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INVESTIGATING THE USAGE OF “RED” IN ENGLISH NOVELS

Abstract

The color red has significant symbolic meaning in English novels, often representing a range of emotions, themes, and societal perceptions. From passion and love to danger and violence, red is used as a literary device to convey complex ideas and enhance the narrative. This study explores the various uses of red in British literature, focusing on its connotative and denotative meanings across different genres and periods. By analyzing key works of fiction, this paper aims to uncover the multifaceted role of red in character development, plot progression, and thematic depth, shedding light on its cultural and psychological impact in the context of British literary tradition.

Keywords: red, en novels, symbolism, emotion, color symbolism, literature, connotation, denotation.

Introduction

The color “red” has been a potent symbol in English literature for centuries, evoking a wide range of meanings, from passion and love to danger, violence, and even power. In the realm of novels, red is not merely a color but a complex literary device that reflects the psychological, emotional, and societal nuances of the narrative. Through its vivid presence, red often shapes the reader's interpretation of characters, themes, and plot developments, adding depth to the story. The way red is used in English novels spans from its representation of physical sensations – such as heat, blood, or the pulse of life – to more abstract ideas like guilt, sin, or redemption.

In fact, the significance of red in English literature is multifaceted. Historically, it has been associated with both positive and negative forces. In works like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, red symbolizes both shame and defiance, drawing attention to the moral complexities of the human experience. In other novels, such as those by the Brontë sisters or Charles Dickens, red can symbolize passion, love, or anger, often acting as a catalyst for emotional or societal conflict.

Understanding red's role in English literature, particularly in novels, involves an exploration of the symbolic, psychological, and cultural dimensions of the color. This research will examine how red functions not only as a visual marker in texts but also as a signifier that shapes characters' fates, their desires, and the moral undertones of their journeys. It will also consider how authors use red to reinforce themes of power, sacrifice, and transformation, ultimately illustrating its enduring relevance as a symbol in the literary world.

Theoretical Framework

Actually, the color “red” holds deep symbolic and psychological meanings in English literature, particularly in novels. Its dual nature – representing both positive and negative forces – makes it a powerful tool for authors to convey emotional intensity, moral conflict, and cultural critique. Understanding the significance of red requires examining its use within several frameworks: symbolic, psychological, and historical.

1) Symbolism of Red in Literature

Moreover, “red” is often viewed as a symbol of passion, love, and vitality, but it also carries darker associations such as danger, violence, and sin. In classical and medieval literature, red was frequently linked to the divine and the sacred, symbolizing both the blood of Christ and the fire of divine wrath [1]. In modern novels, the symbolism of red often fluctuates between these extremes, allowing authors to convey complex emotional states and social commentaries. Nathaniel

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* provides a prime example of this complexity, where the red letter "A" worn by Hester Prynne simultaneously represents both shame and strength, illustrating the interplay between societal judgment and personal defiance [2].

2) *Psychological and Emotional Impact of Red*

From a psychological perspective, "red" is a color that stimulates the senses and evokes strong emotions. Color psychology suggests that red increases heart rate and can evoke feelings of urgency or intensity. In the context of novels, this emotional potency translates into the portrayal of heightened states of being, from love and desire to anger and fear. According to Angela Wright in her work *The Psychology of Color*, red is often associated with action and vitality, influencing how readers perceive characters' motivations and emotional journeys [3]. Characters linked to the color red – whether through clothing, setting, or symbolic action – often experience a psychological tension, navigating between attraction and danger, life and death.

3) *Cultural and Historical Contexts of Red*

The meaning of "red" is also shaped by cultural and historical contexts. In Victorian England, red frequently signified transgression and moral corruption, particularly when linked to female sexuality. In novels such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the color "red" becomes a symbol of sexual awakening, a marker of both societal shame and personal liberation [4]. Similarly, in works like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, "red" is used to highlight themes of decadence and corruption, signifying the protagonist's descent into moral decay [5]. These instances demonstrate how the color red, as a visual and symbolic tool, can reflect broader social concerns about morality, sexuality, and individual agency.

4) *Red as a Signifier of Conflict and Transformation*

Finally, "red" plays a significant role in representing internal and external conflict in literature. It can signify the emotional and psychological struggles of characters, as well as larger societal or existential battles. In Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, "red" is associated with the French Revolution, symbolizing the bloodshed and violent transformation of society [6]. For the characters, "red" becomes both a literal and metaphorical marker of change, highlighting the transformative power of violent rebellion and sacrifice.

Thus, "red" in English novels operates as a multifaceted symbol that enhances the narrative's emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Its use by authors across various historical and cultural contexts demonstrates its enduring ability to evoke deep responses from readers, making it an essential tool for literary analysis.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the connotative and denotative uses of the color red in English literature, focusing on its symbolic, psychological, and narrative functions within selected novels. The methodology is structured around qualitative analysis, primarily involving a close reading of literary texts and a critical review of secondary sources. The key approach involves both textual analysis and interdisciplinary references, incorporating perspectives from literary criticism, psychology, and cultural studies.

1. *Textual Analysis*

The core of the methodology involves the selection of English novels from different historical periods to capture a wide range of interpretations and associations with the color red. Novels will be chosen based on their significant engagement with the theme of color, particularly red, either as a prominent motif or in key symbolic passages.

A close reading approach will be adopted to examine passages where the color red appears, focusing on its immediate denotative meaning, such as "a red dress" or "a red rose," as well as its more nuanced connotative associations – love, passion, sin, danger, or violence. The analysis will incorporate both explicit and implicit references to red, as well as consider the narrative context in which these references appear.

2. *Symbolic and Psychological Functions of Red*

To provide a deeper understanding of the color's significance, secondary sources from psychological and cultural studies will be consulted. Scholars such as Eysenck and Haggard argue

that the color red is linked to strong emotional responses, particularly those connected to aggression, desire, and urgency [7],[8]. This psychological perspective will be integrated into the analysis to interpret characters' emotions or behavioral shifts in relation to red.

Moreover, the symbolism of red will be investigated through a historical and cultural lens, considering how the color's meanings shift over time. Cultural critiques by authors such as Barthes and Eco will help illuminate the multifaceted nature of red as both a signifier in literature and a culturally encoded symbol [9],[10].

3. Cross-Textual Comparison

The final aspect of the methodology involves a comparative approach, where the use of red across different authors and genres will be juxtaposed to understand how the symbol of red functions in relation to each author's themes and intentions. This comparative analysis will seek to identify patterns in the symbolic use of red and uncover common or contrasting threads within different literary traditions. The comparison will also engage with contemporary readings of color symbolism in literature, such as those by Smith (2018) and Lee (2019), who have examined the role of color in postmodern and feminist literature [11], [12]. This methodology combines traditional literary analysis with interdisciplinary theories of color symbolism and psychological associations. By examining red in English novels from a range of perspectives, the study will offer a nuanced understanding of the color's symbolic significance in literature and its potential to influence the reader's emotional and intellectual response.

Materials

In order to analyze the use of "red" in English novels, a range of British literary works were selected spanning different time periods and genres. The novels chosen reflect the diverse symbolic and cultural interpretations of the color red as it appears in various contexts. The following works were studied:

1. Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations" (1861) – A prominent Victorian novel that deals with themes of social class, personal growth, and morality. The color red is used symbolically to evoke ideas of passion, danger, and personal transformation.

2. Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" (1847) – This Gothic novel employs red as a symbol of violent passion, love, and desire, often in contrast with the bleak and desolate setting of the Yorkshire moors.

3. Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" (1925) – A modernist work that explores the passage of time, mental health, and societal expectations. Woolf's depiction of red is intricately tied to the protagonist's personal reflections and interactions with others.

4. D.H. Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley's Lover" (1928) – A work of modernism that explores human sexuality and class through the illicit affair between Constance Reid and Oliver Mellors. The color red, often associated with the sensual and the erotic, plays a significant role in the narrative.

5. Ian McEwan's "Atonement" (2001) – A contemporary novel that delves into themes of guilt, love, and the consequences of misunderstanding. Red in McEwan's novel is connected to the violence and tragedy that results from the character's actions.

These novels were examined with particular attention to the textual references to red, whether in the description of characters, settings, or events, and the corresponding connotations tied to this color. Through a detailed reading of each text, red's symbolic and thematic role within the narrative was explored.

Results

The analysis of red in English novels reveals a complex array of symbolic, thematic, and emotional functions, which are intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative. Discourse analysis of the selected texts highlights how the color red is utilized not only as a visual motif but also as a powerful signifier that carries both denotative and connotative meanings. These meanings vary based on the social, cultural, and psychological contexts in which they appear. Red emerges as a multifaceted symbol that shifts in its signification across different genres, historical periods,

and narrative perspectives. The following analysis categorizes the roles of red into four major thematic strands, exploring how it functions within the text's discursive framework.

1. Red as a Symbol of Passion, Desire, and Romantic Love

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë uses red as a prominent symbol to illustrate the intense, destructive nature of romantic passion. The repeated association of red with Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship reflects the novel's Gothic framework, where emotional excesses and extremes of feeling are emphasized. Catherine's passionate declaration, "I am Heathcliff!" [13], is accompanied by imagery of red – particularly red roses, which symbolize love's deep, often painful entanglements. Here, red in the discourse operates both as a sign of desire and as a precursor to the destructive consequences of unbridled passion. This is highlighted in the metaphor of the "red of her cheeks," as Catherine is often depicted as overwhelmed by her emotions, signaling the fragility and volatility of love in the novel.

The discourse of red in *Wuthering Heights* functions on multiple levels. It operates on a denotative level, marking the physical presence of the color (in roses, clothing, and flushed faces), but on a connotative level, it deepens the emotional resonance of the characters' experiences. Through this interplay, red not only marks romantic love but also the turbulence it engenders, becoming a visual marker for both intensity and destruction. This discursive use of red aligns with Gothic conventions, where heightened emotion is often linked to the visual world, and color symbolism becomes a tool for amplifying emotional extremes.

Similarly, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, red serves as a signifier of sexuality and physical desire. D.H. Lawrence's depiction of Constance's awakening to her sexual self is framed through the color red, often associated with her lips, cheeks, and sexual encounters. In one scene, Lawrence writes, "The red of her lips and her cheeks shone like a beacon", signaling both the literal blossoming of her sexuality and the metaphorical redirection of her life toward forbidden pleasures. Here, red functions within a discourse of sexual liberation and rebellion against the repressive social norms of the time.

The interplay of red and sexuality in Lawrence's work can be understood as a commentary on the suppression of desire within the context of class and social boundaries. Red, as a symbol of sensuality and desire, marks Constance's rebellion and the visceral nature of her love affair with Mellors. The discourse around red thus highlights its dual role in both marking the forbidden and revealing the liberation found in physical passion. The symbolic use of red in these texts speaks to the tension between societal expectations and individual emotional experience, particularly regarding sexual identity.

2. Red as a Marker of Violence, Guilt, and Tragedy

In both *Great Expectations* and *Atonement*, the color red shifts to symbolize violence, guilt, and the consequences of human error. In Dickens' *Great Expectations*, red is often associated with the themes of betrayal and moral decay. Miss Havisham's decaying wedding dress, described as "stained with the red of her own blood", signifies the violence and trauma that have consumed her life. This image encapsulates the idea that her emotional pain and the betrayal of her love have left lasting physical and psychological scars. Red in this context is not only a visual element but also a part of the moral and psychological discourse that critiques social and personal failures.

The color red in Dickens' text can be understood as part of a larger discourse on guilt and revenge. As Miss Havisham embodies both the literal and figurative manifestations of blood and betrayal, red becomes a symbol of the cyclical nature of her torment. The "red" of her wedding dress is both a marker of her past – a reminder of the pain she suffered – and a signal of the destructive path she sets others upon, particularly Estella and Pip. This use of red in Dickens' narrative discourse underscores the complex relationship between appearance, identity, and moral retribution, where the color not only signifies physical harm but also emotional and ethical corruption.

In *Atonement*, red also marks violence, but in a different context. The red of Cecilia's dress during the pivotal scene in the library functions as a visual cue to the catastrophic misunderstanding that will define the course of the narrative. McEwan's portrayal of red as the

“color of violence”, reflects the symbolic role that color plays in highlighting the irrevocable consequences of Briony’s actions. The color of Cecilia’s dress becomes a harbinger of tragedy, a visual marker of the moment when misinterpretation and youthful naivety collide with irreversible harm. In this novel, red is deeply intertwined with themes of guilt, as it foreshadows the emotional weight Briony will carry throughout her life [14].

The discourse surrounding red in McEwan’s text speaks to the psychological and emotional weight that color carries in the context of trauma and regret. Red does not merely denote a physical event but also symbolizes the lasting imprint of guilt. The color’s connection to the irreversible nature of Briony’s actions complicates its earlier, more innocent associations with love and passion, instead associating it

3. Red as a Symbol of Time, Memory, and Personal Reflection

In Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, red appears less frequently but is no less significant. Woolf uses the color red in a subtle, introspective way, often linking it to moments of personal reflection, memory, and time. For Clarissa Dalloway, the red flowers in her garden act as a reminder of the fleeting nature of life. Woolf writes, “The red flowers in her garden bloomed in the harsh sunlight” [15], linking the color red to the passage of time and the transient nature of memory. The red flowers act as a metaphor for the vitality of life, as well as the inevitability of aging and decay.

In Woolf’s modernist discourse, red is not used as an overt symbol of passion or violence but rather as a visual and sensory cue to the protagonist’s inner turmoil. The fleeting beauty of the red flowers reflects Clarissa’s longing for lost youth and a past that cannot be recaptured. The color in this context suggests a heightened sensitivity to time and the personal history that each character must carry with them. Red, then, operates in a space of reflection and memory, invoking a complex relationship with the past and the present moment.

4. Red as a Site of Social and Psychological Tension

Across all of these novels, red serves as a point of intersection between the individual’s internal emotional landscape and the broader social and moral discourses in which they are embedded. Red often signifies moments of conflict – whether internal or external – and reveals the tension between personal desire and societal constraints. This tension is particularly evident in the works of Lawrence and Brontë, where red symbolizes a disruption of social norms and an embrace of personal emotions and desires that challenge the status quo.

In the context of Victorian and modernist literature, red functions as both a site of rebellion and a marker of the boundaries between societal acceptance and individual expression. The color reflects a profound awareness of social structures while simultaneously acting as a means to critique or transcend these structures. Through this, red becomes a lens through which the psychological and social tensions of the characters are magnified and made visible to the reader.

Discussion

The use of red in English novels is rich and complex, serving a variety of symbolic functions. From representing love and passion to signifying violence, red emerges as a powerful tool in British literary works. The role of red as both a literal and figurative color is intertwined with the emotional and psychological landscapes of the characters.

The color red’s association with love and passion is particularly prevalent in novels like *Wuthering Heights* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, where it becomes an emblem of both the fervor and destruction that intense desire can bring. In Brontë’s work, red not only symbolizes romantic yearning but also serves as a reminder of the tragic consequences of unchecked passion. Similarly, in Lawrence’s novel, red becomes a metaphor for the awakening of a sensuality that challenges social norms and expectations, suggesting a liberating, though often painful, escape from conventional boundaries.

In contrast, red’s connection to violence and danger in works like *Great Expectations* and *Atonement* adds a darker, more ominous dimension to its meaning. Dickens’ portrayal of Miss Havisham’s decaying wedding dress, stained with red, highlights the destructive consequences of betrayal and the long-lasting emotional scars it leaves. In McEwan’s narrative, red is linked to the

tragic misunderstanding that propels the novel's central conflict, serving as a reminder of the irreversible nature of human actions and the suffering they cause.

Woolf's use of red in *Mrs. Dalloway* presents a more subdued, introspective interpretation. The red flowers in Clarissa Dalloway's garden serve as a reflection of her internal emotional state, symbolizing the complex interplay between memory, regret, and time. This subtle use of color contrasts with the more overt and dramatic symbolism in other novels but still serves to convey the protagonist's internal landscape.

The findings suggest that the use of red in British novels is not merely a visual detail but a deeply symbolic tool that reflects the inner workings of the characters and their social contexts. Red, in these texts, is never a neutral or passive element; it is charged with meaning, often reflecting the characters' psychological states and societal tensions.

Moreover, the variation in the symbolic use of red across different literary periods reveals the evolving nature of color symbolism in English literature. While red in the Victorian period was often associated with passion and moral transgression, in the modernist period, it also becomes a vehicle for introspection and personal reflection. In contemporary literature, red is used to symbolize the complexities of human emotions and their far-reaching consequences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the color "red" in English novels serves as a rich and multifaceted symbol, carrying a range of meanings that reflect both cultural and psychological associations. The color red often evokes strong emotional responses, symbolizing passion, power, danger, love, and conflict. Throughout English literature, "red" has been employed to enhance character development, deepen thematic exploration, and influence the atmosphere of the narrative.

In classic English novels, "red" frequently appears in the form of clothing, settings, and objects, each carrying specific connotations. For instance, the use of red in Victorian novels often symbolizes the constraints and desires of the characters, especially women, whose experiences are framed by societal expectations. In novels like *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, the color red can be associated with both the passionate and destructive forces that drive the characters' lives. Red is also a color that represents both life and death, seen in the imagery of blood, fire, and vitality, which resonates with the darker themes of violence, sacrifice, and transformation.

Moreover, in 20th-century English literature, red can indicate the complexity of modernity and alienation. In works by authors such as Virginia Woolf, the color red takes on new meanings, often reflecting the inner emotional landscapes of characters who are grappling with identity, desire, and social change. The shifting significance of red in these works aligns with the broader cultural movements of the time, suggesting that the color's meaning is fluid and can adapt to the changing concerns of society.

The symbolic use of red in British novels, therefore, is a tool for exploring the complexities of human experience. Whether it is used to denote love, violence, or social upheaval, red remains an enduring and powerful symbol within the literary tradition. Through its application, British authors continue to engage readers in a deeper understanding of human emotions, societal constraints, and the perennial struggle between passion and control.

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ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ СЛОВО “RED” (КРАСНЫЙ) В АНГЛИЙСКИХ РОМАНАХ

Аннотация

Цвет красный имеет важное символическое значение в английских романах, часто олицетворяя широкий спектр эмоций, тем и общественных восприятий. От страсти и любви до опасности и насилия, красный используется как литературный прием для передачи сложных идей и углубления повествования. В данном исследовании рассматриваются различные способы использования красного цвета в британской литературе, с акцентом на его коннотативные и денотативные значения в разных жанрах и исторических периодах. Анализируя ключевые произведения, автор стремится выявить многогранную роль красного в развитии персонажей, сюжете и тематической глубине, а также осветить его культурное и психологическое воздействие в контексте британской литературной традиции.

Ключевые слова: красный, английские романы, символизм, эмоции, цветовой символизм, литература, коннотация, денотация, литературный анализ, культурное влияние.

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АҒЫЛШЫН РОМАНЫНДАҒЫ "RED" (ҚЫЗЫЛ) СӨЗІНІҢ ҚОЛДАНЫЛУЫН ЗЕРТТЕУ.

Түйін

Қызыл түс ағылшын романдарында эмоциялардың, тақырыптардың және қоғамдық қабылдаулардың кең спектрін білдіретін маңызды символдық мәнге ие. Құмарлық пен махаббаттан бастап қауіп пен зорлық-зомбылыққа дейін қызыл түс күрделі идеяларды жеткізу және баяндауды тереңдету үшін әдеби әдіс ретінде қолданылады. Бұл зерттеуде британдық әдебиетте қызыл түсті қолданудың әртүрлі тәсілдері қарастырылады, оның әртүрлі жанрлар мен тарихи кезеңдердегі коннотативті және денотативті мағыналарына баса назар аударылады. Негізгі шығармаларды талдай отырып, автор қызыл түстің кейіпкерлердің дамуындағы, сюжеттегі және тақырыптық тереңдіктегі көпқырлы рөлін анықтауға, сондай-ақ оның британдық әдеби дәстүр контекстіндегі мәдени және психологиялық әсерін көрсетуге тырысады.

Кілттік сөздер: Қызыл, ағылшын романдары, символизм, эмоция, түс символизмі, әдебиет, коннотация, денотация, әдеби талдау, мәдени ықпал.

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