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Title: A cognitive interpretation of a new trope at the intersection of metaphor and metonymy

Abstract:

Consider the following: Кто был охотник? — Кто — добыча? / Все дьявольски-наоборот! (Цветаева); Я и садовник, я же и цветок (Мандельштам); And then the gradual and dual blue / As night unites the viewer and the view (Nabokov), O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance? (Yeats); Je suis la plaie et le couteau! / Je suis le soufflet et la joue! / Je suis les membres et la roue, /Et la victime et le bourreau! (Baudelaire), Ist dir Trinken bitter, werde Wein (Rilke).

What is the trope employed in all these examples? We claim that the structure that occurs in these poems constitutes a special type of a rhetorical device which is quite important if relatively rare in the XX century poetry (though it also occurs in earlier texts). This device shares certain substantial features with both metaphor and metonymy yet cannot be reduced to either. As such, it deserves its own nomination, and we suggest to call it “metactant”. This term reflects what in our view constitutes the nature of this phenomenon. It establishes paradoxical equivalence between inequitable semantic actants (in linguistic parlance), or participants in a situation described by a predicate, where each has a certain semantic role (Agent, Patient, Experiencer, Object, etc.). Thus, hunting involves hunter and prey (Agent, Patient), gardening – gardener and plants (Agent, Patient), viewing – viewer and view (Experiencer, perceived Object), dancing – dancer and dance (Agent, Activity), execution – executioner and victim (Agent, Patient), or different other kinds of Subject-Object relations. The equivalence between the two parts of the metactant is perceived as cognitively paradoxical because they are both close (being part of the same situation) and remote (because their semantic roles are antithetical). Metactant prominence may be considered as part of the universal revolt against the classical Subject-Object duality in XX century philosophy and poetry.