EMOTIONS UNDER PRESSURE: HUMORAL RESIDUES IN ROMANIAN IDIOMS OF ANGER AND SPITE

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Abstract This article explores how conceptual traces of humoral theory, particularly those linked to yellow bile and the choleric temperament, persist in contemporary Romanian idioms. Through an analysis of idioms linked to yellow bile, the present paper seeks to understand how cognitive metaphors of rage, spite, and envy – emotions long tethered to the choleric temperament – preserve a worldview in which bodily fluids once explained emotion and behaviour. The expression of such emotional dispositions as a boiling liquid, as excess and pressure, reveals not only the metaphorical architecture of emotion but also the lingering presence of premodern medical models in everyday language. The analysis is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Cultural Linguistics (CL), and Conventional Figurative Language Theory (CFLT), and is extended through Cultural Residue Theory (CRT), which frames idioms as linguistic fossils of cultural knowledge embedded in speech. The paper highlights how language, embodiment, and cultural memory intersect in the persistence of these expressions and proposes future research into idioms tied to the other humours and across Romance languages, where shared conceptual patterns may reveal further residues of humoral thought.
Keywords Idioms, humoral theory, Cultural Residue Theory, Romanian phraseology, emotion metaphors.

1. Introduction

The history of human thought is marked by persistent efforts to understand not only the cosmos but also the human self, its behaviour, emotions, and inner structure. Among the many lenses through which this has been attempted, humoral theory stands out for its long-lasting influence on how emotions were imagined, named, and explained across cultures. Though now obsolete,

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this ancient model continues to echo through language, particularly in idiomatic expressions grounded in bodily fluids such as bile.

This article investigates the conceptualisation of yellow bile in Romanian idioms, focusing on how this humour (and the emotional dispositions traditionally linked to it, such as rage and envy) have shaped cultural models of embodiment, affect, and cognition. More specifically, it seeks to uncover how the concept of bile, as a humoral body fluid, serves as a metaphorical bridge between bodily states and emotional experiences. To account for the persistent symbolic power of bile-related expressions, this study proposes a theoretical framework, Cultural Residue Theory (CRT), that addresses the conceptual afterlife of humoral theory.

Based on a corpus of idiomatic expressions collected from Romanian lexicographic sources, this study explores how references to bile (*fiere*, *bilă*) and its associated chromatic and emotional fields (yellow, green; rage, envy) encode culturally embodied understandings of the self and the passions. Through semantic and cognitive analysis, it uncovers how these idioms operate as metaphorical mappings between body and emotion and as cultural fossils that preserve fragments of older ways of knowing.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, grounded in frameworks from Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural Linguistics, and Diachronic and Historical Linguistics. It also incorporates a complementary approach, Cultural Residue Theory, to examine the persistence of humoral concepts in idiomatic expression.

The primary data consists of idiomatic expressions drawn from a range of Romanian lexicographic works, including general dictionaries[1] and phraseological collections.[2] The selection criteria focused on expressions containing lexemes such as *fiere, bilă* ('bile'), *venin* ('venom'), and colour terms traditionally linked to yellow bile (*galben* – 'yellow', *verde* – 'green'), as well as idioms that explicitly or implicitly evoke emotional states historically associated with the choleric temperament: rage, spite, anger, envy, and irritability.

Idioms were analysed in terms of their semantic structure, metaphorical motivation, and cultural grounding. Special attention was paid to conceptual metaphors (e.g., anger is heat, the body is a container), image schemas, chromatic symbolism, and cultural models of embodiment. This analysis aimed to uncover how these expressions encode culturally specific conceptualisations of emotion, as well as how they act as residues of pre-modern medical and emotional systems. The methodology integrates both synchronic and diachronic perspectives: idioms are treated not only as expressions of current cognitive structures but also as conceptual fossils – linguistic traces of a worldview in which bodily fluids were central to understanding the self, its health, diseases, passions.

[1] *Dicţionarul limbii române* (DLR 2000), *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii romîne* (DEX 2009), *Dicționarul limbii romîne literare contemporane* (DLRLC 1955-1957).

[2] Vasile Ilincan*, Dicționar de expresii românești în contexte,* 4 vols. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2015–2021).

3. Theoretical background

The study of idiomatic expressions rooted in the bodily humours, such as those centred on bile in Romanian, requires more than a semantic or lexical analysis. It calls for a theoretical framework that brings together language, culture, and cognition. Through linguistic expressions and idiomatic usage, we gain access not only to lexical remnants of humoral theory but to deeper imaginaries that continue to reverberate through collective representations. As an anthropological notion, *l'imaginaire*[3] helps us interpret how past models of the body and emotion become sedimented in language. It shapes our understanding of history, configures social memory, and offers continuity between inherited knowledge and current discourse. In this light, idioms related to bile are not linguistic curiosities, but traces of how cultures have imagined the body and the passions, how they have encoded emotional knowledge, and how these visions continue to circulate in everyday language.

To explore how such expressions are formed and interpreted, this analysis engages with three complementary theoretical frameworks: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural Linguistics, and Diachronic & Historical Linguistics. These approaches together help explain the embodied logic of metaphor, the cultural models that inform idiomatic meaning, and the historical continuities that anchor figurative language in past conceptual systems.

To complement these, the Cultural Residue Theory (CRT) is introduced and aimed at understanding the diachronic persistence of humoral concepts in modern phraseology. Inspired by Tylor's notion of "survivals,"[4] Raymond Williams' concept of "residual culture,"[5] and Sharifian's theory of "cultural conceptualisations" (see below), CRT proposes that many idioms function as conceptual residues. These are fragments of past worldviews that remain embedded in contemporary metaphor systems. Even if they are no longer epistemologically central, these residues still shape emotional discourse in subtle, embodied, and culturally meaningful ways.

3.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

[3] *L'imaginaire*, as it appears in the works of Durand and Bachelard, is a complex network of symbols, archetypes, and sensory metaphors through which humans interpret their world. Rich in philosophical and artistic implications, this concept shapes our narratives, dreams, as well as our understanding of both the outer and inner worlds, including the body and its humours.

[4] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1, chap. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871). (Survivals are described as cultural practices, customs, or beliefs that have persisted into modern times despite having lost their original context or function).

[5] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), chaps. 8–9 (Williams distinguishes between dominant, residual, and emergent elements in culture. Residual culture refers to traditions or meanings from earlier social formations that persist into the present, often reinterpreted but still active).

The conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson[6] and later refined by Lakoff[7] and others, offers a cognitive framework for understanding how we interpret abstract experiences, such as emotions, morality, social behaviour, through metaphors grounded in the body. In this view, metaphor is not just a stylistic or rhetorical figure, but a fundamental cognitive mechanism that allows speakers to reason about the intangible by relying on what they can feel, see, or touch.

Lakoff and Johnson, and later Kövecses, argue that metaphor is not language-specific but a cognitive habit: many of the same figurative patterns (about time, emotion, or the self) are cross-linguistically consistent.[8] As Kövecses explains, "If metaphor is based on the way the human body and brain function and we as human beings are alike at the level of this functioning, then most of the metaphors people use must also be fairly similar, that is, universal – at least at the conceptual level."[9]

Lakoff and Johnson identify several cognitive operations central to figurative thought: metaphor, metonymy, and analogy. Metaphor enables us to understand abstract notions in terms of more concrete ones (e.g., *anger is heat*), while metonymy operates within a single domain, using a part or quality to stand for the whole and vice versa. In emotion-related idioms, bile may stand metonymically for anger or bitterness, resting on ancient physiological models. In French, for instance, *colère* no longer refers to the bodily fluid itself, but it preserves the emotional profile once linked to yellow bile, reflecting a lasting influence of the humoral theory, particularly in its association with the choleric temperament: hot-headed, irritable, quick to anger. These cognitive operations do not occur in isolation; they interact with one another and are deeply tied to embodied experience and to the cultural knowledge that shapes how we read those experiences.

A core premise of CMT is that bodily experience underlies conceptualisation. Emotions are accompanied by physical responses. Anger, for instance, is often conceptualised as heat rising, pressure building, or a boiling sensation within. Conceptual metaphors like *anger is heat*, *anger is fire, anger is a hot fluid in a container*, or *the body is a container*[10] are widely attested across languages and reflect common physiological responses. These metaphors correlate to what Johnson[11] describes as image schemas – recurrent embodied patterns that organise thought. The *container* schema, in particular, refers to the body as a bounded space that can hold, contain, or release emotion. Romanian idioms like *a fierbe în sine* ('to boil inside') or *a da pe dinafară de nervi* ('to burst with anger') express this conceptual mapping.

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[6] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[7] George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[8] Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 319.

[9] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture*, 34.

[10] George Lakoff and Zoltán Kövecses, "The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English," in *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*, ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 197, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511607660.009.

[11] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

One of the most productive conceptual metaphors for emotion is *anger is a fluid in a container*, widely attested across European languages and grounded in physiological experience (Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 1990; Gibbs, 1990). In Romanian, the same metaphor supports a broad set of somatic idioms: *a fierbe sângele în vine* ('to have boiling blood in one's veins'), *a crăpa de ciudă* ('to burst with spite'), or *a-și vărsa veninul* ('to pour out one's venom'). These expressions capture emotional build-up and release, mirroring real somatic responses like rising temperature or pressure. Beyond these metaphors, some Romanian terms, such as *fiere*, *venin* ('bile', 'venom'), or the colours *galben, verde* ('yellow', 'green') carry cultural echoes of the four humours. The connection between yellow bile and the choleric temperament (hot, dry, irritable) persists in idioms like *a se înverzi de mânie* ('to turn green with anger'). French also retains traces of the humoral theory in idioms involving venom and bile, as *a-și vărsa veninul* ('to spill one's venom') or *a-și face venin* ('to make oneself venom' – to accumulate anger).

While contemporary speakers may no longer consciously link these expressions to ancient medicine, the conceptual patterns remain. As Sharifian[12] and Yu[13] suggest, systems like the four humours persist as cultural models – shared mental templates that once made sense of the body and still quietly shape our language. Although they may originate from a particular historical context, such models often become so internalised that their origins fade from the cultural memory. In this light, the distinction between historical medical theories and the idioms they inspired becomes less relevant. What remains is a conceptual system that continues to shape linguistic expression and emotional representation.

These cross-linguistic patterns support the idea that shared embodied experiences give rise to similar metaphors, but they don't erase cultural differences. As later developments in CMT have shown, metaphors are not culturally neutral. While the early theory leaned toward universality, scholars like Kövecses[14] have argued that metaphors vary across languages and are influenced by sociohistorical context and dominant cultural imaginaries. In this view, conceptual metaphors are neither entirely universal nor strictly culture-specific: they arise from bodily experience, but shaped by the imaginaries, values, and collective histories of each speech community.

In this analysis, CMT offers a necessary lens – one that works best when paired with cultural and historical approaches. It helps us see how idioms linked to bile are more than just colourful language. They are metaphorically and cognitively motivated, mapping physical sensation onto emotional experience. And they carry the traces of older ways of knowing. These

[12] Farzad Sharifian, René Dirven, Ning Yu, and Susanne Niemeier, "Culture and Language: Looking for the 'Mind' Inside the Body," in *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs across Cultures and Languages*, ed. Farzad Sharifian et al. (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 12

[13] Ning Yu, "The Chinese Conceptualization of the Heart and Its Cultural Context: Implications for Second Language Learning," in *Applied Cultural Linguistics: Implications for Second Language Learning and Intercultural Communication*, ed. Farzad Sharifian and Gary B. Palmer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), 65–85.

[14] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture*.

idioms are not just lexical relics of the humoral theory; they represent deeply rooted metaphorical systems through which emotional life is conceptualised and communicated.

3.2. Cultural Linguistics

While CMT gives us a strong foundation for understanding how metaphor is rooted in the body, it does not fully explain how culture gives figurative language its specific shape. This is where Cultural Linguistics (CL) as developed by Sharifian, adds crucial insight. CL starts from the idea that idioms are more than expressions – they are cultural artefacts. They carry the weight of a community's history, worldview, and emotional logic. Figurative meaning may begin in embodied experience, but it is filtered through the lens of shared cultural understanding. This is one reason why idioms often defy literal translation: they are built on metaphors and schemas unique to each linguistic community.

Gibbs[15] writes that language and thought arise from recurring patterns of embodied activity. Ionescu[16] similarly describes idioms as "language products of cultural collective thought, based on experiential events recorded in a nation's history and civilization." Sharifian's model of collective cultural cognition helps explain how conceptual patterns are preserved and transmitted across generations. In his view, language serves as a "collective memory bank" – a living archive of cultural meanings.[17] Idioms, in this framework, function not only as fixed expressions, but as vehicles of communal knowledge and perception. This aligns with CMT's focus on metaphor, but CL emphasises that metaphorical meaning is filtered through culturally specific frames. For instance, emotions like rage, envy, or bitterness are often linked to yellow bile in the humoral tradition. How these emotions are talked about, where they are felt in the body, how they are understood – these may vary by culture.

This helps explain why idioms resist straightforward translation: their meaning is structured by cultural schemata, frames, and metaphors unique to each linguistic community. Expressions such as *a se face foc și pară* ('to become fire and flame') are not just metaphors of intensity, they also carry with them a culturally mediated view of the body as the stage for emotion.

However, recent findings in cognitive psychology supports the idea that, despite cultural differences, there are also patterns of global regularities. A large-scale study by Jonauskaite and Mohr (2020), found strong cross-cultural links between emotions and colours. The findings revealed a surprisingly high degree of global consensus; for instance, red was consistently linked

[15] 11. Raymond W. Gibbs, "Embodied Experience and Linguistic Meaning," *Brain and Language* 84, no. 1 (2003): 2.

[16] Daniela Corina Ionescu, *Food Idioms and Proverbs in English and Romanian: A Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Approach* (Bucharest: Oscar Print, 2017), 11

[17] Farzad Sharifian, *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011).

with both love and anger. Such results may reflect shared cognitive patterns, even across culturally diverse populations.[18]

Another example would be the Romanian and French contexts, where the historical contact and shared Latin heritage have contributed to overlapping conceptual frameworks. French influence during the 19th century played a major role in the modernisation of the Romanian language and culture, particularly in its lexicon. At the same time, broader Romance language ties also shaped similar phraseological and metaphorical systems. These contacts have not only facilitated lexical borrowing but also shaped similar cognitive representations, reflected in parallel phraseological expressions. Building on Sharifian's theory, cultural cognition is best understood as a dynamic, distributed system, shaped through time, space, and repeated social interaction. It evolves collectively, rather than residing in individual memory alone.[19] As Sharifian notes, "cultural cognition is a form of distributed cognition, with emergent properties rooted in the collective minds of cultural groups."[20]

A key aspect of this framework is cultural conceptualisation, the shared process through which meaning is assigned to experience through frames, categories, and metaphors. These conceptualisations often emerge from everyday experiences of the body, such as the common metaphor *anger is heat* (Sharifian, 2002, p. 5). Language, then, becomes the medium through which these cultural schemas are encoded, stored, and transmitted. As Frank (2003) notes, language serves both as a memory bank and a medium for transmitting socioculturally embodied meanings.

Another important dimension in understanding figurative language is the role of emotion schemas – culturally defined models of how emotions are felt, understood, and expressed. According to Palmer (1996) and Lutz (1987), emotions are not purely internal; they are structured by the social contexts in which they arise. Idioms often encode emotion schemas, showing not just how emotions are felt, but also how they are culturally interpreted. Thus, emotions like anger, envy, or bitterness, often metaphorically tied to yellow bile, become structured emotional meanings passed down within communities. Even the body itself is culturally constructed. According to, "whatever the role of body in our cognitive life, […] conceptualisations of 'body' may be culture-specific and, in general, the body takes part and acts as a conceptual resource for our cultural experience."[21] The liver or gallbladder may be organs, but in metaphorical language, they become emotional symbols, shaped by old ideas about humours, colours, and temperaments.

Finally, there is the question of whether metaphors reflect culture or shape it. Some scholars (e.g., Quinn 1987) argue that metaphors reflect pre-existing cultural models, while others, such as Lakoff and Kövecses (1987), suggest that metaphors can actually constitute those models. Kövecses (1995) proposes a layered model that includes physiology, metonymy, metaphor, and

[18] Alice Ionescu, "Les 'couleurs des émotions': Approche contrastive français-roumain," *Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Științe Filologice. Limbi și literaturi romanice* 26, no. 1 (2022): 36.

[19] Farzad Sharifian, "On Collective Cognition and Language," in *Language and Social Cognition*, ed. H. Pishwa (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 3.

[20] Sharifian, "On Collective Cognition and Language," 3.

[21] Sharifian, *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*, 22

cultural models. In this view, humoral theory is not just background knowledge; it functions as a deep cultural model, built through metaphorical and analogical mapping. The metaphorical system of anger may therefore be understood as both emerging from and reinforcing this inherited model.[22] As Sharifian points out, cultural cognition often accommodates multiple models for the same emotional domain, sometimes even conflicting ones. This layered, dynamic structure reminds us that idiomatic meaning is never fixed: it reflects a history of collective interpretation, adaptation, and transmission. When studying idioms rooted in bodily and emotional experience, we must attend not only to metaphor and embodiment, but also to the cultural models that continue to shape them.

3.3. Diachronic & Historical Linguistics

While CMT and CL shed light on the cognitive and cultural roots of figurative language, they do not fully account for the persistence of idioms tied to long-forgotten worldviews. To address this gap, Dobrovolski and Piirainen introduced the Conventional Figurative Language Theory (CFLT), a framework designed to explain idiomatic variation and irregularities that CMT alone cannot account for.[23] According to CFLT, one major shortcoming of CMT is its relative neglect of historical and cultural context. A central critique is that CMT tends to minimize the historical and cultural contexts that shape certain expressions. For example, the *container* metaphor, used to describe internal emotional pressure, does not fully explain expressions shaped by ancient cultural models, such as the theory of the four humours. This pre-modern medical system continues to influence idiomatic usage in languages like Romanian. It is worth noting that its influence persisted well into the modern period and still resonates today in the form of the four temperaments theory.[24]

In the humoral tradition, bodily fluids were more than substances – they were symbols tied to health, mood, and behaviour. Yellow bile, in particular, was linked to the choleric temperament: hot, impulsive, prone to anger. Though the medical theory has long been discarded, its emotional logic survives in idioms that describe anger as heat, eruption, or imbalance. Dobrovolski and Piirainen explore how such expressions evolve through the historical transmission of cultural knowledge, a process central to diachronic linguistics, which examines how past cognitive frameworks shape present-day language. They explore the cultural roots of idioms like *to see red*, tracing the anger-as-heat metaphor back to Hippocratic medicine. While anger is universal, such expressions reflect humoral links between fluids, emotions, colours, and temperaments.[25]

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[22] Farzad Sharifian, "Introduction: Cultural Conceptualizations in Language and Communication," in *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs across Cultures and Languages*, ed. Farzad Sharifian, René Dirven, Ning Yu, and Susanne Niemeier (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008).

[23] Dmitri Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005), 7.

[24] Ibid., 9-10.

[25] Dobrovolski and Piirainen, *Figurative Language,* 10.

CFLT introduces the notion of the 'image component' – a semantic feature that links an idiom's lexical form to its figurative interpretation through culturally embedded imagery. This concept is especially useful for interpreting idioms whose historical or cultural origins may no longer be consciously recognised, although they remain active in language. Romanian idioms like *a se înverzi de mânie* ('to turn green with rage') or *a-i crăpa fierea* ('to have one's gallbladder burst') make little sense outside the framework of humoral theory. Yet they persist, because the emotional imagery they rely on still resonates. What makes CFLT useful here is its typology of idiom motivation: metaphorical, symbolic, textual, and indexical. It treats idioms not as random phrases, but as meaning-rich expressions rooted in cultural history. This aligns closely with what Ionescu[26] calls an "image trigger", i.e., the mental imagery that connects idiomatic form to culturally shared meaning.

Despite the fading of their original meanings, such idioms persist, shaped by centuries of conceptual and symbolic modelling. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen argue that understanding such expressions requires attention to "tacit knowledge of cultural models remote in time."[27] These underlying images continue to guide interpretation, even when the original conceptual systems are no longer consciously accessible. In this sense, CFLT complements and extends CMT by incorporating both metaphor and cultural-historical knowledge into its analysis.

3.4. Cultural Residue Theory

Despite the advances offered by the CMT, CL, and CFLT, these frameworks do not fully account for the persistence of deeply rooted figurative expressions shaped by long-abandoned conceptual systems. This section proposes an additional model, Cultural Residue Theory (CRT), to fill this gap. CRT builds on these approaches but places greater emphasis on the long-term conceptual influence of cultural knowledge systems, such as the humoral doctrine, on contemporary idiomatic language.

While CRT is here applied to the humoral theory as a historical system of thought, its scope can extend to other cultural frameworks as well. Systems such as classical philosophy, mythologies, or religious doctrines have generated their own conceptual models that continue to resonate in idiomatic language. For instance, expressions like *bite the dust* or *by the skin of one's teeth* persist even among speakers unfamiliar with their biblical origins. In such cases, the cultural system may still exist (as with Christianity), but its textual foundations are no longer part of widespread cultural knowledge. CRT thus intends to offer a scalable model for tracing how residual conceptual structures from various belief systems are preserved in everyday language, long after their original context has faded from collective memory. This perspective also resonates with González-Rey's classification of *incongruent somatic idioms* – figurative expressions built around body-related lexemes that show a high degree of semantic displacement from their literal components. As she notes, such idioms convey culturally embedded ideas about personality, emotional dispositions or behavioural tendencies, reinforcing the idea that residual conceptual

[26] Ionescu, *Food Idioms and Proverbs*, 83.
[27] Ibid., 11.

systems, like the humoral model, remain active even in expressions whose literal meanings appear opaque or unrelated to their figurative use.[28]

At the core of the present analysis is the theory of the four humours, introduced by Hippocratic medicine and later developed by Galen. The model holds that health and emotional balance arise from the mix of the four bodily humours (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile), with this paper focusing on the role of yellow bile in particular. Yellow bile (*cholē* in Greek), associated with the element of fire, was considered hot and dry and corresponded to the choleric temperament, characterised by impulsivity, irritability, and violent anger.

This symbolic linkage was also seasonal and physiological. In *Nature of Man*, attributed to Hippocrates, it is noted that yellow bile naturally increases in the body during the summer, intensifying in the heat and remaining active until autumn.[29] Galen and later medieval scholars further elaborated on the role of the liver (the organ that secretes bile) as a warm, vital viscus, responsible for generating inner heat and thus emotional agitation.[30] In this worldview, the body was imagined as a container in which the four humours circulated, boiled, stagnated, or overflowed. Emotional imbalance was thus conceptualised literally: too much bile meant too much heat, too much fire – too much anger. This mental model linked physical sensations, temperaments, and emotional crises into one coherent symbolic logic, where boiling rage was not just metaphorical, but somatic and real.

Across centuries, these connections between fire, heat, bile, and rage remained intellectually and imaginatively productive. Two examples, among many, illustrate this: in the 17th century, La Rochefoucauld[31] described how "la colère a fait les étouffements, les ébullitions de sang, et les inflammations de poitrine" ('anger has caused choking, blood boiling, and chest inflammations'), explicitly linking anger with the rise in temperature, in the Hippocratic tradition. Similarly, Diderot revived the Hippocratic belief that passions are a matter of bodily temperature, arguing that "les passions suivent le tempérament du corps" ('the passions follow the temperament of the body').[32] Even in classical pathology, the mental effects of excess bile were taken seriously. Galen describes mania as a disorder rooted in yellow bile, leading to rash behaviour, delusions, and violent outbursts. The ancient connection between bile and cognitive disturbance reveals how the body's inner state was thought to directly shape reason and conduct.

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[28] Maria Isabel González-Rey, *La nouvelle phraséologie du français* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2021), 160.

[29] Hippocrates, Volume IV: *Nature of Man. Regimen in Health. Humours. Aphorisms. Regimen 1–3. Dreams. Heracleitus: On the Universe*, trans. W.H.S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library No. 150 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1953), 15.

[30] Raffaele Orlandi, Nicola Cianci, Pietro Invernizzi, Giacomo Cesana, and Maria A. Riva, "I Miss My Liver: Nonmedical Sources in the History of Hepatocentrism," *Hepatology Communications* 2, no. 8 (2018): 987, https://doi.org/10.1002/hep4.1224.

[31] François de La Rochefoucauld, "Réflexions diverses," XII, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Martin-Chauffier (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 519.

[32] Carole Talon-Hugon, "Passion," in *Dictionnaire du corps*, ed. Michela Marzano (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 687a–687b.

This choleric model was not confined to medicine. In ancient literature, figures like Heracles and Bellerophon came to embody the rage and volatility linked to excess bile. Their mythic temperaments reflect the same logic: a hot, unbalanced fluid erupting into violent action, madness, or ruin.

Throughout early modern literature, this link between bile and fire manifested in metaphors of inner burning, emotional eruption, and moral imbalance. Robert Burton, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*,[33] attributed madness, destruction, and even war to the unchecked rise of choler. He describes choleric individuals as prone to visions, frenzy, and even destruction, asserting that "nothing so soon causeth madness as this passion of anger." Even prayers, he argues, should include "deliverance from anger and all such pestiferous perturbations."[34]

In non-European traditions, such as Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*, yellow bile (*al-safra'*) is similarly associated with heat, vitality, and digestive stimulation. Abnormal yellow bile (excessive, burnt, or corrupted) leads to symptoms such as bitter mouth, nausea, bilious vomiting, burning diarrhoea, inflammation, thirst, and even dreams of fire and yellow objects.[35] These associations extended beyond scholarly medicine into folk practices, where emotional and physical imbalances were treated through symbolic remedies. For example, bile-related symptoms like jaundice or rage were sometimes addressed with colour-matched treatments, using yellow substances for yellow bile, reflecting a persistent belief in correspondence between the body's fluids, colours, and emotional states.[36]

Crucially, this conceptual system was neither accidental nor loosely symbolic. It was built on a logic of correspondence between fluids, colours, elements, ages of life, and emotional states. Yellow bile, as a conceptual node, belonged to summer, fire, youth, dryness, and excess – qualities that made it volatile but intelligible within a cultural framework. The Proto-Indo-European root *ĝhel-*, which evolved into Greek *khólos* ('bile', 'rage') and Latin *fel* ('bile', 'venom'), illustrates how from the outset, bile was semantically charged with destructive emotional potential. In Greek, the proximity of *kholḗ* ('bile') and *khlóē* ('greenish-yellow') further reinforced visual and somatic symbolism, linking colour to emotional excess.[37]

Although the humoral model is no longer medically valid, its conceptual residue endures in the structure of idiomatic language. Expressions like "to boil with anger" or "to spill one's bile" reflect not only metaphorical mappings but also centuries of cultural encoding, where bodily fluids

[33] Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy (1628), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10800/10800-h/10800-h.htm.

[34] Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

[35] Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 81.

[36] Aurel-I. Candrea, *Folclorul medical român comparat: Privire generală: medicina magică*, with an introductory study by Lucia Berdan (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 307-308.

[37] Araeteus. De causis et signis acutorum morborum, II. 13.2: https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0254%3Atext%3DSD%3Abook%3D2.

were endowed with symbolic and explanatory power. In this regard, CRT both complements and extends existing models.

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Cultural Linguistics (CL), and Conventional Figurative Language Theory (CFLT) each offer important tools for understanding idiomatic language. Cultural Residue Theory (CRT) builds on these approaches but adds another dimension: it places historical belief systems like the humoral doctrine at the core of idiomatic meaning, not just as background influences, but as prevailing cognitive frameworks. CMT focuses on metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied experience, like *anger is heat* or *the body is a container*. CL explores how cultural knowledge shapes language and meaning, often through shared conceptualisations rooted in collective cognition. CFLT expands this view by recognising idioms as semi-fixed linguistic products produced by metaphorical, symbolic, indexical, and textual motivations. It also introduces the notion of the image component, which links an idiom's form to culturally motivated meanings. CRT seeks to takes these insights further. Rather than viewing historical conceptual models as symbolic triggers that fade with time, CRT argues that these systems, such as the humoral theory, leave behind cognitive residues that continue to shape how idioms are used and understood. These aren't just metaphors or stylistic relics; they are linguistic traces of how earlier communities understood the body, emotion, and behaviour. Even after the scientific validity of a theory like humourism has been rejected, its conceptual structure remains sedimented in language, shaping how emotional states like anger are imagined and expressed.

One of CRT's contributions is the idea of residual cognition: the notion that speakers continue to reproduce earlier conceptual patterns without being consciously aware of them. While CFLT acknowledges that idioms often outlive their original cultural context, CRT insists that the historical model itself remains active, not just as a reference point, but as a structuring force in emotional language. For instance, while CFLT might suggest: "this idiom persists because it originated in a system people once believed in," CRT goes further, proposing that "this idiom persists because speakers continue, even unconsciously, to think in ways shaped by that system, even if they are no longer explicitly aware of its origins." CRT thus tries to offer a more robust explanation for how idioms persist across time and cultures. It draws attention to the conceptual afterlife of belief systems: how frameworks like the four humours have generated not only specific phrases, but the way emotion itself is linguistically framed. In this light, idioms are not simply linguistic conventions or cultural symbols; they are conceptual fossils, evidence of how past societies organised knowledge and made sense of the body and the self.

To sum up, CRT differs from previous models in several ways. Firstly, it treats historical cultural systems like humourism as primary sources of conceptualisation, not just symbolic associations. Secondly, it introduces residual cognition as a mechanism for understanding how language continues to carry conceptual structures long after their cultural origins have faded. Thirdly, it shifts attention from idioms as formal expressions to idioms as cognitive containers of inherited thought. And lastly, it adds a diachronic perspective, showing how idioms act as carriers of historical and cultural continuity.

By bringing this long-term historical and cognitive view into focus, CRT offers a more comprehensive account of how language preserves meaning across time, or just through metaphor or structure, but through the afterimages of belief systems that once shaped entire worldviews.

4. Analysis: Tracing Cultural Residues in Romanian Emotion Idioms

Romanian idioms frequently conceptualise the human body, especially its internal organs, as containers for volatile emotional states. This maps clearly onto the conceptual metaphor *anger is a fluid in a container*, as described by CMT, where emotions are understood as pressurised substances capable of boiling over. Yet many such expressions in Romanian evoke more than general physiological experience: they point to a symbolic logic grounded in pre-modern models of the body, particularly the humoral theory, in which excess yellow bile produced the choleric temperament – irritable, hot-headed, and prone to violent outbursts.

This section examines how idiomatic expressions related to anger, envy, and emotional unrest reflect the conceptual legacy of the choleric humour. The analysis foregrounds Cultural Residue Theory (CRT) to show how these idioms preserve not only embodied metaphors, but culturally sedimented understandings of emotion, temperament, and internal balance. Rather than focusing solely on lexical items, the analysis traces deep conceptual structures inherited from humoral thought.

The idioms are grouped thematically, following patterns consistent with excess bile: fire and heat as emblems of rage; boiling, pressure, and overflow as metaphors for internal imbalance; references to organs like the liver, gallbladder, or even *rânză* ('gizzard') as sites of emotional agitation; and colour symbolism, especially green, and yellow, historically linked to bile. These expressions do more than describe anger; they echo a model of the body in which temperament, emotion, and physiology were interrelated.

4.1. Rising Temperature: Fire, Heat, and Boiling in Choleric Emotion

The association between fire and emotional intensity in Romanian idioms offers clear linguistic traces of the choleric temperament. In humoral medicine, yellow bile, linked to the element of fire, the season of summer, and the qualities of heat and dryness, was thought to provoke irritability, aggression, and volatile outbursts. These traits match not only the classical description of the choleric temperament but also the semantic field activated in Romanian phraseology.

Expressions such as *a fi foc și pară* ("to be fire and flame"), *a lua foc* ("to catch fire"), *a scuipa foc* ("to spit fire"), or *a arunca flăcări pe nas* ("to shoot flames out of one's nose") depict anger as combustive, sudden, and externally violent. While these idioms align with the *anger is heat / fire* metaphor described by CMT, they also reflect the symbolic economy of the humoral system, in which fire was not metaphorical but explanatory: it defined the temperament itself, it was one of the elements in the body's composition. These idioms do not simply express heat, they represent temperamental excess, a predisposition to be consumed or to consume others through emotional combustion.

The theme of internal agitation appears with equal force in idioms related to boiling, pressure, and eruption. In *a fierbe de mânie* ("to boil with rage"), *a clocoti de ciudă* ("to seethe with spite"), or *a fierbe în suc propriu* ("to stew in one's own juices"), the emotional state is framed as a literal increase in internal temperature, often with no external release. Others, like *a-i fierbe sângele în vine* ("to have one's blood boil") or *a-i clocoti mațele* ("to have one's guts seethe"), specify physiological sites of pressure and tension. These expressions resonate with humoral ideas about the internal circulation and overheating of bile, as well as with the belief that unreleased emotion could cause physical damage – mania, madness, inflammation, or moral decay.

Two further idioms, *a-și aprinde poalele* ("to set one's hem on fire") and *a fi pârjol / otravă* ("to be scorched / poison"), add another layer to the emotional script of yellow bile. In *a-și aprinde poalele*, the image of clothing catching fire evokes a sudden flare-up of internal heat, igniting outward behaviour. The fire rises from below, suggesting a classic humoral model of emotion erupting from the liver or viscera upward, destabilising the whole self (which may account for the blood rushing to one's head – another Romanian idiom illustrating the upward movement of anger and loss of equilibrium). Even more intense is *a fi pârjol / otravă*, which combines thermal and toxic imagery to portray a person not just as emotionally volatile but morally corrosive. Fire reflects violent intensity, while poison conjures venom, bitterness, and emotional contamination. From a CRT perspective, this expression condenses the humoral theory of character: excess bile not only inflames, but spoils, turning emotion into destructive temperament.

The concept of verbal eruption (emotion forced out through speech) is also embedded in this system. Idioms like *a vărsa focul / fierea / veninul* ("to spill one's fire / bile / venom") express the release of a harmful inner substance, often in the form of reproach, insult, or uncontrolled rage. In humoral terms, such expressions reflect the need to expel excess bile in order to restore bodily and emotional balance. The gallbladder, associated with yellow bile, becomes the seat of this symbolic physiology. *A-i crăpa fierea de ciudă* ("to have one's gallbladder burst from spite") not only dramatises the emotional cost of envy or resentment, it illustrates the belief that emotion, left unpurged, causes internal rupture.

Further intensification occurs in idioms that blend bodily breakdown with animalistic rage. *A face clăbuci la gură* ("to foam at the mouth") or *a turba de mânie* ("to rage like a rabid animal") imply that emotional intensity bypasses reason and humanity. These idioms do not merely describe loss of temper; they construct the speaker as possessed by ungoverned, pathological bile – a legacy of humoral thinking that frames emotional disturbance as somatic and moral disorder.

In this context, *a-și răcori inima* ("to cool down the heart") functions as more than a calming metaphor. It suggests the reestablishment of internal equilibrium: *the cooling of bile*, the symbolic counteraction to burning or boiling. In the logic of humoral medicine, this return to balance was not emotional recovery in the modern sense, but physiological and ethical restoration.

4.2. The Choleric Body: Organs of Bile and Emotional Pressure

The liver (*ficat*) and gallbladder (*fiere*) were traditionally seen as the primary sites of yellow bile production, and Romanian idioms maintain this emotional physiology. Consider expressions like: *a-i*

crăpa fierea de ciudă ("to have one's gall burst from spite"), *a-l ustura la ficați* ("to feel a burning sensation in the liver": to feel deeply angry or frustrated), *a i se umfla ficatul* ("to have a swollen liver" – becoming agitated or furious). These idioms point to emotional pressure, internal heat, or rupture, drawing from humoral models where excess bile led to imbalance, inflammation, and loss of control. These idioms map directly onto the choleric profile, encoding both somatic discomfort and a moral register of excess. An especially compelling example of CRT's diachronic depth appears in the regional term *mai*, borrowed from Hungarian (máj, "liver"). In idioms such as *a-i plesni maiul de ciudă* ("to have one's liver burst from spite") we see not only the same metaphor of internal rupture but the persistence of the humoral model across linguistic boundaries. What is particularly striking about *mai* is that even a regional borrowing from a non-Romance language preserves the same conceptual association: the liver as a volatile emotional organ, swollen with spite or agitation.

More striking still are idioms using non-standard anatomical terms, *rânză* and *pipotă*, which literally denote avian digestive organs, specifically the gizzard, a type of muscular stomach in birds. In idiomatic Romanian, however, these terms are repurposed in idioms to represent the human gut or abdominal core. *a nu mai încăpea rânza în cineva* ("the gizzard to no longer fitting inside" – to be seething with rage), *a-i crăpa pipota de ciudă* ("to have the gizzard burst from spite"), *a avea rânza fierbinte* ("to have a hot gizzard" – to be hot-tempered). This usage is not arbitrary: in Romanian folk cognition, the stomach often stands metonymically for the entire abdomen, the imagined site of both digestion and emotional agitation. In this sense, *rânză* and *pipotă* do not merely substitute for the liver, they extend the metaphor of the "boiling interior", grounding emotional states like rage and spite in the gut as a visceral, reactive centre. From a CL perspective, the use of *rânză* and *pipotă* also carries a stylistic tone: rustic, visceral, and grounded in agrarian life. According to CMT, this reflects embodied experience (anger felt in the gut, pressure in the belly), but CRT highlights a deeper logic: these organs operate as surrogates for the liver and bile, maintaining the structural role of the humoral model even as literal anatomy is replaced by folk imagery.

4.3. From yellow bile to bitterness: *fiere* and *venom*

Among the most semantically layered idioms in Romanian are those built around *fiere* (bile) and *venin* (venom), two lexemes that exemplify the kind of cognitive sedimentation central to CRT. Historically rooted in humoral medicine, *fiere* originally denoted yellow bile – the hot and dry humour associated with the choleric temperament, characterized by anger, irritability, and sudden emotional eruptions. Over time, the term shifted from the fluid itself to the gallbladder, its container. In colloquial Romanian, *fiere* often refers to the gallbladder as well as to the fluid itself, which demonstrates how metonymy and embodiment interact (fluid → organ → emotional site). Finally, *fiere* developed metaphorical meanings such as bitterness, venom, anger, sorrow, and moral toxicity. These shifts were not arbitrary but conceptually guided by humoral theory, which treated bile as a causative agent of both emotional and ethical imbalance.

Romanian idioms reflect a deeply embodied logic of emotional accumulation and discharge, echoing humoral causality. Common expressions include: a vărsa fiere ("to spill one's bile" – to unleash

fury or bitterness), *a avea fiere în gură* ("to have bile in the mouth" - to speak harshly or venomously), *a fi fiere spurcată* ("to be filthy bile" – to be verbally toxic or abusive), *a-i crăpa fierea de necaz* ("to have one's gallbladder burst from grief/spite" – to be consumed by envy, rage, or sorrow). What was once a bodily fluid becomes moral character: *fiere* is not just in the body – it is the body, corrupted by emotion and expressing itself through behaviour or language.

A parallel semantic path unfolds through *venin* (venom), often used interchangeably or in collocation with *fiere*. While *venin* originates in poison and toxic secretion, its idiomatic usage blends seamlessly with bile-related imagery, particularly when describing verbal aggression or internal bitterness: *a-și vărsa veninul (asupra cuiva)* – ("to spill one's venom (on someone)" – to vent rage or resentment), *a fierbe de venin* ("to boil with venom" – to seethe with spite), *a(-și) face venin / sânge rău* ("to make oneself venom / bad blood" – to brew toxic emotions internally), *a pune venin la inima cuiva* ("to poison someone's heart" – to sow emotional corruption), *a-și sparge / răcori veninul* ("to break / cool one's venom" – to discharge or be rid of pent-up anger), *vorbe cu venin* ("words with venom" – spiteful or hurtful speech).

In these expressions, the lines between emotion, physiology, and morality dissolve. *Venin* becomes both internal state and external behaviour – a fluid emotion that can be stored, boil over, poison others, or, if expressed, cool and resolve. CRT views this not just as metaphor, but as the continued use of a historical medical-emotional model in everyday speech: *venin* and *fiere* are conceptually fused, their physical origins long forgotten but their emotional valence still powerfully active.

What binds these idioms together is a shared structure of emotional release, mirroring both embodied sensation and humoral logic. Rage, spite, envy, and grief are not passive experiences – they build internally, pressurising the body, especially the guts, liver, and mouth, until they demand to be expelled. Speaking becomes excretion; venom becomes verbal. This structure reflects the prescribed remedies of humoral medicine, where emotional and physical imbalances were treated through purging, vomiting, or bloodletting – techniques designed to evacuate excess humours from the body. CRT helps us see that these are not merely metaphors for anger, but the conceptual afterimages of an emotional theory in which the balance and movement of bodily fluids determined not only health, but temperament, speech, and moral behaviour. In these expressions, the boundaries between emotion, physiology, and morality blur, sustained by a symbolic system that equates verbal aggression with physical discharge.

4.4. Chromatic symbolism: colour as emotional code

The final layer of analysis focuses on colour-based idioms, which offer some of the most vivid linguistic residues of the humoral legacy in Romanian. In classical humoral theory, each fluid was associated with a specific colour, elemental quality, and emotional profile: the colours of bile were yellow and green. These associations were not symbolic in the modern sense but explanatory: colour was a visible symptom of internal imbalance. When a person turned red, flushed, greenish, or pale, these were taken as signs of humoral excess or deficiency. Romanian idioms preserve this chromatic logic in striking ways: *verde / galbe de ciudă* – ("green / yellow with envy" – overwhelmed by jealousy). CRT shows how these expressions preserve the symbolic physiology of

humoral medicine: excess bile could discolour the body – green with toxicity or envy, yellow with jaundice and bitterness.

However, not all colour idioms in Romanian preserve the humoral framework with equal clarity. Yellow, despite its strong historical association with bile, is not a productive colour in Romanian emotional idioms. Its link to yellow bile and the choleric temperament appears to have faded from popular linguistic expression, possibly due to its weaker symbolic presence in Romanian cultural imaginaries. Even green, though more frequently used in idioms of envy or rage (*verde de ciudă*), has undergone semantic diversification. In many Romanian expressions and cultural references, green is also associated with youth, renewal, nature, and vitality – a far cry from its toxic connotations in humoral thought. This tension between residual meaning and contemporary reinterpretation illustrates how cultural models evolve: the emotional logic of the humours may persist, but its chromatic code can drift, fade, or be recontextualised.

Such partial survivals and overlaps do not weaken the presence of the humoral legacy, but they highlight the uneven persistence of conceptual systems. CRT accommodates these shifts by recognising that conceptual residues are not uniform but layered, adaptive, and sometimes conflicting.

5. Conclusion

This article has shown that Romanian idioms related to anger, envy, and spite retain deep conceptual traces of humoral theory, particularly the association between yellow bile and the choleric temperament. Starting from Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural Linguistics, and Conventional Figurative Language Theory, and extending them through Cultural Residue Theory (CRT), the analysis reveals how apparently ordinary expressions encode a worldview in which emotion, physiology, and morality were fundamentally correlated.

Expressions involving fire, heat, boiling and burning, venom, ruptured organs, and colour shifts reflect a shared structure of emotional pressure and release. They evoke the logic of humoral medicine, where imbalance, especially an excess of bile, had to be expelled to restore order. Even when anatomical references become blurred or lexical meanings drift, these idioms continue to function as conceptual fossils, shaped by long-abandoned but culturally persistent models of the body.

At the same time, this residue is uneven. The relative absence of yellow as a colour term, or the semantic ambiguity of green, suggests that not all symbolic elements endure with the same clarity. Yet this partial survival is precisely what CRT helps us explain: cultural knowledge does not disappear, it sediments, adapts, and re-emerges in new forms.

This study has focused on idioms derived from yellow bile, but future research could expand this approach to include expressions linked to the other three humours, blood, phlegm, and black bile, and their associated emotional and symbolic profiles. A comparative phraseological analysis across Romance languages could further reveal the extent to which these shared conceptual models persist, diverge, or evolve across linguistic and cultural contexts.