

Imagining Stories about Other Characters in Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift: The Role of Imagination in Creating Fiction

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Abstract. The paper aims to analyze when characters in Woolf and Swift imagine stories about other characters and why, as well as what the other implications of this are. What part does imagination play in creating fiction? What theories of imagination best explain their characters' attitude? How is imagination connected with lyricism?

I try to find the occasions which lead to characters' imagining stories about other characters in both Woolf and Swift. It seems that in both authors we may speak about common aspects such as metafictional concerns or about the creative imagination of the Romantics. Imagining stories about other characters (in fact, brief scenes) leads to the underlining of the subjective aspect in both authors which is a feature of lyricism. Poetic aspects of prose are highlighted by the use of imagination, artistic creation, and subjectivity.

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1. Motivation

In both Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift there are characters who imagine stories about other characters. This is the case of the narrators in some of Woolf's short stories, of Peter in *Mrs Dalloway* and of George Webb in the novel *The Light of Day* and of Prentis in *Shuttlecock* by Swift.

In *An Unwritten Novel*, the narrator imagines a story about a passenger she sees while in a train, without knowing anything about the person. She even gives her an imaginary name: Minnie Marsh. Woolf uses this short story to make some statements on how a writer should break up with the conventions of the realist novel. Other short stories by Woolf where a character imagines stories about other characters are: *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points* and *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection*. In *The Light of Day*, detective George Webb imagines scenes featuring Kristina and Sarah and even their feelings in various situations. He builds his stories based on things he hears about Kristina from what Sarah tells him, which he completes with details of his own imagination. George Webb was hired by Sarah to make sure that her husband's affair was truly over, that he really parted from Kristina. Events that occur throughout this time lead George into Sarah's past. In Swift's novel *Last Orders*, Amy

imagines where her husband's friends and family are in their journey to throw her husband's ashes into the sea at Margate.

Both authors alternate the stories belonging to the imagination of the two characters with a reality which could be called objective. Although the situations in the two writings are a little different, they have in common the workings of imagination. So do other instances of imagining something from a character's past or even future will be examined, in *Mrs. Dalloway* by V. Woolf and *Shuttlecock* by G. Swift. Peter Walsh predicts that Clarissa will become a very good hostess and marry Mr. Dalloway, while Prentis tries to find out whether his father was a hero (he makes up certain scenes which are not written in his father's book). Clarissa even imagines what her life would have been like if she had married Peter.

Other characters imagine stories about other characters in Woolf's novel *Night and Day* or in Graham Swift's novels *Out of This World* and *Ever After*. These and other situations in other novels as well will be analyzed in this paper.

This paper aims at investigating what happens when characters imagine stories about other characters, whether they think about artistic creation or whether they just make suppositions while trying to better understand what went on in their mind when acting in a certain way in certain situations. These are occasions for looking at similarities and differences or continuities between Modernism and Postmodernism, especially in terms of the borders of fiction, illusion, reality, creation of possible worlds, perception of reality. The way the two authors' writings fit into these trends will also be examined. Moreover, the way Freud's theories on day-dreaming, fantasy, mental representation or theories of the Romantic poets on imagination may provide an explanation for the characters' imaginings will be taken into account.

2. Reasons for imagining stories

The reasons for imagining certain scenes or even stories about other characters may be related to illustrating the process of writing fiction (and expressing an opinion related to literary trends), to an attempt of understanding the past or future of a character and thus even his/her personality. How real it is what others imagine brings into question the theory of projection in psychoanalysis, which holds that what we see in others may be an image of ourselves, reflecting our own thoughts, feelings, desires.

2.1. Imaginative or artistic creation

According to Justin Wintle¹, the "workings of creative imagination" is "the single great theme in Virginia Woolf's novels". Wintle relates the "workings of creative imagination" to the purpose of "shaping different visions of order". Indeed, characters in Woolf have moments of being in order to make sense of the world, to have a vision of the world as a coherent whole, in order to escape the feeling of the chaos of existence. They try to reach a better understanding of the surrounding world.

In *An Unwritten Novel*, the unnamed first-person narrator presents a story that is not finished. The focus is, in fact, on the process of story-telling.

The journey, which may also be interpreted as "from one age of fiction to the next" is an occasion for the narrator "to construct the fictional life of an elderly woman

¹ Justin Wintle, *Makers of Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), 580.

sitting opposite, whom s/he names Minnie Marsh. Ironically all the situations and background which make up Minnie's life draw from worn out realist conventions and constitute a parody of them, a fact which stands in opposition with the narrative mode that the narrator uses – the so-called stream-of-consciousness – as well as with the process of alluding to the complexities of creating fiction within fiction and, above all, character in fiction.”¹

The narrator begins to imagine a story about the character Minnie Marsh because of the woman's sad look.

The narrator imagines for Minnie Marsh “a contemptuous sister-in-law she is going to visit, an unspecified crime she committed in the past, an ailing mother she nursed faithfully for many years and a lurid travelling salesman she has to confront at her brother's house. Even though the narrator claims that all this unhappiness is “life's fault. Life imposes her laws; life blocks the way”², to the reader it is much more the conventions of sentimental fiction which seem to determine Minnie's life.”³

Other characters in Woolf's short stories are also used to illustrate imagination to create a life for characters they think or wish to understand. While literary techniques are not discussed explicitly like in *An Unwritten Novel*, there are similarities with the other two short stories: the same imagined life and the same return to reality, where what is imagined proves to be false.

In *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points*, Fanny Wilmot, Miss Craye's pupil, realizes that her piano teacher has an ordinary life, too, following her remarks about Slater's pins. From that moment on, Fanny imagines a life for Miss Craye based on some facts and remarks:

““Slater's pins have no points—don't you always find that?” said Miss Craye, turning round as the rose fell out of Fanny Wilmot's dress, and Fanny stooped, with her ears full of the music, to look for the pin on the floor.

The words gave her an extraordinary shock, as Miss Craye struck the last chord of the Bach fugue. Did Miss Craye actually go to Slater's and buy pins then, Fanny Wilmot asked herself, transfixed for a moment. Did she stand at the counter waiting like anybody else, and was she given a bill with coppers wrapped in it, and did she slip them into her purse and then, an hour later, stand by her dressing table and take out the pins? [...]”⁴

The previous quote represents a moment of being. Hearing what Miss Craye says, her student has a “shock” which leads to her imaginings about her teacher. What she has just found out is unexpected to her. She begins to make suppositions on her

¹ Laura María Lojo Rodríguez, “Parody and metafiction: Virginia Woolf's ‘An Unwritten Novel’”, *Links & Letters* 8 (2001), <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/linksletters/article/viewFile/22738/22572>, 75.

² Virginia Woolf, *An Unwritten Novel*, in *Monday or Tuesday* (USA: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 112.

³ Elke D'Hoker, “The role of the imagination in Virginia Woolf's short fiction”, *Journal of the Short Story in English* 50 (spring 2008), special Virginia Woolf issue, <http://jsse.revues.org/index692.html>.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have no Points*, in *A Haunted House* (Mariner Books, 2002).

teacher's life and feelings. As we can see in *Virginia Woolf and the essay*, by Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino¹, in *Slater's Pins Have No Points*, the title sentence "occasions a complex and poetic personal history".

Fanny remembers what her teacher had said at various times about her past and she fills in the missing details in her imagination:

"One could imagine every sort of scene in her youth, when with her good blue eyes, her straight firm nose, her air of cool distinction, her piano playing, her rose flowering with chaste passion in the bosom of her muslin dress, she had attracted first the young men to whom such things, the china tea cups and the silver candlesticks and the inlaid table, for the Crayes had such nice things, were wonderful; young men not sufficiently distinguished; young men of the cathedral town with ambitions. She had attracted them first, and then her brother's friends from Oxford or Cambridge. They would come down in the summer; row her on the river; continue the argument about Browning by letter; and arrange perhaps, on the rare occasions when she stayed in London, to show her Kensington Gardens?"

Fanny realizes the possibilities of imagining stories about her teacher. She can create anything starting from what Mrs Craye had said in reality about her past. Not knowing too many details leads to imagining almost anything:

"One could make that yield what one liked, Fanny Wilmot thought, single out, for instance, Mr. Sherman, the painter, an old friend of hers; make him call for her, by appointment, one sunny day in June; take her to have tea under the trees. (They had met, too, at those parties to which one tripped in slippers without fear of catching cold.) The aunt or other elderly relative was to wait there while they looked at the Serpentine. They looked at the Serpentine. He may have rowed her across. They compared it with the Avon."

Fanny is aware that in imagining stories, she is in control, meaning that she can imagine what she wishes. In doing this, she may project her own wishes or just her own impressions about Mrs Craye. She can create a character Mrs Craye of her imagination, different from the real one in certain respects. At the same time, Fanny is aware that she is, after all, mostly making suppositions, e.g.: "He may have rowed her across."

In *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection*, the narrator begins to imagine something about the life of her friend, Isabella Tyson. What happens is similar to the situation in *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points*. The narrator believes that "it was strange that after knowing her all these years one could not say what the truth about Isabella was"². The narrator thinks that she doesn't know anything for sure about the inner world of her friend, Isabella: "[i]t was absurd, it was monstrous. If she concealed so much and knew so much one must prize her open with the first tool that came to hand – the imagination"³. Her friend tries to imagine something about her thoughts on life, death, happiness, regret.

In *An Unwritten Novel*, the narrator thinks about a story in a novel. She imagines what she can, but she remains aware of the fact that reality may be different.

¹ Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino, eds., *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* (New York: St Martin's, 1997), 186.

² Woolf, Virginia, *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have no Points*, 216.

³ *Ibid.*, 217.

She will never truly know the woman she had imagined the story about. In the other two short stories, the persons are known up to some extent and the characters do not think about novels.

In Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*, Bernard is a character who tells stories about other characters to his friends. His stories are thus made public, shared. An example is his story about Dr Crane:

‘When Dr Crane lurches through the swing-doors after prayers he is convinced, it seems, of his immense superiority; and indeed Neville, we cannot deny that his departure leaves us not only with a sense of relief, but also with a sense of something removed, like a tooth. Now let us follow him as he heaves through the swing-door to his own apartments. Let us imagine him in his private room over the stables undressing. He unfastens his sock suspenders (let us be trivial, let us be intimate). Then with a characteristic gesture (it is difficult to avoid these ready-made phrases, and they are, in his case, somehow appropriate) he takes the silver, he takes the coppers from his trouser pockets and places them there, and there, on his dressing-table. With both arms stretched on the arms of his chair he reflects (this is his private moment; it is here we must try to catch him): shall he cross the pink bridge into his bedroom or shall he not cross it? The two rooms are united by a bridge of rosy light from the lamp at the bedside where Mrs Crane lies with her hair on the pillow reading a French memoir. As she reads, she sweeps her hand with an abandoned and despairing gesture over her forehead, and sighs, “Is this all?” comparing herself with some French duchess. Now, says the doctor, in two years I shall retire. I shall clip yew hedges in a west country garden. An admiral I might have been; or a judge; not a schoolmaster. What forces, he asks, staring at the gas-fire with his shoulders hunched up more hugely than we know them (he is in his shirt-sleeves remember), have brought me to this? What vast forces? he thinks, getting into the stride of his majestic phrases as he looks over his shoulder at the window. It is a stormy night; the branches of the chestnut trees are ploughing up and down. Stars flash between them. What vast forces of good and evil have brought me here? he asks, and sees with sorrow that his chair has worn a little hole in the pile of the purple carpet. So there he sits, swinging his braces. But stories that follow people into their private rooms are difficult. I cannot go on with this story. I twiddle a piece of string; I turn over four or five coins in my trouser pocket.’“

Neville has the following reaction to his friend's story: “‘Bernard's stories amuse me,’ said Neville, ‘at the start. But when they tail off absurdly and he gapes, twiddling a bit of string, I feel my own solitude. He sees everyone with blurred edges.’”¹

Hassan² draws attention to the Romantics' view of dreams such as the ones previously presented of characters in Woolf and Swift: “The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his dreams – the poet ecstatic in front of a forever blank page, the musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to translate them into notes.” This is, Hassan specifies, a quotation from Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony*.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Mariner Books, 1950).

² Ihab H. Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn. Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Ohio State University Press, 1987), 15-16.

2.2. Detective work: investigating the past

We get our perception of Kristina mainly by means of George's presuppositions and imaginings (when we are not given Sarah's account of her experience with her). According to him, police work is "fifty per cent in your head"¹. He imagines a lot, for example what Kristina does in Geneva or Dubrovnik, or the beginning of Bob's meeting Kristina, the beginning of the affair and its development, its progress. He is actually inventing it all. Sometimes he acknowledges this, and sometimes he presents his guesswork as fact. No one has observed these scenes. For instance:

"I know what he'd have thought: a thought that had never occurred to him before then. The nape of Kristina's turned, shuddering neck. That he couldn't do it, could he? It wouldn't be permitted, would it? That simple, obvious and healing thing Sarah was doing. Put his arms around her. You have to picture the scene. Even when they had that flat in Fulham. Because of the mad thrill of it. Even that last autumn, after the picture had changed – after the Croats had won. A last walk in the woods. They shuffle through last year's leaves. September: this year's leaves still form a screen. He brushes bits of leaf, twig, bark from her back. A sort of ritual by now. She's wearing that old outdoor jacket. It's his. They're still wet and bruised with each other. And she's already aware how this may be a memory soon. An English wood. Bracken and bramble and silver birch. There was a reason once why she came to this country. But she's still a student of English words – and he's her teacher now. She scuffs at something at her feet and stoops and looks. The hair parts from her neck. She knows the word 'mushroom' but she's forgotten, if she ever learnt it, the other word. 'Toadstool,' he says, and they both have to think about it while he explains a bit more."²

Sarah feels compassion for Kristina, which is how it all starts:

"She'd never seen Kristina cry before. She'd seen the student with the frown and the dark eyes that were dark in some extra way, but she'd never seen her cry."

George imagines the scene from here:

"I can see it. You have to put yourself in this scene. The two of them in the kitchen. The girl sobbing and Sarah holding her, as if there was no question who needed protecting."

Kristina seems at times to have lost the capacity to feel, but this may come only from George's wondering about her.

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In *Shuttlecock*, Prentis, while reading his father's adventures as a World War II spy, begins to suspect that his father was not really the hero his book claimed him to be. A discussion with his boss leads him to wonder if what is written in his father's autobiographic book is true. Afterwards, he reads the book and while doubting, he imagines alternative scenes. His father cannot talk now and Prentis can only imagine what could have happened when his father was interrogated by the SS. Prentis begins to suspect that his father had talked then. His father suffered a breakdown which left him speechless. Prentis visits him regularly in a mental institution. Prentis had started reading

¹ Graham Swift, *The Light of Day* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 273.

² *Ibid.*, 80-81.

the book “hoping Dad would come out; hoping to hear his voice”¹. As that is not possible, he makes use of his imagination.

The situation of Swift’s characters George Webb or Prentis differs from those of Woolf’s characters in the previous sections in that their purpose is more similar to the one of a detective. Woolf’s characters are wondering about other characters they realize they didn’t know so well after all or about whom they are aware they are imagining things (*An Unwritten Novel*) as they don’t know the person and will never see her again. However, what George Webb imagines about Kristina will remain mostly without confirmations, just as in the case of *An Unwritten Novel*. George will never talk to Kristina and he will never know what she will be doing when she arrives home in Croatia. All the while, however, he imagines various details and scenes about her and he does this in a lyrical way, similar to characters in Woolf. Prentis imagines stories about his father in a similar way, and in his case too he will never receive confirmation for a final version of the story, as his father can no longer speak. The search for truth is up to a point very important to George Webb until he decided to destroy the evidence.

There are metafictional comments in *Shuttlecock*, with reference to both war memoir and the book consisting of Prentis’ confessions:

“And then one day [...] I stopped reading Dad’s book. I inquired no further. How much of a book is in the words and how much is behind or in between the lines? Perhaps it is best not to probe too deeply into those invisible regions, but to accept on trust what is there on the page as the best showing the author could make. And the same is true perhaps of *this* book (for it has grown into a book) which I have resumed now after a six months’ lapse, only to bring to its conclusion. [...]”²

There is a reference to novel writing and perception in novels in Prentis’ discussion with Quinn, his boss. When Quinn suggests an alternative story about his father, Prentis asks him: “Was he a traitor?” I blurted out naively – as if Quinn were omniscient.”³

Quinn points out to other reasons for imagining stories, namely of hiding, of changing the truth. They talk about the pages where Prentis’ father describes his escape. Quinn tells Prentis:

“He knew the Chateau, and the region – and perhaps he had – like you – a strong imagination. If he wanted to invent an escape story he could have done so. I’m just pointing this out, not disagreeing with you.”⁴

Here Quinn offers a theory of imagination that applies to the way characters perceive other characters but also about the way characters in a novel write a novel of their own, even though it should have been a memoir, containing only facts. From this point of view, the war memoir may be seen as an imaginative creation of Prentis’ father, in a similar way to the “unwritten novel” in Woolf’s short story with this title. Quinn even says that if the story in the memoir was so convincing it could be because even the author wanted to believe what he imagined. Quinn draws attention to the many interpretations possible, which are as many as points of view, as many as characters.

¹ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock* (London: Picador, 1997), 199.

² Ibid., 214.

³ Ibid., 186.

⁴ Ibid., 186.

A character who is similar to George Webb or to Prentis is Bill Unwin in Swift's novel *Ever After*. Like Prentis, he imagines a lot trying to reconstruct the life of one of his ancestors from the manuscript he has left: "I imagine, I invent"¹, "I see him"², "I conjure him up, I invent him"³, "You have to picture the scene"⁴ are some of the examples emphasized by Malcolm⁵.

"Unwin does not emphasize the invention that lies behind narrative exclusively in relation to the distant past. Even more recent events [...] are clearly presented as reconstructions via imagination."⁶ He imagines, like George Webb imagines scenes with Kristina and Bob, his wife Ruth quarrelling as a child with her mother while Bob tries to break the conflict, and a whole scene he has not seen when he notices Gabriella's bottle of perfume in Potter's car.

2.3. Predicting the future

Peter's comment that Clarissa would be the perfect hostess, which occurred in their youth, is remembered by an older Clarissa and by an older Peter. In fact, his "prediction" was right.

Clarissa remembers:

"It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said."

The reason why Peter is able to predict Clarissa's future is because he analyzes her and he understands what she is like.

For this same reason, Peter experiences a revelation during dinner:

"He sat down beside her, and couldn't speak. Everything seemed to race past him; he just sat there, eating. And then half-way through dinner he made himself look across at Clarissa for the first time. She was talking to a young man on her right. He had a sudden revelation. "She will marry that man," he said to himself. He didn't even know his name."

Peter is right in his predictions because he knows his friend and because he interprets her very well, but his predictions may also be interpreted as moments of being, as Woolf calls them.

In *The Light of Day*, George Webb keeps saying that his assistant, Rita, will leave him. He expects this to happen yet we are not told by the time the novel ends if this happens. Rita is in love with George but he falls for Sarah, his client. Towards the end of the novel, George thinks: "Rita might have left me a year ago. I know she's going to leave me now."⁷ It's normal to assume this if he takes into account that she is in love

¹ Graham Swift, *Ever After* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 138.

² Ibid., 139.

³ Ibid., 155.

⁴ Ibid., 197.

⁵ David Malcolm, *Understanding Graham Swift* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 138.

⁶ Ibid., 138-139.

⁷ Swift, *The Light of Day*, 322.

with him and that she hopes him to be in love with her too. If this does not happen, she will have no reason to stay and work for him.

Rita herself makes a prediction, which however turns out to be wrong. “Rita said, ‘It’ll fade.’”¹ referring to George’s love for Sarah. She could have been right, considering Sarah was in prison and George would only see her for some days. Rita told him:

“Look at me, George. The goods may be past their best, but at least you’ve seen what you’re getting. Think about it, George. You haven’t ever seen her naked.”²

We witness George saying that his love for Sarah didn’t fade, contrary to Rita’s prediction, yet the novel’s open ending leaves room for various doubts. Anything can happen in the future.

Helen Ambrose in Woolf’s novel *The Voyage Out* is another character who makes predictions. She feels that something bad is going to happen. According to Winifred Holtby³, Helen has “presentiments of disaster” “in the Indian village”. Helen also sees “beneath the trivialities of tea-table conversation” that “great things were happening – terrible things, because they were so great. Her sense of safety was shaken, as if beneath twigs and dead leaves she had seen the movement of a snake. It seemed to her that a moment’s respite was allowed, a moment’s make-believe, and then again the profound and reasonless law asserted itself, moulding them all to its liking, making and destroying.” Chapter XIX of the novel goes on in telling us the following about Helen: “She looked at Rachel walking beside her, still crushing the leaves in her fingers and absorbed in her own thoughts. She was in love, and she pitied her profoundly.” Helen has a moment of being, a moment of revelation, which is similar to the ones experienced by Peter. Helen’s predictions will prove true as well. She pities Rachel and Rachel will finally die before being able to continue her love. This prediction serves as anticipation in the novel. Helen proves to have a very good intuition.

In *Night and Day*, we find out that Ralph had pictured a part of the scene which then takes places with Katharine:

“Further, her still look, standing among the orchids in that hot atmosphere, strangely illustrated some scene that he had imagined in his room at home. The sight, mingling with his recollection, kept him silent when the door was shut and they were walking on again.” (Chapter XXV)

We don’t know much about what he had imagined, yet this fragment shows that he had been thinking a lot about Katharine and that such a brief portion of the scene may function as a prediction coming true. He had analyzed Katharine enough to know about some of her reactions.

2.4. Reflections

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa lives Septimus’ death in her imagination. She wasn’t a witness and she didn’t even know Septimus. Using her imagination is a way to help her begin her reflections on death. Leaska, in *The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End*, underlines that Clarissa experiences both fear and “urge toward death”⁴. One of

¹ Ibid., 321.

² Ibid.

³ Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Memoir* (London: Continuum, 2007), 65.

⁴ Mitchell A. Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End* (The City University of New York: The John Jay Press, 1977), 89.

Clarissa's memories becomes significant when linked to what she has heard about Septimus' suicide: "She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away"¹. In this case, one might say that imagination is used in relation to perception. Clarissa's imaginings allow her to express her perception of Septimus' suicide and on the issue of death:

"[...] He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? [...] They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," she had said to herself once, coming down in white.

Or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself. [...]

It was due to Richard; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank."

Amy in *Last Orders* reflects on her life with her husband while she imagines where his friends and family are and what they are doing as they have gone on the journey to Margate to throw her husband's ashes into the sea at Margate. She has refused to come with them on the journey; instead, she accompanies them in her imagination, she wonders what they are doing at certain moments. For instance:

¹ Ibid., 280; 202.

“Well they must be there by now, they must have done it. Tipped him in, chucked him. For all I know, they’re making a day of it, they’re out on a spree, donkey-rides all round, now the job’s done, down there in Margate.”¹

Clarissa, the character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, on a different occasion imagines her life if she had married Peter after she meets him in the present: “[...] If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day.” Freedman² notices that “[...] the entire scene is captured in the vision of this imaginary life as a play. The collapse of the moment becomes the end of the play; it is “now over” and Clarissa is collecting her things.”

Clarissa talks to Peter in her imagination:

“Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over.”

While investigating the past or imagining the lives of other characters may also be classified as reflections, they imply more than just that.

Reasons why a minor character in the novel *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf are already given after describing his brief moment of imagining:

“But though it was probably cowardice, or love of hot ale, that led Mr Dupper to imagine his Lordship safe among the tombs so that he need not go in search of him, it may well have been that Mr. Dupper was right.”

Nothing is certain, however.

In Woolf’s novel *Night and Day*, Ralph imagines a few moments while he is with Katharine:

““But which way are you going?” Katharine asked, waking a little from the trance into which movement among moving things had thrown her.

“I’m going to the Temple,” Ralph replied, inventing a destination on the spur of the moment. He felt the change come over her as they sat down and the omnibus began to move forward. He imagined her contemplating the avenue in front of them with those honest sad eyes which seemed to set him at such a distance from them. But the breeze was blowing in their faces; it lifted her hat for a second, and she drew out a pin and stuck it in again,—a little action which seemed, for some reason, to make her rather more fallible. Ah, if only her hat would blow off, and leave her altogether disheveled, accepting it from his hands!” (Chapter VI).

Ralph is one of the characters who imagines a different reality, a reality which would be better for him.

At some other point in the novel, however, Ralph imagined, briefly, a different reality which is negative:

““I would marry her in St. Paul’s Cathedral,” Ralph replied. His doubts upon this point, which were always roused by Katharine’s presence, had vanished completely, and his strongest wish in the world was to be with her immediately, since every second he was away from her he imagined her slipping farther and farther from him into one of those states of mind in which he was unrepresented.” (Chapter XXXIII)

¹ Graham Swift, *Last Orders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 228.

² Ralph Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 219.

The reason for this scenario is given immediately afterwards: “He wished to dominate her, to possess her.” He fears that he might lose her if he is not always with her.

Katharine has a moment where she herself imagines a different reality, although she afterwards becomes rational again. After she finds about some letters, she wonders what would Ralph and Mary say about them. Then she imagines a more convenient reality, where she could escape such problems:

““What would Ralph Denham say to this?” thought Katharine, beginning to pace up and down her bedroom. She twitched aside the curtains, so that, on turning, she was faced by darkness, and looking out, could just distinguish the branches of a plane-tree and the yellow lights of someone else’s windows.

“What would Mary Datchet and Ralph Denham say?” she reflected, pausing by the window, which, as the night was warm, she raised, in order to feel the air upon her face, and to lose herself in the nothingness of night. But with the air the distant humming sound of far-off crowded thoroughfares was admitted to the room. The incessant and tumultuous hum of the distant traffic seemed, as she stood there, to represent the thick texture of her life, for her life was so hemmed in with the progress of other lives that the sound of its own advance was inaudible. People like Ralph and Mary, she thought, had it all their own way, and an empty space before them, and, as she envied them, she cast her mind out to imagine an empty land where all this petty intercourse of men and women, this life made up of the dense crossings and entanglements of men and women, had no existence whatever. Even now, alone, at night, looking out into the shapeless mass of London, she was forced to remember that there was one point and here another with which she had some connection. William Rodney, at this very moment, was seated in a minute speck of light somewhere to the east of her, and his mind was occupied, not with his book, but with her. She wished that no one in the whole world would think of her. However, there was no way of escaping from one’s fellow-beings, she concluded, and shut the window with a sigh, and returned once more to her letters.” (Chapter VIII)

On some other occasion, Katharine tells Ralph the following:

“You come and see me among flowers and pictures, and think me mysterious, romantic, and all the rest of it. Being yourself very inexperienced and very emotional, you go home and invent a story about me, and now you can’t separate me from the person you’ve imagined me to be. You call that, I suppose, being in love; as a matter of fact it’s being in delusion. All romantic people are the same,” she added. “My mother spends her life in making stories about the people she’s fond of. But I won’t have you do it about me, if I can help it.” (Chapter XXVII).

Katharine tries to make Ralph think more realistically. She is aware that there are plenty of stories made up about herself or about other characters. The stories indicate the way a character is perceived by the other characters.

3. Perception, subjectivity and imagination

The characters in Woolf and Swift previously mentioned offer to the reader their own perception on other characters and events in their past or present.

The influence of the theories of Sigmund Freud and Ernst Mach may be visible in this case. They claimed that “the mind had a fundamental structure, and that subjective experience was based on the interplay of the parts of the mind” in the 1880s¹.

¹ Wikipedia, *Modernism*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism>.

The unconscious plays an important part in perceiving reality in a subjective way, according to Freud. Drives, instincts form a subjective version of reality.

What we bring into our perception of the world could even be projection, according to psychoanalytic theory. We perceive the world as we ourselves see it, due to various reasons, not as it actually is. There is both objectivity and subjectivity when perceiving the world. We rely on common understanding in order to function in this world and not remain alone in our constructed world, yet we also bring our own subjectivity. Our mind forms an inner reality, feelings, ideas regarding how we view the world. The idea that the mind is not only a passive receptor is also found in Freud. The mind is active in forming a reality when perceiving it.

Such theories may explain why some characters begin to imagine stories about others in Woolf and Swift. They describe their own view on these characters, they may even bring something that says more about themselves than about the character described. Obviously, they can imagine what they would themselves do or think in a certain character's place or even make that character act as they would unconsciously or consciously wish.

Imagination may play an important part in such cases. Some characters' perception on other characters is influenced by it.

Woolf seems to draw our attention to the Modernist emphasis on subjectivity and inner life. The inner life of certain characters is imagined due to the wish to be known and understood.

4. Day-dreaming, fantasy, creativity

Could we say that in this case such characters are day-dreaming about others? Are these fantasies?

According to Freud, "a fantasy is a product of the imagination in the form of a script in the theatrical or cinematic sense and deployed in support of a wish-fulfillment. It may be a conscious creation, a daydream created by the subject to procure an imaginary satisfaction that is erotic, aggressive, self-flattering, or self-aggrandizing in nature."¹

According to Wikipedia², "daydreams may involve fantasies about future scenarios or plans, or reminiscences about past experiences [...]". Very vivid mental images are also one of their characteristics.

The fantasy is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language³ as "An imagined event or sequence of mental images, such as a daydream, usually fulfilling a wish or psychological need." Britannica Concise Encyclopedia⁴ tells us that a fantasy consists of "Mental images or imaginary narratives that distort or entirely depart from reality. Primary fantasies arise spontaneously from the unconscious,

¹ Michèle Perron-Borelli, and Roger Perron, *Fantasme, Action, Pensée* (Algiers: Éditions de la Société algérienne de psychologie, 1997).

² Wikipedia, *Daydreams*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daydream>

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010).

⁴ Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, *Fantasy*, Britannica.com, 2008, http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/_/gr.aspx?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.britannica.com%2Fsearch%3Fquery%3Dfantasy&source=Britannica

while secondary fantasies are consciously summoned and pursued. [...] In adult life it is crucial to creative thinking and the making of art. [...]"

These theories may partly hold in the case of characters that imagine stories about other characters in Woolf and Swift. Sometimes in imagining something the characters are influenced by how they would want reality to be like. They bring their own contribution and make up a reality as they see it or maybe as they want to see it.

The writer of the unfinished novel in Woolf's short story makes use of her creativity and finally she realizes that reality is different. The narrators in Woolf's *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points* and *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection* try to understand their teacher and their friend, respectively. Their conclusions are similar, in the end. For Fanny, what she imagines about her teacher comes from her own thoughts and feelings. There are remarks of Miss Craye which Fanny changes, for instance Miss Craye's remark that "It's the use of men, surely, to protect us", which turns into Fanny's "It was the only use of men, she had said"¹. Fanny's imagined desire of Miss Craye "to break the pane of glass which separated them from other people"² reflects her own desire to understand the person behind the teacher. Fanny seeing Julia Craye as a strong, independent woman who turns down a suitor so as not to "sacrifice" her freedom³ recalls Fanny's remark that she doesn't "want protection [from men]."⁴

Prentis imagines different stories about his father, in one he is a hero, in the other he is no longer a hero and thus no longer perfect. After this, Prentis himself no longer feels perfect and no longer has misunderstandings with his family. His attitude towards them and himself changes.

The dog Flush, in Woolf's novel entitled *Flush. A Biography*, is anxious as he doesn't understand what is going on with his mistress as she exchanges letters with the poet Browning. He fears changes in his relation to his mistress and he imagines the poet as a stranger he fears:

"Yet, he argued, what was there to be afraid of, so long as there was no change in Miss Barrett's life? And there was no change. No new visitors came. Mr. Kenyon came as usual; Miss Mitford came as usual. The brothers and sisters came; and in the evening Mr. Barrett came. They noticed nothing; they suspected nothing. So he would quieten himself and try to believe, when a few nights passed without the envelope, that the enemy had gone. A man in a cloak, he imagined, a cowed and hooded figure, had passed, like a burglar, rattling the door, and finding it guarded, had slunk away defeated. The danger, Flush tried to make himself believe, was over. The man had gone. And then the letter came again."

To George, it may be easy to imagine Bob's falling in love with Kristina as he himself had fallen in love with Sarah. Moreover, he had become more imaginative, more careful with using language since he met Sarah. Peter imagines Clarissa in the future and his assumptions prove right. He feels that Clarissa will reject his marriage proposal. As

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection*, in *A Haunted House* (Mariner Books, 2002), 211.

² Ibid., 210.

³ Ibid., 212-13.

⁴ Ibid., 211.

this happens after he sees Clarissa's reaction to Mr. Dalloway, his prediction is based on his analysis of Clarissa and thus on his judgement. He most likely notices changes in Clarissa's behavior, and there may also be his fear of losing her which makes him have such thoughts.

George's prediction that Rita may leave him as an associate at work comes from his knowing that she is in love with him but he doesn't love her. Sometime Rita may most likely stop hoping and decide to leave. Rita's prediction that George's love for Sarah will fade comes most probably from her common sense judging of the situation but also from her own desire to have George single again and maybe for herself.

Peter also experiences feelings of insignificance, of low self-esteem. This can be noticed in the scene at Bourton when Mr Dalloway wins Clarissa from him:

"And all the time, he knew perfectly well, Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway; but it didn't seem to matter. Nothing mattered. They sat on the ground and talked—he and Clarissa. They went in and out of each other's minds without any effort. And then in a second it was over. He said to himself as they were getting into the boat, "She will marry that man," dully, without any resentment; but it was an obvious thing. Dalloway would marry Clarissa.

Dalloway rowed them in. He said nothing. But somehow as they watched him start, jumping on to his bicycle to ride twenty miles through the woods, wobbling off down the drive, waving his hand and disappearing, he obviously did feel, instinctively, tremendously, strongly, all that; the night; the romance; Clarissa. He deserved to have her."

As Leaska notices, Peter "has essentially encouraged a situation which insures his failure"¹. This can be seen in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*:

"For himself, he was absurd. His demands upon Clarissa (he could see it now) were absurd. He asked impossible things. He made terrible scenes. She would have accepted him still, perhaps, if he had been less absurd."

Leaska goes on saying that "[...] when he can actively thrust onto someone else his own sense of nothingness, Peter can then passively remain the innocent victim. With or without active agent, however, his inclination toward self-defeat becomes a recurrent pattern and explains why 'he had never done a thing they had talked of' [...]"².

According to Freud, the artist can choose and make changes in the unconscious material. This and the way the artist transforms his egotistic fantasies into something acceptable for public appreciation could be regarded as parts of the artist's gift. The fantasies of a man of artistic talent give us pleasure, while those of an ordinary day-dreamer could leave us indifferent, or bore or disgust us; or, while we might find that the fantasies of an ordinary day-dreamer have something in common to ours, his 'work' would not have the same value as a true, gifted artist's, and the day-dreamer will not be interested in sharing his 'work' and reworking it for the public.

The main character "speaking" to the reader in *An Unwritten Novel* is the closest to the artist. The artist uses a monologue both to create a story by the use of imagination and to comment on literary technique. The other characters who show their imagination to the reader in *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points* and *The*

¹ Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End*, 97.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection are not conscious about literary technique, yet they also create a life for the characters they find interesting for this or wonder about their life. The other characters are not ordinary day-dreamers either. Their fantasies are used in order to gain the reader's interest. They are not explicitly artists creating public fantasies, but their fantasies are used by the author to fit in the novel for a purpose. While in the real world maybe they would be fantasies belonging to an ordinary day-dreamer, they are different as they belong to characters in novels. Their fantasies concern themselves (Prentis) but they may also concern close ones (Peter's imagined predictions about Clarissa) or even be relevant to understanding a situation (detective George). Peter's predictions function as anticipations in the novel, Prentis tries to analyse and understand his father's past and even himself and his relationship with his father and with his family, detective George Webb tries to understand the reasons of characters who come to have an affair.

Malcolm¹ notices how characters in Swift's novel *Out of This World* "conceive of other possibilities"; they imagine other situations in which their lives would be different. These are "all hypothetical possibilities and imaginings, [...] a kind of refuge from an awful reality." Harry Beach imagines how life would have been different if he had accepted to work for his father's company or if his father had not ignored him after his mother's death. Sophie imagines a version of life where Uncle Edward doesn't die and where he is visited by Sophie and her father.

5. Coleridge's theories on imagination

Coleridge defines two types of imagination: primary and secondary. Primary imagination is spontaneous, while secondary imagination means creating consciously. There is also fancy, which is "the lowest form of imagination". "With fancy there is no creation involved; it is simply a reconfiguration of existing ideas."²

Ralph Freedman (1963) sees Woolf's moments of being as instances of Coleridge's primary imagination. Indeed, these moments are spontaneous, they are visions, revelations which occur naturally. Characters make no conscious effort in creating these visions.

Characters such as Rhoda or Bernard in *The Waves* have "flight of imagination."³ These are spontaneous and thus instances of primary imagination. For instance, Rhoda in her imagination "converts petals into a fleet of ships"⁴. Lily, the artist in *To the Lighthouse*, also used imagination in creating her painting of Mrs Ramsay. "I've had my vision," she says after her painting is finished. Throughout the novel she has struggled not to create something consciously but to create it spontaneously.

The stories characters imagine about other characters which are presented in this paper seem to contain features of several of Coleridge's types of imagination.

Peter's vision of Clarissa as Mr Dalloway's wife is spontaneous, and thus it's part of primary imagination. Clarissa's sympathizing with Septimus is spontaneous as

¹ Malcolm, *Understanding Graham Swift*, 15.

² Rider, Shawn, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Emotion, Imagination and Complexity*, http://www.wdog.com/rider/writings/wordsworth_and_coleridge.htm

³ Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf*, 251.

⁴ Ibid., 251.

well, yet this vision comes after she makes some connections with experiences of her own, thus it's partly conscious imagination. All other instances of characters imagining stories about other characters (including Clarissa's thinking about Septimus) may be linked to Freud's theories on day-dreaming. Characters are partly conscious that they are imagining. They are imagining possible scenarios. Such instances may also fit in a bit into Coleridge's "fancy": characters use parts of what they already know when imagining something. But this doesn't mean that there is no creation. They imagine something starting from what is real. Real characters are used as the protagonists of happenings imagined by other characters.

Such situations are opposed to what Rhoda imagines in the example given previously, which is something very much removed from reality and which does not involve imagining a story about another character. Lily Briscoe does not create a story, but an image, presented according to the way she perceived Mrs Ramsay.

For Septimus, reality and his imaginings are no longer distinct from one another. He is no longer aware that what he sees is not real (especially his friend Evans who is dead). From this point of view, a common feature of characters imagining stories about other characters is that they are aware of the difference between imagination and reality. They are aware that when they make suppositions or try to imagine what a certain character did or felt are not necessarily the same thing with reality. They imagine a possible reality and are aware of this. They imagine alternate realities.

The case of Peter and his vision of Clarissa's future marriage with Richard Dalloway is, however, different. Here Peter doesn't make any suppositions. He just sees this and later we have the confirmation. This is not a simple reflection on alternate realities. Due to this reason, this moment is the closest to what Coleridge calls primary imagination (Peter's vision is spontaneous).

There is another Romantic poet whose theories are to be found in Woolf. Freedman notices that Woolf's "analysis of mental experience sometimes recalls Wordsworthian definitions – the artist's conscious reconstruction of unconsciously assembled impressions recollected in tranquility."¹ What Wordsworth claims may be found in Freud's theory of day-dreaming. What characters imagine about other characters contains both unconscious and conscious elements. On the one hand they are aware that they are imagining something, while on the other hand their imagination contains unconscious elements. Unconsciously, they may be aware of certain things, or they may imagine the stories according to their own wishes, projections and so on.

6. Visionary imagination. Lyricism.

Ali Güneş² notices that the use of a highly developed visionary imagination and capacity for intense states of feelings (the working of memory bring both feelings of terror and joy) as well as the use of a narrative technique similar to that of the Romantics were among the Romantic elements mentioned by critics in *Mrs Dalloway*. Critics like Daiches, Freedman, Troy, Beja, Edel, Forster, Bradbury, or Philipson acknowledge that Woolf's representation of intense or visionary states of feeling is similar to lyric poetry.

¹ Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf*, 200.

² Güneş, Ali, "William Wordsworth's 'Double Awareness' of Memory in Virginia Woolf's 'Mrs Dalloway'", *Doğuş Üniversitesi Dergisi* 4 (2) 2003: 183-196.

Woolf herself viewed her attempts in this way: in *Modern Fiction*, she wrote that the artistic consciousness or creativity was important to her, because it was more intuitive, more poetic.

The Romantic poets show their influence on Woolf's and Swift's novels. In both Woolf and Swift there are, aside from echoes from some of their poems, moments of vision, of revelations, moments that are experienced intensely. Feelings, views on reality are expressed by means of images, by means of poetic descriptions. Imagination was very important for the Romantics. It offered access to see beyond the surface of reality, to see beyond reason, to modify the external world according to one's individual views. The poet had the role to share his vision with the rest of society. He was the visionary.

In Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*, Rhoda imagines a story about herself:

"I imagine these nameless, these immaculate people, watching me from behind bushes. I leap high to excite their admiration. At night, in bed, I excite their complete wonder. I often die pierced with arrows to win their tears. If they should say, or I should see from a label on their boxes, that they were in Scarborough last holidays, the whole town runs gold, the whole pavement is illuminated. Therefore I hate looking-glasses which show me my real face. Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness. I have to bang my head against some hard door to call myself back to the body."¹

Her experience is very close to a vision, but it may also be considered as a day-dream.

Characters who imagine stories about other characters may share their vision with the others or not. However, they always let the reader know about it. Whether they share it or not reminds of Freud's theory of creativity. There are fantasies which are made public and fantasies which remain private. Some fantasies would never be appreciated by others. This is because they have personal meaning (for instance, Peter's predictions about Clarissa's marriage or her becoming a perfect hostess). They have personal meaning, they are kept private, yet at the same time they are part of novels, which are in their turn public fantasies. In Swift's novel *Shuttlecock*, Prentis' father has written his war memoir, which is read by his son, who analyses it and reflects deeply on it. In fact, Prentis' father creates a public fantasy, as his war memoir is up to a point a reflection of reality and the other part of it is fantasy suited to create his image as a war hero. In this sense, Prentis' father may be seen as imagining a story about himself in his war memoir. Prentis' father is both a real character and an imaginary one for those who read his memoir, his son included, until he begins to question his father's deeds. His father had made changes to reality, he had mixed it with imagination. In his case, however, this is not simple creativity; it means lying.

In relation to characters' identity, Woolf intended to show "the right relationship [...] between the self you know and the world outside."¹ Here there is also the characters' "enduring struggle with the facts"² of their existence. From here, moments of vision and thus of poetry occur. It is from perceiving the world in their own way that such moments appear.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1932.

² Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf*, 18.

According to Freedman¹, as he refers to Woolf's novels, "The poet's imagination becomes the novelist's task of representing moments precisely and of gathering them in adequate forms. Imagination in prose narratives unites the formal awareness of isolated moments with the outer universe and the portrait of manners."

Imagination is connected with lyricism. Aspects of everyday life become more interesting, they are expressed in an imaginative way by means of lyricism.

7. Borders between fiction, illusion and reality

Irene Simon notices that "It is just the purpose of Virginia Woolf to abolish the distinction between dream and reality; she effects this by mixing images with gestures, thoughts with impressions, visions with pure sensations, and by presenting them as mirrored on a consciousness."² Do the details of Minnie's life imagined by the narrator correspond to her actual situation? This is not what matters most. We get to see two different points of view, in fact: the first-person narrator's imaginative one and then we see what the narrator discovers in time about Minnie. Her assumptions do not prove to be true, but they sounded quite real until then. It was a convincing story.

With Modernism, reality is no longer objective. There are individual perspectives of reality. According to Postmodernism, reality is a construct. In Postmodernist fiction, there are multiple perspectives and interpretations on and of reality.

Woolf, in *An Unwritten Novel*, creates what Linda Hutcheon called "fiction about fiction", when she referred to Postmodernism. Just like the Postmodernists, Woolf contradicts the conventions of Realism in her metafictional short-story. What metafiction does "is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction."³

The stories imagined in *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points* and *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection* are also convincing until the end comes and shows something else about the characters whose life is imagined. What Fanny imagines about her teacher comes, in fact, after what she imagines about herself, from what she herself wishes. What is found out about Isabella in the end is that she was "perfectly empty" and had "no thoughts" at all,⁴ unlike what her friend imagined about her inner life:

"And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills."

What Peter Walsh does with his "predictions" is more than just fiction. His predictions become real in the novel. He has moments of vision which go beyond reality.

We never know whether the scenes George Webb imagines between Kristina and Bob were ever real or ever happened. There are details which belong only to his imagination. Prentis finds out that reality may be different from his imagination when he tries to understand his father from the book he has written. Here, Swift appears to illustrate a fiction which is questioned. The book written by Prentis' father appears to be only imagination. The truth is uncertain, but most likely Prentis has lived with the

¹ Ibid., 205.

² Irene Simon, "Some aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery", *English Studies* 41 (1960): 180-96.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic narratives: The metafictional paradox* (London: Methuen, 1980.)

⁴ Woolf, *The Lady in The Looking Glass. A Reflection*, 219.

illusion that his father had been a hero. His father cannot speak and Prentis cannot hear a convincing answer from him.

Prentis believes that his father's memoir, which he has read many times, is getting "not more familiar but more elusive and remote"¹. What is strange to him is that his father offers, mostly, just a descriptive account of what he went through. He rarely mentions his feelings, and mentioning them mostly "in a bluff, almost light-hearted way," makes the story in his book look like "some made-up adventure story".² His whole father's book looks "like fiction, like something that never really took place".³ Only the parts describing his father's capture, torture and escape make the following impression on Prentis: "These pages are more vivid, more real, more believable than any other part of the book. And yet, strangely enough, this is because the style of Dad's writing becomes - how shall I put it? - more imaginative, more literary, more speculative".⁴

"Is it important to be *heroic*?" a review of *Shuttlecock* in *Punch* magazine⁵ asks. This question sums up what happens with Prentis after seeing his father's adventures as a spy from a different perspective, which changes his relationship with his father and with his family. He is no longer making use of too much authority over his family. He no longer feels as if he has to be a hero himself in order to get his sons' attention.

Prentis interrogates the narrative of his father in a Postmodern way. Moreover, he finds another reading of his father's book.

His father's book is an example of blurred boundaries between reality and fiction. He was supposed to write a memoir, to present reality, yet he was also creative, changing facts. However, in his case, being creative equals to being a liar. Everyone had believed him he was a hero. His son struggles to preserve this version for the others. He destroys the evidence that shows what actually may have happened.

Characters in Woolf and Swift describe imagined scenes as though literally "seeing" them.

There is a duality between imagination and fact⁶ in Woolf. This occurs in Swift as well.

Imagined scenarios are more or less removed from possible reality. Amy's seems very close to reality. She tries to imagine where her husband's friends are on their journey. She knows her husband's friends, she knows the way to Margate, she knows that they are together during their trip. Woolf's short stories *An Unwritten Novel*, *Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points* and *The Lady in the Looking-Glass. A Reflection* present the imagined scenarios as not real, but just inspired from reality. Nothing is certain and the characters who are part of stories are not very well-known. The situation in *An Unwritten Novel* is similar to *Shuttlecock*, with the exception that the fantasy in the memoir was made public, not kept by Prentis' father to himself. Peter's

¹ Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 52.

² Idem.

³ Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 52.

⁴ Stef Craps, *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 106-07.

⁵ Barry J. Fishman, *Shuttlecock: An Introduction*, 1989, <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/uk/gswift/shuttle/shuttleinto.html>

⁶ Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf*, 201.

predictions are confirmed later in the narrative. Clarissa's imagined life with Peter is clearly imaginary, as she is aware that she is only day-dreaming. George's presuppositions about Kristina in *The Light of Day* are neither confirmed nor disconfirmed in the narrative. They do, however, sound likely to have happened in a similar way. He doesn't know Kristina personally, however, and it's not likely Kristina has spoken or behaved exactly the way George described her in his imagined scenes.

Katharine tries to draw Ralph's attention to the border between reality and fiction when she talks to him about the difference between the way he imagines (perceives) her and the way she actually is. Moreover, she extends her reflections to the same difference between imagining stories about characters and the way they actually are like in reality.

Perceiving the world according to one's subjective perspective illustrates this as well as their creating stories about other characters. Their stories are based on real characters and sometimes real situations. There is also a blending between poetry and prose in creating the lyrical novel.¹ Inner and outer experience are combined in such novels.²

Kaivola notices contradictions as part of the lyrical novel in Woolf. Such contradictions, ambiguities are reconciled in lyrical novels. Karen Kaivola points out the ambivalences in Woolf. Starting with the ambivalence between art and politics (as Woolf includes in her writings political and social critiques, but by means of her lyrical fiction she "obscures" them), Kaivola goes on to point out that Woolf's lyrical novels shape experience yet protect the self from a "hostile world" and that there is even a "dissolution of boundaries between the perceiver and the external world"³ which leads to ambivalence.

The distinctions between reality and fiction often blurred in both Woolf and Swift in these cases. With Woolf, however, we are given an ending which shows us something else than what is imagined during the short stories. What is imagined is replaced by something else. It is only in *Mrs Dalloway* that Peter's predictions prove to become true. With Swift, we don't know whether what George or Prentis imagine is in fact true. We are only given George's imagined view of certain scenes and only Prentis' final imagination of the story of his father who is no longer a hero. However, whether his father was a hero or not is not yet clear. We are only given a possibility to doubt the truth of his father's novel. Nothing is clarified by the end of the novels and neither readers nor characters know anything for sure.

According to Robert Olen Butler, in *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*, fiction becomes fiction from the moment it happens in someone's imagination. Until then, fiction is, according to Butler, ink on paper, letters from the alphabet brought together, words, sounds, syntax and so on. Finally, Butler claims, fiction becomes "an evocation of sensual experience inside the reader's mind."⁴ This shows the important role played by imagination, not only in lyrical fiction but in fiction

¹ Ibid., 185.

² Ibid., 186.

³ Idem.

⁴ Robert Olen Butler, *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

generally speaking. Bradbury¹ states that, in poetics, “there is the presumption that fiction itself is a creative power”. Characters who imagine stories about other characters may be regarded as an example of fiction within fiction, regardless of how long or short what they imagine is.

Woolf's essay on Turgenev contains, according to Freedman, the explanation of “her ‘mature concept of ‘imagination’ [...] A truly symbolic vision, she held, must represent two incompatible efforts in an ideal form: that of ‘observing facts impartially’ and of ‘interpreting them symbolically’. Emotions [...] obtain their existence from a vision of ‘incompatible things’ drawn together in single instances of illuminated perception. Radiating from ‘some characters at the centre’, a succession of these emotions replaces the succession of events to create a form embodying life as a whole.”²

Hassan³ offers his views on Modernism and Postmodernism as not clearly delimited from one another. Modernism may be a continuation of Postmodernism. They may also be seen as coexisting. Such views may account for the common aspects in Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift. Hassan⁴ lists experimentalism as a feature of both trends. Innovation is associated with Modernism (this is the case with Woolf). Swift's time also shows a desire to be innovative, to shock readers. The “fusion of forms”, the “confusion of realms” are features related to innovation in Postmodernism, as well as “fantasy, play humour [...]”⁵. Hassan⁶ sees imagination as one of the “ambiguous aspects” of the Postmodern concept of indeterminacy.

8. Conclusions

Imagination is, mostly, the source of the narrator's perceptions when s/he imagines something about certain characters. The questions that come after reading Woolf's short stories is if one can truly know or understand another person, or how that other person can be differently perceived. At the same time, what prompts a character to imagine a story about another character is a word, a situation of reflecting, of searching for answers which serves as a starting point for a moment of being, of vision.

Fanny begins to imagine a life for her teacher after she experiences a moment of being: “[A]ll seemed transparent for a moment” and she really „sees” Miss Craye. A similar revelation makes Peter able to “see” Clarissa's future. The other stories show a wish to understand someone else.

An Unwritten Novel is an example of metafiction, while the other short stories by Woolf can also be interpreted as illustrating a story inside another story. These short stories allow different ways of perceiving the same characters. They are examples of multiple points of view, multiple perspectives, not just one. What in the end shows that what was imagined was not true may be a proof of the fact the narrators' imagination is determined by literary stereotypes and conventions. This explanation may hold true not

¹ Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities. Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 15.

² Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf*, 201.

³ Ihab H., Hassan *The Postmodern Turn. Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 25-33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

only for *An Unwritten Novel*, but also for Woolf's other two short stories mentioned in this paper.

In Swift's novels, as mentioned in this paper, we don't know with certainty whether what is imagined is what is real. This is how a Postmodernist feature, lack of one truth, lack of one true way of perceiving reality, is illustrated. In *Shuttlecock*, however, there are some files which are supposed to speak a certain truth and which are to be found in the police archives. With those files destroyed, however, access to truth is no longer totally possible. Rita's predictions about George's love for Sarah have an uncertain ending that we as readers don't know. The same happens with George's feeling that Rita will leave him. The outcome of these predictions is left ambiguous.

Ambiguity is also felt in Woolf, considering that one can never truly know another character, like in her short stories. This holds true for most situations of imagining stories about other characters. Moreover, ambiguity contributes to revealing various sides of characters, be they imaginary, and thus possible or unrealistic. Various sides of other characters may be seen as a contribution to fluid identity, which is specific to lyricism. Aside from changing in time, identity is in progress and flexible according to the way characters are perceived by other characters. Identity is flexible as it changes in time as well as in the imagination of the others.

Characters imagine not only in order to create, to daydream, but also in an attempt to solve certain problems (especially detective George Webb) or to better understand a person (some of Woolf's characters wonder how certain persons are, or even judge them, while Swift's character Prentis tries to understand his father and himself).

Imagination is associated with the visionaries in Romantic poetry but it is also linked to metafiction in some cases or to subjective perception, to ambiguity.