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Psychological Codes of Primary Colours:

A Comparative Reading of W.B. Yeats and Nima Youshij's Poems in the Light of
Phenomenological Psychology

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*“[Receive] the colour of Allah,
and who can colour better than Allah?
and Him do we serve.”*

(The Holy Qur'an: Al Baqara :138)

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Colours and Phenomenological Psychology.....	1
1.1 General Overview.....	1
1.2 Colours and Colour Psychology.....	2
1.3 Phenomenology.....	11
1.4 Phenomenological Psychology.....	16
1.5 Review of Literature.....	21
1.6 Delimitations.....	24
Chapter Two: W.B.Yeats: A Colourful Poet	25
2.1 Biography.....	25
2.2 Colour Images.....	27
2.2.1 Red	27
2.2.2 Green.....	33
2.2.3 Blue.....	40
2.2.4 Yellow	45
Chapter Three: Nima Youshij: A Yellow Poet	51
3.1 Biography	51
3.2 Colour Images	54
3.2.1 Yellow	54
3.2.2 Red	62
3.2.3 Blue	67
3.2.4 Green	72
Chapter Four: Subjective Systems in Yeats and Nima	78
4.1 Symbols in W.B. Yeats and Nima Youshij	79
4.2 The Least Frequent Colour	83
4.3 Colours Compared and Contrasted in Two Poets	86
4.3.1 Red	86
4.3.2 Yellow	89
4.3.3 Blue	94
4.3.4 Green	99

4.4 Mottled Images	103
Chapter Five: Epilogue	107
Bibliography	112

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Chapter One

Colours and Phenomenological Psychology

1.1 General Overview

Psychological and subjective significances of colours are the foci of this essay. While colour psychology provides this research with tables of colours and their symbolic meanings, connotations, and associations, phenomenological psychology paves the way to find access to the inside world of the poets and therefore to their subjective meanings of colours. Marx Luscher, a Swiss psychotherapist, in his book on colour psychology declares that blue, green, yellow and red are principal colours and represent our basic mental and psychological needs (Luscher 73). This research is a comparative study of these colours in the poems of Irish symbolist poet W.B. Yeats, and Persian symbolist poet Nima Youshij (Jannati 23). Through a phenomenological psychological approach researcher investigates the subjective meanings and moods that each poet associates with these colours. These two poets are studied separately during chapter two and three. The results are analyzed in comparison with the psychological meanings of colours provided by Luscher. Also, facts and debates about poets' lives and poetry are discussed when the results allow for related issues. Chapter four compares and contrasts the two poets and shows how different factors have come to different subjective colour system and colour symbolism in their poems. Since the results of this research verges on the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty- one of the most influential figures in the development of phenomenological psychological methods- chapter five discusses his

phenomenological philosophy in more detailed way so that the conclusions of this research can be supported firmly.

1.2 Colours and Colour Psychology

During the history of literature different approaches have been applied to access the meaning of a literary work. The author, the reader, and the work, individually or considered together, have been important in the process of understanding the meaning of a literary work.

Historical-biographical approach resorts to author's life, history, and culture. In this approach a literary work is seen as a "reflection of its author's life and times, or the life and times of the characters in the work" (L.Guerin 51). New Criticism emphasises on the text itself and it mainly focuses on the poem. In fact, "this interpretive model begins with a close analysis of the poem's individual words ... and then moves to a discussion of possible allusions within the text" (E. Bressler 54). Reader Response theory states that readers and text together make the meaning of a work. In this approach meaning is "context dependent and intricately associated with the reading process" (E.Bressler 80). Along with different approaches critics apply different elements to access the meaning of a work of art. One of these elements is 'symbol,' which signifies something beyond itself. Literary symbols are either 'public' or 'private'(Abrams 358). One of the systems of symbols is related to colours. Generally speaking, there are three sources known to be basis of the symbolic meanings of colours. The first source is nature (Morton 15); human being has always been exposed to the nature. So, nature provides a significant starting point for colour symbolism. Natural references such as night, day, the sunrise, the sunset, fire, and water play a powerful role in the symbolic meaning of colours. "This Symbolism can be considered timeless"(Morton 20). The second source is culture; human being is born and grown up among people who teach him what and how things around him mean. It is linked to politics, fashion, religion, myths, and geography

(Morton 15). “These cultural symbolic meanings change over time and are considered timely” (Ibid 20). The third source is human being (Luscher page 31); human being experiences things personally and produces his own symbols which may or may not be parallel to what nature and culture have taught him. “Seeing colours is our own perception and it is a subjective experience” (S. K. Wong 1). It is under the influence of factors such as personality, mood, emotion, age and gender. As a result, “different individual perceive colours in a different way” (Ibid 1).

Since colours possess a high potentiality of being subjectively experienced, they are the subject of this study. As A.Riley explains the study of colours stands among the most complicated investigations that come to the most uncertain results:

Colour is taken to higher and higher levels, admixed inseparably with all our visual memories, images, desires, expectations, until it becomes an integral part of us, or our life world. It is not clear that the experience, the phenomenon, of colour can even be explained (or explained away) by physiology or science: it retains a mystery, a wonder, that seems inaccessible, and that belongs in the sphere of the "given," not the sphere of questions and answers (A. Riley 319-20).

Colours can be studied in different systems such as aesthetic, psychological, physiological, associative, and symbolic. Investigation of colours in psychology has resulted in findings of the psycho-physiological attributes of colours. Man responds to different colours in different ways since he responds to colours biologically and psychologically (S.K.Wong 1). Rossotti

states that “while a sensation of a particular colour is usually triggered off by our eye receiving light of a particular composition, many other physiological and psychological factors also contribute” (Rossotti 16). These factors, when interpreted, may verify our final perception of a colour (Vodvarka 2). Colour psychology is a field of study devoted to the analysis of the effects of colours on human behavior and feelings. “Colour has an extraordinary power to move us emotionally and exert influence through its innate qualities” (Vodvarka 1). It is usually based on the effects that colours have on man and the way they elicit certain responses from him. In addition to the effects of colours on man, he has different attitudes towards different colours and this fact also has become a basis in colour psychology in order to know people and their characters. On the one hand, “the psychologist is interested in problems of the influence of colour radiation on our mind and spirit” (Itten 21). On the other hand, “expressive colour effects - what Goethe called the ethico-aesthetic values of colours - likewise fall within the psychologist's province. The artist (or designer), finally, is interested in colour effects from their aesthetic aspect, and needs both physiological and psychological information” (Ibid 21).

The study of the psychology of colours has been complicated because of the different symbolic meanings of colours in different languages. Benjamin Whorfs believes that “a person's language determines and limits what the person experiences” (De Bortoli 4). He states that not every language has the potentiality to express all concepts and this ‘language barrier’ influences human's perception of colours. Different studies show that factors such as climate, gender and age effect one's perception of colours and therefore his colour preferences (De Bortoli 4-5). Another fact that is gathered during different studies on colours is that “the data on human colour-preferences are quite consistent” (Vodvarka 9). The question is whether such preferences are learned or innate. J.P.Guilford states that this

consistency "probably rests upon biological factors, since it is hard to see how cultural factors could produce by conditioning the continuity and system that undoubtedly exist" (T.Sharpe 149). However, to distinguish learned from innate responses in psycho-physiological studies remain speculative. This may also lead to skepticism of colour's traditional role as an expressive device, and many of our views of colour based on custom and symbolism (Vodvarka 9).

In his book *Psychology of colours* [*Psychologie der Farben*] Marx Luscher, Professor of Psychology at the University of Basel, puts a great emphasis on direct relationship between preferences for different colours on the one hand, and our psychological and mental needs on the other. He explains in his book that from the very beginning of the history different colours became particularly significant for human being. Primitive man has been in direct connection with the nature and overwhelmed by it. This colourful nature taught him the very basic meanings of colours. So, he started to associate colours with meanings, emotions, and connotations. For instance, he saw the dark blue sky in the night when it was time to sleep and connected dark blue with peace, calmness, and motionlessness. Therefore, certain colours can stimulate certain thoughts and emotions in man. Because colours are directly connected to our psychological and spiritual needs, they influence man's character (Luscher 20). Luscher invented a colour test that associates colours with emotional experiences. He developed his theory on some work by Hering who created a relation between physiological change within the eye and colour contrast (Luscher 8). In Luscher's test higher preference for a colour in the present state is related to the more important or impacting emotions in the subject's life at the time of the test (Hoss 1). He believes that man's psychological reaction to a colour indicates his present mental state and this is not alterable by race, sex, or social environment. For Luscher every colour has a 'real meaning' and it does not change. It is the same for everyone; whether one likes 'blue' or not, its meaning, that is 'peace and quiet,'

does not change. On the contrary, its 'function' that is a 'mental attraction to a colour' is what differs from person to person. For example, 'red' can irritate man's nervous system and increase his blood pressure while 'blue' has the opposite effects on him (Luscher 22). He states that:

Acceptance of a particular colour is related to the degree of the physical needs of an organism to anabolism or catabolism. If an organism, either physically or psychologically, needs emotional peace, renovating physical strength, and releasing from mental hysterics or pressure, the instinctive response will be preference for darker colours. If an organism needs spending energy through exercise and physical activity or mental creativity, the instinctive response will be preference for lighter colours (Luscher 26-27).

Luscher believes that colours can be psychologically autonomous or non-autonomous. Therefore, not all of them are of the same significance, and each plays a different psychological role. In his view, there are eight colours that matter: blue, green, red, yellow, violet, brown, black, and grey. Among these eight colours there are four principal colours that are associated with general personality traits (Luscher 31). Blue is associated with contentment, green with self-respect, red with self-confidence, and yellow with development (Luscher 38,39,40). Jung is among those who knew that in a dream yellow, red, green and blue represent a 'pattern for wholeness,' in other words these colours are 'the presence of the natural inner balancing force' (Jung 362). "Yung theorized that the appearance of this four-colour motif represented a pattern for order and completeness, or the emergence of a balanced condition or concept" (Hoss 3). These colours are thought to be fundamental

colours and traditionally have been called 'psychological primaries.' Yung assigns colour associations to his four primary "functions": intuition (yellow), thinking (blue), feeling (red), and sensation (green) (Jung 332). For Luscher the other four colours are either neutral or combination of principal colours. Luscher states that black and gray are colourless and brown and purple are not psychologically autonomous colours. While these colours manifest those traits towards which people are indifferent, principal colours are indicators of our fundamental psychological needs (Luscher 43). He relates these colours with some psychological responses: blue with tranquility, calm, depth of feeling, sensitive, harmony, belonging, green with Self-esteem/assertion, defensive, possessive, persistence, tenacity, pride, control, yellow with spontaneous, projective, aspiring, investigative, expectancy, hope, and red with action, aggressive, desire, excitement, sexuality (Ibid 38-40). Luscher explains that "every one of these colours has been chosen carefully; they involve a specific psychological and physical meaning that is called 'structure' of the colour. This meaning has a general significance which is the same for the old and the young, men and women, the literate and the illiterate, the civilised and the uncivilised all over the world" (Luscher 73). He asserts that whenever one of these four colours takes a place with lower preference, it indicates that one the person's primitive needs is unfulfilled and present conditions are not his favourable conditions. Such dissatisfaction is a source of spiritual pressure and causes deficiencies in his life and spiritual anxiety in him. Therefore, the source of spiritual pressure of a rejected colour indicates the source of a spiritual anxiety (Luscher 51). Unfulfilled needs and its due anxiety are usually repressed and this repression is so emotionally unpleasant that consciousness gets into unconsciousness and often appears only as a vague anxiety. Such source of spiritual pressure necessitates compensatory behaviour, which in Luscher's test is specified as the most preferable colour (Luscher 52-3). Since such compensation, in terms of its real nature, is a substitutive action, it rarely leads to a real fulfilment. Instead, it results in

extreme and improper action, slant and prejudiced mind, tendency to integrity and preaching others, desire for dilettantism, intellectual arguments, or other form of substitutive fulfilment (Luscher 54). Luscher claims that three out of four principal colours are directly related to the power of preservation of effective and desirable actions in different occasions. These colours are green, red and yellow. As an inactive and peaceful colour, blue is not related to action and is connected to calmness and satisfaction (Luscher 67). He explains the role and power of each of green, red and yellow in creation and preservation of an effective action as follows:

Green: It causes flexibility of will. This flexibility gives the person an ability to resist problems since through this resistance he can act and therefore bring more respect for himself (Luscher 68).

Red: It creates willpower, a will that desires action and efficiency. Both lead to satisfaction because he has acted desirably (Luscher 68).

Yellow: It causes an involuntary pleasure of action. It also makes him able to predict his situation and outcome of his actions in the future. It even exceeds and compels him to think about things waiting him after finishing his present actions (Luscher 68).

In Luscher's colour test, personal preference with which a person nears an action appears in the most preferable colour among green, red and yellow. If it is green, person's aim is to increase his respect and credit among people. If it is red, he desires a satisfaction that comes after overcoming a problem. Finally, if it is yellow, he daydreams about his future in which he is interested (Luscher 68). Whenever green retreats, person's resistance wavers and his spiritual power to continue the action weakens. When colour red retreats, it seems that weakness is physically and indicates energy decrease. Retreatment of yellow means a

spiritual weakness; but, it has less serious consequences since it is less tangible. Therefore, it is not as significant as green or red (Luscher 71).

Luscher's test was largely used in the 50's and 60's in the medical and psychological area. It was supported by more than 140 clinical investigations and articles (Hoss 5). During different studies developments have been made to this test and deficiencies have been removed, but its bases have remained unchanged. Despite the fact that interpretations of this test have improved and completed, its early principles have survived and needed no change (Abizade 29). One of the researches based on Luscher's colour test has been done by Jaakko Gabriel Borg. Borg developed a colour test called BLE [Borg-Ekman-Lüscher] in which he demonstrates relationship between Zsondi Factors and Luscher colour test (C. Johnston ii). In Zsondi's test the subject makes choices among eight photographs each evoking "a meaningful psychiatric 'destiny' registered in a face" (Louvet 8). Zsondi's fate analysis is based on four drives: the Contact Drive, the Sexual Drive, the Affects Drive (called Paroxysmal), and the the Ego Drive (Louvet 8). Borg explains that "the central hypothesis in these tests was that the common factor in them would prove to be functional polarity – usually between centrifugality and centripetality, but possibly also dominance polarity between autonomy and heteronomy" (C. Johnston ii). Borg finds this connection suitable for experimental demonstration. He tries to show how far this functional polarity corresponds to that in the Szondi reactions (C. Johnston ii). In his book *Szondi's Personality Theory in the Year 2000*, Borg successfully demonstrated a correlation between Szondi's factors and Lüscher's colour test (C. Johnston 24). He also agrees with concepts in Luscher's colour psychology such as 'Centripetal' and 'Centrifugal' (Borg 86). Like Luscher, Borg states that "blue and green are concentric and thus centripetal and that red and yellow are ex-centric and thus centrifugal" (Borg 97).

Another research based on Luscher's colour test has been done by Robert Hoss. He believes that this test is the only tool that directly associates colours with personality or emotional states. He affirms that Luscher's statements about correlation between colours and emotions in the physical world are also true about correlation between colours and emotions in dreams (Hoss 7). He concludes that his research "provides support for a hypothesis that colour not only reflects emotional content within a dream image, but that the frequency of colour recalled from a persons' dreams over the long term can reflect the occurrence of emotional events and perhaps even be influenced by, or an indicator of, personality." (Hoss - 1) He explains that 'the waking emotional situations' that stimulate a dream are directly related to colours in a dream. His hypothesis is that colours combine with dream imagery and add 'emotional content' to the final image (Hoss 9). He uses the fact that processing of colours and processing imagery occur in different areas of the brain (Borg 86). Hoss says that in a dream 'internal associations' with an event play a role rather 'external sensory source'. Therefore, understanding the colour of an image will give us a more complete meaning of it than understanding the objects only. "The colour our sleeping brain assigns to dream images, completes the dream image and is as meaningful as the dream image itself" (Hoss 3). He states that colours can add to the meaning of a dream image in four ways. They either 'amplify' the emotional content of it, or 'complement' the associations of it, or 'compensate' for the associations, or represent a general emotional environment associated with the dream story at that point (Hoss 9). His emphatic conclusions are that colour recalled from dreams relates to the more important or impacting emotional associations from daily events and the most frequently recalled dream colours can be directly associated with higher colour preference when administering the Colour Test.

This research tries to show how much the appearance of colours in a poem, as symbolic imagery, represents the emotional condition that has stimulated the whole image. The purpose is to demonstrate how colours combine with the imagery to form a more complete 'meaning' for the image and give it greater emotional significance that is important to the overall 'meaning' of the image and reveal a more complete representation. Researcher investigates the hypothesis that colours add new content to the image and reveal hidden meanings within it because they have both emotional and semantic significances. Through a phenomenological psychological investigation of four principal colours the researcher attempts to access the subjective meanings and connotations, as well as mental and psychological states that a poet associates with them. Frequency of these colours is substituted with the factor of preference in Luscher's colour psychology in order to develop a psychological analysis of a poet's characteristics and psychological aspects of his poems. To demonstrate this idea the following questions are examined:

1. What meanings does the poet associate with each principal colour?
2. In what mental and psychological states do these principal colours appear?
3. What is the relationship between a colour and its bearers in creation of a personal symbolic system?
4. Can colours and their frequency be analyzed through colour psychology?

1.3 Phenomenology

Phenomenological psychology has been developed and substantially influenced by the philosophical concept of 'phenomenology.' There are three philosophers who developed this

concept and had a great affect on the courses that phenomenological psychology has taken. These philosophers are Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

1) Edmond Husserl

Husserl, pioneer of philosophy of phenomenology, was a German philosopher who took the concept of 'intentionality' from his master, Brentano, and tried to solve the problem with his theory by developing 'phenomenology.' Brentano had defined intentionality as a 'special kind of directness upon an object.' Deficiency of his theory was that it could not explain acts without an object. Husserl tried to analyze those features of consciousness that make it as if of an object and called them 'the act's noema' (Routledge Encyclopaedia of philosophy 3724-6). He thought we can have direct access to the contents of the mind and introduced three stages that should be taken for this purpose: phenomenological reduction (Spiegelberg 128), eidetic reduction (Ibid 144), and transcendental reduction (Ibid 227). Although there are debates about his hostility to all psychology, he was the first one who tried to explain the relation between phenomenology and psychology in his two important lectures on "Pure Psychology" and "Phenomenological Psychology" in 1928. However, his major concern was his philosophical version of transcendental phenomenology (Spiegelberg 25). He states:

Phenomenological idealism does not deny the factual [*wirklich*] existence of the real [real] world (and in the first instance nature) as if it deemed it an illusion Its only task and accomplishment is to clarify the sense [*Sinn*] of this world, just that sense in which we all regard it as really existing and as really valid. That the world exists...is quite indubitable. Another matter is to understand this indubitability which is the

basis for life and science and clarify the basis for its claim

(H.L. Van Breda- V 5- 152).

Husserl's version of psychology was an "a priori psychology of our inner experience designed to describe its essential structures" (Spiegelberg 25). His version of phenomenology suggests that we can go outside the experience and look at the world from above. It was Martin Heidegger, his student, one of those who rejected practicability of his theories and created his own version of phenomenology that is existential phenomenology (Langdrige 30).

2) Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger, German philosopher, began a new direction in phenomenology. Existential phenomenology focuses on existence that is our experience in the world as it is lived by us. Langdrige explains Heidegger's ideas that "all perception of the world is according to this philosophical perspective, therefore grounded in our body in relation to the environments in which we live" (Langdrige 29). In his famous work *Being and Time* he investigates the meaning of 'being' in general. He distinguishes between an entity and being an entity and calls this division an 'ontological difference.' He calls human being Dasein and states that Dasein's being is temporal and its temporality influences all of human awareness. He believes that we cannot know eternal essence of things; we can only distinguish their meaning 'in a given situation' (Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 3409- 21). Unlike Husserl who believed one can look at the world from above, Heidegger believed that people are inseparable from the world. The essence of phenomena is inaccessible. He believed philosopher can never get out of the experience and overlook the pure meaning but he only can have an interpretation of meaning in his relation to that experience (Langdrige 40-45). As he explains in *Time and Being*:

In . . . an interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being. In either case, the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality or with reservations; it is grounded in something we grasp in advance—in a fore-conception (Heidegger – 132).

Heidegger believed things must be interpreted and his theories prepared possibilities for interpretive methods in phenomenological psychology. It is through discourse that meaning of the world is presented to us (Langdrige 46). He believes that poetic language is the creator of new worlds and 'new varieties of being.' As he says "language shapes consciousness and perception" (B. Leitch 1164). It is not there to express or label things, objects, thoughts, or feelings that already exist. It is mostly concerned with imaginative creation. His major contribution to phenomenological psychology is through introducing themes such as being, Dasein, world, time and death, and by this "he puts man and his psyche before a vast cosmic background that psychology had never before considered in this manner" (Spiegelberg 30). Husserl and Heidegger introduced two extreme poles in phenomenology that reconciled in Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

3) Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, French philosopher and psychologist, following his masters -Husserl and Heidegger- changed their ideas into a new form and made his own version of phenomenology. His version stands in the existential direction but it is different from Heidegger's. His impact on phenomenological psychology is greater than his masters since

as a psychologist he could provide more logical explanations for his philosophical theories (Spiegelberg 32). He believed that "man is not a rational animal. The appearance of reason and mind does not leave intact a sphere of self-enclosed instincts in man" (Merleau-Ponty (1963) 181). In his philosophy mind and body are not separable; they are distinctly connected. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he expresses that through our experience meaning is bestowed upon the object of experience. He believed that phenomenologist never can have a 'God's eye view' of the phenomena. He rejected the possibility of transcendental subjectivism because in his view essence and existence cannot be separated. He tried to reconcile the inside with the outside. Body is not an object; as he explains "what prevents it ever being an object...is that it is that by which there are objects" (Merleau-Ponty (1962) 95). This reconciliation of mind and body will be the major discussion of chapter 5.

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy subjectivity is neither in the consciousness as Husserl argued, nor in the material world as Heidegger claimed. Human being is a body-subject; perception takes place through body and the world becomes meaningful only through it. He believes there is a structure in the perceived world that we can discover like an archeologist. The site of this excavation is the perceived that is buried under the piles of expressions. Structure will emerge from the study of these expressions (Lingis 263). He explains that "the invisible is the idea, the interior lining of expression, both perceptual and linguistic, that helps provide its structure or sense or logos" (Low-72). E.Kazdin's *Encyclopedia of Psychology* emphasizes his important role in philosophy and psychology: "Merleau-Ponty developed ontology of the body as the perceptual and expressive vehicle of subjectivity. With Merleau-Ponty, the philosophical investigation of human experience itself becomes an activity of the body-subject, and philosophy turns from shadows on the wall to the prose of the world" (E. Kazdin 2684).