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Introduction

It is often overlooked that one must both learn and forget individual letters in order to comprehend words and their meanings. Lines and lines of carefully written letters in copy books eventually give way to words which constitute larger texts. A smaller unit, once learned, acts as a building block for a larger structure. The works of Virginia Woolf demonstrate a similar quality: the symbols and images used by Woolf are imbricated into the larger narrative structure of her opus, which in turn enables one to identify symbolic patterns in her works. Moreover, Woolf's writing demonstrates typical features of Modernism with its lack of a unifying narrative voice and with the use of the stream of consciousness technique. One could even say that some of her novels, such as *The Waves*, go beyond the stream of consciousness and unleash a full-blown torrent of consciousness onto the reader. However, Woolf's writing still possesses a unity of structure which is built on her specific use of symbols and imagery.

In my thesis I will focus on three novels from Woolf's late phase of life: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931). These novels have been chosen because they feature a common basis for imagery and symbols, which then ramifies into unique symbols and images meriting individual attention. Some of the notions which I explore in this thesis are not equally represented in all three novels, which might lead to me relying on examples from only one or two novels. I have not included *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919) because I wanted to focus on novels from Woolf's later writing phase; these two novels are similar in technique to Woolf's literary predecessors in England and they lack the voice she found in her later novels. *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933) have been omitted from this thesis due to their comic and fantastic nature: *Orlando* follows the eponymous hero/heroine on a four-hundred-year long journey, and *Flush* is focalised by a cocker spaniel. Other novels have been omitted due to the scope of the thesis. Having chosen three novels for analysis, I believe that I will be able to delve into greater detail into every individual novel, all while drawing conclusions which might pertain to Woolf's writing in general.

This thesis had its origin in a seminar on moments of being in *To the Lighthouse*. I have started reading Woolf's other novels and have noticed similarities in terms of symbolic structures and their relationships to the narrative. One such instance is the use of a salient symbol or an image which dominates the narrative for a certain period, which one might observe at the very beginning

in *To the Lighthouse* with the introduction of the lighthouse, and in *Mrs. Dalloway*, when the entire flow of the narrative is suspended by the introduction of the motor car. However, the main focus of this thesis is not the isolation and ‘decoding’ of individual symbols. It instead focuses on the analysis of the relationship between the larger narrative and symbols and images, which has enabled me to come to the following core thesis: although these three novels feature a myriad of diverse symbols and imagery, they can still be described as realistic because Woolf uses symbols and imagery as vehicles through which one might truly experience everyday reality. Her symbols might hint at a reality beyond human experience but are ultimately grounded and point to the common reality experienced in the daily lives of people.

In order to prove this claim, I will mostly rely on theoretical works belonging to the tradition of New Criticism. I have chosen this critical tradition for its emphasis on theory which should have its origin in the literary work itself and the importance it places on close reading. Monroe Beardsley and William Kurtz Wimsatt Jr., the authors of two key New Criticism essays “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946) and “The Affective Fallacy” (1949), stress the importance of studying and interpreting symbols in their wider narrative surroundings, which is an idea that I agree with. In defining symbols and imagery, I will mostly rely on two works: *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), by Northrop Frye, and *Theory of Literature* (1948), by René Wellek and Austin Warren. Wellek and Warren’s idea of a symbol as a persistently recurring image will be explored in this thesis, as well as Frye’s symbol phases. Another major New Criticism figure whose theoretical works are featured in this thesis is Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965). Essays such as “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), “The Perfect Critic” (1920), “*Hamlet*” (1919), and “The Function of Criticism” (1923) became seminal works of New Criticism with their emphasis on the unity of a work of art and on giving the primacy to the work, and not the author. Finally, since Woolf herself was a prominent critic, I will also include her critical and autobiographical works since they often explain the thought processes behind the symbols and imagery in the novels analysed herein. Scattered throughout various autobiographical episodes in *Moments of Being* (1976) and various essays in *The Common Reader* (1925) and *Granite and Rainbow* (1958) are Woolf’s comments and notes, in which she judges her own writing and compares it with the works of other authors, thereby shedding light on her opaquer images and symbols.

Although I have previously listed Woolf's novels in a chronological order, I will not analyse them in their order of publication. Each chapter of this thesis will instead feature an abstract notion which is shared by all three novels. I will then proceed to explain this notion by using the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. Following that, I will begin with the analysis of individual novels.

The first chapter will take a different approach to symbols and imagery in Woolf's three novels by focusing on the symbolic potential of new technology. One of the most defining characteristics of the twentieth century was mechanisation and innovation, the arrival of previously unseen and potentially devastating technologies. The aim of this chapter is to clarify the manner in which Woolf incorporated new technologies into these three novels. Furthermore, the chapter will also explore the impact of symbols and images grounded in technology on the narrative. Woolf predominantly uses such symbols and images in these three novels in order to disrupt the idyllic atmosphere that was prevalent before. This is the case at the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Clarissa, enjoying the ambience at the florist, is suddenly and violently interrupted by a loud bang coming out of the exhaust pipe of a motor car. It can be said that images and symbols associated with new technologies introduce a note of discrepancy and discord into these narratives.

The abstract technological forces and the problem of their representation through symbols and imagery will make up an important part of the second thesis chapter. However, this chapter will expand on this by putting forth a hypothesis that Woolf tackled this problem through her specific use of water-based imagery and symbols. The three novels discussed in this thesis, as well as Woolf's biographical and prose writings, are brimming with images and symbols connected with water. Moreover, these symbols and images are almost exclusively used to denote the antagonistic abstract forces faced by Woolf's characters. One does not have to look further than Rhoda from *The Waves* and Septimus Smith from *Mrs. Dalloway*. Aquatic imagery and symbols present a crucial part in the *Weltanschauung* of these characters, with both being depicted as characters who have trouble coping with external reality, and, more importantly, whenever they believe their crisis has reached a climax, they utter phrases such as: "I went under the sea" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 52), and "Let me pull myself out of these waters", "life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea" (*The Waves* 19;47). Sentences such as these reinforce the idea that water is the symbolic medium which Woolf interposes between her characters and the abstract forces threatening to overwhelm them.

Finally, it might be said that the way in which Woolf took away her own life was the final confirmation of the importance of water in her life.

The third chapter will delve further into the problematics of reality representation in these three novels by focusing on the relationship between symbols, images, and the Overwhelming. I use the Overwhelming as an umbrella term which encompasses all of the aforementioned abstract forces which might even be thought of as the antagonists of these three novels. In this chapter I will explain the difference between the symbols and images associated with the brevity of human life and the never-ending flux of time. If we think of the relationship between the protagonists and these abstract forces in terms of hostility, one could argue that the symbolic portrayal of this struggle is decidedly one-sided. Woolf seemingly has no issues finding adequate symbols and images for her protagonists. One of the most prominent examples would be Mr. Ramsay when he thinks about the future and his legacy: Woolf writes a cavalcade of quick images in which Mr. Ramsay is portrayed as the fearless leader of men, thereby shedding light on his character. However, when she introduces the antagonistic forces of life and time, to name a few, one has the impression that she had trouble finding, in Eliot's terms, the appropriate objective correlative which would bring about the emotional intensity of the force in question.

The fourth chapter of this thesis will analyse symbols and images associated with parenthood and matrimony, with special emphasis being placed on motherhood, as it is given a more prominent role in the scope of these novels. The analysis of characters such as Mrs. Ramsay, Susan, Betty Flanders, and Clarissa Dalloway will make up the majority of this chapter, wherein the possible dichotomies of portrayal-conflicting male and female points of view and stances-shall be explored.

The fifth chapter of the thesis will deal with the problem of direct experience and interposing. It will also focus on the notion of the 'objective-correlative' as it is defined in Eliot's essay "Hamlet" (1919). Although this term was allegedly first used by the painter Washington Alston, Eliot was the one who introduced this notion into the poetics of drama by saying that the expression of emotion in art requires a certain substitute, be that a set of object or different events and situations. I interpret this definition as Eliot's way of speaking against emotions which have been rendered in an abstract or vague manner. In this chapter I will demonstrate how Woolf struggles to find symbols and images adequately representing complex emotional states which her characters undergo when facing abstract forces such as life and time. I will also analyse instances in which

Woolf successfully finds an objective correlative. One example of this would be the scene from *To the Lighthouse* in which William Banks thinks of the Ramsays' eight children and assigns them personality traits of old English sovereigns, thereby enabling the reader to formulate an emotional response to a large number of characters without having detailed information about them. Following my analysis of the objective correlative, I will return to the problematics of direct experience and interpositional. Two characters from *The Waves*, Bernard and Rhoda often point out the difficulties one faces if one wishes to experience reality directly. Bernard claims that he constantly has to "make phrases and phrases and so *interpose* something hard between myself and the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces (*The Waves* 21, my emphasis)", whereas Rhoda asks herself what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing (*The Waves* 123). I believe that sections such as these possess a metatextual nature and can therefore be interpreted as theoretical passages pertaining to the problems Woolf faced in her writing. This chapter will bring together the findings from previous chapters in order to determine what makes symbols, no matter how vague or unfinished they might appear, an adequate structural unit of analysis in the context of these three novels.

I. Modern Technology and Its Role as a Symbolic Vehicle

At the very beginning of his book *Real Presences* (1989), the French-born American critic George Steiner discusses the idea of obsolete expressions in languages. He claims that the English language, in spite of advancements in science and technology, is full of expressions which, as “vacant metaphors, eroded figures of speech” (1), still refer to sunsets and sunrise – notions debunked by the Copernican system – and the idea of God, who is now apparently not needed in the world of modern sciences. Steiner eventually develops an argument against those who believe that God is purely a “phantom of grammar, a fossil embedded in the childhood of rational speech” (1). This thesis chapter, however, shall focus on that part of the argument pertaining to a language and the survival of these apparently recalcitrant expressions. The idea which is developed herein is based on Steiner’s argument, but it goes in the opposite direction by asking how does literary language – in this case, the language in the novels analysed – incorporate never-before seen innovations in science and technology which arose during Virginia Woolf’s lifetime.

Being born towards the end of the nineteenth century, Virginia Woolf came of age as a writer in the first half of the twentieth century. The scientific and technological changes of this century, brought about by the impetus of the Industrial Revolution(s), were astoundingly rapid. Previously unimaginable contraptions, machines, and discoveries became a part of the daily life. Health care was revolutionised with the introduction of antibiotics, radios enabled long-distance communication, and motor cars were replacing horse-powered vehicles. However, a considerable number of these inventions was weaponised. It is easy to smile while looking at the first and somewhat loony take-off attempts made by the Wright brothers. Keeping that smile during an air raid in London when one is bombarded by the weaponised version of that very same invention is no simple manner. The vectors from which a possible lethal machine might come have been further extended with the modernisation of submarines in the twentieth century – the seas became more treacherous than ever. Finally, the then-cutting-edge technology was truly brought to bear on a massive scale in the unprecedented conflicts of the First and the Second World War.

In addition to influencing everyday life, technological progress was also problematised in various spheres of art. The ever-accelerating technology demanded its place, as well as its representation in the arts. The *Futurist Manifesto* (1909), written by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, represents a controversial and radical perspective on the relationship between

art and technology: art should revoke its old rules, and completely surrender itself to the new world of speed and industrialisation. Even though the manifesto features controversial lines about the glorification of war and alleged despicability of women, it proves that the inclusion of new technologies and discoveries into art was a prominent topic circulating at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Concerning Woolf and her relation to the technology of the twentieth century, a single anecdote might reveal her stance. In 1910, Virginia Woolf, along with five of her friends from the Bloomsbury Circle, participated in a prank which became a scandal for the Royal Navy. The event in question is the famous Dreadnought Hoax – six friends decided to disguise themselves as Abyssinian nobility in order to gain access onto *HMS Dreadnought*, the pride of the Royal Navy. The prank was successful, and the Navy was mocked by the public and the press because of its apparently lax security measures. This incident is important because it shows how Woolf was willing to take part in a prank which specifically targeted the pinnacle of military technology, a ship so powerful that a whole class of future vessels was to be named after it. Very few things could have symbolised technological progress and the military power of the Empire better than the *HMS Dreadnought*. Woolf was by no means a Luddite arguing against technological progress, but one could argue that she had at least been sceptical about the ship as a symbol representing purely positive progress and superiority of the British Empire. This interplay between technology and politics will be explored later in this chapter.

Following the brief general comments on the relation between technology and art in the twentieth century, one can now investigate how the emergence of new inventions and innovations influenced the three novels analysed in this thesis. The goal of this chapter is to analyse scenes in which major inventions and innovations of the twentieth century act as salient images and symbols and to explicate the manner in which they enter Woolf's language. Furthermore, the chapter will explain the impact of these images and symbols on the broader narrative of the respective novel. The following is the hypothesis: in these three novels, Virginia Woolf uses symbols and images based on new technologies in order to introduce a note of discrepancy and disharmony into a previously undisturbed setting. These symbols and images indicate the turn of the narrative towards a more disconcerting tone or setting. One can therefore conclude that Woolf chose to focus on the disconcerting aspects of modern technology in these three novels.

a) Disturbing the Idyll: Symbols of Technology

The first scene which shall be analysed takes place at the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel starts with Clarissa Dalloway being in a pensive mood and thinking about post-war London. After a short enumeration of what can now be found on London's streets, she adds that she loves life; more specifically, this exact moment in it (*Mrs Dalloway*, 4). The prevailing tone in this part of the novel is almost idyllic – even though Clarissa's thoughts range from war and its lasting impact on the English population, the perfect government clerk Hugh Whitbread, and the party she will be giving later that day. This mood culminates in Clarissa's visit to the flower-shop, where she enjoys a plethora of flowers, which are presented in a paragraph-long catalogue. The descriptions employed therein evoke and augment a certain idyllic atmosphere which cannot be found so easily in the London of her time. However, it is exactly modern London which whisks Clarissa away from the idyll of her fancy. The following quote shows the distortion of the hitherto prevalent tone:

As she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, 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 when – oh! A pistol shot in the street outside! (*Mrs Dalloway* 10)

The quote demonstrates a contrast which plays an important role in the three novels analysed in thesis: the world of nature seems to be under constant assault by the modern man and his contraptions. This pistol shot – for which we later find out was a shrill sound coming from an exhaust pipe of a motor car – changes the prevalent tone. Just like the broken gramophone in Woolf's novel *Between the Acts*, it introduces a note of discrepancy into the overall tone of the narrative. With its suddenness, Clarissa is whisked away from her private enclave of pleasure as she steps out of the florist's shop onto the brimming streets of twentieth-century London. As Thakur puts it, "the flowers, gardens, countryside, and nature, mentioned in this novel at different places, represent sanctuaries of peace" (67), thereby emphasising the wedge between the two worlds.

However, a clear-cut dichotomy seems to be rare in Woolf's writing. In her essay "The Narrow Bridge of Art", she emphasises the necessity of seeing both beauty and ugliness when she contrasts the beauty of willows, the moon, nightingales against "a diseased old woman [...] picking over

her greasy rags on a hideous iron bench” (16). Her other essay, “On Not Knowing Greek”, demonstrates how difficult it truly is to capture a subject in its multiple aspects. In her analysis of the Greeks, she warns her readers of the dangers when one imagines the Greeks living in remote villages in a serene landscape, enjoying “all the elements of a perfect existence” (40). According to Woolf, Greek literature is the creation of a “well-sunned nature” (52), of a people who enjoyed living. Despite their “well-sunned nature”, the Greeks also lived in cities, and one only has to think of *Oedipus Rex* to see a city, in this case, Thebes, as a literary background of a tragedy. But even in cities, Greek literature is characterised by its “out-of-doors manner” (“On Not Knowing Greek” 41). Woolf proceeds by comparing her own age with that of the Greeks by saying that the Greeks were able to dive into “the thick of emotions which blind and bewilder an age like our own” (54). Moreover, she mentions the First World War and its influence on the emotions of the people: “Our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry and fiction” (54). These pages are filled with writing which admonishes the English and their literature through the praise of the Greeks. Woolf believes that in the Greek language “every ounce of fat has been pared off, leaving the flesh firm” (55). This image evokes the setting of a *gymnasium*, a facility where the Greeks gathered for various activities, but mainly for physical exercise. The most important feature in this analogy is that the sportsman who wished to enter the *gymnasium* had to do so naked. The entrée, therefore, had to display himself in complete nakedness, with nothing to count on but the vitality and capability of his body and mind. Woolf’s interpretation of the Greeks echoes this mindset: the thing had to be laid bare; all constraints had to be cast off in order for one to exercise his powers fully.

On the other hand, the world of twentieth century London is not the same as the world of Ancient Greece. Its language, as well as the literary techniques employed in its representation, differ. Woolf, however, subscribes to the Greek way by trying to see and write about that which lies beneath the veneer of everyday life. Returning to Clarissa and the “violent explosion” coming from the motor car, we are now given a more detailed description of the car, and, more importantly, of the persons inside it. The vivacity of the first few pages, which had its peak at the florist’s, is brought to a halt by the mysterious vehicle. The symbolism of this scene might be analysed on two levels: the political and the religious. The two levels are not mutually exclusive, as they permeate each other.

The only thing which is known about the person inside the car is that this is someone of grand importance to the British state. Moreover, everyone in the street can feel the mysterious power silently emanating from the vehicle:

But now the mystery had brushed them with their wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew. (*Mrs Dalloway*, 11)

The anonymous figure inside is the symbol of political authority. It is important to note how Woolf creates the solemn atmosphere surrounding these figures. First, one must mark the almost eerie calm which had descended on the street. "Everything had come to a standstill" (*Mrs Dalloway*, 11). The idea suggested in this seems to be that of the importance of motionlessness and composure in figures of political authority. It does not become them to be bustling in public, for that would send a message of restlessness and disorganisation. Instead, their comport ought to be serene. An analogy from the art of Lily Briscoe, Woolf's painter in *To the Lighthouse*, might clarify this even further. Portraits of political figures, such as Queen Victoria and Lord Castlereagh, display them as almost marmoreal figures, always emphasising their calm composure. On the other hand, the power of the political figure to hold everyone in awe is in stark contrast with the symbolic connotations of the motor car, which, as already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, reflects the growing tendency of the twentieth century human towards greater speed and rising industry. Northrop Frye discusses the possibility of analogic imagery, i.e. symbols which evolve through different modes (153-154). The motor car presents such a case; it has replaced the horse-drawn carriage and represents the next stage in the evolution of a symbol of prestige.

This scene is also important because it contains passages in which Woolf comments on the symbolical side of politics. The whole scene with the car, and, later on, aeroplane, might be read like Thakur read it – as a critique of the English religion and politics (56). Such an interpretation, however, is dangerous because it only analyses a possible moral aspect of the symbol. In this scene, Woolf also comments on the relation between the political figure and the passage of history:

The enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting through the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known. (*Mrs Dalloway*, 13)

This quote brings us back to the introduction of this thesis and the question of realism. The lines above imply that the political figure in question will survive in the realm of cultural memory; that is, it will not be forgotten, since its face will be known to future generations. The lines also focus on the symbolic character of the figure, while comparing it with the ephemerality of the crowds, who are doomed to oblivion and dust. The awe caused by “this symbol of what they all stood for, the English society” (*Mrs Dalloway*, 125) is repeated towards the end of the book when the Prime Minister arrives at Clarissa’s party. By becoming an “eternal symbol of the state”, the political figure has ensured its place – we can also say, for the purposes of this paper, its *reality* – in the minds of coming generations. Since we have already mentioned the Greeks, a comparison based on their mythology and history might further augment the argument at hand. During the Peloponnesian War, countless seamen and helots have perished. We know that these men existed, fought, and died. However, they were a nameless mass. On the other hand, the Minotaur, the bull-headed monster residing in the Cretan Labyrinth, is a mythological being usually symbolising the animal part of human nature which ought to be conquered by reason. The Minotaur never bestrode the earth, but in our cultural memory it is more ‘real’ than the anonymous mass of men who lost their lives in the war, for it has survived more than two thousand years of history in our imagination thanks to its symbolic nature, thereby demonstrating that symbols have a reality-constituting potential.

In the above-analysed part of the scene, the modern car acts as a container in which the actual symbol – the political figure – is hidden. The second part of this scene features a modern invention taking on a symbolic role which contains certain religious elements. Following the car’s departure into the palace, the attention of the silent crowd is drawn to an aeroplane over their heads. The prevalent atmosphere is still that of solemnity and silence: “the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky [...], and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls” (*Mrs Dalloway* 16). Now we have the elements of purity and pallor juxtaposed and augmented by church bells. Furthermore, the religious overtone of the scene is emphasised by the verticality, which might imply hierarchy, as well as the fact that the plane is “letting out white smoke from behind [...] actually writing something! making letters in the sky!” (15). This message, however, is not clear and everyone is trying to decipher either the letters or the meaning of the message. The aeroplane as a symbol possesses the features of Northrop Frye’s heraldic symbol, in that “as a unit

of meaning, it arrests the narrative; as a unit of narrative, it perplexes the meaning” (Frye 92). At this point, the narrative is completely focalised on the aeroplane as its purpose is being divined by every character. Furthermore, its prominence in the scene suggests that there is special meaning to be assigned to it. As mentioned before, the attribution of this meaning displays religious overtones; the aeroplane seemingly fulfils the role of a messenger; a modern Hermes whose mysterious caduceus is replaced by the aeroplane’s exhaust smoke. The crowd’s gaze is bolted onto the chassis of this modern invention, just like it had been drawn to the motor car and the political figure in it. The difference, as already hinted, might be explained by spatial terms. The motor car was on the ground level, whereas the aeroplane soars above the sky, thereby hinting at a power above the secular. Septimus Smith, the shell-shocked veteran who commits suicide at the end of the novel, sees in these letters a message from beyond: “So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; [...] it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty” (*Mrs Dalloway* 16). Even though it turns out that the message was a toffee commercial, Septimus sees in it an inherent teleology which will lead him to the fulfilment of his goal. Later in the novel, doctor Holmes utters the following words: “He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card” (*Mrs Dalloway* 71). Coupled with his diagnosis, in which he consults Septimus to “notice real things” (*Mrs Dalloway* 71), one can see that there is once again a clash between what is perceived to be real. For Doctor Holmes and Septimus’ wife Rezia real things are music halls, playing cricket, and enjoying the outdoors. But Septimus is almost enraptured by the arrival of the aeroplane because he believes he can hear the words of either his deity or his prophet.

b) Symbols, Modern Technology, and the Narrative

The previous subchapter analysed modern inventions as possible symbols with some reference to the overall narrative of the respective works. This subchapter brings the relationship between the wider narrative and select symbols into the fore by focusing on the portrayal of Septimus Smith and the ill-fated Andrew Ramsay from *To the Lighthouse*. In their portrayal, modern technology is once again symbolically depicted as a disconcerting force, which influences the flow of the narrative.

From the very beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, Andrew Ramsay is presented as a promising young man, an excellent student who is not found wanting even when judged by his father’s high

standards. This does not prevent him from dying in the war. The manner in which Woolf includes his death in the narrative is interesting: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous]” (*To the Lighthouse* 99). The death of a young man is an event brimming with poetic potential. A poet might choose to emphasise the heroic side of soldiers, as done by Tennyson in “Charge of the Light Brigade”, or to stress the carnage and meaningless slaughter of war, as done in Siegfried Sassoon’s and Wilfred Owen’s works. Woolf’s depiction leans towards the latter, but the most striking feature of this passage is its brevity; one has a feeling that the poetic subject-matter has not been fully realised. Here one must consider the industrialisation and mechanisation of warfare. The instantaneous nature of Andrew’s death is paralleled in the narrative; there are no pensive comments on Andrew’s possible future as Woolf, much like a war-time reporter, delivers only the facts with a minimum of personal commentary, further stressing the feeling that Andrew’s death, just like the death of the nameless soldiers of the Peloponnesian War, will have oblivion as its legacy. The passage once again features a modern invention – the image of a shell exploding is used to emphasise the suddenness and violence of Andrew’s death. The parenthesised section gains even more gravitas if we look at the lines which precede and follow it. The exploding shell is the culmination of a crescendo of auditive images with which Woolf creates a threatening and foreboding atmosphere. “Ominous sounds, like the measured blows of hammers” (*To the Lighthouse* 99) invoke the inner workings of a factory, but after that we have silence, with “the thud of something falling” (99). The shell completes this section; the modern killing contraption delivers the ultimate disconcerting note.

The brevity of the passage might also reflect a writer hesitant to deal with a subject matter which cannot be duly presented in a novel. In her essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art”, Woolf contemplates the boundaries of prose:

But can prose [...] adequate though it is to deal with the common and the complex – can prose say the simple things which are so tremendous? Give the sudden emotions which are so surprising? Can it chant the elegy, or hymn the love, or shriek in terror, or praise the rose, the nightingale, or the beauty of the night? Can it leap at one spring at the heart of its subject as the poet does? I think not. (20)

As already mentioned, Andrew’s death could have been treated in poetry, be it epic or lyrical. Woolf decided to assign Andrew’s death a role which is marginal, even though the parenthesised

section represents the culmination of a wider narrative unit. The answer to why she believed this to be necessary might be found in the lines following the report on Andrew's demise.

The second part of *To the Lighthouse* differs from the first and third part. Apart from the entirely different representation of time, its most marked distinction is the shift in the narrative voice. The voice chosen for this part bears some resemblance to the omniscient narrator, since it looms over the narrative and nothing is barred from its eye. However, it is not a classical omniscient narrator, since it does not deliver, as Harvena Richter wrote, "a complete dossier on the character" (136). Richter continues by suggesting that the unique character of Woolf's employed narrator is "there not to give facts but to ask questions, to suggest, or perhaps even to divulge a little of the character's mystery" (136). The tedious enumeration of facts and unnecessary occupation with boorish descriptions is exactly what Woolf held against the Edwardian writers in her essay "Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown".

This nameless narrative voice, both omniscient and subjective, dominates the second part of *To the Lighthouse*. Whereas the first and third part of the novel mostly feature third-person narration with the internal dialogues and monologues of multiple characters acting as focal points, the voice of the nameless narrator serves as the only focal point for the narrative conveying the passage of times and the tragedies which had befallen the Ramsay family. Richter notes that Woolf herself compared such a narrative technique with the Holy Ghost, but only in terms of presence (138-139); that is, the way in which relationship is established between the narrator and the characters narrated. I will return to this narrative technique in the subsequent chapters in the analyses of *The Waves*.

Now that the main characteristics of the narrative voice looming over the lines preceding and following Andrew's death have been introduced, we can look at the scene after the parentheses and deduce why it is important for this chapter. The lines are the following:

At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine bounty – the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising [...] – something out of harmony with this jocundity, this serenity. There was a silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. (*To the Lighthouse* 99)

These lines can be seen as the fullest enactment of the contrast suggested at the beginning of the chapter. Something which could generally be described as dislocation of reality had taken place; the twentieth century, along with its terrible novelties, had forced a new *Weltanschauung* onto everyone. The main pattern repeats itself: we have the world of the past, represented by men who gaze into the sea or the sky – which might suggest possible sources of poetic inspiration – expecting to see harmony, but this expectation is violently assaulted by images which symbolise modern technology. “The ashen-coloured ship” image evokes dreadnoughts, corvettes, and various other battle-ships, together with the threat of a naval invasion, which, furthermore, could be abstracted into a general fear of the British populace who had been used to naval supremacy for a long time. This fear is further augmented by the image of stains on the surface of the sea, suggesting that, with submarines being introduced into the fray, one cannot escape war even in the depths of the sea. The figures wandering along the shore, hoping for a revelation and used to finding tranquillity in nature, now must take into account changes wrought about by human behaviour. The new horizon bears ill omens. This in itself should not be taken as something extraordinary, since wars have always taken and always will take their toll on the human psyche. However, up to that point in history, humanity had never seen such wide-spread conflict. The unprecedented scale of the war was made possible by modern advancements which were militarised. Industrial progress and novel discoveries forced upon everyone a substantial change of perception, and, towards the end of this scene, Woolf states: “To pace the beach was impossible, contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken” (*To the Lighthouse* 100), signalling that it is difficult to expect any harmony or tranquillity in the world’s current state of affairs and that words are not sufficient against the horror of the Great War.

It is exactly the current state of the world which occupies the mind of Septimus Smith, as he had become a figure on the shore, gazing at the broken mirror. Thakur identifies him, together with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, as a person who embodies “the adventurous, the unconventional, and the visionary in society” (60). But after the war, Septimus goes mad; he starts experiencing visions which put him at odds with what one considers the prim and proper society of the time. In one of his ravings, Septimus declares that he “knew the meaning of the world” (50), suggesting that he is now looking beyond all the trivial things with which – as he believes – society is obsessing over. When he is visited by Doctor Holmes, the familiar image of a motor car emerges. Thakur juxtaposes the Doctor’s car and the car from the beginning of the novel by stating that “their

greyness, reflecting the lack of warmth and colour of feeling, becomes symbolic of his insensitivity to human suffering” (60). Therefore, the modern invention is once again used to augment one side of two contrasting world views. We can see Septimus declaring and scribbling down mini-revelations: “Men must not cut down trees. There is a God [...] Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known” (*Mrs Dalloway* 18). As seen on the preceding pages, he stills feels a mysterious connection with the world around him, which is why he corresponds to the figure wandering alongside the beach from *To the Lighthouse*. His converse is Doctor Holmes, whose deity is Proportion: “worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself, but made England prosper, *secluded her lunatics*, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their view until they, too, shared his sense of proportion” (*Mrs Dalloway* 73, emphasis mine). Even though the Doctor is a successful man, brilliant in his field and respected by his peers, the surrounding grey panoply, strengthened by the motor car image, suggests that he is lacking something a human being ought to possess. Septimus sees this, but, being unable to make others see it in a world riven with difficulties, he throws himself into his death. We might see his death as the final confirmation of the change which the post-war world is undergoing. He represents a world view which might have been rendered obsolete by modern technology and industry.

I would like to finish this chapter by briefly summarising its key points and conclusions. The hypothesis from the chapter’s introduction has been confirmed, since I have demonstrated, through the use of selected scenes, that images and symbols based on twentieth century’s developing industry and technology have a role to play in the wider context of Woolf’s novels. This wider context usually takes the form of a conflict which Woolf proceeds to unravel: on one side, we witness the relatively idyllic world of the past, in harmony with the human being, but on the other, Woolf presents forces which assault or arrest this idea of harmony. Modern inventions, which become symbols in these works, act as augmentations of these hostile forces. The aeroplane’s message befuddles Septimus and the masses; the motor car emerges as a symbol of the political elite, as well as the symbol of the new society’s lack of compassion and understanding. In “Modern Fiction”, Woolf voices her thoughts on the differentiating conceptions of progress in literature and in science: “It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature” (184). In the scenes analysed in this chapter, she shows how the relentless linear progress brought about by industrial and

scientific revolutions influences, changes, and, ultimately, shapes the human perception. Her achievement can be found in the fact that she was no Luddite arguing for the abolishment and destruction of machines. Through what we might call the *symbolification* of these inventions she gave these novels an additional layer of meaning, all while suggesting the magnitude of impact these novelties have had on human existence.

II. Water as an Archetype

Ich seh von des Schiffes Rande

Tief in die Flut hinein:

Gebirge und grüne Lande

Und Trümmer im falben Schein

Und zackige Türme im Grunde,

Wie ich's oft im Traum mir gedacht,

Das dämmert alles da unten

Als wie eine prächtige Nacht (Meeresstille 1-8)

The focus in the previous chapter was placed on the symbolic capacity of the new technological and industrial developments in the twentieth century. This chapter will take the opposite direction as its subject matter is the exploration of the primeval element of water and its multifarious role in these three novels.

Water certainly has a prominent place in the stories of mankind. Ever since the dawn of mythologies, the importance of water has been stressed. In Babylonian mythology, the god-hero Marduk vanquishes Tiamat, the grand beast embodying the tumultuousness of the primordial waters, and subsequently carves the world from her body. The Greeks even had two stories which featured destructive deluges. The first one takes place during Prometheus' incarceration on top of Mount Caucasus, when the Olympian gods become dissatisfied with the general state of mankind. Among the wider populace, only two individuals – Deucalion and Pyrrha – survive because they have been warned by Prometheus. Following their survival, they eventually repopulate the land, while Pyrrha gives birth to Hellen, from whom the Greeks got their name. The second story refers to the fate of the famed and lost Kingdom of Atlantis, which Poseidon obliterated by causing a gargantuan tidal wave after he had noticed a decline in moral standards and an increasing hubris of its rulers. The same pattern can be found in the Biblical story of Noah: God, unsatisfied with humanity, warns a select few who are supposed to ensure the survival of humanity in the post-diluvial age. I have briefly recounted these famous myths because a specific relation between water and humanity can be observed in them. In each of these stories, water is presented as a purification method, an answer to a world ridden with moral, emotional, and psychological issues. Humanity,

unable to deal with this crisis, is then drowned by a higher power. Water, therefore, is hostile, as it represents an overwhelming force which might be unleashed on the unsuspecting.

In his book *Masse und Macht*, the Austrian author Elias Canetti devotes several pages to what he identifies as mass-symbols of the nations. To the Germans he assigns a marching forest, to the Spanish the matador, to the French the Revolution. But it is the mass-symbol of the English which piques one's interest. Canetti claims that the English have a special connection with the sea, which functions as their mass-symbol: Der Engländer sieht sich als Kapitän mit einer kleinen Gruppe von Menschen auf seinem Schiff, *ringsum und unter ihm* das Meer. Er ist beinahe allein, selbst als Kapitän von der Mannschaft in vielem isoliert (200). The italicised part of the quote is crucial, for the spatial relations described by it can be observed in the three novels analysed in this thesis. Although Woolf refers to other bodies of water, this quote is nonetheless applicable to her writing because she tends to use water-based imagery and symbols in order to emphasise a character's growing state of emotional unrest, coupled with the danger of metaphorically giving in to or falling into what might be called the dark waters of the psyche.

The importance of water in Woolf's writing can also be found in her biographical works. In *Moments of Being*, her collection of biographical essays, Woolf likens herself to "a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (15). Water is still presented as a hostile force; as a current one must swim against. The last part of the quote – the indescribability of the stream – will be further explored in the following chapter in which I will analyse how Woolf tackled the problem of symbols and the Overwhelming.

Even though it might be considered grim and somewhat inappropriate, one must mention Virginia Woolf's suicide when discussing the importance of water in her life and work. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Woolf's life-long psychological issues have finally gotten out of her control. Filling her overcoat with heavy stones, she cast herself into the river Ouse, where she drowned.

The theoretical criterion according to which I have isolated water as an archetype for separate study is based on the theory of symbols of Frye, Wellek, and Warren. Both theories are similar in that they stress the importance of repetition; for Wellek and Warren, images become symbols through recurrence (193), and Frye stresses the need for a specific type of criticism which will "have to be based on that aspect of symbolism which relates poems to one another, [...] the

symbols that link poems together” in the archetypal phase of the symbol (*Anatomy of Criticism* 96). The “poem” mentioned in Frye’s quote refers to any literary work, which he clarified at the beginning of his theory of symbols (*Anatomy of Criticism* 71). There is also a different criterion mentioned in Frye’s theory which is of interest when one wants to isolate a symbol. In what he dubs as the formal phase of the symbol, Frye claims that symbols are actually images “which show an analogy of proportion between the poem and the nature which it imitates” (*Anatomy of Criticism* 84). As already hinted, water-based imagery and symbols are brought to fore whenever Woolf delivers lines concerning the darkest and ultimately inexplorable depths of human psyche. One can observe a simple, but efficient analogy whereby the concept of depth is taken from natural waters and, through water-based images and symbols, used in creating a personal reality. The final theoretical criterion for understanding why water plays a crucial symbolic and archetypal role in these novels is based on Frye’s understanding of societal use of archetypes, with the notion of the “archaic dignity of the primitive” (108) emerging in his analysis. This notion might help us explain why is it that Woolf used symbols and images grounded in water to such a great extent. As the importance of water has already been explicated in the brief mythological paragraph I have written, we can now follow the conclusions made therein and say that there is a link between the strength of a symbol and its ‘primitiveness’. By employing the archetype of water, with which humanity has a close and ancient connection, Woolf imbues her symbols with gravity and timelessness, thereby increasing the impact they make by tapping into the archetype. Frye mentions the example of the Soviet flag featuring a sickle instead of a tractor (*Anatomy of Criticism* 108), which enables us to draw parallels with the previous chapter and say that a great amount of time will have to pass before modern technology attains archetypal status. However, if we continue talking about flags, we may notice that some flags – like that of Mozambique and Guatemala – include modern firearms, which suggests that some societies are keener on bestowing archetypal significance to modern inventions.

Having presented the mythological and theoretical arguments for the importance of water as an archetype, I would like to state this chapter’s hypothesis. It claims that water, understood as an archetype, acts as the crucial symbolic theme in these three novels. Water-based symbols and images have two aspects. The first one is the creative aspect, whereby these symbols and images are used to stress a character’s creative proclivity. The second aspect refers to the calamitous nature

of water, since Woolf extensively employs water-based images and symbols to foreshadow, indicate, and diagnose great psychological stress and periods of emotional turmoil.

a) Water as an Archetype: Creativity and Creation

In this subchapter, I will explore the way in which Woolf uses water-based imagery and symbols to augment the notions of creativity and creation. The notion of creativity will mostly, but not exclusively, refer to Woolf and her characters who are of artistic disposition. Creation, on the other hand, might be seen as a notion referring to characters who are not necessarily artists, but can nonetheless be seen as creators due to the primeval water imagery and symbols present in their respective passages.

The first prominent instance in which one can notice the relation between water and creation occurs in *To the Lighthouse*. Andrew and Nancy Ramsay, together with Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, decide to take a stroll along the beach. During their walk, Nancy's way of playing presents an interesting passage for analysis:

She crouched low down and touched the smooth rubber-like sea anemones, who were stuck like lumps of jelly to the side of the rock. Brooding, she changed the pool into the sea, and made the minnows into sharks and whales, and cast vast clouds over this tiny world by holding her hand against the sun, and so brought darkness and desolation, like God himself to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures [...]

She became with all that power sweeping savagely in and inevitably withdrawing, hypnotised, and the two senses of that vastness and this tininess (the pool had diminished again) flowering within 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. (*To the Lighthouse* 54-55)

Here we can witness Nancy in her own moment of being, which is a famous Woolfian notion whereby a character briefly surrenders to the density and intensity of experience. For Harvena Richter, a moment of being is seen as “a cross-section of consciousness in which perceptions and feelings converged and formed for an instant something round and whole (27)”. Nancy's moment of being is interesting because in it we can observe various symbols interacting with each other in a relatively short passage, augmenting thereby the intensity of experience. Firstly, we have a metonymical relation between the small pool of water and the vast ocean. In her brooding playfulness, Nancy imagines a whole world under her. Because she is depicted in such a manner, one cannot miss the similarity between Nancy and various mythological figures who had used

water when fashioning the world in their respective cosmogonies. Odin, the main deity in Nordic mythology, creates the world from the remains of the slain frost giant Ymir; out of his blood, Odin, together with his brothers, creates the waters of the world. Towards the end of the novel, this pattern of a smaller body of water standing in for reality is repeated: “For the whole world seemed to have dissolved in this early-morning hour into a pool of thought, a deep basin of reality” (133).

Forming an enclosure around her own small “pocket of reality”, Nancy proceeds to take on the character of what we might call a pessimistic demiurge. A notion I have already briefly touched upon, the Overwhelming, is inherently connected with this act of enclosure, but it will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Now we must look at the symbols and images in Nancy’s pool and analyse their relations. The most important characteristic Nancy takes from water, i.e. the ocean surrounding the island, is its vastness. The vastness of the enclosure is further emphasised when the creatures therein grow in Nancy’s creative perception. Further *gravitas* is bestowed upon this scene through the use of the word “leviathan”. Even though Woolf does not capitalise this word, opting instead to use it as a common noun, the Leviathan is a proper noun referring to the mythological serpent-beast of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Even though Frye laments upon the steady erosion of a “common cultural ground” and deficiency in contemporary education which prevents authors from employing archetypes successfully (101), I believe that Woolf skilfully used the Leviathan as a symbol, since there seems to be a parallel between the Leviathan of the Bible and Nancy’s “fantastic leviathan” (*To the Lighthouse*, 55). In both cases, the role of the beast is definitely symbolic: in the Bible, the Leviathan – embodying, as is the general pattern in mythologies with grand serpentine beasts, the tumultuousness and precariousness with which the sea was seen by the ancient peoples – is granted an epic description: an igneous inferno roars around its nostril and bellowing jaw, its hide is impenetrable by mortal means, as he makes a mockery out of the then-modern armaments and armour (Job, 41). This descriptive and epic technique serves a singular purpose: to juxtapose the Leviathan’s awe-inducing power with that of God’s and to confirm subsequently that God’s power absolutely dwarfs the Leviathan’s. The creature’s existence is therefore almost reduced to that of an auxiliary character, whose purpose is to demonstrate the strength of God, one of the protagonists. Despite the detailed descriptions, the Leviathan is written as a mere relation, a symbol of power and vastness, given prominence only to be ultimately defeated.

During Nancy's moment of being, Woolf uses the leviathan in a similar manner, but with a different goal in mind. The Leviathan of the Bible is supposed to accentuate the glory and power of God. When Woolf writes the words "fantastic leviathan", they immediately invoke images of the Leviathan's primary attributes: vastness and power. Due to these attributes, this leviathan can only live in the sea, just like the Jörmungandr, the World Serpent of Norse Mythology. However, the container should always be larger than that which is contained. We therefore witness a transference of symbolic properties; the monstrous size of the leviathan amplifies the vastness of sea, its home. This attribute is in turn captured in Nancy's demiurgic action: her small enclosure successfully retains the main attributes of the vast and endless sea. Nancy has managed to briefly conquer the sea, and, even though the entire episode is marked by foreboding tones, the creation-aspect of water is truly brought to the fore.¹

As mentioned before, water-based imagery is used by Woolf herself and her characters who are artists by vocation. In this chapter's introduction, I have quoted Woolf comparing herself to a fish in the stream. This brief part on the connection between water and creativity should be understood as a bridge between the creative and destructive, i.e. chaotic aspects of water. With her fish simile, we witness these aspects combined: the looming threat of being overwhelmed by the stream and the apparent necessity of "being submerged" into what Thakur, borrowing the Latin phrase of the English alchemist George Ripley, calls *prima materia*, "a self-explanatory symbol of reality (108)". Moreover, the imagery Woolf uses when describing how she envisages the scenes from her books features the archetype of water as one of its symbolic lynchpins:

I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. A scene always *comes to the top*; arranged; representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion—it is irrational; it will not stand argument—that we are sealed vessels *afloat* upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; *in floods* reality; that is a scene. (*Moments of Being*, 142, emphasis mine)

Expressed in simple terms, scenes from Woolf's novels arise from the aforementioned *prima materia*, with the writer having the task of fashioning the scene. In this quote we can observe that the two realities are initially separated. However, they are suddenly brought together, with symbols being the main constituents of the new and united reality. As I will demonstrate later in the chapter

¹ In my analysis of Nancy as a demiurgic figure I have relied on my previous seminar paper "Moments of Being in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*". In the thesis analysis, I have decided to expand upon it with the permission and consent of Dr. Fuchs.

on the Overwhelming, water is indubitably a creative medium, but we can now observe that Woolf's creative process is symbolically portrayed as a struggle against a torrential force which is constantly threatening to flood in.

In addition to Woolf, some of her characters share this connection with water. Mr Carmichael, the poet in *To the Lighthouse*, is seen as "an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand" (154). Lily Briscoe, during one of her meditations, repeats the pattern whereby water is enclosed: "What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored?" (37). Water, we may conclude, is seen as the creative medium, an inexhaustible fountain of creativity into which an artist must be able to tap into.

b) Water as an Archetype: Hostility and Psychological Danger

As we explored water as an archetype, we have noticed that it, despite representing creativity and creation, is often, if not predominantly in the context of these three novels, associated with danger. Biographically, Woolf's suicide might be seen as the ultimate confirmation of the water's siren song, the dangers lurking in the depths which might trap those who dive into it. Moreover, the three novels, as well as the essays and biographical works analysed in this thesis, feature numerous occasions in which "waters of annihilation", invoked by the narrative voice on the Ramsays' voyage to the lighthouse (134), play a prominent role. Woolf's essay "The Russian Point of View" features one such instance. As with the Greeks, Woolf is presenting her views on the literature of a people. She stresses that English readers ought to adapt to the unfamiliar tunes of the Russians (223). Singling out the relation between soul and health as that special interest of the Russian authors, Woolf continues by analysing the writing of Dostoevsky: "The novels of Dostoevsky are seething whirlpools, gyrating sandstorms, waterspouts which hiss and boil and suck us in" (226). Tumultuousness and calamity dominate the quote; Woolf seems to be fascinated by Russian authors who are able to ponder the souls of men, which are "confused, diffuse, tumultuous, incapable, it seems, of submitting to the control or logic or the discipline of poetry" (226). I believe that Woolf sees the Russian writers mentioned in her essays as those who share her interest – as well as the paradox – of writing about issues which seemingly cannot be expressed in prose. Another instance in which Woolf points out a similarity of experience can be found in her essay "The Russian Background", wherein she analyses a story by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov:

The steppe is the background for that particular story. [...] it seems to be the journey of the Russian soul, and the empty space, so sad and so passionate, becomes the background of his thought. [...] Fate has sent these travellers across our path [...] The English reader may have had something of the same experience when isolated on board ship on a sea voyage. (125)

For the Russian, the steppe is the main symbol – and one could say archetype in Russian literature – of the unknown and the vast, and the hostile which dwarves a human being. For the English, as already mentioned by Canetti, it is the sea.

At the beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf immediately describes the precariousness brought by the constant thud of waves beating against the shore of an island. For Mrs Ramsay, the waves are sometimes calming, reminding her of “some old cradle song”, but they are also responsible for directing her train of thoughts towards the “destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea” (12). Clarissa Dalloway, overwhelmed by emotions and just before meeting Peter Walsh for the first time in years, utters the following lines: “Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall” (*Mrs Dalloway*, 29). We can observe that the sea becomes a container for negative emotions and any feelings which might be considered inappropriate for a high-society hostess such as Mrs Dalloway. In the same novel, Septimus Smith, following what his peers would perceive as a rhapsode-like episode of rambunctious ramblings, seems to be aware of his shell-shocked condition, but, interestingly, he compares himself to a drowned sailor: “I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down [...] I went under the sea” (52). Septimus’ feeling of being drowned is only increased as the novel continues: “sound of water was in the room, and through the waves came the voices of birds singing [...] He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on the cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea” (101-102). In his relation with water, and through the images, symbols, and metaphors that he uses, Septimus creates, similarly as Nancy, a reality of his own. Harvena Richter writes that “he [Septimus] not only thinks in metaphor, he *experiences* it, projecting his inner vision onto outward reality” (88). Following this quote, we may continue and say that Septimus, suffering from shell-shock and schizophrenia, retreats into his own reality. Even though he has people who are willing to help him – his wife Rezia, as well as Dr. Holmes – he ultimately commits suicide by jumping from a window. I believe that Woolf, in her portrayal of Septimus, which was intended to be a study of insanity (Thakur 61) once again relies heavily on the archetype of water. This time,

however, the same archetypal characteristics of water – vastness and depth – are used in a different manner. As we have seen in the brief enumeration in this paragraph, symbols and imagery connected with water are also used in order to portray various negative emotions such as hopelessness, despair, and fear. Woolf's characters, much like Woolf herself in her biographical works, start using such imagery whenever they believe that they are facing an overwhelming challenge or problem. Their state of emotional and psychological distress is augmented through the use of images such as the drowning sailor, the use of spatial relations, predominantly that of falling or plunging into the unknown and unforgiving waters. I have demonstrated that bodies of water are often used as symbolic receptacles for negative human emotions, which – depending on the characters – will successfully or unsuccessfully be kept at bay.

Even though I have listed characters and places which have a special connection to water, I believe that the interplay between a character, negative emotions, and water-based imagery and symbols plays a special role in the portrayal of Rhoda from *The Waves*. Early in the novel, we witness Rhoda playing in a manner similar to Nancy Ramsay. Rhoda thinks to herself: “I will now rock the brown basin from side to side so that my ships may ride the waves. Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sails alone. That is my ship” (12). The similarity between her and Septimus is noted by Harvena Richter:

Rhoda in *The Waves* exhibits a similar use of abnormal perception for thematic and artistic values. Although a member of a closely-knit group of six friends, she is isolated, shrinks from contact with others, and spends most of her time day-dreaming. This isolation and autistic behaviour result in a distortion of reality. (89)

It seems to me, however, that there is an important difference between Rhoda's and Septimus' connection with water. As already mentioned, Septimus' mental condition was caused by the death of his friend, Evans, and his subsequent inability to mourn this loss. The incorporation of water-based imagery and symbols in Septimus' insanity discourse occurs after he had experienced the loss of his friend. In *The Waves*, on the other hand, Woolf writes water into Rhoda from the very beginning of the novel. Moreover, Woolf drew on a moment of being of her own and gave it to Rhoda. In *Moments of Being*, Woolf describes this memory:

There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something...the whole world became unreal. [...] Again I had that hopeless sadness; that collapse I have described before; as if I were passive under some sledge-

hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged upon me, unprotected (78)

Rhoda, coming home from school for the holidays, also stumbles upon a puddle which she cannot traverse (*The Waves*, 47). Moreover, she continues to relay her conflicted state of mind – following her humiliation at the garden party – by portraying the sea as a receptacle of dark, inimical forces: “With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses. And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and distinguishing these fissures” (47). The “dark crest” reminds me of the aforementioned leviathans lurking in unfathomable depths, but, more importantly, Rhoda explicitly refers to her relationship with a force beyond her control, untameable like “wild horses”. In this passage, this force or presence – I will tackle the issue of naming it in the following chapter – is identified as life, which presents a unique challenge for Rhoda. Harvena Richter analyses Rhoda, ‘the nymph of the fountain always wet’, and points out that the mythological portrayal of Rhoda is marked by a subtle link “with an unconscious fear” and that Rhoda’s mythological counterparts, “myth-twin”, might be found in the stories of Leda and the nymph Arethusa (125). Rhoda tends to use a language whose lexicon is brimming with, but by no means reduced to, water-based similes, images, symbols, and metaphors. “Like minnows, conscious of the presence of a great stone, we undulate and eddy contentedly”, she thinks to herself when Percival arrives to have dinner with the six of them (102). If we look closely at this language, we can conclude that it is an attempt to express her inability to deal with life, both with its most miniscule and mundane moments, as well as those events which only happen once in a lifetime. Thakur views the “bird singing by the bedroom window alone [as] a symbol of her timid character”. Out of all characters analysed in this chapter, even more than the deranged Septimus, Rhoda’s predicament - the atmosphere of danger and fear present in her passages - is expressed through Woolf’s usage of numerous water-based images and symbols which are used to convey the sense of overwhelming odds.

Before concluding this chapter, I would briefly like to point out one possibility of viewing the “lyrical sections” (Thakur 113) of *The Waves*. Interspersed throughout the book are nine sections which seemingly have no connection to the rest of the narrative. However, as Thakur, points out, these sections are akin to “choruses in a play or the intermezzos of an opera [...] they not only connect up the various parts, but also explain what follows in the succeeding sections” (113-114).

Woolf herself noted that novelists are always trying to find some substitute for the chorus (“On Not Knowing Greek”, 46-47). From the first section of *The Waves*, which depicts the moment of pristine primacy, when the “sea was indistinguishable from the sky” (3), and the protagonists are at the beginning of their journeys, to the mid-point of their lives marked by “the sun [...] risen to its full height” (111), and finally, to the closing section, in which “the sun had sunk”, the sky and the sea are once again indistinguishable, with darkness covering all (181-182), we notice that these sections follow the rhythm of the novel’s events. Richter defines rhythm in Woolf’s writing with the following words: “a synthesis of emotion and style, *a way of thinking in which the rhythms of thought carry the overtones of the emotions which prompt them*” (216). It is important to add that Woolf refers to waves when discussing rhythm of the eponymous novel: “*The Waves* is I think resolving itself [...] into a series of dramatic soliloquies. The thing is to keep them running homogenously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves” (*A Writer’s Diary*, 159). The importance of water as an archetype is once again brought to the fore, as its role is crucial in “the effort to unite the symbols toward a simultaneous perception of the unity of the structure” (Frye 77). We have seen that, as an archetype, and in its symbolic capacity, water is used as a basis for symbols and images of clashing notion of destruction, serenity, fear, distress, and danger. In these choric sections, Woolf employs these images to dictate the overarching flow of the narrative and to establish a poetic reality which, even clearly separated from the rest of the narrative, must also be analysed if we wish to understand the all-too real struggles of the novel’s characters.

In his theory of symbols, Northrop Frye claims that “an archetypal symbol is usually a natural object with a human meaning” (113). He also touches upon the special potential of archetypes: “Because of the larger communicative context of education, it is possible for a story about the sea to be archetypal, to make a profound imaginative impact, on a reader which has never been out of Saskatchewan” (99). Although we could by no means reduce Woolf’s style and say that it is marked by the exclusive use of water-based imagery and symbols, we can nonetheless conclude and say that the archetype of water in the context of these three novels is present in two main patterns which can be extrapolated from the medley of aquatic symbols and images. The first pattern is positive: various images and symbols connect water with the ideas of creation and creativity, representing it as a well of untapped resources which an artist – be that Woolf herself or one of her characters – should be able to access. Analysing this pattern, I have pointed out the similarities between various mythological figures, often in the moment of creation, and Woolf’s

own characters. The second pattern analysed in this chapter carries a negative sign: water becomes the symbol of an unknown, inimical, overwhelming force or presence. The sea is often seen as a canvas of horror, with indescribable entities lurking therein, which often symbolise emotions that characters wish to repress. These characters always struggle to control this force and interpret it as a psychological danger. Woolf uses and transfers some of the principal characteristics of water as an archetype – depth, vastness, tumultuousness, but also its tranquillity and nourishment potential – in all major areas of her writing: literary, critical, and biographical. Although I have observed these patterns separately for the purposes of analysis, I must stress that they cannot be precisely demarcated easily in the novels. The characters often feel the influence of both these patterns in the span of a few lines. Moreover, if we connect the findings of this chapter with the thesis statement of this work, we will notice that water-based imagery and symbols have a large role to play in constituting the realities of the characters who employ them. For them, these symbols, drawing upon the primeval potency of water and humanity's intimate relationship with it, portray the choice between life and death. Such symbols confirm that Woolf's 'realism' is not a realism of mundane minutiae, but a different kind of symbolic realism concerned with depicting the inner state of the protagonist.

III. Relaying the Overwhelming Through Symbols

As I was analysing the role of water as an archetype in Woolf's writing, I have often referred to an inimical force or presence to be faced by Woolf's characters. The first objective of this chapter is to further elaborate on what is exactly meant by such references.

a) Understanding and Defining the Overwhelming

This is by no means an easy task. Water-based imagery and symbols might be seen as the most salient symbolic facet of this notion, which I have decided to call the Overwhelming. This thesis is by no means the first critical work recognising the existence of such a notion in Woolf's writing. Erich Auerbach devotes a whole chapter in his famous study *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* to Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. In it, Auerbach speaks of "das Überwirkliche", when discussing against what exactly is Mrs Ramsay taking her stand (494). A similar argument is brought forth by Bernard Blackstone, who sees the sea as symbol through which a greater reality might be glimpsed (105-106). Thakur speaks of the "relationless absolute", and "the Vast Unknown" which he tries to explain with the help of Indian philosophy (74; 79-80; 109). Although Thakur's analysis might have its merits, I believe that Northrop Frye is right when he warns critics against imposing other interpretative frameworks onto literary works: "Such a method gives one the illusion of explaining one's subject while studying it, thus wasting no time" (6). Finally, in *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction*, Mark Hussey discusses at length the relation between 'reality' and "Woolf's sense of the numinous" (95) in her novels. I believe that these authors share a fundamental assumption, namely that Woolf was a writer who was not only occupied with the accurate representation of human experience, but also a writer interested in trying her hand at depicting that which might be beyond human experience and rationality.

Seeing that the notion of the Overwhelming has a prominent place in Woolfian scholarship, I have decided to approach this chapter in a different manner. In lieu of a more traditional introduction, wherein I would succinctly enumerate and briefly lay out the goals and structure of the chapter, I have decided to start *in medias res* with an overview of all those characteristics of the Overwhelming which preclude it from being analysed easily. By doing that, I also hope to further our understanding of this problematic notion. Following this analysis, I will analyse certain

aspects of the Overwhelming and the symbols through which Woolf tries to depict such a complex notion.

Firstly, the Overwhelming must be seen as an umbrella term encompassing all the inimical and abstract forces present in the works analysed for this thesis. Certain notions encompassed by this umbrella term, such as life and time, have become the objects of various studies, ranging from erudite philosophical treatises to popular psychology self-help booklets. Moreover, these notions require constant reinterpretation and it is questionable whether any human will ever be able to offer a satisfying and conclusive definition of such abstract notions. That is why the Overwhelming represents such a challenge for the critic: its astoundingly abstract nature encourages the use of sources from areas such as philosophy, theology, and natural sciences, in which these grand issues have been explored. It is then easy, as Frye pointed out, to apply a certain theoretical framework onto the Overwhelming. Even though Woolf was familiar with different philosophies – Harvena Richter names Bergson, Freud, Piaget, Cassirer, and numerous others as possible philosophical influences (246) – we must not fall in the trap of reductionism and analyse Woolf's works only through the lenses of these external concepts, regardless of how complex, subtle, or erudite these concepts might be. I therefore believe that the key to understanding the notion of the Overwhelming lies in Woolf's own oeuvre.

However, Woolf has not made it simple for her interpreters, which leads us to the second characteristic of the Overwhelming precluding us from grasping it critically. The Overwhelming is seen as an *abstractum abstractorum*, but it also contemporaneously enables us a deep insight into the motivational and personal spheres of Woolf's characters. Many characters have a personal relationship with the Overwhelming, i.e. some of its aspects. For Mrs Ramsay, as well as Rhoda – whose predicament was already presented in the previous chapter – the Overwhelming is life:

There it was before her – life. Life: she thought but she did not finish her thought. She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was trying to get the better of it, as it was of her and sometimes they parleyed (when she sat alone) [...]

But for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt *this thing that she called life* terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance.

[...] And then she said to herself, brandishing her sword at life, nonsense. They will be perfectly happy. And here she was, she reflected, feeling life rather sinister again (*To the Lighthouse*, 43-44, emphasis mine)

Mrs Ramsay's past, current, and future worries are all subsumed in the word *life*. Looking at the quote, we can see the aforementioned juxtaposition of the personal and the abstract, as Mrs Ramsay develops an intimate relationship with the Overwhelming; she is coercing it, yielding to it, but also boldly defying what she perceives as life's sinister advance. The personal angle in Mrs Ramsay's struggle against the Overwhelming is crucial, since it enables readers to "step into the thick of emotions" ("On Not Knowing Greek" 53-54). Finally, it seems that Woolf herself was aware of the difficulties of the Overwhelming when she wrote that "life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it" ("The Narrow Bridge of Art" 23).

Mrs Ramsay's husband is also a character who, in my opinion, has a relationship with the Overwhelming, albeit with a different aspect of it, namely time. He is described as a remarkably intelligent man, who, despite his brilliance, lacks true genius (*To the Lighthouse* 25). Moreover, his way of comprehending is described as being primarily linear, clearly structured, comparable to the "the keyboard of a piano" or "the alphabet" (24). In one of his meditations, he ponders the legacy of his work and future generations' interpretations thereof:

How many men in a thousand million, he asked himself, reach Z after all? [...] One in a generation. Is he to be blamed then if he is not that one? Provided he has toiled honestly, given to the best of his power, till he has no more left to give? 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. His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? [...] What, indeed, if you look from a mountain-top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare. His own little light would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger still. (*To the Lighthouse* 26)

From this excerpt we can see the conundrums we face when discussing the Overwhelming. On the one hand, we have a character in his moment of being, contemplating matters of utmost personal importance. On the other hand, Woolf uses time as the aspect of the Overwhelming to augment the *gravitas* of her characters' emotions. The symbols and images in this short paragraph – the unreachable Z, the dying hero, the knocked-off stone, the small light – all of them augment the sense of Mr Ramsay being at the mercy of forces beyond his, or anyone's, control. These images, coupled with the "eerie quality of time-expansion, with its suggestion of infinite emotional pressures" (Richter 157), create a compelling portrait of Mr Ramsay, enabling the reader clear

insight into a character's motivations. At the same time, the images and symbols constitute the surface of the Overwhelming, all while drawing their poignance from the unfathomable notions only hinted at therein.

The key to understanding the final obstacle precluding us from completely analysing the Overwhelming might be hidden in one of Woolf's observations pertaining to writing in general. In *Moments of Being*, Woolf once again questions the various problems a writer, more specifically, a novelist, faces while writing:

Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that I, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand - 'non-being'. Every day includes much more non-being than being. Yesterday, for example, Tuesday the 18th of April, was [as] it happened a good day [...] I enjoyed writing these first pages; my head was relieved of the pressure of writing about Roger; I walked over Mount Misery [...] These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. I have already forgotten what Leonard and I talked at lunch [...] This is always so. A great part of every day is not lived consciously (70)

In this paragraph, we can see how Woolf explained the choice of her novels' subject matter; as already seen, she is not merely retelling and recounting every event which had transpired but is only interested in a select few. "Non-being", as she dubs it, plays an important role in our life, but is not exactly eligible for artistic portrayal. Furthermore, it might be of interest to compare the notion of non-being with the notion of the Overwhelming. At a first glance, the two notions might be seen as being on the opposite points of a spectrum. Non-being refers to all the mundane activities an individual does almost unconsciously; daily chores, obligations, and biological needs would fall under it. The Overwhelming, on the other hand, as I have demonstrated, plays an important symbolic role in the characters' moments of being, where it is utilised as a way of stressing any emotional state a character might be in. We might say that the former is indescribable because it would not amount to a great narrative, whereas the latter threatens – as its name says – to overwhelm the narrative flow with the strength of its symbols and images. However, if we compare Mrs Ramsay and her experience of the Overwhelming with Woolf's account of non-being, we will notice that they are similar, as already hinted at, in their indescribability. Moreover, we can be more specific and say *cumulative indescribability*. In the above-quoted paragraph, Woolf states that she loses her ability to recall, as time progresses, all the individual daily events which she then subsumes under non-being. However, she later adds that, in her opinion, "the real novelist can somehow convey both sorts of being" (*Moments of Being* 70). We witness this fusion

of non-being and being in Mrs Ramsay: before her meditation on the hostility of life, a lone Mrs Ramsay briefly lists the things on her mind: the reckless behaviour of some of her children and the unavoidable brevity of childhood; her strong desire to see Minta and Paul married; her husband's strength and need for affection; her dislike for Charles Tansley (40-42). Separately, Mrs Ramsay is only too aware of these issues. However, the artistic synthesis of all the complex emotions invoked by these issues results in the indescribability of life, one of the aspects of the Overwhelming. Such a complex synthesis is not easily translated into the narrative, "for words, when opposed to such a blast of meaning, must give out, must be blown astray, and only by collecting in companies convey the meaning which each one separately is too weak to express" ("On Not Knowing Greek" 48). If we continue following this conclusion, we will notice that we are facing a paradox in which realism, understood as accurate description of people, the issues that concern them the most, events, and places, is no longer possible.

In his analysis of *The Waves*, Hussey makes the following claim: "'reality' is 'no-thing', but writing is naming, an attempt to substantize, to give a form to that which has no form" (85). In "Modern Fiction", Woolf identifies this attempt as the goal of a writer:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of alien and external as possible? (189)

I believe this passage signals a change in perception which, as we have seen in "Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown", characterises Woolf and some other writers of her generation, such as Joyce. One could describe it as an ontological shift, i.e. a different perception of reality resulting in a different kind of realism in which the indescribable – the Overwhelming – will play a significant role. We can therefore say that the final obstacle in grasping the Overwhelming is its inherently indescribable character. The remainder of this chapter will therefore focus on the manner in which Woolf tried to resolve this problem, as well as some other defining characteristics of the Overwhelming.

b) Clarity versus Depth and the Limits of The Overwhelming in Prose

Before we move onto other aspects of the Overwhelming, I would like to dedicate a brief subchapter to an analysis of the traits of Woolf's style which, I believe, pertain to the Overwhelming. The characteristics that I am interested in are clarity and depth. We have seen that Woolf manages to manipulate the Overwhelming; she connects its simultaneously abstract and private nature through the use of symbols and images, achieving – to a certain extent – “the revelatory of the imperceptible” (Wellek & Warren 202). Moreover, she states in “Life and the Novelist” that the writer's task is to “take one thing and let it stand for twenty: a task of danger and difficulty; but only so is the reader relieved of the swarm and confusion of life and branded effectively with the particular aspect which the writer wishes him to see” (45), hinting thereby a belief in certain imperatives put before writers, as well as a belief that a writer can manipulate the Overwhelming. In this subchapter, clarity is understood as the writer's ability to relay his or her thoughts in a clear and concise manner, i.e. the realization of artistic goals or ideals. Depth, on the other hand, will refer to the writer's ability to convey as much meaning as possible through the use of symbols or other stylistic devices.

There is, however, a hindrance. I have indicated in the thesis introduction that I wish to rely on the theoretical framework of archetypal criticism and New Criticism. These two approaches adopt an extremely sceptical stance towards deciphering an author's intent or desire. Northrop Frye uses the example of a *New Yorker* cartoon, which brilliantly explains the intentional fallacy argument. In this cartoon, a sculptor mistakenly makes the head of his statue too big. He undoes the mistake by simply calling the statue “The Woman with the Large Head” (87). In such an approach, any claim of identifying the author's intention, and its relevance for the critic, is highly dubious and scrutinized. I will therefore limit my brief analysis on those passages in which Woolf explicitly expresses her personal views and admiration for the writing of others, without trying to speculate about any author's true intentions.

The first of these passages can be found in “On Not Knowing Greek”. In it, Woolf states that highest poetry is marked by an ambiguity and our inability to grasp its (poetry's) exact meaning (49). Moreover, Woolf compares the language of famous Greek dramatists, such as Aeschylus, and the language of a modernist novelist. She reaches the following conclusion:

None of these dramatists had the licence which belongs to the novelist, and, in some degree, to all writers of printed books, of modelling their meaning with an infinity of slight touches which can only be properly applied by reading quietly, carefully, and sometimes two or three times over. Every sentence had to explode on striking the ear, however slowly and beautifully the words might then descend, and however enigmatic might their final purport be. (50)

This quote allows us to see what clarity means for Woolf, and how it is related to what we have called depth. According to this quote, we should understand clarity as effectiveness, the writer's ability to convey his intended message – whatever that might be – to a readership, or, in the case of a dramatist, an audience. Even though the meaning might be “on the far side of language” (49), a writer is still forced to use – and abuse – language for conveying the message, i.e. intended meaning.

The second passage can also be found in one of Woolf's aforementioned essays, “The Russian Point of View”. It seems that Woolf holds both the Greeks and the Russians in high regard. Concluding “The Russian Point of View”, she is full of praise for Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy. In her short encomium, clarity, once again, emerges as a quality towards which writers should strive:

Even in translation we feel that we have been set on a mountain-top and had a telescope put into our hands. Everything is astonishingly clear and absolutely sharp. Then, suddenly, just as we are exulting, breathing deep, feeling at once brace and purified, some detail—perhaps the head of a man— comes at us out of the picture in an alarming way, as if extruded by the very intensity of its life (230)

The reason for praise, however, is not only Tolstoy's success in clarity of style. It is his successful balancing of clarity and depth which had earned him laurels from Woolf's pen. I have already mentioned Woolf's analysis of the “Russian soul”, wherein she uses several water-based images and symbols to convey the difficulty of what she believes to be the subject matter of Russian literature, as well as the depths to which Russian authors are willing to plunge in order to find this precious matter. Writing about “the soul” is no easy matter, but Woolf believes that the Russians had mastered it.

However, as we have seen, Woolf seems to be keen on using extremely abstract notions in her own writing. We might attribute this to a tendency to cover her writing with “a veil that heightens” (“The Narrow Bridge of Art” 15), lending thereby depth to her works. However, such an approach, focusing on depth at the expense of clarity has resulted in some critique. Hussey rightfully notes that “‘Reality’; the soul; ‘that which we are not’ —these are a few of the many linguistic

displacements Woolf employs to shape round the abstraction that is felt through all her fiction” (148). The syntagma “linguistic displacements”, as we have seen, is certainly justified, since Woolf is not exactly prone to clear description, as she leans more toward the language of images, metaphors, and symbols. Moreover, she heavily relies on this ambiguous language in her critical works. Hussey’s conclusion is preceded by his analysis of *The Waves*, which for him is an “aesthetic failure”, useful only as “a storehouse of typical ideas, but not much more than this. It is a kind of ware house in which are found the materials from which novels such as *To the Lighthouse* or *Between the Acts* may be created” (82). Even though I am hesitant to call *The Waves* a failure due to reasons I will present in the final chapter, I agree with Hussey in that *The Waves* presents a novel which, if we follow the terminology of this chapter, relies too much on the Overwhelming, i.e. depth, while sacrificing much of its clarity, thereby failing to achieve what Thomas Stearns Eliot calls the “lucidity of style” (“Dante” 209). “Lucidity of style” is hard to reach when all the characters employ their own personal languages of images and symbols whose meaning must be unveiled to a certain extent before understanding can take place.

We might conclude this brief digression by saying that Woolf’s balancing of clarity and depth is influenced greatly by the degree of the Overwhelming’s presence in the three novels. Expressed in a simple sign-referent relationship, we can say that *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* represent novels in which Woolf achieved relative clarity in the manner she admired Greek and Russian literatures. *The Waves*, on the other hand, is a novel in which the referent has completely overwhelmed the sign, leading to high degrees of abstraction and ambiguity. This, however, should not be seen as a failure, since *The Waves*, as I hope to demonstrate in the final chapter, represents Woolf’s most intricate symbolic representation of the Overwhelming, which, we can now say, after analysing her various essays, seems to play a great role in her writing.

c) Aloneness and Struggle

Having finished the more general problems pertaining to the notion of the Overwhelming, we may now look at symbols and images Woolf uses in order to relay the Overwhelming. In relaying the Overwhelming, I believe that Woolf relies on the creation of certain atmospheres, which she then builds up using select images and symbols. The first atmosphere that I wish to analyse is that of aloneness. In the context of the three analysed novels, all the characters facing the Overwhelming do it predominantly in solitude. The character of Mrs Ramsay may once again

serve as the starting point of our analysis. She is a character whose personality is determined by her relations to other characters and further augmented by symbolic actions such as knitting (thereby reminding us of the first Moira Clotho, who spins the life-thread of each human being, just like Mrs. Ramsay wishes to unite those around her), but even she has to be alone in order to experience a moment of being (*To the Lighthouse* 45-46). Due to Mrs. Ramsay's strong connections to other people, her moment is of special interest to the reader because it strongly implies the fact that being alone, being "herself, by herself" (*To the Lighthouse* 45), is an unavoidable precondition preceding a moment of being. It is only in complete aloneness that one can somehow come nearer to the "wedge of darkness" (*To the Lighthouse* 45), which is the image Virginia Woolf chose to depict what happens with the core of being when all personality is shed within a moment of being. The moment of being, as we have seen, is also a moment of greatest vulnerability since the Overwhelming is at its closest.² Richard Dalloway's atmosphere of aloneness, similarly to Mrs Ramsay's, is also written using images invoking darkness and water as one of the aspects of the Overwhelming: "For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable" (*Mrs Dalloway* 117). The relationship between individuals is clearly summarised in Richard's quote: the vastness of water is again invoked to augment the miniscule dimensions of humans who are forced to move through a medium they can barely comprehend. The necessity for aloneness can also be noticed within Mr Ramsay's moments. Whether he is reciting Tennyson's poetry like a mad rhapsode or whether he is climbing a sandhill, "like a desolate sea-bird, alone", in order to gaze upon the sea, his aloneness is repeatedly emphasised by Woolf (*To the Lighthouse* 32-33). Moreover, the images and symbols surrounding him also hint at aloneness and a losing struggle against the Overwhelming, i.e. as we have seen, against time. Woolf describes as him as possessing "feelings that would not have disgraced a leader who, now that the snow has begun to fall and the mountain-top is covered in mist, knows that he must lay himself down and die before the morning comes" (*To the Lighthouse* 25); and as "a leader of a forlorn party" (26). As we have seen in the previous chapter, a major part of Septimus Smith's predicament is his growing isolation from the everyday world and his inability to communicate his ills to either his wife or Doctor Holmes.

² In the analysis of Mrs Ramsay and aloneness, I have again relied on my seminar paper "Moments of Being in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*" with the permission of Dr. Fuchs.

Northrop Frye identifies the beginning of formal criticism as “an examination of the imagery of a poem, with a view of bringing out its distinctive pattern” (85). I have applied this principle onto the three novels in order to discuss the relation between aloneness and the Overwhelming. Even though the listed images contribute greatness to the atmosphere of aloneness, I believe that the culmination of this “distinctive pattern” can be found in the following scene in *Mrs Dalloway*:

The solitary traveller, haunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants, looking up suddenly, sees the giant figure at the end of the ride.

By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women [...]

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth (42-43)

This is an account of Peter Walsh’s dream sequence, featuring “the nightly awakening of a titanic self” (Frye 105), which is akin to a pilgrimage to the mysterious figure of the “grey nurse”. The sequence itself is similar to the one analysed in the first chapter of the thesis, wherein we looked at “those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed” in *To the Lighthouse*. The aloneness of the solitary traveller is strengthened by the preceding events in *Mrs Dalloway*, when Peter Walsh’s reunion with Clarissa goes awry, something which he blames on Clarissa’s changed character. The quoted sequence also indicates a strong desire for aloneness. Karen Schiff pointed out that Virginia Woolf’s understanding of the moment of being and the activity of reading share solitude as their main trait (189), which might lead us to conclude that Woolf’s characters are almost reclusive misanthropes absorbed in their own soliloquies, all while being unable to express their utmost concerns or emotions.

That, however, is not the case. As I have indicated before, Woolf’s writing is often characterised by its contradictory nature. In this case, the “distinctive pattern” of aloneness juxtaposed with a “distinctive pattern” of images and symbols which convey a strong desire of the characters to escape this aloneness and share their existence with others. As Karen Schiff pointed out, reading was an activity with which Woolf occupied herself extensively. The essay “Hours in a Library” is of great interest, because Woolf conjures up an image of an ideal reader at different points in his

life. The most defining characteristic of a youthful reader, she argues, is to “hold [...] himself aloof from all the activities of men, and, looking at them from a distance, judge [...] them with superb severity” (27). We can liken this period in a reader’s life to self-imposed exile, similarly to how a young John Milton retreated to his father’s estate in order to read voraciously in Greek and Latin.³ However, Woolf identifies a crucial moment in the life of a young reader. She writes: “One of the signs of passing youth is the birth of a sense of fellowship with other human beings as we take our place among them” (27). The sense of belonging and shared existence is at odds with the aloneness invoked through a clash with the Overwhelming. Richard Dalloway’s fish-like soul is yanked from the depths of the Overwhelming by gossip about India as Woolf denotes the sense of desire to co-mingle with a series of tactile images: “a positive need to brush, scrape, to kindle herself [the soul], gossiping” (117). In Mr Ramsay’s case, the need for interaction with others can be observed towards the end of the novel in the pleasure he derives from a conversation with Macalister (223). In instances such as these, the “the distinctive pattern” of aloneness is broken, and “separateness, which seems to be the true aspect of all reality” (Stevanato 137), is temporarily overcome.

The characters of *The Waves* seem to be keenly aware of the distance between them. The difficulty of truly knowing somebody who is alone is pointed out by Bernard, the storyteller of the group: “Stories that follow people into their private rooms are difficult” (36). Furthermore, there is an instance in which the group briefly manages to overcome their sense of aloneness. With the six of them at dinner, absorbed in their own thoughts, Bernard notes the change in atmosphere brought about by Percival’s arrival:

We who yelped like jackals biting at each other’s heels now assume the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain. We who have been separated by our youth [...], who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked (92)

Following Bernard’s introduction, all the characters comment on Percival’s arrival, but Louis’ comment confirms the change: “Let us now issue from the darkness of solitude” (93). Percival, just like Mrs Ramsay, possess the admirable ability to bring people together, so that they can create “one thing [...] seen by many eyes” (95), which I understand as a shared memory. This event can serve as an example of what Savina Stevanato calls “communal intersubjectivity” (127), which is

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/oct/23/john-milton-berkyn-manor-paradise-abandoned-photographs-former-home>

a term she uses to describe the special treatment of subjectivity in *The Waves* by Woolf. Woolf emphasises the difficulty of truly knowing yourself, and, as a correlative thereof, others, in *Moments of Being*: “The person is evidently immensely complicated. Witness the incident of the looking-glass. Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons” (69). According to this quote, Woolf seems to believe that there does not exist a certain way of completely understanding a person. Even if one reaches the point of understanding, we have seen that, as was the case with Peter Walsh and Clarissa Dalloway, persons change, sometimes beyond recognition. However, the dinner with Percival manages to briefly counter this initially impermeable layer of ego. Woolf denotes this through several images: the spirit of the military unit, falling of the veils (94), of “light falling at real objects” (94). The respite, however, is brief, and it ends with Percival’s departure, with Neville thinking to himself: “Now the agony begins; now the horror has seized me with its fangs [...] Now the cab comes; now Percival goes. What can we do to keep him? How bridge the distance between us? How fan the fire so that it blazes for ever?” (110).

Aloneness, as we have seen, plays an important role in relaying the Overwhelming. Woolf writes into her characters a simultaneous desire to retreat into themselves, exposing themselves to the Overwhelming, and a strong yearning to break out of their solitude, even for an instant. This contrast leads us to the other atmosphere of the Overwhelming, which is the idea of an ongoing struggle.

In introducing the idea of a struggle, I will once again refer to Woolf’s death as an argument. Her farewell letter to her husband Leonard begins with the following sentences: “I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time”.⁴ The short note evokes a lifetime of struggles against a mental illness, which Woolf always believed to be around the corner. Her fight against the illness, and the way in which she ultimately succumbed to it, remind us of Septimus Smith’s fate. In her own way, Woolf has been soldiering on against the Overwhelming and her own struggle is translated into her writing. In “An Essay on Criticism”, she praises Ernest Hemingway’s style and proceeds to use a simile based on one of Hemingway’s favourite motifs:

⁴ <http://www.openculture.com/2013/08/virginia-woolfs-handwritten-suicide-note.html>

For in truth story-writing has much in common with bullfighting. One may twist one's self like a corkscrew and go through every sort of contortion so that the public thinks one is running every risk and displaying superb gallantry. But the true writer stands close up to the bull and lets the horns—call the life, truth, reality, whatever you like—pass him close each time (92)

The struggle is portrayed through the clash of the matador and a lethal bull. Through this image, the idea of a direct clash is brought to fore. It is also interesting to note that Woolf does not really care that much about naming the notion we have dubbed the Overwhelming and defined loosely as an umbrella term encompassing all the inimical and abstract forces present in the works analysed for this thesis. The above quote also hints at Woolf's desire to reach clarity and realism in her work.

This image full of bravado is by no means an isolated incident. We have already witnessed Mrs Ramsay as the Joan of Arc “brandishing her sword at life” (*To the Lighthouse* 44). Furthermore, Mr Ramsay asks himself: “Who will not secretly rejoice when the hero puts his armour off, and halts by the window and gazes at his wife and son” (25) invoking the figure of an *emeritus* in the Roman sense of the word, an old soldier at the end of his military service. He also prefers quoting Tennyson's poem “The Charge of the Light Brigade”, whose subject matter is the British cavalry storming the Russians during the Crimean War. Even the mild-mannered Rhoda, before proclaiming “Oh, but I sink, I fall!”, utters to herself: “I can see my Armadas sailing on the high waves” (*The Waves* 19), reminding us of the English national symbols in Canetti's analysis. However, I believe that the notion of struggle finds its ultimate expression in the image invoked by Bernard's final words: “I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!” (228). This is an image which serves as an audacious end to a novel characterised by “a background which perpetually alternates between wordless nothingness, the poetic language of being, and the little imperfect language of everyday life” (Stevanato 162). In this image, Bernard has the air of a knight – which is an image usually reserved for Percival – charging an opponent, whereas he is predominantly described as an unsuccessful story-teller. Thakur writes that “like the Knights of the Holy Grail, Bernard charges against death, and remains unvanquished, because when one realizes that by residing in reality one continues to exist, Death as a leveller and annihilator ceases to be” (108).

The images listed in the previous paragraph share the feature of referring to an epic past, in which struggles and conflicts were a much more direct affair, lacking the scale and dehumanization

brought about the modernization of war discussed in the first chapter. Analysed through Frye's theory of modes, we will notice that such epic images are associated with the high-mimetic mode, wherein the hero "has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject to social criticism and to the order of nature" (34). It is important to emphasise that I do not wish to cloister Woolf's characters into Frye's categories. Frye himself noted the tentative and unfinished character of his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Moreover, he points out that the "five modes evidently go around in a circle" (42) and "may be simultaneously present" in a single poem. In our analysis of the struggle with the Overwhelming, victory and defeat emerge as related concepts. The concept of defeat, as we have seen throughout the thesis, is often relayed through the images and symbols related to drowning, sinking, and fall. The concept of victory is often relayed through epic images of knights, swords, sailing ships, and armour.

Having analysed the Overwhelming, we should summarise our findings. Firstly, I have approached the notion of the Overwhelming in a *via negativa* manner, whereby I decided to focus on those characteristics of the Overwhelming which preclude it from being analysed easily. The most important of these characteristics would be the Overwhelming's inherently indescribable character, which is a result of it simultaneously possessing an abstract and private dimension. Its abstract dimension, evident from some of its aspects such as life, death, water, and time, make detailed analysis extremely difficult while inviting the use of sources external to literary criticism. The private dimension of the Overwhelming stems from the different experience with and the different perception of this problematic notion by Virginia Woolf's characters. For some, it might appear as a struggle against life, others will see it as a race against time and memory, and the remaining characters will point out to death and nothingness as these inimical forces. I have relied on the presence of the Overwhelming as something which has been recognised, albeit under different names, in Woolfian scholarship. Subsequently, I have concluded that the presence of the Overwhelming must have exerted an influence on Woolf's writing style by having her rely more on the language of symbols and images. Reliance on such a language, however, has its advantages and disadvantages. I have pointed out that Woolf fails to achieve the delicate balance between clarity and depth in *The Waves*. However, branding *The Waves* as a failure only means that certain aesthetic criteria have not been met. Similarly to Eliot's critique of *Hamlet*, we might say that *The Waves* is a novel which "is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art" (48). I believe that, in Woolf's case, this "stuff" is the Overwhelming. I

plan to argue in the final chapter, while pointing back to the findings in this chapter, that *The Waves* represents an interesting medley of literature and meta-literary commentary which, out of the three novels analysed herein, represents Woolf's best attempt to utilise the Overwhelming in the fullness of its symbolic potential. Having analysed the relation between clarity and depth, I have singled out two symbolic atmospheres created through the manipulation of the Overwhelming's symbolic potential – aloneness and struggle. As it has already been established with other ideas, aloneness and struggle often permeate each other, with several characters expressing their desire to retreat into themselves, only to immediately proclaim that they wish to participate in the affairs of the wider community. The reality of both atmospheres is created through symbols and images via the following patterns: there is usually an event or a memory which a character contemplates, e.g. the dinner party in *The Waves*, the publication of Mr Ramsay's new book, disobedient children running amok. Woolf does not employ the realism of her predecessors, which she criticises in her essay; the event, in its minute details, is not given primacy. A character's perception of events is instead brought into the foreground. In their perception and contemplation of her characters, Woolf remakes these events into a new reality, which is predominantly symbolic in nature, filled with fish-like selves, drowned sailors, knights charging adversaries or taking off their armour after an arduous ordeal. These new symbols and images, contained in a "single line of insight", tell scores about characters' emotions and struggles, which are often "discarded" into the Overwhelming, resulting in what we have called *cumulative indescribability*. Relaying the Overwhelming through symbols and imagery, therefore, becomes a crucial activity in these three novels. A realism of pure event recounting is no longer possible since the *cumulative indescribability* of the Overwhelming has to be overcome. This is done, in these three novels, through a realism entrenched in symbols and images.

IV. The Symbols of Parenthood and Matrimony

Following the chapter on the Overwhelming, we turn our attention to another theme present in these three novels. Throughout *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Mrs Dalloway*, parenthood and matrimony emerge as two poignant themes often permeating each other. We have seen that Woolf, in her portrayal of the Overwhelming, employs several images and symbols which recur in the three novels. One such “distinctive pattern”, as Frye dubs it, emerges in the portrayal of parenthood and matrimony. Even though this pattern might not be as abstract as the Overwhelming, parenthood and matrimony offer a richness of symbols and images, often in contrast with one another, which merits separate analysis. Fatherhood is portrayed differently and often at odds with motherhood; some characters thrive in marriage, whereas others suffer in such a union. In this chapter, I will focus on identifying key images and symbols through which Woolf portrays the traits she believed to be characteristic of parenthood and matrimony. Where possible, I will make references to the parallel construction of Woolf’s real-life experience and that of her fictitious characters in order to facilitate the understanding of symbols and images. I will base my analysis around five characters: Mr and Mrs Ramsay, Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh, and Susan.

a) The Archetypal Couple: Mr and Mrs Ramsay

I have already extensively analysed both characters in the thesis. However, if we look at the couple through the themes of parenthood and matrimony, we will notice that there remains a plethora of unmentioned images and symbols surrounding them.

Firstly, we should point out the biographical foundation for Mr and Mrs Ramsay in Virginia Woolf’s own parents, Julia and Leslie Stephen. Thakur notes that Virginia Woolf “has not only created pleasing portraits of Leslie and Julia Stephen in Mr and Mrs Ramsay, but also has used them as expressive symbols of some truth of her own conceiving” (73). Woolf’s father was also prone to sudden outbursts, euphemistically referred to by others as “coloured showers of sparks”, which were in truth stentorian tantrums characterised by “the breast beating, the groaning, the self-dramatisation” (*Moments of Being* 145). Sir Leslie and Mr Ramsay also share a common intellectual background; Sir Leslie was a prominent author and historian in his time. The similarity between Mrs Ramsay and Julia Stephen can simply be summarised in one quote in which Woolf is reminiscing about her mother: “She was keeping what I call in my shorthand the panoply of life

– that which we all lived in common – in being” (*Moments of Being* 83). This quote also introduces the ideas of unity and togetherness, which are notions, as I will demonstrate, Woolf tends to associate with motherhood and femininity.

The symbolic nature of the couple is noticed by Lily Briscoe in the first part of the novel, when she catches the Ramsays observing their children in play:

And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the tube or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr and Mrs Ramsay watching the children throwing catches. (*To the Lighthouse* 53)

The descent and retreat of the symbolic happens in an instant. Harvena Richter identifies the married couple as “the archetypal wife and husband” (127), who, along with other archetypes, “show how Virginia Woolf used universal myth to underline the particular character or situation, and to relate her material to the archetypes of human experience” (127). However, the quote from *To the Lighthouse*, even though it acts as the confirmation of the Ramsays as symbols of marriage, does not divulge any details on the dynamics of the marriage, which is created, as I will shortly demonstrate, through the opposing images and symbols belonging to either Mr or Mrs Ramsay, which eventually leads to their archetypal status.

Even though marriage is the confirmation of the union of two people, it is by no means a no-conflict agreement. The conflict and contrast between the Ramsays is hinted immediately at the beginning of the novel when Mrs Ramsay offers gentle words of comfort to her son James, only to be brashly rebuked by her husband who denies every possibility of the weather calming down on the day after. Unlike her husband, who enjoys the company of intellectuals, she prefers “boobies to clever men who write dissertations” (40). Even though this might be a somewhat silly image, Mrs Ramsay is by no means a silly character. She comes into prominence during the dinner episode, where we briefly witness “the reign of chaos subdued” (35). We have already mentioned a similar scene in *The Waves* when the six protagonists gather for a dinner with Percival. Mrs Ramsay’s words echo those of Bernard: “Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after” (76). In the dinner episode, all minor conflicts and dislikes are reconciled through Mrs Ramsay’s mastery of bringing people together. Mrs Ramsay’s role in the world is noted by Thakur: “Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, who have had their visions, live to serve others,

to create unity and harmony, and to pacify and soothe the irritated nerves of modern intellectual society—The Ramsays and Tansleys of the world (80). In addition to analysing Mrs Ramsay's role, Thakur's quote also introduces a clear divide based on the sex of the characters. There seems to be a difference between the manner in which men and women approach reality. Woolf herself notes the divide in her essay "Women in Fiction". After concluding that women must boldly shape and develop their own approach to fiction, Woolf states the following: "It is probable, however, that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man" (81). The dinner episode illustrates this further as the challenges to the unity Mrs Ramsay wants to impose on the group come mostly from men: Charles Tansely's burgeoning desire to "assert himself" (77) and prove his value; Mr Ramsay's anger flying "like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brow" just because Augustus Carmichael had asked for another plate of soup (69). Mrs Ramsay is ultimately triumphant – symbolised by the perfection of the Boeuf en Daube, consisting of "specially tender piece[s] of eternity" (76) – as she creates the foundation of a memory which will stay with all those who participated. Thakur recognises the importance of Mrs Ramsay's hostess role; for him, she is the lynchpin upon which the fragile unity of otherwise distant individuals hangs: "By her mere presence at the dinner-table, Mrs Ramsay merges them all into a party by bringing close all those who sat separate. No sooner does she leave the dining-room than the party breaks into separate groups again, and their talk turns from poetry to politics" (80). She is the one who feels unconditional joy at the prospect of Minta and Paul being married, even though the marriage is not successful, proving to us that Mrs Ramsay follows her dogma of unity without paying attention to possible consequences. Woolf often describes her desire to unify through the impressions of other characters. Lily Briscoe, for example, imagines Mrs Ramsay surrounded by a halo of sorts, a goddess who "held her hands over it to warm them, [...] and yet, having brought it all about, somehow laughed, led her victims, [...] to the altar" (73). Lily's lines also demonstrate that Mrs Ramsay might be somewhat dictatorial in her tendencies to bring people together as she glosses over any possible dividing issues.

Another image strongly connected with Mrs Ramsay is that of the shawl wrapped around the pig skull. I have previously singled out Mrs Ramsay as one of the "champions of life". This scene further confirms this claim as she is appalled by the skull and wishes to immediately shield the eyes of her children from the archetypal reminder of mortality. Death, which we have identified as one of the aspects of the Overwhelming, becomes Mrs Ramsay's adversary. Moreover, in order

to calm Cam, she quickly lists several images – bird’s nests, beautiful mountains, fields and pastures filled with antelopes, goats, flowers, and bells (*To the Lighthouse* 83) – in order to soothe the restlessness summoned by the presence of the skull and to lull her children into sleep. Mrs Ramsay, however, dies. In her absence, we can witness how the “whole effort of merging and flowing and creating” (60) is brought to a halt in the second part of the novel. With her death, nobody is there to resist the advance of the Overwhelming, namely time, which, although hinted at with numerous images of stillness and inactivity, finds its expression in the image of Mrs Ramsay’s shawl slipping from the skull it was once firmly wrapped around (96). The vacation house “was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it” (102). Finally, mostly through the efforts of another woman, Mrs McNab, the house is restored and cleaned, but it now lacks the life Mrs Ramsay once brought into it.

Such is the role of Mrs Ramsay. As Stevanato points out, “Mrs Ramsay’s perception brings about her capacity to establish connections and to confer unity” (137). Through her efforts, aloneness and separateness, which we have analysed in the previous chapter, are overcome as she, as we have seen during the dinner episode, creates a shared experience for people who would have otherwise found it hard to communicate or enjoy their time together. The conferral of unity is also a capability which seems to be exclusively a feminine trait, since Mrs Ramsay often sees men as inherently destabilising for her unity. I will now analyse the character of Mr Ramsay and the images and symbols used to portray his specific traits.

At a first glance, Mr Ramsay seems to be the embodiment of cold and detached rationality stereotypically associated with men. “Subject and object and nature of reality” (17) are the words with which Andrew explains his father’s work to Lily Briscoe. She, not knowing what that might be, is then offered the image of a plain kitchen table as a substitute for these perplexing words. The image eventually evolves into a symbol through which Lily sees Mr Ramsay and shapes her perception of his personality:

The kitchen table was something visionary, austere; something bare, hard, not ornamental. There was no colour to it; it was all edges and angles; it was uncompromisingly plain. But Mr Ramsay kept always his eyes fixed upon it, never allowed himself to be distracted or deluded, until his face became worn too and ascetic and partook of this unornamented beauty which so deeply impressed her. (*To the Lighthouse* 116).

To this atmosphere of seriousness and austerity, as well as determination and devotion, we might add the notions of barrenness and sterility. Woolf invokes these notions through the use of aggressive images of various bladed objects meant for cutting or slicing. In one of the many instances in which his father spoils everything for him, James notes that he “felt all her [Mrs Ramsay’s] strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy” (28). The imagery is repeated in the other two novels. Bernard notices “the rent in my defences that Neville made with his astonishing fine rapier” (*The Waves* 66) and Peter Walsh is constantly playing with his pocket knife in *Mrs Dalloway* during the scene in which he confronts Clarissa (30). I will comment on Peter Walsh in the subchapter on Clarissa Dalloway, but it seems to me that in the case of Mr Ramsay and Neville the bladed objects act as symbols for the way in which they apprehend reality, since both are portrayed as intellectuals and academics. Their approach to reality is predominantly invasive, with no ability to see or create the unity which is so characteristic of Mrs Ramsay. Their “experience of reality and search for truth are of philosophical and purely rational kind, and rely on the logical linearity of language” (Stevanato). Mrs Ramsay herself identifies “as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men” (60), because she feels that men simply do not wish to take upon themselves the burden of creating an experience shared by everyone.

Moreover, Mr Ramsay seems to be of a certain histrionic character, for he, as it has already been noted, frequently indulges in self-dramatizing, just like Woolf’s own father. He comes off as a child in his desperate need for sympathy from women. Initially, he demands sympathy from his wife: “he wanted something – wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him” (89). Following Mrs Ramsay’s death, he demands something similar from Lily:

Look at him, he seemed to be saying, look at me; and indeed, all the time he was feeling, Think of me, think of me. [...] A woman, she had provoked this horror; a woman, she should have known how to deal with it. It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb. One said – what did one say? – Oh, Mr Ramsay! Dear Mr Ramsay! That was what the kind old lady who sketched, Mrs Beckwith, would have said instantly, and rightly. [...] His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet. (114)

Lily manages to indulge Mr Ramsay’s need for sympathy when she hastily praises his boots, which leads to Mr Ramsay’s being re-emboldened. In addition to this episode, there are several others in which he quotes poetry which reflects his current emotional state. Thakur identifies one such

episode when Mr Ramsay recites Cowper's "Castaway", thereby using the familiar images of drowning and deep waters (83) in order to articulate the feelings caused by the loss of his wife. The sorrow is sincere, but it is his expression thereof that is questioned and scrutinised.

Finally, we should analyse the idea of unfulfillment and how it is linked to Mr Ramsay. It has already been mentioned that Mr Ramsay takes great pride in his work and that others, such as Charles Tansely, praise him. However, he is constantly thinking about his intellectual legacy. Moreover, he seems to be divided on whether his decision to marry was the right one. He ponders the possibility of his ability of reaching the coveted "R" from the alphabet analogy being somehow diminished through matrimony, or whether he had allowed himself to be distracted by the mundane problems of married life. On the other hand, he also expresses a certain propensity towards marriage. There is an event from Mr Ramsay's youth recounted by William Banks:

William Banks remembered (and this must refer to some actual incident), by a hen, straddling her wings out in protection of a covey of little chicks, upon which Ramsay, stopping, pointed his stick and said 'Pretty - pretty', an odd illumination into his heart, Banks had thought it, which showed his simplicity, his sympathy with humble things; but it seemed to him as if their friendship had ceased, there, on that stretch of road. After that, Ramsay had married. (15)

This is an event from Mr Ramsay's youth, when he was still "Ramsay". In the end, he does have a small covey of his own children in whom he takes pride. The two opposing forces, unfulfillment and pride with parenthood and marriage are ultimately reconciled in the silent encounter with his wife (89).

With the Ramsays, we have witness one of Woolf's instances of contrast. Mrs Ramsay is the unifying force lacking rationality and comprehension, whereas Mr Ramsay, represented through the images of blades, stands for logic and reason. Even though their marriage is not immaculate, the union brought about by matrimony tempers the differences as the two are combined into a symbolic whole. Mr Ramsay's intellectual aridity does not preclude him from adoring and desiring the intuitive and embracing Mrs Ramsay.

b) Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is married to Richard Dalloway, who, although her partner, is not given that much dialogue and prominence in the novel. Therefore, when analysing parenthood and matrimony in this subchapter, I would like to focus on the relationship between Clarissa and her

“old flame” Peter Walsh. With them, I am mostly interested in exploring the idea of possession and its connection to parenthood. Following that, I will explore the archetype of the grey woman with which Woolf seems to deal with *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

Clarissa Dalloway is a character who seems to be similar to Mrs Ramsay in terms of the desire to create unity; to bring about the grand convening of people in a single place. We find further echoes of Mrs Ramsay in Richard’s short elaboration of Clarissa: “What she liked was simply life” (89). Others, like Peter, might scoff at her party to which all the dignitaries and glitterati are invited, but for her, the party is a triumph of unity, just like the dinner was for Mrs Ramsay.

With her main trait being outlined, we must look at her relationship with Peter Walsh. Peter’s comments ought to be analysed because they, just like those of William Bankes, shed light on a person’s life before marriage and parenthood.

Their brief encounter at the beginning of the book is an intense but short event. Both are initially happy to see each other. The happiness, however, is immediately displaced by the emerging conflict. Whereas the conflict between the Ramsays was a matter of a married couple who had learned to deal with each other’s virtues and flaws, the conflict between Clarissa and Peter is of a different kind. Woolf’s role as a writer in this scene is similar to a herald which announces a duel: “So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other” (32). Moreover, we could also claim that they are both armed as the images of Clarissa’s needle working on her dress and Peter’s progressively restless playing with his pocketknife are juxtaposed. Thakur notices that the restless knife –suddenly sprung, held at arm’s length, caressed, and ultimately retracted - reflects Peter’s constant rethinking of his actions (69) – he is not sure whether he should have divulged his feelings to Clarissa; he doubts that he will be able to influence Clarissa in any way due to the growing divide between them. Clarissa’s counterpart is the needle, and, as an extension thereof, the dress which she is mending for the party later in the evening. The parallel between Clarissa and Mrs Ramsay can once again be noticed, since the “mending the dress, collecting the folds together, suggests her [Clarissa] drawing her parts together and not showing the other side of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions—the tear in her personality” (Thakur 69). This is Clarissa’s attempt to keep herself together in the face of Peter’s challenge, since he had caught her in an inopportune moment, “like a Queen whose

guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected [...] so that anyone can stroll in and have a look at her” (*Mrs Dalloway* 32). Having been caught like that, Clarissa immediately tries to put up something between herself and Peter. The first thing that she finds is the dress she is mending, but, as Thakur notes, the interposal of the green dress “shines in artificial light but loses colour in the sun”, bolstering the image of Clarissa as the “perfect hostess” (70), which is the part of her personality that Peter Walsh despises. The contrast between the artificial light and the sun further augments the inability of Clarissa and Peter to fully express their emotions. They feel the need to hide and go around them. This can be seen in some unfinished sentences, such as when Clarissa almost has a *lapsus linguae* and casually reminds Peter that her father never liked anyone who wished to marry his daughter (31). Later in the novel, Peter comments on his history with Clarissa and concludes that “they always had this queer power of communicating without words” (45). Moreover, he states that he was always aware of Clarissa’s less favourable traits. He even describes her as “timid; hard; arrogant; prudish” (44). He finally summarises his thoughts after the encounter: “That was the devilish part of her – this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability” (45). The image of his knife therefore might hint at a desire to cut through this mantle of impenetrability and reveal “that which lies behind” the image of the “diamond hostess” (Scott 131). Towards the end of their encounter, Peter breaks down in tears; this unexpected outpouring of emotions finally breaks the hostile and conflictful atmosphere as Clarissa decides to embrace and kiss him.

His sudden outburst of emotions is strong enough to completely change the atmosphere of the meeting, albeit only for a few paragraphs, in which we witness how Clarissa imagines what life would have been like with Peter. Peter then starts inquiring about Clarissa’s true state of mind; he wants to know whether she is happy with Richard, but, before this revealing conversation can continue, Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth, steps into the room. This is where the idea of possession starts to play a role. We have seen that Clarissa puts her dress between herself and Peter, an act which helped her steer the conversation away from questions that Peter finally succeeds in asking. The questions are left unanswered because Elizabeth’s presence once again reaffirms the divide between them. The idea of possession is further strengthened with Clarissa’s simple, but, for Peter at least, poignant line: “‘Here is *my* Elizabeth’, said Clarissa, emotionally, histrionically, perhaps” (35, my emphasis). Peter’s remark on the following page affirms that this line was Clarissa’s *coup de grâce* which made him storm out of the house: “The way she said ‘Here is my Elizabeth!’ –

that annoyed him. Why not ‘Here’s Elizabeth simply?’ It was insincere. And Elizabeth didn’t like it either” (36). We can see how Clarissa’s small act of asserting her possession, i.e. emphasising that this is *her* daughter is used against Peter. Elizabeth’s presence, we might even say her very existence, precludes Peter and Clarissa from honestly discussing emotions because Elizabeth acts as a stark reminder that Clarissa has another, happy, life with Richard.

We have seen how Clarissa’s choice to define herself in terms of motherhood drives Peter away. In addition to Clarissa, there is also another scene in which a character defines herself in terms of motherhood. Sally Seton is Clarissa and Peter’s childhood friend who was always considered free-spirited, inappropriately dressed, and impulsive. At one point, she even kissed Clarissa on the lips (*Mrs Dalloway* 27). However, Peter Walsh, while rummaging through his memory, realises that it was exactly Selly Seton who married “a rich man and live[d] in a large house near Manchester, the wild, the daring, the romantic Sally!” (54). Moreover, there is a brief exchange during Clarissa’s party when Sally simply proclaims: “I have five sons!” (136). The line already reminds us of Clarissa’s utterance, asserting possession. However, the preceding paragraph demonstrates that Sally views her multiple births not only as a personal achievement, but, first of all, as an achievement of social prestige, or a sort of a woman’s ‘career’. The paragraph in question is Sally’s brief inner monologue which features a small list of “great merchants, great manufacturers, men, after all, who did things”, ending with an exclamation “She [Sally] had done things too!” (136). We can see how Sally tries to find her own act of creation, with which she would deserve a place among these men. She decides to choose her children, believing them to be her greatest and most precious possessions. By juxtaposing Sally’s children and great merchants and manufacturers, I do not wish to denigrate motherhood in any way; I merely wish to point out what exactly Sally and Clarissa choose to emphasise in different situations; Sally in her search for a success of her own, and Clarissa as a final tactic in her duel with Peter. In “Women and Fiction”, Woolf notes that women are often forced to choose between motherhood and personal success when she points out that “the four great women novelists—Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot” (78) were all childless, with two of them being unmarried as well. We can therefore conclude this part by saying that the idea of possession is an inevitable part of motherhood, and that, as we will see, egotism and selfishness emerge as some of its most defining traits.

We have concluded our analysis of the first four characters related to parenthood and matrimony. Before I move on to the final part of this chapter, namely the analysis of Susan from *The Waves*, I believe that we should look at an archetypal figure which emerges in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*. The archetype in question is that of the grey woman, who seems to be the synthesis of various symbols of motherhood and femininity. In *To the Lighthouse*, she is first mentioned by Lily, who, bereft of Mrs Ramsay's presence, laments her loss: "Oh Mrs Ramsay! she called out silently, to that essence which sat by the boat, that abstract one made of her, that woman in grey, as if to abuse her for having gone, and then having gone, come back again" (133). A more detailed description is to be found in *Mrs Dalloway*, in Peter Walsh's already-mentioned dream sequence. In this dream, we find all the patterns we have analysed, expressed in abstract and archetypal images and terms: the grey nurse and her connection with womanhood; her knitting, through which she is like Clarissa and Mrs Ramsay (42). Moreover, the grey woman is joined by the "solitary traveller", whom, I believe, we ought to imagine as a man. He is the "haunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants" (42), which reminds us of the invasiveness and barrenness of Mr Ramsay, Neville, and Peter Walsh piercing with their blades. Ultimately, the grey woman is described as "the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world" (43). Scott analyses Peter Walsh and states that he, just like the surrealist André Breton, "seeks the consolation, the embrace [...] of a monumental vision of womanhood" (128). Scott also concludes that the men act as predatory admirers (128) in their devotion to this archetype. Even though the men are invasive in their attempts to reach the women they admire – as we have seen with Mr Ramsay and Peter – their inner monologues also present to us their earnest desire to communicate with women. We can say that one of the main ideas Woolf wished to explore in these three novels is the extreme difficulty of judging someone's character or intentions due to a lack of appropriate means of communication which would facilitate understanding between humans, and, consequently, men and women. Dorothy Bevis similarly writes: "to neither man or woman is it possible to know each other or to know fully anyone else" (12). Woolf's essays demonstrate that she was aware of the roles assigned to men and women during her time. Whether she tried writing within or against these roles is not of our immediate interest in this thesis, but I wish to emphasise that the male characters can only be described as predatory as a result of a deep and inherent misunderstanding between them and women. Scott's article is also interesting because he recognises the complexity of the woman in grey, who is seen

by Peter as “a giant, maternal, sea creature, benevolent and annihilating” (132). This complexity is the result of multiple symbols and ideas converging within a single archetype. We have extensively discussed water and its simultaneously threatening and creative aspect; the mythological parallels to the act of knitting; Mr Ramsay and the expedition doomed to fail. In Frye’s theory of symbols, an archetype draws its representative strength from repetition, but also from convention, and is “primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication” (99). With that in mind, we can now see how Woolf utilised this archetype of womanhood. Although she extensively wrote about the new role and new responsibilities of women, she also relied heavily on the primeval role of women as mothers and caretakers in these novels.

c) Susan: The Evolution of an Archetype

In the final subchapter I will analyse the character of Susan from *The Waves*. I have analysed her separately from the archetype of the woman of the grey because she is the only character whose growth and progress is completely recorded, from her childhood and well into her old age. Compared to her, our insight into other maternal characters is limited, because we usually only find them within the span of a single day, interspersed with various memories of their youth. I will therefore analyse Susan in a chronological sequence in order to elucidate on how exactly Woolf develops her into an archetypal figure.

Susan develops her sense of the self after she had witnessed Jinny kiss Louis. She is immediately made aware of her physical appearance – “And I am squat, Bernard, and I am short” (9) – reminding us of the famous Venus of Willendorf. Moreover, her eyes seek the earth and behold squirming insects. These first lines demonstrate Susan’s close connection to earth. For Thakur, Susan is “elemental. She is not afraid ‘of the heat, or of the frozen winter. She wants natural life and natural happiness’” (111). The primal imagery of earth continues (17-18) as Susan spies on Florrie and Ernest having sex, seeing “a crack in the earth and hot steam hisses up”. Her perception of sex is related to her image as the primeval mother; unlike Jinny’s sexuality, which is described as akin to flame, the description of Susan’s view of sexuality is marked by the fact that “she adheres to the precise and unpoetic prose of the adult world (presaging the conventionality she will demonstrate as a grown woman)” (Pinkerton 76). Her view of sex,

therefore, might not include pleasure, as it does for Jinny; instead, it is related to “the primeval instinct for fertility, the fierce need for possession” (Bevis 12).

Her connection to earth is continually stressed via her aversion to the smell of linoleum and sanitary tiles during her school days (23). Following the end of that period, she is happy to return to the fields, where she can witness people “doing real things” and rejoice in “the fields and hedges, and woods and fields, and steep railway cuttings, sprinkled with gorse bushes, and trucks in sidings, and tunnels and suburban gardens with women hanging out washing” (45). It seems that nature works as a panacea for her, purging the undesirable traces of the sterile school. As a young woman, Susan begins to recognise a certain transformation: “I cannot be tossed about, or float gently, or mix with other people. Yet now, leaning here till the gate prints my arm, I feel the weight that has formed itself in my side [...] Something has formed” (73). She ultimately utters the following conclusion: “What I give is fell” (73). Here we might draw a parallel between her and the woman in grey, since both characters feature destructiveness and fertility as their determining traits. Such a portrayal reminds me of the Abduction of Persephone myth. In this myth we witness Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, growth, and nourishment, suffering because Hades had kidnapped Persephone and made her his bride. As she searches for Persephone, Demeter forbids the plants to grow, thereby starving the Greeks and proving the terrible extent of a mother’s wrath.⁵ Coming to terms with her growing personality, Susan also accepts the inevitability of her becoming a mother in the future, which is hinted at when Woolf writes “All the world is breeding” (74).

The aforementioned idea of possession influences Susan’s motherly behaviour as well. She states: “I will possess more than Jinny, more than Rhoda, by the time I die” (99). Moreover, she reaffirms her desire to commit fell deeds, if necessary, for the sake of her children: “I shall push the fortunes of my children unscrupulously. I shall hate those who see their faults. I shall lie basely to help them” (99). She does not see her life as something separate from the life of her children. The idea of possession is strengthened, and it turns into an identity. Mark Hussey analysed Susan with a specific interest in the way her body is portrayed, and he concludes that “her body, to her assumes the contours of the land. This child is more than just another possession; it is an extension of her body” (11). The images Susan uses to portray her desire to protect should also be noted; she wishes to protect the child by “wrapping it in a cocoon made of my own blood”; she sees her body

⁵ <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Demeter-and-Persephone>

remade as “a hollow, warm shelter for my children to sleep in”; she, similarly to Mrs Ramsay, feels that life is hostile to her children as she demands from it to “sheath its claws and gird its lightning and pass by” (130-131).

There is a scene which I believe to be the culmination of Susan as a mother. Walking through the fields with her son, she states: “I have reached the summit of my desires” (145). The idea of possession is then brought into the foreground. Starting with the “I possess all I see” sentence, Susan repeatedly stresses herself as the origin of various images that surround her. “I have grown trees”; “I have made ponds”; (146); the list goes on, but ends with her assertion of possession over her children: “‘My son’, I say, ‘my daughter’” (146). On her farm, everything is an extension of her being. Hussey concludes that “the idea of possession is central in Susan’s character: by possessing all around that is around her, and that her senses bring her evidence of, she can create her own world through her body” (9).

At the same time, however, Susan is aware of the limits of such a life. Even though she ultimately comes to terms with it, she does admit that she had had enough of her “own craft, industry, and cunning, of the unscrupulous ways of the mother who protects, who collects under her jealous eyes at one long table her own children, always her own” (147). Hussey writes that Susan’s “identification with the earth tends toward a sort of unembodiment” (10), which would entail Susan’s aforementioned tendency to see everything around her as a part of herself, thereby losing the sense of her own physical body in the process. Her connection with earth, however, is also used to stress the limits of her body and a life determined primarily by motherhood. Towards the end of one of her monologues, Susan says: “Life stands round me like glass round the imprisoned reed” (147). By likening herself to a plant isolated from the rest of the world, Susan reaffirms her connection with the earth, as well as the limits of body. The notion of Susan being rooted is repeated by Neville, who, possessing the brilliant but arid rapier of intellect, immediately sees the disadvantages of her life. “You meanwhile”, he says, after noticing her shabby dress and red hands as the images that confirms her motherhood, “have stuck like a limpet to the same rock” (164). Through such an approach to life, Susan might have lived a life marked by “a sense of security, of ‘belonging’” (Hussey 12), but she is at the same time conditioned and limited by her choices.

In this chapter, I have analysed the notions of parenthood and matrimony in the three selected novels. By focusing on the images and symbols around these notions, I have come to the following conclusions. Firstly, we can witness the competing and conflicting dynamics of fatherhood and motherhood at play in Woolf's writing, created through her specific use of symbols. The blades of men often clash with the fabrics of motherhood; Mr Ramsay's "arid scimitar" intrudes upon Mrs Ramsay's desire to unite and bring everyone together. In their case, being married enables them to overcome this conflict, which is evidenced by the sudden descent of the symbolic on them, leading to their portrayal as the archetypal married couple. Secondly, we have noticed that Woolf presented women in more archetypal terms than men. The woman in grey and Susan therefore emerge as the two characters who are portrayed in this way. I have drawn the parallel between Susan and the goddess Demeter, mostly because I wanted to stress Susan's close connection to the element of earth. Thirdly and finally, I would say that Woolf successfully employs the archetypal technique because she does not fall into the trap of reductionism often associated with archetypes as conventional images. This can be seen in Susan, whom I believe to be her most archetypal character. In her portrayal, Woolf skilfully uses the primal element of earth, as well as its associated images and symbols, in order to create a compelling character. I say compelling, because we can simultaneously behold both the negative and positive sides of the maternal archetype. Susan is caring and elemental, with an overwhelming desire to possess and protect, but her choice of motherhood and earth also forces her to commit fell deeds for the betterment of her children and to be rooted and alienated from the rest of the world.

V. The Objective-Correlative and the Problem of Direct Experience

In *Moments of Being*, Woolf describes the manner in which she turns impressions into art. At the end of this process there is a feeling of unity and completeness as she concludes that “we are the music; we are the thing itself” (72). The thing itself for Woolf is located behind the “cotton wool of daily life” (72), the non-being as it is explained in the third chapter of the thesis. It seems that the search for the thing itself presents a crucial facet of Woolf’s writing. In “On Not Knowing Greek”, Woolf admires Aeschylus’s technique which amplifies the reverberation and reflection which the thing itself has made (49). Savina Stevanato recognises Woolf’s general tendency for “investigating what lies beneath surface visuality” (151). Woolf’s definition of reality, as presented in a *Room of One’s Own*, should be quoted in its entirety:

What is meant by reality? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable—now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes it seems to dwell in shapes too far away to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches it fixes and makes permanent... Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us... (Bevis 5)

Woolf’s reality is not static; this reality, which reveals the things themselves, can be glimpsed in the most insignificant and mundane details of human existence. This is usually reflected in the starting point for her most poignant moments of being: Nancy, playing in the water, becomes akin to a demiurge shaping a mini-cosmos; Mrs Ramsay is undergoing her moment of being as she is knitting; Lily Briscoe simultaneously experiences a rapturous moment of being and beholds a small boat travelling to the lighthouse. In view of such scenes, we might take Dorothy Bevis’ suggestion to “let down one’s net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface’ what she [Woolf] has said” (16).

However, in the chapter on the Overwhelming, we have seen the dangers of relying heavily on abstract and vague terms when trying to achieve depth and *gravitas* in writing. We ought to keep in mind Mark Hussey’s “linguistic displacement” when talking about the search for the thing itself, which, if we analyse Woolf’s definition of reality, may also threaten to overwhelm the reader. It has also been noted that Woolf herself commented on the limits of prose and the novel; she was

interested in the capacity of prose to match poetry in its emotional intensity, i.e. in the ability of a few lines of text to directly affect the reader. She also wrote about the relation between prose and drama in “A Narrow Bridge of Art”. Therein she asks the question “Can prose be dramatic?” (22). During her brief analysis, “the explosive emotional effect of drama” (22) emerges as the genre’s most prominent effect. Finally, she concludes that the minutely realized characters of contemporary fiction often sacrifice dramatic power in the interests of psychology (23). From these quotes, as well as from our previous analysis of the Overwhelming in terms of clarity and depth, we see that Woolf was aware of the potential loss of dramatic effect, which I understand as the ability to clearly convey emotions and ideas to an audience, caused by the “over-psychologization” trend in the fiction of her time.

The loss of dramatic effect is expressed in more general terms by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. In a series of lectures under the title *This Craft of Verse*, Borges, one might say, establishes his diagnosis of the state of the novel in the twentieth century. He states the following:

We all feel that the novel is somehow breaking down. Think of the chief novels of our time - say, Joyce's *Ulysses*. We are told thousands of things about the two characters, yet we do not know them. We have a better knowledge of characters in Dante or Shakespeare, who come to us - who live and die - in a few sentences. We do not know thousands of circumstances about them, but we know them intimately. That, of course, is far more important.⁶

We might take Borges’s claim further by introducing the analogy of a stage on which we find modernist characters and Shakespearean characters. Even though Borges is comparing characters from two different genres, I do believe that his claim is true. One must only think of the first soliloquy in *King Richard the Third*, wherein the Duke of Gloster unravels his treacherousness in just a few lines. Conversely, imagining one of Woolf’s characters on a stage is difficult. They are absorbed in their own thoughts and are not written as being ‘dramatic’ in their demeanour. In contrast to the characters of drama – a Greek term which may be translated as ‘things done’ or ‘things performed’ – , the characters from Woolf’s fiction are absorbed in intimate thoughts rather than public deeds or speech-acts. This is most obviously the case when the narrative voice takes over and elaborates upon the silence between two characters resulting from their inability to

⁶ <http://giveitaname-giveitaname.blogspot.co.at/2009/06/this-craft-of-verse-jorge-luis-borge.html>

articulate their emotions. One has the impression that, despite all the images and symbols Woolf uses to portray them, we, as Borges pointed out, never fully grasp their character.

With that being said, I wish to state the aim of the final chapter of the thesis. Herein I will once again focus on images and symbols in the three novels. However, I will now analyse them in relation to the problem of direct experience in order to determine whether Woolf was successful in bestowing “the emotional explosive effect of drama” onto her symbols and images. In order to do that, I will first explain Eliot’s notion of “the objective correlative”. Even though Eliot applied the notion onto drama, I believe that the same notion can be applied to Woolf’s writing so that we can acquire a better understanding of her symbolism. When talking about symbols, we should also keep in mind the Greek meaning of the word, which might be translated as a *memory shard*, which is broken into two pieces between two friends, and, later in their lives, reunited so that we might recognise an old friend.⁷

Following the part on the objective correlative, I will analyse two characters from *The Waves* whose portrayal is based around the idea of direct experience, namely Jinny and Percival. I will explain why Percival stands out from the other six characters, and I will analyse Jinny and the images and symbols Woolf used to convey direct corporeal experience. Towards the end of the chapter, Rhoda and Bernard will be analysed as meta-literary characters from whose lines we might draw conclusions pertaining to Woolf’s writing in general. In addition, I will focus on the problem of interpositional, which I believe to be crucial, since it demonstrates the limits of Woolf’s imagistic and symbol-heavy style. Finally, I plan to demonstrate that we should not approach Woolf’s symbolic realism by discussing separate realities, one mundane and made of the trivial, and the other one symbolic and ostensibly more ‘real’ than the first one.

⁷ This interpretation is to be found in Hans Georg Gadamer's *Kunst als Aussage*. This work, together with a selection of his writings from *Hermeneutische Entwürfe* has been translated into Croatian and published as *Ogledi o filozofiji umjetnosti*.

a) The Objective Correlative: Analysis and Pertinence to Woolf's Writing

Eliot's famous definition of the objective correlative can be found in his essay on Hamlet. Therein he defines the notion as follows:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. ("Hamlet" 48)

Before we begin our analysis, we should note that, as already mentioned, Eliot was not the first one to use this term, with Washington Alston usually being credited as the first person who had used it. Moreover, there are several articles which explore the similarity between Eliot's objective correlative and other similar notions. Pasquale di Pasquale compares Coleridge's "framework of objectivity" with Eliot's objective correlative, while Jūratė Levina mentions the overlapping terminology of Eliot's objective correlative and Edmund Husserl's *objectives Korrelat*, in addition to pointing out several other philosophers and literati such as Sartre, Brentano, and Merleau-Ponty (196) as potential influences. These sources demonstrate that the origin of the term requires further research, but in this subchapter, I am mainly interested in explaining the objective correlative with the help of archetypal criticism and Eliot's other critical works.

Firstly, we must explain what Eliot understands under the word "emotion", since it is emotion that should be expressed via the objective correlative. For Di Pasquale, this is the main difference between the "framework of objectivity" of Coleridge and Eliot's objective correlative: "Where Coleridge seeks an objective correlative for an idea, Eliot seeks one for an emotion" (496). Di Pasquale also asks whether the poet should distinguish between the two, but we will discuss that further in the chapter. Similarly, Eliot also wrote about a writer's, i.e. poet's, task, and, just like Woolf in her definition of reality, he believes that a writer must be a person who is able to cope with "the intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object" ("Hamlet" 49). I have quoted a line which contains the word "feeling", which, for Eliot, is separate from emotions. If we look at this distinction, we might understand how an emotion exactly differs from a feeling in Eliot's criticism. In "Tradition and Individual Talent", Eliot explains the poetic process via the analogy of interaction between platinum, oxygen, and sulphur dioxide. This analogy is introduced in order to bolster his stance on the impersonality of poetry, with the sliver of platinum

emerging unchanged from the other chemical processes. Following the analogy, he comments on emotions and feelings:

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed of one emotion or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever. (41)

Eliot also comments on the interplay between emotions and feelings in terms of a structural emotion: “But the whole effect, the dominant tone [of a drama] is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, having combined with it to give us a new art emotion” (42). Finally, he puts a task before poets: “the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all” (43).

Having enumerated the lines pertaining to emotions and feelings, I believe that we may now analyse them. In my opinion, feelings should be considered more subjective and singular in nature. Under subjective, I mean that for Eliot feelings represent personal impressions. A writer might experience a certain feeling and may wish to subsequently incorporate this feeling into his work. In order to do that, as we have seen, he might use any means at his disposal to evoke this feeling. By experiencing through the act of reading, a reader might then develop a personal feeling that he associates with the image. We may think of Mrs Ramsay’s shawl and the pig skull. The shawl evokes feelings of softness and gentleness, but the skull evokes the feelings of dread and barrenness. As Eliot wrote, these feelings are “floating” during the scene, which furthers their subjective character. Emotions, on the other hand, are more objective in their character and more related to the structure of the work of art. I believe that Frye’s understanding of emotions is similar to Eliot’s: “the unity of a poem, then, is best apprehended as a unity of mood, a mood being a phase of emotion, and emotion being the ordinary word for the state of mind directed toward the experiencing the pleasure or the contemplating of beauty” (80). The emotion is a crucial element in the creating of a poem’s “dominant tone”; all of the floating feelings hint at one or more emotions present in a single work. These floating feelings are like the keys on a piano keyboard which, when struck separately, only produce separate tones. However, when struck together, each tone contributes to the creation of unity which is a piece of music. Frye also notices that poetic

images, just like individual keyboard keys, “do not state or point to anything, but, pointing to each other, they suggest or evoke the mood which informs the poem” (81). The feeling evoked by the shawl and skull therefore clash, giving rise to conflicting emotions of, as we have seen, a parent who wishes to protect her children. Di Pasquale briefly described this unique process whereby “contrasted emotions are fused by the dramatic situation into the structural emotion, and in turn the structural emotion is combined with ‘floating feelings to make’ ‘a new art emotion’. This, then, is the significant emotion, the impersonal emotion of art which Eliot is seeking” (497). Emotion therefore enables complex artistic synthesis and unity within a literary work, offering the writer a possibility to unite possibly conflicting feelings and achieve “the sense of a growing richness of meaning unlimited by denotation” (Frye 81).

We have finished analysing emotions and the manner in which the objective correlative expresses them. Having done that, I believe that we should determine the type of relation between images, symbols and the objective correlative. From Eliot’s definition, it seems that the notion of objective correlative encompasses both symbols and images. We will also notice that the extremely general manner in which Eliot defines the objective correlative as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula” corresponds to Northrop Frye’s broad definition of a symbol as “any unity of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention”. Images have already been mentioned as a possible objective correlative through which an artist might express an emotion. Ezra Pound’s definition of a poetic image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (Wellek & Warren 192) corroborates this further. However, we must keep in mind that the objective correlative is primarily a dramatic notion for Eliot and that his broad definition reflects this. There is a difference between the objective correlative of prose and the objective correlative of drama. Prose is normally not written to be performed, which severely limits the realization of the objective correlative, which does not depend only on the writer’s skills, but the solitary reader. Drama, on the other hand, is performed by actors before an audience and the playwright’s objective correlative is much broader. He might employ poetic figures of speech such as alliteration, assonance; he will find language to be a much malleable instrument for expressing emotions that a prose writer. The *didascalie* might be employed in the service of the objective correlative; and the actor, in my opinion, is the living embodiment of the objective correlative, for the emotions contained in the work ought to come to life through him. Compared to such richness of choice, prose seems mute in its objective-

correlatives. Woolf commented on the possibility of a prose play, and she noted subsequently that it is “too rigid, too limited [...] It lets slip between its meshes half the things he [the poetic dramatist of the future] wants to say” (“The Narrow Bridge of Art” 22). Moreover, Woolf recognizes in the same essay that it “will be necessary [...] to bring to bear upon [...] tumultuous and contradictory emotions the generalizing and simplifying power of a strict and logical imagination” (22). We can therefore conclude that the objective correlative is a more general term than an image or a symbol, since the latter two terms are just two of the many instances of the objective correlative in writing practice.

Our analysis has shown the broad spectrum of possibilities in which an objective correlative might appear. I believe therefore that we should not overcommit to the analysis of this term just because it has become a *locus classicus* of literary criticism (Di Pasquale 496;499). Frank Kermode recognized how difficult it actually is to determine the exact nature of the objective correlative because “that what the object is correlative with is the emotion of the poet” (17). The term is relevant for this thesis because it introduces the idea whereby the writer’s experience needs a certain mediator (the objective correlative) in order to be communicable in literature. I am of the opinion that Eliot defined the term broadly because he was also a poet who would have been primarily occupied with the practical implications of the term. We should therefore understand the objective correlative as any instrument or the means through which a writer is able to relay experience, ideas, and emotions in his work. It should be understood as a tool at the writer’s disposal.

After discussing the theoretical side of the objective correlative, we may now turn our attention back to Woolf’s novels and see how the objective correlative pertains to Woolf’s writing. There is a brief episode in *To the Lighthouse* in William Bankes reveals his mnemonic technique for memorizing the names of the children: “He called them privately after the kings and queens of England: Cam the Wicked, James the Ruthless, Andrew the Just, Prue the Fair” – for Prue would have beauty, he thought, how could she help it? – and Andrew brains” (16). This part might constitute a trick on Woolf’s part – it is the beginning of the novel, and none of these characters have been extensively described or presented. This is where the objective correlative comes into play. She employs a “set of objects” – the kings and queens of England – in order to hint at a character’s defining trait, which we might paraphrase as Eliot’s “floating emotion”. It is a small,

but effective trick which establishes the initial relationship between these characters and the reader. As the novel progresses, we witness these “floating feelings” leading to a build-up of great emotions of senselessness and futility brought about by Andrew and Prue’s untimely deaths. Another use of the objective correlative, which could also be designated as a trick because it is seemingly trivial, is the exclusive use of the verb “said” in the opening lines of every character’s inner soliloquy in *The Waves*. As Kate Flint wrote in her introduction to the book, the use of this verb signifies that the characters do not “manifest individualized conversational habits”, as they engage in “soliloquies, self-presentations and self-justifications, rather than acts of communication with one another” (xi). There are no clear interlocutors but themselves, but, even as they are unable to communicate with one another, the repeated use of the verb “said”, which I see as an anaphora on the level of the whole novel, acts as an objective correlative in that it lends a sense of unity which ties all of the soliloquies together. The characters might never completely understand each other, but the verb “said”, as the basic reporting verb, becomes the key constant in the “formula” of this specific objective correlative, since it simultaneously acts as a coda, separating individual soliloquies, and an anaphora which confers a sense of unity onto the novel’s rhythm.

I have chosen the names of the children and the verb “said” as examples of the objective correlative in these three novels because they demonstrate how a seemingly trivial detail might actually play an important role in the structuring the main emotions of the novels. Even though there are other prominent images which could have served as great examples of the objective correlative, such as the lighthouse and the puddle of water which could not be crossed by Woolf and Rhoda, I believe that the two examples listed illustrate the practical nature of the objective correlative, instead of the highly subjective and biographical basis of Woolf’s images which one would have had to explore in the case of the latter images. My aim in this subchapter was to briefly explain what I believed to be the most difficult theoretical issues of the objective correlative: the distinction between emotions and feelings and the relation of the objective correlative to images and symbols. As we have seen, even though both emotions and feelings can be utilised in the structure of a literary works, it seems to me that feelings are strongly connected to a writer’s immediate impressions. The writer might decide to create a work based purely on “floating feelings”, but, for Eliot, these “floating feelings” must relate to “structural emotion”, which is crucial in determining the tone – Frye’s mood – of the work. This interplay of emotions and feelings is a smaller part of the experience a writer ought to work with and finally “unite in an

atmosphere which is ‘tranquil’ only in that it is a passive attending upon an event” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent” 43). In terms of its relation to symbols and images, the objective correlative emerged as the superordinate of the two since Eliot singled out images and symbols as possible instances of the objective correlative. We have seen how the objective correlative might appear in different genres and how in drama, the playwright has more instruments at his disposal through which he might convey emotions, experience, or ideas. We will now briefly leave the theory of the objective correlative behind and analyse two characters who are determined by their ability to directly experience the world: Jinny and Percival.

b) Jinny: Direct Corporeal Experience

Jinny is a character who primarily experiences the world through her body. This sensationalism is already hinted at in the first image she describes: ‘I see a crimson tassel, [...] twisted with gold threads’ (5). In experiencing the world through her body, she is similar to Susan. However, there are certain differences between the two. Mark Hussey devotes a whole chapter to the role of the body in Woolf’s writing. Therein, he compares Jinny’s and Susan’s apprehension of reality through her bodies. He writes that Jinny “experiences no gap between consciousness and body, but lives entirely through her body” (6). Moreover, he notices how the “crimson tassel” of her youth heralds her tendency to dress herself in bright colours. These colours, as Dorothy Bevis argues, do not have an ornamental function. Instead, “colour is not a separate but is merged with something else; it is an appearance, it is a quality” (14). In other words, colour imagery associated with Jinny can be seen as yet another objective correlative through which emotions and feelings specific to her character are conveyed.

Jinny’s awareness of her body starts at an early age. During her school years, she finds herself looking at a small looking-glass which “[only] shows our heads” (*The Waves* 29). In the following lines we witness how alarmed she is at the prospect of not being able to perceive her body, because, as we see in the remainder of the novel, “embodiment provides an initial firm foundation for being” (Hussey 12). Woolf often stresses Jinny’s connection to the body with dynamic images; “I move like a leaf”; “I dance”; “I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth” (30). The final image of flames evokes sexuality, for it is similar to the “a crack in the earth and hot steam hisses up” image which emerges when Susan catches two servants having sex. Bevis

suggests that the “fire images might have come from Mrs. Woolf’s appreciation of the Greeks” (14), which is a plausible claim given Woolf’s stance on Greeks and their literature.

As already mentioned, even though both experience the world primarily through their bodies, Susan and Jinny differ, especially in their stance towards sexuality. Whereas we have portrayed Susan as a primeval mother figure, the Demeter of the novel, Jinny might be closer to the fickle und unpredictable Aphrodite. Where Susan yearns to be rooted and fixed, which is expressed in her connection to earth and nature, Jinny proclaims: “I do not want to be fixed, to be pinioned. I tremble, I quiver, like the leaf in the hedge, as I sit dangling my feet, on the edge of the bed, with a new a new day to break open [...] I have not yet broken into my hoard. This is the beginning” (40). In this quote, the connection with her body is stressed via tactile imagery of quivering and shaking. Her faith into the body is reaffirmed once again when she experiences a brief encounter with a stranger in a train. In this moment she says: “My body lives a life of its own” (46). Moreover, she recognises the strong role of the body and her being and is completely content with that, leading her to exclaim: “Life is beginning. I now break into my hoard of life” (47).

In our analysis of Susan, we have isolated a scene and called it a culmination of everything that Susan stands for. I believe that the same can be done for Jinny. In her case, the scene in question is that of a high-profile party. From the beginning of the scene, we notice the familiar pattern of tactile imagery emerging as Jinny can feel the silk on her knee, the silk on her legs, the cold necklace stones on her neck. As she enters the venue, she asserts the faith in her body and says: “Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world” (75). In this scene, “her childhood aspirations are realized as she grows up to take her place in what she calls the ‘great society of bodies’” (Hussey 6). As she takes to the floor, familiar dynamic images reappear; she flutters, ripples, and streams (*The Waves* 76). Ultimately, while dancing with her partner, Jinny describes the union of bodies: “Our bodies, his hard, mine flowing, are pressed together within its body; it holds us together; and then lengthening out, in smooth, in sinuous folds, rolls us between it, on and on” (77). But this union is brief, as it lasts only until her body is drawn to someone else, until she remembers that she also likes “fair-haired men with blue eyes” (78). Jinny’s experience of the world, determined by and through her body, is therefore both intermittent and continuous; there is a certain flow to her which is interrupted whenever she desires the company of another body.

The body, however, has its limits, and Jinny becomes more and more aware of them as she ages. She notices that her “imagination is the bodies” and that she cannot “imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body” (96). Working within the framework of the corporeal, however, enables Woolf to portray Jinny’s sexuality with direct and even aggressive images. One such example is the scene in which Woolf portrays Jinny’s seduction as being akin to a rabid pursuit in the woods. The end of the scene has Jinny hearing the “crash and rending of boughs and the crack of antlers as if the beasts of the forest were all hunting, all rearing high and plunging down among the thorns”; she finally adds: “One has pierced me. One is driven deep within me” (135). Unlike Susan, whose sexuality is connected to the primal images of fertility and breeding, Jinny’s sexuality is much more direct, aggressive, and focused on pleasure. Hussey notes how such an “explicitly sexual embodiment” determines Jinny’s actions. “She cannot”, he writes, “like Neville, range in her memory back and forth in time, nor, like Susan, can she be a *mother*, for a relationship with children would not be physically sexual” (8).

Finally, with the coming of age, Jinny’s body suffers, but she is not ready to yield. Although other characters note how their bodies and minds underwent change over the years, the deterioration of the body represents an “ontological depletion” (Hussey 8) for Jinny. However, in the face of this, she still decides to “keep a stiff upper lip” and brace herself via means that are familiar to her; while remaining devout to her “religion of the body” (Thakur 112). She still brings her face up to her looking-glass and, despite turning grey and gaunt, concludes: “But I am not afraid” (170).

In Jinny’s example, we have seen how Woolf created a character preoccupied with her appearance without being superficial. In her, Woolf creates a depth of experience through tactile images and symbols evoking Jinny’s unbound sexuality and corporeality, such as fire and bright colours.

c) Percival: The Lost Figure

The second character who can experience the world directly is Percival from *The Waves*. He does not deliver soliloquies and is mostly portrayed in the soliloquies of others. One should notice his name, which hearkens back to Sir Percival of King Arthur’s Round Table, whose story – usually connected with the search for the Holy Grail – has been retold numerous times by Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Sir Thomas Malory, and Richard Wagner. The name itself

already links the character with a heroic British past, a trait which sets him apart from the rest of the cast. His demeanour, with its emphasis on action and directness, stands out in a novel with an inward focus. As the seventh character, he takes the role of the opposition towards the six.

His uniqueness is stressed early in the novel when Neville, still a child, comments on Percival playing with other boys:

He is thinking of nothing but the match. [...] He despises me for being too weak to play (yet he is always kind to my weakness). He despises me for not caring if they win or lose except that he cares. [...] He cannot read. Yet when I read Shakespeare or Catullus, lying in the long grass, he understands more than Louis. Not the words – but what are words? [...] *Not a thread, not a sheet of paper lies between him and the sun, between him and the rain, between him and the moon as he lies naked, tumbled, hot, on his bed.* (35, emphasis mine)

Percival, in spite of being single-minded in his pursuits, is still admired by Neville, the future intellectual of the group, for he is seemingly able to grasp the ‘pattern behind the pattern’ (Kermode 15) of poetry and enjoy the world directly – as seen in the emphasised part – without the need for Bernard’s phrases, Neville’s intellect, Louis’s insecurities, Jinny and Susan’s embodiment, and Rhoda’s fear and apprehensiveness.

There is also a sense of firmness attached to Percival, as if he were the anchorage of the remaining six characters, who are adrift on the currents of life, which Percival easily and unconsciously navigates. This feeling can be observed as the six characters start convening for a dinner. Neville comments how they are all, despite being close to each other after years, still separated: “But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background” (91). The change in atmosphere brought about by Percival’s arrival has already been mentioned in the third chapter; the separateness is eliminated as they gather around Percival the hero. The firmness inherent in him might explain why he is drawn to Susan, who also displays firmness due to her close relation to earth. When the impressions of his arrival are settled in, Percival is further honoured by his friends, as he becomes “the beloved, decked with garlands and with laurel leaves” (Bevis 11), the brave hero on his way to India, the land in which adventures await him. It does not come off as a surprise that Bernard, the group’s phrase-maker, delivers the lines which further glorify Percival; against the bleak background of “stamped mud” and “strange sour smells”, Bernard describes the glorious figure:

But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster around him, regarding him as if we here – what indeed he is – a God. (102)

Clad in a sun-helmet, like the god Helios⁸, Percival bestrides the Indian subcontinent as he illuminates the darkness as a giant among men. It seems that no task, be it mundane or grand, is beyond his capabilities. We can once again see the emergence of a familiar pattern, whereby Woolf resorts to the use of imagery of riders, knights, and armour – epic imagery – in order to portray the concept of victory.

On the other hand, this epic portrayal clashes against the manner in which Percival dies. He, the unassailable God, falls from his horse, from a position in which he should have been firmly entrenched. Neville, for whom Percival, I believe, was something of a Muse, is the first one who comments on his death: “He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown. The sails of the world have swung round and caught me on the head. All is over. The lights of the world have gone out. There stands the tree which I cannot pass” (114). Bernard’s reaction, however, is more complicated, since he simultaneously experiences sorrow for Percival and joy for his newly-born son: “My son is born; Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know” (115). In her analysis of Percival, Kate Flint identifies him as “a potential figurehead of the British Empire, [who] would seem an obvious target for Woolf’s dislike of unquestioning militarism and male self-confidence” (xxxv). We have seen how his trivial death clashes with his epic and heroic *persona*; and yet, the sense of loss is indubitably present in the novel; the sorrow of the characters is genuine, and it finds its best expression in Bernard’s words: “Oh yes, I can assure you, men in felt hats and women carrying baskets – you have lost something that would have been very valuable to you. You have lost a leader whom you have followed; and one of you has lost happiness and children. He is dead who would have given you that” (116). In his brief eulogy, Bernard stresses Percival’s connection to the world, his undoubtable place in it. He also comments on how ridiculous Percival’s name is, but at the same time, he reminds the world of the magnitude of the loss by addressing an imaginary audience, to which he declares: “You would have had to respect him. You would have had to form up and follow behind him” (116).

⁸ <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/Helios.html#Descriptions>

With Percival and Jinny, we witness how Woolf portrays two different types of direct experience. Jinny's body is the main medium through which she apprehends reality; this method is stressed via the use of tactile imagery and bright colours which denote the vivacity inherent in Jinny. In Percival's case we can observe a mute character, brought to life through others, who seems out of place in the novel. The ease with which he navigates through life, his undoubtable leadership position, as well as his blunt and direct relationship with all of life's facets, put him at odds with the other six characters. His name evokes an ancient chivalric past, strengthened by images which conspicuously lack a connection to the technology of modernism. Whereas the character of Jinny finds expression in her "religion of the body", Percival is mute, as if Woolf was unsure how she would describe the thoughts of such a man. Moreover, Percival might be the lost figure, whose death confirms his non-belonging in the world of the twentieth century.

d) Bernard and Rhoda: The Issue of Interpositional

Having analysed Jinny and Percival, we may now begin the final part of the thesis. Herein I would like to focus on the characters of Bernard and Rhoda. I have decided to analyse them because I believe that some of their sections possess a meta-literary character which enables us to question the limits of Woolf's style, which, as Dorothy Bevis claims, is a "style carried by symbols" (9). The key issue within such a style is interpositional, defined simply as an act whereby one puts something between two different things. Following the analysis of interpositional, I will list those arguments which corroborate my claim that separation of realities, which is a term I would like to use in order to attack the tendency of separating the symbolic from the object itself, should be avoided in Woolfian scholarship.

The word "interpositional" appears early in Bernard's vocabulary. He is neither Jinny nor Percival, who can experience the world directly. Instead, he claims: "I must make phrases and phrases and so *interpose* something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry" (*The Waves* 21, emphasis mine). As he grows older, he notices that there is a discrepancy between his phrases and that which is described by the phrases. As the hour of the dinner approaches, he plays with the images of his friends in his mind:

I feel already those harbingers, those outriders, figures of one's friends in absence. I see Louis, stone-carved, sculpturesque; Neville, scissor-cutting, exact; Susan with eyes like lumps of crystal; Jinny, dancing like flame, febrile, hot, over dry earth; and Rhoda the nymph of the fountain always wet. These are fantastic pictures – these are fragments, these

visions of friends in absence, grotesque, dropsical, vanishing at the first touch of the toe of a real boot. Yet they drum me alive. (87)

We see how Bernard briefly recounts the dominant image of every character, but, despite this, he is not content with such a portrayal, with his words hinting that all his phrases are actually pale copies of friends, lagging behind their true selves. I consider Bernard's conundrum to be a part of an old *mimesis* question dating back to Plato, for whom works of art were second-tier copies, since things themselves were already only reflections of Forms. There is a quote from *The Waves*, however, which we might read as Woolf's stance on the truth status of images and symbols. Towards the end of the book, Susan says: "Thus he directed me to that which is beyond and outside our own predicament; to that which is symbolic, and thus perhaps permanent, if there is any permanence in our sleeping, eating, breathing, so animal, so spiritual and tumultuous lives" (191). This quote also highlights another feature of Woolf's writing: she is always hesitant about clear demarcations, definitions, and borders. Even when she states that the symbolic might also be the permanent, she always leaves room for doubt. On the one hand, this might be interpreted as a strength since it eliminates any restrictive influence as her words acquire a tendency "to become infinite emotions" ("The Perfect Critic" 54).

On the other hand, we have seen that a lack of clear definitions might lead to what Hussey dubbed "linguistic displacements", overly abstract terms for which Woolf has to find suitable objective correlative, i.e. images and symbols. Rhoda, who has the closest connection to these "linguistic displacements" – to which we can now add the Overwhelming – questions the validity of interposing further. Unlike Jinny, who can directly experience the world through her body, Rhoda finds herself trapped "in this ill-fitting body" (78). In her quest for the "truth which [she] desire[s]" (121) she asks herself:

'Like' and 'like' and 'like' – but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? [...] Let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling-place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation. (123)

These lines should be analysed together with Eliot's objective correlative. We have seen that the objective correlative is the means through which a writer expresses emotions in a work. Because it was defined in broad terms, I have concluded that it is superordinate to images and symbols.

Rhoda's few lines bring to the fore the discrepancy between the means of expression and that which is represented. With her "likes", Rhoda confirms Bernard's fear that his phrases, which, as we have seen, are images and symbols, function as mere approximations of that which they should stand for. In other words, there can only be semblance, but never complete identity if one relies on images and symbols.

However, we have seen that Woolf is unique in her approach to reality. In the definition quoted beforehand, she sees reality as something that might overwhelm one, as if the "thing itself" cannot be expressed or described completely; as mentioned before, life is always one step in front of those who seek to translate it onto the pages of a book. We cannot therefore castigate Woolf for "the failure of Bernard, and consequently of *The Waves*, to make a final statement" (Hussey 94). We have seen how Woolf's realism is not the realism of mundane minutiae or extensive reporting, with a focus on the external. As Woolf said, we must realise that life is always beyond the novelist. That is why every type of realism chooses what it wishes to represent as real. In Woolf's case, the focus is on the emotions and the inner mental state of her characters. We have described the reservoir of these emotions through the notion of the Overwhelming, which can never be fully comprehended, but still, even as an immensely abstract notion, represents an important part in the direct experience of numerous characters: Mr Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway's view on life; Septimus Smith's madness; Mr Ramsay's preoccupation with time; Rhoda's obsession with water – these are all aspects of the Overwhelming through which Woolf portrayed the all too real struggles of her characters. An image, a symbol, and even an archetype with its numerous meanings may not be able to completely capture the intensity of emotions that Woolf wishes to convey through them, but, as Thakur wrote: "to convey the meaning and the complexity of life, therefore, [Woolf] needs symbols" (117). Their interpositional is consequently necessary, because they are, if not perfect, then the most appropriate means at her disposal.

In his already quoted study, Erich Auerbach concludes the following after analysing *To the Lighthouse*: "Es handelt sich in beiden Exkursen um Versuche, eine eigentlichere, tiefer liegende, ja sogar wirklichere Wirklichkeit zu ergründen" (502). The deeper reality hinted at in the quote is problematic because it has the danger of portraying Woolf as a writer focused only on the abstract, whereas we have seen that she, without exhaustively recounting events or engaging in longish descriptions, engages in the process of concretization, whereby she externalizes a complex of

emotions into a transfiguring image (Richter 185). Woolf's successful conveying of direct experience relies on the simultaneous apprehending of the symbol and its meaning (Thakur 3). We should keep in mind Gadamer's etymology of the word "symbol"; every symbol is a whole composed of two parts which should fit together. Conveying Mr Ramsay's tenacity through his boots and soldier-like stride is just one of harmonious symbols utilised successfully by Woolf. We must not forget that the Overwhelming simultaneously has an abstract and a private nature created through personal paraphernalia, which is why it is often used in symbols. In her writing, Woolf never forgets that realism often depends on the detail; these small details are turned into images and symbols pointing to complex mental states and emotion, all while retaining their own importance and grounding the meaning within the narrative.

Conclusion

Before writing a general conclusion of this thesis, I wish to briefly summarise its key points and findings chapter by chapter.

In the first chapter, we have seen how Woolf incorporated the rapidly-developing technologies of Modernism. New inventions, such as the motor car and aeroplanes became important symbols in her writing. As symbols, the role of these contraptions is usually limited to that of a disconcerting note in the wider narrative whereby their presence either introduces disharmony or is used to augment the growing divide between man and nature.

Exploring the richness of water as an archetype was the main focus of the second chapter. Therein, I have pointed out two distinctive features of water, creativity and hostility. I have concluded that the latter plays a more important role in these three novels since they are brimming with images and symbols in which various bodies of water play a crucial role in establishing an atmosphere of hostility and psychological danger.

It was also mentioned that water-based imagery was the most salient facet of the abstract notion which I decided to call the Overwhelming. After listing some similar notions in Woolfian scholarship, the Overwhelming was defined as “an umbrella term encompassing all the inimical and abstract forces present in the works analysed for this thesis”. Some of its aspects were identified, such as life, death, and time. Having decided that a *via negativa* approach might help us understand the notion, I have explained why it is so difficult to discuss the Overwhelming in critical terms. Following that, I have demonstrated that the Overwhelming might be manipulated to a certain extent through skilful use of images and symbols, if one is able to achieve the balance of clarity and depth. Finally, I have demonstrated why symbols and images emerge as appropriate means of portrayal due to the Overwhelming’s *cumulative indescribability*.

The fourth chapter is mainly built on the analysis of dichotomies which are present in the notions of parenthood and marriage. We have seen how Woolf associates different patterns of symbols and images with masculinity and femininity. As a result of these opposing images of sterility and fertility, we can follow the inevitable conflicts between men and women as a result of their inability to understand each other. In the other part of the chapter, I have brought to the fore two archetypal figures of motherhood which synthesise the aforementioned symbols.

The final chapter tackled the problem of direct experience in the three novels under consideration through Eliot's notion of the objective correlative. I have explained the two most important theoretical facets of this notion: the exact nature of emotions in a work of art, and the relationship between the objective correlative, images, and symbols. Having done that, I have isolated two instances in which Woolf resorts to the clever use of the objective correlative. Subsequently, I have analysed how direct experience is portrayed through two characters: Jinny and Percival. Finally, by introducing the issue of interposals, I have pointed out the limits of a symbol-reliant style and demonstrated how Woolf unifies the symbol and the symbolised.

The three novels analysed in this thesis are similar in that they demonstrate a development of Woolf symbol-based style. Her writing elicits emotional response from a reader by relying on images and symbols in order to construct a reality which is simultaneously marked by great emotional depth achieved through her use of images and symbols as the most appropriate objective correlatives of her style and a fine sense for everyday detail which is not overwhelmed by her decision to represent reality symbolically.

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ABSTRACT

Extensive use of symbols is often singled out as one of the most prominent features in the writing of Virginia Woolf. Her prose is usually described as being “poetic” and “lyrical” in its composition, going beyond the purely prosaic. Within the three novels analysed for this thesis – *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *The Waves* – a tendency to constitute reality in symbolic terms has been noticed. Serious issues such as fighting against madness and coping with the death of a loved one are discussed via appropriate imagery and symbols representing complex emotions associated with such issues. This thesis focuses on the isolation and analysis of shared symbolic patterns such as the archetypes of parenthood and matrimony and significance of water as archetype for Woolf. Patterns such as these are analysed through theoretical concepts of the objective correlative, Northrop Frye’s theory of symbols, and the Overwhelming. By focusing on Woolf’s use of symbols and images, the author has identified the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach to reality representation and concluded that Virginia Woolf’s use of symbols ultimately establishes a reality in which the external and the internal are in harmony.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Umfangreiche Verwendung der Symbole ist oft erwähnt als eine der bedeutendsten Eigenschaften in den Romanen Virginia Woolfs. Man bezeichnet die Zusammensetzung ihrer Prosa als „poetisch“ und „lyrisch“, gehend jenseits des Reinprosaischen. Innerhalb der drei Romane analysiert in dieser Masterarbeit – *Zum Leuchtturm*, *Mrs Dalloway*, und *Die Wellen* – wurde eine Neigung zur Darstellung der Wirklichkeit durch das Symbolische bemerkt. Ernsthafte Angelegenheiten – das Kämpfen gegen Wahnsinn, die Bewältigung des Todesunfalles – werden häufig durch entsprechende Bilder und Symbole besprochen, welche komplexe Emotionen darstellen. Diese Masterarbeit behandelt die gemeinsamen symbolischen Muster wie die Archetypen der Elternschaft und Ehe, und die Bedeutung des Wassers als Archetyp für Woolf. Solche Muster werden durch theoretische Konzepte wie objektives Korrelat, Northrop Fryes Theorie der Symbole, und das Überwältigende analysiert. Die Vorteile und die Nachteile Woolfs Zugang zur Wirklichkeitsdarstellung wurden identifiziert, indem der Verfasser sich auf Woolfs Verwendung der Symbole und Bilder konzentriert hat. Das Folgende ist die Schlussfolgerung: Virginia Woolf stellt schließlich eine Wirklichkeit dar, in welcher das Äußere und das Innere in Eintracht sind.