

DOROTHY RICHARDSON AND THE POETICS OF SILENCE

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It may seem ironic that a novel verbose enough to cover over two thousand pages should have silence as one of its central themes.¹ Yet Dorothy Richardson's thirteen-volume novel *Pilgrimage* constantly reverberates around different aspects of silence, both in its content and in its form. Not only is silence represented on the page - in the form of ellipses, gaps, and blank spaces - but it is also a constant presence in the protagonist Miriam Henderson's explorations of her existential condition. In its efforts to portray those sides of human experience that resist verbal representation, the novel repeatedly positions itself perilously close to the limits of language, making the question of how to capture the ineffable and the silent in words an acute dilemma, frequently addressed directly in the text itself. Thus, when Miriam in *Revolving Lights* asserts that '[r]eal speech can only come from complete silence', her statement reads like a literary creed or a poetics, defining the central role played by silence in Richardson's novel-sequence.² If we take Miriam's statement at face value, it is silence that should be the focus of our attention.

Silence in *Pilgrimage* has a strong spiritual quality. It is present in Miriam's personal experience of both stillness and solitude, as well as in the form of the novel she comes to envision. In both these aspects of silence there is a connection to Miriam's spiritual development, and in particular to her affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends. While this faith only plays an active and important part in Miriam's life in the last instalments of the

¹ I would like to thank Dr Rebecca Beasley and Professor Marianne Thormählen for their helpful remarks on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the anonymous reader from *Pilgrimages* for careful reading and perceptive comments.

² *Pilgrimage*, Vol. 3 (London: Virago, 1979), p. 389. References to *Pilgrimage* are henceforth given directly in the text, by volume and page number.

sequence, its influence on what could be called Richardson's philosophy of silence is present throughout *Pilgrimage*.

This article explores that philosophy, and the role that silence plays in the novel. While there are many aspects to Richardson's interest in silence, in the following discussion the connections between her novel and the role of silence within the Quaker faith will be of central interest, leading to an examination of the relation between silence and the poetics that Miriam develops over the course of the sequence.³ Miriam's religious experiences, often occurring in moments of intense silence, have affinities with the novel she conceives; to her, silence in literature, like silence between people, represents experiences that move beyond words, speaking to the reader's intuition through an act of recognition.

'A Friend in All But Name' - Dorothy Richardson, the Quakers, and Pilgrimage

Richardson's association with the Society of Friends started in 1901, when her friend Benjamin Grad - Michael Shatov's real-life counterpart - brought her to the Quaker Meeting House in St Martin's Lane, where she first participated in a Meeting.⁴ The

³ Silence is an aspect of Richardson's writing that has not received a lot of critical attention. In *A Pathway to Reality: Visual and Aural Concepts in Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2000), however, David Stamm offers an introductory survey of the theme, exploring, among other things, the relationship between silence and mysticism in the novel. In Stamm's study however, silence is construed as an absence of sound, whereas in this article, it will primarily be understood as opposed to language and the effable. Joanne Winning explores silence in *Pilgrimage* as a 'signifier' in which an 'embedded lesbian sub-text' may be found; see *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp.121, 133. In her study of the Modernist short story, Claire Drewery repeatedly refers to silence as a negative quality in Richardson's short fiction, linking it for example to 'death, incoherence [...], madness and alienation'; *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.4.

⁴ On Richardson and the Quakers, see Howard Finn, "In the Quicksands of Disintegrating Faiths": Dorothy Richardson and the Quakers', *Literature and Theology*, 19, 1 (2005): 34-46; Eva Tucker, 'Dorothy Richardson and the Quakers', *Pilgrimages* 1 (2008): 124-131; Bryony Randall, 'Work, Writing,

experience seems to have affected her deeply. In a letter to John Cowper Powys dated 1939, she writes that this meeting constituted an 'astonishing revelation' for her, being 'a central experience I can never forget'.⁵ But it was not until 1908 that the Quakers came to occupy a more central role in Richardson's life. To recuperate from a breakdown, she went to stay with a Quaker family in Sussex, the Penroses, with whom she remained until 1911.⁶ It is noteworthy that it was during this period of intense involvement with the Quakers that Richardson started to write fiction. While still in Sussex, she wrote 'middles', a series of short-fiction pieces, most of which describe an atmosphere or some event in the daily life on a farm. Many of these pieces were subsequently published in the *Saturday Review*. Following her long period of rest in Sussex, Richardson, who had quit her position as a Harley-Street dental secretary before leaving London, began a serious attempt at writing. Her first novel, *Pointed Roofs*, was completed in 1913. At the same time, she wrote about the Quakers themselves; in February 1914, *Quakers Past and Present* was published - a slim volume of just under one hundred pages where Richardson introduces the Quakers and their faith, largely focusing on the influence of founder George Fox but also touching on subjects such as women's role within Quakerism, which was an important issue for her - followed in May by *Gleanings from the Works of George Fox*, a short collection of texts by Fox which Richardson introduced and edited.⁷

One of the things that most deeply affected Richardson about the Quakers was their emphasis on silence, which is one of the faith's most distinctive characteristics. Friends' meetings of worship are conducted without clergy; the congregation meets in silence, allowing members to share their experiences and thoughts when

Vocation and the Quakers in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, *Pilgrimages* 2 (2009): 39-60; and David Stamm, op. cit, pp.197-211.

⁵ Dorothy Richardson, *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, edited by Gloria G. Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.368.

⁶ See Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp.54-56.

⁷ *The Quakers Past and Present* (London: Constable, 1914); *Gleanings from the Works of George Fox* (London: Headley, 1914). *Pointed Roofs* was not published until 1915.

they are moved to do so. In the letter to John Cowper Powys quoted above, Richardson goes on to describe her first overwhelming experience of the Quaker silence:

As an outsider, admitted at the request of Quaker friends, I had to sit, on a sweltering midsummer evening, in a sloping gallery almost under the roof. The place was packed. Before the preliminary silence was settled down to, during the initial formalities - for this is the great 'business' meeting of the year I wondered how long I should endure without fainting or apoplexy. A few minutes after these massed Friends had gathered themselves into stillness, I felt, physically, coming up from that sea of humanity, boxed in that old, ill-ventilated building, packed together & certainly sweating, of that evening of 'debate', as Quakers understand it, my head remained clear & cool & the air in the 'stifling' gallery pure & fresh.⁸

Quaker silence is characterised by a deep focus, what Richardson calls 'silent attention', enabling religious experience as well as a deeper form of connection with the self: 'The "thing" which has had the power of so arresting us, of making a breach in the normal, unnoticed rhythm of the senses, allows our "real self" - our larger and deeper being, to which so many names have been given - to flow up and flood the whole field of the surface intelligence'.⁹ According to the Friends, silence thus enables individuals to come into contact with themselves in a more fundamental sense. While attempting to undermine notions of logic and sense - 'surface intelligence' - as a basis for knowledge, Quakers instead believe that this state of mind, this deeper focus, opens the self to an intuitive knowledge of reality. As Richardson suggests, to 'journey to the heart of reality', one must break 'through the veil of sense', and silence offers the possibility of doing so: 'Silence, bodily and mental, is necessarily the first step in this direction. There is no other way of entering upon the difficult enterprise of transcending the rhythms of sense, and this, and

⁸ *Windows on Modernism*, p.368.

⁹ *Quakers Past and Present*, pp.33-34.

nothing else, has been invariably the first step taken by the mystic upon his pilgrimage'.¹⁰

Richardson's focus on the mystical aspects of the faith is symptomatic of the age in which she was writing. The faith that she (and Miriam) encountered in the beginning of the twentieth century had recently taken a liberal turn. This modern version of Quakerism - sometimes referred to as Liberal Quakerism - apparently imagined that it was returning to the faith's origins, but, according to the theologian Pink Dandelion, it constituted 'the biggest departure [...] to date' from traditional Quakerism.¹¹ One of the central tenets of Liberal Quakerism asserts the authority of personal experience over Scripture.¹² The idea that all humans share an equal ability to experience God directly, without the involvement of church authority, attracted Richardson, who in *Quakers Past and Present* writes about 'the direct communication of truth to a man's own soul: the presence, in other words, of a "seed of God" in every man'.¹³ The faculty which allows one and all to come into direct contact with God is referred to by modern Quakers as the 'Inner Light', which in turn is described by Richardson as 'an immediate pathway to reality within the man himself', representing a 'perfect realization of the fusion of human and divine' which previously had only been ascribed to those 'giants [...] of human civilization' referred to as 'mystics'.¹⁴

In Richardson's presentation of the Quakers, the focus on the self as the basis of spiritual experience - and the responsibility placed on individuals to advance God's cause in the world as they themselves understand it - relates directly to Liberal Quakerism, which is apparent partly through her choice of words. For example, her references to the 'Inner Light' instead of the older, more traditional Quaker concept of the 'Inward Light'

¹⁰ *Quakers Past and Present*, pp.35-36.

¹¹ *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.130. See also Finn, pp.37-38.

¹² Dandelion, pp.129-130. See also Pink Dandelion, *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers: The Silent Revolution* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), pp.xix-xx, 12.

¹³ *Quakers Past and Present*, p.41.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.13.

demonstrate her affiliation with the modernised faith, which held that there was an essential difference between the two¹⁵: where 'Inward' would imply that the Light came 'from beyond, as if through a keyhole', 'Inner' instead emphasises the role of the individual and can thus, according to Dandelion, 'be used to accommodate more monist interpretations of how God works with humanity'.¹⁶ The experiencing subject is thus given a more central position.

Liberal Quakerism also emphasises the limitations of language, believing words to be insufficient to describe - and therefore demeaning to - religious experience.¹⁷ This strand of thought does relate to the faith's earliest beliefs, where silence was construed as a spiritual state, partly achieved through the practice of abstinence from language. Along with the early Puritan movement, the first generation of Friends sought to reform language, attempting to scour off any influence of ornate, Latinate rhetoric.¹⁸ Instead, both Quakers and Puritans advocated what they referred to as the 'plain' style of speaking, with reference to Ecclesiastes 5.2: 'let your words be few' - avoided excessive verbiage. George Fox makes a distinction between 'carnal' and 'spiritual' talk, where 'carnal' relates to any use of language that does not stem from a spiritual source to the flesh; according to Fox, the 'divine Word of wisdom' - the spiritual word - can only be heard through a return to the 'state in which Adam was before he fell'.¹⁹ The word 'carnal' implicitly links language to the notion of sin. Abstinence from speech was a form of self-suppression linked to other restraints; to be silent is thus also linked to refraining from, for example, giving in to carnal lusts. In early Quaker faith, it was believed that 'carnal' talk should be limited to solving practicalities of daily life, and that members should remain silent as far as possible. Silence was not an end in itself, however, but a means to achieve spiritual

¹⁵ Ibid, p.18 et passim.

¹⁶ Dandelion, *Quakerism*, p.132.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.136-142.

¹⁸ See Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence Among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.2.

¹⁹ Bauman, p.21.

experiences.²⁰ This is the aspect of silence that is emphasised by Richardson in *Quakers Past and Present*. The voice of God, which is wordless, can only be heard within those who practise silence.

If Quakers disdain the spoken word, they are even more sceptical towards the written word, presumably because it is often given a position of authority, a position Friends refuse any individual expression. This is especially relevant when it comes to the Bible's status. Quakers believe that the Scriptures do not represent God's will and command, but are only an early record of individual experiences of the Divine. Liberal Quakers especially stressed this aspect of the Bible, sometimes even claiming that new revelations should have an authority over old ones.²¹ God's word is silent in the sense that it cannot be apprehended in the same way as natural language; it cannot, claims Fox, 'be heard or read with the natural external senses, as the Scriptures can'.²² All written words should be regarded with similar scepticism and should never be accepted as unquestionable truth.

It is interesting to consider *Pilgrimage* from this perspective. As a work of fiction, it would not meet with the Quakers' approval.²³ But the fact that Richardson chose to write about her own life, and that she did so because it was the only thing she felt she knew well enough to write about, is in line with the Quakers' view on language and the self. By claiming Miriam's thoughts and experiences (carnal and spiritual) as her own, she gives them the same status as the Quakers grant the Scriptures. *Pilgrimage* could thus be read as a kind of testimony, in that it constitutes Richardson's revelations and records of her attempts to examine her own Inner Light, although she does not refer to it by that

²⁰ Bauman, p.23.

²¹ This idea is called 'Progressivism': Dandelion, *Quakerism*, p.130.

²² Quoted in Bauman, p.26.

²³ Especially the early Quakers were very sceptical against all forms of make-believe, believing that play-acting, for example, harmed the wholeness of an individual through the attempt at representing something which was not true according to that individual's spirit. Literary works by Quakers are sparse, and poetic works seem to outnumber fiction. Among the most renowned Quaker authors can be found the poets, Basil Bunting and the American John Greenleaf Whittier, and the novelist Charles Brockden Brown.

term. Her habit of putting the letters 'I.R.' - meaning 'imperfectly realised' - in the margins of her published novels when she felt that she had failed to represent a scene faithfully, compared with how she actually experienced it, reveals how she aimed for truth measured by her own experience.²⁴

Richardson's interest in Quaker philosophy is present in her work beyond Miriam's direct contact with the faith, and is noticeable in, for example, Miriam's constant search for silence and stillness. Throughout *Pilgrimage*, thought and contemplation are linked to silence, the latter providing Miriam with a space in which she can function in a way unavailable to her when others are present. Already in the very first paragraph of *Pointed Roofs*, Miriam's need for silence in order to be able to think is stressed:

Miriam left the gaslit hall and went slowly upstairs. The March twilight lay upon the landings, but the staircase was almost dark. The top landing was quite dark and silent. There was no one about. It would be quiet in her room. She could sit by the fire and be quiet and think things over until Eve and Harriett came back with the parcels. She would have time to think about the journey and decide what she was going to say to the Fräulein. (I, 15)

As Stamm points out, the emphasis on silence in this scene underlines its importance as a theme in the sequence.²⁵ The words 'silent' and 'quiet' are repeated three times in these short lines, and the absence of noise is clearly linked to the fact that Miriam is by herself. Not only is the room quiet, but Miriam too can 'be quiet', and, being so, she can 'think things over'. However, what seems crucial here is not, as Stamm suggests, the absence of sound *per se*, but the fact that Miriam does not need to speak. Silence is opposed to language, in the sense of conversation or chit-chat.

²⁴ It is interesting to note that Richardson found *Dimple Hill*, the novel-chapter which deals with Miriam's stay with the Quaker family Roscorlas (discussed below), especially hard for her to write. In a letter to Powys she writes that she has 'scrapped' as much as two years' work on the novel because she deemed it 'I.R.' (see *Windows on Modernism*, p.325).

²⁵ Stamm, p.177.

Not having to talk, or listen to others talking, she is free to focus her mind on what she wishes.

This passage introduces two lines of thought which are central to the early volumes of *Pilgrimage*: first, Miriam's need for silence in order to think, and, secondly, the association of language with social situations that are often - although not necessarily in this scene - uncomfortable for Miriam, and where she frequently feels she has to perform.²⁶ Indeed, what Miriam is thinking about in the dark, silent room is actually what she is going to say to Fräulein Pfaff when she arrives in Germany; she is preparing for her first performance as a teacher. The contrast between scenes of silent solitude and those in which Miriam is forced to interact with others is distinct in the first novel-chapters, and somewhat disturbing. The inner tranquillity Miriam is able to experience in solitude and through silence remains distant in social situations, which are instead marked by a strong sense of unease and failure. If *Pilgrimage* often presents contemplation and thought as wordless and silent by nature, social interaction is instead linked to performance and language.

The need for silent spaces for contemplation and concentration is a pressing concern for Miriam in the first novel-chapters of the sequence, probably the more so as there is no space for her to properly call her own. In the Henderson home, she shares a room with her sister Harriett, and during her time in Hanover and at the Wordsworth school respectively, she is forced to share rooms with other teachers and students. Even outside sleeping arrangements, there is little solitude for Miriam in these schools. In Hanover, the moments she enjoys the most are those when she can play the piano by herself in an empty bedroom or *Saal*, and the Saturday-

²⁶ Although Miriam is with her sisters later in this scene from *Pointed Roofs*, it is clear, from this scene as well as from the following pages, that the relationship between them has never been easy. Miriam seems to need to withdraw from her family to think clearly and the sisters' conversation mostly seems to circle around 'safe' topics. Miriam is rebuffed, for example, when she touches on the dangerous subjects of the family's economic situation or their mother's mental health: 'Don't, Mim' (I, 18). However, her impending departure seems to make the sisters more intimate. Eve tells her sister that she 'seem[s] to know [her] all at once so much better' (I, 20).

afternoon letter-writing, marked by an 'almost unbroken silence' (I, 65). Miriam loves 'the atmosphere of these Saturday afternoons', because of 'the sense of this room full of quietly occupied girls' (65-66). Instead of writing home, she scribbles down what she can remember of a poem, contemplating its meaning, all the while aware that she must 'pretend to be writing letters or someone might speak to her', because she 'would hate any one who challenged her at this moment' (67). Finding a silent space at Fräulein Pfaff's school is not easy, and so Miriam holds dearly to those few moments when she is liberated from the pressure of having to find something appropriate to say to the other girls.

Silence in scenes such as these does not necessarily entail the absence of noise - the letter-writing scene in *Pointed Roofs* is marked by small sounds, like Minna's mutterings under her breath and pens scratching against paper. Instead it is a mental, non-verbal state, accessible only in complete solitude, or at moments when there is no risk of disturbance from any other person present. The most important prerequisite for Miriam to access this silent state of mind is thus the absence of spoken language, not the absence of sound. As during a Quaker meeting, silence creates a space for Miriam in which her thoughts can move around, and in which she can take the time to seek answers and pursue insights.

In this silent space, Miriam also finds that she can *be* differently, and apprehend the world surrounding her in a different, more comprehensive way than when she is forced to interact with others. Such is the case in a scene rather late in *Pointed Roofs*, when Miriam remains in bed while Emma and Ulrica, with whom she shares the room, are forced to get up for chores. Alone, slowly emerging from sleep, Miriam finds herself in her silent space, resisting the temptation to put words to her sensations, even for herself: 'Two separate, sudden and resounding garglings almost startled her to thought, but she resisted' (I, 149). While she remains in her bed in silence, everything appears clearer to her, even her own self:

She could feel the shape and weight of each limb; sounds came to her with perfect distinctness; the sounds downstairs

and a low-voiced conversation across the landing, little faint marks that human beings were making on the great wide stillness, the stillness that brooded along her white ceiling and all round her and right out through the world; the faint scent of her soap-tablet reached her from the distant washstand. She felt that her short sleep must have been perfect, that it had carried her down and down into the heart of tranquillity where she still lay awake, and drinking as if at a source. Cool streams seemed to be flowing in her brain, through her heart, through every vein, her breath was like a live cool stream flowing through her. (I, 149)

This sense of harmony, of experiencing herself at one with the world, and of being able to reach deep into herself, ‘into the heart of tranquillity’, is unusual for Miriam at this early stage in the sequence. But this is a state that she soon learns to seek herself, and to cherish as a process of reaching her innermost core, that part of herself which she seeks to attain throughout *Pilgrimage*: ‘the warmth of her body sent up a faint pleasant sense of personality. “It’s me,” she said, and smiled’ (I, 150). Miriam’s state of silence is thus linked to what she perceives to be her self in a fundamental sense: only in silence can she access that core. As Stamm points out, Miriam needs an ‘atmosphere of quiet intimacy’ to experience ‘essential knowledge’.²⁷ Elizabeth Bronfen, too, recognises a separate reality ‘beneath the surface’, which is recognizable only in silence, and which constitutes ‘a permanent, continual essence’.²⁸ Indeed, in this scene, as in many of the early instalments, silence needs to be external before it can become internal; only because of the absence of Emma and Ulrica can Miriam delve in her inner tranquillity. It is a fragile state of mind, threatened not only by the gargling, but by the possibility of anyone entering, or even by Miriam’s own movements: ‘She knew that if she even moved she would be changed’ (I, 150).

Miriam’s first real room of her own - not counting the room in which she sleeps as a governess in Honeycomb and where she

²⁷ Stamm, p.184.

²⁸ *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.148-149.

never feels at ease - is the room she rents from Mrs Bailey in *The Tunnel*, and where she then remains for several novel-chapters. This room means freedom for Miriam, and it offers a constant possibility of solitary contemplation.²⁹ Entering the room for the first time as its sole occupant, Miriam immediately feels that the space becomes an extension of her self, a place where she can move in and outside of herself without ever having to worry about being interrupted, as she previously had been. The whole house seems suffused by a promising silence: 'a small silent afternoon brightness', '[s]ilence flooded up from the lower darkness', '[s]ilence came in from the landing' (II, 12, 13-14). Already during her first moments in the room, Miriam seems to locate an essential part of herself in it: 'Twenty-one and only one room to hold the richly renewed consciousness, and a living to earn, but the self that was with her in the room was the untouched tireless self of her seventeenth year and all the earlier time. The familiar light moved within the twilight, the old light...' (II, 16). In this room, she is free to be herself, without the pressure of any company. It is this lack of social pressure which has renewed her consciousness, and has allowed her to access a part of herself lost during the hard years of teaching and worrying about her mother's mental illness. The freedom Miriam finds in this silent, solitary space releases a long train of thoughts and memories, which have to be sorted out. 'I can *think* about it all, here, and not mind', Miriam concludes, revealing something of the safety she feels when removed from the pressure of socializing (II, 18). The room on Tansley Street is a good example of the effect external silence has on Miriam throughout most of *Pilgrimage*; it is a solitary, quiet space, where she is free from having to arrange herself into phrases.

Through much of *Pilgrimage*, Miriam explores the relationship between identity and language. Her constant interest in words and dialect, witnessed not least by the frequent onomatopoeic representations of pronunciation on the page, indicates a heightened sensitivity to the spoken word. For the Miriam of the early novel-chapters, what a person says and how it is said

²⁹ See Bronfen for a further discussion of Miriam's different spaces, especially pp.18-20, 27.

generally amount to a personality. Thus, she is constantly preoccupied with what to say herself. However, identity in *Pilgrimage* is gradually revealed to be something both innate and essential.³⁰ It is the inner core Miriam is constantly getting at, which she on several occasions names, in the most essential sense, as herself.³¹

Related to this exploration of the self and of reality - and to the distinction made between silence and language in relation to the self - are the two states of being which Miriam refers to as 'being' and 'becoming'. 'Being' is what Miriam herself calls the immovable consciousness, that innermost part of herself that is only accessible through silent meditation, whereas 'becoming' is its surface counterpart, that aspect of identity which is changeable and linked to language:

Being versus becoming. Becoming versus being. Look after the being and the becoming will look after itself. Look after the becoming and the being will look after itself? Not so certain. Therefore it is certain that becoming depends upon being. Man carries his bourne within himself and is there already, or he would not even know that he exists. (IV, 362)

This line of thought is associated with Hypo, who is the foremost representative of 'becoming' for Miriam. As Shirley Rose demonstrates in an often-quoted article, the reason Richardson disapproved of the term 'stream-of-consciousness' was that she did not perceive consciousness as moving but as something still.³²

³⁰ But see Kerstin Fest, *And All Women Mere Players?: Performance and Identity in Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys and Radclyffe Hall* (Wien: Braumüller, 2009), p.49.

³¹ In the scene quoted above, for example, where Miriam is slowly waking up in the bedroom in Hanover, she seems to reach such an inner core ('It's me, she said, and smiled'), but generally such experiences occur later in the sequence, especially after Miriam has begun writing. Her inner core is then described as a 'centre of being', and as 'that centre where everything is seen in perspective; serenely' (IV, 609, 619).

³² See Shirley Rose, 'The Unmoving Center: Consciousness in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Contemporary Literature*, 10 (1969): 366-382, p.369. About the term 'stream-of-consciousness', Richardson wrote: 'What do I think of the term "Stream of Consciousness" as applied, in England, to the work of several modern novelists? Just this: that amongst the company of useful labels devised

This immovable consciousness - the being - relates strongly to internalised silence, as it is portrayed in *Pilgrimage*, while 'becoming' seems related to the performative aspects of language.³³

While the room on Tansley Street allows Miriam a space in which to think about things 'and not mind', thinking is not the right path to achieving the silent mental state she seeks. It seems that for Miriam, thinking is connected to language, and her inner self only answers to silence. When contemplating, thoughts should thus not be put into words; her inner state of silence is ineffable, not only in the sense that it cannot be described through words, but also in that it cannot be accessed unless she avoids all verbal phrases. In the scene from *Pointed Roofs*, when she remains in bed while the others get up, Miriam is described as resisting thought, suggesting that the silent inner core she has reached at this moment would be disturbed by putting thoughts into words. It seems the silent state she seeks cannot be reached through language - on the contrary, words countermine any effort to achieve it. Similarly, in her own room in Tansley Street, Miriam finds that 'there was no *need* to do anything or think about anything', because there is '[n]o interruption, no one watching or speculating or treating one in some particular way that had to be met' (II, 17). For her, putting thoughts into words are connected to socializing, a preparing for performance, whereas real thoughts, or contemplation, are intuitive by nature, and move beyond language.

Implied in the descriptions of Miriam's silent contemplation is the notion of understanding something fundamental, of *seeing* something not always there to be seen. Through her internalised silence, she is able to grasp something not otherwise available. Indeed, silence offers Miriam the opportunity to explore not only her inner self, but aspects of reality moving beyond ordinary perception. This implication is reinforced through the descriptions

to meet the exigencies of literary criticism it stands alone, isolated by its perfect imbecility', in Stanley Kunitz (ed.), *Authors Today and Yesterday* (New York: Wilson, 1933), p.562.

³³ Indeed, Miriam characterises Hypo as fundamentally against silence: 'You hate silence and you hate opposition. You always think people's minds are blank when they are silent. It's just the other way round' (III, 389).

of lightness and darkness that often accompany scenes focused on silence, where 'light' not only brings to mind the Quaker concept of the 'Inward Light' but also carries a metaphorical suggestion of knowledge. David Stamm notes that for Miriam, silence and light are often connected, in the sense that 'light appears as the fulfilment of silence', conveying 'a sense of the [...] hidden side of things' for Miriam.³⁴ The reflection of light in Miriam's silent spaces thus becomes, in Stamm's words, the 'projected vision of her own illumination', a reflection of 'the "secret" of her innermost self'.³⁵ To Stamm, this light 'becomes the supporting guide on her *pathway* to the mystical perception of the secret of life'.³⁶ Certainly, in these scenes, light consistently indicates illumination and understanding of a kind that moves beyond words. The interplay between light and dark reveals the transitory nature of this knowledge, so hard to grasp, and so hard to hold on to. Escaping direct treatment in words, 'light and darkness and darkness and light' is an appropriate designation both for the experience of this knowledge, and for the effect of silence on Miriam.

Beyond internalised silence and its function in Miriam's inner life, silence also becomes increasingly important in her relationships with others, as a measure of intimacy and mutual understanding. Here, too, she is influenced by the Quakers, who hold that silence should not only be a means of communicating with God, but that it also offers the possibility of a deepened communion between human beings. By minimizing conversation - especially during mealtimes - Friends sought to widen their respective personal experiences of silence into a shared, mutual experience. For Miriam, the Quaker way of communicating offers a long wished-for escape from awkward social situations construed by language. What she learns from the Quakers, then, is that silence offers a possibility of communion and closeness between two or more persons that language never can: 'Strength that remains; making a link that perhaps, between two people who have ever met in

³⁴ Stamm, p.174.

³⁵ Ibid, p.182-83.

³⁶ Stamm's italics. Ibid, p.183.

silence, is never broken [...] Spirits meet and converse and understand each other only in silence' (IV, 620-21).

A Poetics of Silence

Miriam's spiritual exploration of the relationship between herself and reality as she understands it have affinities with the ideas she develops about literature in the course of *Pilgrimage*. Over time, literature and writing become for Miriam another way - perhaps even a better way - to explore the world and to access hidden depths within her self. As with the practice of her faith, silence plays an important part in Miriam's view of literature: a text, to have any worth to her, must communicate silently, and must enable the kind of silent attention she constantly seeks to achieve.

There is thus a clear connection between Miriam's spirituality and her literary pursuits. As she leaves the Roscorlas at the end of *Dimple Hill*, her spiritual explorations and her internalised silence, explored and developed during the time she spends with the Quakers, are transferred to her artistic pursuits. Indeed, through her writing Miriam seems to find another method of moving through those barriers, into the core of her being. The aesthetics that she develops over the course of the entire novel-sequence come into fruition in *March Moonlight*, the final novel-chapter of *Pilgrimage*, as she starts a serious attempt to realise her literary ideals through her own pen. Writing, for Miriam, turns out to be an ideal method for achieving the kind of silent attention she has been seeking throughout the sequence. It enables her to '[t]ravel [...] down to that centre where everything is seen in perspective; serenely' (IV, 619).

As several critics have noted, there are affinities between Miriam's spiritual experiences and her attitude towards writing. Radford, for example, suggests that in *March Moonlight*, Miriam turns 'from a religious vocation to writing', and Bryony Randall discusses Miriam's writing precisely in terms of 'vocation', claiming that her 'experience of writing is directly comparable with the experience

she has at a Quaker meeting'.³⁷ I would like to develop this idea briefly, and to examine the often religious vocabulary Richardson uses to describe Miriam's literary pursuits before moving on to examine the larger affinities between Miriam's spiritual experiences of silence and the kind of literature she wishes to write.

Indeed, it is interesting to note the constant interplay between religion and literary practice throughout *Pilgrimage*, not least between the religious connotations of the word 'pilgrimage' and its possible connection to Miriam's writing, repeatedly described both in terms of travelling and in a language reminiscent of religious worship. Through reading, and subsequently through translating and writing, Miriam creates a 'secret place' for herself (III, 134). In *Deadlock*, 'the paper-scattered lamplit circle' on her desk - where she works on her translations of Andreyeff - is established as 'the centre of life': '[h]eld up by this secret place, drawing her energy from it, any sort of life would do that left this room and its little table free and untouched' (III, 134).³⁸ Writing, Miriam discovers, is a 'journey', a 'glad adventure'; in her solitary work at her desk she comes to uncover 'through the shapeless mass [of text] the approaching miracle of shape and meaning' (III, 142). In *March Moonlight*, as Miriam withdraws from the world in order to start writing for real, the parallels between religion and writing are even stronger: 'I forget the price; eagerly face the strange journey down and down to the centre of being. And the scene of labour, when again I am back in it, alone, has become a sacred place' (IV, 609). When contemplating the nature of the time she has been given for writing ('A year secure'), she divides her working days into morning, afternoon and evening in a way clearly reminiscent of the Holy Trinity: 'Three eternities. Yet they are not three eternities but one eternity. The ever-changing light, one light. Unbroken' (IV, 609). Using words like 'sacred place' and 'miracle', Miriam

³⁷ See Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.32-33; Randall, op. cit, p.53. See also Shirley Rose, 'Dorothy Richardson's Theory of Literature', *Criticism*, 12 (1970): 20-37, pp.34-36.

³⁸ See Richardson: 'The small writing-table in my attic became the centre of my life'. In 'Data for a Spanish Publisher', in *Journey to Paradise* (London: Virago, 1989), p.139.

represents her own literary pursuits in terms of religious worship. This is especially true about her own act of writing, but those works which she finds are successful according to her own norms are described with similar words: 'it was he [Henry James] after all who had achieved the first completely satisfying way of writing a novel. If this were a novel. There *was* something holy about it' (III, 410).

Miriam's literary pilgrimage is concretely tied to physical places - the actual sites where the writing takes place ('the scene of labour') are consistently underlined as important ('secret'; 'sacred'; 'drawing her energy from it'). Like a pilgrim travelling from holy site to holy site, Miriam journeys from table to desk, which all become places where worship can be performed. The act of writing itself is sometimes also described as a voyage, but mostly it is the place which is of significance to the writing and reading process. The writing space becomes a place of meditation, imbued with some divine presence:

The spell of the ink-stained table had survived the night. Moving about, preparing for to-day, she turned continually towards the window-space, as to an actual presence, and was answered by the rising within her of a tide of serenity, driving her forward in a stupor of confidence, impervious to strain and pain. It was as if she had entered a companionship that now spread like a shield between her and the life she had so far dealt with unaided. (III, 135)

There is often something ritualistic about Miriam's activities in these sites, and in the way she approaches them, as for example in this description of a vegetarian restaurant in *March Moonlight*, where she would go to read:

the charm of that Eustace Miles place. Unique amongst cheap restaurants, most of whose customers don't seem to be fully present, seem, even in the evening, just food consumers. All day the place awaits me. Gives me the long ramble from suburb to centre, sure of the welcome of a spacious interior well filled but never crowded. Sure of a seat in some corner

where, after the queer, well-balanced meal comfortingly independent of slaughter-houses, I can sit within the differently nourishing variations of the assembled company, reading as receptively as if I were alone, yet feeling one even with that woman who sat at my table last night eye downcast in meditation, breathing out now and again her Buddhistic O-m. (IV, 657)

The repeated journey to the restaurant ('the long ramble'), the reading that takes place there, and her felt connection with the meditating woman all link Miriam's literary pilgrimage to spiritual imagery.

Writing becomes for Miriam a way of realizing herself without the constraints of organised religious practice; it develops into an individualised religion, an open space for her to adjust according to her mood. Elisabeth Bronfen writes that unlike being amongst the Quakers, when writing 'in her solitary room' Miriam is 'able to belong "in spirit" to any worlds'.³⁹ Certainly, Miriam always avoids becoming anything 'in name', to contain that freedom which allows her mind to wander (or to go on a pilgrimage).⁴⁰ When writing, however, she draws deeply from the meditative practices she has come to know amongst the Quakers, practices largely associated with silence. 'Why should it be only Quakers who employed, in public as well as privately, this method of approach to reality?', Miriam demands (IV, 498). Writing enables the same kind of focused attention that silence brings her in *Dimple Hill*, and thus writing in a sense becomes an extension of Miriam's spiritual exercises. Writing allows her to access her inner self and to experience truth, in a way very similar to how silence during Meetings removes barriers to the centre of her self. For Miriam, the experience of silence and of organised religion with the Roscorlas only constitutes the beginning of her spiritual explorations: '[I], who am only at the alphabet' (IV, 551). Miriam's choice of word seems relevant here - she is about to attempt to put her spiritual search into words. And writing becomes a way to

³⁹ Bronfen, op. cit, p.161.

⁴⁰ See Rachel Mary's comment that Miriam is 'a Friend in all but name' (IV, 540).

continue her explorations - not as a substitute for religion, but as a way to practise it, as Miriam personally understands it.

Not only the act of writing itself, but *what* Miriam writes is strongly related to her spiritual experiences. Through her writing Miriam attempts to find a way, not only to realise a state of silent contemplation for herself, but also to express that silence on the page. The spiritual experiences she has sought and apprehended more fully during her stay with the Quakers become her aesthetic aim, as silence becomes her poetics. For Miriam, expressing silence means grasping those experiences that move beyond language and representing her own, subjective reality, which means not only her perceptions of the material world, but also how that world looks through her state of silent attention.⁴¹ As discussed above, this perspective changes over the course of *Pilgrimage*: only in the last volumes is Miriam able to internalise silence, which in *March Moonlight* is shown to be the ideal state of mind for a writer. A text which realises Miriam's poetics of silence expresses this internalised silence in its perspective, in its form, and in its subject, but most importantly between the lines; the core of reality, which is ultimately Miriam's literary subject, is impossible to represent in words, as it moves not only beyond language but also beyond what the mind can easily grasp. Expressing silence thus means rendering the intuitive process which makes sense of reality.

Miriam's poetics are built upon her understanding of the relationship between art and life; fundamental to her understanding of fiction is that there can be no distinction between the two. Nothing in a work of literature can be based on anything other than the writer's own experience. Nothing can thus be made up, created, or imagined. Any text worth reading must have its base in its author's own life. A text based on reality in this sense is not a work of the imagination, which in any case is a problematic concept for Miriam. Her first realization in this direction comes from her meeting with the author Edna Prout during a visit with the Wilsons in *Revolving Lights*. Edna, Miriam finds, bases her novels on her own life:

⁴¹ A state comparable to what Richardson in her 1938 preface to *Pilgrimage* refers to as 'contemplated reality' (I, 10).

That was ‘writing’; from behind the scenes. People and things from life, a little altered, and described from the author’s point of view. Easy; if your life was amongst a great many people and things and you were hard enough to be sceptical and superior. But an impossibly mean advantage... a cheap easy way. Cold clever way of making people look seen-through and foolish; to be laughed at, while the authors remained admired, special people, independent, leading easy airy sunlit lives, supposed, by readers who did not know where they got their material, to be *creators*. (III, 342)

It might seem strange that Miriam is shocked to learn that there are authors who base their work on their own lives (“She had put *people* in.... People he knew of. They joked about it. Horrible...”), as she herself will ultimately advocate a similar stance (III, 342).⁴² But there is an essential difference between Miriam’s version of autobiographical fiction and that of Edna Prout. Prout has judged her characters in her presentation of them, debased them in order to elevate her own alias. As Gillian Hanscombe points out, the presentation of real, living people in books is not objectionable to Miriam ‘as long as they appear, as they do in “life”, as the percepts of the observer without any attempt to give the objective facts and details that only a “godlike” creator can know’, because to a subject, ‘[p]eople can be perceived, but not known’.⁴³ In other ways, the passage above does seem to capture essential parts of Miriam’s poetics for a new novel - a text filled with ‘[p]eople and things from life’, solely from the ‘point of view’ of the author/character, who in turn does not need to be a creator or a great inspired genius but simply someone capable to describe

⁴² There is of course a deliberate irony here, as readers must at this point be aware of the autobiographical nature of the novel they are in the process of reading - this very scene depicts a summer’s day with Hypo, the character based on H. G. Wells and his intimate friend Edna, who according to George H. Thomson is based on Violet Hunt: see *Notes on Pilgrimage: Dorothy Richardson Annotated* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1999), p.185.

⁴³ ‘Dorothy Richardson Versus the Novvle’, in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (eds), *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp.85-98, p.89.

reality as it is actually experienced (III, 342). Writing, it is implied, is thus not necessarily an art, but a craft.

The question of imagination looms over *Pilgrimage*, its alleged role in the writing process constantly repudiated by Miriam. In relation to the Romantic view of the writer as a genius clearly set apart from ordinary people - prevalent among many of Richardson's contemporaries - this denial of any creative faculty on the part of the writer is noteworthy.⁴⁴ An example of this Romantic tendency among Modern novelists can be seen in Stephen Dedalus's celebration of both the imagination and the genius of the artist, in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. According to Stephen, only a true artist can express such beauty as to awaken in the beholder 'an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an ideal terror', and the 'first step in the direction of beauty is to understand the frame and scope of the imagination'.⁴⁵ In his act of creation - for the Romantic genius is always a man - the artist is likened to God ('The artist, like the God of the creation'; 'O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh', et cetera), powerful and almighty - an interesting contrast to Richardson's 'sacred place', where worship of writing may certainly take place, and where God may be experienced, but where the writer would never presume to declare him- or herself God.⁴⁶ Moreover, Stephen goes into a voluntary exile and plans to leave Ireland at the end of *Portrait of the Artist*, in order to 'discover the mode of life or of art whereby [his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom', while Miriam instead finds that freedom inside her, by internalizing silence.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ For example, Frank Kermode notes that the idea of the 'necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive [the Image]' is shared by the Romantics and the Moderns alike: see *Romantic Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.4. Roberta Seret also recognises this Romantic strand in the modern Künstlerroman and asserts that the 'Modern Artist's final goal is creativity and the unlimited expression of his soul': *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p.2.

⁴⁵ James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Jeri Johnson (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.173, 175.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.181, 182-83.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.207.

The 'imagination', writes Kermode, is often placed 'in an antithetical relationship with "reality"', and this is indeed the case with Miriam's poetics. If she rejects the concept of creativity ('You see, I have no imagination'), it is because of her commitment to the 'real': 'Contemplation is adventure into discovery; reality. What is called "creation" imaginative transformation [sic], fantasy, invention, is only based upon reality. Poetic description a half-truth? Can anything produced by man be called "creation"?' (III, 431; IV, 657). The author's task is not to create, but 'to record' the real (IV, 609). To Hanscombe, this 'is not only an anti-Romantic stance'; it 'derives from a fundamental Puritanism', one of whose chief characteristics is a 'resistance to fantasy'.⁴⁸ Indeed, Miriam finds little to applaud in literary works that do not relate to her understanding of the 'real'; books are only interesting if you can sense reality in them, meaning their authors' experience. Moreover, she cannot perceive anything unique about the artist as compared to other humans, and in this sense, her poetics is certainly egalitarian. Anyone who will take the trouble can become a writer: 'The incense-burners do not seem to know that in acclaiming what they call "a work of genius" they are recognizing what is potentially within themselves. If it were not, they would not recognize it', she states - and by 'incense-burners' she is presumably referring to those who, like Stephen Dedalus, worship at the altar of the 'imagination' (IV, 657). Through proper contemplation, anyone can retrieve proper material for literary work from within their own self.

The act of contemplation - meaning silent attention, as discussed above - replaces the role of the creative imagination for Miriam, and it becomes the foundation for her writing. At one point she even suggests redefining 'imagination' to something more similar to her meaning of contemplation: 'Imagination? Not in the sense of *making up*. Imagination means holding an image in your mind. When it comes up of itself, or is summoned by something. Then it is not outside, but within you. And if you hold it, steadily, for long enough, you could write about it forever' (IV, 613). The act of contemplation - that 'journey' into oneself that occurs when one

⁴⁸ Hanscombe, op. cit, pp.89-90.

focuses on one's inner reality - is essential to the writer, a point Miriam repeatedly returns to in the second half of *Pilgrimage*. It is this 'unchanging reality' Miriam seeks through her writing and through the act of silent contemplation, and it is this reality she aims to present in her texts. She holds that the only subjects worthy of literary exploration are those firmly based in the writer's own reality, and they can only be reached through silent contemplation, allowing her to retrieve the essence of herself and her literary subject, which to Miriam amounts to the same thing. For Miriam, writing requires both external and internalised silence: 'To write is to forsake life. Every time I know this, in advance. Yet whenever something comes that sets the tips of my fingers tingling to record it, I forget the price' (IV, 609). To '[f]ully [...] recognize, one must be alone' (IV, 657).

Reading occupies a central place in Miriam's life and thus in *Pilgrimage*. Her choice of reading material over the course of *Pilgrimage* offers invaluable insights into the literary scene at the turn of the last century. I would like to spend some time looking at Miriam's reading, not only from the perspective of *what* she is reading, but *how* she reads it. As discussed above, literary activities have affinities to religious practice for Miriam. If writing enables Miriam to achieve a state of silent attention, reading offers a possibility of communicating and sharing, in a way similar to how Friends communicate in silence, sharing their experiences of their Inner Light. Silence in literature, like silence between people, represents experiences that move beyond words, and speak to the reader's intuition through an act of recognition.

What Miriam seeks in a work of literature is not the author's thoughts spelled out, but rather represented so that she can relate to them herself, based on her own experiences. A silent text awakens a response in its readers, who recognise it as true because something in them responds to it. Already in *Honeycomb*, Miriam comes to the conclusion that she reads to get at the mind *behind* the words:

I have just discovered that I don't read books for the story,
but as a psychological study of the author... [...] it was true

and exciting. It meant... things coming to you out of books, people, not the people in the books, but knowing, absolutely, everything about the author [...] It did not matter that people went about talking about nice books, interesting books, sad books, 'stories' - they would never be that to her. They were people. More real than actual people. They came nearer. (I, 384)

The fact that the word 'stories' is put within quotation marks reveals something important about Miriam's attitude to plot. She does not read for 'story', but for the representation of thought. To her, a text presents a mind-frame or a perspective: a silent, textual presence which hovers between the lines.

Richardson expressed ideas about the act of reading on several occasions, using words like 'collaboration' and 'adventure'. She thought that writers should present their work as though 'thrown upon a screen, the author out of sight and hearing', and themselves be present in the text 'only in attitude toward reality... by his accent... by his use of adjective, epithet and metaphor'.⁴⁹ By doing so, writers create texts which force the reader to search for points of recognition in order to understand what they are reading.⁵⁰ Richardson also points towards the kind of intuitive reading Miriam is experiencing in *Pilgrimage*: 'the writer, whatever his struggles, is handling a medium he has used from infancy onwards and whose arduous acquisitions and final mastery he has long since forgotten. It lies, ready for use, stored up within him in fragments each of which is a living unit complete in form and significance. Within this medium the reader is also at home'.⁵¹ When she is finding her faith in *Dimple Hill*, Miriam is described as returning to somewhere within her where she had been as a child. Similarly, Richardson here seems to point to the writer's 'medium'

⁴⁹ Quoted in Kunitz, op. cit, p.562.

⁵⁰ Richardson's discussion of the necessary collaboration of the reader for creating meaning in the text have led critics to discuss her work in terms of 'writerly' text; see for example Radford, p.15. Shirley Rose finds that reading for Miriam and Richardson alike is a 'spiritual exercise', which creates a 'reader-writer unity of consciousness': 'Dorothy Richardson's Theory of Literature', op.cit, p.24.

⁵¹ *John Austen and the Inseparables* (London: William Jackson, 1930), p.12.

as a natural quality of the spirit, lost since childhood. Learning to use this 'medium' means learning to communicate with readers, who share this faculty, and who will recognise it in themselves. This 'medium' is not language - but the art of silently communicating the essence of existence, of making readers see in the text that which is not explicitly stated but surrounding every word.

This act of recognition in the reader does not concern the author's morals and has nothing to do with empathy, but concerns instead the most basic human conditions: what it is to experience reality, and the workings of consciousness. What a perceptive reader can recognise in a text is the presence of those wordless aspects of existence that constitute its foundation to Miriam. Moreover, a text which allows readers to recognise these silent aspects of reality will also enable them to access their own inner being. Silence in a text speaks to that silent attention that constitutes the heart of Miriam's existence, and from where she is better able to experience and understand reality in a more profound sense. It triggers that attention, allowing her to see reality more clearly. Thus, in a sense, Miriam does not *read* texts so much as *experience* them, which also explains why she is so uninterested in plot. In *Honeycomb* she reflects on the difference between her way of reading and that of others: 'People thought it was silly, almost wrong to look at the end of a book. But if it spoilt a book, there was something wrong about the book' (I, 384). Instead, Miriam reads a little here and a little there, looking for that 'something that came to you out of the book, any bit of it, a page, even a sentence - and the "stronger" the author was, the more came' (I, 384).

To Miriam, recognizing in a text a quality which speaks to the silent depths of the consciousness means conversing with the philosophy of the writer. This conversation is enabled through the silent spaces in the text. Reading W. H. Mallock's *A Human Document* (1892) in *Honeycomb* - the novel which makes her reflect on the difference between her reading habits and those of others - she experiences a strong sense of identification with the text, not with what it says, but with what it does not say:

Why did this strange book come so near, nearer than any other, so that you *felt* the writing, felt the sentences as if you were writing them yourself? He was a sad pained man, all wrong; bothered and tragic about things, believing in sad black horror. Then why did he come so near? Perhaps because life was sad. Perhaps life was really sad. No; it was somehow the writing, the clearness. That was the thing. He himself must be all right, if he was so clear. Then it was dangerous, dangerous to people like Mrs Corrie and Joey who would attend only to what he said, and not to him ... sadness or gladness, saying things were sad or glad did not matter; there was something behind all the time, something inside people (I, 384-385)

There is something 'behind' the text, which makes Miriam experience the 'clearness' of what Mallock writes. Similarly, when reading *Anna Karenina* with Michael in *Deadlock*, Miriam feels the text as though she were a part of it: 'What was the mysterious difference? Why did she feel she could hear the tone of the voices and the pauses between the talk; the curious feeling of things moving and changing in the air that is always there in all conversations?' (III, 60). The 'mysterious difference' in texts like these becomes Miriam's drive for reading. She searches in literature, not for words of truth, but for silent truth.

Because it is silent, and because Miriam spends a long time feeling uncomfortable about the intuitive nature of her understanding, she has problems expressing her thoughts about literature. Like religion, reading becomes something essentially private to her, a form of worship conducted in private. How is it possible, she asks, to convey intuitive understandings of texts to other persons? Is it ever possible to express the deeply personal feelings that literature and art sometimes awaken? Like the experiences she has with the Quakers, who teach her to internalise silence and to communicate silently, Miriam learns that her form of intuitive reading can only be acknowledged in silence, and shared by those who have had similar experiences. Reading books others have talked about, she constantly finds herself 'finding principally quite other things, which stayed, after one had forgotten what people had explained'

(III, 61). A rare moment of such understanding passes between Miriam and Eleanor Dear in *The Tunnel*, as Miriam reads Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* to her convalescent friend. This reading opens up, not only a conversation with Brontë's text similar to that of Mallock's, but also a sense of shared experience between Miriam and Eleanor, despite Miriam's initial reluctance to share her favourite novel with her sickly acquaintance: 'They were looking and hearing together [...] Something was passing to and fro between them, behind the text; a conversation between them that the text, the calm quiet grey that was the outer layer of the tumult, brought into being. If they should read on, the conversation would deepen' (II, 260-1). This is an altogether wordless form of conversation, enabled by the text the two women are sharing. *Villette* thus opens silent spaces within and between the two women, allowing them - or at least Miriam - to better understand the shared premises of their humanity. The silent, intuitive conversation allows them to acknowledge their common experience instead of their idiosyncrasies.

'[T]he test of absolutely everything in life is the quality of the in-between silences', Miriam asserts in *Revolving Lights* (III, 389). This is hardly a surprising conclusion in a novel where silence, stillness, and solitude all appear as important ways of reaching and discovering the self and the world, as well as those aspects of existence that move beyond language. Throughout *Pilgrimage*, silence is celebrated as a strength, a quality of life that in the end it would be impossible for Miriam to do without. Silence enables, communicates, and reveals truth. Yet, silence in Richardson's text also often represents the unknowable: those aspects of existence that move beyond language and that even when grasped and briefly held by Miriam seem to remain hidden from the reader. Silence, then, hides parts of *Pilgrimage* from us, unless we, too, can see beyond words to the hidden side of things and converse with the text in the way suggested by both Miriam and Richardson. If 'real speech' can only come from silence, as Miriam says in *Revolving Lights*, perhaps the reason Richardson needed to write such a very long novel was because she had so much silence to put between the lines.