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*VISIONARY EXPERIENCE AND METAPHYSICAL ANTITHESIS
(CONCERNING THE ROLE OF SYNAESTHESIA AND OXYMORON
IN W. B. YEATS' POETRY)*

Д. А. Холина (Воронеж, Российская Федерация). МИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЗРЕНИЯ И МЕТАФИЗИКА ПРОТИВОПОЛОЖНОСТЕЙ (О РОЛИ СИНЕСТЕЗИИ И ОКСЮМОРОНА В ПОЭЗИИ У. Б. ЙЕЙТСА). В статье анализируются основные свойства и функции синестезии и оксюморона в поэтическом идиолекте У. Б. Йейтса. Особое внимание уделяется доминантным моделям смены модальности в работах Йейтса, относящихся к различным периодам его творчества. Делается попытка связать синестетическую метафору с мотивами сверхъестественного на ранних этапах творчества поэта и с проороческими произведениями позднего периода. В работе также исследуется взаимосвязь оксюморона и катахрезы с противоречивостью поэтического мира Йейтса.

Ключевые слова: синестезия, модальность, синестетическая метафора, оксюморон, катахреза

Recent work deals with the nature and function of synaesthesia and oxymoron in the poetic idiolect of W. B. Yeats. An emphasis is placed upon the dominant models of modality transfer throughout Yeats's works of different periods. An attempt is made to link the use of synaesthesia to the supernatural motives in the early works and the visionary poems of the later period. Attention is also paid to oxymoron and catachresis in relation to the antithetical quality of Yeats's poetic world.

Keywords: synaesthesia, modality, synaesthetic metaphor, oxymoron, catachresis

1. Introduction

From the semiological perspective poetry can be regarded as a secondary semiotic system created using the primary means or components, i. e. the language. If we ask ourselves in what part of a poem its meaning is concealed, we would probably have to go from the smallest structural components, such as phonemes or morphemes to the bigger textual units and even intertextual cross-references (Lotman 1970). As synaesthetic metaphor and oxymoron can be

regarded as the constituent cells the textual body of the poem's textual body, the approach I have used can be called structuralist. Working within this approach I will attempt to link the instances of both phenomena described with the message of the whole poem. The synaesthetic metaphor and oxymoron are structural components of a poem that could be called "ungrammaticalities" (Riffaterre 1980: 1 – 22), the language "abnormalities" carrying the concentrated charge of meaning. I propose that these ungrammaticalities reveal the ideas of *A Vision*, Yeats's main philosophical work which contains the most important concepts of Yeats's poetic world. *A Vision*, generally, has to do with the antithetical nature of the universe, the interrelation between the ideal and the physical reality, the supernatural and the real world. The reason why I find the structuralist approach useful is that one can trace certain similarities between the way language operates and the overall concept of *A Vision*. Language in general is a system of symbolic signs acting as the means of conveying a message. These signs are put into relation with each other through grammar. *A Vision* is also a system which has its constituent "particles" and its "grammar". We can regard the gyres and the twenty-eight Moon phases as the symbolic elements of this framework. Then the spinning of the gyres, the direction of their movement, the circular trajectory, and the antithetical struggle between subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the material, would be its "grammar". Language possesses the principle of binary oppositions which makes it possible to distinguish between its various elements, e. g. long and short vowel sounds, voiceless and voiced consonants in English, etc. Yeats's philosophical system is based upon antithesis. Indeed, antithesis is its main "grammatical category" defining the relations among all its elements. Phase One of the Great Wheel is opposed to Phase Fifteen (Body vs Spirit), and so are all the other phases of the Moon. Phase One (The New Moon), the starting point of the cycle, is the stage of submissiveness and plasticity, there is no independent thought or being, so mind and body can take any shape imposed on them. Phase Fifteen, the Full Moon, is the apogee of the cycle where the struggle for subjectivity reaches its highest point. It stands for the temporary triumph of Image over Reality, so subjective images are seen as being more real than what exists objectively. It symbolizes art, the achievement of maturity and visionary experience. Another "grammatical" relationship is that of the Self and the Daimon (the

Spirit, or the Mask, or the Anti-Self), the spiritual opposite of the Self. The creative person (the Self) can achieve the Unity of Being (Phase Fifteen) through wearing a Mask (the Anti-Self) which possesses antithetical qualities. Almost every single element of the system, with the exception of Phases One and Fifteen, which represent pure states and cannot be found in reality, is “contaminated” by the opposing properties. The degree of this antithetical “contamination” depends mainly on the place on the Great Wheel and also on the converging/diverging personality and history phases (Yeats 1981: 67-80). Synaesthetical metaphors and the instances of oxymoron are the examples of such contamination, thus reflecting the dialectical nature of Yeats’s worldview.

2. Synaesthesia, Language, and Metaphor

By *synaesthesia* we understand “the perception, or description of the perception, of one sense modality in terms of another; e.g. perceiving or describing a voice as velvety, warm, heavy, or sweet <...>” (Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics 1975: 839 – 840). Synaesthesia in poetry was popularized by two sonnets: Baudelaire’s “CORRESPONDANCES” (1857) and Rimbaud’s “VOYELLES” (1871), though it had been employed earlier by John Donne (*loud perfume*), Shelley (*the fragrance of a hyacinth* referred to as *music*), Heine (*sweet as moonlight*) and others (Ibid.: 840). Distinction should be made between the actual perception of the voice as having such qualities and the transfer of modalities as a cognitive operation of metaphorisation. In the first case we would have the involuntary “neurological synaesthesia” of parallel or joined sensation, “the rare capacity to hear colours, taste shapes, or experience other equally strange sensory fusions <...>” (Cytowic 2002: 283 – 284), in the second – a synaesthetic metaphor, or literary synaesthesia which is the deliberate use of imagery, the symbolic form of representation. But the boundaries between these two phenomena are not as clearly marked as at first it seems. In George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s words, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff, Johnson: <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>). Not only is metaphor a phenomenon of the language, but also operates as the key mechanism of the conceptual system of the human mind, defining the way we

perceive the world and interact with it. For instance, it is possible to conceptualize an argument in terms of war:

*I've never **won** an argument with him.
He **shot down** all of my arguments.*

This is what G. Lakoff and M. Johnson call an ontological metaphor based in physical experience which treats events, actions, emotions as self-contained objects, and this is what we consider a “dead” metaphor, or conceptual (in G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s terms) that should be distinguished from the verbal device. In other words, the transfer of meaning occurs as a cognitive process, on the level of thinking, not on the level of the language. If we describe a sound as ‘sweet’, it does not mean that it has a sweet taste, though a true synesthete would be very likely to describe it in this very way. Instead, ‘sweet’ would stand for ‘*melodious and harmonious*’ (Oxford English Dictionary), since metaphors tend to emphasize only some aspects of an object, making others obscure (Oxford English Dictionary).

Nevertheless, synaesthesia is related to metaphor in terms of those fundamental processes that underlie it, as it is, as well as the metaphor, rooted in human experience. R. Cytowic considers synaesthesia prior to metaphor, as it is found in animals and in newly-born children, but is generally lost in the process of growing up. Instead, with the development of abstract thinking, the joined senses give way to metaphorical use of the language as a symbolic system, as “perceptual knowledge makes itself available to the abstract structures of language” (Lakoff, Johnson: <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>). Therefore, synaesthesia can be a model for the conceptual (linguistic) metaphor, as well as for the stylistic device. In a synaesthetic metaphor “the imagery is linguistically related in terms belonging to one or more differing perceptual modes” (Day 1996: <http://www.theassc.org/files/assc/2358.pdf>).

3. Synaesthesia and W. B. Yeats’s Visionary Poems. The Link to the Supernatural

There is no evidence to suggest that W. B. Yeats was a synaesthete. Yeats’s attitude to sensing and physicality is, nevertheless, worth mentioning, as it is one of the basic concepts in his philosophical system aimed at achieving the Unity of Being. This idea is continuously expressed throughout Yeats’s life through various

symbols, such as the tide, the wind, the ship or the bird symbolism, marking the transition between the real world and the world of the supernatural. Bird imagery plays an important role in the early poem "THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN" (1889) which, according to J. Unterecker, has the relationship between time, mortality, wisdom at the price of decrepitude as its subject matter (Unterecker 1959: 47-66). For instance, sorrow is often referred to as 'osprey', an ominous bird of prey, or 'ravening' because of its sinister, "deathly" overtones. That is the reason why the inhabitants of the first island visited by Oisín, the immortal Sidhe, sing:

*For neither Death nor Change comes near us,
And all listless hours fear us,
And we fear no dawning morrow,
Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow (Yeats 1989: 363).*

In "THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE" (*The Wind among the Reeds*) the speaker sees the apparition of beings with long unbound hair, pale cheeks and gleaming eyes, who are luring him to follow them into the land of the immortals and thus leave the mortal world. The Sidhe are material, sensual, though supernatural. Their physicality suggests the unity of the world of the living and the world of the Immortals:

*Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart <...> (Yeats 1989: 55)*

Among the symbols of transition and antithetical unity one can also mention the ambivalent Tree of Life in "VACCINATION" (*The Winding Stair and Other Poems*), alive and blossoming and dead and burning at the same time:

*A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew <...> (Yeats 1989: 250)*

The Dance is another symbol, reflecting the unity of sensuality and spirit. In "THE DOUBLE VISION OF MICHAEL ROBARTES" (*The Wild Swans at Coole*) the speaker is dazzled by the double vision of a Sphinx and a Buddha, the images suggesting intellect opposed love, body opposed to soul. A visionary girl, almost "Death-in-Life" and "Life-in-Death",

but without Coleridge's "gothic" shade, belongs to Phase Fifteen of the Moon. It is an image placed between the physical and the spiritual, connecting and balancing them, and fusing them into an organic unity:

*And right between these two a girl at play
That, it may be, had danced her life away,
For now being dead it seemed
That she of dancing dreamed.*

*Although I saw it all in the mind's eye
There can be nothing solider till I die;
I saw by the moon's light
Now at its fifteenth night (Yeats 1989: 171).*

Crazy Jane's paradoxical statement that "<...> *nothing can be sole or whole/ That has not been rent*" ('Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop', Yeats 1989: 260) is yet another variation of Yeats's permanent dialectical theme. Fair and foul are not only clashed against one another, but are, in fact, claimed to possess some kind of kinship, as the old woman states that '*fair needs foul*'. This suggests that Crazy Jane has more profound knowledge of love and its dimensions, from '*the heart's pride*' to '*bodily lowliness*', whereas the Bishop defends a purely conventional, moral point of view.

The complex concept of struggling elements constituting the whole requires a specific way of representation in Yeats's idiolect. Strictly speaking, synaesthesia can hardly be regarded among the most common phenomena in Yeats's poems. Its occurrence varies from one in eighty-five lines in average (*Crossways*) to one in three hundred and ten lines (*The Winding Stair*), reaching its peak in the earlier volume *THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS* (1/26) and in the book of poems of the middle period – *IN THE SEVEN WOODS* (1/23) (Table 1). The frequency of synaesthesia decreases noticeably in such middle period volumes as *The Green Helmet* (1/260), and *RESPONSIBILITIES* (1/145). It is not frequent in the volumes of the later period, *THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE* (1/295) and *LAST POEMS* (1/280). It is hardly present in *MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER*, *WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS* or *FULL MOON IN MARCH* (Diagram 1).

The Wind among the Reeds, as well as *In the Seven Woods*, dwells upon the complexity of love and the lover's defeat. J. Unterecker underlines that in comparison to the previous volume, *The Rose* with

its rather abstract rose symbolism, the imagery of *The Wind among the Reeds* is characterized by increasing physicality. This has a role to play considering the 'joined senses', i. e. synaesthesia. Along with that is the idea of the 'multiple' personality referred to by J. Unterecker, which can be extended to the multiplicity of senses (Unterecker 1959: 87-95).

Diagram 1.
Rates of Occurrence for Synaesthetic Metaphors
in Yeats' Poems (per 100 lines)

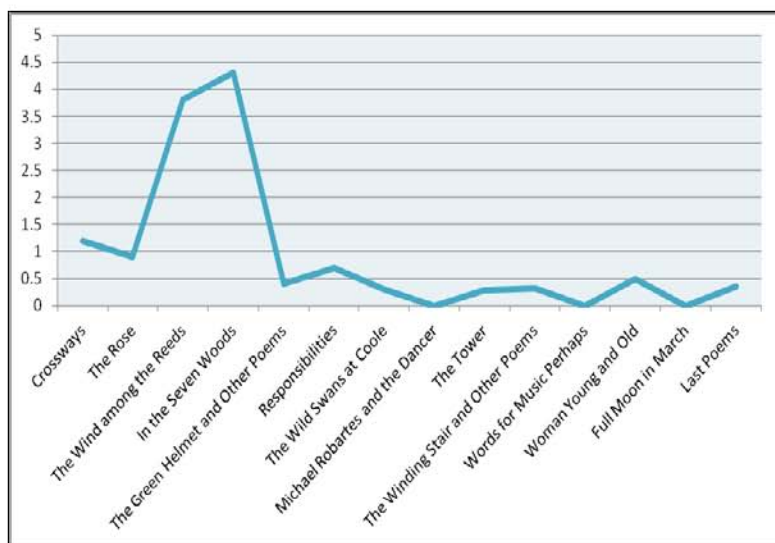


Table 1.
Rates of Occurrence for Synaesthetic Metaphors in Yeats' Poems

Volume	Rate (1/ number of lines)
Crossways	1 / 85
The Rose	1 / 112
The Wind among the Reeds	1 / 26
In the Seven Woods	1 / 23
The Green Helmet and Other Poems	1 / 260

Responsibilities	1 / 145
The Wild Swans at Coole	1 / 295
Michael Robartes and the Dancer	0
The Tower	1 / 360
The Winding Stair and Other Poems	1 / 310
Words for Music Perhaps	0
Woman Young and Old	1 / 182
Full Moon in March	0
Last Poems	1 / 280

One of the most persistent images in *The Wind among the Reeds* is **dew**. It is characterized as '*pale dew*' ('He Bids his Beloved Be at Peace', 'He Remembers Forgotten Beauty') and also '*flaming dew*' ('The Secret Rose'). It also appears in other combinations, indicating joined senses: '*he dew-cold lilies*' ('He Remembers Forgotten Beauty') or 'In twilights of dew and fire' ('The Blessed'). Technically, dew is water, so the primary sense in '*pale dew*' here will most likely be touch. The synaesthetic sense which modifies the primary sense in '*flaming dew*' refers to both sight and temperature, the latter classified by Sean Day as a separate modality (Day 1982: <http://www.theassc.org/files/assc/2358.pdf>), as flame is able to produce both heat and light, the lilies are both white and cold because the dew on them is cold. '*Pale dew*' probably refers to sight only, but contains personification, implying that dew is as pale as a face. Another image linked to, and, indeed, mingled with dew through synaesthesia, is **twilight**, the source of metaphorical "flame" due to the red colour of the rising sun. Both twilight and dew refer to the same vague borderline between night and day, light and darkness. It is one of early Yeatsian symbols of transition between the mortal world and the world of the supernatural and their unity. On the other hand, water symbolism suggests sorrow, loss and even death, fire – love or imagination (Ellmann 1975: 30). As a result, joining these elements would produce the "deadly" mixture of

love and sorrow. In 'The Secret Rose' the idea of the two worlds meeting is expressed through several synonymous images:

<...> and him

Who met Fand walking among *flaming dew*

By a grey shore where the wind never blew,

And lost the world and Emer for a kiss <...> (Yeats 1989: 69-70)

Fand and Emer – both are the women claiming CuChulainn's affection, one of them – immortal, the other – mortal. The appearance of Fand brings jealousy and bitterness to the familiar and seemingly well-ordered world '*where the wind never blew*'. If we read the wind as vague desires and hopes, the call of the superhuman beauty, then it might mean that the hero used to be content with what he had, but meeting Fand was sweet and bitter at the same time, indeed, '*bittersweet*'. '*A grey shore*' is another "borderline" image resembling "twilight", having a reference to mortality (grey). Therefore, '*flaming dew*' fits into the pattern of bitter love and loss, referring to the two features of twilight – dew on the grass and the colour of the sky at sunrise at twilight.

In 'The Lover Asks Forgiveness for His Many Moods' the sight/touch combination of modalities gives way to smell and sight. '*The odorous twilight*' is repeated twice, for the first time in what M. Riffaterre would call 'ungrammatical' line '*And cover your lips with odorous twilight <...>*' (Yeats 1989: 66), and then – in the very last two:

And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest

The **odorous twilight** there (Yeats 1989: 66).

After reading the whole poem the reader realizes that covering lips with twilight could be read as speech mixed together with a sigh, the mystical quality of which is created by the conjunction of smell and sight. '*Many moods*' of the speaker, being read as the sign of transitory mortal existence, has its equivalents in the first four lines of the poem: words lighter than air, hopes that pass or the crumpled rose. Then the imperative to cover the lips with odorous twilight is opposed to the images above, as they will pass, but the twilight evokes the vision of the faery world, its ancient cities and battles, and Niamh over '*the wandering tide*'. The '*murmuring*' that escapes the lips and travels in the faery world is mixed with longing and bitterness of mortality:

*O piteous Hearts, changing till change be dead
In a tumultuous song'<...> (Yeats 1989: 66)*

But this vision evoked by the murmuring is not just a vague set of shapeless images. The reference to '*the dim heavy hair*' indicates physicality and the involvement of the senses together with imagination, supported by the '*odorous twilight*' in the last line, the state of breathing in the fragrant air and seeing the transition between night and day. The visionary experience of the immortal lands becomes substantial, believable and very tightly tangled with the mortal world of the speaker. Synaesthesia marks the transition or mingling of different states on the one hand and emphasizes physicality and sensuality on the other.

In later poems Yeats uses synaesthesia less frequently, but in many ways more deliberately. At the same time, the new 'conversational manner' (Unterecker 1959: 102) of *IN THE SEVEN WOODS* results in the use of linguistic or conceptual metaphors like '*the sweet laughing*' or '*the bitter wind*'. There is no evidence to say that they appear in later works more frequently, though in *IN THE SEVEN WOODS* they make 25% of the whole group of synaesthetic metaphors.

The deliberate use of synaesthesia linked to visionary poetry is especially clearly marked in *RESPONSIBILITIES*. In 'The Grey Rock', for instance, we see:

*'Why are they faithless when their might
Is from the holy shades that rove
The grey rock and the **windy light**?
Why should the faithfullest heart most love
The bitter sweetness of false faces? (Yeats 1989: 106)*

Aoife, the immortal being, laments the loss of her beloved, a mortal man who rejected three hundred years of immortality offered to him for the sake of battle and duty. The '*grey rock*' could be equivalent to '*mortal clay*' in 'The Travail of Passion' (*The Wind among the Reeds*) or '*pavements grey*' in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree': it is earthly, solid, dark of colour, while the '*windy light*' suggests the glimpses of the eternal, short visionary experiences humans have. If we oppose light to '*the dim /Imaginations of their eyes*', then it would imply a revelation of something that lies beyond ordinary human existence. The speaker of 'The Cold Heaven' is '*Riddled with light*', his imagination and heart driven wild. When the vision disappears, '*The darkness drops again*'

(‘The Second Coming’). This mystical vision corresponds to the 15th Phase of the Moon in *A Vision* when human experience and the physical world are transformed into a series of images. This experience is accompanied by “flooding” with light. This is the meeting of the opposing qualities of the Universe, of will and thought, desire and thought is described by Yeats as “musical” (Vendler 1969: 33-37). So, the senses are clearly involved, the experience is not totally abstract or spiritual.

In ‘The Grey Rock’ the wind serves as a vehicle of intensifying the experience, as it brings the Sidhe and their voices, and fills humans with longing. Mortals have to ‘rove *the grey rock*’ feeling longing and hoping to catch a glimpse of the metaphysical truth, though they will never be able to see it as a whole. It is not an idle coincidence, though, that we see an oxymoron in the last line. This is why Aoife is so grief-stricken: she realizes how incomplete a human being is, and her love for the man is, indeed, bitter.

In ‘Paudeen’, another visionary poem, we see the reverse pattern of joining modalities. Here we have sight and sensing, not sensing and sight, but the lexemes are almost the same as in ‘The Grey Rock’:

*Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;
Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
A single soul that lacks a **sweet crystalline cry*** (Yeats 1989: 109-110).

Structurally, we can divide the poem into the two parts: “before the visionary experience” and “after it”. The lack of light and vision (obscure spite, blind) is opposed to the luminous wind, God’s eye, and the cry of the curlew which is finally described as a ‘*sweet crystalline cry*’, combining the modalities of both sight and sound (We do not take ‘sweet’ into consideration here, as it has no indication to taste in its literal sense, showing the positive impact of the cry instead). Vision and sound joined together redouble the intensity of the experience and make it more shrill, piercing and, eventually, material.

The visionary quality of Yeats’s synaesthesia can be confirmed statistically. According to Sean Day, the five most frequent forms of synaesthetic metaphors in English are **hearing** / **touch**,

hearing/taste, sight/touch, hearing/temperature, hearing/ sight 17 (Table 2). Despite the apparent multiplicity of senses of Yeatsian metaphors, sight (most likely, but not necessarily accompanied by touch or temperature: 'wintry dawn', 'pure cold light', 'wintry moonlight', 'when the light grows cool', 'the glimmering snow') seems the most frequent: out of 7 synaesthetic metaphors found in *Crossways* six contain vision either as a primary or the synaesthetic sense. *The Wind among the Reeds*, *In the Seven Woods*, *Responsibilities* and *Last Poems* have the same pattern: 18/13, 5/3, 12/7 and 6/4 respectively (Table 3). On the one hand, sight fits into the pattern of vision and supernatural experience; on the other hand, it partly fits into the common sight/touch synaesthetic pattern in the English language.

Table 2.
Rates of Occurrence for Synaesthetic Metaphors
in Various English Texts (Sean Day 1996)

Type of Metaphor	Rate
Hearing – touch	42.6%
Hearing – taste	11.7%
Vision – touch	10.6%
Hearing – temperature	6.8%
Hearing – vision	6.3%

Table 3.
Rates of Occurrence for Sight-Based Synaesthetic Metaphors in
Yeats' Poems

Volume	Number of Synaesthetic Metaphors per Volume	Number of Sight-Based Metaphors
Crossways	7	6

The Rose	5	3
The Wind among the Reeds	18	13
In the Seven Woods	5	3
The Green Helmet and Other Poems	1	0
Responsibilities	12	7
The Wild Swans at Coole	4	2
Michael Robartes and the Dancer	0	0
The Tower	3	2
The Winding Stair and Other Poems	2	2
Words for Music Perhaps	0	0
Woman Young and Old	1	1
Full Moon in March	0	0
Last Poems	6	4

4. Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a form of condensed paradox and means “foolish wise” or “silly clever” translated from the Ancient Greek. ‘It is the rhetorical figure in which two antithetical words are pitted against each other, adjective against noun, as in John Milton’s *living death*, *loud silence*, or *darkness visible*’ (Hughes 1984: 15). Oxymoron traditionally occurs in religious or metaphysical poetry (Milton, Keats). It effectively evokes mysteries and meanings beyond the reach of human sense by fusing all experience into a unity (Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics 1975: 595-596). T. S. Eliot in his critical essay on *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921), namely, Donne, Cleveland, and Cowley, discusses the typical conjunction of heterogeneous material in their poems and uses a quote from Samuel

Johnson writing about the same poets mentioning “the most heterogeneous ideas” that “are yoked by violence together”. T. S. Eliot gives provides the example from S. Johnson himself (‘The Vanity of Human Wishes’), where, among all the heterogeneity of experience, ‘a petty fortress’ serves as a fine example of oxymoron:

*His fate was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;
He left a name at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale*
(<http://personal.centenary.edu/~dhavird/TSEMetaPoets.html>).

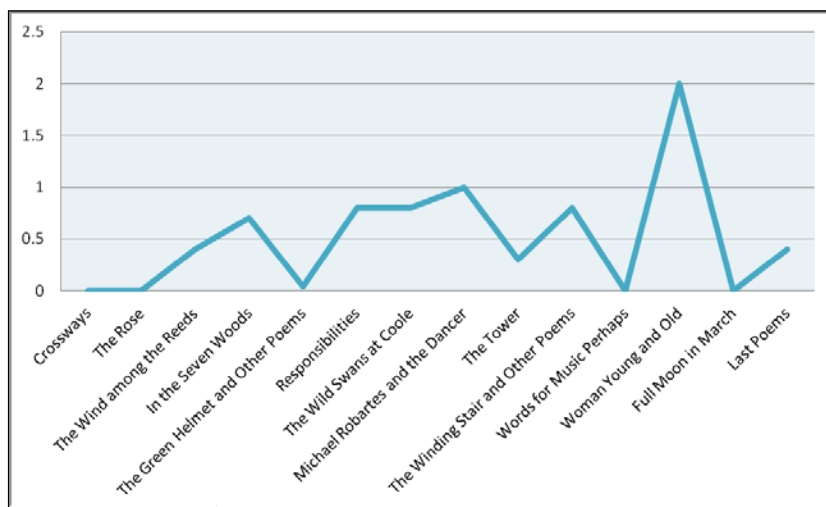
In Yeats’s *A Vision* the idea of forcing heterogeneous human experience together reminds us of Phase 15 of the Great Wheel, where the conflict between the opposing elements disappears turning them into a unity.

Table 4.
Rates of Occurrence for Oxymoron in Yeats’ Poems

Volume	Rate (1/ number of lines)
Crossways	0
The Rose	0
The Wind among the Reeds	1/ 240
In the Seven Woods	1/ 140
The Green Helmet and Other Poems	1/ 130
Responsibilities	1/ 121
The Wild Swans at Coole	1/ 118
Michael Robartes and the Dancer	1/ 103
The Tower	1/ 360
The Winding Stair and Other Poems	1/ 124

Words for Music Perhaps	0
Woman Young and Old	1/ 45
Full Moon in March	0
Last Poems	1/ 240

Diagram 2.
Rates of Occurrence for Oxymoron in Yeats' Poems



If synaesthesia in Yeats is especially noticeable in the early and the middle periods, oxymoron is more typical for the middle and late periods. It is hardly present in *CROSSWAYS* and *THE ROSE* and is quite rare in *THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS* and *THE GREEN HELMET* (occurs once in 240 and 260 lines) (Table 4). It occurs more frequently in *Responsibilities* (1/121), *THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE* (1/118), *MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER* (1/103), *The Winding Stair* (1/124), *WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD* (1/45) (Diagram 2). One can speculate about this radical change in terms of the poet's development of both his worldview and, as a result, his style. The twilight-vague 'wandering stars' of the early poems, the dim, misty, slow-moving meditative tone, much in the style of the fin-de-siècle aesthetic fashion, is replaced by

more precise and dramatic speech, dealing with a wider range of topics (Unterecker 1959: 96-101). As W. B. Yeats wrote in 1937,

<...> *I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza. Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter* <...> (Atkins 2010:158).

Not only did he revolutionize his syntax and stanza, but also his use of lexicon and stylistic devices.

It is true, though, that the syntactic structure of Yeats's oxymoron, is quite unusual: alongside with conventional adjective + noun collocations like '*tragic joy*' or '*intellectual hatred*', the antithetical elements are joined by a comma acting as homogeneous parts of a sentence, joined as if there is no semantic discrepancy between them, both referring to one thing:

We're in our laughing, weeping fit ('Reconciliation') (Yeats 1989: 91).

This 'fit' of reconciliation is opposed to the speaker's poetic "drive" after his beloved left him: he has the images of 'kings, helmets, and swords' to sing about, but when she comes back to him, the past material for poetry seems almost toy-like and unimportant. Even the reconciliation itself is antithetical, embracing both laughing and weeping. The chain of adjectives can have more than two elements joined by commas:

*A laughing, crying, sacred song,
A leching song ('The Three Bushes')* (Yeats 1989: 297).

Other instances of syntactic oxymoron include the use of the conjunction **and** to join the semantically antithetical adjectives:

*And Bridget his bride among them,
With a sad and a gay face ('The Host of the Air')* (Yeats 1989: 57).

In the Host of the Air the lover's bride, Bridget is taken from him by the Sidhe. At first she joins the merry dance but finally vanishes together with the Sidhe. The encounter with them brings joy and loss at the same time. This pattern of bringing the opposites together is enforced by parallelism, where the opposing properties are put together through identical sentence structure:

*And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay* ('The Host of the Air') (Yeats 1989: 57).

The antithetical personality of the speaker is quite capable of expanding oxymoron into **catachresis**, i. e. logical contradiction between the two parts of an utterance:

<...> the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar ('Under the Moon') (Yeats 1989: 83)

I am worn out with dreams ('Men Improve with Years') (Yeats 1989: 136)

Men dance on deathless feet ('Mohini Chatterjee') (Yeats 1989: 247)

When sleepers wake and yet still dream ('Under Ben Bulbin') (Yeats 1989: 327)

In the first line this effect is created by the logical contradiction between proud kings and doing hard physical work. The state of being worn out with dreams seems contradictory only on the surface level, since poetic dreaming has such intensity that it brings emotional weariness and physical weakness: *'It's a burden not to be borne'* ('Under the Moon'). In 'Mohini Chatterjee' we have a brief description of Yeats's metaphysical cycle of reincarnation. Although a human being is mortal, it remains alive through generations of ancestors and descendants. In 'Under Ben Bulbin' the paradox refers to painting and suggests the visionary property of art "snatching" eternity and transforming human life into it.

Technically, the function of oxymoron in Yeats can be described as "reinforcing the structure" and producing in a concise form the "message" of the poem. Let us see how the idea of antinomies is expressed through various "synonymous" means, including oxymoron.

In 'THE COLD HEAVEN' we have a series of statements supporting the image of the visionary un-Christian purgatory, opposed to vanishing 'casual' thoughts and memories. There is also an inner opposition of the expectations of Christianity and the use of Christian terms for the godless "otherworld". The first of them is *'the cold and rook-delighting heaven'*. It is "heaven", nor the "sky", that is put together with the rooks – a word so lofty is joined by "rough" bird imagery, thus producing the two-level oxymoron. The rooks circling in the sky are ominous, but bring the speaker to the vision of his own death and rebirth he is about to experience, as they, together with the

whole crow family are believed to possess hidden knowledge and be able to foretell the future (Graves 1976: 403).

*Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?* (Yeats 1989: 125)

The 'burning ice' is another oxymoron which is based upon the antithetical senses. The coldness of ice is related to the coldness of Heaven in the title, suggesting death and its inevitable ruthlessness, both deprived of sensual comfort, human warmth and emotion, the sensation resembling 'An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve' (Yeats 1989: 248), the purgatorial flame of Byzantium borrowed from the Neo-Platonic tradition. In this ecstatic purgatorial state the speaker's feelings, imagination, senses and reason are driven to their utmost intensity. These four elements are the opposing parts of personality joined within the poem in such a way that the reader can hardly recognize them as antithetical – ideally, feelings should be opposed to reason, senses to imagination, but the opposition is, in fact, blurred, as it should be beyond the ordinary mortal experience. The opposition "life-death" is destroyed in the extended oxymoron 'the ghost begins to quicken': the dead spirit is stirring like an unborn child, so, it is, in fact, reborn. The burning ice one image of Purgatory, another is the naked spirit on the roads. We can see a similar image in the poem that was written much later, 'Byzantium', where nakedness suggests being purified of mortal experience:

*All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins* ('Byzantium') (Yeats 1989: 248).

In Byzantium we see a reference to nakedness, or, rather, to a spirit approaching nakedness:

*For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path <...> (Yeats 1989: 248).*

Hades suggests another image from the Greek mythology – Hecate, who can see the past, present and future (just like the rooks and their prophetic abilities), who rules the 3 elements – earth, water and air (death-bed, ice, Heaven) and walks the roads at night accompanying the spirits. She is just but not compassionate, her 'punishment' for the souls that have not yet achieved the Unity of Being is ruthless and seems to mock at the Christian Heaven which does not reveal the whole scale of the speaker's visionary experience, hence 'the injustice of the skies'.

In 'THE COLD HEAVEN' oxymoron appears to be a device for bringing together the antithetical properties, clashing and reconciling them, reinforcing the speaker's experience and emphasizing its intensity, providing "links" and references to other Yeats's poems, thus fitting the poem into the already existing system of poetic signs.

Finally, the motives linked to oxymoron can be briefly summarized as bitterness and loss, the experience of the other world, vision of death, reincarnation, the antithetical nature of the universe, the opposition of active life to poetic dreaming.

5. Conclusions

Both the synaesthetic metaphor and oxymoron have the same function of bringing together the elements that can not be put together in everyday speech because of their logical incompatibility. Both of them are antithetical and contain two contradicting properties within one unit. Both of them reflect the meeting of the mortal world with the world of the supernatural and their penetration into each other. We can relate such moment of union to Phase Fifteen of the Great Wheel, the Full Moon in Yeats's symbolic system, when all human experience is for a short moment is transformed into the ideal state of an image. That reminds us about the Yeats's alchemical metaphor of transmutation of life into a work of art (Yeats 1962). This process might lie behind *A Vision* as well, then, oxymoron and synaesthetic metaphors work as elements showing this transmutation on the level of the structural components of the text.

While synaesthesia uses the images of the senses, oxymoron seems more intellect-or feeling-oriented, since it suggests the union of the

concepts, not of the senses and is based upon semantic (logical) opposition. One can argue that the concepts of the senses should also be taken into account. Then synaesthesia joins the concepts of the senses and all the associations they carry and brings them into the domain of imagination, while oxymoron brings together logical concepts in order to give a more acute expression to feeling. This is one of the examples how the image of the Unity of Being can be created through a mere system of language signs.

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