

## MOMENTS OF BEING AND LIFE

In May 1924 Virginia Woolf delivered a lecture entitled *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* in which, stating that the basis of Good fiction is in "**character in itself**", she launched an attack on the Edwardians, i.e. those realistic "**materialists**" writers like Bennet, Wells and Galsworthy who still used "conventions and tools" that meant "*ruin and death*" for the modernists (i.e. Eliot, Joyce and herself, of course). She said that, though both groups shared the same concern with the problem of characterization and tried to be as accurate and realistic as possible, the Edwardians contented themselves with presented their characters from the outside, i.e. they gave the reader a sort of external "house" in the hope that he (the reader) might "be able to deduce the human beings who lived there" But since the "human beings" inside the "house" are not only what they do (actions, dialogues) but above all what they are (feelings, thoughts, memories) the novel, in order to be a faithful analysis of human nature, had to turn inwards and explore man's mental experience and his complex consciousness.

What became all important for the write, therefore, was what she called "**the moments of being**", that is to say **the moments of utmost intensity, of perception, of vision** in the "*incessant shower of innumerable atoms*" that strike our minds everyday as she wrote in her often-quoted statement

*"Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions -- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from beginning of consciousness to the end." .." Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it."*

Later, she continues:

*"Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness."*

According to V. Woolf the human beings are not what they do (actions, dialogues etc.) but above all what they are (feelings, thoughts, memories) that is why the novel, in order to be a faithful analysis of human nature, had to turn inwards and explore man's mental experience and his complex consciousness. What became all important for the writer, therefore, was what she called "**the moments of being**"

Mirella Billi in Virginia Woolf, Il Castoro states:

"Il discorso si frantuma, si moltiplicano gli atti di "visione" attraverso i quali l'autrice procede, quei momenti illuminanti, fulminee penetrazione nelle reciproche sensibilità, attraverso cui si apre il tentativo di comunicare un essere umano. Queste improvvise illuminazioni scaturiscono da eventi apparentemente insignificanti che, nel momento epifanico, fanno scaturire alla coscienza attimi del passato, profondità remote e sconosciute della sensibilità dei personaggi, brandelli di flusso mentale e emotivo, esperienze ormai fuori del tempo. Il procedimento per "visioni", cioè per momenti di illuminazione che permettono di cogliere la realtà interiore, è presente in tutta la narrativa di V. Woolf e ne costituisce un aspetto tipico e essenziale (Jacob's Room è il più epifanico dei suoi libri, quello in cui l'epifania, è la base della struttura del romanzo")