Masaryk University
Faculty of Arts

Department of English and American Studies

English Language and Literature

Tomáš Klíma

The Deployment of Natural Motifs in the Fiction of V. Woolf
Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

Supervisor: Stephen Paul Hardy, Ph. D.

2014
I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

..............................................
Tomáš Klima
I would like to thank to all the people who supported me and helped me during my studies. Especially I would like to mention Dr. Stephen Paul Hardy, who helped me with his guidance and suggestions during the writing of this thesis.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 4

1. Importance of Selected Motifs ................................................................. 6
   1.1 Importance of Floral Elements ........................................................... 7
   1.2 Importance of Aquatic Elements ......................................................... 8
   1.3 Importance of Time Elements ............................................................. 10

2. Mrs. Dalloway ................................................................................................. 11
   2.1 Flora in Mrs. Dalloway ........................................................................ 12
   2.2 Water in Mrs. Dalloway ....................................................................... 16
   2.3 Time in Mrs. Dalloway ......................................................................... 18

3. To the Lighthouse ............................................................................................ 21
   3.1 Flora in To the Lighthouse .................................................................... 22
   3.2 Water in To the Lighthouse .................................................................... 24
   3.3 Time in To the Lighthouse ..................................................................... 28

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 31

List of Works Cited ................................................................................................... 35

Résumé (English) ...................................................................................................... 37

Résumé (Czech) ......................................................................................................... 38
Introduction

This thesis deals with the topic of natural symbolism, more concretely with the symbolism of aquatic, floral and time motifs in selected fictional works of Virginia Woolf, namely *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The reason why these two novels are chosen is because they were written between the years 1925 and 1927, therefore in a very short period, and they are consecutive novels, where a reader can observe how her techniques, be it her famous stream of consciousness, or usage of symbolism developed. These novels therefore share a number of similarities from which the three motifs occurring repeatedly are selected and compared in this thesis, as well as the development of Woolf’s writing, as she transferred her focus from concrete metaphors to a more abstract one.

The purpose of this work is to prove that the use of these motifs is not accidental and that they are connected with certain memories from the life of Virginia Woolf such as the life at Talland House or her writing in the gardens of Monk’s House. It then proceeds to provide an interpretation of these symbols, using an ecocritical approach. After that it compares and contrasts the use of these symbols in the aforementioned two works by Virginia Woolf and finally it tries to prove that these symbol are in some way connected with the theme of death, which is steadily occurring in Woolf’s novels and is foreshadowing her own suicide by drowning in 1941.

Statements in this paper are based on reading selected novels by Virginia Woolf as well as her diaries and various bibliographies, from which the author selected the latest one written by Alexandra Harris titled *Virginia Woolf* (2011). This bibliography is an important source of information for this thesis, as Harris describes Woolf’s whereabouts which are important due to the fact that Woolf draws a lot of inspiration from the places
she lived in. Apart from this, Harris’s bibliography also provides a fresh modern view on Woolf’s novels and uses Woolf’s correspondence with various people to explain the influences on Woolf’s writing.

The second critical source for this thesis is *Time and Narrative, volume 2* by Paul Ricoeur (1986), in particular the chapter which deals with the time in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In this chapter, Ricoeur discusses the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* with the relation to the Woolf’s concept of time, as well as overall relationship between the narrative, plot and the time. Ricoeur sets out an interesting topic by dividing the narratives into two spheres, one being the “tales of time” the other being “tales about time” (Ricoeur 101). The stories written by Virginia Woolf are supposedly the second one, therefore time plays an important role in them and his analysis of time in *Mrs Dalloway* is important for this thesis.

The third and fourth critical sources for this essay are both written by Irina-Ana Drobot. They are titled “Flowers in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the Light of Day by Graham Smith” (2012) and "Repetition and Variation of Images in Virginia Woolf and Graham Smith" (2013). Both of these essays deal with the symbolism of Woolf and they discuss the use of her images. In the first one Drobot analyses how ecocritical approach might be useful for deeper understanding of Woolf’s novels. She argues that poetical images which occur in *Mrs. Dalloway* have a meaning and that they help to create and form the characters and narrative. In the second one she analyses the repetitiveness of these images and argues that it bears a significance as well.

By analyzing these three motifs in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* reader can observe the way Woolf’s writing has developed in a short period of time and how are these particular motifs reflected in her life and work. This knowledge is useful for
further understating of her narrative, as well as for better understanding of her motives she had while writing these two novels.

1. Importance of Selected Motifs

In order to fully understand the symbolism hidden within the writing of Virginia Woolf it is important to understand the importance of these motifs to Woolf herself. A.D. Moody argues in his book titled *Virginia Woolf* (1963) that the life and experience of Woolf “…did not enter directly into her art, but was only its raw material.” (Moody 2). While it is true that certain events are rather directly reflected in her works, such as the death of her mother in *To the Lighthouse*, and it would seem that she really used her life and experiences as a material for her novels, it would be an exaggeration to claim that her life is not used as an inspiration for her writing. As Harris suggests in her book, Woolf’s memories from youth, mostly the places she lived were a huge inspiration for her. She says that all of her memories “…are connected to the Talland House in St. Ives” and that it was “…a little place of heaven…” for her. (Harris 23, my translation¹). After all, the descriptions of Talland House are rather similar to the descriptions she used in *To the Lighthouse* as both describe some sort of house engulfed by the gardens with the view of the sea. It could therefore be suggested, that her youth and life were influential for her works, and her surroundings, such as the houses she lived in or the gardens which were basically a part of her everyday life were essential for her writing style.

This chapter examines those places, Woolf’s memories and her life, with the focus on floral, aquatic and time elements and tries to connect them to find an element which

¹ Due to the Czech version of the book all citations from Harris are translated by the author of this thesis.
binds them to prove, that these symbols are essential for Woolf and are therefore deliberately used in her works. In some way, this essay presents, that all of these motifs are connected with the element of death.

1.1. Importance of Floral Elements

The first element which is examined is flowers in the life of Virginia Woolf. Flowers are commonly taken as a symbol of beauty or love as the visual aspect of flowers is the most noticeable and most flowers are considered to be beautiful. But flowers bear many unique properties and not all of them have a positive connotation. In fact, flowers can represent basically anything, and their meaning is variable. Virginia Woolf uses this variability of meaning in her works, mostly in Mrs. Dalloway, where flowers appear all the time. They work mostly as an inhibitor of thoughts, where characters remember something from their past, vividly reliving it which corresponds to Woolf’s idea of ‘moments of being’. Nicole L. Urquhart in her article titled “Moments of Being in Virginia Woolf’s Fiction” defines these moments as “…a moment when an individual is fully conscious of his experience, a moment when he is not only aware of himself but catches a glimpse of his connection to a larger pattern hidden behind the opaque surface of daily life.” (Urquhart). These moments can be explained simply by saying that the people ‘feel alive’ in those moment, due to the conscious perception of reality, thus the flowers often make people to be alive, creating the potential counterpart to the death symbolism of water and time which is described later in this essay.

As mentioned in previous chapter, the houses in which she lived were basically always surrounded by huge gardens, and she spent a lot of time writing her works there, especially at the Monk’s house garden room, where she wrote her most famous novels.
In the biography written by Alexandra Harris, Talland House was the “…most influential memory…” of Woolf (Harris 23). It is therefore possible that the garden to which she referred as a ‘paradise’ enchanted little Virginia so much, that she later on decided to incline to flowers and their imagery in her works. In fact, this house and its garden is reflected in her fictional work Jacob’s House where the main protagonist is invited to a dinner party and he describes the garden as “…the grey-green garden, and among the pear-shaped leaves of the escallonia fishing-boats seemed caught and suspended. A sailing ship slowly drew past the women's backs. Two or three figures crossed the terrace hastily in the dusk…” (Jacob’s Room 54). Even though it is only a brief description it is apparent that the garden, to which Harris refers as a place of “amazing sensory perceptions” (Harris 23), serves as an inspiration for Woolf’s writing.

However, probably the most important garden of her life was the one surrounding the Monk’s House in Rodmell, which was bought by Leonard Woolf in 1919, and Woolf spent a huge amount of time in the garden room writing her novels since then. As she mentions in her diaries she “…has so much of the most profound interest to write here – a dialogue of the soul with the soul – and I have let it all slip – why? Because of feeding the goldfish, of looking at the new pond, of playing bowls…” (A Writer’s Diary 205). This dreamy description of the garden or rather the atmosphere she experienced while writing shows that she really liked the place and that it evoked thoughts in her and therefore provided a further inspiration for her works.

1.2 Importance of Aquatic Elements

Water is one of the most influential things in the life of Virginia Woolf. As Kazuko Kajiwara suggests in his article “A Study of Virginia Woolf’s Imagery.” (1955), water imagery is quite important, as “…nautical metaphors predominate in her
[Woolf’s] imagery.” (Kajiwara 1). It is almost possible to claim that she was obsessed with the element of water. Just considering the names of her novels – *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves*. All of these names have something to do with the water.

Water is often perceived as a symbol of life, as it is believed, that life on our planet originated from water. For Woolf, the sea was “…the great renewer, the source of life, the image of eternity and unity.” (Kajiwara 1). It is apparent, that she liked the sea, as many of her novels are situated near the sea, or it is at least in the background. But for Virginia, the water was also a medium of her own death, as she committed suicide by drowning. Therefore once again the dichotomy of life and death arises from this symbol, and it is used accordingly as well in her works.

Virginia Woolf likes to depict her characters very deeply. In fact, most of her works are built around the characters, their feelings and thoughts, leaving the story behind. Water images perfectly fit as they can be represented as something, that flows, constantly moves the same way, the human character evolves and changes. There is also an old greek saying “You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you” by Heraclitus, which sums up the nature of water.

Aquatic elements also provided an inspiration to Woolf. In her letter to Vanessa Bell which she wrote prior to writing *The Voyage Out* she said that she “…usually end up at the beach (…) creating images by the shape of waves.” (Harris 49). Apart from showing her inspiration which is drawn from the sea images, it also shows that she liked to spend her time by the sea, which is later reflected in her works, as her characters like to take a walks along the banks and basically entertain themselves by the sea, ponds or other water related objects.

---

2 From the Greek original “Διὰ τὴς ἑτέρης τοῦ ὑδάτος ἡμείας, ἐμβαίνοντας” , taken from Wikipedia.org.
1.3. Importance of Time Elements

Concept of time in the works of Virginia Woolf is probably the most complex one of the selected three. This is due to the fact that time is unlike the other two a concept made by a man, and is not exactly natural even though it is accepted as one. This is the reason why Ricoeur refers to the works of Virginia Woolf as “tales about time” (Ricoeur 101). Connection with the previous two motifs is once again provided by the symbol of death, as everybody has to die someday and time is used to measure what is remaining of one’s life.

As Harris suggests, all of Virginia’s books somehow deal with the past (Harris 47). This is due to the fact, that the events of her life are recorded in her works, for example the death of her friend inspired her to write Mrs. Dalloway or that she wanted to immortalize her group friends in The Waves. Also, writing about past had another value for Virginia, as she realized, that by “…writing about the past she can put the ghosts of the past that haunted her to the rest…” and find her tranquility (Harris 42). This was very important for her, as many of her family members died due to various illnesses, including her father in 1904 which caused her mental instability and she even tried to commit suicide.

Immortalization or rather one’s legacy is one of the main concerns of Virginia Woolf when it comes to the terms of time. This is due to the deaths in her family, namely the death of her father and her mother. According to Harris, her father left Virginia a lot of books after he died which she read until her death. (Harris 21). This strengthened Virginia’s feelings towards her father, and must have caused her fear of leaving nothing behind. She compared her father’s legacy to the legacy of her mother and she was afraid that after death “…nothing will remain…” and writing then became
her way of running away from such thoughts, because when “…something is written down, it remains forever…” (Harris 21).

She was also afraid of aging and not living her life to the fullest, as she wanted to move from Hogarth House, where she lived with Leonard due to her illness. According to Harris, she felt “…trapped and wanted to experience an adventure in her life…” (Harris 86). On one hand, she sought further inspiration for her works, which she could only find in central London, on the other hand, she is willing to risk her life in order to write – therefore in order to leave something behind her and she was afraid, that her time is running out.

2. Mrs. Dalloway

This chapter analyzes the symbolism of selected motifs within the novel Mrs. Dalloway, especially the motif of flora since it occurs very often and it plays a significant role in the story. The floral elements in this story help characters in various ways – they trigger memories of events from the past, they help to create the characters as a whole and they induce thoughts about life and death as well. Motifs of water and time occur in this novel as well, but unlike the flora which is displayed through specific flowers and plants, they tend to appear more abstractly. Aquatic motifs in this story are presented in a rather particular way, as objects that seemingly have nothing to do with water gain its properties. The motif of time is notably presented by the strikes of Big Ben and by constant flashbacks to the past, providing two different attitudes towards time.
2.1. Flora in Mrs. Dalloway

As mentioned, floral motifs are dominant in this story. They approach the reader straight from the first sentence: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.” (Mrs. Dalloway 1). By this sentence Woolf introduces the reader to her story and to the main protagonist of this story, Mrs. Dalloway. It can therefore be assumed that Mrs. Dalloway has a positive relations with flowers, as she is willing to buy them herself instead of sending her servants to do so. This is proven later in the story as she approaches the flower shop and she sees:

“...flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes--so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym ( . . . ) snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness.” (Mrs. Dalloway 18).

She experiences relief from the urban life between those flowers and her knowledge of all the types of flowers implies that they are important for her.

As Irina-Ana Drobot suggests, “Flowers (and nature generally speaking) accompany characters in their perception of life around them. They may serve as occasions for moments of vision, where one may experience poetic moments, led by one’s imagination” (Drobot, “Flowers” 151). One of these moments occurs to Clarissa right at the florist, as she goes around the flowers with Miss Pym, the florist. She starts to fade out of reality as she smells the flowers in the shop: “…as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up…” (Mrs. Dalloway 19). Notice that she is talking about defeating some sort of ‘hatred or ‘monster’ possibly suggesting that flowers and their scent help her to
overcome bad situations in life. There is a little reflection of Woolf herself, as she wrote this novel while living in the Monk’s House and she used to do so in the little lodge in the garden.

Apart from awakening the imagination, floral images are also connected to one’s past. As Drobot mentions, flowers are used for “…simply bringing back memories (Clarissa).” (Drobot, “Flowers” 151). When Clarissa remembers about Sally in Bourton one of the characteristics she mentions is “…her way with flowers, for instance ( . . .) Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias- all sorts of flowers that had never been together- cut their heads off, and made them swim on top of the water in bowls.” (Mrs. Dalloway 47). She presents a new character in the story with the image of flowers. Also, Clarissa’s most memorable moment in her life is connected to the motif of flowers: “Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips” (Mrs. Dalloway 49).

After this, Clarissa automatically enters the state of trance, or as Woolf would name it, she experiences a ‘moment of being’. So in addition to bringing the memories back, floral images are connected to the most important memories, creating a link through which they can be relived again and again. They also serve as a medium for describing characters.

This idea is mostly apparent with the characters of Lady Bruton and Clarissa, as they are the only two women in the story that receive a bouquet as a gift. Rebecca L. Walkowitz in her essay named “Floral Growth of Genuine Emotion” suggests that by the way these two women deal with the gift Woolf “…critiques the etiquette of floriography…” (Walkowitz 1). She examines the behavior of Lady Bruton when she receives the flowers from Hugh Whitbread. While it is true, that she acts rather awkwardly at the moment she receives the flowers from Hugh as she was “…holding them rather stiffly…” and then “…laid the carnations beside her plate…” (Mrs.
Walkowitz claims that by placing the flowers beside her plate, Lady Bruton “…rejects the flowers significance.” (Walkowitz 2). Yet if one takes into consideration the theory that flowers are a reflection of the character’s personality there is another possible interpretation of why she did so. She does not refuse the symbolism of the flowers, she simply either does not understand them, or is not able to appreciate them due to unfinished duties. Notice that she is able to appreciate the flowers after Hugh finishes the letter for her as she “…stuffed all Hugh’s carnations into the front of her dress…” (Mrs. Dalloway 153), therefore after he finishes the task she asked him to do. In the book it is mentioned that she is a descendant of a general and that she “…should have been a general of dragoons herself” (Mrs. Dalloway 145). She is therefore attributed with a very non-feminine description of her personality, thus possible placing the sense of duty, in this case the writing of the letter, higher on the priority list, which is reflected by the way she handles the bouquet. After the sense of duty is gone, she is able to act naturally, and accept the flowers. Thus again, the flowers are used to expand the reader’s knowledge of a character.

Another important function of floral images is their ability to induce thoughts about life and death. This is best illustrated using the character of Septimus Warren Smith, as he is the one character who contemplates about life and death throughout the story. Unlike other characters, it is not an image of flowers which causes Septimus to think, but the image of trees which causes him to remember about his fallen comrade Evans. This happens at the Regent’s Park. Notice that the location suggests a close proximity to nature, especially trees, thus providing an excellent environment for thinking. The thoughts are induced by the connection between the character and the nature as is shown in the following passage: “But they [the trees] beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body”
(Mrs. Dalloway 31). At this moment, Septimus falls into the similar state of trance as Clarissa does in the flower shop when she smells the flowers. Unlike Clarissa’s vision however, Septimus does not see any uplifting message in this. Due to his war experience and shellshock condition from which he suffers, he is not able to break free from the visions of death. His train of thought leads him from almost poetic image of environment where “Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds.” (Mrs. Dalloway 32) towards the image of “…trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk…” (Mrs. Dalloway 34), successfully transiting from feeling alive to thoughts about death. His connection to nature and trees makes him ponder about the cycle of life and he is struck by the memories from the war which leads him to think about his dead comrade Evans.

The image of Evans and therefore of death being connected to the motif of flowers occurs several times in the story. “He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—“(Mrs. Dalloway 97). Notice that his comrade “answered from behind the tree” and “sang among the orchids”. Once again, there is a flashback to the character’s past and it is connected with the motif of flowers.

Another moment where flowers are clearly connected to the death is shown at the moment Lucrezia brings the bouquet of flowers to their home:

“And Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in a vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and it went laughing, leaping round the room. She had had to buy the roses, Rezia said, from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses. So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead” (Mrs. Dalloway 129).
Again, Septimus mentions his deceased friend from war when he sees the deteriorated flowers. Their condition which is described as “almost dead” reminds him of Evans once again. As is suggested in article by Sara Elizabeth Jordan named *A garden party for spinsters, queers, and whores: Gender performance and nature imagery in the novels of George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* from 2007 “The flowers serve as a bridge between life and death for Septimus and as a way for him to communicate with the dead.” (Jordan 58), thus confirming the idea of connecting floral themes to death.

To sum up, floral images in *Mrs. Dalloway* serve several purposes. Apart from the obvious ones such as having them as setting or decoration, they have an eminent effect on characters. Flowers and trees inspire characters to ponder about their lives, they make them reminisce about the past or help to portray their characteristics. It is important to say that in this book, floral images are addressed directly and are rather dominant.

### 2.2. Water in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Water motifs are frequently used in *Mrs. Dalloway* even though, the setting of the novel in the center of London would suggest otherwise. Of course, they are not as apparent as in the other novels such as *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves* where their significance is suggested even by the name of the novel, yet they still occur quite frequently as Woolf subtly inserts them into the narrative. Still, water sources are almost never mentioned directly but rather metaphorically. This is due to the fact that Woolf uses the properties of water such as fluidity and assigns them to other objects. Kazuko Kajiwara claims that “In her use of these [water] images it seems that her aim was to reflect in her art the sense of movement in life.” (Kajiwara 3). This notion occurs in *Mrs. Dalloway* several times. For example she writes that “The car had gone, but it had
left a slight ripple which flowed…” (Mrs Dalloway 25) or “…her [Rezia’s] sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contended tap left running.” (Mrs. Dalloway 200).

In the first example she places the water-like quality to a passing car which leaves a trace which spreads out to the street, thus creating something to complement her description of the environment. What is more, by this she carefully shifts the scene by the use of these water images, as they occur both at the start and at the end of this paragraph. At the beginning the motion of the car is accompanied by the small ‘ripple’ and at the end of the paragraph the car “sunk” (Mrs. Dalloway 25) thus confirming the idea that these images serve the purpose of reflecting the sense of movement and in addition they help to connect the individual fragments of the story. Woolf uses these images to complement her use of the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique, in the way Johanna K. X. Garvey mentions in her essay titled “Difference and Continuity: The Voices of Mrs. Dalloway” from 1991: “The recurrent imagery – particularly that related to water – reinforces the impression that everything is running together…” (Garvey 60).

The connection between water and death is an interesting subject when studying the writing of Woolf. One has to bear in mind that she in fact committed a suicide by drowning herself and her novels are sort of foreshadowing this incident. In case of Mrs. Dalloway it is the character of Septimus Warren Smith who commits suicide. Although he does so by jumping out of the window, connections with the water can be found in the story before he performs his act as he keeps pondering about life and death. “Suddenly he said, "Now we will kill ourselves," when they were standing by the river” (Mrs. Dalloway 92). At this moment, Septimus thinks about drowning in the river. This is possibly a reflection of Woolf’s own mind, as she was suffering from the mental illness at the time she wrote this novel. What is more, there is a possible counterpart to
this in the novel, as the characters of Clarissa and Septimus are basically two sides of one coin.

This counterpart is presented at the climax of the story – at the party Clarissa is hosting. As she arrives with her husband she is described in following words: “She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist…” (Mrs. Dalloway 116). She wore a dress which resembled in some way a mermaid, thus she engulfed herself in an image of water creature. And to add to this image, Woolf describes her movement as ‘lolloping’ and what is more, she attributes her with the image of being and existing, thus providing an exact counterpart to the idea of Septimus and his association with water and death.

In conclusion, water images in Mrs. Dalloway uses are mostly presented by the properties of water which are attributed to the other objects. The nature of water as a flowing element helps to connect this book together as it uses the technique of ‘stream of consciousness’ and the idea of constant flow is also tightly connected to the motif of death.

2.2. Time in Mrs. Dalloway

The motif of time is possibly the most complex one to interpret yet nevertheless still important for proper understanding of the novel. Its importance can be suggested by the name Woolf gave it while it was still a work in progress. She called it ‘The Hours’ and therefore her main aim, before she changed the names, was possibly to create a story with the focus on time.

Concept of time in Mrs. Dalloway can be divided into two levels on which the time could be understood. Firstly, time is presented by the physical objects, such as the Big
Ben or ticking of the clock. What is important is the physical presence of time which plays a crucial role in this novel as the tolling of Big Ben appears many times in the novel and it therefore constantly reminds characters about the chronological time. As mentioned in the chapter about water motifs, the same sentence is repeated four times as the bell tolls throughout the day. Ricoeur claims that “This sentence, which is repeated three times in the course of the narrative, will of itself recall the sameness of clock time for everyone. (Ricoeur 105). What is significant is that this sound is conveyed throughout the physical media, in this case Big Ben, and it deals with the present time. It might therefore seem that contemporary time is not that important, as the notion of time is the same for everyone. This goes well with Ricoeur’s other claim that “The strokes of Big Ben have their true place in the experience that the various characters have of time.” (Ricoeur 103). This means that the passing of chronological time is not as important for the narrative as the significance which is given to it by the characters themselves. And the fact that the narrative of Mrs. Dalloway is, unlike To The Lighthouse which is analyzed later, compressed into a single day suggests the same. It is therefore not the contemporaneity which is important for the story, but the memories and the past which cause the narrative to progress as the memories bear the experience of characters, although the constant reminder of present time could be interpreted as a way of reminding the characters of running time and therefore about the death.

The exact opposite of this symbolizes the sound of St. Margaret’s. Unlike the sound of Big Ben which is described as “…a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable” (Mrs. Dalloway 6) which points out the burden of passing time, St. Margaret is described in following way: “… and the sound of St. Margaret’s glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight…” (Mrs.
Dalloway 69). Sounds of St. Margaret’s seem pleasing and the language which Woolf uses is in contrast with the description of Big Ben, hence creating a counterpart to the grim toll of Big Ben.

Second level of time is developed in the story throughout the memories of characters. These memories are not physically represented in the story by some sort of ticking or tolling as the previous one and happen therefore only in the minds of the characters. These are important to the development of the plot, as they provide an information about character’s pasts, their youth or thoughts which are reflected in the light of contemporary events. History of the characters is important due to the fact, that by telling us their stories, Woolf creates a complete image of them. As is mentioned in her diaries, for this novel she developed what she calls a ‘tunneling process.’ Woolf described it as following: “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humor, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment.” (The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol.2 263). This means that Woolf intended to dig into the past of her characters to tell us their story, to give us an overview of their thoughts and build their characteristics on it.

This is highly important for understanding the story as a whole, as two main characters, Septimus and Clarissa constantly think about their pasts and their memories provide an overview of their characters. The point is, that by showing us their memories Woolf creates a plot which comes to conclusion at the end of the day, where the present and the past meet and mingle together and all the thoughts of Clarissa and other characters about the past and future and about ‘what could have been if’ are answered at Clarissa’s party. One of these questions that accompany Clarissa throughout the novel is question about being. At the beginning she asks herself, while walking down the street
following question: “…did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 13). She is not sure, whether the idea of death wiping completely her existence is consoling or resentful, and the fact that she thinks about not living her life to the fullest throughout the story suggests the latter option. This is something that Woolf herself was afraid of after the death of her father and therefore the idea of dying and not leaving any trace after oneself is directly reflecting Woolf herself.

To sum up, the idea of time in this novel bears a significant importance when it comes to understanding the narrative. Motifs of time are presented in two forms, one being the physical, chronological time of the present, which is represented by the bells of Big Ben or St. Margaret’s. The other one is portrayed throughout the memories and pasts of the characters, which thanks to the technique Woolf used helps to draw the characteristics of characters. In the end, these two time levels meet and mingle together, creating a final scene of this story. The fear of death is reflected via the constant reminder of death, which is provided by the Big Ben and other clocks, and through Clarissa’s thought about leaving some sort of legacy after death.

### 3. *To The Lighthouse*

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of the novel *To the Lighthouse*. Unlike *Mrs. Dalloway* this novel is not so filled with the images of flora, but its’ imagery shifts more to the abstract area. As the title suggests, the dominant motif in this novel is the motif of water which is presented by the sea and the object of lighthouse. Floral images appear through little details and objects in the story. The concept of time is not represented by ticking clocks or tolling of bells but it rather follows the idea of abstract
image which Woolf created through the flashbacks in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Important thing is as Harris claims that “Woolf realized that by this novel she put the ghosts of her deceased family members to rest. “I wrote this book fast” she said later “and when it was finished I stopped being obsessed by my mother. I don’t hear her voice nor see her anymore” (Harris 97). It can therefore be observed as some sort of elegy which Woolf composed to get rid of the ghosts from her past.

3.1 Flora in *To The Lighthouse*

Although floral images are not occurring as often as they are in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf still uses them in this novel. This abandonment of floral images which were very tangible supports the idea that Woolf’s style is shifting towards the images which are more abstract than concrete.

The first important picture of flowers in *To the Lighthouse* is described during the walk of Mrs. Ramsay and Charles Tansley. He looks at her and describes her as “Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair.” (*To The Lighthouse* 18). This description fits Mrs. Ramsay’s personality, as she is a caring mother of many children, thus the “lambs that had fallen”, and she is also a housekeeper hence “taking to her breast buds that had broken”. This is a very poetic description of Mrs. Ramsay and flowers in this case serve as a similar symbol as in *Mrs. Dalloway* – they tell the reader more about her and help to build up the overall image of character. It is possible that Woolf also embraces the femininity throughout these flowers, as she assigned Mrs. Ramsay with the gender role of mother and connected it with flowers. This can be observed from the feelings of Tansley, as he “…felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets for he was talking with a beautiful woman for the first time in
his life.” *(To The Lighthouse 18).* The floral images are connected with the gender of the character, which happened in *Mrs. Dalloway* as well, as there were two women who received a gift in form of flowers and thus the use of flowers in this case is similar and Woolf repeats her imagery. As Irina-Ana Drobot suggests in her paper titled “Repetition and Variation of Images in Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift” from 2013, “Repetition and variation mark poetic moments, as intense perception of reality is expressed in lyrical way” *(Repetition 116).* This is what happens with Tansley and Mrs. Ramsay, he poetically gives her attributes based on his perception.

This intense perception of reality is repeated in the book at the moment Mr. Ramsay ponders about his life in a very philosophical way. He experiences the following:

“Here, stopping for one moment by the stone urn which held the geraniums, he saw, but now far, far away, like children picking up shells, divinely innocent and occupied with little trifles at their feet and somehow entirely defenseless against a doom which he perceived, his wife and son, together, in the window. They needed his protection; he gave it them.” *(To The Lighthouse 40).*

The mere presence of flowers awakens his perception and thoughts in his head which is very similar to the way flowers induced memories and thoughts in characters in *Mrs. Dalloway.* Woolf herself admits this use of flowers when she repeats the image of the flowers: “…seeing again the urns with the trailing of red geraniums which had so often decorated processes of thought…” *(To The Lighthouse 41).* Woolf uses the flowers to provide an inspiring element to her characters, something, upon which they can draw their thoughts.

This is what happens with Lily Briscoe and her painting. She finds an inspiration for her painting by looking at the tablecloth: “There's the sprig on the table-cloth; there's
my painting; I must move the tree to the middle; that matters--nothing else.” (To The Lighthouse 98). Notice, that flowers are not mentioned directly, but rather through the property of the table cloth having a floral pattern. This is similar to the use of water images in Mrs. Dalloway. This indicates her shift from concrete symbols towards the quality-like symbolism which is more abstract.

Apart from having an effect on characters, floral imagery serves also as a reminder of destructive force of nature. This is most notable at the end of third chapter of second part of the book, where Mrs. Ramsay dies. The scene is described as following: “The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters…” (To The Lighthouse 146). Of course, there are other elements participating in the destruction, but it is the image of trees being plunged which is visually the most destructive force in the process, along with the sea. Notable is the fact that Mrs. Ramsay is described as dead after this scene and therefore the utter destruction caused by nature is partially connected with her death, thus providing a connection between flora and death in this story.

3.2 Water in To The Lighthouse

Unlike Mrs. Dalloway where the images of water are addressed throughout their qualities, in To the Lighthouse Woolf is available to access the water directly thanks to the setting of the novel by the sea. As the title suggests, the main objective or goal of this novel is for the characters to reach the lighthouse. Its’ significance is therefore undeniable, yet the title itself does not say much about the meaning of this building. As mentioned in introductory paragraph, this story is based on Woolf’s youth, more
precisely on her youth at Talland House and it can be therefore presumed, that the images Woolf provides in this story are tightly connected with the life at Talland House.

In the first part of the book which is named “The Window” the reader discovers that the lighthouse can be seen outside the window in the house and that it serves as a destination to which they want to travel. It is said that “This going to the lighthouse was a passion of his [James]…” (To The Lighthouse 24). It is therefore safe to assume, that the lighthouse is something equivalent to an ultimate goal, something that characters, or at least the character of James who is one of the main protagonists of this novel, strongly wish to achieve. This is interesting, as the lighthouse is separated from the land by the sea, and characters therefore must somehow find a way through the sea, which is mostly described as having “dreary waves” (To The Lighthouse 7) or “waves mountains high” (To The Lighthouse 10) thus creating an image of an impassable path.

These dark descriptions of the sea are in the contrast with another property of the lighthouse. As the word itself suggest, lighthouse is “a tall structure topped by a powerful light used as a beacon or signal to aid marine navigation.” (“lighthouse”). And this feature of lighthouse is used in the book as well, although not exactly for guiding ships, but rather for guiding characters through their lives. This is shown on Mrs. Ramsay, as the lighthouse seems to provide a calming element to her by providing pleasant thoughts in her, as seen in the following excerpt: “…and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at – that light for example.” (To The Lighthouse 73). It is therefore safe to assume that the lighthouse stands on one hand for some goal which characters try to achieve and for the inspirational guide that helps them through the life. Arhendu De claims something in his analysis titled “The Various Use of Symbols in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse.”
(2011). He argues that “The lighthouse surrounded by sea always illumines and clarifies the human condition in some way.” (Arhendu De). In this case the way Arhendu is referring to is conveyed through the beams of light from the beacon which is a crucial component of the lighthouse which can be seen from far away.

It is important to say that the physical mention of lighthouse is mainly used later in the novel, as the expedition reaches the lighthouse. “There it loomed up, stark and straight, glaring white and black, and one could see the waves breaking in white splinters like smashed glass upon the rocks.” (To The Lighthouse 230). This is shown from the perspective of James Ramsay as he arrives there and thus fulfills his lifetime goal of visiting the lighthouse. It is no longer just a mere beacon or some shape in the dark, he finally manages to achieve what he dreamt of and therefore the image of the lighthouse is not reduced only to its beacon but it is shown in its full physical appearance.

Apart from the lighthouse which is obviously a major figure in the story, water elements are provided mostly by various images of waves and mostly through the portrayal of sea. As mentioned, sea is mostly depicted via harsh images of crushing waves, pointing out its destructive nature. This is shown through the character of Mr. Ramsay, as he sees the island they live on as “…a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away…” (To The Lighthouse 51). Apart from granting him a stimulus from thinking, sea in this case is portrayed as something negative, something that slowly destroys the ground on which he is living. Figuratively speaking, the sea displays an element which disintegrates his certainties, in this case the land he is living on. This destruction and disintegration of other things can be found again in the scene where Mrs. Ramsay dies. Woolf writes that “…the sea tosses itself and breaks itself…” (To The Lighthouse 146). In this case, it is shown that sea has the ability to be out of control
by using its own force against itself. What is also interesting is that unlike the floral images, where the trees were pulled from their own roots and leaves were flying everywhere, this destruction does not have any effect on water, thus suggesting the indestructibility of water element and impermanence of the others.

Yet, as the sea itself moves and is changing at every moment, so do change the descriptions or rather uses of sea as a symbol in this novel. Surely, its destructiveness is possibly dominant and the most apparent feature, as the images of harsh waves accompany the reader in the whole book, but it is not the only feature of water which is important for understanding the story. Another connection sea and water make in this book is the connection to the emotions of the characters.

“…she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!” (To The Lighthouse 76).

Woolf shows the emotions of one character and contrasts them with the nature of sea. She shows the images of happiness on the background of “rough waves” and uses the properties of sea to specify these feelings. By doing so, she distorts the negative image of sea, and shows the brighter side of a sea.

Furthermore it is not only the bright or dark side of the sea which is discussed in the mind of Mrs. Ramsay when she thinks about the sea she is overwhelmed by her emotions which are evoked by her view on the sea.

“it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot and unable to move by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of
all the people in the world, for ever, to nothingness. So listening to the waves, crouching over the pool, she brooded” *(To The Lighthouse* 88).

Mrs. Ramsay basically compares the human existence to the existence of sea and realizes, that compared to the vastness and greatness of the sea the mere human existence is almost nothing. By this passage, Woolf expresses her fascination with the water and the sea and shows the reader how these water objects induced thoughts in her, because this passage is fairly similar to the letter which is mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this essay where Woolf describes how she passes time at the shore.

Therefore similarly as the lighthouse, even the sea itself does not have one particular meaning. It seems that the meaning is shifting in a similar way the water flows, once it is an enormous destructive force capable of destroying everything, the other time it is a source of soothing images and feelings. As opposed to the water images in *Mrs. Dalloway*, images in *To the Lighthouse* are not attributed to other objects which have no connection to water, but the water itself is addressed throughout the whole book. This means, that Woolf switched from the use of water as a subsidiary element, in other words from using the water to attribute the properties to other objects, towards using particular water images, which are physically present, to express her thoughts. She realizes the force behind this natural element and uses its destructive properties to express her thoughts about death.

### 3.3 Time in *To The Lighthouse*

The concept of time in this novel can be divided in a similar way as in *Mrs. Dalloway* on two levels. One level being the chronological time which is presented via physical objects or in this case rather events, the other one being the psychological time which is conveyed throughout the minds of the characters. What is different from *Mrs. Dalloway*
*Dalloway* is that the general concept of time is less concerned about the past, and focuses more on the present time and future. It is also important to mention that the chronological time in this novel is mostly conveyed through the second part of the novel named “Time Passes”, while psychological time which is conveyed through the ideas and thoughts of characters is dominant in the other two.

Taking the book chronologically the first level of time is psychological and is conveyed through the minds and thoughts of the characters. In the novel, there are many occasions where characters think about the future or present and their thoughts correspond to their role imposed by gender, age or occupation. For example Mrs. Ramsay as a mother thinks about her children and is horrified by the thought of her children growing old. “Oh, but she never wanted James to grow a day older! Or Cam either. These two she would have liked to keep forever just as they were…” (*To The Lighthouse* 67). By doing so, Woolf possibly expresses her fear of aging as she was afraid of growing old and not reaching her goals in life.

This idea is further suggested by Mr. Ramsay who ponders about his achievements as a philosopher as they represent something very similar to a legacy – something what remains after he dies. He creates an alphabetical metaphor by which he measures the success of a person in life and he asks “How many men in a thousand million (. . .) reach Z after all? (. . .) And his fame lasts how long? It is permissible even for a dying hero to think before he dies how men will speak of him hereafter.” (*To The Lighthouse* 40-41). By this train of thoughts Mr. Ramsay tries to find something, by which he could transcend from the mortality and ‘live’ in the world even after he is dead. What he is seeking is some sort of legacy he would leave after he dies.

As is shown, the sense of time in the first part of the book is rather static with emphasis put on the prospect of future. The critical moment when reader realizes the
change of time in the second part of book is connected with the death of Mrs. Ramsay. S.H. Derbyshire in his essay named “An Analysis of Mrs. Woolf’s To the Lighthouse” from 1942 argues that “After Mrs. Ramsay's death Time begins to run together into lumps and finally has become one conglobulate mass with no part of it distinguishable from any other.” (Derbyshire 357). If the singular elements of time cannot be distinguished one from another then the characters nor the reader can perceive time through his own experience, thus creating the notion of the sameness of the time. This is something Ricoeur pointed out in Mrs. Dalloway and the tolling of Big Ben, where he claimed that the sound and vibration it made symbolizes the sameness of the chronological time for everyone. He also mentioned, that the meaning of time is conveyed throughout the personal experience of characters, yet if the character is dead, there is no such experience.

This is probably the reason, why Woolf decided to depict the death in a rather strange way. Mrs. Ramsay, who was a dominating character for the first twenty chapters of the story is dying in a following manner: “[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]” (To The Lighthouse 147). Woolf abandons one of her main characters in less than three sentences, possibly due to the fact that her death was more connected with the chronological time, as she died “rather suddenly” thus no character had a chance at the time to create some sort of experience with this event as it was unexpected. This idea fits the other deaths in this chapter too, as Andrew died in a war due to shrapnel and Prue dying while giving a birth. All of these deaths are unexpected and none of the characters has therefore attached any kind of experience to them before they happened and this is why they are
described so briefly. What is more, by doing so Woolf shows the reader that the passage of time is ruthless and that this kind of time leaves nothing but destruction.

Furthermore Derbyshire suggests that because time is “…a purely artificial concept imposed by Man on Nature, one not naturally inherent in things…” and thus the life is “…not limited by extremities, and Death, as one of those limits, no longer exists as a limit, rather as a name for another form of life.” (Derbyshire 358). In other words, Derbyshire says that after death characters accept another form of life, possibly relating to the legacy of characters as their deeds while they were alive must have affected other characters and their legacy therefore lies within the minds of the others such as Mrs. Ramsay in the mind of Lily Briscoe.

To conclude, the concept of time in *To the Lighthouse* is fairly similar in a way to the one in *Mrs. Dalloway* as it can be understood on the two levels, namely the chronological time which is described as quick and ruthless and psychological time which is due to its nature more static. What is different is the fact that in this novel Woolf does not seem to recall the past as much as she did in *Mrs. Dalloway* and is more concerned about the present and future as she seeks timelessness. In this timelessness can be found the connection with the motif of death as she expresses the fear of growing old and not achieving success in life.

**Conclusion**

The three natural motifs, namely the motifs of flora, water and time, occur repeatedly in the work of Virginia Woolf and bear a significant meaning in terms of understanding Woolf’s novels. As is shown in the first chapter of this thesis, Woolf was largely inspired by her surroundings, mostly by the houses and gardens she lived in, and by the view on seas and beaches, which are reflected in her works. Apart from this
connection to her life, these three motifs are connected by their link to the theme of death, as is proposed and demonstrated on selected works. This connection is important because in majority of Woolf’s novels the theme of death occurs and is supposedly connected to her own thoughts and intentions, as she was suffering from mental illnesses which ended with several attempts to suicide.

Apart from explaining the importance of these motifs, this essay offers an interpretation of them as well as showing how they help to develop certain important aspects in the stories, thus helping with the understanding of Woolf’s symbolism and imagery. It also demonstrates that Woolf shifted her focus from small and specific images, such as descriptions of individual flowers or drops of water towards greater and more abstract images of nature.

Floral images in her works serve several purposes, but their main purpose is to evoke thoughts in characters and to describe their characteristics, which is the same for both books. This is demonstrated on the two main characters of these stories – on Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay who are both depicted using floral metaphors. What is different in her use of flora is that in Mrs. Dalloway floral images occur through the whole story, while in To The Lighthouse Woolf slightly abandoned this motif and it is not as dominant as it is in Mrs Dalloway. This is arguably due to the setting of both novels but it suggests that Woolf shifted her focus from concrete images of individual flowers to more general depiction of flora as she attributes the properties of flowers to non-floral objects in To The Lighthouse. The connection of flora to death is demonstrated via the death scene of Mrs. Ramsay in To The Lighthouse and by the memories and visions of Septimus Warren Smith in Mrs. Dalloway.

Water images share less common features than the other two motifs do. In Mrs. Dalloway Woolf attributes the properties of water to other objects, creating a sense of
constant flowing. By doing so she keeps the story coherent which helps her to use the technique of ‘stream of consciousness’. In *To The Lighthouse* Woolf addresses water images directly, in other words she does not substitute the water images with their properties but uses the water images in form of sea, waves or physical objects which have a tight connection with the water such as the lighthouse. Consequently this shows Woolf’s transition from small images, in this case the properties of water, towards the bigger image, thus further supporting the claim that Woolf shifted from concrete images towards the abstract ones. Connection with water and death in *Mrs. Dalloway* is represented via the character of Septimus as he ponders about the life and death by the river, mentioning it directly, while in *To The Lighthouse* death is expressed through the destructive nature of water element thus more abstractly.

The concept of time is fairly similar in both novels, as it can be understood on two main levels, namely the chronological time, which measures the time in terms of hours and days, and the psychological time which is measured by the minds of characters, in other words, in their experience of the time. In *Mrs. Dalloway* chronological time is represented by the physical existence of clock and bells which toll throughout the story, constantly remembering the characters about the time. While in *Mrs. Dalloway* these two times are not visibly divided and they mingle together, in *To The Lighthouse* each part has a different concept of time. The first and the third part are fairly similar, concerned about the thoughts of the characters thus about the psychological time. The second part named “Time Passes” as its title suggests deals with the chronological aspect of time and is visibly different from the other two. Important difference between these two novels is that in *Mrs. Dalloway* the narrative is centered on the memories of characters. These memories help to develop the plot and characters, as Woolf uses the method she calls ‘tunneling process’ which consist in digging deep into a character’s
past and showing as much information about him and his thoughts as possible. While
the memories are important later in the story of *To The Lighthouse* as well, its narrative
is more concerned about the present and the future time. The connection of time and
death is shown by the constant remembering of time in *Mrs. Dalloway* and by many
deaths in “Time Passes” part of *To The Lighthouse*. What is more, the fear of death is
reflected also by the characters, as they worry about their future and not leaving any sort
of legacy after their death.
Works Cited

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Résumé (English)

The goal of this bachelor thesis is to analyze the three key motifs used in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, concretely the motifs of flora, water and time. Author tries to prove that these three motifs are crucial to understand her works as they all have some sort of connection to the life and youth of Virginia Woolf and that they are also connected to the theme of death. Author also highlights that Woolf shifted her focus from the use of concrete metaphors to more abstract imagery. Each chapter is divided into three subchapters, each dealing with the portrayal of individual motifs. These motifs are analyzed in these chapters and author through their interpretation shows their importance for overall understanding of Woolf’s work as well as showing their connection to the theme of death. Several works were used to support this thesis, the most significant ones being the biography written by Alexandra Harris, analysis of the time motif by Paul Ricoeur and two short essays by Irina-Ana Drobot. This thesis shows how Virginia Woolf worked with these motifs and demonstrates their importance for overall understanding.
Résumé (Czech)

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat význam tří klíčových motivů, konkrétně motive flóry, vody a času v dílech Virginie Woolfové. Autor se snaží dokázat, že tyto tři motivy jsou klíčové pro pochopení jejího díla, neboť se všechny váží nějakým způsobem k životu a mládí Virginie Woolfové, a že mají společné pojítko v motivu smrti. Zároveň poukazuje na to, že Virginie Woolfová přešla od používání konkrétních metafor k metaforám abstraktnějším. Každá kapitola je rozdělena na tři podkapitoly, které se zabývají zobrazením jednotlivých motivů. Tyto motivy jsou v těchto kapitolách analyzovány a autor skrze jejich interpretaci znázorňuje jejich důležitost pro celkové pochopení díla a ukazuje jejich spojitost s motivem smrti. Pro tuto práci bylo použito několik sekundárních zdrojů, mezi ty největším patří biografie od Alexandry Harris, pojednání o čase od Paula Ricoeura a dvě krátké esje od Iriny-Any Drobot. Tato práce ukazuje, jak Virginie Woolfová pracovala s těmito motivy a dokazuje jejich důležitost pro pochopení jejího díla.