

## ARTICLE

# Precedent Poetic Colorism in the 20th Century: S. Heaney and A. Kushner

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## ABSTRACT

The vocabulary of color holds a significant place in artistic expression, particularly in poetic texts, where it serves as both an image and a symbol. Despite its prevalence, the multidimensional analysis of how poets utilize color remains underexplored. This article investigates coloristic motifs in the works of two distinguished poets: Seamus Heaney, the Irish Nobel Prize winner, and Alexander Kushner, a prominent Russian poet. Both poets, representing the same historical epoch, experienced the hardships of war and oppressive political systems, yet their works reflect a profound love for life. The study focuses on identifying words with color semantics and defining coloristic motifs within their poetry. Methodologically, it employs qualitative analysis to interpret the meanings of colors, a descriptive approach to highlight the distinctive features of S. Heaney's and A. Kushner's poetic styles, and analytical methods, including semiotic analysis, to compare and synthesize findings. By closely examining their works, the research aims to uncover patterns in their use of color and to draw conclusions about the symbolic and aesthetic roles of coloristic elements. This analysis not only enriches the understanding of S. Heaney's and A. Kushner's poetry but also contributes to the broader discourse on the interplay between color, symbolism, and poetic expression.

**Keywords:** Poetry; Color Elements; Symbols; Semantics; Seamus Heaney; Alexander Kushner

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# 1. Introduction

Color is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon, the study of which is of interest to various sciences from the ancient times. Various terms are used in the literature to designate words with the meaning of color: color name, color image, colorant, color name, etc. The term coloronym refers to all words that have a color meaning (white, red, blue-green, blackish, yellow, blue, etc.).

The phenomenon of color is highly complex, leading researchers to investigate the processes of color perception and linguistic color designations for decades. Scientists have determined that color perception is influenced by various linguistic, cultural, and individual factors, and it exhibits both specific and typological characteristics among individuals of different nationalities, cultures, mentalities, and personalities<sup>[1-3]</sup>.

The vocabulary of color plays a special role in works of art, particularly in poetic texts. In poetry, the creator who paints with words cannot disregard the visual potential of color, which is one of the most prevalent symbols. The question of a multidimensional analysis of poets' use of color as both an image and a symbol remains underexplored.

It should be noted that the use of color as a symbol has been known since antiquity. Alongside dance, facial expressions, and gestures, color is one of the most important ways of understanding reality and the world around us. Painting, as an ideal means of expression for poets, is an integral part of humanity's existential worldview. First of all, it should be noted that the comprehensive reference work interprets color as a symbol used in worship, alchemy, and all types of art and literature. It is also emphasized that color symbolism is based on the polarity of two color groups: warm, which is associated with assimilation processes and activity (e.g., red, orange, yellow, white), and cold, whose colors are associated with dissimulation processes and passivity (e.g., cyan, blue, violet, and black). It should also be noted that green, for example, is considered ambivalent and belongs to both color groups. Additionally, the purity of a color always corresponds to the purity of its symbolic meaning. The encyclopedia states: "Blue is an attribute of the heavenly gods; green is the color of nature on the one hand and of egoism, depression, inertia, and apathy on the other; violet corresponds to nostalgia and memory, as it combines red and blue; yellow is an attribute of the sun god and a sign of

the soul, intuition, and intellect; red signifies sensuality and vitality. Thus, there is a social, psychological, alchemical, and cosmic symbolism of colors"<sup>[4]</sup>.

Each color used by the artist has its own circle of semantic formations that fulfill important ideological and aesthetic functions. The use of color symbolism in creativity is determined by the author's worldview. After all, the main indicator of the individual worldview of each artist is the symbolism of the color palette that prevails in his work. Color names are emotionally and semantically charged, have a certain meaning and evoke associative connections both in the artist, the creator of the text, and in the recipient, the reader of the coloristic image "encoded" by the author. Each color is associated with an evaluation scheme in a person – neutral, positive or negative<sup>[5, 6]</sup>.

Color is a conscious, carefully considered technique that helps the artist to express thoughts and impressions. To understand the meaning of color is to penetrate into the depths of the artist's subconscious, to feel the uniqueness of his creative laboratory, the individual characteristics of the author's vision. This view is confirmed by the position of M. Gay, who stated: "Each spot of color has a certain emotional content that the artist can use to convey his feelings and experiences. It contains at the same time a "ramified" content, abstracting from real objects, and a reference to real qualities"<sup>[7]</sup>.

In a work of art, color has other means of expression than in painting, because "poetry, with the help of words, only influences the ideas we have, evokes them, makes them come alive, shine, resound with new energy in our souls"<sup>[8]</sup>. Fiction does not imitate painting, but looks for its reserves to convey color, finds words that influence the reader's imagination, concretize what is described and give it more emotionality and poetry.

In poetry, color often serves as a representation of an epoch, reflecting the dominant emotions, socio-political atmosphere, and cultural identity of a particular time period.

Color is a clearly chosen, developed, deliberate and thoughtful technique that helps the author to put his thoughts and feelings into words. In this article, coloristic motifs in poetry are analyzed to determine their role and how color semantics function as primary or supplementary elements. Additionally, the study identifies their thematic categories through an analysis of poems by two poets from the same

period. The article also examines the representation of color in the late 20th century.

## 2. Methodology

This study examines the poetry collections of Irish Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney and Russian poet Alexander Kushner, focusing on color semantics in their works. These poets were chosen because they lived through the same era of war, political turmoil, and social change, which left a deep mark on their poetry, even though they have different cultural backgrounds. Both S. Heaney and A. Kushner use color not just as description but as a way to process history and emotion, turning bright, vivid tones into symbols of hope, resilience, and survival. Their works show that, even across different cultures, shared historical struggles can shape artistic expression in strikingly similar ways.

The following methods were used in the research:

- Qualitative method to identify the significance of color symbolism in individual poems. This method allowed for an in-depth analysis of the use of colors within the context of each work, aiming to establish their symbolic or emotional meaning.
- Descriptive-quantitative method used to provide a detailed presentation of the specific characteristics of Seamus Heaney's and Alexander Kushner's poetic texts. This method involved describing recurring color motifs and analyzing the frequency of their use, which allowed for the revelation of the unique features of each author's poetic language. The descriptive method also helped analyze how cultural and historical contexts influence the choice of colors in their works.
- Semiotic analysis employed to determine the meanings and functional characteristics of specific colors in the texts of each poet. This analysis allowed for the identification of how various shades of color correspond to certain emo-

tions, states, or symbols of both poets.

- Typological method used to identify specific and common patterns in the use of color symbolism by poets from different national cultures, whose works are united by a shared chronological framework.

The application of these methods ensured a comprehensive approach to the study of the poetic texts, which made it possible to draw conclusions about the cultural particularities of color usage and their artistic significance in the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Alexander Kushner.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Seamus Justin Heaney (1939–2013) was an Irish poet, playwright and translator. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1995). Heaney was and still is considered one of Ireland's most important poets<sup>[9]</sup>. The American poet Robert Lowell called him “the most important Irish poet since Yeats”, and many others considered him “the greatest poet of our time”. After his death in 2013, *The Independent* described him as “the best-known poet in the world”.

The subject of our research was the poetry collections of the Irish poet and Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney, “Human Chain”, “Singing School” and others, which stand alongside the best works of world literature. The rich and varied legacy of Seamus Heaney is an integral part of the intellectual culture of the Irish<sup>[10, 11]</sup>.

The collections, which were created around the same time, differ so much in the nature of their poetic worldview, the creative style of the artist and the formal characteristics that this difference can only be explained by the versatility of the poet's personality and the genius of his artistic gift<sup>[12, 13]</sup>.

We selected 39 well-known works by the poet from electronic sources and the collection *The Haw Lantern. Selected Poems*<sup>[12, 13]</sup> to compile a frequency dictionary of color imagery, which is presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Frequency of usage of color names in S. Heaney's poetry.

№	Color	Numbers	№	Color	Numbers
1	White	21	7	Yellow	3
2	Black	20	8	Brown	3
3	Red	12	9	Gold	2
4	Blue	12	10	Purple	2
5	Gray	7	11	Silver	2
6	Green	6	12	Orange	2
			13	Bronze	2

Among the 13 identified color terms, the most frequently used are white, black, red, blue, gray, and green, whereas gold, purple, silver, and others appear less frequently.

After analyzing Seamus Heaney's poetry collections, we have found that the poet uses a wide range of colors. In the poem "Blackberry-Picking", for example, we read: "Late August, given heavy rain and sun/For a full week, the blackberries would ripen./At first, just one, a glossy purple clot/Among others, red, green, hard as a knot." The dominant colors in the poet's palette are white, black, green and their shades. We have noticed that the poet's color semantics are somewhat altered. Let's analyze the color symbolism in the artist's lyrical texts using sample lines from some poems.

Dark colors are preferred in these collections—black, gray and blue. These are the colors of sadness and coldness, of fear, which lend the poems a tragic, pessimistic mood.

Black is the traditional color of sorrow, grief and heaviness. According to Luscher<sup>[14]</sup>, the color black conveys the idea of non-existence, disappearance. According to psychologists, the frequent choice of the color black indicates the presence of conflict, obstacles, dissatisfaction with something: "With cut-offs of black calico, Remnants of old blackout blinds/Ironed, tacked with criss-cross threads, We jacketed the issued books" (1); "Imagine this pain: an old man./Lives to see his son's body. Swing on the gallows. He begins to keen. And weep for this boy, while the black raven. Gloats where he hangs: he can be of no help" (2). Heaney frequently employs the color black to symbolize the swamp, a prominent motif in his poetry. This soft, pliable earth is metaphorically described as "good black butter". In his poem "Bogland," for instance, Heaney portrays the swamp akin to the eye of a Cyclops, drawing the surrounding landscape irresistibly towards it. The use of the color black in describing the earth as "black oil" underscores its fertile and adaptable characteristics. These metaphors not only enrich the poetic imagery but also offer insight into the lyrical persona's complex perception of the swamp. It evokes a blend of admiration, respect, and even trepidation, highlighting the profound impact of this enigmatic landscape on the human psyche.

Lexemes to denote the color black are quite common in Heaney's poetry. It is a popular, emotionally charged color whose semantics are dominated by negativity, although there are also neutral and even positive aspects. Lexemes with

black semantics are just as fundamental to Heaney's work as lexemes with white semantics.

In a literal sense, lexemes with black semantics are used by Heaney to describe: coloring; the appearance of a person; outfits; animals and parts of their bodies; birds and their body parts; berries; natural materials.

In the analyzed verses, the lexemes that denote the color black and are used in a figurative sense usually have purely negative connotations and symbolize the following concepts in particular: death; evil; failure, illness, sorrow; poverty, dirt; emptiness, loneliness; suffering; tiredness; sadness; melancholy.

Lexemes for the color black can have a hyperbolic meaning. It appears more frequently in descriptions of dark, tanned skin ("plum skin").

The color blue has a symbolic meaning of sadness, coldness and at the same time peace. According to Goethe's theory, this is the main color that is passive in its emotional effect and evokes a gentle but restless and sad feeling<sup>[15]</sup>. In Seamus Heaney's work, blue is associated with darkness and shadows.

According to M. Luscher's test, gray is a neutral color that has no stimulating tendencies and is, so to speak, an area between "contrast zones"<sup>[14]</sup>. Seamus Heaney's poems also contain word images that convey the color gray: "She came every morning to draw water Like an old bat staggering up the field/I recall Her grey apron, the pocked white enamel" (3); "But when the bath was filled we found a fur/A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache/I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair/That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot" (4). Lexemes denoting the color gray are often used to express a low valuation<sup>[16]</sup>. In the poetic works we look at, they often convey qualities such as invisibility, indistinctness: a gray, simple person, processions of gray people; routine, uninteresting: gray work, gray streets, etc.

White is one of the colors that has been the most important color for the Irish since ancient times. The Irish considered it sacred and used it for clothing, art and decoration. This is why white occupies a central place in Seamus Heaney's poetic color scheme. And this is expressed not only by the frequent use of this color, but also by a special attitude towards it. White is the most common color in Irish folklore. People usually associate it with light, joy, purity and holiness. This is probably the reason why Seamus Heaney uses white

color in the depiction of his father: “His shoulders globed like a full sail strung” (5), which underlines the sacredness of this image.

The epithet “white” is used in different contexts and can therefore be described as polysemantic. In combination with words such as wings (“Air from another life and time and place Pale blue heavenly air is supporting/A white wing beating high against the breeze...” (6)), bags (“Seeing the bags of meal passed hand to hand/In close-up by the aid workers, and soldiers” (7)), it reflects the life characteristics and worldview of the Irish.

Red is one of the most frequently used color terms in Heaney’s work, which is not surprising since the author wrote his works during the time of oppression of the people of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republican Army. Considering the well-known associative marker of the color red – “the color of blood” – such a choice of the poet is quite obvious: most of the heroes of his works are in the maelstrom of hostilities and constantly see blood and death, others are associated with the bloody consequences of the war in Ireland. Seamus Heaney’s poem “Requiem for the Croppies”, for example, captures the essence of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and the Battle of Vinegar Hill, a turning point in Irish history marked by resistance to British rule. The term “croppy” refers to rebels who cut their hair as a sign of defiance.

By using the possessive adjective “our” in the first person plural, the reader learns that the speaker is one of these warriors, and it helps to convey a sense of simplicity and honesty. The repeated mention of what these croppies did not have (“No kitchens ... no striking camps” (8)) conveys their lack of equipment and training, which is emphasized by the use of anaphora. “The priest lay behind ditches with the tramp” (9) – the mention of the priest and the tramp reminds the reader that these fighters are ordinary people, farmers, local residents. They are all united, regardless of their social status, and are fighting for one thing: their country. “On the hike” indicates that their formation is disorganized and that they were taken by surprise. The “pike” is an agricultural implement used here as a weapon, emphasizing the unconventional character of the insurgents and their resourcefulness in resisting. Sending “cattle into infantry” is another unconventional method of warfare that complements the spontaneous and unprepared tactics of the insurgents. “Conclave” implies a decisive meeting or gathering that indicates a turning point

in the rebellion, and “final” conveys the inevitable doom alluded to in the poem’s title, a requiem.

The line “Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon” is structured like a summary and conveys a vivid picture of the rebels in battle. The juxtaposition of “terraced” and “thousands” emphasizes the scale of the tragedy. The use of “shaking scythes at cannon” shows how the rebels confront the cannons with hand-held agricultural implements, emphasizing their ingenuity and determination.

“The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave” (10). Here the author uses personification by attributing feelings to the hills. The metaphor of the “broken wave” hints at the brave collective efforts of the rebels and their ultimate failure. “Blushed” adds another nuance, conveying the sense that the mountain is reacting to the unfolding events.

“Without shroud or coffin” (11) points to the lack of traditional burial rites and emphasises the sacrifice of the rebels and the brutality of their suppression. The repetition of the pronoun “us” emphasises the collective identity and common fate of the rebels. The symbolism of the image of barley goes beyond its agricultural significance. It becomes a metaphor for rebirth and refers to the resilience of the Irish people in the face of adversity.

“Death of a Naturalist” is a multi-layered metaphor that stands out from Heaney’s generally non-metaphorical early poetry. It is about death in the literal sense, for its shadow is invisibly present in the poem’s imagery, and about a phenomenon associated with the revision of philosophical and psychological views.

“All year the flax-darn festered in the heart/Of the townland; green and heavy headed/Flax had rotted there...” (12).

From the very first lines, the gaze is fixed on an everyday landscape – a particular area that is not too tidy, for at its heart is a “dam” of flax that rots all year round. The effect of a heavy atmosphere created by the decomposition of the plant remains is achieved by the participles: “festered”, “rotted”, “sweltered”, which evoke not only obvious visual images but also olfactory sensations of decay. The motif of withering and death, which has crept into the fabric of free verse, is obliterated by the semantics of the adjective “green”, which takes on the meaning of blossoming, and the complex adjective “heavy headed”, which means filled with life juices. The sensual, life-giving power of nature is embodied by sounds (“bubbles gargled delicately”). The

visual, olfactory and auditory sensations are united by a complex metaphor: “bluebottles/Wave a strong gauze of sound around the smell” (13), which becomes a symbol of bubbling, victorious life.

Lifeless rocks, normally covered only with a light veil of small shoots and dust of dry thorns, turn into a bright, living natural corner when the broom blooms on them (“die blossoms scald”). Small yellow flowers are associated with the yolk of an egg and thus take on the semantics of a symbol for emerging life: “All year the whin/Can show a blossom or two/But it’s in full bloom now./As if the small yolk stain/From all the birds’ eggs.../...Were spiked and hung/Everywhere...” (14) (“Whinlands”). Metaphors enrich the sensually visible landscape and help to create visual images that are complemented by color features: “gilt”, “oxidize gold”, “fierce heat”, “flame”. The metaphorical series evokes associations with the ever-burning fire of life and defeats the opposing symbols of death (“dead thorns”) and war (“flintbed and battlefield”). The destructive power of war, which brings ruin and death (a motif that first appears in the poem “Door into the Dark”), is symbolically overcome both by the wild yellow flower full of vitality and by the humble but persistent barley that sprouts from the pockets of the dead on the hillsides and the Irish rebels who were not buried according to human rules: “The hillside blushed, soaked in our brotchen wave./They hurried us without shroud and coffin/And in August the barley grew up out of the grave” (15) (“Requiem for the Croppies”).

The series of synonyms embodying the seething energy of life in nature is extended in the poem “Death of a Naturalist” by an element similar to the one mentioned above [“small yolk”] - frogspawn: “But best of all was the warm, thick slobber/Of frogspawn...” (16). The spawn resembles a “thick slobber” – a naturalistic and obviously non-lyrical detail that nevertheless complements the tactile and visual picture of the painting and emphasizes its abundance of life juices. This use of a traditionally non-poetic detail, which expands the sphere of the poetic, emphasizes the equivalence of all elements of nature.

The lyrical hero of the poem “Death of a Naturalist” does not limit himself to observation but moves from contemplation to action: “...Here, every spring,/I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied/Specs to range on window-sills at home” (17).

Philosophers and intellectuals unanimously declare that children in their natural manifestations are much closer to untouched nature than adults who try to approach it artificially. A child collecting frog eggs in a jar, watching them grow and waiting patiently for the “explosion” that signals the emergence of a new frog, is not guided by the imposed necessity of a forced implantation of knowledge but by the natural instinct to learn about the baby that has fallen out of the nest. But then the mentors intervene, earnestly trying to “fix” everything and tearing the child, this piece of nature, out of its natural habitat: “...Miss Walls told us how/The daddy frog was called bullfrog...” (18).

“Miss Walls” does not appear by chance. A teacher who has a name but is also impersonal by it. Miss Walls symbolizes social conventions (walls), putting empirical knowledge in a scholastic shell. She is on the other side of the “walls,” perceiving nature not with her imagination but with her mind. “Miss Walls appears as external author of guilt,” writes Nicholas Rowe and adds in a Freudian vein: “...perhaps a sexual awakening”. The critic interprets Miss Walls as a prototype of the biblical Eve, who is responsible for the loss of innocence (here) – as a child. The dual nature of man, based on the synthesis of living nature and layers of civilization, is characterized by Mara Kalnis as “the broken integrity of the natural world”. In “Death of a Naturalist” this violation is layered on a new stage of cognition, beginning with the keywords: “invaded”, “gathered for vengeance”, and “not heard before”, symbolizing the impossibility of returning to the past.

The situation of a child collecting frog eggs and patiently waiting for a signal announcing the appearance of a new frog has a deep philosophical subtext: “The fattening dots burst into nimble – /Swimming tadpoles” (19). In the child’s perception, a turning point occurs at the same time as the natural “explosion” of the environment, a moment that the author characterizes as the “death of a naturalist”: “Iben one hot day... the angry frogs/Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedge/To a coarse croaking that I had not heard/Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus” (20). Something frightening is happening, and the child literally perceives it with all his senses: he sees terrifying bloated frogs, hears their menacing chorus, feels the negative energy of revenge on his skin. An empiricist who knows no fear and no compassion “dies”. He is replaced by a man who

still sees himself as part of nature, but interprets it differently. The connection to the outside world is not lost – the child has grown up and moved to another level: “and I knew/That if I dripped my hand the spawn would clutch it” (21).

The choice of primary colors by a poet-artist is an extremely complex creative act. The analysis of the color names in Seamus Heaney’s work allows us to draw conclusions about the peculiarities of the realist and romantic worldview, the author’s inner state of mind and his ideological worldview.

We are convinced that Seamus Heaney uses a rich palette of colors in his poetic works. Colors play an important role in the artist’s poetry. They not only create vivid images of nature but also paint the inner world of the lyrical hero and are a means of conveying feelings and emotional experiences.

Alexander Kushner (1936) – Russian poet, essayist. Author of more than 50 volumes of poetry (including for children) and a series of essays and articles on classical and modern Russian poetry, collected in seven books. Laureate of the State Prize of the Russian Federation (1995).

A. Kushner builds color images on the interpenetration of the primary – spectral and secondary – symbolic semantics of the word, especially white and black color. In Christianity, the primary colors – white, red, black – had symbolic meaning. White expresses purity, virginity, red is a symbol of blood, power, black – mourning, sadness, death. The poet’s classical color semantics are somewhat modified.

The core of Alexander Kushner’s poetic colorism is white, a color composed of achromatic tones<sup>[17]</sup>. White is the most common color in Slavic, including Russian, folklore, which may explain the special attention of Russian artists to this color nomination as a means of word formation: “It was red and yellow and purple, And also – dazzling white. “Are you ready?” I whispered: “Not ready”. The color designations for white turned out to be the most heterogeneous in the word formation structure: A. Kushner uses derivatives of the substantival, adjectival, verbal and adverbial type, composites<sup>[18–20]</sup>.

By analyzing three poetry collections by A. Kushner, we identified the frequency of usage, which is presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Frequency of usage of color names in A. Kushner’s poetry.

№	Color	Numbers	№	Color	Numbers
1	White	34	10	Turquoise	3
2	Black	17	11	Lilac	3
3	Blue	17	12	Azure	2
4	Yellow	15	13	Purple	2
5	Green	14	14	Gray	2
6	Red	11	15	Silvery	2
7	Light blue	10	16	Bronze	2
8	Gold	10	17	Copper	1
9	Pink	5	18	Orange	1

Statistical data on the frequency of color usage in the works of A. Kushner shows that the poet most frequently uses six colors: monochrome (white, black); blue, green, red and yellow. The calculations reveal patterns in color usage.

The white color in the poet’s poetry has a wide range of meanings – from the nominative to the symbolic generalization. In the artistic language of A. Kushner, color properties are associated with natural phenomena (moss, snow, cloud), spatial concepts (sky, field, garden), names of flora and fauna (flowers, lilies, geese, bears), and objective realities (envelope, handkerchief). By combining names of the color white with the lexemes of the specified lexical-semantic groups,

the original meaning of the color name is demonstrated. The rendering of the coloring of realities is reflected in such poetic lines: “Блестящее, белое, с яркой каймой, Как быстро промчалось оно надо мною/Shining, white, with a bright edge, How quickly it rushed over me” (22), “Белая ночь. Белою ночью деревья в саду как на ладони у нас на виду/White night. On a white night, the trees in the garden are in full view of us” (23), “Что ни год получает По письму, по письму. Это в белом конверте Ему пишет зима. Обещанье бессмертья – Содержанье письма/What every year receives By letter, by letter. In a white envelope, winter writes to him. The promise of immortality is the con-

tent of the letter” (24). White color is used to denote the color of snow. A. Kushner uses it in descriptions as an attribute of winter landscapes and thus diversifies the means of linguizing artistic images. These are metaphorical structures formed on the basis of botanical morphology by attributing the properties of plants to realities (“Флоксы белеют; не спустишься в собственный сад, Чтобы вдохнуть их мучительно-сладостный запах. Бог – это то, что не в силах пресечь камнепад/Phloxes are turning white; you can’t go down to your own garden, To breathe in their painfully sweet scent. God is that which cannot stop a falling stone” (25)). There are dynamic, personified images filled with concepts for certain human actions and states: “Кто-то в черную трубку дышал. Зимний ветер ему поддвывал. Словно зверь, притаясь, выжидал. ... Все равно хорошо среди рассыпчатой белой зимы, Расторопно, свежо! – недоволен лишь мальчик дворовый/Someone breathed into a black pipe. The winter wind howled at him. Like an animal hiding, he waits. ... After all, it’s good in the crumbly white winter, Quick, fresh! – only the yard boy is unhappy” (26).

A. Kushner often relies on the symbolic system developed by the Russian folklore tradition when ascribing certain symbolic functions to color names. White, blue and red are the colors in A. Kushner’s pictorial system associated with Russia. Some peoples and nationalities associate white with death and symbolize melancholy, sadness, mourning, the absurdity of existence, while in many cultures these functions are taken over by black. Playing with the inner contradictions inherent in the mythological nature of white creates an expressive stylistic effect that deepens the minor tonality of the poetry: “Белая ночь. Белою ночью деревья в саду как на ладони у нас на виду. Вот я без лампы сижу у окна – в книге любая картинка видна. Тихо скользят по Неве корабли. Шпиль Петропавловки блещет вдали/White night. On a white night, the trees in the garden are clearly visible. Here I sit at the window without a lamp – every picture in a book is visible. Ships glide quietly along the Neva. The spire of the Peter and Paul Fortress sparkles in the distance” (27).

The white color is also used to describe the poet’s romantic ideas, which are alien to the lyrical hero. In the poem “Эти бешеные страсти/These mad passions...” (28) the term “romance” itself is not mentioned; the literary movement is characterized by listing the behavioral reactions characteris-

tic of the heroes of a romantic work: mad, strong passions, agitated gestures (hands wrung in flour), words that are two notes higher than they should be. Colors are used to depict the unnaturalness and absurdity of the characters’ actions: “Эти бешеные страсти/И взволнованные жесты – Что-то вроде белой пасты. Выжимаемой из жести/These raging passions/And agitated gestures – Something like white paste. Squeezed out of a tin” (29). Pasta, smoke, fog – all this conveys the exaggeration and extremes in the expressions of emotion that are alien to Kushner’s lyrical hero, because he sees them as a deception: “...forced passion, exaltation, “habits” are the object of Kushner’s eternal hostility and disgust,” says Beck<sup>[21]</sup>.

It is assumed that the occurrence of certain associations influences a specific visual and sensory image. Thus, stable associative connections are established between a certain color and its “standard” carriers<sup>[22]</sup>, universal elements of human experience<sup>[23]</sup>, such as the sky, water – for blue, the sun – for yellow, etc. Yavorskaya<sup>[22]</sup>, dealing with the problem of categorizing the linguistic concepts of color, explains: “...for the most important color names, their prototypes (sky, water, vegetation, fire, blood) are at the same time archetypes, i.e. extremely stable and powerful mythological and mythopoetic symbols”. The individual psychophysiological perception, the understanding of color as a product of the human eye and consciousness projected onto language, manifests itself in the semantic dynamics of color names, in the appropriation of symbolic meaning through these entities. The material of artistic language demonstrates semantic changes in the vocabulary of color. Poetry is the material in which “color lives in an image, in a way that is not only shaped by the objectivity of perception, but depends on the artistic goals, the subjective preferences of the author and the individual understanding of colors”. The use of color names as components of semantic-associative oppositions is determined by the visual purpose in poetic language: white – black, black – blue, red – yellow, yellow – gray. For example: “Чёрная пластинка В комнате моей. Белая пылинка Кружится на ней/The black plate lies in my room. A white speck of dust swirls on it” (30), “Декабрьским утром черно-синим Тепло домашнее покинем И выйдем молча на мороз/On a black and blue December morning we leave the warmth of the house and go out into the cold in silence” (31), “Я люблю эту виллу мистерий, это Бичеванье, нагую люблю



вакханку, Красный цвет, я не видел такого цвета! Жёлтый плащ и коричневую изнанку/I love this mansion of secrets, this flagellation, I love the naked bacchante, the color red, I have never seen such a color! A yellow coat and a brown interior” (32).

A high degree of frequency in A. Kushner’s poetic dictionary is characterized by units from the lexical-semantic group of yellow color, especially gold. Gold is a bright color, and so the poets naturally use it to represent the color of the celestial sphere and fire. It is significant that A. Kushner rarely uses this color name in precisely this context. Thus the name golden is used with the semantics “luminous, shining” to denote a cloud: “Что ни век, то век железный. Но дымится сад чудесный, Блещет тучка; я в пять лет Должен был от scarlatины Умереть/Every century, it is an iron age. But the wonderful garden smokes, the cloud shines; I should have died of scarlet fever at five” (33) to describe the starry sky: “Стыдно слез мне во сне; за морями, лесами Есть иные края, с золотыми дождями. Там ни спичек, ни масла не надо, ни хлеба, Там покажется это волнение нелепо, Хватит всем золотого сиянья и неба/I am ashamed of tears in my sleep; beyond the seas and forests there are other lands with golden showers. There are no matches there, no butter, no bread, there this excitement will seem absurd, there there will be enough for all of golden splendor and sky” (34), space: “С золотым узором, Звёздной пылью/With a golden pattern, star pollen” (35). To reflect the beauty, the colors, the flowers and the splendor of spring, the poet uses traditional color lexemes to describe the sunny spring, the hot summer and the elegantly glowing autumn: “Эти травинки, которые в дом Мы на подошвах приносим из сада, В зеленоватом, потом золотом Блеске их – радость для нашего взгляда/These blades of grass we carry on our soles from the garden into the house, In their greenish, then golden glow - joy for our sight” (36).

Kushner also uses shades of red, e.g., rusty in the text of the poem “Ruins”, which primarily expresses the feelings he experienced as a child of war: confusion, helplessness, fear. “I experienced the war as a child and remember its horrors: evacuation, trains, a terrible crush on the banks of the Volga in Kazan – that was in the fall of ’41. My father was at the front, my mother and I went to Syzran... And when we returned to Leningrad forty-four years later, I saw the skeletons of the destroyed houses”<sup>[24]</sup>.

The rusty color helps to reveal several meanings of the word “ruin”: as a decorative ornament for 18th century parks; as a collapse of ideals, hopes and relationships; as a real testimony of war; as the condition of a man who has lost his roots and himself: “Вот человек, похожий на руину/Here is a man who looks like a ruin” (37). The hero compares these different types of “ruins”: “Я помню те разбитые кварталы/И ржавых балок крен и провисанье/Как вы страшны, бывшие идеалы. Как вы горьки, любовные прощанья, И старых дружб мгновенные обвалы, Отчаянья и разочарования!/I remember the broken blocks/And the rusty beams that lean and sag/How terrible you are, former ideals. How bitter you are, fond farewells, And instant collapses of old friendships, despair and disappointment!” (38).

Among the names of the chromatic colors in the artistic language of A. Kushner, the color blue predominates. In this color is concentrated the highest “sensuality”, the utmost devotion: “Кавказской в следующей жизни быть пчелой, Жить в сладком домике под синею скалой, Там липы душиные, там глянцевые кроны. Не надышался я тем воздухом, шальной/To be a bee in the next life of the Caucasus, To live in a sweet house under a blue rock, There are sultry lindens, there are shining crowns. I have not breathed that air” (39). A. Kushner’s work illustrates the emergence of a metaphorical context based on the interpenetration of superficial landscape, descriptive and deep existential plans. The sky and the sea are traditional attributes of the author’s poetry, endowed with constant color definitions, but there is a clear line of sensual perception of everyday realities<sup>[25]</sup>. The esthetics of the blue color is based on the recognition of its slightest “materiality”, because the prototypes of this color – the celestial bodies – are associated with the unknown, the mysterious, due to their real distance from man. In A. Kushner’s work, color neutralizes its original – spectral – meaning and becomes a sign of the transcendental, of abstract essences – depth of feelings, harmony. Direct and figurative meanings actualize the names of blue and blue colors in the artistic language. Units from the composition of these lexical-semantic groups denote both concrete and abstract concepts. The analysis of the contextual environment reveals the functional and semantic specificity of color names.

In the Russian poetic language, there is a tradition in

which the lexeme blue functions in combination with nouns that name the realities of the celestial sphere. The nominative potential of color names is realized in such contexts: “И поэтому Рембрандт забыть обоих был бы рад, да нельзя: написал их слишком Хорошо. Где-то облачно-голубое Небо есть: как нужна ему передышка!//And that’s why Rembrandt would like to forget them both, but it’s impossible: he painted them too well. Somewhere there is a cloudy blue sky: how it needs a rest!” (40). A. Kushner embodies visual associations in the word as a set of heterogeneous sensory impressions and paints a visual picture: “Конечно, русский Крым, с прибоем под скалою, С простором голубым и маленькой горою, Лежащей, как медведь, под берегом крутым. Конечно, русский Крым, со строчкой стиховою, и парус на волне, и пароходный дым. Конечно, русский Крым/Of course, the Russian Crimea, with the surf under the cliff, with blue expanse and a small mountain lying, like a bear, under the steep bank. Of course, the Russian Crimea, with a book of poems, and a sail on the wave, and steamboat smoke. Of course, the Russian Crimea” (41).

Kushner actively attracts red nominations to figurative word usage. In terms of the number of different shades, this is the most representative group of color lexemes in the poetic dictionary. Of all the chromatic colors, red is characterized by a high degree of intensity, saturation, and concentration; it is most noticeable when perceiving objects. Among all the structural coloristic groups, it is the names of the red tone that demonstrate semantic diversity and the widest compatibility with abstract and concrete concepts in the verbal poetic continuum. Special color associations are explicated in the poet’s intimate lyrics, where the red color becomes the personification of a woman, symbolizing femininity, beauty, mystery, passion, love: “Калмычка ты, татарка ты, монголка! О, как блестит твоя прямая чёлка! Что может быть прекрасней и нелепей? Горячая и красная, как степи/You are Kalmyk, you are Tatar, you are Mongolian! Oh, how your straight bangs shine! What could be more beautiful and absurd? Hot and red, like the steppes” (42).

It has been established that in the intimate and landscape poetry of A. Kushner the names from the group of red flowers are carriers of a positive evaluative semantics, which organically overlaps with the nominative meaning of the words. In the poetry of bourgeois sound, the ana-

lyzed lexemes show their ambivalent nature by activating negative evaluative connotations. Red is the color of blood, of bloodshed caused by wars and catastrophes, it embodies evil, is a sign of destructive fire, symbolizes suffering and death: “На кладбище, можно сказать, машинально, Задумавшись, я посмотрел на часы: Без четверти три. Населённая спальня Средь чахлах берёзок и красной лозы/In the cemetery, one could say, mechanically, lost in thought, I looked at the clock: a quarter to three. An inhabited room between stunted birch trees and red vines” (43). Note that the names of red and other colors in this group have a relationship to the color names of black in terms of their symbolic content.

In the poem “Lilac”, which refers to the lyricism of the urban landscape, the most important poetic image is a blooming lilac. The metaphorical meaning of its name is the transience of existence associated with the short-lived beauty of the humble spring flowers. The color terms “violet, white, purple, blue” not only comprehensively describe the lilac as the main symbol of spring and renewal, but also create unique content and guide the reader to a special emotional perception.

The color violet can also be found in the poem “Контрольные, Мрак за окном фиолетов.../Control, darkness before the violet window...” (44). This poem consists of three stanzas, a traditional form for Kushner. He often uses short stanzas to convey a sense of simplicity and focus. The first line of the poem states that a purple darkness falls outside the window. The color purple is often associated with mystery, mysticism, and deep feelings. This could be a reference to the mood or state of the speaker. In the second line, it is said that the hands be writing assignments as if they were breathing. A metaphorical comparison can be made here, where the hands probably belong to students or students writing exams. The use of the verb “breathe” can emphasize the diligence and concentration with which they carry out their tasks. The third line, “И только белая бумага просит: Больше, больше, больше.../And only white paper asks: more, more, more...” (45) indicates the paper’s need for new information, filling, creativity or an idea. Paper is a symbol of pure potential or possibility. The poem conveys the idea that assignments are constantly evolving and require more information and thought from students to fill the void of paper. In general, in the poem “Control, darkness before the

violet window...” Kushner creates an atmosphere of mystery and a certain tension associated with writing exams not only in the literal sense but also life exams where one is afraid of making a mistake. He also draws attention to the writing process and the seemingly endless need for new information or ideas.

Frequency analyses, presented in **Table 3**, have shown that the most frequently used colors in the poets’ works are white and black.

**Table 3.** Comparative table of poets’ frequency dictionaries.

№	Heaney	A. Kushner
1	White	White
2	Black	Black
3	Red	Blue
4	Blue	Yellow
5	Gray	Green
6	Green	Red
7	Yellow	Light blue

White emerges as the dominant color. Each poet either experienced war as a child or participated in it as a soldier, witnessing its horrors and the “black” face of destruction. This may explain why they were unconsciously drawn to white as a symbol of hope or purity. Their works reflect the lasting impact of World War II and the Irish Civil War.

We have dealt with color terms that are used both literally and figuratively. The actual nominative semantics of color terms are used in combination with the names of certain realities: natural phenomena, spatial concepts, objects of flora and fauna, and the appearance of a person, household objects, clothing, and temporal concepts. The linguistic-synergistic function of color names contaminated with units of the aforementioned lexical-semantic groups is reduced to a descriptive, landscape-pictorial function. Based on the analysis of color elements, we attempted to create a typological color map (**Table 4**).

**Table 4.** Typological color map of Seamus Heaney and Alexander Kushner.

Additional Semantics	S. Heaney	General Semantics	A. Kushner	Additional Semantics
Political overtones	Black	Death	Black →	Revival
	White	Memory, nature	White →	Creation, homeland
	← Red	War, blood	Red →	Feelings
	Blue	Sacrament	Blue →	Nature
Landscape, life energy, barley	Green	Nature	Green	
	← Yellow	Natural-existential	Yellow →	Gold
	← Grey «human»	Existential	Purple → «human»	Mysticism

Analyzing the typological color palette of Seamus Heaney and Alexander Kushner, the following similarities can be highlighted:

1. Both poets are contemporaries, which creates a common cultural-historical foundation for their works.
2. Their worldviews intersect, as evidenced by their similar perspectives on nature, humanity, and culture.
3. Both authors actively reference folklore, reinforcing their commitment to traditions and folk imagery.
4. The poets balance between the universal and the individual, exploring universal themes through the lens of personal impressions and experiences.

The use of similar color motifs revealed not only typological similarities but also emphasized the unique individual approaches to color. However, these differences in their color palettes can be unified within the broader artistic context.

## 4. Conclusions

In summary, both S. Heaney and A. Kushner employ a diverse array of colors in their poetry to evoke emotions, establish atmosphere, and convey symbolic meanings. They share a tendency toward using pure colors rather than shades, emphasizing their pursuit of clarity, contrast, and emotional intensity in poetic expression.

Moreover, their works exhibit similarities in the historical typology of color interpretation, likely influenced by the shared era in which they lived. Both poets’ experiences were shaped by the lasting impact of World War II and the Irish Civil War, events that deeply influenced their perception and use of color as a literary device.

Their coloristic motifs also reveal notable parallels. Both poets frequently use white, black, red, blue, green, and yellow, reinforcing traditional color symbolism. However, an important distinction emerges: Kushner incorpo-

rates light blue, while Heaney favors gray, a difference that can be attributed to cultural influences. In Russian poetic tradition, light blue is often associated with spirituality, openness, and nostalgia, whereas in Irish literature, gray tends to evoke themes of history, endurance, and the harshness of nature. These variations demonstrate how cultural backgrounds shape poetic color perception, adding layers of meaning to their works.

The findings of this study provide a foundation for further research into the role of color in contemporary poetry, contributing to the development of a coloristic model of poetic expression that accounts for both universal and culturally specific color symbolism.

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Conceptualization, M.M. and S.A.; methodology, M.M., S.A.; validation, D.S. and S.A.; formal analysis, R.M., D.S.; investigation, M.M.; resources, M.M., R.M., D.S.; data curation, M.M.; writing—original draft preparation, M.M., D.S.; writing—review and editing, M.M. and S.A.; project administration, M.M.; funding acquisition, M.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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