

SCATTERED VISION AND SILENT MASKS:
DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S CRITICAL
PERCEPTIONS ON RACE

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A Strange Convening

In a scene near the end of *Deadlock* (1921), the sixth book of Dorothy Richardson's serialised novel, *Pilgrimage*, Miriam Henderson experiences a chance encounter with a black man while having tea with her suitor Michael Shatov, a Russian Jewish émigré¹. Miriam has just returned from a visit with the Brooms, her genteel friends in north London, which she spent in agony and with 'aching heart' over how to respond to Michael's confession of love for her a few days prior (III 207). After reconvening in a park, she and Michael board an omnibus together and, on a whim, disembark near the docks. Obliquely registering its service as a gateway between Britain's metropole and colonies, Richardson's narrator describes this location (foreign to her novel's protagonist) as having a tropical atmosphere: it is a 'marshy jungle' with 'the air that moves softly on still days over wide waters'. An enclosure of water that Miriam pauses to observe from 'a little quay' is cast in 'shadowed light', leading her to reflect that the setting has a 'charm' and a 'lonely beauty to be gathered only by the chance passer-by'. Within the vicinity of this 'strange romantic place', as Michael calls it, they enter a teashop—'a small dark room...close packed with an odorous dampness' (III 215-17). Once seated, Miriam's enjoyment of this tiny 'jungle' is interrupted by a 'black form', which the narrator describes in most dehumanising terms:

Miriam sat frozen, appalled by the presence of a negro. He sat near by, huge, bent, snorting and devouring, with a huge black bottle at his side. Mr. Shatov's presence was shorn of its alien quality. He was an Englishman in the fact that he and she could *not* sit eating in the neighborhood of this marshy

¹ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, Vol. III, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p.217.

jungle. But they were, they had. They would have. Once away from this awful place she would never think of it again. Yet the man had hands and needs and feelings. Perhaps he could sing. He was at a disadvantage, an outcast. There was something that ought to be said of him. She could not think what it was. Every time she sipped her bitter tea, it seemed that before she should have replaced her cup, vengeance would have sprung from the dark corner. Everything hurried so. There was no *time* to shake off the sense of contamination. It *was* contamination. The man's presence was an outrage on something of which he was not aware. It would be possible to make him aware. When his fearful face, which she sadly knew she could not bring herself to regard a second time, was out of sight, the outline of his head was desolate, like the contemplated head of any man alive. Men ought not to have faces. Their real selves abode in the expressions of their heads and brows. Below, their faces were moulded by deceit. ...

While she had pursued her thoughts, advantage had fallen to the black form in the corner. It was as if the black face grinned, crushing her thread of thought. (217)

Critics have addressed the rabid bigotry in this scene, recognising it as a key site for discerning Richardson's reactionary ideas on race in both *Pilgrimage* and 'Continuous Performance', Richardson's column for the film journal *Close Up* (1927-1933).² Thomas Fahy argues that Miriam's perception of this man exemplifies her 'inability to see beyond gender, cultural, and ethnic/racial differences' throughout the volumes of *Pilgrimage*.³ Jane Garrity interprets this encounter as aiding Miriam in her struggle to perceive Michael romantically by 'displacing [Michael's] Otherness on to the black body and aligning Michael with her Englishness,

² The avant-garde *Close Up* is considered the first film journal. It was produced primarily from the Riant Chateau in Territet, Switzerland, under the direction of Kenneth Macpherson, Bryher, and H.D. The editors described the journal as 'the first to approach films from the angles of art, experiment, and possibility' (*Close Up*, 1, 4 (1927): cover).

³ Thomas Fahy, 'The Cultivation of Incompatibility: Music as Leitmotif in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Women's Studies*, 29 (2000): 131-147, p.143.

reconstructing him as both white and European'.⁴ According to Garrity, Richardson's description of the man 'is consistent with her racist treatment of the black body' in her film writing, particularly, in her article 'Dialogue in Dixie'.⁵

In spite of its blinding racism, however, this scene in a peripheral teashop contains what Rita Felski calls 'evidence of dissonance, ambiguity, and contradiction', which parallels the equally complicated figurations of race and racism in Richardson's film column.⁶ This evidence cannot simply be dismissed in the difficult effort to decipher Richardson's racial politics, for it reveals Richardson's writings to be more subversive of Euro-American race ideology than the passage above suggests at first glance. In this article, I analyse this troubling scene of difference in *Deadlock* alongside several articles published in *Close Up*, including not only Richardson's contributions to the journal but also the third installment of the American poet H.D.'s 'The Cinema and the Classics' series and an article titled 'The Negro Actor and the American Movies' by the African American journalist Geraldyn Dismond, the only writing by a woman featured in *Close Up*'s August 1929 special issue on black cinema.⁷ These texts form a matrix for thinking about race and racism within transatlantic,

⁴ Jane Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.110.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.109.

⁶ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.29. I adopt Felski's method of 'oscillating between illumination and critique' to avoid the 'unreflecting projection of present-day truths onto the texts of the past' that tries to expose these texts' lack, or their authors' naivety (p. 34). While Felski develops this approach 'to track the figure of the feminine' in modernist texts, I use it to track racialized figures in writings that engage with the transition from silent to sound-synchronised cinema.

⁷ Dismond, later known as Gerri Major, was a popular journalist and publicist; she served as editor and wrote columns for a number of African American publications, including *The Inter-State Tattler*, *The Amsterdam News*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Jet*. She was the first African- American woman to host a regular radio broadcast program, 'The Negro Achievement Hour', which first aired on WABC. With Doris E. Saunders, she wrote a book on four centuries of African American elites, titled *Black Society* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1976).

modernist, cinematic culture. Interpreted within this matrix, Richardson's writings resist dominant constructions of race. Undercutting the tenets of what Marianna Torgovnick calls 'primitivist discourse', Richardson's meditations on race are transgressive even as they appear definitively racist according to today's codes for discussing social and biological difference.⁸

Protesting the union of speech and image in cinema, Richardson challenges the 'fetishi[s]ation of the "black voice"', which, as film scholar Alice Maurice writes, characterised racism in early sound-synchronised film.⁹ During this period, which also saw Hollywood's first feature-length films with entirely African American casts, white directors, including King Vidor and Paul Sloane, hired black actors, rather than white actors made up in blackface, to depict scenes of African American cultural life. The reason for these mainstream directors' departures from the racist tradition of blackface performance in the United States had everything to do with easing the transition to sound synchronisation. Dark-skinned bodies on screen were perceived as 'a remedy to the often clunky and disappointing marriage of sight and sound in the early talkies'; rather than motivated by a progressive attitude toward African Americans, this perception, Maurice argues, reflected 'a kind of synesthesia' surrounding race in the dominant viewing public's imaginary.¹⁰

Referring to the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definitions of this term, Maurice describes synesthesia as 'a sensory wire-crossing helped along by imagination and the "arbitrary association of ideas"' and

⁸ Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.29. Torgovnick characterises primitivist discourse as a form of 'us/them thinking' (p.4) consisting of tropes and categories by which Westerners align 'the Other' with, on the one hand, 'our untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous' and, on the other hand, the qualities of 'a precapitalist utopia', or everything Westerners wish they could be (p.8). Either way, the purpose of such thinking is to 'draw lines and establish relations of power between us and them' (p.11).

⁹ Alice Maurice "'Cinema at its Source": Synchronizing Race and Sound in the Early Talkies', *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 49, 17, 1 (2002): 31-71, p.32.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.32.

as ‘a literary device’ by ‘which terms relating to one kind of sense-impression are used’ for another.¹¹ In the reception of early sound film, the audience’s imbrication of visual and aural perceptions of black bodies and black voices, respectively, satisfied an ideological imperative to represent race as a fixed and tangible aspect of identity. Thereby, synesthesia buttressed white American racism:

Claims that African American performers’ voices could be reproduced more faithfully than others essentially promised that these voices would be ‘in sync’ with their bodies—and with audience expectations about what should emanate from those bodies. In other words, the sound would be synchroni[s]ed not merely with the image on screen but with the image or stereotype of the ‘Negro’ long produced and exploited by Hollywood.¹²

Maurice theorises that, during ‘the transition to the talkie’, the discourses of race and sound ‘supported each other not because of the alleged suitability of “black voices” to sound recording, but because of what they already had in common: a dependence on popular expectations regarding authenticity, the alignment of internal and external characteristics, and the evidence of the senses’.¹³ Maurice’s inattention to Richardson’s writing on Sloane’s 1929 film *Hearts in Dixie* might suggest that Richardson’s national identity makes her irrelevant to issues of race in Hollywood films. On the contrary, Richardson’s representations of race in *Deadlock* and articles in *Close Up* extend Maurice’s insights into the ‘discursive link created - by studios, critics, and the popular press - between African American performers and sound technology’ in the late 1920s.¹⁴ In particular, Richardson takes issue with linking sight and sound in cinema because of its racist effect.

Problems of Authenticity

Critics have lately made efforts to redress neglect of Richardson’s recapitulation of British imperialist-racist ideology in *Pilgrimage* and

¹¹ Ibid, p.33.

¹² Ibid, pp.33-34.

¹³ Ibid, p.32.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.31.

her twenty articles for *Close Up*. Jane Garrity, for example, faults Susan Gevirtz for overlooking the ‘cultural blindspots’ in Richardson’s inscription of ‘racial, racist, and colonial discourses [...] through Richardson’s privileging of femininity’; in contrast, Garrity ‘seeks to broaden the analytical base [of criticism on Richardson] by considering the question of spectatorship and gender alongside issues of ethnicity, sexuality, class, race, and empire’.¹⁵ In a groundbreaking article on race ideology in Richardson’s film column, Rebecca Egger situates ‘Continuous Performance’ in relation to Freudian psychoanalytic discourse.¹⁶ Garrity praises Egger’s approach but distinguishes it from her own: ‘[w]hereas Egger argues that Richardson’s conception of femininity is ultimately “outside the reaches of language and analysis”, [Garrity] suggest[s] that the author’s essentialist stance must be read precisely within a British context and its imbrications within the ideology of imperial expansion’.¹⁷ While indebted to their work, I part company with these scholars by arguing that, when her writings are placed inside a transatlantic frame, Richardson’s incorporations of racism actually enable antiracist critique.

Critics who focus on interpreting *Pilgrimage* and Richardson’s film writing as conformist on issues of race may do so at the expense of authors whose work has traditionally been marginalised because of their racial identity. For example, Garrity’s identification of Dismond’s article in *Close Up* as an obvious countercontext to Richardson’s ‘Dialogue in Dixie’ relegates the former to a footnote. Without actually explicating it, Garrity suggests that Dismond’s readings of representations of African Americans in talkies are inherently superior to Richardson’s. However, Garrity omits demonstrating the ways in which Dismond’s praise of ‘the talkie, for making audible “the fact that all Negroes can sing and dance”’, is distinct from Richardson’s ‘erasure of black speech’ and ‘celebrat[ion of] the black body only when it is in motion’,

¹⁵ Garrity op. cit, p.91.

¹⁶ Rebecca Egger, ‘Deaf Ears and Dark Continents: Dorothy Richardson’s Cinematic Epistemology’, *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 30 (1992): 5-33.

¹⁷ Garrity, op. cit, pp.97-98.

laughing, singing, and dancing.¹⁸ Garrity's inattention to Dismond's own reproductions of race ideology begs a question that Michele Wallace asks of contemporary criticism on race in silent film. Discussing film historians' neglect of Madame Sul-te-Wan (nee Nelly Conley), a 'mixed-blood black and Native American actress' who starred in scenes cut from D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and became perhaps 'the first black woman to be a contract player in the industry', Wallace asks, '[c]ould it be that most critiques of racism, which aim for an impossible ideal of colorblindness, continue to render the social and cultural histories of bodies of color (e.g., black women) invisible?'.¹⁹ Rereading Richardson's 'colour vision' helps to compel a more thorough analysis of Dismond's writings on film and their complicated figurations of race. Categorising Richardson's discourse as only racist, nationalist, or imperialist leads critics to neglect its affinities with, as well as its contradictions to, works by racially oppressed writers. Revealing such affinities and contradictions, my analysis of *Deadlock* and articles in *Close Up* establishes a network of figures whose writings expose and often challenge sensibilities about race.

Despite the value of Richardson's texts for promoting a wider study of representations of race in various modernist writings, it remains tricky business to argue that Richardson's writings are racially subversive. It is incumbent on me to consider how my own privilege as a white, native-born citizen of the United States makes my rereading of Richardson's racism balance precariously between resistance and conformity. My own subject position highlights the need to question the extent to which there is legitimacy or value in recovering antiracism in writings by women who have benefited from colonialism and institutionalised racism. If my objective is to contribute progressively to antiracist literary criticism, then why direct my energy and resources toward defending writers whose work relies on racial stereotyping and naturalises white privilege? Why not focus, instead, on the politics of authors victimised by racial systems?

¹⁸ Dismond qtd in Garrity op. cit, p.135, fn.96; Garrity op. cit, p.98.

¹⁹ Michele Faith Wallace, 'The Good Lynching and *The Birth of a Nation*: Discourses and Aesthetics of Jim Crow', *Cinema Journal*, 43, 1 (2003): 85-104, pp.86-87.

Rather than research one group of writers exclusively, I place white and decolonised writers, including racial minorities in the West, in dialogue with one another to construct an international, multiracial tradition of women writers who variously defy white patriarchy. While there are important differences between Dismond's and Richardson's views on race in early sound film, the danger of neglecting to closely compare them is that it implies that African American women's writing is always already resistant to racism. This essentialism presumes a one-to-one correlation of the identity of an author as a racial minority to the identity of her texts as 'authentically transgressive'.²⁰ As Garrity's footnote on Dismond reveals, this assumption can render the work of writers whose identity is marked in contexts of racial oppression impervious to analysis by implicitly characterising their work as transparent on issues of race. Ironically, to presume that writing by women of colour lacks the kinds of secrets about race and racism that critics can take pleasure in decoding in white women's writing tacitly labels the former as uninteresting. To engage with the politics of race in modernism, critics would do well to avoid knee-jerk categorisations of writings as resistant or conformist based on the racial identities or alliances of their authors. If feminist critics should indeed exercise caution, as Egger argues, then they should do so to ensure their analyses of writings by racial minorities in the United States, and decolonised subjects in the West generally, are neither overdetermined by white writers' politics nor fetishised as authentic representations, hermetically sealed off from their white contemporaries' ideas on race.

Illuminating the racial politics of Richardson's 'Continuous Performance', Egger reacts to 'the desire of contemporary theorists to construct a history of feminist filmmakers, performers, and thinkers who might serve as predecessors and ground-layers for their own work'.²¹ To Egger, the danger of this desire is exemplified by white feminists' constructions of Richardson as their foremother. Egger is not as concerned that this revisionist *her*story leads to unduly favourable readings of so-

²⁰ Felski op. cit, p.27.

²¹ Egger, op. cit, p.5.

named foremothers' texts as that it tends to obscure 'the ease with which a posture of not-knowing can flip over into an equally problematic position of all-knowingness'.²² Egger theorises Richardson's 'construction of the spectator who refuses to know' as participating in Sigmund Freud's discourse of the 'dark continent'; specifically, Richardson encrypts forms of difference as incomprehensible secrets and, thereby, precludes their analysis.²³ Whereas, in Egger's view, the best feminist critics exhibit epistemological caution, even as they aspire to write as 'fully curious subject[s]...able to read and apprehend forms of racial, cultural and, indeed, sexual difference', Richardson is epistemologically empowered through the 'willed non-knowledge' of difference relayed in her rejection of sound-synchronised film, particularly, in her article on *Hearts in Dixie*.²⁴

However, Richardson's narrative technique of 'slowing down a first reading and making a second reading necessary in order to decipher the content' of her texts, as Gevirtz describes it, approximates Egger's ideal by piquing readers' curiosity while delaying, even refusing, readers' certainty of comprehension.²⁵ There is no denying that Richardson propagates significant elements of the dominant racist discourse of her day in *Pilgrimage* and 'Continuous Performance'. Furthermore, Richardson was not necessarily conscious of the racial critique made available in her writings. Nevertheless, rereading Richardson's texts allows the 'dissonance, ambiguity, and contradiction' of her ideas about race to rise to their surfaces and reveals a radical ethics that may be appropriated and refined by contemporary antiracist, feminist critics.²⁶ That said, it is crucial to ask: what meaning of race does 'a circling back and rereading' of Richardson's texts produce, and what does critical attention to this meaning accomplish?²⁷

²² Ibid, p.27.

²³ Ibid, p.27.

²⁴ Ibid, pp.26-27.

²⁵ Susan Gevirtz, *Narrative's Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p.18.

²⁶ Felski op. cit, p.29.

²⁷ Gevirtz, op. cit, p.15.

Rereading Richardson's 'Black Face'

Given how blatantly her narrator dehumanises the black figure in the room, it is certainly unsettling to linger over Richardson's construction of racial difference in the dockside teashop scene in *Deadlock*. This figure accords precisely with the myth of the hypersexualised black male 'brute' and 'the well-worn stereotypes about the Negro's special talents for song and dance', which Maurice observes in reviews of early black cinema.²⁸ However, reading between the lines of Richardson's racist imagery in this scene uncovers the ways in which the man's presence confuses Miriam's sense of time. This disruption manifests in the narrator's movement through various forms of the past tense, from the simple past ('But they were, they had') to a prediction of a remote past not yet actualised ('They would have'), and through the narrator's seemingly random alternations between *could*, *should*, and *would*, modals used to signify possibility or conditionality. The narrator's indecision about which past tense is most appropriate to capture Miriam's experience in this teashop reveals Richardson's consciousness of the predicament of language in relation to time. It shows *Deadlock's* narrator as paradoxically burdened by the demand to track time and the impossibility of time's adequate representation. Richardson's play on these variant pasts culminates in her narrator's attributing Miriam's racial prejudice to the simultaneous pressure and absence of time ('Everything hurried so. There was no *time* to shake off the sense of contamination. It *was* contamination'). It suggests that Miriam struggles against a system of representation that pushes meaning too quickly into the past, fixing it, and, thereby, leading Miriam to only see this figure's alterity to Englishness.

However, a twist occurs in the passage when Miriam finds recourse from this system of language by placing the black man into the periphery of her vision - by making his face 'out of sight'. As mentioned previously, Fahy analyses this scene as demonstrating the limitations of Miriam's vision and, by extension, her ethics.²⁹ However, what if Miriam deliberately chooses myopia

²⁸ Maurice op. cit, p.44.

²⁹ Fahy op. cit, p.143.

to disregard this man's face, and faces in general, as a way to counter her racism? That is, where Fahy and Egger criticise the subjects of Richardson's writings for, respectively, failing to see and refusing to know, I propose that Miriam, in this scene, questions the visual knowledge of race. Miriam's myopia corresponds to ignorance only if one aligns sight with knowledge - a conflation that Tom Gunning claims transpires in the 'gnostic (from gnosis, knowledge) mission of cinema'.³⁰ Through its technique of the close-up, cinema extended a longstanding Western figuration of the face as the window into the soul, which, before the invention of cinema, manifested most forcefully in physiognomy. In the late-eighteenth century, influential works by the Swiss theologian Johann Kasper Lavater and British surgeon Charles White, among others, correlated facial appearance with 'human virtue', economic development, and 'racial worth'.³¹ Such interpretations of the face continued into the twentieth century, as scientists, writers, artists, and filmmakers directed the belief that the face offers empirical evidence of the abstract, invisible qualities of human identity toward supporting race ideology. Gunning argues that the 'desire to know the face [...] stimulated the development of photography itself, spurring it to increasing technical mastery over time and motion, prodding it toward the actual invention of motion pictures'.³² Given this context, it is precisely by resisting reading human character in faces that Richardson undermines racism.

Miriam's difficulties with time correspond to her critique of the face ('Men ought not to have faces. Their real selves abode in the expressions of their heads and brows. Below, their faces were moulded by deceit. . . .'). Richardson's 'Forward' to the 1938 edition of the collected volumes of *Pilgrimage*, which Gevirtz uses as a 'lens' through which to read Richardson's 'ambidextrous writing project', echoes Miriam's frustration with the face in this

³⁰ Tom Gunning, 'In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film', *Modernism/modernity*, 4, 1 (1997): 1-29, p.1.

³¹ Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), pp.67-71.

³² Gunning op. cit, p.25.

scene in *Deadlock*.³³ Speaking of herself in the third person in the 'Forward,' Richardson explains how she became aware, as she wrote *Pilgrimage*,

... of a stranger in the form of contemplated reality having for the first time in her experience its own say, and apparently justifying those who acclaim writing as the surest means of discovering the truth about one's own thoughts and beliefs, she had been at the same time increasingly tormented, not only by the failure, of this now so independently assertive reality, adequately to appear within the text, but by its revelation, whencesoever focused, of a hundred faces, any one of which, the moment it was entrapped in the close mesh of direct statement, summoned its fellows to disqualify it.³⁴

Richardson's observations on the face call to mind Emmanuel Levinas's description of the face-to-face encounter between the self and other. To Levinas, the problem of the face of the other is that it both demands and refuses representation. As Diane Perpich explains, Levinas's philosophy both reveals and is founded upon the dilemma that 'there is no way to *say* or *state* the singularity of the other without thereby rendering it an abstract, universali[s]able property'.³⁵ Richardson also recognises the limitations of speech in relation to the other when she remarks, in her 'Forward' to *Pilgrimage*, that any one of 'the hundred faces' of reality, 'the moment it was entrapped in the close mesh of direct statement, summoned its fellows to disqualify it', as well as through Miriam's reflection, regarding the black man in the dockside teashop in *Deadlock*, that 'There was something that ought to be said of him. She could not think what it was.'

By Levinas's theory, Miriam fails to achieve an ethical relationship with this man as other because she refuses an encounter with his face and, instead, chooses 'comprehension' of him, which 'in every case consists in going beyond the particular in order to grasp it

³³ Gevirtz op. cit, p.xii.

³⁴ Richardson qtd in Gevirtz op. cit, p.11.

³⁵ Diane Perpich, 'Figurative Language and the "Face" in Levinas's Philosophy', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 38, 2 (2005): 103-121, p.105.

through that in it which is general or universal'.³⁶ In avoiding the man's 'fearful face', Miriam notices, 'the outline of his head was desolate, like the contemplated head of any man alive'. Only the nondescript, barren quality of the man's head makes Miriam capable of humanising him, which leads her to decide, 'Men ought not to have faces. Their real selves abode in the expressions of their heads and brows'. Therefore, according to Levinas's philosophy, Miriam denies difference. The man's particularity, as signified by his facial features, horrifies her. She universalises his non-facial features in order to dominate him by placing him within a Western racial hierarchy that she refuses to challenge. She possesses the man as a thing for the benefit of her own being and absorbs him into her ego, rather than recognising him as a distinct being that exists apart from her and who 'counts as such'.³⁷ However, one should not forget Richardson's idiosyncratic representation of time in this scene. Why does Richardson imbricate her narrator's indecision about time with Miriam's refusal to encounter this other's face?

Through her narrator's indecision about time, Richardson represents what Levinas terms 'hypostasis'; that is, she 'attempts to catch sight of the very event by which a verb takes on substance'.³⁸ As Tina Chanter explains, the importance of 'hypostasis' for Levinas is that it allows for 'the upsurge of the subject', or 'the taking up of existence by an existent, the event of *becoming subject*'.³⁹ Through the subject's erotic encounter with the other, the 'I' escapes the '*there is*' and 'definitive solitude' of being, finds 'the way of remaining in the *no man's land* between being and not-yet-being', and gives up 'mastery of the subject'.⁴⁰ Realizing the instant allows one 'to give a convincing account of the other'; in its caress, 'the Other comes to me in the instant without changing one instant into the next'; therefore, eros makes possible an alternative

³⁶ Ibid, p.108.

³⁷ Ibid, pp.113-114.

³⁸ Tina Chanter, 'The Alterity and Immodesty of Time: Death as Future and Eros as Feminine in Levinas', in David Wood (ed.), *Writing the Future*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 140.

³⁹ Ibid, p.140 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, A. Lingis (trans.), (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), pp.259-260 (emphasis in the original).

conception of time to linear progression.⁴¹ In her film column, Richardson theorises that silent film achieves this kind of time by its 'quality of being nowhere and everywhere, nowhere in the sense of having more intention than direction and more purpose than plan, everywhere by reason of its power to evoke, suggest, reflect, express from within its moving parts and in the totality of movement, something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming'.⁴² Miriam's perceived crisis of encountering a black man in the dockside teashop in *Deadlock* reveals the ethical significance of this kind of time. It is an example of what Shirley Rose, in her analysis of time in *Pilgrimage*, defines as '*moments privilégiés*', or 'moments that illumine the self'.⁴³ Such moments produce for Miriam 'the condition of stasis in which self-realisation is possible' by encapsulating 'movement best expressed as pulsation without propulsion, or described metaphorically as a vibrant particle in the midst of time's flux'.⁴⁴ Miriam fails to achieve a non-hierarchical relationship with the black man in this scene. However, as she 'sat frozen, appalled by the presence of the negro', she experienced the instant, and this produced self-awareness of her racism. Her revulsion at the man provokes Miriam's attempt to halt the too-quick progression of time into the future. It is as if Richardson understands that capturing the instant might transform Miriam's perception of the black man and her thinking about race.

Levinasian ethics and Freudian psychoanalysis combine in this scene in *Deadlock* so as to complicate Miriam's perception of the black man as other. By characterising the man as 'contamination', Miriam affirms that, by Western law, the black man is off-limits to her as a white woman. Toward him, Miriam exhibits 'dread of contact' in extended form: according to the *délire de toucher*, or touching phobia, which 'primitive' taboo has in common with 'civilised' neurosis, 'mental contact is just as much prohibited as immediate bodily contact'.⁴⁵ By placing the man within a system of taboo, Richardson indicates that Miriam has ambivalent emotions

⁴¹ Chanter op. cit, pp.145-146.

⁴² Dorothy Richardson, 'The Film Gone Male', *Close Up*, 9, 1 (1932): 36-38, p.37.

⁴³ Shirley Rose, 'Dorothy Richardson's Focus on Time', *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 17 (1974): 163-172, pp.166-167.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.169.

toward him: not only is he ‘uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean’, but he is also ‘sacred, consecrated’.⁴⁶ As such, the man is an object of her repression and desire: Miriam wants to look at the man’s face again, ‘but she could not bring herself to’ do so. Because Miriam’s ambivalent feelings toward this man centre on looking at him, Miriam’s *délire de toucher* is extended to sight, specifically. Later in this scene, Miriam claims that the man assists her in transforming her thoughts into speech in her conversation with Michael. Despite her initial sense that the man’s face was ‘crushing her thread of thought’, she concludes,

In the awful presence she had spoken herself out, found and recited her best, most liberating words. The little unseen room shone, its shining speaking to her from small things immediately under her eyes. Light, pouring from her speech, sent a radiance about the thick black head and its monstrous bronze face. He might have his thoughts, might even look them, from the utmost abyss of crude male life, but he had helped her, and his blind unconscious outlines shared the unknown glory. But she doubted that she would remember that thoughts flowed more easily, with surprising ease, as if given, waiting, ready to be scanned and stated, when one’s eyes ceased to look outwards. If she could remember it, it might prove to be the solution of social life. (III 219)

The narrator’s idea, in this passage, about what occurs ‘when one’s eyes ceased to look outwards’ equates to Miriam’s myopia. In *Pointed Roofs*, the narrator of *Pilgrimage* describes Miriam as having ‘severe myopic astigmatism’, meaning she sees with multiple focal points and is so nearsighted that she is nearly blind without glasses. While Garrity interprets this condition as an indicator of the ‘conceptual limitations’, ‘ceaseless mobility[,] and refusal to be fixed’ that mark Miriam as an imperialist subject, I glimpse a socially radical potential in this way of seeing.

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, A.A. Brill (trans), (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005), pp.24-26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.17.

The teashop scene in *Deadlock* indicates that Miriam would rather not see because blindness to others ‘might prove to be the solution of social life’. Apparently, Miriam’s myopia does not lead her to overcome her racism: she still describes the man in the teashop pejoratively as possessing ‘a thick black head’ and ‘monstrous bronze face’, she still questions his intelligence (‘he might have his thoughts’), and she still characterises him as the basest form of a masculinity she abhors (as ‘from the utmost abyss of crude male life’). However, this passage does indicate that Miriam’s myopia *could* radically transform her worldview, and perhaps also that of Richardson’s reader, by succeeding in undermining racist ideology, if only Miriam could store this revelation in her memory. As Richardson explains in ‘The Film Gone Male’, there are two kinds of memory: memory as ‘mere backwards glance’ and ‘memory proper’. The latter ‘gathers, can gather, and pile up its wealth only round universal, unchanging, unevolving verities that move neither backwards nor forwards and have neither speech nor language’; silent film, or film ‘in the day of its innocence, [...] [i]n its insistence on contemplation[, ...] provided a pathway to reality’.⁴⁷ Because of its relationship to memory, silent film can realise ‘the solution to social life’ by shifting vision from exterior signs to interior qualities.

While Richardson’s idea of ‘proper’ memory encourages recognition of the significance of the instant in her philosophy, her point that memory ‘can gather, and pile up its wealth’ suggests it is important to consider Miriam’s epiphany in the dockside teashop as on a continuum with her past and future transformations in *Pilgrimage*. One such transformation occurs in the chapter immediately preceding this scene, in which Miriam exhibits a comparable, though non-extended, ‘dread of touching’ Michael when he approaches her after she returns from visiting the Brooms. Upon meeting Miriam in a London park, Michael ‘pull[s] up before her with white ravaged face and hands stretched silently toward her’, which, feeding anti-Semitism, figures him as a sort of vampire marked by a haunting whiteness (III 210). The narrator continues, “‘For pity’s sake don’t touch me”, [Miriam] cried

⁴⁷ ‘The Film Gone Male’ op. cit, pp.36-37.

involuntarily and walked on, accompanied, examining her outcry. It was right. It had a secret *knowledge*' (III 210, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, Miriam's attitude, here, toward Michael's otherness as a Jew links to an earlier scene in *Deadlock* in which Miriam and Michael converse over soup and beer in a 'completely strange' German restaurant in London's East End, which has 'not the usual restaurant smell', and which Michael informs Miriam is mostly patronised by Jews (III 126). Growing intoxicated as they dine in this restaurant, Miriam thinks she can 'get perhaps further than ever before into the secret of Germany'. Anticipating the synesthetic association of the taste of 'her bitter tea' with the 'vengeance [...] sprung from the dark corner' (III 210) in the dockside teashop, Miriam observes of her first taste of beer, '[t]he foamy surface was pleasant; but the strange biting bitterness behind it was like some sudden formidable personal attack' (III 126). Subsequently, Miriam is shocked to learn of the Jewish identity of most of the restaurants' patrons because she had initially perceived her fellow diners as 'all *fair*'; taking a second look around the room, she thinks to herself, 'Nearly all of the people in the room were dark...But there were no hooked noses', then she wonders, 'What *were* Jews? How did he [Michael] know the room was full of them? Why did the idea cast a chill on the things she had brought in with her?' (III 126-7, emphasis in the original).

Just as London's modern public sphere facilitates the 'production of new gendered identities', as Scott McCracken persuades in his analysis of Miriam's visits to the Aerated Bread Company (ABC) cafés and J. Lyons & Co.'s teashops, it also allows Miriam to think critically about race, as exemplified by her revelations in the teashop by the docks and the East End German restaurant in *Deadlock*.⁴⁸ In the latter, Miriam's encounter with people whose facial features defy stereotypical physiognomy encourages her to question the construction of Jewishness specifically and racial identity generally. At this moment, she perceives her transgression of the boundary between the self and other as threatening to her but crucial nonetheless. She catches herself reproducing the racial logic of her culture, recognises that her understanding of identity

⁴⁸ Scott McCracken, 'From Performance to Public Sphere: The Production of Modernist Masculinities', *Textual Practice*, 15, 1 (2001): 47-65, p.48.

is trapped within a way of knowing that privileges the visible, and begins to question this epistemology. Identity, as the German restaurant's customers evince, is elusive, hidden, and unseen. In the teashop by the docks, with the black man's help, Miriam takes this critique one step further, concluding that perceptiveness is found by looking inwards, not 'outwards'. While it is unclear what Miriam will do with this new knowledge, the extent to which it challenges dominant Euro-American scopic regimes merits attention. Rather than further pursue its implications in *Pilgrimage*, in the remainder of this article, I examine how this revelation plays out in *Close Up* to show that Richardson's argument that myopia must shape the subject's field of vision overlaps with her philosophy on the superiority of silent film relative to sound-synchronised film.

Listening to Silences

In 'The Mask and the Movietone', published in November 1927 as the third part of her series 'The Cinema and the Classics', H.D. addresses her anxiety about the so-called talking picture – an anxiety shared by most of her *Close Up* associates, nearly all of whom 'saw the death of the silent film as the death of the twentieth-century art form they had cherished and tried to nurture'.⁴⁹ However, writers in *Close Up* also admit sound film as promoting sympathy and understanding across national and racial lines. Introducing *Close Up*'s special issue devoted to 'the 'negro' in film', Kenneth Macpherson writes, '[t]alking films took films from us but they have given us a glimpse of him, and the momentous edge of possibility is set punkah-fashion waving, fanning something entirely and wholly new, that may expand not in the Negroid alone, but throughout the whole of a rationalised international cinema'.⁵⁰ H.D. also reads internationalism as the one reason to embrace sound synchronisation. In 'The Mask and the Movietone', she considers whether or not the talkie, which debuted that year in Alan Crosland's film *The Jazz Singer*, poses a legitimate problem for film artists and spectators alike. Figuring film actors as 'so many dolls' on screen, she first asks if, with the

⁴⁹ Maurice op. cit, p.53.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 5, 2 (1929): 85-90, p.90.

advent of sound synchronisation, 'our nursery favorites' are really 'to be discarded',

for another set of boxes, containing such intricate machinery, such suave sophistication of life that we wonder if we really want them? [...] Don't we really want what we know, what we see, what intellectually we can aptly 'play' with? Don't we? Or do we? [...] Do we really want to discard our little stage sets and all the appliances that we have grown so used to for something more like 'real' life? Well, do we or don't we? Please answer me. I am at my wits' end. Do we or don't we want to scrap our old dolls?⁵¹

Although H.D.'s racial politics are convoluted in this piece, their significance to her discussion of the talkie is not easily lost upon readers when she compares the 'old dolls' of silent film - to which, she says, 'we' could 'whisper our devotion' - to the 'Topsy (of the old days)', referencing the girl-slave character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling novel.⁵² In the nineteenth century, the character Topsy was adapted into a popular doll and character on stage. In the twentieth century, Topsy remained an icon of the so-called pickaninny, 'the first of the coon types to make its screen debut', and 'became such a film favorite that she starred in *Topsy and Eva* (1927)'.⁵³ Dismond calls the many silent film adaptations of Stowe's novel 'the outstanding accomplishment of the Negro in the movie world' before sound synchronisation.⁵⁴

For my purposes here, the key question raised by 'The Mask and the Movietone' is whether H.D.'s rhetoric in opposition to sound-synchronised film upholds a racial hierarchy. What racial significance is there to H.D. wanting to keep 'Topsy' as the old kind of 'doll'? H.D.'s issue with the new 'Topsy' of the talking film is that this figure has been turned into 'a sort of robot', into 'a wonder-doll, singing, with musical insides, with strings that one

⁵¹ H.D., 'The Mask and the Movietone', *Close Up* 1, 5 (1927):19.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵³ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp.7-8.

⁵⁴ Geraldyn Dismond, 'The Negro Actor and the American Movies', *Close Up*, 5, 2 (1929): 90-97, p.93.

may pull, with excellent wired joints'.⁵⁵ She claims the Movietone commits an act of violence against Topsy by mechanising her; however, she ultimately condones this 'mechanical and utterly proficient' doll because it 'threaten[s] that world of half-light' that makes possible 'our touch with mystery':

[t]here is something inside that the Movietone would eventually I think, destroy utterly, for many of us. That is the whole point really of the matter. Is our temple, our inner place of refuge, to be crowded out with gods like men, not masks, not images, that are so disguised, so conventionalised that they hold in some odd way possibility of some divine animation? If I see art projected too perfectly (as by Raquel Meller) don't I feel rather cheated of the possibility of something more divine behind the outer symbol of the something shown there? The mask in other words seems about to be ripped off showing us human features, the doll is about to step forward as a mere example of mechanical inventiveness. We cannot worship sheer mechanical perfection but we can love and in a way worship a thing (like Topsy with her rag arms) that is a symbol of something that might be something greater.⁵⁶

H.D.'s language of inside versus outside echoes the epistemological vocabulary that Richardson develops in *Deadlock* and reveals the ways in which modernist writings on sound synchronisation are implicated in primitivist discourse. If H.D.'s 'we' reads as 'white,' then her article suggests that Euro-American identity depends on the West's figuring of Africans and people of African descent as a valuable 'resource' for the white subject's rejuvenation.⁵⁷ By becoming 'so vibrantly incarnate', the 'doll' that formerly represented 'mystery' and 'a place of refuge' threatens to undo H.D.'s dichotomy. This reading is complicated, however, by H.D.'s implicit gendering of this dichotomy when she says that the silent

⁵⁵ H.D. op. cit, p.21.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.21, pp.30-31. Raquel Meller was a Spanish actress and singer who starred in such silent films as Jacques Feyder's *Carmen* (1926). H.D. probably refers to the Hollywood musical shorts featuring Meller, released during the transition to sound-synchronised film.

⁵⁷ Torgovnik op. cit, p.9.

cinema will 'be crowded out with gods like men, not masks'. H.D.'s opposition between 'men' and 'masks' anticipates psychoanalyst Joan Riviere's equating 'genuine womanliness' with the 'masquerade'.⁵⁸ Like Riviere, H.D. creates a gender scheme that divorces identity from biology. Over physical appearances, H.D. values 'something more divine behind the outer symbol of the something shown there'.

Like H.D., in 'The Film Gone Male', her main article against the talkie, Richardson constructs a gendered division between silent and sound-synchronised film. She writes, 'women who never question the primacy of "clear speech" [...] are by nature more within the men's than the women's camp'; such women 'are distinguishable by their absolute faith in speech as a medium of communication'.⁵⁹ In contrast, 'womanly' women's 'use of speech is various': 'all kinds of women,' including 'village,' 'villa,' 'unemployed service-flat women' and 'chatelaines,' 'use speech, with individual differences, alike: in the manner of façade'; for this reason, she argues, silent film is feminine.⁶⁰ Richardson does not mention race in 'The Film Gone Male'. However, this article's alignment of 'various' speech with 'façade' and both with silent film also manifests in 'Dialogue in Dixie', in which Richardson inveighs against sound synchronisation's degradation of black speech.

Published in the issue immediately following *Close Up*'s special issue on 'the 'negro' and cinema', 'Dialogue in Dixie' is one of the few articles that Richardson wrote for *Close Up* that she devoted to

⁵⁸ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 10 (1929): 303-313, p.306.

⁵⁹ 'The Film Gone Male' op. cit, p.36-37.

⁶⁰ However, like H.D., Richardson expresses ambivalence about the 'death of silent film,' predicting, optimistically, as 'a medium, or a weapon at the disposal of all parties[...the new film can, at need, assist Radio in turning the world into a vast council-chamber' and, when free of censorship, level the 'battlefield'; moreover, Richardson's conclusion to the article suggests that even sound-synchronised film can harbor so-called womanly women's speech: 'And multitudinous within that vast chamber as within none of the preceding councils of mankind, is the unconquerable, unchangeable eternal feminine' (p.38).

a particular film. As noted above, Richardson's description of speech in *Hearts in Dixie* has earned her criticism for conforming to the racial stereotyping of her day. However, such critiques of Richardson's film writing gravely misread the opening paragraphs of 'Dialogue in Dixie'. Here, Richardson's description of the figures who initially appear in the showing are not of actors in *Hearts in Dixie* at all, but, rather, a 'semi-circle of young persons on the screen, stars, seated ostensibly in council over speech-films' in a pre-show to introduce the audience to the new medium and 'teach us how to hear Talkies'.⁶¹ Of these actors - who were all, presumably, white - Richardson writes,

Their respective mouths opened upon their words widely, like those of fish, like those of ventriloquists' dummies, those of people giving lessons in lip-reading. And the normal pace of speech was slowed to match the effort. The total impression was strong enough to drive into the background, for clear emergence later, our sense of what happened to film upon its breaking into speech, into no matter what imagined perfection of clear speech. For the moment we could be aware only of effort.⁶²

Once the feature begins, Richardson describes its black actors' speech along the same lines. Given this parallel, the 'hideous partnership' that she observes between the actors' 'careful enunciation' and the 'indistinctness' of their voices results not from their race but, rather, from the demands and limitations of the new medium:

we were confronted by a soloist, the simulacrum of a tall sad gentleman who, with voice well-pitched—conquest of medium?—but necessarily (?) slow and laboriously precise in enunciation, and with pauses between each brief phrase after the manner of one dictating to a shorthand-typist, gave us, on behalf of the Negro race, a verbose paraphrase of Shylock's specification of the claims of the Jew to be considered human. He vanished, and here were the cotton-fields: sambos

⁶¹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Dialogue in Dixie', *Close Up*, 5, 3 (1929): 211-218, p.212.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp.212-213.

and mammies at work, piccaninnies [*sic*] at play—film restored to its senses by music. [...] A mighty bass voice leapt from the screen, the mellowest, deepest, tenderest bass in the world, Negro-bass richly booming against adenoidal barrier and reverberating: perfectly unintelligible. A huge cotton-gatherer had made a joke. Four jokes in succession [*sic*] made he, each smothered in sound, each followed by lush chorus of Negro-laughter, film laughter, film-opera attain, noble partner of silent film.

And so it was all through: rich Negro-laughter, Negro-dancing, of bodies whose disforming western garb could not conceal the tiger-like flow of muscles. Pure film alternating with the emergence of one after another of the persons of the drama into annihilating speech. Scenes in which only the natural dramatic power of the actors gave meaning to what was said and said, except by a shrill-voiced woman or so and here and there the piercing voice of a child, in a way fatal to any sustained reaction: slow, enunciatory, monstrous.⁶³

As in *Deadlock*, Richardson's representation of her subject's encounter with racial others in 'Dialogue in Dixie' seems to reproduce primitivist discourse. Indeed, Richardson essentialises race by tagging the actors' idealised qualities as 'Negro'. However, subsequent readings make it hard to ignore that Richardson couples her spectator's derogatory impression of African Americans on screen with criticism that the new sound technology distorts the actors' actual voices. For example, one of the actor's voices is of 'the mellowest, deepest, tenderest bass in the world', but the 'adenoidal barrier' endemic in the recording device makes the meaning of his dialogue 'perfectly unintelligible'. The same is true of the film's visual representations of African Americans: the 'fixed expressionless eyes of the actors' are not natural but, rather, the 'result of concentration of microphone'.⁶⁴ Thus Richardson resists the dominant claims of the period, to which Maurice brings attention, that the sound film synched black bodies and black voices. Even the most primitivist statement of the passage above -

⁶³ Ibid, pp.213-214.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.215.

that the black bodies on screen exhibited 'the tiger-like flow of muscles' - may be read as racially subversive because it exposes the contrived use of black bodies by Hollywood directors to persuade audiences that sound synchronisation increased the verisimilitude of cinema.

In her article 'The Negro Actor and the American Movies', Dismond also reproduces primitivist discourse. Explaining why 'the Negro turns out some of the best acting on the American screen and stage', Dismond writes, 'A people of many emotions with an inherent sense of humor, and a love of play, they do not find it difficult to express themselves in action, or to bring to that expression the genuineness and enjoyment they feel'.⁶⁵ The essentialist tenor of this description is strategically important for refuting claims by some of Dismond's white contemporaries of having recently 'discovered' African Americans' performance skills and for resisting white appropriation and exploitation of black art. Furthermore, sketching a history of white-made images of blackness in American cinema, characterising the different phases of these images' evolution in a manner that anticipates Donald Bogle's work of the 1960s, Dismond undermines white modernists' fetishising of blackness.

In order to better appreciate the attitude of the white producer toward Negro talent, we must keep in mind the change in the social status of the group. To put it briefly, at the time of the Civil War, the northern white man considered the Negro a black angel without wings, about whom he must busy himself in spirit and deed. On the other hand, the southern white man detested Negroes in general and liked his particular blacks. After the Negro had been given his freedom, there soon arose the feeling that he was an economic and social menace and we find him depicted everywhere as a rapist. Then the white dilettante, exhausted with trying to find new thrills, stumbled over the Negro and exclaimed, 'See what we have overlooked!' These beloved

⁶⁵ Dismond op. cit, p.92.

vagabonds! Our own Negroes, right here at home! And voila!
—Black became the fad.⁶⁶

Dismond's mocking of 'Negrophilia' as a flippant form of praise, barely 'improved' from earlier representations of African Americans as dangerously hypersexualised, sets the tone of her piece, which is distinct from the tone of all the other contributions to this special issue of *Close Up*. Dismond is the only female contributor to this issue and the only featured writer whose byline, 'well-known American Negro writer', reveals her race.⁶⁷ Dismond's article also differs strikingly from Richardson's 'Dialogue in Dixie' because it historicises African Americans' employment in Hollywood and is overtly politicised, which explains Dismond's biting critique of the predominantly negative attitude toward the talkie in *Close Up*. Dismond concludes, 'And the talkie which is being despised by certain artistic circles is giving [the 'Negro' movie actor] the great opportunity to prove his right to a place on the screen'.⁶⁸ Like Richardson, Dismond praises 'the Negro's voice' as 'a thing of beauty'; however, unlike Richardson, she argues that African Americans' 'greatest charm was lost by silence' and '[w]ith the talkie, the Negro is at his best'.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, Dismond admits that the unprecedented success of African Americans in Hollywood after the addition of sound to cinema was due, in large part, to the 'particular pleasure' that 'White America...is supposed to get...out of the Negro's dialect, his queer colloquialisms, and his quaint humour'.⁷⁰ Thus, on the one hand, Dismond indirectly reveals the ways in which Richardson's privilege, as a white woman, blinds her to the gains in status and wealth that sound synchronisation afforded African American actors. On the other hand, Dismond offers a path for approaching Richardson's dismay about the sound film as antiracist critique.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.91.

⁶⁷ Elmer Anderson Carter, editor of *Opportunity*, was the only other black writer for the issue.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.97.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.94.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.94.

Dismond's article for *Close Up* helps to elucidate the complex ways in which modernist writers challenged race ideology in spite of their essentialism, an understanding of which must inform racial critiques of Richardson's *Pilgrimage* and 'Continuous Performance'. Rereading 'Dialogue in Dixie' with the nuances of Dismond's analysis of African Americans in cinema in mind undermines claims that seeing and hearing black actors on-screen offends Richardson's sensibilities. Rather, Richardson is opposed to the ways in which the sound-synchronised film diminishes the 'power' of black actors by futilely attempting authentic reproductions of speech. Song is superior to speech in *Hearts in Dixie* for the same reasons that Miriam's 'thoughts flowed more easily, with surprising ease, as if given, waiting, ready to be scanned and stated, when one's eyes ceased to look outwards', as she realizes with the black man's help in the dockside teashop in *Deadlock*. As Richardson writes in 'Dialogue in Dixie', 'partly no doubt by reason of the difference between spoken word and sustained sound, [song] got through the adenoidal obstruction and, because the sound was distributed rather than localised upon a single form, kept the medium intact'.⁷¹ Noting, here, that '[m]usic and song demand only a distributed hearing which works directly as enhancement rather than diminution of the faculty of seeing', Richardson extends her argument about the significance of unclear speech in 'The Film Gone Male'.⁷² The distributed sound that Richardson praises in the silent film and its 'noble acceptable twin', the sound film with music, echoes the field of vision made possible by Miriam's myopic astigmatism in *Pilgrimage*.⁷³ Linking sight and sound, Richardson reworks synesthesia so as to question rather than affirm established beliefs about race.

⁷¹ 'Dialogue in Dixie' op. cit, p.214.

⁷² Ibid, p.215.

⁷³ Ibid, p.214.