

DESCRIBING SENSORY EXPERIENCES: WINE IMAGERY IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract: In this paper¹, we aim to explore the figurative language used in wine literary discourse. Starting from an approach whose overall view is guided by conceptual metaphor theory, we will analyze and classify conceptual metaphors related to wine. We will illustrate the identified categories by examples taken from a corpus of excerpts of Romanian literary discourse and explain how wines are conceived and described metaphorically.

Tackling the issue of perception and description of wine in literary discourse allows us an orientation of the research by multiple approaches of the semantics of winespeak: the recognition of essential aspects of the wine imaginary in our research corpus; the analysis of sensory impressions and representations in literary winespeak; an analysis of the main categories of conceptual metaphors associated with wine and wine tasting notes.

*Our main objective is to organize conceptualizations of wine tasting notes into several categories of cognitive metaphors related to wine, according to the model inspired by the research of Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors we live by*, 1980).*

Keywords: *conceptual metaphors, description, literary discourse, perception, senses, wine imagery, winespeak.*

1. Introduction. Theoretical premises

A major tendency of current semantic research is reflected by the emphasis on cognitive semantics and cognitive stylistics, following the model inspired by the conceptual metaphor theory, as it was illustrated by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980).

From construing and locating metaphor within the poetic or the figurative domain, modern theories move to and are directed towards an approach of the metaphor as pervading element in our day-to-day life, as issue or as a locus of thought that can be dealt with and analyzed cognitively, once we understand that metaphor is “[...] an indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world” (Lakoff, 1992: 203) and all the more so as we become aware that the “cognitive linguistic view of metaphor” can paradoxically and simultaneously account for “the universality and diversity in metaphorical thought” (Kövecses, 2005/2007: xii).

The cognitive conceptualization of metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson starts from the premise that metaphors do not represent mere linguistic expressions or mere “devices of poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish”, “matters of extraordinary rather than ordinary language” (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980: 2-3) whose aim is to illustrate vivid poetic images, but cognitive structures or metaphorical concepts which can be identified and reflected at a level “prior to their manifestation in language” (Faur, 2004: 340).

Their theoretical framework allows an extension of the use of the concept of metaphor outside the literary and rhetorical domain since for them metaphor is a cognitive category of

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thought by which new cognitive contents within the framework of mental spaces are created and these conceptual domains of thought are unconstrained by language functioning.

Starting from exemplifications with current expressions, certainly metaphorical, but which, by continuous use have become common place and have been stripped of the novelty that characterizes metaphors in literary context, Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge that it is possible to reconstruct a “pattern” of thinking, situated at the origin of these expressions, everything being integrated into a coherent and systematic structure. Thus, the non-literary dimension of metaphor, which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call conventional metaphor, and which is materialized at the level of speech, represents a projection of the way in which the speaker can operate with abstract concepts, hardly cognoscible, by comparison to the empiric world, through his/her straightforward experience. The new dimension of the metaphor unveils the consistent and systematic manner in which our knowledge is organized according to a *pattern* known a priori and expressed metaphorically.

Cognitive metaphors permit the structuring and restructuring of our common conceptual system and their study relying upon current conceptual-semantic theories allows the orientation of research based on the approach of the metaphor as locus of thought, while the major framework of analysis remains conceptual, since metaphor is not only a way of conceptualizing the world and things around us, but all the more so as our common behavior reflects “our metaphorical understanding of experience” (Lakoff: 1993: 203-204 following Reddy, 1979: 287). The construal of everyday language as locus of manifestation of the metaphor began at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century and the study of the metaphor has focused, starting from this new perspective, on specialty languages: winespeak, language of fragrance, juridical language, economic language and so on.

The corpus chosen for the study of figurative language used in Romanian literary language is analyzed starting from the approach whose perspective is directed by conceptual metaphor theory. The aim is to classify and analyze categories of conceptual metaphors related to wine and wine tasting. We will understand how wines are described metaphorically and we will illustrate the identified categories by examples taken from a corpus of excerpts of Romanian literary discourse.

Dealing with the issue of perception and description of wine in Romanian literary discourse allows us an orientation of the research by several approaches of the semantics of winespeak: the identification of essential aspects of the wine imagery in our research corpus; the analysis of sensory perceptions and representations in winespeak; an analysis of the major categories of conceptual metaphors associated with wine and wine tasting notes.

The overall purpose of our paper is to distinguish characteristics of metaphors in the language of wine tasting and establish the main characteristics of these metaphors in Romanian literature, all the more so as they have not been deprived of the novelty which characterizes metaphors in literary context.

If authors and researchers such as Caballero, Diaz-Vera (2013), Suárez-Toste (2007), Lehrer (2009), Paradis, Eeg-Olofsson (2013) have emphasized that conceptual metaphors are pervasive in wine advertising/TV/media discourse and that several conceptual frames such as 1) WINES ARE LIVING BEINGS, 2) WINES ARE CLOTHES, 3) WINES ARE THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTIFACTS, 4) WINES ARE BUILDINGS, 5) WINES ARE SHAPEABLE PIECES OF WOOD OR METAL BUILDING MATERIALS²) are common place, in this paper we would like to draw the attention on peculiar categories of conceptual

² These categories were first accounted for by Caballero and Suárez-Toste (2008) in the language of wine reviewing and wine tasting in Romance and Germanic languages.

metaphors related to wine and wine tasting notes that are to be met only in Romanian literary discourse such as WINE IS A DAYBREAK, A SPELL, BLOOD or CRYSTAL LIQUID.

Literary metaphorical extensions are employed in order to convey the wide array of sensations and perceptions in wine tasting and these are based on different source domains such as human/bodily fluid, the beginning of twilight and so on. Our corpus-based research will check whether or not we can identify peculiar or exclusive characterizations of wine in Romanian literary discourse different from those already identified in media discourse. Since wine imagery in Romanian literary discourse is so rich and complex, we believe it is better for the purpose of the current study to choose excerpts from the works of a single writer/poet (Mihai Eminescu) in order to build our corpus.

2. Wine metaphors in Romanian literary discourse

Peculiar conceptual wine metaphors have been identified as characteristic of literary discourse. With Mihai Eminescu, in *Demonism*, the readers comprehend that romantic inebriation is brought about by a beverage which resembles not so much usual wine, but is visually closer to an unusual God's drink sipped from a tall glass, reflecting a rainbow of colours, lost and scattered amongst a foam of white clouds; this wine is a *daybreak*, marking the beginning of twilight before sunrise, highlighting the moment after which the sky is no longer dark:

„Acolo sta la masa lungă, albă, / Bătrânul zeu cu barba de ninsoare / Și din păhare nalte bea auroră / Cu spume de nori albi.” (Eminescu, ed. 1999: 366)

In *Egipetul*, the wine evoked at the end of the poem becomes a profane excessive drink, subject to desacralization, since the once mystic liquor turns unholy, and wearisome are the cases where the heathen liberating effects of the beverage lead to abuse and moral corruption, as well as to endless means of distraction. Wine turns into mere *entertainment* as people enjoy themselves in wine and shout from dusk to dawn:

„Sub nisipul din pustie cufundat e un popor, / Ce cu orașele-i deodată se trezește și se duce / Sus în sălile din Memphis, unde-n săli lumina luce; / Ei petrec în vin și-n chiot orice noapte până-n zori.” (*Ibidem*: 101)

The metaphor WINE IS A SWEET FRAGRANCED SPICE is found in *Memento mori* where the wine of Sardanapal becomes one and the same with the aromatic spices of the largest continent – Asia. This synaesthetic metaphor does not only emphasize wine's structure and body, but it also shapes the perceptual way of tasting in relation to other modes of perception (smell) rendering wine description richer. It shows the readers of *Memento mori* that wine and wine tasting are based on a human experience involving simultaneously two or more senses: taste and smell. This metaphor involves a multi-sensory mapping where smelling becomes involved in the construction and shaping of taste. That is why wine tasting is metaphorically conveyed as smelling a sweet fragranced Asian spice:

„Asia-n plăceri molateci e-mbătată, somnoroasă. / Bolțile-s ținute-n aer de colonne luminoase / Și la mese-n veci întinse e culcat Sardanapal; / Și sub degete măiestre arfele cugetă mite, / După plac și-mpart mesenii a cântării flori uimate, / Vinuri dulci, mirositoare și femei cu chipul pal.” (*Ibidem*: 393)

As we can easily observe from the example above, the cross-sensory mapping where smelling implies the construction and shaping of taste is enriched by another sense: hearing; tasting is not only metaphorically rendered by smell, but it is also linked to a music composition; its metaphorical design also refers to sections or parts of a peculiar music composition once the guests at a feast enjoy and share the amazed flowers of a liquorish song.

Finally, the whole exotic continent gets sleepy and drunken and is permeated by soft lingering vapors of wine.

In the poem *Povestea magului călător în stele*, the wise man serves wine to a young emperor; wine is an unusual *narcotic* visually rendered by the ruby-like color of bull *blood*, hiding treasured written spells:

„O cupă cu versuri, cu cifre de maur / Ia-n mână bătrânul – ca sânge de taur, / Un vin roșu toarnă și regelui dă. [...] O cupă pe margini cu aur / El ia și-n ea varsă cristalicul vin. / Stau în jurul cupei cu cifre de maur / Obscunse vrăji scrise...Ca sânge de taur / E vinul și totuși e clar ca rubin. // - Bea – zice –atunci somnul din muri se coboară / Și ochii-ți sărută cu dulce surâs; / Atunci tu grumazu-i cu brațu-nconjoară, / El aripa lui și-o ridică și zboară, / Te duce cu dânsul în lumea de vis. // Și junele bea și adoarme. Deodată, / Pe ochi buze calde și moi a simțit.” (*Ibidem*: 450-451)

The metaphorical image of wine as narcotic is enhanced and refined by that of wine as magic bloody potion, able to transport the individual to another dimension of reality, mediating the path to a strange spell bound dream provoked by the crystal liquid contents of a cup filled with verses and numbers which accomplish the young emperor's wish to feel soft warm lips on his skin. The magical liquid narcotic makes the young emperor fall into a profound slumber embracing his eyes with a sweet sedative smile.

With the romantic poet, wine is not only a magical narcotic drug, since it is also construed as strange *sacrificial liquid* sipped by the vanquished Dacians (in *Memento mori*), following their defeat by the army of the Roman emperor Trajan, in order not to lead a life in slavery. Wine as sacrificial liquor makes possible for them to commit mass suicide, by sipping the *poisonous* drink out of white, smooth, dry human cups shaped from the enemies' skulls. Goblets filled with alcoholic poison, white, smooth and dry, carved from human skull bones are strangely silver gilded and adorned with finely chiseled gold ears. The environment is surrounded by the tragic vapors of death breaking the night's silence together with the sounds of clinking goblets clanged by defeated Dacians who talk and laugh, mocking death:

„Cupele – țeste de dușman – albe, netede, uscate, / În argint, cu toarte d-aur prea maestru cizelate – / Și cu ele-n mână-nconjur lunga masă de granit; / Vor mai bine-o moarte crudă decât o viață sclavă / Toarnă-n țestele mărețe vin și peste el otravă, / Și-n tăcerea sânt-a nopții ei ciocnesc, vorbesc și râd.” (*Ibidem*: 421)

Voncu (2013: 171) notices that the romantic poet is interested in wine as poetic matter, therefore he seeks it in the works of other poets. The poet lets himself inspired by Goethe in *Cântec de nuntă*, asserts Voncu, and associates wine with the sober Germanic gaiety which is this time stylistically enhanced and rendered by more blatant colors:

„Ș-acum clappai și dappai și rappai, așa / De laiți, scaune, mese. / La masa cea mare oricare ar vre / Să stea lângă puicele-alese. / Și-aduc cârnăciorii, jamboanele mici / Și păsări și pești și fripture pitici / Și vinul înconjură mesele mici, / Și vuiesc, gălăgesc pân'dispare / Întreg-adunare-n cântare. ” (*Ibidem*: 765)

In this example, the metaphorical design illustrates a conceptualization of wine as life sweetener, as peculiar liquid maintaining a friendly feel and atmosphere at a feast prone to carnality. The profane wine liquor and its mouthfeel raises the spirits of the whole assembly and sets the tone of music, made up of swaying vocal pieces with accompaniment, overtures and interludes.

Conclusion

We conclude that the metaphors illustrated in Romanian literary discourse do not only uncover the way a romantic poet conceptualizes wine, but they also function as effective means for conveying the complex sensory experience of tasting and drinking wine to readers.

Our research provides a brief corpus analysis of the range and occurrences of metaphors associated with wine and wine tasting in Romanian literary discourse. The analysis reveals the lexical richness in Romanian romantic poetry and it also makes us become aware that the metaphoric configuration of wines in Romanian literary discourse emphasizes the presence of rare mental images of wine, peculiar images, such as that of wine as daybreak, as sweet fragranced spice, as sacrificial liquid, as narcotic that rather rely upon the conceptualization of wine tasting as a system of complex experiences and sensations, involving the mastership of visual, gustative, olfactory, and tactile mental imagery. Wine literary discourse composes and recomposes emotional and sensory experiences through the richness of the metaphorical thought built around the conceptualization of wine and wine tasting.

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