Daria A. Kholina (Voronezh, Russia)

OISIN AS A QUESTING HERO: CONCERNING THE ROLE OF MOVEMENT
IN THE POETIC WORLD OF W. B. YEATS

*The roots of the language are irrational
and of a magical nature.*
Jorge-Luis Borges

*Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep.*
W. B. Yeats

Д. А. Холина (Воронеж, Россия). Ойсин как ищущий поэт: концепт движения в поэтическом мире Йейтса. Мифологема пути (поиска) рассматривается как ключевая составляющая ранней поэмы Йейтса «Странствия Ойсина». Традиционно интерпретируемое как поэтический поиск себя, это произведение представляет собой рассказ о путешествии персонажа по трём островам в фантастическом мире. В статье предпринята попытка показать, что три этапа путешествия Ойсина описываются как три различных типа движения, и это находит отражение в выборе языковых средств.

Ключевые слова: миф, У. Б. Йейтс, лексические средства, когнитивная метафора

The Quest Myth is regarded in the article as the key component of the early Yeats's work "THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN". Generally interpreted as a poetic Quest for one's true self, this poem gives the account of the character's journey to the three islands in the world of the supernatural. We are making an attempt to reason that the three stages of Oisin's journey are expressed through the three different kinds of movement, which presupposes the specific use of language means.

Keywords: myth, W. B. Yeats, lexical choice, cognitive metaphor

"THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN", being an early poem of W. B. Yeats, has long been subject to various interpretations due to its mysterious and symbolic nature. Its storyline is based upon the old Irish legend about the bard and warrior Oisin, the son of Finn, who abandons his home country after having met Niamh, the daughter of the Celtic god of love, Aengus. Oisin falls in love and follows Niamh to the land of the Immortals where he is granted eternal youth for three hundred years. During his journey, he visits three islands on the first of which he stays in the company of the Sidhe. Then Oisin moves to the second island where he fights with the ever-changing image demon, and to the third, the land of sleeping giants, where he finds his rest for one hundred years. Feeling homesick, Oisin returns to Ireland only to find that it has changed dramatically, as Christianity has substituted the old religion. When the character steps on the ground, his youth vanishes and he turns into a decrepit old man. So, Oisin's mysterious journey is an *anti-quest*, but surely it has no objective other than to prove its futility?

While some researchers see the poem as an autobiography of W. B. Yeats which includes several locations, such as Sligo, South Kensington and Howth or Dublin which correspond to the unclouded childhood, the struggle of maturity and the peaceful daydreaming of the old age, others take Freudian theories as the basis of interpretation, interpreting the battle with the demon as a fight against the authoritative father-figure or the suppression of subconscious desires. Still, it is generally acknowledged that through its mythical images the poem tackles the problem of Time, death and immortality. M. Aguilera describes it as representing the three stages of poetic evolution: the character's journey symbolizes the "movement" from complete subjectivity of poetic dream through "objective" or social poetry to the stage that reconciles the opposites, and therefore provides a wider and clearer vision of reality (Aguilera 1994: 7-21). Thomas L. Byrd, who also speaks of poetic evolution, puts a special emphasis on the author's use of landscape, suggesting that the images of "lesser life", such as birds, animals and fish, create motion in Yeats's works, and in the language of the poet "motion" means "life" (Byrd 1978: 11-34).

But should we really take the last statement for granted? Is not literary criticism supposed to be intuitive, subjective and based on notoriously big text units to support ideas? The study of a *poetic idiolect* through constructing the poet's *model of the world* out of smaller units

can be regarded as an attempt to introduce objectivity into otherwise extremely vague sphere of poetry and poetic vision (Панова 2003: 16-17).

Since the title of the poem states clearly that the whole piece is going to be about "wanderings", it is logical to assume that we will have to deal with some variation of the *Quest Myth*. Obviously enough, it underlies the plot and can be seen as the core intertextual element deeply rooted in the mythological beliefs of the ancient world. If we consider the elements of the so-called *"monomyth"* described by Joseph Campbell, then the poem definitely contains:

The Call to Adventure: hunting the deer, which leads to the appearance of Niamh;

The Magical Helper: Niamh takes Oisin to her magical land over the sea;

The Threshold: "the edge of the sea/ the tide", the place where the sea and the land come together;

The Magical Journey to the "other world";

The Trial: setting free the girl in the Tower; the never-ending battle with the demon;

Reaching the Objective of the Quest: can be defined only symbolically, since the rest gained on the Island of Forgetfulness is long desired, but not exactly searched for;

The Homeward Journey over the sea without Niamh (the Helper);

The Threshold: "the tide";

The Return: the hero comes back to find his kinsmen long dead and forgotten and the whole country changed utterly (Campbell 1997: 156).

In fact, the Quest Myth, being related to the Jungian *archetype*, provides a certain framework filled with specific language means that form the idiolect of an author (Панова 2003: 13-69; Питина 2002: 15-21; Самойлова 2007: 15-24). Speaking in terms of cognitive linguistics, the Quest Myth represents by itself a *frame* which comprises the strand of land or the surface along which one can move *(the road)*, the process of *movement, the traveller, the means of transport, objects required for travelling, the "circumstances"* – the characteristics that define *the direction* as well as the "location" in time and space (Шишова 2002: 10). We also suggest pointing out *"the Call to Adventure"* which urges the character to go as one of the key components of this scheme. On the one hand, it is definitely present on the macrotextual level, which we have already shown by mapping out the plot; on the other

hand, moving the other way round, there is a certain group of language units that calls for a new slot which they might fill. These units are generally grouped by their "sound" semantics (speaking and singing, falling water).

Briefly, here are the most typical examples for each category:

The road: *our dark pathway, a bridle-path, its misty way, forest alleys, a countless flight of moonlit steps, the dim doorway*;

Movement: *the days pass, to wander, to chase the noontide deer, mount by me, and ride, drifting greyness, whirling flames, a wandering land breeze*;

The traveller + moving objects: *the painted birds, the hounds, the deer, a foam-white seagull, the wind, the stars, the moon, the waves, the foamdrops*;

The means of transport + objects required for travelling: *in long boats, on doomed ships, on their prows, the saddle, the hoofs; the cloak*;

The "circumstances": *in the pale West, over the pale tide, by rivers and the wood's old night, to where the dewdrops fall; at evening tide*;

"The Call": *the sea's old shout, a murmurous dropping, the sea's vague drum.*

Since T. L. Byrd puts a special emphasis on the role of motion, let us see in detail what language means fit into the slot marked as *"Movement"*. It is pretty obvious that the numerous units that form this group are not similar in terms of meaning and structure. We have classified them into four categories as shown below (Diagram 1).
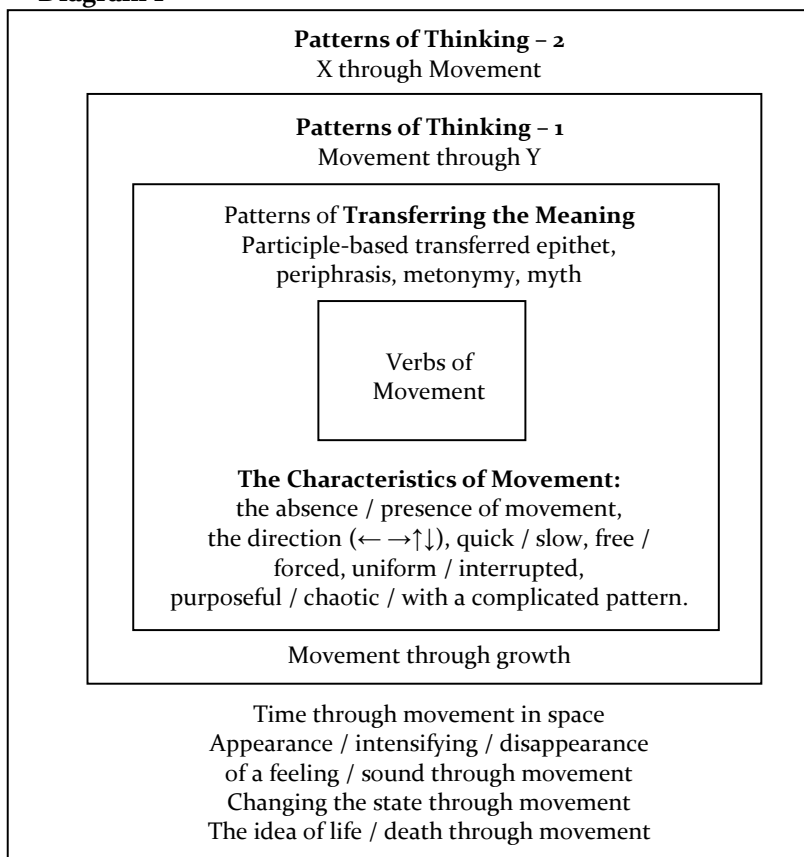
In the centre of the field we have put the verbs of movement in their direct meaning. But as the plot evolves, their "quality" and "quantity" change significantly.

The journey to the first island is generally characterized by the fast linear kind of movement: *to ride, to run, to chase, to gallop, to hurry, to race towards, to follow.* Not only is it an escape from the real world, but also a willful pursuit of something that lies beyond "the dove-grey edge of the sea". We consider that this pursuit can be regarded as a symbol of the linear movement of time in the "mortal" world which Oisin is about to leave. So, what exactly is he looking for on his Quest? The alternative to the "mortal clay" seems to be a logical answer.

The visit to the first island is marked by the extraordinary variety of motion with different characteristics which, indeed, can be united

by the umbrella term "the dance". Firstly, it is pointed at different directions (*to spring / raise* vs *fall / bend/ kneel*), can be linear *(to ride out / pass by / chase)*, circular *(to wind / wrap)*, pendulum-like *(to toss and turn / sway)*, or have no pattern *(to wander, wandering / dance)* at all. Secondly, the traveller can move either on his free will or not *(to bring / lead smb)*. Thirdly, it can be fast or slow *(to run / fly, rush out* vs *wander)* easy or complicated *(to limp / falter)*. Finally, the absence of actual motion also adds to the rhythm and variety of patterns: *to stand / sit / hang/ lie*. So, this is what the pursuit leads to: the almost unchained freedom of motion, expression and delight, as if the real life begins after the escape from the living world.

Diagram 1

Patterns of Thinking – 2
X through Movement

Patterns of Thinking – 1
Movement through Y

Patterns of **Transferring the Meaning**
Participle-based transferred epithet,
periphrasis, metonymy, myth

Verbs of
Movement

The Characteristics of Movement:
the absence / presence of movement,
the direction (← →↑↓), quick / slow, free /
forced, uniform / interrupted,
purposeful / chaotic / with a complicated pattern.

Movement through growth

Time through movement in space
Appearance / intensifying / disappearance
of a feeling / sound through movement
Changing the state through movement
The idea of life / death through movement

The second island, though, proves quite different in this respect. The number of verbs with the meaning of "purposeful, linear motion" is notably small. The movement here can be described as monotonous, pendulum-like: *to sway / swing/ pass to and fro / tramp up and down*. Besides, the idea of "forced" movement is quite insistent: *to throw / bring / carry / cast*.

Not only can the dance be conveyed through motion, but also the idea of struggle. These two can be regarded, among others, as the "key" concepts of W. B. Yeats's mythopoetic model of the world. While the dance stands for the unity of a creator and his art, the dialectical "struggle" underlies the poet's vision of history, human soul and relationship (Smith 1990: 104-109).

The third island is characterized by slow motion, mainly without any particular aim (*to drift / wander* vs *flow)* which can also be described as "forced" *(to drift / follow)*. Besides, the group of verbs united by "downward movement" is also quite noticeable: *to drip / drown/ drop*. Describing the owls, the poet says that they are *"pacing"* which means walking / moving "with regular steps around a small area" (Macmillan English Dictionary 2002). In fact, this kind of motion reminds us of a pendulum which moves at regular intervals, which produces some kind of trance. So, the characters get into the place in which neither human will nor purpose can influence the circumstances. Indeed, the atmosphere of sleep makes all the aims and efforts meaningless. Besides, the presence of insistent downward movement is strongly associated not only with sleep, but also with death: the lower – the closer to the ground. The closer to the ground – the closer to death (Приходько 2005: 116).

Still, Oisin's dreams about Ireland are filled with absolutely different kind of movement. It is much more objective and real: *to walk / move round / come by*.

The *return journey to Ireland* which results from these dreams is rather rich in motion. It becomes faster and more purposeful: *to march / flee / run / ride*. But in the lines that tell us about the old age the examples of slow or downward movement are quite frequent: *to crawl / creep / stagger; fall / lean / drop*. The fact that the characters have to carry the "burden" of the mortal world is also expressed through the verbs that show "complicated" movement: *to stagger / carry / bear*.

Even at this stage, we can see that the kinds of movement throughout the poem show us the ***circular*** itinerary of the character's Quest, as he goes back to fast linear movement with which he started his journey. But the circle proves open, as Oisin returns to a different country and is determined to continue his wanderings in order to join his kinsmen.

The space of the field ***around the centre*** is filled with the units that convey the idea of movement through transferred meanings. Semantically, the metaphors mentioned above express the ***characteristics of movement*** such as:

The absence / presence of movement: the *stars hang in the air, to stable lightnings, owls pacing around*;

The direction (← →↑↓): *the red sun falls, trees rise/ stand, a valley flowed*;

The pattern: *purposeful movement* vs *chaotic or with a complicated pattern: whirling flames, the winding thicket, wandering dances*;

The speed: *quick / slow: the winds fled out, a shadowy face flowed*.

From the point of view of stylistics, we deal with various tropes the most "telling" of which are:

Periphrasis: *to crush the sand* (= to ride), *to pierce the tempest with sails* (= to sail);

Metonymy: *For all your **crosiers*** (= the clergymen)/ *they have left the path and wander in the snow*; ***hearts*** (= mortal men) *toss and turn in narrow caves*.

Metaphor, mainly, predicate-based from the point of view of its structure: *whispering **flew**, the dance **wound**, the white vesture **flowed**.*

Tired metaphor: *the sun sank, the towers rose*.

Personified metaphor: ***fled** foam underneath us; his purpose **drifts and dies**, Joy makes the little planets **run***.

Myth: *Earth and Heaven and Hell would **die** / and in some gloomy barrow **lie***.

We cannot but mention this last group, since the situation which is represented here has little to do with transference of meaning. A myth is not exactly a trope, but rather a type of poetic imagery described by A. F. Losev. The act of "dying" could be considered as metaphorical but for the second element which describes movement in space in its literary meaning and thus gives the situation the sense of physically-perceived reality (Лосев 1991: 27).

One should comment upon the significance of *metaphorical epithets* that frequently occur in the poem, sometimes emphasized by alliteration: *the **w**indless **w**oods*. A special role belongs to *the participle-based transferred epithets* that both characterize a noun and convey motion: *a wandering and milky smoke, the unvesselled sea, drifting greyness, ravening Sorrow, whirling flames, dripping trees, the winding thicket*. Since the action is ascribed to an inanimate object, the latter acquires the role of "the doer" and becomes personified. Notably, the most frequent is the epithet *"wandering"*. It describes "the absence of straightforward movement or the lack of clearness" (Macmillan English Dictionary 2002). Statistically, this epithet is quite frequent and appears insistently in "The Wanderings of Oisin" and W. B. Yeats's later works. It occurs roughly once in 60 lines out of 914 which is the total number of lines in the poem, though its appearance can vary as the plot evolves. In Book I it comes once in 43 lines out of 428 and describes mainly the natural phenomena on the characters' way and what is happening on the first island. Book II contains no "wanderings" at all. Obviously, the battle requires more straightforward movement which cannot be qualified as "wandering". In Book III it appears once in 45 lines out of 224 and characterizes the character himself and the natural phenomena. You can see its most typical uses in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1

What is Described	Examples
Natural phenomena	*a **wandering** land breeze* *a **wandering** and milky smoke* *pacing the shores of the **wandering** seas*
Inanimate objects	*the **wandering** moon* *your **wandering** ruby cars*
Living beings and their activity	*a merry **wandering** rout* *wandering dances*
Abstract notions	*the grey **wandering** osprey Sorrow* *our **wandering** hours* *a wandering mind*
The main character	*wandering Oisin*

Therefore, the epithet "wandering", conveying the idea of aimless and sleepy "flowing" movement, creates the air of obscurity and irreali-

ty in the poetic world of "CELTIC TWILIGHT". As for the use of personified epithets ascribed to various inanimate objects and phenomena, it can be considered a specific, and a very marked feature of W. B. Yeats's poetic language.

The periphery – 1 contains cognitive metaphors semantically related to motion with no actual movement from the formal point of view: *to grow near, to hold one's way, "unloosed feet touched".*

The periphery – 2 consists of cognitive metaphors that are formally related to movement and convey quite different meanings. The general trend is to convey abstract ideas through ***material*** images connected with movement in space, as shown in the table below (Table 2). One should notice that, according to G. Lakoff, this characteristic is supposed to be the main function of a metaphor as a cognitive operation, but it is also a very typical feature of the mythological model of the world (Лакофф 2008: 27; Мелетинский 1976). It seems that we constantly operate with myths, and, moreover, without them the whole process of thinking and speaking would be impossible. The study of the poetic idiolect of W. B. Yeats only shows how true it is.

Table 2

Metaphorical Patterns X through Movement	Examples
Time through movement	*days / hours **passed** (by)* *years after years began to **flow*** *and my years three hundred **fell** on me*
Appearance / intensifying/ disappearance of a feeling / sound, etc. through movement	*the dreams were **gone*** *a sudden laughter **sprang*** *the joy that **fell*** *He **fell** into a druid swoon* *Like drops of honey **came** their words* *to **drop** a sound* *the heart longing to **leap***
Changing the state through movement	*to **run** through many shapes*

The idea of life / death through movement	*The sadness moves* (= exists) *men pass* (= die)

Going back to T. L. Byrd's interpretation of Oisin's journey, we can say that it is quite accurate to what we have seen. The three islands are definitely described through different kinds of motion which keeps changing throughout the poem from linear to circular and back to linear as the character leaves his country to "the other" world and back to Ireland. This pattern shows the dialectical approach of the poet towards life, death and art.

The "other" world is characterized by a specific type of movement – slow, with no particular pattern or direction ("wandering"). It is generally opposed to the linear motion of the transitory world. The most typical stylistic means describing the country of the immortals is the participle-based metaphorical epithet, very often personified. So, one more telling feature of the poetic style of W. B. Yeats is general personification rooted in the mythopoetic nature of his works.

Even the cognitive metaphors that do not express the meaning of motion through the verbs of movement show its connection with feelings, life, change, age and death. This probably means that the most basic philosophical aspects of being a human are conceptualized through motion, which shows that the Quest Myth is not something we choose willingly, but rather an archetypical frame enforced by the common way of thinking in the society in order to convey "vague" and "immaterial" notions with the help of "familiar" objects of physically-sensed reality.

REFERENCES

1. Лакофф, Дж. Метафоры, которыми мы живём / Дж. Лакофф, М. Джонсон. – М.: Едиториал УРСС, 2004. - 256 с.

2. Лосев, А. Ф. Философия. Мифология. Культура. – М.: Политиздат, 1991. – 525 с.

3. Мелетинский, Е. М. Поэтика мифа. – М.: Наука, 1976. – 406 с.

4. Панова, Л. Г. «Мир», «пространство», «время» в поэзии Осипа Мандельштама. – М.: Языки славянской культуры, 2003. – 808 с.

5. Питина, С. А. Концепты мифологического мышления как составляющая концептосферы национальной картины мира. – Челябинск: Челябинск. гос. ун-т, 2002. – 191 с.

6. Приходько, В. С. Мифопоэтический аспект ранней лирики У. Б. Йейтса / Дис. ... канд. филол. наук. – Ростов-на-Дону, 2005. – 262 с.

7. Самойлова, И. Ю. Динамическая картина мира И. Бродского: лингвистический аспект. – Гродно, 2007. – 191 с.

8. Шишова, Ю. Л. Лингвистическая объективация мифологемы пути в современной английской литературе / Дис. ... канд. филол. наук. – СПб., 2002. – 215 с.

9. Aguilera, M. Oisin's Quest: The Myth of the Modernist Poet's Evolution // Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses. – 1994. – Pp. 7-21. URL: http://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/6011/1/RAEI_07_01.pdf (дата обращения: 12.10.2011).

10. Byrd, T. L. The Environment of the Quest: The Poetic Dream // The Early Poetry of W. B. Yeats: The Poetic Quest. – Kennikat Press, 1978. – Pp. 11-38. URL: http://www.enotes.com/poetry-criticism/yeats-william-butler/thomas-l-byrd-jr-essay-date-1978 (дата обращения: 12.11.2011).

11. Campbell, J. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. – Bollingen Series XVII. – Princeton University Press, AST. – 1997. – 235 p.

12. Smith, S. W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction. – New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc. – 1990. – 178 p.

Sources

1. Macmillan English Dictionary. – London: Macmillan, 2002.

2. Yeats, W. B. The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats. – Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2008. – 402 p.

Дарья Александровна Холина,
Воронежский государственный университет
пл. Ленина, 10-110, Воронеж, 394006
Российская Федерация
daryakhol@yandex.ru

Daria A. Kholina
Voronezh State University
pl. Lenin 10-110, Voronezh, 394006
Russian Federation
phone: +7 (473) 222 73 62