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BACHELOR THESIS

Themes and Motifs in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Témata a motivy v díle Virginie Woolfové *K Majáku*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor thesis exclusively by myself under the supervision of doc. PhDr. Petr Chalupský, PhD. and that in this process, I have used only the sources cited. I declare herewith that I have not used this thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, 13 July, 2018

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to elaborate on the thematic and motivic layers of the novel *To The Lighthouse* written by Virginia Woolf in 1927. The purpose of this work is to find the themes and motifs most commonly used by Woolf. I am focusing in particular on a detailed analysis of the themes and motifs typical of Woolf's writing style. Among other things, the aim of the work is to find a possible link with the author's life, which could have had undisputed influence on the choice of themes and motifs, as well as the other intentions of the author to use the given motifs.

KEYWORDS

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Modernism, themes, motifs

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zpracovat tematické a motivické vrstvy románu *K Majáku* britské autorky Virginie Woolfové. Cílem této práce je vyhledat témata a motivy, které Woolfová používá nejčastěji. Zaměřuji se zejména na detailní rozbor témat a motivů typických pro styl psaní Woolfové. Mimo jiné, cílem práce je i najít jednak pojítka s autorčiným životem, které měly nesporný vliv na volbu témat a motivů, jednak jiný záměr autorky k použití daných motivů.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Virginie Woolfová, *K Majáku*, modernismus, témata, motivy

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Introduction

The theme of this bachelor thesis is an analysis of one of the most significant novels by Virginia Woolf *To the Lighthouse*. This novel, published in 1927, is an example of a new and innovative style of the prose in the early 20th century. The novel features a sophisticated structure, disruption of chronological conception of time, depth of motifs, and the use of the style of stream of consciousness. For these reasons it is deemed a prototypical modernistic work through which Woolf managed to express her own ideas and in which she succeeded to include many of her life experience.

I chose to study the themes and motifs in this particular novel for the great personal sympathy for Virginia Woolf and for my admiration and respect for her works. Undoubtedly, she has become my most favourite author. At the same time, I have a particular admiration for the artistic genre of modernism, whether in the context of literature or in the context of art in general. I admire the modernist apt expression of the existence and functioning of the human being in the world. The passing of the elusive moment, the fleeting of time, the constant motion, the unsustainable passage of time – these are the features expressed by modernism for which I search for it and for which I hold it in such a high esteem.

The thesis aims to outline and analyse themes and motifs used by Virginia Woolf in her work. All the themes and motifs are closely related to the artist's life and her aesthetics, therefore significant parts of the writer's life are also included in my thesis. Her life experience and belonging to the avant-garde Bloomsbury group have clearly influenced the form and depth of *To the Lighthouse*.

The theoretical part deals with modernism, a literary movement appearing at the beginning of the 20th century, which is very typical for the author and which she herself helped to create. The thesis also deals with a well-known modernist literary and philosophical circle, the Bloomsbury Group, of which Virginia was the centre from the very beginning of its existence, and sessions of which often took place in her dwelling. This part also covers Woolf's concrete personal approach to the new movement of modernism, and to society generally.

The first part also presents Virginia Woolf's life, especially the parts and events that are directly connected with the production of the novel *To the Lighthouse*. In the novel, the author involves many autobiographical elements and life experience. She deals with life events and situations from her home, and with the inner bonds and relationships that the writer had with her family, especially her parents.

The practical part aims to outline and analyse individual themes and motifs that appear in the novel, and to explain their use, and their various interpretations. I put these themes and motifs primarily into the context of Woolf's life and the time she wrote and lived in.

1 Theoretical part

1.1 Modernism

The following chapter aims to present a basic outline of the development of modernism in society and literature and to name its most important elements in literature.

Without exaggeration, it can be said that cultural and civilization changes took place in the European society from the beginning of the 20th century (Hilský 15). As a result of these changes, a new artistic and literary movement emerges, later called modernism. Modernism refers to a period roughly between 1910 and 1930, with the peak in the 1920s. There are many reasons why rapid changes in society and culture occurred. The society was influenced by both the First World War and the boom in the popular culture that came from the United States of America. New discoveries and new theories in the field of psychology, philosophy and, last but not least, art contributed to the development of modernism (Hilský 13).

The Victorian era, which preceded modernism and was on its decline gradually since the 1890s, was for the young and progressive population anachronistic. People tried to break out of its binding norms, and the conservative values of Victorian society were no longer respected by the new generation. On the contrary, young people were longing to replace the deep-rooted norms with much more relevant ideas that were in accordance with the development of science. The traditional society, which worshiped the cult of the family with a strict hierarchical structure, began to change and disintegrate under the pressure of the new age.

World War I influenced the thinking of people all over Europe, all the more so in Britain. Before the war, people believed in progress, morality and stability (Levenson 17). Suddenly, after its beginning, people lost many of their illusions. This negative event stirred doubts about religion, social and personal values among people (Gillies and Mahood 63). These doubts and feelings of crisis and pressure, and certain disillusionments led people to turn their minds from public sphere to private, and their consciousness focused on themselves. The human mind now appreciated inward and subjective thinking (Levenson 220-224).

Popular culture brought certain influence on society as well, but it was viewed rather negatively. The so-called “Roaring Twenties”, which appeared, and were largely supported, in America, found their followers in Europe as well. However, its form was much weaker because the movement was considered superficial. These years characterized by loosening of strict manners brought more freedom and liberal thinking. At the same time, the morale of young people was loosened even in the area of sexual openness and willingness. All of these new trends defied anachronistic Victorian period and rejected its long-established values.

Modernism is also a reflection of new theories in philosophy and psychology. Philosophers Henri Bergson and William James became the personalities that inspired modernism in several ways. They created a new concept of perception of time, which divided psychological and historical time. They both saw the state of mind as an ever-changing, fleeting event. It was mainly Bergson who influenced modernists, especially Woolf. Modernists saw his contribution mainly in naming so-called absolute knowledge; that is knowledge that stems from inner experience and intuition. By such theory he touched on the inner space-time of human being. Bergson asserted that intuition is an intellectual sympathy that causes a recognizing subject to identify with a recognized object, and therefore fully recognizes it. Both scientists claim that the perception of time is subjective, because the duration of time is different for different people in different circumstances. The present consists of both the past and the anticipation of the future through memories, wishes, and expectations (Hilský 26-28). “Every mental event is connected with events preceding and following, which act together as all-surrounding halo.” (Hilský 29, transl. by the author of thesis). Such a view of time and its understanding was entirely new and, for many authors, thought-provoking.

William James contributed to then perception of time and consciousness by expressing his ideas concerning the way consciousness really appeared to him: “Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as “chain” or “train” do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A “river” or a “stream” are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call in the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective

life.” (McDermott 33) He introduced the term “stream of consciousness”, which became almost synonym to the topic of modernist literature. James and Virginia Woolf agreed in the respect of perception of time as a river. The flow of river, or thoughts, is close to images of holy and radiation that were also distinctive for the writer and her aesthetics (Hilský 29).

New discoveries of the psychologist Sigmund Freud became inspiration for many people and he himself influenced modernism by introducing his psychoanalysis (Bradbury and McFarlane 67). He stressed that the subconsciousness, one of the three layers of the human psyche, and the libido affect the human being extensively (Marcus and Mukherjee 173). Freud gave a scientific justification for loose morals and new open sexual standards to the society. Psychology of this kind is totally different from Victorian puritanism and restraint.

Artistic influence is another field that affected changes in society. Graphic art demonstrated its power at the 1910 London Post-Impressionist Exhibition, where paintings by Van Gogh, Picasso, or Cezanne were presented. The organizer of the exhibition was Roger Fry, an influential critic, who later became a member of the Bloomsbury Group (Johnston 15). His exhibition showed that art should stand for subjective perception of one particular moment. The philosophy of post-impressionists was the search for something new, which agreed with modernism. Woolf said about the exhibition that “On or about December 1910, the human character changed.” (Goldman 12).

The result of all these influences was that people’s image of themselves and humanity changed, which was naturally reflected in the language and form of the emerging literature. There were major changes in the literature, mainly in the decline of 19th century conventions and traditions. Instead, experiment with the style and form of a novel was put forward, as well as the experiment with the language of literature.

Bradbury and McFarlane in their *Modernism* enumerate major features of modernism:

The modernist novel has shown, perhaps, four great preoccupations: with the complexities of its own form, with the representation of inward states of consciousness, with a sense of nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality, and with the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot.

In all of these areas what is being questioned is linear narrative, logical and progressive order, the establishing of a stable surface of reality (393).

It is predominantly the experiment with time and space that is considered to be a key feature of Modernism in literature. The very phenomenon of time and space takes on its importance when it is viewed as if from the inside. A true modernistic conception of time and space manifests at the moment when the author is interested in a particular perception of time and what is happening with such perception in the mind of the character. It is not physics or any other science, but it is psychology and subjective perception of reality that has an impact on modernist works. Not only Woolf, but also Joyce and Lawrence stood behind this concept, separating themselves from realist (or so called naturalist) writers. The time, as seen in the works of the leading modernists, can be from this perspective stretched, studied second after second, or the other way around, it can be shortened and the character can fly through (Hilský 20).

Modernist notions of time are different and immeasurable, but there is a common feature shared. It is the possibility of splitting and relativizing of human time, the possibility of dismantling it or assembling it again. Artists, scientists, and intellectuals who gave shapes to modernism transformed their perception of time and space by their approach. Objective and standardized public time was replaced by private, pluralistic and relativized time that was constantly flowing and changing (Hilský 25).

A new way of perception of time resulted in the emergence of other typical features of modernist literature. The chronology of plot was completely disrupted due to the subjective perception of action and reality. For this reason, there was often a limitation or rejection of the traditional plot. Although the novel carried a certain story, works were often rather lyrical. New methods, such as an internal monologue, which suggested thought processes, and free associations that are connected with the flow of thoughts, were appearing because of subjectivization. The stream of consciousness was one of the most powerful narrative elements in modernist prose at all. It reflected the flow of thoughts and feelings in time and was modified by the individual's original experiences. Individual inner life experiences were the basis for new symbols and images. Modernists also involved recurring motifs, or leitmotifs.

The position and importance of the narrator also changed. The omniscient narrator was removed and the unreliable narrator appeared instead. He could only rely on his subjective perception of the surrounding world, because he did not look at the outside world objectively and realistically.

One of the first works with some basic modernistic features in the field of literature can be considered aesthetics and artistic practises in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890. Here, for the first time, the reader encountered distortion of the traditional chronological flow of time in the novel. The main character was being changed only on his portrait of himself, whereas he remained unchanged in real life. Just as Hilský suggests: "The contradiction between the transience of life and the eternity of art is ironically reversed in the Wild's experiment" (15).

Modernist authors, unlike their predecessors, were not afraid to touch upon taboo topics. Writers rejected conventions and traditional opinions and introduced modern themes, including open discussions of sexuality. They also concerned themselves with themes of feminism and women's and men's relationships and their position in then society.

1.2 Modernism in Virginia Woolf's writing

Virginia Woolf was known for her own unconventional view on life from the beginning of her literary work. Woolf perceived life as a shower of impressions and feelings, and this perception was imprinted on the aesthetics of her writing and the selection of literary techniques that she used to express her ideas. What Woolf tried to do was to express life by lyrical writing, expressing her attitudes and inner feelings.

Virginia Woolf was engaged in literature and literary criticism, as well as in society, since her early age, and therefore she was well aware of the changes that took place in the Victorian society. She was interested in new inventions by philosophers and psychologists, and she was inspired by their views on the human mind, the thinking, the flow of consciousness, the unconsciousness and the flow of thoughts. At the same time she was interested in subjective perception of time. All these ideas were implemented and intertwined in her prose.

A literary technique called stream of consciousness is particularly typical for her. This method helped the author pass the unspoken thoughts and feelings of the character on her readers. She used it to express human's mental experience (what one experiences in his mind). An independent and free flow of thoughts naturally results in loose, seemingly illogical, associations in disordered arrangement.

Woolf was not looking at reality in her writing but became part of it. She even shifted reality into her inner consciousness and made an analysis of it from that position. Mental states and feelings were more important to her than objectivity and external reality. Woolf shared this particular literary approach with her colleague James Joyce.

Her attempt to faithfully capture feelings and attitudes of the characters resulted in her using poetic, highly figurative language. Her prose was therefore rather lyrical. The evocative, imaginative language contributed to accurate depiction of mental condition of the characters. Free associations and stream of thoughts were expressed also by changes in syntax and illogical sequences in her writing. Woolf also uses alternation of narrators, who is in fact always unreliable.

The short story "The Mark on the Wall", published in 1917, was her modernist debut. Here for the first time, Virginia demonstrated her view on the world when describing a stain on the wall. Every time she looked at the stain, she saw something else behind it. But she never forgot to look at it from the inside, subjectively. Virginia wrote about what she saw on the wall, not what there really was. In her narrative, Virginia demolished the outline of traditional prose, where the plot and character description are the most important parts.

Woolf claimed that the plot is artificially imposed on life. She never used the story to describe an event or to capture life. In her masterpieces, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, the plot was literally generated by the inner life of characters. Her characters were usually unfold by a flow of individual impressions, feelings and thoughts of a person.

Woolf had an almost impressionist view on nature, more precisely on the moment she was trying to capture. She created a so-called literary impressionism, in which she approached several famous painters of Impressionism such as Cézanne or Gauguin. Woolf was able to capture and immortalize the present moment and atmosphere in mere words. A

reader could feel the breeze, lightness and fragility from her writing. In her larger prosaic works, Woolf captured the moment by the means of memories. As Hilský asserts: “(...) this special distance gives rise to the impression of dullness and contemplative meditative dreaming, the atmosphere of nostalgia and the search for lost time ...” (178). The atmosphere of nostalgia and the notion of lost time repeat in Woolf’s works quite often. It is predominantly connected to the autobiographical elements influencing some of her novels.

Another common denominator of her prose was capturing of one moment of being which she tried to analyse and look at it from different angles. She dismantled it into individual impressions and feelings and through such a detailed analysis, she found its beauty and purity. Woolf incorporated these analyses into the stream of consciousness she used in her novels. Woolf actually saw what others did not. She wrote about small, everyday things and found extraordinariness in them (Hilský 204).

Woolf was well aware of the changes in people's lives in the early 20th century society. That is why the transformation of human and family relationships in her works was so distinctive to her and why it was a frequent theme in her books. Such thinking is crucial to modernism. She was concerned with the themes of family hierarchy and the patriarchal concept of family relationships, where men had the right to decide and rule. She rejected the omnipresent superiority of men, and she never saw a woman as a subordinate and serving family member (Hilský 185-187). She perceived men and women as even in every way. Since her youth, she was also interested in the position of women within society. She herself was an example of the fact that a woman may be devoted to art or literature and did not necessarily have to become a wife and mother. The theme of feminism intertwined in many of her novels. She had the urge to write about equality of women and men, and about gender issues.

A significant number of leitmotifs recurred in Woolf’s aesthetics. They appear mainly in her principal works, such as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, or *To the Lighthouse*. Recurring small motifs that have a significant meaning, such as flowers, waves or repeated sentences, create a remarkable background to the plot and underline the meaning of the novel. Woolf also skilfully combined a number of symbols, images and metaphors to achieve a psychological effect in her lyrical prose.

Virginia Woolf was a writer who actively participated in the development of literary modernism, and who contributed to it with, at least, woman's point of view on society and life. Her creative style was innovative, unique, and undeniably masterful. This might be because of its originality and authenticity. Her legacy attracts the attention of so many readers even today, almost a hundred years after the publication of her most famous works.

1.3 The influence of the Bloomsbury Group

The Bloomsbury Group was a British avant-garde art circle which united a group of artists, intellectuals and writers with similar, yet innovative point of view on life. It was most active at the very beginning of the 20th century, and at that time Bloomsbury became the centre of literary activity. The members of the group were united by the bonds of friendship, the same way of thinking and attitudes that formed the circle's orientation and future creative production of their members.

The very first step for creation of the circle was the fact that young Virginia, her sister Vanessa and their two brothers, moved to house in Gordon Square in the quiet Bloomsbury district of London after the death of their father, where they met with their friends (Johnston 5). The name of the district later gave name to the literary circle. After the death of their eldest brother Thoby in 1906 they moved again; and it was Fitzroy Square this time (Johnston 6). Nevertheless, the meetings went on. It was at that time when the group with its regular meetings was formed.

The very first members of the club were Virginia and Vanessa, their brother Adrian and their friend Clive Bell. Other artists and writers joined them soon after. It was for example political scientist Leonard Woolf, critic, writer and painter Roger Fry, novelist E. M. Forster, and Lytton Strachey, historian. Most members came from a higher social class. Many male members of the group came from the Cambridge University where they were members of the so-called Society, "whose members came to be known as "Apostles", and whose affairs were supposed to be kept secret. The Apostles were a selected group" (Johnston 7). One of the group's characteristics was that it was based on friendship and sincerity. This feature was then transferred to Bloomsbury. Their regular sessions, or rather friendly meetings, took place in the Stephen's house (Johnston 10).

University graduates fully supported the ideas summarized by G.E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica*, 1903, and laid the basis of the philosophy and orientation of the group on the ideas explained in the book. Moore suggested that one of the purest ‘goods’ is the feeling we reach when we experience joy, which springs from looking at beautiful things (Johnston 20-22). Beauty in nature and art was a source of the purest impression of good: “Moore believes, in fact, that the appreciation of beauty is the most essential constituent of the good” (Johnston 26). The group was also influenced by Henri Bergson. The members of the group agreed with his definition of time and its division into the psychological one and historical one. The group is known for a kind of artistic indefiniteness and indistinctness, which sprang from the philosophy of Henri Bergson, which was characterized by similar fluidity (Hilský 29).

Their attitude to philosophy was notably reflected in the organization of the group. The circle was actually not organized at all, and neither was it supposed to be. Such a fact differentiated the group from other literary groups of that time. Bloomsbury Group was led as a community of friends who argued on and debated topics which were close to them and their philosophy.

The relationships between the members of the group were extremely loose from the point of view of then morality and at that time they were most liberal. Their relationships had either familial or sexual character; especially homosexual and lesbian relationships were quite common among them (Johnston 17). Their shared critical opinion on the Victorian concept of family, home and position of woman within a family, determined significantly their behaviour and attitude to the same-sex relationships. The entire group rejected values and beliefs of the Victorian society. They even demonstrated their feelings about such concepts by their own behaviour. Their different opinion on new values of society may result from the fact that many of the group’s members came from typical Victorian families, including Virginia Woolf.

Although the group criticized Victorian manners of superiority and inferiority of husband and wife in family, it was unthinkable for the members to turn away from their elite social status, which was naturally associated with material security. That is why the group was so often strongly criticized from many sides (Johnston 189). Professor Hilský claims in

his *Modernists* that, for example, John Keynes or Clive Bell publicly declared that the British government should be in the hands of an intellectual aristocracy as a guarantee of a good standard (189). All members, especially writers, focused predominantly on people who have similar origin as they themselves had. They also reflected it in their works. For example, Virginia Woolf's protagonists are always members of a higher, or at least upper middle class.

Jane Goldman summed up the topics Bloomsbury Group was concerned with as well as their characteristic aesthetics: "Bloomsbury became synonymous with avant-garde art, formalist aesthetics, libertine sexuality, radical thinking, rational philosophy, progressive anti-imperialist and feminist politics, conscientious objection during the Great War, and antifascism in the 1930s" (Goldman 32). Even though the Bloomsburies' freedom and openness highly influenced Woolf's writing, she did not employ the same liberal sexual openness in her works. She avoided explicitness; on the contrary, she did not hesitate to make mere hints and insinuations of sexuality (Hilský 188).

The Bloomsbury Group did not have impact only on formation of literature. Writing was influenced in the same extent as art, and in many cases, members of the circle did not look at these two categories separately, they combined them. Art gained a new sort of dimension in the works of the members of the group. Art was now able to express subjectivity, feelings and attitudes towards various topics.

Virginia Woolf's activity in the circle had a huge influence on her personality and, consequently, on her literary development. Woolf found support for her opinions on society and views on art and literature in her colleagues. At the same time, the group was a source of inspiration for her. It was based especially on fine arts and works of Clive Bell and Roger Fry. The group was of fundamental importance for the development of modernism in literature, as well as the development of literary works by Virginia Woolf.

1.4 Virginia Woolf

The life of the writer is no less interesting than her work. Adeline Virginia Woolf was born 1883 in London in a family of Leslie and Julia Stephen. She took the name Woolf after marriage with Leonard Woolf, a businessman and political scientist. Adeline Virginia

was the second offspring of the Stephens, but both the parents had one child from their previous matrimony – Thoby and Andrew. Before Virginia, Vanessa, whom Virginia loved and had a deep relationship with, was born in the family (Harris 15). After all, this very fact and its importance were shown, for example, in the novel *Hours* by Michael Cunningham.

The Stephens were a traditional Victorian family of a high social class. The girls were educated at home whereas boys attended schools and universities (Harris 22). Her father Leslie Stephen was an educated writer, who compiled biographies of historical figures. Even though Virginia admired him, they had a very complicated relationship (Harris 20). Her mother Julia was an uneducated Victorian woman, who was concerned with children and household. She was an example for Vanessa and Virginia, who adored her (Harris 18-20). However, Julia was rather a spirit of their house than its real member. Julia died when Virginia was about thirteen years old. Virginia could not put up with her death up to writing her novel *To the Lighthouse*. And even before, she depicted some of her features in her novels (Harris 26). After the death of her father nine years later, Virginia missed her family immensely, even though the relationships in the family were sometimes difficult to cope with.

The fact that Virginia was to become a conventional Victorian woman, that is wife and mother, in her household did not suit her from her youth. She was studying literature since she learned to read and her first literary attempts appeared in her teens (Harris 22). However, up to her thirties, Virginia was rather searching directions for herself and for her writing. The arrival of new, modern time helped her to separate from her family and dependence on her loved ones; nevertheless, mentally she endured such separation with great difficulties. Maybe it was her ever-returning mental illness or her innate inclination to the family and a strong bond to its members, what intensified her dependence on family, especially her sister Vanessa. While she was becoming independent, and when she was cured from her disease alternately, she spared no effort on developing her writing skill. She read passionately, reviewed and, as she herself wrote in her diaries and letters, prepared for the time when “true writing” would come (Harris 42-43). As a result of her strenuous work, her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915 after two years of writing.

At that time, between 1913 and 1915, Virginia suffered from mental collapses, and in the course of a few years she experienced several psychic breakdowns (Harris 60). The doctors and her husband, Leonard, helped her with the illness. During the long recovery she wrote *Day and Night* and *Jacob's Room*. In 1917, Woolfs purchased a printing press and Virginia saw again a kind of encouragement for her writing. Her new stories were swift and innovative. At the time when, for example, her famous snail in "A Mark on the Wall" appeared, Virginia came up with her distinctive style and moved from outer reality to inner life in her writing.

For her whole life Virginia Woolf was tormented by her awareness of the fact that life was flowing and slipping through her fingers. She tried to stop it and find out why and for what purpose we are here. In her works, such as in *To the Lighthouse*, she gave meaning to small and unexceptional things. She found beauty and peculiarity in overlooked ordinariness. Woolf reflected such subjective perception of the world in many pieces of her fiction. The flow of life and time, and the capturing of an ordinary moment were signs of modernism, but in this context, they sprang from the Woolf's perception of life.

Her husband, Leonard Woolf, supported Virginia all her life; he himself was engaged in writing activities as well (Harris 54-56). Thanks to him she survived many of her breakdowns and he managed to literally keep her alive during her worst states of frustration and dejection. Virginia appreciated his support and understanding, and their marriage, childless but respectful for each other, became one of the themes of the novel *To the Lighthouse*.

Despite her greatest pleasure in writing, she was unable to hold out her depression and committed suicide by throwing herself into the river Ouse in 1941. She was 59 years old (Harris 168). Nevertheless, her husband decided to keep her legacy alive and for the rest of his life he published her works, diaries, and letters and helped save her works and legacy for future generations.

1.5 To the Lighthouse

To the Lighthouse, a novel written in 1927, is one of Virginia Woolf's most famous works, but also one of the most important pieces of Modernist prose. The book was only outstripped

in popularity by *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel which was published two years earlier. Both the novels are similar in terms of form, especially by using similar literary techniques and the stream of consciousness, but *To the Lighthouse* is thematically different from the former Woolf's novels.

Professor Alison Pease comments on the popularity of the book: "Readers turn to the novel for its radiant prose, its nostalgic depiction of familial love and loss, or its audacious rendering of the passage of time" (1). This explains the underlying reasons why the novel has remained so popular among readers for decades already.

The basic story line is quite simple. Quiet and familial Mrs. Ramsay spends with her husband, sometimes tyrannical Mr. Ramsay, and their eight children vacation in a house on the Isle of Skye. Several different family friends come to see them during their stay. However, the author focuses on the analysis of the complex family life rather than on the story line. Woolf notices the tension, but also the cohesion that exists in the family circle. The novel focuses on the coexistence of the male and female elements, their differences and clashes. She assesses these relationships both from inside, through the Ramsays couple, as well as from outside as she lets the visitors, for example Mr. Tansley or Lily Briscoe, comment on the Ramsays relationship.

To the Lighthouse is also Woolf's most autobiographical work. She does not explicitly describe herself and her life in the novel, but the protagonists of the novel reflect on the most important persons of Virginia's life – her parents. The novel illustrates their relationship, characteristics, and, above all, their role in her life. The autobiographical elements of Virginia's life are reflected throughout the whole work of *To the Lighthouse*. Ramsays' children have many of the features of Stephens' children, and the character of Cam is very much like Virginia. With Ramsay's family Virginia expressed aptly the atmosphere that often stood at Stephens' home while she and her siblings were children and both parents were still alive (Harris 101).

The two main pillars of Virginia Woolf's life became the themes of her novel: her parents Leslie and Juliet Stephen, their relationship and her relationship to them, and her

own marriage to Leonard Woolf. The themes of family and marriage were very important and personal for her, since Virginia Woolf valued her family above all.

The subject for the book and the approximate structure crossed Woolf's mind quite suddenly and quickly. The idea itself came to her during an ordinary walk through the city. As she mentioned in her initial remarks, the structure would be tripartite: "something H-shaped, two blocks joined by a corridor" (Harris 101). She immediately knew that the first part would focus on the past, the second short part would interrupt the story and slightly shift it, and the third part would rejoin the first part, but a few years later.

The autobiographical elements, which were largely embedded in the novel, were very delicate topic to write about for her. Both parents left deep impressions and traces in Virginia. She often saw them and heard their voices, even though it was long after their death. The strength of their relationship in life never diminished after their death. By the fact that Woolf likened the two main characters of the novel to her parents, she began to cope with the relationship with them and the influence they both had on her personality. When writing *To the Lighthouse*, it was probably the first time since her parents' death she managed to get over this loss. Woolf herself noted in her diaries that writing *To the Lighthouse* was a kind of therapy for her, and that she could eventually cope with their deaths after many years.

Woolf found a model for Mrs. Ramsay, the main character of the book, in her mother Julia. Julia Stephen was the driving force within the entire household. This energetic woman was able to manage the whole household while taking care of both family members and friends, or distant relatives, whether poor or wealthy. Julia Stephen also provided the Stephens' house with joy and entertainment. She was able to help everyone and did not hesitate to sacrifice her own comfort (Harris 18-20).

Because Julia still had a lot to do, Virginia realized her more like something present than a certain person. Her mother's presence remained in her mind for the rest of her life, and she kept trying to understand what the mighty woman was like. Mrs. Ramsay, like Mrs. Stephen, is the mighty person, who creates an atmosphere and is a centerpoint of things and actions, but for example, to be seated when the painter is working on her portrait, she constantly moves her head in pursuit of her son or guests (Harris 20).

Julia Stephen's death came very suddenly. This event hit all members of the family, but Leslie Stephen and Virginia were almost defeated. For a long time after the mother's death, they could not reconcile themselves to her being dead (Harris 256). In Woolf's novel, Mrs. Ramsay died just like Julia Stephen – suddenly and unexpectedly, due to a rapid illness.

Virginia Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, became the inspiration for the character of Mr. Ramsay, husband of Mrs. Ramsay. Leslie Stephen was an educated Victorian writer and academician, who dealt with writing biographies about Britain's prominent figures. He was fully committed to his work, and he was of the opinion that hard work also requires its sacrifices, and that was to justify his gruesome and cruel behaviour at home. Therefore, the children approached him only rarely. On the other hand, he was also a person who supported the education of his daughters, impressed them with the love of the books and supported them. Although he did not show much sensitivity, he loved his children (Harris 20-21).

Mr Ramsay is depicted in the novel exactly in the way Leslie Stephen led his life. He values his work above all and therefore he pays it almost all of his attention. His ambition forces him to leave behind a magnificent work or at least a valuable trace. He tries hard to become successful in his research and achieve as much recognition as possible. He was a philosopher, who approached life in academic, scientific way.

It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in 26 letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole England ever reach Q. (...) (Woolf 31).

The relationship between Virginia and Leslie was even more complicated than that between her and her mother. "Her feelings to him were extremely strong and often contradictory. It was he who understood the depth of her intellect and firmly believed in her writer's future" (Harris 40). Virginia incredibly appreciated his support and his high opinion of her, though these words were never spoken aloud between them.

2 Practical part

2.1 Themes

Virginia Woolf found most of her topics and themes for *To the Lighthouse* in her life. She felt an urge to let the past and her parents “speak”, so that she could let them go, and cope with their death. The themes in the novel are predominantly connected with Woolf’s perception of her parents and their relationship, as well as position of a family, or more concretely of wife and husband, within Victorian society.

2.1.1 Family

The central theme of the whole book is the subject of the family and the relationships that surround it. These relationships are very complex, complicated and often tense. Internal tension and pressures cause misunderstandings and collisions among the members of one family. Despite these negative aspects of coexistence, marriage also has joyful and positive sides. Although there might be sometimes serious disagreements, marriage might be peaceful and the whole family is then characterized by cohesiveness and a strong and warm emotional bond. Woolf also strives to show that the coexistence of different people, including mother, father and children, is in its nature filled with both disagreements and agreements.

For the first time in *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf devoted herself to studying these relationships in her own family, and she decided to analyse them not only from the inside from the perspective of the main characters, Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay. The children's views are also included in the novel. Child's eyes see the relationship of mother and father in a different light, and this view complements what was already known about the couple from their point of view. Another viewpoint is given to the reader by visitors of the Ramsay’s house. For example, painter Lily Briscoe is a careful observer of Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay.

The rapport between the two spouses is the most stressed topic in the novel. The Ramsay family is a Victorian family with a patriarchal arrangement of family hierarchy. A wife and a mother Mrs. Ramsay takes care of the family, creates a loving and supportive environment for children and gives the best she can to everyone. Her ability of the expression

of warm emotion and support makes her undeniably a positive character in the book. Mrs. Ramsay appears to be a person who always sees hope and believes in hope, which is proved in the situation at the very beginning of the book. Namely, when Mr. Ramsay spoils his son's joy from the way to the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay soothes her son: “‘You will wake up and find the sun shining and the birds singing,’ she said compassionately, soothing the little boy's hair (...)” (Woolf 14).

Mrs. Ramsay feels inner pleasure that she is the one who can take care of others and soothe them. She is the protector of the good in their household. This is reflected in relation to her husband. Though he often behaves rudely and does not hesitate to tell her words such as “Damn you” (Woolf 29), she knows that Mr. Ramsay needs her to gain her compassion: “(and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. He was a failure.” (Woolf 34), and so he continues to demand: “Nothing would make Mr. Ramsay move on. There he stood, demanding sympathy.” (Woolf 34) .On closer examination, however, it is possible to find out that Mr. Ramsay is not a mere grumpy and tyrannical man who requires compassion and understanding from his wife, and who is unable to give her anything in return. He is actually dependent on his wife, and this fact makes him, to some extent, a more accessible, even human, person.

On the second page of the book, Woolf outlines the relationship between parents and children. Mrs. Ramsay promises to her boy a trip to the lighthouse if the weather is good; naturally, he is happy and excited about that. But Mr. Ramsay strives vigorously and coldly: “‘But,’ said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, ‘It will not be fine.’”(Woolf 2). The boy's reaction follows immediately: “Had there been an axe handy, and poker or any weapon that would have leaked and a hole in his father's breast and he killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his child's breasts by his mere presence (...)” (Woolf 4). From the very first two pages, it turns out who is the favourite parent among children, and what relationship James has with his father.

On James's relationship with Mr. Ramsay Woolf demonstrates the relationship between son and father and applies Freud's Oedipus complex on him. The son feels like

being a rival to Mr. Ramsay, because he takes his mother and claims her. This also defines James's attitude towards his father. James hates his father because he keeps Mrs. Ramsay for himself and is at the same time a superior person in family, which is the reason why James does not have a chance to win his mother for himself. Mrs. Ramsay unintentionally influences the relationship of those two men: "She stroked James's head; she transferred to him what she felt for her husband, (...)" (Woolf 29). She, therefore, is partly responsible for the attitude James had to his father.

"But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head..." (Woolf 34). The hatred that James feels is a conscious, strong, violent feeling, though it cannot be denied that James is also fond of his father. However, James is not aware that such a feeling is hidden deep in him. James' fondness is though expressed only by a certain respect for his father.

James is described as a sensitive, sympathetic child. He remains the same in his adulthood. However, his relationship to his father slightly shifts at the end of the novel:

He always kept this old symbol of taking a knife and striking his father to the heart. Only now, as he grew older and sat staring at his father in an impotent rage, it was not him, that old man reading, whom he wanted to kill, but it was the thing that descended on him – without his knowing it perhaps: that fierce sudden black-winged harpy, with its talons and its beak all cold and hard, that struck and struck at you (he could feel the beak on his bare legs, where it had struck when he was a child) and then made of, and there he was again, an old man, very sad, reading his book. That he would kill, that he would strike to the heart (Woolf 175).

James, therefore, during the humiliating voyage to the lighthouse, realizes he hates his father's behaviour rather than his whole personality.

Visitors of the house are people who do not belong to the family circle and are not able to understand the family situation quite well. However, they know both wife and husband enough to be able to make their own judgment about them. The individual supporting characters, visitors of the house, and their views are complement in the story the last pieces of information the reader in the book receives about Ramsay's marriage.

Characters that assess behaviour and relationship of the married couple most are Lily and Charles Tansley.

Lily sees Mr. Ramsay more simply and more distinctly than the other characters. The reason for this is the fact that she is not inside the family circle and therefore is not a participant in the relationships between its members. However, she is still able to say condemning words about Mr. Ramsay: "He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoiled; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death" (Woolf 23). Lily resents Mr. Ramsay for his weakness which is according to Lily rooted in his inability to focus on nobody but himself and his wife as a subordinate person. As time passes, she develops a certain understanding for him. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Mr. Ramsay arouses respect in Lily. Their relationship is complex and it gradually develops. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Mr. Ramsay seeks understanding and sympathy at Lily. She understands him, but she refuses to give him her compassion.

Mrs. Ramsay, for Lily, as well as for children, is the centrepiece of events. Nevertheless, the relationship between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay is even more complicated than the one of Lily and Mr. Ramsay. Lily adores Mrs. Ramsay for her capability of being a perfect wife, mother and a welcoming hostess, as well as a wise and pure and knowledgeable heart: "And yet she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored in Mrs. Ramsay's heart." (Woolf 47-48). On the other hand, she honestly does not fathom Mrs. Ramsay's reason for giving preference to happiness of others before her own and voluntarily become a victim of her husband's demands and wishes. What also upsets her is the fact that Mrs. Ramsay expect her to become the same Victorian woman like Mrs. Ramsay.

Despite their different personalities and attitudes to life, Lily loved her and after Mrs. Ramsay's death she suffered a terrible loss, with which she did not know how to cope: "It was all Mrs. Ramsay's doing. She was dead. Here was Lily, at forty-four, wasting her time, unable to do a thing, standing there, playing at painting, playing at the one thing one did not play at, and it was all Mrs. Ramsay's fault. She was dead. The step, where she used to sit was empty. She was dead." (Woolf 143).

Among other things, it is Lily, who was able to clearly understand the crisis between Mrs. Ramsay and her husband. “That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all this.” (Woolf 143). Woolf clearly names the problem of spouse’s relationship through Lily. Mrs. Ramsay sacrifices herself to her husband, he does not plan to pay her back and he just takes what he wants from his wife. Lily and James were the only ones able to see this dispute, which was the reason for which they both loved Mrs. Ramsay and hated Mr. Ramsay.

Charles Tansley admires Mr. Ramsay for his philosophical education, his work, but also for the life he leads. “They knew what he liked best – to be for ever walking up and down, up and down, with Mr. Ramsay, and saying who had won this, who had won that, who was a “first-rate man” at Latin verses (...)” (Woolf 7). Charles, just like Mr. Ramsay, supports the Victorian family arrangement. He himself takes an arrogant approach to women – he considers them to be unintelligent and inferior. This, of course, does not apply to Mrs. Ramsay. Charles feels almost sacred respect for her abilities and beauty: “(...) [Mrs. Ramsay] stood quite motionless for a moment against a picture of Queen Victoria wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter; and all at once he realised that it was this: it was this:– she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen.” (Woolf 13). Similarly, Mr. Ramsay becomes almost his model, he is trying to equal him and achieve similarly valuable successes. This man raises in Charles academic ambitions and desire to leave something behind in life.

2.1.2 Marriage

The Ramsays are contrasting with other characters just because of the fact that they are married. None of their friends who came to visit them has a partner. Mr. Carmichael, Charles Tansley, William Bankes, and Lily Briscoe are all single, and there's a good chance they may remain single for the rest of their lives. Although Mr. Carmichael and William Banks were already married, their marriages did not last long, since Carmichael’s wife abandoned her husband Banks is a widower for years. Both of them closed up for other marriages and they do not seek any opportunity to marry. Charles and Lily are single, because they do not fit into then society for various reasons. Charles is devoted to science and philosophy; Lily

is an unconventional independent painter in her thirties, which is not fully acceptable for the society requiring obedience and following norms.

Marriage is an alpha and omega of private life for the Victorian society. It is considered as a cornerstone, which is needed for creating a family. Mrs. Ramsay's tendency to support and even form other marriages is reflected in her access to the visitors of the house.

Mrs. Ramsay comments on Lily Briscoe's future marriage prospects in the book very soon and surprisingly openly: "With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; but she was an independent creature; Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it (...)" (Woolf 16). Mrs. Ramsay serves here as a general member of society. She judges Lily's appearance and artistic skills, predominantly because it is not conventional and traditionally Victorian way of life.

Mrs. Ramsay imputes the ability to create a family mainly to appearance and conventional behaviour. According to Mrs. Ramsay, that is why Lily's appearance seems to be one of the reasons she is unlikely to be proposed for marriage, which is considered a shallow, narrow-minded opinion by Lily. Later Mrs. Ramsay would come to a different conclusion. She notices that Lily would be suited to Mr. Banks, a gentleman, who also visited Ramsay's house. Although it would seem unlikely before, it will come to her that the appearance does not have to mean everything, especially in case when people understand each other quite well. She eventually tries to convince Lily to think about getting married: "(Mrs. Ramsay) insist that she must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world, whatever laurels might be tossed to her (...), or triumphs won by her (...), there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (she slightly took her (Lily's) hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life." (Woolf 46).

Mrs. Ramsay actually well estimates Lily's situation. Lily really feels that as a painter and artist she does not need anyone by her side, that she could easily make do with herself, but also that she would not find the person even if she wanted to. She is reconciled with her fate of being a spinster, yet an artist. All the more so, she concentrates her intellect and talent

on her work. This moves her further from the characteristics of a typical woman of her time and brings her nearer to the male creative world.

2.1.3 Feminism and Gender

The question of gender is in Virginia Woolf's book "highly traditional, almost retrograde" (Pease 80). A woman takes care of her family, her children and her husband, visitors or friends. A woman keeps the household in order and function and sets the family atmosphere. She is not supposed to have any occupation, therefore she does not need to be educated much. She should be available to a man who has both an education and an intellectual predisposition to better decide on the matters to be decided. It is the man who participates in the governing of the society, secures the means for the family and protects it.

Mrs. Ramsay is just such a woman. Because she was raised in the Victorian society, she does not object to the division of roles in her family. "All must marry... an unmarried woman has missed the best of life." (Woolf 46). By this statement, Mrs. Ramsay herself declares her opinion on the status of a woman in family and in society. She is a true Victorian woman who practices her role as a caretaker, of course, and she performs it with the greatest pleasure.

Just as Mrs. Ramsay is a typical Victorian woman, though very sensitive and understanding, Mr. Ramsay meets the standards of a Victorian man. Gabrielle McIntire describes him briefly: "Mr. Ramsay is an authoritarian, tyrannical, emotionally distant philosopher, modelled on Virginia Woolf's own father." (Pease 81). The difference between wife's strong emotionality and sensitivity, and husband's emotional detachment is one of the greatest contrasts in the work. As the Victorian society demands, Mr. Ramsay looks at his wife as at an uneducated, unobjective, though pleasant, family-friendly creature, while he is involved in making history with his demanding work.

Woolf disrupts in the novel her traditional, Victorian concept of the role of wife and husband by the character of Lily Briscoe. Lily is completely beyond all the accepted concepts of the traditional position of a woman in society. Lily is a spinster, painter and artist, who is still alone, both at the beginning of the novel, where she is in her early thirties, and at the

third part “The Lighthouse” where she is already in her forties. She does not want to take the place as a wife and a mother instead of concentrating on her work.

The figure of Lily Briscoe portrays an emancipated woman. Her character proves that women no longer are able only to give birth of children, manage their upbringing and perform household management. A woman, here concretely as Lily, has the right to step out of a traditional social role and present herself in a new light. Lily Briscoe is a proof of this new opportunity for women.

Lily is portrayed as a very strong and independent woman in the novel. She bravely stands up for the way of life she already chose. Lily has to heroically defend her painting against the mocking looks of men, especially Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, who ridicule Lily almost all the time for her special social status. She protects her fragile work in front of the wicked male world carefully: “But so long as he kept like that, waving, shouting, she was safe; he would not stand still and look at her picture (...)” (Woolf 16).

Few women were able to think about abandoning their family preference, and fewer of them could do it at that time; and Lily Briscoe belongs to this small number of them. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is an example of a woman who holds the opposite view – that a woman must marry and fulfill her maternity duties.

If women are the ones who have to adapt, then men are the ones who place demand and requests. Mr. Ramsay is a relentless writer, a reserved husband and a cold father. Rationality and logic are undoubtedly more valuable to him than emotions and communication. He is selfish because he only wishes to satisfy his needs and treats his wife in emotionless way. If life goes according to his plan, his behaviour does not change. However, Woolf herself brings change into his life at the very moment she suddenly lets Mrs. Ramsay die. This unplanned event strikes his life unexpectedly. After the death of Mrs. Ramsay, this reserved man interested only in himself gradually becomes a more accessible person than before, who although does not talk about his grief and misery, but expresses his feelings non-verbally in a slight change of his behaviour.

Charles Tansley is an arrogant, purposeful young man who tries to convince others about his qualities. Unfortunately for him, he presents his attitudes so awkwardly, that he

can hardly become a welcome guest in the house. "He was such a miserable specimen, the children said, all humps and hollows. He couldn't play cricket; he poked; he shuffled. He was a sarcastic brute, Andrew said." (Woolf 6-7). Ramsay's kids make fun of him, Lily hates him for his haughty opinions, which he clearly demonstrates in his words: "Women can't paint, women can't write." (Woolf 6-7) Thus, he achieves a status of the negative character of the book. The only person who considers him to be tolerable or at least partly justifies his behaviour is Mrs. Ramsay. But this fact brings more pleasant light on her rather than on him.

He generally considers women to be inferior and underestimates their qualities and abilities. He feels to be superordinate both because he was a man and that he was educated. By his "women can't write, women can't paint" he demonstrates all his opinions. Both gender and feminism influenced men's opinions about women, which is well depicted by his character in the novel. Charles Tansley shares such approach to women with Mr. Ramsay who, however, never expresses these opinions explicitly in conversations, but only in his behaviour to his wife.

The theme of feminism and gender reflects the values of Victorian society, which Virginia Woolf could not support. She tried to demonstrate on Lily that women are capable of any abilities and are equal to men.

2.1.4 Death

Death in the novel appears suddenly and unexpectedly which gives it enormous power. Its consequences are fatal and they remain present long after the death occurred. The subject of death does not appear in the novel so often, but the very fact that it has taken place has an extreme influence on the characters, which becomes evident until the end of the novel. The characters are changing, or more precisely, they appear in a completely different life situation, which is the test for them. So the reader has the opportunity to experience Lily, James or Mr. Ramsay in a completely different light.

The death of Mrs. Ramsay comes first. Such a fact is implemented into the novel as a mere mention of tragedy in the family. The very information about her death is short, brief and not emotionally coloured. Woolf uses square brackets to inform that Mrs. Ramsay died, as if said by the way, at the beginning of the second part "Time Passes": "[Mr. Ramsay

stumbled along a passage stretched his arms or a ton dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay had died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]” (Woolf 122). These few words change the direction of flow of the novel slightly, and the death of the main character of the house remains present for the rest of the book.

Death arrears in passages where Woolf concentrates on nature, singing birds, Ramsays’ house standing in the middle of the countryside, influenced by the elements. She uses nature and sea, which are ever-repeating and immortal, to contrast it with limited, temporary life of a human being.

The death of Prue, the daughter of the Ramsay's couple, is also briefly reported. Within a short time, we learn that she married, and immediately that she died when her first child was born. This time, the message is again left without an emotional commentary: “[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.]” (Woolf 126). And just a few lines later, Woolf goes straight to Andrew's death. “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (Woolf 127). Readers of the novel learn about the events that have happened in the past 10 years within a short period of time.

Although Woolf does not explicitly describe the mourning or any feelings of the remaining family members, the atmosphere in the house that Woolf notices in the last detail expresses sorrow and sadness. When reporting the deaths of family members, Woolf concentrates mainly on what the death passage has left in their home. Even in this case she draws on her own experience. When her father, Leslie Stephen, died, the house felt his presence and the presence of death in all his surviving affairs.

The effect of repetitive appearance of death is reflected only in the character of Lily Briscoe: “How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. Mrs. Ramsay dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too - repeat it as she might, it did not feel any sense in her.” (Woolf 140). Whatever she tried to do, she was so affected by the death of the family members, especially Mrs. Ramsay, that she could not express emotions for such a moment. But at least she talks about emotions, whereas Mr. Ramsay

does not – he does not even realize what real emotions he is going through. After some time, the tension in Lily releases, particularly in the form of anger. She is angry at Mrs. Ramsay that she died, and that she allowed the fact that Lily stayed alone.

2.1.5 Passage of time

Woolf operates with time very gently and sensitively. Time and its flow are perceived as if they were in the background of the whole story. Time is viewed as omnipresent, overwhelming and unrepeatable. And that is what Woolf knows, and the characters in *To the Lighthouse* just as well.

Mrs. Ramsay perceives more than anyone else how quickly and irrevocably the time flies away. “(...) but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had 14 slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephermal as a rainbow (...)” (Woolf 15).

She is aware of the moment of being and is trying to create such moments for her children, regardless her own life and happiness. She believes in future.

Mr. Ramsay perceives time differently from his wife. He is self-centered in perception of time; he is interested only in his work and future success, so for him there is almost exclusively the future that is worth his attention. Only later, in moments when he remembers Mrs. Ramsay he dares to face the past and look back on the past event, nonetheless only concerning his wife. But predominantly, he objectively thinks only about his work or his intellect: “It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q.” (Woolf 31).

Another figure whose perception of time is given certain attention is Lily Briscoe. Lily is not afraid of the future, nor of the past. Her feminine sensual soul is reflected in the way of her thinking about life. In her mind, she jumps from past to present and future things. She often remembers Mrs. Ramsay and thinks about what will follow.

The theme of time is also reflected in the basic structure of the novel. It is the main concept that hangs over the novel. The division of the book into three parts of different scales reflects the time distribution of the story into the life of the characters. The individual chapters “The Window”, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse” are the result of Woolf’s work with time, with its layout.

The individual chapters The Window, Time Passes and The Lighthouse are the result of Woolf’s work with time, with its layout in the characters’ story. Compared to The Window and The Lighthouse, Time Passes is very different.

Woolf in the Time Passes for a moment leaves the characters and their relationships and puts nature to the fore. “(Nature) quickly comes to the fore with its periodic indices: a bird singing, a cock crowing, the autumn trees, and tidal surges of the waves.” (Sheenan 53). Woolf thus represents recurring patterns of life in nature, which are subordinate to human world. Nature and cosmos outnumber human life, and their understanding goes beyond the limits of human mind and feeling. However, the feeling and intuition at least approximate to the understanding of the universe. That is why Woolf describes nature and its effects on the life of characters in the tiniest details and uses her lyrical, sensitive language. In this section, events as the death of some characters are depicted as trifling in comparison to the importance of nature in cosmos. Nature is immortal, wise, omnipresent power.

Time and its flow are also captured by inanimate objects or elements. The strongest elements that indicate movement over time are the lighthouse and the flow of water, or sea, and waves. Woolf plays with time and uses it as a tool to either accelerate or slow down the action on the scene. Woolf returns to the theme of time by repeating sentences, sentence structures, or repeating situations for example, when deciding whether the family is going to the lighthouse or not.

2.1.6 Social Class

Virginia Woolf also implemented some of her ideas and opinions concerning social classes into *To the Lighthouse*. She chose Mrs. Ramsay, an emphatic and understanding person, to touch on such a topic. “It seemed to her such nonsense – inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that. The real differences, she thought standing

by the drawing-room window, are enough, quite enough. She had in mind at the moment, rich and poor, high and low” (Woolf 8). Even though Mrs. Ramsay does not dwell on her thoughts of poor and powerless people very long time, she obviously comes to such issue repetitively:

(...) But more profoundly she ruminated the other problem, of rich and poor, and the things she saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London, when she visited this widow, or that struggling wife in person with a bag on her arm, and a note-book and pencil with which she wrote down in columns carefully ruled for the purpose wages and spendings, employment and unemployment; (...) (Woolf 8).

Mrs. Ramsay is interested in the social problem, but she is unable to find a solution to it on her own. “Insoluble questions they [social problems] were, it seemed to her (...)” (Woolf 8)

2.2 Motifs and symbols

Motif is a recurring element, which has a symbolic meaning in a literary work. It can be used through imagery, symbol or sound. Woolf used many motifs to contribute toward the development of the chosen themes. Several major motifs, leitmotifs, repeatedly used motifs, and symbols, are analysed in the present chapter.

2.2.1 The Lighthouse

The symbolic and uniting motif of the lighthouse appears several times in the book from the very beginning to the very end. This fact is meaningful in itself. The lighthouse symbolizes the permanence and stability of certain things in life. Whatever a character in the book is thinking about, working or resolving disputes, the lighthouse stays calmly and steadily in the same place.

Kate Flint states that lighthouse functions as an image, which symbolizes Woolf’s multiple perspectives. This is proved even on a drawing of Vanessa Bell, painter and Woolf’s sister, who created a book jacket design for Woolf’s novel. The drawing itself brings out ambiguity. The lighthouse may be perceived as a symbol either of eruption (of emotions for example), unity, steadiness or sexuality. It can be also associated with either feminine or masculine elements. Space for interpretations of various symbolic meanings of the lighthouse is very broad and loose. Eventually, Woolf herself claimed in her letter to Fry

that: “‘I saw’, Woolf went on in her letter, ‘that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it [the lighthouse] the deposit for their own emotions” (Flint).

The soft, inviting, ever-repeating light of the lighthouse may associate hopes and possibilities. It is also a stimulus, which helps to induce thoughts on life, philosophical ideas and the stream of consciousness, which invites further associations.

“When the small boat has nearly reached the lighthouse, the young James recollects his impression of it as ‘a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening’. Now, however, it appears ‘stark and straight ... barred with black and white.’” (Flint). Thus, characters change their perceptions of the lighthouse and its meaning for them. For example, James altered it into a painful memory of her mother rather than on fulfilment of his inner wish of discovering the mystique symbol.

At the same time the lighthouse gains another function. The lighthouse symbolizes the collision of relationships in the novel. Just when planning a trip to the lighthouse, there was a quarrel between spouses witnessed by their son James. The lighthouse symbolizes an unlikely goal, an unfulfilled wish, as well as James's painful memory of his beloved mother and the impotent despotic father who had ruined his excitement in the past.

The reason for choosing the lighthouse as the principle and influential motif of the book stems from the Woolf's own life experience. Stephen's Talland House, which had a nice view of a lighthouse could be, as Flint says, main inspiration for the lighthouse in the novel. In that place, Virginia Woolf experienced her early years of life.

2.2.2 The Sea and Waves

The movement of water is a parallel to the motion and flow of time. The Ramsay House stands on the coast of Skye Island, so the characters may have easy and frequent access to it. Waves symbolize an unstoppable flow of life and time. Whenever Mrs. Ramsay, or anyone else looks at the sea, she begins to think about the past or the future or stops at the moment of being. Here, the repeated moves of waves become a stimulating means by which the characters return to the philosophical thoughts about life, family, or the upcoming events.

Through the visions and thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay or the independent narrator, Virginia Woolf presents her own feelings she was experiencing as she stood on the coast of Scotland near their home. She felt a stimulating atmosphere that was triggering her streams of thoughts, just as happens to Mrs. Ramsay. The lyrical form of the Woolf's language guaranteed the impression of subjectivity and certain forms of impressionism. "The sight of all the seas breaking in measure round round the isles soothed them; he night wrapped them; (...)" (Woolf 136).

The symbolism of the water is complex, however, for it seems to represent both permanence and ephemerality. Mrs. Ramsay enjoys listening to the waves beating against the shore. The rhythm is steady and constant, serving as a symbol of consistency and eternity. She learns to depend upon this sound, and it soothes her, providing a deep sense of stability. "So that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again (...)" (Woolf 14).

Melvin J. Friedman states in his essay in *Modernism* that Woolf uses the movement of waves also as a device "partly serving to establish her own poetic presence in the novel" (460). For Woolf, the motif of waves is quite significant, since she used it also in her novel *The Waves*.

2.2.3 Ramsay's house

The House of the Ramsay family, a light and spacious house on the shore, is a motive that reminds all the characters of life and merriment in the family. Mother – Mrs. Ramsay – is always at the very centre of every event taking place in Ramsays' house. As long as she was alive, the house seemed to come to life under her hands. But Woolf suddenly changes the atmosphere in the house right at the beginning of the second part of "Time Passes".

So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, "This is he" or "This is she." Sometimes a hand was raised as

if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness (Woolf 119).

Through a detailed description of Woolf's gloomy abandoned house, she prepares readers for a reversal in the form of Mrs. Ramsay's death. From the time the woman died, it was as if the house without her had begun to die. It was her blooming soul that gave the house an atmosphere of loving and inspiring environment.

So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked (Woolf 122).

But with the death of the main heroine, this atmosphere has died.

The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it. The long night seemed to have set in; the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breaths, fumbling, seemed to have triumphed. The saucepan had rusted and the mat decayed. Toads had nosed their way in. Idly, aimlessly, the swaying shawl swung to and fro (Woolf 131).

The House more than anything else reminded Ramsay's family and Lily Briscoe's beloved Mrs. Ramsay.

3 Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to outline and analyse themes and motifs appearing in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The theoretical part elaborates on the facts from the field of culture and literature at the beginning of the 20th century. I briefly described the emergence of modernism and the events that contributed to its development, the basic literary techniques and methods that characterized modernism in literature. The theoretical part also focuses on the Bloomsbury Group, a very influential circle for the development of modernism, its formation, development and contribution to literature and art. And finally, facts about the life of the author and her own family background were crucial for *To the Lighthouse*.

All these cultural, literary and personal facts were a key source for the themes involved in *To the Lighthouse*. This novel is one of the most autobiographical Woolf novels, however, it was the detailed analysis and study of Virginia Woolf's life what helped me understand what meaning and value the work and its creation had for the author. At the same time, the novel also says a lot about Woolf's approach to the family, and her opinion on particular socio-cultural themes, when she was able to build them into such a remarkable work and entwined them all through into a complex picture of a Victorian family.

The key events of her life became the key themes of the novel, which are analysed individually in the practical part of my thesis. By writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf created a study of interpersonal relationships in the family, as well as the relationships of men and women outside the family circle. At the same time she dealt with the issue of marriage and its importance for Victorian woman and man and for unconventional character represented by Lily. Woolf touches also on the topic of inferior status of a woman, both in family and society, which was a topical theme at that time. All these themes were described from several different perspectives through individual main characters, such as Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, James and Lily, and supporting characters, such as Charles Tansley, Ramsays' children and several other figures. As a result, Woolf's reader obtains a complex picture of the situation between the characters, and their complete characteristics. The theme of time works predominantly on the background of the novel and is, therefore, ubiquitous. The theme itself was very important for the author in many of her works, but especially in *To the*

Lighthouse, Woolf works with its flow, transience and persistence with particular delicacy. Woolf did not avoid even the theme of death, which also sprang from her own experience, and which appears unexpectedly and brings fatal consequences for remaining characters.

Motifs and symbols appearing in the novel were very carefully incorporated into Woolf's work. Their interpretations may have innumerable variants and possibilities, therefore I tried to point out the most obvious examples with a clear connotative function. The main ever-repeating motif is, of course, the lighthouse. It is a pivotal symbol that has a uniting function. The lighthouse itself has several interpretations and meanings. Another ubiquitous motifs are water, sea and waves, and the elements in general. Woolf touches upon nature, its cruelty, and the superiority of it above the human race. Some of the minor, though repetitive, motifs are, for example, Lily's painting or Ramsay's house.

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