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Dead Men, Walking:

Actors, Networks, and Actualized Metaphors in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Raymond*

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Abstract: This article takes up Rita Felski's recent call to modernists to explore how Bruno Latour's latest work on actor-network theory might be adapted for literary studies. It examines two accounts of World War I soldiers who (allegedly) return from the dead in material form: Virginia Woolf's fictional account of Septimus Smith, who is convinced his friend Evans has come back from the dead, and Oliver Lodge's best-selling memoir, *Raymond, or Life and Death*, which recounts in detail how Lodge believed his dead son sent messages to the family to assure them of his continued material existence. That these moments may be read as obvious signs of delusion or unresolved grief tell us little about the power such images had in the early twentieth century or about how metaphors at a particular historical moment might be read, shaped, disrupted, and made real. A Latourian approach, instead, demands a shift in interpretive practices: rather than reading vertically for a latent meaning that might lie hidden beneath a text, we read horizontally, tracing actively a network of places, times, and objects, a network that offers a new understanding of the interactions between historical contexts and literary studies.

Midway through Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked veteran of World War I, famously sees his dead comrade Evans return from the grave. As readers and critics, we know just what to do here. We dash in as theoretical medics, ready to diagnose a wide range of underlying problems that might explain his vision. Approaching the scene from a psychoanalytic or human psyche angle, we can detect post-traumatic stress, point out the unresolved grief that lies beneath his hallucination, or note the repressed homoerotic desire that appears in the form of Evans. If we arrive from the somewhat more fashionable school of historical context, we might observe how Septimus represents a larger group of traumatized veterans, or we could see Evans as symbolizing a transnational expression of the violence wielded by imperialism. And many other approaches are available to us: it's a rich time for literary criticism. But what we are least likely to do, faced with Septimus' vision, is to believe it, to entertain the idea that yes, he does see his dead friend Evans rise from the dead, and to consider what that might mean. Our reaction—for good and productive reasons—is usually to move to

unveiling, to a vertical model in which we read the vision on top as Woolf's metaphor for something else that lies beneath. Indeed, part of our job as critics is to interpret the vision as a sign of other things.

I propose in this essay to experiment with a different kind of reading, one that asks what might happen if we did, at least for a moment, take seriously Septimus' belief that his dead friend has actually returned.¹ If, rather than asking what his vision might *mean*, about Septimus, the novel itself, madness, and so on, we ask what his vision *does*—to and for Septimus, his surroundings, the scene itself, and so on—another landscape emerges. Septimus' belief that Evans has risen from the dead and that his material body has been reanimated is certainly a delusion, one obviously crafted by Woolf, but his belief is nevertheless a force within this scene, possessing a power all its own. And Septimus was hardly alone in imagining such an actualized return in the early twentieth century. The unprecedented casualties of WWI created a surge of such moments in literature and in memoir, and also helped inspire the sudden reemergence of the Victorian craze of séances and contacting the dead; indeed, the experience of believing a dead comrade or family member had returned was a seemingly common occurrence after the war, and not just among those who were as delusional as Septimus.² Those who sought to reach lost sons, husbands, and partners through séances were not seeking a metaphorical consolation so much as an actual one, an actual return of the dead. The idea that the dead might rise again, has, of course, a long and varied religious history, but for the most part I will set aside religious considerations of this idea to focus on a few instances surrounding WWI when an individual believes someone dead has reappeared in a quantifiable way, and I will ask what happens when we take this idea as a potent force, not just as a sign of wish fulfillment or repressed grief, but as an active belief that had considerable power and thus the ability to effect change.

To help see what such a move might entail, I will draw on three areas for assistance: sociologist Bruno Latour's work on actor-network theory (recently summarized in his book *Reassembling the Social*), discoveries in psychology on the impact that trauma may have on an individual's ability to think metaphorically, and the often peculiar relations between literary metaphor and WWI. First, Latour's actor-network theory, or ANT, offers a way to take seriously the *effect* of, say, believing someone dead

might have returned, even if we might ourselves disagree with the accuracy of this belief.³ A complex yet deceptively simple approach, ANT proposes a revolution in sociology, one that as Rita Felski notes, might be adapted productively to literary theory.⁴ Latour argues that rather than viewing the social through a vertical model of understanding, as a kind of stuff or material that might be seen as the underlying cause or container of some event (the social context we might bring in, for example, to understand Septimus' vision), we should instead move horizontally, understanding events, things, people, and so on as assemblages of networks; the analytical task then becomes to trace slowly and carefully many different actor-networks or webs of associations. As we will explore, the real advance in Latour's theory for our purposes is to understand the many actors—both human and non-human—that might have agency and thus “force” in a given situation; as Felski notes, “an actor, in [Latour's] schema, is anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference” (582). To approach Septimus' vision, we would need to consider the immense power of his belief that his friend has actually returned. In other words, we would consider the belief itself as an actor within this scene, along with many other actors (including the novel itself exerting power across time, as well as Evans, and Woolf's words, and Septimus, and . . .). Unless we consider the belief as a particular force, and work to trace that force across different areas, we risk missing, in this case, a profound aspect of grief in the terrible aftermath of WWI.

I pair Latour's theory with scientific work on an unusual psychological phenomenon that had particular resonance during and after the war: the phenomenon of actualized metaphor. As psychologists have noted, after a trauma, a victim may have trouble creating and recognizing metaphor, as what is metaphoric may seem real rather than being a figure of speech. So, as one case study showed, a trauma victim who had lost many members of her family, and who still felt an overwhelming responsibility for keeping them safe, came to believe that her family was actually living—protected—inside her body; she translated her desire into something that appeared real to her.⁵ Likewise, Septimus is unable to see the return of Evans as a kind of metaphor (for his grief, for the past, etc.), as the reader of Woolf's novel is able to do, but instead sees the return as something actually happening. Therapists and linguists have labeled these actualizations differently, calling them concretized or frozen or dead

metaphors, but the theories all recognize the loss of a patient's ability to understand certain observations or symptoms *as* metaphoric.⁶ Therapeutic intervention involves trying to restore the patient's ability to recognize metaphor and to allow him or her to move mentally from one part of a metaphor to another (and I'll have more to say on this in the third section of the essay).

The phenomenon of actualized metaphor had particular significance in WWI and also, in turn, shaped the literature that emerged from it. The war experience was so unprecedented and so traumatic, it could transform what had once been simply metaphoric into something real, demanding a change in perception, and thus a change in how that experience was represented in literature. So, for example, as Wilfred Owen explores in his poem "Greater Love," familiar romantic images such as red lips, a trembling body, a soft voice, or a large heart could become brutally and actually realized for the soldier in the red blood of dead comrades, in their twitching bodies, and in their hearts made—literally— "great with shot" (l. 20). The experience of seeing this living nightmare demanded, as both Owen and Woolf realized, a corresponding change in the use of figurative language—the language itself had to maintain the experience of the actualization. Paul Fussell also notes in *The Great War and Modern Memory* this reverse metaphoric process in which author's use "canonical literature to help suggest the actuality of front line experience [by working] to literalize what before had been figurative" (Fussell 165). As Fussell observes, Shakespeare describes a hand that "smells of mortality," and means the phrase to be read metaphorically, as a sign that the hand's owner was corrupt; a lieutenant in WWI recalled this same line of Shakespeare but used it to indicate "the smell of corpses in the ruins of a French village" (166)—hands actually smelled of mortality. Thus, in WWI, rather than a sign of madness, actualized metaphors could be a record of lived experience, yet an experience so overwhelming it could in turn produce madness. Woolf captures this tangled skein of metaphor, belief, experience, and delusion in Septimus' visions, and in order to read the character fully—as well as to read the experience of the war accurately—we must take seriously his belief in the actuality of his visions.

In what follows, I explore these actualizations in two specific examples of dead men walking, in both cases accounts of WWI soldiers who appear to rise again in some form after death. The first is from

Mrs. Dalloway, when Septimus experiences profound metaphoric disruption and the corresponding conviction that Evans has returned from the dead. Woolf offers a vivid portrait of a misfiring interpretive system, detailing Septimus' relentless experience of concretized visions. And by creating these visions, Woolf in turn shows fiction's power to portray the experience and the power of these actualizations in their lived immediacy. From Woolf's fictional treatment of disrupted metaphors, I trace an association to a non-fiction memoir by Sir Oliver Lodge, an eminent scientist of the early twentieth century. Lodge lost his son in the war, and published his bestselling memoir, *Raymond, or Life and Death*, in 1916. He recounts in detail how his son returned to the family through mediums and table-tilting sessions to assure them of his continued existence. Whatever we might think of the accuracy of Lodge's account, he gave voice to the longing, so pervasive at the time that it threatened to overwhelm many survivors, to have assurance that the departed might retain aspects of their material forms and might remain alive however altered those forms might be. Both writers, though in very different ways, seek to materialize the dead, not simply wanting to represent grief through metaphor—imagining, say, the ghostly presence of the departed as a metaphor or sign of continued grief—but to address grief by making the imagined dead body a revitalized material body.

In both Woolf and Lodge, these moments of transfiguration offer a strange reversal of the workings of imaginative literature. Literature takes both bodies and their experience and transforms them into language, a transformation that continues to represent the material presence of the body while nevertheless manifesting by its language the necessarily figurative quality of this preservation. Woolf and Lodge, however, explore peculiar eruptive moments when Septimus and Lodge and his family attempt to bring the body of the dead soldier back out of the imagination, out of language and memory, and into its original, material form (though of course they must describe this process in language). That such moments may be read as signs of delusion tell us little about the power such images had in the early twentieth century, or how metaphor at a particular historical moment might be shaped, disrupted, and made real. When forced to read both backwards and forwards, and to follow the slippery and unstable passages between material bodies and spiritual ones, and between literary representations of actualized

metaphors and actual experiences of metaphoric disruption, we are also able, as we will see, to trace and even to imitate the very process of making metaphors, and to follow actively the connections among the places, times, and objects that might make them up.⁷

I anticipate two central pay-offs from reading in this way. First, by using Latour's approach and avoiding seeing "context" as a kind of box in which to embed an event, we might sidestep the danger Rita Felski notes, of an endless critical swing between grounding texts in a particular historical milieu or insisting on a return to a more aesthetic approach to literature.⁸ In exploring associations among moments when the dead appear to return, we might unite elements of both camps, charting the tangled influences of actualized metaphors in experience and in fiction, and their effects on each other; the interchanges among Woolf's fictional novel, Lodge's memoir, and events on the battle fields and the home front; and the way language acts and is acted upon, without using either context or aesthetic concerns as underlying *frameworks* or *containers* in which to view these details (though we will certainly touch on the historical and the aesthetic). Unlike Septimus's rigid and disrupted reading of metaphor, our approach would gain flexibility by not freezing us in one meaning or in one interpretive camp, keeping our critical faculties more dexterous and more horizontally mobile, and allowing us to trace connections among various actors and actor-networks rather than only seeking an underlying cause.

Second, by taking a fuller range of actors seriously, as Latour urges—from an idea to a character to a hat—we might better trace the power of a particular vision, or a particular object, or even a particular novel. Stanley Fish has taught us to consider "interpretive communities," acknowledging that readers and institutions themselves shape the meaning of a given text.⁹ Such communities must expand when we also see characters—Evans, Septimus—as having an ability to effect change both within and outside of the novel, or when we take seriously the possibility that Lodge's dead son continued to act and exert force from beyond the grave, even if we might disagree with Lodge as to the origin of that force. And we will not only consider *people* as actors, but *objects* as well, exploring how, for example, the hat that Septimus creates at the end of his life also has force, both within the novel and within Septimus's ability to recognize and find metaphoric resonance in particular things. Under Latour's Actor-Network Theory,

novels, characters, objects all suddenly emerge not simply as things we interpret or place meaning on, but as actors themselves, powerfully shaping meaning within their own webs of associations.¹⁰ By tracing these radically expanded actor-networks, we might better understand the power of the dead returning, resurrecting the peculiar empathy that literature may offer, and allowing us to reassemble a more vibrant picture of what it might have been like to be alive at that particular moment, in that particular place.

Septimus Smith and the Disruption of Metaphor

Critics have long seen Septimus Smith as a sufferer of shell-shock and a victim of post-traumatic stress, as indeed he is. Karen DeMeester, in her frequently cited article on trauma and *Mrs. Dalloway*, argues that the narrative form of the novel, with its fragmentation and seeming disorder, reflects the disjointed mind (and experience) of the trauma survivor. Other critics have read Septimus's hallucinatory yet evocative ramblings on nature, art, London, the war, and other matters as reflecting the symbiotic and at times troubling connections between madness and artistry; indeed, the character's own thoughts reveal him to be both mentally unstable and unusually attentive to beauty. Septimus's use of language has been another area of interest for critics; Bonnie Kime Scott, for example, argues for a new modernist language that emerges through Woolf's use of imagery, and Suzette Henke has analyzed the schizophrenic language patterns of Septimus's thoughts and speech.¹¹ Septimus's scrambled metaphoric thinking, however, has received less attention, and yet his profound disruption of metaphor not only suggests some of the demarcations between the sane and insane mind within the novel,¹² but also reveals how understanding metaphoric language demands seeing a distinction between the metaphor's two terms, a process that breaks down for Septimus with disastrous results. As I will explore, while Septimus's language and thoughts are full of invented and remembered images, as well as of the people and things he sees before him on one London day, he cannot seem to negotiate or recognize the relations among these various visions. He can, for example, see an airplane in the sky both as an actual plane and as a past war plane, but he cannot see that the present plane reminds him metaphorically of past planes

he might have seen in combat.¹³ The ability to recognize metaphor requires not simply the understanding of the two points of comparison, but the ability to travel between the two points and to perceive their relation, a journey Septimus is largely unable to make.

Woolf introduces Septimus within the framework of traumatic flashback. At the start of the novel, as Septimus and his wife walk down a London street, an automobile backfires, making a “violent explosion” that stops Septimus in his tracks:

Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor car had stopped outside Mulberry’s shop window. . . .And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. (14-15)

Woolf’s free indirect discourse vividly portrays Septimus’s thoughts. He first considers his surroundings through a simple simile: the engines beat like an irregular pulse. The use of simile here may suggest Septimus’s need to keep the two sides of the comparison clear; by its form, a simile is in many ways a tidier kind of imaginative expression than a metaphor. To describe something as “like” or “as” something else allows you to state, explicitly within the form of the language, that you are making a comparison. The engines are not irregular pulses; they are “like” them. With metaphor, however, the comparison is merely implied; it is up to the hearer or reader to realize that the metaphor is an imaginary connection between one thing and another. (To take a common example, saying “my love is a red, red rose” implies that the two sides of the metaphor—the beloved and the rose—are one and the same, though we of course misread metaphor if we take this statement as an actual sameness rather than as a figurative connection). For Septimus, understanding metaphor proves more difficult, as his ability to distinguish between the two compared items is disrupted by their eventual collapse into each other. He makes

connections where he should not, seeing a cause and effect relationship between the car's stopping and the sun's heat, for example, and while he can still effectively shape a simple simile, comparing a pattern to a tree in the fourth line, his own imagination suddenly overtakes his reality. By the end of the passage, Septimus experiences what I term an abrupt actualized metaphor, as his own horror suddenly turns into fire, moving from his mind right to the world, which "wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames."

There are (at least) two levels of metaphor here: First, Woolf (or the narrator) makes an implicit metaphor, comparing Septimus's madness—his horror over the war triggered in part by the firing of the car—to an all-engulfing flame that threatens both the victim and his world. At the same time, however, Woolf also details the experience of actualized metaphor. For Septimus, the experience is one of metaphor made real; he actually feels that he and the world might ignite into flames. While at this moment in London, that expectation is unlikely to be realized, the constant threat of bursting into flames was in fact an accurate description of daily life in the trenches. Woolf captures here both the wrenching experience of the soldier and the changes the war demanded of literary form. On the first level, this passage records the past (and yet ever present) horror of the war for Septimus and other soldiers, when their worst fears could in fact have come true at any moment, an experience potentially catastrophic to the ability to distinguish between something imagined and something real. On the level of the novel, the passage registers and demonstrates the disruption of literary metaphor after the war: as readers, we can certainly see the flames as a metaphor for Septimus's madness, his anger, or any number of other things, but to understand the experience, Woolf suggests, we must also read metaphor differently: as actualized (for Septimus, at this moment) and also as in some ways accurate, for this delusion in fact may record a (previous) actual experience. If we only read what Septimus's visions might "really" mean metaphorically, we lose a critical aspect of his experience and the war's radical disruption of language itself.

Woolf suggests that Septimus not only has a disordered experience of metaphor but is often particularly horrified by the process of connecting one side of a metaphor to the other, since he sees this

connection as an actual rather than a figurative metamorphosis. A bit later in the day, as he mutters to himself on the street, a small dog comes up to sniff his trousers, and he is immediately terrified: “It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man! At once the dog trotted away. . . . But what was the scientific explanation. . . ? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men? . . . Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibers were left” (66). On the broadest level here, the dog/man connection gestures towards the war, when figuratively speaking, Septimus found men behaving like dogs (though even here the metaphor remains disrupted, as one would expect the description to be of men shifting into dogs, rather than the reverse). For Septimus, however, the very mental process that would allow him to understand the metaphoric connection between dogs and men breaks down; instead the metaphor seems real, as he sees this connection as an actual transformation. Notably, he seems to *strive* for a literal reading, seeking beyond everything to approach the world scientifically (as he repeats many times). Yet as the metaphor becomes more concrete for Septimus, it also grows more horrifying, making his experience feel not like an emotional maceration—which indeed is what it is—but an actual, physical melting of flesh. Here again, Woolf suggests another link to actual war experience: Septimus imagines something as real that *had* been real, and that indeed was the frequent result of the flames from the earlier passage. As burn victims from the war visually recorded, the war had in fact melted the flesh off many soldiers. Woolf’s description of actualized metaphor captures here how the war could destabilize experience and imagination; what was real (in the war) produces delusion (for Septimus) which in turn seems real (to Septimus).

Even language itself, the very words and letters used to create metaphor, take on physical, material characteristics for Septimus. In the famous moment when the airplane starts writing words in the sky, the letters resemble the languishing and melting quality Septimus experiences in his own body. The actual sound of the letters spoken by a woman near him resonate physically with Septimus, as the *K* and *R* produce a sudden burst of similes: “. . . like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound

which, concussing, broke. A marvelous discovery indeed—that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life” (21). In the use of similes, we can see Septimus straining to keep the comparisons explicit and the terms apart, but the words and letters take on physical properties and physical power, capable of producing bodily sensation in Septimus, and capable of—according to Septimus’s perceptions—bringing trees actually to life. His constant emphasis on the need to be scientific reflects his own attempts to make his hallucinatory experience something that suggests a true picture of reality rather than a growing madness. Ironically, his over-determined insistence on the science of his illusions becomes a fundamental sign of his insanity.

Metaphors Made Real

I want to step back for a moment and explore scientific work on how trauma may disrupt the ability to think metaphorically, which should grant a clearer picture of the disruption we find in Septimus’s language.¹⁴ Researcher Antal Borbely points out that metaphoric thinking requires us to take in new information and new experiences, and relate them to our previous knowledge. Borbely sees the linguistic concept of metaphor as having a parallel in psychoanalysis and its attempt to relate different moments in time to each other. As he notes, “Past and present are like two parts of a metaphor. . . linguistically, metaphor is to understand something in terms of something else. Psychoanalytically, ‘in terms of something else’ becomes ‘in terms of another time’” (Borbely 925). Thus a patient’s experience in the past—say, Septimus’s experience in the war—is linked to an experience in the present—say, Septimus’s reaction to the plane in Regent’s Park. A psychoanalyst (or a critic) might say that we can understand these two experiences as a kind of metaphor, with the present moment in many ways representing in another domain the experience in the past; indeed as psychoanalysts have observed, “work in a psychoanalytic treatment can be compared to reading a metaphor” (Campbell and Enckell 806).

As we have seen with Septimus, however, traumatic experience can profoundly disrupt the metaphoric process. In the traumatized or psychotic patient, metaphors enter a rigid or what Borbely

calls an analogic repetition (934). As researchers Donald Campbell and Henrik Enckell observe, to recognize metaphor, a patient must see the “difference between the psychic fields in question” (808). A person might set up a kind a metaphoric framework—as indeed we see with Septimus—but cannot recognize the differences between the two sides of the metaphor: “the metaphoric structure is formally established but remains abortive in *function*. For these persons a metaphor is not a representational figure *through* which something is elaborated . . . but a presentation of a reality” (Campbell and Enckell 808). Thus Septimus does not see the dog-changing-into-a-man as reflecting his horrific war experience, but as the experience itself. Woolf not only illustrates this metaphoric and psychological breakdown in her novel, she also explores how this phenomenon must be read differently when we link it to the war.

Yet how do we make sense of Septimus’s most profound actualization, his delusion that his friend Evans has risen from the dead? The psychoanalysts I have been citing would surely say that Septimus is delusional and is confusing the past and the present by believing his hallucination is actually Evans, and of course they would be correct. Yet if we return to Latour’s Actor –Network theory, it is possible to get closer, I think, to another reading that does more justice to the radical quality of Woolf’s novel. Latour distinguishes between “mediators”—actors that “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry”—and mere intermediaries, things that “transport[] meaning or force without transformation” (Latour 39). Latour argues that actors (or mediators or actants) are the things most worth tracing, as they are the things that make the changes, and he dramatically enlarges the types of actors we must consider by adding inanimate objects to the actor category. While he does not suggest that inanimate objects have intentions, he points out that they are not “hapless bearers of symbolic projection” (10) either. To reassemble the social, we must realize that the social is not some kind of stable state of affairs, or a hidden force that might provide the “context” for our readings. Latour specifically points out in one telling example how bringing our own premade context to someone’s experience, say, of “spirits, divinities, voices, ghosts, and so on” means that we have to “put scare quotes around them, bracket their existence out, and locate them firmly in the believer’s mind” (234). But as he observes, “it makes no empirical sense to refuse to meet the agencies that make

people do things[.] Why not take seriously what members are obstinately saying? Why not follow the direction indicated by their finger when they designate what ‘makes them act?’” (235). Thus for Septimus, if we take seriously even his most delusional actualization, we might explore what sort of force Evans is exerting. While Evans’ return is a delusion, by projecting a “healthy” relation to metaphor onto Septimus’s experience, we in fact miss his experience altogether. Septimus is mad, but that does not make the experience itself less real. Because, as readers, we need to understand the *content* of his experience, and not merely the *accuracy* of its signifying relation, we must take great care not to assume our own understanding of metaphor. Moreover, we must also remember, according to Latour and indeed many others, that those doing the observing—us—also change what is observed. As critics (or sociologists, or scientists, or. . .), we too are actors within the network; our observations of, say, Evans, in fact change the network itself.

Investigating the (alleged) return of the dead in WWI and its literature offers an excellent test case for exploring how a particular actualization may become a critical actor within a network of associations. We might read Septimus and his disrupted language as part of a web of actors involving people, characters, the text itself, and different aspects of his thinking, all working with and against each other, all with possible agency. Thus, in addition to reading vertically—seeing actualizations as signs that reveal his underlying madness or Woolf’s underlying artistry—we might also read horizontally, moving from Septimus’s language to Woolf’s own creation of that language, to the reader’s ability to consider the disruption of language, and Woolf’s ability to create new webs of metaphors from this very disruption. *Mrs. Dalloway* itself, travelling through the years since 1925, becomes an actor within this network, inspiring countless articles (including this one), and suggesting in its very multiply-interpreted form the dexterity that may (on one level) be missing in Septimus’s own thoughts.

To show what this shift in emphasis might mean, I return now to *Mrs. Dalloway* and the moment of Septimus’s most intense actualization: his belief that his lost war comrade Evans has returned. The visions of Evans become at once the most profoundly real experiences for Septimus and also his moments

of most profound delusion. In the first reappearance, Septimus sits in Regent's Park and watches his dead friend approach; language, war, and Evans seem to meld into a physical, material form:

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. . . .

'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. (68)

Here linguistic composition has again become visible, taking on the fragments of war, yet becoming imperishable, enduring. Evans assumes physical form (in Septimus's mind), moving towards him, terrifying him, as Septimus seems aware at some level that literally and figuratively, he cannot "look upon the dead." Septimus of course misreads his surroundings, unable to see his vision as a sign of madness, unable to see that Evans is in fact Peter Walsh. It is the ability to make a connection but not a transposition between the two things compared that for Septimus would make it metaphor rather than madness. The reader is invited, however, to make this very separation, to read this vision as metaphor—Evans represents terrible grief and trauma, never fully repressed, always threatening to rise again. Yet we can, and should, stay with the actualization as well; if we can see it as an actor in this system, with its own immediacy and agency and not simply as a sign of something else, we will see more clearly the radical and disruptive grief engendered by WWI. Woolf in effect gives us a moment when the literary and the literal are suddenly unsettled, a moment that again shifts our very reading practices. What is literary is fundamentally metaphorical, something that takes lived experience and translates it to another realm. Here, though, Woolf depicts a moment of reversal when the literary threatens to become for Septimus literal—words shift back into things. To understand the experience we have to read

backwards, as it were, to return ourselves to the original moment, before the literary transition began. The belief (and sometimes the terror) that the dead might walk again—actually walk again, and not just in dreams or fantasies—was an acute and affecting experience; to borrow Latour’s term, the figure of Evans all cleaned up is an *actor* and not simply a vessel signifying something else. To see it only as a repressive structure or a delusive intermediary is to shelter ourselves from the experiential reality of the agony felt by so many at this time. We miss the immediacy of that belief if we don’t grant it agency within this system, reading it simply as a container for another meaning.

Septimus himself seems keen to prove the legitimacy and power of his vision; he senses how much it might change about the war, how profoundly it might alter the entire world should the return of Evans turn out to be true. To continue from the passage above, Septimus sees his vision in all its transformative possibilities:

I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, . . . the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole—

‘But I am so unhappy, Septimus,’ said Rezia trying to make him sit down.

The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation— (68-69)

Here we find a simile comparing Septimus to a personified and colossal figure of grief, and not just a figure of grief for WWI, but a figure who is so large he might represent grief in every time, for all the ages of sorrow stretch around him. By the third paragraph, Septimus appears to embody the vision, no longer “like” the colossal figure, but the colossal figure himself. And this figure has the key, the answer to this sorrow, the answer even to Rezia’s particular unhappiness: the dead walk again, for if they do, then the grief surrounding the war must be radically transformed. Watching how the two sides of the metaphor or simile—Septimus and the colossal figure—move towards each other, we can actively read both the

distinctions and their collapse into each other. The actualization itself becomes a potentially transformative experience for Septimus, allowing us not simply to unmask Septimus's vision as madness (though it certainly is that), but to understand more clearly his vision as an actor-network—meaning here a thing itself (his vision) as it is moving and coming into being by connecting and altering webs of other meanings and things. Our own reading must trace these very connections, becoming itself a network rather than a stable context in which to fit the actualization. Such an approach keeps us alert to the agency of the actualization, and to its power to explain the war's suffering, a power we might find at work across England.

Séances, Mediums, and the Return of the Dead

Septimus's vision of resurrection, one that he hopes might heal the suffering of the world, links to another group of actors at the time who believed they had tangible proof that the dead endured in some actual way. As a few critics are starting to explore, the post-war period saw an intense revival of spiritualism, a return to the mid-Victorian craze of table-tilting, ghosts, and attempts to speak to spirits who had "passed over."¹⁵ Books, journal articles, and newspaper accounts chronicling psychic phenomena both during and after the war appeared across England. Such an increased interest, which had its American parallel in the visions of ghosts after the Civil War, seems immediately and obviously understandable. The grief of parents, spouses, siblings, and friends of the departed fueled the sudden emergence of mediums throughout Britain who promised to convey messages from across the divide, and these mediums in turn fueled the desire to speak to the dead. For example, one popular book, Hereward Carrington's *Psychical Phenomena and the War*, appeared in 1918, and again in another edition in 1920. Carrington offers account after account of ghostly returns during and after battles, mass visions seen by soldiers and civilians, as well as numerous anecdotes of dreams, premonitions, and the delivery of messages from dead soldiers to loved ones left behind, messages designed, like Septimus's vision, to address an overwhelming grief with a vision of resurrection.

What is particularly interesting for our purposes is the insistence throughout these accounts on the actual and often material aspects of these visions. Both Carrington and the people in the stories he tells repeatedly emphasize both the scientific nature of their observations and the return of the actual person, albeit in a different form. While Carrington admits that many mediums were charlatans, he insists that the stories he details are not the mad ravings of the traumatized or grieved, but scientific data that can be, as he says, “minutely investigated” (114). Such accounts of psychical phenomena held agency, in Latour’s sense, speaking powerfully of and to the individual and national agony of the post-war period. Under Carrington’s readings, what is unbearable becomes understandable. The mourners are comforted—indeed, Carrington relates that the only pain the dead experience is seeing the grieving family left behind, making a cessation of mourning a kind of personal and patriotic duty to the lost soldier. On a larger basis, the war itself might be explained and even justified if psychical phenomena are believed. For as Carrington declares, in ways that echo Septimus’s own prophetic and hysterical musings, “Should it be proved, however, largely as the result of the present conflict, that man is immortal; that he. . . continues to persist in some sphere of activity more suited to its evolutionary progress than is this world, then it will not have been in vain, for mankind will have gained knowledge past all recompense, the ‘pearl of great price,’ for it will have solved the riddle of existence. . .” (5). Here Carrington recasts the war into revelation, insisting that belief in the actual return of the dead might be the path to healing rather than to madness.

Perhaps the best-known account of a dead soldier’s posthumous return at the time was that of Lodge, whose memoir of his dead son offers an instructive link to Woolf’s depiction of Septimus. Lodge’s memoir is written as non-fiction (whatever one may think of the truth of Lodge’s experiences and conclusions, he does appear to have had these experiences) and rather than being the story of a combatant it is an account of one of the many family members left behind. While Lodge was by all reports sane, and indeed a well-respected scientist and physics professor in his own time, he nevertheless insisted, as Septimus does, that the dead returned on numerous occasions to give messages to his family. In his memoir, Lodge details his family’s trips to mediums, where they felt certain that they had received

messages from their son, and works to illuminate for his readers the translation, he claimed, of the earthly body to the spiritual realms beyond. Throughout the work, Lodge insists that he has based his speculations on long study and careful observation, using his scientific background to question and to hypothesize about this experience before reaching any conclusion (a search for scientific proof that Woolf suggests as a kind of madness in *Septimus*). He claims, much no doubt to the comfort of many of his readers, that his conclusions are not based on wish fulfillment or speculation or anything, in other words, psychological or imaginary, but on what he has seen and witnessed and heard for himself—on the materiality of this experience. Lodge sees that it is a matter of urgency for his grieving readers to read these psychic experiences as actual communications from the dead. He shapes, inspires, and becomes a spokesperson for a longing held by many families, a need to translate the nightmarish vision of the soldier's body rotting in no-man's-land into a place of safety. Lodge tellingly writes that he must think of his son “not as lying near Ypres with all his work ended, but rather, after due rest and refreshment, continuing his noble and useful career in more peaceful surroundings, and quietly calling us his family from paralysing grief to resolute and high endeavour” (6).

Lodge is at pains in his memoir to illuminate the transitions between the material and the spiritual, to find ways to describe for his readers the moment of transition itself, the way the material body is transformed in death while maintaining some of its material existence. To understand how this works for Lodge, we can return to the idea of actualized metaphor. His explanations in many ways are attempts to illustrate how things we might read as figurative or intangible—a ghost, a spirit, a memory of the departed—are in fact material and real; indeed, for Lodge, the power and agency of his claim is lost if we read his experiences only as metaphoric expressions of his deep-seated grief, as indeed many of his contemporaries did. True or not, his book and his claims affected many across England and America, as *Raymond* rapidly became a bestseller. As if to reassure his readers of the truth of his findings, Lodge is at pains to present the material endurance of the body. While he does admit to the death of the body, and he does offer the traditional religious consolation that a spiritual body remains, he also posits a more nebulous zone of material continuity. *Raymond* reports, Lodge tells us, that a material presence endures,

one that in many respects seems to wipe clean the image of the decayed body in no-man's-land while still maintaining a kind of substantive existence. Lodge notes that Raymond "lives in a house—a house built of bricks—and there are trees and flowers, and the ground is solid. And if you kneel down in the mud, apparently you get your clothes soiled" (184). Here we have the body returned to a place of peace, the domestic scene, where dirt itself has been transformed back from the decayed bodies of comrades into ordinary mud that might soil the clothes. Raymond likewise maintains a body, reporting to his father that "my body's very similar to the one I had before. I pinch myself sometimes to see if it's real, and it is" (194). He notes he has eyelashes and eyebrows and tongue and teeth. Lodge makes clear that the essence of his personality is also preserved, as are his memories of life on earth, for "it appears to be a state which leaves personality and character and intelligence much where it was" (391). For Lodge and his family, and no doubt many others, the thought of a heavenly afterlife is not quite enough of a comfort; the body itself had to continue in some way, had to be mentally transferred from the field of battle to a different sort of bodily existence.¹⁶

At this point, it is possible, of course, to analyze Lodge's memoir metaphorically, to see it as speaking eloquently if unconsciously of his unresolved grief. We could then make the predictable turn to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," with perhaps a brief foray into his essay on the uncanny. My point here is certainly not to deny that we should read these works as examples of grief processes that have been interrupted. But by moving immediately—and only—to reveal the hidden psychological impulses of the works, we risk missing—and indeed may repress—how the questions surrounding death were experienced at the time. At the heart of Lodge's memoir lies the desire that these experiences not be read as manifestations of repressed longings, but as actual evidence of the continuation of the dead, as illuminations of the transition from life into death. We may certainly dismiss these ideas as nonsense—indeed, the popularity of Lodge's account was matched by the many books and articles that debunked his findings¹⁷—and the question of life after death obviously lies well beyond the scope of this article. But reading Lodge alongside Woolf reminds us of the very real burden, in 1914 and after, of trying, repeatedly, to understand the moment of death, to preserve a concrete space that might bestow for surviving soldiers

or for the family of the deceased a lost comrade's longed for body and personality—all that might have made him a real and particular physical presence. This desire was powerful enough after the war to disrupt metaphor itself, and not only for the mad: a way to take intense longing and appear to create a material answer to meet that longing, to say not “my grief is so strong I am hallucinating that the departed is speaking to me”—a statement that recognizes a metaphoric relationship between the two parts—but to say “my grief is so strong, and it has been answered by a material return.” We can see in this answer the collapse of metaphor, the grief becoming the actualization of the wish it contains. That we can read these actualizations as signs of madness (for Septimus) or as signs of wish-fulfillment melancholy (for Lodge), does not negate the fact that they had enormous force. Woolf shows, in fact, the ripple effects Septimus and his experiences—including his eventual suicide—have on the world within the novel. And the intense popularity of Lodge's memoir during and after the war suggests the tremendous power of his imagined actualization in the aftermath of the war's devastation. In the final sections of her novel, which I turn to in the next section, Woolf presents the far-reaching effects of these actualized metaphors, without either simply accepting them or dismissing them as nonsense, and at the same time offers a kind of workshop for metaphors, exploring how Septimus slowly rebuilds his understanding of metaphoric language, an essential task in the aftermath of grief and trauma, though not finally in time to save himself from his own actual death.

“Just look at it”

To conclude, I return to *Mrs. Dalloway*, bringing Lodge and company along, to see what it might mean to approach a particular moment by following the traces the actors have left behind. I propose an experiment, a close observation of Septimus's final scene in the novel, where we can trace how he slowly rebuilds his ability to understand metaphoric language, only to have it disintegrate again. Engaging in this active process—reassembling the social, in Latour's terms, we can also work to reassemble the traces left by Woolf, the reader, me, Evans, the language, the hat Septimus is decorating, and the novel itself. The process of building and dismantling metaphor offers a particularly rich field to consider, for this very

process—of making and recognizing connections, of linking the figurative to the literal, and of creating connections where none existed before—as well as observing how this process might break down and freeze at actualization, connects directly to the approach I wish to employ when describing the scene. And in particular, seeing how material objects create parts of Septimus's thoughts and indeed shape his language and behavior will help trace how a now absent material body might continue to exert an active presence.

In Septimus's final scene, he has a brief moment of what seems to be sanity. He begins with his eyes closed, and his earlier flights of fantasy, his flashbacks, his jumbled temporal sense, and the experience of actualized metaphor are gone, at least temporarily. Instead, he slowly begins to observe again:

He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then, gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. . . .None of these things moved. All were still; all were real. (138-139)

Here, he just looks at objects and names them, and his descriptions, with the exception of “green,” are kept to nouns. These are simply the objects, a quite literal picture of what he sees. As he notes, these objects are still and real, a welcome change from his earlier experiences when things always threatened to morph into other things, and thus the language is still and direct. We see Woolf here as well, offering the description of Septimus's description, shaping what the reader experiences of Septimus's experience. The reader comes into play, for it is the reader who must in part shape the meaning of this description by seeing the differences between this language and Septimus's previous language, by analyzing how Septimus is changing. The objects themselves create a kind of stability, granting a solidity to the scene and to Septimus himself, in part because they are not at the moment triggering him to make connections, only to observe. The material object becomes a source of comfort from its very ability to remain whole

and not to disappear. By noting these actors, I am also in this scene, shaping how the scene in this essay is presented, what words and images to consider, and what connections might be made.

Like Septimus, we can continue to reassemble connections from here. Once he sees the objects, he moves on to something more dangerous: the human body. He looks at Rezia, and he gradually observes her, starting with the face:

He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no, there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, . . . But there was nothing terrible about it, he assured himself, looking a second time, a third time at her face, her hands, for what was frightening or disgusting in her as she sat there in broad daylight, sewing? . . . Why then rage and prophesy? . . . Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins in the front of her dress. . .? Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers. (139)

The human body is far riskier for Septimus. Unlike the objects in the first passage, the body when alive moves, changes, is never stable or still. He takes in first Rezia's face, one feature at a time. Septimus works to keep himself in the present moment, to see the body as it is now, to divorce it from earlier bodies he might have seen in the war, bodies that were indeed deformed, bodies that bore terrible marks. He finds, though, nothing frightening, nothing disgusting. If he can stay in this present moment, and not collapse either different times or different bodies into Rezia's, he might escape all the torments he lists at the end of the passage, the sensations of drowning and burning, images that threatened all too often to become real in the trenches, and that earlier in the novel had seemed quite real to Septimus. Such images of burning and drowning also reflect the process he fears—that boundaries will dissolve, that the connections between things will collapse and run together. He arrives at the end of the passage at a new metaphor, one that creates a connection but not the feared transposition: Rezia, the hat, and the movement between them suggest to Septimus a coverlet of flowers. While the word "cover" evokes a

covering over of the torments or perhaps a burial, it also offers a simple metaphoric expression that does not immediately threaten to become actual. Rezia is not morphing into something else; for Septimus she stays Rezia and yet is connected to this other image. By gradually showing Septimus's tentative rebuilding of a metaphoric structure, Woolf shapes her own rebuilding, her creation the recreation of her character's linguistic and mental structures. Rezia's face and body become actors within this set of associations as well; Septimus for the first time in the novel is able to see this face and body, her features as-they-are exerting an active influence on his perceptions, rather than having only his perceptions shape the world—a solipsism that Woolf indicates as madness. The body is seen here as whole and safe, a picture that suggests an accurate image of the scene, and that also recalls the clarity with which Lodge and others pictured their lost loved ones, insisting that the body was like this—whole and recovered. The scene only becomes a representation of recovery, however, when the reader notes these changes and connections, the reader too defining how the observations unfold. As critic, I am again in the scene, selecting the parts to reassemble, shaping how we might read them.

Septimus begins to take more risks, and the hat itself begins to exert more influence. He takes the hat from Rezia, and he calls it “an organ grinder's monkey's hat” (139), a kind of quasi metaphoric connection between the hat in his hands and a hat in his memory.¹⁸ Rezia and Septimus then begin to create and change the hat together, adding decorations that shape the way the hat appears, and this process, and the hat itself, changes the mood between the couple. Rezia adds a flower, and Septimus insists the hat's owner will now look “like a pig at a fair” (140), an appropriate simile created by Septimus, and one that does not threaten to collapse, to make Mrs. Peters actually morph into a pig. He then begins to change the actual hat, adding “odd colours” and “taking up this and that.” He finishes his design, then gives it to his wife to stitch together, but “she must be very, very careful, he said, to keep it just as he had made it” (140). Septimus has entered the creative process, adding odd things together, making connections among different parts, but he wants, somewhat ominously, those parts to stay fixed, to remain as he had made them. As Rezia sews the design together, Septimus suddenly finds a new

linguistic freedom, as if the making of the hat helped prevent the actualizations and reawakened his metaphoric understanding:

When she sewed, he thought, she made a sound like a kettle on the hob; bubbling, murmuring, always busy, her strong little pointed fingers pinching and poking; her needle flashing straight. The sun might go in and out, on the tassels, on the wallpaper, but he would wait, he thought, stretching out his feet, looking at his ringed sock at the end of the sofa; he would wait in this warm place, this pocket of still air, which one comes on at the edge of a wood sometimes in the evening, when, because of a fall in the ground, or some arrangement of the trees (one must be scientific above all, scientific), warmth lingers, and the air buffets the cheek like the wing of a bird. (140)

He begins with a simile linking Rezia's sound to a kettle. The imagery grows as it unfolds, and in the first part of the passage, he seems to be able to flow between the scene and its objects (the needle, the tassels, the wallpaper, the sock, the sofa) and the images that touch them (the sun, the imagined woods, the trees, the air, the wing of a bird). He seems here to navigate successfully the different sides of the metaphoric language, to move from the reality of the scene to the imagery that it evokes, without having them collapse together. The parenthetical note on being scientific, however, unsettles this journey, reminding the reader as it does of Septimus's rigidity, of the way his imaginations threaten to become actual. We might say the objects can here exert a more natural agency; while Septimus's earlier terrors about trees coming to life and objects having a kind of animated and personified power might seem to grant more activity to objects, all this activity occurred within Septimus's own mind, rather than actually granting objects independent force. Here they can again exert their own influence, becoming actors in this network. When Rezia shows him the completed hat, he is delighted: "never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters' hat. 'Just look at it,' he said" (141). Septimus can look at objects—and even create them—and this looking and this creation and these connections are not frozen but an active mobile process. Just looking at the hat does not rob Septimus of agency or creative power, but instead becomes a way for the character, as well as Woolf and

the reader, to experience the object and its web of associations, to see how the object itself creates these associations, and how we shape the object from within our own position in the web.

For Septimus, however, these connections can only be traced momentarily. As the most feared and the most wished for actualization begins to erupt, Septimus's linguistic mobility begins to slow. The return of the dead lies at the heart of actualization, a crossroads of imagined returns, a vividly pictured material presence that is nevertheless out of reach. Such an imagined return becomes the final stumbling point for Septimus. As Septimus recalls his sense of isolation after the death of his friend Evans, the objects in the room return to stillness, and his ability to make connections is either disrupted or simply blocked as the fear and hunger for the return of Evans emerges:

He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out—but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; on Mrs. Filmer's sitting-room sofa. As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen.

“Evans!” he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. The screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard remained to him. (142)

Like watching a film in reverse, we can see Septimus retreat from and reverse his connections. He is alone; the objects make no connection to him. He may picture himself on a bleak eminence, but he pushes such images away, insisting he is in the scene, unconnected. His earlier visions of faces and beauty and the voices of the dead are now blocked by a screen, both in his own mind, and by the material screen within the room. He receives no answer to his call to Evans, and while he somewhat halfheartedly identifies the voices of the dead, he connects them now with a mouse or a curtain, not with the actualization he might desire or fear. These objects remain; Evans does not. The objects have again become still and simple, and Septimus's new ability to recognize webs of meaning among his thoughts and the world stalls. In the rest of this scene, one that will culminate in Septimus's suicide, he lurches

between a radically chaotic perceptual field, where his earlier patterns of metaphoric disruptions arise again, and a colder, more analytic observing eye that while more based on his surroundings also seems empty of meaning. The idea that the dead might return as material presences remains a powerful (though somewhat obscured) actor within this scene. Its continued manifestations for Septimus and for many after WWI suggest an enormously influential nexus of meaning, a place or a moment or an idea that at once becomes the meeting place of memory and the physical world, of metaphoric connection, of the precarious and blurred journey between what we think and imagine and what we see in the world.

Beyond Context

What, though, might all this networking get us? What is gained by seeing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Raymond* (and Septimus and Lodge and the hat and the metaphors. . .) as agents acting in a web of associations? Here we can return to the particular set of actors I have traced and see them as mobile combinations without freezing them only at a particular moment in time. We might travel among questions of historical specificity and the aesthetics of metaphor without treating either as an explanatory context. Focusing on process allows us to recognize an aspect of Latour often misunderstood: the “network” in Actor-Network Theory applies less to what is studied than to how it is studied. By tracing associations of actors, we may end up describing a network, but Latour means less that we should read for these networks than that we should network to read: the approach, in other words, should itself be a network (Latour 142). Exploring process in turn allows us to read texts again and again, taking responsibility for our readings in part by seeing ourselves as part of them. Thus looking back at the approach in this article, it is possible to follow associations among the more formalist questions of metaphor, for Septimus but also for Woolf and Lodge, and yet also to historicize those metaphors (and their actualizations) both on the individual level (why these metaphors for Septimus?) and also for a larger group (why these metaphors for so many?). Objects, characters, and images act within a particular text, as well as outside it, shaping each other, creating the social that might exist, as Rita Felski notes, “only in its instantiations, in the sometimes foreseeable, sometimes unpredictable ways in which ideas, texts, images, people, and

objects couple and uncouple, attach and break apart" (578). The texts and characters and objects are not within an historical box but are seen in their activity, in their interactions and agency and movement.

Reading as network in turn allows a temporal mobility for the text itself, helping to show us how particular works might, as Felski says, "resonate across time," which we can do without making them atemporal aesthetic objects (575). *Mrs. Dalloway* continues to exert a force in part because it adeptly connects itself to and captures so many of the dramatic shifts in the post-war period. Septimus himself has profoundly shaped images of WWI vets, as well as how we read the traumatic after-effects of this conflict. Lodge at the time provided a new world view for many of his readers, and we can even say that Raymond continued to exert a powerful force from the other side, though we may not view this force in the way his father did. Indeed, the idea that the dead might return—the central actualization I have traced in this essay—acts as both a metaphor for an actor's continued power across time, as well as a particular example of such power.

Tracing actor networks in turn may give literary critics a way to read texts horizontally rather than vertically, a move that potentially avoids placing the critic outside or above the scene, staring down with knowing, all seeing eyes. As with understanding a metaphor, one must stay mobile to trace such actor-networks, not seeing one side or system as the key to understanding the whole, but seeing the process itself—the activity of making and remaking connections—as the central task. Woolf herself offers an image of such a process, describing a kind of continued ghostly influence that resonates out as a network beyond the grave, confronting us with the slippery and always mobile passage between the murky world of metaphorical truth and our material experience. In one of the final sections concerning *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf writes, "[Clarissa] believed (for all her skepticism) that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death" (149). To read this passage, we need to see Woolf's image as interacting with—and indeed pushing against—the alternative reading that Lodge offers, understanding

this haunting as both an imaginative possibility, and a powerful, active desire that this imaginative vision be made real.

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¹ Woolf, of course, creates Septimus’ delusion, so the imaginative vision is two-fold: both a delusion that seems actual for Septimus and Woolf’s creation of the experience for the reader. The contradiction implicit in a literary depiction of an actualization is an issue I take up later in the essay.

² See, for example, Helen Sword’s *Ghostwriting Modernism*, which offers a fascinating exploration of the unexpected connections between modernism and the various techniques of mediums.

³ I draw on Latour’s provocative and intriguing theories throughout this essay. I do not seek to apply every aspect of his theory to the literary arena, however, and nor do I claim that my approach is a complete application of his theory. See footnote 4 for more information on the critical response to actor-network theory.

⁴ Latour summarizes Actor-Network Theory in *Reassembling the Social*. Latour’s theories have received some attention from literary critics, particularly in Science and Technology Studies, theories of the posthuman, and science fiction studies. Rita Felski recently explored Latour’s latest work in “‘Context Stinks!’”; see T. Hugh Crawford, “Networking the (non)Human: *Moby-Dick*, Matthew Fontaine Maury, and Bruno Latour.” *Configurations* 5.1 (1997): 1-21, for an examination of Latour’s earlier work in relation to *Moby-Dick*. Latour’s work has come under fire for eliding power relations and hierarchies, especially in regards to postcolonial critique; see for example Amit Ray and Evan Selinger, “*Jagannath’s Saligram: On Bruno Latour and Literary Critique after Postcoloniality.*” *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 18.2 (Jan. 2008).

⁵ For a discussion of this case study, see Ilse Gurbrich-Simitis, “From Concretism to Metaphor: Thoughts on Some Theoretical and Technical Aspects of the Psychoanalytic Work with Children of Holocaust Survivors.”

⁶ In the third section of this article, “Metaphors Made Real,” I offer citations on the psychological phenomenon of actualized metaphor.

⁷ Just to be entirely clear: I am in no way denying that Septimus and Lodge suffer from unresolved grief symptoms, nor do I question that Septimus has hallucinations. Woolf herself was of course a committed atheist, and I am also not implying that she believed in spiritualism. I am asking, via Latour, what difference it makes to consider the force of Lodge’s and Septimus’ beliefs, even if we believe they are mistaken.

⁸ Rita Felski writes on Latour’s theories and their implications for literary criticism in “Context Stinks!”

⁹ See Stanley Fish’s well-known work *Is There A Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*.

¹⁰ Throughout this essay, I borrow Latour’s terms from Actor-Network Theory, including “actor-network,” “webs of associations,” “actors,” “tracing” associations and “reassembling the social.”

¹¹ The critical work on *Mrs. Dalloway* is voluminous and has been summarized in many other places. For the articles I reference here, see Karen DeMeester, “Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*”; Bonnie Kime Scott, in “‘The Word Split Its Husk’: Woolf’s Double Vision of Modernist Language,” discusses Woolf’s use of metaphor; Suzette Henke, “Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith: An Analysis of Paraphrenic and Schizophrenic Use of Language.” For more on Woolf and trauma, see the recent collection by Suzette Henke and David Eberly, *Virginia Woolf and Trauma. Embodied Texts*; Ariela Freedman, *Death, Men, and Modernism: Trauma and Narrative in British Fiction from Hardy to Woolf*; Patricia Moran, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*; Kaley Joyes explores witnessing and the limits of recovery in “Failed Witnessing in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.” For more on Septimus’ use of language, see Jean M. Wyatt, “*Mrs. Dalloway*: Literary Allusion as Structural Metaphor”; J. Hillis Miller reads the novel as a kind of All Souls Day, with the past returning in a ghostly form: “Virginia Woolf’s All

Souls Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” and Christine Froula looks at mourning in “Mrs. Dalloway’s Postwar Elegy: Women, War, and the Art of Mourning.”

¹² Critics over the years have disagreed on the demarcation between the sane and insane mind in the novel, with some arguing for a clear distinction and other noting the links. A definitive answer is impossible, though it is worth noting that Leonard Woolf saw Woolf’s periods of sanity and insanity as distinct. See *Beginning Again*, 78.

¹³ All quotations from *Mrs. Dalloway* taken from the 2005 Harvest/Harcourt edition.

¹⁴ A few critics explore actualizations, particularly in relation to women’s writing. Margaret Homans, in *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-century Women’s Writing*, considers how figurative language may become literal at moments in novels by women writers, and connects these moments to women’s identification with a non-symbolic order. See also Jean Wyatt, who links literalizations in Toni Morrison to unresolved traumas: *Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism*, 67.

¹⁵ See in particular Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*.

¹⁶ Indeed, Lodge goes into detail about how damage to the body might be repaired in the afterlife. When limbs are lost, for example, they appear to re-grow after death. More reassuring still, Raymond notes that “when anybody’s blown to pieces,” they are still able to reconstitute their bodies, to bring together the scattered pieces and make them whole again (197). Thus Lodge, or Raymond, returns to the idea of an ideal material body: one that has lost the vulnerabilities of the actual body but that nevertheless maintains everything about the person that a loved one might value.

¹⁷ See for example Walter Cook. *Reflections on “Raymond”: An Appreciation and Analysis*. London: Grant Richards LTD., 1917, among many others.

¹⁸ Mark Hussey explores how Woolf encodes ideas of reading through symbols and metaphors, such as sewing or hat-making. See *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf’s Fiction*.