

FEMININE FLUIDITY: MIND VERSUS BODY IN *PILGRIMAGE*

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Although it was *Pilgrimage* that provoked it, Dorothy Richardson rejected the literary description ‘stream of consciousness’. ‘Stream of consciousness is a muddle-headed phrase. It is not a stream, it’s a pool, a sea, an ocean’¹ she is reported to have said to Vincent Brome. Always unsatisfied with Sinclair’s categorisation, Richardson had sought a new outlet for her feminine prose; while initially appearing to follow along standard lines, *Pilgrimage* ultimately challenged the traditional view that there are correlations between men, mind, and intellect on the one hand, and women, the body, and fluidity on the other. So, if consciousness was not a stream, what was the relationship between the concept of feminine fluidity and Richardson’s work? To answer that question this article will trace discussions of feminine fluidity through feminist discourses that connect fluidity with ideas of pollution, materiality, contamination and a viscous uncontrollability.

Mary Douglas’ pioneering socio-anthropological work *Purity and Danger*, first published in 1966, but reprinted multiple times since, has proven an influential source for contemporary feminist theory.² Douglas explores how society, its influences, boundaries

¹ Dorothy Richardson, ‘A Last Meeting with Dorothy Richardson’, Interview by Vincent Brome, *London Magazine*, 6 June 1959, p.29 cited in M. Harvey, review of Elisabeth Bronfen *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text, Modernism/modernity*, 7, 3 (Sept 2000), 525.

² Douglas’s theories in *Purity and Danger* have been used by many feminist theorists including: Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and subversion of identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Douglas is cited in the introduction to *Feminist Theory: A Reader* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2005) and her work also continues to influence literary studies in work such as Patricia Yaeger’s *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990*, (Chicago: Chicago Univerisy

and taboos can be read into the physical and material body and how female and male bodies are read differently. Looking at social status Douglas states how ‘it is not difficult to see how pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status’, illustrating that in some beliefs ‘only one sex is endangered by contact with the other, usually males from females’ which ‘suggest that many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system’.³ Such examples are given from the Hindu caste where ‘a double moral standard is often applied to sexual offences...Through the adultery of a wife impure blood is introduced to the lineage. So the symbolism of the imperfect vessel appropriately weighs more heavily on the women than on the men’;⁴ equally the Mae Enga ‘fear female pollution for their males and for all male enterprise’ with the ‘strongly held belief that contacts with women weaken male strength’.⁵ These examples give an insight into the socially constructed position of women and the concept of their threatening and contaminating fluidity. Douglas’ work has been influential across many disciplines and can be seen as the starting point for most contemporary feminist theories on pollution, dirt and fluidity.

More recently, Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* has offered an extended interpretation of female materiality. Considering Plato’s interpretation of the female receptacle, Butler explores its gendered nature : ‘for she will never resemble - and so never enter into - another materiality. This means that he...will never be entered by her or, in fact, by anything. For he is the impenetrable penetrator, and she, the invariably penetrated’.⁶ Butler states that

Press, 2000) and Diane Hume George’s *Oedipus Anne: the poetry of Anne Sexton* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987). Douglas’s other theories on anthropology, cosmology, performance, food and witchcraft (to name but a few) continue to influence scholars from a similarly diverse number of disciplines.

³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concept of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.4.

⁴ Ibid. p.156.

⁵ Ibid. pp.181-182.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.50.

this position strictly prohibits the female from penetrative actions ‘through the exclusive allocation of penetration to the form, and penetrability to a feminized materiality’.⁷ She argues that if the female were to penetrate, either the male or elsewhere, this would bring into question the gendered identity of ‘she’ and if she could remain as such; more importantly, it questions if ‘he’ could remain as ‘he’ if penetrated. Butler goes as far as to suggest that Plato’s theory amounts to an example of male panic: a fear of effeminacy, where female fluidity, rather than being considered a powerful penetrating force, is regarded as sequestered power and reduced to a contaminating reagent which requires suppression. Consequently, the penetrative capability of the fluid female assumes masculine agency and threatens the hegemonic position. The male denunciation of female fluidity therefore can be seen as a defensive measure, as the concept of the ‘uncontrollable’ and ‘seeping’ fluidity not only acts as a fluid which ‘engulfs all’ but also a feminine fluid which is able to *permeate* all.

Elizabeth Grosz goes beyond Butler’s work in her theorisation of fluidity by exploring the idea of corporeality and symbolism and its resonances within society. In *Volatile Bodies* she suggests that socially defined categories have encoded women’s bodies with a sense of uncontrollability and indeed volatility:

the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment - not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order⁸

Importantly, in this sense of physicality, male fluidity is regarded as quite the contrary; it is not simply an uncontrolled occurrence, it has a specific role, an outcome, it is seen in terms of what it produces. Most notable is seminal fluid, which is encapsulated as a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p.203.

specified object - sperm, thus reducing the fluid to a solid and increasing its perceived worth. Again, Grosz extends this idea and states that 'Seminal fluid is understood primarily as what it makes, what it achieves, a causal agent and thus a thing, a solid: its fluidity, its potential seepage, the element in it that is uncontrollable, its spread, its formlessness, is perpetually displaced in discourse onto its properties, its capacity to fertilize, to father, to produce an object'.⁹ So, while male fluidity is defined as creative and powerful and, as Grosz highlights, the flow of sperm can be solidified by 'connecting it metonymically to a corporeal pleasure and metaphorically with a desired object';¹⁰ the onset of menses for the female has unstable connotations and a less desirable connection with dirt, shame, incapacity and the Freudian bleeding wound resulting from castration. It is this social connotation of difference and inadequacy that have 'enabled men to associate women with infection, with disease, with the idea of festering putrefaction, no longer contained simply in female genitals but at any or all points of the female body'.¹¹ Therefore, the idea of 'female fluidity' moves a step further from simply connecting females to their physical 'flow' and female fluidity becomes a kind of *pars pro toto* for women themselves.

However, this more sophisticated view of female fluidity comes well after Richardson. Historically, a nineteenth-century example of the ancient association between female fluidity and contamination can be found in the Contagious Diseases Acts. These Acts demanded that women, and not men, were treated for venereal disease and thus stigmatized. Although originally passed in 1864 and not repealed (following a long campaign by women activists) until 1886, the Acts show how, particularly working-class women were aligned with danger and the idea of contagion. Clearly, it is not simply the metaphor of contamination but also male social power which places women in a subordinate position, however the ubiquity of the association show the close relationship between metaphor and social power. The association between women and contamination is perpetuated as a means to deflect any challenges

⁹ Ibid, p.199.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.205.

¹¹ Ibid, p.206.

to the social power of men, while men's power is sustained by the metaphor's effectiveness. The image of contamination is often deployed by men in the modernist period.

Male 'high' modernism persists in making a connection between women and 'dirty' fluids. John Quinn, a great supporter and facilitator within Modernist literary circles, in particular of the trinity of Pound, Eliot, and Joyce, certainly maintains the association of women with fluid waste. In his correspondence with Ezra Pound, Quinn espoused his censure of *The Little Review*'s two female editors and their literary proficiency:

I don't like the thought of women who seem to exude as well as bathe in piss, if not drink it, or each other's...

Without being personal, I think of female literary excrement; washy urinaceous menstruations...a feeling of stale urine exuded in the place of the cream of the jest.

Putrid ignorance, imbecile brazenness, banal pretense—that make the sight of a squatting bitch dachshund pouring a sheet of urine into a ditch a poetic, if not a pitiful sight.¹²

Quinn appears to have failed in one aspect – how could the editors, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, or indeed any female not take this personally? But, what this misogynistic tirade of graphic insults also does is again reaffirm the clear demarcation between the creative capability of male 'cream' and the contaminating and dirty fluids of females, even in literary production.¹³

¹² Quinn to Pound, 16 Oct 1920, quoted in W. Koestenbaum, 'The Waste Land: T.S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 34, 2 (1988), 119.

¹³ Indeed this idea, albeit in a less graphic manner, can also be seen in Ezra Pound's 'Translator's Postscript' to Remy De Gourmont's *The Philosophy of Love*. In response to De Gourmont's comment, 'Il y aurait peut-être une certain corrélation entre la copulation complète et profonde et le développement cérébral' (London: Casanova Society, 1926, p.169), Pound likens his own literary creativity to the qualities of the phallus when he states, 'There are traces of it in the symbolism of phallic religions, man really the phallus or spermatozoid charging, head-on, the female chaos; integration of the male in the male organ. Even oneself has felt it, driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London, a sensation analogous to the male feeling in copulation'. (p.170) This

However, for Richardson, the stream (or, indeed cream) is limited and represents linear movement - it is restrained by banks. Richardson's proposed theory on fluidity is less restricted; the movement of thought, style and form which she utilises is less structured and has freedom to fluctuate in any direction: '[i]t is not a stream, it's a pool, a sea, an ocean'.¹⁴ In her refutation of the notion of 'Stream of Consciousness' Richardson rejects the traditional view of fluidity and adapts the term to come in line with her own theories on the subject. In this respect, Richardson can be seen as an early contributor to feminist debates about feminine fluidity. The fluid outpouring of words which Richardson strives for in her 'feminine prose' allows an efflux of internal thoughts and an insight into the private feelings of *Pilgrimage*'s protagonist, Miriam Henderson. Indeed, Richardson's own rejection of the term 'Stream of Consciousness' is echoed by Miriam, who is always wary of definitions and categories. This investigation of 'female fluidity', in both the physical and metaphorical sense, is a useful method of better understanding Miriam's gendered identity and, especially, her position with regard to her own embodied femininity.

Rather than embracing female fluidity, throughout *Pilgrimage* Miriam tends to veer away from overt expressions of physical fluidity and, initially she seems so resolute in her antagonism towards femininity, 'She loathed women' (I 21), that she also views fluidity as a form of contamination. However, *Pilgrimage* as a whole does make concessions to fluidity, not least in the 'feminine prose' employed by Richardson which allows the words, punctuation and sentence structure to flow freely. Richardson offers a 'feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism' (I 9) which is not bound by punctuation and traditional style. Richardson states that 'Feminine prose...should properly be unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstructions' (I 12); this new

appears to be a reversal of the female fluidity synecdoche with opposite connotations of the male/phallus correlation having positive, creative and forceful qualities.

¹⁴ Dorothy Richardson, 'A Last Meeting with Dorothy Richardson', op. cit, p.525.

'feminine prose' not only allows her to define her feminine writing in distinction to masculine writing, but also allows her to create a new stance on fluidity by exercising her ability and power to choose her own form and style without the restraints of male rules. In addition, the movements and travels of the characters and indeed the seemingly formless movements between scenes is, as Jean Radford argues in *Dorothy Richardson*, also fluid.¹⁵ Radford highlights how Richardson shifts from a view of 'Miriam's physical movements' to 'her consciousness, the inner world of her mental activity' and how this 'process is repeated in a series of fluid movements from 'outside' to 'inside' and back again'.¹⁶ Even time appears to have its own fluidity in *Pilgrimage*, as past events are intermingled, for the first time, in the present consciousness of Miriam, thus removing the standard linearity of time. So, the question is, if, in *Pilgrimage*, the text on the page, the characters' movements and even time itself can offer this kind of fluidity, why can't Miriam be comfortable with or embody her own personal fluidity?

To start where one should, at the beginning, the opening novel-length chapter of *Pilgrimage* sees Miriam in a problematic relationship with her femininity; she actively avoids any overt signs of femaleness and favours a more masculine disposition by focusing on her intellectual attributes. Evidently, at this time she is more disposed to views similar to those of Pound's and Quinn's. One of the first examples of Miriam's uneasy relationship with her body and fluidity is given in *Pointed Roofs*, when all the girls, including the teachers, at the school in Hanover are ordered, by Fraulein Pfaff, to have their hair washed. Miriam sees this invasion of her person as almost a form of contamination and she utterly rejects the sense of female unity created in the communal washing of hair:

Ordering her, Miriam, to go downstairs and have her hair washed ... by Frau Krause ... off-hand, without any warning ... someone should have told her – and let her choose. Her

¹⁵ Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.27.

¹⁶ Ibid.

hair was clean. Sarah had always done it. Miriam's throat contracted. She would not go down. Frau Krause should not touch her [...] What could she do? She imagined the whole school waiting downstairs to see her come down to be done. (I 59)

Miriam's desire to situate herself apart from the other females and indeed deny her position in the public feminine display is apparent in her venomous rejection of the shared activity as she imagines that all the girls will be waiting to watch her 'initiation' into the fluidity of this sororal act. The episode illustrates the influence of the dominant masculinist ideology on the young Miriam's perception of fluidity.

The laborious process of washing hair is an example of the protracted toilet exclusive to women, one of the gendered social duties that Miriam so greatly resents. A practice that had been performed within the privacy of her home and by her sister, Sarah, becomes an open display of the subject's interaction with fluids and with other women. This public display physically affects Miriam, and with her 'throat contracted' (I 59) she becomes nauseous. In another passage, worth quoting in length, Miriam's total resentment can be seen:

Miriam's outraged head hung over the steaming basin – her hair spread round it like a tent frilling out over the table.

For a moment she thought that the nausea which had seized her as she surrendered would, the next instant, make flight imperative. Then her amazed ears caught the sharp bump-crack of an eggshell against the rim of the basin, followed by a further brisk crackling just above her. She shuddered from head to foot as the egg descended with a cold slither upon her incredulous skull. Tears came to her eyes as she gave beneath the onslaught of two hugely enveloping, vigorously drubbing hands – 'sh – ham – poo' gasped her mind. (I 60-61)

This bodily orientated extract gives an idea of the sensory overload which is too much for Miriam to bear, as the sight, smell

and feeling of this onslaught is overwhelming. The ‘large’, ‘coarse red hands’ (I 60) of Frau Krause not only physically touch her but actually facilitate the fluid transaction and, what is viewed to be, contamination.¹⁷ The aftermath of this onslaught leaves Miriam feeling less than adequate as a female as she is unable to successfully make herself presentable enough to join the other girls in the dining room.

Miriam is clearly at odds with the whole process from start to finish, she is loath to express or acknowledge any fluidity which is associated with the feminine. Whether Miriam’s uncomfortable relationship with her femininity, siding with a more masculine position, is as a result of her point blank rejection of all things ‘feminine’ or whether it is her inability to perform ‘feminine’ (as other women do) and thus rejection of associated matters that causes the uncomfortable relationship is difficult to decipher. I am more disposed to the idea that she is uncomfortable with her own femininity, desiring a more masculine stance because she is unable or unwilling to conform to the feminine expectations and therefore rejects such overt displays of femininity, even the act of washing women’s hair.

Miriam continues her avoidance of such overt expression of her bodily ‘flow’. An apparent example of this is when she only mentions her menarche once and this is executed in a (typically Richardsonian) circuitous manner:

She remembered with triumph a group of days of pain two years ago. She had forgotten.... Bewilderment and pain ... her mother’s constant presence ... everything, the light everywhere, the leaves standing out along the tops of hedgerows as she drove with her mother, telling her of pain and she alone in the midst of it ... for always ... pride, long moments of deep pride...Eve and Sarah congratulating her, Eve stupid and laughing ... the new bearing of the servants ... Lilly Belton’s horrible talks fading away to nothing. (I 137)

¹⁷ As an aside, it might be added that this description of Frau Krause’s hands firmly places her in the lower social position of a servant, especially when compared to the ‘soft, plump’ hands of Sarah who usually performed this task.

Although confused and unsure, a connection to the earth is felt with Miriam noticing the ‘light’ and the ‘leaves’. This sense of affiliation with Mother Nature can be seen as representative of Miriam’s entrance into the natural female cycle as her own fertility is realised. Yet Miriam has the same feeling of scorn towards her sisters, especially Eve’s, reaction as she does to Lilly Belton’s ‘horrible talks’. Uncomfortable in this ‘Gaian’ role and the reaction it causes in other people, Miriam disregards her ‘flow’, either because of embarrassment or aversion, and grants it very little space within her consciousness. At this stage in her journey, it is apparent that Miriam is in no way inclined to the idea of female biological superiority or the views which we have come to regard as essentialist feminism.¹⁸ She does not appear to view her own fertility with approval, a standpoint later reiterated when she asserts: ‘There was nothing wonderful in having children. It was better to sing, She was perfectly sure that she herself did not want children... “Superior women don’t marry,”’ (I 410).

While it may indeed be true that superior women do not marry, this, as Miriam discovers in *Dawn’s Left Hand*, does not necessarily affect ones ability to have a child. Further along on Miriam’s journey, as her relationship with Hypo develops, he seeks a physical relationship and insists that procreation will help her literary creativity, ‘You want a *green solitude*. An infant. Then you’d be able to write a book’ (IV 238). This ‘green solitude’ links to the Gaian status of ‘Woman’ evoked by Miriam’s first menses. After Hypo’s statement Miriam becomes aware of ‘Tree-trunks, in woodland variety, standing in light dimmed by their full-leaved branches, [which] came before her inward eye’ (IV 238) and mimic

¹⁸ For example, the French feminist Annie Leclerc. Leclerc dismisses femininity as a social construct, insisting that women should value their biology ‘periods, childbirth, etc.’ and consider it as a ‘joyful experience and not a slough of torment’ (*Parole de femme*, in T. Moi, (ed.), *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp.73, 74). Leclerc goes on to argue that mothering and giving birth should be seen as the most fulfilling experiences life can offer. She promotes female’s procreative ability as the reason for their equality (or indeed supremacy) to men, arguing that women are men’s ‘most threatening enemy precisely because she is the most gifted for life’ (p.73).

her initial feelings toward menstruation. However, as before she soon denies this affiliation. Feeling her strong position threatened with female weakness she retreats into her mental space of safety, her ‘inward eye’ and believes that the ‘green solitude’ was ‘so full of his influence that there was no space wherein her own spirit could make its home’ (IV 238).

Joanne Winning, in *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, explores Richardson’s own sexual identity and looks at her relationship with H.G. Wells. Winning argues that Richardson avoided intimacy, trying ‘to circumvent the sexual, preferring to keep their intense connection on a cerebral level, and preferring Wells as an intellectual sparring partner’.¹⁹ Certainly, in *Pilgrimage*, Miriam enjoys a relationship with Hypo based on intellect and is reluctant for it to be fully consummated. This reluctance is expressed in Miriam’s detached aestheticised view both her own and Hypo’s body. As they lie naked together she explores their appearance:

With the eyes of Amabel, and with her own eyes opened by Amabel, she saw the long honey-coloured ropes of hair framing the face [...] falling across her shoulders and along her body where the last foot of their length, red-gold, gleamed marvellously against the rose-tinted velvety gleaming of her flesh. Saw the lines and curves of her limbs, their balance and harmony. Impersonally beautiful and inspiring. (IV 231)

This is the most positive portrayal of the female body thus far in the text. In contrast, she regards Hypo’s body with little pleasure, ‘His body was not beautiful. She could find little to adore’ (IV 231).

As Miriam’s journey progresses she moves past the initial rejection of her femininity and she is enabled, through the sensual and sexually experienced influence of Amabel, to become confident in herself and find pleasure in her own female body. She is able both to recognise women’s inherent fluidity and how that fluidity is

¹⁹ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.23.

affected by the perspectives of men:

Women, then, want recognition of themselves, of what they are and represent, before they can come fully to birth. Homage for what they are and represent.

He was incapable of homage. Or had given all he had and grown sceptical and dead about it. Left it somewhere. But without a touch of it she could not come fully to birth for him. In that sense all women *are* Undine. Only through a man's recognition can they come to their full stature. (IV 230-231, original emphasis.)

What is really important in this quote is Miriam's reference to Undines. By giving women the mythological status of the beautiful and immortal water nymphs, Miriam begins to recognise the female elemental force and their innate fluidity. In this, she also recognises the male dominance to which women are subject. The myth of the Undines tells that they, the water nymphs, are only able to gain a soul by bearing the child of a human man and thus relinquishing their immortality. Therefore, Miriam must choose between an immortal status of femininity or the human procreative 'Woman'. Clearly, one can't have both.

With a sense of indifference, Miriam's and Hypo's affair is eventually consummated and it is regarded, by Miriam, as a solitary journey in a shared act:

It was uncanny, but more absorbing than the unwelcome adventure of her body, to be thus hovering outside and above it in a darkness that obliterated the room and was too vast to be contained by it. An immense, fathomless black darkness through which, after an instant's sudden descent into her clenched and rigid form, she was now travelling alone on and on, without thought or memory or any emotion save the strangeness of this journeying[...]

His relaxed form was nothing to her. A mass of obstructive clay from which the spirit had departed on its way to its own bourne. (IV 257)

This rather apathetic view of her first sexual experience and the ‘unwelcome adventure’ of her body indicates the detachment she feels in this shared experience. She is further removed from Hypo as his spirit/semen departs and he achieves his goal of penetrating Miriam’s verdant ‘solitude’. Miriam is uncomfortable with the physicality of their union and her masculine countenance is unsteadied as their relationship moves from a cerebral level and becomes sexual. Unable to fulfil the normal male/female roles results in an unsatisfactory experience for both parties and she is no longer able to assert her masculine, intellectual self; to counteract this she attempts to regain her power and views the physical experience from the most masculine position she can achieve - that of an observer, a *flâneur*. This out-of-body experience allows her to detach from the physical experience of being the female receptacle and to explore the mental, and thus more masculine, experience.

However, Miriam’s relationship with Amabel appears to surpass those she has had with men and she is able to connect to her without her usual courtship of extensive debating. She finds pleasure in their silent union, relaying ‘moments when they were suddenly intensely aware of each other and the flow of their wordless communication’ (IV 245). The extent of Miriam’s journeying is realised in her relationship with Amabel: where she once denied any vestiges of femininity, she is now able to relate to and enjoy female fluidity. It is in her relationship with Amabel that Miriam begins to recognise her own femininity and being with Amabel, she feels ‘an intensity of being that flowed refreshingly through all her limbs and went from her in a radiance’ (IV 190). Throughout her journey, Miriam tends to find difficulty in her relationships with males, as she did with Hypo, as both parties strive for the dominant position whereas with Amabel, Miriam is able to situate herself in the masculine position and appreciate Amabel’s femininity and subsequently, through her ‘male’ consciousness, she is able to see herself and her own femininity ‘from the outside, as an object of desire’.²⁰ Therefore, it is only through Miriam’s masculinity that she is fully able to acknowledge

²⁰ Gevirtz, S., *Narrative’s Journey. The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p.59.

her own femininity. Ultimately this leaves Miriam caught between masculine and feminine perspectives. She later claims that she is ‘something between a man and a woman; looking both ways’ (II 187).

As we have seen in *Pointed Roofs*, Miriam’s use of masculine positions does not always work to her advantage, and she is often restricted by the parameters masculine hegemony allocates to women. Consequently, she is caught in a difficult bind of not acknowledging and embracing her femininity because of the restrictions which accompany women’s position, but also of not being able to have full access to the advantages allotted to men. At the start of Miriam’s journey, she adopts a masculine position, distancing herself from her own female fluidity and, in effect, renouncing femininity to fully embrace her masculine side. In so doing, she denies herself the advantage of free flow between the two. In Miriam’s dilemma, *Pilgrimage* highlights the limitations of adopting a masculine position, particularly in relation to the ideas and experience of female fluidity. Later in the novel cycle, however, under Amabel’s influence, Miriam begins to recognise her own femininity and fluidity and enjoy the ‘flow’ of their mutual communication. By this point, the representation of female fluidity has become more sophisticated and has moved away from the simplicity of binary oppositions.

In this respect, the later novel-length chapters of *Pilgrimage* offer an opportunity to re-read the earlier chapters. These re-readings of chapters such as *Pointed Roofs* and *Backwater* can also offer a marker of how far Miriam and perhaps Richardson herself had travelled: from an apparently thorough rejection of physicality to an acceptance and acknowledgement of femininity as an innate, unconstructed, elemental force. Thus it is only when an equilibrium is reached between the masculine and feminine aspects of Miriam’s consciousness that she is able to utilise the full power of her female fluidity. While Richardson’s text could never be reconciled with the views of essentialist feminists such as Annie Leclerc, she does nonetheless move a significant distance from Miriam’s original refuge in a predominantly masculine viewpoint. Rejecting the traditional view of feminine fluidity and offering a

more balanced interpretation by taking into account both the masculine and feminine qualities one individual can hold, Richardson proposes a theory of gender which was to be adopted by many subsequent theorists, that of a new, less contaminating, yet more powerful concept of feminine fluidity.