

# Conceptual Container Metaphors and Entrapment in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

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*This paper deals with conceptual container metaphors in the novel Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf. The study is based on the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors we Live by), as well as on its extended versions which have contributed to the study of conceptual metaphor in literary texts, as proposed by Werth (Text Worlds) and Tsur ("Lakoff's Roads"). The focus is on container metaphors suggesting entrapment and containment, identified both through rapid conceptualisation (identification by means of the immediate context) and its delayed counterpart (metaphors discovered bearing in mind the entire text of the novel). We argue that container metaphors in the novel combine into a metaphoric web permeating the entire body of the novel and defining all the characters. This undercurrent of metaphors helps create an atmosphere of entrapment.*

Keywords: English literature / Woolf, Virginia / cognitive theory of metaphor / conceptual metaphor / rapid conceptualisation / delayed conceptualisation / sustained metaphor / entrapment / containment

*A Woman Contained is a Woman  
Constrained: 'Out of doors, out of the  
window, out of her body and brain'*

For a century or so, Virginia Woolf has been read, analysed, re-read, explained and (re)contextualised. Numerous perspectives have been employed, most notably psychoanalysis – Freudian, Jungian or Lacanian, as well as their derivatives. Feminist theory and queer criticism, amongst other approaches, have also found in Woolf more than a rewarding source.

While Woolf's language itself – the words which the author was very conscious of ("Do I *fabricate with words*, loving them as I do?"; Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* 56) – has been recognised as beautiful, poetic

and melodious, and its contribution to conveying the idea of the character and the subject as a (seemingly Deleuzian) flux of sensations acknowledged, it has seldom been systematically and consistently analysed within her narrative.

The authors of this article believe that an immense contribution to what might be perceived as an all-pervading atmosphere of anxiety and discomfort in Woolf's novels is rendered through the underlying conceptual metaphors that she employs systematically and coherently, sending strong overt and covert messages. Thus, we set to explore cognitive linguistic aspects of Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*, i.e. the use of conceptual imagery which permeates its texture and amounts to more than just the beautiful and the poetic. We argue that the identified container metaphors – suggestive and reflective of the entrapment of virtually all the characters in the novel, but not always easily recognisable – combine into a network which underpins the entire narrative, sending a clear subliminal message.

## Theoretical background and methodological framework

The theoretical remarks which follow include a brief overview of conceptual metaphor, as well as the expanded framework of studying such metaphors in works of literature. We then continue by giving a quick outline of the previous work on metaphors in Woolf's works, before finally presenting the analysis rendered within the framework specified.

### Conceptual metaphor

In contrast to the traditional understanding of metaphor, the cognitive perspective views it as much more than a simple rhetorical, decorative device. Cognitively speaking, metaphor refers to the conceptualisation of a more abstract concept in terms of that which is more concrete. Let us consider the following set of sentences:

- She has come *a long way*.
- He had *a head start* in life.
- Look how *far* we've *come*.
- We're at *a crossroads*.
- We'll just have *to go* our *separate ways*.
- You'd better *slow down* and think about what you want to do with your life.
- *Our roads* will *cross* again.

- We had *a few bumps in the road* but we managed to make it through the remainder of our college days.

All of the italicised items conceptualise *life* in terms of a *journey*, whereby the travellers are people; life is to be travelled along a *way/road*, which of course can be crossed; people have *crossroads* as turning points in their lives; there are *bumps* which represent difficulties these travellers come across, etc. What underlies all these examples is the so-called *mapping*, where the source domain JOURNEY is mapped onto the target domain LIFE. Hence we get the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which is ingrained in the English language (and not just English) and which gives birth to many examples such as those above, with some of them being established phrases, and other being novel (*He's cruising down the highway of success*). Of course, this is not the only way *life* is conceptualised in English, although it is one of the prevailing metaphors – life can also be conceptualised as a GAMBLE (*I'll take my chances; It's a toss-up; If you play your cards right...*), BUILDING (*Her life is in ruins; He is trying to rebuild his life*), GIFT/VALUED POSSESSION (*We value the life of every man; gift of life*), CONTAINER (*Life is full of surprises; Live your life to the fullest; I need to fill the emptiness in my life*), etc. All the instantiations represent *metaphorical expressions*, whereby the term *metaphor* itself denotes an abstract conceptualisation process. Accordingly, “metaphor is only derivatively a linguistic phenomenon” (Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture* 8). Put differently, metaphor facilitates the way we understand the world and exceeds the level of a merely linguistic expression – instead, metaphor represents the mental mapping in our cognition that is reflected in the language (Lakoff *Women*; Langacker; Gibbs; Fauconnier; Taylor).

Conceptual metaphor permeates thought and language. It has become a blooming field of research for cognitive linguistics, ever since the seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson was published (*Metaphors We Live by*, 1980). Given that “it is hard to think of a common subjective experience that is not conventionally conceptualised in terms of metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* 45), this area of research has generated vast interest amongst scholars over the last few decades.

### **Conceptual metaphor: The *container* metaphor**

We shall separately cover one special type of conceptual metaphor, as it is central to our analysis, while further explanations thereof may be warranted. In the above depiction of the various conceptualisations for

the source domain *life*, we mentioned the metaphor LIFE IS A CONTAINER (*Life is full of surprises; Live your life to the fullest; I need to fill the emptiness in my life*). This metaphor belongs to the class of the so-called container metaphors which seem to be universal, i.e. cross-cultural, and which are very productive.

The container metaphor, as many other major metaphors, was first discovered by Lakoff & Johnson (*Metaphors We Live by*). The rationale behind the conceptualisation is that “certain directly emergent concepts, like containers, with a clear structure” could be “utilised in understanding concepts that have no such clear structure” (Kövecses, *Emotion Concepts* 144). This generates major metaphors such as BODY IS A CONTAINER (*He was full of anger*), EVENT IS A CONTAINER (*What are you hoping to get out of it?*), COUNTRY IS A CONTAINER (*which we can go into*), and TIME IS A CONTAINER (*She did it in three minutes*). Thus, the container metaphor is a pervasive type of ontological metaphor (in which an abstraction is presented as something concrete), where a concept is conceptualised as having an *inside* and an *outside*, or being *capable of holding* something else. It is one of the most important and well-established metaphors in the human cognition.

### **Conceptual metaphors in the study of literary texts**

The cognitive perspective has shed new light on the study of literary texts as of late. Hobbs opens his book *Literature and Cognition* by remarking that “[l]iterature is first of all discourse. Therefore, it should be possible to apply to it methods and insights arising from the analysis of discourse” (1). As noted above, in the study of discourse and linguistics in general, the theory of conceptual metaphors has opened new doors into the cognitive realm of discourse production and interpretation. Consequently, the study of such metaphors in literary texts has steadily been gaining ground in the form of the ever more systematic efforts within the field broadly defined as “cognitive literary criticism” (Richardson and Steen 2). The historical “tension” between linguistics and literature is thus being fruitfully overcome and the cognitive linguistic approaches to literature have brought with them “the air of the tower and the heat of the stove,” as Freeman metaphorically puts it (1175).

The papers studying the conceptual metaphors employed by writers in their literary works have seen such metaphors as reflections of writers’ cultures (Richardson and Steen 6), as well as of their individual

styles and entire worldviews (Semino and Steen 239). In this paper, we are particularly interested in the latter – the potential of the conceptual imagery to shed light on the implicit worldview in a text (Wolf 173–174) – Virginia Woolf’s in this case, which we hypothesise to be that of entrapment.

### **Conceptual metaphors we (do not) live by in literature: Delayed conceptualisation, megametaphors, and subliminal messages**

Abbott notes: “Literature does not work as literature until it is cognised. Given the complexity of its great achievements, it is an ideal subject for cognitive study” (720). This is why we have chosen the cognitive perspective, particularly the theory of conceptual metaphor, as the starting point of our study. However, to analyse literary subtleties of the items which cannot be unequivocally judged as either metaphorical or non-metaphorical, i.e. which have double potential meanings – as well as metaphors extending over considerable stretches of text which can be recognised only after grasping the underlying semantic structure of the text – we believe that a deeper and more nuanced framework is needed, which is why we shall present some attempts at such a model.

Given the potential of conceptual imagery to expose an implicit worldview, as noted above, we shall first take into account the extended version of metaphor interpretation, as proposed by Werth (*Text Worlds*), and present some of the terms needed for this analysis, as he defines them.

Werth notes that Lakoff and Johnson’s analysis seems to be reduced to sentence phenomena and that it treats literature as yet another domain to study metaphor in, with basically the same tools and processes applied as in other discourses. However, Werth (*Text Worlds* 84) rightly remarks that there are real differences between everyday metaphors and metaphors found in literature in a significant number of cases. *Sustained metaphors*, he adds, extend throughout the text and are not confined to single phrases or sentences. “There may be an entire metaphorical ‘undercurrent’ running through a whole text, which may manifest itself in a large number and variety of ‘single’ metaphors” (80), and these *undercurrents* cannot be studied through Lakoff and Johnson’s model solely. The *underground metaphor* is a result of the obvious surface metaphors combining “to point to a compelling subliminal message” (85) and are not to be limited

to single locations, but are instead cumulatively achieved through the overarching discourse processes. It is precisely the accumulation of various metaphors clustering around a single frame which gives the text its power, Werth concludes.

Another Werth's concept we shall draw on is that of *double vision* ("The Linguistics"; *Text Worlds*), which presupposes that some literary metaphors are double-layered, meaning that not only do they consist of two levels (the literal and the figurative), but that they also have "a special quality that we can see both simultaneously, or one through the other" (83).

Building on this, another categorisation, proposed by Tsur ("Oceanic' Dedifferentiation"; "Lakoff's Roads"), could shed more light on how metaphorical conceptualisation may be studied in literature. Tsur also finds it difficult to *live by* Lakoff's view on conceptual metaphor in its entirety. According to the author, the theory seems not to hold when applied to literary texts. He challenges Lakoff on several planes and finds his theory and practice somewhat objectionable, in particular because, when applying them to literary texts, he sticks to the safe ground of "rapid conceptualisation," while it is "delayed conceptualisation" which leads to a conceptual breakthrough by "insist[ing] on certain 'meaning potentials' of the sign unit, the final meaning being determined by its unforeseeable interaction with the signs that constitute the context" (Tsur, "Lakoff's Roads" 340). Therefore, apart from the first conceptualisation, we form of a unit, i.e. the flash insights usually attained upon our first encountering the unit (*rapid conceptualisation*), the knowledge of the entire context and the text may thus give rise to a new, double vision of the unit – we might see it to have new, additional meanings, in light of the metaphorical undercurrent of the entire text (*delayed conceptualisation*). The latter is usually subtler, but indispensable when analysing literature. In the analysis, we will also argue that units deemed entirely unmetaphorical at first reading may indeed be found to be potentially metaphorical after a sustained metaphor – the metaphorical undercurrent of the entire text – has been identified through more salient and obvious metaphors. This might be a type of what Tsur calls *delayed conceptualisation*, or what we might term as *subsequent conceptualisation*.

## **Conceptual metaphor, cognitive approach, entrapment, and Woolf**

There has not been much research on the concepts we dwell on separately, let alone on their combined impact in any of Virginia Woolf's texts. As far as **metaphor** in its broadest sense is concerned, mentions of it in Woolf's texts are scattered sporadically throughout different papers, but only as ancillary means to corroborate different points in research focused on something else (the prevalent and pervasive themes or motifs).

As for a cognitive perspective in any form, Vorobyova's "interplay of imagery and symbolism through a cognitive lens" (202) is, to our best knowledge, the only analysis that has so far focused on the conceptual metaphor and cognitive operations exclusively in one of Woolf's texts.

On the other hand, without dwelling particularly on the very words suggestive of it, entrapment or its variations also feature in the critical discourse on Virginia Woolf. Charles sees her as "playing out, through her characters, tensions between insanity and creativity and between *freedom, containment, and constraint*" (71).

As for the container metaphor itself, it has been noted that Woolf employs the standard concept of LIFE AS A CONTAINER. Harbus notices that

Woolf likes to describe life itself as a metaphoric container or frame for consciousness, with a culturally specific, now outmoded, metaphor based on a "gig-lamp", or carriage light: "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end". (189)

Thus, the findings in the critical discourse on Woolf do include some references to concepts similar to ours and only vaguely tangent to what we argue might be central to understanding as to why the reader's anxiety seems to build up alongside that of the character as the narrative proceeds through a succession of "floral" descriptions, ethereal passages and flashbacks on one's sweet youth. Woolf's inclination towards the use of symbols, creating the atmosphere of containment, as well understanding the mind as a container, have thus been only sporadically observed in the literature and there has been no systematic investigation into her use of conceptual container metaphors, which we attempt at in this paper.

## Data and method

The data analysed in this paper, as stated above, refer to the text of the Virginia Woolf's novel – *Mrs Dalloway*.

The methodological framework has been referred to above. For the sake of clarity, we shall outline it here again in more concrete terms:

- we intend to examine conceptual metaphors in the novel *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, based on the classical framework of conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors We Live by*), as described above;

- using the described Werth's model (*Text Worlds*), we attempt at discovering sustained metaphors in the novel, achieved through the accumulation of single metaphors scattered throughout the novel;

- upon revealing sustained metaphors, through several re-readings of the text, we revisit some units, at first not identified as metaphorical, and through delayed conceptualisation (Tsur, "Lakoff's Roads") or, more precisely, subsequent conceptualisation, arrive at a number of units that might also work as metaphors drawing from the same sustained metaphors as the more salient units first identified;

- based on the metaphors discovered, especially the sustained ones, but also the salient units rapidly conceptualised as metaphors, we try to extrapolate the subliminal message and implicit worldview in the novel.

The underlying method is essentially linguistic, although the detailed comments and the analysis building on it – which we present as the paper progresses – are more in the style of literary criticism. We believe that the combination of the two can render a more complete analysis and the two components thus complement each other.

## Analysis

In the following section we present our analysis. We shall start by illustrating our method within the theoretical framework specified above and then continue with a more detailed analysis.

### Rapid and delayed conceptualisation in *Mrs Dalloway*

Upon first reading the novel in the quest for metaphors which can be identified rapidly, we were left under the impression that it abounds in container metaphors – most salient and obvious of them being the

BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor. The metaphor quoted at the beginning of this paper perhaps embodies it best:

- (1) [S]oft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by *the open staircase window* which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, *out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain* which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 55)

Using Lakoff's framework, one can easily identify the surface metaphorical realisations "out of her body and brain" as belonging to the conceptual metaphor BODY AS A CONTAINER. However, a keen reader might notice something else as well, which cannot be accounted for using the Lakoff's framework: the parallel "out of doors, out of the window" and "out of her body and brain." They might also stop at "the open staircase window" found above, after re-reading the passage through the new perspective borne out by this parallel. We will come back to that point later in our analysis and deal with the most obvious first.

Let us illustrate the body container metaphors with additional examples from the novel:

- (1) Away and away *the aeroplane shot*, till it was nothing but a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr. Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, *to get outside his body, beyond his house*, by means of thought, Einstein, speculation, mathematics, the Mendelian theory – away the aeroplane shot. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 53)
- (2) She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; *at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone*; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 39)
- (3) But often now *this body she wore* (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 40)
- (4) There was *emptiness about the heart of life*; an attic **room** (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 55).

Using Lakoff's framework, we can conclude that the characters in the novel see their body as a container, which, in itself, is nothing uncom-

mon. Additionally, one might work out the mappings and arrive at a conclusion that the body is a border/barrier between the inside (entrapment) and the outside (freedom): being *inside* is being *entrapped*; being *outside* is being *free*; going *out* is setting oneself free. This insight might help understand the novel better and what the main character (and others) go through. However, we suggest that we might gain more insight using Werth's model (*Text Worlds*).

The overall single body container metaphors accumulate in the text and combine into the sustained metaphor – LIFE IS PRISON, which sends a subliminal message (and a literal one at the end of the novel), that death might be liberation and a way out of the prison. This metaphor is realised and instantiated throughout the novel, obviously in the more salient metaphors as the ones illustrated above. However, with this new insight, can we unravel more?

Let us go back to our examples above. We commented on the window (1); now let us look at (2), where we find the symbol of *aeroplane*. Symbols *per se* are essentially a type of conceptual metaphor. So, an aeroplane, when paralleled with the linguistic metaphor “get outside oneself,” might be viewed as a symbol of self-liberation. To avoid bias and reading too much into this symbol, let us consider additional descriptions relating to the said plane:

- (5) The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, **freely**, like a skater... (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 48)
- (6) Then suddenly, **as a train comes out of a tunnel, the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds** again... (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 48)
- (7) [W]hy not enter in [St. Paul's cathedral], he thought, put this leather bag stuffed with pamphlets before an altar, **a cross, the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking** and questing and knocking of words together and **has become all spirit, disembodied**, ghostly – why not enter in? he thought and while he hesitated **out flew the aeroplane** over Ludgate Circus. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 53)

We see that the aeroplane moves *freely* (6), that it comes *out* of clouds, as a train *out of a tunnel* (7), and we find the parallel with the cross, which is a symbol of something *soaring* and which has become *all spirit* and *disembodied* (8) – there is no body, which is a container. There is no denying that the aeroplane is a symbol of liberation, which is equated to disembodiment. We might assume that the body container metaphors and the imagery relating to the aeroplane draw from the same source – the sustained metaphor LIFE IS PRISON.

In (3), the main character sees herself *outside, looking on* (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 38) (practically disembodied). This is compared to

being *out, out, far out to sea and alone* – the sea/ocean is a common symbol of liberation,<sup>1</sup> although freedom often comes at a cost (since these calm waters can turn dark and stormy). Using Lakoff's model solely, we will most certainly miss sea as a metaphor deriving from the sustained entrapment metaphor. And this is not the only indication of sea being a metaphor deriving from the same source – *waves, sea, and water* are recurring images in the novel.

In (5) there is a reference to the *attic room*, combined with the *emptiness of her heart*, which is an obvious body container metaphor. *Rooms, windows, and doors* are also uncommonly recurrent – if we conduct a simple test of frequency and compare it against the results from the British National Corpus, as representative of the general language, we arrive at the following (Table 1):

	Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words)
<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	
window	0.78
door	1.16
room	2.00
BNC	(per 1,000 words)
window	0.10
door	0.23
room	0.29

Table 1. Frequency of the selected words in *Mrs Dalloway* and the BNC

Apparently, these words (*window, door* and *room*) are much more frequent in the novel than in everyday language, and seem to be reflective of the novel's entrapment atmosphere. Not only that – from the perspective of the sustained container metaphor, they might also function as metaphors themselves.

As noted above, this underpinning entrapment metaphor and message cannot be reached solely through rapid conceptualisation. In fact, it is the context – combined with the above-mentioned conceptualisation mechanisms and even some degree of what Vorobyova calls “conceptual defamiliarisation” – that develops it gradually and thus all the more ominously. It might prove useful here to quote one meta-fictional

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<sup>1</sup> In Freudian psychology, the *oceanic feeling/experience* is that of *limitlessness* and *freedom* (Vermorel and Vermorel).

passage from the novel in which quite unexpectedly, but conveniently, all the concepts we invoke in our analysis resurface:

- (8) Oddly enough, she was one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met, and possibly (this was a theory he used to make up to account for her, so transparent in some ways, so inscrutable in others), possibly she said to herself, As we are a doomed, *chained* to a sinking ship (her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical *metaphors*), as the *whole thing* is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our *fellow-prisoners* (Huxley again); decorate the *dungeon* with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 90)

This is, arguably, the longest and the most comprehensive elaboration of the sustained metaphor LIFE IS PRISON and the subliminal message/implicit worldview that humans are entrapped, condemned to living. In a most self-conscious manner, Woolf extends the metaphor LIFE IS PRISON by evoking a set of powerful images: chains, fellow prisoners and a dungeon. Peter Walsh's *theory* on Clarissa elaborated here is Woolf's meta-fictional address to the reader and a bold revelation of her own poetics: it is a theory "transparent in some ways, so inscrutable in others," much like the rapid and delayed conceptualisation one must employ to understand the sustained metaphor. And just as the character "mitigate[s] the sufferings of ... fellow-prisoners [by] decorat[ing] the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions," so does the author embellish the narrative of containment and entrapment with the ethereal quality of her sentence and keenness of observation. Woolf tries to make the entrapment of the narrative bearable to the reader much as Mrs Dalloway tries to make the entrapment of life bearable to her co-sufferers relying exclusively on the aesthetic.

In the following section, we deal with the identified container metaphors in more detail.

### **Rooms, doors, windows: In and out of the container**

The three salient container metaphors, referred to above as well as in the title of this section, are analysed and discussed in the following lines. The analysis, which follows, rests on the underlying linguistic method, but the comments we make based on the linguistic findings also echo comments in the vein of critical literary analysis.

## Doors

Doors in *Mrs Dalloway* open and shut countless times. The novel actually begins with the extension of the room metaphor – the third in the sequence of simple, yet visually evocative sentences comprising the introductory passage of the novel reads: “*The doors would be taken off their hinges*” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 35), and exactly in this sense the metaphor is viewed/understood in our paper – within the context of delayed conceptualisation, which is mostly how container metaphor is employed in successful literary narration. It is a temporary removal of the barrier of a container both between the inside/domesticity/family and the outside/society and the beginning of a painful circular journey. This is a departure point both (meta-)literary for the novel and metaphorically for Clarissa, who embarks on a day of adventure. The conventional metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is both questioned, extended and elaborated since Clarissa’s journey is a return one – it is a movement in a container (room, home), within a container (the City). This is one example of a conventional container metaphor (“rapidly” conceptualised) serving as a conceptual element to build up to the sustained metaphor LIFE IS PRISON, i.e., to the subliminal message of entrapment.

When advising Rezia on how to help Septimus, Dr. Holmes suggests “a nice out-of-door game,” as “the very game for her husband” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 51). The phrase poignantly conveys the sense of entrapment and the idea of LIFE AS PRISON, especially for someone tormented by a serious mental ailment and entrapped within their unbearable condition. The beauty of this instantiation of the sustained metaphor of entrapment is in its seeming commonness – many a physician at the time would “prescribe” some fresh air to patients with an exceedingly sensitive nervous system and were there no more examples of doors suggestive of containment and constraint, this would be but a passing comment, an insignificant exchange. Nevertheless, in the light of the delayed, subsequent conceptualisation, which seems to be indispensable to literary texts, this is yet another example of a container metaphor. It is probably due to this non-transparency that the importance of container metaphors for literary texts has not been sufficiently acknowledged so far.

In Clarissa’s first reminiscences of her sweet youth, one seems particularly vivid. Clarissa remembers her friend Sally proclaiming *suddenly*: “What a shame to sit indoors!” and prompting the whole party to go “out on to the terrace” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 57). If we dwell on no more but its literal meaning, this exclamation is, again not uncommon, neither

is it uncommon for young people to be restless. Nevertheless, once the subsequent conceptualisation occurs, each instantiation of a metaphor, however superficially insignificant (or, perhaps, precisely because of that) may gain in significance. If we proceed with the analysis, we might discover that the movement the characters make after the invitation is not a forward one; “[they] walked up and down” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 58) in a repetitive, reiterating pattern suggestive of a prison cell or yard. “Doors off their hinges,” giving Clarissa “a sense of something achieved,” further support the underlying idea of entrapment.

Later on into the novel, Clarissa is represented as “go[ing] up into the tower alone” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 67). As soon as she had entered “the door had shut” and she found herself among “the dust of fallen plaster and the litter of birds’ nests” (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 67). The atmosphere of the old and decrepit within a container of a narrow attic room seems only to add to the conceptualisation of LIFE AS PRISON.

Peter Walsh, Clarissa’s old friend and scorned suitor, is very often seen opening doors, usually with a sense of unhealthy escapist enthusiasm, giving an air of an escaped convict rather than that of a long-lost and dearly cherished friend:

- (9) I haven’t felt so young for years! thought Peter, *escaping* (only of course for an hour or so) *from being precisely what he was*, and feeling like a *child who runs out of doors*, and sees, as he runs, his old nurse waving at the wrong *window*. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 71)

The above example (10) is an example of the BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor and in combination with that of the ROOM AS A CONTAINER (“a child who runs out of doors, window”), points to the underground, sustained metaphor LIFE IS PRISON and is suggestive of entrapment.

The following example is another instance of a combination of different conceptual elements pointing to the same subliminal message of entrapment:

- (10) *He was at his best out of doors*, with horses and dogs – how good he was, for instance, when that great shaggy dog of Clarissa’s *got caught in a trap* and had its paw half torn off, and Clarissa turned faint and Dalloway did the whole thing; bandaged, made splints; told Clarissa not to be a fool. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 88)

The next container metaphor to be analysed is that of *windows*.

## Windows

Unlike doors, Woolf's penchant for windows has already been noticed, though not as a container metaphor, but as an architectural concept. In his inspiring text on misperceiving Virginia Woolf, James Harker recognises "the frequency with which Woolf presents characters looking through windows" (17). According to this author, the windows seem to stand for the author's perception (and perspective) and as such can influence the clarity of the image perceived ("modern fiction's interest in perception as the relation of the mind to the outside world"; 18). Woolf and others (notably Keats and James) used this metaphor in terms of perception of the outer world and its (re)production. And unlike Joyce, Woolf did not dare (or rather did not want to) "break the windows" towards too dangerous and disintegrating, and perhaps liberating, an experiment as Joyce did. Scott (372) is aware of "a series of architectural and natural metaphors," which she found to be yet another means of female empowerment, or at least an indicator of a women-specific relation to language, which is a statement which we shall neither try to prove nor repudiate, since gendered language is not within the scope of interest of the paper.

Alongside doors, windows feature prominently as a container metaphor building up to the sustained metaphor LIFE IS PRISON, and, due to lack of space, among the numerous examples we shall focus on just a few which seem to leave little doubt as to the function of the metaphor in the novel.

No sooner has the novel started than the author makes use of the window metaphor, and to a double purpose: to express the main idea/motif of entrapment and to make an abrupt narrative transition into another time and place – Clarissa's youth:

(11) [O]r so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, **she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air.** How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, **standing there at the open window,** that something awful was about to happen. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 35)

And it is not only the protagonist whose entrapment is suggested by the window metaphor. Rezia Warren Smith, the young foreign wife of Septimus, projects her feeling of despair and utter isolation in a strange world beside her strange, ill husband. When the sun – the only thing

which brings memories of the warm, native South – is gone, Rezia finds herself in the bleak, ominous world of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban England, which is *blank of windows*:

- (12) But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, ***blank of windows***, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 50)

The following passage, crammed with participles and gerunds suggestive of both withering and disintegration of the human (female) body and the robust perseverance of the life outside that body, combines the container metaphors of *room* and *body* rolling towards a desperate crescendo of desire to leave the container and break free, as is obvious in (1) (“she paused by the **open staircase window**... feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, **out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain**”; Woolf, *Collected Novels* 55).

Again, it is not only Clarissa that perceives her existence as imprisonment. Septimus, also, in his bitter cynicism and profound contempt for life, perceives windows as perhaps the only remaining way towards the exit out of all the suffocating containers – the room, the building, the society, and the most troublesome and persistent one, that of the body itself:

- (13) There *remained only the window*, the large Bloomsbury-lodging *house window*, the tiresome, the troublesome and rather melodramatic business of *opening the window and throwing himself out*. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia’s (for she was with him). (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 143)

Septimus’s death resonates with Clarissa within the same set of metaphorical container imagery. The metaphors employed throughout the novel are in this disturbing passage conjoined in a way that only a *delayed, subsequent* conceptualisation based on what has been read and learned from the narrative can untangle. Both Septimus’s and Clarissa’s bodies are containers. Both are prisons. Septimus kills himself and thus breaks himself free. Clarissa’s *body* and not her brains is what *goes through it first*. It is a *window* that has been the vehicle of liberation, and finally, when visualising Septimus’s death-liberation for herself, the ground which flashes for him for the one last time is *up*, not *down*, as if his way was upwards and positive and not downwards

and into his death. This corroborates our finding of the sustained metaphor pair LIFE IS PRISON, DEATH IS LIBERATION as the underlying idea of the narrative:

- (14) And they talked of it at her party – the Bradshaws, talked of *death*. He had killed himself – but how? Always her *body went through it* first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her *body burnt*. *He had thrown himself from a window*. *Up*<sup>2</sup> had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 168).

## Rooms

Rooms, not unlike doors and windows, and often conjoined, unravel the underlying idea of entrapment and desire to escape, all the more clearly as the novel approaches its dark ending. Rooms contain the containers of our bodies. They embody imprisonment and witness it resonating within its walls. They also trick us into believing that there might be some dignity left to us, prisoners, with their doors and windows showing that there is the *outside* of the room, and, perhaps, even of the body-prison. We shall discuss here the three most striking instances of the room metaphor.

To carry the idea of entrapment and claustrophobia further, Woolf takes Clarissa up to an attic room. This room feels both suffocating and empty at the same time and its description hints at the idea of regression (withdrawing, child) and suppressed sexless femininity. Although less keen readers might fail to notice it, even the stripping of one's clothes at the end of the passage may be an extension and elaboration of the LIFE IS PRISON metaphor:

- (15) Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went, upstairs, paused at the *window*, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an *emptiness* about the *heart of life; an attic room*. Women *must put off their rich apparel*. At midday they *must disrobe*. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 55)

Again, without the recognition of the underlying sustained metaphor pair LIFE IS PRISON, DEATH IS ESCAPE, “opening the window of

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<sup>2</sup> *Up* is usually conceptualised as *good* (UP IS GOOD), which consequently might imply DEATH IS GOOD.

the room” in the paragraph below (17), as a clear instance of delayed conceptualisation, would hardly sound so conspicuously revealing as it does now. Now, one can understand perfectly why death euphemised twice by verb phrases suggestive of activity, volition and deliberation, can come to anyone as “triumphing ... consolatory, indifferent”:

- (16) [Y]et had they been *dying* that had *some woman breathed her last* and whoever was watching, *opening the window of the room* where she had just *brought off that act of supreme dignity*, looked down on Fleet Street, that uproar, that military music would have come triumphing up to him, consolatory, indifferent. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 134)

Our next example dwells on all the above-mentioned tropes and metaphors adding, though quite cautiously, a new element, that of a typically Modernist sense of a bifurcated, “unfixed existence,” of inhabiting more than one space at the same time (“the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above Westminster”; Woolf, *Collected Novels* 170). This feeling in *Mrs Dalloway* is merely palliative: it is a temporary medicine, a consolation to the prisoners but not a resolution to any of their conflicts. The old lady whom Clarissa watches *in her room* across the street is a mirror image of herself, just a bit forward in time:

- (17) *She walked to the window*. It held, foolish as *the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky* above Westminster. *She parted the curtains*; she looked. Oh, but how surprising! –*in the room opposite* the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was – ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, *in the room opposite*. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, *coming to the window*. (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 170)

As (18) suggests, apart from the final liberation in death, there are other metaphorical images focusing on the escape from the container and these are chiefly connected with different modes of transport and speed, which is yet another modernist obsession and hope towards the so desperately needed reshaping of life as they know it.

## Escaping the container

Modes of transport (cars, taxis, aeroplanes, as well as urban traffic, such as omnibuses), which, as Beer and Schröder noted, appear frequently in Woolf's opus, seem to be quite successful metaphoric vehicles and provide what Schröder terms as "exhilarating escape" from the self. Flying entities such as birds and aeroplanes also feature prominently in the novel, suggesting the possibility of out-flying the world as is known to the characters and us. Still, they too move in circles, reinforcing the idea of imprisonment and entrapment.

Throughout the novel, Clarissa tries painfully to experience (not to define) herself as a free-floating conscious entity gliding on the surface of everyday events, as if they were waves of a powerful ocean of sensations, a source of never-ending joy and surprise and not merely part of the petty existence of a middle-class urban wife, mother and hostess. Still, this in-between "unfixed" existence is only a temporary solution. The critical discourse on Woolf features similar insights on Woolf's characterisation in the novel:

[C]haracter, in *Mrs Dalloway*, is not something merely inherent within a person: it is the *result of an interrelationship* between individuals and the space they inhabit ... Here is the Modernist sense of character not as something innate, but produced from without, from the lived practices (which must include the ideology) of a society, rather from a deep personal subjectivity. (McVicker 215)

As noted earlier, there is a whole aeroplane chapter, with the enthusiastic "away and away the aeroplane shot" uttered repeatedly and accompanied by several equally dynamic variations of the phrase, all to reinforce the idea of speed and flight as temporary liberation of the staleness of everyday existence ("*away and away the aeroplane shot*, till it was nothing but ... a symbol ... of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley ... *to get outside his body, beyond his house*"; Woolf, *Collected Novels* 53). The aeroplane functions as a triumphant symbol of this escape and liberation ("the *triumph* and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved"; Woolf, *Collected Novels* 36).

Having shared as she did, the penchant for speed and travel at great speeds with her contemporary modernists, Virginia Woolf had a particular liking of her own, that for birds and wings as symbolic and metaphoric of the possibility of escape. It is enough to remember the famous opening lines or to dwell on this superb combination of the

metaphors of rooms, windows, birds and flies reiterating once and again, the mutual connection among them and the sustained metaphor pair LIFE IS PRISON, DEATH IS ESCAPE, which we arrive at by means of delayed conceptualisation:

- (18) Gently the yellow curtain with *all the birds of Paradise blew out* and it seemed as if there were *a flight of wings into the room, right out, then sucked back.* (*For the windows were open.*) (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 157)

We would close this subsection with a longish paragraph (20) summing up best the notion of *refusal to fit a container*, which would be quite difficult to recognise as such were it not for delayed conceptualisation:

- (19) She *would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that.* She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; *at the same time was outside, looking on.* She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, *of being out, out, far out to sea and alone;* she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her *it was absolutely absorbing;* all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, *she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.* (Woolf, *Collected Novels* 39)

The protagonist refuses to restrict or reduce herself, or anyone else for that matter, to a definition or a fixed, pre-determined position, form or pattern, which would bound them and set limit(ation)s of any kind. The repeated use of the preposition *out* further reinforces and strengthens our argument.

## Conclusion

In the paper we argued that much of the texture of the novel orbits around the two core containers – that of *room* and that of *human body*. Pertinent to the former are *doors* and *windows* (unhinged open, closed, ajar...), which often function as container metaphors, whereas the latter, which is one of the basic conceptual metaphors in our cognition, views the *body* as a perimeter that separates the self from the *outside*. The main character, Mrs Dalloway, is trapped inside (the room and the body) and throughout the novel seeks to break through, towards

freedom. We argue that the novel is, ultimately, a story of a journey from inside to outside that the main character undertakes. The journey is further conceptualised in terms of other minor container metaphors and is not restricted to the main character solely.

The rough mapping underlying the container rationale would be the following:

- door/window/the body is a border/barrier between the inside (entrapment) and the outside (freedom);
- being *inside* is being *entrapped*;
- being *outside* is being *free*;
- going *out* is setting oneself free.

In addition, we argued that Virginia Woolf's narrative witnesses possibly one of the finest and clearest instances of employing one of the two cognitive strategies – that of *delayed conceptualisation* as opposed to *rapid conceptualisation*, as termed by Tsur in his reaction to Lakoff's theory of metaphor (last update 1998). Through a range of cognitive mechanisms and their combinations by which the container metaphors of ROOM and BODY are *extended*, *elaborated*, *combined* and *questioned* (Kövecses, *Emotion Concepts* 47–49), as well as through a combination and accumulation of individual symbols and other textual elements, a powerful subliminal message is woven into Woolf's enchanting but bitter narrative. And it is precisely this undercurrent, this worldview framed via the container megametaphors of LIFE IS PRISON and DEATH IS ESCAPE that makes the dreamy, elusive and ethereal atmosphere of the novel so disturbing.

Prominent container metaphors functioning as vehicles of Clarissa's (and not only her) entrapment and leading to the sustained metaphors of LIFE IS PRISON and DEATH IS ESCAPE are rooms, (in) houses and buildings. The sheer number of occurrences of certain words, such as door(s) and window(s), testifies to what extent Werth's metaphorical "undercurrent" is omnipresent in the narrative. Even the post-war city of London with its web of streets, teeming crowds, chance meetings and luring shop-windows stands for a huge container of myriads of small colliding containers – bodies (human and otherwise) only reiterating the idea of confused entrapment.

Corroborating our analysis both by showing the prevalence of words suggestive of entrapment and the number of instantiations of the container metaphor, our aim was to show that the two characters' urge to escape both the constraints and limitations of their physical bodies and, possibly, the author's attempt to avoid the constraints and restrictions of the conventional narrative, are (en)coded in Woolf's text at more

than one level. The title character finds herself painfully restricted by all sorts of boundaries, and as it will appear later in the narrative, also by all sorts of *definable shapes and forms*. The only container allowed to absorb, take in and contain is the mind. And the mind itself is not to be absorbed, it is uncontainable and indefinable.

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## Konceptualne metafore vsebovanja in ujetost v *Gospe Dalloway* Virginie Woolf

Ključne besede: angleška književnost / Woolf, Virginia / kognitivna teorija metafore / konceptualna metafora / hitra konceptualizacija / zapoznela konceptualizacija / odložena metafora / ujetost / omejenost

Članek obravnava konceptualne metafore vsebovanja v romanu *Gospe Dalloway* Virginie Woolf. Analiza temelji na teoriji konceptualne metafore (Lakoff in Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*) in njenih razširjenih različicah, ki so prispevale k proučevanju konceptualne metafore v literarnih besedilih (Werth, *Text Worlds* in Tsur, »Lakoff's Roads«). Poudarek je na metaforah vsebovanja, ki nakazujejo ujetost in omejenost, opredeljenih s hitro konceptualizacijo (identifikacija s pomočjo neposrednega konteksta) in njenim zapoznelim dvojnikom (metafore, ki se razkrijejo ob upoštevanju celotnega besedila). Trdimo, da se metafore vsebovanja v romanu združujejo v metaforično mrežo, ki prežema celotno telo romana in definira vseosebe. Ta metaforični podtok pomaga ustvariti vzdušje ujetosti.

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