

## The Ambivalence in the Metaphor *Life is Wine* from the song “No I in Threesome” by Interpol: The Semantic Analysis of the Lyrics of a Post-Punk Revival Song

La ambivalencia en la metáfora *life is wine* de la canción “No I in threesome” de Interpol: análisis semántico de la letra de una canción *post-punk* revival

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### Abstract

The song with lyrics can be seen as a poetic text due to the evidence of figures of speech, images, and symbolism, as well as, phonetic resources that reflect the musicality of poetic language. In this sense, the post-punk revival band Interpol wrote *No I in Threesome*, the account of a persona trying to convince his significant other to have a threesome. This song includes the metaphor *life is wine*, which makes explicit the poetic value of the song. But not only that, the metaphor also shows how a statement, in this case a statement part of a literary text, can have different meanings.

**Keywords:** literary analysis, song, poetry, post-punk, Interpol, metaphor

### Resumen

La canción con letra puede ser considerada un texto poético, puesto que incluye figuras retóricas, imágenes, simbolismos, así como recursos fónicos que evidencian la musicalidad del lenguaje poético. En este sentido, la banda de *post-punk* revival Interpol compuso “No I in threesome”, la historia de un yo lírico tratando de convencer a su pareja para tener un trío. Dicha canción incluye la metáfora *life is wine*, la cual sirve como ejemplo para demostrar el valor poético del texto, además de exponer como un enunciado, en este caso uno dentro de un texto literario, puede ser entendido de diferentes maneras.

**Palabras clave:** análisis literario, canción, poesía, *post-punk*, Interpol, metáfora

## Background

The indie rock movement from the 2000s represented a re-birth of rock music in which many new bands inspired their sound in the works of iconic bands from the 60s, 70s and 80s, therefore, the emergence of the so called “revival” sound. In this context, post-punk revival comes into the scene, a type of indie rock with many reminiscences of the characteristic sounds of classic post-punk bands from the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s.

In 2002, a New York-based band called Interpol became, with the recording of the debut album, *Turn on the Bright Lights*, one of the most significant exponents of this revival of post-punk. This album evokes many of the voices of the first wave of post punk musicians, but it also gives something else, a new sound that pays tribute to the ones that walk that path first (Sheffield, 2018, para. 1). In terms of lyrics, it is the sense of intimacy and introversion that Interpol seems to borrow from their predecessors when sharing their lyrics, which are into a great extent about human relations and the feelings that come up from these interactions (Kimber, 2020, para. 7); however, there are exceptions in the band’s repertoire.

Their third release, *Our Love to Admire* (2007), includes a fairly peculiar song: *No I in Threesome*, due to their unusual yet honest lyrics. This song shows the perspective of a speaker who is trying to convince his/her lover of engaging into a threesome with the excuse that it is time that their mature relationship takes the next step. Not only the idea of the song is rather original and rare for a pop song, but also it

is skillfully formulated in terms of the writing style. The lyrics exhibit several figures of speech, such as metaphors and personifications, and include a great variety of sensory images than can make the listener get to the conclusion that these are not just regular lyrics of a popular song but an elaborated poem. In this sense, the song stands as monologue in which the persona, mirroring a poet, is using language in an aesthetic and refined way to kind of seduce or convince his beloved of joining him in a nonstandard sexual practice.

Among the many poetic images and figures of speech, the song includes a metaphor that effectively conveys the meaning of the lyrics: *life is wine*. This relation between life and this alcoholic beverage reveals the persona’s attitude towards sexuality and experimentation. Historically, alcohol has been associated to pleasure, excess, and to loosen one’s self. By repeating this metaphor three times throughout the lyrics (see appendix), the persona is making sure that his beloved understands the repercussions of comparing living life and giving one-self to pleasure. Repetition, as a figure of speech, has the purpose of emphasizing meaning. However, is the message that persona tries to convey clear to the lover and to the listener of the song? Is the use of a metaphor the most effective way to communicate the persona’s intentions and feelings?

The meaning of words and the possible new connotations when put together with other words has constituted a problem to language specialists for decades. In this regards, Gilda Pacheco and Kary Meyers (2018) affirm that “linguistic meaning is invariable dynamic because meaning depends on

the context; this makes it impossible to proclaim any final fixed meaning” (p. 100). Context is the one who creates meaning of words. A metaphor should be examined in its context, as a part of a whole. When one reads *No I in Threesome*'s notable metaphor of the wine, one may understand that it represents a complex image evidencing polysemy, several semantic shades. The present analysis corresponds to a literary approach to a non-canonical literary text. The analysis executed would be the analysis of semantic signs in order to give meaning to the words, phrases, and images that make up the song.

### Theoretical Premises

This study aims to analyze the ambivalence related to a specific poetic image included in *No I in Threesome*. Three key aspects to be analyzed are:

- a. The ambivalence of language
- b. Possible connotations of wine
- c. Semantic Implications of the metaphor *Life is Wife*

For the purpose of this study, the lyrics of the song *No I in Threesome* will be read as a poem due to the elements already suggested above that show the similarity of the lyrics to a poem. In this sense, Interpol's song has figures of speech, imagery that appeal to the senses, a persona that expresses the account, and symbolism. Not only that, the song is written in verse form, exhibits instances of rhyme, repeats sounds, and refrains phrases. All these stand for, according to Cara Batema, poetic elements that the song with lyrics presents. Due to this literary tint

meant to be exalted in the text, this study represents an academic exercise, a literary interpretation, a dialogue with the text based on the theory exposed in the following pages.

Regarding the notion of text, Chris Baker (2008) establishes that a text not only constitutes a written work or a piece of literature, but also any signifying practice, anything culturally produced, images, sounds, objects, and activities, that can carry a meaning. The reason for this assumption relies on the fact that all cultural practices are language-like organized, so they can be subjected to a process of interpretation of their semantic elements, in other words, a process of reading (p. 11). This author also claims that texts do not carry meanings; on the contrary, meaning emerges from the interplay between the reader and the text. In other words, it is the act of reading which creates the text and its meaning (ibid), but this will be discussed further on.

In terms of the concept of the song, it, at least the one with lyrics, has its origins in ancient poetic texts which were meant to be sung. These were organized in verses, were recited along with music, and even danced. Poetry and music constituted just one concept in the ancient classical and pre-Hispanic societies (Ureña, 2013, p. xvii). Moreover, there exist remarkable cases of musicians that have taken poems and have put music to them, by that, making evident the musical shade of words and language that poetry exhibits. Some significant instances of these attempts are the case of Paco Ibañez taking Leon Felipe's poems a making songs with them or the case of Leonard Cohen who took a poem written

by Federico Garcia Lorca, added music to it, and released it as a single. To deny the musicality in poetry and the poetry in lyrics represents the denial of the basic first component of poetry: the verse, the rhythmic organization of words and syllables in order to create a sense of musicality. Poetry is musical in its nature.

### **The Ambivalence of Language and Meaning**

Many theorists have dedicated their works to analyze the concept of language because it lacks a fixed meaning, as identified by many deconstructionists, and, paradoxically, because of its vital relevance in many human spheres. In this sense, many experts have pointed out the inconsistency of using an element as fragile and with such volatile meaning as language to define reality, identity, and dominant discourses. If language produces this type of academic uneasiness in these cultural pillars, it is only natural to understand that its blurriness has a significant impact in the world of art, specifically, in a language based artistic expression such as literature.... This reasoning generates an inquiry: how can someone grasp the meaning of a literary or artistic work if the language that was used to materialize it does not have a fixed meaning?

Jonathan Culler (1997) affirms that “there are at least three different dimensions or levels of meanings: the meaning of a word, of an utterance and of a text” (p. 56). Words are the raw material of a literary work. They appear to have fixed meanings found in dictionaries; however, things are not as simple as they seem in practice and,

actually, words have different shades depending on different cultures (and subcultures). Moreover, institutions in charge of studying language such as RAE for the Spanish language do not recognize many linguistic expressions as official although people of specific regions have been using those for a long time. In other cases, dictionaries, which official records of languages, take time to update to include new terminology, therefore, not reflecting new language phenomena at the moment these may appear. In this sense, dictionaries and institutions in charge of studying the meanings of words are not that reliable and do not reflect the reality of language. Utterances represent the reason behind the action of producing the literary work and language, and these are extremely subjective because they depend on the individuality of the artist and his/her cultural background. Finally, there is the product, the text. It constitutes the result of the utterance, and its meaning does not depend on the words, the author, or the utterance, but, according to Culler (1997), on its ability to cause an effect on the reader (*ibid*). The meaning lays somewhere around the interaction of these three, plus the reader. In addition, Culler (1997) believes that language and its meaning also become more difficult to grasp when one takes into account the concepts of the signifier and the signified, which mark a difference between the sound/sign and the thought/concept, between the real and the imaginary (p. 57). The true meaning of a sound/sign will vary because it will recall a different experience in the realm of the imagination and the latter depends on the mind of each subject.

Derrida (1991) goes further and affirms that “all writing, therefore, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general” (p. 91). An effective piece of writing stands for one that anyone can read. A text (a literary text at least) is not born to be read just by one reader. Authors that are considered serious do not write thinking about the reader; they think about the story they want to share. However, when dealing with who has the last word in terms of meaning, Derrida (1991) also affirms:

What holds for the addressee holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer. To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting. (p. 91)

Derrida believes that writing is creating a machine, a system that will work auto-sufficiently, without the help of the creator. This implies (as Barthes would put it) the death of the author, the disappearance of the artist in the process of the creation of meaning. This author continues and affirms that “[p]erformative communication [communication in which the word implies action] once more becomes the communication of an intentional meaning, even if this meaning has no referent in the form of prior or exterior thing or state of things” (1991, p. 99). Language will get meaning when understood within the action derived from it, the word along with the

action it implies are the ones that create the meaning. However, the words used and the action associated to these words as the producer of meaning also present problems due to the fact that in a world of signifiers and signifieds, in which signifieds represent thoughts, there is no homogeneity of meaning of a signifier or an action because thoughts are individual and subjective and they depend on each person’s experiences and reading of a situation. Consequently, performative communication and the reading of this type of communication may be desynchronized because the action will be read differently from its original intention since it will produce different thoughts in the minds of the receivers; the receiver again will not be able to fully grasp the intention of the speaker because they do not share the same thoughts. The intention and the reading of an intention are not the same.

So is this the end? Is textual meaning an impossible task? Is reading a useless practice due to the fact that a reader will never be able to fully understand the intended meaning of a statement? Barthes (1977), who believes in the intertextuality of texts, in other words, in the polyphonic voice of a text and plurality of its origin, states that “a text is made of multiple writings... [however] [t]he reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (p. 143). The reader is the one that gives unity to the text through creating a concise meaning. Likewise, the many voices that make up a text may interfere in the unity of a meaning; however, the reading of a receiver that can pick one semiotic shade from the signifiers

used that create one meaningful textual experience. But another question comes to the table: is there only one reading based on the fact that readers have different thoughts/signifieds when exposed to the same text? No, meaning will vary from reader to reader. Catherine Belsey (1990) discusses the origin of meaning or meanings in a literary work affirms that “language is a social fact” and that the meaning of a statement depends of discursive analysis, and it is the duty of the reader to identify these different discursive tints in order to create multiple meanings (p. 49). Therefore, the meaning of a statement is plural (ibid). Belsey (1990) also believes:

Literary realism [and literature in general] [...] constructs its signifieds out of juxtapositions of signifiers which are intelligible not as direct reflections of an unmediated reality but because we are familiar with the signifying systems from which they are drawn, linguistic, literary, semiotic. (p. 46)

In a world ruled by language and its ambiguity because of the failure of the connection between signifiers and signifieds and the relation of the second with the subjectivity of the mind, the relation between signifiers and the rules created to relate these produce meaning. In other words, the grammatical and semiotic rules of language are the ones that give hope when trying to understand the general meaning of a text. In this sense, the concept of context comes to discussion. Pacheco and Mayers (2018) state that “the meanings of individual words are not fixed, but rather depend on their context”

(p. 119). Context plays a vital role because a word may have a specific meaning depending on the words and grammar structures that surround it.

But what is the relevance of the concepts explained to the metaphor in Interpol’s song? This theory supports the notion that in a metaphor like *life is wine* the word wine may be understood in different ways; therefore, the metaphor will have different semantic shades but, at the same time, the context around the metaphor will contribute to create its meaning.

### The different shades of wine

Interestingly enough, most of the literature written about this alcoholic beverage is from a scientific perspective; they deal with the chemistry, geography, biology, and science related to it and its production. Very few studies see this subject from a more cultural, historical, or literary perspective.

### Taste

Wine has been an element present in literature since ancient times (Ferber, 2007, pp. 237- 238), and Interpol does continue with the tradition of recurring to this alcoholic beverage to convey a deeper meaning, but first of all, what is wine and which are the characteristics of it that are important to the understanding of the lyrics? The main feature of wine, besides its intoxicating quality, is its taste. David Derbyshire (2013) elaborates:

Three of wine's most basic qualities – sweetness, sourness and bitterness – are picked up by the tongue's taste buds. A good wine has the perfect balance of sweet from the sugar

in grapes, sourness from the acids, particularly tartaric and malic acid, and bitterness from alcohol and polyphenols, including tannins.

Wine has a seemingly complex taste. It does not have only one shade; it can be described as sweet, better, and acid at the same time. In terms of this spectrum of taste, Sáenz-Nava-  
jas, Fernandez-Zurbano, and Ferriera (2012) state that:

Balancing the oral sensations of a wine is one of the most demanding tasks for a winemaker, since a distinguishing feature of superior wines is the harmony achieved among these seemingly simple sensations. Indeed, imbalances created by excessive acidity, astringency, or bitterness, among others, are often the first deficiencies noted by a judge. (p. 390)

The *right* taste for wine results of the artistry of the winemaker who tries to balance the different gustatory shades in order to create harmony, but what is harmony and why is it important in order to explain the nature of the taste of wine? Harmony in this case, as in music, is the artistry in the arrangement of the parts of a whole with the purpose of creating pleasure. Winemakers try to arrange and to balance these different tastes, which are the parts of the overall flavor, so that all of them are perceived when one drinks and tastes the beverage. In this sense, this study will center on two main gustatory shades of wine, sweetness and bitterness, and on how these flavors exist metaphorically in the lyrics of *No I in Threesome*.

### Pleasure

Historically, alcoholic beverages have been associated with pleasure. This relation goes back to the ancient Greek tradition and mythology. Wine relates to the deity of Dionysus, who represents “passion, frenzy, and amorality” (Quinn, 2006, p. 183). According to the Greek myth, it was he who discovered that the fermentation of grape fruit produced a beverage that made the being “pervaded by an unwonted sense of pleasurable excitement” (Bereens, 2009, p. 106). Such discovery generated the worshiping of Dionysus through the celebration, dancing, singing, consumption of alcohol, and engaging into sexual intercourse. In the Roman empire, the festivity of Dionysus is present as the Bacchanalia, a secret gathering that lasted three days and included unspeakable vices, alcohol ingestion, and orgies (Schmitz, n.d.). The mythical origin explains it: wine relates to pleasure. Alcohol consumption has a relaxing and pleasing effect. In terms of the concept of wine, passion, and pleasure, Geoffrey R. Scollary (2015) affirms that:

Wine has long been associated with passion, as expressed in art, literature and music. Opera, especially Italian opera, is no exception. In Verdi's *La Traviata*, there is a beautiful brindisi (*Libiamo ne' lieti calici*) in the first act. A brindisi is a toast or drinking song and here Alfredo sings ‘... let's drink from the joyous cups, that beauty so truly enhances ... Let's drink for the ecstatic feeling that love arouses ... Let's drink, my love, and the love among the chalices will make the kisses warmer’. Violetta replies

‘... everything in life which is not pleasure is foolish. Let’s enjoy ourselves for the delight of love is fleeting and quick ...’ (p. 39)

Scollary believes that wine has a direct relation with passion when found in arts. When he analyzes the concept of wine and passion in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, he also deals with the subject of pleasure. As seen in the previous except, the toast of Alfredo includes words such as *joyous*, *beauty*, *ecstasy*, *love*, *kisses*, *enjoy*, and *delight*. All these words are somehow related to pleasure, and the fact that he mentions these words while having a sip of wine links the alcoholic beverage with passion and pleasure.

#### **Losing inhibitions and the irrational**

The ingestion of alcohol, in this case wine, is related to the losing of inhibitions. Alcohol has an intoxicating effect that makes people lose control and behave without following social standards of proper behavior. Furthermore, as stated above, wine has a connection with passion, and when one is under the influence of passion, one cannot think properly. Therefore, being under the influence of wine implies that a person will not be able to use his/her mental abilities at their fullest and, consequently, feelings will influence the actions of this person. Also, revisiting the relation of wine and Dionysus, when Edward Quinn (2006) discusses Nietzsche’s thoughts about the origin of the tragedy and drama, he points out some significant ideas about the bond between the god and the irrational:

For Nietzsche, the Apollonian (after the god Apollo) stands for order,

rationality, and moral behavior, while the Dionysian (after Dionysus, the god of wine) represents the spontaneous, irrational, and amoral spirit of life. Nietzsche employs these terms in his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in which he argues that Greek tragedy is essentially Dionysian, rooted in powerful and primitive emotions, and that the Apollonian element is a later accretion. (p. 38)

There is a yin-yang relation that explains the extremes that form the human nature: the human essence is made of two main parts: the rational and moral (Apollonian) and the irrational, connected to Dionysus and everything he represents (wine). So when one person drinks wine, the beverage prompts his/her irrational part to emerge; therefore, losing all moral and rational restraints, moving away from that Apollonian and rational side that influences his/her behavior when sober.

### **Semantic Implications of the Metaphor Life is Wine**

#### **Sweet**

Interpol, in consistency with previous points in this article, implies that life and wine share the characteristic of being sweet. The sweetness of life can be associated with pleasure and situations of comfort and wellbeing. The songs as some instances of this which directly support the main metaphor here discussed.

The first two verses of the song represent one first instance of life holding this connotation; the verses read:



*Through the storms and the light<sup>1</sup>  
baby you stood by my side and life  
is wine.*

These lines introduce the image of storms that work as a metaphor symbolizing problems one may face in life. In addition, Interpol states the way in which the significant other (this is inferred through the use of the noun “baby”) sometimes constitutes a vital support when facing difficult situations. The band ends the idea with the metaphor *life is wine*, stating that having the support of the significant other in difficult moments turns out to be so gratifying that it can be related to the sweet moments in life and with the sweetness of wine. The positive connotation of that metaphor, the sugary flavor of the liquor, relies on the previous part of that section: *baby you stood by my side*.

A second case in which Interpol suggests that life may have a sweet part and that connects to this central metaphor of wine stands the following verses:

*And baby, tonight  
I see your lips are on fire and life  
is wine  
Now the windows are open, the  
moon is so bright  
Cause no one can tell us what love  
brings for you and I*

Sexual connotation (which has a direct relation to pleasure and the sweetness being discussed) is present in the first two lines. The writers accomplish this by the use of the image *your lips are on fire*. First of all, the lips are a part of the body that are related to the sexual act; the mouth has a significant role in kissing, licking, and other

sexual protocols. Second, fire refers to sex due to the fact that fire relates to passion, so by saying that the lips are on fire, the persona sees and may feel that fire. The passion of the significant other is placed in this part of the body.

Lines three and four work as a picture to create a mood that supports this notion of passion and sexuality. *The windows are open* may reflect that both, the persona and the significant other, are opening to a new sexual experience (this image supporting the theme of the song, a threesome). The moon shining also present in the image is related to lunacy, to losing one's mind. Lunacy was once believed to be caused by the phases of the moon; it was a momentary insanity caused by the moon. The etymology of the words *lunacy* and *lunatic* show that both have their origin in the Latin term is *luna*, which means moon (Lilienfeld & Arkowitz, 2009, p. 64). So the moon is believed to cause a distorted state of mind, and when the persona in the poem affirms that *the moon is so bright*, he implies that they may be affected by the light of this mythical satellite and that they may lose rational abilities and inhibitions and give themselves to pleasure. In this sense, these four verses relate to pleasure and losing inhibitions, two of the possible notions related to liquor (and the sexuality implied, associated to the gratifying part of life and to the sweetness described in the central metaphor).

Interpol continue with the subject of sexuality in the following verses:

*Sound meets sound, babe  
The echoes, they surround*

What is described in the first two lines constitutes an echo, the reflection of a sound in a surface, and these sounds in the verses are, perhaps, the echoes of moaning. The first line reads *sound meets sound, babe* and, given that before the persona and the significant other engaged into sexual activity when describing the lips and moonlight images, the sounds meeting could be the moans that the two lovers are producing because of the sexual act. This auditory image is reinforced when the persona says *the echoes, they surround* because the moans are too many that they bounce and start filling the room; the two lovers are surrounded by the many moans they are producing, and the hyperbole captures the delightful moment.

All these instances demonstrate in which way the lyrics show a shade of wine related to pleasure, happiness, sexuality, losing inhibitions, and gratification which, at the same time, are reflected in the sweetness of this alcoholic beverage.

### Bitter

The song represents a highly complex piece of writing and makes evident that not only the sweet part of the metaphor *life is wine* has a significant role in the song. On the other hand, the lyrics also introduce a series of images which relate to ungratifying experiences in a romantic relationship; life has a bitter part because wine is not only sweet, but also bitter. In this sense, the persona, in the first lines of the song, affirms:

*Through the storms and the light  
Baby, you stood by my side and life  
is wine  
But there are days in this life*

*When you see the teeth marks of  
time, two lovers divide*

The first two lines were already discussed above; they are related to the comfort of having the significant other supporting the persona in difficult situations, and he finishes this first idea with the central metaphor. However, the important lines for this section of this study are verses three and four and the relation they have with the wine metaphor. These verses expose a metaphor in which time is endowed with life, but it is not human life. Time resembles a beast, perhaps a dog that bites and leaves a mark. Now having an animal biting a person can be a traumatic and painful experience. So the persona, by using this figure of speech, implies that there are days in which he can see how time has passed and has left a detrimental and painful mark in the relationship. Those days, maybe, are days in which the relationship has presented problems and, when these appear, the two can see how there are still marks that they haven't healed from previous arguments and come to sight every time they engage into a new argument. They are still carrying the problems from the past that have affected the relationship.

These notions expressed through this figure of speech relate to the metaphor *life is wine* due to the fact that, as explained before, wine does not only taste sweet, but also bitter. Consequently, the central metaphor *life is wine*, used to close the image of support in storms and lighting, also works as an introduction for the image of time biting the persona. In this sense, *life is wine* acquires a double meaning; if related to the previous idea (storms and support) this wine tastes sweet. But if read in

relation to the next image (time biting the persons involved in the romantic relation), it acquires a different semantic shade; wine, in this case, will taste bitter. At the end, as explained above, meaning depends on context, the words and images surrounding, in this case, the wine metaphor.

After these lines, the persona gives more images that support the idea that the central metaphor of the song can be understood as life having bitter moments, take the case of the following:

*Sound meets sound, babe  
The echoes, they surround  
And all that we need is one thing  
Now what is there to allow?*

These verses work as a pre-chorus in the song and at the same time contribute to develop the opposing semantic shades of the central metaphor (sweet vs. bitter). Before, when seeing life as sweet, these lines implied the joy and ecstasy in a sexual encounter evident in the many moans of pleasure that fill the room. But, when seeing the first two verses understanding that life is bitter and reading these as a continuation of the previous idea that time has bitten and left a mark in the relationship, the sounds and echoes here are not the result of the physical act of love but can be interpreted as a manifestation of an argument. From this perspective, sounds meeting can be understood as a fight in which the parties are offending and even screaming to each other. In this sense, the image stands for a couple saying offences to each other; one of the parties says an insult at the same time that he/she is receiving the insult of the other party. Following this interpretation, the verse *The echoes, they surround* would be,

first, (and as explained when this verse depicted the sexual act) a hyperbole that portrays the couple filling the room with the many insults they say to each other, making this space an unbearable place for living, but the reader should pay attention to a significantly important word in this line: *echoes*. This word seems to be very revealing because an echo, as explained before, constitutes the reflection of a sound in a given surface, and when the speaker of a given sound listens to the echo of the sound s/he made, s/he is receiving a reminiscent of a sound that is no longer being produced. In this sense, an echo stands for a direct referent of the past. In terms of the lyrics, the echoes in *The echoes, they surround* represent previous problems and unresolved arguments that are coming to the present again when the couple fights, and these unresolved issues are so numerous that they also start filling the space of the couple; everything that surrounds them relates to previous fights that have left marks in the relationship. All their context is stained with the bitterness of their past together.

Another part of the lyrics which is connected to the bitter taste of wine corresponds to:

*Oh, alone we may fight, so just let  
us be three tonight*

In this verse, the persona declares that the couple may have problems when they are alone; their intimacy may be tumultuous at that specific moment of the relationship. This section of the lyrics makes evident that not everything in the life of a couple is pleasing and satisfying. Lovers in real relationships experience many conflicts throughout their time together.

The persona gives a solution to the excessive fighting: *let us be three tonight*, an invitation to have a threesome. The invitation of a third for the sexual act also evidences the lack of passion between the two of them; they cannot create any desire in the other person, a dark and lamentable side of a relationship that seems to be immersed in a violence-like cycle in which the relationship may be fueled by constant fighting.

### Final Remarks

This study aimed to explain, taking into consideration the thoughts of significant theoreticians of language and culture, the different semantic variations of a metaphor in the lyrics of a song when juxtaposed to the context that surrounds and complements this figure of speech. By doing so, this article used the specific instance of a post-punk revival song to exemplify the problem that meaning represents for scholars of language.

The review of the theory related to language and meaning revealed the fragility of the latter element. Meaning is not something fixed or given by divine right; on the other hand, it represents another social construct. The problem comes when individuals try to define their reality, identity, and experience in the world based on such unstable concepts as language or meaning because these are subjected to the interpretation of signifiers. In other words, the meaning of an utterance does not depend on the speaker; it depends on the reading that the receiver does of the text; however, this last has to be able to speak to more than one receiver. Therefore, readers give meanings (not Meaning) to signifiers; their reading

is a subjective decoding of the elements of an utterance in which variables such as context play a vital role in the attribution of meaning.

Following this logic, the analysis of just the word wine in the metaphor *life is wine* demonstrated that this word has different shades as a poetic image. When connected to the sense of taste, wine as a beverage represents the conjunction of two opposite flavors, bitterness and sweetness. From a historical and cultural perspective, it has also been related to pleasure, to the irrational part of the human psyche, and to the loss of inhibitions. The review of theory demonstrated that wine constitutes a recurrent symbol in art and literature, carrying all semantic shades as well.

The analysis of the lyrics pointed out that the metaphor has different semantic shades when read within the context of the other images that surround it, giving two possibilities: life is wine as a reference to the gratifying experiences of having a significant other, which includes the pleasure derived from the exercise of sexuality, and life is wine as a manifestation of bitterness that sometimes follows being in a conflictive and worn out amour. The metaphor works as an example of the volatile meaning of words and ideas and of the relevance of context in order to create meaning. Moreover, the analysis of artistic expressions like this song makes evident the subjectivity in the act of reading.

To conclude, this study not only represents an academic exercise, but also is relevant for the academic sphere due to the fact that it opens the door to the study and analysis of non-canonical works or works not considered literature but that have an artistic value and question human experience.

Cultural productions like this song show that human capacity to create art goes beyond the traditional artistic expressions; it is a good time for the academia and the critics to start noticing this.

## Notes

1. Some lyrics online have the word “lie” instead of “light,” which would suggest that part of those problems in life would be a lie; could that be the lie of living, the promises that life give but do not become real?

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## Appendix

### “No I in threesome”

by Interpol (taken from Genius.com)

Through the storms and the light  
Baby, you stood by my side and life is wine  
But there are days in this life  
When you see the teeth marks of time, two lovers divide

Sound meets sound, babe  
The echoes, they surround  
And all that we need is one thing  
Now what is there to allow?

Babe, it's time we give something new a try  
Oh, alone we may fight, so just let us be three

And baby, tonight  
I see your lips are on fire and life is wine  
Now the windows are open, the moon is so bright  
Cause no one can tell us what love brings for you and I

Sound meets sound, babe  
The echoes, they surround  
And all that we need is one thing  
Now what is there to allow?

Babe, it's time we give something new a try  
Oh, alone we may fight, so just let us be three tonight

Through the storms and the light  
Baby, you stood by my side and life is wine  
You feel the sweet breath of time  
It's whispering its truth, not mine  
There's no I in threesome

And I am all for it  
Babe, it's time we give something new a try  
Oh, alone we may fight  
And feathers bend like trees in the moonlight  
Babe, it's time we give something new a try  
Oh, alone we may fight, so just let us be three tonight