'NEITHER QUITE SHELTERED, NOR QUITE FREE': ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE DOMESTIC IN DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S *PILGRIMAGE*[*]

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In *The Tunnel*, the fourth 'chapter-novel' in Dorothy Richardson's thirteen-volume *Pilgrimage* (1915-67), the protagonist Miriam Henderson reflects on the working life of her friends Mag and Jan and realises her own position is 'somehow between two worlds, neither quite sheltered, nor quite free'.[1] Although she is talking about her own experience, Miriam's statement could equally be about the changing status of women at the turn of the century, when increasing numbers of single women embraced the new employment opportunities open to them, leaving the traditional shelter of the family home to lead free independent lives of their own.

This new world of single working women may have been growing, but it continued to exist in sharp contrast with the expectation that a woman would remain at home with her family until marriage. Independent women like Miriam were not only living outside traditional domestic structures; they were placing themselves outside socially and culturally defined domestic roles. Recent criticism has examined the material spaces that Miriam occupies in *Pilgrimage*, from her time as a resident teacher and governess, to her life as a worker in the city living in lodgings and visiting teashops, and drawn attention to the liminality of these spaces 'between two modes of being'.[2] Carol Watts has described them as 'places of interconnection',[3] and Scott McCracken has argued that the ABC cafés Miriam inhabits are 'thresholds between her private room in

[1] Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* Vol. II (London: Virago Press, 1979), p.163. Henceforth, page numbers in text.
[2] Elizabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p.75.
[3] Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), p.48.

the boarding house and the public life of the city'.[4] In this essay I will extend these discussions by considering how the gendered distinctions between public and private are further blurred, as both Miriam's private home life and her public work life occupy an ambivalent threshold space between sheltered domesticity and the freedom of independence. Focusing on the period when she first moves to London, I examine how Miriam is both attracted to and repelled by the idea of settled family life and how she negotiates her autonomy in the space between shelter and freedom.

'She had never made a bed in her life'

At the start of *The Tunnel*, Miriam is twenty-one and, relying solely on her wage as a dental secretary of one pound a week, she has moved to a single room in Mrs Bailey's lodging house in Tansley Street. Richardson describes the acute sense of freedom that Miriam experiences sitting in her room alone: 'there was no *need* to do anything or think about anything . . . ever, here. No interruption, no one watching or speculating or treating one in some particular way that had to be met' (II, 17). Joanne Winning has commented that Miriam 'sees London as an exile from the event',[5] and her flight to London is motivated as much by the need to escape the reminders of the past and her mother's suicide as it is by a desire for independence: 'I left home to get here. None of those things can touch me here' (II, 13). There is a sense of potential about her new living space that is emphasised by its role as a place of exile from her family home and her past life. Alone with no past and no future and 'no *need* to do anything' it seems that suddenly anything can be possible.

There has been another lodging house before Mrs Bailey's. In the opening section of *The Tunnel* this is alluded to in brief memory fragments and the reader is left to infer that the experience has not been a pleasant one. Miriam's reference to 'no one watching or speculating' (II, 17), thus appears to relate to the invasive nature of

[4] Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.133.
[5] Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.47.

the previous landlady and the other lodgers: 'I will never again be at the mercy of such women or at all in the places where they are. That means keeping free of all groups' (II, 20). The appeal of the cheap attic room at Mrs Bailey's at the top of seventy-five stairs is the promise of complete isolation. The other two rooms on her landing are empty and, apart from the shared entrance and hallway, she can avoid interacting with the other lodgers: 'No one knew her here ... no past and no future ... coming in and out unknown' (II, 77). The room becomes a refuge; at Mrs Bailey's 'she was going to live, in freedom, hidden, on her pound a week' (II, 29).

For Miriam solitude and freedom are inexorably linked – 'longing for solitude and to be free to wander' (II, 372) – and this independence is also clearly gendered. Miriam learns to ride a bicycle, revelling in the masculine feeling of escape it gives her: 'I am going to lead a man's life, always getting away' (II, 230). Richardson reflects many of the debates of the day surrounding the 'New Woman' through the character of Miriam, as Watts has pointed out: 'Miriam's taste for reading Ibsen and Zola immediately marks her, as does her love for smoking cigarettes in public, her thoughts on marriage, on free love, and on riding a bicycle without a corset'.[6]

The New Woman was a controversial construct – 'a creature of contradictions' – a symbol representing freedom and emancipation for some, and 'cultural disintegration and social decline' for others who thought women should continue to conform to traditional gender models.[7] Sally Ledger has argued that the New Woman's 'elusive quality […] clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently homogeneous culture of Victorianism […] a threat to the *status quo*'.[8] In the act of smoking a cigarette Miriam announces herself as a new woman: 'I suppose I'm a new woman – I've said I am now, anyhow' (I, 436). However, her ambivalence about this self-definition is evident when she also wonders 'how

[6] Watts, p.39.
[7] Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p.17.
[8] Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.11.

she would reconcile the role with her work as a children's governess' (I, 436). Miriam is acutely aware of the threat a radical assertion of her New Woman status poses to the traditional expectations that surround her position as a governess, that very essence of 'Victorianism'. Her difficulty in naming herself highlights an ongoing conflict between Miriam's definitions of herself, and the roles she is expected to play.

Born in 1872, the year before Richardson, the writer and suffragist Cicely Hamilton states in her autobiography that she was drawn to revolt against the institution of marriage by the 'dependence implied in the idea of "destined" marriage, "destined" motherhood – the identification of success with marriage, of failure with spinsterhood, the artificial concentration of the hopes of girlhood on sexual attraction and maternity'.[9] Richardson shows Miriam also rejecting the idea of an implied destiny for women. Although she wants the freedom that men have, Richardson is quick to point out that Miriam does not actually want to be a man: 'I wouldn't be a man for anything. I wouldn't have a man's – *consciousness*, for anything' (II, 149).

Miriam wants to be free to choose her own life away from the constrictions of marriage and motherhood, as she explains in a conversation with Mag and Jan, 'I can't imagine anything more awful than what you call the sheltered life' (II, 90). The use of the term 'sheltered' life suggests both the protection given by the father or husband and the physical space of the family home that provides a defence against the outside world. It seems that it is the home as defence that is attractive to Miriam. An example of the conflation of these two ideas appears in *Honeycomb* when Miriam indulges in a fantasy of the sheltered life involving a 'lonely old gentleman who had a large empty house' and who would 'shut her up in the quiet, beautiful house, protecting her and keeping people off' (I, 396). Elisabeth Bronfen has suggested that for Miriam 'there is a correspondence in her imagination between the assumption of a socially accepted female role and the ownership of her own living space', but it also seems that this is a daydream

[9] Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1935), p.65.

about the protection and privacy afforded by that space.[10] In the same way that Miriam moves to Mrs Bailey's in order to be 'hidden' in her room, she wants to be 'shut up' in a house where the most important thing is 'keeping people off', and ensuring nobody can encroach upon her space. The difference is that while the home provided by a husband is imprisoning, the room paid for out of her weekly salary is a shelter on her own terms.

Living in Mrs Bailey's lodging house, Miriam's freedom from traditional enclosures of domestic space is emphasised by the porosity of the boundaries between her lodgings and the city outside; London permeates her room 'just outside all the time, coming in with the light, always present in the depths of the air' (II 16). The fluidity between public and private and exterior and interior space represented by Miriam's lodgings has frequently been noted by critics; as Jean Radford observes, there is a subtle interaction between the privacy of Miriam's room and the freedom of the city streets: 'The room provides the solitude necessary for Miriam's self-realisation, the city a sense of community in which to develop a new social identity'.[11] This interaction demonstrates Miriam's freedom of access and also provides a new articulation of how these spaces were being used by independent women to create alternatives selves and identities outside traditional gender roles.

These liminal spaces between the traditional family home and the public life of the city can also offer a new definition of domestic values. One of the ways in which Richardson references the blurring between the domestic space and the city is through Miriam's observations of dirt. On entering Mrs Bailey's house Miriam notes that 'the cracks of the flooring were filled with dust and dust lay along the rim of the skirting' (II, 12). Melinda Harvey has commented that 'dirt is the mark of porosity'.[12] It points to the

[10] Bronfen, p.98.
[11] Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.53.
[12] Melinda Harvey, 'Dwelling, Poaching, Dreaming: Housebreaking and Homemaking in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', in Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga (eds), *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating*

closeness of these new communal areas to public space and highlights the difficulty of domestic control against the constant traffic of people. Unlike the usual binary that aligns cleanliness with goodness, the 'dinginess' (II, 11) that pervades Mrs Bailey's house feels welcoming, and is contrasted with 'the *horror* of the ugly clean little room' (II, 20) of Miriam's previous lodgings. In her anthropological study *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas makes the well-known observation that dirt is 'matter out of place'.[13] Whether one accepts the dirt or not is a subjective response, but both the keeping and the elimination of dirt imply a particular order: 'dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained'.[14] Miriam is rejecting the ordered life and the 'pattern' of domestic behaviour that it implies. The sanitised space of careful housekeeping is associated with the 'disliking and disapproving' (II, 20) women, linking domesticity with oppressiveness, and dirt with freedom.

Douglas argues that there is a transgressive freedom in disorder. She writes that 'order implies restriction' by forcing things to conform to a pattern, while 'disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite'.[15] Richardson frequently makes a similar connection between disorder and freedom. When Miriam first moves into Mrs Bailey's she opts for leaving 'her things half unpacked about the floor' (II, 17) and reading a book instead, and when she moves into Flaxman's Court with Selena Holland Miriam delights in going out for tea and enjoying the evening rather than staying at home and organising her belongings: 'Homekeeping people missed that adventure. They slaved on and on, saying how nice it will be when everything is *straight*' (III, 416). By 'homekeeping people', Miriam means women, and sets herself clearly against them in her rejection of order: 'Always, in relation to household women, she felt herself a man' (III, 412). Miriam does not want to be tied to

Public and Private Space, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), pp.167-188 (p.173).

[13] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) p.36.

[14] Ibid, p.41.

[15] Ibid, p.95.

the home, and by implication to the domestic role; she wants to be free to pursue adventure, and this is reflected in the deferred act of unpacking.[16]

Kate Fullbrook has described *Pilgrimage* as 'an experiment in living in independence by a young woman who begins by having freedom forced upon her and who comes to value that freedom as the centre of her being'.[17] The sense of limitless freedom comes in part from the anonymity of Miriam's new life, but it is also closely connected to her lack of domestic responsibility. She is not expected to care or provide for anyone other than herself. Miriam's domestic experience is limited. Entering her first teaching position in Germany, Miriam reflects that if this post is not a success she could perhaps become a servant, before acknowledging her lack of domestic skills: she 'had never been allowed into the kitchen at home except when there was jam-making … she had never made a bed in her life' (I, 30).

Once in London, Miriam joins the ranks of underpaid women workers struggling to afford food on their meagre wages. One journalist noted the problem of low salaries for the proliferation of typists in the city and its impact on their poor diet: 'the girl who has to provide food, lodgings, and clothing out of a salary which does not always reach a pound a week, and rarely exceeds thirty shillings, more often than not has to make her tea-shop lunch her principal meal. She would rather die than confess it'.[18] On first moving to Mrs Bailey's, Miriam purchases her meals, invariably a boiled egg and a bread roll, at one of the many ABC teashops in the city. When she visits Miss Dear in her lodgings, Miriam marvels at her cooking a haddock: 'It was wonderful and astonishing to know how to cook a real meal, in a tiny room […] how did people find out how to do these things?' (II, 259).

[16] Miriam's relationship with her luggage has been explored in detail by Emily Ridge in her paper 'Miriam Henderson's Saratoga Trunk' given at the Dorothy Richardson Day Conference, 1 July 2013.
[17] Kate Fullbrook, *Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp.115-6.
[18] Frances, 'Five O'Clock Tea Talk: A Woman's Restaurant', *T. P.'s Weekly*, 11 December 1903, p.918, quoted in Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting 'The Waste Land'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.56-7.

However, as Scott McCracken has argued, Miriam's ABC meals symbolise more than a lack of cooking ability: 'Miriam's meal, a boiled egg, roll and butter and a small coffee, is the cheapest available that allows her to participate in London's public culture'.[19] Her use of the teashop is a conscious rejection of the domestic role and an embrace of the freedom that comes with public life, and the ability to perform an alternative gendered subjectivity: 'The teashop could provide a brief opportunity to become something or someone other than a person pressured by the demands of family and work'.[20] This highlights the precarious nature of Miriam's participation in public life and that her ability to experience freedom and independence outside the family home is dependent on her limited income. Miriam is also aware that her freedom could not be maintained within the traditional enclosures of the family home with a husband and children. When her friends Mag and Jan question her desire not to marry, Miriam explains: 'Well – it would mean giving up this life' (II, 150).

Lodging vs Boarding

Between 1861 and 1911 female clerical workers in London increased from just under 300 to over 500,000.[21] Richardson was part of this growing community of working women and felt the same thrill as her character Miriam. In her brief autobiographical sketch 'Beginnings' she writes: 'At last, London, clerical work, "freedom"'.[22] The increase in women workers resulted in a pressing need for affordable housing. A writer in *The Englishwoman's Review* noted in 1900 that 'the number of professional women in London, and especially in central London, increased very rapidly, [and] the supply of suitable house-room

[19] McCracken, p.142.
[20] Ibid, p.4.
[21] Jane Lewis, 'Women Clerical Workers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Gregory Anderson (ed.), *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.27-47 (p.34).
[22] Dorothy M. Richardson, 'Beginnings A Brief Sketch', in John Gawsworth (ed.), *Ten Contemporaries: Notes Toward Their Definitive Biography*, (London: Joiner and Steele Ltd, 1933), pp.195-198, p.197.

naturally did not increase at anything like the same rate'.[23] This led to much discussion among reformers and commentators in the periodical press of the period. Their concern was primarily centred on the poorest working women, the shop assistants, clerks, and typists. In an interview published in the *Women's Penny Paper* in 1890, the philanthropist Agnes Beddoe outlined her concern for 'the large body of women workers earning only from five to ten shillings a week and who are yet trying upon that to lead honest, respectable lives, and to keep up a decent appearance […] and yet too poor to afford decent lodgings'.[24] In the public discussions that took place regarding the provision of lodging houses for women, even the supporters of such an initiative put forth concerns that hinged on assumptions about women's natural inclination to domesticity and stressed the need to ensure that such accommodation was only temporary and never to replace the permanence of the family home.

The need for women to have supervision is also a view that emerges frequently. Writing in the *Contemporary Review* in June 1911, Christabel Osborn, a staunch opponent of lodging houses for women stated that: 'man wants a lodging, but woman wants a home'.[25] Her main objection was that away from the stabilising and moral influence of family life, women's behaviour would become lazy and immoral: in short, unregulated. Osborn declared the lodging house cultivated 'anti-social habits' and neglected 'domestic responsibilities'.[26] The need to control women is couched in language of morality and the virtues of the private family home. Osborn states: 'No arguments can make it really desirable that these young women should go to lodging-houses, where they would be wholly uncontrolled from morning to night.'[27]

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[23] H. Reinherz, 'The Housing of the Educated Working Woman', *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions*, 31 (1900), 7-11 (p.7).
[24] Helena B. Temple, 'Interview: Mrs. Beddoe', *Women's Penny Paper*, 66 (1890), 157-8 (p.157).
[25] Christabel Osborn, 'Rowton Houses for Women', *Contemporary Review*, 99 (1911), 707-17, (p.717).
[26] Ibid, pp.711, 708.
[27] Ibid, p.709.

Although boarding house living had long been deemed acceptable for the bachelor male, single women taking up residence in single rooms were not met with the same social approval. In the nineteenth century there were usually around two or three male lodgers for every female lodger.[28] Despite the increasing numbers of women living alone in this period, society still deemed their accommodation as marginal and a temporary solution while they awaited marriage and a family home of their own.

The Girl's Own Paper was a publication launched by the Religious Tract Society and targeted at young, unmarried women from the working and lower middle classes. The editor, Charles Peters, described the aims of the paper as training women in 'moral and domestic virtues' and 'preparing them for the responsibilities of womanhood and for a heavenly home'.[29] In the late 1890s the paper ran a series of articles on education, work and independent living. One article entitled 'How Working Girls Live in London' argued that: 'Boarding is preferable to lodging in this, that there is more supervision, and that it keeps up the feeling of family life which it is desirable we should never lose'.[30] It is the attempt by boarding house keepers to imitate these aspects of the traditional family home that I want to explore further here.

For the unmarried woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the boarding house was both a new space of modernity, symbolising women's independence, and a continued imitation of the family home modelled on rituals of middle-class behaviour. It thus became a vital resource for women who wanted to experience a certain amount of freedom but not lose social respectability.

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[28] Leonore Davidoff, 'The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century England', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women*, (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.64-97 (p.79).
[29] Kim Reynolds, *For Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain 1880-1910* (New York: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.139-40.
[30] Nanette Mason, 'How Working Girls Live in London: Part III', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 31 August 1889, p.764.

At the end of *The Tunnel*, Miriam's landlady converts the house from a lodging to a boarding house. The meaning of the term 'boarder' can be traced to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of 1755, where 'board' originally meant 'table'; thus, a boarder was one who lives in the house of another and shares their table, whereas a lodger has a room without the provision of food.[31] The transformation of Mrs Bailey's lodgings to a boarding house raises the status of the house, aligning it with behaviours associated with a private household and distinguishing it from the transience of the common lodging house. While the lodger is confined to a single room and often required to be self-sufficient, the boarder has greater inclusion within the household. In *Interim*, Richardson elaborates on how the shift in status creates a change in the materiality of the house as it becomes more permeable. As a lodging house 'its huge high thick walls held all the lodgers secure and apart, fixed in richly enclosed rooms in the heart of London' (II, 77). However, as a boarding house 'it lay open and bleak, all its rooms naked and visible' (II, 324). Miriam has established her freedom through her separate life 'enclosed' in her room and seeing nobody: 'She could not remember ever having met a lodger face to face' (II, 325).

Mrs Bailey's other lodgers who are not able to pay the extra to remain as boarders have been given notice, but the landlady makes an exception for Miriam, offering her the opportunity to teach French to her daughter Sissie 'in exchange for a proper breakfast ready for her in a warm room every day and the option of having single meals at any time for a very small sum' (II, 330). The conversion of the house to a boarding house and its new permeability demonstrates a corresponding shift in status for Miriam as she is forced to become more involved with the Bailey's family life. Unlike a hotel where individuals can dine alone on separate tables, or a lodging house where meals can be prepared in the privacy of one's room on the single gas ring, in a boarding house meals are deliberately designed as 'family' affairs. The communal aspects of boarding house living are often seen as an uncomfortable mimicry of the domestic arrangements of the

[31] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of The English Language 1755*, Cambridge University Press.

family home, with Mrs Bailey 'presiding over' (II, 453) the table, adopting the role of head of the household. Mrs Bailey actively encourages Miriam into her dining room, but Miriam ventures tentatively into these new communal spaces in the house, not feeling comfortable because she works, rather than pays, for the extra advantages of being a boarder. Miriam finds herself torn between the desire to keep her emotional and spatial distance from the Bailey family, and the temptation of the hot dinner. Sitting next to Mrs Bailey at her first dinner Miriam observes Mrs Bailey's 'triumphant affectionate sense of Miriam's presence' (II, 375). However, Miriam resents 'Mrs Bailey's public familiarity' (II, 376); instead of feeling like one of the family she feels more like 'a poor relation' (II, 376).

Contemporary commentators' concerns about the lack of monitoring in a lodging house, and the preference for the supervision of family life recommended by *The Girls' Own Paper* are echoed in the shift in status at Mrs Bailey's. These new 'family' style arrangements mean that Miriam no longer has the freedom to retreat to her room unobserved and 'unknown' (II, 77). In a boarding house, it is not only the landlady who knows the business of each member of the household; the boarder's private life is displayed to all. The shared communal areas make Miriam more visible and thus more vulnerable to the observations and gossip of the other boarders. The new inhabitants of Mrs Bailey's are made up almost entirely of men, but although Miriam is able to interact freely, that freedom has its repercussions. She discovers her interactions have been watched and discussed by the other boarders: 'Spies talking; idle; maliciously picking over her secret life' (II, 431). Her room is also affected, and on occasions she finds it becoming claustrophobic: 'a cell of torturing mocking memories and apprehensions', forcing her into the communal spaces of the other boarders with their 'dreadful voices' and 'unchanging words' (III, 31). Pulled between the shelter of her room and the shelter of the shared spaces, Miriam frequently feels simultaneously alienated by her interactions and isolated without them.

Miriam has to redefine her relationship with her interior space in order to appreciate the new freedom of greater spatial mobility offered by Mrs Bailey's boarding house. Wendy Gan has described Miriam's situation as 'a communal form of solitude and privacy'; these 'semi-public spaces' provide 'a welcome antidote to the enforced loneliness of her room and her status as a single female worker in the city'.[32] In *Deadlock*, Miriam explains to another boarder that Mrs Bailey: 'lets me be amphibious […] I'm neither a lodger nor a boarder' (III, 81). Miriam's descriptor 'amphibious', a deliberate malapropism of amorphous, indicates the associations Miriam makes with her room as an island of stability, anchoring her firmly within the changing and uncertain sea of the rest of the house and the coming and going of other people.

According to Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, the function of the house is to provide protection for the dreamer: 'the house allows one to dream in peace'.[33] Mrs Bailey's boarding house becomes a restorative space for Miriam, where she is able to reconcile her need for privacy with her occasional need for engagement with the wider household. By being amphibious Miriam is able to create a new space for herself in the threshold 'neither quite sheltered, nor quite free' (II, 163), but with the advantages of both.

Work and 'life'

In both her home life in Mrs Bailey's lodgings and her employment as a dental secretary, Miriam operates in environments that frequently imitate the protected life of the traditional family home, but always remain in an ambiguous space on the periphery. In Miriam's previous posts as a teacher and a governess she has lived at work; in her new life as an office worker she can separate her work and home life, a divide that Mag and Jan emphasise: 'what is our life worth, without late hours? The evening is the only life we have' (II, 162). Work is seen as a means to an end, they must work

[32] Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.59.
[33] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p.6.

in order 'to be free from it and live' (II, 162). However for Miriam there is no easy divide between her work and her 'life': the boundaries blur, and become increasingly complex.

To Miriam, her self-sufficient New Woman friends Mag and Jan seem to have greater freedom in their working lives; she envies their working hours, lack of clothing restrictions, and their assertive behaviour towards their bosses, but she acknowledges the advantages of her own working life as a dental secretary:

> compared to her own long day, what freedom the girls had – ten to five and eleven to six and any clothes they found it convenient to wear. But city men . . . no restrictions were too high a price to pay for the privileges of her environment; the association with gentlemen, her quiet room, the house, the perpetual interest of the patients, the curious exciting streaks of social life, linking up with the past and carrying it forward on a more generous level. (II, 162-3)

What Richardson is stressing here is the contrast between the familial and intellectually congenial environment of the 'quiet room' in which Miriam currently works, and the impersonality of the business-like world of the city. Miriam is sheltered from the realities of a busy office, with its demands for productivity. Although she is employed as a secretary, Miriam writes letters by hand, lacking the technical clerical skills that were increasingly becoming required by businesses: 'handwriting was doomed ... shorthand and typewriting ... she ought to know them, if she were ever to make more than a pound a week as a secretary' (II, 47). In Richardson's many pages detailing the minutia of Miriam's working day the reader discovers that Miriam is far from the 'professional' office worker. Her daily tasks are carried out in an unstructured, rather haphazard way; she spends a long time making up and labelling a parcel 'with firm round little embellishments', while the accounts and day-books are 'in arrears—three, four days not entered in the ledger' (II, 47).

Miriam's work may be badly paid, but it allows her the space for intellectual development that she craves. Mr Hancock, a senior

partner at the dental practice, takes an interest in Miriam, inviting her to lectures and providing her with an education that 'made up for only being able to say one was secretary to a dentist at a pound a week' (II, 101). McCracken has highlighted how Miriam's 'cultural capital outweighs her actual capital'.[34] Within the workspace this places her in an uncertain position: on a class and intellectual level she is an equal, but as a poorly paid employee she is clearly subordinate.

As an equal on a class and intellectual level, the dental practice at Wimpole Street offers a supportive and protective environment for Miriam. It is run from the Orlys' home and the family involve her in their lives, from trips to the theatre to asking her advice on book recommendations: 'Poised between the competing interests of many worlds, Miriam basked in the friendly tones' (II 71). Unlike the majority of clerical workers who would have to pay for their lunch on their meagre salaries or go without, Miriam has a cooked lunch, of several courses, and afternoon tea provided at work. Here a similar mimicry of the family table occurs as it will in the future boarding house dinner scenes; this time Miriam is seated awkwardly with the family and the dentists, on the periphery of both the domestic and professional worlds. At these meals Miriam frequently finds the conversations uncomfortable, divided by the desire to be heard and unnoticed simultaneously.

When she joins the Orlys' table for breakfast after her cycling lesson, Miriam has a very different experience of the shared table. Eating a meal with them outside the professional day solidifies the feeling of family life and Miriam's desire to be part of the household:

> Miriam found herself wishing that she lived altogether at Wimpole Street. They were all so kind. Life would be simplified if she could throw in her lot with them. Coming in to breakfast after the lesson had been a sort of home-coming. There were pleasant noises about the house; the family shouted carelessly to each other on the stairs […] The very aroma of the coffee seemed tranquilly to feed one. At

[34] McCracken, p.136.

> breakfast every one was cheerful and kind. It was home. It gave the morning a beginning and shed its brightness over the professional hush that fell upon the house at nine o'clock. It would make lunch-time more easy; and at the end of the day, if asked, she would join the family party again. (II 172)

Miriam is strongly drawn towards the comfort of family life, where 'every one was cheerful and kind', but she also wants her own independent life and recognises that the two are difficult to reconcile.

In her employment at Wimpole Street, Miriam demonstrates the difficulties of living between the two worlds of shelter and freedom. Although she outwardly rejects the 'sheltered life' and traditional expectations of women's destinies as wives and mothers, she finds herself playing out these very roles in her working life. In her relationship with Mr Hancock, her complicity with the woman's role seems more evident. Miriam's admiration of Mr Hancock means she ministers to his needs almost unconsciously: tending to his office, cleaning his instruments, and replenishing his dental supplies, while her clerical work and her work for the other partners is frequently neglected: 'She left the room with her everyday guilty consciousness that hardly anything in it was up to the level of Mr Hancock's room' (II, 73).

Watts has argued that 'Miriam is thus caught up in the domestic duties usually reserved for women in family life, playing out a role of enormous resonance in Victorian society – the housekeeper'.[35] Miriam's housekeeping for Mr Hancock could express an unconscious desire to create a feeling of 'family life' within Wimpole Street or, like the other tasks that Miriam undertakes that involve her with the household, such as accompanying Mr Orly's singing on the piano, it could be read as an avoidance technique, a deliberate attempt to distance herself from the clerical tasks that reinforce her lowly status. However, as her job progresses, Miriam becomes critically aware that the divide between clerical and domestic 'work' is increasingly blurred. The endless repetition of the drudgery that Miriam undertakes and its similarity to domestic

[35] Watts, p.49.

housekeeping is emphasised by Richardson in a detailed passage of the rituals of cleaning the dentistry equipment:

> Everything was in its worst state. She began the business of drying and cleansing, freeing fine points from minute closely adhering fragments, polishing instruments on the leather pad, repolishing them with the leather, scraping the many little burs with the fine wire brush […] The tedium of the long series of small, precise, attention-demanding movements was aggravated by the prospect of a fresh set of implements already qualifying for another cleansing (II, 40).

Miriam's feelings about her working life are in conflict. On the one hand she feels that she is the beneficiary as much as her employers, and feels guilty at being paid: 'Salary was out of place – a payment for leading a glorious life, half of which was entirely her own' (II, 182). At the same time, Miriam is fully conscious that she is underpaid and exploited in her role, that she is one of the 'drudgery workers, at fixed salaries' (II, 40). Her emotional investment in the life of the household is demonstrated by her assertion that it was only possible to do this kind of work 'for people who were fine and nice ... there must be, everywhere, women doing this work for people who were not nice. They *could* not do it for the work's sake' (II, 40). However, as Watts has observed, although Miriam's workspace may appear to be intimate and familial, underneath 'it is a business run on paternalistic lines', and there are rules and expected standards of behaviour to which she must adhere.[36] When Miriam attempts to question her role within Wimpole Street, the boundaries between employer and employee, and Miriam's lack of power in that relationship, are sharply revealed.

Bronfen has pointed out that Miriam's relationship with Hancock draws her between the two worlds of 'independent work' and that of the 'professional Englishman', the latter being 'her family's world that she has left behind'.[37] However, instead of bringing the two worlds together, Miriam becomes increasingly conscious of

[36] Watts, p.48.
[37] Bronfen, p.125.

the distance between them and her own position in neither. Miriam is aware that ultimately this life is unsustainable and there can be no permanence in the role she plays at Wimpole Street: 'What future would it bring? Less than ever was there any chance of saving for old age. She could not for ever go on being secretary to a dentist' (II, 163). Bart Vershaffel has argued that 'Domesticity implies centrality, stability, continuity, fixity, caring for the basics'.[38] Miriam is able to care for the basics while her employers are 'fine and nice' and she feels that she is also benefiting from the arrangement. Although her employers seem to provide Miriam with a certain sense of stability and continuity, she remains on the periphery, unable to participate fully in either the family life of the Orlys, or the professional world represented by Mr Hancock.

This is also evident in Miriam's home life at Mrs Bailey's. Despite attempts to imitate life in the family home, living in a boarding house did not provide women with any clear role in these temporary households. Leonore Davidoff has described how boarders, 'like servants, were also liminal figures at the boundaries of families, eluding any clear categorization'.[39] Boarders maintained an ambiguous relationship with domesticity; they were free from domestic duties yet controlled by domestic rules. Miriam is conscious that maintaining the advantages of both her home and work life require the daily performance of the rituals of family life and obedience to a particular set of unwritten rules: 'All her privileges were bought with a heavy price, here [at Mrs Bailey's] and at Wimpole Street. It's us; our family; always masquerading' (II, 336). At both work and home, Miriam is always on the periphery of another family's life.

Writing as Work

Pilgrimage represents the freedoms of independent living available to women in the early twentieth century and simultaneously marks the precariousness of unmarried women's lives. Not wanting a family of her own, Miriam must rely on her own inner resources

[38] Bart Vershaffel, 'The Meanings of Domesticity', *Journal of Architecture*, 7, (2002), 287-296, (p.288).
[39] Leonore Davidoff and others, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p.178.

to provide an alternative form of stability and continuity in her life, and she discovers this through writing. Hannah Arendt has made the distinction between labour and work, describing labour as activities that 'were undertaken not for their own sake but in order to provide the necessities of life'. In contrast work is an individualizing occupation that 'transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use'.[40] However, as Bryony Randall has recently argued, the distinctions between labour and work are often blurred in relation to Miriam's writing, and further complicated by the introduction of a third term, 'vocation'. While living with the Quaker Roscorla family at Dimple Hill:

> the scene of writing is also clearly marked as a scene of work, and a particular kind of work: "the scene of labour, when I am back in it, alone, has become a sacred place." (IV, 609). It is, ideally, the genderless location of what is (and, the temporal compression suggests, always has been) literally her sacred work – her vocation.[41]

In the passage Randall quotes, Miriam distinguishes the 'labour' involved in her writing, the physical exertion involved in putting pen to paper, while also clearly defining her writing as something that 'transcends' its production and consumption: 'To write is to forsake life' (IV, 609). It is only in her writing life that Miriam can undertake work for its own sake and, at the same time, rise above the enforced performance of proscribed gender roles that defines women's 'labour' in this period.

Randall has argued that, from the beginning of Miriam's writing life in her rented rooms through to the summerhouse and writing room she occupies while living at Dimple Hill, 'Miriam's place of writing has a history that specifically invites us to read it as a conflation of inner and outer, an enactment of the blurring of

[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp.83, 173.
[41] Bryony Randall, 'Work, Writing, Vocation and Quakers in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, 2 (2009), 39-60 (p.47).

boundaries'.[42] The settings in which Miriam sits as she embarks on her writing life are important to this discussion, because they also take place on the periphery of another family's life. Just as the act of writing blurs the boundaries between an external work life and an inner private one, Miriam's 'scene of labour' must be negotiated within an ostensibly private domestic space; thus the location of her writing as work redefines the distinctions between public and private, work and home.

Miriam starts her writing life in her room at Mrs Bailey's, redefining the domestic space from bedroom to study. Both are rooms that would still have retained their Victorian gendering as respectively female and male spaces. Writing in *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* about representations of the study and the woman writer in Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Victoria Rosner contends that: 'So strong is the connection between masculinity and the study that women with studies are invariably defined (and see themselves) as manly. Crossing genders to cross the study's threshold affects both the way these women construct their authorship and the way they understand the authorial work they do in the domestic sphere'.[43]

Miriam's ambiguity about her own gender has been frequently observed, and following Randall's argument that 'Miriam's identity as a writer' is 'one who resists separate spheres and externally imposed identities',[44] I want to suggest that rather than 'crossing' genders at the study's threshold, writing actually allows Miriam to transcend gender binaries. It is precisely through her construction of herself as author in these domestic spaces, which fall between the shelter of the family home and the freedom of independent living, that Miriam is able to forge an alternative space for creativity that is both internal and external, private and public, and female and male simultaneously.

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[42] Ibid, p.46.
[43] Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.93.
[44] Randall, p.55.

Writing brings Miriam an intensification of the solitude she has always craved, but this time it is a friendly solitude that embraces her: 'It was as if there were someone with her in the room, peopling her solitude and bringing close around her all her past solitudes as if it were their secret […] this was life!' (III, 133). Writing also gives Miriam a new relationship with her room. Her 'ink-stained table' (III, 135) provides evidence that someone else has written here, and she feels a new connection with her surroundings and a sense of continuity with the ghostly presence of that other writer. *March Moonlight*, the final volume of *Pilgrimage*, ends with Miriam at forty reaching the end of her journey, now able to write in 'Solitude. Secure.' (IV, 655). Morag Shiach has argued that Miriam's 'horror of domestic comfort' is that it is 'the antithesis of the productive spaces of literary invention, which are bounded, separate, and lonely'.[45] Miriam comes to embrace the freedom that comes from inhabiting the liminal spaces between several worlds. In these spaces on the periphery of domestic life, Miriam rejects marriage, motherhood and settled family life for the creative life of a writer on her own terms. For it is only by writing, sheltered in the solitude of her room, that Miriam can ultimately be free.

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[45] Morag Shiach, 'Modernism, the City and the "Domestic Interior"', *Home Cultures*, 2 (2005), 251-267 (p.262).