

DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S ADVENTURE IN MEMORY

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Across the Year

Evidence of the problem memory posed for Richardson can be found already in the first page of *Pointed Roofs*:

The organ was playing *The Wearin' o' the Green*.

It had begun that tune during the last term at school, in the summer. It made her think of rounders in the hot school garden, singing-classes in the large green room, all the class shouting 'Gather *roses* while ye may', hot afternoons in the shady north room, the sound of turning pages, the hum of the garden beyond the sun-blinds, meeting in the sixth form study ... Lilla, with her black hair and the specks of bright amber in the brown of her eyes, talking about free-will. She stirred the fire.¹

While Miriam Henderson, alone in a room full of the scattered signs of her journey to come, animates the novel from its beginning, to follow her thoughts we already have to leave the present and jump into the past: to a moment during the previous summer. The music of an organ coming from the street stirs the novel's first memories: confused fragments of a school life forever lost. The openings of two almost contemporary novels come to our mind: Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In both, the past in the shape of a dream assails Marcel and Stephen within the first two pages.² According to Leon

¹D. Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, Vol. 1, (London: Virago, 1979), p. 15-16. From here on page numbers in text.

²In both these beginnings memory is connected to sleep: Marcel wakes up in the middle of the night and, after the gallery of rooms where he has lived in the past, he spends 'the greater part of the night recalling our life in the old days'; in the first episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen starts to remember a dream from the previous night, made up of materials from his past: '[he] leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the frying edge of his shiny black coat-sleeve. Pain, that

Edel, who defines the new psychological novel through the work of Richardson, Proust, and Joyce (he later adds Virginia Woolf), the key role played by memory in their novels is provoked by the disappearance of the omniscient narrator: 'this removal of the author from the scene made necessary a significant shift in narrative: it created the need to use the memory of the characters to place the reader in a relationship with their past'.³

In Richardson's case, memory is the most important of the wide range of mental phenomena to which she pays attention. If we take *Pilgrimage* to be a single work, it is significant that memories open and close the novel. Thus, the last page of *March Moonlight*, published more than fifty years later reads:

Yet all such moments, since she knew how thankfully I had given Michael into her hands, surprise me with their continuous suggestion of successful rivalry; while still the essence of our relationship remains untouched. [...] Something of the inexpressible quality of our relationship revealed itself in that moment she did not share, the moment of finding the baby Paul lying asleep in his long robe in the sitting-room. [...] Often I had held babes in my arms: Harriet's, Sally's, and many others. But never with that sense of perfect serenity (IV 658).

2100 pages stand between the two passages. Miriam has gone from adolescence to middle age. The point of view has moved between the third and the first person, but the key moments of her experience are still represented through a process of remembering: from her initial departure for Germany to finally making sense of her relationship with Jean. If many critics in the period read *Pilgrimage* as an English, feminine *A la recherche*, this is not just because of the roman-fleuve structure, but because of the

was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death': M. Proust, *Remembrance of things past*, Vol.1, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1981), p.9; J. Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.4.

³L. Edel, *The Psychological novel 1900-1959* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1955), p.15.

importance of presence of memory to both novels. As with many readers outside France, Richardson only discovered Proust after his death in 1922. But whereas for Woolf, the encounter with Proust marks a turning point that results in the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925, the most Proustian of her works, Richardson's interest in memory predated her encounter with *A la recherche*. The evidence can be found not just in the early parts of *Pilgrimage*, but also in her early sketches, short stories, private letters, poems and articles on cinema.

In 1911, she published a sketch or 'middle', 'Across the Year', in *The Saturday Review*, which ends:

There is nothing to parcel out the sweetness of the hours.... Dominated and banished the days yield at last their richest treasure. They come at your will, slow-drifting phantoms along the margin of your deep content. They show you beauties you never saw for your eagerness in seeking. They are yours to hold or to cast away.... Wakening some night at the goal of your journey into the darkness and with deep hours ahead, you may see for a moment the flaming summit of the year. You may, if you care, accept the flashed challenge and set your feet upon the steep uplands lying between the year's end and the black plateau of March. You may pass in a dream along the high-hung valley of April and up May's winding pathway to the height. There you may watch the serene swing of widespread days and see the sunlight on earth's brimming goblet; you may feel the swift touch of twilight nights across the June meadows.... The night stirs and is silent. You relinquish your visions. They pass and are blotted out in the flowing darkness. You are left, full awake, cradled and secure at the heart of the year.⁴

In the impressionistic style typical of these short pieces, a style that she will use again in *Pilgrimage*, the investigation into memory is implicit rather than explicit, describing the recurrent surfacing by day and by night of images of the past. The reference to a dream makes it tempting to think that the passage describes an

⁴D. Richardson, 'Across the Year', in *The Saturday Review*, 23 December, 1911.

unconscious process, but the word 'wakening' suggests a more conscious meditation on memories. The influence of the romantics is clear, in particular Wordsworth's 'passion recollected in tranquillity', which makes it possible to apprehend a beauty that cannot be perceived in the urgency of the first impression.⁵ Richardson here is writing about voluntary memory, a second sight whose gift you can keep or abandon. Above all, to remember is a way, and perhaps *the* way to emancipate oneself from time, to interrupt its rush towards the future, and to make time into space. It is no coincidence, that Richardson's friend and former lover, H. G. Wells, uses the same premise for his scientific romance, *The Time Machine*, where his Time Traveller founds his theories on the basis that "Time is only a kind of Space".⁶

In the same way, for Richardson's narrator the year becomes something you can travel across, a journey which moves forward and then backward, finally returning to its starting point, but with a new sense of security. Memory turns the sequence of months into places of memory, an imaginative geography through which you can walk. This short piece, published by an unknown writer at the very beginning of her career, already indicates two uses of memory that will return in *Pilgrimage* and her shorter fiction: on the one hand, memory plays a role in the psychological definition of character, on the other, it works as a narrative mechanism which foregrounds the representation of time, the *mise en scène* of the *fabula*, both in the short stories and in the roman-fleuve.

⁵ Wordsworth is the romantic poet Richardson most admires. She often refers to him, from the review 'The return of William Wordsworth' published in December 1930 in *The Adelphi*, to the 1939 essay on *Finnegans Wake* which she opens with his famous definition of poetry. Interestingly, in a letter to Richardson, John Cowper Powys associates her treatment of sensation with Wordsworth and Pater: 'I can't tell what your attitude is – writers are so different – to a devotee adherent but except for Wordsworth & Walter Pater it is from your philosophy that I have, among our English writers, got the most for my furtive cult of pure sensation', in Gloria G. Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.171.

⁶ H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* in *The Time Machine and The Invisible Man* (New York: Barnes & Nobles Classics, 2003), p.5.

In *Pilgrimage*, memories, which are almost always Bergson's image-remembrances,⁷ tell us about Miriam Henderson, filling the gaps of her unknown past, underlining the main events of her life by repeating them, defining her character through the questions and answers they raise. But in writing that has a strong autobiographical component, the uses of memory also tell us much about Dorothy Richardson and her decisions as a writer. From them we can infer something of her personal, non-systematic theory of literature. 'The feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism'⁸ depicts a fragmented identity that moves between present, past and future, not always making a clear distinction between them. This identity is reflected, using the mirror of memory, in the fragmented language and narrative structure of *Pilgrimage*, which are premised on the deliberate breaking and disarticulation of linear order.

Lights and spaces of memory

In *The Principles of Psychology* (1891), William James wrote:

Memory requires more than mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in *my* past. In other words, I must think that I directly experienced its occurrence. It must have that 'warmth and intimacy' which were so often spoken of in the chapter on the Self, as characterizing all experiences 'appropriated' by the thinker as his own. [...] Memory is [...] a very complex representation, that of the fact to be recalled plus its associates, the whole forming one object known in one integral pulse of consciousness.⁹

⁷ In his essay *Matter and Memory* (*Matière et mémoire*, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896) Henri Bergson distinguishes between two forms of memory: one is automatic, connected with the body, concerns habit and has a practical nature; the other, called pure memory, registers the past in the form of image-remembrances, it is spiritual and free from utilitarian purpose.

⁸This is how she defines her attempt at writing in the Foreword to the 1938 edition of *Pilgrimage* (I 9).

⁹W. James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 1990), pp.425-426.

To James memory is recognised by the subject as part of his own self, and brings, just for this reason, 'warmth and intimacy'. 'Pure life preserved in its purity', writes Proust in his preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 'pure substance of ourselves that is a past impression'.¹⁰ Having achieved as scientific and objective a definition of memory as possible, James was ready to admire the Copernican revolution constituted by Bergson's *Matière et Mémoire*,¹¹ where the French philosopher used the concept of image to overcome the classical distinction between the subject and the object of perception. According to Bergson, memory is the survival of past images that mingle constantly with our perception of the present and may even take its place. They complete and enrich our present experience and action. In fact, perception is just an occasion for remembering. Even if there is a qualitative difference between pure perception and pure memory, they constantly interpenetrate one another exchanging something of their substance by a process of 'endosmosis'. What happened yesterday or ten years ago is active and actual in our present body and it can be expressed through it.

Miriam Henderson is an incarnation of this idea, and despite Richardson's reluctance to admit any direct philosophical influence on her work, she seems to have perfectly learnt Bergson's lesson when in *Interim* she states: 'the present can be judged by the part of the past it brings up. If the present brings up the happiness of the past, the present is happy' (II 402).¹² The interpenetration of present perceptions and past memories in Miriam's daily life is so common and at the same time so apparently accidental that the

¹⁰M. Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve*, in *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1988), p.4.

¹¹James to Bergson in H. Bergson, *Mélanges* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), p.566-68.

¹² Richardson was evasive about the influences of James and Bergson on her work. In a letter of August 1952 to the Indian critic Shiv Kumar, now in the Beinecke Library, Yale she writes: 'I was never consciously aware of any specific influence beyond the overwhelming longing to pay tribute to the marvel of existence anywhere, of anything; [...] No doubt Bergson influenced many minds, if only by putting into words something then dawning within the human consciousness: an increased sense of inadequacy of the clock as a time-measurer. [...] William James I have never read save in brief citations?.'

reader could be forgiven for perceiving it to be redundant. In a novel where events are often only vaguely represented, the frequent interruptions of memory are a further impediment to fluent reading. Nonetheless it is evident that *Pilgrimage's* value is not to be found in an exciting story or in a pacey narrative: that was not Richardson's aim. An understanding of her protagonist's inner life and 'contemplative mind' requires the slow time of reflection which is also an analysis of the past. The narrative's apparent stagnation conceals an openness to being overcome by a sudden 'flood of memories' (IV 388).

In *Pilgrimage* this flood of memories is connected with positive feelings, bringing pure happiness just for the fact of it having taken place: 'the flowers all shining separate and distinct and all together, indistinct in a blaze. She gazed at them ... sweet-williams of many hues, everlasting flowers, gold and yellow and brown and brownish purple, pinks and petunias and garden daisies white and deep crimson ... then *memory* was happiness, one happiness linked to the next' (II 214). Only rarely is it veiled with melancholy, most of the time the past seen from the present is perfection and wholeness, as Emerson, the philosopher 'who holds perhaps the most pervasive and lasting influence over [Miriam's] thought throughout *Pilgrimage*',¹³ had stated in his first series of essays published in 1841: 'behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do far off. Not only things familiar and stale, but even the tragic and terrible are comely, as they take their place in the pictures of memory'.¹⁴ Thus memory is not only 'warmth and intimacy', it puts our past life in order and finds the right place for past events, even the tragic and the terrible, connecting them one to the other. Thanks to this ordering function, memory always expresses a kind of beauty, no matter what its content.

But the beauty and happiness of memory lie also in its power to affirm permanency against time's constant erosion, to stem the

¹³ D. Longworth, 'Subject, Object and the Nature of Reality: Metaphysics in Dorothy Richardson's *Deadlock*', in *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* No.2 (2009), p.20.

¹⁴ R. W. Emerson, *Spiritual Laws* in *The Essays* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.77.

flow of never-ending days. However, this erosion is much less affecting in Richardson's writings than it is for her contemporaries Woolf or Proust. We only have to recall Eleanor Pargiter's 'sudden sense of the passage of time and its tragedy' in *The Years*, or the 'destructive action of Time' which informs the writing of *A la recherche* until the actual metamorphosis of the characters at the final *matinée* in *Le Temps Retrouvé*.¹⁵ Richardson lived and described the same experience but with a serenity unknown by Proust or Woolf, to whom the beauty of regained time is always proportional to the tragedy of that which is lost.

'Flaming', 'shining', a 'blaze' - memory in Richardson's writing is light. In *Pilgrimage*, the metaphorical field of light comes both from the mystical perspective at the core of the novel, and, for the chapters published after *Deadlock*, from Richardson's intense reading of Proust. From his early fragments, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, the association between light and memory, or at least a certain kind of memory, is a constant in Proust's writing. After the theorisation of the *sensations de lumière* in *La Prisonnière*, in the last volume of *A la recherche* the long-awaited revelation of memory's power of denying death, and thus saving from it, finally comes, wrapping the subject in dazzling light: 'a profound azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness, of dazzling light, swirled round me'.¹⁶

In *Pilgrimage*, memories can emerge from the fire, as in *The Tunnel*, where: 'pictures came out of the fire, the strange moment in her room, the smashing of the plaque, the lamplit den; Mr Orly's song, the strange, rich, difficult day' (II 76). Images of the day, now at its end or from many years ago, are called up by the fire, as a source of energy and light that urges them to come back. Later, in *Interim*, a scene from the previous spring comes unexpectedly into the dark autumn illuminating it 'as if by a suddenly switched on electric

¹⁵ V. Woolf, *The Years* (London: Penguin, 2002), p.135; M. Proust, *Remembrance of things past*, Vol.3, op. cit, p.971.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.899. The idea of sensations of light (p.381) includes not only memories but also those vague sensations arisen by experiences such as listening to Vinteuil's sonata or the view of Martinville's steeples. In these cases, as in many similar in *Pilgrimage*, memory shifts into epiphany, which is also characterised by the metaphor of light.

light' (II 351). Towards the end of the same chapter, which is rich in such examples, we read:

The rosy light shone into far-away scenes with distant friends. They came into her mind rapidly one by one, and stayed grouped in a radiance, sharper and clearer than in experience. She recalled scenes that had left a sting, something still to be answered. She saw where she had failed. [...] Her own judgments, sharply posed in her memory upon the end of some small incident, reversed themselves, dropped meaningless, returned reinforced, towards some clearer understanding (II 405-406).

As happens in Proust, it is not only light that brings memories but, vice versa, memories which bring light, or *radiance* in this case, and leave opacity and darkness when they are gone.¹⁷ Memory is thus not just beauty, a lens which colours life, but a gnosiological instrument, a new way to read reality. Its power lies not only in giving beauty to the past and in miraculously rescuing it from time's passing, but in the knowledge and deep understanding of life's events it enables. Opinions formed about friends some years ago return and distance allows reconsideration and greater clarity. Remembrance allows a 'clearer understanding' and answers looked for in vain in the past. Forgotten things, once regained, reveal themselves, and from a confused mass of images there proceeds order and logical succession. It is thus possible to develop the sort of 'important laws' that Emerson writes about, relating them precisely to memory:

in every man's mind, some images, words, and facts remain, without effort on his part to imprint them, which others forget, and afterwards these illustrate to him important laws. All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud.¹⁸

¹⁷ Radiance is connected with the concept of epiphany and revelation in Joyce's *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait*. There are epiphanies in *Pilgrimage* as in other modernist texts.

¹⁸ R. W. Emerson, *Intellect* (1841) in *The Essays*, op. cit, p.195.

In the transcendentalist perspective of life as a progressive unfolding of meaning, time's flow cannot but help in bringing more wisdom towards the past and thus a new awareness in the present. This will bring Miriam, as for Marcel, to the effort of building a new system to interpret reality, that set of *grandes lois* Proust refers to at the end of *Le Temps Retrouvé*. Memory will be a key element of this new system of interpretation.

The presence of a set of such laws within novels such as *Pilgrimage* or *A la recherche* is part of their inheritance from the previous century, even if imbued with a modern spirit. In contrast, the characters of Woolf or Joyce, not to mention Eliot or Beckett, will never be able, or allowed, to pronounce such general truths, which are supposed to be valid for the whole of humanity. For Richardson it is possible instead to recover what we are missing in the present by interpreting the past. Laws are possible, even if strictly personal. This is not to say that *Pilgrimage* is a sort of modern *Comédie humaine*, as it is certainly closer to Gide than to Balzac, nor a new *Buddenbrooks*, a book Richardson admired.¹⁹ In *Pilgrimage* an organic view of society is missing, personal destiny is not part of a general one, and the political or economic perspective is much more undetermined than characters' inner life. In this sense, Proust's *A la recherche* is closer than *Pilgrimage* to nineteenth-century novels. If Proust's narrator confesses to have finally built a system through a telescope, by observing from a great distance very small things and making a world out of them, in *Pilgrimage* this same system is tailored to the single individual, or rather to the individual woman and her unique view of the world. In *Revolving Lights*, while Miriam is retrospectively analysing a period of discussions with Michael, we read:

wide generalization was, she had immediately vowed, the way to illuminating contemplation of humanity. Its exercise made the present moment a life in itself, going on forever; [...] her past life gleaming about her in a chain of moments; leaping

¹⁹ As well as translating his biography by Léon Pierre-Quint, Richardson admired and often referred to Gide. Of Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, in a letter to Bryher in 1924 Richardson says she has already read it twice: Fromm (ed.), op. cit, p.109.

glad acceptances or ardent refusals, of large general views. The joy of making statements not drawn from the things heard or read but plumbed directly from the unconscious accumulations of her own experience was fermented by the surprise of his interested attention (III 254-255).

Drawing again from the metaphorical field of light, memory here is clearly connected with the idea of a linear chain of moments able to bring a larger view on humanity, life and the world. The truths Miriam has to state, her *large general views*, come from her intimate sense of self and her own experience. Her knowledge has little to do with the many books she has read, with the political or cultural circles she has attended, or with others' words. Her own past, once she has the chance to see it from a distance, is the main authority to listen to, the only reliable source for possible generalisations.

Memory as a mind process stands at the convergence of past, present and future, demonstrating their co-presence. This idea is so established in Richardson's thought that she can put it in brackets in an article in *Close Up* on a totally different topic: 'in this strange "memory" (which, however we may choose to define it, is, at the least, past present and future powerfully combined)'.²⁰ Memory moves from the moment when it arises backwards, towards the *forgotten things*, whose truths, once defined, enlighten powerfully both today and tomorrow, seeming to have escaped from the overwhelming power of fate. Not only do past, present and future merge in the subjective perception of time reflected in the modernist novel's structure, but this merging in the heroine's journey also seems to bring fulfilment. What has been lost with the collapsing of positivistic dogmas and its replacement with relativism is partially recovered in a unique, personal temporal dimension, where it is possible to state your own rules and where memory plays an extraordinary unifying role.

If the final goal of the journey is a return to the self, then the laws behind the temporal evolution of this self build a sort of closed

²⁰ D. Richardson, 'Continuous Performance – A Tear for Lycidas', in *Close Up* 7, 3, September 1930, p.197.

system which reminds us of the spiritual progress Emerson wrote about: not a linear trajectory through time, but a swinging movement backwards and forwards with its centre in the present of narration. *Revolving Lights* is particularly meaningful in this sense, since its title carries both the ideas of a temporal rotation and light, with its associations of memory in the text. At the centre of the chapter there is a long passage where fragments emerge casually from the past:

she suddenly knew that they were there only because she was on her way to a goal. Somewhere at the end of this ramble into the past, was a release from wrath. (III 323-4)

[...] She seemed to be looking with a hundred eyes, multitudinously, seeing each thing from several points at once, while through her mind flitted one after another all the description of humanity she had ever culled.

[...] A single scene opened for a moment in the far distance, closing in the empty vista, standing alone, indistinct, at the bottom of her ransacked mind. It was gone.

[...] The strange faint radiance in which it had shone cast a soft grey light within the darkness concealing the future (III 324).

The spiritual or transcendental plan which runs Miriam's journey through memory delineates itself and cast a light on the future, paving the way for the next steps of her pilgrimage. In the process of remembering, sight gets sharper, perspectives multiply, and it is finally possible to get at the *radiance* of revelation. If the true light precedes us, as a goal to reach, the belief perhaps that *March Moonlight* will conclude the cycle, memories are like street-lamps illuminating our path.

Richardson, following Bergson, describes memory mainly through spatial metaphors, adopting what Proust defines as a psychology of space, a sort of three-dimensional psychology. The psychology of space, in contrast to two-dimensional psychology, adds a new

beauty to memory because it introduces the past into the present without modifying it, and thus ‘suppresses the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived’.²¹ Richardson’s adopting on a large scale this sort of *psychologie dans l’espace* through the ever-repeating memory process is a way of openly denying time’s linear chain and affirming a kind of simultaneity. This simultaneity, inside the novel’s structure, is used as a way of escaping from a male-orientated, nineteenth-century literary canon.²²

Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* operates as an alternative pole in *Pilgrimage*, and it comes as no surprise that Brontë’s narrative is also built on the uncanny processes of memory:

Where was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord? For all these objects were of past days, and of a distant country. Ten years ago I bade them good-bye; since my fourteenth year they and I had never met.²³

Bretton! Bretton! And ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror. And why did Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus?²⁴

The return of Bretton, the place where Lucy Snowe’s childhood took place, shows how Charlotte Brontë, in progressing the narrative, takes it backward at the same time, achieving the cyclic movement Richardson probably admired. The same movement is at the core of Molly Bloom’s monologue: the inconclusive

²¹ M. Proust, *Remembrance of things past*, Vol.3, op. cit, p.1087. On Richardson’s use of spatial metaphors to represent events of psychical life, see Elizabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory – Space, identity, text* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

²² ‘I believed myself to be, even when most enchanted, intolerant of the romantic and the realist novel alike. Each, so it seemed to me, left out certain essentials and dramatised life misleadingly. Horizontally’, D. Richardson, ‘Data for a Spanish Publisher’; written in August 1943, it was published for the first time in 1959 in *The London Magazine*, now in Trudi Tate (ed.), *Journey to Paradise* (London: Virago, 1989), p.139.

²³ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (New York: Bantam, 1986), p.159.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.161.

conclusion to *Ulysses*. Molly not only treats past events, hopes for the future, and lost opportunities equally, implying their interchangeability, but herself embodies the cyclic ideal, closing her monologue with the same memory with which it had began many pages earlier.

In a similar way Miriam, far both from Brontë's heroine, with her psychological fragility and her nineteenth-century sensibility, and from Molly's super-modern moral freedom, reacts against the constraints of the banal succession of days and years. Against Lucy Snowe's passive resignation and Molly's instinctive and sensual perception, Miriam chooses a self-conscious subjectivity which is also conscious of time, but without a sense of precariousness or mortality. In fact, when it is not possible to give time its right place, it can even appear too slow. In the passage from *Revolving Lights*, past fragments 'detached themselves' and then are reorganised in a new patchwork through which Miriam passes and which she can watch as if from the outside. She wanders 'in and out of the years' in a manner which is reminiscent of 'Across the Year'. Later, in *Clear Horizon*, we read:

But the movement of time, because she was consciously passing along the surface of its moments as one by one they were measured off in sound that no longer held for her any time-expanding depth, was intolerably slow. And so shallow, that presently it was tormenting her with the certainty that elsewhere, far away in some region of consciousness, her authentic being was plunged in a timeless reality (IV 298).

Time is intolerably slow because it does not deepen; authentic being inhabits a spatial but timeless dimension. Even time, therefore, is part of *Pilgrimage's* general dichotomy between movement and stillness. When time can enlarge, be described as a landscape or a pathway, in tending towards eternity it deals more with stillness and thus with 'being' rather than with movement. It is the same eternity that Proust, through memory's final triumph, identifies with the extra-temporal break which brings redemption and emancipation from death. To Richardson, permanency is possible on the one

hand through a mystical perspective,²⁵ on the other through the filter of memory, able, as in Proust, to catch forever some of life's most meaningful moments: 'within your consciousness, vivid in your memory, as in mine, is the eternal vast interior of last summer's revealing moment. A destination never to be lost' (IV 622).

In 'The film gone male', published in *Close Up* in March 1932, Richardson relates the introduction of sound in movies to memory. The main thesis of her article is the contrast between films with sound, which she genders as male, and silent film, which she genders as female. Silent films, in her view, are connected with permanency, memory and women's minds. According to what 'characteristically occidental thinkers' perceive, memory is the passive recording of a dead past within a linear temporal perspective, and, as a consequence, is ascribed to women because of this passivity. Richardson inverts this argument claiming the act of remembering as feminine but for completely different reasons:

Memory proper [...] can gather, and pile up its wealth only round universals, unchanging, unevolving verities that move neither backwards nor forwards and have neither speech nor language. And that is one of the reasons why women, who excel in memory and whom the cynics describe as scarcely touched by evolving civilisation, are humanity's silent half, without much faith in speech as a medium of communication.

Memory bases its wealth on universal truths, on those wide generalizations Miriam talked about ten years before, and which are here related to both language's superficiality and silence, also one of *Pilgrimage's* main themes. If women are on the side of silence, this is also because they embody this kind of memory and its permanency, an unchanging truth to which silent cinema up until that point had given expression:

²⁵ Mystical influences seem to be recognised also in a letter written in October 1946 to Peggy Kirkaldy: 'life is people. Not "individuals", (a biological category), but "persons" spiritual beings independent of time and space, for whom the "future" regarded as distinct from the "present" has no meaning. For whom "eternity" is "now"': Dorothy Richardson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale, Box 3, Folder 36.

the film, regarded as a medium of communication, in the day of its innocence, in 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 their totality of movement, something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming, was essentially feminine. In its insistence on contemplation it provided a pathway to reality.²⁶

The idea of contemplation as a pathway to reality permeates the novel as well. The image of a silent film as a moving totality, but able to get at the changeless being, recalls the dichotomy between movement and stillness and those memory processes where eternity finally becomes manifest. To Richardson, 'planful becoming' is an inevitable 'masculine destiny' while 'purposeful being' is connected with an active remembering, open to knowledge and, in this case, feminine.²⁷

Eternity, which relates memories to epiphanies, is only the final outcome of Richardson's constant subtraction of events from the temporal line. In this sense, the process of reducing events, through memory, to pure nuclei of facts and emotions, means their dislocation in space (according to new parallels and correspondences), but not in time. They persist in a subjective and elastic time, where simultaneity, as we have seen, signifies an authentic permanence.

According to Richard Ellmann, after the preparatory phase of *Stephen Hero*, Joyce worked on the materials for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in a similar way, while Proust, according to Georges Poulet, built *A la recherche* through a constant *composition par juxtaposition* of images and places, past and present, but also through the collection of temporally discontinuous episodes

²⁶ D. Richardson, 'Continuous Performance – The film gone male', in *Close Up*, 9, 1, March 1932, pp.36-38.

²⁷ Ibid.

unified by memory.²⁸ The process Richardson relates to memory works both to arrange narrative material and to act on her past life while writing the novel. The *fabula* is organised in thematic nuclei of meaning, *patchworks* in Miriam's words, disregarding time's juxtapositions or contradictions.²⁹ In 'Excursion', a short story from the 1940s about an excursion in time, we read:

Life make artists of us all? No longer seeing experience chronologically, we can compose it, after the manner of a picture, with all the parts in true perspective and relationship. Moving picture. For moments open out, reveal fresh contents every time we go back into them, grouping and regrouping themselves as we advance.³⁰

The artistic vision, emancipated from chronology, belongs more to the pictorial genius of Proust's Elstir or Woolf's Lily Briscoe, than to history: to a visual perspective closer to the composition of a picture than to the chain of episodes of a Victorian *Bildungsroman*. So Proust, in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, compared painter and writer on the common ground of memory and the preservation of the past. Elstir's almost biblical act of creation, breaking the original bond between names and things and disposing of the world's elements in a new way to reveal their *correspondances*, mirrors not only what the process of metaphor does in literature, as Proust explains, but also what memory does in life. In the same way Lily Briscoe's final artistic vision in *To the Lighthouse* arises from memories and seems to become complete only at the end of a complex process of remembrance. The final line, drawn right at the centre of her painting, is both the outcome of her 'tunnelling into the past' and the answer to the question which opened the third section of the

²⁸ R. Ellmann, *James Joyce: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.297; G. Poulet, *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp.133-34.

²⁹ In 1923, in Trieste, Italy, Italo Svevo published *La coscienza di Zeno*, which is structured in a similar way. *La coscienza di Zeno* is probably the most modern Italian novel of its time, imbued with psychoanalysis and Middle European culture. Thanks to Joyce, who had known him since 1905 when he was living in Trieste, Svevo achieved a sort of fame in Europe.

³⁰D. Richardson, 'Excursion', in *English Story* 6th series, 1945, p.107-112, now in *Journey to Paradise*, op. cit, p.103.

novel: 'such were some of the parts, but how to bring them together?'.³¹

For Richardson from her earliest published writings, the saving power of memory is almost always a matter of fact, connoted in the sense of artistic creation. But the new perspective given by memory serves not only for writing, but for life in general, the entanglement of which with fiction is confirmed once again. In a letter written to her friend Henry Savage when she was seventy-seven, a time when no doubt one feels closer to the theme, we find clear echoes of her approach to fiction:

For me, there is no such thing as memory. The things that have 'happened' in one's life, all the outstanding moments, prepare themselves, so to speak, for immortality even as they pass, are investments paying increasing dividends as 'time goes on'. Past incidents, no longer seen in rotation, in illusory horizontal relationship, reveal their essential depth of relationship.³²

The illusory, horizontal chain of events is replaced by a vertical and deep perspective which, denying chronology, makes a new clarity of vision possible. *Pilgrimage*, begun by an already forty-year-old writer, is in fact its tangible result and demonstrates per se the arranging power of memory. So, if critical books, such as George Thomson's *Reader's Guide*,³³ which traces the correspondences between Richardson's and Miriam's lives, are certainly necessary and useful, Richardson on her side suggests that her biography will never be established by proper documents or evidences but rather by that alternation of ellipses and *patchworks* of meaningful elements that converge in Miriam Henderson's character. Memory can be misleading, as William James had observed, but this does not affect Richardson's trust in it: she relies on memory's

³¹ V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp.188, 161.

³² See G. Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism*, op. cit, p.636. See also the conversation transcribed by Vincent Brome, 'A Last meeting with Dorothy Richardson', *The London Magazine* 6 (June 1959): 26-32.

³³ G. H. Thomson, *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1996). T. Staley's *Dorothy Richardson* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1976) is also based on similar premises, at least in its first part.

unpredictable choices to give us, through a process of 'compression' or 'condensation', not an autobiography in terms of traditional literary genre but, to her, the only possible faithful autobiography.

The Reader's Adventure

Richardson's 'intense contemplation of her past', observes Doris Wallace, was not:

a passive recollection of what was. It was an active reconstruction, involving a dynamic reciprocal relationship between the meaning of past and present. Richardson was aware of the influence of her present consciousness on her perception of her past experience. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why she called *Pilgrimage* a novel.³⁴

The active reconstruction Doris Wallace writes about, where the narrated self interacts with the narrator in a new kind of novel, recalls the other main relationship addressed by literature: that between the text and the reader. Richardson writes two articles that touch on this relationship, 'Adventure for Readers' and 'Novels', both of which seem to anticipate her later critical reflections. 'Adventure for Readers' was published in *Life and Letters Today* in July 1939, as a review of *Finnegans Wake*, and contains some important hints about Richardson's theories of literature and poetics. Faced with the 'new novel', which is similar to poetry in its dense texture and where everything is significant (Richardson refers mainly to the writing of Joyce and Proust, but also to her own work), how should readers react?

Opening, just anywhere, its pages, the reader is immediately engrossed. Time and place, and the identity of characters, if any happen to appear, are relatively immaterial. Something may be missed. Incidents may fail of their full effect through ignorance of what has gone before. But the reader does not

³⁴ D. Wallace, 'Stream of consciousness and Reconstruction of Self in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', in D. Wallace and H. Guber (eds.), *Creative People at Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.163.

find himself [...] completely at sea. He finds himself within a medium whose close texture, like that of poetry, is everywhere significant and although, when the tapestry hangs complete before his eyes, each portion is seen to enhance the rest and the shape and the intention of the whole grows clear.³⁵

How should they face the disorientation caused by the immateriality of time, place, and characters' identities? The problem was evident with Joyce's last novel. Richardson's answer is simple: in an unpublished note she advised that we give up that modesty with which readers 'always regard themselves as recipients, never as donors'.³⁶ We should change our way of reading and claim the active role Richardson also encouraged for film audiences.³⁷ This new role for the reader was, according to Leon Edel, one of the new novel's main innovations. The reader seems to become an author himself, gathering together different bits of information to make sense of the story.³⁸ In this new process of interpretive co-operation, the relationship between the reader and the text renews itself by mirroring the relationship between the author and the narrative material.³⁹ The reader, who is, in phenomenological terms both a subject and a centre of a consciousness, no longer reacts passively to the text, but acts to fill its gaps and silences.

In *Pilgrimage* Miriam is a clear example of this new reader. In *Dawn's Left Hand* (1931) the *blanks* Wolfgang Iser will theorise forty years later⁴⁰ are the principle of composition in a decisive letter:

³⁵ D. Richardson, 'Adventure for Readers', op. cit, p.47.

³⁶ Held in the Dorothy Richardson Collection, Beinecke, Yale, Box 8, Folder 39, undated, it was probably written in preparation for *Adventure for Readers*.

³⁷ Something of which Richardson herself was not unaware: 'I realised that the source of the haunting guilt and loss was for me, that the players, in acting at instead of with the audience, were destroying the inner relationship between audience and players. Something of this kind, some essential failure to compel the co-operation of the creative consciousness of the audience', in 'Continuous Performance', *Close Up* 1, 1, July 1927, p.36.

³⁸ L. Edel, *The Psychological novel 1900-1959*, op. cit.

³⁹ U. Eco, *Lector in fabula*, (Milano: Bompiani, 1993).

⁴⁰ W. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* (München: Fink 1976).

strange pattern of curves and straight strokes rapidly set down. Each separately. Gaps not only between the straight and the curved part of a single letter. Letters and words to be put together by the eye as it went along. [...] Between each letter of each word was as much space as between the words they were supposed to compose. [...] When meanings were discovered, they sounded; as if spoken (IV 214-215).

The modernist novel relies on the same principle, and thus *Pilgrimage*, to which the letter is a *mise en abyme*, a sort of miniature of the exploded texture made of gaps and dots, each of them clearly intended by Richardson, as her manuscripts demonstrate.⁴¹ In order to gather letters and words in the best way, and to make an interpretive cooperation between reader and text useful, the reader has to reproduce within the text the processes behind its writing which, as we know, reproduce in their turn the processes of memory.

So in 'Adventure for Readers', the image of the tapestry-novel⁴² (directly recalling the origin of the word text) where each portion enlightens the rest and makes with it a complete whole, mirrors the spatial metaphors used in the same years to describe the arranging process of memory. Memory, from Richardson's perspective, is the prime mover of the novel. The text develops following the same processes of memory to which readers have to adapt. They must:

really release consciousness from literary preoccupations and prejudices, from the self-imposed task of searching for superficial sequences in stretches of statement regarded horizontally, or of setting these upright and regarding them

⁴¹ The manuscript of *Dimple Hill* held at the Harry Ransome Center in Austin, Texas, has many of Richardson's notes: 'space', 'one line', 'two/three/four lines'.

⁴² The same image returns in a letter to Percy Beaumont Wadsworth in August 1925 about Proust's novel: '[The whole twelve French volumes] all came to me from Paris in a heap and the whole fabric [...] hangs now a marvellous fabric, a rich tapestry, threadbare in places and in places translucent beyond any other writing whatsoever, about the walls of my mind', in G. Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism*, op. cit, p.116.

pictorially, and plunge, provisionally, here and there; enter the text and look innocently about.⁴³

Modern readers have to abandon the old way of reading as modernist authors abandoned the nineteenth-century way of writing. There is no linearity in the new method of dealing with the text, where you have to ramble without direction. If both time and text are perceived as space, you have to deal with them in the same way: moving freely.⁴⁴ Not by chance then, Joyce puts the same idea of wandering at the core of *Ulysses*, a novel which is already structured like a city the reader has to cross. The 'Wandering Rocks' episode is on the one hand a scale drawing of the whole novel, with its eighteen episodes corresponding to the eighteen chapters, and on the other, a clue for the reader. Just as memory juxtaposes past and present, interrupting narration, moving it backward and forward and stretching it out towards the future, so too does the reader, whose relationship with the text is 'comparable only to the rider who leapt into the saddle and rode off in all directions'.⁴⁵

The reader as a rider is again implicitly evoked ten years later in 'Novels'. To face novels that have to be 'entered at any point', Richardson advises us to 'read backwards, or from the centre to either extremity'.⁴⁶ She foreshadows Roland Barthes' idea of 'plural' reading in *S/Z*.⁴⁷ Thus, Miriam in *The Tunnel* re-reads *Villette* nonstop, while later we find her 'reading a paragraph here and there' (III 409), or 'opening the book at random' (IV 415). In *Oberland* we read: 'everything she had read stood clear in her mind that yet, insufficiently occupied with the narrative and its strange emanations, caught up single words and phrases and went off

⁴³ D. Richardson, 'Adventure for Readers', op. cit, p.47.

⁴⁴ Thus May Sinclair in her famous review: 'If you want to know on what day she is practising you have to read on and back again. It doesn't matter. It is Miriam's consciousness that is going backward and forwards in time. The time it goes in is unimportant', 'The novels of Dorothy Richardson' in *The Little Review*, V, 12 (April 1918): 7-8.

⁴⁵ D. Richardson, 'Adventure for Readers', op. cit, 51.

⁴⁶ D. Richardson, 'Novels', op. cit, 192.

⁴⁷ R. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

independently touring, climbing to fresh arrangements and interpretation of familiar thought' (IV 58).

In 1927, the same year as the publication of *Oberland*, Richardson praises Proust again in a letter to Bryher adding another element to her theory of reading: 'I am now in my third year of reading him – two volumes at a time now one from each end to meet presently in the middle. A change from reading all over the series haphazard, & then from beginning to end & then from end to beginning'.⁴⁸ Apart from the temporal lapse (which is perhaps a sign of her desire to confuse the issue of her possible influences), because she first encountered Proust not three but five years earlier, the way she and her fictional alter ego experiment with reading, again denies a traditional approach to the text. Virginia Woolf, just a year later, suggests a similar approach: 'I will read Proust I think. I will go backwards and forwards'.⁴⁹

As for her fellow modernist writers, memory in Richardson's work is more than a theme. It is an intra- and an extra-textual element of the narratives and metanarratives of her sketches, fiction, and essays. More than a way of depicting her characters' inner life, memory is at the heart of a semiotic relationship between fiction and reality.⁵⁰ Through memory, Richardson and her contemporaries deal with their past, organise the spatial and temporal dimensions of their narrative material and frame the act of reading.

⁴⁸ G. Fromm (ed.), *Windows on modernism*, op. cit, p.146.

⁴⁹ V. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1982), p.136.

⁵⁰ F. Bertoni, *Il testo a quattro mani. Per una teoria della lettura* (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1996), p. 183.