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GODS AND BELIEVERS IN "MRS. DALLOWAY" (A COGNITIVE STUDY OF V. WOOLF'S RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS)

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**Abstract.** The article deals with topical issues of religious worldview and its interaction with national culture and individual artistic worldviews as crystallized in the language of literature. It presents a vigorous study of some religious concepts in Virginia Woolf's artistic worldview which have previously been overlooked. The concepts "God" and "believer" are studied by means of conceptual interpretation to explicate their essential semantics. Several conceptual layers represented by corresponding sets of cognitive features reflect various types of religious worldview and are presented in a resulting table. The only cognitive feature of the concept "God" in which all conceptual layers overlap is "individual". The author comes to the conclusion that V. Woolf with her modernist broad-mindedness asserts that religion is a highly personal issue; and the main questions that are placed before an individual are whether his "god" is benevolent or antagonistic and what provides the meaning of his own life.

**Key words:** concept, religion, artistic worldview, religious worldview, cognitive feature

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БОГИ И БОГОМОЛЬЦЫ В РОМАНЕ «МИССИС ДЭЛЛОУЭЙ»  
(КОГНИТИВНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ КОНЦЕПТОВ  
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**Аннотация:** В статье рассматриваются актуальные вопросы взаимосвязи религиозной картины мира с национальной культурой и индивидуально-авторской картиной мира, кристаллизованной в языке художественных произведений. Данное исследование представляет собой подробное изучение некоторых религиозных концептов в художественной картине мира В. Вулф, которым ранее уделялось недостаточно внимания. Посредством концептуальной интерпретации выявляется эссенциальная семантика концептов «Бог» и «верующий». Для каждого концепта выявляются специфические концептуальные слои и соответствующие им когнитивные признаки, отражающие разные типы религиозной картины мира. Результаты исследования представлены в таблице. Единственным когнитивным признаком концепта «Бог», который встречается во всех концептуальных слоях, оказался КП «индивидуальный». Автор приходит к выводу о том, что для В. Вулф, с ее модернистской широтой взглядов, религия – сугубо индивидуальная вещь, и основные вопросы, встающие перед каждым человеком: добр или антагонистичен его «бог» и что определяет смысл его жизни.

**Ключевые слова:** концепт, религия, художественная картина мира, религиозная картина мира, когнитивный признак

INTRODUCTION

The study of concepts has been taking a center stage in Russian linguistic science for at least fifty years by now ever since the term "concept" in its today meaning was first explicated by S.A. Askoldov in his famous article "Concept and word" way back

in 1928 [7]. So far, concepts have been studied from various points of view: as universal phenomena, as national symbols or cultural constants, as expressions of individual consciousness and etc. The concept has become a useful tool for uncovering some of the underlying cognitive processes hidden behind the

processes of language and speech production. It allows for the unveiling of individual mental worlds of people whose speech can now be found only in the crystalized form of their writings, that is, the great authors of the past. One of the most famous and abstruse English writers is Virginia Woolf with her mind-bending stream of consciousness technique. It is such persons, the cultural symbols and key figures of their time, that deserve scientific attention. Through their consciousness and artistic worldview we can uncover, study and analyze the dominant concepts and prevailing ideas of their age. One of the most topical spheres of our time is the sphere of religion. "Religion can also be said to represent a favourite independent variable, as witnessed by the growing number of surveys in which religion is used alongside other explanatory variables in the study of a wide range of cultural phenomena" [4, p. 2].

#### MAIN PART:

##### PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to study religious concepts, namely the concepts of God and believer, in the works of Virginia Woolf (on the material of the novel "Mrs. Dalloway"), to explicate its main features and the individuality of the contents of these concepts in the author's artistic worldview.

##### MATERIAL AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

Before we start analyzing the material it is necessary not only to state the methods but also to explain the terms used. It is no secret that cognitive linguistics has been developing in a bit different directions in Russia and abroad. We all started from the Sapir-Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity which claims that "an intellectual system embodied in each language shapes the thought of its speakers in a quite general way" [2, p. 66]. Thus, a crucial connection between language and culture, and language and cognition was established. Theoretical findings and main trends within the cognitive linguistics were shared and popularized both in Russia and abroad. And as a result there were created numerous methodologies for explication of the contents of concepts.

As N.N. Boldyrev writes "Conceptual analysis encompasses various research techniques of the numerous means of world interpretation (conceptualization) represented in language forms and expressions of various complexity levels: from a separate morpheme to a full statement or text" [8, p. 27].

For instance, Yu.S. Stepanov sees a concept as a structure containing three components: 1) the main or relevant feature, 2) one or several additional, passive

features, which may not be relevant anymore but which historically have been so, 3) the inner form which is imprinted in the wording [12, p.40-43].

Z.D. Popova and I.A. Sternin have developed their own theory stating that concepts have field structure in which the nucleus is represented by a sensory image and surrounded by the information field which is further enveloped by the interpretation field. The concept itself is formed by cognitive features, which are structured field-wise and placed closer to or further from the nucleus according to the relevance (or brightness) of the feature in the consciousness of language speakers [11].

V.I. Karasik sees the concept as including three main components: a notional component, an image-bearing component and an axiological one [10, p. 127].

But for the purposes of this study it seems sensible to employ the concept structure proposed by S.G. Vorkachev [9]. He believes that semantically a concept consists of three constituents: the notional one which reflects the features of the concept derived not only from various definitions but also from the numerous contexts of language use; the visual (or representational) one which records cognitive metaphors that serve to maintain the concept in the language conscience; and the "valeur" constituent which signifies the place of this concept in the lexical and grammatical system of the language (that is, all of its paradigmatic connections) [9, p.123].

It is the notional component that we are going to look at in this paper since we are studying a concept in an individual consciousness of an artistic person. And in Vorkachev's terminology such individual author's conceptual layers of meaning included in the notional component are called "essential semantics" of the concept [9, p.123]. We want to see what is specific in V.Woolf's perception of religion and what cognitive features of the studied concepts can be derived from her works by means of conceptual interpretation.

##### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Virginia Woolf as other modernists (such as J. Joyce, K. Mansfield) openly declared herself an atheist. Once in a letter to her sister Vanessa Bell in 1928 she wrote: "I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God." [5]

Even though there are no other explicit remarks on the existence of God such as this one to be found in her non-fiction prose Woolf's atheism seems to be self-apparent. But it does not negate the presence of the concept religion in her worldview (see [3]). Rather it makes it the more interesting.

Thus in the view of the foregoing it is no wonder that in the novel "Mrs. Dalloway" only two characters openly acknowledge the existence of God. The first one is the mentally disordered Septimus Smith who refers to God in his distracted ramblings:

*Men must not cut down trees. There is a God [6].*

And the other one is a character with marked negative features, the only character explicitly brought into opposition to the protagonist – Miss Kilman. A subtle case of *antonomasia* in her last name foreshadows her role in the narrative and gives us an understanding of the author's attitude to her.

Her alliterative description introduces a concept of a fanatical believer:

*Bitter and burning, Miss Kilman had turned into a church two years three months ago[6].*

It seems that Woolf has put all her aversion towards religious bigotry into this character. Kilman seems to be asserting that religion and God are a means for "assuaging" hurt feelings and taking one's revenge on the world.

*... the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there (S.B. in a church)... So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God. She thought of Mr. Whittaker. Rage was succeeded by calm. A sweet savour filled her veins, her lips parted, and, standing formidable upon the landing in her mackintosh, she looked with steady and sinister serenity at Mrs. Dalloway, who came out with her daughter [6].*

Thus, the concept of a "believer" acquires such negative cognitive features as "hot", "turbulent", "painful", "feeling hatred", "bearing a grudge". Even when her rage is succeeded by calm we can see that this "sweet savour" is not of forgiveness but of malice, as her serenity is characterized as "sinister".

As for the aspirations of this earnest believer, they are not as might be supposed to be of reaching inner peace or gaining personal salvation. The subjunctive mood in the following sentences hints at the unattainable intimate desires of this "ardent Christian":

*If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered... She despised Mrs. Dalloway from the*

*bottom of her heart. She was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit[6].*

Here the concept of "believer" acquires some more characteristics through the verbs with negative semantics of "opposition": ruin, humiliate, despise, glared, glowered. And the phrase "religious victory" stands for her desire to "overcome and oppress". Thus this concept may be said to actualize an image of some hawkish Crusader. It is obvious that such characteristics would be extrapolated to the concept of God, following the reversed line of thinking "like father, like son" or "quails rex, talis grex".

It is no wonder that the protagonist expresses her astonishment at such qualities. Even though she is not a believer herself, she expects Christians to be otherwise: humble, submissive and "knowing the meaning of life":

*Clarissa was really shocked. This a Christian – this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her! She in touch with invisible presences! Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace, she knows the meaning of life! ...[6].*

Some other cognitive features of the concept "God" are provided here by means of periphrasis – "invisible" and "present". At the same time, we see that Woolf does not propose Kilman as a prototypical "believer" but as an extreme case, showing the extent which bigotry and fanaticism can reach. Even other worshippers perceive her as an outsider:

*"Doggedly she set off with her parcel to ... the Abbey, where, raising her hands in a tent before her face, she sat beside those driven into shelter too; the variously assorted worshippers, now divested of social rank, almost of sex, as they raised their hands before their faces; but once they removed them, instantly reverent, middle class, English men and women... But Miss Kilman held her tent before her face. Now she was deserted; now rejoined. New worshippers came in from the street to replace the strollers, and still ... still she barred her eyes with her fingers and tried in this double darkness... to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of 109 hatred and of love. Her hands twitched. She seemed to struggle [6].*

Unlike other worshippers, who come and go, Miss Kilman is shown to be intensively praying (the repetition of an adverb "still") by "holding her hands in a tent". This outward expression of devotion may seem ostentatious. She is presented as missing out on the whole point of Christianity, using almost Buddhist outward practices: "double darkness", "aspire above vanities, desires, commodities", "rid herself of both hatred and love". So, we can conclude that she does not stand for a Christian specifically, but represents a fanatical believer in general.

Miss Kilman cannot be called a happy worshipper. When she goes to church, she does it "doggedly", as if it is something compulsory for her and the word "struggle" also introduces a cognitive feature "forced/induced".

The following example again places Miss Kilman outside the mainstream of believers for whom God is easily "accessible":

*Yet to others God was accessible and the path to Him smooth. Mr. Fletcher, retired, of the Treasury, Mrs. Gorham, widow of the famous K.C., approached Him simply, and having done their praying, leant back, enjoyed the music (the organ pealed sweetly), and saw Miss Kilman at the end of the row, praying, praying, and, being still on the threshold of their underworld, thought of her sympathetically as a soul haunting the same territory; a soul cut out of immaterial substance; not a woman, a soul [6].*

This group of ordinary worshippers can be characterized by such positive cognitive features as "simple", "smooth", "having an easy access to God", "enjoying"; they feel sympathetic towards this soul that for some reason cannot even enter the same territory of inner peace.

The following example underlines that each person for Woolf has his or her own God, or perception of God. As the other worshippers approached God smoothly, Kilman had a hard time with "her" God. This adds another cognitive feature to the concept of God – "individual".

*... it was so rough the approach to her God—so tough her desires [6].*

All of the above mentioned proves that Kilman had an eclectic image of God incorporating ideas of different religions and pagan beliefs. The idea of God's omnipresence does not cross her mind, but she calls the Cathedral God's habitation. And she is surprised at His presence in everyday life amidst the traffic:

*The tower of Westminster Cathedral rose in front of her, the habitation of God. In the midst of the traffic, there was the habitation of God [6].*

In her worldview, the concept of God has a cognitive feature of "limited" or "circumscribed to a certain place".

The examples that follow only add to the idea that Kilman's God is a means of having one's revenge on the world and a tool for oppressing others:

*But one must fight; vanquish; have faith in God [6].*

*Mr. Whittaker had said she was there for a purpose. But no one knew the agony! He said, pointing to the crucifix, that God knew. But why should she have to suffer when other women, like*

*Clarissa Dalloway, escaped? Knowledge comes through suffering, said Mr. Whittaker [6].*

Miss Kilman is so egoistic she sees only her own "suffering", while this cognitive feature is attributed not only to the "believers" but to the concept of God too, through a reference to the crucifix. Thus another cognitive feature of the concept of God to be added here is "knowing".

Opposed to Miss Kilman is a positive character of Peter Walsh, Clarissa's friend of youth whom she gave up for the prominent Mr. Dalloway. His God seems to be as accessible as that of an average believer shocked by Kilman. Even though he professes himself as "an atheist perhaps" [6] he refers to God quite often and quite naturally as to his "benefactor":

*... those admirable letters which Peter had read thousands of miles across the sea in the Times, and had thanked God he was out of that pernicious hubble-bubble ... [6].*

*Villains there must be, and God knows the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness [6].*

*"Everybody in the room has six sons at Eton," Peter told her, except himself. He, thank God, had none [6].*

*For hours at a time (pray God that one might say these things without being overheard)... [6].*

This is the kind of religion then that Woolf approves of – where God is just a by-word, only a cliché; at least, when believers do not explicitly express any further depth.

If we continue exploring the idea of "individual religions" (or idolatries) with other characters we can notice that this concept is repeatedly actualized in this novel, sometimes by referring to the conceptual sphere of the church and its practices – a domain in which God would usually be found. In the following abstract as Mrs. Dalloway returns home she compares her feelings to those of a "nun who has left the world". Thus, such lexical units as "nun", "devotions", "bowed", "blessed", "purified" bring the concepts of religion and God to the foreground without being mentioned. So, that we can surmise from the extract that her religion is her service to the family, and her house serves the role of a temple. But who or what exactly is her God? It is difficult to reckon. Since it is usually to God that we bow and it is God who blesses and purifies, sometimes these actions would be performed through an intermediary – a priest, but in the context it is problematic to attribute these words to something particular. Perhaps, what she means is her state and situation in life.

*The hall of the house was cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to... she felt like a nun who has*

left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to **old devotions**. ... It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she **bowed** beneath the influence, **felt blessed and purified**, she thought ... **not for a moment did she believe in God**; but all the more, she thought.. must one **repay** in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the **foundation** of it—of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling... - one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments... [6].

And as she concludes her inner represented speech with the confession that “not for a moment did she believe in God”, she has to name the beneficiaries of her gratitude instead. And here she names an unusual list of recipients to whom she feels obliged to “repay”: servants, dogs, canaries and her husband. This makes us think that Woolf is deliberately creating a religion here, something akin to a natural religion or urban paganism. She seems to be worshipping her status in life.

And her status is given quite a high evaluation. Her servant’s perception of Mrs. Dalloway puts her in the position which she methodically tries to bring down, that of a highest deity:

and, taking Mrs. Dalloway's parasol, handled it like a **sacred** weapon which a **Goddess**, having acquitted herself honourably in the field of battle, sheds, and placed it in the umbrella stand [6].

Here a person of high social status (a hostess, a lady) is compared to a goddess (and spelt with a capital letter!), her parasol metaphorically representing a weapon.

Another example confirms Woolf’s predisposition to polytheism:

... she implored **the Gods** to lay by her side a bunch of purple-heather [6].

For although the clouds were of mountainous white ... and had all the appearance of settled habitations **assembled for the conference of gods** above the world [6].

Those **ruffians**, the **Gods**, shan't have it all their own way, – her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of **hurting**, **thwarting** and **spoiling** human lives were seriously **put out** if, all the same, you behaved like a lady. ... Later she wasn't so positive perhaps; she thought there were **no Gods**; no one was **to blame**; and so she evolved this **atheist's religion** of doing good for the sake of goodness [6].

This last partly ironic assertion provides some additional cognitive features of the concept “God”. The noun “ruffians” brings in a jocular note to the definition, and is further supported by such action verbs as “hurting”, “thwarting”, “spoiling”. Thus, a new cognitive feature is added to the concept of her

God that of “opposing” or “antagonistic”. The verb “put out” adds some anthropomorphic features to the concept. Unlike the omnipotent benevolent Christian God, the Gods of Woolf are mischievous and touchy, resembling the Greek Pantheon. Since there were no Gods, so “no one was to blame” means that usually one would blame God/Gods, who are “culpable” for problems in human life.

Woolf goes on to extend this idea of everybody worshipping some gods of their own on the example of still another character, a well-off psychiatrist, Sir Bradshaw. Woolf’s criticism of him is very harsh:

**Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired** by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon... **Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper** ... [6].

Thus Woolf shows that people can worship whatever makes them prosper adding another cognitive feature to the concept of God – “by which you can prosper” and “that which can be acquired”.

Sir William with his thirty years' experience of these kinds of cases, and his **infallible instinct**, this is madness, this sense; in fact, his **sense of proportion** ... [6].

Sir William has probably thought himself the highest priest of his religion, since such adjectives as “infallible” only have been used in religious discourse to describe the Pope. He feels that he can pronounce the final judgement (“this is madness, this is sense”) just like the apostles of Christ (see Matthew 18:18).

Woolf goes even further to show the perils of serving false gods and following the path of religious bigotry by mentioning another goddess – Conversion.

But **Proportion** has a sister, less smiling, more **formidable**, a **Goddess** even now engaged ... in **dashing down shrines, smashing idols**, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. **Conversion** is her name and she **feasts on the wills** of the weakly, **loving to impress, to impose**, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. ... offers help, but **desires power** ... **bestows her blessing** on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own... But conversion, **fastidious Goddess**, loves **blood** better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will [6].

The cognitive features that are added to the concept are “formidable”, “smashing”, “imposing its will”, “stern”, “fastidious”.

But the main question that Woolf proposes that the religion (or God) should have to answer is “Why live?” This is the question Sir William’s patients ask him:

**Why live?** they demanded. Sir William replied that life was good. ... But to us, they protested, life has given

no such bounty. He acquiesced. They lacked a sense of proportion. **And perhaps, after all, there is no God? He shrugged his shoulders. In short, this living or not living is an affair of our own?** [6]

If we try to look at concepts in a broader sense and consider the concept of this novel on the whole or the problem that it seems to be solving – it can be summed up in this one question usually addressed to religion - "Why live?" This is the question that the protagonist is implicitly trying to find the answer to throughout the whole text. She considers the concepts of life and death and tries to identify what role the religion plays in this whole affair. This is what she seems to be concluding: while there are personal gods (benevolent or formidable) the question of living is an affair of one's own.

#### CONCLUSION

Religious concepts of God and believer are extremely versatile in Woolf's novel. We can distinguish several layers of belief and present the findings in a table:

Table

Conceptual layers of the concepts "God" and "believer" and their cognitive features

Layers	God (cognitive features)	Believer/Adherent (cognitive features)
Regular Christian	<b>Individual</b> Invisible Present Smooth Easily accessible <b>Benevolent</b>	Simple Enjoying Knowing the meaning of life
Fanatical Christian (Miss Kilman)	<b>Individual</b> Suffering Knowing Assuaging	Bitter Burning Turbulent Painful Hateful Unforgiving Oppressive Forced Suffering
Atheism/Pantheism (Clarissa)	<b>Antagonistic</b> Multiple Culpable	Good Grateful
Idols: Social status Proportion Conversion	<b>Individual</b> by which you can prosper can be acquired formidable imposing its will <b>Antagonistic</b>	Infallible

Thus, we can see that the various layers of these concepts coincide only in one cognitive feature, which is "individual" and have a couple of

contrasting features in the conceptions of God: beneficent/antagonistic. Similar conclusions are stated in the study by Nadia Gerritsen: "Rather than presenting a general view of how secularization impacted the world and society, Mrs. Dalloway shows the messy, multifarious, and intimate response of different people on an ordinary day [1, p. 55]. In Woolf's artistic picture of the world (based on this novel) she seems to be asserting that the concept of religion is a purely individual thing and the main questions are whether one's God is beneficent or antagonistic and who provides the purpose to one's life.

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