

OBERLAND: 'A CHARMING LIGHT INTERLUDE'?

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The first eight *Pilgrimage* books, from *Pointed Roofs* in 1915 to *The Trap* in 1925 appeared in quick succession. Eight books published within a decade. It is remarkable how prolific and sustained Richardson's original momentum was. But by 1926 that momentum was being lost. The next five books would take well over a decade - still an impressive output all things considered - but the gaps between each book increase significantly. It could be argued, therefore, that *The Trap* marks the close of one *Pilgrimage* era, with *Oberland*, *Dawn's Left Hand*, *Clear Horizon*, *Dimple Hill* and, belatedly, *March Moonlight*, forming the other. In this schema *Oberland* is a kind of interlude between the two parts.

At least this seems to be how some contemporary readers saw it. Conrad Aiken concludes his 1928 review of *Oberland* in the *New York Post* by saying that this ninth volume in the series is 'slighter than its predecessors [...] but it is a charming light interlude in Miss Richardson's scheme and should introduce many new readers to a work of importance.'¹ We might also see the idea of this interlude being 'light' as alluding to the fact that there are so many references in *Oberland* to the brilliant quality of the mountain winter light at various times of the day and night - the detailed descriptions of Miriam's visions of this radiant light, contrasting with the grey drabness and lack of light in most of the London-set *Pilgrimage* books. This picturesque 'lightness' with its Alpine snow scenes, sleigh rides and ski-jumps, has been the main appeal of *Oberland*, but is also the reason why the book is often seen as problematic by readers today, as if the book lacks the requisite downbeat London ambience that is the authentic mark of *Pilgrimage*. Gloria Fromm too sees *Oberland* as a scenic interlude, albeit a prelude as well, a 'prelude to sex':

¹ 'Dorothy Richardson Pieces Out The Stream of Consciousness of Her Pilgrim, Miriam Henderson', *New York Evening Post*, Sec. 3, 12 May 1928, p.9. Reprinted in Conrad Aiken, *A Reviewer's ABC* (London: WH Allen, 1961), pp.329-331

Miriam takes a holiday in the Bernese Oberland with the understanding that on her return she will have decided whether to enter into an affair with Hypo Wilson. The interlude in the Oberland, then, is also a prelude to sex: and Miriam - never altogether free of the sense of Hypo Wilson - finds herself in a curiously suggestive atmosphere, where snow and ice and music [...] provide the background for Miriam's preoccupations.²

The term 'interlude' refers to something which is dependent on what comes before and after, and yet something standing apart, distinct and separate. And Richardson seems to have approached the writing of *Oberland* with this in mind. What was the context of that writing? In the *Biography*, Fromm pays a lot of attention to the tribulations of *Pilgrimage's* publishing history and, in her account, *Oberland* marked a definitive crisis among the many crises. By 1925 there was a clear decline in critical interest in Richardson's work and an apparent decline in already disappointing sales. Richardson blamed publishers Duckworth in Britain and Knopf in America for mishandling the promotion and distribution of the books, while the publishers were tiring of subsidising *Pilgrimage*. *The Trap* ends with Miriam feeling suffocated by a 'sense of death', not only trapped existentially and emotionally but literally, in a squalid flat listening to the drunken man beating up his wife downstairs while the smell of cats from the yard drifts up through Miriam's window. It is hard to imagine a greater contrast than between that scene at the end of *The Trap* and the picturesque Alpine resort where most of *Oberland* is set. It was seemingly evident to Richardson that if *Pilgrimage* was to continue she needed to write something with a change of ambience to attract new readers.

H.G. Wells intervened to try and set up a deal with various alternative publishers who had expressed a particular interest in publishing the projected Switzerland book and Richardson attempted to clinch a deal by placing an evocative set-piece from

² Gloria G. Fromm, 'Dorothy M. Richardson', *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 36: *British Novelists 1890-1929, Modernists* (Detroit: Gale, 1985), p.217.

Oberland entitled 'Sleigh Ride' as a short story in the magazine *Outlook* as advance promotion.³ These efforts came to nothing and Richardson was left with no option but to offer the book back to Duckworth and Knopf.⁴ After publication, however, as the correspondence reveals, her new-found promotional zeal continued with rather touching attempts to send off copies of *Oberland* to the Swiss sports resorts for the winter season and instructing Bryher and Adrian Allinson to advertise the novel by carrying, as conspicuously as possible, copies of the book on their Swiss travels.⁵

Oberland did succeed in reviving interest in *Pilgrimage*: it was nominated for a prestigious literary prize in France and attracted some positive notices, especially in America.⁶ The general tone of the positive reviews fits in with the idea of *Oberland* as something with scenic appeal, a charming light interlude, best summed up by the *New York Times* review entitled 'Overland is a Novel of Quiet but Dazzling Beauty', which said the book would be a 'perpetual joy' for anyone with an experience of Switzerland in winter.⁷ Or, as Richardson herself put it, somewhat cynically, in a letter to Bryher many years later: 'I learn that *Oberland* is the best known of my lot in America. Certainly. Makes the simple-hearted feel they've had a trip to Switzerland.'⁸

³ 'Sleigh Ride', *Outlook*, 58, 11 December 1926, p.588. Also collected in *Journey to Paradise*, Trudi Tate (ed.), (London: Virago, 1989), pp.37-40.

⁴ Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1977), p.194.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.213. See also various letters to Bryher e.g., November-December 1927, in Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp.143-4

⁶ Fromm, *op. cit*, p. 227. *Oberland* was nominated for the French Femina-Vie-Heureuse prize in 1928.

⁷ *New York Times*, 11 March 1928 p.7. See Fromm, *op. cit*, p.214 and Gloria Glikin (Fromm), 'Dorothy M. Richardson: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings about Her', *English Literature in Transition* 8, 1, (1965): 29 also at: http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/en/richardson/biblio_dmrobits.html#ober.

⁸ Richardson, letter to Bryher, June 1946, in *Windows on Modernism*, *op. cit*, p.540

The Three *Sphere* Articles

Pilgrimage always has a temporal duality, the narrative is set in the time of Miriam, but the narrative also reflects the time, decades later, in which Richardson is writing. The narrative of *Oberland* is set around winter 1905 - George Thomson dates it to two weeks in February 1906.⁹ The book was written between 1925 and 1927.

Miriam's holiday in *Oberland* is presumably based on the time Richardson was sent by her Harley Street employer Harry Badcock (Hancock in *Pilgrimage*) to the Burnese Oberland at the end of 1904 to recuperate from some kind of breakdown.¹⁰ Richardson went again in the winter of 1907, possibly recovering from the miscarriage of a child with Wells. Richardson seems to take elements from these different vacations as generative materials for her composite fictional narrative. But we also have to factor in the time in which *Oberland* is being written. Richardson and husband Alan Odle had their eventful European tour to Paris and Switzerland from November 1923 to May 1924, staying with Bryher and H.D. in Montreux, before moving on to a lengthy stay at the same Château d'Oex resort where Richardson had stayed in 1904.¹¹ In the *Biography* Fromm makes much of the idea that the 1923-1924 trip coincided with a crisis in the marriage Richardson had 'arranged' between Veronica and Benjamin Grad and that this trip, rather like the earlier ones, was in part an escape from difficult emotional pressures and that Daphne, the hysterical possessive girl-child in *Oberland*, who is infatuated with Eaden, is a representation of Veronica - the irony being that *Pilgrimage* was just nearing the period in the narrative where Veronica appears as a major adult character in the Amabel episodes. After returning to England from Switzerland, Richardson began writing *Oberland* relatively quickly through 1925, the basic draft being completed early 1926, although the aforementioned publishing difficulties meant that the book didn't appear until the end of 1927. So the recent trip and the experience of Alpine sports resort culture

⁹ George H. Thomson, *Readers Guide to Pilgrimage*, (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1996), p.41

¹⁰ Fromm, *Biography*, p.44

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.162

must have provided much of the inspiration and impetus for the writing of *Oberland*, at the very least summoning Richardson's source material - the memories of her Swiss holidays twenty years earlier.

While at Château d'Oex in 1924 Richardson wrote three commissioned articles on the Swiss winter sports resorts for *The Sphere*, published in its March, April and November 1924 issues.¹² The articles were written in conjunction with the genesis of *Oberland* and engage with certain themes that inform the novel. As these articles have not been widely discussed in Richardson criticism it may be of interest to look at them here.

Founded in 1900, *The Sphere* was a quality fortnightly London newspaper which, as its full title '*An Illustrated Newspaper for the Home*' suggests, exploited the turn-of-the-century technological advances in photographic reproduction and printing. Photographs and illustrations accompany the text, the visual image being integral to many articles and to the overall layout and design of the paper. By the 1920s, *The Sphere* had achieved a high level of sophistication in its printed reproduction of photographic images, including colour and colour-tinted, although the paper still relied heavily on illustrations, often made to resemble photographs. As the title '*...Newspaper for the Home*' also suggests, *The Sphere* was aimed at a general readership, bringing the news of one sphere, the world, to another sphere, the home.

Each issue has a news section with photographs of current events and people in the news from around the world. Like early cinema, the paper delights in bringing 'ethnographic' pictures of exotic people and places from far off corners of the globe. But the novelty of the photographic medium also facilitates the exotic closer to home, for example, in the March 1924 Richardson issue, 'artistic' shots of crowds of commuters crossing London Bridge, the quirky defamiliarisation of urban modernity. There are also

¹² 'Veterans in the Alps', *The Sphere*, 96 (March 29, 1924): 354. 'Alpine Spring', *The Sphere*, 97 (April 12, 1924): 44. 'The Role of Background: English Visitors to the Swiss Resorts during the Winter Sports Season', *The Sphere*, 99 (November 22, 1924): 226

elaborately contrived photographic tableaux of scenes from the London stage featuring theatrical stars of the era. Many of the photographs in each issue are portraits of arts or 'society' figures, an equivalent to today's images of celebrity. Indeed 'newspaper' may give the wrong impression, as *The Sphere* in its design and content was closer to a fashionable magazine such as *Vanity Fair*.

Consumption of *The Sphere* occurs in the home, the domestic sphere, so there are different articles of interest to different sections of the family, including children and 'boys' and 'girls' (i.e., teenagers) but the paper seems to be particularly aimed at women, with extensive fashion spreads and articles on furniture and interior design. And the advertising, characteristic for the period, is related to domestic routine (Ovaltine, soaps and numerous items relating to health of skin and digestion, children's medicines and so on). Many of the articles and advertisements seem to assume an upper middle-class readership: advertisements from the top West End stores, for high fashion; and there is also a great deal of advertising for tourism, sometimes of the grand tour variety - cruises of the Amazon and Nile and other exotic destinations lasting several months. It may be that, as with pictures of high society figures at play, such material and the newspaper as a whole appealed to a middle-class readership that enjoyed reading about the lifestyle of the upper classes. A striking example of this class identification, real or imagined, is the emphasis on winter sports, an apparent assumption that most of *The Sphere* readership will be off to enjoy the winter season in Switzerland come December each year. The November 1924 Richardson issue is themed around the Swiss season, featuring guides to resorts and facilities, travel and tour arrangements and numerous advertisements for winter sports wear (mostly for the lady skier). If the *Sphere* articles were commissioned as what might now be called 'lifestyle' pieces for the fashionable young woman reader, the editors may have been disappointed because Richardson predictably turned in three idiosyncratic essays. But the articles are interesting because they are a comparatively rare late example of Richardson writing for a mass readership publication and of particular interest to readers of *Oberland* in that the articles rehearse what might be called Richardson's 'phenomenology' of sport and the idea that the

microcosm of the Swiss winter sports resort is a privileged site for the exploration of English identity and its archetypes.

'Veterans in the Alps'

The first article appears in *The Sphere* for March 29th 1924 and is placed in a section entitled 'The Sphere of Travel' sharing the page, appropriately for Richardson, with an illustrated piece on pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Easter. 'Veterans in the Alps' begins with an *Oberland*-style imagistic depiction of a beautiful Alpine scene in which human activity - the winter sports - is perfectly integrated, a dazzling white landscape with 'multi-coloured figurines of all sizes, skimming and falling, or merely strolling about.' Richardson writes of the 'dark weeks of almost perpetual snowfall that prepared the scene now lying brilliant in calm magnificence' - not only is the picturesque scene formed out of the long dark winter, but ideally the visitor should have experienced the long dark weeks in order to appreciate the transition to scenic brilliance. This is a recurrent theme in the *Sphere* pieces (and in *Pilgrimage*): that the seasons have their own character and contrasts - and transitions between seasonal variation need to be fully experienced in order to be appreciated. Unfortunately most English tourists cannot stay long enough in Switzerland to experience such transitions, the exceptions 'who can make holiday when they will' being the very rich and the elderly. Here Richardson turns to the main subject of this piece, not the young fashionable sportsman or sportswoman, but the elderly tourist. The title of the piece 'Veterans of the Alps' refers both to these elderly tourists and to those 'veteran' tourists, like Richardson, who came in the early 1900s when English tourism to the Alps was in its infancy and can chart the changes that have occurred by 1924 - Richardson taking it as given that it was the English sportsmen (as opposed to any other national group) who were responsible for creating the Swiss winter sports season:

For those who knew the Swiss winters in the far-off days of their first discovery by the English, an interesting feature of recent years is the large and growing company of the middle-

aged and the quite elderly. There have, of course, been elders at the well-known resorts ever since the beginning of the century, when first our sportsmen persuaded the hotel-keepers to put in central heating and keep open during the winter. And these old people were the discoverers of the joys Switzerland offers in the winter, apart from any kind of sport, to those who have reached the age when the English winter becomes each year more and more a redoubtable foe

These elders or veterans have the need to escape the horrors of an English winter and have the leisure to spend months in a Swiss resort if they so wish. But Richardson on this 1924 visit notes a big change from her memory of 1904 and 1907. The elderly used to just stroll, gaze at the scenic views or watch others skiing and tobogganing. Now, however, the elderly also participate in the winter sports activity:

But of those who merely walk about and look on there are nowadays very few. They have given place to a generation of elders who ski and skate. Most of them are to be found on the rinks skimming about in the manner that betrays long experience - cutting complicated and elaborate figures in quiet corners. Skating is, of course, at any time a sport that even a septuagenarian may indulge in, in moderation.

Richardson notes that it takes courage to begin skating on the Swiss resort rinks as an elder surrounded by youngsters or foreign expertise. She concludes that the elders coming to Switzerland are 'veterans' who took up skating long ago and are now able to continue into their old age:

The very first arrivals on the first lawn flooded this year, in this valley of many rinks, were three elderly Englishmen cutting figures as if they had left off only yesterday, and congratulating each other on the early opening of the season. And since youth was called back to school and college, the larger proportion of first-class skaters are middle-aged and elderly. They mark the beginning of a new outdoor sport for the aged. Golf has a rival. They are the first elders who learned to skate, and to skate really well, in their youth.

And so 'Veterans in the Alps' closes with a projection of future generations of English elderly skating their way to health and happiness and the intriguing assertion that 'golf has a rival' of which more in a moment.

An obvious aspect of 'Veterans in the Alps' is its stress on the English tourist. Perhaps this is to be expected in the context of the *Sphere* readership but it is also true of *Oberland*: the experience of being English abroad tells us something 'essential' about England and being English, an identity by which other identities - gender, class, generational - are mediated. In the London-based *Pilgrimage* books it is often easy for Miriam to disavow her Englishness but abroad, in Switzerland, her own identifications with Englishness vis-à-vis the foreign other are, as we shall see in the discussion of the novel, both more pronounced and more unstable.

'Alpine Spring'

The April 12th 1924 issue of *The Sphere* has a full front page black and white photograph of a rather dandified Mussolini with the heading:

ITALY'S GENERAL ELECTION –
SIGNOR MUSSOLINI REMAINS IN POWER

Richardson's second *Sphere* article precedes a portfolio of colour-tinted photographs of a Gilbert and Sullivan production and shares its page with a column entitled 'The House and its Furnishing' concerning antique French furniture. The Richardson piece is headed with a biographical note:

Miss Dorothy Richardson, the author of this contribution, is truly a pioneer in literature. She has told the story of her heroine in six volumes, from 'Pointed Roofs' to 'Deadlock,' and her books have influenced Miss May Sinclair, Miss Clemence Dane, and other popular writers. She has been enulogised for the English and American public by Mr. J.D.

Beresford and Mr. William Follett. The latter refers to her 'brilliant subtlety' and 'nervous vitality.'

The article deals with the transition from winter to spring. It begins with a description of how, as soon as the thaw hits the Alpine valleys, the winter tourists scatter. The stress is again on the English tourists, who either escape back to England to face the unpredictable English spring or escape south to Italy or the French Riviera (which, again, raises the question of the class-identification of Richardson and her readership in these articles). At the end of *Oberland* the wealthier characters, Eaden, Maude Holleborne and the Chisholmes, when they have 'had enough of Switzerland for this year' go south: 'To travelled people, a journey to Italy was as simple as crossing London. Was even a bore, a tiresome experience to be got through as pleasantly as possible.'¹³ Similarly, in the *Sphere* piece, once the skiing slopes and skating-rinks close the winter sports set moves on and Richardson agrees that the period of the thaw is 'dismal' and 'unlovely':

The rinks are in process of becoming tennis lawns, pickaxe and shovel have cleared the roads of their foot-deep coating of ice, and only upon the northern slopes is anything left of the snows of this terrific winter. There are unlovely features in the period of transition. Half-frozen slush is not beautiful, nor pleasant in its ways. And the wreckage of last year's grass, revealed as the snow is stripped from the hill-sides, is a dismal spectacle.

However slush alone can't explain the bleakness attributed to the Alpine spring and Richardson concludes that this bleakness is a misnomer propagated by those who leave too soon and don't fully experience the transition to spring:

But a little slush under the feet and a glimpse of dead grass are not themselves enough to account for the mournful reputation of the Alpine snow. I have seen this year the thaw at its worst - the *débâcle* of a tremendous winter - and am left

¹³ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, Vol. 4 (London: Virago, 1979), pp.111, 104 (from here on references in text).

with the conviction that the blackening of its character is the innocent work of those who have never stayed to see it through and reap its gift, the dawn of the Alpine spring.

At the first sign of the Alpine thaw the English prematurely and misguidedly retreat back to the English spring: 'Spring is spring, and is lovely everywhere. And for most Englishmen no spring is equal to England at its best. But it is so rarely at its best.' In fact the English spring is in a 'minor key' and is too unpredictable and muddled and therefore lacks the process of clear transition that Richardson sees as essential to the experience of seasonal change. Such transitions cannot be artificially simulated, she says, by suddenly changing location, for example by moving from north to south at the right moment:

If contrast at its sharpest is won by moving swiftly from the northern winter into the spring of the south ready-made all about one, the abrupt transition has something of the quality of a dream. Wonderful enough, but not more wonderful than spring seen emerging, sure and unhesitating, upon the scene of winter's utmost rigours.¹⁴

The Alpine thaw with its unlovely slush is therefore an integral part of the experience of the transition to spring which, when it finally arrives, is all the richer to the tourist who has stayed the course, a real experience rather than a mere dream:

For if spring laughs anywhere, it laughs upon the Swiss mountains. Nowhere else in Europe, except perhaps in northern Russia, where spring breaks in a night, is its coming so radiant and so swift. And, like the Russian, the Alpine spring owes part of its charm to being the sudden breaking of an enchanted silence. Alpine winter is beauty; snow-clad

¹⁴ Unfortunately Miriam Henderson in *Oberland* is only on a fortnight holiday and, on her very last day, realizes that she will miss the seasonal transition: 'And, for the last morning again, a strange surprise. Mountains and valleys hidden behind impenetrable mist, and even the nearest objects screened by the thickly falling snow. Alpine winter tremendously at work, holding her fascinated at windows downstairs, upstairs; mighty preparation for the beauty of days she would not see.' (125).

peaks, brilliant skies, sunshine, and crystalline air. But its unique quality is its perfect stillness....

The piece is moving into the stylistic territory of *Pilgrimage* with its aesthetic of stillness and silence (not to mention its four dot ellipsis). And various *Pilgrimage* motifs can be discerned in a closing paragraph which seems to rehearse the picturesque or scenic mode that will provide the means of representing Miriam's communion with the Alps in *Oberland*:

And upon this perfect stillness spring breaks as sound, the magic sound of a thousand mountain torrents released. Fed by the melting snow, a riotous cascade dances in every gully. The early morning is full of the gladness of birds. In the hot sunshine of midday, questing bees, set free from long-closed hives, go singing across the thinning snowfields, gathering strength for their wings in an air that is full of the warmly expanding scent of the pinewoods.

'The Role of the Background: English Visitors to the Swiss Resorts During the Winter Sports Season'

The third and final Richardson piece appeared at the beginning of the next season, in the November 22nd 1924 issue of *The Sphere*. The front page of this issue is a drawing of the surface of Mars based on new astronomical observations. Inside is the usual mix of illustrated articles relating to current events in politics, arts and society gatherings. Given that this November *The Sphere* coincides with the beginning of the winter season it is not surprising that the issue is themed around winter sports, with extensive photographic essays on, and guides to, the Swiss resorts, along with numerous related advertisements for the various resorts, hotels and facilities (ice-rinks etc), including one for Château d'Oex declaring it 'The Mecca of the British Sportsman'. The big stores of London's West End - Harrods, Burberry, D.H. Evans - run advertisements for the new season's range of winter sports fashions, the majority of which are aimed at the female reader. A Debenhams-Freebody illustrated advertisement reads: 'Everything for Winter Sports. We

have made a special study of winter sports outfits and have now in stock an immense variety of every conceivable garment suitable for Tobogganing, Sleighing, Ski-ing, Ski-joring, Lugeing and Skating. Ladies are invited to inquire for the manageress of the department, who has personally made a careful study of the subject at various centres of Winter Sports, and will willingly give the benefit of her experience to anyone wishing to consult her.¹⁵ Similarly the advertisement for Dickins and Jones of Regent Street is illustrated with a picture of a stylishly dressed lady skiing and reads: 'For many years we have made a special study of Winter Sports Wear, and to meet the convenience of our patrons who respond regularly to the call of Switzerland and to the lure of Winter Sports we have opened, on the First Floor, a Section devoted exclusively to Winter Sports attire.'¹⁶ Richardson's article is explicitly positioned as a commentary on the issue's winter sports theme and is headed with the following note:

Miss Richardson, the author of a number of novels, is reputed to have influenced more writers than any other English woman writer of to-day. The following article should be read in conjunction with the pictures of winter sports reproduced on the other pages of the present issue.

In fact the piece begins not with a scenic description of winter sports but a lengthy and rather droll account of Richardson's experience playing golf, focusing on the combination of simultaneous physical movements required to make a drive: 'My club made, perforce, its unexpected sweeping curve upwards through the air, and my body, also perforce and unexpectedly, swung round upon its rooted toes in a complimentary spiral.' This physical motion of swinging her golf club created a corresponding motion in her experience of the landscape 'due to the sudden lift and sweep, accompanying my own swift movement, of the quiet sky and the motionless wide landscape'. This account probably perplexed *Sphere* readers but won't surprise Richardson readers familiar with the skating and skiing scenes in *Oberland*. In certain sports a precise combination of physical actions occurs in which

¹⁵ *The Sphere* November 22, 1924, page b (advertisement section)

¹⁶ *The Sphere* November 22, 1924, page g (advertisement section)

motion and stillness, movement and contemplation, are fused in a transcendent 'still-point' or epiphany of consciousness. Such actions generate an encounter between being as consciousness and being as physicality, the latter in the form of both individual bodily movement and enclosure within the landscape. In golf, according to Richardson, it is primarily this encounter with the landscape that is staged through the actions - meaningless in themselves - of the sport:

Golf is golf. But golf is also the earth and sky about you, moving with you, quiet in the still moment that precedes your stroke, swinging poised on their centre while, poised, you swing.

But, as we saw at the end of the first *Sphere* article, 'golf has a rival' - referring to skating as a suitable sport for the middle-aged and elderly. More generally, in this third article, the argument is that if the object of a sporting activity is to engage with the 'background' then an Alpine landscape is going to be far more stimulating than an English golf course and more likely to generate sublime moments of being:

And while it is perhaps golf that most intimately reveals to the player the role of the background, there is no game, of all those that set earth and sky in movement about you, that can compare, by reason of its setting, with any kind of winter sport, and no proof of the part played in any and every game by its surroundings more convincing than the spectacle of the English coming out in their thousands in mid-winter to the Alps.

The rest of the article switches to a discussion of Englishness and the sensibility of the supposed 'average Englishman' - actually the upper-class English sportsman. As a self-styled 'veteran of the Alps' she refers back twenty years to the time when no 'average Englishman' would 'renounce any part of his English winter, the amenities of town, his hunting, his country-house Christmas, in favour of exile in a Swiss mountain village'. Such an Englishman knew of mountaineering in the Swiss summer but only the 'winter

sports pioneers' knew of the delights of an Alpine winter. Although things are now, in 1924, changing, Richardson argues that these 'average Englishmen' still tend to focus only on the 'seriousness' of a sporting activity - its technical expertise, its competitive angle, its danger. The English winter sportsman cannot *see* the background. He lacks or represses any aesthetic sense:

And even today he would be chary of admitting that his love of winter sports is largely aesthetic. For while overtly and without shame the Englishman rejoices, especially when there is the spice of danger, in all tests of skill, to the appeal of beauty he responds shyly.

The English are therefore easy to distinguish from other nationalities milling about the Swiss resorts, because of the seriousness with which they set about their sporting task, whether a lowly skater or 'one of the chosen' - the skier. Together they form 'the freemasonry existing amongst the English out here, the freemasonry of race and sport' - 'freemasonry' being a frequent term in *Oberland* for describing the various Château d'Oex groupings in relation to gender as well as nationality. Towards the end of 'The Role of the Background' the register shifts away from the inter-war 'race and sport' discourse back to the gentleman English sportsman:

And it is easy, watching these sportsmen, to understand how they have earned their reputation for caring, deeply, for nothing but sport. They will talk their games interminably.

But in the *Sphere* article Richardson holds back from explicitly drawing out a critique of this philistine English masculinity, its interminable talk of sport, its lack of aesthetic sense and its missing of the 'background' - that kind of critique will have to wait until *Oberland*.

Oberland: *English Abroad*

By the beginning of the twentieth century a holiday in the Alps was no longer the preserve of the rich on the grand tour. It had become accessible to adventurous tourists from Britain - H.G.Wells visited in 1904 and recommended it to Richardson, whose first trip was paid for by her employer.

The special appeal of the Alpine region had three main sources. First, the continuing cult of the sublime: the Alps were seen as the greatest site of pure natural beauty in Europe if not the world, close to Heaven and God, a place for the individual to enter into direct relation with nature and therefore the human soul, or, in Richardsonian terms, being and existence. Second, there was the early twentieth-century cult of health and hygiene. For inhabitants of cities like London - crowded, smoky, fog and smog-bound, with concerns over sanitation and disease - Alpine resorts were seen as places of recuperation, places to take the healing fresh mountain air and waters. Third, as is evident in the pages of *The Sphere*, there was the emerging cult of sport and the mass participation in competitive sports, in this case winter sports.

Richardson addresses all three of these factors in *Oberland*. The narrative is filled with imagistic descriptions of Miriam's encounters with the sublime. Miriam has come to a Swiss resort for a rest cure, to restore her health and well-being. And there are descriptions of sporting activities: skating, tobogganing and skiing. In setting this book in a middle-European mountain resort as a social microcosm, separate, high and above the everyday world below, Richardson was reflecting a literary vogue of the period, best remembered now for the sanatorium in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924). At this time - the mid 1920s - Richardson's correspondence shows that she was avidly reading Mann, and it is worth noting that she had a fascination with - and met - D.H. Lawrence while writing *Oberland*, the climactic concluding scenes in *Women in Love* from 1920 taking place high in a Tyrolean resort.¹⁷ This vogue was also reflected in popular culture, such as the series

¹⁷ Fromm, op. cit, p.194

of German 'mountain' films from the twenties starring Leni Riefenstahl in an early incarnation.¹⁸ The British film which is interesting to think of in relation to *Oberland* is Hitchcock's 1938 *The Lady Vanishes*. Where Richardson's narrative starts with a train journey and then moves to the resort, Hitchcock starts in the resort and then switches to the train journey. Hitchcock's Tyrolean village and hotel are pure kitsch with a cast of 'foreign' hotel managers, maids and waitresses who are incompetent, immoral, childishly good-natured and fiendish in turn, but always baffled by, and baffling to, English codes of behaviour - very much like Richardson's 'foreign' railway porters, sleigh drivers and hotel staff. Richardson and Hitchcock's mountain resorts are also alike in being places where certain normal standards of British propriety can be suspended, places where unattached young men and emancipated young woman meet, places of erotic possibility.

However, the key point of comparison is the way that the very clever Launder and Gilliatt script for *The Lady Vanishes* plays with the idea of how English social stereotypes - national, class, gender and generational - interact with stereotypes of the foreign other. In the film almost every character is a stereotype - which is then overturned in the course of the film. The arrogant playboy character turns out to be a substantial and reliable hero, the hedonistic flapper girl turns out to be a resourceful saviour and heroine, the two effete upper-class Oxbridge English bachelors (only concerned with cricket test match scores) turn out to be courageous in a violent crisis, the respectable judge turns out to be an adulterer and a coward, the nun is a working class gangster's moll, the friendly urbane Austrian psychiatrist is an enemy agent, and of course the quaint little old lady is a top English spy, and so on. In *Oberland*, Richardson sets up a set of stereotypes of the foreign other: Swiss, German, French, American, Russian, Italian - which interact with a set of stereotypes of English middle-class life ranging from the cosmopolitan Oxbridge sportsman Vereker to the suburban Croydon family. And Miriam herself? To the Croydon family she is the London girl on the make, to Mrs Harcourt she is the down-at-

¹⁸ Arnold Franck, *Peak of Fate (Der Berg Des Schicksals)* 1924, *The Holy Mountain (Der Heilige Berg)* 1926

heel future spinster, to Guerini she is the bafflingly exotic English woman, to Vereker she is a possible figure of holiday romance as an unattached single woman and to the land-owning Eaden she is as an emancipated feminist socialist, an object of challenging curiosity. Towards the end of the book Miriam declares that she is in fact several incompatible selves and therefore cannot be assigned to just one type (122). Although Miriam has difficulty acknowledging it, this is also true of the other characters: each first appears as a type to Miriam but then other selves come into view, incompatible with that first impression. In *Oberland*, as in *The Lady Vanishes*, it is invariably the case that the first impression of someone will turn out to be incorrect or in need of revision. In a Hitchcock film the underlying reality or truth of a person or situation is produced by way of a destabilising of the stereotype or conventional façade, which masks that underlying truth. The stereotype is necessary because it is only through the subversion of the stereotype that the repressed reality is revealed. It might be argued that the extraordinary variety and complexity of Miriam's perspectives of people throughout *Pilgrimage* is similarly dependent on the setting up of initial assumptions and stereotypes that are then called into question and undermined, requiring further analysis or speculation. Or to put it another way, Richardson clearly found it untenable to disavow national, class or gender stereotypes as false or prejudiced. But she doesn't see such stereotypes as necessarily identical with any of the selves an individual might possess, rather the stereotype throws into relief those individual selves through degrees of correspondence or disparity.

Oberland begins with a rather arch comic scene, worthy of *The Lady Vanishes*, of Miriam panicking at a French train station imagining the unhelpful porters as 'brutishly preoccupied forms [...] in an evil dream' - 'bloused fiends' from whom she is rescued by a group of serene English tourists (11-12). Ostensibly this chapter is an account of Miriam's journey from London to Dieppe to Paris and then on to Berne. But the precise chronology and sequence is, as we would expect, deliberately obscured in favour of foregrounding Miriam's feelings and responses to minor events and situations - like in this initial instance, trying to get a station porter to carry her bag. The aim is to render some quintessential aspects of the

experience of being a tourist and one such aspect is the experience of being surrounded by foreigners and foreignness and of being oneself a foreigner. A woman briefly glimpsed in a Paris station represents 'style [...] redeeming ugliness and cruelty. She was the secret of France. France concentrated.' But then Miriam remembers the view of Russian Michael Shatov who had said 'that the French are indescribably evil and their children like monkeys. He had fled eagerly to England. But Michael's perceptions are moral. France, within his framework, falls back into shadow.' (13). So, in a few sentences, we have Miriam's characterisation of France as style and Shatov's characterisation of France as evil. And how exactly do we read Miriam's dismissal of Michael's view of France as merely 'moral'? When a man gets into Miriam's train compartment she thinks he is the exotic embodiment of France, a quaint vision soon shattered as the man starts noisily turning the carriage into a bedroom and Miriam has to make a hasty exit to the sound of 'a sniggering expletive, mirth at the spectacle of British prudery' (15).

Arriving in the Oberland, Miriam takes a sleigh ride to her hotel, suffering the 'deep-rooted, patient contempt' (26) of the Swiss driver for the English tourist. On the first night, at dinner, Miriam surveys the other English guests, noting how they exclude two outsiders, an American and a Russian: 'it was an atmosphere in which the American and the Russian were ill at ease, one an impatient watchfulness for simpler more lively behaviour and the other a bored detachment, heavily anchored, not so much by thoughts as by hard clear images left by things seen according to the current formula of whatever group of the European intelligentsia he belonged to' (42). Later she meets the American tourist, with his 'little American smile, that came to her from a whole continent [...] to him, as an American, her greeting would seem neither naïve nor bourgeois. For all Americans are either undisturbedly naïve and bourgeois or in a state of merely having learned, via Europe, to be neither.' (68). More often than not, Miriam's first impression of a person turns out to be not quite right. So although the American starts out as a naïve and shallow stereotype, he becomes progressively more complicated,

becoming a projected critical counter to English hypocrisy.¹⁹ As for the other marginalised guest, the Russian, we are told explicitly his position within *Pilgrimage* as an archetype of the exotic male other. He is 'the Russian: the reincarnated, attractive, ultimately unsatisfactory Tansley Street foreigner' (48). Miriam initially wonders, 'perhaps, he had been in a Russian prison? He might be a refugee; an anarchist living in Switzerland.' (74-5). In fact he turns out to be an Italian businessman, named Guerini. By the end of the holiday she perceives 'the look of a man penned within an office, the look upon his low Italian brow of worry left over from his daily life. He looked common too, common and ordinary - she wondered now that she could ever have mistaken him for a musician wandered from Russia.' (121).

Two important English characters Miriam encounters are Harry Vereker and his friend Eaden, towards both of whom she feels attraction and hostility in equal measure. She sees Vereker at the first night's dinner at the hotel and immediately sums him up: 'There he was, almost opposite, Cambridge, and either history or classics, the pleasant radiance of *Lit. Hum.* all about him [...] But his strength was borrowed. His mental strength was not original. An uninteresting mind; also he was a little selfish, with the selfishness of the bachelor of thirty - but charming.' (49-30). Vereker is the embodiment of the English gentleman sportsmen who, according to the *Sphere* articles, are the elite of the Swiss resorts, an admirable figure but lacking intellectual and aesthetic sensitivity. Although Vereker's good qualities do appeal to Miriam, the novel can sharply critique the type he represents in a way the *Sphere* articles could only imply. Vereker's friend Eaden is initially presented as a handsome 'strong and silent' stereotype of the male who lives by charm and who, at their first meeting, Miriam condemns as living by a fake worldly wisdom - especially in relation to women - that is 'cheating him of life. There was no hope for him.'²⁰ However, this apparently definitive and

¹⁹ 'Deep in his soul the American must certainly be deploring this baffling urbanity. English correctness and hypocrisy. Here was the original stuff from which the world-wide caricatures were made.' (76)

²⁰ 'Homage and contempt for women came equally forth from him, the manifest faces of his fundamental ignorance. The feminine world existed for him as something apart from life as he knew it, and to be kept apart. Within that world

damning first impression is gradually revised in the light of Eaden's unique ability to recognise the inner being of the hysterical girl Daphne. Eaden remains true to his type but there is a *frisson* in his relationship with Miriam, which she locates in the possibility that she might draw out a self that is concealed behind the stereotype.

Oberland: *English at Play*

There are three main set-piece winter sports scenes in *Oberland*: the tobogganing scene in chapter III, the skating scene in chapter IV and the ski scene in chapter VII. Echoes of the *Sphere* articles can be discerned particularly in the skating scene. Miriam comes upon the strangely surreal scene of an ice rink and its earnestly gliding English inhabitants:

Here on their tree-encircled rink they were together all day as in a room. Passing and re-passing each other all day long. Held together by the enchantment of this continuous gliding [...] It was skating escaped from the niggardly opportunities of England and grown perfect. Long sweeping curves; dreaming eyes seraphic, even the sternest betrayed by the enchantment in their eyes. There were many of these in this English crowd. Many who knew there was absurdity in the picture of grown persons sweeping gravely about for hours on end. (86)

The description then switches to the topic of the third *Sphere* piece on the role of the background, except in this case it is not the background that enlivens the sport but the skaters who enliven the background:

But when she looked across, from the grey crowded rink with its belt of ragged bare trees, to the mountains standing in full sunlight and filling half the opposite sky, and saw, away above the pine woods ascending beyond the little bridge, the distant

“charm” and “wit” drew him like magnets and he never guessed their source; knew nothing of the hinterlands of the minds of women who assumed masks, put him at his ease, appeared not to criticize. And such women were the sum of his social knowledge.’ (81-82)

high white saddle of the pass with its twin peaks rising on either side - they startled her with their heightened beauty. These enchanted skaters, cooped upon their sunk enclosure, had enlivened the surrounding scene. (87)

This enchantment of the skaters in the Alpine setting is characteristically Richardsonian in facilitating a transcendent moment of being, but it is also specifically English in that it provides a link with the collective memory of English experience:

Gliding, as if forever; the feeling, coming even with the first uncertain balance, of breaking through into an eternal way of being. In all games it was there, changing the aspect of life, making friends dearer, making even those actually disliked, dear; as long as they were in the rhythm of the game. In dancing it was there. But most strongly that sense of being in an eternal way of living had come with skating in the foggy English frost. And this it must be that kept all these English eagerly and shamelessly fooling about on bladed feet; eternal life. (87)

Ideas from the *Sphere* articles are reworked in a comparison of skating with golf *vis-à-vis* the body, the landscape and the eternal, but the voice in Miriam's head that calls this fanciful meditation on sport into question is not Hypo Wilson but H.G. Wells himself and Miriam's analysis of skating slides down the slippery slope of her precarious self-analysis:

It might be wrong. Wells might be right. Golf. There must be a secret too in golf. The mighty swipe, the swirl of the landscape about the curving swing of the body, the onward march? All these must count, even if the players think only of the science of the game, only of excelling an opponent. Even in safe and easy games there is an element of eternity, something of the quality there must be in sports that include the thrill of the life-risk. Savage sports. Fitness, the sense of well-being of the

healthy animal? But what *is* health? What *is* the sense of well-being? (87)²¹

It is important to remember that Miriam has ostensibly come to Switzerland for a rest cure following a breakdown of both health and well-being. Then, suddenly, one skater stands out from the gliding crowd:

He was not perhaps doing anything very wonderful, just rushing easily about, in the manner of a native of some land of ice and snow. But he transformed the English skaters to jerking marionettes, clumsily clothed, stiff-jointed. [...] His style was spontaneously alive. His whole soul was in his movements. (89)

In a rapid reversal, characteristic of *Pilgrimage*, the English skaters a moment ago gliding enchanted in eternity are suddenly reduced to ridiculous 'jerking marionettes' by the appearance of a foreign other who represents a unity of physicality, intellect and soul.

The climactic ski-jump scene enacts a similarly abrupt reversal of fortune for Englishness. The scene begins by drawing on the passages of picturesque description in the *Sphere* articles, as well as making some appeal to the fashionable winter sports tourist. Miriam picks her place amongst the spectators on the mountain and spends much of the event looking at the other spectators:

Choosing a place half-way down, she became one of the gathered crowd of Oberland visitors lining the smoothed and steeply sloping course. They were all here. The black and distant dots had become people in every fashion of sports clothes, standing on skis, sitting on toboggans, stamping about in the snow. (114)

Miriam is full of admiration for the skill and bravery of each skier coming down the slope to make their jump: 'Achievement. Thrilling and chastening. Long ago, someone had done this difficult thing for

²¹ The gender politics of the Alpine 'rest cure' is discussed in this issue by Stacey Fox, see 'The Appropriation of Psychiatric Discourse in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', pp.??

the first time, alone, perhaps driven by necessity. Now it was a sport, a deliberate movement into eternity, shared by all who looked on.' (115). Then Vereker steps up to make his jump: 'He was the best. Length of jump, pace, style. The best of the English.' (115). But where the *Sphere* articles assumed that the English gentleman skiers were the elite, 'the chosen', *Oberland* provides a surprise twist. Vereker, the best English sportsman, is followed by one last skier, the Swiss 'peasant' Zurbuchen:

What could be more beautiful? He was heavy and solid, thickly built. But with his shapely clothing and smooth rhythmic movement he made the English graceless and their clothes deliberately absurd.

All the Swiss, though some were rough and ungainly, moved with that strong and steady grace. But Zurbuchen was the best. It was he who would live in her memory, poised against the sky like a great bird. (116)²²

Oberland: *Novel or Chapter?*

The preceding discussion has looked at *Oberland* as an 'interlude' which both stands apart from the surrounding *Pilgrimage* series and yet has an important and integral position within the overall structure of the series. As suggested at the outset, this position may be that of a bridge between two 'halves' of the *Pilgrimage* narrative (and its writing and publication). Alternatively *Oberland* might be seen as a site of otherness acting as a counterpoint to the dominant London sections of the sequence. The first book, *Pointed Roofs*, with its picturesque German setting, provided a similarly

²² The ski scene has been extensively discussed in Richardson criticism since Shirley Rose's seminal articles of the early 1970s, both as a representation of Richardson's theory of consciousness and as a metaphor for her theory of the artistic process. Rose argues that 'The skier becomes the standard symbol for the experience-first-reflection-after process.' Shirley Rose, 'Dorothy Richardson's Focus on Time', *English Literature in Transition* 17, 1974, pp.168-169. For a recent article see Melinda Harvey, 'Moving, Movies and the Sublime: Modernity and the Alpine Scene in Dorothy Richardson's *Oberland*' in [Colloquy issue four, 2000](#).

'other' narrative and geographical space - and social microcosm - but it wasn't until *Oberland*, eight books later, that Richardson repeated the shift to such a setting. After *Oberland*, however, she repeats this shift in two of the remaining four volumes, with the pastoral Quaker farm setting of *Dimple Hill* and the Swiss sanatorium-like setting of Vaud in *March Moonlight*. If *Pilgrimage* is driven by a dialectic of self and other, replicated at various levels including gender, class, nationality and race, then it is not surprising that settings overtly contrasted as other to London form an occasional but increasingly necessary part of the overall design of the series. And *Oberland* is indeed integrated retrospectively into the series in that to a greater degree than previous places in *Pilgrimage* such as Newlands, Tansley Street or Flaxman's Court, the Oberland becomes a symbolic space, resembling Proustian places such as Combray, Balbec and the routes from Marcel's childhood home - Swann's Way, the Guermantes Way - in being not only a social and cultural microcosm but a psychological, existential and spiritual state. This becomes clearer in the next book *Dawn's Left Hand* where Miriam refers to Oberland as a golden glow or 'golden eternity' (IV 139), a 'golden life within her life' (136), something she wants to maintain as a part of her life back in London, though its precise symbolic, analytical or spiritual significance remains bewilderingly profuse, ranging from the 'freemasonish Oberland way of addressing strangers as if they were old friends' (131) to 'In Oberland the eternal being of woman is an escorted procession. Its men are trained to pay homage to the giver of life and the pain-bearer.' (139). Miriam distinguishes people in London who have never even been to Switzerland as Oberlanders or non-Oberlanders. For example, about her Wimpole Street employer she realises: 'it was not that Mr Orly's consciousness was less deep and wide than hers but simply that like all true Oberlanders he was unconscious of his consciousness.' (132). Oberland becomes a transcendent other through which Miriam can interpret symbolically the here and now of everyday reality in her London life; Oberland, a Swiss winter sports resort, has become a spiritual way. In other words, as is always the case in *Pilgrimage*, the particular and concrete has become general and metaphorical.

Oberland can be seen, therefore, as having a relative autonomy from the surrounding narrative and yet its very separateness or departure from the main *Pilgrimage* narrative can itself be reintegrated into that narrative as a contrast integral to the overall structure of the series. The initial impetus for the present article was a concern with the status of individual books in the *Pilgrimage* series, a discussion brought on by issues to do with readership, publishing and the difficulties in getting *Pilgrimage* on to university courses and in getting students to read it. The idea that this is one of the longest novels ever written is a major obstacle to students and new readers. Yet the *Pilgrimage* books are not so long or daunting when read as individual novels and several - for example, *Honeycomb*, *The Tunnel* and *Revolving Lights* - surely qualify as key modernist novels in their own right. It is true that Richardson envisaged *Pilgrimage* as a whole and there is the obvious point that in each book Richardson will refer in passing and without explanation to characters and events in a preceding book, sometimes a long distant preceding book. More generally, it is probably true that most readers only really appreciate the depth and reach of *Pilgrimage* after reading the whole series at least once. However it is worth remembering that this was not how *Pilgrimage* was originally read. The original reception of the books was on the basis of one novel at a time, sometimes years apart and, as the contemporary reviews and criticism show, the shape of the work as a series was not uppermost in the minds of the early informed readership, most of whom saw the books as novels forming a loose sequence or saga featuring the same protagonist, Miriam Henderson, rather than as chapters in an integral whole. The discussion about whether the *Pilgrimage* books are novels or chapters is, of course, not a new one. As Thomas Staley writes in the 1966 *Adam International Review* special Richardson and Proust issue:

Some years ago I devoted a long essay to one of the novels, *Deadlock*, in order to show that it is a perfectly integrated work of art and further to suggest that the insistence upon looking at each of these 'chapters' as part of a whole was perhaps one major reason for the lack of wide critical interest in Dorothy Richardson's achievement. If one were to read

several of the novels as separate works of art (which I think they are), one would recognize her important contribution to the English novel not only as an innovator but also as an extremely interesting craftsman. *Deadlock* is perhaps the best example, but careful study of *Pointed Roofs* or *The Tunnel* would reveal the same careful artistry, well-ordered structure, carefully delineated character portrayal and singleness of theme.²³

We might not agree with the precise terms that Staley uses, we might prefer to see each book in the *Pilgrimage* series as a microcosm or variation of the whole, each book constituted by a recurring structure or pattern of relationships and events, variations on a set of archetypes in terms of social and sexual characterisation. Nevertheless, as Staley suggests, it could be productive for the critical emphasis to shift towards readings of the books as individual novels, which in turn would generate fresh reconsiderations of the structure and thematics of *Pilgrimage* as a whole.²⁴

²³ Thomas W. Staley, 'A Strange Anachronism', *Adam International Review*, 31, 310-12 (1966): 48-49

²⁴ A recent example of this approach would be the reading of *March Moonlight* (including a comparison of draft manuscripts) in Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), Chapter 5. 'Writing Silence'.