

# **Metaphor inside the wine cellar: On the Ubiquity of Personification Schemas in Winespeak**

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## **Abstract**

Because there is no single lexicon with the expressive potential to cover all the range of sensorial impressions, the intellectualization of sensory experience is inextricably linked to the figurative uses of language. When technical discourse is under scrutiny the inherent subjectivity of sensory experience represents innumerable difficulties. Anthropomorphic metaphors help conceptualize wines as something more concrete and manageable than a mystical beverage with impossibly picturesque jargon. *Winespeak* relies on different kinds of metaphor, which can be classified according to the experiential domains the lexis is sourced from. In the case of Sherry the predominance of anatomical schemas seems to be even higher than with other wines.

Da der zur Verfügung stehende Wortschatz nicht die gesamte Bandbreite der sensorischen Eindrücke abdeckt, ist die Versprachlichung der sensorischen Erfahrung unausweichlich mit der Verwendung bildlicher Ausdrücke verbunden. Die inhärente Subjektivität der sensorischen Erfahrung führt bei der Erforschung der technischen Fachsprache zu unzähligen Schwierigkeiten. Anthropomorphe Metaphern helfen, Weine als etwas konkreteres und handhabbareres als lediglich ein mystisches Getränk mit unverhältnismäßig bildgeladener Fachsprache. *Winespeak* beruht auf unterschiedlichen Metapherentypen, die entsprechend den erfahrungsmäßigen Gebieten eingestuft werden können. Im Fall des Sherrys scheint die Vorherrschaft der anatomischen Schemata ausgeprägter zu sein als bei anderen Weinen.

## **1. Introduction**

The many discourses around the world of wine offer incredible expressive richness derived, no doubt, from sheer necessity. Much sophisticated wit has been put into this little universe, but even if we filter out what we perceive as unnecessary flourishes we are faced with a discourse that both fascinates and intimidates the general public (see Peynaud 1987). Fun as it may be for the diner to listen to the sommelier, the oenologist faces a radically different dilemma, for the flourishes of the sommelier are utterly useless for his job: naming aromas may sound witty and ingenious, but there are too many other aspects of wine that the oenologist is concerned with. Indeed, because the oenologist needs not sell his own wine his discourse may be properly technical, but because his experience and wisdom must be passed over to the following generations he must find the right metaphors to conceptualize and communicate it. Otherwise wine would be simply undiscussable (see Amoraritei 2002;

Lehrer 1975, 1983, 1992). The incredibly wide range of aromas in wine is probably what attracts most neophytes to this beverage, but because the identification and naming of aromas in a wine is mainly a matter of experience and memory, the use of metaphors is particularly important in the description of a wine's texture (see Gawel 1997; Gawel/Oberholster 2001; Lawless 1984; and especially Nedlinko 2006). Once in the mouth wine transmits different impressions: the most immediate of these is temperature, of course, but more importantly we perceive a series of tactile impressions depending on taste as well as other less simple parameters. These include volume, weight, mouthfeel, and length. It is a traditional fault to use the generic term "taste" loosely to encompass too many aspects, and hence the gross simplification "taste" has become synonymous with "everything that takes place inside the mouth." Actually taste is the most basic element here: sweet, sour, acid, salt; and many of the sensations we popularly call flavors are simply aromas. So how do we move from this familiar territory into the world of "iron wall of tannin," "extremely long," "caressing and round," "assertive and sexy," "hot," or "closed"? In order for a wine to deserve these adjectives we must first assume that they point to different figurative schemas and thus refer to wine as a living creature, a jewel, a building, or a tissue, to name but a few of the metaphorical schemas underlying lexis used to discuss it (see Hughson/Boakes 2001; Solomon 1997). These schemas point to the existence of asymmetrical mappings across two domains, and in our case include among others A WINE IS A BUILDING, A WINE IS A PIECE OF CLOTH, and conspicuously the one I shall claim is ubiquitous A WINE IS A PERSON (which is but a part of the much more comprehensive primary schema WINES ARE DISCRETE LIVING ORGANISMS). I use a concept and formalization of metaphor taken from Lakoff /Johnson's 1980 *Metaphors We Live By*, and Lakoff/Turner's 1989 *More than Cool Reason*. While conceptual metaphors may refer to the wine itself, these are often expanded endlessly to cover other, more specific aspects (its color, its tannin, etc). Moreover, synaesthetically motivated metaphors (normally derived from the sense of touch, sight, and sound) are also recurrently used to express (the subjective perception of) specific parameters such as body, alcohol, acidity, etc. But if there is one inescapable schema in this context, that is surely anthropomorphic metaphor.

## 2. Methodology

This paper studies the recurrent use of anthropomorphic metaphor and focuses on a very specific type of wine production with extremely unusual requirements. The production of the Sherry styles called *fino* and *manzanilla* demands the development of a layer of yeast (called *flor*) on the surface of the wine that isolates it from the air inside the butt (in fact it feeds on oxygen as well as on glycerin, alcohol, and other wine components) and preserves the wine from oxidation, while simultaneously imparting a unique character to it. I shall then concentrate on the misunderstandings derived from the explanation of this process to a British layman. The discursive implication seems to be that the purely scientific jargon, in its aseptic coldness, triggered the “wrong” (i.e., perfectly consequent but undesirable) linguistic realization of the A WINE IS A PERSON metaphor and exposed the dangers of using a strictly technological discourse in front of potential consumers who decidedly need to be offered the prettified version, where the “right” metaphors and the discourse of miracle and mystique are emphasized.

I draw here upon the—preliminary—results of a research project devoted to exploring metaphorical language in *winespeak* and, more specifically, in the description and evaluation of wines as articulated in the genre of the tasting note (evaluative texts aimed at the promotion of wine for a general audience). For these purposes we have built a text corpus consisting of 12,000 tasting notes drawn from the most authoritative British and American publications: *Decanter*, *Wine Enthusiast*, *Wine Spectator*, *The Wine Advocate*, *Wine News*, *The Wine Pages*, and *The Wine Anorak*. These reviews have been deliberately chosen at random, although we were particularly concerned with having wines from as many diverse varieties and wine-producing regions as possible represented in the corpus, since an assortment of climates, vintages, varieties, and styles, may indeed produce wines as different as to demand different realizations of the schemas mentioned. We were also interested in an analyst-centered approach to metaphor (Low 1999) insofar as whether the wine community regards its jargon as metaphorical or not is not the subject of this specific paper.

Though having to decide what is being used metaphorically and what not is hard enough, beyond the identification of such metaphors lies the task of classifying them according to coherent parameters. In this case we have applied the methodology used previously by Caballero (2006) and classified them ini-

tially on the basis of the experiential domains where the lexis seems to originate—the source domains—namely architecture, physiology, anatomy, textiles, among others, while it is no less true that some other instantiations also appear to be synaesthetically motivated and therefore termed cross-modal or inter-sensory metaphors (Ramachandran & Hubbard 2001), intersense metaphors (Yu 2003), or, simply, synaesthetic metaphors (Day 1996).

### 3. Anthropomorphic metaphor in wine tasting notes

Corpus data confirms the pervasive presence of figurative language in the description and assessment of wine. But while Lakoff/Johnson (1980) proposed that figurative language comes into play in order to help articulate the abstract in terms of the concrete (e.g.: LOVE IS A JOURNEY), in wine assessment the properties that demand the use of figurative language are often basic physical ones, such as acidity (e.g.: ACIDITY IS LIGHT). It is not as if acidity could be called an abstract property per se, but it is not reliably measurable by the human palate, and therefore we must resort to figurative expressions sourced from everyday—if at times rather far-fetched—language. It is nonetheless extremely odd that concrete physical properties should demand the use of others sometimes not even equally concrete. A case in point is the recurrence of (to a great extent more abstract) personification: most newcomers experience trouble understanding the meaning of such terms as *masculine/feminine, shy, intellectual, diffident, sexy, demure, extroverted, restrained*, etc. because they are complex terms when applied to (complex) human beings and therefore what gets mapped and what not is not always clear.

Within the figurative repertoire of wine critics most language portrays wines as discrete living organisms (plants, animals or human beings), manufactured entities such as cloth, musical pieces, buildings, and three-dimensional, geometrical bodies, each of which foregrounds only certain aspects of the wine under scrutiny. Among the plethora of examples that we use on a daily basis, the following are particularly illustrative. It is interesting that two or more metaphorical schemas are not mutually exclusive, to the point that it is common to see several of them coexisting peacefully, and complementing each other even within very short texts:

- (1) This has a sweet and savoury nose, with pears, herbs and Chenin damp straw notes. It's quite complex. It smells a bit sweet. The palate is com-

plex and intense, with an unusual texture: it is a little *soft* and *flat* in the middle but then there's an acid *kick* giving it *life* and *definition*. It almost has a cidery *character*. There's amazing length and real separation of flavours. There's a bit of marmaladey, citrus sweetness that suggests a bit of botrytis. It's a wine that is hard to pin down; it's continually changing and showing different *facets*. Excellent. [AK W1]

- (2) [...] the 2001 Batard-Montrachet offers a thick, dense aromatic profile of toasted white and yellow fruits. This rich, corpulent offering reveals lush layers of chewy buttered popcorn flavors. *Medium-bodied* and *extroverted*, this is a *street-walker* of a wine, making up for its lack of *class* and *refinement* with its well-rounded, *sexually-charged assets*. Projected *maturity*: now-2009. [RP W552]

An essential set of expressions draws upon the domain of physiology, which is far from surprising since wine is a mutable substance: this grape juice changes considerably along its *life* inside both oak casks and bottles (during its *breeding* or *ageing*) as well as during the ceremony of service, especially while letting it *breathe* as it *sits* in the glass. The relevance of this schema lies not only on the number of different instantiations, but also in their recurrence and widespread generalization, irrespective of which writers/critics/consumers are speaking. Accordingly, wines are described as living organisms that can *be born*, *fleshen out*, *get rid of [their] puppy fat*, *mature* and *age*, *grow tired*, *thin out*, and, finally, *die*. (Development of these schemas reaches the point where the drinking of a wine in a premature stage of development is often—informally—condemned as *infanticide*). The following tasting notes are illustrative of this point:

- (3) This dramatic wine is dark, *young* and closed. It opens with a flourish of black cherry and currant aromas conjoined with the smoky vanillins of oak, but it hasn't all *come together*. Yet it impresses with its sheer flashy depth. Give this *puppy* a few years to *knit together*. It is a very, very good wine. [WE R1000]
- (4) Lovely toasty notes on the nose here, a nice mineral and smoky *maturity*, and still very good, pure fruit. The palate has a full, lush, very rich palate that is thick and unctuous, with fabulous nectarine juice fruit and a grapey sweetness. Terrific balance here, with a lovely pear acidity and a deal of juicy, thick fruit. Fine acid balance, and really no sign of decay or *tiredness* despite not being from a top vintage. [WP W376]

Another set of expressions focuses on the structural properties of wines, and usually draws upon the domains of anatomy and architecture:

- (5) The *big*, bold, and sultry 2001 Chevalier-Montrachet is a highly *expressive*, *fleshy*, supple wine packed with spices, pears, and minerals. This white chocolate, truffle, cream, and spice-scented beauty is medium-*bodied*, concentrated, and *sexy*. Projected maturity: now-2010. [RP W443]
- (6) A magnificent *edifice* of a wine, elegant and refined in structure but dripping with flavour -a virtual *cascade* of plum, black cherry, blackberry, anise, pepper and exotic spices that lingers on the finish; this just doesn't quit. Best after 2002. 780 cases imported. [WS R459]
- (7) Fantastic modern Chianti! Young but already exuding powerful berry fruit along with loads of cigar box and other attractive spices. The present tense of this wine is all about *layered*, climbing complexity. Its future is all but ensured, with its *tight core*, *solid wall of tannins* and a deep, black cherry finish that lasts a good two minutes. [WE R781]
- (8) A beguiling combination of rich, almost decadent flavors on an upright frame that has a nicely buried *backbone* of acidity and tannin. Nothing is obtrusive, everything is in graceful balance, leaving an ultimate impression of both *muscle* and *flesh*. Best after 2002. [WS R107]

If we narrow this down to the lexis that instantiates the anthropomorphic metaphor we find that the combination—as perceived in the mouth—of alcohol, acids and tannin in a red wine is commonly labeled as its *body*, and the tannins (or acids in certain cases) supporting it as its *backbone* or *spine*. As a consequence of this anthropomorphic view of wine, it is far from surprising to find different wine components referred to as its *nose*, *palate*, or *legs* (sometimes also named *tears*). These are often metonymically motivated (see Panther/Radden 1999; Radden/Kövecses 1999). Other frequent terms instantiating this anatomical schema are *big-bodied*, *robust*, *fleshy*, *backbone*, *sinewy*, *long-limbed*, *fat*, *flabby*, *broad-shouldered*, *lean*, or *disjointed*. Yet other terms point to the 'kinship' relationships among wines (e.g. *clone*, *pedigree*, *sister*, *mate*, *sibling* or *peer*). By way of illustration, consider the following example:

- (9) [A certain wine of the 2001 vintage] does not possess the *muscle*, volume, or weight of the 2000, but it is a beautifully etched, elegant, intensely mineral wine offering hints of white flowers, citrus oils, and earth in its dense, *full-bodied*, chewy *personality*. Like its older *sibling*, it will be delicious in its first 3-4 years *of life*, then close down, to re-emerge 10-12 years later. [RP W320]

While the description of a wine's structure often relies on anatomical lexis, the overall evaluation of the wine is usually dependent on personification: the

wine's *personality* is evaluated by means of adjectives prototypically used in the qualification of human beings (e.g., *brooding, friendly, sexy, voluptuous, boisterous, assertive, sensitive, demure, shy, or expressive*). The diversity of terms used to express (attributed) personality traits of wine is impossible to predict by the layman, and much of the farfetchedness of the genre lies precisely here. Most people consider most of these attributes extremely subjective ones, and it is both curious and frustrating that any one should resort precisely to this grey area in the vicinity of morality in order to transmit anything with precision, but at the same time it speaks of the extent to which personification is—for those inside the discourse—deeply buried in winespeak:

- (10) Fermented in 85% new oak and matured in barrel for 18 months. A light yellow colour, this has a *complex, restrained* nose with nutty, creamy *character*. Delicious rich, savoury palate is quite *elegant* with some citrus notes. Impressive and quite *classy*, but expensive. Very good/excellent. [AK W601]

### *The case of sherry*

The sherry style known as Manzanilla is only possible in the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where the climactic conditions favor the growth of *flor*. The ageing process demands that after fortification from 12% to 15% ABV (alcohol by volume) the wine is aged in butts. Those butts are deliberately not filled to the top of their capacity, to allow room for air. Instead of oxidizing the surface of the wine develops a thick layer of yeast which not only prevents contact between the wine and oxygen, but also flourishes in a frenzy of activity. For their survival these yeast consume alcohol, glycerol, oxygen and acetic acid, among other components. This *flor* is extremely fragile, and only survives in very specific conditions of temperature, humidity, alcoholic concentration, and availability of oxygen. If any of these variables fails the *flor* inevitably dies. That is why every butt is periodically refreshed with small amounts of younger wine (replacing in turn each extraction destined to be bottled or to refill other butts, in what is called the *solera* system). As the wine is transferred from one row of butt to another it ages. These rows are therefore called, very appropriately, *criaderas* ('nurseries'). The effect of *flor* is nothing short of miraculous, transforming (sometimes after seven or more years) a fairly neutral wine into a unique product of almost impossible organoleptic properties.

Vinoble is the biannual fair of sweet and fortified wines celebrated in Jerez. In the 2004 edition of this fair a bodega wanted to display the didactic glass-bottomed butt for visitors to see the thick layer of *flor*, but even the short trip inland to Jerez would have been disastrous for the butt, so they had a round TFT screen custom-shaped to fit in the bottom of an empty butt. The screen displayed the well-known image of the *veil of flor* and soon became a tourist attraction. One such tourist approached us and inquired about the nature of the image. I provided an explanation in the line of what you have just read. Seeing the sediment at the bottom of the butt he also wondered what it was composed of. “The dead yeasts simply sink to the bottom” was my answer. “So this is a bit like the wine’s dandruff?” he whispered, moderately embarrassed by his daring imagination.

I am very much afraid that his realization of the WINE IS A HUMAN BEING metaphor is impeccable. Pejorative to the point of disgusting it sure is, but also accurate. In fact in my mini explanation I cannot have conveyed to what point this metaphor is exacerbated in the context of the Sherry area. Anthropomorphism in the description of wines is particularly conspicuous there, and carried to a hairsplitting extreme where the supposedly more delicate manzanillas are given female names (*Aurora, La Pepa, La Gitana, Gabriela, Charito, La Cigarrera, La Goya, Macarena*) in opposition to finos, which often receive male names (*Marinero, San Patricio, César, Tío Pepe, Tío Mateo*, and most illustratively *Don Fino*). Moreover, the architectural term *fortified* translates into Spanish as *generoso* [‘generous’], yet another instance of personification, related here to alcoholic content. Along the same lines, if a manzanilla, fino or amontillado is not aged enough time under *flor*, it is not sufficiently exposed to its drying, glycerol-eating effect and therefore ends up having too much body. In this context that extra body translates as something negative, which in Spanish is called *gordura* [literally a ‘fatness’ or ‘plumpness’ best described in English as ‘vinosity’] in the most anatomical sense of the term. The opposite quality—however—would be *finura* [‘finesse’], while *delgado*, [‘thin’] is not considered a compliment. When a wine has lost its freshness it is commonly referred to as *cansado* [‘tired’] or even *desmayado* [a wine that has ‘suffered a faint’]. Back to the properly technical jargon (winemaking rather than tasting), the technical term to refer to the process of fortification (the addition of alcohol, and incidentally an architectural term also in French: *fortifié*) is in Spanish *encabezado*, taken from the anatomical

*cabeza* ['head']. This 'addition of head' to the wine emphasizes the identification (conceptualization) of alcohol as spirit. A similar expression (*cabeceo*) refers to the process of blending the different wines. If wine has a head, one should not be very surprised to discover it also suffers from dandruff. This eschatology is far from unusual in the (Spanish) wine world, unflattering as the realizations may sound: Alejandro Fernández, celebrated producer of Tinto Pesquera, once said "Wine is a living creature, and so it pees and poops."

In fact sediment is a much-desired element in many winemaking practices. In Champagne production it is essential because the self-consumption of the yeast (autolysis) must take part inside the bottle, and so the dead cells sink to the bottom of the bottle (which rests slanted on its side). In the making of white Burgundy the wine is often aged on its *lees* (the noble term for this "dandruff") and their periodical stirring is known as *battonage*. It provides the wine with extra complexity and many of the world's greatest and most expensive wines rely on this treatment. But essentially it *is* "dandruff" in all these examples. What is striking is that the British tourist should have chosen precisely the dead *flor* cells to develop the anthropomorphic metaphor. It is of course possible that seeing the butt cut across—which is normally not an available sight in Burgundy—helped him in this odd instantiation. But the champagne bottle prior to disgorgement is usually shown for didactic purposes almost everywhere, as the production of sparkling wines using the *méthode champenoise* is extended nowadays all over the (wine producing) world.

#### 4. Conclusions

The ubiquity of anthropomorphic schemas in winespeak (cf. examples 2-5 and 8-10) is all the more exacerbated in the language of Sherry (we are presently exploring whether this can be applied to the Spanish wine world at large, as a cultural trait). This is perceptible to the point that the average layman, abruptly exposed to this language, identified this feature and expanded this schema to produce his own—extremely original—instantiation. The dandruff anecdote alone, as described in section 3.1) has no more experimental validity than its own weight, but interpreted in the context provided by our 12,000-tasting-note-strong corpus it certainly provides an illuminating point of view about how primeval and influential this schema can prove in the conceptualization

of wine even by the newcomer. On the discursive level this was a disastrous development of the personification schema: from the point of view of promotional language the image is disgusting and much to be avoided, and in the future the spokespeople for all these wine regions should bear in mind the potential dangers of these personifications.

## Corpus

Corpus references follow a basic documentation pattern: source initials (RP for Robert Parker of *The Wine Advocate*, WS for *Wine Spectator*, AK for *Wine Anorak*, etc.), followed by **R** or **W** for R[ed] or W[hite], plus corpus number of tasting note within each type (1 to 1000 of each). Thus [RP W552] refers to white wine number 552 of the tasting notes extracted from *The Wine Advocate*. Because the data have been sourced from the online versions of these publications (some of them only available by subscription) it is virtually impossible to document each example without revealing the identity of the wine at issue, thus probably incurring in copyright liability.

Decanter: <http://www.decanter.com/>

The Wine Advocate: <http://www.erobertparker.com/>

The Wine Pages: <http://www.wine-pages.com/>

WineAnorak: <http://www.wineanorak.com/>

Wine Enthusiast Magazine: <http://www.winemag.com/homepage/index.asp>

Wine News: <http://www.thewinenews.com/>

Wine Spectator: <http://www.winespectator.com/Wine/Home/>

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