A CONVERSATION WITH EVA TUCKER

Howard Finn

The novelist Eva Tucker has been involved with the Dorothy Richardson Society since its inception in 2007, regularly attending events put on by the Society and contributing three papers to the *Pilgrimages* online journal.[1] Eva's latest piece on Richardson was published in *The London Magazine* in 2013.[2] Eva recently celebrated her 85th birthday and it seemed appropriate to mark the occasion by talking to her about her own life and writing as well as her longstanding interest in Dorothy Richardson.

The interview took place on Thursday 17th July 2014 at Eva's flat in Belsize Park Gardens – two doors down from where, on 19th February 1909, Lytton Strachey proposed to Virginia Woolf (they then had second thoughts and managed what he called 'a fairly honourable retreat').

The conversation covered three main areas: first, Eva's long engagement with Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*; second, Eva's association with the so-called 'British experimental fiction' writers of the 1960s, her friendship with Eva Figes, Ann Quin and others; and thirdly, Eva's own novels. After a brief biographical introduction, the following extract is taken from the part of the conversation concerning Dorothy Richardson.

Readers familiar with your recent autobiographical novels Berlin Mosaic *(2005) and* Becoming English *(2009) will have some sense of your background. Perhaps you could briefly outline the basic facts of this background. You were born in Berlin?*

[1] 'Richardson and the Quakers', *Pilgrimages* 1 (2008): 124-131;'Why Won't Miriam Henderson Marry Michael Shatov?', *Pilgrimages* 4, (2011): 51-60; 'Dorothy / Miriam in Sussex: Between Memory and Promise', *Pilgrimages* 6 (2013): 107-115.
[2] 'The Enchanted Guest of Spring and Summer', *London Magazine*, June/July, 2013.

Yes, I was born in Berlin on 18th April 1929. My father Otto Steinicke was German, a left-wing journalist. My mother Margot was Jewish. My parents divorced in 1933 when I was four, but remained on amicable terms. My mother and I went to live with her parents, Felix and Doris Opfer, my grandparents, in Berlin on the Friedrichstrasse. My grandfather Felix was a prosperous doctor with a thriving Berlin medical practice. After Hitler came to power and the anti-Semitic laws started coming in, my grandfather could not believe those laws applied to him. But of course eventually they did. My grandparents were too rooted in Berlin to leave, but after Kristallnacht in 1938 my father and grandfather made the arrangements to send my mother and myself to England. My father, who was not Jewish, also refused to leave, although being a communist made him equally undesirable in Hitler's eyes. As things turned out he was killed in the war not by Hitler but by an allied bomb. My grandparents perished in the camps.

So, with me in tow, my mother arrived in England in February 1939, just in time as things turned out, World War 2 beginning in September that year. But it was also bad timing in the sense that in England Germans were now the enemy and German refugees like us were viewed with varying degrees of suspicion and hostility. It was hard for my mother, who didn't settle at all. She was both too Jewish and too German to feel comfortable in England, especially in wartime. Thankfully I spent much of the war out of London, attending a boarding school in Somerset. I was enthusiastic about my new home, learned the language and quickly began to think of myself as English. My main problem was my surname, Steinicke, which was unpronounceable to English people. That problem was solved when, in 1950, I married an Englishman called John Tucker!

So you came back up to London from Somerset when the war ended. When did you first become involved in the literary scene in London?

I had a boyfriend, Antony Borrow, and we went to poetry readings held in Bayswater in the late 1940s where Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford read. Antony was editing a little magazine called *The Glass* – poetry, short prose pieces, some art and some criticism. We

printed it ourselves, doing everything manually – he owned a 100 year old printing press – I really enjoyed doing that.

[Eva shows her collection of copies of *The Glass*]

I'm glad you've kept copies of The Glass *– they are fascinating. I recognize some of the names, young people starting out!*

There's a poem in one of the early editions from around 1949 by a Harold Pinta – he hadn't yet started spelling it Pinter.

'You in the Night' – that must be one his very earliest published pieces. Calling himself Pinta, I think, was an affectation that he came from Spanish stock or something like that. The Glass *is very well put together. I'm looking now at issue 2 from winter 1948 – a short prose piece called 'The Psychic Secretary' by Bernard Bergonzi – of course he went on to become a well-known critic. And on the facing page is a short prose piece called 'Flowers' by Eva Steinicke – I assume that's you – still in your teens and your first published piece?*

> I look across the shabby room at the flowers. I can see glistening on their small velvet petals bright drops of water, infinitesimal bronzen pools. I gaze at this profusion of beauty, and am thrilled with a sudden glow of contentment, as I sit in the brown chair, my brown eyes (I am half conscious of their brownness) focusing on the corner of the room with the flowers at its summit. I hear the gentle hiss of the fire, sense the movement of restless legs in the chair beside me, but am enveloped by the richness of colour and texture at which I look . . .

I have to say it reads a bit like Dorothy Richardson!

But that was 1948, I didn't even know who Dorothy Richardson was when I wrote that.

So when did you first read Pilgrimage*?*

In 1952 – my husband John gave me the complete Dent hardback edition of *Pilgrimage* for my birthday – he'd bought it in Zwemmer's bookshop in the Charing Cross Road. To be honest I'm not sure how we'd come across the name of Richardson, other than that we were both great fans of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce – John was more of a Joycean than me.

To have bought a complete hardback Dent edition, you must have had some prior interest or knowledge about what you were purchasing.

I don't remember – I just remember it as a wonderful birthday present! I remember John presenting me with these 4 volumes of *Pilgrimage* – I still have them. I suppose with this literary background in Woolf, Joyce and so on, we had come across references to Richardson somewhere. And we were, at the time, both reading Proust – trying to read Proust in French! So after encountering Richardson and *Pilgrimage* we couldn't understand why she wasn't better known. It seemed obvious to us that she fitted in somewhere between Woolf, Joyce and Proust.

There are no dust-jackets for your Dent hardback complete edition. In the Richardson archive at Keele University there is a hardback edition of Deadlock *with a rather romantic painting on the front of a sophisticated cosmopolitan couple in a London street, a painting by Dorothy Tennant apparently.*

I don't recall there ever being any dust jackets on our Dent edition. It might well have been a second-hand edition.

A lot of readers, even those who become Richardsonians, start off resisting Pilgrimage. *Did you appreciate* Pilgrimage *straight away?*

Yes I read the first books with bated breath and then read the whole thing over the course of, I suppose, a year or so. On first reading there were some longueurs in the narrative, some parts I read less conscientiously than others, but overall it made an immense immediate impact on me. I identified with Miriam, specifically with her sense of dislocation. She wasn't dislocated to the extent that I was, but I immediately understood that aspect of

the books. The fact that this dislocation is initially manifested in *Pointed Roofs* by Miriam being caught between her English identity and Germany and its culture added to my sense of identification. Of course the Germany of the 1890s that she is describing was not the Germany of 1930s Berlin that I had known, but this sense of cultural dislocation between Germany and England was something I thought I recognized.

The thing that really impressed me about Richardson's writing was how she got people's accents completely right, I don't just mean foreign accents as in *Pointed Roofs*, but generally, she gets the way people talk exactly right, she must have had a great ear for speech and dialogue – I admired that enormously.

Another thing that impressed me with *Pilgrimage,* and which has remained with me when rereading it over the subsequent half century or so, is that the book was open to the sacred. Many subsequent biographers and critics have tended to downplay or miss that aspect. Richardson was not religious in any sectarian sense but still, the series is called *Pilgrimage* for a reason and that word has many overtones for Richardson, which I think can be summed up not just in the narrow idea of a religious quest for salvation or whatever but in this broader sense of an openness to the sacred.

One of the earliest academic readings of Pilgrimage*, a book by the African-American critic Caesar Blake, dealt with this aspect.*[3] *When you first read Pilgrimage in 1952 did you have religious inclinations?*

Well, my husband John was an arch atheist! My husband's been dead now for 27 years so I risk misrepresenting him. He went to a particularly dogmatic Catholic school and lost his faith early. After the war he became a philosophy lecturer. John was very interested in Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle and his specialism was mathematical logic. But he was literary too, a Joyce scholar.

[3] Caesar R. Blake, *Dorothy M. Richardson* (University of Michigan Press, 1960).

My relationship with my Jewish background was less important to me at the time, in terms of religion I mean, less important than John's Catholicism, so I didn't have that reaction against religion. But the thing was … both John and I were very interested in epiphanies! And Richardson, like Woolf, was interested in epiphanies of being.

So you actually read Pilgrimage *together with your husband in 1952?*

Yes, I think I was even keener on it than he was, but as a Joyce fan John took to Richardson and we couldn't understand why she wasn't better known. When I got to the middle volumes, the Michael Shatov books, where the dislocation is between England and Jewishness, I identified even more strongly with *Pilgrimage*. For me Shatov is more important than Hypo Wilson, but because H.G. Wells is famous Hypo sometimes gets more attention. And in real life, as far as we know of it, Benjamin Grad [Michael Shatov] was more important than H. G. Wells [Hypo Wilson]. Grad and Richardson were equals, intellectual equals. And it was Grad who introduced Richardson to the Quakers and found her the Quaker family to stay with. He was desperate to marry her. Could she not accept his foreignness? His Jewishness? Maybe there was a sexual issue. I wonder about Dorothy's sexuality and her relationship with her parents: why did it fall on the young Dorothy to look after her mother? Why wasn't the father looking after his wife in her final illness? And I wonder about the relationship between her parents. Was there some bad sexual experience?

All this is depicted at the end of Honeycomb *– Miriam trying to look after and deal with her mother and the mother's suicide, but also some disturbing passages where Miriam imagines her father violating – it would not be too strong a word – her mother, yet there's a very complicated set of identifications in the scene and in general Miriam identifies with her father rather than her mother.*

Yes, so this reflects complications in Richardson's relationships. Is the relationship between Dorothy and Alan Odle like a mother and son relationship? This wayward dependent man she has to look after and keep in check, with his ghastly drawings. . .

Alan Odle is quite late. Perhaps earlier in Richardson's life, the part represented by Miriam in Pilgrimage*, Richardson was sexually active. I mean in* Pilgrimage *Miriam has apparently sexual relationships with several men – Shatov, Hypo, Hancock, Densley, and several women, like Amabel, and numerous what might be called flirtations – in* Oberland *and with various boarders at Tansley Street.*

That's true. Particularly with Amabel / Veronica – that seems very passionate, Miriam seems to enjoy that more than with Hypo, if we can judge by what we read in *Pilgrimage.*

As well as being impressed by the writing, the ear for speech, the epiphanies and openness to the sacred, I think it's possible to see why Pilgrimage *may have had a particular appeal for you in 1952: the sense of dislocation, the English / German aspect and then the English / Jewish aspect.*

Although in 1952 I didn't consider myself to be interested in Germany, I mean my experience of Germany might be described as … fragmented. I'm not sure I considered myself especially interested in Jewish issues. I regarded my mother as Jewish, embarrassingly so! From almost the moment I set foot in England in 1939 I considered myself English. But, yes, in the middle volumes of *Pilgrimage*, the Jewish issue comes to the fore. In *Deadlock*. Long discussions of Zionism and discussions about Jewish marriage. Miriam visits the Jewess to discuss what it would mean to become a Jewish wife.[4] It must have struck of chord with me, Miriam's sense of dislocation, as I've said – the fact she is caught between different cultures and identities.

Caught in the tensions between these different identifications.

But what was even more important to me was Miriam's openness to these different possibilities. In *Pointed Roofs* she visits various different kinds of churches and she sees good things in each. She does this throughout *Pilgrimage,* encountering different cultures, different religions – the Quakers – different political views and

[4] Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (London: Virago, 1979), pp.223-229.

ideologies, different ways of life. And, although she never commits herself totally to one of these ways of life, she extracts something positive from each. This is what appealed me.

When did you first come across the Quakers yourself?

Oh well, that goes right back to my father Otto in Germany. He had been badly injured in World War One and in the 1930s he used to spend time at a Quaker holiday home for war veterans in Bad Pyrmont, and there he became friendly with three Quaker woman and later on, when things started to get really bad under the Nazis in the later 1930s, these Quaker women told my father that he could send his (ex)wife and child – that was me – to them, out of Berlin, to be looked after. And later still, after Kristallnacht in 1938, they told my father that they would bring my mother and me out of Germany to England, my mother passing as their domestic servant, the only way into England for Jewish refugees.

In England my mother did not stay long with my father's Quaker friends, she could not adjust to country life and housework, so she took herself to London. But I loved the country house called Big England because that was the name of the field the house was built on. The Quakers helped me get my English up to scratch before sending me to boarding school in Weston-Super-Mare, a Church of England school run by friends of theirs. As a child all I knew was that the Quakers were kind, peaceful and didn't hate Jews.

I see. Your encounter with the Quakers, albeit as a young child, was very important and predated reading Pilgrimage. *So when you got to the later volumes like* Dimple Hill*, where Miriam engages with Quakerism and goes to live, as a kind of rehabilitation, on a Quaker farm – well, you must have thought it was almost uncanny that this series of books was so closely reflecting aspects of your own life; Miriam is negotiating England, Germany, Jewishness and now Quakerism.*

Yes and it long predates the point at which I became a Quaker myself in the 1970s. But I always had this sympathy with the Quakers going back to my childhood experiences, obviously.

In the late 1970s I had a personal crisis and it was after that I seriously reengaged with the Quakers. It was open to me to go to the synagogue. People say 'if your mother is Jewish, then you are always Jewish' – but that leaves out all the genes which aren't Jewish! So I found myself going along to a local Quaker meeting, around 1979, and I soon became a Quaker by convincement, a Quaker phrase, and I've stuck with it ever since.

Since you became a Quaker in the late 1970s, have you gone back and read those parts of Pilgrimage *which deal with the Quakers* – Dimple Hill*?*

Of course. Although Richardson in the end didn't commit to the Quakers, I think her representation of them in *Dimple Hill* is the best I've come across in a novel. Her description of a Quaker meeting is also superb. In the early 1980s I had the idea to write a biography of Richardson. There had already been a few: Fromm, Rosenberg, so the demand wasn't really there at the time. But I assembled quite a lot of materials and did some research. I wrote a piece on Richardson and the Penrose family. I went to the area in Sussex, to Windmill Hill, where Dimple Hill is set and talked to surviving members of the Penrose [Roscorla] family.

So you were able to reconstruct Dorothy's time at Windmill Hill?

To an extent yes. I went there in the early 1980s – nearly a century after Richardson! But it was still and had always been a very close knit community, so it was possible to get a sense of how it was in Richardson's time. It is a rural community whereas I am from the city, I am used to Quaker meetings in an urban environment, so that made it different from my own experience of Quakerism. My meeting is in Hampstead, quite a large meeting, but the way Quaker meetings are organized, with no hierarchies and no divisions between men and women, that is all much the same from place to place and unchanged over time.

What was your evaluation of the way Richardson represents Quakerism?

I think her early account *Quakers Past & Present* is very good, succinct, and the selection *Gleanings from George Fox* is also good. She was an archetypal outsider, wasn't she – she could not, finally, commit herself wholly, to a faith or a political ideology or to a man or a woman. Ok she committed herself to Alan Odle, but that was a kind of. . . non-committal committal! The only thing she could wholly commit herself to in life was her writing, her faith was her writing, that is what *Pilgrimage* is. In many ways she was a Quaker in everything but that final commitment. And, in fiction, I know of no other account of a Quaker meeting that rivals hers – it's wonderful (III 326-330, IV 422).

Having read Pilgrimage *over such a long period of time, which parts of the series do you now think stand up best?*

Pointed Roofs, *Deadlock* and *Revolving Lights*. The latter two are really the Michael Shatov books, dealing with the Jewish issue.

Revolving Lights *also has Russian revolutionaries and Hypo Wilson – and* Revolving Lights *is an archetypal modernist novel, Miriam walking around London, through the crowds, around the West End, choreographed like* Ulysses *and* Mrs Dalloway.

That's right. I would also add *Dimple Hill* to my list of personal favourites, because of the Quaker aspect.

Are there any parts of Pilgrimage *or its overall conception that you now have reservations about?*

As I've said, when I first read it in 1952 there were some bits I found boring or off-putting, like the characters Eleanor Dear and Selina Holland, I couldn't understand how Richardson could bring herself to write about them. That was what I thought when I first read *Pilgrimage* and subsequently I've tried to revise my opinion, but I still find those two characters uninspiring. Later I read Gloria Fromm's *Biography* and she has a theory that Eleanor Dear is a version of Alan Odle – that idea would never have occurred to me – but certainly Dorothy initially married Alan on the basis of being a kind of carer, she didn't think he would last

very long, so I suppose there is a parallel of sorts with Miriam looking after Eleanor.[5]

Although Eleanor is not exactly sleazy, she has this helpless but decadent aspect, which would tie in with Alan – he definitely came from an ultra bohemian fin-de-siècle milieu.

He must have thought he was Aubrey Beardsley or something. More generally I have reservations about the books in the fourth volume. In 1952 I didn't know *March Moonlight* but already felt that there was a decline in the later books, *Dimple Hill* excepted. I now have reservations about *Oberland.* There's unquestionably some beautiful descriptive writing in *Oberland*, but it doesn't quite hang together for me as a part of the series. It seems a bit out of step or out of place in *Pilgrimage* as a whole.

I agree but I think that was intentional – she was making an effort to write a self-contained book, something that might appeal to new readers. She was under pressure by that point to come up with a volume that would renew public interest, such as it was.

As I say, I'm very fond of *Dimple Hill*, but the other books in the fourth volume … they are uneven to me. *March Moonlight* was composed in fits and starts over such a long and difficult period of time.

It's a bit like a draft for a novel, although personally I find it an appropriate way to end (or not end) the series. Joanne Winning has written some interesting commentaries on March Moonlight*, comparing the various draft versions.*[6]

There was a big interval between *Dimple Hill* and *March Moonlight*. It must have been such a desperate struggle for her to write *March Moonlight*.

---

[5] Gloria Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (University of Illinois Press, 1977).

[6] Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

You said that you and your husband basically discovered Richardson for yourselves in the 1950s, by way of an interest in Woolf, Joyce and Proust. I was wondering whether there was any particular critical context for reading Pilgrimage *in the 1960s, when you were writing your first novels and very involved in the London literary scene. There was the new complete Dent edition in 1967 including* March Moonlight *and with the Walter Allen introduction, and also the* Adam International *special Richardson and Proust issue.*[7]

That issue of *Adam International* was superb, I still have copies of that. I knew the editor Miron Grindea a bit. Apart from that edition of *Adam International* and a little later the Rosenberg biography there wasn't much critical reception.[8] Reading *Pilgrimage* again in the early 1970s, before the *Virago* edition, it rankled with me that Richardson was still so little read, so I had an idea: there is an *Essential James Joyce* – a selection of good extracts to introduce Joyce to new readers – so I thought there should be an 'Essential Richardson' and I should be the one to edit it! I went through the text very carefully and made what I thought was a good selection of key sections from *Pointed Roofs*. *Virago* had just started up, my editor at *Calder & Boyars* knew Carmen Cahill and knew this company *Virago* had taken off, so he put me in contact with them and I proposed my idea of an abridged edition. Cahill replied that in response to my proposal they had now read *Pilgrimage* and felt it deserved a complete collected paperback edition, rather than my idea of an introductory abridged edition. So, whatever one thinks of the idea of an 'Essential Richardson', I feel I was instrumental in getting *Virago* initially interested in publishing *Pilgrimage*, which of course they did not too long after.

I think the single volume Richardson Reader *is an interesting idea. It could happen yet.*

At the time I approached various people for support. I wrote to Margaret Drabble, I still have the reply saying that, quote, she

[7] *Adam International Review* 31 (1967).
[8] John Rosenberg, *Dorothy Richardson: The Genius They Forgot. A Critical Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1973).

'greatly respects Richardson but has always found *Pilgrimage* to be slow reading'!

Richardson would take 'slow reading' as a great compliment.

What I really had in mind was a plan for a 'Dorothy Richardson Reader' containing extracts from *Pilgrimage* alongside a selection of short fiction, articles, reviews and letters. The basic proposal was for 50,000 words, with around 9,000 words for each extract from *Pilgrimage* and I had a rough idea of the extracts from *Pointed Roofs*, *Backwater*, *Deadlock*, *Revolving Lights* and *Dimple Hill.* Around this time, the late 1970s into the early 1980s, I also had the idea of writing a biography of Richardson. I'd kept a small archive since I first read *Pilgrimage*, you know – just cutting out things from the newspapers.

When you were thinking of tackling a Richardson biography in the 1970s and 1980s did you get in touch with anyone else from her circle?

Richardson had two avid young fans Owen [Percy Beaumont] Wadsworth and Pauline Marrian, both of whom I got to know. By the time I contacted them of course they were getting old. Owen Wadsworth was a charming man. As I've mentioned, I went to Sussex to the Windmill Hill Quaker community, and the Penrose family, to talk to people there. I also got to know some of the people who'd known Richardson in Cornwall. I have a letter from the sister of Mary Warne, one of Richardson's landladies in Trevone and a short memoir by Dianne Hopkinson, she was the wife of Tom Hopkinson, editor of *Picture Post*.

[Eva shows documents]

The landlady's sister recalls that Dorothy and Alan would smoke 50 cigarettes each a day. 'Meals were of no interest to her [DR] when she was writing'! According to the memoir by Diana Hopkinson, Dorothy and Alan seemed a decidedly eccentric couple to neighbours in the area. Dorothy and Alan used to sit up all night long talking, smoking and drinking, and would go to bed at dawn.

Pauline Marrian I met a number of times and I made a resume of one long conversation in which she says how much Dorothy regretted losing H. G. Wells' baby. Pauline stressed the point to me. I have a little photo Pauline gave me – an elderly Dorothy in the garden with a little boy, I don't know who he is.

I think Dorothy should have gone to bed with Benjamin Grad instead of Wells.

Maybe she did.

You think so? I'm not so sure – I think she withheld herself. Miriam withholds herself from Michael Shatov in *Pilgrimage*, otherwise the narrative doesn't make sense, including the ending. Of course this is just my speculation but if Dorothy had married Benjamin Grad she would have been free and more supported in her life and with her writing, as opposed to getting stuck looking after Alan Odle.

Maybe she felt freer with Alan because he was an artist and bohemian companion. Whereas Benjamin, going by Shatov in the book, was highly strung, would have soon become demanding emotionally. Alan was essentially passive, which gave Dorothy her space.

I don't think she was afraid of that, I think she was afraid of becoming a Jewish wife. In *Pilgrimage* Miriam does virtually accept the idea of marrying Michael Shatov, until she goes to visit the Jewish wife in *Deadlock* and realizes it would not be the life for her. At least that is what Miriam thinks, although Shatov was hardly an orthodox Jew and he was very attracted to Miriam's Englishness, which I find interesting.

Did Benjamin Grad allow Veronica a fairly free lifestyle in their marriage?

Who really knows? The marriage was not a success, we know that. They only got married to please Dorothy. They had a son.

It was like an arranged marriage. It's such a bizarre story. And on the last page of March Moonlight*, the very last page of* Pilgrimage*, there is that tableau freeze-frame with Miriam holding Michael and Amabel's baby. Like a Madonna but with someone else's child!*

I think that confirms my point that the loss of the baby with Wells, and the missing out on motherhood, is a defining aspect of *Pilgrimage*, every bit as important to understanding the narrative as the loss, the suicide, of Miriam's mother.

So anyway that's what's left of my Dorothy Richardson archive – after the *Virago* edition and Gloria Fromm's biography I rather lost enthusiasm for doing my own Richardson project.

I had better luck getting Richardson onto the radio. In the 1970s I'd had several of my own short stories broadcast on the Third Programme, now known as BBC Radio 3, and become friendly with a well-known BBC radio producer Piers Plowright, and I managed to interest him in the idea of broadcasting extracts from *Pilgrimage*. In a way it was a follow-on from the idea of a 'Richardson Reader' and abridged extracts, but instead of print it took the form of radio broadcasts. It was hard work but enjoyable. There were three programmes, consisting of short introductions by myself and acted-out readings of various extracts by four or five actors. There was some very subtle music, which I barely remember. The selection of extracts was based on the selections I'd already made when putting together the proposal for the 'Richardson Reader'.

Do you have copies of the broadcasts?

No, the original tapes are lost or wiped – that was the policy then, to erase tape and then reuse. Later on I tried to find out if anyone had copies of the tapes, but without success. I don't even have copies of the scripts. I have a copy of the proposal which indicates the general outline of the programmes. I also wrote a piece for the *Spectator*, a general overview of Richardson and *Pilgrimage*, as a tie-in for the broadcasts. I still have a copy of that article.

[Eva shows clipping of 1982 *Spectator* article]

'Each lake of boredom in *Pilgrimage* is compensated for by a peak of iridescent light'.[9]

As a practising novelist do you have any thoughts about Richardson's development of the 'stream of consciousness' technique? (or whatever term one prefers). Or her decision to have just one single centre of consciousness for such a long novel?

Well, I think it's all she could do – I don't mean that as a criticism, I mean this is what suited her purpose and her conception of what *Pilgrimage* was; it worked for her, having this single perspective. You get it in Proust and Joyce and so many others at the time. I suppose Joyce in *Ulysses* broadens it out to two characters and then a third, Molly, at the end. But what these writers, especially Richardson, could do very successfully was to show lots of other characters through the main character. Michael Shatov, Hypo Wilson, Hancock, Densley, Amabel – she gets those quite well.

That's what is clever about the technique and goes back to Conrad and Henry James – although it is the main character's consciousness, as readers we still get to see all these other characters distinct, as it were, from the main character's own perspective, a little bit like when we have an unreliable narrator.

And she does get a lot of characters very well, including many of those boarders at Tansley Street, fleeting characters but beautifully drawn, via Miriam's perspective. But on the other hand, in a way, it is all about her – she can't leave herself alone! But I don't begrudge Richardson that at all – in its own terms it is unparalleled, she explores her consciousness and perhaps more generally feminine consciousness to its utmost and got to places other people couldn't get to. She got to places Virginia Woolf couldn't get to. I mean Woolf did other things equally valid, but what Richardson did was unique. She went to places no-one else had got to.

[9] Eva Tucker, 'Dorothy Richardson: A Reassessment', *The Spectator,* 2 July 1982, p.28.

I know you are a great reader of Woolf. Do you have any general thoughts comparing Woolf with Richardson?

In the reviews Woolf wrote of *Pilgrimage* I get the impression she was a little bit jealous of Richardson, who was ahead of her at that point.

Yes, Woolf's review of The Tunnel *is 1919, she didn't really arrive at full-blown modernism herself until* Jacob's Room *which is 1922.*[10]

Without question Woolf was the more brilliant writer in the sense that each book is different, she could do all these very different things, there is an artistic flexibility there, so she was experimental in a more diverse way than Richardson. But I don't think Woolf was any less of an egoist! In the review she castigates Richardson for her 'dammed egotistical self'.

In the 1960s you wrote two novels for Calder & Boyars*:* Contact *(1966) and* Drowning *(1969) – novels I like very much. The 1960s British experimental fiction group associated with B.S.Johnson – but I'm thinking particularly of Eva Figes, Ann Quin and yourself – seemed to be trying to update the modernist techniques we associate with Richardson, Woolf and Mansfield, rather than the later Joyce – especially the stream of consciousness in its broadest sense, in the 1960s you and your colleagues were trying to use it in new ways.*

Ha! Well, no, in terms of my own novels I didn't consider the example of Richardson or anyone else in that way. I didn't make conscious decisions like that, I can only speak for myself but it doesn't work like that – for a novelist influences are largely unconscious. When I was young, in the 1940s, before I'd read Richardson, I used to go into Gordon Square – it was completely open, the railings were still down from the war … well, we used to lie down on the grass in Gordon Square and I used to think 'tomorrow I'll wake up as Virginia Woolf'! It never quite happened. I don't think stylistically I'm influenced by either Woolf

[10] Virginia Woolf, 'The Tunnel', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17, 13 February 1919, p.81.

or Richardson. One writes what one can. *Contact* was fairly orthodox, *Drowning* is slightly more experimental, I think, and I enjoyed doing that – but not because anyone was breathing down my neck, dead or alive.

I know you are keen to stress that Contact *and* Drowning *were not autobiographical, but I assume your most recent novels* Berlin Mosaic *and* Becoming English *are largely autobiographical?*

Oh yes definitely – well, they are novels I hope, they are fictionalized – *Berlin Mosaic* begins in the last century and even I don't remember the 1890s! I've used my imagination to recreate events as I would with any other novel. The characters and events have to achieve what I call 'vertical take-off' – hopefully the narrative takes off of its own accord, in the way that only fiction really can.

This is the point about Pilgrimage *too, isn't it? – it's autobiographical, but it is clearly a novel not autobiography per se – the structure and style of the narrative is shaped by the requirements of a novel.* Pilgrimage *draws on memories from early life and transposes them into a fictional mode.*

You talked earlier about how, when you first read Pilgrimage *in 1952, it was for you largely about a sense of dislocation and we discussed this in terms of German, Jewish, English and Quaker identifications. Bryher often talked about how her family – her rich father – was haunted by the possibility of a financial crash.*

Bankruptcy. Yes, something Richardson experienced, with her father going from prosperous would-be gentleman to a complete bankrupt.

Bryher says that to understand Pilgrimage *you have to have some experience of such a crash.*[11] *I wonder if, unconsciously, you also felt a particular identification in this sense with the first three books:* Pointed Roofs*,* Backwater*, and* Honeycomb *– it's like a slow motion crash, finally exploding or rather imploding inside Miriam's head at the end of*

[11] Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, (London: Collins, 1963), p.19.

Honeycomb. *And then from* The Tunnel *onwards she's trying to put a life back together, start a new life after the crash.*

Oh not just unconsciously, I think I was very conscious of that aspect of *Pilgrimage*, that was a very great point of identification. Clearly we – my mother and I, had been through a catastrophe which, incidentally, aside from everything else, was also a financial crash, going from being a very prosperous family in Berlin to poverty stricken refugees living in a succession of run-down lodgings in London. It was particularly hard for my mother . . . she worked for a while as a waitress in the West End of London, in a Lyon's Cornerhouse. And later on in a munitions factory.

Maybe your mother had it worse than Miriam – I don't think Miriam ever works as a waitress in an ABC.

But what you also get in *Pilgrimage* is Miriam's childhood. Miriam's recollections of her childhood are wonderful and I really empathized with that. Even more so now I'm older. They say that as you get older your early life becomes much more vivid, I gather this is common. I'm now well into my 80s and I have such strong memories of my childhood in Berlin.