Narrative Truth in Bloomsbury's Novels and Biographies

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Vorgelegt von

Alessia Benegiamo-Chilla

72764 Reutlingen

Erster Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Vera Nünning

Zweiter Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Peter Paul Schnierer

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE STUDY OF TRUTH IN THE LITERATURE OF THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

1.1 The truth-question in modernist literature on the verge of the twentieth century

Doubt, scepticism and subjectivity are, in common knowledge, the cultural mind-sets informing the epoch of English Modernism[1]. This literary period, stretching approximately from the end of Queen Victoria's reign to the beginning of the Second World War, marked a controversial time in which writers, poets and painters like Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry were engaged in artistic activities. The unifying feature of their art was a provocative and at times exhausting transcendence of the literary and social conventions imposed on the artists and the intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. Their work and aesthetic attitudes were permeated with a sense of distrust, crisis and a – sometimes deliberate and polemical – break with the past, but also with

[1] Michael Levenson's reflections on the term "Modernism" are a very important starting point for the definition of this literary epoch, because they place it in a diachronic dimension. This leads to the observation that Modernism is an extremely difficult era to contextualize, since it is always open to revision, re-design and further exploration: "Still we call it Modernism, and this despite the anomaly of holding to such a name for an epoch fast receding into the cultural past. […] "Modernism" will be the name of a period in the beginning of a previous century, too distant even to serve as a figure for the grandparent. Uneasily but inevitably, we have reached a time when many feel the obsolescence of a movement still absurdly wearing such a brazen title. The temptation, much indulged in recent years, has been to dance beyond the reach of the aging, dying giant, to prove that one can live past the epoch marked by such names as Joyce and Woolf, Pound and Eliot, Eisenstein and Brecht, Freud and Marx. Certainly, many forces have joined to change the vectors of late twentieth-century culture. But our contemporary imperative to declare a new period and to declare ourselves citizens of a liberated postmodernism has badly distorted and sadly simplified the moment it means to surpass. No one should be surprised by the distortions and simplifications of Modernism. Nor should anyone waste tears of sympathy on figures who themselves were more than willing to cut the shape of the past to suit present polemical purposes. And yet the task of rendering a fuller account is justified not only by the desire to provide richer, thicker narratives but also by a pressing need to clarify our own late-century, new-millennial position. A coarsely understood Modernism is at once an historical scandal and a contemporary disability". (2011: I).

an enthusiasm for innovation, for the "new"[2] and the "experimental". The abundance of opportunities the Modernists offered to display new forms of experience[3] is testimony to such attitude. Despite being direct descendants of the previous Victorian generation, Modernists were extremely conscious of a cultural watershed, be it social or historical, real or "manufactured", between the Victorians and themselves[4]. To this extent, they revolted against an abstracted, late bourgeois Victorianism, i.e. against an externalized "code of conduct and morality", which they perceived as a far too stolid and constricting conventional system. Repeatedly they sought to confront this generational and aesthetic cleft, sometimes openly and earnestly, at other times subtly and ironically. One of the most pre-eminent causes of the refusal and relativization of values in Modernist times was the recognition of an epistemological limitation of the prevailing scientific and philosophical knowledge practices of the previous century. Scientific argumentation gradually lost its privileged status of a predominant

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[2] The urge for renewal is not a sole characteristic of the Modernist times, though a crucial one for the literary epoch at issue. In addition, the act of re-newing, reforming and re-organizing was not always received favourably throughout human history. However, for the moderns, and therefore also for the Bloomsbury group members, re-newing becomes an artistic imperative, which reaches out to the re-designing of literature, modes of narration and of the principles informing them, such as, among others, truth. As Kurt Heinzelman argues, "[…] 'newness' [was not always] regarded as a virtue. The sixteenth-century poet Thomas Wyatt […] spoke of their lovers as practising 'new-fangledness", a newly minted term referring to women who were susceptible of 'chaunge', vulnerable to 'mutabilitie' of affections, and liable to be […] 'beguil'd'. A new valorisation of 'the new' came to pass in the latter part of the eighteenth century when a relatively uncontroversial word radically changed its meaning. I am speaking of the work 'original', which, in its changed form, became a keyword both in political and aesthetic theory. […] Slightly before the outbreak of the French Revolution, […] the meaning of 'originality' changed from 'going back to the origins' to 'being without origins'. This date marks the publication of Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, and Young's monograph is the direct ancestor of Ezra Pound's commandment 'make it new!', which is by far the most famous poetic slogan of the twentieth century. Pound's phrase is often cited by both scholars and practitioners of all the arts (and not just of poetry) to explain modernist principles. The phrase is almost always understood to call for a creation *ex-nihilo*, out of nothing, without regard for tradition but with the highest regard for individual talent and craftsmanship", (Heinzelman, 2003: 131).

[3] Compare Manfred Jahn in "The Cambridge Companion to Narrative", when he claims "The Modernists liked to think of themselves as avant-gardists", (2007: 96).

[4] "Identifying herself by birth and imaginative disposition with the Georgians, Woolf pronounced a surprisingly harsh historical verdict on 'the failure of the Edwardians – comparative but disastrous . . . how the reign of Edward the Seventh was barren of poets, novelists, or critics; how it followed that the Georgians read Russian novelists in translations … how different a story we might have told today, had there been living heroes to worship and destroy'. In Woolf's estimation, the Edwardians lacked creative power and authority, hence inspired no murderous Oedipal revolt in their artistically ambitious heirs. Their sterility, Woolf implies, had tremendous consequences for literary if not social history." (Di Battista, 2009:43).

“truth-maker”, i.e. of a knowledge source providing a paradigmatic form of truth. Such a phenomenon of relativization found its narrative counterpart in the distinctly Modernist focalization on a subjective “centre”, which refracted its own feelings and perceptions within a novelistic frame and thus provided only a restricted, (or “relative”) amount of information.

Modernist writers are known for having renewed and repositioned the role of the observer in the narration and for having transferred it to the focalizers in their narrative texts. Thanks to their exercise in speculative theory, they understood that it is possible to infer a multiple construction of reality, based on two levels: the first one is the physical world and the second one is the human consciousness. Intensely aware of the fluid character of reality, the Modernists aspired to create and to make use of alternative, innovating instruments of knowledge, in order to take on the challenges posed by the new-fangled century and to comprehend them thoroughly. By exploiting the facets of doubt and subjectivity, they came to terms with those impersonal and standardized values they refused to inherit, thus trying to follow new paths and to reach for the “new truth” of their time. Hence, in a world plunged into crisis, characterized by doubt and uncertainty, truth was likely – Modernists eventually argued – to reach us in a chaotic and protean condition, rather than as a given paradigm of absolute dogmas.

Standing at the intersection of epistemology, hermeneutics, aesthetics, philosophy of language and history, the concept of truth represents a very suitable starting point for an interdisciplinary analysis of the modernist literary production. The present dissertation aims at opening a line of enquiry in the manifold macrocosm of modernist studies and, through the study of such methodological and procedural stances as doubt and subjectivity, at investigating how truth was conceived of and understood in modernist literature.

Recent debates in literary theory and criticism seem to tend to positions pertaining to the sphere of truth-making and to the correspondence theory of truth. While the correspondence theory of truth, as it was exposed in Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903), was certainly the most studied and examined theory in

the Bloomsbury Group, the present doctoral thesis argues that the literary production of the group anticipated other philosophical ideas, which are to be found in succeeding theories of truth, e.g. the coherence theory. Before stating this argument, the study surveys the most frequent questions arising when we face up to the notion of truth in the novel. It queries the essence of what is perceived as truth in a text and how it is constructed, achieved and conveyed. It also explores the meaning of the concept of truth in modernist times, asking whether truth is a shifting or a fixed concept. After having assessed these general concerns, the focus of the present work moves to its most crucial issue, i.e. the narrative value of truth in modernist novels. To this extent, the most important questions investigate the existence of a narration of truth. Given the existence of a fixed system of narrated truths, it is relevant to verify how this system of truths can serve as a bearing structure of a literary world. By implication, if to a new worldview corresponds a new worldmaking structure given by a specific system of truth-values, it is relevant to ask what the modernist way of worldmaking is and what narrative strategies it makes use of. In addition, the present work explores how the members of the Bloomsbury Group implemented the concept of truth in their narration and how they explored truth as an inherent theme of their novels and biographies.

As a matter of fact, the majority of the studies on Modernism have so far mainly focused on the narration of doubt, scepticism and subjectivity, thus paving the way for the formation of a stereotyped description and narration of the modernist discourse. Such studies failed to consider adequately other aspects of the modernist narration, like the conception of truth; indeed, the latter has remained fundamentally unmeasured. Hence, in the wake of the new interest in the notions of artistic truth and truth-making, it is a goal of this thesis to track down the modernist research on truth, to analyse the means and devices that were used to make sense of truth and reality in modernist times and to outline the meaning of truth. Briefly put: the present work aims at re-constructing how truth was found, but, most importantly, how it was made in modernist narrative texts. Truth in general can be defined according to qualitative or quantitative criteria, as well as

in virtue of relations of correspondence or consensus, deriving from philosophical theories. In this dissertation, truth is analysed according to the notions of epistemic modality and its semantic value, i.e. according to its meaning within a given frame of reference and to its implications in terms of power and achievement. Truth is considered here as the epistemological narrative signboard for the analysis of the rules governing the comprehension and interpretation of reality. The urge of defining a distinction among different intertwined questions regarding the modalities for the narration of truth and its nature in a period characterized by doubt and scepticism like Modernism gives the impulse for the compilation of the dissertation. A general, intuitive survey can already hint at a situation of fragmentation and disruption, in which truth is regulated by the subjective stance of the truth-maker, but it is evident that a more detailed analysis of the mechanisms highlighting the epistemological value of truth is appropriate and desirable. I would like to address these questions by drafting the outlines of the modernist discourse of truth, i.e. the manner in which truth is told and negotiated in modernist times, what constitutes it, how the negotiation (and truth-making) games are attained and what are the consequences of such games. Rather than relying on the sole instruments of theoretical analysis, I will try to deduce modernist conceptions of truth through the narratological analysis and close reading of the texts, holding in mind the cultural methodologies modernist writers employed. To obtain measurable results, the focus on the present work lies on the literary endeavours of the Bloomsbury Group. The boundaries of this literary movement appear quite vague and unspecific, but the literary production of the group constitutes a well organized – although heterogeneous – unity. In the present work, the Bloomsbury Group is seen as a literary laboratory, or rather, as a microcosm in which it is possible to explore some modernist processes of the conception and establishment of truth. Within the scope of Bloomsbury, its literary environment and its cultural formation, this work intends to investigate the value of truth and its discourse construction, providing a new reading of the classics written by Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and E.M. Forster.

The text corpus of the work is challenging: the analysis does not remain within the borders of fictional texts like novels, but it also focuses on biography. This choice is not only due to the well-known new configuration of the genre during the period in question and to the fact that all the Bloomsbury members contributed to the re-invention of the genre, but also to the special condition of biography as a privileged field of research, since it has an intrinsic link to the concept of truth. The writing of biography exemplifies at best the various obstacles and problematic points arising from the fictional arrangement of factual material. Subsequently, through the analysis of both the novelistic and the biographical production, this thesis is going to offer narratological studies an innovative tool of text-comparison. Finally, if defining truth in a specific literary context has any cognitive relevance, it is because it permits to comprehend that reality (and the world) are not merely given, but they are the result of mind processes and of its power of constructing, weighting, assigning and designing.

1.2 The Bloomsbury microcosm: a brief sketch

"What is Bloomsbury?";
"where does [it] end," and where does it begin?";
"What are the qualities that admit one to it,
what are the qualities that expel one from it?"[5]

Virginia Woolf, *Old Bloomsbury*, 1922

If the previous section of the introduction hinted loosely at the Bloomsbury Group, defining it as a literary microcosm within the vast modernist macrocosm, this section of the chapter sketches the composition and the nature of Bloomsbury. It also expounds the reasons why the Bloomsburian literary movement is an ideal research base for the exploration of the hypothesis at issue in the dissertation. In McNeillie's words, literary movements are "active fictions involving differences as well as difference, whether formed by minorities or majorities" (2010: 2). The

[5] Cf. Woolf [1922], (1976: 370).

concept of “Bloomsbury Group” must be interpreted in this sense, i.e. as a fictive categorization. Because of that, soon after having familiarized with the notion of Bloomsbury, the immediate second step is the familiarization with the assumption that the term has a vague and slippery nature and it resists the constrictions of any clear-cut characterizations[6]. As Blair (2004: 813) explains, “[the term] implies that Bloomsbury is constituted by an ‘aura’, a distinctive mode of self-presentation that makes its projects and politics notoriously difficult to situate”. In literary criticism, every attempt to define Bloomsbury has proved in fact haphazard, not only because the word has many meanings and it denotes the expression of both a moment in time and of a physical place, but also because the internal structure and its values configuration of the literary movement are marked by ambiguity and contradiction. Since it is functional to the present work, Bloomsbury, this “set of writers, artists and intellectuals” (Rosenbaum, 1995: IX) is considered here as a *group*[7] and not just as a loose set of artists and writers.

“Bloomsbury Group” is the name given to an unofficial society of writers, artists and intellectuals, who lived in Bloomsbury, a residential district in London[8]. Bloomsbury was “in origin Victorian and by acculturation securely British upper-middle class” (McNeillie, 2010: 2). This grouping of intellectuals budded from a Cambridge-based, male secret congregation, called *Conversazione* Society, whose members, known as *Apostles*, discussed philosophy, art and history. Around 1905, after the society had left Cambridge, it continued to congregate to discuss art and philosophy together with two women, Virginia Woolf (at those times, Stephen) and her sister Vanessa. The Bloomsbury saw itself as a modern

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[6] As Lang points out: “If - as some of its 'members' have asserted - the Bloomsbury Group did not exist, it would have to be invented.' Even should we choose to ignore the compelling historical evidence of its activities, conceptual affinities in the work of many of the figures usually connected with it would identify an unusually cohesive intellectual coterie among whom a single idea frequently circulated and reappeared in a variety of forms” (Back, 1964: 295).

[7] “Let everyone have his or her notion of ‘Bloomsbury’; but let everyone who uses the name in public speech do his or her best to say exactly what he or she intends by it. Thus, even should it turn out that in fact there was never such a thing, the word might come to have significance independent of the facts and acquire value as a label” (Bell, 1956: 126).

[8] Cf. Blair, (2004: 813-838).

laboratory in many intellectual fields, but they never took clear-cut political positions. As Kurt W. Back posits,

> The Bloomsbury group represented "modernity" in the sense of that term which was popular immediately before and after the first World War. As cultural innovators, they sponsored post-impressionist art, new styles in biography, stream-of-consciousness writing, and individual handicrafts. Politically, however, the group—although in general close to the Labor Party—was little involved in the emotion-charged social issues of the day such as women's suffrage, Irish Home Rule, or the rights of labor unions. The Bloomsbury group and its allies were innovative but not "engagé", nor were they alienated or revolutionary. In essence, they formed a group which assumed intellectual eminence as a birthright analogous to an aristocracy (1982: 43)[9].

The transition towards innovation implied a gradual negotiation of cultural and intellectual values and it brought about moments of rupture and moments of contiguity with the past epoch. Concerning the conflicts, Bloomsbury attempted to reject and to react to late-Victorian restrictions and stiff conventions in the arts, philosophy and ethics. Within this dialectic of opposition, Bloomsbury formulated its own idea of civilization, which rejected the late-Victorian obtuse moralism and their vainglorious rhetoric of public mind, politics and seeming respectability. Nonetheless, the attitude towards the Victorian period would be outlined spuriously, if it were merely described as an abrupt revolt against a set of spurned values. To this extent, it is perhaps relevant to notice that, although Bloomsbury's roots are thrust in Victorian soil, the literary movement itself is not a "natural outgrowth of late Victorianism" (Schwarz, 1987: 719), but a new artistic entity. An emblematic example of the Bloomsburian struggling with their past is the complex relationship between Virginia Woolf and her father, Leslie Stephen. In pointing at the similarities between Woolf's and Stephen's literary criticism, Hyman (1980: 144) observes that:

> Stephen has generally been seen as the rational moralistic Victorian critic and Woolf as the modern aesthetic impressionist. As her criticism comes

[9] Back, (1982: 38).

> to be examined more carefully, however, we are beginning to see that she was far more conservative as a critic than she was as a novelist. And if we look at the values underlying her criticism, we see that her conservatism derives, in large part, from the attitudes that she absorbed and adopted from her father.

For all these reasons, Bloomsbury's attitude towards its antecedents should be perceived as a more many-layered relationship[10], characterized by occasional haziness and incongruity. Even though a very large amount of information about Bloomsbury is available and the Bloomsburian literary production has been most disparately analysed, debated and discussed, this coterie of artists and circle of associates, who were linked by a forty-year-old friendship, is still to a great extent wrapped into an unfathomable fog of mystery and inscrutability[11]. This lack of clearness in the definition of Bloomsbury is also reflected in the intricacy of the interpersonal relations and reciprocal influences within the constellation of the group. As a matter of fact, all the members of Bloomsbury were either related to each other or they had attended Cambridge in the same or nearly the same years as *Apostles*, i.e. members of the coveted student society known as *Cambridge Conversazione Society*[12]. Hence, the members of the group were bound together

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[10] Hyman reports: "For example, Lytton Strachey asked [Virginia Woolf] whether she didn't agree that the Victorians were a 'set of mouthing, bungling hypocrites' and then apologized for not having excepted her father 'who, qua man . . . was divine,'. Virginia Woolf replied that she did not altogether agree about the nineteenth century; on the contrary, she thought that it was 'a good deal hotter than the eighteenth.'".

[11] Clive Bell, in polemical response to certain generalizations made by "columnists and broadcasters", pointed in his *Early Beliefs* at the slippery character of the definition of Bloomsbury with the following series of questions: "Is it merely for fun that grave historians and pompous leader-writers, no less than the riff-raff of Fleet Street and Portland Place chatter about the thing? 'The thing', I say, because that is the least committal substantive I can think of, and it is not always clear whether what the chatterers are chattering about is a point of view, a period, a gang of conspirators or an infectious disease. Beyond meaning something nasty, what do they mean by 'Bloomsbury'?". Later, he delineated the configuration of Bloomsbury in a rather dry way: "Did such an entity [Bloomsbury] exist? All one can truthfully say is this. A dozen friends [...] between 1904 and 1914 saw a great deal of each other. They differed widely, as I shall tell, in opinions, tastes and preoccupations. But they liked, though they sharply criticized, each other, and they liked being together. I suppose one might say they were "in sympathy". Anyway, the first World War disintegrated this group, if group it were, and when friends came together again inevitably things had changed". (Bell, 1956: 126)

[12] Leonard Woolf affirmed that "Bloomsbury grew directly out of Cambridge" and that "the colour of [their] minds and thought had been given to us by the climate of Cambridge and Moore's philosophy", (1964:25).

not only by common concernments and points of view, but also by complex friendship and (homo-)erotic entanglements.

Whereas it is possible to identify the basic ideas, beliefs and tastes that informed the culture of the group, it is quite difficult to gauge all these resemblances as a unitary whole of common worldviews. Despite the generic tight-knit character of the group, in which the ideas and the peculiarities of each member seem sometime to vanish into the amalgam of the group, some other times the individuality seems to take an elliptical orbit and to gain an independent or peripheral position. Kurt W. Back confirms this stance by stating that "elite groups combine the attitudes of commonality and individuality"[13] (This might be one of the reasons why the combination of intellectual contributions presents such a dense and interrelated character. Considering only the heart of "literary Bloomsbury", the group was constituted by the novelists Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and E.M. Forster (1879–1970), by the biographer Lytton Strachey (1880–1932) and by the political writer and publisher Leonard Woolf (1880–1969), Virginia's husband. The art critic Clive Bell (1881–1964 and Vanessa's husband), the painters Roger Fry (1866–1934), Duncan Grant (1885–1978) and Vanessa Bell (1879–1961, Virginia Woolf's sister) formed the "artistic pole" of the group. Finally, there were the contributions of the economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) and the literary journalist Desmond MacCarthy (1877–1952). The artistic peak of the Bloomsbury Group, which had a key-role in innovative literary, aesthetic, artistic and intellectual development of the movement, reached its highest point in the first decade before the first World War and it peaked again during the two decades after it.

Among the most often discussed themes within Bloomsbury there were topics like "beauty", "good", and "reality", which were based, to a large extent, on the

[13] Back, (1964: 295).

G.E. Moore's monograph *Principia Ethica*[14] . The interest in reality was central and it was often debated in connection with issues of morality, honesty and ethics. It would not be exaggerated to affirm that the pursuit of such issues was inscribed in the mind of Bloomsbury since its very beginning in the Apostles' Society. In those times, the interest for the topic of truth seems to have had its origin. It was probably G.E. Moore's work and methodology[15] to have instilled the interest in the topic of truth in the Bloomsbury circles, as Donald J. Watt suggests, when he states that the great philosopher "had a pure and intense passion for truth which could alarm a new colleague" (1969: 120). Indeed, the willingness to deepen into the exploration of the concept of truth may have directly shaped the "Apostolic spirit", which Henry Sigwick[16] (1838-1900) aptly describes in such terms:

> [It] was the spirit of the pursuit of truth [which was carried out] with absolute devotion and unreserve by a group of intimate friends, who were perfectly frank with each other, and indulged in any amount of humorous sarcasm and playful banter […]. No consistency was demanded to with opinions previously held – truth as we saw it then – and there was what we had to embrace and maintain, and there were no propositions so well established that an Apostle had not the right to deny or question, if he did so sincerely and not from mere love of paradox. The gravest subjects were continually debated, but the gravity of treatment, as I have said, was not imposed, though sincerity was. In fact it was rather a point of the apostolic mind to understand how much suggestion and instruction may be derived from what is in form a jest – even dealing with the gravest matters (Rosenbaum, 1975:168).

It is within this frame of reference that the investigation of truth in the Bloomsbury took its form. As Andrzej Gasiorek suggests, though, like many other modernists',

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[14] According to Rosenbaum (237:1987): "Principia Ethica was the climax of Bloomsbury's Apostolic philosophical education. When as an old man Forster wanted to describe the Cambridge of his autobiographical novel *The Longest Journey*, he identified it as 'the Cambridge of G. E. Moore which I knew at the beginning of the century: the fearless, uninfluential Cambridge that sought for reality and cared for truth'".

[15] Donald J. Watt reports Leonard Woolf's thought that "Moore […] pursued truth with the tenacity of a bulldog." (1969: 120).

[16] Henry Sidgwick was a philosopher and economist who became part of the Cambridge Apostles in 1856. He founded and was the first president of the Society for Psychical Research and Newnham College in Cambridge in 1875. He became part of the Cambridge Apostles in 1856.

Bloomsbury's intent behind the investigation of truth was not moralistic. To this extent, they distance themselves strongly from their Victorian predecessors.

> Many modernists rejected the idea that literature should be judged according to moral criteria, but this didn't mean that they were indifferent to moral questions. It would be more accurate to say that by freeing themselves from moral prescriptiveness, modernist literature sought to complicate our understanding of what Iris Murdoch describes as 'a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons'. Modernism didn't demonstrate 'moral truths' but offered nuanced accounts of intractable problems, and its stylistic 'difficulty' was an integral aspect of its ethical anxiety. It's misleading to suggest that modernism in general sought to inhabit a privatized aestheticist realm (2012: 170-171).

Truth was considered an ideal to be pursued, the expression of the complex nature of the ultimate reality, but the pursuit of this ideal was somehow invalidated by a sense that it is merely possible to grasp a few exiguous glimpses of truth during every-day life experience. Therefore, a further goal of the present work is to track down narrative manifestations of such truth glimpses and to follow the transformations of the ideal of truth throughout the Bloomsburian activity, thus highlighting Bloomsbury's theory of knowledge and analysis of the common-sense world.

1.3 Theories, methods and architecture of the study

The rationale of the study has a qualitative nature, i.e. it principally seeks to address a certain literary/narrative process, to explore it and to generate a range of possible interpretations, based on a corpus of data. Subsequently, the work seeks to give as complete and detailed description and explanation as possible of the examined processes. The data have been gathered from written narrative texts. For these reasons, among the main objectives of the methods adopted here are the identification, highlighting and review of relevant points for the research questions in the data findings and their subsequent examination and evaluation. Because of its qualitative character, the research is predominantly conducted according to the interpretive methodology and it therefore

concentrates on the meanings which are brought to situations and behaviour, and which are used to understand the world. The aim of the dissertation thesis to develop a theory out of the results "grounded" in the analysis of the data corpus gives the continuity with grounded theory. In the same manner, the present work shares some of the goals of narrative research, since it also seeks to find causal links in the data corpus and to let knowledge emerge through the identification of themes and specific perspectives.

The working hypothesis lies within the paradigm of the realism-idealism controversy. Modernist writers discarded the traditional models imposed by their literary predecessors, who envisioned truth as a unitary and univocal propositional phenomenon corresponding to a specific object in reality. Reality and its description/narration were supposed to overlap; this overlapping was merely supposed to be truthful and trustworthy; subsequently, truth was likely to be thought as the visible result of a correspondence[17] between two levels, i.e. the statement/utterance level and the objective (or "real") one. The way in which reality was perceived and received shaped the idea of truth based on what was expected to be true. As aforementioned, it is only with the coming of modernity that truth began to be considered as the mere result of shared beliefs in given propositions, reflecting our intuitive expectation of what is true and individualistically "plausible"; hence, what seemed *prima facie* to be a simple and straightforward visible correspondence between facts and statements has indeed proved to be a quite problematic issue that deserves further investigation. Modernist writers fostered the urge of renegotiation of the relationship within reality and fiction and reshaped the idea of reality; in fact, their epistemological and hermeneutical approach has debunked the concept of *objective truth*. According to modernist writers, knowledge and exploration of reality and truth is

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[17] Goodman rejects the idea of correspondence: "*Truth must be otherwise conceived than as correspondence with a ready-made world. Truth cannot be defined or tested by agreement with "the world".* Significantly, his target is once again a conception of the world as *"undescribed, undepicted, unconceived. We must obviously look for truth not in the relation of a version to something outside that it refers to, but in characteristics of the version itself and its relationship to other versions.* (1984: 37).

a matter of perception. This approach casts a new light on the importance of the subject and of the self for the comprehension of the world and the establishment of its form and features. The paradigm illustrated here underpins every part of the dissertation and it informs the decisions taken and the conformation of the task of choosing methods and analysing data.

The present work is subdivided into two main sections, the first of which is dedicated to the accounting of the major theories of truth and their relevance in relation to the working hypothesis. It has, as a result, a double function: first, it depicts the theoretical panorama about the concept of truth and it provides a comprehensive definition of truth in relation to the fictional discourse; second, it seeks to determine which theories are relevant for the definition of the modernist worldview and which consequences such implementable theories can have on literary production. In the light of these premises, the theoretical part of the dissertation focuses on the application of the concept of truth to narrative, through the analysis of the epistemology and the hermeneutics of truth and, subsequently, of phenomena like bias, interpretation or formal categories like fact and fiction.

The second part of the work focuses on the comparative narrative analysis of the texts produced within the sphere of activity of the Bloomsbury Group. This section has two interwoven foci, i.e. the textual analysis of the biographical and the novelistic production. A common issue of fiction and biography in modernist times is the fact that their boundaries might have blurred. As the former may lack the “reality of truth”, so the latter may have too much of the “artistry of fiction”. In this project, I will argue that modernist writers such as Woolf and Strachey conceived of biography from a completely altered point of view. Both authors sought to portray personality and subjectivity by means of pursuing the truth of the character without hampering it and without following the idea of goodness at any cost, as in the Victorian epoch. After a brief discussion of the story of the relationship between truth and biography, the work concentrates on biography and the implications with the work hypothesis, highlighting divergences and convergences in the respective modernist approaches.

Similarly, the analysis of the novels points at the modalities of representation of truth in a fictional environment like the novel. Truth in fiction is to be considered as a *constructed* phenomenon based on the representation of a given world, and by consequence, in language; truth is circumstantiated by the text in which it appears as such. Truth in a fictionalized world is man-made and *text-specific*; the writers exploit the new flowing condition of truth in order to outline their own fictional horizon. The negotiation process takes place on a particular stage, between the text and the reader. Truth is no longer a tangible, univocal phenomenon or a visible correspondence, but it turns into the recount of an inner, subjective fulcrum of conscience, the focalizer's. Rhetoric and other linguistic strategies (such as figures of speech, linguistic cues, allusions, cross-reference and perspective) are fundamental instruments for its conveyance and its establishment. Whereas *moments of being* and *epiphanies* are generally supposed to be the main narrative sources of truth and truthfulness in modernist fiction, the emphasis lies on the argumentation that the whole compositional construction of the stream of consciousness can be seen as a form of representation of truth, based on psychological verisimilitudes. The latter are able to render a real and more truthful image of the fluidity of the surrounding reality. Truth in the novel has therefore to be the result of a negotiation between the inner and the outer narrated worlds: it is a *give-and-take* between the fictional framework and the values/concepts/ideas we attribute to reality, i.e., a negotiation of the different forms of worldmaking. Beside pursuing the truth informing a text, the aim of the research project is finally to define possible implications of the constructed and coherent inner worlds in the texts for the "real" world and for different fields such as society, politics or philosophy.

1.4 State of research

Studies and research on the modernist *oeuvre* are overwhelmingly copious and they never ceased to appear throughout the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. For reasons of efficiency, the reviewing scope of this

section is restricted to the research production concerning the research question[18].

Whereas Woolf, Strachey and Forster's works have until recently been a privileged object of investigation in gender, race and socio-political studies – in the form of books, manuals, research papers, journal articles and reviews – less attention has been paid to other significant aesthetic aspects of their writings. In their novels and in their biographical production, the "Bloomsberries" attempted to establish and systematize a new narrative/aesthetic theory of truth and the methods to achieve it in a text. Within the scope of the exploration of truth-establishing processes in the modernist and Bloomsburian novel, the amount of research in this field is rather sparse. On the contrary, the research into the meaning of truth in modernist biography enjoys a widespread interest and it saw an intensification from the 1980s to the 2010s[19]. This research casts a light not only on biography, but also on auto-biography, thus enlarging the scope of the investigation to other constituent elements of life-writing and reaching to aspects like self, subjectivity and auto-reflexivity. In addition, they contain specific chapters dedicated to Woolf and Strachey as biographers.

The present work may be useful as an impulse and as a model for the development of further in-depth analysis into the narrative representation of truth in modernist novels and biographies. More importantly, a central issue of the present work is interdisciplinarity. The definition of the relationship between fiction

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[18] Amongst the major publications of the last 30 years of the twentieth century in Europe, which take into consideration Virginia Woolf's activity, it is significant to hint at the works of Vera Nünning (1990), Rachel Bowlby (1992) and Mary Ann Caws, Nicola Luckhurst, (2002).
Amongst the major works considering E.M. Forster's production, titles like *E. M. Forster* by Harold Bloom (1978) and David Medalie's *E. M. Forster's Modernism* can be very helpful, because they give a detailed and comprehensive account of the relationship between the author and his era, Modernism.

[19] Some examples of in-depth analysis of this aspect are Elena Gualtieri's article *The Impossible Art: Virginia Woolf on Modern Biography*, (2000), Laura Marcus's *Auto/biographical discourses: theory, criticism, practice*, (1994), Peter France and William St. Clair's *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (2004) and Max Saunders's *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010).

and the concept of truth relates not only to literary and narratological studies, but obviously also to other disciplines, like philosophy[20] and history. However, despite the disciplinary variety with which the theme is treated, works like Ben Levinstein's *Facts, Interpretation, and Truth in Fiction,* (2007) and Richard Gaskin's *The Truth in Fiction*, (1993), with their focus on literary theory, are among the models for the development of the entire structure of inquiry of the dissertation. The theories constructed on the model of "worldmaking" are instead the result of the observation and implementation of the well-known world-making theories elaborated by Nelson Goodman and expounded in the works *Ways of Worldmaking,* (1974)[21], *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (1983) and *Of Mind and Other Matters* (1987). Given this fragmentized situation in the state of research, in which a great amount of general theory is not adequately supported by a sufficient number of specific "case-studies", the present work endeavours to give a coherent and defensible input to narratological research about the topic of the conception of truth and its literary representation.

1.5 Text corpus

The second section of the present work is committed to the close reading of a selection of texts, based on the inquiry of the methods for the achievement of truth conducted by Bloomsbury's "literary core". As stated previously, the analysis concentrates on the novelistic and biographical production of the Bloomsbury Group. Therefore, the first half of the analysis is dedicated to the novels by Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, while the second half addresses Woolf's and Strachey's biographical experiments. The choice to analyse both of the production typologies is substantiated by the fact that the Bloomsbury Group attempted to cope with the opposition between two distinct lines of thought, i.e.

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[20] A few examples from the last two decades are the works by Paul Horwich (*Truth*, 1998 and *Truth-Meaning-Reality*, 2010), that of Michael P. Lynch, (*The Nature of Truth, Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2001) and that of Jan Szaif/Markus Enders, (*Die Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs der Wahrheit*, 2006).

[21] On the latter point, it is certainly relevant to refer to the collection of essays *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking* (2009), edited by Ansgar and Vera Nünning, which also significantly contributes to the formation of the line of inquiry present in the dissertation.

between idealism and realism. If the goal is to obtain a comprehensive overview of Bloomsbury's philosophical cogitations and consequent narrative universes, it is crucial to analyse truth in connection to the concepts of idealism and realism. Such conceptual opposition is reflected in the very essence of novels and biographies and it is therefore essential to examine both of the genres in order to understand fully the complexity of the truth-conceit as it evolved in the Bloomsbury Group. As a matter of fact, as idealism is connected with mind and art, so realism is connected to the categories of world and life.

The textual and semantic aspects of the novel strengthen the concept of a rhetoric display of the truth-argument, while the processes of emplotment and rearranging in biography display the negotiation and reconstruction processes underpinning the modernist truth-discourse. Focusing on the novel, the analysis encompasses two literary works by each author: *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *Howard's End* (1910), by E. M. Forster and *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) by Virginia Woolf. With regards to biography, the present work presents the analysis and commentary of two to three works by each author, i.e. Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918), *Queen Victoria* (1921) and *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928); Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and *Flush* (1933). A further criterion for the choice of the texts to include in the primary literature is a chronological one. Although being almost the same age (Forster is only three years older than Woolf), both of the authors can be regarded as two "Bloomsberries"[22] belonging to two different Bloomsbury generations. Encompassing more than one generation is functional to the structuring of the work, because it gives the opportunity to provide in-depth analysis of the possible developments of Bloomsbury's apperception of truth throughout the time.

[22] "Bloomsberry" was just one of the innumerable nicknames the members of the Bloomsbury group were saddled with. On this point, Compare Clive Bell's comments in which he explained that "*the term, as [Lady MacCarthy] used it, had a purely topographical import; and the letter [in which it was first used] must have written in 1910 or 1911*". (Bell, 1956: 126).

CHAPTER 2

DIEGETIC WAYS OF TRUTH-MAKING

2.1 On fictional truth and diegetic ways of truth-making

"What, therefore, is truth?
A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms...
truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are *illusions...*
coins which have their obverse effaced
and now they are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal"
(Friedrich Nietzsche, NW III, ii, 357-75, TF 180).

There is more than one way to approach truth in fiction and literature. As Marcia Eaton highlights, "it is a mistake to look upon the problem of truth in literature as a single problem. For in fact it is a whole series of questions"[23] (1972: 163). Indeed, there are multifarious ways to tackle the problem of making sense of truth in fiction and literature, each of them drawing from various intellectual focuses, like that of philosophy[24], history, psychoanalysis and sociology. From the philosophical point of view, truth in literature can be defined on the ontological level. This approach relates to the status of the statements forming a text. Such an approach is suitable for the attribution of the values of "true" or "false" to propositions in accordance to their correspondence with actual reality. In this sense, it is a strictly text-immanent approach and being true or false become properties of a proposition, as G.E. Moore theorized. The investigation of truth has a century-long tradition in philosophy and it traces back to the ancient Greek Aristotle and Plato.

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[23] Cf. Grodal (2010: 39): "*Truth is not a question of form, it is an empirical question. Empirical verification may be difficult, but this is not a result of form, but a result of limitations of our knowledge about the world*".

[24]As Lubomír Doležel argues, "*philosophical (logical) semantics dominates the dialogue* [on the relationship between truth and literature]. For this reason, the problem of fictionality emerges as the central problem of literary semantics. For philosophers and logicians, the distinction between reality and fiction, between truth and falsity, between reference and lack of reference, is a fundamental theoretical problem. Any philosophical and logico-semantic system has to offer a solution to this problem. Of course, the problem is not unknown in literary theory. Literary critics have not hesitated to use the concepts of fictionality, of truth in/of literature, truthfulness to life, etc., but the theoretical standard of critical discourse is rather low in this domain" (1980: 7).

As David Marians explains

> The correspondence theory is often traced back to Aristotle's well-known definition of truth (*Metaphysics* 1011b25): 'To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true' —but virtually identical formulations can be found in Plato (*Cratylus* 385b2, *Sophist* 263b). It is noteworthy that this definition does not highlight the basic correspondence intuition. Although it does allude to a relation (saying something *of* something) to reality (what *is*), the relation is not made very explicit, and there is no specification of what on the part of reality is responsible for the truth of a saying. As such, the definition offers a muted, relatively minimal version of a correspondence theory. (For this reason, it has also been claimed as a precursor of deflationary theories of truth) Aristotle sounds much more like a genuine correspondence theorist in the *Categories* (12b11, 14b14), where he talks of underlying things that make statements true and implies that these things are logically structured situations or facts (viz., *his sitting* and *his not sitting* are said to underlie the statements "He is sitting" and "He is not sitting", respectively). Most influential is Aristotle's claim in *De Interpretatione* (16a3) that thoughts are "likenessess" of things. Although he nowhere defines truth in terms of a thought's likeness to a thing or fact, it is clear that such a definition would fit well into his overall philosophy of mind." (Marian, David. "The Correspondence Theory of Truth". The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/truth-correspondence/).

A second aspect to consider is the one concerning the authorial intention, i.e., the investigation of the type(s) of truth the author wants to convey or to attain with his fictional work. Finally, a third line of inquiry refers to the level of internal coherence within textual states of affairs and to the construction of literary possible worlds. All these lines of enquiry discuss the same issue, i.e., what truths in texts are, and what makes such truths true, according to the rules of their own discourses. Each discipline follows its own methods of investigation and it would be quite an impracticable enterprise to discuss them all thoroughly, even though the obvious interactions between the three approaches cannot be denied. Indeed, the first approach is primarily relevant for the research in the philosophy of language and, therefore, it is – quite regrettably – beyond the scope of this dissertation. Moreover, addressing the authorial intention too often involves

intentional fallacy. Hence, speculations about which particular truths the author might have intended to put across in a fictional work will not be dealt with herein. On the contrary, the focus of the present work concentrates on the relevance of the concept of truth in the subjects of literary criticism and post-classical narratology. The following chapter addresses primarily the third approach: thus, it concentrates on textual truth, because it is deemed the most relevant line of inquiry for literary criticism and narratology and it can shed some light on the question of truth in fiction. In particular, the exploration of the concept of truth in the present work is contextualized within the scope of modernist fiction.

Not only is the issue of truth debatable under manifold intellectual points of view, but the very comprehension of the concept has shifted throughout time. As Leif Søndergaard (2010: 77) highlights:

> We must realize that "truth" has been conceived in many different ways through history. There is no true, universal idea of "truth." As in the case with other ideas, the conception of truth has varied, changed and developed from period to period, from place to place, from social class to social class, from individual to individual. When we use this notion like "fact" and "reality" we must therefore be extremely careful to make sure that we are aware that they are historical constructs.

After having clarified this aspect, it is not yet possible to put the quietus on the matter, because other questions arise. The first natural questions are: a) why it is relevant to look for truth in fiction and b) how it is possible to detect the narrative constituents of fictional truth.

This dissertation does not aim at contrasting fictional and non-fictional narrative[25], but perhaps it is useful to underline quickly some general illocutionary differences

[25] Factual or non-fictional narration convey are here used as synonymous. Compare Jean-Marie Schaeffer's definition of factual/nonfactual narration: "*Factual and fictional narrative are generally defined as a pair of opposites. However, there is no consensus as to the rationale of this opposition. Three major competing definitions have been proposed: (a) semantic definition: factual narrative is referential whereas fictional narrative has no reference (at least not in "our" world); (b) syntactic definition: factual narrative and fictional narrative can be distinguished by their logico-linguistic syntax; (c) pragmatic definition: factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims. One could add a fourth definition, narratological in nature: in factual narrative author and narrator are*

between fictional and non-fictional narration, in order to provide a frame of reference as regards the concept of truth. At first glance, it would seem counter-intuitive to look for "truth" in fiction[26], because, normally, the stronghold of genuine truthful narration are scientific accounts or history reports[27]. On the cognitive level, non-fictional narrative, as opposed to the artistry of fiction is said to be grounded in verifiable evidence. Its general intention is to describe the real (physical) world *as it is*. The rhetorical strategies of non-fictional narrative aim at convincing the reader of the validity of the description of the real, reporting neutral facts and avoiding partial elements, biased commentaries or inventions, which would seriously delegitimize and invalidate the narration. A further crucial criterion of rhetoric satisfactoriness for a non-fictional text is the unmediated recognition of a concrete correspondence to extra-textual reality elements and experiences. Being grounded in a dialectic of necessity of correspondence between statement and object of reality, non-fictional narrative is arguably considered as one of the most important signposts of truth-claiming. Drawing on a parallelism between non-fictional and fictional discourse, a certain tradition of detractors has discarded fiction – and the novel – as a frivolous occupation, attaching to it the function of mere entertainment and escapism from reality and truth, in order to indulge in fantasy. To this extent, Stacie Friend reports that "some theorists have denied that we can learn ordinary facts from fiction. On one

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the same person whereas in fictional narrative the narrator (who is part of the fictional world) differs from the author (who is part of the world we are living in). (Genette [1991] 1993: 78–88).

[26] The theory of fiction developed in order to focus on the problem of reference between text and reality. Such discipline lies at the crossroads of literary criticism and philosophy. The philosophical interest in fiction finds its most privileged locus into the progress of modern philosophies of language and logic. Starting with Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein, the programme of analytical philosophy had as its central task the clarification of philosophical through careful scrutiny of concepts and the construction of powerful logical models. Literature addresses the narrative aspect of written texts. As Barthes points out, "the function of narrative is not to "represent"; it is to constitute a spectacle still very enigmatic for us, but in any case not of a mimetic order. The "reality" of a sequence lies not in the "natural succession" of the actions composing it, but in the logic there exposed, risked and satisfied".

[27] As Gerald Prince pertinently observes, "for the historian, say, for the metaphysician or the philosopher in love with truth, for the psychologist too and for the critic, and, clearly, for human beings in their daily lives, the distinction entails important consequences. But for the narratologist (who would like, above all, to characterize the *differentia specifica* of narrative), just as for the linguist, the relevance of this distinction is not self-evident" (1991: 546).

hand, fiction necessarily fails to refer to reality and thus cannot make claims about it. On the other hand, fictions fail to provide evidence for the claims they do make" (Currie, 2014: 227). As Ilya Kliger points out, "the novel has often been understood as the genre *par excellence* of truthlessness" and as a "ventriloquist of the many voices that can be heard in the metropolitan, multicultural world for which it serves as the most appropriate symbolic form" (2011: 1-2). Such stance can be tracked down to the etymological meaning of the term "fiction." The word derives from the Latin accusative *fictiōn-em*[28] and it signifies the acts of "fashioning", "feigning", "counterfeiting", so that possible paraphrases of the word range from "fabrication" to "illusion" and even "falsehood". It designates an act of arbitrary invention or imitation. If one does not distinguish between two different meanings of the word *fiction*, i.e., fiction as "something feigned" and fiction as "literary material", the result may become puzzling. The confusing linguistic connotation of the term might have given it a somewhat pejorative tone and it might have consequently led to a negative attitude towards the genre. In literature[29], "fiction" refers, just as well, to the narrative species appertaining to the concocting of a narration of imaginary events and to the representation of invented characters. Putting it in a nutshell: if a text has a fictional nature, it cannot be concerned with reality and, above all, with truth[30] grounded in external reality. Nevertheless, the assertion that fiction must be concerned with the fictive and that only non-fiction is able to be concerned with hard facts and shared systems of values is misleading. Aloysius P. Martinich shares this standpoint, when he states that

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[28] John D. Caputo highlights in a playful tone the common origin of the word "fiction" and "fact": "In the most literal sense, facts are made (factum), and here we hit upon another sense of 'making the truth'. […] The word 'fiction', to which we like to oppose facts, has an analogous etymology, from fingere, fictum, to 'form', and in hermeneutics we are perfectly happy to say that facts are formed, which means not pure of and uncontaminated by fiction. We do not distinguish between formed and un-formed, but between well-formed and ill-formed, or between informed and uninformed, or between risky conformity and being too conforming" (2013: 215).

[29] Please bear in mind that literature and fiction are not overlapping categories: in fact, neither all that is fiction is also literary, nor what is literary is always fictional.

> Fictional talk is talk, and a fictional account of something is still an account. A fictional account (that is, an account in fiction) need not even be a false account of something, because such an account of, for example, a battle may be a perfectly accurate and hence a true account. The conflation of "fictional" and "fake" may stem from a confusion of "fictional" with "fictitious." A fictitious account of a real event is one that is false, but a fictional account of a real event (that is, an account in fiction, of a real event) may be a true and highly accurate account of that event. Likewise, a fictional account of a fictional event may be true too, but a fictitious account of a fictional event is false. (2001: 98).

Vera Nünning (2009: 215) stresses the independence of the two categories, when she argues that "the worlds constructed by science are not inherently 'better' for an understanding of life than other [literary] worlds." As a matter of fact, not only can non-fictional texts offer a counterfactual version of a specific issue or reach for a new truth through the debunking of previous commonly accepted conventions, but fiction is also able to tackle the problem of higher truth. With regard to this, Michael Riffaterre speaks of a "wonder":

> Fiction still manages to interest, to convince and eventually to appear relevant to the reader's own experience, despite containing so many remainders of its artificiality. The wonder also is that it eludes the ever-present danger that the imaginary story may appear gratuitous. Furthermore, whatever symbolic truth fiction may have, that truth results from a rhetorical transformation of the narrative into figurative discourse or from situational analogies between the writer's inventions and representations of recognized reality." (Riffaterre, 1990: I-II)

To this, Søndergaard adds that

> in his book on *Mimesis* from 1946, Erich Auerbach stated that literature is able to give a true account of real phenomena and thus provide access to the historical, sociological and psychological truth. He focused on the represented world in the literary works rather than on the aesthetic means used to create a fictional world (Søndergaard, 2010: 79).

In this sense, it is satisfactory to assert that fictional writing can yield truths, even though such truths do not need be bound to a reference to an external reality and to a demand for conformity with it. Indeed, modernist writers seem to endorse the view that truth can be de-coupled from its correspondence to external reality. One

condition that must be fulfilled is, however, that the truths a fictional text can actually yield must have a different nature than the truths a non-fictional narration can disclose. Such different qualities provide the basis for the construction of alternative world versions and alternative realities, which can be realized in a novel. During the last decades, the "focus [of truth-discourse] has shifted from factual or essential truth in literature in relation to the real world, to the imagined or simulated or virtual world in fictive literature and the way it functions" (Ryan in Johansen/Søndergaard, 2010:80).

The character of freedom from referentiality has paved the way to the observation that fiction has the power to convey knowledge and that it is endowed with its own veridictory mode. To this extent, as Zohar points out,

> literature has been misinterpreted as always being free from any constraints on the level of modelling reality. One of the major tasks of literature has been understood to be that of breaking with conventions. No doubt some literature does do this, but not necessarily all of it. Moreover, even in those texts where the principle of breaking with convention has been dominant, this dominant has neither eliminated all convention-bound features nor obliterated the repertoire basis of the newly introduced elements. (Zohar 1990: 209)

To a certain extent, therefore, the intention to relate on "invented" material makes it acceptable to point at the "illusory character" of fictional narrative. Indeed, a fictional text is always accompanied by an act of pretence.[31] With regard to this, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that, according to John Searle, "this act of pretence relieves the author of the responsibilities of fulfilling the sincerity conditions that relate to assertion". Furthermore, in Searle's opinion, a typical characterization of fiction is essentially its status of "non-seriousness":

> Fictional utterances are "nonserious." To avoid one obvious sort of misunderstanding, this jargon is not meant to imply that writing. A fictional novel or poem is not a serious activity, but rather that, for example, if the

[31] Pretence must not be understood as "the intention to deceive", because "to pretend to do or be something is to engage in a performance which is as if one were doing or being the thing and is with-out any intent to deceive" (Zohar, 1975: 324).

> author of a novel tells us that it is raining outside, he isn't seriously committed to the view that it is at the time of writing actually raining outside. (Searle, 1975: 320-321)

Hence, a fictional world has a different logical status from the world created by the historian or the physicist and it entails a different type of commitment to actual states of the world. Objects inhabiting the fictional world are presumed to be of a specific nature and fiction requires a different conception of truth functionality.

2.2 Unravelling truth and reality

Throughout the history of literature, one literary method which has been thought to be the most suitable for the transmission of truth in a text is the narration of a story according to *mimetic* and hence *realist* principles. Though inextricably linked and interdependent, reality and truth are two different topics. One way to address and formalize the distinction between reality and truth is to define the characteristics of each concept. One of the most challenging issues when one attempts to specify the formal characteristics of the concept of truth is the multiplicity of meanings the term has acquired throughout time and history. For example, if truth is investigated as a property, basing on the meaning applied to the qualification, some statements may acquire a logical justification, but they can also lose it[32]. The process of understanding takes its shape through the application of the properties of "true" or "untrue" to the constituents of reality. Since the property of "true" is a quality, human beings or human-like intelligences assign to reality with language and with narration, it can be affirmed that "truth establishes itself in the structure of fiction" (Derrida, 1987: 411). Once the qualification of "true" or "untrue" has been assigned to a narrative construct, other

[32] As Edward A. Hubbard writes, "The whole point of deconstruction is to show how truth and meaning are always unstable and contingent, brought into existence by force – by stabilizing or fixing a meaning (based on a binarism) in place and by the elevation of a privileged category within the binary and the simultaneous suppression of its opposite. Deconstruction is a way to critique regimes of Truth by way of showing how this Truth is always based on logocentrism. Derrida does not suggest that we can escape logocentrism – without it, there would be no Truth, no meaning in the world – but he suggests that deconstruction can become a powerful tool in challenging transcendental ideas that support regimes of truth and for dismantling powerful oppositions in politics and philosophy", (1975:2).

intertwined problems rise. The first problem is formal, or linguistic, and it concerns the question of the meaning of the qualification of "true"[33]. Therefore, truth must be based on language. Since words have many different meanings and uses, and, most importantly, they do not always and univocally correspond with their definitional meanings, language has to be conceived of as a chaotic system. The various meanings words can assume depend on other signifiers. For Derrida language is independent from a correspondence between established codes and the fixed meanings attached to them: it exists in an unstable, "free play" of signifiers. A word can gain fixed meaning only if a certain "violence" is applied. Such abuse of power "freezes a binary opposition and institutes logocentrism" (Hubbard, 1975:2)

On the other hand, reality can be seen as a "background domain" in a narration, while truth is a system of values and conventions, which are said to correspond to the narrated reality. In this way, fictional truth imposes a narrative order on reality. As noted by Brian McHale, (2008: 6, 17), the issue of realism has actually been an object of everlasting attention throughout the history of poetics. Quoting Roman Jakobson, he points out that

> classicists, sentimentalists, the romanticists to a certain extent, even the "realists" of the nineteenth century, the modernists to a large degree, and, finally, the futurists, expressionists, and their like have more than once steadfastly proclaimed faithfulness to reality, maximum verisimilitude in other words, realism - as the guiding motto of their artistic program (Jakobson in McHale, 2008: 6, 17)

Indeed the representation[34] of reality cannot ever cease to be a desideratum for fictional texts. Although from a different perspective, Pam Morris also argues that

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[33] G.E. Moore put this point very clearly in a short entry written a year later on 'Truth': "it seems plain that a truth differs in no respect from the reality to which it was supposed merely to correspond: e.g. the truth that I exist differs in no respect from the corresponding reality — my existence. So far, indeed, from truth being defined by reference to reality, reality can only be defined by reference to truth", (1901:21).

[34] As Newman (1996: 6) highlighted, "Representation [is] the most ubiquitous of realist procedures, that emerges as the singular obstacle to the realization of fiction. Whether or not its practitioners hold to a corresponding belief in the visible as against the invisible is finally irrelevant".

“aesthetically, realism refers to certain modes and conventions of verbal and visual representation that can occur at any historical time” (Morris, 2003:9). The reader’s epistemological progress that is enacted through realist novels replicates the methods with which one acquires empirical knowledge of the actual worlds through the examination of accurate facts, behaviour and events (Morris, 2003:10). This means they imitate the process minds experience when they attribute a truth-value to the particulars of the actual world surrounding them. The perception of a satisfying correspondence between an object and its truth-value embodies a form of realism. As claimed by Grodal (Morris, 2010: 39), “the feeling of realism is linked to perceptual salience, emotional relevance for some living agencies and action potentials for those agencies”. In this sense, realism and truth are necessarily intertwined categories, and even though they are not identical, they are at any rate inseparable. To this extent, truth should be understood as a subset of reality, with which reality can be substantiated and categorized. Hence, truth is an instrument to talk about reality and to sustain one’s version of that reality; as such, truth becomes a property of reality. In contrast to the literary tendencies of the nineteenth century, during which writers intensively engaged with the notion of realism, the Bloomsbury group came to react against it. One reason why this occurred was that they tried to redefine the design of reality in a fictional environment, because their apperception of reality was undergoing a drastic modification. In Virginia Woolf’s words:

> 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 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, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. This is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. 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 (2002 [1928] :143).

In order to adhere to the rules of imitation of reality, a fictional text must include elements of coherence constructing the fictional world within itself and, at the same time, it must include elements that can be judged true-to-the-text by the reader. In this sense, the fictional worlds created within a fictional text must be provided with an internal structure of coherence, but they remain free from the constraints of a correspondence with the actual world. As pointed out by Ingarden, coherence is not a necessary quality of textual representation:

> The literary work does not have necessarily to be 'consistent' or to be contained in within the bounds of what is possible in the actually known world. [...] In principle, there can be literary works which do not trouble themselves at all with staying within the bound of a particular type of object; but precisely because of this, they can make a particular aesthetic impression by representing a world that is actually impossible or one that is full of contradictions, (Ingarden, 1974: 253).

In a textual environment, truth-bearers, i.e. objects endowed with the quality of truthfulness, perform the action of sustaining and conveying truth. The coherence of the literary representation of reality is based on the truth-values of specific utterances in the text. Fictional representations of reality create a separate reality, which is independent of the external (or extra-textual reality). The only feature textual and extra-textual realities have in common is they both refer to a system of values and conventions. These represent the objects of reference with which it is possible to construct textual truth.

I will argue that the truth of a text cannot be sought or found in the external, agreed-upon facts of reality, but it must be found within the scope of the text itself. It is important to bear in mind that truth is not an absolute category of fictional analysis, but rather a *realeme* (Even-Zohar, 1990: 207), i.e. a narrative functional element that is useful for the representation of the real. The whole of the fictional elements informing a text with the quality of "true to the text" constitute the fictional truth of the text. As Ruth Ronen points out,

> the non-claim about reality is a general feature of the pragmatic position of fictional states of affairs, and this general observation can be rendered through a variety of models, each representing differently the way a

> fictional proposition is detached from a standard language/world relation and its truth-value is suspended" (1994: 89).

The whole of the elements containing a truth-value in the fictional domain that constitutes the textual (f)actual reality shapes fictional truth. The category of fictional truth carries out a basic construction function, i.e., it provides the text with its internal coherence structure and with an external justification. Fictional truth is the sustaining principle of fictional texts. To put it in a metaphor, fictional truth performs the same task as the mythical giant Atlas, who bears the world on his shoulders; in this sense, fictional truth makes it possible for the reader to interpret and assign meaning to the fictional world. Fictional truth is therefore one of the ordering principles around which all the fictional entities constituting the text revolve and are made plausible and credible. If fictional truth were missing or if it were not well-formed, all text components would lose coherence and cohesion and drift away, leaving the text recipients with scattered pieces of raw material without any logical relation to each other and, consequently, without any truth-yielding effect.

As opposed to non-fictional truth, fictional truth does not necessarily have to be compatible to the truth of external reality. Indeed, it only needs to be coherent with the internal modal laws regulating the fictional text. Such laws constitute the truth-makers of the text. According to this principle, every truth (of a certain class) has a so-called truth-maker, an entity whose existence accounts for truth. The truth-maker principle states that "for every truth there is a something that makes it true, that every truth has a truth-maker", (David in Lowe-Rami, 2009: 137). On the discourse level, it can be asserted that every fictional text is its own truth-maker, i.e. that it functions as its own authoritative source of truth. Because of this property of auto-generation of truth, the law structures regulating a fictional text can fluctuate with respect to the rules informing reality and produce asymmetries with regards to generally asserted codes. The truth-makers of a text therefore give birth to its autonomy and to its capacity for creating a (realistic) world. Narratologists like Ryan called such new world-like textual creations a

"textual actual world" or TAW[35]. In this sense, the representation of reality is not just a naive imitation of commonly accepted conventions, but it becomes an actively creative moment, in which a new alternative world with its own current states of affairs, its predecessors and its general laws defining the range of possible future developments from the current situation is brought into being. In each textual actual world negotiations may occur. These negotiations take place on the textual level, but they are also influenced by the cultural context. Furthermore, they can be brought into being by the interaction with the reader's apperception of the textual world. As it has been asserted, although fictional truth does not refer to actual world truths, it can nonetheless tell us about a specific textual truth-set, which is related to the cultural background in which texts are created. This means that a reading mind can have the truth of a specific textual utterance or assertion strengthened (or weakened) by its own set of cultural constructs and convictions. For example, the way a specific issue is presented, or the way particular elements are assumed and deemed relevant can help recipients to construct a fictional world in their mind, substantiate it and perceive it as real[36]. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that the negotiation process is mediated by the interpretive stance of the recipient, i.e. by his/her ability to understand "in frames" of previous experience. As it is, "the objects present in a literary work are not just 'there'", (Herbert Grabes, 2009: 49). Rather, they are possible simulations, parallel re-enactments of the objects as one knows them from the direct experience of the actually existing world. Actual reality has therefore a shifting deictic/referential function and it can be seen as a model to project onto fiction in order to give it an internal structure. The fictional text contains truth-cues informing the internal coherence of a narrative and the external correspondence with an object of reference. Such truth-cues in a narration are like seeds; in order to let the seeds thrive, the fertile ground of a

[35] Compare Ryan 1991 et al.

[36] For example, in myth and its corresponding reality, people can be endowed with powers nobody would imagine them having in everyday life. This does not imply that there is no distinction between fact and fiction, but that what counts as a fact may be relative to a specific "truth program." Schaeffner, (2009: 99).

reading mind is needed. Such process follows the bi-active model of reading. Therefore, the truth-yielding function of a text strengthens the role of the text recipient, because s/he must draw inferences and find truth-telling elements disseminated in the text. In this sense, the interaction between the text and reader creates a consensus bond and it is necessary for a dynamic the establishment of textual truth.

2.3 Truth narration and truthful narrating: merging philosophical and narratological theories

As stated above, understanding reality means to provide it with a frame of reference that inherently shapes, regulates and informs it. At the same time, it implies the capacity of being cognizant of the fact that the logical and consistent structure of reality is a human construct. Applying a frame of reference to reality purports that the mind is able to classify objects and theoretical constructs according to specific criteria, such as acceptability, plausibility, validity, credibility or pragmatism. Such mental proceeding constitutes a method of assessing the objects of reality. One of the most relevant ways to build up this kind of frame of reference for reality in the form of a judgement[37] or evaluation is to attribute a "truth-value" to the objects and constructs constituting it. In this sense, the concept of truth becomes a criterion for the mental organization of the real. According to W. Alston, a "truth value is a matter of whether, or the extent to which, a belief is *justified, warranted, rational, well-grounded*" (1997: 188-9). Olsen/Lamarque (1994) point out that "true" can mean "sincere" or "true to life, lifelike, having verisimilitude"[38]. Through this approach it is possible to apply the

[37] Blackburn says: "Truth is internal to judgement in the sense that to make or accept a judgement is to have it as an aim. Truth counts as success in judgement" (1984: 23).

[38] "After all the predicates 'true' and 'false' have many applications—true friend, true likeness, true beauty, false teeth, etc.—and no doubt there is a recognizable sense of 'true' as 'sincere'. Then the debate simply shifts elsewhere. If, more problematically, 'true' is used to mean 'true to life', in the sense of having 'verisimilitude' or being 'lifelike', then that notion needs careful explanation. Whether literary value resides in being 'true to life' will depend at least partly on the explanation given" (Lamarque, Olsen, 1994: 6).

qualification of “true” or “untrue” to a specific constituent of reality and thus to employ the conception of truth as a “mode of knowing” reality.

A second problem derives directly from the first one, and it angles the justification strategies for the assignment of a “truth-value” to a specific object. A certain statement can in fact being justified in *accepting* or justified in *believing* (Alston 1989: 9 et passim/32 et passim). The truth-status can be substantiated objectively, but it can also be refuted, and this different outcome can be the product of a process of interpretation. Through language, through mind, through a connection of constructs, it is possible to make sense of these problems and to systematize feasible solutions. Truth must be analysed according to two levels: that of the "truth-statement" and that of "meaning”. To this extent, Ankersmit (2010: 32) observes that:

> Firstly, there is the (object-)level of (the) truth(s) about the world that are expressed in a text. Next, there is the (meta-)level of establishing either truthfully (or not, of course) *which* truth(s) the text actually expresses about the world and whether those truths are legitimate. This second level can be said to shift the focus from first-order truth to the meaning of such truth. [...] In complex literary texts questions of meaning and interpretation may drive questions of truth into the background; then it will be the second level that really matters.

Narration is a human strategy to convey meaning to a text. The narrative strategies are supposed to be linguistic strategies and they pertain to questions of meaning and interpretation, but first and foremost to the sphere of telling in the sense of *signifying*, but also *mediate through words*. The narration of reality is a way to put into words what is true and what is untrue. Through language, through mind, through a connection of constructs (e.g., time, space, consciousness), narration provides the frame of reference for processing reality.

As it appears, the theoretical scope of the concept of truth is ample and complex. As such, it was a constant source of interest for the members of the Bloomsbury group. Ever since the foundation of Bloomsbury, and possibly even before, still at Cambridge times, they were pervaded by “the spirit of the pursuit of truth with

absolute devotion and unreserve" (cf. Rosenbaum, 1987: 168). It was an urge that could not be ignored. The members of the Bloomsbury group considered truth as a primary object of investigation, along with "beauty" and "goodness". John Maynard Keynes confirmed it in his *Early Beliefs*, (Rosenbaum, 1975: 53) when he observed that "[t]he appropriate subjects of passionate contemplation and communion were a beloved person, beauty and truth, and one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge" (Keynes, 1975: 55). Truth was an entity the artistic mind not only had to "follow", but also to "pursue", like an argument or like something shifty requiring to be overtaken and tamed. In these auto-biographical reflections, Keynes pointed out that truth was one of the primary concerns of the *Apostles*. Interestingly, he also connected the concept of the pursuit of truth with the concept of the pursuit of "knowledge", i.e., he implicitly correlated the notion of truth with that of knowing, thus introducing the epistemological character of the narration of truth. Later in his report Keynes made the correlation clearer, by posing some significant questions:

> [K]nowledge too presented a problem. Were all truths equally good to pursue and contemplate? – as for example the number of grains in a given tract of sea-sand. We were disposed to repudiate very strongly the idea that useful knowledge could be preferable to useless knowledge [...] and we were prepared to think it just possible that 'interesting' knowledge might be better to pursue than 'uninteresting' knowledge. Another competing adjective was 'important', provided it was quite clear that 'important' did not mean 'useful'.[39]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims in his preface to *Of Grammatology* that, according to Derrida, "Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field 'of freeplay, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble'" (1975: XIX). Hence, truth and knowledge are connected and this connection draws attention to the

[39] Rosenbaum, (1975: 53).

epistemic modality of truth. Modernist writers sought narrative solutions to the problem of the representation of truth. The causal relationship between reality and true statements is the basic assumption of the correspondence theory of truth[40]. According to Marian David, this theory shows "the view that truth is correspondence to a fact—a view that was advocated by Russell and Moore early in the twentieth century"[41], but which was later rejected by modernists. Soon afterwards, she adds: "[…] Truth consists in a relation to reality, i.e., truth is a relational property involving a characteristic relation to some portion of reality". Modernist writers took a quantum of that correspondence relation between fact and representation and they expanded or contracted it according to their narrative agenda. To obtain the internal narrative scaffolding, novelists have been using different narrative tools and instruments, depending on historical and cultural circumstances. As stated by Ronen (1994: 91), "the authorship of a fictional text reflects an understanding of fictionality as an intentional action of world-projecting, of imagining, of belief-suspending." Authors craft fictional truth by means of rhetoric and other linguistic strategies. Not only that, they also make use of narrative strategies and categorizations in order to adhere to the truth-programme of their time. The next subchapters analyze in detail the various narrative tools for the representation of fictional truth, giving primal importance to the formal elements in a story that constitute the signpost of truth.

2.3.1 "World" and world-making

As it has been highlighted, every fiction has the construction of a fictional world and attached sub-worlds as an outcome. Before plunging into the details of the

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[40] See the definition of the Correspondence Theory of Truth by Marian David in, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), UR L=http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/truth-correspondence/.

[41] In the encyclopaedia entry quoted above, David specifies that "The correspondence theory of truth is often associated with metaphysical realism. Its traditional competitors, coherentist, pragmatist, and verificationist theories of truth, are often associated with idealism, anti-realism, or relativism. In recent years, the traditional competitors have been virtually replaced (at least from publication-space) by deflationary theories of truth and, to a lesser extent, by the identity theory: they now lead the attack against correspondence theories. Another approach to truth that has recently received considerable attention is truthmaker theory; it is sometimes viewed as a competitor to, sometimes as a more liberal version of, the correspondence theory".

relationship between literary worlds and literary truth, and before grafting these theoretical conceptions on modernist literary production, it is probably appropriate to elucidate the modalities in which a narrative world comes into being and how the concept of world is related to the concept of fictional truth. In this section, I will restrict the field of focus to the notion of world-making in literary sense. The coiner of the term world-making is the philosopher Nelson Goodman. With the development of a world-making theory he argued that there are no ready-made worlds and that each new world is constructed upon other already existing worlds. To this extent he states that "the making is a remaking" (1978: 6). The first world one can come up with is the world "on hand," whose description is pre-known (in hermeneutic terms, with a "text"). In order to build up a description of the world, it is necessary to recur to a new system of symbols. Such system reorganizes or recodes the world which was initially given, thus creating a new one. Goodman proposes a series of transformation categories for the construction of a world-reality by which one realm may be related to another. Such categories are: (a) composition and decomposition, (b) weighting, (c) ordering, (d) deletion and supplementation and (e) deformation. As Eric Bredo explains: (1979: 109-110)

> New worlds may be constructed through composition or decomposition when a number of initially given objects are grouped together and taken as the "same" under a new schema or when what was originally taken as unitary is broken into parts. [...] Change by reweighting or reemphasis might be seen as more modest since it alters only the degree of (rather than the absolute) relevance of different features. [...] Deletion and supplementation are of interest because they are necessary for moving from analogue to digital or from digital to analogue coding, respectively. Finally, deformation is involved in changes like smoothing out a curve [...].

The list of categories here reported is of relevant interest to narratology too, because it is possible to see each of transformation type as a narrative strategy to achieve the conveyance of the narratives' truth-programme. With respect to the construction of new worlds, the concept of truth becomes of crucial importance. As a matter of fact, if a ready-made world, i.e. made of primordial elements is not given, how is it possible to have truth? Goodman's hypothesis is that the concept of truth in the world-making process must have an "operational"

(Goodman, 1978: 122) function, i.e. it has to be adjusted according to the internal laws and to the judging procedures that are valid in the world. In doing so, it is possible to apply "standards of truths [to] cross-systems without presuming a pre-given world or some absolute standpoint from which to judge the accuracy of versions". Herbert Grabes (2009: 47) distinguishes among three different theories of world-making: phenomenological, constructivist and cognitive. He claims that "the worlds that are imagined in the act of reading are the result of an interaction between text and reader, or rather of a special kind of processing of a literary text." From the phenomenological point of view, "imaginary worlds are perceived as products of the constitutive intentionalities of an aesthetic consciousness."[42]

The concept of "world", like any other concept, has a history[43]. In philosophy, the concept of world is "identified with a constellation of represented objects, with an ontic[44] region constituted by the deliberate process of structuration carried out by a consciousness."[45] This means that what is knowable of the world has undergone a process of organization and rewriting by a specific subject that can be called a "mapping entity." In the case of fictional worlds, the "mapping entity" is the narrator, but the reader's mind has also a very important role. To begin with, a fictional world is not merely a place, it is not only a setting, but rather an organized set of beliefs, i.e. a literary world is not only a background, but also a cultural foreground. Under this point of view, the concept of world is interesting for the present study, because it provides the terrain in which the narrative discourse of the constitution of truth is established. All the same, the characters inhabiting a fictional world are "worlds" themselves or, specifically, a whole of worlds constituted by their consciousnesses, in which wishes, needs, norms and

[42] Ronen, (1994: 97).
[43] Compare Connor (2009: 29-45).
[44] See Margolin's definition of ontic (1991: 517):"[Ontic is] what can be referred to, that is, the types of referents picked out: linguistic (expressions, utterances), abstract, or spatio-temporal; and their modality or ontological status: actual, counterfactual, hypothetical (doxastic), or imagined."
[45] Ronen (1994: 97).

internalised morals dwell and find an expression. The concept of world as applied to narrative cannot be separated from the concept of "world-making."

2.3.1.1 Possible truths in fictional worlds

The concept of possible worlds has its roots in philosophy. It was first formulated by the German philosopher Leibniz, who developed it further in the context of modal logic. In this sense, the concept of possible worlds was used especially to deal with problems in formal semantics (cf. Surkamp 2002 and Nünning, 2010) and to make sense of *de dicto* and *de re* modalities[46]. *De dicto* modalities have to do with the modal sentences (propositions) in a language and the truth-values of these,[47] while *de re* modalities deal with the different properties of individuals, i.e. what is indispensable to them, what is not possible to them and what is contingent to them. The philosopher David Lewis rediscovered the possible world theory in order to state that possible worlds differ from the actual world "not in kind but only in what goes on at them."[48] As explained by Ryan (2010: 11), Lewis finds that "possible worlds stand at various distances from the actual world, depending on how many propositions take a different truth-value in each world." Therefore, in his (quite extreme) view, the worlds are all equal in their degree of realness and existence, and the actual world is deprived of any kind of privileged ontological or and priority status (i.e. of absolute existence) in relation to other possible worlds.[49] According to Lewis, in addition to all possible worlds being equally existent and real, all in them can be very dissimilar from what it is in the actual world. Lewis's material realism becomes visible in the manner in which he considers all the worlds as equally material. As a result, Lewis is a major advocate of actualism. As stated by Ronen, for Lewis

> 'actual' is an indexical term and the inhabitants of each world see their universe as the actual one. To grasp this ontological extravagance, it should be noted that for Lewis possible worlds are parallel worlds,

[46] Michael Loux, (2001: 151-152)
[47] Compare 2.1.1 of the current chapter in the present work.
[48] Lewis, (1994b: 184)
[49] Michael Loux, (2005: 193).

> autonomous ‘foreign countries’, with their own laws and with an actuality of their own (Ronen, 1990: 281)

Further in her expounding of various views of the possible worlds in literary theory, Ronen refers to a third stance, in which “any kind of heuristic or explanatory powers” is denied to possible worlds. Such stance considers actuality as a relative conception, and, consequently, as impossible to differentiate from non-actual states of the world. This – she argues – “may seem another version of the Lewis approach, but [...] a philosopher like Goodman [does not] attribute existence to any worlds”. In fact, Goodman perceives “all worlds as versions subject to radical relativism” (Goodman, 1990: 282).

The concept of possible worlds did not manage to be an object of inquiry in literary theory until the second half of the twentieth century. “Possible-Worlds Theory [...] puts emphasis on the complexity and the dynamics of the narrated fictional world.” It argues that, unlike actual worlds, “literary worlds are ‘possible worlds’ which explore alternative realities”, (Neumann/Nünning 2010:148). An important mainstay of the application of possible worlds semantics to fiction is Searle’s contribution to the study of the logical status of fictional discourse (cf. 2.1.1.). Nonetheless, subsequent theorists have found weak points in his argumentation. For instance, Ryan maintains that Searle’s distinction between fictional and nonfictional statements which can come about inside one and the same fictional text leads to problems that could be straightforwardly unravelled by means of the concept of possible worlds. The greatest contribution of the theory of possible worlds to literary theory is, as argued by Ryan, the valuable metaphor of “world” to “describe the semantic domain projected by a fictional text.”[50] The worlds of narrative fiction are possible worlds in the sense that they constitute “unrealised possibilities.”[51] It is important to distinguish between fictional worlds and possible worlds. In Ruth Ronen’s words, fictional worlds are not the same thing as possible

[50] Ryan, (1991: 3).
[51] Nünning, (2010: 160).

worlds. In fact, whereas the latter are merely "possible but not actualized courses of events", the former are "regarded as possible or impossible constellations of events and situations which are fictionally actualized". Therefore, fictional worlds are "not a modal extension of the actual world, but rather a world with its own modal structure" (Ronen, 1994:84 et passim). As Nünning remarks,

> PWT proceeds from the assumption that reality is a universe – or a 'modal system' – composed of a plurality of diverse elements. This universe is hierarchically structured by the opposition of one actual world, which functions as the centre of the system[...] to other, merely possible worlds. (Nünning, 2010: 159).

According to Possible-Worlds Theory, fictional worlds constitute a non-actual possible world, i.e. a world that is not true but, at the same time, a world that gives the possibility to take into account alternative sub-worlds and counter-worlds, which might be true under some circumstances[52]. Possible worlds do not exist in the same way as the actual world exists, but that is not the crucial point. What is interesting is the question whether possible worlds can contribute to a systematic theory of the observed world, or in the case of novels, of the textual world and also whether such textual worlds can create truth. Each textual world or sub-world consists of a set of truth-valued statements that form a state of affairs. The segmentation of a text in worlds and sub-worlds enables us to understand the type of truth conveyed in the text. The option of the existence of a possible world sets us free from the brutality of the reduction to a unity of one world, which was typical of realist narrations. This process highlights the new function that the conception of truth has acquired and which was carried by modernist writers into their literary production.

2.3.2 Identifying narrative truth-tellers: formal narratological categories

[52] Nünning, (2010: 160).

As stated in the previous paragraphs, fictional truth is a set of elements with the property of “truth-bearers” in a narrative world. The detection of the narrative constituents with a truth-telling function can be achieved according to empirical criteria. As a matter of fact, not all narrative constituents are able to yield truth about the fictional world and, moreover, the truth-yielding elements of a specific genre or a specific epoch may vary or be unavailable in another one. A truth-bearing element is given when its position in the text indicates that it conforms to a rule that is part of the constitution of the fictional world and when it has connections with another object in the world of reference. For example, a major modernist novel narrative constituent like the stream of consciousness, which is here considered as a truth-telling element, does not exist anymore in later novelistic developments or it has changed its form. In this section, I will discuss which elements are eligible for the characteristic of truth-bearing and truth-telling in modernist novels. Such elements, which, so far, have remained unspecified, are the narrative components of emplotment, (narrative) voice, focalization and consciousness. All of these narrative constituents are mutually intertwined and it is their interlacement and interaction within a narrative domain that releases the relative truth-telling effect. One of the goals of the present work is to create a “morphology of truth-yielding elements” with which it is possible to analyze narrative truth and draw meaning from it. For instance, emplotment, with its dynamic of inclusion and exclusion can yield knowledge about the narrated states of affairs and, consequently mould the truth of a narration. Moreover, since emplotment functions as a narrative regulator, it also imposes limitations and directions to the text and it serves rhetorical functions. However, this process cannot take place without the presence of a voice, be it that of a narrator or a focalizer, which shapes the emplotment strategies and that is shaped by emplotment. All of these narrative tools together are useful in understanding the internal dynamics and mechanisms in the characters’ mind and attitude, i.e. their consciousness.

2.3.2.1 Emplotment Strategies

Emplotment constitutes an all-encompassing narrative domain that gives the text its narrative tonality. Through emplotment it is possible "to privilege one domain of events and states as the *factual domains* of the narrative universe" (Ronen, 1994: 171) and to make inferences about the outcomes and the tenor of the narration.

The literary scholar Northrop Frye distinguishes four types of "emplotment", which he denominates "mythoi" (1973: 7-11) and which H. White used for his theory of emplotment. Frye's modes of emplotment are romance, tragedy, comedy and satire[53] and he defines them as archetypical plot schemata. In the present work, and especially in the following textual analysis chapters, I will refer to the concept of emplotment as a process through which the modernists composed the structure of a plot and steered the possibilities of actualization of a specific truth-yielding element, thus giving the term a teleological function. A relevant method for the identification of the mode of emplotment is the classification of the structure of events of the narration. In the course of the process of emplotment, some elements are given a privileged status, while some others undergo a process of falsification, i.e. they are made irrelevant for the narration purposes. Therefore, emplotment gives expression to a possibility, it transmits a message and it channels the narration toward a specific end, leaving aside other elements. As stated by Ronen, "every point in a narrative chain opens up alternative options for actualization. Within narrative semantics [Umberto] Eco (1979) describes plot-structures as a process of activating some semantic possibilities, while narcotizing others." (Ronen, 1994:169) Furthermore, textual truths have to be embedded in a sequence of narrated events. In modernist novels, events are presented in an incoherent order, which makes it challenging for the reader to

[53] As explained by Martínez-Schaeffel, (1999:157) „'Romance' ist eine Erlösungsgeschichte, und erzählt die Selbstfindung eines Helden, der Hindernisse überwindet und sich von der Erfahrungswelt befreit; […] [Satire] schildert die unausweichliche Niederlage des Helden gegen widrigen Umstände, böse Mächte oder den Tod. Die Komödie drückt eine zumindest vorübergehende Versöhnung widerstreitender Kräfte aus, den temporären Triumph des Helden über seine Umwelt. Die Tragödie macht ansatzweise eine Lösung von Konflikten deutlich, allerdings durch die resignative Einsicht in ihre Ursachen, die nur für den Beobachter und nur um den Preis der Vernichtung des Helden erfolgt".

relate to the representation of events, because time does not follow anymore a commonly agreed chronological pattern, but it is subject to mental time expansions and contractions. Emplotment serves as a narrative strategy for plot orientation and direction and it is an important tool to make the text adhere to the truth-programme. Such process of embedding is particularly important in biographical texts. Its narrative task is the truthful representation of a real life. The way in which events in life are presented can induce to judge such account as genuinely and authentically reflecting real life or to spot a satirical intent. Emplotment strategies show that worlds are mediated through discourse. For example, the elegiac motifs in Forster's *The Longest Journey* and in Woolf's *Jacob's Room* serve two distinct purposes, but they both want to underline the sense of regret with respect to unrealized possibilities in each of their fictional worlds. In the case of biography, the comic, absurd or teasing undertones in both Woolf and Strachey's production aim at highlighting some aspects of the described lives, which had been previously neglected, thus giving their texts an alethic function.

2.3.2.2 Speech, Voice and (Un-)Consciousness

If in realist novels the dominant ordering principle was the availability of an external narrator, of a chronological development of events and of a regular scene rotation, in modernist novels the source of ordering principles gradually becomes the characters' inner consciousness and his/her subjective stance. Whereas a sequence of events in the characters' lives was defined truthful in the traditional realist novel if it reflected a commonly accepted order and logic, I will argue that the sketched, associative, scrambled fragments of reported thoughts, which are typical of the stream of consciousness, yield truth even though they are illogically or disorderly presented. The narrative constituents of realist novels provided the truth-yielding effect in a perhaps intuitive but certainly – or at least, according to the moderns – misleading way. Unlike their predecessors, modernist writers attempted to provide accessibility to truth using other, less conventional narrative tools. This attempt resulted in the attribution of the labels "psychological realism" or "literary impressionism" to modernist literature. One of the most

challenging narrative enterprises under the point of view of the property of truth-bearing is the unmediated presentation of the characters' thoughts and consciousness. In the previous sections, it was stated that, in analogy with the narrative "physical" world, the characters' consciousness represents a fictional world as well, in which desires, hopes, fears and internalised morals constitute other satellite worlds. This analogy, which is constructed on "Goodman's assumption that worlds are always constructed out of existing worlds" (Nünning, 2009: 216), becomes problematic when it is applied to consciousness, because a real and objective actual world of reference is not available. The representation of consciousness is always subjective and therefore unique and perhaps irreproducible or at least not applicable as a model. Furthermore, not only does consciousness exist only as a subjective mental construct, but, even once "actualized", i.e., realized and elaborated into a verbal text, it responds to its own criteria of validity and judgement, yielding truth principally about the self. Consciousness, moreover, arranges its own logic chains without following a prespecific pattern. Therefore, as opposed to the parallelism between fictional and actual worlds, it is much more difficult (a) to make a correlation between a hypothetical actual consciousness and a fictional one and (b) to take an actual consciousness as a model for the projection of a fictionalized one, because the object of reference is missing. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of a character is the starting point for the depiction of his/her set of beliefs and it also defines what is true of his/her own description. In modernist novels, the conjuring up of a consciousness occurs without the mediation of a narrator, who could state its verity and its plausibility. In these circumstances, it is legitimate to ask how a portrayal of a character's consciousness can be identified as true. What is relevant for such portrayal and what makes it credible? My hypothesis is that it is not possible to answer this question without speculating on the nature of psychological representations. Even though an actual objective consciousness of reference cannot exist, a projection model is still necessary if we want to discuss the nature of the truth of consciousness representation. A further specific characteristic of the modernist novels could probably prove helpful. As a matter of fact, not only are the objects constructing the literary world constituents of the

narrated environment, but they also shape the characterization of the characters. Sometimes a reader can gather information about a character's consciousness by looking at the spaces inhabited by him/her. A second hypothesis is that the representation of consciousness does not actually respond to any modal laws. Perhaps the distinctive traits of disorder and fuzziness are the truth-yielding factors, with the ultimate actual world of reference being the dream or the cross-cueing properties of collective memory. In conclusion, there is another narrative constituent playing a crucial role in the establishment of the properties of "true" and "truthful", i.e., the text recipients' inner voice. The comparison of one's own inner voice with the voice given to the inner monologues is probably the reason why it is possible to attribute a truth-value to the representation of consciousness. This is probably due also to the fact that the inner voice of consciousness is, to a large degree, rendered through the use of homodiegetic narration. As it is well-known, homodiegetic narration gives a heightened sense of truthful narration, because it is an account of first-hand experience. In this sense, the stream of consciousness is able to yield unique and unrepeatable truths about the self, and it gives information about an alternative world. It is appropriate to maintain that the representation of consciousness is also the representation of an optional possible world.

2.3.2.3 Focalization and truth-claim

As Gérard Genette theorized, focalization, as opposed to the previous "point of view" puts the stress on knowledge and information. From this stance, it is immediately clear that focalization is the most relevant narrative tool for the creation of truth-telling elements in a text. The concept of focalization is relevant for the investigation of fictional truth. Just as the focalization of sunlight on a magnifying lens causes a concentration of energy, so does narrative focalization. It increases the level of attention to specific elements, producing the effect of a revelation and subsequent extension of knowledge. As stated by Ronen (1994: 177):

> When *narrative motifs* are considered on the level of focalization, the identity of the focalizer and the type of focalization carried out pre-

> determine the degree of authenticity or the degree of (fictional) factuality eventually assigned to the narrative speech-act.

As indicated before, (possible) worlds are substantiated by a truth-bearing authority. “Worlds”, Ronen argues further, “both actual and fictional, are discursive constructs. Worlds are therefore dependent on instances of discourse responsible for the selection and arrangement of world components.” Since information about worlds always has a source, a world can be seen as being mediated by a variety of speakers and positions; these mediating positions operate on world-components determining their nature and their status in a given world.

Perspective and perception are mediating agents. In order to understand how the accessibility to truth can be provided, it might be useful to turn to the concept of vision in narrative. Vision is inextricably and etymologically linked with knowledge, and, consequently to truth. Specifically, the metaphorical conceit is linked to the notion of perspective. Depending on where the point of view is placed, we can have different knowledge results. What is more, different perspectives are able to create different worlds. A system of symbols that is normally used to decode reality does not always function in the same way for every observer of such a system of symbols. In fact, each perspective relies on different reference cues and it yields truths, according to the adoption or the rejection of the cues. Also in the case in which a focalizer finds itself at a vantage point with respect to another, it is possible to have different truth-outcomes. For instance, some important elements may remain hidden from the “disadvantaged perspective”, while other less relevant elements can be highlighted, but still be useless, or irrelevant to the truth-standards. Another relevant issue pertains to the nature of the decodification of truth in the fluid environment of reality, if a point of view interrupts such fluidity. Through a certain perspective a story can be filtered through one truth-stance or another. The reading mind can accept or rebuke the truth-stance. Perspective and truth-claim are connected by the fact that every narration is the narration of what the narrating centre considers

relevant, according to its own perception and its own angle of observation. “All worlds are perspective-dependent and hence only versions of reality. The fictional world, as other world-types, contains a set of perspectives interacting with all other sets of objects contained in that world” (Ronen, 1994: 117)

2.4 Artistic Truth

The survey of the ways of truth-making in fiction would not be complete, if a brief outline of the theory of aesthetic truth were not included. Indeed, artistic truth has a prominent place as part of a general conception of truth and fictional truth must be aesthetic, because one of the most pre-eminent tasks of aesthetics is the mediation between art and philosophy. According to Lambert Zuidevaart, artistic truth is the result of the combination of three dimensions, within which art phenomena may acquire the qualification of “true”. As Lauren Bialystok explains,

> Zuidervaart puts forward three criteria for artistic truth, or ‘modes of imaginative disclosure,’ which he labels ‘authenticity,’ ‘significance,’ and ‘integrity.’ The kind of truth they disclose is ‘truth with respect to,’ as opposed to the truth yielded exclusively (on some theories) by propositions, or (on others) by some metaphysical correspondence between fact and representation (2006: 173)

Such criteria – or relationships – can be very useful tools for the analysis of the narrative corpus, since they shed light on the method applied while composing the structures of the various works. The first, “authenticity” must be interpreted as the artist's intentions, “significance” as the audience's interpretive needs and “integrity” as the work's internal demands. The interplay of the three factors form Zuidervaart’s notion of “imaginative disclosure”. In particular, the notion of “integrity” can offer insights on the ways of achieving internal coherence in the text and thus giving it a formal substantiation. Furthermore, the notion of “integrity” allows us to “consider the artwork in its cultural and historical milieu, where its meaning is given by a combination of the artist’s imaginative processes, the artwork’s ‘internal demands,’ the audience’s interpretive needs, and the shared principles of their environment” (Bialystok, 2006: 173). Indeed, the artist’s imaginative processes become the privileged places of formation of truth.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that truth is formed and delivered arbitrarily in the text, according to the partiality and wilfulness of the artist – this would be detrimental to the purpose of narrating truth and it would nullify every effort in that sense. The sense of telling stories through the prism of artistic truth is to open new narrative universes by means of expanding and elevating the scope of every narration. To this extent, truth in fiction is yielded according to artistic and/or idealistic principles, which are inspired by the desire to transmit a higher sense of truth. Of course, such negotiation of truth-values does not and cannot occur directly, but it is mediated both by language and by the recipient's mind. The mediated expression of truth is an essential part of the construction of artistic truth and it helps contextualizing the truth the artist wants to communicate. That is the reason why, in order to convey artistic truth successfully, it is imperative to plunge into the explorations of all the variables constituting reality, such as time and space, but also life, culture, history, religion and philosophy. All these variables influence the shaping of artistic truth. They inform the significance accorded to artistic narrations. In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that the creation of artistic truth is a dynamic process happening at the crossroads between author, text, reader and concept and that it is always the result of negotiation, both at the intra- and the extra-textual level.

2.5 Summary conclusions: Modernist stream of consciousness novels as narrations of augmented reality

Modernist revolted against ("absolute") realism but at the same time wanted to reach a truthful account of life and character. How can these two urges converge? One proposal is to talk of a "realism of uncertainty" . Nevertheless, since the modernists did not drastically cut off the link with their predecessors, even though they refuted their operational modes, I will argue that their intent was not to discard realism tout court, but to reach truthfulness to life through the exploration of the characters' inner consciousnesses. Rather than simply breaking with the late Victorians, the moderns violated their most strict rules. In other words, they went through a process of unworldling of the previous Victorian world, which was

too much concerned with an externalised vision of reality. As this process of unworldling took place, the moderns did not forget how the world had been described previously, and thus they could manage to change the old rules effectively. The fortunate coincidence was that such process of unworldling took place at the coming of a new century. The modernists shuffled off the remains of the previous dominant culture and found themselves in front of new open roads and possibilities. Modernists chose to rewrite realism. Gradually they turned to the description of inner worlds, using methods that became more and more abstract, impressionistic and unmediated with the development of the modernist poetics. This “inwardly turn” was considered as a restriction of vision by many critics and scholars, but I will argue that the contrary is the case: the inwardly turn was an extension of the vision possibilities, it was the exploration of worlds which had remained so far uncharted, only glimpsed at or, in the worst case, voluntarily adumbrated, omitted or ensconced. The modernist account of reality is therefore radically non-mimetic – because the object of reference is not objectively given – but true. My aim is, therefore, to point at the affirmation of a higher form of realism, which may be defined as an augmented realism. In an augmented-reality environment, every detail of the inner worlds is shown with the goal of presenting its truth-stance and to point at its revealing/disclosing function, but also to highlight the fabricated dimension of such truth and its constructed quality. The storyworlds contained in modernist novels may include an entire metaphysical universe, the narration of which is an attempt to reach new truths. Focalization, exploring the inner worlds of the fictional characters provides a further level of narration and consequently it leads to a deeper insight and to a greater knowledge of the fictional world, i.e. it makes it narratable, or rather, it leaves the text with one “spot of indeterminacy” less. It is a disclosure of things, feelings and states of mind, which had remained so far unobserved, hidden, neglected. Modernists spearheaded the human capacity to perceive both an internal and an external reality and thereby come to know them. In their reaction against “absolute realism”, they wanted to demonstrate that they can attribute a work of fiction the power to function as truth. What remains an excruciating problem for the modernists and a cause of hesitation is, however, that such truth is

hypothetical and jeopardized by an epistemic modality of narration, i.e. a mode which is based on suppositions, on doubts, on unrealised possibilities. This fact is at odds with the formalist ambitions and aspirations of the modernist writers. Such rupture is probably the cause why, even though modernist narration can be seen as an extension of what was previously knowable of a textual world, it retains a taste of ambiguity and indefiniteness. Modernist writers explored alternative realities, with unconventional parameters of existence. They made such alternative realities respond to new codes and to new frames of reference. With the exploitation of consciousness, the moderns brought this process to its limits, presenting inner worlds for which an objective frame of reference cannot be provided. Finally, the pursuit of truth is also an inherent theme of modernist narrations and it represents a universal of narrative interests that are grounded in the reader's processing of a text. In G.E. Moore's words, truth becomes in Bloomsbury's literary production, "an end in itself". The modernist search for truth occurs at the threshold between different levels of narration. Whenever a Bloomsburian writer discusses truth, s/he talks about both truth in fiction and about fiction: sometimes the distinction of levels is not neat and clear-cut. However, the blending of levels does not cause any confusion, but it is an invitation to engage in an active reflection on fictional truth. Indeed, truth in fiction gives the possibility to ask whether the reading mind can rely on the information contained in a text. The modernist way to pursue truth is through epistemic modality and doubt and through the questioning of every logic asserted with too much peremptoriness and incontrovertibility. With their interplay of fact and fiction, they make text recipients alert that reality is not a "single, specific and determinate set of facts, but a constellation of possible and impossible situations" and, above all, that all world-constructions depend on perspective and can only be versions of reality. Modernist truth is always particular and it never generalizes. The moderns cannot accept generalizations, because they represent a failure, a flaunting of their vision, the disintegration of their aspiration to pure truth.

CHAPTER 3

THE ALETHIC TRUTH

3.1 Art Speech is the Only Truth: Bloomsburian Value of Truth in the Novel

"After all, I was aware that the earth was round,
but I knew *it was flat."*
(W. Somerset Maugham, *Cakes and Ale or The Skeleton in the Cupboard, 1930)*[54]

To write about the Bloomsburian novel is not only to write about an entirely original and complex subgenre of the English modernist novel, but, rather, to explore a proper subset of specific characteristics all Bloomsbury's literary productions share and which gave birth to a far-reaching narrative corpus. If it is undeniable that Bloomsbury, with its markedly progressive ideals and its faith in the "Enlightenment project" of civilization, (Froula, 2005: VI), is inscribed in the modernist movement, it is also legitimate to remark that the Bloomsburian production had a unique position in the modernist literary panorama. One of the most specific traits of the narrative output the Bloomsbury group generated was the literary focalization on the topic of truth and all its thematic foci. The narrative way of addressing the conception of truth in Bloomsbury's fiction follows a specific philosophical, idealistic pattern, based on the thoughts, theories and notions that circulated among the members of the group and inspired them. The commonality of purposes in Bloomsbury's literary experimentation was grounded in the micro-cultural environment that took form during the time in which the writers' cultural and literary exchanges took place and it becomes particularly visible on the cultural and aesthetic levels. The common philosophical background contributed significantly to the creation of a set of values informing the novels at issue, but often the literary paths diverged from the ways the philosophical lessons had shown. Phenomenal concepts like beauty, goodness and truth prompted the novelists to explore their meaning, to combine them according to aesthetic

[54] Maugham, W. S. *Cakes and Ale*. London: Vintage, [1930] 2009.

associations and evocations and, finally, to put them on trial in a literary sense. For instance, beauty and goodness were re-functionalized as necessary attributes of truth, but also the opposite happened. In order to exemplify what is stated above, the study of the conceptualization of truth in Woolf and Forster's novels is certainly crucial, since it can demonstrate how strong and deep-rooted the impulse they gave to the development of modernist literature and culture was. To this extent, it is possible to affirm that Woolf and Forster observed the concept of truth in their novels through a philosophical-aesthetic prism. As will be shown in the following analysis, unlike in the case of biographical studies, in which Bertrand Russell's notion of the correspondence between truth and reality was based on the assumption that correspondence had to be interpreted within the general framework of internal, textual congruence, Bloomsbury's novelistic output was primarily concerned with truth and its narrative rendition and semanticization. In addition to that, there remains the canonical fascination with the potential ambiguity of the same concept, into which they also delved diffusely. To put it concisely, the Bloomsburian study of truth drew almost directly from Moore's philosophy[55]. As Banfield reports:

> 'Moore and his book', Leonard Woolf thought, suddenly removed from our eyes an obscuring accumulation of scales, cobwebs, and curtains, revealing for the first time to us, so it seemed, the nature of truth and reality via 'the fresh air and pure light of plain common sense'. (2000: 17)

Obviously, mere common sense could never be enough for Virginia Woolf, to whom "it [was] never common sense which […] capture[d] the ultimate truth about the world", (Banfield, 2000: 43). Moreover, as Banfield adds, Woolf did not follow slavishly all that Moore theorized about truth:

> Woolf rejects Moore's epigraph to *Principia Ethica*, [which states that] 'everything is what it is, and not another thing. True, the fact that there are many clocks yields a universe in which 'undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things' (TTL, 40) might be neither true nor false, but as with

[55] Emily Dalgarno recollects that Leonard Woolf used to remark "G.E. Moore was the only modern philosopher [Virginia Woolf ever] read" (2014: 69).

the question whether ‘there is a progress in the universe’, where ‘optimism and pessimism are neither true nor false’, it ‘depends upon the choice of clocks’[56] (Banfield: 144-145).

She much rather attempted to make sense of the nature of truth through literature. Thus, Woolf’s and the other Bloomsburian novelists’ interest in the comprehension and exposition of the nature of truth expanded gradually from the experimentation on the formal, narrative level to the exploration of truth as a literary theme. The Bloomsbury novelists passed from the questioning and doubting of factual information and the (un)-conscious manipulation of facts and states of affairs, to a formalist/abstract study of truth as a theme and as an object of investigation per se. Therefore, the exploration of truth took into account the implications on the formal and thematic levels of the texts, since the analysis of the status of truth in literary production has proven this concept affects the text in different orders. The study of truth occurs at multiple textual levels and it is not limited to the scope of the inherent propriety of fictional texts to self-assert their meaning and to re-negotiate it according to external impulses, in an infinite dialogical and dialectical interchange , but it stretches to truth as an inherent theme of Bloomsbury’s narrations. On the formal, textual level, truth finds its expression in the novel in terms of making and/or of being made, i.e. according to rhetorical and/or linguistic games. Moreover, together with the construction of a story, it also strongly contributes to the making and to the maintaining of a coherent narrative world . On the substantial, content-related level, the functionalization of truth permits the addition of ulterior meanings to the story and to enrich it with multiple layers of significance. Such configuration of novelistic truth is strongly coherent with the avant-gardist character of the Bloomsbury Group and its literary production. The continual re-modulation of truth finds its realization in the

[56] Quoted from: Russell, Bertrand. *The Abc of Relativity*, (1925: 255). Abbreviated as (ABCD) in the original text.

act of telling or narrating and this ultimately generates an extensive improvement in the attempt to reach a new way to represent reality in fiction.

CHAPTER 3: PART I

3.2 E.M. Forster: a Modernist (not) at Odds with Modernism

> To try and approach truth on one side after another,
> not to strive or cry, not to persist in pressing forward,
> on any one side, with violence and self-will –
> it is only thus, it seems to me,
> that mortals may hope to gain
> any vision of the mysterious Goddess.
>
> (Matthew Arnold)

As I stated in the introductory chapter, there is no real unanimity of judgement, whether E.M. Forster (1879-1970) can be regarded as a fully-fledged modernist writer. His position within the Bloomsbury Group and within the scope of modernism has been described as marginal (Bristow, 1997: 116-117), peripheral, (Garnett, 2007: 36) and essentially defiled. As Marny H. Borchardt reports (2013: 84), such an understated presence of Forster within the sphere of Bloomsbury made him obtain a quite evocative nickname:

> While the exceedingly shy Forster tended to be more of an observer than a participant in the society's discussions, Leonard Woolf described his unique place within the group.
>
> > [Lytton Strachey] nicknamed him the Taupe, partly because of his faint physical resemblance to a mole, but principally because he seemed intellectually and emotionally to travel unseen underground and every now and again pop up unexpectedly with some subtle observations or delicate quip, which somehow or other he had found in the depths of the earth or of his own soul. (Sowing, 188)[57]

Forster's position within the literary periodization is quite eccentric and a definite classification seems to be, at times, quite problematic. Even his location in the Bloomsbury universe is an object of debate among scholars. Indeed, Forster's position shifts in and out of the frame of the group according to the criteria used to categorize his life, his frame of values and his work. If one takes into account

[57] Woolf, Leonard. *Sowing*. London: Hogarth Press, 1962.

the membership to the pre-Bloomsburian sect of the Apostles in Cambridge as a measure, then Forster clearly belongs to Bloomsbury as well. Like Strachey, Bell, Leonard Woolf and Maynard Keynes, he was also appointed the title of Apostle, while attending university. Obviously, this sole anecdotic fact cannot be enough to affirm that Forster's work is an integral part of the Bloomsbury canon. What is crucial in this sense is the attempt to discern to what extent Forster's values and attitudes fit into the Bloomsburian schemes and conventions. The exploration of Forster's treatment of the concept of truth in his novels can prove quite suitable for the task expounded above. As will be shown, Forster's oeuvre is rich in references to the conception of truth and many of his main characters can be conceptualized as truth-bearers, truth-makers and truth-seekers.

Before finding a definite answer to the question of Forster's belonging to the Bloomsbury group, it may be useful to clarify his position as a modernist. More generally, there is ample space to discuss if and to what extent Forster can be considered a modernist writer at all. The figure of E.M. Forster as a novelist escapes historical categorization to the point that it becomes difficult to give the author a fixed label. In addition to that, because of his overwhelming popularity, many stereotyped characterizations stamp the description of Forster's person, life and work, making the author appear like a sort of iconic character. Among the most widespread characterizations of the author is the figure of the "sage", of a guardian of values like "secular wisdom [and] anti-collectivist rationalism". According to this premises, one is legitimated to ask what is anti-modernist in Forster. Here too, the opinions about Forster's "modernity" diverge. If, on the one hand, Brian May describes him as an "anti-anti-modernist", thus highlighting Forster's awareness and openness to different literary cultures and movements, Medalie proceeds to see a "reluctant modernist" in him. In point of fact, Andrzej Gasiorek argues,

> Forster's writing [and conception of literature are] rooted in empirical reality and [seek] to develop nineteenth-century narrative conventions rather than to shatter them. But it's a mistake to think of Forster as a non-experimental novelist who simply produced cosy humanist fictions about bourgeois life. His various innovations, especially his use of an unstable register and a protean narrator, belong to a modernist continuum (2012: 178).

Forster's place in the modernist continuum from late Victorianism to Modernism and beyond may be found in his association with the Bloomsbury group, which "prompted the *avant-garde* quality of his novels" (Sarker, 2007: 32) and enhanced his "impati[ence] with realism" (Sarker, 2007: 32), thus paving the way to his narrative experimentation, especially with the tool of the narrator. As Gasiorek continues, "[Forster's] hybridised writing drew on fantasy as much as on mimeticism, creating uneasy novels that explored the limitations of liberalism, the dangers of narcissism and the consequences of moral obtuseness" (Gasiorek, quoted in Sarker, 2007:32). It is possible to see a confirmation of such assertions in a letter Forster wrote to Dickinson, in which he claimed to have "tried to invent realism […]. Instead of copying incidents and characters I have come across, I have tried to imagine others equally commonplace, being under the impression that this was art, and by mixing the two methods I have produced nothing (Furbank 1,91).

According to Medalie, then, rather than being a canonical modernist, E.M. Forster had a reputation of a "wry, stoical and wistful [writer], saddened (but not overwhelmed) by the inevitability of compromise and the failure of ideals, not lacking in conviction, but refusing to be chauvinist", (Bradshaw, 2007:32). In the present work, I will maintain that such a sketch of Forster's personality can reinforce the sense of affinity with the other Bloomsbury members, which becomes evident in the common urge to reject pre-constituted power and inflexible, dogmatic bigotry.

Then, if one must find a suitable literary-historical categorization to define Forster's position in the canon and in the present work, one good attempt should be the application of the "Edwardian" label. As Margaret Drabble comments (2000: 316-317), the Edwardian period was

> an era of outstanding achievement in the theatre (with G. B. Shaw and Granville-Barker) and, especially, in the novel, notably in the great works of H. James's last phase and the radical experiments of Conrad (and his collaborator F. M. Ford). At the same time, strongly traditional themes in the writing of the period—the empire as a source of national pride, the countryside as the custodian of national values, the upper-class house party representing the whole of English life—support the still current

alternative sense of the word 'Edwardian', referring to a period of sunlit prosperity and opulent confidence preceding the cataclysm of the Great War.

All the elements listed above are present, to various degrees, in Forster's production and some of them are even functionalized in order to reflect on truth as a narrative theme. For instance, English life and culture are problematized in both the so-called "English novels", i.e., *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, in order to expound the attitude of the English society towards the concept of truth, the ways it directs itself towards truth-bearers, self-creates its own identity and constructs accepted narratives.

Of all the Bloomsburian writing, Forster's is perhaps the one with the greatest level of engagement with truth in its purely philosophical meaning. As will be shown, Forster's greatest concern about the narrative representation of truth was to expound it as a value, rather than functionalizing it as a coherence agent in the text. This does not mean he never used truth as a narratological tool, but, rather, that he used it to a less considerable extent than, say, Virginia Woolf or Lytton Strachey. However, a certain degree of formal functionalization of the concept of truth in a narrative sense is present in Forster's work too, in particular in the manipulation of events enacted in *Howards End*.

3.3 The Longest Journey or An Education to Disillusionment (1907)

Allegedly, the novel *The Longest Journey* (1907)[58] was E.M. Forster's favourite work. The novel is subdivided into three parts, which are named after the places that mark the protagonist's life. The main character is the young Rickie Elliot, a youth with a sensitive personality but a challenged body. Like Forster himself, he

[58] The quotations of the novel *The Longest Journey* are taken from: Forster, E. M. and Elizabeth Heine. The Longest Journey. London: Penguin, 2006.

goes up to Cambridge, where he meets Ansell, a grocer's son who becomes his best friend. Ricky Elliott is still confused about what he wants to become in life, but he dreams of a career as a writer. While at university, he makes the acquaintance of the beautiful but superficial Agnes Pembroke and of her athletic fiancé Gerald. Unexpectedly, the latter dies suddenly during a football match. From that moment on, Rickie begins to court Agnes, until they eventually become engaged, even though Ansell has tried to dissuade his friend from such an endeavour, with the argument that Agnes would not be “truthful” (82). During a visit to his aunt Mrs Failing in Wiltshire, Rickie discovers that he has a half-brother, Stephen Wonham, who lives with her at Cadover. Rickie’s literary career does not go as expected and his collection of pastoral short stories is rejected by various publishers. Instead of pursuing his dream, Rickie marries Agnes and becomes a schoolmaster at Sawston. Rickie’s life suffers a painful involution: he loses all contact with Cambridge and with his university friends and he starts to notice Agnes’s shortcomings. Their only daughter is born with her father’s deformation and dies. Meanwhile, Stephen Wonham has found out about his real relationship to Rickie and he decides to visit him at Sawston. Agnes, highly concerned about the possibility of a scandal, tries to buy his silence with a sum of money. Stephen is outraged by such a vulgar offer and disappears. Eventually there is a reconciliation between the two half-brothers, but Rickie becomes the victim of an accident, while he tries to rescue Stephen. The novel ends with the information that Rickie’s stories attained retrospective acknowledgement in the literary scene.

3.3.1 Philosophical grounds of the fictional construction of truth

As will be shown in the following analysis, the novel *The Longest Journey* illustrates the parable of disillusionment accompanying the search for higher truth and the realization that truth is a volatile, difficult concept, liable to create disappointment and frustration in those who try to dissect and analyse its essence. At the root of the philosophical structure of the novel lies the subdivision of the concept of truth into “higher” and “lower” truths. The first may be found in the world of ideas, in philosophy and literature; the second may be furtively

encountered in concrete, everyday life. Neither of them can be fully possessed or transmitted to the outside, but it can only be experienced as a personal realization and from a personal perspective.

At its very opening, the novel addresses the concept of truth as a purely philosophical concept. Truth becomes a sub-category for the definition of reality and a value to aspire to. The plot of the novel starts with a discussion about ontology, i.e. on the philosophy of existence. Two young Cambridge students debate the possibility for an object – in their case, a commonplace being like a cow – to exist beyond the sight of the viewer. As John Beer explains, "one of the leading participants in the argument is Stewart Ansell, who stands throughout the novel as an embodiment of one virtue to be found at times in Cambridge – the disinterested pursuit of truth" (Beer, 2007: 61). Their discussion acquires the nature of a dialogue on subjectivity and on the influence and repercussions that subjectivity has on the delineation of truthful narration. Proving the existence of an object means to give it an ontological substantiation, and, indirectly, to assign it a truth-status. Nevertheless, doubting the continuation of existence of an object that is alienated from sight functions as an alarming symptom of the precariousness of certitude; it vigorously reminds us that truth is never in danger-free or obvious conditions. The two protagonists of the scene entrench themselves in their own positions and refute their reciprocal stance by stating that no one of them can manage to impose the supremacy of his thesis. Thus, they emphatically move the focus from a theoretical categorization of an object as existing/non existing, to subjectivism.

> "The cow is there," said Ansell, lighting a match and holding it out over the carpet. No one spoke. He waited till the end of the match fell off. Then he said again, "She is there, the cow, there, now."
> "You have not proved it," said a voice.
> "I have proved it to myself."
> "I have proved to myself that she isn't," said the voice.
> "The cow is *not* there." Ansell frowned and lit another match.
> "She's there for me," he declared. "I don't care whether she's there for you or not. Whether I'm in Cambridge or Iceland or dead, the cow will be there". (1) (emphasis in the text)

The scene of the argument on the existence of the cow, while describing the graciousness of young, intellectual minds attempting to solve an ancient ontological problem, also exposes the absurdity of the position of the students as truth-seekers. Indeed, the closed, sheltered college environment, with its own rules and customs, is probably the least suitable place to judge the complexity and wholesomeness of reality. The argument on the existence of the cow, then, is an emblematic example and confirmation of the impossibility of finding absolute truths. Such realizations of one's impossibility to escape his/her own perceptions are scattered throughout the text, in a subtle way. To a certain extent, the real meaning of each scene lurks behind the scenes themselves, thus conveying a sense of unreality, even though the writing seems to be encompassed fully in the realist literary motifs.

To this apparently innocent intellectual argument between undergraduates, the narrator grafts his extra-diegetic considerations. His/her tone is both distant and vaguely condescending, though s/he does not take any firm position on the matter at issue. The protagonist of the novel does not take a stance either. For Rickie Elliott, the semi-cripple main character, the debate on the validity of a subjective perception proves to be too "difficult"[59]: thus, he is quite uncomfortable with the thought of participating in the debate. He remains in the margin of the dispute and at the margin of narration. While he weighs both strains of argument and finds them equally "attractive", he still does not find the courage to side with any one of them. Pictured as an insecure young man, Elliott falls short of any kind of answer to the philosophical question and with a sense that his feeble reasoning can only lead him to "absurd conclusions" (5). In an environment in which the laws of subjectivity prevail, it becomes difficult to establish with certainty the

[59] The notion of the "difficulty" of truth is a recurrent theme in Forster's narrations. As Jeffrey M. Heath points out, "in *Passage* [to India], Adela Quested 'had always meant to tell the truth and nothing but the truth' but finds doing so 'a difficult task' (2008: 229). Forster, [Heath argues on], knew that 'telling the whole truth' was difficult because the truth is 'alive'; it has a human dimension. It can only be found, as the narrator of HE observes, through the gradual achievement of a sense of proportion by means of 'continuous excursions' into the material *and* the spiritual worlds (Howards End, 195-6)" [emphasis in the text].

position of truth. Ricky Elliott feels uncomfortable not only with the participation in the debate, but also, and above all, with the determination whether the existence of an object continues to be given after the viewer, i.e., the perspective holder, has ceased to be present. To a certain extent, it is possible to infer that Elliott finds it difficult to accept subjectivity as a dominant category for the interpretation of reality. Such uneasiness is probably the reason why he cannot fit into his epoch and his environment, why he falls prey to others' perspectivizations and why he ultimately fails to succeed in his life and to survive, since he has not been able to figure out how a totalizing subjectivism can be morally acceptable and a valid *viaticum* to truth.

Along with philosophy, literature is a privileged medium of truthfulness. One of Forster's crucial systematic thoughts about truth is the pondering whether truth is found or whether it is the fruit of construction. Notably, he argues that if a truth is constructed, it automatically ceases to be a truth, therefore he maintains that truth must always be found[60]. Truth in material life is constructed and therefore "untrue". The real truth resides in the world of ideas, in the "theory of life" and thus it can primarily found in literature and especially in poetry, but it cannot be translated into the language of everyday life. The latter is only a scenery, an inevitable series of chores, anxiety and humiliations, without any deeper significance. In this sense, only things like "fine poetry" are true, and love can even be "truer" (127), but little else remains. Nonetheless, real marital love does not apply to the classification, since a marriage can happen between two very distant characters, and because common women are often too mundane and shallow to be signposts of truthfulness. Such is, at least, Stewart Ansell's position, Ricky's fellow student and best friend, who distrusts women[61] and thinks their position is antipodal to that of Cambridge students and future superior men. Women are considered manipulative, but their greatest fault is their capacity to

[60] In this strain of argument, Forster is opposed to both Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, who were both convinced that truth, not only in fiction, but also in philosophy and history, was the result of fabrication and construction.

[61] Cf. the same distrust of women that characterizes the figure of Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room*.

divert men's intellect from the realm of philosophy and ideas – and consequently, from the realm of higher truth – and to drag them down to the prosaic world of domesticity. According to Ansell, women consider family life as the ultimate and the sole goal of existence and thus, as the reign of truth and as the "truthful" way to spend life: "Damn *these* women, then," said Ansell, bouncing round in the chair. "Damn these particular women" who "looked and spoke so ladylike" (79). According to Ansell, when women behave like ladies, with good manners and affectations, they automatically produce lies: in this sense, women are highly mischievous and untrustworthy creatures. Miss Agnes Pembroke represents a perfect embodiment of such manipulative attitude. Her perspective on life and reality swallows up Ricky's possibilities to form his own vision of reality and to pursue higher truth. Ansell is quite vexed by this circumstance and he laments the fact that "Miss Pembroke told a lie, and made Rickie believe it was the truth." […] "She said 'we see' instead of 'I see'" (79). Indeed, such a stance is not immune to a certain amount of misogyny. It produces a false dichotomy made up of the couplets men/theory and women/practice that is perpetuated in the text. Such dichotomy pervades the outlook on life and it inevitably falsifies it.

> "She said 'we see'," repeated Ansell, "instead of 'I see', and she made him believe that it was the truth. She caught him and makes him believe that he caught her. She came to see me and makes him think that it is his idea. That is what I mean when I say she is a lady" (79).

Truth occupies a central place in the hierarchy of values in human life as it is depicted in the environment of the novel. It is deemed "a great thing in life we ought to aim at" (122), but, at the same time, it is considered a hard good to source. In this sense, truth and the search of truth are a relevant element for the formation of the world inherent to the text. Nonetheless, finding truth proves very problematic. The underlining message of such difficulty is that the pursuing of truth may condemn the pursuer to the loss of any other "great thing" to aspire to. For instance, during a dialogue between Agnes and Rickie about his aunt Emily, truth is paired and compared to kindness. At the same time, it is argued that to have the both of them is impracticable in real life. This may certainly seem like a puzzling assertion, but probably it means that absolute truth hides an unpleasant

side and that pursuing truth to the extremes could be likely to destroy relationships.

Even though Ansell attempts to dissuade Rickie from marrying Miss Pembroke, he fails. From that moment on, their paths take two distinct and opposite directions. Whereas Elliott interrupts his quest for truth, because he has become Agnes Pembroke's husband and a schoolmaster in Sawston, Ansell continues to pursue truth. The more time passes and the more the both of them are removed from Cambridge life and influence, the harder it becomes to continue the quest for truth. It slowly loses its meaning, until it increasingly takes the shape of a chimera, of an illusion that brings nothing but failure. Thus, even though "it was worth while reading books" (177) or growing "old and dusty seeking truth" (177), the awareness that "truth is unattainable" (177), becomes more and more compelling and tangible.

3.4 Howards End (1910): Idealism and Pragmatism as Emanations of Truth

Three years after the publication of *The Longest Journey*, Forster released his perhaps most famous and most analysed novel, *Howards End*[62]. The novel begins in media res, when the two Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen, exchange letters about the latter's visit to Howards End. The Schlegel sisters and their brother Tibby are fond of music, literature, and conversation with their friends; they care for civilized living and the cultivation of high values. On the other side of the characters' constellation, there is the Wilcox family, which is composed of Henry and his children Charles, Paul, and Evie. They are far less idealistic than the Schlegels are; in fact, the Wilcoxes are mainly concerned with the more practical aspects of life, like business. They regard emotions and imagination with contempt and distrust. Helen Schlegel is intrigued by the Wilcox family, and after getting involved in a little sentimental misunderstanding with Paul

[62] The quotations of the novel *Howard's End* are taken from: Forster, E.M. and David Lodge. Howards End. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

Wilcox, she distances herself from him and his family for good. On the contrary, Margaret becomes much more involved. The differences in both families' *Weltanschauung* stimulate her. Later in the narration, after the death of Ruth Wilcox, she marries Henry Wilcox. Both families are appalled by such a decision, but the marriage proves at least stable, if not solid. In the end, Margaret manages to find an equilibrium between the two factions.

According to Lionel Trilling, "*Howards End* is undoubtedly Forster's masterpiece" (1967:113). Later in his argumentation in the essay "Howards End", Trilling asserts "[Forster] represents the truth but he does not show the difficulties the truth must meet" (Trilling, 1967:113). In this respect, the novel may be different from *The Longest Journey*, since there the theme of the "difficulty" of truth was recurrent. Indeed, in *Howards End* the representation of truth is much more formalized than in the previous novel and the references to truth are much more explicit and organized, while the level of mediation through philosophical and literary speculations is much inferior.

The opposition between pragmatism[63] and idealism[64] continues to be present in HE, but it acquires a more formalistic shape. In the novel, the characters are functionalized as symbols of different, contrasting conceptions of truth, as keys for the interpretation and the appraisal of truth. In *The Longest Journey*, truth was represented as a wish the characters wanted to fulfil, as a delicate philosophical

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[63] A working definition of pragmatism in philosophy is reported here: "School of philosophy, dominant in the United States in the first quarter of the 20th century, based on the principle that the usefulness, workability, and practicality of ideas, policies, and proposals are the criteria of their merit. It stresses the priority of action over doctrine, of experience over fixed principles, and it holds that ideas borrow their meanings from their consequences and their truths from their verification. Thus, ideas are essentially instruments and plans of action". (Retrieved from: "Pragmatism". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 26 Jun. 2015 http://www.britannica.com/topic/pragmatism).

[64] Daniel Sommer Robinson gives the following definition of the doctrine of idealism: "In philosophy, any view that stresses the central role of the ideal or the spiritual in the interpretation of experience. It may hold that the world or reality exists essentially as spirit or consciousness, that abstractions and laws are more fundamental in reality than sensory things, or, at least, that whatever exists is known in dimensions that are chiefly mental—through and as ideas" (Retrieved from: "Idealism". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 26 Jun. 2015 http://www.britannica.com/topic/idealism).

dream with no tangibility whatsoever. Therefore, the analysis of the concept of truth had to remain within the scope of a commentary: as a text, *The Longest Journey* did not yield directly information about truth as a modernist narratological tool.

Instead, in the case of *Howards End*, the analysis and interpretation of the concept of truth is much more clearly embedded in the construction of the characters; these serve as indicators of different conceptualizations of truth. For instance, the different positions in the English class system is used as a parameter for the investigation of the meaning of truth for each of the social classes composing the system. In this sense, there are two main representations and symbolizations of truth in the novel, which are materialized in the text by the contrast of the Wilcox and Schlegel family nuclei. The first rough differentiation between the two families is in their logical construction. Both groups gravitate around a cluster of opposed values: whereas the Schlegels are pervaded by idealism, the Wilcoxes are pragmatists, “breezy” (189) businesspersons whose main aim in life is to achieve profits and benefits and to keep up appearances. The relationship with the idealistically minded Schlegel sisters is constructed according to antinomy and thus, the rationality and solidity of the Wilcox family is counteracted by their fragility and contemplativeness. The relationship between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes may seem to lack any forms of meaning or *raison d’être*, but in actual fact, it articulates a dialogic exchange of contending truths. The analysis of the various relational levels between exposes not only the differences between the philosophical stances of the two factions, but it also highlights their opposition in the micro-level of the plot of the narration.

Although the Schlegel sisters are, at the beginning of the novel, two sides of the same representation of transcendentalism, each one’s application of their convictions is different. If both Margaret and Helen are seduced by the Wilcoxes’ ways of constructing the world, ordering values and assess the meaning of life, only one of them finds the right way to reconcile the two clashing systems of beliefs. Whereas Helen is more ingenuous – and also more radical – she makes the mistake of embracing the Wilcoxes’ ways of life for the sake of variety. On the contrary, Margaret, seems to understand them, but also to never lose her critical

stance. To this extent, Margaret takes up the position of the explorer searching for the meaning and the sense of the Wilcoxes' utilitarian *Weltanschauung.* Thus, she succeeds in connecting both ways of constructing, interpreting and/or understanding reality. Sometimes Margaret sides with the Wilcoxes, at other times she distances herself, because she recognizes "the breezy Wilcox manner, though genuine, lacked the clearness of vision that is imperative for truth" (189). Not only is clearness of vision necessary to achieve truth, but also completeness of vision: that is probably what Margaret seeks to discover and partially manages to attain in her quest towards truth. To the extent of completeness of vision giving birth to truth, it is probably suitable to notice Helen's remark after having observed Margaret and Mr. Wilcox conversing with each other: "Helen was nettled. The aim of *their* debates, she implied, was Truth" (138), (emphasis in the text). Finally, the narrator's comments on Margaret's stance best illuminates Margaret's faculty to achieve completeness of vision and, subsequently, a glimpse of truth:

> At every turn of speech one was confronted with reality and the absolute. Perhaps Margaret grew too old for metaphysics, perhaps Henry was weaning her from them, but she felt that there was something a little unbalanced in the mind that so readily shreds the visible. The business man who assumes that this life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side and on that, to hit the truth. 'Yes, I see, dear; it's about halfway between,' aunt Juley had hazarded in earlier days. No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and, though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility (203).

3.4.1 Narratorial exercises in the re-negotiation of states of affairs or ways of re-worldmaking (1) – Helen Schlegel's short romance with Paul Wilcox is re-designed as Error

The episode of the re-negotiation of the short and mysterious romance between Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox stretches for the first five chapters of the novel HE. In the following analysis, I would like to focus on noteworthy scenes in the text, in which there is a challenging of the state of affairs narrated in the text. In the case of HE, states of affairs frequently undergo a process of re-design, both intra- and extra-diegetically. Such modifications in the inherent structure of the events and in their significance show the text recipients they need avoid taking

an absolute stance on the rendition of events, because these are always likely to be re-organized. Sticking to a unique set of interpretation tools derived from a definite set of values is not suitable for the understanding of reality. More importantly, however, the re-design of events brings about a process of deconstruction, which causes the re-negotiation of values and hierarchies informing the fictional worlds and affecting their hegemonic models. The re-modelling of the set of values and of the meaning of the states of affairs offers the possibility to install new ones, which is a central goal of the modernist attempts to renew narrations and the forms of narration. As Vera Nünning points out (2009: 219), "while modernist writers did not differ from the Victorians in their attempt to describe characters and actions, they shifted their concern from the events to the perception of those events, from the characters' agency in the fictional world to their consciousness – with the result that the form of the novel changed drastically".

With a close reading of the text, I would like to explore how a modernist narration manages to treat sudden changes in the states of affairs of the narrated world and to study the narratological and rhetoric strategies implemented in the novels to convey the conception of truth as a narrative device in the novel. Moreover, truth as a narrative motif is treated in the same pages, therefore I would like to illustrate the meaning of the concept of truth as a theme in the text and to show how these two lines of inquiry of the concept of truth are interwoven in the novel. As is well known, the novel opens with an epistolary exchange between the protagonists of the narration, i.e., the Schlegel sisters. After writing two letters to her sister Margaret about the beauty and the perfection of the Wilcox's estate Howards End, Helen Schlegel sends a third, very short letter, which reads as following: "Dearest dearest Meg, I do not know what you will say: Paul and I are in love – the younger son who only came here Wednesday" (4). Such brief message prompts the other figures of the novel belonging to the Schlegel clan, i.e. Margaret and Mrs Munt, to believe Helen and Paul will soon get engaged to be married. Such a beginning to the novel can be defined as an *in media res* opening. This means a "true" beginning in the traditional sense is lacking.

Because of this lack of an ordered, chronological introduction of events, it becomes very difficult to make sense of the narrated experiences. Hence, the degree of suspension of disbelief remains very low. In addition to that, the sudden coming of Helen's letters generates a chain of hideous consequences, which take the form, in Margaret's words, of "telegrams and anger" (26). The reaction of the two figures at Schlegel's house is of astonishment and caution. Neither of them is able to believe that such a happening is really possible, since their acquaintance with the Wilcoxes is quite limited. While the two women ponder the authenticity of the Helen's written assertion and attempt to figure out the next steps to take, the notion of "German-ness"[65] of the Schlegel family is introduced. This happens almost in the form of a psychological repression of unpleasant thoughts through the device of digression, when Margaret tells

> 'We met the Wilcoxes on an awful expedition we made from Heidelberg to Speyer. Helen and I got it into our heads that there was a grand old cathedral at Speyer – the Archbishop of Speyer was one of the seven electors – you know, "Speyer, Mainz and Köln". Those three sees once commanded the Rhine Valley and got it the name of Priest Street' (5).

However, Mrs Munt soon takes the focus of the discussion back to Helen's declarations in her letter by affirming to "feel quite uneasy about that business, Margaret" (5). The German heritage plays a pivotal role in the understanding and in the definition of the Schlegels' stance and of their conception of truth in the novel. Indeed, their essence is imbued with the idealist philosophy and such association almost instantly triggers a connection with the principles of transcendentalism and with Kant and Hegel's thought in general. Such theories

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[65] Peter Edgerly Firchow sees some auto-biographical reasons why Forster decided to endow the protagonists of *Howards End* with a German ancestry: "Undoubtedly part of the reason for these German elements in *Howards End* is to be found in Forster's biography. For about a year – from 1905 to 1906 – Forster lived in Nassenheide in Germany – [today, in Poland], where he acted as tutor to the children of Elizabeth von Armin, (at that time well-known in England as the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, 1898). Forster admitted this biographical connection himself, when, in an essay written over half a century later, he stated that in Howards End he had 'brought in the Oder Berge and the other Pomeranian recollections'. But what he did not say was that he had brought in not only his strong, positive feelings for the German landscape – important as those were – but other, even more significant experiences as well. […] What Forster did with his experience of Italy and India in other works of fiction was not to render it literally but to shape it to the purposes of his art. […] German and English cultures have mingled and married, or, to borroe Forster's famous words, they have connected", (1986: 62).

influence strongly and visibly Margaret and Helen's cultural identity and their approach to truth. In her *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans, 1890-1950*, Petra Rau traces the idealist imprinting of the Schlegel sisters back to the education their father gave them, but also to his influence as a person on his daughters, and thus, to their personal relationship:

> The way in which Forster characterizes the Schlegel family and their German heritage traces the history of Anglo-German relations from the more amicable mid-nineteenth century to the tense antebellum years. Father Schlegel stands for the Pre-Bismarckian Germany associated with music, philosophy and philology; the Germany much loved by Carlyle, Thackeray and George Eliot. Schlegel, however, is also a member of a fighting race, a Veteran of the German wars of unifications and of the Franco-Prussian war. It is a clever response to the British critique of German expansionism that Forster chooses a character who is both an academic and a soldier, both German and anglophile, in order to articulate a Hobsonesque critique of the imperialist misuse of the epistemological quest. (2009: 47)

The text provides an explicit reference of the connection between the Schlegels' father's *Weltanschauung* and the possibility of having a glimpse of truth through it. As Heiko Zimmermann points out (2010: 152-153):

> After 1870/71, the spirit of materialism, utilitarianism and imperialism had arrived in Germany and resulted in the megalomaniac belief that God had appointed Germany to power. Another effect was a deterioration of the special German intellect and imagination. The turning away of Helen and Margaret's father, Ernst Schlegel, from the new Germany produces a connection of the whole family with the idealistic Germany. This is also supported by their qualities as described in the novel. The Schlegels are, in contrast to the new Germany, unpractical and they represent truth in argument, whereas the Wilcoxes represent quickness. The Schlegels are […] are idealistic, dreamy, and their imperialism is the "imperialism of the air", (cf. Beer 1962: 102-103); thus, they represent, in the contrast between public and private, the inner life in the novel.

Such a stance is reported in the text by a series of considerations made by the narrator, who tells the readers that

> If one classed him at all, it would be as the countryman of Kant and Hegel, as the idealist, inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air. Not that his life had been inactive. He had fought like blazes against Denmark, Austria, France. But he had fought without visualizing the results of victory. A hint of the truth broke on him after

> Sedan, when he saw the dyed moustaches of Napoleon going gray [sic]; another when he entered Paris, and saw the smashed windows of the Tuileries. Peace came – it was all very immense, one had turned into an Empire – but he knew that some quality had vanished for which not all Alsace-Lorraine could compensate him (27).

It is in this very spirit, that the minds of both Schlegel sisters are formed. Because of their upbringing, Margaret and Helen are keen to mysticism and intellectualism. This evident fact leads Mrs Munt to ask – legitimately – for the suitability of a Schlegel-Wilcox match. In particular, she poses the questions: "What do you think of the Wilcoxes? Are they our sort? Are they likely people? […] Do they care about Literature and Art?" (capitalized letters in the text). With this series of interrogatives, Mrs. Munt stresses how much the Schlegels' identity is shaped by higher values and how this can have direct effects on their conception of truth.

In point of fact, the level of uncertainty about the firmness of Helen's feelings is different for both characters. If Aunt Munt is very sceptical about the possibility that Helen and Paul might really become a couple, Margaret suspends her judgement by stating that she has "it in Helen's writing that she and a man are in love" (8).

After the discussion about the convenience of such a relation, Mrs Munt convinces Margaret that she must travel to Howards End and possibly put an end to the engagement. Margaret agrees and she accompanies her aunt to the station. Here the narration speeds up relevantly and Margaret has scarcely the time to remark her association of a station with the infinity - thus highlighting again the idealist mark of her thinking mode - that her aunt is already gone on a train bound to Howards End. Margaret's impressions at the station of King's Cross are mediated by the narrator, who almost seems to acknowledge them as his/her own. To the import of the narratorial voice in *Howards End*, Jo M. Turk remarks that

> In *Howards End*, the narrator's attitude and stance are essentially the same as in *A Room with a View*, 1905, but his viewpoint is more often through the central character's consciousness than over the shoulder. Like the narrator of RW, he points out the book's "message" and underlines the symbolism. [S/he] is obviously present, pervading HE like "a careful

> hostess who is anxious to introduce, to explain, to warn her guests of a step here, a draught there," as Virginia Woolf says […].
>
> In this novel, he does not always stand aside, interested but aloof, proffering the entire action to the reader. Instead, he sometimes moves in so closely to certain scenes that his voice seems to come from the scene itself instead of from an ironic position above or beside it. (1973: 430-431)

Almost simultaneously, a telegram from Helen arrives, containing the following wording: "All over. Wish I had never written. Tell no one. Helen" (11). Helen's telegram introduces two important questions from the narratological point of view, i.e., a) how does such a sudden change in the state of affairs affect the configuration of the particular reality presented in the text? and b) How will reality be reconfigured? The answer to these questions can be found in the process of re-negotiation of world systems by means of the re-designing of truth. Indeed, from this moment on, the narrative element of the love and possible engagement between Helen and Paul are re-negotiated as an "error" in the narration. Before the real re-negotiation is enacted in the text, though, there is the expounding a scene of crisis and displacement of the narrative elements from the way they had been configured in the text so far. Such a crisis takes the shape of an argument being brought about by a misunderstanding between Mrs Munt and Charles Wilcox. At first, their dialogue is polite, but then it becomes harsher and harsher:

> The wind was in their faces down the station road, blowing the dust into Mrs Munt's eyes. But as soon as they turned into the Great North Road she opened fire. "You can well imagine", she said, "that the news was a great shock to us."
> "What news?"
> "Mr Wilcox," she said frankly, "Margaret has told me everything – everything. I have seen Helen's letter". […]
> "I'm sorry to be so dense, […] but I still haven't quite understood".
> "Helen, Mr. Wilcox – my niece and you". […]
> "Miss Schlegel and myself?" he asked, compressing his lips.
> "I trust there has been no misunderstanding," quavered Mrs. Munt. "Her letter certainly read that way".
> "What way?"
> "That you and she –" She paused, then dropped her eyelids.
> "I think I catch your meaning," he said stickily. *"What an extraordinary mistake!"* (17) (my emphasis).

Eventually the misinterpretation finds an end and Charles Wilcox, though quite impolitely, is the first to claim there must have been a mistake. Nevertheless, after the *qui pro quo* has been cleared, the narrator informs the readers that the quarrel has not reached a conclusion yet, because both characters engage in an argument about which family is "better", thus underlining the clash between two different conceptual and philosophical systems.

An example of what is meant by the different negotiation of truthful states of affairs is the brief skirmish between Paul and Charles Wilcox, in which the subtext indicates clearly that, for the Wilcoxes' philosophical system, there is no long path to truth and truth is not at all unattainable, but a simple account of states of affairs. Indeed, during the Wilcox brothers' confrontation, Charles, who is in a much more powerful position than Paul, asks him to tell the "truth": "Paul, is there any truth in this? […] Yes or no, man; plain question, plain answer" (20). Undoubtedly, the narration shows clearly that Charles Wilcox's conception of the "truth" is a clear and basic one, stripped of every philosophical or metaphysical concern. In this sense, the narration shows all the distance between the Schlegels' conception and the Wilcoxes' one. In actual fact, the question has a great rhetorical import, because it shows how complex the answer to a "plain question" might be and how ambiguous the narration can become. Indeed, Paul refrains from giving a clear answer to the "plain question". Up to this point of the narration, it is not possible to state if there was truth in Helen's words or not. Indeed, from the point of view of the text recipients, it is not possible to make any statements or any assessments, because the events are outside of the narrated space and hence inaccessible. In the following chapters, readers get to know from Helen's words, that her first letter had a reason for having been written, because a brief "passion" between Helen and Paul had really taken place. Therefore, for once it is possible to confirm that truth is sometimes a plain thing with well-defined scope and contours. Back at Wickham Place, Helen discloses some details about her affair with Paul Wilcox. Forster uses the device of the analepsis in order to clarify the events occurred before the delivery of Helen's third letter. The use of a flashback immediately triggers in the text recipients the idea that the re-telling of an event

entails a certain amount of re-design and re-organization of the elements constituting such event. Therefore, it is highly probable that the degree of reliability of the narration will decrease. While Helen makes her statement, the narrator remains on the discourse level, interrupting the story and re-evaluating the narration by claiming that "the truth was she had fallen in love not with an individual, but with a family" (22). Such assertion made by the narrator is remarkable, because it serves, to a certain extent, to limit the degree of veracity contained in Helen's narration. In addition to that, it stresses the clash between the narrative binary representations of the values both character constellations present. Although being slightly too polarized, such binary configuration marks not only the distance between the two "ideological" blocks, but it also serves as starting point for the narrative representation of the attraction for one's opposite pole. As the narrating agent notes,

> She had *liked* giving in to Mr Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had liked being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. One by one, the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing them, she had rejoiced (22).

By "giving in" to the Wilcoxes' model of thought and behaviour, the character of Helen is shown in the act of re-negotiating her own set of values and re-designing her hierarchy of principles. The pliability of her stance shows that the set of truth-values is always re-negotiable. By underlining Helen's partial adhesion to the Wilcoxes' set of values, the narrating voice undermines Helen's credibility as a truth-teller.

Although there is a partial disclosure of the events occurred before the beginning of the narration, the narrator tends to "relativize" the renderings of the characters involved in the story-level. Thus, s/he instils a certain degree of insecurity and doubt in the veracity and reliability of the rendering itself: "That was 'how it happened', or, rather, how Helen described it to her sister, using words even more unsympathetic than my own" (23). At this point, text recipients must suspend their judgement, because neither the intra- nor the extra-diegetic level

produces enough elements for the assessment of the degree of truthfulness. Finally, the definitive sanction of the love affair between Helen and Paul as an error comes the morning after the encounter between the two young people happened. At that point, the re-negotiation of the states of affairs acquires concrete traits and their "passion" is re-designed intra-diegetically as an inexplicable mistake:

> Then [Paul] said: "I must beg your pardon over this, Miss Schlegel; I can't think what came over me last night." And I said: "Nor what over me; never mind". And then we parted – at least, until I remembered that I had written straight off to tell you the night before, and that frightened him again. […] It was the most terrible morning. Paul disliked me more and more, and Evie talked cricket averages till I nearly screamed" (25).

3.4.2 Narratorial exercises in the re-negotiation of states of affairs or ways of re-worldmaking (2) – The figure of Mrs Ruth Wilcox is re-designed as Untrue Wife

A relevant topic for the analysis of the construction of truth in the episode at issue is the introduction of a further figure belonging to the Wilcox clan, who seems to be endowed with the capacity of seeing what is true. As Helen Schlegel reports, "Mrs Wilcox knew" (25). Helen's rendering of her stay at Howards End is once again called into question after she asserts that Mrs Wilcox had known "'Everything, though we neither of us told her a word, and had known all along" (26). Helen endows Mrs Wilcox with a power of acquiring higher knowledge, which is, up to a point, very similar to that appointed to Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*[66] by Virginia Woolf. To find a parallelism between both characters is not difficult: 1) Both are bestowed the gift of understanding, of knowing more about the heart of those near them and also without having been explicitly told. 2) They are the matrons of their houses. 3) They die suddenly, though the rendition of both deaths is quite different from the narratological point of view. Whereas Mrs Ramsay remains the symbol of the ideal of truth throughout the text, Mrs Wilcox loses such status – which was already much more precarious

[66] Compare paragraph 3.5.1. of the present work.

than Mrs Ramsay's – and she becomes the emblem of deranged untruthfulness. Indeed, after her death, she ceases to be represented as the noble, loving matron of her house and her family and she becomes a source of dissonance in the harmony of the truth-narration perpetrated in the Wilcox model. The reason why this shift in the representation happens is an apparently irrational and unjustified decision she took secretly before she died, i.e., leaving Howards End estate to Margaret Schlegel. Because of the nature of the Wilcoxes' system of beliefs, based on pragmatist and utilitarian principles, Charles and the others cannot accept their mother's decision. However, neglecting the last will of their mother would place them in the position of dishonest traitors. In order to overcome this possibility, the Wilcoxes' (un-)consciously rebuild the image of their mother and wife. In other words, they challenge Ruth Wilcox's decision by changing the nature of Mrs Wilcox's representation and by depriving her of her iconic status. From this moment on, the portrait of the "true wife" is shattered and destroyed. Mrs Wilcox stops being the honest and pure lady of the house, she loses her status of truth-bearer and she becomes a simple woman – the word *woman* acquires almost a derogatory sense – who acted under the influence of "illness" and who had been "under the spell of a sudden friendship" (102). They even suspend their sorrow for the loss of their mother, in order to re-design her narrative image:

> The incident made a most painful impression on them. Grief mounted into the brain and worked there disquietingly. Yesterday they had lamented: 'She was a dear mother, a true wife; in our absence she neglected her health and died'. Today they thought: 'She was not as true, as dear, as we supposed'. The desire for a more inward light had found expression at last, the unseen had impacted on the seen, and all they could say was 'Treachery'. Mrs Wilcox had been treacherous to the family, to the laws of property, to her own written word. How did she expect Howards End to be conveyed to Miss Schlegel? […] Treacherous! Treacherous and absurd! […] That note, scribbled in pencil, sent through the matron, was unbusinesslike as well as cruel, and decreased at once the value of the woman who had written it (102-103).

Mrs Wilcox's deed proved to be contrary to her past behaviour and demeanour, but, above all, it infringed on the rules of the Wilcox' system of beliefs. The rest of the Wilcox clan manages to re-design the state of affairs, until they obtain a

completely different image of the world, and, consequently, create a new narrative.

3.4.3 Narratorial exercises in the re-negotiation of states of affairs or ways of re-worldmaking (3) – Leonard Bast's death is re-designed as Tragic Incident

As I hope to have shown, in *Howards End* the complexity of the conception of truth is expounded in the micro-level of the story-world. In the following analysis, I will attempt to demonstrate this point by illustrating the re-negotiation of Leonard Bast's death into a tragic accident.

The story of Leonard Bast is inextricably intertwined with the familiar story of both the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels. The episode at issue in this paragraph is the result of a long concatenation of prior events, which are worth being summarized briefly. Since Margaret and Helen are convinced that the young Leonard must be elevated to a superior social class, they convince him to leave his post as clerk in an insurance company and to work in a bank. Unfortunately, he goes to a bank that reduced its staff within a month and he subsequently loses his job. Consequently, he is left penniless and with a base wife he saw himself compelled to marry three years before. While Margaret, who in the meantime has become the second Mrs Wilcox, attempts to refuse to help Bast, Helen is convinced they are entirely to blame for Bast's economic disaster and she tries to convey such feeling to her sister. Margaret, then, decides to ask her husband Henry to find an occupation for Leonard, but she feels humiliated for having used her position as a wife to obtain a favour. Meanwhile, Helen and Leonard go back to the hotel Margaret has booked for them and they have a long conversation on materialism, spiritualism and death. The following morning, they receive a note from Margaret informing them Henry has no vacancy for Leonard. After that, the life paths of the three figures separate. Later in the narration, Leonard appears again, plagued by guilt and remorse, which produces a grave distortion of Leonard's perception of the state of affairs. As the narrator remarks: "Remorse is not among the eternal verities. The Greeks were right to dethrone her. Her action is too capricious, as though the Erinyes selected for punishment only certain men and certain sins.

And of all means to regeneration Remorse is surely the most wasteful" (333). His sense of guilt for having corrupted Helen's life plagues him, until he, in a state of semi-hallucination, reaches out to Howards End to tell Margaret he has "done wrong" (342). Opposite the mansion, however, Leonard finds only his death because Charles Wilcox stabs him. From this moment of the narration, the end of the novel begins. The closure comes very slowly and it is marked by a bifurcation of the modalities to bring the truth about Leonard Bast's death. Indeed, the narration of this event is so highly ambiguous that the re-negotiation as tragedy almost takes on a schizophrenic slant and, in the immediate aftermath of the stabbing, Leonard's murder is re-designed as a heart failure. The very witnesses of the assassination, who are heard "scream" while the deed was done, (343) are the first ones to declare that the death was "from natural causes" (348). In such a highly ambiguous scene, the voice of the narrator intrudes to ask:

> In this jangle of causes and effects what had become of their true selves? Here Leonard lay dead in the garden, from natural causes; yet life was a deep, deep river, death a blue sky, life was a house, death a wisp of hay, a flower, a tower, life and death were anything and everything, except this ordered insanity (348).

The narrator's role in the account of the Leonard's death becomes increasingly important: the re-design of the event occurs through his words, which show Helen moving

> through the sunlit garden, gathering narcissi, crimson-eyed and white. There was nothing else to be done; the time for telegrams and anger were over, and it seemed wisest that the hands of Leonard should be folded on his breast and be filled with flowers. Here was the father; leave it at that. *Let squalor be turned into tragedy*, whose eyes are the stars, and whose hands hold the sunset and the dawn (349), (my emphasis).

Eventually, however, the hallucinatory state into which the whole narration seems to have fallen is redeemed by the action of justice, which is able to find the culprit, i.e., Charles Wilcox, and to restore truth: "Charles was committed for trial. It was against all reason that he should be punished, but the law, being made in his image, sentenced him to three years' imprisonment" (353). Thus, it can be

possible to affirm that, although the re-designing of events in the episode of Leonard Bast's murder is in fact only partial, it still has remarkable effects on the perception of the states of affairs and on the ways in which it is possible to modify the apprehension of events and the definition of truthful narration.

Re-designing an event through the re-negotiation of truthful states of affairs does not serve the purpose of manipulating and thus suiting the convenience of the actants, but it aims at establishing a narrative equilibrium that is an essential condition for achieving the closure of a story-world. Without the achievement of a balance between two versions of reality at odds with one another, it is impossible to find a coherent end to the narration.

CHAPTER 3: PART II

3.5 Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse: Coming to terms with one's past and the narrative representation of truth as an act of artistic supremacy

The novel *To the Lighthouse*[67], published in 1927, provides a great starting point for the exploration of truth as a philosophical concept in a novel, since nearly every narrative element can be considered as the textual formalization of a multiple conception of truth. To begin with, for the most of the time, the narrative display of contrasting points of view shapes the conceptual multiplicity in the novel and it thus challenges the notion of "objectivity" in relation to truth. As Thomas C. Caramagno points out, "*To the Lighthouse* invites readers to relinquish the wish for an objective narrative truth – by giving us not simply two irreconcilable views but seventeen subjective points of view, each provisional", (1992: 244). A further remark on the overarching structure of the text is the evident effort to outline a narrative tension toward a revelation of truth – or, at least, a hopeful struggle towards such revelation. Such effort determines an epistemological process. At the same time, the text aims at warning, through its elegiac tone, that such process of attainment of truth will always be troublesome. The attained knowledge will always have a partial, unsatisfying, almost maimed quality. A formalist, abstract and highly lyrical language and modality of expression characterizes the process of attainment of knowledge throughout the text. Not only does *To The Lighthouse* thematise the compelling struggle to find truth, but it also treats markedly the bitter, resigned disappointment stemming from the realization that a unified truth does not and cannot exist in a far too complex, modern reality. The structure of the novel is arranged into three sections: each of them plays a relevant role for the analysis of the truth discourse.

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[67] The quotations of this novel are taken from: Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Penguin Books, 2012.

As a matter of fact, the three-section scheme is a common feature of the Bloomsburian novels and it is found in Forster's *The Longest Journey* as well, where its significance is, however, less central than in *To The Lighthouse*. In accordance with the semantic coherence and consistency of the symbolism of the work, the novel recipient is prompted to recognize the three sections of the work as the narrative rendition of a ternary rhythm, corresponding to the alternating signalling phases of a lighthouse. The three parts imitate – in a meta-iconic reference – the movements of the light of the lantern on top of the lighthouse; thus, there is a phase of light, a phase of eclipse and darkness and eventually the return of a concluding and intense phase of light. This last ray of light works like a final flash impressing the mental retina of the text recipient. Jane Goldman speaks of the novel's "triadic shape and the movement from light, to darkness, to light again", (1996: 178)[68]. In this sense, it is possible to consider the first and the third sections as the light phases, and the second section, "Time Passes"[69], as the eclipse phase of the lantern of the lighthouse. However, the linearity of the symbolic progression should not be confused with the episodic nature of the narrative progression, in which the period of darkness represents a huge semantic gap. To a certain extent, then, it might be possible to talk of "movements", rather than simple sections.

On the story level, the first section, called "The Window", opens just before the start of World War I. Like the third section, its chronological duration is relatively brief, as it does not exceed one day. The protagonists, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, have taken their eight children to their summer home on the Scottish Isle of Skye. Across the bay from their house stands a tall lighthouse, which six-year-old James Ramsay wants desperately to visit. Mrs. Ramsay reassures him that they will go the next day if the weather permits, but James's father insists, with a patronizing tone, on the impossibility of the actual realization of the trip to the

[68] Same reference as for the square brackets.
[69] Banfield (2003: 471-516)

lighthouse, since the weather conditions are too unfavourable: “No going to the Lighthouse, James!” (19). Mr. Ramsay’s attitude causes a great resentment in the child, who finds his father’s impassive consideration of the state of affairs callous and hateful. The first section displays all the distinguishing traits of the portrayed characters[70]: it introduces the members of the Ramsay family and it roughly delineates their main features, it addresses the rural setting[71] of the story and it shows all the relational structures among the characters. However, as hinted before, light is undoubtedly the implicit protagonist of the first section. As Jack F. Stewart observes, “in ‘The Window’ light is the positive force of visionary consciousness", (1977: 377). Light permits to visualize the external surface of everything and this is reflected in the presentation of the characters’ constellation and the island. During the second section, “Time passes”, which stretches for an actual period of ten years, war breaks out across Europe. The passage is concocted as a very long and dark narrative hiatus, in which Mrs. Ramsay suddenly dies one night. Two of her children, Andrew and Prue, undergo the same destiny in different circumstances. Once again, the summerhouse begins to fall into oblivion and to decline. The forces of nature seem to invade and to destroy the mansion irreparably[72]. The house remains in such a state of deterioration until the artist Lily Briscoe returns, a friend of the family, who had started Mrs. Ramsay’s portrait ten years before. The interchange between space and time gives an abstract value to the passage and it gives room for musing on its significance as a tying knot between the two visible, light-flooded sections of the novel. David Dowling managed to expound this point in the following passage:

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[70] Some commentators claim the distinguished Edwardian characterization of the first part of the novel. According to their analysis, the Edwardian character gradually leaves space to a narratological progression towards a pronounced modernist style.

[71] The autobiographical references in the novel are well known. Xxx reports that, at the time of publication, there was a certain criticism of the characterization of the Scottish island of Skye, which would be far too reminiscent of the Cornwall, the actual holiday destination of the Stephen’s family during Virginia’s childhood.

[72] Probably the destroying force of nature in this section might also be interpretable as a metaphor for the devastation and annihilation of all human and civil things brought about by the war. At the same time, it could be a metaphor for the wish to return to a pre-linguistic world as an attempt to attain primeval truth.

> On a larger level, ‘Time passes’ has spatial significance in that it at once divides and connects the other two sections of the novel, functioning like Lily’s final stroke or like Lily herself, who stands on the cliff between the window and the lighthouse. Those other two titles are spatial locations, but Time Passes is a teasing use of our hopeful cliché, which spatializes what is beyond space. With reference to the final moments of the novel, the section is that bit of art, which extrinsically helps the reader to connect past and present, Mrs and Mr. Ramsay, in an aesthetic way similar to that in which Lily intrinsically achieves her vision in her head and on her canvas. And it gives the secret union in itself, because it conveys the two truths: Mr. Ramsay’s overwhelming sense of aloneness with the sudden, senseless deaths of the parentheses; and Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of the unity of the moment in the resonance between what goes on at the Ramsays’ holiday home and what affects their lives elsewhere. (1984: 158-159)

“Time Passes”, far from simply being an annoying interruption of the narration of the first section of “The Window”, can be interpreted as a crucial moment of reflection in the novel, in which truth as a conception starts to take form as an entity beyond the physicality of everyday things and everyday reality. Truth takes its form in a superior reign of the ideas, far away from directing/imposing light beams, which cause only confusion during a creative, thinking process. As a distinctly un-chronological time goes by, the coming of darkness and its persistence seem to provide the fecund soil on which the seeds of truth can thrive and yield their fruit, but they also create a space of indetermination and uncertainty, where doubt can develop just as well. In this section a black night falls, obscurity covers everything up, all the lights in the summerhouse are gradually put out, all the sounds are gently hushed. On the story level, this section should have marked the moment before the actualization of reality, when it could have become clear who had pronounced the “truth” about the trip to the lighthouse. In fact, this section marks the destruction of the illusion of getting to know, of discovering truth, on finding rest and satisfaction towards suspended matters. Even though everything was still possible, the range of possibilities should have begun to shrink until the arrival of the new day and it should have brought clarity and definiteness. It is the moment in which Mr. Bankes, Andrew, James, Lily, the Ramsay couple and all the other “must wait for the future to

show", (137). Instead, the story line undergoes a break and the waiting proves to be very long: suddenly "night […] succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen, they darken", (139). The unceasing succession of these black nights loses its order, they are scrambled and scattered by a "divine goodness", so that "it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever […] read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth", (140). Mysteriously, Mrs. Ramsay dies in the waiting and thus, she cannot ever be able to find out if she were the depositary of the only truthful sensibility.

Finally, in the third section, called "The Lighthouse", all the unsolved conflicts in the multiple sub-plots illustrated in the first two narrative segments find their unravelment and conclusion. One of the most important resolutions is Mr. Ramsay's decision to carry out the journey to the lighthouse together with his children. The Ramsays set off, while Lily Briscoe is left behind to complete her portrait. Both cathartic experiences end at the same time and constitute the highly climactic end of the novel, whose narrative structure is marked by a chiasmic intersection of both scenes.

As in almost every other literary work by Virginia Woolf, in TTL quite everything seems to be drenched in dense symbolism. The sea, the island and the vegetation, the summerhouse and the lighthouse, the characters and their personality: all the elements constituting the novel are functionalizations of the concept of truth. All the constituents of the physical world are described and conceived of as if they were pervaded by a multi-semantic vital force, in virtue of which "nothing [is] simply one thing", (202). Each of the elements carries a rich endowment of representative attributions, which have been most disparately debated. Innumerable studies of the novel have repeatedly highlighted that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay represent two polarizing and polarized stances in the character constellation of *To The Lighthouse*. They constitute two spheres of influences according to which all the other figures orientate their conceptions of reality and truth. The close analysis of the characters' constellation and their characteristics

triggers various inferences about the construction of truth. Indeed, since the Ramsays are a couple, it should seem convenient to describe their narrative relation as a dichotomy. Nevertheless, supposing that *To The Lighthouse* is based on a simple binary opposition would be giving a far too rigid interpretation of the novel. In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay represent a dualism only at first sight. In my argumentation, the value of both characters goes beyond their dualist nature in the plot and it reaches a high symbolic degree as regards as the semanticization of the concept of truth. Rather, the multiple personification of the concept of truth may be the narrative concretization of the concept expounded in the essay *On Not Knowing Greek*, in which Woolf talked of truth as "various" and as an object "com[ing] to us in different disguises" (2015 [1925]:32). Looking more closely at the narration, it appears evident that the polarizing attributes of each character are attenuated and the controversy between the two characters is carried on with blunt weapons. Indeed, both characters are plagued by doubt. Throughout the narration of the first section, the Ramsay couple counterbalances each other's truth-stance. The two major characters alternately re-shape future states of affairs according to their truth-making rules and their own subjective stance. Through the game of counterparts played by both characters, then, the author can point out that not only is it impossible to have one unifying and unified truth, but that the very assumption of an absolute truth cannot have any concrete foundation. Indeed, the systems they represent are not closed and impenetrable to each other, but their relationship is dialectical and disclosive. To this extent, the major concern of the novel is to present two different conceptions of truth represented by two different characters. This kind of elaboration of the main characters is carried out not for the sake of highlighting a contentious situation, but to create the conditions for describing the dissolving of a tension due to competing narration, by means of the establishment of a subjective/artistic stance.

Woolf concedes to literary art a high degree of authority in matters of truth. In this sense, the relationship between the two spouses is of merely symbolic diametrical opposition. Throughout the first two sections, the relation between Mr.

and Mrs. Ramsay is of complementarity, so that, up to a point, it could become quite difficult to keep the spheres of polarization of both characters cleanly separated. In the end, the interchange between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay highlights that each one of them omits/neglects a decisive element, so that the both of their conceptualizations require an addition, a specification or a clarification. Obviously, the characterization of the protagonists is not merely superimposed by the choices of the author, but it is the result of the other figures' perspectives. The opposition between the two stances on truth prompts the other characters' thoughts and perceptions of truth. In many cases, it is Lily's diffidence or James's – perhaps Oedipal – hatred towards his father who will bring about the antagonism between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. To this extent, their position becomes that of truth-makers in the text. Such statement is substantiated by Marian David's truth-making principle, which states, "that for every truth there is something that makes it true", (2009:137). The reflection on truth occurs through a process of research, which finds its actualization in the reflection of everyday life and everyday thoughts and emotions. Thus, the truth to be found acquires a material quality: as will be shown in the following paragraphs, both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are engaged in their personal research for the *truth of things*. Such research is both frustrating and intensely captivating at the same time, and it forces every figure, both minor and major, to participate in the study and investigation of the concept of truth. Eventually, though, the artist Lily Briscoe will be the one to carry out the task of getting at the truth of things by completing her artistic work and thus providing all the others with a superimposed final, truth-yielding representation of their life.

Leaving aside for the moment the underlying solidarity between the two major characters, it would be fruitful for my argumentation to expound the characteristic of the two narrations of truth the corollary characters attribute to Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. This kind of analysis ultimately posits that claiming the narration of truth can be neutral is impracticable.

3.5.1 Mrs. Ramsay or the Eternal and Connected Truth

The characters of Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay have a significance as both truth-bearing and as truth-making categories. Each one of them epitomizes a conception of truth of opposing import and content, which they narratively embody in the text. From this angle of observation, both characters' conceptions and modes of achieving truth become archetypical, i.e. each representing a typified, symbolical conceptualization of truth. As far as Mrs. Ramsay is concerned, Woolf functionalizes her character in order to disseminate the text with implicit references to the concept of truth by delineating a narration of truth as it developed within the frame of reference of matriarchal tradition[73]. Therefore, the character of Mrs. Ramsay becomes the personification of truth as possibilism and inclusiveness. The narration illustrates a rotational scheme by which the character of Mrs. Ramsay debunks and overthrows apparently unchangeable states of affairs. Thus, each time Mr. Ramsay shatters James's hopes to sail to the lighthouse, adducing some rational arguments, like the probability of foul weather and the subsequent impossibility to take to sea, Mrs. Ramsay re-negotiates the state of affairs by insinuating doubt in her husband's version of truth. A continual transaction takes place: "Perhaps you will wake up and find the sun shining and the birds singing", (19); "Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow", (19). Remarkably, Mrs. Ramsay's actualization of truth is atemporal and, being also prone to consider innumerable variants of reality, it can encompass infinite possibilities that will eventually generate the desired outcome: "And even if it isn't fine tomorrow, it will be another day", (31). However, nothing is what it seems at first sight, because, although Mrs. Ramsay has the capacity to re-negotiate the conditions to validate a new or different standpoint, she also fears she is not able to tell the truth or else she is reluctant to confront with her husband's versions

[73] The somewhat maladroit quality of the gender depiction of the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay is, although typical of *To The Lighthouse*, a unique case in Woolf's production. While the assumptions that logic and rigorousness are exclusively male domains and that mildness and gentility are typically female attributes, may sound disturbing and biased today, they must certainly be interpreted here as strictly functional to the characterization of the two conceptions of truth, which are – and possibly need be – in their nature, just as stiff as their figural actualizations.

openly and directly. Such state of mind proves sometimes painful: “further, [she] could not bear not being entirely sure […], of the truth of what she said,” (45). In point of fact, her power to re-organize facts is limited and only guaranteed by the trust little, narcissistic James has in her statements. To this extent, it follows that Mrs. Ramsay acquires the function of truth-source for her son James. Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay has a reassuring effect on him, because her openness gives him the possibility to construct his own reality and his own world: “she alone spoke the truth; to her alone could he speak it. That was the source of her everlasting attraction for him, perhaps; she was a person to whom one could say what came into one’s head”, (203). Mrs. Ramsay’s assertions and reassurances become truthful, because James makes an act of faith and trust, which – incidentally or not – creates the space for a narrative world. Such construction reveals the deceitfulness of openness and inclusion. It contains a warning for the text recipients that the narration of truth actually encounters many obstacles on its way to full disclosure and revelation. One of the most insidious obstacles is represented by (maternal) love. Mrs. Ramsay’s attitude and behaviour exemplifies it openly. It is because of her love to her husband and to her children if she seeks for alternative narrations to unpleasant realities. Her act of protection heightens the sourness of doubt and it paves the way to a sense of underlying hypocrisy, to which, however, both James and Lily seem to be immune.

> Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called ‘being in love’ flooded them. They became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love. (53)
>
> Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so that all one’s perceptions, half-way to truth, were tangled in a golden mesh? or did she lock up within her some secret which certainly Lily Briscoe believed people must have for the world to go on at all? (57).

The character of Mrs. Ramsay is the narrative embodiment of what could be defined a "feminine truth"[74], which consents to a broader acceptance of facts, and favours both a more open attitude in evaluating reality and a readiness to assess states of affairs as true. As Stewart points out, (1977: 377) "on the verge of [Mrs. Ramsay's] field of vision is the 'feminine' realm of emotion, fancy, intuition, dreams, and the unconscious, where spirit, or anima, rules serene". There is a likeness in her character and in the narrative of truth it represents. For instance, her femininity may be connected remotely with the fluidity of truth. Moreover, being feminine in the sense of maternal, Mrs Ramsay has a peculiar readiness enlarging the scope of the actualizations of reality and to "sugar-coat" it. This gives her the role of occasional confidante and of a comfortable, undemanding companion: "Men, and women too, letting go of the multiplicity of things, had allowed themselves with her the relief of simplicity," (47). Such characterization of her figure can be interpreted as a warning sign against the dangers of taking Mrs. Ramsay's attitude to the extreme, i.e. against the over-simplification of reality and the creation of illusions, which are both the complete opposites of truth. For the rest of the narration, though, Mrs. Ramsay's behaviour brings about positive effects and she functions as an "ordinary" truth-maker. More importantly, she becomes a truth-source, because she is able to transmit to all the other characters the capacity to believe in a statement, no matter how precarious its possibility of actualization is. Mrs. Ramsay gives the other characters something to which they can attach meaning, so that the property of truth that the propositional law "p is true, if p" can be realized:

> He [Paul] must tell some one – Mrs. Ramsay of course, for it took his breath away to think what he had been and done. […] He would go straight to Mrs. Ramsay because he felt somehow that she was the person who had made him do it. She had made him think he could do anything. […] *She had made him believe* that he could do whatever he wanted. He had felt her eyes on him all day to-day, following him about (though she never said a word) […]. [T]he lights after the darkness made his eyes feel full, and he

[74] "Feminine" and "masculine" truth are not rigorous categories of definitions but they derive from the oppositional representation of the characters' conception of truth.

> said to himself, as he walked up the drive, *Lights, lights, lights*, and repeated in a dazed way, *Lights, lights, lights* […], (85-86) [my emphasis].

Halfway through the second, dark section, an abrupt report on the death of Mrs. Ramsay is embedded in the text, almost furtively:

> **[**Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty**]** [my emphasis].

Surprisingly, such a relevant turning point in the narration, such a powerful transformation and such a destabilising occurrence is put into simple square brackets[75]. As it is well-known, many crucial events in TTL are just hinted at with sentences in parentheses. Through the close observation of this narrative choice, it is possible to affirm this narrative device is used to draw attention to the event itself, but it also gives the impression of a striking immediacy of reception. Secondarily, it might also point at the fugacity of everything in life. However, what needs to be stressed for my argumentation is that brackets are textual markers of facts, bare facts, mere facts. Putting facts into brackets means relegating them to a subordinate role in the hierarchy of narration and thus highlighting the supremacy of inner perspectives over outer occurrences. In addition, the language used for the enunciation of the statements into brackets contributes to the reinforcement of the sense of subservience: unlike the poetic and solemn language of the passages outside the parentheses, the utterances in parentheses are characterized by an utterly prosaic and hasty tone. Finally, brackets are the means to fulfil the wish of "reading two things at the same time", (D3, 106): they give the text a double reading lane and thus, they allow a double

[75] With reference to this point, Compare Stevenson, Goldman (1996: 174), where they argue: *"*This is one of the most disturbing moments in in twentieth century fiction, for reasons aesthetic as well as emotional. Finding an event of such emotional import apparently so marginalized, readers are bound to register painfully the implications of those square brackets – the inconsequentiality of even the richest life. And what the brackets contain is disturbing in form as well in meaning. In describing stumbling along a passage, the first sentence of the parenthesis is itself a passage readers are bound to stumble over because of its fractured temporality and the odd, almost a-syntactic way it is expressed".

apperception of reality, i.e. of the outer reality of things and the inner reality of thoughts and emotions. Background and foreground levels of narration overlap almost perfectly and so they succeed in conveying a sense of comprehensiveness, a nearly perfect *mimesis of narrative truth*.

However, the most compelling question is why Mrs. Ramsay dies at all. One answer might be found in the circumstance that she, like the intrusion of the lighthouse and Mr. Ramsay's pedant, almost asphyxiating way of understanding life, is an element of disturbance in the attainment of pure truth. All the space she leaves to speculation, to openness, to the admissibility of possible outcomes, to conjectures and suppositions deprives the artist of the possibility to concretize her project, her pursuit of truth-yielding assertions and actions.

> To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible an outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded, she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked. There was nothing to be said. (37).

Mrs. Ramsay's attitude allows almost every character – but above all, Lily Briscoe – to procrastinate, to postpone their experience of truth. As far as she is present, truth is projected in the "beyond", it remains a potential affair. If Mrs. Ramsay is observed through a narratological lens, thus, it is possible to argue that her figure becomes a prophet of possible worlds in the text. Her function in the text is to keep semantic possibilities activated.

3.5.2 Mr. Ramsay or The Finite and Fragmented Truth

The major characters of the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, might be considered as the narrative elements with the highest symbolic value connected with the concept of truth. More specifically, truth and its manifold phenomenal appearances seem to constitute the essence of the protagonists and to shape their nature, their behaviour and their perspective. In addition, characters can also be defined as narrative constructs with the function of semanticizing the

various forms of truth. In this sense, Woolf constructed the character of Mr. Ramsay as the reflection of rationalist, formalist and rigorous principles[76]. In the system of values informing Mr. Ramsay's perspective, knowledge and truth are two strictly derivative concepts and sometimes they even overlap. The existence and the validity of knowledge depends upon truth and *vice versa*. For this reason, Mr. Ramsay's understanding of truth is engraved in the rigorous research, creation and assertion of authoritative knowledge. He considers the possession of knowledge as the antidote against the dangerous poison of untruth, but also as an instrument to control the others and to elevate himself above them. According to Mr. Ramsay's perspective, from the attainment of knowledge, it also derives – or rather, it should derive – certainty and finality in truth matters. As Janet Winston points out,

> Mr Ramsay uses objective data gleaned from direct observation and scientific instruments […] to support his views without considering their effects on actual human beings. His devotion to pursuing the unadorned truth at any cost […] dictates his approach to human interactions in general, (2009:47).

As is well known, Mr. Ramsay's prevaricating attitude is daunting to all the other characters revolving around him, because they consider it too oppressive and abusive. Their discontent soon pushes them to drift away from Mr. Ramsay. As a reaction, he tries increasingly to contrast this situation by attempting to grab the endorsement of the rest of the character constellation; thus, he creates a circular movement of dependencies. Therefore, Mr. Ramsay personifies, on the one hand, the strictness, the inflexibility, the canonicity of truth as a mere, stolid correspondence to actual states of affairs. On the other hand, it also points out the necessity to have a consensus in order to establish its own narration of truth. As hinted before, the firmness in imposing one's perspective on truth stirs hostile

[76]As Elizabeth Lambert reports, "in her novels and essays, Woolf tended to treat science not as a repository of truth but as a discourse that claims the authority to interpret reality, a discourse with enormous potential mired in its own patriarchal values" (1991:1).

feelings in the other figures in the novel. Such feelings are deep-rooted in all the characters, even in the younger ones. Indeed, the first figure to deliver an impression of the discontent towards Mr. Ramsay's perspective on truth is six-year-old James, whose unarticulated thoughts and resented feelings reveal all the insufficiency of his father's attitude[77]. Through James's feelings it is possible to trace back every outlook Mr. Ramsay has on the concept of truth and to understand the irritation implied in the narrator's voice, when s/he states that "What [Mr. Ramsay] said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure of convenience of any mortal being," (8). Nonetheless, James is not the only character struggling with Mr. Ramsay's perspective: the painter Lily Briscoe too has a problematic relationship to it. Indeed, she "sides" with Mrs. Ramsay from the beginning of the story, when she thinks Mr. Ramsay is "petty, selfish, vain, egoistical; […] spoilt, […] a tyrant [who] wears Mrs. Ramsay to death" (29). Such feelings of diffidence bring her to develop not only a psychological detachment, but, eventually, also to put a physical distance between Mr. Ramsay and herself. Such distance is marked by the decision to "set her clean canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier [she hoped was] sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay and his 'exactingness'", (163) and then by the necessity to wait for all the Ramsays to be gone off to sea, before she can complete her painting. Mr. Ramsay relies almost exclusively on facts to recount truthful reality, because they are, to him, "uncompromising", (163). As Susan Dick observes, "For Mr. Ramsay, the reality of facts and solid objects is the truth", (2006: 61). For him there must be a strong correspondence between reality and what is said about reality: thus, there can be no space for tolerance or acceptance of statements and utterances outside of the limit of such correspondence. Hence, not only is the narrative/recounting dimension of "facts" sacred to Mr. Ramsay, but he cannot

[77] There have been numerous studies on the autobiographical roots of *To The Lighthouse*. The majority of these studies argue that the figure of the despotic authority seems to have been drawn directly from the author's experiences with her father Leslie Stephen.

either admit to hear somebody else diminish the importance and the centrality of facts by adducing unfounded argumentations:

The extraordinary irrationality of her [Mrs. Ramsay's] remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him. He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered; and now she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies. (37)

It is possible to claim that Mr. Ramsay's apperception of truth is almost self-complacent in its linearity. It seems to attain automatically a finite identity, a clear position and clear-cut boundaries. All that goes beyond these boundaries is simply rejected as falsity and discarded as such. Nonetheless, Mr. Ramsay's conception is far from naïve. Although he makes every rhetorical and argumentative effort to put its conceit forward and although he constantly attempts to remain as rigorous as possible in his line of reasoning, in the course of the narration, the recipients discover he is actually plagued by the doubt that his philosophy and his theories stand on fragile grounds. To this extent, Mr. Ramsay's anxieties and preoccupations are contextualized in the exposition of his thoughts and speculations regarding a cornerstone of his intellectual research, i.e., the attainment of truthful knowledge. Such research leads Mr. Ramsay to realize that achieving truth is a mired enterprise and that only very few individuals can manage to come out of the morass. The passage on the "Q and R" demonstrates it:

> He reached Q. […] But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. *If Q then is Q* – R – Here he knocked his pipe out. […] 'Then R…" He braced himself. He clenched himself. […] R is then – what is R? A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R. In that flash of darkness he heard people saying – he was a failure – that R was beyond him. He would never reach R. [my emphasis]

Rigorous study and contemplation seem to be the only instruments for entering the realm of truth. Consequently, expanding the scope of one's knowledge becomes the key to the attainment of truth. Nevertheless, with the realization of the difficulty in tackling the actual advancement of knowledge, it also comes the awareness that a full, truthful knowledge of the world is impossible. As Joshua Kavaloski explains, "the letter R seems to be forever put of his grasp and he resign himself to a scholarly accomplishment that is distinguished but still short of true significance", (2014:129).

Finally, Mr. Ramsay is left with only two alternatives: the first to cling with all his strength to his philosophy and to his identity of disciplined, hard-minded man of science or to succumb to resignation, finitude and doubt. His recurrent thought, drawn from poetry that "We perished, each alone" can be interpreted as a self-reflexive refrain, which echoes his and everybody else's eternally failing attempts to achieve a unified truth. As Lund points out (1989: 81) "Ramsay, rather melodramatically, sees himself as the captain of some doomed expedition, 'the leader of a forlorn hope' (55-56)". The word *alone* heightens the sense of individuality of everyone's intellectual expedition to the discovery of truth: to this extent, it stresses again the multiplicity and variety of forms truth can acquire. Moreover, the personal pronoun *we* serves the function of stressing the universality of the research of profound truths. Nonetheless, truths remain unattainable and those who seek them are destined to taste loneliness and ultimately to die. Such realization causes fear, doubt and a fatalistic sense of impotence, to which Mr. Ramsay reacts with his urge to establish a supreme order on reality and experience and to exert a despotic, assertive control on events. Such reaction is, in point of fact, quite problematic for the rhetorical intentions of the novel, which points at the dissolution of categorizations of the experience of truth and to show the entropic gorge beneath them.

3.5.3 Eclipses and illumination: The Lighthouse or Truth-making Visions Marked by Shining Lights and Dark Losses of Orientation

The lighthouse is the tall, physical object looming over the Ramsay family throughout the novel. A lighthouse is normally a simple navigation instrument, with a directional function for boats, ships and other objects at sea. In the novel, the lighthouse acquires multiple functions: on the story level, for example, it has an enormous power to shape the plot and thus to give a course to the story. Moreover, it is the fulcrum of an irresistible attraction for every figure in the novel. On the discourse level, instead, the intermitting light coming from the lantern of the lighthouse attains a metaphorical significance, since it expresses the ambiguity and potential shapelessness of truth. The ray of light represents guidance when the lantern shines and projects its beam onto the sea or, rather, onto the observer; on the contrary, it denies guidance when the light is out, when the observer finds itself in the phase of eclipse. In such a moment, all those agents relying on the lighthouse for guidance and help are left alone with their own capacity of judging, with their intuitions, presumptions, conjectures and their simple guesses. In this sense, the lighthouse acquires a highly equivocal meaning. Hence, among all the other symbols of the novel, the lighthouse is the emblem of the substantial amorphousness of truth, because it is the direct image of the constructed nature of its conception. In addition to that, the lighthouse might also be interpreted as the physical element with the greatest capacity to symbolize the process of truth-yielding: where its light shines, there can lie true knowledge. The lighthouse is the bearer of light, the material with which it is possible to construct one's own vision and to achieve truth. Light is the narrative indicator that there has been a guidance in the assessment of states of affairs. Light is the evanescent narrative/metaphorical object, which provides a source of control and direction in the establishment of truthfulness or untruthfulness. Each character of the novel seems to agree on this point. To Mrs. Ramsay, the illumination mechanism of the lighthouse, with its repetitive movement is a truth-yielder, because it instils a sense of security, of certainness in the viewer. The metaphorical meaning of the lighthouse becomes its most salient trait and is all

that really is relevant for Mrs. Ramsay. Conversely, Mr. Ramsay is denied the capacity of always being cognizant of a double layer of interpretation – the physical and the phenomenal – of the power of light. Indeed, he does not even spend too many thoughts on the epistemological power of the lighthouse, because he cannot see or acknowledge any superior meanings beneath the surface of everyday objects. Therefore, he probably just considers the lighthouse as what it is, i.e. as a navigation instrument *per se*, and he is thus able to put the quietus on the matter. The artist Lily Briscoe's relationship to the lighthouse is quite different. For her, the lighthouse represents, in the meantime, the obstacle and the instrument to achieve her final artistic vision. Thus, she is highly alert of the ambiguousness of this object.

3.5.4 Lily Briscoe's Vision or Truth Established through the Artist's Vision

In the previous paragraphs, there has been the delineation of the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as narrative "tools" with which it is possible for the author to elicit a narration of truth and to convey effectively the *liquid* status of the concept in modernist times. Through the exploration of the inextricable links and mutual dependence of both major figures, it has become quite apparent that, as Jensen observed, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay "are two parts of a single vision", (2007: 121) in which the two characters find and afford evidence for their own standpoint in the other's. As long as the Janus-faced configuration of truth in the novel is considered as a source of conflict through the interposition of the minor characters' perspectives, the narration is in a situation of conflict and jeopardy, in which the reading of reality is chaotic and unintelligible. As long as the dualistic opposition between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay is forced on them, everything appears as a conundrum. Every object of sense is perceived as both true and untrue. As a matter of fact, their ideological chasm is artificial. Mr. Ramsay's scientism and Mrs. Ramsay's ingénue faith are two faces of the construction of propositional truth, but they aren't suitable metaphors to construct artistic truth. The only resolving instrument must be a courageous artistic act, with which a unifying "vision of truth" can be applied. In the hierarchy of values informing Bloomsbury's aesthetics, truth and love are always subordinated to art (cf. Rosenbaum).

Drawing a swift reflection from this assumption, it is possible to maintain that it is no coincidence if the figure of the artist is entrusted with a fundamental purpose, i.e. with the power of establishing final truth. Art has a pre-eminent role in the formation and construction of truth. The artist, having the capacity to handle the discovering power of art, is given the authority to assign a final shape to reality, to diffuse light and guide experience, once "a lighthouse" or any other fetish of truth becomes absent. Such power derives from the claimed capacity of the artist to interpret reality and history, because interpretation of phenomena, experience and creation are intrinsic to the work and the sensibility of the artist[78]. As Christina Froula states (2013: V):

> *To the Lighthouse* launches the modernist artist Lily Briscoe on a quest for what she calls "reality", the thing itself before it has been made anything. Impossible on the face of it, this quest ends with the simultaneous completion of Lily's painting and the novel itself.

Lily Briscoe inherits from the Ramsays the task of getting at the *truth of things*. After having got to know both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Lily's idea of unity slowly transmutes in an idea of truthful unity. To this extent, her role as a visual artist mingles with a role as a storyteller and it triggers a series of implicit intermedial references, which will serve to construct an analogy between the achievement of subjective truth and the realization of a work of art. As Winston (2009:85) indicates, quoting from Diane Filby Gillespie and Paul Goring,

> 'Woolf creates a portrait of Lily Briscoe creating a portrait, however abstract, of Mrs. Ramsay, but she creates her own portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and her own partial self-portrait besides' (1994: 222). Underscoring meta-textuality, Paul Goring explains how Lily's painting functions as a laden symbol within the novel, specifically 'a reading of the text within the text. Her picture functions as a supposed literal visualization of the novel's form, a concrete realization of what Virginia Woolf believes the reader constructs mentally' (Gillespie/Goring, quoted in Winston, 2009: 85).

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[78] As Lambert Zuidervaart holds, [together with Joseph Margolis], "art itself is interpretive through and through", ([2004] 2009: 7).

Before Lily can accomplish the crucial assignment of shaping the image and the story-world of the Ramsay family, and thus fulfil the teleological goal of the novel, i.e. attaining truth, she must find the courage, the strength, and the right language to compose her artistic *vision*. The latter may be abstract in its mode of manifestation, but its mode of expression must be intelligible like an uttered, agreed-on corpus of propositions. This point, i.e. the negotiation of her aesthetic vision and its proper actualization proves to be the most excruciating and difficult task for the woman/artist. As Dowling observes: "Lily 'could not contract her feelings, could only make a phrase resound' [*To The Lighthouse*, 159]. She yearns for the cognitive precision of language – if only she could 'put together' words or ideas, she would reach the truth", (154). Her preoccupation, her anguish and her struggling against reticence, the strain brought about by the creative effort are present since the beginning of the novel. In particular, the strain causes the highest degree of frustration, when the expressive sign must be transferred from the theoretical frame of reference of the artist's mind – where it is already graspable – to the actuality and tangibility of the painting.

> Then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. (23)

Not only does Lily struggle to take control of her creative process and of the means to concretize it, but she also struggles to live up to it, to its uniqueness and its individualism:

> Such she often felt herself – struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see', and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her, (23-24).

As Susan Dick explains:

> For Lily, […] truth and reality are not only in appearances, but also 'at the back of them. The world around them dissolves into 'a pool of thought, a deep basin of reality' as she confronts fully her grief for Mrs. Ramsay. Her realisation that the artist's vision is a fusion of the ordinary and the extraordinary unites on a theoretical level the perceptions of reality enacted by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, (2006: 61).

To get at the truth of things, Lily has to discard some general assumptions on composition, in particular the dogma of aesthetic *oneness* (cf. Matro, 1984: 214), which states that the artist must compose an all-encompassing vision of unity. This vision of unity, which entails a merging, a disappearing of any sense of separation, differs from the unity created by displacing shapes, masses and colours, "the attraction of the eye," around a central line that, by a process of juxtaposition, emphasized the relations among the elements but paradoxically implies their separateness (Matro, 1984:214).

Lily's fears to conclude her painting stem from the awareness that her work of art will remain in the future as the image of "truth". The painting will cease to be a personal affair and it will become the truth everybody will agree upon. In other words, Lily seems to become conscious of her role as truth-maker and that such a role is strongly mind-dependent, the mind in question being her own. An escalating tension will become stronger and stronger throughout Lily's development of her research of truth, until a growing awareness and a self-confidence ripen in the artist. At the opening of the third section, "The Lighthouse", a new consciousness slowly dawns on Lily with the approaching of a new day in the future. The foggy and howling nights of the central part of the novel are in fact dissipating or have already dissipated. As they disappear, so does the sense of unreality that had hampered Lily's research of truth so severely. The new day has got the same candour of her still untouched canvas. This characteristic of unified emptiness, of unrealized possibilities, which at the beginning was for Lily a reason of anxiety, now becomes the seat of exploration: "The extraordinary unreality was frightening; but it was also exciting", (161). The expanding confidence is also a cause of pleasure. The more the artist retreats

into the personal world of her point of view, the more she can progress with her work:

> Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at [the portrait], drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers – this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention. (173)

In the end, Lily is able to condense different conceptions into a single perspective. She manages to complete a process of narrative, philosophical and aesthetic reduction and thus to find an expressive trait with the capacity of yielding *her* truth, the one with which she is able to determine not only a final stance, but also to give a form to the reality of the Ramsays. In this sense, the abstract, formal quality of the sign she chose to use acquires a clear logic, through which it is possible to comprehend why a "purple triangle" may represent truthfully a mother with her child. For all these reasons, it is possible to argue, finally, that an artistic/epistemological progression in Lily's discovery and delineation of truth has taken place and that through this labouring process it is possible to infer valuable information.

Before the analysis arrives to an end, though, it is important to tackle further questions about Lily's "moment of vision", because they can shed a further light on the epistemological process of attaining truth. One of these questions might be why the lighthouse disappears behind a blue haze as soon as Lily has her vision. A plausible answer may be the fact that the lighthouse, as stated above, is not only a symbol of guidance, but it is also a mysterious place, with a hidden, disguised face representing risk and danger. In this sense, the lighthouse is a metaphor for the opacity of truth itself. As the lighthouse disappears from the sight of the artist and her vision comes to the foreground, so the recipient understands that artistic truth is the only truth achievable and that it is based and found in the

I/eye of the artist[79], in her subjective, creative sensibility. In this sense, Lily purports the concrete actualization of the concept of truth in the form of the portrait and surpasses the idea that everything around her, i.e. reality, is in fact "unreal", her feeling of a consistent reality that is increasingly dimming and blurring. In this sense, the novel celebrates the supremacy of the "I" as a unifying force with the power of bypassing superficial oppositions. Lily fights against the approach of the phantom of the negation of reality. Perhaps the great creative difficulty to recount truthfully about the Ramsays is not only brought about by the "exacting" presence of Mr. Ramsay, which, to a certain extent, contributes to her fulfilment of the work of art, but by the fact that the truth to be told has become inaccessible. Indeed, it is placed in the past and therefore, the essential personification, the actualization of this truth is dead, i.e., it has become unreachable and irretrievable.

> Mrs Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all this. Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay. With the brush slightly trembling in her fingers she looked at the hedge, the step, the wall. It was all Mrs. Ramsay's doing. She was dead. […] [It] was all Mrs. Ramsay's fault. She was dead. The step where she used to think was empty. She was dead.

Eventually, Lily succeeds in envisioning a picture of Mrs. Ramsay that has the necessary magnetism and force to generate a concrete representation of her own point of view: this gives truth a rigorous domain within reality. Thus, Lily as the artist asserts her version of the nature of the narrative universe. The latter is based on a common historical past she shares with the other characters in the novel. Remarkably, Lily does not complete her vision in a state of joy and eagerness, but in a state of nostalgic weariness and grief. She is increasingly tired of having an idea spinning through her mind but not being able to concretize

[79] Certainly, it is not a simple coincidence that the artist who finds and, at the same time, constructs truth is a woman. The metaphorical construct of the "female artist" carries a significance, as she finds truth in the moment of perfect detachment with the male forces of the novel. In addition, Lily gives her subjective truth the face of a woman as well, in that she paints the portrait of Mrs. Ramsay, so that a double linking between truth and femininity occurs.

it. This feeling leads her to see herself as the parody of a painter, as an "old-maidish" (161) person who, at forty-four, is too old to just "play" the artist:

> It was all dry: all withered: all spent. […] One can't waste one's time at forty-four; she thought. She hated playing at painting. A brush, the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos – that one should not play with, knowingly even: she detested it. (164)

Such thoughts are a predicate of the necessity to take art as a serious language of truth, to consider it a regulator of chaotic, unclear conditions. As the epilogue of the narration slowly approaches, Lily finds a new force with which she brings herself to complete the painting. Unfortunately, her path towards the representation of Mrs. Ramsay's truth is paved with doubts and uncertainties. To overcome them means often to take dramatic decisions.

> She took her hand and raised her brush. For a moment it stayed trembling in a painful but exciting ecstasy in the air. Where to begin? – that was the question; at what point to make the first mark? One line on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex. […] Still the risk must be run; the mark made. (172)

In this crucial passage, Lily experiences the first and most poignant of her fears, i.e. the crystallization of a fleeting moment that thus acquires an absolutistic connotation. Lily sees how problematic such an act is, since it entails a drastic selection of a single instant to tell. Moreover, after the selection of the moment to portray has taken place, there remains the problem of representing its own inherent complexity. As she grows cognizant of the complex structure of concrete reality, she must also take responsibility for the manifold challenges it imposes on her. Lily's proceeding is unsteady: she alternates moments in which she is resolute she will achieve a result and give truth a uniformity of meaning, but there are also other moments in which her determination fails. It is important to stress that Lily the artist is painfully aware of the potential philosophical fallacy of her artistic endeavour at this stage of her creative process to reproduce truth. She hesitates and wonders how her painting can actually succeed in conveying the

truth of its subject. Nevertheless, painting is her way to communicate truthfully a soul. Remarkably, the decision to give an artistic form to truth transfers Lily's consciousness away from the reality of a moment in life into a mostly introspective dimension. Gliding into her inner world is the key to open the door to her interpretive abilities. When she finally decides to find the intellectual courage to carry on her deed, she does it regardless of the consequences on the philosophical level. To put it in nutshell: Lily dismisses her hesitation by renouncing to connote her representation with the attributes of absolute truth. Therefore, Lily embraces painting as an explorative tool to fix *her own* truthful narration on a white canvas. The character engages in a dialogue among her creative impulses, her fears and insecurities and a mysterious external force that seems to move her to the completion of her work of art.

> She was half willing, half reluctant; […] this form challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted. Always before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness, […] she was exposed without protection to the blasts of doubt. (173).

One of Lily's greatest concerns is, possibly, that a painting cannot express the truth of a personality, if it depicts a single moment that has been severed from the rest of life and time. However, the isolation of a distinct moment is the sole instrument Lily can conceive of that allows her the construction of truth and the institution of shape "in the midst of chaos" (176). Truth must necessarily be abstracted from the "eternal passing and flowing" and be "struck into stability" (176). Taking this kind of decision is utterly excruciating for Lily and even after having decided to complete her painting, - and to do it in silence, without the participation of any other kind of communication – she continues to suffer the blows of uncertainty: "Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge?" (187). As she takes more confidence with the canvas and the paintbrush, so her thoughts and concerns become increasingly profound and articulate, and, from the narrative point of view, the character makes an implicit meta-referential assertion, in which she

states that truthful personality is not easily communicated, because there cannot be a real mutual knowing between two persons. Lily convinces herself she can at most create a fictional, approximate artistic truth, based on her emotions and on her memories: “And this making up scenes […] is what we call ‘knowing people’, ‘thinking’ of them, ‘being fond’ of them! Not a word of it was true […but] she went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past” (188). The analogy between the written sign (the novel) and the painted sign (the painting) becomes gradually more powerful as the painting work develops within the text and a wave of doubts and concerns rises in Lily’s mind. Painting and writing imitate each other, they are both instruments for telling; Lily doubts her representation is really able to capture and preserve truth, but she remains hopeful, nonetheless. “She looked at her picture. […] – how ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish; nothing stays, all changes; but not words, not paint.” (195). Therefore, she develops a discipline and elects her vision as the authoritative stance in the narration of Mrs. Ramsay’s truth.

> One must keep on looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion, the determination not to be put off, not to be bamboozled. *One must hold the scene* – so – in a vice and let nothing come and spoil it. One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that’s chair, that’s a table, and yet at the same time, It’s a miracle, it’s an ecstasy. (218)

If Lily Briscoe wants to complete successfully her work of art, she must transcend reality, fight against over-simplification and arrive at the core of truth, which must be immutable and irreducible. Although she wishes she had “fifty pairs of eyes to see with”, in order to “get round that one woman” (214), although she is aware that her work of art might be forgotten, neglected, hidden and “hung in the attics” (225), she is firmly convinced that it will always succeed in conveying her vision of Mrs. Ramsay’s truth. Hence, at the end of the novel she manages to conceive of an essence of Mrs. Ramsay, of an abstract but truthful gist of hers. This is expressed on the formal level by an impressionistic purple triangle, by green and white lines and on the substantial level by Lily’s vision, which functions in the narration as a truth-source. “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a

second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (226). As Banfield explains:

> What finally constitutes that "vision" which Woolf's artist has had and, once having it, disappears from, leaving as signature no single viewpoint but a series of moments? It is a vision composed of fragments, yet ultimately achieving a strange, contingent unity – contingent on the very having occurredness of these moments, shaped by an uncompromising refusal to turn away from the consequences of this series of givens which constitute a life, a history, a novel (2000: 388).

Finally, then, by having her *vision*, Lily elaborates a narrative process of establishment of truth, which is signified by her painterly work. Using her eyes, she can convey her truth and thus assert a world order in which her personal perceptions are reflected and transfigured.

3.6 Jacob's Room: The shadows of Truth / A study of the truth of a character / The elliptical mode of conveying truth

Drawing from James Phelan's triple categorizations of characters, - defined as thematic, synthetic and mimetic - Edward L. Bishop argues in his essay *The Subject in Jacob's Room* (1992), that Jacob's figure is representative, in variable quantities, of all three categorizations[80]. As Bishop writes, "the synthetic [categorization] is foregrounded by the narrator herself who wonders about the possibility of knowing another human being and about the legitimacy of drawing character" (Bishop, 1992: 147). Following his assumptions, I will maintain that the synthetic characterization of the protagonist is an essential starting point to reflect

[80] The chronological order I followed for the introduction and the discussion of E.M. Forster and V. Woolf's works is here interrupted. The reason for the interruption lies in the configuration of the novel *Jacob's Room*.
Although the work is older than *To the Lighthouse*, its radicalism in the discussion of the concept of truth as a meta-narrative device is much more prominent and present than in Woolf's "purely novelistic" later productions. Moreover, the treatment of relevant issues regarding the genre of biography and its correspondent treatment of truth makes the novel a very suitable crossover junction to the next chapter of the present dissertation, which focuses on the literary relationship between the members of the Bloomsbury Group and the genre of biography.

upon the relation with the construction of character and its subjectivity and identity in a novel and upon the conceptualization of truth in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*[81]. In particular, the present analysis of the novel will illustrate the author's problematization of a truthful construction of character. As Mark Hussey notes: "'There is,' says the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, 'something absolute in us that despises qualification' (143)" (1986: 23). Indeed, the detailed focus on the creation of character is one of the most important fundamentals of the novel. Brad Bucknell[82] confirms such vision by stating that "the novel *Jacob's Room* seems an excursion into the historical composition of character as such and […] into the making of a set of beliefs and world-views […]" (2008: 761). Indeed, *JR* is not only a novel with meta-narrative references, but it is also, and overwhelmingly, a novel fully concerned with its protagonist, i.e., Jacob Flanders[83]. As Hermione Lee suggests, form and content in *Jacob's Room* mingle so inextricably together, that "the form of *Jacob's Room is* the subject" (1977: 72). More precisely, *Jacob's Room* does not focus on the sole process of construction of a character, but it also addresses the difficulties and the failings in tackling such task. Since JR is a literary work with a strong concentration on subject, it also offers an immediately evident possibility to draw a parallel to the process of construction of *biographees*[84], i.e. subjects, in biographical texts and with the problems of designing them coherently in a text. As Max Saunders explains, *Jacob's Room* "is also a parody of biography, in which the biographer-narrator fails to capture his subject, fails to accommodate him within the conventional framework of biography, but cannot concede the impossibility of the task he has set himself", (2010: 239). It may therefore be interesting to examine how the use of biographical *topoi* influence the truth-yielding processes of a fictional work that

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[81] The quotations of this novel are taken from: Woolf, Virginia. *Jacob's Room*. London: Vintage, 2004.
[82] Bucknell, Brad. The Sound of Silence in Two of *Jacob's Rooms*. Modernism/modernity. Volume 15, Number 4, November 2008. pp. 761-781 | 10.1353/mod.0.0041
[83] According to Pericles Lewis, who focused on *Jacob's Room*'s engagement with the theme of the war, Jacob's surname is aptly given, since it would be evocative of "*Flanders, [i.e.], a "region of Belgium where the British sustained many of their heaviest casualties*" (2007:112).
[84] Compare chapter on biographical works in the present work.

imitates biography and other genres, like the *Bildungsroman* and that exposes their shortcomings. As Elizabeth Bronfen explains,

> Woolf's experiment traces [the] need to resolve the antagonism produced by virtue of the fact that another person always remains unknown to us to such a degree that we can never fully assimilate various perspectives into one unified vision (2000: XV).

Woolf's third novel, which was published in 1922, is at a liminal position between novel and fictional biography. Even though it is a highly complex text that gives the opportunity to explore many paths of analysis and interpretation, it has found, so far, relatively little attention within the vast universe of modernist literary criticism. As Ann C. Crosby reports,

> Woolf writes in her diary on October 14, 1922: 'I think Jacob was a necessary step, for me, in working free.' This statement refers perhaps most specifically to the stylistic change which one notes in her third novel as she moves from the Victorian mode with its logical sequence of events, to a collage of events, seemingly unrelated, in Jacob's Room. It is this change in approach which removes her from the criticism that she herself directed at such traditional writers as sterne and Jane Austen when she wrote in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that both Sterne and Jane Austen were interested in things in themselves in character in itself in the book in itself, (1965: 327)

Following the assumption that one of *Jacob's Room*'s greatest concerns is the questioning of truthful transmission of personality through novelistic and biographical narrative devices, Brian Phillips notes that

> when, in 1920, [Woolf] had the idea for Jacob's Room, her first concern is how she will keep "the damned egotistical self from invading its pages, and how she might "provide a wall for the book from oneself." The writers for whom she reserves her highest praise are those, like Shakespeare and Jane Austen, whose work is free from the taint of personal concern. (2003: 421).

By focussing on these initial premises, the narrative strategies will be analysed according to their relation to inferences used to construct the main character and their function will be explored to make statements about the use and

implementation of the concept of truth. As will be shown, the concept of truth is both a thematic key-point in the novel and a very significant part of its theoretical/poetical arrangement. Woolf addresses the question of truthfully telling about a specific character in an environment characterized by vagueness and uncertainty. Subsequently, she transforms her character into an instrument for the narration of truth. Since *Jacob's Room* is a modernist work – some critics argue that it is the first novel by Woolf, which explicitly discards late-Victorian, realist conventions, and thus her first truly experimental literary work – it can be reasonable to claim that it also inevitably accounts for the constructed nature of truth. The final representation of Jacob's figure is the product of fragments of impressions of him other characters in the novel have throughout the narration. Jacob is an abstraction: therefore, the account of his personality is precarious and unstable, always in the making and subject to change. More often than not, truthful narration gets lost under the pressure of the background noises produced by chattering, musing and speculating. The wild guessing around the figure of Jacob reaches a peak of irony as Charlotte Wilding, an unknown guest at a dinner party exclaims, after seeing Jacob, "He's come! He's come! […] I've won my bet!" (56). As Woolf herself notes in her essay "The Man at the Gate"[85], obtaining a solid, coherent, one-piece truthful narration of a character is not viable in reality: "It is the only way of getting at the truth--to have it broken into many splinters by many mirrors and so select" (1940). Even though the work is clearly inscribed in the genre of the novel and Jacob's life is a work of fiction, some typical modalities of life-writing[86] dominate the text and informs its constitution. To a certain extent, JR can be seen as a forerunner of the full-scale experimental biographical works of Woolf's coming literary years. It may be claimed that JR is a novel imitating biography and the explicit goals of biography, but being free from the constraints of reporting about *realia*. Moreover, JR is a novel concerned with the concept of

[85] https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter14.html
[86] To this extent, it might be suitable to point out that there are some auto-biographical references in the novel, i.e., the character of Jacob is possibly based on the real figure of Thoby Stephen, Virginia's younger brother who died in 1906 of a typhoid fever in Greece.

truth and its epistemological implications. The figure of Jacob functions both as a biographical subject and as an allegoric figure standing for suspicion and incredulity. In this sense, Jacob becomes a character who is engaged in the search for truth, since incredulity is a state of mind that naturally leads to the pursuit of truth by means of verification.

In JR, the study of all the other narrative elements apart from character is placed on a secondary level. For instance, a solid plot pattern is not present in the work. The readers are merely presented with glimpses of the protagonist's various, scattered stages of his life and they are left with the task of conjuring up a figure and hold its pieces together in their minds. The narrating agent in JR cannot be defined as omniscient; in fact, the term "semi-scient" should be more suitable. Even though s/he strives to achieve omniscience, s/he constantly fails. His/her tone is lamenting, because s/he seems to be conscious of his/her limits. S/he is very different from the "chatty" narrator in *Orlando* and s/he is conceded very few moments in which s/he can give sparse hints the art of crafting a character and the dangers of caging a subject into a perspective. Here is one of those moments, which Megan Quigley defines as "asides*"* (2015: 89 et passim):

> In short, the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details. But the difficulty remains – one has to choose. For though I have no wish to be Queen of England – or only for a moment – I would willingly sit beside her; I would hear the Prime Minister's gossip; […] But no – we must choose. Never was there a harsher necessity! or one which entails greater pain, more certain disaster; for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile. […] (63)

Jacob's stages of life represented in the novel range from his childhood in Cornwall to his studies at Cambridge, his life in London, his journey to Greece and eventually his death in World War I. During the course of his life, Jacob

encounters a wide array[87] of further *satellite* characters: at Cambridge, he becomes friend of Timothy Durrant and his sister, Clara, who is attracted to Jacob. Richard Bonamy is another Cambridge friend Jacob will encounter again during his life in London. There are also other women in Jacob's life, like Florinda and the model Fanny Elmer, but no one seems to interest him deeply. Towards the end of the narration, Jacob decides to travel to Greece. Before arriving there, he visits some friends in Paris and proceeds his journey through Italy. When he finally gets to Greece, he falls in love with a married woman, Sandra Wentworth Williams. In the brief last chapter, the readers apprehend from Richard and Betty Flanders, who are in his rooms and are collecting his things, that Jacob is dead. On the formal level, Jacob's stages of life are not signalled in the text by any textual marker e.g., there is no labelling of any chapters or paragraphs. Readers glide from one stage to the other, at times seamlessly, at times after abrupt narrative breaks.

3.6.1 "Had he, then, been nothing?" – Jacob Flanders or The *Absent* Protagonist

One of the peculiarities of *Jacob's Room* is that its central character is never directly experienced, but he comes across in the narration merely as the hazy result of a constant observation from different narrative angles, i.e. from the experiences, reports, thoughts and perceptions of the satellite figures around the protagonist. Indeed, the figure of Jacob epitomizes vagueness and elusiveness. The construction of the character envisages the truth-conceit inside Woolf's oeuvre, i.e. that fictional truth and truthful narration are possible only through artistic mediation. A multitude of epistemological restrictions characterizes the narration, so much that a truthful representation of the subject seems to be

[87] The satellite characters are so many – it is possible to count 28 different figures – that it seems likely the choice of introducing such a vast number was a deliberate decision of the author. Because of their inconsistence and lack of corporality, perhaps it might be more suitable to apply the broader terms "existents" or "entities" to them. However, through this narrative device, Woolf may have wanted to provide the text both with a sense of confusion and with a feeling of immediacy and reduction to reality. Indeed, it is probably impossible to take note of every acquaintance one subject makes throughout his life. To this extent, Hussey adds, "the characters of Jacob's Room, as Leonard Woolf noticed, are all ghosts; their contacts form "spiritual shapes" that shift and splinter, never enduring" (Hussey, 1986: 47).

doomed to jeopardy. Jacob dodges wilfully the *eye* of the focalizers. He shies away from the eye, because it is an imperfect and fallible instrument. It is not apt to perceive truth, despite its claim of seeing (it). In fact, even though eyes can retrieve data from reality, the interpretation of such data may not yield truth[88]: "Stop a man; ask him the way: he'll tell it to you; but one's afraid to ask him the way. What does one fear? – *the human eye*" (75), [my emphasis]. Such fear of the eye is a distinctive trait of the modernist sensibility, for which the understanding of a life has become increasingly a matter of hermeneutics. The notion of observation has become progressively more problematic, thus reinforcing the awareness that truth is to be found exclusively in the realm of ideas and inner thoughts, and not in objective, external realities.

The narrating agent in *Jacob's Room* delineates the character of Jacob through the thoughts, emotions, words and judgements of all the other surrounding reflector characters. A constant *looking upon* him, *gazing at* him, *watching* him, always precedes every verbal expression about his persona. I will maintain that such mode of shaping a character may be named *indirect* internal focalization: in this narrative mode, the reader experiences a strong restriction of narrative information about the protagonist and must rely almost exclusively on his/her mental image of him. This mode of "knowing" a character is remarkable for its extreme ambivalence: even though readers perceive a strong feeling of absence of a protagonist, they are fully aware of his identity. Even though the awareness of the existence of a narrative entity named "Jacob" is present, there is still the possibility that the narration of such entity is incomplete, biased and impossible. There is a startling juxtaposition of disclosure and negation of information and thus, the insinuation of a constant feeling of doubt and distrust, which grow together with the construction of a clear image of the protagonist. Jacob is

[88] To this extent, Jacob's "fear" and distrust of the eye may be compared to Lily Briscoe's fear of putting her "vision" on canvas in *To the Lighthouse* (Compare 3.5 of the present work). In that sense, the portrait of Mrs. Ramsay can be viewed as an ekphrasis of a biographical text.

portrayed like a young man with a ghostly or shadowy quality throughout the book; some characters refer to Jacob as “unworldly” (65 and 78). His narrative persona totally lacks “materiality” or simply a concrete manifestation in a narratological sense. His actions do not leave a tangible sign, only memories and thoughts of him do, especially in the other female characters, who seem to be hypersensitive to his charm. The circumstance of our retaining information about Jacob through hearsay may appear, at first glance, like a paradox and a considerable obstacle to a successful conveyance of the character’s essence and, above all, of his truth. As a matter of fact, Jacob’s essence is biographically invisible, or at least, highly elusive in the traditional sense. Consequently, its truthful narrative representation may become elusive too. Nonetheless, Jacob’s characterization is coherent, even though fragmentary and never entirely systematized by an extra-diegetic figure. In this apparently puzzling situation, Woolf’s metaphor of “granite and rainbow” seems to be already fully realized, since the tangibility of purely everyday actions is successfully combined with the insubstantiality of the thoughts and emotions. As Woolf wrote in her diary “I insubstantiate, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality – its cheapness”, “have I the power of conveying the true reality? To get to the bones” (D, II, 248)[89]. The fact that the protagonist moves within the frame of reference of a fictional environment heightens the sense of paradox even more and it points at the co-existence of different perceptions of reality. In Elizabeth Bronfen’s words:

> The obscillation between gaining a full insight into the personality of another and recognizing that this can be nothing but a fleeting view […] led Woolf to compose her portrait of Jacob Flanders as an unwieldy composite of different, even incommensurable brush strokes. ‘It is no use trying to sum people up. […] One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done. (2000: XII).

The title of the novel makes readers alert to the self-reflexive character of the text and it draws attention to the pre-eminent narrative device used to give shape to

[89]Banfield (2000: 156).

the figure of Jacob, which is the narration of his absence or his elusiveness. That may explain why the book is concerned with Jacob's *room*, i.e., with the fictive space he occupies – or does not occupy – in the text. As the novel's subject, all the action in the novel revolves around Jacob's persona, but absence represents his presence at best. As Lee points out, "We have the *luminous halo*[90], but nothing inside it" [my emphasis] (Lee, 1977: 84). Drawing from this image, it is possible to imagine that void and emptiness, together with absence, are relevant narrative elements to represent truthfully the character of Jacob. Moreover, not only void and absence *per se*, but also the objects containing such void become truth-telling elements. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the container also conveys the idea of closure and, possibly, impenetrability. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney writes, "Jacob is a lacuna in the consciousness of the text, an absent centre, a fissure in the novel round which the other characters gravitate" (1987: 28). The unanswered calls of "Ja-cob! Ja-cob!" (2-3, 13, et passim) echoing in the novel function as a reinforcement of the feeling of absence and emptiness.

The entire narration is sprinkled with scenes in which Jacob is not present. At the opening of the novel, Jacob is absent from the scene, which is occupied by Jacob's mother. She is writing a letter to Captain Barfoot in a slightly upset state of mind and tears obfuscate her vision of the surrounding space. In this moment of loss of balance and perspective, in which "the entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun" (1), the world loses its form. As Claudia Olk suggests, "seeing through tears describes a world in constant flow, which is paling into colourlessness and does not offer the eye anything to attach itself to" (2014: 89). As soon as the world regains its form, the first reference to Jacob *in absentia* also appears in the text: "Where *is* that tiresome little boy? […] I don't see him" (2014:89). However, from this moment on, the awareness that

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[90] See Virginia Woolf's assertion in the essay *The Common Reader* (1925): "*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*."

the world and life are constructed within a precarious frame of reference will always be present. Jacob's absence is reiterated in the text. Sometimes it is due to the current circumstances narrated, e.g. as Jacob and his brother Archer are together on the beach at the beginning of the novel. Most frequently, Jacob hides behind his own solipsism, thus drifting even farther apart from the rest of the world. The other characters are left alone with speculations about what he might be doing at a certain moment: "Jacob is after his butterflies as usual" (23); "Jacob's off" (31). Some other times, though, Jacob's absence is deliberate, i.e., he leaves the scene on his own accord, usually by walking out of a room. On a meta-narrative level, such behaviour might be interpretable as a refusal to subjugate to the rules of traditional portraying of a biografictional subject. There are numerous examples of Jacob walking away, scattered throughout the book, and the protagonist reiterates his isolating behaviour both when he is in company – "'Good-bye,' said Jacob. 'Good-bye,' he repeated. 'Good-bye,' he said once more" (57) – and when he is alone, thus restricting once again the access to his life: "Jacob, too, heard them, and raked out the fire. He rose. He stretched himself. He went to bed (93); "Jacob walked off as if he had been in the country; and late that night there he was sitting at his table with his pipe and his book" (103); "Jacob turned away. Two minutes later he opened the front door, and walked off in the direction of Holborn" (111); "Jacob rose from his chair in Hyde Park, tore his ticket to pieces, and walked away" (170), etc.

As Megan Quigley argues, such mode of narration might be the expression of a particular attention to the themes of censorship and omission, which are defined in the novel as "the lid shut upon the truth" (64):

> [Jacob's Room] is a novel that seems fixated on the topic of censorship – insisting that […] there is much […] any inquiring observer would never know about him. Some of Jacob's self-censorship is intentional […]. The text, mirroring Jacob's omissions, enacts its own kind of censorship. […] [Woolf's text] is in some ways disembowelled. (2015: 91).

It has become apparent that the narrative devices I listed above are those that most compellingly let the figure acquire the characteristics of existence and of

truthful delineation as a character within the text. The character of Jacob is the result of a complex of descriptions, i.e., the stratification of the merging thoughts, emotions and opinions the members of the community of satellite characters have about Jacob *create* him. Since all the other characters shape the same individual image and agree on the mental image of him, the outcome is the construction of a common image or notion of Jacob, which is nonetheless fingerprinted according to gender or social roles (mother vs. male vs. female vs. friends).

Another aspect of Jacob's personality is that he treasures silence and loneliness. Not only is he often absent or he makes himself absent, but there are moments in which he actively wishes not to be there, not to be visible, not to be *looked* upon:

> After six days of salt wind, rain, and sun, Jacob Flanders had put on a dinner jacket. The discreet black object had made its appearance now and then in the boat among tins, pickles, preserved meats, and as the voyage went on had become more and more irrelevant, hardly to believe in. And now, the world being stable, lit by candle-light, the dinner jacket alone preserved him. He could not be sufficiently thankful. Even so his neck, wrists, and face were exposed without cover, and his whole person, whether exposed or not, tingled and glowed so as to make even black cloth an imperfect screen (51).

Later in the story, as Jacob is alone on his trip in Greece, there is another moment in which loneliness is a relief to him: "And though Jacob remained gloomy he had never suspected how tremendously pleasant it is to be alone; out of England; on one's own; cut off from the whole thing" (136). With this behaviour, Jacob underlines his active desire to distance himself from everything and everybody else, thus emphasizing his being "other" and the impossibility to penetrate his otherness. Some characters make an intra-diegetic remark to this condition. For instance, Mrs. Durrant thinks, during a party that "he is extraordinarily awkward," […] "yet so distinguished-looking" (55). Towards the end of the narration, the same thought is heard with a chiasmic rhythm in Clara Durrant, Julia Eliot and Mr. Bowley's gossiping circles: "That young man, Jacob Flanders," they would

say, “so distinguished-looking – and so awkward” (150). The term “distinguished-looking” is noteworthy, because it refers to the concept of vision and it emphasises the fact that the sense of sight is overwhelmingly a sense of distance. After Jacob leaves, other characters fill the space that has remained empty with their own perspective on the protagonist. Such a mode of telling might stem from Russell’s theory of “the space of perspectives”, which is “the space of points of view, since each private world may be regarded as the appearance which the universe presents from a certain point of view” (154)[91]. Accordingly, it is possible to maintain that not only Jacob, but also the reality about him acquires a ghostly quality, in which mere, no-strings-attached speculation becomes the truth-maker in the narration and contributes to the construction of the character. Most astoundingly is, though, that the sense of absence is as strong as ever even when Jacob is present on the scene. To this extent, the description of Jacob’s actual room is emblematic of such condition:

> Jacob’s room had a round table and two low chairs. There were yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats of arms, and initials; notes and pipes; on the table lay paper ruled with a red margin – an essay, no doubt – “Does History Consist of the Biographies of Great Men?”[92]There were books enough; very few French books; […] Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there (33).

The spectral image of a fibre creaking under an invisible weight conveys Jacob’s phantom-like quality of his representation at best and it is repeated at the very end of the novel, when the readers apprehend that Jacob is dead and therefore materially and irrevocably absent.

As Patricia Waugh points out,

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[91] Banfield, (2000:74).

[92] The reference to biography is certainly not fortuitous, but it functions as a meta-reference to the theme of truthfully representing a character and to the importance of factual information for the production of “rigorous” biographical writing.

> […] In *Jacob's Room*, "epistemologically, the dualism of mind and body in the novel is unmistakable…Jacob's consciousness is so difficult to apprehend not only because of its unity, transcendence, and privacy, but also because of its transience.
>
> […] The room as symbolic of consciousness is so appropriate here because consciousness dies; things like rooms and shoes endure…The quest for the mysterious and transient consciousness of another is bewildering if not futile, and these are the conditions of our love and perceiving" (2011:31).

Hence, in the last moments of the narration, the topic of absence reaches its climax, which is reinforced by a renewed, sombre calling of Jacob's name – as in the beginning – and by the presentation of a pair of Jacob's shoes. As Olk remarks, the shoes are a metonymic figure that "capture Jacob's life-journey in a poetic image that expresses the duration of time in an instant. Like a painting the shoes represent Jacob's absence" (2014:133). Not only do they epitomize the protagonist's absence, but they also express the finality of the absence – a finality that recreates extremely urgently and powerfully all the force of ultimate reality and its truth.

3.6.2 Jacob's *Aporia* and his critique of implicit belief as inherent falsity

The composition of the main character in JR proposes a series of questions, the most pressing of which is how it is possible to create and describe faithfully a character that is practically almost never there, either physically or spiritually, in the narration. Indeed, Woolf's writing achieves the double goal of enhancing a sense of reality and reducing that reality to an impermanent construct, paving the way to a compelling feeling of doubt. Clearly, the narrator in the next intends to warn on some aspects of Jacob's representation, i.e. incommunicability, difficulty to "know" him, impenetrability of his narrative "room". This way of constructing Jacob's character might seem illogical and counter-intuitive, but it acquires nevertheless an internal coherence that makes the text function in a narratological sense.

As briefly mentioned before, apart from being a biografictional character, Jacob embodies the very modernist incapability to believe. Indeed, one of the most difficult things for him is to accept other people believing "implicitly" in specific states of affairs. Up in Cambridge, during a dinner with prof. Plumer, his wife and other students, to which Jacob comes too late, an affirmation about truth Mrs. Plumer utters "brightly", irritates the protagonist profoundly: "I don't feel that I know the truth about anything till I've read them both!" (29). The precise reason why this utterance makes Jacob exclaim: "Oh God, oh God, oh God!" (29) remains unclear, but it is possible to argue that the cause of his frustration is the fact that Mrs. Plumer's desire to get to truth can be satisfied, that she manages to believe in something, to choose a side where to stand, if she is confronted with two counterfactuals. Jacob's incredulity or incapability to believe grows into a kind of existential uncertainty, until he starts to think that "a world capable of existing [is a thing] […] unnecessary […] to believe in" (29), because, in his opinion, "there will be no form in the world unless [he] makes one for himself" (30). That is the reason why Jacob creates his own very restricted system of beliefs, which is solidly grounded in the realm of literature and philosophy. Towards religion, the realm of implicit belief *par excellence*, Jacob shows, on the contrary all his distrust. A scene at sea with his college friend Timmy Durrant provides the setting for the disclosure of Jacob's feelings:

> "The Duke of Wellington was a gentleman," said Timmy.
>
> "Keats wasn't."
>
> "Lord Salisbury was"
>
> "And what about God?" said Jacob.
>
> The Scilly Islands now appeared as if directly pointed at by a golden finger issuing from a cloud; and everybody knows how portentous that sight is, and how these broad rays, whether they light upon the Scilly Isles or upon the tombs of crusaders in cathedrals, always shake the very foundations of scepticism and lead to jokes about God.

> "Abide with me:
>
> Fast falls the eventide;
>
> The shadows deepen;

Lord, with me abide,"

sang Timmy Durrant.

"At my place we used to have a hymn which began

Great God, *what do I see* and hear?"

said Jacob. (45) [my emphasis]

Not only does Jacob's recollection express a defiant incredulity towards the existence of God, but it also traces his uncertainty about the shape and the structure of the world around him and also about his capacity to perceive it and to perceive it truthfully.

Thus, Jacob's system of beliefs is centred on philosophy and literature. Their values and principles regulate his perspective. Jacob constructs his personal identity and his view of the world based on what he has read and studied. Clearly he views ancient Greek philosophy as the repository of higher culture and, therefore, he assigns it a high truth-yielding level. Otherwise, he believes in very few things: he reads only Shakespeare and Marlowe and he is firmly convinced that Greek philosophy is the most suitable (and possibly the only) way to access knowledge and truth and to comprehend the world. His belief in Greek culture may stem from an affinity Jacob feels towards it. "'Probably', said Jacob, 'we are the only people who know what the Greek meant'" (70). In addition, he feels he is able to establish an empathic relationship to the Greek thought:

> Jacob knew no more Greek than served him to stumble through a play. Of ancient history he knew nothing. However, as he tramped into London it seemed to him that they were making the flagstones ring on the road to the Acropolis, and that if Socrates saw them coming he would bestir himself and say "my fine fellows" for the whole sentiment of Athens was entirely after his heart; free, venturesome, high-spirited… (70-71).

Hence, Greek philosophy can be said to be the functional agent for Jacob's autonomous world-making. Through the principles of Greek philosophy, in

particular Plato's and Socrates', Jacob acquires the instruments to construct reality linguistically and to aspire to "spiritual truths". According to Charles Armstrong, Plato's *Phaedrus* is a fundamental text for Jacob, because "at the end, Jacob's digested reading enables him to a vision of the world around him that is characterised by what is called *astonishing clearness*" (2012: 113). In this sense, Jacob too is a character (un-)consciously involved in the search of truth. To this extent, he tends to explore truth through doubt, as philosophy may have instructed him to do. His distrust in everything around him may serve as a trigger for the process of searching for truth, because if one feels distrust and disbelief, s/he is automatically urged to look for verification of specific states of affairs.

Such searching is reflected, in the novel, in Jacob's journey to Greece. The section dedicated to Jacob's trip to Greece marks a turning point in the story. From this moment on, Jacob becomes a present protagonist and the narration discloses ampler glimpses of his consciousness and his thoughts. Even though his faith in Greek culture is not total, it still represents a crucial frame of reference to Jacob, since it is a relevant part of his culture, education and identity. Greek culture and philosophy are the only standpoints Jacob acknowledges and to which he assigns a truth-bearing privilege. In the novel, there is a definitive rupture with those authoritative stances, when Jacob explores Greece on his own. When confronted with matter-of-fact Greece, he suddenly realizes that "all this business of going to Greece [was] an intolerable weariness" (131). The more he observes the Mediterranean country, the more he finds there is a lack of correspondence between the actual place he sees in front of him and the "ghostly" one he knew from his studies:

> It is the governess who starts the Greek myth. Look at that for a head (they say) – nose, you see, straight as a dart, curls, eyebrows – everything appropriate to manly beauty; […] And the Greeks could paint fruit so that birds pecked at it. First you read Xenophon; then Euripides. One day – that was an occasion, by God – what people have said appears to have sense in it; "the Greek spirit"; the Greek this, that and the other; though it is absurd, by the way, to say that any Greek comes near Shakespeare. The point is, however, that we have been brought up in an illusion (133).

This cultural cleft discomforts him[93]. "From being moderately depressed he became like a man about to be executed" (133). Back in England, Jacob declares "there's none of th[e] European mysticism" (161) in Greece. What he calls "mysticism" is in fact a construction of a truth about Greece and its culture, which has turned out to be, in fact, nothing but a fiction, a myth without any foundations. Such realization makes him experience a strong disillusionment and possibly shame for having trusted a fictional fabrication and having believed "implicitly in the truth of the moment" (115-116).

Fanny Elmer, of whom Jacob thinks she has the capacity to believe implicitly, (116), muses about Jacob's literary taste and then she thinks *Tom Jones*[94] would be a novel he "could like". She believed that "this dull stuff about people with odd names is what Jacob likes" (118). In the essay *Tragedy and the Whole Truth* (1951: 331), Aldous Huxley maintains that Fielding was "another author who preferred to tell the Whole Truth" (1942: 335) and that

> *Tom Jones* is one of the very few Odyssean books written between the time of Aeschylus [– a Greek author Virginia Woolf was particularly fond of –] and the present age. Odyssean, because never tragical; never – even when painful and disastrous, even when pathetic and beautiful things are happening. For they do happen. (Huxley, 1942: 335)

In *Jacob's Room* the book is called three times "a mystic book", perhaps because it is one of the few novels Jacob actually deems readable or perhaps because it is antithetical to JR. Certainly the novel *Tom Jones* functions as an intertext, possibly giving clues and inferences on Jacob's system of beliefs and principles. However, while Huxley maintains that *Tom Jones* is a book about truth because

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[93] The idealization of the Hellenistic culture and the delusion with the encounter of modern Greece is a theme Virginia Woolf shares with E.M. Forster. As Ann Ardis argues, "*Forster's Hellenism has been aptly described as the 'simple idealizing sort in which the ancient world is invoked as a standard to set off the deficiencies of modern civilization'. This intellectual training prompts Forster to argue in Alexandria that 'the Greece that is a spirit' died in the fifth century: 'the Greece that tried to discover truth and create beauty and that had created Alexandria' has no relationship whatsoever with modern Greece*" (2013: 65).

[94] *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling,* often known simply as *Tom Jones,* is a comic novel by the English novelist Henry Fielding. The novel is both a *Bildungsroman* and a picaresque novel. It was first published on 28 February 1749 in London, *Tom Jones* is subdivided into 18 books, each preceded by a discursive chapter, often on topics unrelated to the book itself.

it does not shy off from telling anything, for Jacob *Tom Jones* is a novel that yields truth, because of its pure structure, because it tells about a prototypical life following a prototypical pattern. *Jacob's Room* is a novel about truth for the opposite reason, i.e., because it acknowledges and embraces the fallibility of the attempt to tell "the whole truth". Thus, JR acquires a denouncing force by stating implicitly that realist novels, with all their conventions, their rules and their obligation to expound everything, are simply another means to cover the abyss between what is professed and what is true.

3.6.3 Light and Darkness

Having dealt with the elusiveness of Jacob as a narrative character and of his coming across in the text as a constructed entity, it may be profitable to search for further narrative devices with the capacity to shape him as a truthful character. One of the most captivating narrative devices in *Jacob's Room* is the use of light as an indicator of the bivalence of Jacob's narrative construction and of the power of truthful narration. Light is a stylistic device that narratively shapes both settings and characters. Through the semanticization of light, it is possible to gauge the degree of actualization of the narrated states of affairs. As a symbolic element, light adds to the epistemological process entailed in the pursuit of the concept of truth. Jacob's willingness or unwillingness to show, the narrator's way of showing/hiding his persona, the disclosure of his moods and feelings in the narration echo in the narrative rendition of light and darkness. Hence, light becomes a metaphorical instrument with which it is possible to establish what can be seen and thus known and what remains in the obscurity, i.e. unknown. With its marking function, light naturally recalls the process of selection in biographical production. By flashing on a specific object, it permits the realization of an epistemological progression towards knowledge and truth. Light brings clarity and illumination: it unearths undiscovered truths lurking in the darkness, hidden in unlit corners. As light sculptures Jacob's figure and his environment, the text recipients get entangled in a mesh of pressing questions as to whether the construction of the figure of Jacob bears any truths or not. As shortly mentioned

before, light plays an important role in the shaping of the environment. All characters are set against darkness and indefiniteness, until a ray of light juts onto the objects around them and brings them to reality. When an adolescent Jacob makes his first entrance in the novel, he appears “out of the depths of darkness” and he “stands blinking at the light” (18). At the same time, places endowed with superior knowledge and functioning as depositories of truth seem to irradiate a special, nearly preternatural light:

> Above Cambridge […] there is a difference. Out at sea a great city will cast a brightness into the night. Is it fanciful to suppose the sky, washed into the crevices of King’s College Chapel, lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the light elsewhere? Does Cambridge burn not only into the night, but into the day? (25-26)

> If any light burns over Cambridge, it must be from three […] rooms; Greek burns there, science there; philosophy on the ground floor. […] It is not simple, or pure, or wholly splendid, the lamp of learning (34).

Of the two quotations, the latter is the most interesting for the analysis for two reasons: the first is that it introduces a series of “if-clauses” in the narration, which have the function of heightening the speculative tone of the novel. The second is the fact that it numbers Greek among the “lights of knowledge”. As it was shown, Greek culture, language and philosophy acquire a symbolical value of truth-bearers for Jacob’s system of beliefs. Light is not always a shaping force in the text. The narrator warns about its ambivalent and potentially deceiving power, positing that since signs of knowledge and truth may become a cruel instrument of deception, distrust and diffidence must become a vital necessity:

> If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it – a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose – something senseless inspires them (26).

Even though the symbolical light in JR may seem to be able to become its own negation, in the text there is also a contiguous counterpart of light, which is represented by the shadow. Indeed, wherever light shines, there stretch shadows

as well. Their reach is extraordinarily wide, since shadows are actually what lives are made of. Indeed, not only do shadows represent an instrument of preservation of truth from the distortions of observation and interpretation, but they also constitute the incorporeal material with which lives are fabricated:

> Life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us – why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him. Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the condition of our love (66).

In this passage, there is a very complex reflection on the nature of life and human ways to perceive it. Life is made up of fleeting moments, which simultaneously materialize and dissolve in our existence. They are of the same mutable nature of shadows. Within this symbolical frame of reference, it becomes very difficult and problematic to assign a truth-value to any states of affairs in life and to their verbal narration. The truth of life is therefore just as impalpable and ineffable as lights and shadows. As Quigley comments,

> Woolf's narrator puzzles over Jacob's reality, how he can suddenly appear "known to us" and a moment after being a stranger. Woolf chooses, however, to depict in [JR] this view that "life is but a procession of shadows", which is the exact opposite view from Bertrand Russell's, where the "real truth" is "something precise, clear, definite" – "the real truth of which that vague thing is a sort of shadow" (2015: 90).

The last glimpse of light in the novel is laden with a further semantic connotation, i.e., it becomes the light of the sunset and it reddens, thus paving the way to associations with the semantic fields of blood, war and death. At first the light turns "fiery rose" (170) on the "long windows of Kensington Palace" and then its hue intensifies until it reaches the colour red on the letters of Mrs. Flanders. Soon after, the narration moves abruptly, but indistinctly, to present-time Greece, where a battle is taking place and "fitful explosions" are heard "among the channels of the islands" (172). In the meantime, light ceases to exist; it is killed by "darkness drop[ping] like a knife on Greece". The death of light occurs together

with Jacob's death: the end of light determines the end of the protagonist. While such narrative device brings to the fore all the vividness of the moment of death, it also provides the terrain for a narrative shift back to Mrs. Flanders and her thoughts. There, the narration acquires all the force of a distant gazing, of an estrangement from Jacob and from the observation of his life; he is no more mentioned, he becomes anonymous, simply one of "her sons fighting for the country" (172).

3.7 Summary conclusions

The novel *Jacob's Room* needs to be situated at a crossroads between many different literary paths and genres. It is Woolf's first literary work leaving the paths of conventional, realist storytelling and narration and taking the path of experimentation. Dealing with both biographical and narrative issues according to new rules, the work redefines the concept of truth in fiction and it represents a hallmark in the modernist production dealing with truth issues and their narrative implementation. Jacob's life is inscribed in a metaphysical dimension, in which the main protagonist seems already projected into a "beyond" and therefore in a position that is out of reach for both the intra-diegetic figures and the text recipients, thus making both categories complete outsiders in Jacob's life. Through the narrative strategy of the absence of the protagonist, the narration of Jacob's character reflects the impossibility of telling truthfully about a life and, at the same time, it functions as a narrative tool for exposing incoherencies and imprecisions in the construction of character, thus preying on every attempt to make narrations an absolutist matter. In this sense, it stands in open contrast to traditional realist literature. The hegemonic mechanisms of biografictional construction are abandoned and novelistic conventions are put aside, in order to favour the development of a new narratological scheme, in which the questioning and challenging of the concepts of truth and truthful narration acquire a much higher priority. Since the novel indirectly imitates biography, it takes into account all the problems of truthfully portraying a subject and it deals with the difficulties implied in the process, such as the issues of selecting, ordering and shaping the

facts of the biographee's lives. However, JR's first preoccupation is not the transmission of such notions – in fact, they become mere negligible details – but it is the construction of the character's consciousness and emotional sphere, i.e., its inner life.

Woolf shows in her novel that the biographical proceedings are highly invasive of the reality of the character and that there is always a concrete danger of distorting it by means of an erroneous perspective. This warning is represented – in a meta-narrative fashion – as Jacob's *fear* of the eye and of being focussed on, i.e. Jacob's fear of "seeing oneself being seen" (1978: 83). Through the representation of the main character, of the space surrounding him and of the perspective of the narrator, the novel transmits a new and alternative mode of telling about the truth, which may be defined as a mode of uncertainty, but, more importantly, of disbelief. Traditional representations of characters are discarded and deconstructed. The lack of a coherent plot structure limits the access to the events of Jacob's life, but it opens up to a deeper understanding of artistic truth. It negotiates the notions of creating a character, of designing its thoughts, emotions and systems of beliefs and it offers the possibility to contemplate the unattainability of truth by juxtaposing disclosure and concealment. Both of them are systematized and functionalized in the text with the use of the metaphors of light and darkness.

CHAPTER 4

FICTIONAL BIOGRAPHIES

4.1 Aspects of narratology and role of the conception of truth in the cross-over genre of biography

Biography is a narrative genre whose primary task is the truthful representation of a life. Its mainstay is the description of specific events in the life of a subject, covering a time lapse that generally goes from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave95. In his introduction to the study of literary biography, John Batchelor (1995: 2) attributes "a conservative character" to biography, claiming that the genre is "immune to deconstruction96" and that "the structure of biography is biology." All these statements trace back to the general assumption that biography has a fundamentally fixed structure, just as biological life follows a specific pattern. Turning life into a text seems therefore to be possible, at least at first sight, only within the boundaries of the given life-structure. Hence, the core intentions of biography should remain within the scope of the mere description of the unfolding of a selection of events characterising a life. What is more, biographical writing may only be considered successful, if its representation of life respects as much as possible the correspondence between the "lived life" and the "told life" and if the account is faithful (truthful) to the biographical subject's experience of life.

Describing a life is not the sole aim of a biography. The biographer, the "regulatory mind" behind the biographical text, can have various motives and concerns, which may stimulate the production of a biography. Sometimes, thus, a biographer begins his work, because s/he wants to celebrate a certain figure, his/her deeds and his/her actions, some other times because s/he ultimately

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[95] In actual fact, the biographer can take a different decision and make a biography begin before or after the birth, just as like as he can decide to put an end to his work at a moment (long) before death.

[96] The term "deconstruction" refers to an "*expanded expectation, one that simultaneously challenges all univocal meanings attributed to a life (and the possibility of such) and holds out for something less (or more than) consistency about a person*" (Hutch, 1988: 5).

intends to condemn a certain behaviour or to highlight and document a social, moral or historical change. Especially for this last reason, at a certain point in the history of literature, and particularly with the modernists' treatment of the problem of truth in biographical writing, the correspondence between lived life and told life ceased to be a necessary desideratum for biography. Other narratological concerns, such as the reporting of inner feelings, inner subjectivity and self-reflexivity, became predominant in the study and production of biography. The narration of these details and the providing of a new perspective on the biographical subject began to be perceived as more suitable narratological devices for their approach to life-writing.

Generally speaking, biographical writings are supposed to focus on verifiable facts and on traceable sources. Nonetheless, biography is also based on the biographer's ability/craftsmanship to organize facts and sources into a coherent narration that reflects the actuality of the life portrayed. The discrepancies between the narrated life and the lived life reveal the necessity to think about the ways of narrating something that has occurred in reality and it consequently leads to the problematization of the concept and the function of truth in a biographical text. As a matter of fact, the (re-)organization of facts in a narrative way is the most appropriate instrument a biographer can use to write and make sense of his own biographical work. Bruner stresses the fact that we "seem to have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of narrative," (1987: 12). This character of "unavoidability" links biographical writing with fictional writing, since the both of them construct and re-enact[97] a "story" by telling it, i.e. expounding it with language. They both naturally follow a precise time-pattern and explore the psychology of the characters involved. Therefore, biographical writing has much in common with novelistic creation, because both of them provide a representation of a life or a complex of interacting lives. Schabert (1982: 8) points

[97] "Worldmaking always starts from a world at hand; making is remaking" (Goodman, 1978:6-7).

out that “fictional biographers create ‘lives’ from the facts by working within the formal traditions of the novel.” In other words, just as a novelist invents a “world,” a biographer (re-)constructs it with the facts s/he has gathered, because the biographer needs to find causal nexuses that join all the facts together. Although his/her statements are endowed with a truth-value, s/he inescapably also provides a fictional pattern to his work. However, whereas the novelist, being free from the constraints of verifiable facts, can afford to fully acquire the role of creator, the biographer, being “bound by fact”[98], can only be seen as a re-creator of a life. Manganyi (1983: 34) confirms this condition of the biographer, when he states that “[biography] is one of the genres in which an attempt is always made to re-create a life”. Not only does biography describe a life, but it also “emplots” it, i.e. it gives its set of facts a narrative frame. As Lusin (2010: 267) points out, “the task of the biographer […] is not simply to reproduce random facts, but to organize them as a narrative text, drawing back on the conceptions of plot, character and narrative perspective.” In fact, both the biographer and the novelist establish the point of view from which the story is told. This leads to the discussion of the methods applied to the re-construction of a life, of the reality in and around the subject and to the consideration of the various selection factors that push the biographer toward one direction or another. Usually the novelist has a greater number of instruments[99] at disposal than the biographer: s/he can introduce a first-person narrator into the story or s/he can establish a direct contact with the events in the life of the protagonist by letting his thoughts and emotions reach the reader by means of an interior monologue. Unlike the novelist, the biographer must try to let his/her voice remain “transparent” (Middlebrook, 2006:5) and

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[98] Woolf, V. (1942). *The death of the moth: and other essays*. London, Hogarth Press.

[99] Sometimes the freedom of the novelist is seen as a burden. In “Mapping Lives: the Uses of Biography”, France and St. Clair quote a letter from Louis Stevenson to Edmund Gosse, dated 1893, in which he affirms, perhaps playfully, that “[…] [F]iction is too free. In biography you have your little handful of *FACTS, LITTLE BITS OF A PUZZLE, AND YOU SIT AND THINK AND FIT ‘EM TOGETHER IN THIS WAY OR THAT, AND GET UP AND THROW ‘EM DOWN, AND SAY DAMN, AND GO OUT FOR A WALK […]” (2004: 253).*

his/her role must remain that of the "explainer" (Middlebrook, 2006:5). One of the central issues of the biographical representation is the truthfulness of its account. As regards biographical writing, Hibbard (2006:19) claims that "it is generally assumed that there is a certain truth or essence to be ascertained". On a theoretical level, therefore, it may be possible to discuss, whether a biography needs to be true, independently of its factual or fictional nature, if it is acceptable to omit or conceal things and if a biographer must be objective or may intrude his/her own subjectivity.

There are numerous typologies of biographical writing. A traditional distinction highlights the opposition between factual biography and fictional biography. This distinction is a reflection of the more general distinction between factual narrative and fictional narrative. It is based on the parallelism with Schaeffer's pragmatic definition of the latter, which posits that "factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness, whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims," (2009: 98). In the light of such a definition, factual biography may seem, at first, the only plausible biographical typology at all. Caroline Lusin defines factual biography as "classic" in the typology range and she states that "[it] concentrates on facts, tends to follow the traditional pattern of beginning, middle, end, and focuses on a straightforward development of character" (2010: 265).
Given this frame of reference, it would be legitimate to ask oneself what the sense of biography would be, if it were otherwise, i.e. if the biographical text was not the result of accurate research and truthful recording of hard facts. Nonetheless, in a modernist view, and especially under a Bloomsburian[100] perspective, factual biography is only a narrative pole in a continuum[101] towards fictional biography and the biographical novel (the opposite poles) and it would be curtailed on the

[100] The term "Bloomsburian" is attested in McNeillie (2010: 2). The online edition of the OED suggests "Bloomsbury" or "Bloomsburian" (Compare: entry n.1 Bloomsbury, n. Second edition, 1989; online version March 2012. <http://www.oed.com.ubproxy.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/view/Entry/20473>; accessed 11 May 2012. First published in *A Supplement to the OED* I, 1972).
[101] The freer from the "fact", the closer to fiction.

knowledge level to limit the investigation of life and reality to the sole reign of outer factual information. Factual biography and fictional biography should be regarded as two different gradations on the same scale, where the discriminant between the two is the approach and the "weighting" of the truth-value in their statements.

Facts are just the starting point, because a biography is not prefigured, until its author has established a hierarchy of facts, i.e. s/he let specific facts acquire the status of events and thus distinguished between events and non-events, and a biography is not fulfilled, until the events are re-organized by means of the process of emplotment. Schabert (1982: 4-9) very helpfully categorizes the two narrative poles according to the six criteria.

As the scheme shows, the two biographical narrative poles infer a different negotiation of the truth-value within the construction rules of a narrated world:

Factual biography	**Fictional biography**
Transparency	Self-referentiality
Authenticity	Essentiality
Historiographic concepts of coherence[102]	Novelistic structures

Fig. 1: Schabert's categorization of the distinctions between factual and fictional biography.

Whereas the criterion of transparency implies a detachment of the biographer, the concept of self-referentiality involves a direct participation and consequently, a shift from the biographical subject to the biographer itself, his own perspective

[102] Quoting William C. Dowling, Schabert (1984: 5) suggests that "'correspondence' to the world of historical knowledge and not aesthetic 'coherence', is the first concern of factual biography".

and/or its environment[103]. Even though the third opposition (Historiographic concepts of coherence vs. Novelistic structures, see Fig.1) gives an insight in the practical questions of biographical narrative patterning, the second opposition of the scheme is the most interesting for the explication of the "weighting" of facts and data in terms of truth-value. The concept of "authenticity" draws attention to the characteristic of "faithfulness" to fact. The emphasis is put on the evidence that something has "happened" and that it produced remarkable effects in the biographee's life. When Schabert spoke of "essentiality," she meant "poetic essentiality" (1982:6) and she indicated that "'poetic essentiality' demands a creative use of the evidence." As a result, a true but poetically "unfitting"[104] fact may become a "poetically false" fact.

The aim of this chapter is to focus on the relationship between fictional biography and truth and on the narrative repercussions on the genre of biography. Lytton Strachey's work is embedded in this category and I shall investigate the problem of truth and of truthfully representing life. My analysis includes Virginia Woolf's studies on biography as well. Woolf devoted herself to the study of biography in a quite peculiar way. Besides writing essays on the subject, only after she had written a hybrid quasi-biography (*Orlando*) and a mock-biography (*Flush*), she painstakingly and laboriously endeavoured to write a biography stricto sensum (*Roger Fry*). Through the comparison between the two approaches on biography, I am going to illustrate the narrative shift that ultimately brought about radical changes in the representation of truth and reality. Enlarging the analysis, I am also going to examine the relationship between fictional biography and fiction

[103] Later in this chapter, I shall argue that Modernist authors like Strachey and Woolf might have designed and arranged their biographical (and fictional) endeavours in a self-reflexive way, especially as regards to their social and philosophical experience and background.
[104] Nelson Goodman also uses the concept of "fit" in the sense of "truth": "[…] [T]ruth of statements and rightness of descriptions, representations, exemplifications, expressions – of design, drawing, diction, rhythm – is primarily a matter of fit: fit to what is referred to in one way or another, or to other renderings, or to modes and manners of organization" (1978: 138).

itself, thus highlighting their points of junction and their conceptual and organizational distinctions in the construction of narrative worlds and narrative truth.

As a matter of fact, the accomplishment of a narration of truth implies a series of choices on the part of the biographer: such choices depend on the same criteria of "selection, abstraction and prioritization," (Nünning, 2010: 196) which apply for the definition of a world-making event. When the author of a biography conjures up his work, he gives a (new) textual form to a pre-existent life, which can be considered as the pre-existing world upon which the subsequent biography is construed. To achieve this, s/he is forced to answer specific questions arising from the nature of the material s/he has gathered and from the biographer's structuring intentions and methods. Halpern (1978: 5) reminds that "biography is an art which reflects the biographer's conscious selection, arrangement and design." According to his/her purposes, the biographer has to emphasize certain aspects and leave others aside. S/he is given the prerogative to decide what matters and what doesn't in the life of the biographee. S/he deals with "spots of indeterminacy" (Ingarden, 1974: 246), filling the blanks of the physiologically unknowable about another subject's life with his/her own conjectures, deductions and illations. On the other side, the reader has to detect these "critical points" and to negotiate between the represented world and the rhetorical setting-up provided by the biographer and his own pre-existing opinions and beliefs on the biographee. Doing this, s/he is able to judge if the biographer's version is credible and objective or, conversely, improbable and biased.

The previous attempts made by the Victorians to find the right equilibrium between truthful representation and the represented subject proved inadequate for the modernist "new biographers." A particularly afflicting point was the presumption that truth could only be found in fact-researching, as it had been

conducted by personages like Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen[105] (1832-1904), the editor of the huge *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB)[106]. Such approach, based on factual research, but ultimately aimed at commemoration and idealization, refused to admit the biased character of its pretensions of absolute objectivity. Unlike their predecessors, modernist biographers considered this biographical method flawed and preposterous. They were extremely conscious of the limitedness of an individual standpoint. Modernist biographers worked to underline the dangers of "absolutistic" proclivities, claiming the acknowledgment of the inevitable presence of the biographer's subjective stance. Woolf and other "new biographers" understood the need to try to solve the problem of seizing lived life in a narrative net, of "enliven[ing] biography through the use of imaginative techniques borrowed from the novelist's 'art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect' "(Neal-Parke, 2002: 68), thus leaving as much space as possible to truth and truthful representation.

In order to give form to her purpose, Woolf structured her argumentation on the relationship between the concept of truth and the description of personality. According to Neal-Parke, (2002: 71) personality was for Woolf

> the new biography's primary challenge. Its practitioners could no longer justify themselves as mere chroniclers, secretaries to their subjects, lives and times, but rather must rise to the challenge of being coequals.

[105] Sir Leslie Stephen, (born Nov. 28, 1832, London—died Feb. 22, 1904, London) was an English critic, a man of letters, and first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

[106] The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography is the national record of men and women who have shaped British history and culture, worldwide, from the Romans to the 21st century. It is overseen by academic editors at Oxford University, UK, and published by Oxford University Press. The Oxford DNB was first published in 2004 in print (60 vols.) and online. The Oxford DNB now includes biographies of more than 58,202 men and women who died in or before the year 2008—plus 500 'Theme' articles for reference and research. (Source: Retrieved 07 June, 2012, from http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/.)

Together with the employment of narrative elements such as emplotment and eventfulness, one of the most relevant devices a “new biographer” can use is the exploration of the subject’s personality.

In her essay “The new Biography”, (1928), Woolf recognized an unwelcomed watershed, - a “split” - between truth and personality, and she asserted that “on the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality. […] [T]he aim of biography is to weld these two into a seamless whole”. Personality and truth could not be divided, otherwise the truthful effect of the narration would vanish. If the biographer kept them apart, the result would be “dull” and “unreadable”, because, as she formulates it, “the truths which transmit personality” would be ruled out in the process. Personality is therefore the keyword for the new approach to biography for three main reasons: first, it is linked to the conception of self and self-perception; second, it gives way to the exploration of consciousness (“thoughts and emotions”) and, finally, because it acts like negotiation landmark between the knowable and the unknowable of a single subject. Woolf correlates the concept of personality, “the evanescence of human character, of a whole that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts,” (Gualtieri, 2000: 349) to the development of the genre of biography, proclaiming the former as the principal vehicle of truthfulness in the biographical representation. This method leads to a subsequent reflection, i.e. to Woolf’s questioning of the *single, stable* subject as opposed to a new, modern *indefinite, multi-faceted* one.

Although Woolf’s approach was systematic under the rhetorical point of view, at its heart lay a paradox[107], and her categorization has an opaque trait: “successful biography must both capture the *personality* and retain factual integrity even though, generally, ‘fact and fiction refuse to mix’” [Emphasis added]. In order to explain this apparently puzzling misconception, it would be profitable to draw back on a very well-known metaphor by Woolf, in which truth is compared to “something of granite-like solidity” and personality to “something of rainbow-like

[107] E. Cooley (1990:74).

intangibility". Being so different in nature, truth and personality are later defined by Woolf as incompatible. Yet, she added, "[the biographer] is now more than ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act"[108]. Perhaps, then, Woolf's difficulty to find a "unity of truth" did not lie so much in the mixing of fact and fiction, but in the fact that the report of the biographee's personality was perceived as fundamentally fictional in its nature. It was necessary to find a new way of creation on a new narrative level, with new instruments altogether; perhaps Woolf's concerns were directed to finding a way to "legitimise a controlled form of fantasy" (Thompson, 2007:6). In order to give shape to a truthful depiction of the biographee's personality, a biographer must therefore try to attain a "perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow", of truth and personality. Only when, after this process, readers/biography recipients have "implicit belief" in the biographer's stances, a biography can be considered accomplished. This kind of accomplishment is one of Woolf's main concerns in the essay "The Art of Biography", published in 1939, about ten years after "The New Biography." In this second essay she dedicated to biographical writing, Woolf analysed in detail the reasons why she considered Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* and *Queen Victoria* as well-formed biographies, but she dismissed *Elizabeth and Essex*, stating that the work represented a biographical failure. By the time she composed the essay "The Art of Biography", she was also working, or better, "toiling" at the realization of her only formal biography, *Roger Fry*. During the time in which she worked at the production of Fry's biography, Woolf had to give up most of her fictional devices and, although she was an intimate friend of Fry's and could have had access to a great number of private details of his life, she chose to avoid the "inclusion"[109] of all facts she had at disposal. Normally Woolf would have granted the biographer the right to "use"

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[108] Quoted from Dowling (1984:163).

[109] According to Thompson, (2007: 6) Virginia Woolf uses facts in biography for inclusion, "allowing a character trait to illustrate a larger facet of the personality, rather than relying on the documented deeds of a subject's life to convey personality".

such details, but this time she voluntarily renounced to this right. She was confronted the other, probably more taken for granted nature of the biographer, that of the "transcriptionist", the "chronicler" of actually occurred facts. Later in her investigation, being conscious of the biographer's doubled-nature, Woolf attributed the value of "craftsmanship" to the work of the biographer, while she reserved the definition of "art" to the sole novelistic creation; not only that, when she did make use of the definition "art" to describe biography, she tended to associate it with adjectives like "minor" or "young". Woolf remarked the fact that if biography is considered an art, due to its condition of "the most restricted of all arts", it is automatically doomed to inefficacy:

> It was not Lytton Strachey who failed; it was the art of biography. In VICTORIA he treated biography as a craft; he submitted to its limitations. In ELIZABETH he treated biography as an art; he flouted its limitations," [Emphasis in the text].

Having worked "against the grain"[110] of her novelistic talent, Woolf established that biography had to take the expounding of facts as its primary preoccupation. It could not loosely allow itself to borrow too much from the "artistry of fiction," because the risk would be to land "in an ambiguous world, between fact and fiction". Hence, Woolf was well aware that the problem of conciliating biographical truth and narrative representation is a difficult one. Her solution proposal was to concentrate on the study of personality and inner thought and to integrate it with the accounting of facts, rather than just recording actions and "exploits." Although Woolf's reflection puts biography in the position of a potentially new modernist genre, her ambivalent relationship to it "indicates that it is precisely when biography threatens to spill over into the realm of fiction or 'imaginative' literature, that censure must intervene" (Gualtieri, 2000: 358). In his study on "auto/biografiction" in 2010, Max Saunders also highlights Woolf's objections. In

[110] "[Writing] against the grain" is an expression that Leonard Woolf often employed, when he wanted to affirm that his wife Virginia was "stepping" in another direction, that "could [have] easily [been] the wrong [one]". (2012: [1988] online resource).

an attempt to give a solution to the problem of mixing fact and fiction, he argues that, according to Woolf, "writers shouldn't combine fact and fiction under the sign of biography; but if they do it under the sign of fiction, it will be a different story; especially if they fictionalize the biographic process as well," (Saunders, 2010:467-8).

Furthermore, Woolf pointed to yet another distinction between fiction and biography, namely the "verifiability" of facts, when she noted that "one [a verifiable fact] is made with the help of friends, of facts; the other [the unverifiable fact] is created without any restrictions save those that the artist, for reasons that seem good to him, chooses to obey". As a consequence, she concludes her statements by maintaining that the problem of condensing truth of fact and truth of fiction lies in the very nature of the genre of biography. Woolf exposed this conception so eloquently, that it merits extensive quotation:

> The trouble lies with biography itself. It imposes conditions, and those conditions are that it must be based upon fact. And by fact in biography we mean facts that can be verified by other people besides the artist. If he invents facts as an artist invents them — facts that no one else can verify — and tries to combine them with facts of the other sort, they destroy each other.

While she was convinced that verifiable and not verifiable facts destroy each other, there is no evidence that truth of fiction and truth of fact are mutually exclusive, if they are put together. Indeed, they are intended and employed in the various biographies as a duality. Analogously, the nature of the duality of truth of fact and truth of fiction, just as for the categories of factual and fictional narration, must not be considered as a mere binary concept, but it constitutes a span of narrative possibilities.

It has already been claimed that *fact*[111] is generally acknowledged as the bearer of truth in biography. Incontestably occurred events, usually marked by a date,

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[111] Nelson Goodman defines fact, like meaning, as *"a syncategorematic term; for facts, after all, are obviously factitious"* (1978: 93).

like birth, marriage, professional achievements and eventually death, unmistakably signal a moment of truth, which the biographer has the right/duty to transfer and integrate into his work. Virginia Woolf seemed to be less interested in this kind of unquestionable facts than in the more elusive and certainly more ineffable "suggestive reality behind facts". The exemplification of this category of facts, which normally only exist within the boundaries of inner feelings and thoughts, can be found in Woolf's biographical works.

In her works, Woolf provides evidence that the essence of facts is not incontestably and verifiably true. Facts must be observed and examined. They are useful only if they are "fertile fact[s]", "fact[s] that suggest and engender". According to Virginia Woolf's concept of truth in biography, the biographer has to be a *fact-fashioner*: he has the power to assign the status of "event" to the fact, expound it and substantiate its qualities by means of narrative strategies and narrative constructions pointing at the conveyance of specific effects. It is therefore worthwhile to assume a distinction in the category of facts, which acts as a "discerner" and helps the Modernist biographer with the substantiation of his subjective choices.

Not only do the choices of facts influence and affect the final biography, but also the biographer's vision, his/her own point of view. Unlike the Victorians, who did not seem to realize they were writing from a certain stance, Woolf (and other new biographers) were the first ones to be aware of the presence of a narrative perspective. It was probably the acute awareness of the problem of blending dual truths (the factual and the fictional truth), that brought Virginia Woolf to the production of borderline biographies, playing at the cusp of genres and categories. The result of these genre-games was the coming to life of three very dissimilar literary productions: *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), *Flush* (1933) and *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940). Strictly speaking, the first work could only ironically be considered a biography, because it is in actuality a playful novel, juggling with and thinking over the conventions, the methods and the assumptions of biography. Nevertheless, the correctness of this definition, since

there is no unanimity of judgement on the nature of the work,[112] may be disputed. The second work takes the protagonist of the novel as the focalizer[113] for the recounting of the actual protagonist's life, so that we have a novel (or at least fictional material) framing a biography.

Eventually, the third work, *Roger Fry*, is the only one which can be regarded as a proper/formal biography. By examining these three examples and cross-examining the literary genres they represent, I will attempt to outline Virginia Woolf's standpoint on the problem of biographical truth. This swift survey of the works already shows that the main assertion posits a delicate balance between the proposal of facts and the narrative/imaginative adjustments. According to Woolf, balance should be thus constructed and attained:

> The biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction, nor the substance of fact.

Woolf's study of biography can be considered as an exploration of the fiction/fact equilibrium in a narration, which comprises a new contemplative *modus operandi* that casts a light on personality. Such stance can be defined as a new emphasis on inner life, on thought and on emotion, with the aim of achieving improvement in the practice of biography. Facts should be supported by the recounting of inner feelings and thoughts and a biographer's primary task would be to find the right equilibrium between the two informative poles. As Woolf points out, "[...] [I]n order that the light may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded: yet in the process, they must never lose their integrity" (Woolf, 1967 [1920]: 473).

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[112] Compare Paragraph 2.1

[113] It is worth noting that the focalizer in *Flush* is E. Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel.

CHAPTER 4: PART I

4.2 Virginia Woolf's operationalization of the concept of truth in the genre of biography

As briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, Virginia Woolf tackled the problem of biography and the implications concerning truth and reality representation in an eccentric way, i.e. she approached the genre by experimenting with its possibilities on the fictional level (cf. Monk, 2007: 1-40). Bloomsbury's negative judgement of the state of the art of biography, in particular of late Victorian biographical aesthetics, might have influenced Woolf's decision to conduct some renewing experiments with the genre of biography. The aim of her literary experiments with biography was the amelioration and the innovation of the genre with the use of fictionalizing elements. According to Woolf, the genre had been suffering a decline since Boswell's[114] times and, particularly, since Victorian biographers[115] had avowed biography with too many hagiographic connotations, which flawed the truthful representation of the biographical subject. The intrusion at any cost of the "exteriorized" (Neal-Parke, 2002: 68) concept of goodness**[116]** in their too long and wary biographical works**[117]** was the principal cause of dissatisfaction and need of a further development in biography. As Catherine Neal-Parke notes, Woolf invited the readers to ask themselves if the Victorian way of writing biographies did not "let 'all that has been most real' slip through these writers' fingers," (Neale-Park, 2002: 68). Woolf exposed such a position clearly in her essay "The New Biography"[118], where she stated that:

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[114] James Boswell, (born October 29, 1740, Edinburgh, Scotland—died May 19, 1795, London, England), was a friend and biographer of Samuel Johnson. He wrote the Life of Johnson, 2 vol., in 1791. The 20th-century publication of his journals proved him to be also one of the world's greatest diarists.

[115] Virginia Woolf referred loosely to her predecessors as the "Victorians". Her aim is contrasting an old staid literary and social conception with her own new, fluid and Modernist one.

[116] The concepts of "good" and "goodness" have been debated in the Bloomsburian circles. For instance, they are one of "*the key strands of argument*" (McNeillie, 2010: 12) in G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*. In his work, Moore argued that "*intrinsic good is unanalysable and the word 'good', when used in this way, to mean a thing 'good in itself', is undefinable*" (Sellers 2010: 1-29).

[117] Compare Regard (2003: 195): "[...] *the slimness of the volume [was] another change in twentieth century biography, which has got rid of elephantiasis, the plague of Victorian times* [...]".

[118] Woolf, Virginia, and Andrew McNeillie. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 1*. London: Hogarth, 1986.

> Victorian biography was a parti-coloured, hybrid, monstrous birth. For though truth of fact was observed as scrupulously as Boswell observed it, the personality which Boswell's genius set free was hampered and distorted. The convention which Boswell had destroyed settled again, only in a different form, upon biographers who lacked his art. Where the Mrs Hutchinsons and the Isaak Waltons had wished to prove that their heroes were prodigies of courage and learning the Victorian biographer was dominated by the idea of goodness. [...] (Quoted from Bradshaw, 2009:96)

Therefore, as Hibbard (2006:27) remarks, "Woolf welcomes recent achievements in biography and notes that the biographer and novelist share certain concerns," i.e. she felt the work of the so-called "new biographers" was about to update the genre and thus taking the reforming direction she wished for. Notably, Woolf was very keen on posing that biographical and fictional narration shared common ground. Up to this point, the author could conceive a merging of the horizons of the two narrative genres. Her ultimate purpose was to show that a new perspective and a new treatment of biography were rising and, in the meantime, had to rise. She sought to attain a new conception of biographical truth, in which factual and fictional information could mingle in a flawless fabric and could generate a "fertile" biographical narration.

4.3 Life-writing on the verge between truth and fiction – *Orlando*: A (Quasi-) Biography

Orlando[119], Woolf's 1928 *jeu d'esprit* and "writer's holiday", seems to encompass and impersonate a long list of different issues and literary genres. This work, half-biography and half-novel, resists and transcends traditional classifications and conventional separations, thus opening to the negotiation between rules that govern genres. A proverbial and often-quoted anecdote tracing back to the time of *Orlando*'s first publication, tells about many librarians who chose to shelve Woolf's work in the "Biographies" sections. Perhaps they had been misguided by the subtitle "A Biography," but this uncertainty about where to place *Orlando*,

[119] The quotations of this novels are taken from: Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography*. London: Penguin, 2000.

even in a physical sense, might serve as a means to reflect on the renitence of the work to fit into any given categorization. Furthermore, it might highlight the characteristic parodying tone that distinguishes the work so markedly. While some scholars clearly embed it in the category of novel (Hunting, 1956; Lokke, 1992), some others regard it as "narrative of boundary crossing" (Lawrence, 1992: 253) or even as a "casebook on how to write biography," (Richter, cited in Cooley: 1990). Ira Nadel points at the "metabiographical" element, noting that Orlando holds a "unique position, at once criticism and fiction" (Nadel, quoted in Cooley: 1990). Jane Goldman (2006: 65) describes the work both as a "spoof biography" and as a "satirical *künstlerroman*", while Max Saunders (2010:450 et passim) conceives it as a "fantastic concoction" and later in his work, as a "phantasmagoria", an "exhibition of optical illusion" and as "the expression of the presence of fantasy in everyday mental life." Finally, John Stape's definition of *Orlando* is both the most emblematic of the multiplicity of the work and the one that characterizes its identity at best:

> [*Orlando*] is a hybrid genre of mock forms, simultaneously a novel, a treatise on biography, a study of the art of fiction, a work of feminist social criticism, a revisionist literary history and the fantastically reinvented life history of Woolf's friend [Vita Sackville-West][120].

Hence, a very significant distinctive trait of *Orlando* is its slippery nature, its resistance (almost resilience) to whatsoever labelling or standard classification. Such condition almost immediately gives a sense of fluidity and dissolution of borders, which had been taken, so far, for granted. Analogously, it may be able to shed a first light on the modernist conception of truth.

Furthermore, the several definitions here considered stress the presence of a playful element, of a ludic goal of the literary endeavour. In fact, on Woolf's diary entry on December, 12th, 1927, the author stated that *Orlando* would be "an *escapade*, half-laughing and half-serious, with great splashes of exaggeration"

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[120] Westman, (2001: 40).

(D3 168). Woolf established jocundity and mocking as main features of *Orlando* early in her diaries:

> Satire is to be the main note --- satire and wildness. […] My own lyric vein is to be satirized. Everything mocked. […] I want to kick my heels and be off. […] I think this will be great fun to write. (D3, 131)

The presence of a satirical colouration in *Orlando* can be seen as the reflection of the author's desire to explore her urge of a lively and free and truthful recounting of personality with unconventional narrative devices, such as lightheartedness and debonair teasing. Possibly, Woolf used the latter two as a means to convey "the truth of the unconscious," (Hussey, 1995: 204). Certainly, the employment of satire and parody in a narrative work may serve as a wake-up call and as a further instrument to shake the foundations of previous convictions and conventions. Based on these affirmations on the nature of the work, the analysis of *Orlando* will follow three paths of examination. The first path treats Orlando as "fiction"[121]; the second path illustrates the biographical structure of the work and it underlines the truthmaking strategies in it; finally, the third path deals with the meta-references to biography contained in the text.

4.3.1 Narrative representations of life in *Orlando* and the role of visual narrative constituents in the construction of truth

Throughout the work, Virginia Woolf put her theories, norms and prescriptions about biographical truth painstakingly into practice. One of her best-known decisions about the work was that it had to be "truthful but fantastic". In her critical introduction to the primary text, Gilbert gives a possible explanation of how such paradoxical premise might be interpreted:

> In the free-flying sweep and scope with which it wings over the gravities of history, [Orlando's] life goes beyond even the fantastic, Shandyan parameters Strachey prescribed. Yet at the same time, it is, as Woolf insisted, 'truthful' – truthful because it is true to Woolf's ongoing effort to reimagine history, and truthful because it is true to her developing vision

[121] Due to its nature, perhaps it would be more appropriate to call the work "semi-fiction".

> of the secret psychological realities that shape even the most liberated woman's life. (1992: XXV)

The goal of this chapter is to illustrate to what extent the "truthfulness" pursued by Woolf reverberated in the text, what narrative strategies were employed to enact it on the levels of story and discourse and what implications it had in the development of narratological investigations. A further goal of the chapter is the introduction of the concept of "vision" as the narratological implementation of truth-yielding elements. Both objectives are achieved through the narratological examination of the possibilities and limitations of life representation and through a sustained close reading of the narrator-biographer's commentaries and of the protagonist's literary speculations. To begin with, in almost every passage of the book, it is possible to find a reflection on the narrative performative power of truth in biographical production and to draw a parallel with its function in fictional writing. In these reflections, which the author would later formalize in her essay "The Art of Biography," Woolf made an empirical use of the concept of truth and continuously sought to suggest that the gap between the actual reality of a life and the narrated reality of it is too wide for a simple chronicler to gauge it effectively.

Although *Orlando* has been considered as a "spoof biography," Woolf did not intend to work with binary categorisations and to treat Victorian biography as a bloated aberration from powerful standards of truthful representation. Indeed, placing the Victorian and the modernist traditions on two opposite poles was not her primary goal. Rather, her investigation of the biographical genre might be conceived in a reformist sense, as a swift and joyful attempt "to revolutionize biography in a night," and "to toss [biographical conventions] up in the air and see what happens", [122]. Woolf tried to exploit previously assimilated familiarities with

[122] Diary (1984: III, 428).

Victorian aesthetics, to put forward her new biographical model. Therefore, the two aesthetic approaches have to be considered as two parallel lines pointing at the same end, i.e. truthfully representing and narrating life, but using two contrasting sets of narrative strategies. Nevertheless, in her attempt to enforce new theses, Woolf made her readership constantly aware of the inefficiency of the Victorian method[123]. It should not be forgotten that Woolf's desire to revolutionise biography was also the fruit of a certain impatience and a sense of fatigue towards the accomplishments in biography so far reached. In her opinion, a biography in the classic Victorian sense, with its stolid, too serious and too austere procedures, could not yield any insightful truths about the "great men" it described. The limitation to the description of selected aspects of selected people's lives could not yield any truths concerning life itself, because the restriction of the range would inevitably give an incomplete picture of the innumerable ways to experience life and truthfully represent it. Moreover, it could possible serve political, social or propagandistic aims.

On the narratological level, Victorian biography precluded whatsoever access to the characters' inner life and it also failed to express the biographee's personality in a true and comprehensive way. To this extent, Woolf's argued that the biographer needed to have the abstraction capacity – along with the creative force – of a novelist, in order to be able to confront the problem of recounting personality and to be free from any kind of restraint. However, even if a biographer could have managed to recreate personality with Victorian means, s/he would still have not had the right linguistic tools to convey the significance of life properly. Indeed, another painful issue was that language always proved a too imprecise and impure instrument of disclosure and accurate yielding of significance about "the reality and truth of a figure." The meaningfulness of words as such was always permeated by the "ideology of form," and hence verbal signs, even before narration and its "ordering" power, were the first sources of

[123] In this sense, with the realization of Orlando, Woolf might have also produced a work that theorizes on the readers' responses about narratological truth.

interference and mediation in the representation of real life. Such interference generates a sense of unreliability, which inevitably reflected itself also in the genre of biography. Although Woolf was aware of the relevance of the contribution of biography to the study of the narration of reality, she could not avoid to point at its artificiality.

In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that the author of *Orlando* found herself in greater sympathy with the new biography. She contributed to the development of the movement with the production of *Orlando* and *Flush*. In these works, Woolf managed to pour her doubts and reservations about Victorian methodologies applied to biography into a dense narration, full of inferences and far-reaching observations. In this sense, *Orlando* is the most exemplary work. It is punctuated with multidimensional metaphors, the most important of which is the highly symbolical allegory of truth as a revealing agent. In addition, an ironical, cross-referencing language, which steadily highlights the ambiguity of the biographical stance and the potential unreliability of the information provided by the biographical language, characterizes the entire work and gives it the revolutionizing force that will affect the next biographical productions and will induce the rising of meta-biographies in the second half of the twentieth century.

4.3.2 Orlando or an experimental exercise in the fictionalization of the biographee

Being a long and deft travel through time and space, through literary epochs and history, and covering a time span of about three hundred years, Orlando's life has never "really" taken place in actual reality as it is described in the work, but it is the product of the fantastic assemblage of indexical references to Vita Sackville-West's life. Paradoxically and puzzlingly enough, *Orlando* can thus be considered both the result of a creative process and the recounting of something which actually happened. The story of Orlando, a young nobleman, begins in the Elizabethan Era, when he is sixteen years old. After a meeting with Queen Elizabeth I, he is introduced to the Court by the Queen herself. Orlando lives with

the Queen as her favourite courtesan, until her death. After that, he remains at the court of her successor, King James I. During the Great Frost, Orlando falls in love with Sasha, the Russian ambassador's daughter. At the end of a short affair, Sasha abruptly abandons him. Subsequently Orlando decides to come back to his native home, where he has a strange experience, i.e. a one-week long sleep. After waking up, he decides to leave for Turkey as an ambassador. In the middle of a riot, Orlando repeats the experience of the long sleep, but once awake, he discovers he has undergone a radical transformation: he has become a woman. As a woman, Orlando spends a period as a nomad, together with a clan of gypsies. Driven by her love for poetry, the "new" Orlando comes back to England. At this point, her life is mainly dedicated to the literary activity and to the frequentation of the eighteenth-century London society. Eventually, Orlando falls in love with an adventurer, Lord Bonthrop Shelmerdine. The novel ends "in the present moment", in October 1928, when Orlando is a successful writer, thanks to "The Oak Tree", the poem she has been writing throughout her three-hundred-year-long life.

Three elements constitute the fictionality of Orlando and are characterized by the laws of exemption from and oblivion of reality: 1.The protagonist escapes the laws of time; 2.The protagonist is exempted from the laws of biology; and 3.The protagonist is not aware of these infringements of the laws of nature. The three elements give information as to how the concept of truth is treated and implemented in the text. The *out-of-joint* nature of time, the sexual change of the main character and the double nature of the narrator – in whose language it is difficult not to hear multiple meta-biographical interferences – tend to allude to a new conception of truthful narration. The lack of univocal correspondence between the narrated level of a text and matter-of-fact reality of things no longer necessarily means falsity. The need to recur to hermeneutics in order to get to the truth in the narrative is a new valuable instrument for the epistemological cause and not the symptom of bias. To this extent, the narration of time is a central example and it plays a relevant role for the narratological study of truth.

Normally, in biography, the chronological order of events and their natural duration are represented without the use of any disproportions, like slow-downs or speed-ups; this provides the text with a structure that the narratee naturally assumes as verisimilar. The structure of time in *Orlando* is fluid and variable and it is reminiscent of Bergson's theory of the *durée*:

> Time […], though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its human length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the time-piece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation. (68)

Not only does time become a perspective-dependent variable in the text, but it also elapses without following a "natural pattern", it flies by, accompanying Orlando's changes and changing accordingly. Time can be eternal and atemporal, stretchable and distensible, as it is precisely measured and rhythmically beaten. The beginning of *Orlando* clarifies the protagonist's status as an out-of-time character. Unlike the case in a standard biography, where the recounting generally starts from the biographee's first moments of his/her life, Orlando's story begins *in media res*, when he is a young man absorbed in his training to become a knight, just like his father or his grandfather, (13)[124]. Although the historical time of the initial scene is well circumscribed, the protagonist seems to be suspended in a personal timeless area: recollections of his ancestors' glorious, military past constitute the main temporal cues with which it is possible to date the scene. Such memories come to this mind as the skull with which he plays swings back and forth, an eternal wind blows and a green arras moves "perpetually". Through the semanticization of time, it is therefore

[124] Unless stated otherwise, hereafter, the page numbers in brackets and the quotations are taken from Woolf, Virginia, (1928): *Orlando: a Biography* (Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert, ed. by Brenda Lyons). London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2010, pp. 336.

possible to delineate the figure of the protagonist and, at the same time, to gather information about the possible fluidity of the chronological unfolding of a life. Above all, such analysis of time can shed light on how it can influence the structure of a biographical work or even undermine it.

4.3.3 Narrative representations of life: possibilities and limitations

To put the stress on the linguistic and epistemological discrepancy between narrated life and real life, Orlando[125] states in the first pages of the novel, that "Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another. Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces," (13).[126] In this early consideration, the protagonist's reasoning splits the nature of the colour "green" in two: s/he handles it as though s/he were talking of two different constituents. The first constituent is the colour green as we can encounter it in actual reality, i.e. through the direct experience of senses; the second constituent is the colour green as we can find it in written language, i.e. as a mental evocation and, consequently, merely as the potentiality of the colour and with all the corollary inflections of subjective perceptions. Through this remark, the protagonist points at the culturally attained re-cognizance of the dissimilarity between reality and representation. In addition, it is relevant to put the stress on the visual element of the considered object. The sense of sight is not a random choice, but a rhetorical one: seeing is notably the sense that is most associated with the ascertainment of real, factual state of affairs. It directly refers to the theme of vision, to the objective examination and assessment of reality and to truth as an epistemic means of revelation. If biography puts truthful representation as its primary goal, but the visual overlapping between the

[125] It is hard to assign a definition to the narrating agent in Orlando, because it cannot be defined either as a classic novel narrator or as a biographical one. Even the hyphenated "narrator-biographer" does not seem to be adequate, because it implies a "both…and" relationship between the two terms. Perhaps the best definition for the narrating agent in Orlando is that of "voice". (See Handbook of Narratology)

[126] The quotes about the novel Orlando are taken from Woolf, Virginia, (1928): *Orlando: a Biography* (Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert, ed. by Brenda Lyons). London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2010).

described object and the descriptive tools is insufficient, there can be no substantial truth-yielding effect in the narration.

Orlando is a fully-fledged, formalist theoretical text about the art of biography, whose underlying fabric, beyond the narrating level, is interwoven with a subtle criticism of the Victorian customs and their reflections in biographical texts.[127] The narrator-biographer is the primary narrative agent who spins the web of critique. This choice reveals the intention to decentre the seat of truthful representation from eulogistic and exteriorized Victorian life-writing to move it towards a new, all-encompassing methodology. Woolf did not expound her critical stance directly, but she disseminated it throughout the text. As the narrator-biographer weaves together the plot line and the discourse line, s/he receives a further task, i.e., the dissemination of truth-cues, who refer to half-hidden denunciations of Victorian operational shortcomings and contradictions. The narration is also characterized by the maintenance of a safe distance – masqueraded as cultural and epochal divide – from the previous biographical culture, which, on a secondary level of interpretation, shows the adhesion to the modernist values of the new biography is not yet total or unconditional. This estrangement is present in both the narrator-biographer and in the protagonist. The scene in which Orlando grows tired of his adventurous life with the Earl of Cumberland and abandons him, shows this detached stance at best. At this moment of the narration, the narrative agent exploits Orlando's decision to scorn its own contemporaries, and s/he determines that the ideal literary customs are set in the

[127] One of the most "visible" signs of Woolf's critical stance towards Victorian biography is the use of the iconographic medium in *Orlando*. Victorian biographies were interspersed with photographic or illustrative material as a means to reinforce the idea of accuracy of the biographical account. As noted by Codell in Lago, Law, Hughes (2000: 67), "*the numbers of [iconographic] reproductions varied from 317 (Millais) to 4 (Redgrave) and even none (Cope), [and] most of these biographies contained about 40 to 50 [reproductions], mostly photographs*." The images Woolf used to illustrate her biography were part photographs and part collages of Vita Sackville-West's portraits and those of her ancestors, except for the image of the "Russian Princess," who happens to be Woolf's niece, Angelica Bell. The aim of the illustrations – a unique case in Woolf's literary production – is to mock once again Victorian customs and pretensions of absolute accuracy, which, as Woolf demonstrated, could be easily counterfeited.

Renaissance past. To clarify this concept, the narrating agent compares Victorian and Renaissance attitudes towards the word “life” in the following passage:

> Soon, however, Orlando grew tired, not only of the discomfort of this way of life, and of the crabbed streets of the neighbourhood, but of the primitive manners of the people. For it must be remembered that crime and poverty had none of the attraction for the Elizabethans that they have for us; […] no fancy that what we call ‘life’ and ‘reality’ are somehow connected with ignorance and brutality; nor, indeed, any equivalent for these two words at all. It was not to seek ‘life’ that Orlando went among them; not in quest of ‘reality’ that he left them. (22)

In a Victorian narratological context, the word ‘life’ and ‘reality’ contained in the passage quoted above may take up the meaning of ‘unrestrained behaviour’ as opposed to ‘correct, bourgeois attitudes and socially respectable behaviour.’ The narrative agent makes a critical reference to the social conventions that brought about a different reception of ‘life’ and ‘reality’ and to the hypocrisy deriving from the fact that, in order to maintain their extolling tone, Victorian biographies usually eschewed less agreeable aspects of the lives they attempted to represent. It is perhaps possible to affirm that, in Victorian biographers’ opinion, the lives of the selected people they wrote about were provided with a pre-specific shape, whose certain outcomes did not even need be predicted. Such pre-specificness was visible in the language and in the methodology they adopted. Victorian biographers thought they could achieve truth just by meticulously exploiting external sources and by carefully selecting data. As a matter of fact, in direct opposition to the previous biographical tradition, the narrator-biographer puts the emphasis on private, inner aspects of Orlando’s life. Victorian biographers implied in their texts that it was possible to draw truth-yielding elements about the personality of their biographees from the public activity they carried out. Through the voice of the narrator-biographer, Woolf belied this assumption. She created a reverse narrative world in which all that would have been relevant in a traditional biography is omitted or is fortuitously missing. For instance, of all the “delicate” state offices Orlando was involved in, there is little to no information, because “the revolution […] and the fire which followed, have so destroyed all those papers, […] that what we can give is lamentably incomplete” (84). In addition to

the appalling absence of crucial "official" information, the narrator-biographer seems to spite Victorian dogmas. When s/he places the confession that "often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise and even to use the imagination," (84), i.e. right at the point of the biographical accounting, where the gathering of information from tangible, "historical" documents, would be demanded, s/he is deliberately violating commonly agreed-on narrative rules of biography. Moreover, the narrator-biographer mocks the idea that the representation of life equals the representation of action. The latter must find an explicit expression in both outer and inner life. S/he refuses to accept that life representation may be reduced to the sole listing of public achievements. "This method of writing biography" – thus argues the narrator-biographer – "though it has its merits, is a little bare," (184). Later, s/he affirms that "Life […] is the only fit subject for novelist and biographer; life […] has nothing whatever to do with sitting still in a chair and thinking," (184). Therefore, the expression "inner life" should not be understood as a static whole of inner thoughts, but as a dynamic and conscious flow of emotions and feelings, which stir the soul and shape personality, thus producing visible effects in outer, social life. Woolf unfailingly underlined the decisive importance of inner life and consciousness, without which one's life contours were doomed to indefiniteness. The narrator-biographer coins an *ad hoc* metaphor to highlight the risks of ignoring the dangers of indefiniteness. In a poetic passage of the text, the narrative agent compares human beings to ships at unknown sea, which, in this case, is associated to life representation.

> Our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea, and the sailors at the mast-head ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon: Is there land or is there none? To which, if we are prophets, we make answer "Yes"; if we are truthful we say "No".

There is an atmosphere of absolute uncertainty about the outcome of the life-travel; nobody can be in the position to know whether the outcome of the travel through the sea of life will be the arrival to a safe land or an endless pilgrimage across nothing else but water. In the narrative agent's opinion, only prophets have enough faith to answer positively to the question of destiny, while truthful

answerers have to display a more down-to-earth approach, which is enacted through a possibly pessimistic, critical attitude. Such an attitude reflects the attempt to disperse the idea that it is mistaken and possibly biased to re-configure reality through a hyperbolic employment of illusive narrations, based on accurate and targeted narrative selection, because this approach may create a crisis in the balance of rhetorical powers. As a result, such biographical narrations would not only sound incomplete, but also plainly deceitful. Even though the narrator-biographer sporadically states: “A man who can destroy illusions is both beast and flood” (142) and “Illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth” (142), *Orlando* as a whole is a text that criticizes the use of illusion in biography, because the former removes the latter from its purpose of truthful representation. The critical stance is expounded in the following passage:

> Illusions are the most valuable and necessary of all things, and she who can create one is among the world’s greatest benefactors, but as it is notorious that illusions are shattered by conflict with reality, so no real happiness, no real wit, no real profundity are tolerated when illusion prevails (139).

The idealist and somewhat consoling qualities of illusions might be tolerated, but because of its deceptive nature, illusions have to be expunged from *new* biographies.

Long after Orlando has become a woman and perhaps because she ‘lived’ a first-hand Victorian life, her judgement about Victorian social and literary habits grows even sharper as it gets tinged with a nostalgic Renaissance colour. She swiftly wonders how Victorian literature, despite its elitist claims, could be such a vast phenomenon, (‘Victorian literature meant not only four great names separate and distinct, [like in the past epochs], but four great names sunk and embedded in a mass of Alexander Smiths, Dixons, Blacks, […] – all vocal, clamorous, prominent’, 201). Unfortunately, it is not possible to get access to the direct conclusions drawn by Lady Orlando, because the biographer exceeded his/her limit of six lines s/he wanted to dedicate to the matter. Nevertheless, the goal of the argument is quite clear: the exaggerated length, the overwhelming quantity

and the pretension of seriousness is the cause of the estrangement from the past biographical tradition. Omission is the rhetorical strategy used by the narrator-biographer to signal the uselessness of a lengthened reporting.

Not only does the narrating agent reflect the status of reality and truth in a biography, but also the protagonist, being a poet, questions the meaning of truth, and, in particular, of truth as a cardinal literary theme. The narrator-biographer and the protagonist share the same set of values about the relationship between truth and its literary representation. They equally and alternately comment and reflect on the subject, thus reinforcing the author's underlying thesis. Whereas the tone of the narrator-biographer is often ironical and his/her remarks about how good and severe biography should be conducted, always have a pungent tongue-in-cheek character, Orlando's tone, both in his/her experience as young man and as adult woman, is melancholic and elegiac. The protagonist – or biographee – does not have an active role in the construction of the discourse level of the text, but s/he remains in the story level, trying to deal with the problem of a truthful representation of life in a literary environment. S/he does not partake in the implementation of the structuring principles exposed by the narrator-biographer, but s/he simply lives his/her life without becoming conscious of its unity. As a matter of fact, the protagonist becomes a passive spectator of his/her life. S/he never questions anything, although s/he lives extraordinary experiences and s/he does not look for explanations or justifications for what happens to him/her. His/her sense of criticism is addressed only to two points: the first is literature; the second is the social and historical environment s/he is immersed in. Both points are questioned with respect to their relationship to truth. One of his/her greatest concerns is the pursuit of truth in a literary environment. This remains unchanged also after the protagonist wakes up as a woman. What changes is the level of specificity in the interest in literary issues. As a man, he broods over the question of truth in a philosophical sense: "For not only did he find himself confronted by problems which have puzzled the wisest of men, such as What is love? What friendship? What truth?" (68). Later, as a woman, her

speculations about truth are most distinctively those of a writer: “So she went on to the nature of reality, which led her to truth, which in its turn led to Love, Friendship, Poetry; […] which meditations, since she could impart no word of them, made her long, as she had never longed before, for pen and ink” (102). His/her reflections on the nature of truth are of a different kind than those of the narrator-biographer, because they tend essentially to a despondent set of considerations about truth as a value and as an ultimate goal to be attained through literature. Whereas the narrator-biographer puts on a parodic and, at times, even patronizing tone, when the pursuit of truth becomes too challenging, Orlando becomes discouraged. As a poet, he struggles with the unfathomability of the concept of truth; he finds it too theoretical, too distant and ineffable. At the age of thirty, when he still is a man, Orlando lives a moment of disillusionment about literature, (‘Love and ambition, women and poets were all equally vain. Literature is a farce’, 67). He burns all the poems he has so far composed, except the one he is willing to keep with himself until the end, i.e. “The Oak Tree”, as ‘it was his boyish dream and very short’, (67). In this crucial passage of the text, the biographical framework of the work liquefies and Orlando takes up the position of an internal focalizer, which is an unusual position in a biographical narration. He reflects without the mediation of the narrator-biographer on the meaning of truth in literature in general and, particularly, on the fallacious nature of metaphors and similes as instruments for the conveyance of reality. A possible reason why the poet feels the presence of a conflict might be that metaphors and similes are considered a form of illusion. Coming to terms with reality always represents a painful defeat for the poet and the literate. Through a series of stringent, ever frightening questions, he outlines a crisis of the pursuit of truth and he shows why the relationship between literature and truth is flawed and ultimately inconsistent. He opens the way to a subtle feeling of *horror vacui* in front of the unattainability of truth in a literary text:

> ‘Another metaphor, by Jupiter!’ […] If literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of Truth, what is she? Confound it all,’ he cried, ‘why say Bedfellow when one’s already said Bride? Why not say what one means and leave it?’ (70).

His most recurrent question is a causal one. He asks why the poet needs to conjure up an image, when s/he could simply expose his/her argument with plain words. Beyond this level of understanding, Orlando might ask himself why the poet needs a mediating agent to convey his/her own messages. The protagonist of the work pursues his reasoning through the following visual example, and finally, he gives vent to all his frustration, when he realizes the unreliability of both plain and noble, poetical language:

> So then he tried to saying the grass is green and the sky is blue. 'The sky is blue,' he said, 'the grass is green.' *Looking up*, he saw that, on the contrary, the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods. 'Upon my word, […] *I don't see that one is more true than another. Both are utterly false*.' And he despaired of being able to solve the question of what poetry is and what truth is and fell into a deep dejection. [My emphasis] (70).

Vision is once again the element of perception through which Orlando makes sense of the discrepancy between narrated reality, even at its most truthful level, and actual reality. It is in the moment of looking at the external objects he wants to describe, that he must acknowledge the overwhelming vastness of the gap. Even though he tries to reproduce what he sees with language, he cannot escape using two complex similes, which represent for him an unwanted intermediary between the signifier and the signified. Orlando is incapable of deciding which representational strategy best fulfils his purposes – plain denotative description or complex, meaning-laden metaphor – therefore he despairs. In a following moment, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Orlando has become a married woman, she meets again her old friend Nicholas Greene. Although three hundred years have gone by, since they last saw each other, none of them finds it wondrous in the least. This detail is, almost consciously, not mentioned. Being in reference with a law of time, it merely falls into oblivion. Both friends simply and naturally greet each other, as it is normal between friends who have not met for a long time. They both begin to discuss literature and Greene's attention is

soon caught by Orlando's manuscript. He praises her work as free from "the modern spirit" and "composed with a regard to truth," (195). Both qualities seem to make the poem quite suitable for publication. Greene judges "The Oak Tree" quite positively and promptly imparts Orlando a lesson about royalties and sales, but the salient topic is the realization of the unknowability of truth. Nobody ever gets to read the poem. In fact, nobody receives a glimpse of the truth content of the work. It is therefore possible to infer that "The Oak Tree" is a symbol of the unaccountability of reality's truth.

4.3.4 The fictionalized biographer in *Orlando*

Woolf chose the textual category of the narrator to occupy the position of truth-maker in her work. The narrator of *Orlando* comments on all states of affairs about the protagonist and, at the same time, takes the position of a theoretical meta-analyst in the genre of biography. As opposed to the biographical norm, the voice of the narrator-biographer cannot be said to be transparent, (cf. Middlebrook, 2006). On the contrary, Woolf made the heterodiegetic narrating agent her primary truth-yielder and the fulcrum of her argumentation about the conflict between Victorian and modernist biography. It is not easy to keep the narrator-biographer's voice separate from the author's, though the biographer is a pompous Victorian who sometimes gives voice to Victorian "truth" while some other times he pronounces meta-biographical statements. As it is well-known, Woolf inserted her programmatic plan about biography and the type of relationship a biographer should have to his/her biographical subject, in almost every page of her work. Her argumentation propagates in the text on the discourse level, through the establishment of a metadiegetic relationship with the narrator-biographer, which, nonetheless, takes place without a clear "violation of semantic thresholds of representation," (Pier, 2009:190). Through the study of the biographer's parodic language, his/her tone and rhetorical proceedings, it is possible to shed some light on the narration of truth. In particular, Woolf insisted on the fact that a "good biographer" in the Victorian sense also had to be able to "not see", even though he was allowed to pretend to have delved into every

aspect of biographee's life. This contradictory capacity is iteratively denied and criticized throughout the text and it is elicited through the semanticization of Orlando's physical aspect and psychical states of mind in terms of "vision." When the narrator-biographer describes Orlando's expression at the beginning of the text, s/he makes a direct reference to what is visible about him: "Directly we glance at eyes and forehead, thus do we rhapsodise. Directly we glance at eyes and forehead, we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which is the aim of every good biographer to ignore," (12). The importance of vision become all the more evident, when it is denied or when there is an interference, such as belief. When the narrator-biographer affirms: "the less we see, the more we believe," (142), s/he makes an apparently aphoristic assumption, but, in fact, s/he warns on the power of belief, which can act as a malfunctioning substitute of vision, if this is ineffective or inadequate. Believing is always an act of faith, which presupposes that the believer cannot have – or does not need to have – all the elements to judge whether a state of affairs is truthful or not. Believing imitates seeing, but, even though one cannot ascribe the same stability of interpretation to the process of believing, it can nonetheless be extremely powerful and it can induce the believer to consider his/her beliefs as actual truths.

In order to construct a world, however, it is necessary to interweave one's meta-discourse and one's set of values with the narration. New biographers need to get rid of the sense of reverence towards their biographees and, if needed, act ruthlessly, in order the pursue truth under the most suitable conditions. To realize this, a re-negotiation of previous values must take place. *Orlando*'s fictionalized biographer performs four main actions, which display a developing progress:

(1) The narrator-biographer refuses to encode his/her biographee into a fixed normativity imposed by Victorian biographers;

   a. S/he seeks to impose his/her own normativity, thus constructing a new universe of values and a new world-making system.

The text does not revolve around the attempt to characterize the biographee according to a fixed agenda. On the contrary, the figure of Orlando emerges from the recollection of his/her thoughts, from the doubts s/he expresses, from the description of the people s/he meets, from the social and historical changes s/he deals with.

(2) For the narrator-biographer, the unrestrained recounting of the flow of occurrences is superordinate to the “weighting” put into being by Victorian biographers;

Narrating every aspect of the biographee’s life is the main goal of the narrator biographer. S/he is willing to rely on as many sources as possible, in order to achieve this goal, but s/he is not willing to put an emphasis on one event rather than another. Nevertheless, the awareness that the ambition of all-encompassing narration is impossible to attain is always present. Hence, the narrator-biographer never complies with the Victorian model or with its rule of selection of events, but, on the contrary, s/he feels compelled to reveal everything he *sees* and knows about Orlando and to make his/her account inclusive of all the details s/he knows.

(3) The narrator-biographer systematically violates the truth-schemata of his/her predecessors; s/he violates their cultural *doxa* in specific points of the narration, i.e. every time a bizarre and/or supernatural event occurs in Orlando’s life.

The treatment of the narrative constituent “event” is crucial to the understanding of truth as a narrative constituent. Thanks to the dissemination of truth-yielding elements in the text, it is possible to frame the hierarchical, ideological relationship between oppositional pairs. The very interesting paradox in Orlando is the fact that the truth-yielding events always have a completely fantastic matrix, (e.g. “Truth as allegorical figure”, see next paragraph).

(4) The narrator-biographer re-negotiates the meaning of truthfulness and falseness, thus altering the scale of narrative values in biography with narrative instruments.

This process of deconstruction permits to the narrator-biographer to create a counter-world, in which new, all-encompassing truth-values are implemented, while traditional patterns are overcome. The most important truth-value is selection, which is not simply understood as an alternative to the hegemonic model of narration, but as a new, more efficient ordering framework in which it is possible to represent the biographee's life.

The narrator-biographer merely sustains the argumentations of the author, but s/he never intervenes directly in the narration of events. Orlando tells him/herself his/her thoughts, emotions, doubts. As stated in the following passage, s/he never judges, never tries to compensate, never tries to omit either any facets or traits of Orlando's life story:

> The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of the biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; […] on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it. […] Our simple duty is to state the facts as they are known. (47)

Based on these principles, the narrator-biographer becomes the regulating agent of Orlando's world-representation, but s/he does not become the shaping agent of his/her life.

4.3.5 The Allegory of Truth

As stated before, the most bizarre events in Orlando's life are also the ones, which, paradoxically, have the greatest truth-yielding power. A supernatural event hails the narrator-biographer's unrestrained willingness to report as many things as possible about Orlando's life. During a week of sleep, three supernatural

figures appear before the protagonist. The narrator-biographer is half-alarmed and half-amused, and s/he wishes s/he did not have to tell anything about the magical event. The narrator-biographer hints at the possibility to abstain from telling about the approaching unpleasant event, but he chooses not to conform to the rules imposed by Victorian biography, because otherwise s/he would have adhered to them. S/he carries on with the narration primarily for truth's sake:

> Would that we might here take the pen and write Finis to our work! Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried. But here, alas, Truth, Candour and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer, cry No! Putting their silver trumpets to their lips they demand in one blast, Truth! And again they cry Truth! and sounding yet a third time in concert they peal forth, The Truth and nothing but the Truth!

A deep and complex satire of the granitic correspondence between fact and biographical reporting begins. It takes the shape of an allegorical scene. At the centre of the scene lies a sleeping Orlando, who might symbolize the unconsciousness of truthful states of affairs in a manipulated narration. All around him three overtly Victorian allegorical figures, (Purity, Chastity and Modesty)[128] try to cover and conceal his miraculous transformation into a woman. The three figures advance on the scene one after another, as though they were following a scheme. The narration is iterative and the content of the figures' utterances is highly symbolical and indexical, i.e., the three figures explicitly point at the Victorian normative system in biographical writing. As Victorian biography is keen on hiding away events and attitudes that do not conform with their narrative doxa, so too are all the three figures firmly intentioned to avoid the reader's coming across of "unfitting", "uncomfortable" particulars of Orlando's life. The first figure, the Lady of Purity, presents herself as "a guardian of the sleeping fawn". She claims to "cover the speckled egg's shell and the brindled sea shell", to "cover

[128] Julia Briggs defines the allegorical scene as a "Masque of Truth", for the construction of which Woolf used the structure of the Jonsonian antimasque. To this, she "*added the twist that her vices or antimasquers are figures traditionally considered virtues. It is Chastity, Purity and Modesty, who are bid 'Avaunt! Begone…! (O, 96). At times, during this episode, Woolf's continuous prose threatens to slither into Jonsonian rhymed couplets"* (2006: 156).

vice and poverty," (96). These actions symbolize the Victorian attitude to conceal possible defects or shortcomings of their biographical subjects. She has robes and veils which descend on "all things frail, dark or doubtful". She is the first apparition to plead "Speak not, reveal not. Spare, O Spare!" (96). The second figure, the Lady of Chastity is a sort of icy queen who would do anything not to let Orlando wake up as a woman. Her peroration is stern and her attitude is resolute. It seems as though she would be ready to kill rather than let the truth come to light. In fact, at the end of her speech, she threatens: "Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone. Spare, O spare!" (96). Unlike the Lady of Chastity, the last figure, the Lady of Modesty, can hardly be heard. Her demureness compels her to let others, "men" in general, attribute her a name. Her attitude is passive and withdrawn. Just like a Victorian biographer, she would rather not see: "*I do not see*. Spare! O Spare!" (96, my emphasis) This is her last demand and the refraining conclusion to her sisters' previous suppliant utterances of denial and ensconcing. Not only do all the figures refuse to see, but they also attempt to order the *Truth* with capitalized letter to remain hidden, thus undertaking to restrict the viewpoint of the biography recipients:

> 'Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in *the brutal gaze of the sun* things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide! Hide! Hide!' (96, my emphasis)

The three figures represent the hypocritical Victorian stance towards the representation of life and they can be considered as speaking, phantom-like residuals of Victorian narrative (and social) conventions. Finally, the iterative claim to "spare" on the narration can be considered a further example of incoherence in the Victorian system of rules, because it is evidently at odds with the obsession to sift through every document regarding their biographees and collect the greatest amount possible of information about them.

On the other hand, the impelling trumpets of the "biographer's Gods," *Truth, Candour and Honesty*, whose sound is reminiscent of the word "truth" itself, pursue the three figures closely, insisting that everything must be told and nothing hidden, omitted or disguised. The Gods manage to drive off the figures, who

withdraw in a quite tragicomic manner. They lament they are no longer welcomed by Orlando, but rather by "virgins and city men; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny, […] who prefer to see not; desire to know not; love the darkness," (97). Furthermore, not only do the onomatopoetic trumpets of truth chase away the obscurantist figures of Purity, Chastity and Modesty, but they also bring Orlando back to consciousness. The crescent exposure to truth culminates into the occurring of a supernatural event, i.e. Orlando's transformation from man to woman, which is also highlighted in the text by a brusque interruption of the sentence and the use of a hyphen as a signalling instrument to highlight the syntactic unit and to frame the core event:

> The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast – 'THE TRUTH!'
> at which Orlando woke.
> He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in completed nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice but to confess – he was a woman. (97; emphasis in original)

Whereas the three allegories of Victorian ambiguous virtues worship obscurity and would like to conceal the unlikely event that is going to occur, the allegory of the "biographers' Gods" are specific to defend the cause of showing. The contrast between the acts of seeing and not seeing, enacted by the two sets of allegorical figures, gives information about the narrative function of the visual element in the semanticization of narrative truth. Through the allegorical opposition, the author conveys a power clash between two different approaches to the recounting of truth. On the one hand, there is a desire to stick to the reporting of tangible facts referring to essentially outer, public circumstances and which occasionally degenerate into hagiography. On the other hand, there is the will to include and bring to light inner life and the unseen, in order to achieve the inner truth of a character's personality. This willingness has to confront with the narrative processes of reconstruction and ultimately invention. As a matter of fact, it is probably not possible for an external agent to understand entirely and transmit truthfully somebody else's self or somebody else's inner reality. In the case of Orlando, the narrator-biographer eventually adheres to the latter approach to such an extent that s/he is ready to communicate an improbable happening such

as a change from being a man to being a woman. In her reading of this passage, Laura Marcus notes that “Woolf seems to be taking up, in order to satirise, the metaphysical concept of truth as *aletheia*” (1995: 122) and that her satire of truth is itself “ambiguous.” Through the image of the falling veils that reveal Orlando’s new, true self, and the simultaneous satire of the process, which is also a sort of estrangement effect, Woolf intends to make the readership alert that a unity of telling is no longer possible.

4.4 Conclusions

Woolf’s exploration of truth in biography is complex and manifold and it is based on the delicate interplay of Vita Sackville-West’s real life and other completely invented material. In addition to that, Woolf attempted to negotiate her views on truth in fiction on both the formal and the substantial levels. Therefore, it is helpful to structure the analysis on as many different interpretive levels. The first level, or superficial, may be called textual or narratological. It focuses on truth as a story-informing, narrative constituent. The second level, or profound, pertains to the cultural opposition between the late-Victorian way of making biography and the emerging, Edwardian methodology, to which Woolf felt to be nearer. In particular, the cultural construct at issue is the “pursuing of truth.” Although both methodologies are quite distinctly far apart from each other, Woolf did not construct her argument by putting “new” and “old” biography in contrast with each other. In fact, her main goal was to highlight the rise of a development, a progression from one to the other. On the narratological level, the analysis of Orlando focused on four main, intertwined points:

a) The figure of the protagonist;
b) The figure of the part hetero-, part metadiegetic narrator-biographer;
c) The problems of a truthful representation of one’s life;
d) The allegory of a truth-yielding event.

Through the study of these points, it was possible to draw some general conclusions about narrative truth in *Orlando*. First, the protagonist reflects on

truth, throughout his/her life. S/he considers it a fundamental literary issue and s/he is exceedingly disappointed every time s/he is confronted with the unattainability of truth in a literary representation. However, s/he manages to produce a poem, which is regarded at the end of the work, as a good example of a truth-transmitting work of art. The poem, unfortunately, remains inaccessible to the biography recipients. Such figural reticence and subsequent restriction of the recipient's viewpoint might be interpreted as a reinforcement of the thesis sustaining the unknowability of truth. *Orlando* is, substantially, a piece of fictional biography, which aims to denounce the selection maneuvers of Victorian biography through an elliptical narration, which manages to yield more truths than a traditional, "old" biography. To put it in a nutshell, *Orlando* is Woolf's attempt to beat her antecessors' biographical poetics with the parodic manipulation of their own weapons. Second, the narrator-biographer differs from the "common" Victorian narrating voice in biographies in a peculiar aspect, i.e. his/her voice is not "transparent." The narrator-biographer exploits the strategy of inversion of typical features of Victorian biographical tradition and s/he transposes them into his/her meta-accounting of Orlando's life-story. In this sense, the readers get a brainstorming on how a new biography is constituted and, in the meantime, they are prompted on how to receive their new narrative truths. Third, the problem of the representation of life has been considered as the semanticization of the problem of truth. As it is impossible, or rather, never fully satisfying to portrait every detail of one's life, so it is impossible or never fully satisfying to achieve accurate and omni-comprehensive truth in biographical writing. Finally, the allegory of a truth-yielding event is the most crucial moment of both the narration and the truth-argumentation. It provides the text with a narrative (and cultural) pattern. The semanticization of truth is obtained through the exploitation of visual elements. The semiotic value of vision allows the narrator-biographer to construct his/her world-system and to put it dialectically and dynamically in comparison with the previous pre-eminent world-making strategies and biographical proceedings. The semiotic value of vision as a revealing, truth-yielding process, gives also the possibility to establish an epistemological pattern and to construct the narration of truth thanks to the implementation of the rule "Seeing is ascending to

knowledge." On the cultural, or profound, level, truth is therefore regarded as an intrinsic value shaping cultural normative systems.

4.5 Hanging up Looking-glasses at Odd Corners: Perception, Focalization and Perspective in the Mock-biography *Flush*

"I was so tired after The Waves,
that I lay in the garden and read the Browning love letters,
and the figure of their dog made me laugh so
I couldn't resist making him a Life"
(Virginia Woolf: quote from a letter to
Lady Ottoline Morrell on 23 February 1933

And again, since so much is known that used to be unknown,
the question now inevitably asks itself,
whether the lives of the great men only should be recorded.
Is not anyone who has lived a life,
and left a record of that life, worthy of biography [?]
(Virginia Woolf: 'The Art of Biography', pp. 124-125)

Flush[129], the patently mocking biography Virginia Woolf published in 1933, is a further example of the hybridization attempts she performed with biography and novel. The work, which is one of the least known and has received relatively little critical attention, (e.g., Smith, 2002: 349, Wylie, 2002: 117, Goldman, 2006: 75), deals with the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, Flush, and it follows the dog's life from its beginning to its end, exactly like in the case of a human biography. It is based on very few and scattered references to Barrett Browning's dog in her letters and poetry. Woolf decided to portray the life of a dog, primarily because she wanted to continue her operation of renewal of the genre and of gentle satire of various points in Victorian biographies, like the choice to portray "eminent" lives exclusively, which she considered critical and obsolescent. Nonetheless, her lampooning intent was not limited to late-Victorian

[129] The quotations of this text are taken from: Woolf, Virginia. Flush: A Biography. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933.

conventions, but it also addressed, though blandly, the “debunking” strategies used by Lytton Strachey in his own biographies. Besides, Woolf explored the narrative possibilities of perception and perspective in order to disseminate the apparently ludic text with her aesthetic views on biography and truthful representation. Her intention was to point at the possibility of revealing ultimate truths by taking inclusiveness – the opposite of selection – to, and sometimes beyond, its physiological limits.

The story of Flush is quite straightforward and it follows a traditionally biographical cradle-to-death structure. Possibly, it even expands this structure beyond the natural limits of an individual’s earthly life, because the work opens with a long discussion of the dog’s pedigree and of the ancestral origins of his breed, which bring the narration in a past much farther away in time than Flush’s birth. Even though it is a biography, the narrative structure of *Flush* is reminiscent of both a picaresque novel and a *Bildungsroman*. It begins in the household of Barrett Browning's friend Mary Russell Mitford. As will be shown below, the opening discussion of Flush’s pedigree and ancestry strongly marks Woolf’s aesthetic purposes and it serves as one of the landmarks for the subsequent inferences on truth. Elizabeth Barrett receives the puppy from a friend, named Mitford. At that time, she was convalescent in a back room of the family house in London. Flush leads a sheltered and reserved life in Wimpole Street with the poet, until she encounters the poet Robert Browning. The supervening of love into Barrett's life visibly improves her health, but it damages the dog’s quality of life, because Flush starts to feel neglected by his young mistress. Blinded by jealousy, it even attempts to bite its rival Browning, who, fortunately, does not suffer any harm. Later, Flush's life is perturbed by an episode of dognapping. While accompanying Barrett Browning on a shopping trip, a thief grabs it and takes it to the nearby rookery of St Giles. The misadventure ends when the poet, contrary to her family’s piece of advice, pays the ransom to get her dog back. After its rescue, Flush accompanies the Brownings to Pisa and Florence. During this vacation, two important events occur: Barrett Browning's experiences her first pregnancy

and her maid, Lily Wilson, marries; Flush himself becomes more egalitarian towards the crossbreed dogs of Italy. The end of the work depicts a return to London after the death of Barrett Browning's father. The account of Flush's death is accomplished through the eccentric Victorian passion for tipping tables: "He had been alive; he was now dead. That was all. The drawing-room table, strangely enough, stood perfectly still".

Apart from the great affection Virginia Woolf and her family had for animals, it may be justified to ask oneself why the author decided to write the biography of a non-human creature. Certainly, one of the reasons might be the willingness to produce a further fantastic portrait in which she could embed her narrative strategies of truth-yielding, but she also simply wanted to carry on producing fictional works that could maintain a constant tongue-in-cheek attitude, while being at odds with the strictures of conventional biography. In addition, writing the biography of a dog could give her the opportunity to open new paths of truth-accounting and to cope with the challenges of narrating a non-human self. Another reason for this eccentric choice might be her eagerness to bring to the fore “the lives of the obscure.” All these reasons are valid starting points for the analysis of narrative truth in biography. The analysis of *Flush* concentrates on the investigation of narrative truth in biography and it seeks to establish which narrative devices Woolf used to shape narrative truth in the text. In particular, the focus is going to be on the enlargement of the number of narrative perspectives considered and on the related concept of inclusiveness. Beyond that, the discussion will address further aspects, like the representation of self and the fallibility of words and, above all, the shift in the predominant truth-yielding sensory faculty, i.e. the shift from sight to smell, along with its cognitive implications.

4.5.1 Displacement of normative sets from the human to the animal world as an instrument to distort narrative perspective

The following paragraph deals with the narrative device of distortion of perspective as a means to semanticize negotiations of narrative truth in

biography. As Caughie remarks, writing the biography of a dog means not only to enlarge the scope of the genre, but also "to stretch the limits of literary canonicity" (1991:47-66) itself. Even though Woolf herself was, at times, bored by the work and had, in some occasions, called it "silly" (Diary), it is nevertheless a very relevant piece from the point of view of narrative inclusiveness and it can shed a light on the conception of truth. Indeed, through the production of *Flush*, it was possible for Woolf to open a window on new narrative mechanisms, to extend biographical methods and to point at inclusiveness in a meta-categorical way. At the same time, she managed to let the content of the text run a parallel path and explore truth on the thematic level. A passage of "The Art of Biography" encapsulates perfectly such an attempt. There Woolf summarizes her goals by pointing out that "biography will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd corners. And yet from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity," (124-25). The attempt to stretch the limits of biographical representation in all possible directions begins with the beginning of the novel. The narrator discusses Flush's pedigree and, through the exposition of competing narratives, s/he brings to the fore a story that might have otherwise remained in the obscurity. Because of lack of information, the narrator finds him/herself in front of a chaotic situation, in which several different narratives rival for supremacy. S/he has to deal with different storylines, to take a stance and subsequently to decide which narrative will eventually prevail. Indeed, it is a truth-seeking impulse that triggers the protraction of the mocking and of the weighing of narratives: "There many of us would be content to let the matter rest; but truth compels us to add that there is another school of thought which thinks differently," (13). As in *Orlando* the trumpets of truth compelled the narrator-biographer to reveal every particular and every aspect of Orlando's life, so is truth in *Flush* a compelling agent that forces unseen and/or unknown stories to come to light. Truth is the mark of the impossibility of top-down selection, omission or interruption. It is the urge to overcome narrative restraints at pre-specific points. The discussion of Flush's pedigree is, on the narratological level, a parody of the selection device in biographical writing and the basis to construct the rhetoric of disproportion. As was already shown, Victorian biographers used to portray the

lives of selected people, who were worth the denomination of “illustrious” and who conformed to the predominant values of the time. The discussion of Flush’s pedigree parodies – and thus questions and weakens – such hegemonic value-systems. It underlines the arbitrariness of the conventional importance paid to human lineage and the consequent normative prominence of placing an individual within the class system. Woolf emphasized the dog’s conformity to the guidelines of the Kennel Club, thus pointing at the actual triviality of the entire process of selection. Even though the factors of lineage and genealogy seemed to be so important in the ranking of individuals, the narrator speedily detects a disproportion and a disequilibrium between the different ways to establish hierarchy. Whereas dogs are ranked according to utterly systematized and rigid criteria, which are based on the attainment of an ideal set of physical characteristics, the criterion presented in the text to grade the distinction of human beings is the sheer presence or absence of a “coat of arms,” (15). Woolf was also aware of the irregularity of the criterion of selection. Because of this, she consistently sought to shift the focus from “eminent lives” on to “the lives of the obscure”, like the life of women[130]. Taking an animal as a biographical subject is a drastic strategy to bring to light the most obscure of all possible lives. It is a radicalization of the purpose of dissipating obscurity, and consequently, of the purpose of reaching epistemic truth. Flush’s life may stand for all the lives that

[130] In a very extensive note to *Flush*, the note 124, reported here below, there is a micro-biography of Browning’s maid, Lily Wilson. The fictional biographer seems to have been unable to resist the urge to concoct “a life of the obscure.” The note is also very interesting, because it is emblematic of the main characteristics of obscure life-writing, which is the invisibility of the portrayed individual. Such invisibility is explicated in the absence from any kind of written sources and in the low ranking in the social scale: “Lily Wilson fell in love with Signor Righi, the guardsman. The life of Lily Wilson is extremely obscure and thus cries aloud for the services of a biographer. No human figure in the Browning letters, save the principals, more excites our curiosity and baffles it. […] Whether she was a Cockney; or whether she was from Scotland it is impossible to say. At any rate, she was in service with Miss Barrett in the year 1846. Since she spoke almost as seldom as Flush, the outlines of her character are little known; and since Miss Barrett never wrote a poem about her, her appearance is far less familiar than his. Yet it is clear from indications in the letters that she was in the beginning one of those demure, almost inhumanly correct British maids, who were at that time the glory of the British basement. […] Wilson undoubtedly revered "the room"; […] But nothing can be more vain than to pretend that we can guess what they were, for she was typical of the great army of her kind the inscrutable, the all-but-silent, the all-but-invisible servant maids of history/ "A more honest, true and affectionate heart than Wilson's cannot be found/ her mistress's words may serve her for epitaph” (176-181).

have never been narrated, for the inscrutable and thus unrepresentable lives, for which sources and traces are missing. As a matter of fact, not only are there only "few authorities for the […] biography," (171), on which it possible to rely, in order to get a correspondence with Flush's real life and identity, but the rare available sources are extremely unconventional from the veridictory point of view. An example of these is poetry:

> It is to poetry, alas, that we have to trust for our most detailed description of Flush himself as a young dog. He was of that particular shade of dark brown which in sunshine flashes "all over into gold." His eyes were "startled eyes of hazel bland." His ears were "tasselled"; his "slender feet" were "canopied in fringes" and his tail was broad. Making allowance for the exigencies of rhyme and the inaccuracies of poetic diction, there is nothing here but what would meet with the approval of the Spaniel Club. (18)

Finally, it is also worth noting that the incipit of the mock-biography makes an indirect and ironic reference to the convention of establishing incontrovertible truths at the very beginning of the text. The incipit is strongly reminiscent of the beginning of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* (1813). Both the beginnings sound very similar. Jane Austen's novel begins with the phrase: '*It is a truth universally acknowledged*, that a man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife'[131], while Virginia's Woolf work begins with "*It is universally admitted that* the family from which the subject of this memoir claims is one of the greatest antiquity.'[132] Even though the word "truth" is not present in *Flush'*s opening, the choice of this particular phrasing certainly lets it reverberate in the reader's mind, thus creating an intertextual bond, which both mocks and acknowledges standardized processes of truth-assertion in the text.

4.5.2 Smell vs. vision as a means of inclusiveness and a warning against wholesale assumptions

[131] Cited from Austen, Jane, Vivien Jones, Tony Tanner, and Coralie Bickford-Smith. Pride and Prejudice. London: Penguin Classics, [1813] 2008.
[132] Emphasis added.

In *Orlando*, biographical truth was conceived as “transmission of personality.” Such transmission was perpetuated through the master trope of “unveiling” and, consequently, through the narrative and cognitive device of vision. Even though *Flush* was written after *Orlando*, the work is not as fully modernist and utterly programmatic as the latter, because truth is transmitted through a series of impressions and glimpses, and not through the employment of a fully-fledged, double-levelled model of intra- and meta-textual references to truth. In *Flush*, nevertheless, the biographer faces a quite difficult task, i.e. s/he has to inhabit the life of another species and to convey a coherent – even though lacking of substance – image of the subject. Being the biography of a non-human character, other sense patterns must apply and vision, being the main veridictory sense for humans, has to lose its primacy and its status of exclusive narrative device for ascertaining truth. In fact, it is the sense of smell that acquires the role of the principal exploration sense in *Flush*. Smell becomes a substitute for sight and, subsequently, the main perception gate to Flush’s truth. Flush’s story is grounded in its body impressions, which have a direct shaping impact on its feelings and its emotions and thus affect them. As Wylie notes, Flush is “reduced to a bundle of ‘nerves’”, (2002: 118). This means the semanticization of the truth of Flush’s perceptions is obtained through a radical contraction of consciousness and through an amplification and totalizing of sensory receptions. On a further level of analysis, then, it is possible to argue that biographical truth in *Flush* can be conceived as “transmission of perception,” rather than personality, because Flush’s truth is a truth of sensations, not a fully linguistic consciousness. This different organization of experience and knowledge of experience is based on a different hierarchical alignment of senses and it makes extensive use of a sensorial faculty as a narrative perception channel. Thus, the shift in importance from sight to smell alerts us to the fact that that vision is not the sole sensory, allegorical trope for the attainment of truth in epistemological sense, but that there are further sensory paths, which constitute further knowledge strategies, leading to further truths. Such observation is especially true, if we consider the shift in the focus from a human to a non-human biographee. The sense of smell can be defined as another means of inclusiveness and it allows the enlargement of

narrative perspective. The narration of how Flush experiences life through smell is attained through the process of "olfactivization" (Nelles, 1990: 365-382), i.e. through the exposition of "offline" or "remote perception." Through olfactivization, the narrator tries, from an alien position, to recreate the animal's perceptions, through the employment of inferential or re-narrative constructions. Being in a very distant position, s/he can achieve only a partial, restricted, truly fictional awareness of the dog's experience:

> Yet, it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. Love was chiefly smell; *form and colour were smell*; music and architecture, law, politics and science were smell. To him, religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power. (138)

Nevertheless, the reigns of smell and sight are not entirely separated, at least not in the narrative rendition of Flush's perceptions. In various passages of the work, both senses mingle and complement each other, thus subsuming cognition and emotion and forming synesthetic evocations:

> But Flush wandered off into the streets of Florence to enjoy the rapture of smell. He threaded its path through main streets and back streets, through squares and alleys, by smell. He nosed its way from smell to smell; the rough, the smooth, *the dark, the golden*." (139) [emphasis added]

> He slept in this hot patch of sun – *how sun made the stone reek*! – He sought that tunnel of shade how acid shade made the stone smell! He devoured whole bunches of ripe grapes largely because of their *purple smell*; he chewed and spat out whatever tough relic of goat or macaroni the Italian housewife had thrown from the balcony goat and macaroni were raucous smells, *crimson smells*. (139, my emphasis)

On the cognitive dimension, thus, it is probably adequate to speak of apperception, i.e. one's understanding of someone else's perceptions in terms of recollections of previous "frames" of experience. Even though it is possible to adopt smell as an epistemological narrative instrument, and thus to equate smell and sight, the task of achieving narrative truth will be even more difficult, because

the sensorial vector used is far more distant from the human perception tool *par excellence*, i.e. vision:

> Here, then, the biographer must perforce come to a pause. Where two or three thousand words are insufficient for what we see, and Mrs. Browning had to admit herself beaten by the Apennines: "Of these things I cannot give you any idea." She admitted there are no more than two words and perhaps one-half for what we smell. The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand, and dung on the other. The infinite gradations that lie between are unrecorded. (137-138)

The employment of smell as a truth-yielding agent shows an impending breakdown of the veridictory alliance. If we exclude our basic, instinctive emotions, it is obvious that animal perceptions are wanting in a human being's set of experiential frames. Moreover, they have become, at best, opaque and hard to recollect and figure out concretely. Therefore, human beings are able to understand the truth of Flush's experience only through intuition glimpses and through a synthetic perception. Such impossibility is occasionally turned in the text into a biographer's shortcoming: "Confessing our inadequacy, then, we can but note that to Flush Italy, in these the fullest, the freest, the happiest years of his life, meant mainly a succession of smells. Love, it must be supposed, was gradually losing its appeal. Smell remained" (138). Therefore, the employment of the sense of smell as a truth-yielding element in the text gives as a result only a partial achievement of knowledge, in which the animal's truth remains obscure to the human being or, at the very best, just an abstract concept which can only be approximately modelled on a human, anthropomorphic truth of perception.

4.5.3 The challenge of dealing with an animal, zero-degree self and the authority of the narrative voice

Drawing on Aristotle's dictum on truth that "to *say* of what it is, that it is and of what it is not, that it is not,"[133] it is conceivable to argue that "true" is a property of

[133] Arthur Madigan (1999: 1-2).

said things and not a property of objects or facts. Indeed, the most common sources of personal truth in biography are usually the elaborations and predications of sentences, utterances and assertions made by the individuals involved in the narration. In *Flush,* the only way to achieve narrative truth is to accept the world created by the narrator and to rely on his/her utterances. The omniscient narrator-biographer in *Flush* is far more traditional than the narrator-biographer in *Orlando*. The most striking difference from the previous fictional biography lies in the fact that s/he never explicitly aims to transgress biographical, textual rules. The only – and quite blatant – transgression is the choice of the biographical subject, but even this choice cannot be attributed to him/her clearly. Indeed, the nature of the biographee compels the narrator to invent and to structure the entire biography as a concoction of suppositions, approximations and interpretations. The dog's past and present are reconstructed with effort, because real sources are obviously lacking, and mainly through suppositions, because, even assuming that something like a dog's psyche can exist, it is nearly impossible to penetrate it. Narrative devices like impression and supposition do not alter the diegetic structure of biography, but they certainly elicit a modification in the representation of Flush's otherness. The challenge of a biographical account of an animal is duplicitous: on the one hand, a precise outline of a personality is not available, because the individual consciousness and the possibility to express it are absent. On the other hand, the authority of a narrative voice becomes more disputable, because the elements to establish truth are even scantier than in the case of a human biographee. The compelling conclusion is that the aspiration to describe Flush's inner life is illusory. Nevertheless, Woolf bypasses both aspects of the problem by linking Flush's personality and identity narration to that of his mistress, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The author gives the narrator the function of truth-maker, i.e., of the diegetic entity regulating what is true and what is untrue. Merging the dog's and the poet's life-telling horizons is therefore the truth-making strategy adopted throughout the work. Through the connection and dialogism of the dog's and the poet's lives, the biographer obtains the construction of a cross-self. With the term *cross-self,* I mean a dialogical, identity-shaping and truth-yielding relationship between two or more characters

of a work, which is established on a heterodiegetic level. Such relationship has to be asymmetrical, i.e., one of the two characters has to have an inferior position than the other. The construction of the cross-self begins with the first meeting of Flush and Miss Barrett. In this scene, both of the protagonists feel they “match”, because they are very similar, but they also feel a cleft between them, which make them, each at his/her own level, conscious of an enormous difference. Such contrasting feelings create a bond between them and provide the basis for the establishment of a common self:

> "Oh, Flush!" said Miss Barrett. For the first time she looked him in the face. For the first time Flush looked at the lady lying on the sofa. Each was surprised. Heavy curls hung down on either side of Miss Barrett's face; large bright eyes shone out; a large mouth smiled. Heavy ears hung down on either side of Flush's face; his eyes, too, were large and bright: his mouth was wide. There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I and then each felt: But how different! Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been all that; and he But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other. Then with one bound Flush sprang on to the sofa and laid himself where he was to lie forever after - on the rug at Miss Barrett's feet. (30-31)

Both the protagonist and its mistress are, according to their degree of consciousness, aware of the link between them. The link constructs Flush’s self, but it is verified and substantiated only hetero-diegetically, i.e., only through the narrator’s account: “Between them Flush felt more and more strongly, as the weeks wore on, there was a bond, an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness; so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain” (44). Moreover, the bond between Flush and Miss Barrett, though very strong, is not constant and stable, especially in the rendering of the relationship between the two characters. Each character is the mirror of the other’s self; each character works as the reflector of the other. Flush’s outer and inner life changes according to Barrett’s life events, thus establishing the asymmetry of a

master/servant relationship. Still, the dog does not feel the constraints of its subjection, but it is willing to spend all the day indoors[134], to forget the voices of the men calling “Span! Span!” (43), to curb its vitality and to follow its mistress everywhere she will lead it. However close the relationship, the link remains precarious and imperfect, because a mutual understanding and a unity of perception, given by a common primary perception channel, are lacking:

> And yet sometimes the tie would almost break; there were vast gaps in their understanding. Sometimes they would lie and stare at each other in blank bewilderment. Why, Miss Barrett wondered, did Flush tremble suddenly, and whimper and start and listen? She could hear nothing; she could see nothing; there was nobody in the room with them. She could not guess that Folly, her sister's little King Charles, had passed the door; or that Catiline, the Cuba bloodhound, had been given a muttonbone by a footman in the basement. But Flush knew; […] Then with all her poet's imagination Miss Barrett could not divine what Wilson's wet umbrella meant to Flush; what memories it recalled, of forests and parrots and wild trumpeting elephants; nor did she know, when Mr. Kenyon stumbled over the bell-pull, that Flush heard dark men cursing in the mountains; (44)

Such discontinuity characterizes both figures, but it also serves as a metaphor for the incommunicability of a univocal truth through words. E.M. Forster’s assumes that “words have two functions – information and creation – so each human mind has two personalities, one of the surface, one deeper down.” (Beer, 1979: 34). If we apply this assumption to the animal world, such characteristics of words cease to function properly. Indeed, it is not possible to create a truthful animal world through words, because there is the problem of “knowability,” i.e., the scope of the things that can be known about an animal, and the problem of “mutual agreement,” i.e., the possibility to agree on a certain narrative representation of an animal.

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[134] A word on the indoor spaces in *Flush*. Woolf creates a “gestimmten Raum” in Hoffmann’s sense. Miss Barrett’s bedroom is dark and damp. It is very reminiscent of Woolf’s connotation of the Victorian world, with its stuffy air, its damp and constricting sceneries, its coverings with ivy and other suffocating, infesting plants and it conveys a sense of claustrophobia.

The construction of Flush's self is – and can only be – structured and articulated through the exploitation of the poet's feelings, but it may undergo variations and transformations according to her life events. For instance, Flush's life changes according to the connotations Miss Barrett gives to her life background. Thus, as Miss Barrett becomes Mrs. Browning, and as Italy is contrasted to England and dramatized as a place of liberty, so Flush can experience a loosening of the bond between him and her mistress and reach a certain degree of autonomy and self-determination of life. "It was not merely that she called herself Mrs. Browning now; that she flashed the gold ring on her hand in the sun; she was changed, as much as Flush was changed," (122). The (temporary) abandonment of the chain and the freedom to rove alone through the streets of Florence and Pisa are the figurative metaphors through which Flush's partial autonomy is implemented: "Flush suddenly bethought him of Regent's Park and its proclamation: Dogs must be led on chains. Where was "must" now? Where were chains now?" (125). The chain may symbolize both the cross-self bond between Flush and his mistress and a social, restricting force, that constraints to discipline and order, and which suppresses any other vital, autonomous instincts. Such constricting bonds automatically loosen and nearly dissolve, as soon as they are not confined anymore in the British, Victorian territory. The chain is therefore a metaphor for the achievement of a degree of autonomy and self-determination, which occur far away from the old and staid Victorian conventions. On the story level, Flush's autonomy becomes more evident and concrete, when Mrs. Browning observes that

> her relations with Flush were far less emotional now than in the old days; she no longer needed his red fur and his bright eyes to give her what her own experience lacked; she had found Pan for herself among the vineyards and the olive trees; he was there too beside the pine fire of an evening. So if Mr. Browning loitered, Flush stood up and barked; but if Mr. Browning preferred to stay at home and write, it did not matter. Flush was independent now. (125-126)

Nevertheless, Flush's hiatus of narrative independence from a human self can only last briefly. In the supervened absence of a clear-cut bond between the dog

and the mistress, the narrator establishes a cross-self relationship between Flush and the Brownings' little child. The narrator/truth-maker gives the information that such linking traces back to the fact that Flush perceives a seemingly common horizon, a shared unity of perception, through a channel of perception other than vision: "Did they not share something in common did not the baby somehow resemble Flush in many ways? Did they not hold the same views, the same tastes? For instance, in the matter of scenery. To Flush all scenery was insipid," (135). The child and the dog seem to be equally indifferent to any visual stimuli, regardless of how powerful and compelling they are. To a certain degree, the cross-self bond between the child and the dog is even tighter, because of various analogies in their status. Indeed, both of them do not have the capacity for speaking and they must rely heavily on the figure of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to be able to survive. Dependence and incapacity to communicate intelligibly are the points in common between them. Moving beyond that, it is possible to eventually affirm that from all the linking bonds among the characters', a constellation of interrelated figural nodes emerges. Such web of interrelations constitutes the structure of the truth-assigning system of the biography.

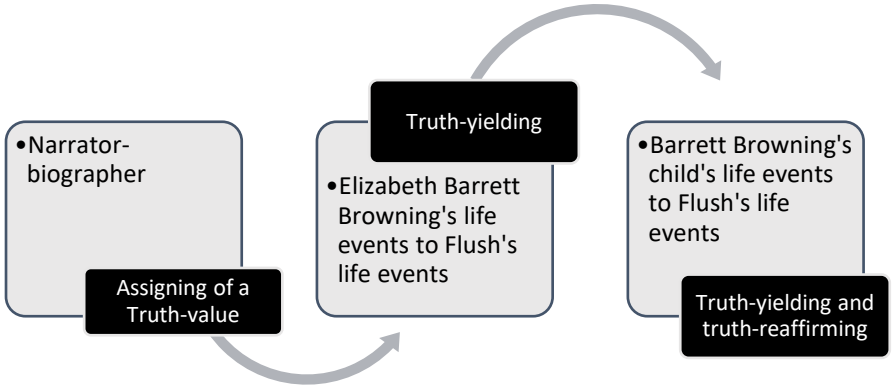

Fig. 2: Truth-assigning system in *Flush*

The scheme above shows the progression of the truth-assigning flux, which goes from the narrator-biographer, who has the function of primary truth-yielder, to the figure of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose life events shape and conjure up

Flush's life. Immediately after the brief hiatus of independence in Flush's life, the figure of the dog needs to be linked to another human figure, in order to obtain a narrative truth-yielding effect and to consolidate it.

4.6 Conclusions

The analysis of narrative truth in Flush leads to two main strains of conclusions. The first pertains to the narrative strategies used in the biography. The narrator-biographer recurs frequently and throughout the work to supposition and approximation, in order to construct the figure of a dog and to tell about its life. To do so, s/he makes use of unconventional, sensory narrative devices like smell, in order to create a dog's world. Furthermore, the narrator attains the substantiation of the narration of Flush's feelings and emotions through the linkage of the animal's self to its mistress's one and thus creating a condition of cross-self narration. Both narrative strategies should lead to the conveyance of a truthful representation of the biographee. In actual fact, such feeling of achievement is illusory, because his/her psyche is not communicable. Therefore, the biographee needs to lean on a human figure's life and to live its life events as a reflection of the events in the human life. The human self fulfills the function of truth-bearing structure in the narration. Through the human component of the link between the two figures, it is possible to obtain purporting information about the dog. The human self is a supporting structure that adds to the credibility of the entire work. Up to a point, then, it would be plausible to argue that the biography of Flush is nothing else but the biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, compiled from an eccentric position. Caught between incommunicability and unknowability, the life of an animal remains an abstract concept, just like the truth of it. The animal's narrative truth is modelled on human truth and thus anthropomorphized. Nonetheless, the employment of suppositions, allegiances, and rough interpretation offers another narrative possibility, i.e., the creation of a possible world. Paving the way to the filling of a further "spot of indeterminacy," (Ingarden), the narrator of *Flush* manages to "occupy a perspective" (see Banfield, 2000:134) and to let the readers infer a possible narrative truth from a possible world.

CHAPTER 4: PART II

4.7 Lytton Strachey's Aesthetic Duties of the New Biographer towards Truthful Narration

"Facts!
They demanded facts from him,
as if facts could explain anything!"
(Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* [1889] 1989:63)

Lytton Strachey was born on March 1, 1880, in Clapham, London, to a well-to-do English family. Strachey was educated in private schools and by private instructors until he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1899. At Cambridge, he was accepted as a member of a group called *Apostles,* which included literary critic and Virginia Woolf's future husband, Leonard, and the novelist E. M. Forster. As stated in chapter 1, the *Apostles* were the members of the group from which Bloomsbury originated. Its school of thought based on the refusal of orthodox morals and on the cultivation of an aesthetic appreciation of art. Strachey obtained a degree in History from Trinity College in 1903, although the following year he failed to obtain a fellowship at the University. As a consequence, Strachey returned to London, where he became an integral part of the Bloomsbury group. Strachey began writing literary criticism and essays for a variety of journals, and in 1907 became a reviewer for the Spectator, which, at those times, was directed by a cousin of his. In 1912, he published his first book, *Landmarks in French Literature*, and first concocted the idea for *Eminent Victorians*, which he called at first *Victorian Silhouettes*[135]*.* In 1918 Strachey managed to publish his biographical work. Later, he wrote two further biographies: *Queen Victoria* (1921) and *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928). All his biographies were marked by his witty, satirical style, his interest in psychological motivation and his determination to avoid the hagiographic approach that had, according to all the Bloomsburians, disfigured

[135] The term "Silhouettes" was very interesting for its semantic implications. The substantive conveys the ideas of "thinness" and of "shadowy character", which fits quite well to the characteristics of the portraits contained in *Eminent Victorians*.

the art of biography during the Victorian Era. Strachey died of stomach cancer on January 21, 1932, in Hungerford.

In *Eminent Victorians*[136] (1918), Lytton Strachey surveyed the lives of four famous English characters from the Victorian Period, with the intent of denying that they were exactly as the previous biographies and popular legend had made them be. The four people in question were Cardinal Manning, a leader of England's Roman Catholic community; Florence Nightingale, a nurse; Thomas Arnold, an educational reformer; and General Charles George Gordon, a soldier and adventurer. The choice of these four personages was not haphazard; on the contrary, it seems to be modelled on a crucial particular, i.e., all the individuals represented were members of the English institutions, but they all had the peculiarity of being, to a certain extent, at odds with the superimposed codex of behaviour and thinking their official roles had to fulfil. In particular, Cardinal Manning found himself against the Anglican doctrine; Thomas Arnold's methods were opposed to those implemented in public schools and Florence Nightingale had to struggle against the strict rule of the British imperial army.

As is well known, Strachey sought a new approach to biography. His treatment of the biographical subjects is often described as iconoclastic and radical. Such notoriety as an unpunished disprover, which relegated Strachey's work for a long time to a secondary role in the literary studies from the Forties to the Seventies of the twentieth century, has ceased to find a stable and creditable support since the early 1990s, when Spurr firmly declared that "[Strachey's] several essays […], although containing satiric elements, are decidedly not the work of a debunker", [1990:31]. While truth remained an inalienable condition and the principal theoretical motivation for tellability[137] in biographical writing, the understanding of

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[136] All quotations are taken from: Strachey Lytton. Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr Arnold, General Gordon. [1918] 2013. Kindle Edition.

[137] "Tellability is a notion that was first developed in conversational storytelling analysis, but which then proved extensible to all kinds of narrative, referring to features that make a story worth telling, its 'noteworthiness'. Tellability (sometimes designated "narratibility") is dependent on the nature of specific incidents judged by storytellers to be significant or surprising and worthy of being reported in specific contexts, thus conferring a "point" on the story. At issue is the breaching of a canonical development that

what truth is, what is true in a biography and what is truthful in narrative had become so different, that the treatment of life-composing materials needed to be altered and re-shaped. The typical, extensive two-volume Victorian biography presented its subject in the best possible light, ignoring any aspects of the life that might blemish the person's accomplishments. In accordance with Woolf, Strachey specific that such sprawling and wearisome volumes, full of "ill-digested masses of material," (2) did a disservice to the art of biography and did not contribute to the achievement of a truthful narrative representation. As a sort of reaction, he wrote short, pithy, artful biographies that told the truth about the subjects as the author “understood it”. As Watt[138] reports,

> Strachey had a zest for new and bold ideas, for honest controversy, for a style based on economy rather than encomia. Too, as his later critical and biographical prose intimates, Strachey was indebted to Moore's insistence that the thinker's first step was to formulate clear questions in order to make it possible to formulate clear answers (1969: 122).

Unlike Woolf, Strachey’s study of biography never considered explicit meta-biographical references. His work remained in the frame of reference of traditional biographies. The fact that his authorial voice and the heterodiegetic narrator are almost inextricable from each other is indicative of a certain degree of respect of the limits imposed by life-writing in the classic sense. More exactly, therefore, *Eminent Victorians* has to be understood as the result of a series of essential re-enactments of acknowledged and recognizable biographical patterns, of which the recipients were well aware. Strachey sought to represent inverted worlds, thus letting two narratives collide and contradict each other: thus Cardinal Manning, is no longer portrayed as the pious representor of God, whose faith is unshakeable, but he is rather presented as a devious, ruthless man striving for power and acknowledgement. Florence Nightingale is depicted as a mordant

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tends to transform a mere incident into a tellable event. However, tellability may also rely on discourse features, i.e. on the way in which a sequence of incidents is rendered in a narrative,” (Baroni, 2014: online resource).

[138] Watt, (1969: 119-134).

workaholic, rather than a piteous *Lady with the Lamp*. Strachey's Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby School, is rendered as a preposterous and retrograde ignoramus. Finally, the portrait of Gordon shows a man driven to destruction by the shortcomings of his personality, by his own contradictions and, ultimately by the irresoluteness of the British administration.

Eminent Victorians is considered a milestone in the genre of biography, not only because it denounced many of the flaws, affectations and stolid conceits of the Victorian ways of life-writing, but because it reinforced a new current in the writing of biography, the influence of which is still apparent today. Such a new conception can be better discerned and understood if it is subsumed in the narrative construction of the concept of truth. It goes without saying that not all of Strachey's precepts had been exposed by him for the first time. By the start of the Twenties, a re-design of biography in an artistic sense had already begun to be a strong interest for other biographers. However, Strachey was probably the initiator of a tradition that put the intersection of art and narrative swiftness at the centre of the study of biographical writing. Perry Meisel noted that "Eminent Victorians is a self-accounting book since it is a text about texts, an interpretation of interpretations, a piece of writing about writing," (1987: 198). With this central idea in mind it is possible to approach the preface of the work. The introduction to *Eminent Victorians* has been quoted and analysed so often, that it barely needs more interpretations and investigations of its literary and aesthetical content. As stated by David Novarr, "the preface of Eminent Victorians provided the kind of revolutionary manifesto for biography that Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* had provided for poetry," (1986: 27). The Preface constitutes a relevant landmark for the analysis of Lytton Strachey's standpoint of the relationship between biography and the methods to investigate narrative truth-yielding strategies. It is profitable for my analysis of the Bloomsburian way to produce and diffuse its own patterns of truthfulness, to dwell momentarily on its most relevant concepts and statements about biographical writing. There is a common agreement that the incipit of *Eminent Victorians* is itself a manifesto of the ideas of the *new biography*:

> The History of the Victorian Age will never be written; we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian – ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects[139] and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art. (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, Introduction. Pos.4[140])

The content of the preface to the four great portraits of Victorian personages is emblematic of Strachey's visions and observations about truth and biography.[141] Indeed, Strachey decided to concentrate his renewing efforts on the narrative renditions of strategic Victorian icons, not because he simply wanted to ridicule or lampoon them, but because he sought to "present Victorian visions to the modern eye" (2). Strachey did not seek to expose the weak points of the previous biographical convention for the sake of rebutting settled cultural patterns and narrative counterparts, but, as I'll argue, because he was searching, like the other *Bloomsberries*, for a different, deeper transmission of narrative truth. In his attempt to examine the genre of biography by discussing biographies and writing them, his aim was neatly meta-biographical, and not primarily satirical, though satire, and most precisely irony, is a "weighty tool"[142] in such purpose.

The whole fundamental structure of Strachey's work is anchored under the flag of irony. It pervades every statement and it is inextricably linked to Strachey's poetics of biography. To this end, Strachey's irony also infiltrates in his strong willingness to ascribe artistry an active role in the process of creating biography. It even appears when he expounds "the first requisite of the historian", which needs to be "ignorance" (2). Within this context, rather than merely keeping a distance from Victorian writing, Strachey considered it as a possible example of

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[139] In the beginning of *Eminent Victorians*, there is a reference to the well-debated process of omission and selection. The aphoristic, paradoxical tone of opening soon leaves space to criticism: biographical productions based on the devices of selection and omissions are linked to the condition of ignorance, which is antithetical to the purpose of reaching and yielding the truth of a subject.

[140] Quotations, if not stated otherwise, are taken from an edition of *Eminent Victorians* in e-book format and have been retrieved on an e-reader computer application in a Windows 8.1 environment working in a Lenovo B560 laptop computer. When referring to the source, I will indicate only the position number, omitting the abbreviation "pos."

[141] For a further narrative analysis of the Introduction, see paragraph 4.7.1. of the present work.

[142] Meisel, 1987:

how biography should not be conducted. In his manifesto, he introduced three new values, the respect of which was necessary for the process of renewal of biography. The newfangled duties of the new biographer were: a) Brevity; b) Freedom of spirit; c) Exposition of facts. Like Woolf, Strachey found that standard biographical volumes "with their ill-digested masses of materials, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design" (2), were no longer acceptable and desirable. Strachey wished biographies were planned according to the principle of a special sort of brevity that excludes every sort of redundancy but retains everything significant. With this statement, he enacted the theories of selection and weighting of events which plays a central role in the process of world-making and consequently, in the construction of the point of view and of textual truth. Secondly, the new biographer should set himself free from the ties of social and literal conventions. Such a stance gives not only an ethical dimension to the activity of the biographer, whose most pressing concern must be the enucleation of facts "dispassionately, impartially and without ulterior intentions" (2), but it also provides him/her with the liberty to assert facts and truth "as [s/]he understands them" (2), thus proclaiming the supremacy of subjective interpretation over external impositions. The third commandment of the new biographer is linked to the second by the acknowledgement that facts need to be simply exposed, without the intrusion of superimpositions and/or secret by-ends. According to Alex Zwerdling, (1980: 617):

> Strachey's methods were designed with a sense of purpose. He used published materials but interpreted them in a strikingly new way, so that the subjects of his group biography would never look quite the same. There was an underlying seriousness in his work, an urgency behind his ironic scrutiny of the established record. His revisionist anger kept his book from becoming mere entertainment. And though some of his eminent Victorians came to seem monstrous rather than heroic, he was not interested in making them appear agreeably eccentric and colourful.

Once again, a Bloomsbury biographer chose the path of irony to put forward his/her theoretical assumptions. Through the motto "*Je n'impose rien; je ne*

propose rien; j'expose", (2) a famous quotation from an imaginary French master, he managed to transfuse the idea of detachment and mere exposition of facts in his biographies, but also to warn about the relationship between visible and invisible truths and to urge the recipient to keep the fictional side of biography in mind.

Among the various principal components of a biographical text, art played for Strachey a relevant role. As will be shown in the analysis, art was not a simple constitutive element of biography for him, but an intrinsic motive, together with convenience, for writing biographies in the first place. Strachey conceived of art as a shaping agent that had to inform the process of writing biography as a whole and the resulting text. In other words, Strachey strongly contributed to the development of a fictionalizing engagement in biographical production. Henceforth, art was the means through which it was possible to apprehend biographical truth. It is important to point out that, by ascribing art such an important role in biographical creation, Strachey did not automatically fictionalize his biographees' lives. He did not intend art as a form of manipulation or modification or reality, but much more as an intrinsic, textual modelling factor. This stance echoed in and was an echo of his aesthetic conception of historical writing. Given that Strachey seemed to consider biography as a sort of *ancilla historiae*, it is no wonder that he treated each biographical text as though it were speaking from and to a specific historical moment. Furthermore, he believed that historiography had to contain in its texts the beauty of art. As Novarr reminds, "when he had reviewed Guglielmo Ferrero's *The Greatness and Decline of Rome* for the *Spectator* of January 2, 1909, he proclaimed that 'the first duty of a historian is to be an artist' and that 'the function of art in history is something much more profound than mere decoration'", (Novarr, 1986:28). To combine art and history, Strachey created an *ad hoc* narrative voice, with the characteristic of being highly "heteroglot"[143], i.e. of being the result of a certain intersection of time

[143] Compare Tjupa (2009: 35-37): "The category of heteroglossia has entered the scholarly apparatus of narratology because the verbal presentation of the narration necessarily possesses certain linguistic

and space that makes it immediately recognizable. In particular, he emphasized space, but, above all he put the stress on time, and to a certain extent, to the *Zeitgeist* of each biography. He underlined the expectations, fears, anguishes and triumphs of the biographees, although he never fully intruded into their psychology the way Virginia Woolf did. In addition to that, he conferred to art an interpretive power. As already mentioned above, not only did Strachey treat biography within a historical frame of reference, but he also pointed out its similes with literary works. In particular, he viewed biography as a literary genre. That explains why the Bloomsburian author did not neglect artistry, but, on the contrary, he acknowledged that it played a fundamental stylistic role. In addition to this, it is perhaps important to remark that, unlike in classic historical accounts and (auto)-biographies, in Strachey's biographies the written discourse prevailed over the oral, as in the case of the novel in general. Such discursive commonality is a further indication of the importance of art in Strachey's biographical writing. It can be reasonable to assume that Strachey firmly believed in the necessity of the interpretive power of art to get to the truth of the biographee. In the case of historiography, he found that the mere application of a scientific method would prove unfruitful in the case of biographical writing. A reorganization of contents was an absolute priority for him. This is the reason why Lytton Strachey treated secondary sources, like letters, diaries and previous biographies in a different way than Woolf did for the realization of her biographies. He sifted through all the documents he could track down and he tried to distill their core. As a matter of fact, the result of such an undertaking is the description of three-dimensional characters showing all their shadowed corners. To summarize: Strachey introduced the concept of the necessity of interpretation before the inevitability of the presence of obscure points for the attainment of a truthful representation. In

characteristics that create the effect of a voice. Narration not only takes place from a particular standpoint in time and space, but also inevitably has a certain stylistic color, a certain tone of emotion and intention that can be described as "glossality." This is directed at the reader's ability to hear".

the introduction to *Eminent Victorians*, it is possible to get a sudden glimpse of such a poetic stance, which was essentially based on the power of interpretation:

> Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold; and art is the great interpreter. It alone can unify a vast multitude of facts into a significant whole, clarifying, accentuating, suppressing and lighting up the dark places with the torch of the imagination[144].

Unlike Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey's poetic of biography was not centred on the transmission of a "truth of…," be it a truth of personality or perception. Rather, Strachey believed in a working method that would reduce truth to a manipulable instrument, subservient to the will of the biographer and to the evaluation of complex data. Truth is the outcome of interpretation and the zest for interposing hermeneutical procedures between the biographer and biographical object is ubiquitous in Strachey's work. In addition, Strachey believed that a biographer or historian had well-defined, common characteristics. Both of them should command a certain attitude of mind, should possess a certain ability and should employ a certain literary method.

Strachey believed in biography as an *art* that has to be mastered by the biographer. In order to make his beliefs effectively act in a text and to make them an evident peculiar and differentiating characteristic of a biographical text, Strachey needed to conjure up a narrative voice that lacked every transparency in Snipes's sense. Nevertheless, such process had a significant *caveat*, i.e., it had to unfold without the intrusion of a biased perspective or preconception, but with the preservation of an "impartial, enlightened vision," (Holroyd, 1978). Contrary to the common assumption that Strachey's biographies intended to "debunk" old and staid Victorian literary conventions, his work rather conveys the willingness to establish a continuum in the tone of his predecessors, which ultimately reveals a certain stylistic mannerism and a contradiction. As Barry Spurr remarks,

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[144] Strachey, (1909: 13-17).

> Strachey's prose, while always retaining its crafted quality, is then reminiscent of oracular Victorianism. He echoes the voices of the nineteenth-century sages, of Carlyle or Arnold, being by turns pontifical, homiletic and intimate. However, Strachey's duplicity is also evident here. He can adapt the Victorians' idiom to the propagation of ideas antithetical to theirs and, in opposition to their grandiose enterprises, encloses his point of view within miniature frameworks. (1990: 32-33)

The critique of Victorian conventions is more noticeable in the description of social attitudes. Strachey's biographies address specific characteristics, which are felt as faults in the representation of truth. Such denunciations make the discontinuity with the Victorian traditions palpable. Nevertheless, Strachey put the emphasis on art and on the common grounds it has with historiography. He mingled the two rhetorical settings and was able to create a light and swift narration. Strachey gave form to a vivid and dynamic depiction of patches of reality: through this scheme, the biographical work acquires a fresh immediacy, on the narrative level, that is comparable to that of a realist novel, although its comprehensiveness isn't. As argued by Holroyd (1978):

> To Lytton, biographies were less rigorous and austere instruments of truth-telling than nicely proportioned entertainments, vehicles for the dissemination of certain aspects of the truth. To assist with this new and milder approach to his subject, which laid more stress on amusement than on propaganda, he adopted a novel-like narrative, very un-Johnsonian.

Under the point of view of rhetoric, Strachey's main strategy to construct his new biographies is to weaken and erase all the official background traces the biographical subjects left behind them in their community and that had become distinguishing parts of their public identities, in order to re-compose a new identity and to create the biographee *ex-novo*. Through this procedure, not only does biography as a genre become a new product, but also the figure of the biographee undergoes a reshaping that is coordinated by new truth-values. On a meta-narrative level, this new form of life-writing creates an effect of estrangement, in which the realist setting of biography as a genre is deviated. Once the deviation from the "received realism" (McHale, 2009: 10) has been achieved, the

corroborative effect of the solidarity-trust granted by the community of text-recipients starts to creak and to show signs of instability, thus generating a crisis of values and convictions.

The narrative fabric of Strachey's biographical sketches is continuous and all-encompassing. The storyline fibers are linear; there are no metaleptic or rough genre-specific meta-biographical interruptions. Strachey is still tied to a "rather pre-modernist assumption of novelistic omniscience."[145] The only audible voice is that of a heterodiegetic, all-knowing narrator[146], whose erudite digressions and remarks reverberate throughout the text. This does not mean, however, that the narrator does not linger, at least sporadically, on reflections on the genre of biography. Indeed, when such moments of self-reflection appear in the text, they are often linked to images referring to the universe of truth, as this example shows: "If that was so, the discretion of biographers has not yet entirely lifted the veil from these proceedings," (1154). Strachey's biographies unfold in different threads and patterns, all of which beckon the biographical subject. In fact, there are occasional points of interruption, in which the focus of the narrator shifts from the biographee, the principal motif of the stitching work, to secondary, satellite characters. They are, at times, given much space, but this space is always functional to the description of the primary character, and it acts as an elucidating factor of specific aspects of the biographical subject. Following the metaphor of the fabric, where the biographee's motif is not present, i.e. at the periphery of the biographical arras, other pieces of work take its place. Such secondary figures do not deviate the attention from the protagonist, but they act as a reminder of the image of the biographical subject, thus reinforcing his/her central position in the biographical structure. As opposed to the seamlessness of the textual fabric,

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[145] Compare Saunders (2010: 294).

[146] To this end, Compare Richard T. Altick (1995: 82) who wrote: "[Strachey assumed] an Olympian pose of omniscience such as no earlier biographer had ventured to do – neither Samuel Johnson nor any subsequent biographer – Strachey professed to isolate a single driving motive in persons whose makeup in reality had at least a normal share of human complexity".

there is a break in the conceptual metaphors on which Strachey's poetics of truth is based. Such a break strongly marks also his work on the narrative level. In the preface of *Eminent Victorians*, the author mentioned his goals explicitly. If, on the one hand, he aims at *illustrating* Victorian society, on the other hand, he claimed to have as a main purpose the examination and the elucidation of "*certain fragments* of truth", (2) [my emphasis]. The metaphor with which he exemplified this concept was that of the ocean and the bucket: "[the biographer] will row out over the great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity" (3). The image of the little bucket highlights the great level of specialization of the selected information and it also moves the focus from the (too) big picture of standard biographies to the freshness and acuteness of details typical of the new biography. The access to the highly selected quantities of information was provided by the application of an interpretive method. Strachey chose the way of interpretation, because it gave manifold results, the most relevant of which is the fact that an interpretive approach was the most direct way against dogmatism and orthodoxy. With this strategy Strachey managed to achieve a truth-yielding narrative impact. At the same time, with the introduction of his newly coined metaphor of the bucket, he intended to erode and relativize the reach and the strength of the metaphor of the searchlight beamed onto obscure recesses[147]. Although he maintained that the biographical subject should be investigated in both his official and unofficial status, i.e., in "the hitherto undivined" aspects of his/her life, Strachey proposed that the biographer had to carry out his/her purposes according to a subtler scheme, avoiding direct methods and categorical patterns, but also the employment of his/her own imagination. More specifically though, this does not necessarily imply that a biographer cannot be imaginative. Therefore, I'll argue in that Lytton Strachey attempted to re-frame his biographees by means of a re-contextualization capable of re-organizing truth-patterns.

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[147] Compare Ní Dhúill [Fetz/Hemecker] (2011: 80-81).

4.7.1 Functions of Doubt in the process of deconstruction of Cardinal Manning's *situated ethos*

Lytton Strachey wrote his biographies in the form of essays (cf. Holroyd, 1974). The choice of this text typology is not haphazard, but it reflects the author's willingness to let a distinctive conceptual mark come across in each biography. Using this text type, Strachey could include his own criticisms, observations, reflections and recollections in the narration, without the risk of blemishing the integrity and the cohesion of the biographical account. A further advantage was the possibility to emphasize the role of biography as a socially useful text. As a matter of fact, since the 1990s, biographical research has been highlighting the acceptance of biography as a social construct. Such a theoretical frame of reference finds a validation in Strachey's work. Conversely, the essayistic form damps the force of the plot. Life progression in Strachey's portraits is characteristically static and episodic. The narration is limited to the description of life, events are sketched but not fully exposed. The various episodes are only insufficiently linked. The whole narrative spectrum is lacking in dynamism. Each life-narration contained in EV is not only the portrait of a Victorian individual, but it is also the representation and the biography of a social role. The four essayistic biographical episodes are thematically linked to each other, but they also exhibit points of distinctiveness. The ratio of personages is representative of strategic positions in the society, and it accounts for the religious sphere, the military milieu, the health-care world and the domain of education. As Avery (2004:186) remarks,

> Strachey selected Gordon and Nightingale, along with Cardinal Henry Edward Manning and Thomas Arnold, as exemplary exponents of what he believed to be the pernicious and hardly heroic, blessed, or merciful worldview that in Strachey's opinion had materialized itself in the unprecedented carnage of the Great War. His comment on Nightingale in a 28 February 1915 letter to Virginia Woolf represents his opinion of all four of his subjects: Nightingale was, he wrote, "distinctly indigestible."

The underlying *fil rouge* in all the biographical sketches is the crisis of faith and the crunch of belief, which are contextualized in the frame of reference of the religious theme. According to Rawlinson (2006:102-103), it is possible to subdivide the four biographical essays into two groups, based on Strachey's personal judgement and attitude towards the biographical subjects: if the author did not explicitly manifest his antipathy for Florence Nightingale and for General Gordon in the text, the same cannot be affirmed for the case of Thomas Arnold and, above all, for that of Cardinal Manning. With the depiction of Manning's life, Strachey intended to demonstrate how the figure of the cardinal was ridden by doubts and contradictions. His life had not been led by incorruptible faith and linear principles, but rather, it had been mainly specific by aleatory contingences, chance and fate.

The life of Cardinal Manning (1807-1892), a convert from the Church of England who became Archbishop of Westminster and the leader of England's Catholic community, opens the biographical collection. When Manning went to Oxford University, he seemed set for a political career, but his expectations were torn, when his father was declared bankrupt and lost all his fortunes. Manning was soon thereafter elected to a Fellowship at Merton College, Oxford, provided that he took orders in the Church of England. The young scholar began to feel an affinity with the reformative ideas the Oxford Movement, which was associated with the names of John Keble and John Henry Newman. However, Manning, having become Archdeacon of Chichester, decided, at a later stage, to distance himself from the pro-catholic ideas of the Oxford Movement. Nevertheless, he inwardly continued to be attracted by the precepts of the Movement and was anguished and appalled by the belief that he was a victim of the lures of the devil. He scrutinised his inspirations and he felt more and more captivated by the Catholic doctrine. After a legal case made clear that the Anglican doctrine could be established by an Act of Parliament, Manning had no other choice but to convert to Catholicism. The Pope promptly appointed him provost of the Chapter of Westminster and, after that, Manning made an expeditious career in the Roman Catholic Church, until he became Archbishop of Westminster.

Strachey casts the last phase of Manning's life in contrast to and in opposition with that of Newman, who had also converted to Catholicism. This kind of narrative strategy is a recurrent trope of his biographies and it serves the goal of portraying the biographical subject as a shadow reflected on the surface of secondary characters. As Holroyd remarks, “Strachey employs a certain tone to turn Manning’s superficially impressive mask of virtue round to something slightly improbable” (1974). The narrative roller-coaster of improbabilities begins its ride soon after the biographical subject has been presented. The constant process of re-shaping of the character, an Anglican pastor who eventually converts to Catholicism, underlines the theoretical assumption that a biography is the result of a constructive process. In this sense, Strachey’s narratives are coherent with the “recognition that narrative communication is a multi-layered event, in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences’ cognition, emotions, and values”, (Phelan, 2007: 203). Strachey as a biographer followed a truth-telling programme that is based on the development of a *crescendo* of tension between the known set of information about the biographee, i.e. the *doxa* about him/her, and his new biographical rendition. The term *doxa* defines, in this context, the set of truth-values which are fixedly attributed to a subject by a specific community and which form the identity of the subject. The introduction of tension through the medium of a new, alternative narrative conveys the idea of a discrepancy between the community’s subjective experience of the biographical subject and the biographee’s objective existence; furthermore, it provides the space for a new description of the subject. Such a new description may lead to a cascade of modifications in the perception of a subject and, subsequently, to a redefinition of his/her identity. The narrative actualization of the shift in the commonly accepted *doxa* is the interposition of doubt, which creates an interference in the transmission of a specific truth-value. The advance of doubt may intervene, on a cognitive level, in a direct way, but it can also disseminate its effects indirectly, by means of a conceit through which the biographical narrator transmits his renewing message. In the case of the excerpt about Cardinal Manning, this narrative device is a metaphor of the *crisis of faith*, which pre-figures the establishment of a new cluster of truth-values. This metaphorical conceit is

commonly assigned, particularly in Western cultures, to epochs of heightened mistrust and inner conflict about one's prespecific beliefs or convictions. A *crisis of faith* is different from a simple period of uncertainty, because it exacts a re-evaluation and a re-assessment of one's values i.e., the crisis requires a decision without appeal: either the outcome of such decision is a sufficient reconcilement with the previous set of beliefs, or the belief in question must be dropped. The shaping of the events in Manning's life imitates and incorporates the metaphor and it provides a narrative access to doubt. The biographical narrator focuses on implicit references to this metaphor to build up the aesthetic conception that the properties of the crisis of faith are intrinsic to Manning's life and environment. The reference to the metaphorical conceit is recurrent in the text and the biographical narrator employs it following a two-fold dissemination pattern. The first pattern attempts to reproduce Manning's feelings and thoughts just as his own castle of values and beliefs begins to vacillate. The following two passages exemplify the way in which doubt and uncertainty spread in the mind and the soul of the Cardinal.

> All he could hope to do was to persuade himself and anyone else who liked to listen to him that the holding of Anglican orders was not inconsistent with a belief in the whole cycle of Roman doctrine as laid down at the Council of Trent. (326)

> For generations there had been the case with the Thirty-Nine articles. Their drift was clear enough; and nobody bothered over their exact meaning. But directly someone found it important to give them a new and untraditional interpretation, it appeared that they were a mass of ambiguity and might be twisted into meaning very nearly anything that anybody liked. (335-344)

The first passage shows how two competing systems of beliefs can stop being in total opposition and become two open systems which can interact with each other and have points in common. Such demonstration triggers the reaction of doubting, which is more diffusely expounded in the second passage. There, the line of thought emphasises the sense of awakening and estrangement following the establishment of doubt. The process of bringing to consciousness new

aspects of a state of affairs through doubts stirs the faculty to ask questions, to look for proofs and validity and, subsequently, to re-appraise one's knowledge. Therefore, it is not astonishing to find out that "Surprised Doctors of Divinity found themselves suddenly faced with strange questions which had never entered their heads before". (164) On the other hand, the second pattern illustrates the considerations made at the extra-diegetical level. They are commentaries with the function of reinforcing the sense of distortion created by the instillation of doubt. Such a sense of distortion becomes even more disturbing, not simply because it dismantles one's beliefs – a re-modulation of conviction may in fact happen all the time, and it daily happens, in a mild form – but mainly because it eroded the walls of credibility of a sacred institution like the Anglican Church:

> The Church of England, they declared, was indeed *the one true Church*, but she had been under an eclipse since the Reformation; in fact, since it had begun to exist. She had, it is true, escaped the corruptions of Rome; but she had become enslaved by the secular power, and degraded by the false doctrines of Protestantism. The Christian religion was still preserved intact by the English priesthood, but it was preserved, as it were, unconsciously – a priceless deposit, handed down blindly from generation to generation, and subsisting less by the will of man than through the ordinance of God as expressed in the mysterious virtue of the Sacraments. (206) [my emphasis]

The passage is made up of two paragraphs: in the first paragraph the extra-diegetical commentary focuses on the flaws and failures of the Anglican Church. The second paragraph does not limit itself to instill doubt in the capacity of the Anglican Church to preserve the integrity of doctrine, but it also observes that doctrine was bequeathed to the next generations without the support of critical sense. Through this remark and the interpretation of the symbols it contains, it is possible to subsume that certainty (represented by religious doctrine) is always linked to unconsciousness and, on an ulterior level of conceptualization, that unconsciousness is linked to blindness. Such concatenation of concepts confirms the necessity of disbelief for the establishment of new truth-values and it highlights the wakening nature of doubt. Consequently, the first narrative pattern works for the corrosion of the situated identity of the biographical subject and it

eventually wipes it out, in order to substitute it with a new one; the second narrative pattern frames the invalidation of the biographical subject's system of beliefs within the invalidation of the dogmas of the institution to which he belongs. Both patterns act complementarily to establish a new system of values capable of yielding a new truth and to cast a new light on the biographical subject. Obviously the re-modulation of truth-values does not occur without struggle and Manning spends many years trying to make sure that "dogma [is] reinstated in its old pre-eminence" (216). However, the biography is constructed in such a way that shows him as a man constantly tempted to revolutionize doctrine. That is the reason why Strachey put thoughts like this into the biographee's mind: "All Oxford, all England, should know the truth. The time was out of joint, and he was only too delighted to have been born to set it right", (171).

Telling *truth* in a narrative text may unfold as a revealing process, as in *Orlando*, or through the establishment of an authoritative stance with the capacity to regulate which states of affairs are acceptable and coherent with the general superimposed narration and which have to be dismissed. Strachey challenged this notion and adopted a distance attitude towards them, because he could track down a distinctive echo of his forbears' precepts. Nevertheless, he restricted himself to the detection of these stylistic maxims by signalling their anachronistic and atavistic character, but he avoided to denounce them openly. The instrument he used to convey his point of view was a subtler and certainly more common one in the circle of Bloomsbury, i.e. satire: "One hair's-breadth from the unknown path of truth, one shadow of impurity in the mysterious light of faith, and there shall be anathema! Anathema!" (1197). Such reticence to take a clear position towards the matter of truth-telling is indicative of a rebuttal of the concept of a source of truth whose authority is unquestioned and it might be interpreted as the consequence of the assumption that, ultimately, truth cannot be either transmitted or externally validated.

> Unfortunately, however, the possibilities of truth and falsehood depend upon other things besides sincerity. A man may be of a scrupulous and impeccable honesty, and yet his respect for the truth – it cannot be denied – may be insufficient. He may be, like the lunatic, the lover, and the poet,

> ‘of imagination all compact’; he may be blessed, or cursed, with one of those ‘seething brains’, one of those ‘shaping fantasies’ that ‘apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends’; he may be by nature incapable of sifting evidence, or by predilection simply indisposed to do so. (352)

As the narrator in this passage explains, truth does not depend on an act of will, and therefore, it is not attained automatically through the application of fixed external norms. Hence, as a voluntary act of procuring and displaying, it can never be thoroughly successful. Because of the complex nature of reality and the myriads of interpretations, contrasting versions and competing narrations we can give of it, the problem of assigning truth-values to states of affairs comes to the fore again and puts its stress on the challenges of comprehension: “‘The facts of nature are unintelligible, therefore, be not afraid if revealed truths be likewise beyond the compass of the understanding’; but this seems to me a meagre meaning” (634). This is the conclusion to which Strachey comes. In order to facilitate the process of understanding, it is necessary to abandon the presumption of grasping and describing the universal system and to focus on particulars: these are the means to enable the interpreting agent to gain truthful information through inductive reasoning. This is asserted by the narrator in the following passage: “Some of the divines of the seventeenth century had, perhaps, been vouchsafed glimpses of the truth; but they were glimpses and nothing more” (216). That is the reason why the capacity of “sifting evidence” increased its importance exponentially in biographical writing. Such theoretical persuasion derives from the fact that the location of authoritative truth-bearers shifted in the hierarchy from a central position to an eccentric one. This is reflected in both the theoretical argumentation and on the story level of Manning’s biography.

Moreover, Strachey attempted to convey the message that truth has no fixed position and, above all, that it is cannot be possessed. Within this frame of contextualization it is possible to discuss the metaphorical relevance of the figure of the Pope and his prerogative of infallibility in Manning’s portrait. Needless to say, the entitlement of having the authority to generate truth is inextricably linked to the tenure of power and control. The figure of the Pope is directly linked to the

idea of an authoritative fulcrum that, under certain conditions, is the depositary of truth. More specifically, the Pontiff is, according to Catholic doctrine, bestowed by God the power to retain truth in his hands and even to generate it through his words: “The Vicar of Christ, when in certain circumstances and with certain precautions, he has once spoken, has expressed, for all the ages, a part of the immutable, absolute and eternal Truth” (1066). More specifically, he is spared from the possibility of error. This circumstance seems to separate the notion of infallibility from the notion of supremacy: “There is one distinction, at any rate, which is palpable: the decisions of a supreme authority can be altered: those of an infallible authority cannot” (1066). Strachey is ironical about the cumbersomeness and intrinsic illogicality of the dogma of infallibility, but, in his lampoonery, he makes us alert of the insubstantial nature of truth. He radically questions the assumption that “legitimate Authority is an Evidence of Truth” (1273). In point of fact, there is no real evidence of truth. The consequence of infallibility is only the impossibility to rethink an assertion. The immutability forced on a statement reveals instantaneously the impracticality of infallibility. Therefore, the main characteristics of truth are, according to Strachey, flimsiness and volatility. Truth cannot be conquered. It is merely possible to speculate, to infer and to look for indications of plausibility. Every other position runs the risk of being enormous and disproportionate. This realization, which sometimes takes on a bitter tone, is especially valid for biographical writing.

4.7.2 Flaws of Florence Nightingale’s Truth-Maker Status: An Anatomy and Deconstruction of Established Mythical Truths

Consistent with his ideas of biographical revolution and re-enactment of well-known and iconic characters of the Victorian period, Strachey chose to dedicate the second portrait of his collection to Florence Nightingale. In the effort to re-tell a life whose contours were already quite well and clearly defined, one of Strachey’s most pressing and evident concerns was to attempt to deconstruct the mythical aura surrounding the so-called “Lady with the Lamp” of popular legend and to downsize the reach and the strength of the myth itself. Holroyd reported a

comment by Kingsmill on Strachey's attitude towards mythological narratives that can shed a significant light on the topic of my research:

> Strachey […] wrote from the standpoint that no one at all is good and that man's only rational occupation is to observe from a distance the contention of conflicting egotisms. To Strachey all mythologies were absurd, whether they embodied the transient illusions of a particular epoch or welled up out of the depths of the soul to illuminate the mysteries of life. Looking at men from the outside, he interpreted their actions rationally.

Strachey mainly employed the weapons of irony to achieve this goal, through which he managed to highlight the points of weakness in the mythical narration. Indeed, Florence Nightingale enjoyed the status of a courageous angel, a champion of selflessness and altruism, who bravely rescued the lives of thousands of soldiers in the war. Strachey arranged his argumentation in such a way that little of such selflessness could be visible. Rather, his aim was to emphasise the opposite, i.e. the biographee's extreme self-centredness and intrinsic narcissism. As this quote shows:

> She was heroic; […] certainly, she was heroic. Yet her heroism was not of that simple sort so dear to the readers of novels and the compilers of hagiologies – the romantic sentimental heroism with which mankind loves to invest its chosen darlings: it was made of sterner stuff. (1682)

Furthermore, Strachey's portrait of Florence Nightingale had to play on a new and more balanced distribution of the poles of respectability and ruthlessness, thus encoding the figure of the biographee in a new, more truthful image: "In the real Miss N. there was more that was interesting than in the legendary one; there was also less that was agreeable (1453). Holroyd argues that Strachey built

> two 'Florences': he transformed her into a grotesque schizophrenic monster, at one moment a saintly crusader in the cause of hygiene, at the next a satanic personality resorting to sardonic grins, pantomime gestures and sudden fits of wild fury." (1974)

While this statement is, to a certain extent, acceptable, I will contend that Strachey did not create so much a two-faced character, but he unveiled the

multifaceted value of truthful narration. In this regard, it is worthwhile to remark that Strachey did not attempt to establish his truth by exploiting the falseness of the myth, but by exploiting the ambiguous character of the truth contained in the myth. To a certain extent, such strategy is capable of mitigating the fierceness of the tension between the two narrations and of clouding their antithetical attitudes.

Strachey begins his account of Nightingale's life by introducing a deviation from the common perception of the biographee, by stating that "[t]he true history was far stranger even than the myth," (1785). He started his description not from the internal level of facts and events, but from an external level of negation of what is known about the figure, what the character represents outside her world. In this passage, the author sums up in a nutshell the essence of Nightingale's life, with the goal of distorting a "vision that is familiar to all" (1446).

> Everyone knows the popular conception of Florence Nightingale. The saintly, self-sacrificing woman, the delicate maiden of high degree who threw aside the pleasures of a life of ease to succour the afflicted; the Lady with the Lamp, gliding through the horrors of the hospital at Scutari, and consecrating with the radiance of her goodness the dying soldier's couch. The vision is familiar to all – but the truth was different. (1446)

The sequence of asyndetic sentences underlines the monotony of the listing of the clichéd description of the nurses and it contributes to raise suspicion. The last sentence in the passage hints at the conceit of vision, but it alludes to the hallucination-related meaning of the term. Indeed, the sentence seems to be put in contrast with the following clause, which contains the word "truth." Hence, vision and truth are, in this case, antithetical concepts and the separation by means of a hyphen marks the disrelation all the stronger. Strachey insisted that, in order to deconstruct a myth based on disproportioned visual assumptions, it was vital to observe Florence Nightingale's life through a more detached, sober glance, which could give a more comprehensive perspective and, subsequently, yield a more powerful and profound truth-effect. In fact, the narrating biographer promptly asks:

> This remarkable woman was in truth performing the function of an administrative chief. How had this come about? Was she not in reality merely a nurse? Was it not her duty simply to tend the sick? And indeed, was it not as a ministering angel, a gentle “Lady with the Lamp”, that she actually impressed the minds of her contemporaries? (1666)

In the mayhem of a disproportioned, almost hysterical and visionary myth concoction, Strachey decreed that a “keener eye [had to] perceive something more than that,” (1690) and it had become absolutely necessary, both on the aesthetic and the narratological points of view.

Florence Nightingale was born into a family of good breeding, but as she grew up, she felt she was deeply extraneous to the domestic entertainments of a young lady of her rank. She dreamt of becoming a nurse, an occupation that was considered disreputable at those times. Her family was dismayed, but she was obstinate and strenuously insisted until she obtained what she wanted. The price she had to pay to achieve her goals was high: she had to sublimate all other desires and to refuse marriage. As a reward, Nightingale became superintendent of a charitable nursing home in London, when she was in her early thirties. In 1854, with the help of her friend Sidney Herbert at the War Office, she managed to reach Scutari, the British military hospital at Constantinople and to assuage the appalling conditions of the British soldiers during the Crimean War. In the hospital, all Nightingale found was, according to Holroyd, "want, neglect, confusion, misery". With a strong will, hard work and discipline, Nightingale solved many problems and became the administrative head of the hospital. Strachey is willing to admit that her intervention in Crimea had actually improved the conditions of the British soldiers, but he was less willing to consent to use the same rhetoric and the same language to acknowledge such states of affairs in his biography. In fact, he was convinced that a more careful observation would make one conclude, at last, that

> [t]o the wounded soldier on his couch of agony, she might well appear in the guise of a gracious angel of mercy; but the military surgeons, and the orderlies, and her own nurses, and the Purveyor, and Dr. Hall, and, even Lord Stratford himself, could tell a different story. (1682)

This difference of opinions, though not entirely denied, is conveyed through the intrusion of doubt and through the introduction of a new, different perspective, which the expression “different story” exemplifies at best. Nightingale left the Crimea in July 1856, enjoying an extraordinary reputation. Indeed, after her return to England, despite ill-health, she kept on working zealously, planning the reform of the entire Army Medical Department and struggling against the bureaucratic obstructions her schemes stirred. The nurse enjoyed an enormous popularity and an excellent reputation. Even Queen Victoria and her consort showed admiration: “The impression which she created was excellent. ‘*Sie gefällt uns sehr’*, noted the Prince. ‘*Ist sehr bescheiden*.’[148] Her Majesty’s comment was different – ‘Such a HEAD! I wish we had her at the War Office’”, (1811), [emphasis in the text]. In 1859, she managed to launch her reform system. The following year, other successes were achieved, like the foundation of the Nightingale Training School for Nurses at St. Thomas's Hospital. At this point, Strachey intruded a remarkable comment: “Her *real* “life” began at the very moment when, in the popular imagination, it had ended”, (1785) [my emphasis]. What did he mean by stating that? Such annotation reveals much of his truth-telling programme in biography. First of all, the narrative scheme “cradle to grave” does not always succeed in delivering a truthful representation of a life. Secondly, the representation of a self may unfold according to more than a single way and it does not end after official accomplishments have been achieved. That may be a reason why the portrayal of the biographee turns inwardly from this moment on. Nightingale was driven on by an obsessive yearning for work. Such desire to be productive marks preponderantly her inner life. While she continued to be a powerful force at the War Office for a decade, with the passing of years, she became softer and her character took on a less mordant tone.

[148] “‘We like her very much’ […], ‘She is very modest’”, (my translation). It is perhaps relevant to underline the ironic tone of the word “modest”.

Strachey's account of Florence Nightingale's life sheds a light on some aspects of narrative truth. In the analysis of Nightingale's instalment, Strachey exploited the ambiguity of truth to give form to an alternative rendition of the biographee's life. This first of both aspects is relevant to my study, because it accounts for the evolution of the genre of biography in virtue of the concept of truth. Indeed, the re-enactment of Nightingale's life generates a re-appraisal not only of the figure *per se*, but also of the conventions of truth establishment. In addition to that, the description of a biographee's peculiar characteristic, i.e. her overt claims of being herself a source of truth – or a truth-maker – may be relevant for the investigation of truth as an inherent theme of Strachey's narration and for a reflection on the arbitrary assertiveness of a claim. "She would publish the truth to the whole world" (1926). This solipsistic act must be observed with mistrust, Strachey implicitly warns. The author regarded such efforts to institutionalize truth and trap it in constraints as utterly problematic and he subtly invited the biography recipients to question the dependability of similar positions. To this extent, he highlighted the lack of self-reflexivity of the so-called Victorian icons and thus proceeded to destabilize their *status of iconicity*. Such claims find their actualization in Nightingale project of re-ordering and, subsequently, putting a hasty quietus once and for all on the most disparate and intricate philosophical questions:

> Before her departure for the Crimea, she had begun this work; and now, in the intervals of her other labours, she completed it. Her "Suggestions for Thought to the Searchers After Truth Among the Artisans of England" (1860), unravels, in the course of three portly volumes, the difficulties hitherto, curiously enough, unsolved – connected with such matters as Belief in God, the Plan of Creation, the Origin of Evil, the Future Life, Necessity and Free Will, Law and the Nature of Morality. (2099)

Strachey fought his personal battle against the highest biographical standards of his forbears, but he did not forget to show off his detachment. That is probably one of the reasons why, playfully feigning resignation, at a certain point he seemed to loosen his grip on his own rhetoric of deconstruction, when he concluded that "that was enough; they understood; the myth was there - -obvious, portentous, impalpable; and so it remained to the last," (2091). Thus he abruptly

marked the ambivalence towards Victorian conventions and he aligned with the mark of uncertainty that characterized the conception of truth of the other members of the Bloomsbury Group.

4.7.3 Dr. Arnold: the Position of *Lawgiver* and the *Sides* of Truth: Textual and Cultural Implications

The portrayal of Dr. Thomas Arnold is the shortest of the four. It focuses on Arnold's role as headmaster of Rugby School. The schoolmaster was a religious man and his work was characterized by a strong emphasis on morals and conduct. When he addressed educational and pedagogical issues, Dr. Arnold seemed to have very clear ideas about what he considered the best upbringing and he allegedly maintained that "if [a boy]'ll only turn out a brave, helpful, *truth-telling* Englishman, and Christian, that's all I want," (2280), [my emphasis]. This assertion contains a highly concentrated essence of the values Dr. Arnold deemed essential. The latter two are the most relevant for my study, because they shed light – the first as an explicit remainder, the second as a metaphorical conceit – on the critique and interpretation of truth as a theme and as a narrative device. Let us linger on the theme of Christianity for a moment: in which sense is it relevant for the investigation of truth? First of all, Strachey exploited its associative and symbolic power. Arnold claimed to have reformed the way the school was governed. Because the schoolmaster remained in the background of the school life and worked his educational plans out as a sort of dreaded grey eminence, Strachey compared his attitude to a specific characteristic of the Old Testament God, i.e. that of being the Lawgiver, who despotically rules according to the laws of command and wrath. As a matter of fact, Arnold made a few teaching reforms, which included the introduction of modern languages, mathematics and history. Unfortunately, the measure was a mere *pro forma*, because, in actual fact, those subjects weren't given adequate space in the curriculum. The only subjects that were granted a prominent place in the students' lives continued to be Latin and ancient Greek. Therefore, Strachey sustained that Arnold's reforms weren't, in actual fact, any, because they strengthened the old system of education. His process of renewal, was, merely an alteration, but not a modification of the old organization.

The example of absolute authority according to which Dr. Arnold shapes his educational methods makes his portrait interesting for my study, because the absoluteness of authority entails the possession and control of truth. Being the *Lawgiver*, he is able to influence the evaluations of truthfulness or falseness and even to coordinate and manipulate them through coercive means. Moreover, the affinity with the religious authority contributes to reinforce the position by means of association and to wrap truth in an aura of sacred mystery, driving it away from common accessibility. Truth takes on the semblances of a dreaded, hidden God, while Arnold ascends to the role of a high priest dispensing "sermons", "high-toned exhortations" and "grave and sombre messages of incalculable import," (2380). Strachey links the image of the patriarchal, god-like regulator, to the figure of the biographee and he highlights the faultiness of this association. He remarks its extraneousness to modern culture and its inapplicability in it, thus bringing out with great force its atavistic character. With the usual ambiguous irony, he makes perplexity stand out, by noting the recipients of such lectures always received them "from first to last in a kind of awe," (2380). While Dr. Arnold seemed to derive a certain pleasure from the juxtaposition of his persona to the Divine, Strachey underlined the fallacy and belatedness of the whole enterprise:

> The whole character of the man stood at last revealed. His congregation sat in fixed attention (with the exception of the younger boys, whose thoughts occasionally wandered), while he propounded the general principles both of his own conduct and that of the Almighty, or indicated the bearing of the incidents of Jewish history in the sixth century B.C. upon the conduct of English schoolboys in 1830. Then, more than ever, he seemed to be battling with the wicked one (2380).

To this end, Strachey's position is densely connected to Auerbach's analysis of reality in the essay *Odysseus's Scar*, not only because the religious theme is repeated, but also because Auerbach stated there that a cultural progress produces a cascade of modifications in the perception and interpretation of truth, which mostly give rise to scepticism, doubt and ultimate rejection:

> [W]hen, through too great a change in environment and through the awakening of a critical consciousness, this becomes impossible, the

> Biblical claim to absolute authority is jeopardized; the method of interpretation is scorned and rejected, the Biblical stories become ancient legends, and the doctrine they had contained, now dissevered from them, becomes a disembodied image. (Auerbach [1946] 2013:16)

The sketch of Dr. Arnold makes us aware of a further manipulation of the concept of truth, i.e. the assignment of a figurative location, a side in which truth *par excellence* must reside. Strachey was aware of this polarization and he took advantage of it to demonstrate its invalidity. Indeed, polarizing a conception, dividing it into sharp dichotomies reduces its reach and it condemns the argumentation to being refuted. In Arnold's case, the polarization of truth showed his absolutistic pretensions and the falseness of his reforming endeavours: "As it was, he threw the whole weight of his influence into the opposite scale, and the ancient system became more firmly established than ever" (2599).

4.7.4 "Who was he really?' – Counterplots and Counter-narrations about General Gordon

General Gordon's portrait is the last of the series contained in EV. The sketch is characterized by the repetition of the schemes and condensation of themes and tropes encountered and employed in the previous biographical sketches. The serialization of Strachey's counter-narratives of the life of famous Victorians contributes to demonstrate the falseness and extreme degree of stereotyping of the *popular* depictions, by putting the stress on their structural equability against completely different social settings. Such high degree of homologation of narrations is indicative of a removal from the truth of individuality and it brings to light the necessity of re-negotiating entrenched images. In the effortless attempt to convey this message with the vehicle of irony and self-reflexion, Strachey represented Gordon and, to a variable extent, the other protagonists of each biography, as though they were explicitly and personally convinced of the exactness of their exteriorized characterization. Hence, "even if a general acquaintance with Gordon's life and character were not sufficient to lead to these

conclusions, he himself had taken care to put their validity beyond reasonable doubt," (3152).

General Gordon served in the Royal Engineers during the Crimean War and was sent in 1860 to China. There, he stayed for four years. He managed to win back vast amounts of land from a rebel force, with the help of a Chinese army. Having achieved such a victory, he returned to England enjoying an excellent reputation. This plot nucleus, developed according the trope of the *return of the hero*, is highly reminiscent of Florence Nightingale's life. In addition, just like all the other eminent Victorians described by Strachey, Gordon had a mystical temperament and spent many hours with his Bible in a search of a marmoreal Truth. As in the cases of Cardinal Manning and Dr. Arnold, the approach with the religious authority functions as a term of comparison in the establishment of an authority of truth. It embodies the idealization of authority and it comprises all those features which are deemed inalienable from the narrative construction of the successful Victorian. In Gordon's sketch, however, the approach to religion and to a god-like figure varies from the other two examples, because the identification with the authority does not take place. What takes place and generates Strachey's scorn, is the assumption that it was possible for Gordon, through the exploitation of a religious text, to deduce truth: "The Bible he read and re-read with an untiring, unending assiduity. There, he was convinced, all truth was to be found; and he was equally convinced that he could find it" (2764-2773). Faith in a supreme authority is missing; Gordon adheres only theoretically to the arrangement. More specifically, he exploits the equation, because he is convinced he can obtain an exegetic tool to access reality, which is always characterized by elusiveness. Not only that, he is also persuaded to be the sole individual who can have the capacity of accessing the *true* truth.

Gordon's last expedition is treated diffusely in his biographical sketch. It took place in Sudan, where he had returned after 1880. Gordon fought against an army led by the Mahdi and was strenuously specific not to let Khartoum fall in the hands of the Mahdi. Notwithstanding, his plans failed, because the Mahdi's forces managed to conquer the city. Gordon repeatedly refused to leave Khartoum

despite the various opportunities he had and was eventually killed under unclear circumstances. Such an end to the story gave Strachey the opportunity to reflect on the nature of events and to put it in correlation with the concept of truth. As it had been shown at the beginning of the work, events are regarded as strongly and principally aleatory:

> If Newman had never lived, or if his father, when the gig came round on the fatal morning, still undecided between the two Universities, had chanced *to turn the horse's head* in the direction of Cambridge, who can doubt that the Oxford Movement would have flickered out its little flame unobserved in the Common Room of Oriel? And how different, too, would have been the fate of Newman himself! (173), [my emphasis].

The figure of a horse rider at the crossroads between two diametrically opposed destinies symbolizes very clearly and with blatant irony how the most important, "fatal", turns in one's life are left to the cracking movement of a pair of horse bridles. This image of risky haphazardness is so emphatic that is repeated also in Gordon's biography:

> 'For some wise design,' he wrote to his sister, 'God turns events one way or another, whether man likes it or not, as a man driving a horse turns it to right or left without consideration as to whether the horse likes that way or not. To be happy, a man must be like a well-broken, willing horse, ready for anything. Events will go as God likes." (2814)

In the latter case, however, the precariousness of the protagonist's position is even more dramatic, since it is signified by the horse and not by the horse rider. As a result, the level of decisional autonomy is even more reduced and debased. The figure of the horse becomes the symbol of the concept of event and also a metaphor of biographical writing. It distantly predicates on the directing role of the biographer in the sequential arrangement of events. Moreover, it implicates the – perhaps fatalistic – consideration that life itself cannot have a fixed structure and that changes of state in one's life do not always occur according to specific rules.

The uncertain circumstances surrounding Gordon's death prompts Strachey to construct a counter-narration that might nullify or, at least, relativize the aura of

military virtue and glorification he had acquired during the Victorian Era. It also serves to establish new truth cues, by disseminating doubt and by taking advantage of counter-narratives. The urge to interpret a reality that fails to meet up the assumptions about it is also expressed and reflected in the analysis of English contemporary culture by means of the metaphorical conceit of *Curious England*:

> There emerges from those obscure, unhappy records an interest, not merely political and historical, but human and dramatic. One catches a vision of strange characters, moved by mysterious impulses, interacting in queer complication, and hurrying at last – so it almost seems – like creatures in a puppet show to a predestined catastrophe. The characters, too, have a charm of their own: they are curiously English. (2632)

Here Strachey seems to allude specifically to the absurdity of the idea that a life can be told truthfully by basing its unfolding on a pre-specific structure. He also specifically attributed this belief to the British society that preceded him and thus strengthened his opposition to the previous standard of discursive truth-yielding arrangement. Such conviction becomes an integral part of Gordon's sketch and it is reiterated towards the end of the text:

> It was upon Sir Evelyn Baring that he fixed his gaze. For him, Sir Evelyn Baring was the embodiment of England – or rather the embodiment of the English official classes, of English diplomacy, of the English government with its hesitations, its insincerities, its double-faced schemes. (3430)

Drawing near to the end of Gordon's portrait, though, one also gets the nearest to a concrete dissemination of truth-cues, by which a new narration, i.e. a new reading of the biographee's life is achieved. After recounting of a heroic end of the protagonist, the narrator makes a little pause to tell with a certain abundance of details an alternative story about the general's last moments of life. If such a double (or, possibly multiple) outcome is possible, then one must assume that truth in a biographical text might cease to have a rigorous meaning:

> Thus, if we are to believe the official chroniclers, in the dignity of unresisting disdain, General Gordon met his end. But it is only fitting that the last moments of one whose life was passed in contradiction should be

> involved in mystery and doubt. Other witnesses told a very different story. (3830-3839)

In doing this, Strachey opens up the possibility to construct a possible alternative outcome, which, consequently, leads to the construction of a new possible world in the text. Paraphrasing Ryan (1985: 270), "a possible end of a biographical story becomes real through a mental act of the biographer". Whether the possible outcome was also the "real" actualization of events is not relevant for Strachey's biographies. What is much more essential is to show that more than one outcome is possible.

4.8 Queen Victoria as Biographical Truth-Source

Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria*[149] (1921) is noteworthy for my research, because it is not only an example of how the investigation of truth in biography rapidly developed in Strachey's writing, but also, and above all, because it shows that the character of a Bloomsburian stylistic and aesthetic mark of writing was beginning to delineate. *Queen Victoria* is a particularly refined and accomplished biography, in which the level of observation of the biographee as regards as its position in relation to the concept of truth is certainly higher than in *Eminent Victorians*. There, the most pressing preoccupation was the detection of absurdities and incongruences lurking behind established narrative truths. In *Queen Victoria*, such urge is not present and the respect and use of all common, agreed-on sources about Queen Victoria's life seem to substantiate such claim. Furthermore, in opposition to *Eminent Victorians*, *Queen Victoria* is the attempt to negotiate the question 'what is narrative truth (in biography)?' by exploiting the potentialities of the genre, with the intent to elevate it to a further level. As Virginia Woolf observed,

[149] All quotations are taken from: Strachey Lytton. Queen Victoria. [1921] 2013. Kindle Edition.

> [The essayistic biographies in *Eminent Victorians*] were short studies with something of the over-emphasis and the foreshortening of caricatures. In the lives of the two great Queens, Elizabeth and Victoria, he attempted a far more ambitious task. Biography had never had a fairer chance of showing what it could do. For it was now being put to the test by a writer who was capable of making use of all the liberties that biography had won: he was fearless; he had proved his brilliance; and he had learned his job. The result throws great light upon the nature of biography. For who can doubt […] that the Victoria is a triumphant success […]?[150]

Indeed, *Queen Victoria* succeeds to contribute incisively to the formation of a comprehensive narration of Queen Victoria, which is able to stand out as her "true" biographical narration and to outshine all the others – past, present and future. To this extent, the work may be defined as a successful treaty on microhistory. However, the primary aim of the biography is not only to produce a historical text about a personage, but to build it up thoroughly. In this, *Queen Victoria* is different from *Eminent Victorians*, which was engaged in the activity of character deconstruction. Furthermore, *Queen Victoria* is dissimilar from *Eminent Victorians*, because the additional intent of the work is not so much to provide an alternative, competing narration of the biographee's life, but to explore the function of truth for and within the biographical subject with deepening awareness. In *Queen Victoria*, the treatment of life materials remains brief and concise, thus respecting the most important of the three formal duties of the new biographer listed above. Therefore, *Queen Victoria* is not an analytical work, but a compendium. It is not the representation of "the real story behind…" and insofar, it does not attempt to recreate a counterfactual narrative. In this biography, all the given narrative plots composing what is commonly known about the life of the Queen are neither commented upon, nor confuted or dismissed, but they are implemented in the fabric of the text. Nevertheless, a radical difference in the exploration of the biographical subject cannot be missed. The truth of the biographee is given its plasticity not by means of the exploration of shadows, but

[150] Woolf, (1939: 506-10).

by narratively moulding its substance anew. As is often the case in Bloomsburian literary works, the inspection of truth unfolds at both the formal and content levels. Not only is *Queen Victoria* a reflection on the narrative ways of transmitting truth in biography, but truth is also thematically treated, since the protagonist of the biography becomes herself a symbol and an embodiment of truth and truthfulness. Subsequently, another relevant feature of the exploration of the concept of truth in *Queen Victoria* is the treatment of truth in terms of power. The text suggests that the "owner" or enactor of truth is also the holder of a great degree of power on the other subjects and therefore, holding truth justifies power in itself. As Michel Foucault explains[151], the "relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse" (1980: 93). In the case of *Queen Victoria*, the discourse at issue is increasingly the truth discourse. Indeed, Foucault's statement that "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1980:93) informs the text from beginning to end. Nonetheless, Strachey's narration of Queen Victoria's life is set under a double perspective: if, on the one hand, the narration seems to show that the theory of truth as a form of power is embraced by Victoria's life and times, it also looks at it with a trenchant and ironic distance. Indeed, Strachey's biography points out that Victoria's contemporaries could not fully grasp the circumstance the relation of contiguity between the Queen and the truth was in fact "produced", "fabricated" and not simply "found" in the world. In Victorian times, Strachey's narrator seems to implicitly argue, truth was a divine prerogative – and, hence, a right – of the sovereignty and/or authority in chief and, at the same time, a duty to be constantly performed.

[151] Foucault proceeds his strain of argument by explaining how "we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified specific in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power" (1980: 94).

Being so different in its formal constitution, *Queen Victoria* could not be written in the essayistic form, as was *Eminent Victorians*. The structure of the biography markedly resembles a novel, in which the characters arrange themselves into three sharply defined categories: “1) the heroine and the hero; 2) minor supporting figures; 3) several off-stage, unsubstantial beings that seem to control the machinations of the plot” (Holroyd, 1974).

4.8.1 The *composite portraiture* as a tool for describing biographical truth

As Saunders posits in his definition of biographical portrait, “biography is always necessarily composite portraiture to the extent that the subject’s life is inextricable from other people’s lives” (2010: 289). Such a stance seems to be interiorized by and indissoluble from Strachey’s biographical writing. If the composite element was already present in EV and particularly in Manning’s biographical sketch, in QV it acquires a full character and an explicit function in the text as a truth-yielding component. Strachey’s composite portraiture does not unfold through the “juxtaposition of different avatars” (Saunders, 2010:289), but through the interplay between the protagonist and one or more further autonomous characters. Remarkably, the composite portraiture of the Queen begins after another kind of juxtaposition has taken place, i.e. the one that merges the figure of the protagonist and the concept of truth. Such coupling of symbol and character reflects a striking combination of the levels of story and discourse. Indeed, the association between the Queen and the symbology of truth and truthfulness is established from the early moments of Victoria’s life on. At this stage of her depiction, a distinctive feature of her character that permeates not only all her actions, but, above all, the essence of her being. Sincerity represents the vicinity of the biographee and the concept of truth is on the narrative level:

> the child was extraordinarily truthful; whatever punishment might follow, she never told a lie. Firm, very firm the new governess yet had the sense to see that all the firmness in the world would be useless, unless she could win her way into little Drina’s heart. (13)

Soon after, the allusion to “sincerity” turns into an explicit reference to truthfulness: “But she was a very truthful child, and perhaps it was her genuine opinion” (14). As the princess grows up, the adherence to a pattern of truthfulness becomes stronger and stronger, until the other figures around her urge her always to be confident in her truthfulness. In moments of a crunch of faith, Victoria’s truthfulness is a very part of her nature and of her identity and not merely an attachment to her morals: “in the crisis that was approaching, she was not to be alarmed, but [she trusted] in the ‘good natural sense of the TRUTH’ of her character,” (24). Evidently, the narrative communion between the biographee and the concept of truth is total and exclusive and it remains so until the configuration of the composite portrait begins to align in the text. Truth is not only the fundamental essence of her nature, but it also reverberates in every word the Queen utters, thus transmitting the juxtaposition of character and symbol to every other external characters in the intra-diegetic universe, but also to the text recipients, on the extra-diegetic level. Such reflection acts as validation and confirmation of the biographee’s identity with the concept of truth:

> As Lady Lyttelton said: “There is a transparency in her truth that is very striking – not a shade of exaggeration in describing feelings or facts; like very few other people I ever knew. Many may be as true, but I think it goes often along with some reserve. She talks all out; just as it is, no more and no less.” (150)

The association to the symbol of truth, explicated in the semantic shades of sincerity, returns at the end of the biography, where it is remarked once again in categorical terms and through definite specification. Its function is nonetheless quite ambiguous and certainly not irony-free, to the extent that being truthful is not only a mark of nobleness, but also a mark of eccentric ingenuity:

> In the impact of personality, it is something deeper, something fundamental and common to all qualities, that really tells. In Victoria, it is easy to discern the nature of this underlying element: it was a peculiar sincerity. Her truthfulness, her single-mindedness, the vividness of her emotions and her unrestrained expression of them, were the varied forms which this central characteristic assumed. It was her sincerity which gave her at once her impressiveness, her charm,

> and her absurdity. She moved through life with the imposing certitude of one to whom concealment was impossible – either towards her surroundings or towards herself. There she was – the Queen of England, complete and obvious; the world might take her or leave her; she had nothing more to show, or to explain, or to modify; and, with her peerless carriage, she swept along her path.

Such a stance incorporates the ancient assumption "that truth is a form of life," (Caputo, 2013: 99) and, as such, it informs every aspect of it, i.e., both its inner and the outer dimension.

Although the Queen is reported to have been resolute and single-minded, she is ready to give up this well-formed identity and its intrinsic unity in order to share it automatically with the figure of the Prince. This constitutes the composite portraiture of the biographee. On the story-level, the changeover happens practically, though unofficially, with the very first encounter of the queen and her cousin, Prince Albert. After she meets him, the unity of her figure – and subsequently the unity of truth – breaks apart all of a sudden, thus triggering a modification in the narration: "Albert arrived; and the whole structure of her existence crumbled into nothingness like a house of cards. He was beautiful – she gasped – she knew no more" (47). Victoria abandons/loses her role of unitary source and embodiment of truth. From this moment on, truth is be propagated in the text by means of the interaction of two characters, whose images and functions blend into one another and whose relationship is characterized by different degrees of dominance relations. This occurs, among other reasons, because Albert explicitly agrees to take on his new role, when he states that he is "firmly resolved ever to remain faithful to the acknowledged truth," (50). The formal ratification of the composite portraiture arrives with the marriage between Victoria and Albert. Through the ceremony, the act of transferring the quality of truth-source is conveyed through the performative act of getting married. With such "*happenings* of truth" (Caputo, 2013:71), it is possible to enter a new level of the narration of the queen's life. The figure of the protagonist retreats more and

more to the background of the story, while the lights increasingly shine on the new truth-bearer, i.e. the Prince Consort. In this sense, there happens a de-coupling of the figure of the Queen and the concept of truth. This brings about a loss of inherent function of the protagonist in her own textual representation. Such narrative device might be interpreted as a critique to Victorian culture. Whereas Victoria's truthfulness was made of soft, genuine sincerity, Albert's truth is poured into the hard cast of the armour of authority. Perhaps this difference had been brought about by external pressures on the prince, which expressed the wish for him of "a great, noble, warm and true heart" (59). Albert actively decided to listen "to the voice of a spiritual director inspired with divine truth. 'The stars which are needful to you now' the voice continued, "and perhaps for some time to come, are Love, Honesty, Truth" (58-59). From the cultural point of view, the transfer of truth-control sanctioned by the progression of the biographee towards marriage, marks the delineation and the rise of the Victorian epoch[152] and it most aptly fits with the rhetoric of the Victorian Age as a time in which traditional gender roles were forced on the royal couple with a particular strength.

> She was Albert's wife. She was more – the embodiment, the living apex of a new era in the generations of mankind. The last vestige of the eighteenth century had disappeared; cynicism and subtlety were shrivelled into powder; and duty, industry, morality, and domesticity triumphed over them. Even the very chairs and tables had assumed, with a singular responsiveness, the forms of prim solidity. The Victorian Age was in full swing. (69-70)

With the passing of time, the composite nature of the queen's portrait crystallized into an ill-proportioned image, in which the figure of Albert takes the greatest part of the available biographical space. His supposedly greater erudition gives him the right to acquire a preponderance in the displaying of truth. Knowledge is therefore an instrument of power in the conquest of the possession of truth and it

[152] Naturally, with the approaching of the theme "Victorian Age", the satiric tone in the text increasingly intensifies. Nonetheless, irony is not a fundamental instrument for the narrative construction of *Queen Victoria*.

entitles general rightfulness. The queen herself was convinced of Albert's intellectual superiority and this participated in the reinforcements of his beliefs: "He knew what was right, and, at all costs, he would pursue it" (104). From the moment in which the prince takes hold of truth and administers it as an instrument for collecting and maintaining power, truth itself undergoes a radical transformation. It ceases to be a naïve, feminine, personal characteristic of the monarch, but it becomes a powerful and severe regal prerogative. In other words, truth loses its status of implicit narrative element, in order to become a discursive matter. As the concept of truth transcends the limits of the narratological levels, Strachey's narrator/biographer expresses new, meta-biographical concerns. Such concerns are often made explicit with a device like a rhetorical question, which has the function of discussing the validity and substantiating the status of absolutistic truth. In the case cited above, an extra-diegetical, meta-referential consideration of the narrator, who seems not to be able to resist asking how the rightness of the prince's attitude can be empirically justified: "That was certain. But alas! In this our life what are the certainties?" (104) is enough to brusquely interrupt – and thus, to challenge – the unstoppable and self-confident race of the Prince Consort's train of thought.

The disproportion and disequilibrium in the control of truth increases and its presence perdures in Victoria's life to such an extent that it eventually transcends the boundaries of physical life, thus paving the way for the construction of a *bio*graphy of a memory. Even after Albert is dead, the queen does not incorporate Albert's conception of truth into her own and fails to restore her original connotation of truth. This is signified, on the story level, by the wish to continue the existence of a binary constellation holding truth, but it can also be read as a nostalgic longing for the departed spouse. On the discourse level, it shows how truth has been put off the scent. Indeed, from the moment of Albert's death on, Victoria's life contours blur and fade as the biographical materials about the queen become scanty and fragmentary. However, this does not represent an obstacle for the new biography, whose nature is to weigh and sift meaning from

a limited amount of resources. Hence, the scarcity of materials does not prevent Strachey from recounting the second half of the queen's life. The biographical narration makes a pause and the readers are warned and reminded them of the new formal situation.

> The death of the Prince Consort was the central turning-point of in the history of Queen Victoria. She herself felt that her true life had ceased with her husband's and that the remainder of her days upon earth was of a twilight nature – an epilogue to a drama that was done. Nor is it possible that her biographer should escape a similar impression. For him, too, there is a darkness over the latter half of that long career. The first forty-two years of the Queen's life are illuminated by a great and varied quantity of authentic information. With Albert's end a veil descends. Only occasionally, at fitful and disconnected intervals, does it lift for a moment or two; a few main outlines, a few remarkable details may be discerned; the rest is all conjecture and ambiguity. Thus, though the Queen survived her great bereavement for almost as many years as she had lived before it, the chronicle of those years can bear no proportion to the tale of her earlier life. We must be content in our ignorance with a brief and summary relation.

Not only does Albert prevail in the conquest and emanation of truth in Victoria's life, but, being the truth-bearer, his figure also attains the symbolical value of light and, more specifically, of *light of the queen's life*. Where Albert's presence is subsisting, there also shines a luminous gleam. Such light seems to brighten and, consequently, to give shape to Victoria's life. Light guarantees that the form of the queen's life is recognizable. If light is not available anymore, disappearance threatens. More importantly, in the case of Strachey's biographies, but also in Woolf's production, light guarantees the supremacy of truth. If light is missing, truth can't be present either. That is the reason why the queen, out of fear of dissolving and losing grip on truth, does everything she can, during the rest of her life, to restore a semblance of Albert's light: "To carry on Albert's work – that was her first duty; but there was another, second only to that, and yet nearer, if possible, to her heart – to impress the true nature of his genius and character upon the minds of her subjects" (114).

4.8.2 Genesis and satire of the *old biography*: some considerations and hypotheses

The passing away of the Prince Consort marks a turning point not only in the queen's life, but also in the internal structure of the biography. Whereas the (mock-)epic tone remains the same, the metanarrative references increase. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Strachey dedicated a good portion of the second part of Queen Victoria's biography to a curious phenomenon arising after Albert's death and influencing the queen's life, i.e. the genesis and invention of what would become known as the genre of Victorian biography. The text of *Queen Victoria* is so constructed as to make the recipients deduce that the source of Victorian biographical convention had been the queen herself. This section of the biography – it goes without saying – focuses implicitly on how *not* to write biography, reporting manifold meta-biographical references pointing at the formation of a kind of biographical writing that is fundamentally divergent from the new biographical style. It constitutes a gentle satire of "old biography" and it ultimately dismisses it as impractical and as a certain way to flaunt truth and to disrespect truthful narration. As I explained before, Queen Victoria never let go of her husband's figure, because the equilibrium of truth, i.e., the balance of power in the narration of truth, would have been lost. The attempt to maintain Albert's truth-yielding authority brought about a desire in Victoria to restore a tangible sign of the prince's presence. Therefore, she entrusted Sir Theodor Martin (1816-1909), a Scottish poet and biographer, with the task of writing a *complete* biography. This text had to substitute Albert's presence and thus to function as a surrogate of the truth-source. According to the narrator, such a *complete* biography seems to contain all the characteristics and stylistic conventions of a typical Victorian biography, i.e. claim of comprehensiveness, accumulation of as many details as possible, emphasis on the "official" life of the biographee and presumption of seriousness:

> The mass of material with which he had to deal was almost incredible, but he was extremely industrious, and he enjoyed throughout the gracious assistance of Her Majesty. The first bulky volume was published in 1874; four others slowly followed; so that it was not until 1880 that the monumental work was finished (114).

To this long list of features a biographical work must have, it is crucial to add the most unpopular among the Bloomsburian biographers, i.e., eulogy. This characteristic was not only disliked, but it was also considered the greatest carrier of untruthfulness in a biographical text. On the contrary, a eulogizing tone can never be sufficient for a queen who wants to conserve the truthful authority of a dead personage. Therefore, even five volumes full of panegyric and encomium leave Victoria with a desire for more. In addition to that, the narrator points at the idealistic tone of this stance, but his/her intention is to convey the message that idealism fits ill with the task of writing biography.

> To have conceived of him as anything short of perfect – perfect in virtue, in wisdom, in beauty, in all the glories and graces of man – would have been an unthinkable blasphemy: perfect he was, and perfect he must be shown to have been. (114)

The word “blasphemy” recalls the semantic field of religion and it signifies the overlapping of the biographee with a saintly or, rather, sanctified figure. This rhetoric serves to alert text recipients that a Victorian biography is interpretable as a hagiography and that, as such, it should be discarded as inherently untrue.

The delicate mixture of irony, historiography and rejection of conventions leads the narration to the exploration of the reception of the biographical work on Prince Albert from the readers of the time. Indeed, it emerges from the story that the narration of Prince Albert as the source of all truths was strongly repudiated and contested:

> The result was doubly unfortunate. Victoria, disappointed and chagrined, bore a grudge against her people for their refusal, in spite of all her efforts, to rate her husband at his true worth. She did not understand that the picture of an embodied perfection is distasteful to the majority of mankind (115).

> Thus it happened, that the public, when it saw displayed for its admiration a figure resembling the sugary hero of a moral story-book rather than a fellow man of flesh and blood, turned away with a shrug, a smile and a flippant ejaculation. But in this the public was the loser as well as Victoria.

> For in truth was a far more interesting personage than the public dreamed (115).

The narrator maintains that a biography in the traditional sense is doomed to narrative failure, because it lacks empathy and it misses entirely the goal of representing a "real creature, […] full of energy and stress and torment, so mysterious and so unhappy, and so fallible, and so very human" (115). The only result such a biographical production can achieve is its recipients' neglect and oblivion. The text proceeds with the narration of the obstinacy in the attempt to re-create Prince Albert as a truth-source. It introduces the Queen's idea to give a third dimension to her simulacrum of truth by realizing a statue of the prince, thus calling to mind idolatrous references. This rhetorical strategy has a double function: it continues to inform the narration with a set of religious semantic references and it heightens the perception of irony in the text: "Words and books may be ambiguous memorials, but who can misinterpret the visible solidity of gold and bronze?" (115). The figure of the statue introduces a variety of implicit references about truth, power and belief. As was shown in the analysis of Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe's portrait functions as an artistic piece of creation with the capacity of conveying Mrs. Ramsay's truth and, at the same time, to make Mrs. Ramsay become a truth-source in the narration.

It is possible to state that the more details are added, the farther the recipients are removed from reality. Curiously, the realization of the statue, instead of reminding of Prince Albert of the absolute truth-bearer, can be considered as a remembering symbol of the Victorian biography, thus providing the text with a further meta-biographical reference. Indeed, the concentration of details reminds vividly of the accumulation of details and facts, which is typical of the compilation of traditional biographies. Furthermore, the proportion itself of the statue and the presupposed seriousness with which it was realized are also emblematic and strongly reminiscent of old biography writing techniques.

After it became clear that it was impossible to impose the continuation of Albert as truth-source, the truth-bearing capacity shifts gradually again towards the

Queen, who is acknowledged again as a source of truth and indeed as a personification of the value of truth itself.

> In the whole tenour of the Queen's existence an extraordinary transformation came to pass. The nation's attitude towards her, critical and even hostile as it had been for so many years, altogether changed; while there was a corresponding alteration in the temper of Victoria's mind (135).

The restoration of the power of yielding truth occurs in the Queen's old age, when she has no longer a concrete possibility to exert it with its full potentiality. As the dominant figure of "dear Albert" fades away in the past, "its place was taken, inevitably by Victoria's own. Her being, revolving for so many years round an external object, now changed its motion and found its centre in itself" (139). Consequently, the Queen's place as truth-source is restored, but her connection to the real world and to society is lost, to the extent that she drops her characterization as a real person and she becomes a mythical tale and a legend. Such a tale narrates only of "public Victoria", i.e., of Victoria as queen, and it thus immortalize her as a regal figure devoid of her personality. "There she was, all of her – the Queen of England, complete and obvious; the world might take her or leave her; she had nothing more to show, or to explain, or to modify; and, with her peerless carriage, she swept along her path" (150). As an insubstantial figure, Victoria is reported to be the emblem of truthfulness.

From the narratological point of view, the biography introduces two intertwined and typically modernist processes: a) the narrative glimpse into Victoria's consciousness and b) the subsequent hybridization of different genres, i.e., novel and biography. The latter process becomes explicit in the very ending of the biography, where the narrator commits a "capital sin" for a traditional biographer, i.e. he intrudes in the biographee's thoughts and s/he gives them a verbal shape by reporting a long narrated monologue, disguised as a narrator's speculative, mental discourse. As Philippe Carrard[153], quoting Dorrit Cohn, explains:

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[153] Carrard, (1997: 287-305).

> Like quoted monologue, narrated monologue involves a privileged knowledge of what takes place in the character's mind. The main difference between the two modes lies in the mediation of the narrator, which affects pronouns and tenses: narrated monologue, while 'rendering a character's thoughts in his own idiom,' maintains 'the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration'.

In such light, the passage on Victoria's last thoughts acquires a high degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, the narrator makes inferences about the nature of a dying mind, but, on the other hand, their value does not come across in the text as an absolute truth.

> Yet, perhaps, in the secret chambers of consciousness, she had her thoughts, too. Perhaps her fading mind called up once more the shadows of the past to float before it, and retraced, for the last time, the vanished visions of that long history – passing back and back, through the clouds of years, to older and even older memories – to the spring woods at Osborne, so full of primroses for Lord Beaconsfield – to Lord Palmerstone's queer clothes and high demeanour, and Albert's face under the green lamp, and Albert's first stag at Balmoral, and Albert in his blue and silver uniform, and the Baron coming in through a doorway, and Lord M. dreaming at Windsor with the rooks cawing in the elm-trees, and the Archbishop of Canterbury on his knees in the dawn, and the old King turkey-cock ejaculations, and Uncle Leopold's soft voice at Claremont, and Lezhen with the globes, and her mother's feathers sweeping down towards her, and a great old repeater-watch of her father's in its tortoise-shell case, and a yellow rug, and some friendly flounces of sprigged muslin, and the trees and the grass at Kensington (153).

As Carrard observes, such a stance "does not overly commit the biographer; it reports mental activities without claiming to account fully, or specifically, for what came to the character's mind" (1997: 289).

Hence, the narrator's attitude towards the narrated is distant, remote, but the style is quite vivid, thus providing a sense of novelistic illusion. The aesthetic devices – long repetitions, anaphora, the rhythmic series of rapidly sketched flashbacks used in the passage enhance a feeling of drowsiness and dimming of consciousness, thus conveying the idea of a plausible state of mind for a moribund. In particular, the anaphoric use of the adverb "perhaps" enhances the feeling that the narrator is ambivalent about the reporting of the Queen's thoughts. To a certain extent, then, the narrator fulfils his/her reporting mission

and s/he doesn't, all at the same time, thus leaving the text recipients the task to discern whether the narration of Victoria's last thoughts might be deemed plausible and/or truthful or whether it is the simple result of the biographer's conjectures.

4.9 Queen Elizabeth's inner life revised: Psychoanalytical approaches to narrative truth in biography

Whether we think of biography
as more like history or more like fiction,
what we want from it is a vivid sense of the person.

—Hermione Lee, Virginia Woolf's Nose: Essays on Biography

Virginia Woolf's essay "The Art of Biography" is an interminable cause of reflection on the modernist way of interpreting and renewing biographies and it provides a very suitable starting point for the analysis of Lytton Strachey's biography *Elizabeth and Essex*[154] (1928). There, Woolf contends Strachey's biography of the Renaissance queen would be inferior in quality to his previous works *Eminent Victorians* and *Queen Victoria*, and an example of "what biography [supposedly] cannot do" (E4, 1966: 226)[155]. Woolf also suggests that the time in which Strachey wrote his biography was opportune, because "at last it was possible to tell the truth about the dead" (E4, 1966: 226). This assertion means that finally biographers could feel themselves free to construct their biographees' portrayals the way they preferred and did not have to confine their work to hagiographic writing. However, according to Woolf, Strachey misused the biographers' newly acquired liberties and treated biography as "art", thus "flout[ing] its limitations" (E4, 1966: 226). In her opinion, the biography *Elizabeth and Essex* is something "betwixt and between" the world of fact and fiction and it presents various problems, the gravest of which is the inappropriate use of

[154] All quotations are taken from: Strachey, Lytton. *Elizabeth and Essex*. [1928] 2013. Kindle Edition.
[155] Woolf, Leonard. (ed.). Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Essays*, Vol. 4. Chatto & Windus. London, 1966.

historical “facts”, which are essential to give a life-writing text the status of biography, but which Strachey neglected to expose coherently. This choice, however, was partly due to the fact that the biographical sources about queen Elizabeth are relatively scant and partly to the fact that Strachey deliberately used such sources as a skeletal story, upon which he constructed a dramatization of the queen and the earl’s lives. Hence, it is possible to argue that a central issue of Strachey’s biography of Queen Elizabeth is the articulation of its narrative truth in terms of a relationship of correspondence to actual reality and of a challenging of knowable and unknowable elements. To this extent, Woolf was probably a little too quick at discarding *Elizabeth and Essex* as a failure. For instance, the fact that the historical distance separating Queen Elizabeth from Woolf and Strachey’s contemporaries was greater than the distance separating them from Queen Victoria – for whom it was possible to reconstruct every moment of life – does not seem to be a sufficient reason to dismiss *Elizabeth and Essex* as an unresolved piece of life-writing. Even though Strachey’s portrait of the Renaissance queen presents some historical inconsistencies and/or omissions, the work offers the possibility to delve into further aspects of the construction of truth in biography and to explore its narrative implications, thus giving text recipients the opportunity to perceive “more of the truth than the idle onlooker” (II, 140)[156]. Like the majority of the modernist texts at issue in the present work, *Elizabeth and Essex* is concerned with the achievement of internal coherence, with a creation of a narrative world and with the enlargement of narrative possibilities. To this extent, two of the major narrative characteristics in the work are a) the construction of characters according to specifically fictional criteria and b) the emplotment in the form of the tragedy. Thus, the structure of the biography makes it possible to draw some inferences on the treatment of truth as a discursive element of the biographical genre and to assess its value in modernist life-writing. Secondly, it is possible to argue that *Elizabeth and Essex* is complementary – rather than opposed – to *Queen Victoria*, because it discusses

[156] Strachey, Lytton. *Elizabeth and Essex*. [1928] 2013. Kindle Edition.

the concept of truth on the discourse level of the text. Whereas Queen Victoria was regarded as the embodiment of truth in the story and thus truth was implicitly talked about in the diegetic level of the narration, in EE the focus on truth shifts on the meta-referential level. Meta-references on the reflection on truth are entailed in the subtext. One first method to draw them from the text can be the analysis of the ways of constructing the truth of personality according to psychoanalytical theories. As Margaret Drabble maintains (2000: 385), "L. Strachey, in *Elizabeth and Essex*, produced what is possibly the first consciously Freud-oriented biography". In this sense, the biographer proposes an in-depth examination of the queen's unconscious life, and thus, not simply a record of it[157]. The truth of such analysis lies in the expansion of the text recipients' knowledge and in the consequent broadening of the scope of previous narrations of Queen Elizabeth's life. Therefore, when writing *Elizabeth and Essex*, Strachey does not play either the role of the historian or that of the artist, but he acquires the status of analyst-interpreter, even though the imprint of the other "roles" of the narrator-biographer are also situated, to various degrees, in the scale of the text. As Eileen Overend remarks, Strachey's psychoanalytical approach also represents both an innovation in the panorama of biographical writing and a departure from "previous ways" ([1984] 2010:158) of constructing a character and she notes that a "new sympathetic treatment" ([1984] 2010:158) of the biographee characterizes the style of *Elizabeth and Essex*. As a matter of fact, Overend defines such "generosity of [Strachey's] stance" ([1984] 2010: 159) towards the biographical subject as unusual, because, as is well-known, Strachey's main stylistic marks are irony[158] and detachment. In any event, the author's goal is not to contest the

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[157] Compare Snipes (1990: 236), when he states: "A simple but useful typology for these remarks may be based on the persona the biographer attempts to project and the type of biography he writes. These would include the chronicler who offers a record of a life, the historian who offers a reconstruction, the narrator who offers a story, the critic who offers an interpretation, and the psychologist who offers an analysis".

[158] Richard A. Hutch's definition of Strachey's use of irony is worth quoting in this passage: "Irony is a sophisticated form of hostility, defined as a feigned ignorance designed to confound or provoke. Such hostility can range from light humor to sarcasm or satire. It probes human weaknesses, not strengths, and seeks out the subterranean opposites that constitute the "depth" of a life, surface appearances notwithstanding. The strategy of using irony in his biographical narratives maintained (sometimes created) a distinction between Strachey the working biographer and the subjects toward whom his hostility was

subject, but to present the story of a queen's life, grafting it on historical writing and according to the aesthetic rules of drama. Perhaps the lack of explicit irony is substantiated by Ira Bruce Nadel's maintaining that the "main master trope" of *Elizabeth and Essex* is, in fact, metaphor[159].

> Operating more consistently and effectively is metaphor […]. For Strachey, metaphor dramatically illustrates while it explains, permitting brevity and aesthetic detachment. In *Elizabeth and Essex*, singular metaphors like opera, for the world of the aging King Philip of Spain, the serpent, for Sir Francis Bacon or a deformed monster for Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, repeat themselves throughout the work. But to sustain the drama of this dual biography, Strachey elaborates a spiral metaphor, one of twisting and turning or even dancing to maintain the confusion, dilemma and tension of Essex in particular and England in general. (2010:311-312)

The associations such metaphors evoke help create the world in which the protagonists of the biography acted and to understand their psyche more fully. To this extent, Nadel's example of the metaphorical conceit of the twisting proves very interesting:

> Paralleling the metaphors of twisting in the biography is Strachey's own stylistic turnings as he rapidly and unexpectedly reverses his sentence structure, alters his tone and shifts his point of view. The result is a *tour de force* of rapid alterations in mood and energy establishing a syntactic analogy to the thematic development based on his use of metaphor.
> The subordination of certain events to others, reflecting the essential selectivity required of biographers, finds its linguistic parallel in the predominance of one trope over another in the language of the biographical text. (2010: 312)

Such use of metaphor might probably explain why Woolf saw too much "artistry" in the biography about Queen Elizabeth. Notwithstanding, irony as a "master trope" is not absent from the text. Indeed, the biography at issue exposes the

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directed, and upon whom his unique literary craft worked. Yet, such a distinction, as will be shown, was not given but achieved, and the achievement was never clear and as permanent for Strachey as one might have hoped" ([1988] 2010: 1).

[159] Perhaps it might be appropriate to argue that irony and metaphor are inextricably linked in the text at issue. As White explains, *"irony is dialectical, inasmuch as it represents a self-conscious use of metaphor in the interests of verbal self-negation"* (1973: 37).

pretence of neutrality of (micro-)historiography by adding a twist of sympathy[160] and indulgence towards the biographee. In this sense, Strachey gauges the balance between history writing and myth-making. In *Elizabeth and Essex*, Overend's observations pave the way to a general reflection on truthful narrative representation, at the outset of which lies the question pertaining to the biographer's "transference dilemma"[161] (Edel, 1984: 283), i.e., whether a biographer's sympathetic attitude towards his/her subject becomes a source of bias and hence a danger for the accomplishment of the biography. According to Wilson Snipes, though, bias is a given in a biographical text and he explains that "a persona by definition will represent 'bias' (angle of vision, point of view, principles of selection) consciously and/or unconsciously" (1990 [2010]: 235). In the light of that, on the narrative level, the analysis of *Elizabeth and Essex* can offer the possibility to assess which narrative stances are best suited to account truthfully for biographees, and bias must be interpreted as being always present. To arrive at the analysis of the biographical subject as a human being with an inner life and to describe its truth, the biographer-narrator decides to dwell only briefly in the description of the social context and of the external reality surrounding the biographee, and then to leave it in the background and concentrate on the characters. Hence, the biographer-narrator sets the historical and cultural frame of reference at the beginning of the narration and then s/he drops its treatment, adducing the justification that

> the age – it was that of Marlowe and Spenser, of the early Shakespeare and the Francis Bacon of the Essays – needs no description: everybody

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[160] Paradoxically, the alleged sympathy for the biographee does not lead the biographer to emplot the biography as a romance or a comedy. As will be shown, Strachey uses the tragic set of reference to convey the truthful meaning of Elizabeth and Essex's lives.

[161] As Leon Edel comments: "The term 'transference' is commonly used to describe the singular involvement that occurs in psychiatry between a psychoanalyst and a patient and it is readily applicable to biography. The analyst may be said to be a kind of biographer of the soul; in the therapy he listens with some regularity and with close attention to the patient's inner history: he is not interested so much in the factual vita as in dreams, fancies, ideas, moods. One psychological dictionary tells us that 'transference' is 'the development of an emotional attitude, positive or negative, love or hate, toward the analyst on the part of the patient or subject.' Within the frame of these emotions of attachment the analyst begins to see a design, an inexorable logic founded on the patient's earlier conditioning and he uses his therapeutic skills to deal with the patient's emotional colorings and the deep soundings of "affect" that reflect life patternings" (1984: 284).

> knows its outward appearances and the literary expressions of its heart. More valuable than descriptions, but what perhaps is unattainable, would be some means by which the modern mind might reach to an imaginative comprehension of those beings of three centuries ago (II,100).

S/he then firmly establishes the focus of the narration, i.e., the pursuit of the description of the people inhabiting Renaissance England, which are considered as mysterious creatures, waiting to be narrated, but who are perhaps un-narratable:

> the path seems closed to us. By what art are we to worm out way into those strange spirits, those even stranger bodies? The more clearly we perceive it, the more remote that singular universe becomes. With very few exceptions, possibly with the single exception of Shakespeare – the creatures in it meet us without intimacy; they are exterior visions, which we know, but do not truly understand. (II, 100-110).

The attempt to provide a narration of the Elizabethans begins with the show of what is already there, what is known about them, which is called “visible” and “apparent”. The latter term, though, marks the supposed ambiguity of the Renaissance culture and it warns text recipients about the necessity to re-negotiate the various histories of the English Renaissance epoch. Ambiguity becomes a centrepiece of Elizabeth’s character and is marked by the rhetorical devices of inconsistency and contradiction:

> It is, above all, the contradictions of the age that baffle our imagination and perplex our intelligence. Human beings, no doubt, would cease to be human beings unless they were inconsistent; but the inconsistency of the Elizabethans exceeds the limits permitted to man. […] How is it possible to give a coherent account of their subtlety and their naïveté, their delicacy and their brutality, their piety and their lust? (II, 113).

The description of the queen’s personality is a reflection of the Renaissance people’s character. The restriction of the focus on her and on her relationship with Essex reproduces the composition of the Renaissance world and it thus helps shaping it in a narrative sense. This mode of representation also implicitly recalls the political function of the queen, i.e., her role of monarch and representative of her subjects. Thus, Strachey establishes a connection between the queen as an individual and the Renaissance people as a collective subject. In addition to that, he compares the ambivalence of Renaissance culture on Elizabeth herself. From

her visible aspect to the profundities of her being, every part of her was permeated by the bewildering discordances of the real and the apparent" (II, 123). In particular, Strachey aims to present a new portrayal of Elizabeth by deconstructing the public image of the queen as it had resulted from the sedimentation process of historical accounts. In order to achieve this purpose, Strachey makes use of the rhetorical strategy of the spoliation of the queen of her regal attributes, which are symbolized by her clothes. They are considered an obstacle to the view of the real Elizabeth and thus they must be eliminated, ruled out of the composition of the portrait. Such strategy echoes the alethic process off unveiling[162] which I described in the close reading of *Orlando* and it suggests the idea that the truth about Queen Elizabeth must be found in the woman and not in her political role:

> Under the serried complexities of her raiment – the huge hoop, the stiff ruff, the swollen sleeves, the powdered pearls, the spreading, gilded gauzes – the form of the woman vanished, and men saw instead an image – magnificent, portentous, self-created – an image of regality, which yet, by a miracle, was actually alive. Posterity has suffered by a similar deceit of vision. The great Queen of its imagination, the lion-hearted heroine, who flung back the insolence of Spain and crushed the tyranny of Rome with splendid unhesitating gestures, no more resembles the Queen of fact than the clothed Elizabeth the naked one. Let us draw nearer; we shall do no wrong now to that Majesty, if we look below the robes. (II, 125, 135).

Indeed, the woman seems to be far removed from the queen: "the lion heart, the splendid gestures […] were […] visible to everybody; but their true significance in the general scheme of her character was remote and complicated" (II, 134).

The cleft between Elizabeth the queen and Elizabeth the woman makes it immediately clear that the myth of the "Virgin Queen" or "Gloriana" is nothing but an aesthetical, perhaps even a patriarchal construct. However, instead of denouncing the sheer falsity of such a construct, Strachey places his narration somewhere between the two narrative poles, by arranging his biography according to the pattern of narrative ambiguity. The exploitation of the semantic

[162] Compare with the passage of the veil in the analysis of Woolf's *Orlando* (chapter 4.3. and following of the present work).

field of ambiguity for the construction of the queen's character continues throughout the biographical text. The queen's ambiguity finds its most manifest expression in her written speeches:

> Her crowing virtuosity was her command over the resources of words. When she wished, she could drive in her meaning up to the hilt with hammer blows of speech, and no one ever surpassed her in the elaborate confection of studied ambiguities. Her letters she composed in a regal mode of her own, full of apophthegm and insinuation. […] Ten the splendid sentences, following one another in a steady volubility, proclaimed the curious workings of her intellect with enthralling force; while the woman's inward passion vibrated magically through the loud uncompromising utterance and the perfect rhymes of her speech. (II, 203-213).

Ambiguity characterizes not only the queen's speeches and thoughts, but it also defines time and space. As it appears, even her young and fertile years are indicated as "ambiguous" (II, 287) and the court around her is defined as "strange" and "the abode of paradox and uncertainty". Unlike Queen Victoria, then, Elizabeth I is quite the opposite of a truth-source. Her role in the biography is not that of regulator and subsequent centralizer of what is supposed to be true, i.e., the conception of truth does not correspond to the conception of being. The conception of truth in *Elizabeth and Essex* is performed as the exertion of power through the exploitation of queen's royal prerogatives and through the manipulation of states of affairs. Truth is therefore conceived of as a highly subjectivist and relativized phenomenon taking shape in the narration as a property of personal judgement. Thus, despite all the open initial praise of the Renaissance age, Strachey casts a long shadow on the epoch, which appears even more sombre and chaotic than the Victorian period of his former biographical works. In the biographer-narrator's words: "there is darkness; in low things as in high the ambiguous age remains true to its character" (V, 708).

4.9.1 Performing truth: Emplotment as a world-making strategy in biography and implications in the conveyance of narrative truth

According to Aglaia Viviani, "Elizabeth and Essex has an anomalous structure for a biography. Michael Holroyd maintains that *Elizabeth and Essex* might be, in fact, 'Strachey's only work of fiction' and that it might be more similar to a tragedy

than a novel or a biography" (2003: 15-16, my translation). Moreover, Viviani suggests a similarity with an even farther narrative genre, i.e., opera. In my analysis, I will not go as far as to make intermedial comparisons with the works of the text corpus, but, as I briefly stated above, I will consider the idea that *Elizabeth and Essex* was emplotted as a tragedy and I will attempt to assess the meaning of this rhetorical choice for the construction of biographical truth. The use of a strategy of emplotment is principally useful for the transmission of extra-linguistic information about the biographical subjects and it gives the text recipients the possibility to expect a specific outcome of the narration. In other words, emplotment means to provide the intrinsic meaning of a story. In this way, the phatic function of emplotment might become a useful instrument for the author's attempt to influence the readers' attitude and convey his/her own perspective on the narration at issue.

In the case of biography, it is perhaps legitimate to ask oneself, whether the practice of emplotment is inevitable and to what extent it can distort or simply guide the perception of the biographee's life. How the biographer's stance is emplotted in the narration will be shown after some brief reference on the paratext of the title of the work, i.e., *A Tragic History*. Without running the risk of "inappropriate psychologizing" (Hutch, 1988 [2010]: 1), David Grant Moss argues that "the tragedy, in the view of this quasi-Freudian approach to the queen […] is not just that of Essex, who is executed for treason, but that of Elizabeth, the sexually repressed unmarried queen who was, […] [unlike Victoria,] 'a woman second' and a queen first" (2006: 798-799). Indeed, *Elizabeth and Essex* is a biography emplotted as tragedy, in which the descending parable of two tragic heroes is depicted and foreshadowed. In particular, the biographic tale is carved within the frame of reference and the pattern of an Elizabethan drama[163]. As Overend (1980: 132) remarks, "not only does *Elizabeth and Essex* have a tragic hero, but it also has the dramatic structure of exposition, (chapters I-II), rising action (III-VIII), climax (VIII), falling action (IX-XIV), catastrophe (XVI) and

[163] Cf. Overend (1980: 130).

dénouement (XVI-XVII)". However, between the representation of Elizabeth and the depiction of Essex lies an even greater difference: whereas the Earl epitomizes a perfect example of tragic hero, whose life begins under a favourable star and ends in despair, the queen is represented as a classical anti-heroine:

> the grand policy which dominated Elizabeth's life was the most unheroic conceivable; and her true history remains a standing lesson for melodramatists in statecraft. In reality, she succeeded by virtue of all the qualities which every hero should be without – dissimulation, pliability, indecision, procrastination, parsimony. It might almost be said that the heroic element chiefly appeared in the unparalleled lengths to which she allowed those qualities to carry her. (II, 134-143).

Strachey exploits the tragic form particularly well, which is reiterated in the narration of both the queen and the earl's lives. The effect of such emplotment is of a reductionist type. Text recipients – at least the most ingenuous, i.e., the ones with the littlest amount of previous contextual foreknowledge about the biographees – are prompted to expect an unhappy ending of the biography. In this sense, part of Woolf's dissatisfaction with the organization of truth-yielding elements in the text can be justified. Nevertheless, the emplotment as tragedy is useful to understand how such truth-yielding elements can take their shape in the text. In the case at issue, truthful telling is conveyed in the text by the use of anticipation of matters throughout the text. As the narrator-biographer summarizes at the beginning of the story, "in the history of Essex, so perplexed in its issues, so desperate in its perturbations, so dreadful in its conclusions, the spectral agony of an abolished world is discernible through the tragic lineaments of a personal disaster" (I, 42). A few narrative moments later, the narrator-biographer repeats his stance by comparing the Earl to a "new star, rising with extraordinary swiftness [and then] suddenly seen to be shining alone in the firmament" (I, 80). Strachey's way of dramatizing the protagonists' lives functions as a tool for re-narrating their life stories, and, to a certain extent, to invent them again while, at the same time, respecting historical tradition, at least in their skeletal form.

4.9.2 Thematization of truth or Truth in the story-level: The "hideous" *affaire* Dr. Lopez

Even though *Elizabeth and Essex* is overwhelmingly concerned with truth on the level of discourse, truth as a theme appears also on the story level and it is epitomized in the narrative digression concerning the figure of Dr. Lopez. This satellite narration is not a simple corollary of the cardinal narration of Elizabeth's life, but it functionalizes the representation of the constructivity of the conception of truth under a historical perspective. The story of Dr. Lopez is emplotted as a tragedy, like the story of the Earl of Essex and like the account of the queen's life. More specifically, it might be possible to refer to parts of the biography as both a "tragedy within the tragedy" and as an emblematic parable about the frail and insubstantial nature of truth. Moreover, the "hideous" episode of Dr. Lopez's unlawful incrimination and execution can also shed some light on Strachey's interpretive conception of truth in the Renaissance age and on the author's attempt to disclose processes of creation, or rather, the construction of truth. The satellite story of Dr. Ruy Lopez follows the mechanistic process that is typical, in White's categorization, of the tragic emplotment. At the opening of the occurrence, the Jewish physician lives in London as a respected and esteemed expert of medicine. The narrator-biographer speaks of him as an "extremely successful" (VI, 708) doctor, who managed to become physician-in-chief to the Queen. Because of his cultural and religious heritage, though – Lopez is a foreigner and he does not belong to the Christian church either – the doctor falls victim to unspecified "murmurs" and "rumours" about him. Later, the (perhaps deliberate) misinterpretation of some commercial letters reinforce the idea that the Portuguese doctor is worth of suspicion, thus heightening the sense of conflict and struggle. The atmosphere of mistrust towards the physician of the queen had probably remained indistinct and harmless, if a plethora of shady personages had not begun to be associated with Dr. Lopez. The long shadow such people cast on the doctor serves as a first motive to imprison and examine him. The Earl of Essex is among those who are convinced of the intrinsic dishonesty of the Jewish physician. He is strongly convinced the doctor must be guilty of a not well-specified crime. His rivals, the Cecils, exploit this obscure moment to overshadow

Essex's figure, who they claim is obsessed with anti-Spanish sentiments. Notwithstanding the rebuke of the charges against the doctor, the Earl still cannot believe in the doctor's innocence and he is extremely disappointed when even the queen refuses to give credit to his accusations. Therefore, he resolves to prove Lopez is guilty at any cost. From this moment, the biographer-narrator begins the narration of the fall of the physician and, at the same time, Strachey pronounces his theories about the conception of truth in Renaissance Age. In particular, the narration illustrates the process of formation of truth, which, apparently, is highly distorted in the Renaissance period. First, the notion of "evidence" is relativized as still in an early phase of development and as a very shifting concept. Then, the biographer-narrator introduces the felony of high treason, which, once formulated, was an accusation there was no hope to be acquitted of. In this passage, Strachey shows how it is possible to make a state of affairs impossible to disprove and how the clinging to a pre-specific and bias rendition of truth can be detrimental to the establishment of justice and even have fatal consequences. This moment of the narration signals the beginning of a process of pursuit of *un-truth*, in which "proofs of guilt must be multiplied – by spies, agents provocateurs, [but above all, by] torture" (VI, 840). The fear of the "rack" and the consequent physical pain was exploited to systematically "force the truth out of the accused" and to distort the real unfolding of events and states of affairs. As the biographer-narrator asks: "Who could disentangle among his statements the parts of veracity and fear, the desire to placate his questioners, the instinct to incriminate others, the impulse to avoid, by some random affirmation, the dislocation of an arm or a leg?" (VI, 849). By confusing truth and falsehood, the "government could prove anything" (VI, 849). Yet, the biographer-narrator contends that the enquiring methods of the Renaissance judicial system were not unjust – and to today's standards, abominable – on purpose, but on the contrary, the justice officers of the time were not aware of the monstrosity of their procedures. Whereas s/he does not justify their actions, the narrator-biographer concedes that "judges, as well as prisoners, were victims of the rack" (VI, 849).

To summarize: during the Renaissance period, the mix of suspicion, pre-conceived ideas and fear, pressed together by the legitimation of powerful organs, like the judicial system, could blend into certainty. To this extent, the belief in the mind of the questioner became a statement in the mouth of the questioned. The counterfeited asymmetry in the relationship between accuser and accused led inevitably to the distortion and destruction of truth and truthfulness. This reflection prompts the text recipient to ask him/herself if and how it is possible to deem untrue a specific state of affairs. After supposition has slipped into fact, the next step is to create consensus around the fabricated elements. Through further manipulations, Essex manages to convince the Cecils, his enemies, that Dr. Lopez is guilty of high treason and that he may have attempted to poison the queen. Once this happens, the destiny of the physician "is doomed" (VI, 911). After having configured the tragic fall of the protagonist of the satellite story, Strachey illustrates the remaining stages of the tragic narration. His narrator-biographer explains that the queen hesitates for a long period, before enforcing the law and condemning the doctor to death, thus neatly concocting the classic "retarding moment" of the tragedy. Then, he renders a crude description of the death sentence, thus delineating the "catastrophe act".

However, apart from the formal characterization of the story in the form of a tragedy, the catastrophic tone of the narration is mainly given by the manipulation of truth, by the ruthless mingling of truth and falsehood. Indeed, with the story of Dr. Lopez, Strachey demonstrates that truth always exists in a chaotic state, in a protean condition and that the presence of a mind regulating and re-assessing states of affairs is no warrant of the rightful establishment of truth. The manipulation of truth has a symbolic, extra-diegetic value as a meta-reference on biography. Indeed, Strachey implicitly shows the dangers of life-writing and how fragile a construct truth actually is: with this affirmation, he underscores the difficulty of realization the task of writing biographies implies. Truth can be made and unmade, it is the mere product of a construction. The process of fabrication is not always consciously carried out and in this lies a potential fault of truth narratives.

4.10 Conclusions

Modernist biographies show clearly that pure non-fictional biography without any aesthetic support of the narration are unlikely. In this sense, it is incorrect to attribute the label of “something betwixt and between” to Elizabeth and Essex, because, in actual fact, every narration is caught between the two expressive universes. Strachey constructs a model of reality which acquires the function of formation of meaning. In order to construct such model, he explores and takes advantage of the formal and semantic properties of the concept of truth as it is applicable to biographical writing. Even though Strachey was a historian, he was aware of the “constructedness” of histories and thus, he attempted to construct truth in a biographical text more by disclosing such constructive processes and less by producing narrative processes with adherence to factual information. With his reconstruction of life narratives, Strachey achieves an improvement of the genre.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

"On or about December 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910" (Woolf, 1924). This extremely playful and, at the same time, extremely serious assertion made by Virginia Woolf in her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", written in 1923 and published one year later, provided the first inspiration for the present dissertation. Through those words, Woolf managed to summarize quite pointedly the literary situation of the epoch in which she lived and worked. As Banfield reports, the change in character implies a "significant shift in what Woolf called 'atmosphere'" (2000: 5). Such change in atmosphere, however, was perceivable not only in the outer space, in the evolution of culture and society. Woolf's observation also epitomizes the state of mind, the degree of observations, the hopes and wishes of all those writers and artists who characterized the modernist epoch. Indeed, there was a sudden shift, a rapid change of direction in almost every level of life and literature experienced a cultural and linguistic turn, which brought about dramatic modifications in the ways of conceiving and interpreting literary productions. As I showed in the present work, the Bloomsbury group took an active part in the re-shaping of the cultural atmosphere of the early twentieth century. In the present dissertation I hope to have shown that one of the crucial foci of the group's research was the exploration of the concept of truth in literature and its transposition in their literary production. To this extent, their work is inscribed in the modernist crisis of veridiction. After having analysed some examples of their novelistic and biographical production, it is possible to affirm that Bloomsbury writers created a discourse of truth, whose conception is loaded with many different layers of meaning. Their stance towards the concept of truth was overtly transgressive of

the rules and the norms regulating the truth-programme that had been hegemonic so far. Their plan of action was critical, transformatory and emancipatory. In the Bloomsburian literary works, truth as concept is elaborated, functionalized and embedded in the narratives, in order to construct new narrative mechanisms. The Bloomsburian writers hoped, through the exploitation of the ambiguities of truth, to give a new meaning and a new direction to literary productions and thus, to evolve and take a different form than in the previous centuries. In particular, my aim was to highlight that the new conception of truth influenced modernist writing both on the formal and on the substantial level, i.e., truth was part of the narrations as an inherent theme, and, at the same time, it helped shaping the structure of the novels by becoming a tool for narrating. This is coherent with the aesthetic and formalist urges of the group. Therefore, as I attempted to demonstrate through the analysis of manifold texts, the conception of truth pervades both the macro-level and the micro-level of the novels. In the micro-level, the conception of truth is not always to be found in its "pure", explicit state, but it is often connected to other metaphorical conceits. These conceits either derive from the semantic family of truth, and can therefore have the form of sincerity, trust, creed, belief, or they are otherwise related to truth: for instance, through the mediation of epistemological modes of knowing, the conceit of vision and the element of light become means to convey or achieve truth. To this extent, the meaning of truth was conveyed in combination with the semanticization of other elements and it was my aim to "separate" such elements from the underlying concept of truth and to bring the meaning of the latter to light. In the novels examined in the present dissertation, many conceits in combination with truth have been identified and summarized as follows: in *Howards End*, the equation is "Connection is truth"; in *Jacob's Room* "Not seeing is truth" and, finally, in *To the Lighthouse* "Artistic subjectivity is truth". For what biographies concern, it was possible to trace back a common conceit for both Woolf and Strachey, which is "Transmission of personality is truth".

In the light of this, the interpretation of novels and biographies has made it possible to come up with some new instruments for the formalist analysis of the organization and the architecture of truth-narratives in the texts. In particular, two

elements have emerged as the most relevant: textual truth-yielding objects – which frequently overlap with the truth-bearing elements in the narration – and the category of the truth-seekers, i.e., of those individuals endowed with the urge and the task to search for truth.

The concept of truth operates in the text also as a construction element of the fictional world: this means that it is possible to construct a fictional world around a nucleus of truthfulness and to create the rules and to assess a hierarchy of values that make such fictional worlds function. As it emerged by my study, modernist writers and, above all, Bloomsbury writers, had a heightened awareness of this narrative process. Consequently, they began to experiment with it, to show how such structures need not be untouchable and thus, they created narratives that have it as a programmatic goal to show how the architecture of truthfulness can be modified, manipulated and/or overthrown. In addition to that, such awareness correlates strongly with the sentiment of uncertainty, with the feeling of doubt and disbelief which started to diffuse during modernist times and which characterized the beginning of the last century so deeply. Since Bloomsbury writers adopted such a stance, it was much easier for them to visualize the constructed nature of truths and to generate multiple and/or possible truths. Thus, they paved the way to the opposite process, i.e., the breakdown of pre-existing truths, which was also implied and applied in their narrations. Therefore, Bloomsburian narratives can be considered as successful attempts to violate pre-constituted norms, to opt out maxims, to flout dogmas and to suspend judgement. The novels and biographies produced by Woolf, Strachey and E.M. Forster re-designed, to various degrees, the relationship between truth-telling programmes and structures of narrative texts. In doing so, they conquered manifold literary liberties and passed them on to the writers of the successive generations. As it has become apparent, then, the challenging of the notion of “true” allows modernist writers to challenge canonical narratives, to refuse to follow rigid protocols and to assign new meanings to new forms of writing. In this sense, it may be possible to affirm that the challenging of truth inevitably implies a radically hermeneutical approach for the ordering of meaning of the narratives at issue.

As already mentioned before, truth as a specifically narrative tool has helped to construct a model for the analysis of Bloomsbury's fictional worlds. To this extent, it is possible to appreciate a well-defined pattern in both the novelistic and the biographical productions. Such a pattern reveals the tendency to consider internal textual coherence as more significant than external correspondence with extra-textual states of affairs. This means, in the case of novels, that realist criteria were eschewed in order to concentrate on the exploration of the inner perspectives: such modes of creating literature produced a paradoxical situation, in which the perception of truthfulness is heightened. Through the analysis of the novels written by Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, to which the third chapter of the present work is dedicated, it was possible to identify many differences and commonalities in the approach to the narrative functionalization and problematization of the concept of truth. Forster implemented his conception of truth in the text as a message, as an object signalling disillusionment, as a symbol for the depiction of its own disintegration, thus declaring that a unified and unifying truth is, at the turn of the twentieth century, nothing but a shattered dream. Woolf used truth to emplot her novels. Hence, in *Jacob's Room*, truth came to transport the elegiac element of the novel, lamenting the death of certainty; in *To the Lighthouse*, truth was the means to convey the "epic mood" of the novel, because it functionalized the quest to truth as the struggle of the subjective stance towards supremacy.

In the case of biography, *realia* concerning the biographical subject were relativized, thus paving the way to experimentation and to the creation of hybrid texts and fictitious biographies. Such procedure, taken to the extreme, brought about the rise of pseudo-, fake- and even mock-biographies. The study of the biographies written by the Bloomsbury writers is essential to gauge and to understand the nature, the import and the impact of the new challenging approach towards the concept of truth and its negotiation in a narrative text. Apparently, unlike novels, for which the freedom to construct or deconstruct a narrative world is ampler, biographical writing has a further obstacle to overcome before it is possible to experiment with it. Indeed, the biographer "is inescapably wedded to a truth-telling programme" (Schlaeger in Batchelor, 1995:66-67),

which is the real life of the biographical subject, with the inclusion of the *realia* about him/her, i.e., all the documented facts, writings, reports and other sources. Nevertheless, Bloomsbury writers – disguised as biographers – proved this must not necessarily be the case either, because they demonstrated that it is possible to experiment even with a spurious and rigid genre like biography.

Finally, it may be legitimate to ask why it was relevant to perform research on the conception of truth in modernist literature and to apply such a method to the production of the Bloomsbury group. As many could argue, English modernism has already been mostly disparately studied, explored, examined and the amount of research is already overwhelming. In addition to that, the modernist period, despite its claim of being modern, i.e., present, is a literary movement which, according to many categorizations, lies in the past. If one assumes, as in my case, that the contemporary period is defined more suitably as postmodern, then such an objection cannot be rejected. For instance, it may be appropriate to cite the example Andrzej Gaziorek expounded in James (2012: 178) of the relation between Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005) and E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. "This view is most clearly articulated when a character proclaims: 'I cannot be worrying-worrying all the time about the *truth*. I have to worry about the truth that can be *lived with*. […] Transcendental truth is displaced by a pragmatic recognition of embodied lives and existential decisions". Yet, it is still impossible to deny the influence of "strictly" modernist works on postmodernist literature. In particular, the thematization of truth becomes an essential issue in the development of meta-biographical writing (see Julian Barnes and A. S. Byatt's works) and also for the "inter-narrative relationships" writers of the twenty-first century established with their predecessors.

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