

## WORK, WRITING, VOCATION AND QUAKERS IN DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S *PILGRIMAGE*

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This article focuses on the final two chapter-novels of Dorothy Richardson's thirteen-volume novel *Pilgrimage*, which find the protagonist Miriam Henderson living with the Quaker Roscorla family at their farm in Sussex, Dimple Hill. I will argue that in these chapter-novels, *Dimple Hill* and *March Moonlight*, an important dialogue emerges between various aspects of the Quaker life, and Miriam's sense of what it means to be a (working) writer.<sup>1</sup>

The composition history of *Pilgrimage* provides evidence for the claim that this part of the novel is particularly pertinent to an exploration of the work of writing. As Howard Finn notes, these Quaker episodes have:

an autobiographical basis (like much of *Pilgrimage*) Dorothy Richardson having lived with a Quaker family, the Penroses, on their Sussex fruit farm from 1908 to 1911. More importantly perhaps, from a literary point of view, the following three crucial years in which Richardson conceives *Pilgrimage* and embarks on writing is also the period in which she is researching and writing on the Quakers.<sup>2</sup>

Richardson wrote two books on the Quakers during 1913, and both were published the following year. In short, Richardson became the author of *Pilgrimage*, and the writer we now know her

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for helpful feedback from those who heard versions of this paper at the English Literature Department Work-in-Progress seminar, University of Glasgow, the London Modernism Seminar, and the Research Seminar of the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts, University of Glasgow. I would particularly like to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Kirstie Blair, Chris Gair, and Heather Walton. I am also grateful to the anonymous readers of this article for their generous responses.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Finn, "In the quicksands of disintegrating faiths": Dorothy Richardson and the Quakers?, *Literature and Theology*, 19, 1 (March 2005), 34-46, 36.

as, during the time she spent thinking and writing about Quakers. Even more recently, Eva Tucker has suggested that ‘In 1907, the year in which Benjamin Grad introduced Dorothy Richardson to the Penrose Quaker family in Sussex, she was approaching the threshold that divided living from writing’, and ‘it was her time with the Quaker family that strengthened her inner resources, making her free to “Travel, while I write, down to that centre where everything is seen in perspective, serenely”.’<sup>3</sup>

The Quakers have, of course, long been associated with what one might call the ‘scene of literacy’, most obviously in slave narratives many of whose authors record, among the many kindnesses shown to escaped slaves by Quakers, being taught to read and write, and/or, perhaps more pertinently here, encouraged to write down their experiences.<sup>4</sup> I am not proposing that Richardson’s Quaker friends urged upon her, as the Quaker *Amy Post* did the escaped slave Harriet Jacobs, ‘the duty of publishing her experience, for the sake of the good it might do’;<sup>5</sup> in Richardson’s case, the relationship between a Quaker context and writing is more complex than this. But Richardson’s text nevertheless forms part of a long-established historical tradition of linking Quakers not only with basic literacy, but with the impetus to write one’s own life.

While not explicitly written ‘for the good it might do’, *Pilgrimage* is, however, frequently described by commentators in spiritual terms. The front matter of the Virago edition expresses what might be called the popular understanding of Richardson’s relationship with her text: ‘Her journalism was her livelihood but the writing of

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<sup>3</sup> Eva Tucker, ‘Dorothy Richardson and the Quakers’, *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, 1 (2008), 124-131, 124, 130. The embedded quotation is from Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* Vol. 4 (London: Virago, 1979), p.619. References to *Pilgrimage* henceforth in the text, by volume and page number.

<sup>4</sup> See for example the narratives of Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* [1861] (New York: Oxford, 1988); William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860), and James W. C. Pennington, ‘The Fugitive Blacksmith’ (1849), both in *African American Slave Narratives: An Anthology*, 3 vols, Sterling Lecater Bland (ed.), (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Jacobs, p.305.

PILGRIMAGE was her vocation'. Vocation is clearly offered here as something distinct from other kinds of work (from 'livelihood'). But, presumably, neither is it simply 'leisure', usually considered to be the opposite of work – it is much more serious than that. Theorists from Thorstein Veblen to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have described the way in which the structures governing work (the logic of capitalism) came increasingly also to govern leisure during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, suggesting that these terms should no longer be viewed in a simple binary relation.<sup>6</sup> To this extent, the model of vocation bears some similarities with the hegemony of capitalist structures that, *per* Adorno and Horkheimer, also erase differences between work and leisure; vocation is also an all-encompassing model. However, where vocation is invoked, the imperative is of course a spiritual rather than economic one. Therefore vocation may be a term that both undoes the work/leisure binary, and also offers a way out of the hegemony of the cycle of production and consumption that, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, has erased its distinctions. But, problematically from any materialist perspective, it does so by evoking the spiritual or the transcendent. The term must thus be interrogated further in order to explore the extent of its usefulness in a discussion of *Pilgrimage*.

The first definition given in the Oxford English Dictionary for 'vocation' is 'the action on the part of God of calling a person to exercise some special function'.<sup>7</sup> Vocation, then, erases the differences between work and leisure in that the activity or activities carried out under its auspices are done neither for financial gain nor for pleasure and entertainment, but are driven by some overriding spiritual impetus that is indifferent to either possible outcome. Interestingly, however, the first of the various definitions offered which does *not* involve some religious element is of 'One's *ordinary* occupation, business, or profession' (my emphasis).<sup>8</sup> It is precisely that commingling of the ordinary and

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<sup>6</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899] (New York: Dover Publications, 1994); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming [1947] (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> 'Vocation'. Def. 1a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Def. 2b

the spiritual, present in the term 'vocation', that is at the heart of Quaker beliefs; the idea that every activity (rather than just the 'special function' referred to in the first definition), whether it might otherwise be labelled work, or leisure, or something else, is governed by the spiritual vocation or calling that involves fidelity to what Quakers call God, or the inner light, or by various other names. We can see this interpenetration of the mystical with the mundane, the spiritual with the material, and the contemplative with the practical, in this key quotation from one of Richardson's short books about the Quakers:

For Fox, we cannot keep too clearly in mind, the relationship of the soul to the Light was a life-process; the 'inner' was not in contradistinction to the outer. For him, the great adventure, the abstraction from all externality, the purging of the self, the Godward energizing of the lonely soul, was in the end, as it has been in all the great 'actives' among the mystics, the most practical thing in the world, and ultimately fruitful in life-ends.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, while she may not always have been actually writing *Pilgrimage*, it permeated Richardson's life; it was always present, inextricably part of her inner and outer life, her 'life-end'. And of course, this sense of its always being present is heightened by the fact that the material of her work was her own life; she was carrying her text with her at all times, as it were, within herself.

I have dwelt on the concept of vocation for two reasons, then: to indicate the link between the writing of *Pilgrimage* and Quaker discourse; and to alert us to the existence of such 'third terms' which destabilise the concept of 'work' – to show that, throughout this article, the term 'work' is under interrogation. But I want to conclude this discussion of the concept of vocation in relation to *Pilgrimage* with a caveat. Carol Watts describes *Pilgrimage* as 'forming a late Victorian/Edwardian cultural landscape in which Miriam Henderson [...] *works* to realize herself as a *woman* and – what is

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *The Quakers Past and Present* (London: Constable & Company Limited, 1914), p.22.

seen to amount to the same thing – a *writer*' (my emphases).<sup>10</sup> Watts's commentary makes two crucial and connected points. Firstly, Miriam's writing retains (or even takes on) characteristics which associate it with 'work' – indeed, it is explicitly described in *Pilgrimage* as her work – and thus cannot be entirely assimilated to the concept of 'vocation'. Furthermore, it also takes work (connoting effort, labour) to move towards self-actualization, becoming a woman and thus a writer (or vice versa). I will briefly pick up on this idea of the work involved in carving out, defining and maintaining one's identity as a woman writer later in this article, as well as considering the ways in which the Quaker context both resists and supports Miriam's own resistance to the gender distinctions culturally available to her. Crucially, however, and indeed before everything else, the persuasive suggestion that, for Richardson, writing *Pilgrimage* became her 'vocation' must not, of course, tempt us to characterise Miriam's experience solely in this way, nor indeed to assume that writing *Pilgrimage* was no longer 'work' for Richardson. The way in which Miriam's work as a writer is described in these final chapter-novels is, certainly, inextricable from the alternative perspective on time, human activity and spirituality that is offered by the Quaker way of life; the concept of vocation reminds us always to question categorical distinctions between work and leisure, or whatever work's other might be. Nevertheless, Miriam's writing remains, both explicitly and implicitly, bound up with the discourses of work. I now turn to a close reading a particular scene of writing, exploring its engagement both with concepts of work, and with Quaker beliefs and practices.

The short chapter providing the focus for the rest of my argument is from *March Moonlight*, and constitutes a palimpsest of various recognisable literary scenes, rewriting or anticipating them in various ways: the scene of literacy, the room of one's own, and the romantic dénouement. In this scene, during Miriam's second stay with the Quaker Roscorla family at their farm, Dimple Hill, Miriam is writing in a room that has been set aside expressly for

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<sup>10</sup> Carol Watts, 'Releasing Possibility into Form: Cultural Choice and the Woman Writer', in *New Feminist Discourses: Essays in Literature Criticism, and Theory*, Isobel Armstrong (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1992), p.95.

that purpose, for her to write in: Rachel Mary, the adult daughter and manager of all things domestic, has said 'You'll be able to work there undisturbed' (IV 619). The door opens, and Richard Roscorla, the eldest brother and head of the Roscorla family, enters and sits down at the table with her. There had been some kind of romantic liaison between Richard and Miriam during her first stay with the Roscorlas, described in *Dimple Hill*. In a characteristically Richardsonian way, there the relationship is sketched out in fragments, frequently consisting in a perception of emotion apparently communicated yet unarticulated, often alluded to somewhat obliquely or retrospectively, and often put to the background. The way the relationship is narrated enacts Miriam's commitment to presenting 'everything [...] that is always there, preceding and accompanying and surviving the drama of human relationships; the reality from which people move away as soon as they closely approach and expect each other to be all in all.' (IV 525), rather than producing a narrative which foregrounds the romance plot to the exclusion of its complex context. However, despite its unconventional presentation in the text, this obviously appears to the rest of the Roscorla family as a relatively conventional courtship; Miriam and Richard are observed 'walking out' together, and allusions are made to the possibility of their marrying. Mrs Roscorla, Richard's widowed mother, had apparently disapproved of any development of this liaison, but we know that by the time of Miriam's second stay with the family Mrs Roscorla has died, thus presumably removing an obstacle to marriage. So in a traditional narrative we might expect this intimate scene to herald some kind of dénouement; yet, and this being no traditional narrative but being, instead, *Pilgrimage*, no such dénouement – or perhaps a dénouement of a very different kind – occurs.

### *Work, space and gender*

Interrupted in a flow of reminiscences which are, we assume, to be transformed into writing, Miriam sees the door open, and thinks it will be Rachel Mary who enters. Crucially, Miriam imagines Rachel Mary 'Passing through the doorway from bustling

kitchen to silent dining-room, scene of the triumphant fulfilment of kitchen labour' (IV 618). This phrase draws our attention to the emphatic gendering of work and of space in the Quaker household; as Miriam put it in the earlier chapter-novel: 'Two groups. The outdoor toilers, and the women of the house. In all her experience of family gatherings she had encountered nothing comparable to this conspicuous sexual division, belonging to life on the land.' (IV 459).

This might seem somewhat surprising given that the Quakers are known for eschewing gender distinctions, allowing women as well as men to hold positions of responsibility within the (generally non-hierarchical) Quaker community. But Howard Finn has argued that it is necessary to see this gender division - the emphatic location of women in the domestic sphere in these Quaker communities - in the context of the lack of separation between inner and outer cited earlier. Placed within a wider Quaker context where 'the world is home and home is the world',<sup>11</sup> working mainly in a domestic space does not prevent a woman from participating in public life; indeed, as Finn puts it, 'the Quaker home-life [...] actually provides the foundation for Quaker women's social activism'.<sup>12</sup>

These observations connect with a familiar debate within feminism in general, and about the woman writer in particular. Finn notes that *Pilgrimage* was sometimes read by 1970s feminists as a reactionary withdrawal to the traditional "feminine" realm of inner spirit and private room, albeit minus husband and family'<sup>13</sup> (we will come to that 'albeit' below). The image we are presented with at the beginning of this scene is apt to reflect this broader structure; Miriam is sitting writing in a room of her own, or at least in one set aside specifically for her, and specifically for her to write in. However, Finn observes that Richardson's Quaker-influenced narrative resists this reading of Miriam as reactionary, withdrawing to a traditional feminine realm, insofar as, as we have seen, for Fox

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<sup>11</sup> Richardson, *Quakers Past and Present*, pp.78-9.

<sup>12</sup> Finn, p.40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

‘the “inner” was not in contradistinction to the outer’;<sup>14</sup> or ‘in an ideal “Quakerised world” the inner is able to “realise itself” only in the outer and vice versa’.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Miriam’s place of writing has a history that specifically invites us to read it as a conflation of inner and outer, an enactment of the blurring of boundaries. We have seen that, at Dimple Hill, there are ‘Two groups. The outdoor toilers, and the women of the house’ (IV 459). It is highly significant, then, that Miriam’s first choice of location for her work of writing at Dimple Hill, before she is allocated this room of her own, was a summerhouse; obviously a liminal space between the outside, the farmland on which the men work, and the house where the women conduct their ‘kitchen labour’ – between the inner and the outer. As if in an attempt physically to enact the resistance to a distinction between the two, Miriam chooses a place that sits between these locations, and thus between gender identities. Further, the experience of entering this summerhouse and beginning to write is described in a way that broadens its capacity to blur boundaries. We find that ‘The rickety little table was now one with its predecessors’ (IV 523); it becomes ‘one with’, identical with, the various tables and bureaux on which Miriam has written in the various rented rooms she has passed through. It is therefore a ‘place’ that transcends not only gender boundaries, but spatial and temporal boundaries as well.

I have inserted scare quotes around ‘place’ because Michel de Certeau’s distinction between a ‘place’ and a ‘space’ helps to articulate the qualities of the scene of writing here. ‘A place (*lieu*)’, says de Certeau, ‘[...] excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines.’<sup>16</sup> By contrast, ‘A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables [...] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper”’. What is important for my

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<sup>14</sup> Richardson, *Quakers Past and Present*, p.22.

<sup>15</sup> Finn, p.40.

<sup>16</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.117.



purposes is that the space has both spatial and temporal vectors. Miriam's place (or rather, space) of writing participates in the "proper", the logic of the place, insofar as it is a location defined by the particular activity that takes place within it. But it also resists this notion entirely by being a palimpsest of all other 'places' where she has sat down to write. Admittedly, de Certeau's description of the place that is made into a space by having numerous bodies moving through it is not so obviously applicable here. Nevertheless, this instance certainly exemplifies his definition of a space insofar as a 'place [...] excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location';<sup>17</sup> here, clearly, this space is defined by the co-existence of multiple temporalities, multiple experiences. Furthermore, de Certeau's emphasis on the body as that which transforms place into space is relevant to my later discussions on the importance of the physical body in the act of writing as Richardson describes it in this part of her text.

Finally, and recalling my opening discussion, we should note that this 'place' takes on a specifically transcendent, indeed spiritual, quality, expressed in a phrase where the scene of writing is also clearly marked as a scene of work, and a particular kind of work: 'the scene of labour, when I am back in it, alone, has become a sacred place.' (IV 609). It is, ideally, the genderless location of what is (and, the temporal compression suggests, always has been) literally her sacred work – her vocation.

### *The practice of writing, the identity of the writer*

However, if we return to this particular instance of the potentially transcendent scene of writing, Miriam sitting in the room set aside for her in the farmhouse at Dimple Hill, we find that it is not so easy to keep gender at the door of this room of her own. The door opens, and we find that it is not in fact Rachel Mary who is coming in from her kitchen labours, but rather Richard – presumably coming in from his 'outdoor toil'. Miriam finds, on Richard's entrance, that 'Blessedly her pen has remained, during

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

her meditations, poised ready for writing. No need for any movement that might suggest a settling down after an acknowledged disturbance' (IV 618). Here we are reminded of an ambiguity specifically involved in the term 'writing'; namely, its capacity to denote, as Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell have recently put it, both "writing" in the sense of producing material marks [and] "writing" in the sense of composing verbal content'.<sup>18</sup> Here, the focus is suddenly on the *mechanics* of writing. Miriam is writing, certainly, as her pen forms words on the page. But she is not actually 'writing' anything, in the sense of composing, as she had been at the beginning of the scene which plunged us in medias res into a memory which Miriam is recovering in order, presumably, to write about it. Rather, she is simply copying out a passage of Keats from memory.<sup>19</sup> Morag Shiach observed in her 2004 book *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood* that 'Few studies of modernism have paid significant attention to the material experience of writing',<sup>20</sup> I want here to dwell for a moment on the

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<sup>18</sup> Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) p.2.

<sup>19</sup> The poem in question is 'Endymion', whose themes of course resonate with Richardson's at this point. Keat's poem is concerned with, among other things, the value of art, and the relationship between the real and the ideal; perhaps most significantly, this poem was the result of Keats setting himself a challenge as a poet, as a test of his poetic abilities and by way of proving himself as a writer.

<sup>20</sup> Morag Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890–1930*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.65. A certain kind of attention has been paid to 'the material experience of writing' in modernist writing in, for example, Lawrence Rainey's recent work on typewriters and typists: see his *Revisiting The Waste Land* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2005), also 'Fables of Modernity: The Typist in Germany and France' *Modernism/modernity*, 11, 2 (2004), 333-340, and 'Eliot Among the Typists: Writing *The Waste Land*' *Modernism/modernity*, 12, 1 (2005), 27-84. While my interests in representations of 'the material experience of writing' in modernism are distinct from the broadly genetic aspects of this recent work by Rainey, they are certainly proximate to his approach where, for example, he discusses the typist's famous 'automatic hand' in *The Waste Land* (line 255) and its relationship with the (in)communicable (Rainey 'Eliot Among the Typists' pp.73-5). It is this question of how modernism configures and refigures the materiality, indeed physicality, of writing, and what is at stake in such figurations, which I too am interested in exploring.

implications of the foregrounding of the material practice of writing here.

Miriam's hand moving across the page represents the physical work of the writer, such as it is. Physical labour of a different sort now also becomes part of this scene embodied in Richard as he sits down at the table and Miriam observes his 'Rugged, weather-stained hands, quiet now, resting one on each side of the arranged papers. The right hand taking up a freshly-sharpened pencil' (IV 619). We are thus invited to compare his work, metonymically represented through those 'rugged, weather-stained hands', with hers.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, we see Richard's working hands about to engage in Miriam's work, '[a]nd not by mistake' – he has interrupted what the whole family know is Miriam's 'work'. But the way in which his physical act of writing is described makes it contiguous with his outdoor work: 'slowly his huge fingers push the pencil across the page' (IV 619), as if it were a heavy farm implement. And, it seems, as Richard becomes engaged with this physical act of writing, Miriam is increasingly able to relinquish this physical act, '[c]an go on writing, or stop writing', her mind 'retires [...] as if I were alone' (IV 619). The more he physically writes, 'producing material marks', the more she is able to 'compose verbal content',<sup>22</sup> or at least retreat into a non-material context – as if the two of them enact the duality involved in writing, of physical and mental labour.

Why, then, does Miriam find this so important, that she must be *seen* to be writing? I would suggest that it forms part of the 'work' that Miriam needs to do, in Watts's terms, to become a woman writer. I have alluded above to the long history of the Quaker house as scene of literacy; here, we may go further, since it is made

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<sup>21</sup> Woolf explicitly draws the same parallel as Richardson, though on different grounds, where she argues in *Three Guineas* (published the year after Richardson wrote *March Moonlight*) that 'Economically, the educated man's daughter is much on a level with the farm labourer' (Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* [1938] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.330). While economics is not part of Richardson's discourse here, Woolf's observation lends weight to the idea of an unexpected, perhaps submerged, potential for solidarity between the middle-class woman and the working-class man.

<sup>22</sup> Price and Thurschwell, op. cit.

more or less explicit that Miriam sees herself as having done nothing less than *become a writer* during the period when she first stayed with the Roscorlas. This comes in a passage in which Miriam reflects on what it means to write, comparing herself with another writer who stayed with the Roscorlas: 'he had not [as, by implication, she had] arrived and been accepted in one guise and then suddenly presented himself in another' (IV 524). By the time we come to the key scene under discussion here, she is firmly established in this 'guise', this identity. Her acknowledged status as writer is implied when she speculates on what Richard has come in for, perhaps driven by 'the naïve desire to see a writer writing' (IV 619). It is thus crucial at this point that Miriam keeps writing (even if only mechanically) to maintain this new identity: 'Meanwhile to be writing something, anything; to empty the room of any sense of her presence as hitherto known to him [i.e. before she was 'a writer].' (IV 618). Here, the expected romantic denouement is rewritten as we discover that Miriam has developed a significantly different sense of self from when she was romantically involved with Richard Roscorla.<sup>23</sup>

However, these passages betray a deeper connection, or at least similarity, between the two than Miriam's outward silence and refusal to engage with Richard might imply. Reflecting on Richard's relationship with his work, brought into this scene metonymically through his hands, Miriam observes that 'Nearer to him than I am, than I could ever be, is his inseparable companion: the ceaseless challenge of his labour.' (IV 620). She sees that her relationship with him could never be as intimate as his relationship with his work, and this is not without a tone of reproach; Richardson will

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<sup>23</sup> Miriam's sense of herself as a writer is, it should be noted, carefully distinguished from various other models which are open to her. She has distanced herself from the 'writers' of her friends the Wilsons' circle, people who Miriam observes 'gradually making themselves into writers' and thereby gaining access to 'the world of clever writers' (IV 147, 148). Clinging to the vision of herself alone in her room in Chapter 4 of *March Moonlight*, spending her three hundred and sixty-five days in an eternity which is beyond the sanctioned divisions of 'work' and 'leisure' (IV 609), Miriam eschews the socially sanctioned figure of 'the writer', instead insisting upon writing as a practice outside of, and anterior to, the world of hobbies and professions, and their attendant associations and social status.

not unambiguously resolve this situation into one where Miriam has cleanly and contentedly relinquished any romantic attachment. Yet just before this chapter, Miriam has made more or less the same realization about her own relationship with her work: 'the realization of a bond, closer than any other, between myself and what I had written' (IV 611). In psychoanalytic terms, we can thus read Miriam's attraction to Richard as one not of object choice, but of identification; she has not been attracted to him as different, but recognised him as similar, and similar in that their primary intimacy is with their work. It is, of course, this which also makes a relationship between them impossible; makes Miriam's 'private room', to return to Howard Finn's formulation, one that, it seems, must remain 'without husband and family'.<sup>24</sup>

We can clarify the nature of the development in Miriam's identity which is signalled in this passage by comparing it to a similar scene earlier in *Pilgrimage*, from *Interim*. In the earlier scene, the setting is the dining-room at Mrs Bailey's Bloomsbury boarding-house, Miriam's London home. A flirtation has arisen between Miriam and Dr von Heber, one of the young Canadian doctors who are temporarily also resident. In this scene, as in the scene with Richard Roscorla, the apparent object of Miriam's romantic interest comes in to a room in which she is already installed with her notebook (though in this earlier scene there are also other people in the room). Dr von Heber himself starts writing, at which point, disconcerted, Miriam 'began writing at random, assuming as far as possible the characteristics he was reading into her appearance.' (II 389). So, as in the scene with Richard, she maintains the physical act of writing as a kind of shield, enabling her to concentrate on her thoughts about his entrance. Here, however, Miriam focuses entirely on Dr von Heber's perceptions, and fantasises about the possibility of her 'grow[ing] into some semblance of his steady reverent observation,' feeling that '[p]erhaps you need to be treated as an object of romantic veneration before you can become one' (II 389). The young Miriam's flustered confusion in this scene, and her apparent contemplation of building an identity to fit the mould set by

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<sup>24</sup> Finn, p.40.

others, is in stark contrast to the older Miriam's surprised, yet controlled, internal responses to Richard's entrance. We might gloss this difference thus: in the early instance of such a scene, Miriam's writing is little more than an accessory to the possibility of a normative heterosexual liaison, ending surely in marriage; in the second instance, it is clearly Miriam's identity as writer which is to the fore, which is established in advance. Miriam has moved from her early struggles with heteronormativity and socially sanctioned femininity to an increasing awareness of her own resistance to the binaries which structure gender and sexuality; identifying with Richard rather than desiring him as object of romantic love disrupts these structures (as, more obviously, do the lesbian erotics of *Pilgrimage*, and Miriam's own statements about her ambivalent gender identity). So, just as vocation is a third term disrupting work/leisure, so here Miriam herself seems to be exploring, contiguous with her identity as writer, a kind of 'third term' within the structures of gender and sexual identity. Indeed, Miriam's speculation on whether she and Richard 'are Friends together, sharing a common vision, rather than man and woman?' (IV 621) indicates her attraction to this 'third term', the genderless 'Friends' who relate to one another outside the conventional binaries of gender. Working to become a woman writer thus involves working on the very definition of 'woman'.<sup>25</sup>

### *Writing, work, and the Quaker Meeting*

Miriam's own speculation on what this scene constitutes – 'Friends together' – offers an intimate and explicit connection between the scene of writing and Quaker practices. Miriam asks herself, she and Richard having presumably passed quite some time in silence, 'Is this incredible situation intended to be a Quaker Meeting in miniature? Has he come, voluntarily abandoning his social armour, to disclose, in silence, the true nature of our relationship?' (IV 621). It is of course primarily the communal silence of the scene to which Miriam is apparently referring here. But if we look at

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<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers of this article for suggesting this development of my argument.

how a Quaker meeting is described in the penultimate chapter-novel, *Dimple Hill*, we find that the text provides us with the opportunity to make a connection between these scenes, of writing and of Quaker contemplation, anterior even to Richard's strange arrival. At the meeting, Miriam begins by 'Closing her eyes to concentrate upon the labour of retreat into stillness of mind and body [...]' (IV 497). Then:

Bidding her mind be still, she felt herself once more at work, in company, upon an all-important enterprise. This time her breathing was steady and regular and the labour of journeying, down through the layers of her surface being, a familiar process. Down and down through a series of circles each wider than the last, each opening with the indrawing of a breath whose outward flow pressed her downwards towards the next, nearer to the living centre. Again thought touched her, comparing this research to a kind of mining operation. For indeed it was not flight. There was resistance from within, at once concrete and buoyant, a help and a hindrance, alternately drawing her forward and threatening, if for an instant her will relaxed, to drive her back amongst the distractions of the small cross-section of the visible world by which she was surrounded. (IV 498-9)

There are a number of important points of connection between this experience and that of writing. Firstly, I follow Jean Radford in noticing that 'journeying' down to the 'centre', which maps directly on to the terms used to describe Miriam's experience of writing: 'Travel, while I write, down to that centre where everything is seen in perspective; serenely' (IV 619), or elsewhere '[I] eagerly face the strange journey down and down to the centre of being' (IV 609).<sup>26</sup> Miriam's experience of writing is directly comparable with the experience she has at a Quaker Meeting; here the sense of her writing as vocation returns to the fore. Indeed, Radford suggests that 'Miriam turns at the end of *March Moonlight* from a religious vocation to writing'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.32-33

<sup>27</sup> Radford, pp.60-1. Elisabeth Bronfen produces a similar reading of the text, saying that 'Miriam learns that she cannot belong exclusively to this Quaker

However, we can amplify Radford's observations by lingering over the language that Richardson uses here, and noting that the journeying is 'labour', 'work', takes effort, as writing does: 'the scene of labour' (IV 609). As I argued at the outset of this paper, the language of work remains a strong presence, in constant dialogue with the concept or discourse of vocation. And again, we note the presence of actual physical labour, as striking as Richard's 'rugged, weather-stained hands': here she describes this 'research' as 'a kind of mining operation', which appears somewhat incongruous here, almost comically so. What can Miriam know of the physical labour of mining? In both instances, in order to express the fact that what is taking place is work, Richardson draws parallels with the body of the archetypal worker, the physical labouring man. Suggesting that writing is like driving a plough, or that silent contemplation is like hewing coal out of the earth, appears absurd. But this absurdity on the one hand draws attention to the apparently limited models for what constitutes work, and on the other acknowledges the presence behind both these activities – writing, and Quaker contemplation – of the (suffering) body; as, indeed, that which makes them possible.

Finally, and most interestingly, 'resistance' here is both 'a help and a hindrance'. Similarly, in an earlier passage Miriam has described how her writing is 'best in those parts that ran away from the idea and had to be forcibly twisted back until they pointed towards it, or cut down to avoid the emergence of a contradictory idea' (IV 524-5). Once again, we are taken back to Richard's 'rugged, weather-stained hands'; not only does the image evoke a general

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world [...] because it demands that she should turn her back not only on her other world but especially on the scene of her own aesthetic creation [...] Discovering that she may not remain a permanent guest, but must ultimately choose to belong exclusively to their community, Miriam leaves the Quakers in favour of her solitary room where she is able to belong 'in spirit' to many worlds' (Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)), p.161. Bronfen's description of the room in which Miriam can belong 'to many worlds' of course resonates with my analysis of the room as Certeauian space, as palimpsest; a space which is interrupted by Richard, signifying the incompatibility of Quaker life with this kind of solitary endeavour.



sense of manual labour and physical exertion, but, more specifically, that twisting back of parts that run away from the idea also describes the traditional rural practice of hedge laying – common in Sussex up until the mid-twentieth century, and kept alive by conservationists today – bending errant branches so that they all lie in the same direction, and cutting off others. Richardson’s language again makes an analogy between her own work and that masculine, outdoor work, like that of the Quaker men, discussed above. One’s best writing, like the good experience of a Quaker meeting, and like physical labour, does not involve a clear smooth path but requires, involves, engagement with that which *apparently* contradicts, warps or undermines, but is in fact the sine qua non of the activity, be it hedge laying, attending a Quaker Meeting, pushing a plough, or pushing a pencil.

Like the ‘resistance’ Miriam feels during the Quaker meeting, the Quakers themselves are a help, but also a hindrance, in her development as a writer. They open up space, both literally, for Miriam to write, and psychically, for her to contemplate alternative identities, third terms outside of the binaries of work/leisure, man/woman, of her London life. Even while gender binaries apparently remain dominant in Quaker life in practice, these are, as discussed above, in principle set within a larger paradigm which rejects the binary as an adequate structure for describing human existence: ‘the “inner” was not in contradistinction to the outer.’ But in my view a Quaker life is never presented as a serious option for Miriam. The Quakers are, throughout these two chapter-novels, observed from the outside, and ultimately the Quaker community, with its emphasis on shared existence, is incompatible with her newly consolidated identity as a writer; further, and reversing my comment above, the way in which their thought seems conceptually to break down separate spheres is not sufficiently fully played out in the practice of their lives. Though ultimately unable to sustain the identity with which she emerges from her time with them, the Quakers, and Quaker thought, are deeply enabling of Miriam’s identity as a writer: the kind of woman writer she aspires, indeed needs, to be; one who resists separate spheres and externally imposed identities.

I want to conclude by playing out that idea of resistance in a broader context, linking it to the role of interruption, and that idea in turn to the question of how we might categorise Richardson's text. Astradur Eysteinnsson, in the conclusion to his book *The Concept of Modernism*, proposes that modernism is best viewed as an 'interruption' to realist discourse; an interruption necessarily having some engagement with that which it interrupts. As Eysteinnsson puts it, 'By interrupting a discourse (or by consciously making "use" of an interruption), we are implicitly claiming the right to participate in and even change that discourse'.<sup>28</sup> According to this definition, Miriam appears here as modernist in that she 'makes "use"', engages with, productively resists, Richard's interruption as part of the work she does to become a woman writer. And in *Pilgrimage* as a whole Richardson interrupts the realist text by interrupting realist narrative; which means both participating in that narrative, and changing it. Richardson herself famously described *Pilgrimage* as an attempt 'to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism' (I 9); indeed, one way of describing *Pilgrimage* is as the ultimate realist text (contemporary reviews almost said as much);<sup>29</sup> an attempt to describe in full and accurate detail the workings of an individual mind. And yet, as Jean Radford has noted, *Pilgrimage* 'breaks with the nineteenth-century [narrative] contract [...] It uses physical description, the descriptive residue, repeatedly and at great length – not to ensure the "reality effect", but as a means to impel the reader onward toward the ever-deferred point where its significance will become recognisable'.<sup>30</sup> Counter-realist in being ultra-realist, it uses realism's strategies against traditional realism, exposing the implications of those strategies in an opposing direction.

But *Pilgrimage* does not only interrupt the literary critical category which from which it is thus ultimately distinguished. It also

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<sup>28</sup> Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.240.

<sup>29</sup> See Ford Madox Ford *The March of Literature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939), p.848.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Radford, 'Coming to terms: Dorothy Richardson, Modernism and Women', *Modernism/Postmodernism*, Peter Brooker (ed.), (London & New York: Longman, 1992), pp.95-106, 100.

interrupts a chronological model of its own literary critical category, of modernism. Begun in the late 1930s, with parts first published a decade after that, and only published in full (though probably unfinished) as part of *Pilgrimage* in 1967, must *March Moonlight* thus be described as 'late modernism', as traditional, historically-based definitions of modernism might require? Or is it more important to see it as inextricably part of the aesthetic that Richardson developed in looking back at the 1890s from the 1910s? It is characteristic of *Pilgrimage* that it destabilises the grounds for its own categorisation. *Pilgrimage* is a test case for the competing theories of modernism as either describing an historically bounded literary period, or, as is increasingly the case in modernist studies, as an aesthetic which flourished during a certain period, but whose birth and death dates are far from certain, and which may still be with us today. Indeed, the case of *Pilgrimage* has always presented a challenge to a purely historical definition of modernism, as restricted to the years 1910-1925, or even 1880-1940. The shameful neglect of *Pilgrimage* during the middle decades of the century silenced this challenge; critical moves to disrupt or even jettison entirely the historical time-frame of modernism are thus timely developments alongside the re-emergence of this text as, surely, central to the landscape of Anglo-American modernism.

There is one final crucial observation that Eysteinnsson cites in relation to interruption that brings together some of the threads of my argument here, namely Ernst Bloch's proposition that 'perhaps real reality is also an interruption'.<sup>31</sup> Attempts to articulate the relationship between modernism (indeed literature of any kind) and 'real reality' are fraught with difficulty, not least because, of course, there are dangers in positing one kind of reality as 'more real' than any other, as the phrase seems to imply. Discussion of 'reality' in relation to modernism in particular always risks being co-opted by the old argument that modernist writers are characterised by their separation from, incomprehension of, 'real' life, where 'real' life here tends to be defined as the life of the working classes.<sup>32</sup> But even if we wish thus to understand 'real

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Eysteinnsson, p.241.

<sup>32</sup> See, most famously, John Carey, *The intellectuals and the masses: pride and prejudice among the literary intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992).

reality', we find that in fact it asserts itself in the scene we have been examining, in the form of the labouring man's body, interrupting a scene of (modernist) writing, and engaging in its work.

Critics of modernism's supposed elitism might view the proposed analogy between Miriam's pen and Richard's plough as an objectionable attempt to justify the work of writing by, implausibly, equating it with the work of the labouring body. The ambiguity, even uneasiness, generated by this parallel resonates with Virginia Woolf's discussion of work in her 'Memories of a Working Women's Guild'. There, Woolf generates a characteristically contradictory picture of her relationship, as a writer, with labouring bodies (here, women's bodies). At first, she admits that she cannot impersonate 'Mrs. Giles of Durham'; 'One could not be Mrs. Giles because one's body had never stood at the wash tub; one's hands had never wrung and scrubbed and chopped up whatever the meat may be that makes a miner's dinner.'<sup>33</sup> That slightly coy 'one' itself brings in ambiguity: on the one hand, it suggests that Woolf is trying to distance herself from this specific identity, implying a problematically non-committal political position;<sup>34</sup> on the other, it indicates that she is not speaking *only* for herself, but for an anonymous collective of well-off individuals – specifically, it would seem, women – who might all potentially be brought to an awareness of their physical privilege. However, having baldly stated that, unlike Mrs. Giles, she has no experience of physical labour, she goes on to assert that 'no working man or woman works harder with his [sic] hands or is in closer touch with reality than a painter with his brush or a writer with his pen.'<sup>35</sup> Woolf here states explicitly what I have been arguing Richardson's text implies; that writing is real labour, comparable with that of Mrs. Giles. Crucially, it is emphatically not just mental labour to

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<sup>33</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Memories of a Working Women's Guild' in *The Captain's Death Bed* [1930] (London: Hogarth, 1950), pp.207-224, 211.

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, this essay appeared a couple of years after 'the year in which a revolution took place in Monk's House: Mrs Woolf began to cook dinner' (Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* London: Penguin, 2007, p.188); the image of Woolf herself chopping up meat (though not of course for a miner's dinner) is, then, not so implausible as previous stereotypes might have implied.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.215.

which Woolf is referring; such an interpretation is foreclosed by that phrase 'works harder *with his hands*' (my emphasis). Further, Woolf's assertion that writers are just as closely in touch with 'reality' as any other individual challenges the idea of 'real reality', mentioned above; Woolf's phrase, in keeping with many of her aesthetic and political formulations, resists hierarchies and insists that 'reality' is not the privileged realm of those who perform certain kinds of labour. The question is whether we read this statement as problematically downplaying the concrete differences between the different experiences of those in different socio-economic groups (a position difficult to ascribe to the author of *A Room of One's Own*) or, more productively, as asserting the intrinsic relationship between art and 'real life' or 'reality', thus forming part of that strand of modernism which insists on a re-reading of everyday life, and the potential in art to capture and express its realities in ways which break preconceptions about the real everyday life of individuals and groups.

Certainly, we cannot erase either from Woolf's text or from Richardson's the politically problematic implications of the suggestion that writing is physically just as difficult as other kinds of apparently more demanding manual labour; this would appear as the voice of self-important privilege. However, we must remember that both Richardson and (more importantly) Miriam did have experience of relatively hard physical labour – see, for example, the description of Miriam's work as a dental secretary in chapter 3 of *The Tunnel* (II 32-74). Thus the coexistence of the implied equality of writing with other kinds of labour (as, I have been arguing, we see in *March Moonlight*) with, elsewhere in *Pilgrimage*, an evocation of the physical reality of these other kinds of labour; or, in Woolf's text, the close juxtaposition of the recognition of the clear distinctions between kinds of work, with the assertion that writing is as physically hard as any other, means that we cannot simply read these depictions of the work of writing, as labour, as the articulations of a privileged non-labouring individual who is ignorant or unimaginative about the realities of other kinds of work. Rather, we must see these texts as attempts to interrogate and explore the various discourses and

positions, gendered or otherwise, available to the modernist working woman writer.