Without Septimus, Clarissa is not Virginia
Without Septimus, Clarissa is not Virginia  

by Bob Gillespie  

Published in May 1925, the whole narrative of Virginia Woolf’s novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, covers one single day in June 1923 weaving telepathically in and out of the thoughts of twenty or so characters. There are no chapters, Woolf consigning her stream of consciousness to a single out-of-breath, literary ‘burn’.  

Clarissa Dalloway, having married long ago the staid Richard Dalloway instead of her adolescent sweetheart, the soulful Peter Walsh, and particularly aware of her role in London society, is preparing a party at her home in Westminster that same evening. The author abandons Clarissa, her friends and family on four occasions throughout the novel to write about the haunted Septimus Warren Smith. Without hope of ending his mourning for his deceased friend and Commanding Officer, Evans, Septimus’s life is tormented by Traumatic Neurosis contracted during the Great War.  

I discuss below how Woolf’s narrative, although it antedates Jacques Derrida’s work by forty years, can be read in the light of his criticism. Derrida describes how literary characters, such as Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, watch and judge others at times while they are themselves unseen: he has called this the ‘visor effect’\(^1\) in his book, *Spectres of Marx* (1994). Nicholas Royle’s *The Uncanny* explains the importance of the haunted in approaching literature and, in this case, of the binary opposition *presence/absence*:
If deconstruction is inseparable from a logic of spectrality it is because the trace or *différance* is ghostly: all language, every manifestation of meaning, is the phantom effect of a trace which is neither present nor absent, but which is the *condition of possibility of the opposition of presence and absence*. The trace cannot become present, or absent, in its essence: it is the revenant at the origin². *(italics mine)*

I also explore how Woolf gives time such a strange sense by referring to the peels of Big Ben heard throughout Westminster as ‘leaden circles’, and this in the context of Derrida’s discussion of Hamlet’s line, ‘The time is out of joint’³; and how Woolf’s anonymous and telepathic⁴ narrator brings the reader to witness Septimus’s trajectory of depression, neurosis and suicide. His illness stirs a wish to die, a *Death Drive*, which is described by Sigmund Freud matching the author’s own suicide sixteen years after she published *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Finally, I recount how Clarissa and Septimus are doubles of two different facets of Virginia Woolf herself, one urbane, elegant and sane and the other demonic, dowdy, deranged and haunted; and this essay finishes with a discussion of the literary oppositions which characterise them both.

**Visors and leaden circles of time**

Derrida calls seeing without being seen, the ‘visor effect’, writing in 1994 of this metaphor that it depicts the behaviour of *Hamlet’s* ghost:

...this thing which meanwhile looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony. We will call this the visor effect: we do not see who
looks at us.

Derrida’s spectral visor portrays ghosts which watch undisturbed: it is ‘the supreme insignia of power, the power to see without being seen’. Clarissa and Septimus walk like ghosts at a distance from each other in a fictional darkness, and Woolf often stations them in the novel where they can watch without being seen: no one notices Septimus listening to a certain Watkiss, with a roll of lead piping, jokingly summoning the ‘Proime Minister’s kyar’ in Piccadilly, nor Clarissa coming to the window of a flower shop, ‘her arms full of sweet peas’ looking onto her beloved Bond Street, where Septimus is watching the same intriguing black car. However, behind their visors, Clarissa and Septimus cope with isolation and loneliness too. Septimus becomes an outcast when he discovers the disappearance of honesty and kindness around him. His madness brings anguish about his lack of feeling for his wife, and he despises himself for it. On the other hand, Clarissa, behind her visor, lives a marriage not of love, but of reason, where she fears that she is losing control of her daughter, Elizabeth, to a rude history teacher. So, Clarissa is torn between the joys of fashion and society parties on the one hand, and gloom, obsessive soul searching and fault-finding on the other.

In this book with only one chapter, Woolf gives time a strange but useful essence: the chimes of Big Ben resound over Westminster in ‘leaden circles’ to provide tempo to the narrative. Like a metronome informing text and reader, they ‘dissolve in the air’ on the hour, marking the passage of time in this book, which Virginia Woolf, in her preoccupation with time, had originally entitled, The Hours.

She meta-writes:-
The word *time* split its husk’, ‘hard, white, imperishable words’ fly to ‘attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time*.  

Her clocks shred, slice, divide and subdivide time, nibbling away at this June day*10*. Derrida quotes Hamlet’s one-liner, ‘the time is out of joint’: it provides a similar sense of disarticulated, dislocated, undone, beside-itself, deranged, off-its-hinges time; but the ‘leaden circles’, when they appear, do provide the essential heart beat to this, Woolf’s ‘immortal ode to Time’.

**Haunting and im-possible mourning**

Septimus, like a ghost from the future, declares, ‘I will kill myself’*11*: for Derrida;  

A ‘phantom comes at least as much from the future as from the past...no one can be sure whether, by returning, it testifies to a living past or to a living future’*12*.  

Septimus’s Italian wife, Rezia (Lucrezia), found the past easier: she bewails the loss of her young, poetic pre-war Septimus, who is now no longer the lover she married. In fact, Rezia believes she wants Septimus dead, thinking that he ‘would not kill himself’ anyway*13*. She hates the hard, cruel, wicked things he says; he talks to himself; he talks to dead men from park seats, but she can tell no one*14*.  

Rezia cries out by Regent’s Park fountain, ‘I am alone, I am alone’*15* which, for all its constative phrasing, rings far more as a performative next to her grumble, ‘I can’t stand it any longer’*16*. A long way from her family living in Italy, she endures her predicament alone: ashamed of her deranged husband, she does what she can to protect her dignity; after all, Rezia is more hunted than haunted, because Holmes, one of her husband’s doctors, finds this woman worth a ‘friendly push’
to ‘get by’.

Woolf had made a lengthy note of the etymology and potential sources surrounding the name of Septimus Warren Smith which includes Great-War soldiers she knew, who could have been models for this character\(^\text{17}\) and she writes:-

> London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents thought to distinguish them\(^\text{18}\).

Distinguished or not, in *The Ear of the Other* (1985), Derrida imparts a ghostly mark to a name, writing that anyway it carries death; that it is haunted, alone surviving as an engraving on the gravestone outliving the corpse below it:

> ‘The name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death’\(^\text{19}\).

He takes a matter-of-fact view of ghosts too:

> Of course they do not exist...so what?\(^\text{20}\)...The logic of spectrality is inseparable from that of deconstruction\(^\text{21}\)...There are phantom effects even if phantoms do not exist\(^\text{22}\).

The narrator explains how Septimus and Evans used to play ‘like two dogs on a hearth-rug’\(^\text{23}\). As a result, after Evans’s death, Septimus cannot let Evans go; the dead Evans still remains resolutely ‘other’. Derrida explains that mourning depends *not* on the other in us, but *on us*. ‘Successful’ mourning ‘assimilates’ the dead other and entails his or her disappearance, but this does not show devotion. On the other hand, ‘unsuccessful’ mourning allows the dead other to remain
other: out of loyalty, the dead other does not disappear but remains as a ghost within. Thus, mourning is im-possible; neither, or both, possible and impossible. Septimus cannot let Evans go to successfully mourn him, as this would amount to disloyalty, so, in loyalty, the un-mourned Evans remains a ghost, as the other in Septimus. Although Rezia tries to reason her husband that everyone has friends who were killed in the Great War, Septimus cannot get over Evans’s death: in obsessive fidelity, he is himself haunted, keeping Evans’s ghost alive within himself.

**Telepathy and Freud**

From Nicholas Royle’s text, *The Uncanny*, we read:

> Phantom texts are fleeting, continually leading us away like Hamlet’s ghost to some other scene which we, as readers, cannot anticipate.

Clarissa’s erstwhile suitor, Peter Walsh, walking behind his own visor in Regent’s Park, also leads us away from this desperate scene of a young couple in an ‘awful fix’ on this fine June morning, where Rezia tries to talk Septimus out of his inattention. With intimate knowledge, Woolf’s narrator reveals the feelings and behaviour of these characters, telling how Septimus hears a sparrow chirping piercingly in Greek ‘from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk’ – as indeed, in a moment of madness, Virginia Woolf herself once had. *The Uncanny* quotes Dorrit Cohn on such telepathic narration:

> “narrative fiction is the only literary genre, as well as the only kind of narrative, in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed.”
and Nicholas Royle adds:

There is uncanny knowledge. Someone is telling us what someone else is thinking, feeling or perceiving\textsuperscript{31}.

Such telepathic narrative tunnels into emotions, revealing for instance Septimus’s thoughts, which regard Rezia as simple and impulsive, but which also regret \textit{not feeling enough} for her\textsuperscript{32}, calling to mind Woolf’s first mental breakdown on the death of her mother when, as a girl, she wrote in her diary:

I remember turning aside at mother’s bed, when she had died, & Stella took us in, to laugh, secretly, at the nurse crying. She's pretending, I said: aged 13. & was afraid I was \textit{not feeling enough}\textsuperscript{33}. (italics mine)

Tunnelling also unveils Septimus’s guilt over ‘very reasonably’\textsuperscript{34} (sic) \textit{not feeling enough} upon Evans’s death, and he concludes that human nature must have condemned him to death for his crime: spectres jeer at him over the rail of his bed in the early hours of the morning about how he married Rezia without loving her, about how he lied to, and seduced her. The reader unearths the thoughts of Woolf’s protagonists and listens in to their ‘free indirect discourse’: for example, into Septimus’s inner conversation shortly before his suicide:

\textit{Human nature, in short, was on him – the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him}\textsuperscript{35}.

This construction appears unusual because it accompanies intimate thought reported by a narrator with opinion presumably added on by the protagonist. A similar example occurs in Clarissa’s narrative: ‘Times without number Clarissa had visited Evelyn Whitbread in a nursing home. Was Evelyn ill again?’\textsuperscript{36}
Septimus tries to cope time and again with his insanity: watching the Prime Minister’s black car in Piccadilly, the world ‘wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames’\(^{37}\); he is weighed down by the wickedness around him and wants to tell the Prime Minister the meaning of the world\(^{38}\) which is clamouring, ‘kill yourself’\(^{39}\). He is alone, condemned, deserted, but there is a luxury in it; an ‘isolation full of sublimity’; a freedom, even from Rezia, which those who are attached can never know.

Septimus’s Doctor Holmes only heightens his patient’s despair by making snap judgements and talking over his head to Rezia. Holmes does not seem to care about his patient’s ‘funk’\(^{40}\): he quite likes Rezia though, and isn’t above, as we know, giving her a friendly ‘push’ to ‘get by’.

In the end, Sigmund Freud’s *Death Drive* entraps Septimus’s unhinged mind. Freud describes it in his 1921 article *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*\(^{41}\) published four years before the appearance of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The article was known to James Strachey and to Leonard Woolf, who were Freud’s UK translator and Hogarth Press publisher, although Virginia, frustrated with psychiatrists, refused to read Freud’s work\(^{42}\). Many soldiers suffered from Traumatic Neurosis on their return from the Great War trenches of 1914-18, and Freud explains how a fixation on such a distressing event can produce subjective suffering when a patient is repetitively taken back in his or her dreams to that particular calamity: he writes that the unpleasant, repressed matter is replayed time and again by the unconscious in an unsuccessful attempt to evacuate it. Freud explains how the repetitive nature of such traumatic dreams led him to discover the idea of
the *Death Drive* as an unconscious impulse to restore a prior state of quietude, such as that of the unborn in the womb, which amounts to taking refuge in death itself\(^43\).

**Of doctors and suicide**

Sir William Bradshaw, Septimus’s consulting psychiatrist, is to attend Clarissa’s dinner that evening. He believes in ‘proportion’ for the treatment of mental illness and concludes that Warren Smith would be better off committed to an insane asylum, where they would ‘teach’ him to rest: Sir William serves England by isolating her lunatics. Septimus, however, has other plans: he hopes that, if he admits his crime, this torturer will let him off: but alas, as much as he tries to, he admits to nothing because he just cannot remember what his crime is. On the other hand, for Sir William, all is clear, Septimus attaches meaning to words of a symbolical kind and has threatened to kill himself: he is therefore very ill indeed; he needs solitude, silence, rest without friends, without books, without messages for six months in order to ‘earn’ a sense of ‘proportion’\(^44\).

Amazingly, Septimus gets better after visiting Bradshaw: later, at home, he and Rezia joke happily together for the first time in ages. As if rediscovering the present moment, he finds himself concentrating on her hat-making and, to her delight, suggests other colours\(^45\). The hat turns out well and Septimus feels proud. Then, in Rezia’s absence, he notices that the visions and the voices of the dead have gone. What miracle has happened? Yet, Bradshaw *must* have him removed to a mental asylum. ‘Must? Why must?’ asks Septimus. ‘Because you talked of killing yourself,’ replies Rezia on her return, and that is the moment
when Septimus realises that they have him in their power.

Where are his writings of conversations with Shakespeare, of messages from the dead? ‘Burn them!’ he cries. But the ‘repulsive brute’, Holmes of the ‘blood-red nostrils’ and scorn on his lips, appears at the door to escort him to the asylum, scoffing, ‘In a funk eh?’

Septimus opens the window and sits on the sill. He doesn’t want to die: life is good; the sun is hot, but Holmes is at the door. ‘I’ll give it you,’ he cries and throws himself out, mortally impaling himself on the landlady’s railings below. ‘That coward’, is all Holmes can find to splutter in this post-war Britain associating ‘shell shock’ with cowardice.

Was Septimus not a literary vehicle to deal with Woolf’s own demons? Jacques Derrida states that: ‘Everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other’\textsuperscript{46}, so Woolf would seem indeed to have written with her own ghosts when she created Septimus. Also, does being told that one is ‘in a funk’, or that one lacks a sense of ‘proportion’, not possibly evoke Woolf’s personal experiences during psychiatric treatment? Might some doctor in a lunatic asylum have asked of the young Virginia Stephen, the seventh of eight children who had lost their mother, ‘in a funk, eh?’ or have given the sensitive young woman a ‘friendly push’ to ‘get by’? Bad experiences over the years with doctors and institutions brought her to turn down treatment for a bout of neurosis just before her suicide in 1941\textsuperscript{47}.

Like Septimus, Woolf had even tried to throw herself out of a window. In the first draft of her novel, Clarissa Dalloway was to kill herself during the party, but in the
end, Virginia Woolf created a different double to pay that price: a poet, a visionary and not a woman, but a man; Septimus and not Clarissa, the polished hostess whom Woolf reclaims for life through his suicide, temporarily reclaiming her own life through language whilst somehow shrouding her discomfort behind a male *doppelgänger*.

But, sixteen years later, her pockets laden with stones, Virginia drowned herself in the River Ouse not far from the bottom of her Sussex garden⁴⁸, writing in a last note to Leonard, her husband:

![Image of a handwritten note]

*Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can’t concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do.*

**Doubles and binaries**

Woolf wrote that she had a *sanity/insanity* theme in mind in her diary on 8\textsuperscript{th} October 1922:

‘I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side-by-side’⁴⁹.

This was to become her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her idea at the time of writing was reputedly that Clarissa and Septimus should double each other, and Clarissa indeed thinks at her party:

But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow like him – the young man
(Septimus) who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they go on living. (italics mine)

Fictional doubles are shadowy projections who impersonate other fictional or real characters to show up personality or behavioural traits. As his double, Clarissa mirrors Septimus’s suicide through her own body: her green silk gown is in flames and her body burns; she watches the ground flash up at her; she follows the suffocation, the blackness, his impalement in slow motion, a final ominous thud, thud, thud in his brain. At all events, Clarissa’s bi-sexual relations with Sally and Richard mimic Septimus’s with Rezia and, possibly, with Evans, suggesting relationships impersonating Woolf’s own experience. Moreover, if Septimus plays out Woolf’s contemplated suicide, the neurotic Clarissa plays Woolf too with an urbane taste for glittering, London-society parties and an evaluative distance from others. Finally then, sane Clarissa and mad Septimus taken together appear to double the various facets of Virginia Woolf herself, but in different ways.
There are other impersonators, notably Sally Seton, who doubles Woolf’s aristocratic lover, Vita Sackville West\textsuperscript{53}, the relationship between Clarissa and Sally mimicking this former closeness between Virginia and Vita\textsuperscript{54}.

Binary oppositions are contrasting pairs, such as \textit{sanity/insanity} or \textit{presence/absence}. The anthropological studies of Claude Levi-Strauss in Brazil during the 1950s described behavioural oppositions between nature and culture in native tribes: then, in 1966, Jacques Derrida delivered a hard edged critique of Levi-Strauss’s work to challenge structuralism about grasping a centre which anchors but which leaves no slack or margin of movement\textsuperscript{55}. And Woolf’s is indeed a binary ‘world seen by the sane and the insane side-by-side’. On the one hand, where Clarissa appears \textit{sane}, rational, even calculating, she is nonetheless depressed and neurotic: however, she knows how to help herself; when she is down, she throws a party. On the other hand, the \textit{insane other} in this \textit{sanity/insanity} binary, is Septimus, the lunatic who sees ghosts and talks to the dead: even his doctors believe he is ripe for a lunatic asylum.

At her party, Clarissa experiences a moment of epiphany: she discovers death, of which she is terrified, through new eyes. Sir William Bradshaw has just spoken of a young man who killed himself today. She listens outraged at this rude doctor talking about \textit{death} at \textit{her} party, and then discovers that the dead young man had in fact thwarted this pretentious character from destroying him in a lunatic asylum:

\begin{quote}
Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness
\end{quote}
drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.\textsuperscript{56}

In Woolf’s text, Gerald Doherty finds ‘relentless endeavours to rehabilitate death as a respectable figure’. Indeed Woolf presents death as content, as a theme rather than as a no-thing, as ‘total absence which can never be subsumed into a function of presence’. She often attempts in her writing to recover death for values which align it with the forces of life, and, once death is represented as a friend, ‘its menacing alterity is neutralised and suppressed’. Her concept of death as sacrificial expenditure is transformed into fulfilment of life; into completion rather than into termination. Septimus dies so that both Clarissa and Virginia Woolf herself may live on.\textsuperscript{57}

Close reading reveals binary oppositions which can be destabilised by reversing them; this is to say by swapping the term hitherto privileged by culture or nature with the underprivileged one; the effect is to expose power hierarchies which may be unacknowledged or taken-for-granted. What is at work in this text in reversing the \textit{sanity/insanity} binary opposition? Where insanity normally foreshadows suicide as demonic, the idea is reversed to become good when Clarissa accepts that (the \textit{Death Drive} behind) this suicide embraces stillness: she even feels reborn through the ‘beauty’ of his ‘sacrifice’. Shakespeare's words from \textit{Cymbelline}, ‘Fear no more the heat of the sun’\textsuperscript{58}, come to her as a coming to terms with death. Through this violent reversal, Septimus’s suicide saves Clarissa and possibly, thanks to her writing, Woolf herself, from the abyss. This is more than just a reversal of structure: it touches on the metaphysical implications of suicide; a fierce opening occurs in these lines which pulls apart
and rebrands the very idea of suicide to the point of aporia. Come on, surely suicide can’t be good! This violent reversal would probably meet Jacques Derrida’s criteria when he stipulates in *Positions*:

> To be effective and simply as its mode of practice, deconstruction creates new notions or concepts not to synthesize the terms in opposition but to mark their difference, undecidability and eternal interplay.\(^{59}\)

Derrida’s writing indicates that he goes further than Gayatri Spivak’s comment in her preface to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, where she writes that Derrida’s reading seeks:

> To ... reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed.\(^{60}\)

Another binary opposition, this time of presence/absence, shows Clarissa able to plunge happily into her party project, to become involved and to control; all of this allowing her to consciously live in the ‘now’, in the present time, in effect, to exist. But, although she derives joy from her Westminster parties, she does not generate trust in others and feels isolated as a result: that is when she absents herself; when she dives into memories of her girlhood in the country house at Bourton; when she gets doubts about rejecting Peter Walsh’s marriage proposal and regrets the end of her love-affair with Sally Seton. Similarly, Clarissa’s double, Septimus, absents himself for a similar reason in a past marked by secret mourning for a poetic youth with his sweetheart, Miss Isabel Pole. At all events, his psychiatric condition isolates him in his world, where he appears both absent from people and from the present moment. It follows that he is stranded and
dependent upon Rezia to manage his presence, even though he cannot ‘feel for
her’. Septimus is, however, present for one sane moment when he concentrates
on her hat-making and procures a feeling of joy for both immediately after his
visit to Sir William Bradshaw who has frightened him by deciding his internment.
Another reversal appears at this point: where such a threat of internment might
be expected to send Septimus into an even deeper ‘funk’, in effect to aggravate
his absence, it provokes the opposite, a short, joyful spell of fully sharing
presence with Rezia. Also, Septimus’s past is marred by a heroic, but rash,
decision to volunteer to fight in the Great War; to become, in reality, little more
than cannon fodder in a gross misjudgement of the meaning of national
greatness. Here, the text reverses the ‘resident hierarchy’ of the binary because
self-sacrifice in the defence of one’s country would appear righteous to Woolf’s
contemporaries, but her narrative presents the consequences of the Great War
as infernal and unjust: as a post-war political statement, this opposition may
appear unrestrained.

Another reversal occurs when Septimus discovers terrified that Rezia has taken
off her wedding ring: he thinks in agony that their marriage is finished…but, oddly
enough, he thinks this with relief too! The narrator reveals that Septimus is now
free, as it was decreed that he, the ‘Lord of men’, should be ‘free and alone’61,
and a marital fidelity/infidelity binary opposition is more or less brutally reversed
to exalt deliverance from the matrimonial bond?

By marrying Richard, Clarissa enters a male-dominated society: known as Mrs.
Richard Dalloway, she becomes a ‘no name’, forfeiting her own identity. In a
male/female binary she struggles under the weight of male social conformity and tradition feeling isolated from female society. Clarissa at Bourton lived as a young woman in a matriarchal family where she loved garden flowers and dressed in country chiffons. Now she has lost this freedom, she tries to reaffirm her female existence by acting the perfect hostess. Again, the text reverses this opposition, causing Septimus to rely on Rezia as the rational one, who thinks for both of them as if she were the male in the couple: by the same reversal, his own behaviour is emotional, frivolous, spontaneous; he cries over beauty or sorrow, which would presumably appear as female behaviour: a reader may recognise political comment in such a reversal.

The beauty of Woolf’s prose exhibits marks of ‘Bloomsbury’ modernism with flashbacks, fine language, sexual ambivalence and stream-of-consciousness writing. But facets of her text appear to go farther than modernism revealing a striking congruence between her writing and Derrida’s criticism of half a century later concerning spectrality, doubles and binary oppositions.

Moreover, she skilfully combines Clarissa and Septimus to create a single insane and socially adept ‘double-double’ of Virginia Woolf herself, the notion I take for the title of this essay. Woolf possibly created these doubles not only to control her own demons but even to relive London life as a surrogate from her country home: her anxious text was possibly the remedy to her poisonous nervous illness; Mrs. Dalloway appears as Virginia Woolf’s pharmakon, where Nicholas Royle describes its characteristics, writing of Derrida’s deliberations on shopping lists:-
The *pharmakon* of writing can aid *and* efface memory: writing can be a way of remembering but also of forgetting\(^6\).

Furthermore, a number of the twenty or so characters in the novel potentially impersonate someone in her life, showing her extreme sensitivity in observing others, and making her the extraordinary storyteller she was: but does her style not also expose the insane voices chattering incessantly in her disturbed mind? If so, as both *remedy* and *poison*, they appear as a *pharmakon* too. And, to add to the wonder of reading her, Woolf’s style ‘swells’ refreshingly into lyrical assonance as when Peter Walsh thinks ‘*still*’:

*Still*, the sun was hot. *Still*, one got over things. *Still*, life had a way of *adding* day-to-day, *still*, he thought, yawning and beginning to take notice\(^6\).
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The literary march toward Modernism threw into question the subjectivity of narrative fiction and paved the way toward omniscient, or rather, telepathic writing: "The twentieth century witnessed a slow but steadily sharpening sense that the I of a narrative fiction cannot simply be talked about as if he or she were the author, and this I is just as much created by the narrative as he or she is the creator of it... (TU257). Understandably cautious about religious dimensions of omniscience, here is rather a telepathic logic according to which a narrator-and thus a reader-is now looking into this mind, now into that... This motions toward a theory of narrative telepathy not narrative omniscience... (TU259). Telepathy opens up possibilities of a humbler, more precise, less religiously freighted concept than does omniscience, for thinking about what is going on in narrative fiction (TU261).

Leonard Woolf described her early stages of mania: She talked almost without stopping for 2 or 3 days, paying no attention to anyone in the room or anything said to her... Then gradually it became completely incoherent, a mere jumble of dissociated words. In full flight of madness..."birds spoke to her in Greek, her dead mother materialized and harangued her, voices called her to 'do wild things.' She refused nourishment. Trusted companions like her husband Leonard and her sister Vanessa became enemies and were abused and assaulted... (VWM)

Her remains are buried under one of two intertwined Elm trees nicknamed Virginia and Leonard in the garden of their 'Monk's House' in Rodmell, Sussex. Evoking the futility of her fight against madness, her stone is engraved with lines from her last novel, The Waves: 'Against you I fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! The waves broke on the shore.' She adds, 'Septimus Smith? Is that a good name?'
The essential secret of literature has to do with the altogether bare device of being two to speak. As soon as there is the explicit figuration of someone speaking as someone else, of an author speaking as a narrator, or of a narrator speaking as (or for) a character, there is literature and there is something essentially secret going on. The essentiality of the literary secret is not something concealed, to be revealed and disinterred: it just is and its being ‘altogether bare’ is what makes literature possible. (TU266)

According to her son, Vita was the recipient of the longest, most charming love letter in history, Woolf’s novel, Orlando.

Indeed all Woolf’s characters are portrayed with such precision, that she probably based a number of them on her acquaintances.

First posited in 1955 after studies in Brazil by the anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss (TT), they were deftly used by Derrida to deconstruct Levi-Strauss’s work in 1966. The ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ paper given by Derrida at a celebrated conference at Johns Hopkins in October 1966, which resembles his ‘Nature, Culture, Writing’ presented a controversial, deconstructive discussion of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural ideas.