

## COLOR IN THE POETRY OF MILTOS SACHTOURIS AND KIRIL KADIYSKI

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*This project is dedicated to my parents, who read poetry with me all along  
and who have stood by me in every step that I have taken.*

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**Abstract.** The motivation behind this project generated in the classes I attended as an undergraduate student; these classes inspired me to get more closely involved with the poetry of Miltos Sachtouris, on a much deeper level. In the context of the class devoted to “Bulgarian Literature and Cultural Review” (this lesson was taught by Mrs. Stefania Filipova-Metzimeki) in our postgraduate program of the Department of Balcan, Slavic and Oriental Studies“ History, Anthropology and Culture in Eastern and South- eastern Europe” I decided to indulge in the color motive within the poetry of M. Sachtouris, and – comparatively – within the poetry of Kiril Kadiisky. So that I could better understand the latter, I have studied the one and only study I managed to discover, written in French. Yet, it proved to be more than helpful in understanding some quite important meanings in his poetry As for the poetry of M. Sachtouris, the number of the available sources was quite large. Still, I was not interested in recycling the already existing projects.

*Keywords:* poetry; color; synaesthesia; black; red; white

### **Miltos Sachtouris**

Before we begin to analyze and compare the meaning of color to both our poets, it would be quite useful to take a small journey back in time and find some basic information, about the backgrounds of the two poets. The initiation in the Greek Letters for M. Sachtouris began in 1941 via the poem collection “The Music of Our Islands”, which was published under the penname Miltos Chrysanthi<sup>1)</sup>. Searching in the internet and listening to the “Sachtouris Recitating Sachtouris”, one may consider that the poet himself renounced his very first work, as he immediately starts with the poems of “The Forgotten” (published in 1945). The poet himself belongs to the very First Postwar Generation of poets. Though it is not clear whether his poems actually refer to history or whether they are

affected by the war, at that time. Al. Argyriou claims that the poetry of Sachtouris misses love. Yet, by studying his poems, and staring off with his collection “The Forgotten”, it seems that the creator is clearly affected by his personal experience. This view of the things rests also in the fact that, twenty years later “The Forgotten” reappears in another poem of his. Here lies the question of, up to what point this female subject was actually forgotten in the end? So, this makes me strongly believe that love is a basic factor within the poetry of Sachtouris. The writer connects love with memory via a variety of images and words, and most importantly, of our object in this project – Color!<sup>2)</sup>

Sachtouris has published altogether twelve poetic collections. The first nine lay assembled in the “Poems 1945 – 1971”. The remaining three are “Colorwounds” (1980), the “Ectoplasms” (1986) and the “Deepsinking” (1990). He passed away in 2005.

### **Kiril Kadiyski**

Concerning Kadiyski, the research in the Greek sources unfortunately did not prove to be very fruitful. Thus, I was brought closer to this writer by a French study of Svetlozar Zhekov.<sup>3)</sup> According to him, Kadiyski is one of the greatest lettermen of our era. Not only in Bulgaria, but also all around the world. He has been an iconic figure of the Bulgarian life for four full decades. A poet, an essay writer, an editor and a translator of foreign poetry, who actually bends the literary criteria, imposed by literature itself. His poetry is characterized as “genuine” and is considered to reflect a lyrical perception of the world. One of the leading ideas of his poetry is the relevance of things: the versatile connection between the uniqueness of the object and nature, between the man and the universe, the cosmos. The perpetual discontent in his poetry was born by his desire to prove the ideas received in his life, to renounce universality, experience and weakness needed for the harmony among matter and conscience, morality and knowledge, the desirable and the possible.

Kadiyski is a typical example of a writer under no circumstances. Svetlosar Zhekov, a literature reviewer writes “It is about a great Bulgarian creator, whose work has not been properly and officially recognized in Bulgaria as much as it should have been, , up until this very day”. Years ago he was accepted in “Mallarmé” French Academy, right next to the world’s greatest poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Academy President Jean Orize, writes about Kadiyski: “As far as I am concerned, he is the most important poet of his generation in Bulgaria. It is not by chance that we made him a member of this Academy, placing him next to the Albanian Ismael Kadare, the Finn Pentti Holopainen, the Romanian Anna Blandiana, the Russian Andrei Voznesenski and others...” Fifteen years ago, Allen Mausque wrote: “Kadiyski is among the greatest intellects of his country” and later on the French Critique Stephan Bauque adds: “In a way

similar to Mandelstam or Brodsky, Kandiiski proposes his own train of thought, for the Century that passes on”.

The poetry of Kadiyski is so original, that his true place in the Bulgarian poetic tradition is really hard to define. On one hand, we may clearly see the dramatization of Peyo Yavorov, connected more with symbolism and, on the other, we may perceive the influence of the great lyricist Dimcho Debelianov. The literature reviewer Georgy Chankov writes about Kadiyski: “...he is an externally calm Yavorov, who believed in the the hope of breaking dawn, a dramatized and powerful Dalchev, a free from sensations Debelyanov – all of these men stand present as eternal fellow comrades to the undoubtedly authentic, creative uniqueness of Kadiyski. To all these another one must be added; the unusual metaphor, as far as the Bulgarian poetic tradition is concerned, the roots of which may be searched for within the Bulgarian folklore and the poetry of Hristo Botev.

Orize: “I do not know any similar poetic writing in modern literary procedure”. He is placed by many amongst the most important modern poets.

This project digs deep into the color motive, which seems to play an important role to the creations of the two poets. Starting from the activity of Sachtouris, I will try to approach the interpretation of colors in a number of poems. There are quite noticeable references implying that for Sachtouris color has a leading role not only in poems, but also in an entire collection of poems, such as the “Colorwounds” (1980). D. N. Maronitis<sup>5)</sup> writes a relevant text about M. Sachtouris named “About People – colors – animals – machines”<sup>1</sup>. As we can see color comes second. Before “Colorwounds”, the poet himself creates in 1958 a collection of poems under the title “Spectrums or the joy on the other road”. We are obliged to make a relevant report: Spectrum is considered to be the field, the color and ghost at the same time (phantasma). Well, in this case we can assume that the poems make a definite reference to the past (spectrumà colorà ghostà historic fact and personal experience). Color is very familiar to the Greek poetry. We see it quite often in the poetry of Nikos Eggonopoulos. Sachtouris himself has spoken about their friendship in interviews, and also about the clear influence he had had towards hyperrealism during his early steps. Obviously there have been interactions between the two writers. The tide of hyperrealism definitely affected the formation of the First Postwar Generation. In the poems of Sachtouris (1945 – 1971) 320 quotations of chromatic words are used, within a field of 262 pages. The basic triplet used is Black – White – Red.

<b>Black</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>White</b>
108 times	62 times	56 times

Sachtouris tends to “paint” his poems with the perfection of black and red, and composes his own crosstalk of colors (black eyes, black snow – red water, black ghost – red corner).

### **Color in Relation to Psychology**

The perception of color is utterly subjective, yet certain chromatic influences are common all over the world. The color seems to be one of the most powerful parts of the non-verbal communication. Colors spontaneously carry meaning and messages. Let us see the basic colors dominating the poems, which this paper discusses:

**White:** It symbolizes the purity of the soul. Also, expresses optimism/ happiness/ the meaning of death and paradise

**Red:** bright color that causes intense feelings. It can bring blood and war, but also love and passion. It catches the attention of the reader. It can show dynamism and success.

**Black:** It symbolizes the threat but also is an indication of strength and seriousness. It expresses: power/ pessimism/ mystery/ fear/ mourning.

### **Color and synaesthesia**

“...it would have been truly odd if the color had not been able to imply the sound, if the colors had not been able to provide the idea of melody, and if the sound and color had not been sufficient to express ideas”. (Claude Debussy).

And somehow, with this particular expression, the thought of using the color motive moved a step further to what we would call “synaesthesia”<sup>6)</sup>. As a definition, we could attribute awareness to the capability of the brain of remembering and recalling different words, by connecting them to colors. “Since antiquity incidents of awareness are noted and from there on, the concept of “soundcolor” emerges; which does actually refer to the hue of a sound, although there have been efforts of transcribing it through emotional perception.

More recently, there have been single cases of artists and poets who openly referred to their sentient capabilities, such as Baudelaire, Wagner, Rebau, Kandinsky, Stravinsky, Liszt, and Nabokov, all of whom made active use of their art yet, they were usually rejected as imaginary artistic illusions – or as delusions, caused by the consumption of absinthe. Kandinsky claimed that he was able to hear colors and see sounds. Since childhood he could sense the color on his palette whispering to him, and paralleled painting with the composition of a symphony: “The color is the ivories, the eyes are the harmonics, the soul is the many strings piano. The artist is the hand that plays, by touching one or another ivory, in order to provoke vibrations to the soul”.

The only reference I could find on the poetry of Sachtouris in awareness, was in an article written in the newspaper “To Vima”, which says: “His relation to the language, which through the extreme awareness leads it to the limits, is almost physical”.

Concerning the two poets, we may hardly say that they were sentient. Especially Kiril Kadiyski, he did not have as many references to the colors – always concerning the materially examined.

### **Color from an artistic point of view**

Color plays a definitive role in art, as well. Especially in painting. Herewith we can see the symbolic qualities of our colors.<sup>7)</sup>

**White.** It symbolizes purity of the soul, the ultimate faith, hope and clarity. Honesty, innocence and shine, as well. It offers the limpidity that relieves us from negative thoughts.

**Red.** It symbolizes love, unity, anger, the maturity and the urge. A warm color, filled with tension, revolution and emotion. Lust, the color of passion and fire, strength, warm hearth, blood.

**Black.** It symbolizes darkness, fear and death. It is a color of tragedy, and austerity, it inspires stability and discipline, as well as introversion. Unexpressed capabilities. Fear for the future.

### **Color in Poetry**

Concerning the poetry of Sachtouris, colors play an important role in the functionality of metaphors, which sometimes do not contain only an adjectival character, but also, assume the part of a noun (“a girl suffocates in black / as I was turning round the corner, I did not expect it to face the black re/ his arm, the left is broken by the demon/ the black it breaks the red it breaks/ burns the white). In relevance to the use and role of the colors, Nora Anagnostaki, proceeded on the following thought:

“I believe that colors, for Sachtouris correspond to basic animalistic backgrounds, to moods defined by color tones. Each color corresponds to some mood ambience and possesses a meaning that suggests a special tending. The colors dominating are red, white and black. I could attempt a quite risky interpretation and say that red is the color of every animalistic reaction. The black – of denial. The white – of salvation and death”.

Yet, D. N. Maronitis seems to be reacting and criticizing:

“Whoever would rush with any criteria given, psychological or artistic, to immediately decode the indicative chromatic triangle (red – black – white), he would only manage to show their naivety. That is because, no matter how stable and discernible these three colors are in nature, they present themselves constant and altering in the poetry of Sachtouris...”

Now, as for the poetry of Kadiyski, we may get the assistance we need from his work “About the Spiritual Element in Art”. For Kadiyski, art itself is neither decoration or entertainment, nor just a mirror of nature. Each color must be the manifestation of a creative vision and echo back of an emotional situation. Truly, the colors in the poetry of Sachtouris seem to cause affective experiences, without having the necessity of the forms colored. On this point of view, colors seem to acquire self-efficiency and they themselves provoke more emotional responses.

### **The color motive in the poetry of Sachtouris**

So, based on all the sources we have been provided about the Colors in Arts, I shall attempt to approach this matter, by confessing that it will be easier to approach the poetry of Sachtouris, since a few months before his passing, he offered an interview to my School Professor in the University School of Philosophy, Michael Bakoyannis, to whom he revealed quite a few things (so in a historical frame, as and in personal frame) which helped me focus on the matter with more certainty. In spite of that, I shall attempt to decode the colors in a manner of my own.

*Collection: Stroll*

*A girl drowns in the black*

*I grew up to an white sky*

*Inside the snowy snow*

*A young man in the fog*

*a few birds in a branch*

*and only one flower*

*and with the voice:*

*-I am going to a white sky*

*in the black a girl is drawing*

**Black:** a color that states fear, death. Perhaps the poet is influenced by the historical experience (through the lonely coldness... freezing...A few black birds). There is a definite reference to the personal experience, as well, to the loss of a girl, drowns/suffocates in black. Thus to death, or even worse for the poetic character, to lithium.

**White:** sky is the constant request in the poetry of Sachtouris. It refers to innocence, clarity, to the resurrecting spirit and, in the end, to freedom itself. Through the optimism the writer brings, he leaves a sense of sorrow, something which shows that for redemption to come, something bad must happen.

**All black priest:** a repeating landscape of desertion and death. The priest stands for death.

**Black birds:** perhaps they are the symbol of poverty and winter. A few black birds: there is no food left and that is the reason why few of them are left only. Still, this may also mean the deeper fears of the poet himself in relation to the historic events, or to his personal life.

It would be useful to note that the girl drowns in black (death/lithium), yet the poetic character rises towards the sky (redemption). Here both colors collide. The white wins all the way.

*Collection: Stigmata*

*The poet*

*When they find me on the cross of my death*

*the sky around will have reddened far beyond  
there'll be a suspicion of sea  
and, from above, in a now terrifying darkness  
a white bird will recite my songs.*

**Red** became the sky as far as the eye can see: a repeating request for heaven. It is red for three reasons: blood, due to death by war, due to love and passion, due to tuberculosis (hemoptysis) that stigmatized him and because of the fact that he missed his chance to unite with his beloved one (the Forgotten is that girl). Perhaps the sky, a place for salvation and relief, may be filled either with love or with pain.

**White bird:** a messenger of death. The bird is the symbol of news announcement, both in Christian religion, as and on folklore level. The white symbolizes innocence and peace. Here the poem brings the idea of upcoming death of our protagonist.

*Collection: Ever Since (poem)  
The walk  
To Aris Konstantinides*

*I walked to the ground  
a small crowd hiding in the sky  
waves of gray and creepy  
Waves of gray grappling at the beach  
my power is pushing me to rotate  
I start walking on the waves  
mawish cats were walking over gray  
waves  
and my soul was dead.  
But suddenly, one of them tried  
clouds.  
the sea turned blue again  
my soul grew again  
and went on my walk.*

**Grey waves:** problems, perhaps through a personal look. Grey, a mixture of black and white. Emotions with both a positive, and a negative sign. The sea is not calm, thus, this may also present the atmosphere of war.

**Blue sea:** the message of optimism is dominant here. The sun appears and the soul of the poetic character is at peace. The blue gives me a note of optimism of hope, the feeling of a journey, of vacation and spiritual uprise.

*Temptation*

*Behind the old women dressed in black  
behind their backs is the white bed and on it the apple utterly alone  
just as before the apple the white flower was utterly alone  
they tore it with knives with scissors they watered it with blood  
and now on the bed a rotted apple lies  
This is why the angel sits by the edge of the bed  
behind the old women dressed in black  
behind their backs he opens his white wings and stretches his hand towards the  
apple*

**Old women dressed in black:** the verse creates a feeling of pessimism and possible chilling sensations, maybe even fear. The old women stand for decay of a generation or of a personal dream. The black is a sign of prestige, but also a sign of fear and death.

**White bed:** behind their backs, so maybe should we go through hard and difficult times for redemption to come?

**Flower of white:** a flower that symbolizes optimism and youth, it was ripped apart with knives and scissors: a scene of violence, clear image of the cruel war, and of the brutal parting of the poetic character.

**In blood they soaked it:** red dominates and makes an impression throughout the poem. A clear sign of death.

**Angel with white wings:** a Christian image, like the apple that reminds me of the original Sin, it states that the angel is meant to take the soul and carry it, thus there will be death. Yet, the white wings are a sign of rebirth and salvation.

**The motive of color in the poetry of Kadiisky**

The poetry of Kiril Kadiyski suddenly appeared in my student life, after I was assigned by my professor to compare his poetry to the poetry of M. Sachtouris. My search for information on his life and the general frame of his time, is in an essay written in French, which I found on the internet. From the book I managed to distinguish some of his poems, on which I shall attempt to reveal the motive of his colors.

*We live. Still...*

*But look at the daisies, millions  
sunshine showing their teeth. And we in  
this one.*

*From the blue everyone is hacking, hungry terrible:*

*And it's already pulverized.*

*The irrational poetry exudes from the current:*



*“Extensive excavators will scatter  
The breast of the mother land ... “and mine?  
Will not man ever be born to live?  
Red Bird My Life Peeps.  
Day-night is hit in the cage  
Of the sides. Will it fly? And where;  
Because when I hear the sound of shattered glasses  
Shudder; And the heart beats again loudly?  
Heart - immature bird with cut wings.*

**Blue:** sky, feelings of freedom, everyone gnaws on it for it is a steadfast request of man. A parallelism to Sachtouris. There is hunger, perhaps not only mental, but also physical. This is a clear suggestion on the historical experience.

**Red bird:** bird, stands for innocence, but it is locked in a cage. Thus, captivity is the reference here (personal / historical experience). Indication of red relates to a wound, bleeding. Heading deeper, perhaps this is all about a passionate form of himself, of the poetic character. And exactly this is where, the bird reminds us of Sachtouris. A poem which causes pessimism.

*The Dawn  
The sun rises from the red ridges.  
On his fingers, you become skilful,  
Like a balloon  
Again you start old life - the smartest  
Trap.  
Always under the sky- astral clock plate  
Always under the markers that your flesh  
They've been pierced.  
You are willing to forgive. But who?  
Hate? God did not send you an enemy.  
To the beach, like a bather  
In the series grow poplar-  
With a dull flesh beneath the green robes.  
They unleashed with you and your youth...*

**Red ridge:** a reminder of war, rebellion, blood. The element of metaphor and images is quite intense in his poetry.

**Milk-colored flesh:** white, beneath green robes/ green is the color of hope, thus a hopeful message of life lies hidden beneath it. It reminds me of the beauty standard of the ancient Greeks (milky-white flesh).

*Water*

*Here on the land, washed out of the heavenly waters,  
With tile slats, the city is just screaming  
And maybe thirsty ... For a long time it all became solid.  
The capsule is getting more and more dead.  
Skeletons of ancient cities and today advocate  
That in the world we are not the first, not the last. And  
Our souls are trout, shuffling upwards, to whom they go  
Mantophores?  
We drown - in the last breath  
Every living person feels the gloomy truth:  
How unfair Is to us is.  
And the earth that creeps in every breath  
Maybe it's a drop that dies over  
In the black rose of the universe.*

**Black rose:** this particular poem lifted me of my feet. Black is the rose that by nature is connected to the red color. Here, Kandiiski makes the subversion. He wishes to ascribe the entire mournful atmosphere to a dearly beloved flower. The powerful sensation of fear and death, yet still there is an expression of prestige and respect.

*It's too late. The dusk is on my face  
Like alcohol.  
My legs stop alone at the finish.  
I'm all black, you were running dressed in a scarlet dress,  
And the wind rained like a flame and poured the fluff on me.  
Only the way back is left-  
On the wet asphalt  
A yellow and a red leaf fall from the traffic light.  
There is an endless time.*

**Black:** it does not express the feeling of mourning, on the contrary. He leaves the impression of a man in love, who burns in the flames of a woman dressed in red.

**Scarlet dress:** possibly a woman wearing a color of passion and tension. Or even might she be wounded?

**Yellow and Red leaf:** autumn, the feeling of cold and melancholy.

**Conclusion.** Somewhere here, the comparison between the two poets in relevance to the motive of colors must end. The sample may be small, but satisfactory enough for us to reach to some certain conclusions. Sachtouris did not feel love for great

words or cosmetic adjectives. He simply was a poet during “Hursh Times”, as Nora Anagnostaki points out. Color played a definitive role in his poetry, which defined him, we might say. Certainly, his backgrounds were as such. Lest we forget the close friendship he had with Nikos Eggonopoulos (a poet and painter), that decisively provided him the stimulus to color color his creations. Among other things, the poet himself made some attempts to paint. In one interview he confides, that had he not become a poet, he would have become a painter. The use of color inspires the reader to picture the image that he reads with a kind of free will. That is precisely what Sachtouris enjoys.

And that is the reason I relished the poetry of Kadiyski in the first place. Even if I did search for more information on his life, I failed to find what I intended to. Making assumptions, this poet, as well, has a personal experience that drove him to become poetically creative, although he is clearly influenced by the heavy historical field of the neighbor country. Reading the French source more closely, I distinguish that “harmony between matter and conscience, ethics and knowledge, desirable and possible, has been accomplished in Kadiyski’s poetry. It is the passion for unanswered questions, which consists the corner-stone of the philosophical poetry of Kadiyski”. I do not know whether he himself gave to the color motive, the same importance, as Sachtouris did; I believe he did not. Yet every time he referred to colors, the references were quite strong, to the reader at least. I would very much like to find and study projects with analysis of his poetry, in order to get even deeper in this matter.

I draw to a close on this project, with a statement of Vasili Kandinsky, the painter, for the color I particularly liked.

“...the color is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the many-strings piano. The artist is the hand that through one or another key makes the human soul to beneficially vibrate”.

## NOTES

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2. Bakoyannis, M. “Investigations of the Historical Dimension in the poems of 1945 – 1971 by Miltos Saktouris”, p. 29.
3. Zhekov, S. “Kiril Kadiyski: Poete, Traducteur, Penseur”, p. 28.
4. Maronites, D. “People-Colors-Animals-Machines”, p. 10.
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## ЦВЕТЪТ В ПОЕЗИЯТА НА МИЛТОС САТУРИС И КИРИЛ КАДИЙСКИ

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