



## **The Concept of the Heart in Spanish Prose: Cognitive and Cultural Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the conceptualization of the heart in Spanish prose, focusing on the interaction between cognitive metaphor, emotional representation, and cultural symbolism. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and narrative studies, the research examines how the heart functions as a central symbol in Spanish literary texts from the 19th to the 21st century. The study identifies recurring metaphorical patterns in which the heart is associated with emotion, morality, identity, and relationality. The analysis reveals that Spanish prose writers frequently employ heart imagery to construct psychological depth, mediate interpersonal relations, and express moral or ethical dimensions of characters. Furthermore, the symbolic heart serves as a cultural marker, reflecting social values, gender norms, and historical perceptions of affectivity. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between cognitive metaphor, literary style, and cultural models in Spanish narrative discourse.

**Keywords:** heart concept, Spanish prose, cognitive metaphor, literary symbolism, emotion, identity, cultural cognition, narrative studies.

The heart has historically occupied a central position in the human conceptual system, functioning both as a physiological organ and as a metaphorical locus of emotion and moral judgment [Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 45]. In Spanish prose, the heart often serves as a semiotic node around which narrative, psychological, and ethical dimensions coalesce. Authors from Romanticism to contemporary literature consistently draw upon heart imagery to convey both individual subjectivity and relational experience [García 2011: 78].

Romantic and realist Spanish prose texts frequently employ the heart as a metaphor for emotion and inner life. For example, phrases such as *tener un corazón noble* (“to have a noble heart”) or *romper el corazón* (“to break the heart”) reflect the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS A PHYSICAL ENTITY CONTAINED IN THE HEART. These expressions illustrate how the heart operates as a central metaphorical vehicle for conveying affective and moral states, thereby structuring the reader’s understanding of characters’ internal worlds [Barcelona 2000: 102].



In 20th-century Spanish prose, the heart acquires additional layers of symbolic meaning. Modernist and postmodernist writers often employ the heart to negotiate identity, social constraints, and ethical dilemmas. In works by authors such as Unamuno, Cela, and Sánchez Ferlosio, heart imagery is linked to existential reflection, vulnerability, and moral responsibility [Hernández 2015: 134]. The heart becomes both a locus of personal authenticity and a cultural symbol mediating between tradition and modernity.

Furthermore, gendered patterns emerge in the metaphorical representation of the heart. Female characters are often depicted through heart-centered metaphors emphasizing relationality, sensitivity, and emotional labor, whereas male characters' hearts are sometimes associated with courage, moral fortitude, or ethical struggle. These patterns reflect broader cultural scripts regarding affectivity, social roles, and normative expectations [García 2011: 95].

The analysis also demonstrates that heart imagery is not confined to isolated expressions but pervades narrative structure and stylistic strategy. Symbolic references to the heart organize plot development, emotional tension, and thematic coherence, revealing the integration of metaphorical conceptualization into literary form. Moreover, the recurrent use of the heart as a symbol highlights the entanglement of cognitive, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions in Spanish prose discourse [Barcelona 2000: 145].

In conclusion, the concept of the heart in Spanish prose functions simultaneously as a cognitive metaphor, narrative device, and cultural symbol. Its representation reflects universal mechanisms of embodied cognition while simultaneously encoding culturally specific perceptions of emotion, morality, and identity. The study underscores the importance of metaphorical analysis for understanding the intersection of literature, cognition, and culture in Spanish narrative traditions.

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