience. Red is impulse, the will-to-win, and all forms of vitality and power from sexual potency to revolutionary transformation [9, c. 48]. Red corresponds symbolically to the blood of conquest, to the Pentecostal flame igniting the human spirit, to the sanguine temperament and to masculinity [9, c. 60-61].

The study *Do we feel colors?* A systematic review of 128 years of psychological research linking colors and emotions found that RED was linked to positive and negative, arousing, and high power emotions (e.g., *love, happiness, excitement, passion, anger, rage, fury, hostility, hate*) [7].

Equally important is the fact that red is "[...] "exciting" in its effect on the nervous system... Similar exposure to psychologically pure blue on the other hand has the reverse effect – blood pressure falls, heartbeat and breathing both slow down. Dark blue is therefore "calming" in its effect ..." [9, c. 12].

In his framework, Lüscher distinguishes a group of auxiliary colors – violet, brown, black, and gray – which he considers separate from the four basic colors. The psychologist doesn't consider black and gray colors at all – black being the negation of color and the gray of the test being strictly neutral and colorless. He also insists that preference for any of the three "achromatic colors," black, gray or brown may be taken as indicating a negative attitude towards life [9, c. 28].

Therefore, gray is neutral, neither subject nor object, neither inner nor outer, neither tension nor relaxation. Whoever chooses gray [...] wants to wall everything off, to remain uncommitted and uninvolved so that he can shield himself from any outside influence or stimulus [9, c. 52]. In their comprehensive review of color-emotion links, Jonauskaite and Mohr showed that GRAY and BLACK carried negative connotations, with GRAY being more frequently linked to low power and low arousal (e.g., *fear, disappointment, regret, tiredness, boredom*) [7].

It is worth noting that symbolic meanings of colors reinforce and expand their psychological associations. Thus, red is associated with blood, wounds, death-throes and sublimation [...] light blue with the sky and the day, and with the calm sea; dark blue with the sky and the night, and with the stormy sea ... [2, c. 53]. Blue is the color most often associated with issues of the spirit and intellect. It is the color of sky and heaven, also having strong connections with nearly all forms of water, for this reason it can have feminine, cool, and reflective qualities. Its link to the sky also connotes eternity and immensity, time and space. Blue may be truth (no clouds to hide it) and transparency; it is linked to loyalty, fidelity, constancy, and chastity. Many babies are born with blue eyes, thus innocence and purity can be attributed to the color. According to Jung, it is the opposite of red... [13] Red is an emotionally charged color. It is associated with the sun and all gods of war, anger, blood-lust, vengeance, fire, and the masculine. It can also mean love, passion, health, and/or sexual arousal [15]. Gray is often associated with neutrality, humility, and depression. Ashes are usually gray in color, and therefore a natural correlation exists between the two. Christianity commonly views gray as symbolic of death of the body while the soul remains eternal [14].

Results and Discussion. Having established the theoretical framework of color psychology and symbolism, the next step is to turn to its practical application. This section begins with the analysis of contemporary English poems published on the open poetry-sharing platform Hello Poetry, focusing on works that foreground the colors blue and red. To preserve authenticity, the study retains the poets' original spelling and visual formatting.

She was blue
I didn't get to choose your favorite colour

If it were me i would chose red
But thats because i paint myself red everyday

You chose blue
I am not blue

But she is... [4]

This concise poem foregrounds the vivid opposition "*blue::red*", while implicitly affirming that love cannot be compelled. The opening line conveys a universal truth: we cannot control other people's preferences or choices. The poet's self-identification with red – excitement, passion, and love – finds expression in the line "But that's because I paint myself red every day," which transforms into a metaphor for her conscious choice to embody these emotions. The image of "painting" conveys a deliberate and repeated act of self-assertion, contrasting with innate qualities that are simply inherited or natural. Consequently, red symbolizes not only vitality and love but also the effort and energy required to sustain them on a daily basis.

By contrast, the poet's loved one prefers blue: tranquility and comfort. His preference for blue, thus, becomes a metaphor for turning away from the poet's passionate, restless love, embracing instead the serenity of a relationship with another woman.

Therefore, the poem highlights the opposition between blue (calm, indifference) and red (passion, love). This opposition may be further interpreted as a clash of emotional worlds and feelings, revealing the gap between the poet's love and the other person's indifference.

Let's consider another poem.

Blue Eyes Like a Blue Rose
Those blue eyes I see

They grow and bloom for me

Like a flower, a rose

A drop of water, I suppose

Your blue water and your blue thorns

My scarlet hands caress you more

My crimson blood, it drips and seeps

From my eyes, red tears do weep

These red tears blind me

From the impossibility

Of a blooming blue rose

And you loving me [6]

The opening lines of the poem illustrate the poet's profound affection for his beloved one. The simile – "*Those blue eyes I see / They grow and bloom for me / Like a flower, a rose / A drop of water, I suppose*" – can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is tied to the image of a flower that grows and blooms, which may metaphorically stand for sincerity and purity of the feelings, as well as the gradual unfolding of love. The second interpretation deals with the color of the flower, as among all the flowers that carry symbolic meaning, blue roses stand out as one of the most enigmatic and captivating. Their striking hue isn't naturally found in nature, making them a rare treasure often associated with dreams, mystery, unattainable desires, and the pursuit of the impossible [11]. Cirlot also notes that the blue rose is a symbol of the impossible, a metaphor for humanity's eternal quest for the unreachable ideal [2, c. 27]. Thus, the poet's love – and the beloved herself – appears otherworldly, a rare miracle, a dream come true.

However, all roses have thorns, and the poet inevitably gets hurt by them. The thorn of the rose represents pain and pleasure [16], emphasizing the duality of love: its allure and charm are inseparable from the possibility of harm. He bleeds, yet blinded by his affection, he continues to love no matter what. The red color of blood becomes a powerful image, standing for self-inflicted pain and torment, but also for passion and profound love. In this light, the lines – "*These red tears blind me / From the impossibility / Of a blooming blue rose / And you loving me*" – function as an extended metaphor. They reveal that the poet's judgment is clouded, his vision is obscured by overwhelming emotion, and his intense

feelings prevent him from seeing reality clearly: perhaps the person he loves is indifferent to him, and this love is indeed an impossible, unattainable dream. Thus, in this poem, blue represents impossibility and unattainable desire, while red signals passion, pain, and sacrifice.

The next poem also illustrates the opposition between blue and red: passive and active, tranquil and passionate:

The Brash And Uncertain
I don't speak often,
When I do I don't speak up,
But that can change.

Two colors rule my mind,
A blue hue,
A red fool.

That doesn't me I'll fight,
It certainly doesn't mean I'll lay down to die [1].

Blue represents tranquility and the tendency to withdraw rather than confront, and the lines "*I don't speak often, / When I do I don't speak up*" testify to this. Red, on the other hand, embodies impulsive action and the will to fight. The phrase "a red fool" suggests that passion or perhaps even anger can override reason, leading to hasty decisions and reckless choices that may later show us in a bad light. The clash of these colors displays the inner conflict of a poet. The final lines – "*That doesn't mean I'll fight, / It certainly doesn't mean I'll lay down to die*" – show his refusal to be defined by either extreme. He resists both reckless action (red) and passive surrender (blue).

Having examined the interplay of blue and red, the analysis now turns to the symbolism of gray.

blue
not the sky,
not today.

today the sky's
an ashy grey.

blue, right now,
is how i feel.

under the dreary
sky of steel [3].

In this poem, the poet emphasizes that the sky is not blue but "ashy grey", a description that immediately

sets a tone of dullness and bleakness. Gray here may symbolize tiredness, while the phrase "sky of steel" adds to the sense of oppression, suggesting a cold, lifeless atmosphere that weighs down on the poet, making him feel blue – sad and emotionally distressed. Blue, thus, becomes the embodiment of the poet's inner world, while gray describes the external environment. Together, they create a powerful emotional atmosphere, where the bleakness of the outside world mirrors and amplifies the sadness within. This effect is further reinforced through graphon, evident in the poet's use of the lowercase "i". This deliberate deviation from standard spelling serves as a subtle yet powerful marker of emotional fragility, reflecting the poet's self-perception: he feels small, insignificant, and diminished beneath the oppressive "sky of steel".

Temporarily Grey
In dark moments of life it may be hard
Finding love for your existence each day
Behind every sorrow is meaning
All clouds will eventually drift away
Skies of blue are waiting around new corners
This time only will be temporarily grey [8]

In the poem "Temporary Grey", the symbolism of gray and blue is contrasted to reveal the complexity and transience of human emotions and life in general. Gray represents sadness and tiredness; the line "In dark moments of life..." evokes periods when existence feels heavy and the sense of life is lost. Blue, by contrast, symbolizes happiness and peace. It serves as a promise that joy is not lost but merely hidden, ready to reappear in due time. The opposition between gray and blue reflects the cyclical nature of life, reminding us that nothing – whether good or bad – lasts forever. Moments of sadness and fatigue eventually give way to peace and joy, just as the bright blue skies of a new day follow the gray clouds of yesterday. Thus, blue skies embody eternity – vast, timeless, and enduring – while the clouds that veil them are merely transient shadows destined to pass. The poem's message resonates with the reader, reminding us of familiar sayings such as "every cloud has a silver lining" and "the darkest hour is just before the dawn", which emphasize resilience and the inevitability of brighter days after hardship. Ultimately, the poem reassures us that even in times of sorrow, peace and happiness lie just "around new corners", and we must be strong enough to endure the "gray moments" and patient to wait for the return of "blue skies".

Conclusions. Blue and red consistently emerge as archetypal opposites, embodying incompatible

emotional worlds – red represents passion/love and vitality, while blue stands for tranquility and calm that borders on indifference. Within this framework, the blue rose arises as a symbol of unattainable desire, a rare and impossible ideal that the poet strives for. In contrast, red becomes the color of pain and torment, the bleeding proof of overwhelming passion driven by love. Yet the shift from red-blue tension

to the interplay of blue and gray introduces a more nuanced dynamic: in some cases, gray reinforces blue's melancholy, while in others these two colors are set against each other, with gray symbolizing dullness and sorrow, while blue represents happiness, peace and eternity. Here, the contrast underscores the transience of hardship and the inevitability of brighter days.

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