

EDITORIAL

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What is Dorothy Richardson's place in the literary history of the twentieth century? The question will have to remain an open one for as long as the proximity of the twentieth century to our time leaves it out of focus. Yet even now, sixteen years after its end, some of the contours of the period are becoming clearer. Eric Hobsbawm's short twentieth century of 1914-1991 made sense because the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of the 'age of extremes' that had begun with the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war.¹ At the same time, a short century implies an alternative 'long century', the beginning and end of which are less well defined. Yet a long century is surely what we need in order to encompass Richardson's long life, long work, and extended reception.

What might a long twentieth century look like? One version might stretch back to the early 1870s. The Paris Commune of 1871 inaugurates both visual modernism and twentieth-century mass politics. It would include Proust's birth in the same year as the Commune and Richardson's in 1873. From the perspective of English modernism, on the other hand, the 1880s look like a better starting point. The publication of the first example of impressionism in English was Olive Schreiner's radical new experiment in prose, *The Story of An African Farm* in 1883. A more conventional history of Anglophone modernisms would start in the 1890s and many of the early modernist semi-autobiographical fictions, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Pilgrimage* itself, look back to a childhood or youth in that decade. The nineteenth century stood over the first unformed decades of the twentieth like a stern Victorian father, but his children's nineteenth century was no more ours than our twentieth century is likely to be the one written about in 2116. Will Richardson play a part in it?

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

Recent history suggests her reputation is in better shape than at any time for the last hundred years. The Richardson editions now in progress have already, before the first volume is published, brought *Pilgrimage* back into view. The blue plaque in Woburn Walk announced in the last issue created a slight tremor through London's streets, so trifling perhaps that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration, yet enough to making visible to the many a decades-old haunting that had hitherto been perceptible only to the few. Throughout the twentieth century Richardson's cultural presence was both strong and weak: strong in that *Pilgrimage* was the example, *par excellence*, of the new prose fiction in the 1920s; weak in that its reception was mixed and its impact difficult to sustain. The Richardson archive is a catalogue of lacunae, near misses, errors, and misjudgements, compounded by Richardson's own dislike of (or more likely lack of aptitude for) self promotion. Contrasted with James Joyce's shrewd marketing of his work,² Richardson was a rank amateur – in part no doubt, because she resisted the role of the professional artist as antithetical to her aesthetic project. As a consequence, more than for most modernist writers, the work of recovery means a process of gathering together fragments from the scatter of what remains. The debris of Richardson's life and work has to be identified, collected and then reconfigured so that the cultural formation of which she was part can be entwined into a revised cultural history of the twentieth century.

The articles in this issue of *Pilgrimages* are all in different ways engaged with processes of recovery. Sarah Kingston's article, 'Restlessness: Sleep and Gender in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', seeks to retrieve nocturnal sleeplessness from moral and medical judgements. Kingston expands the meaning of insomnia from thwarted rest to an active resistance to sleep. Time unslept for Miriam in *Backwater* is time regained. Staying awake in bed is to reappropriate time and energy from her gendered role as teacher and carer in the Pernes' school in North London. Not without

² Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

guilt, she allows herself to read romantic and sentimental fiction, compulsively expanding her imagination beyond the narrow confines of the Pernes' education regime and the (to the young Miriam) suburban backwater that is Banbury (Finsbury) Park. Not sleeping creates a time in which Miriam can escape the instrumental logic of her work and social role and begin to map out what Walter Benjamin would call room-for-play.³ This room, although the young Miriam is not yet aware of it, will be the space she needs to become a writer herself.

Although Miriam feels confined by the neighbourhood of Banbury Park – famously rejecting all London north of the Euston Road – as Tanya Pikula argues in ‘The Thrills of Modernity: Representations of Suburbia in Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* Series’, the representations of those parts of London beyond its centre are more complex than Miriam’s initial bias would suggest. Once established in Bloomsbury, Miriam prolongs her prejudice, yet as her urban and extra-urban journeys expand by foot, public transport, and bicycle, her experiences of London’s suburbs and small towns, such as Marlborough in Wiltshire, each bring a new perspective on what community might be. As Pikula shows, the bohemian suburb of St John’s Wood turns out to be the the urban location from which work on *Pilgrimage* can be begun (although the actual drafting of *Pointed Roofs* was done at an even further location in Cornwall).

Travel is also the focus of Florence Marie’s article, “‘Translating books might lead to Wanderjahre’: *Deadlock* as Blissful Babel’. Marie puts Miriam’s experiments in translation in the wider context of the practice of translation by English modernists. In *Deadlock*, Miriam identifies three stages in her own practice, a process that amounts to nothing less than a theory of translation. As Marie shows, the difficulty of translating the sound and rhythm of a language in order to convey the tone or mood of a text was a particular concern. What attracts Miriam to translation is the journey into unfamiliarity that affords the opportunity to wander

³ For the best account of Benjamin’s concept of *Spiel-Raum* see Miriam Hansen, “‘Room-for-Play’: Benjamin’s Gamble with Cinema”, *October*, 109, 1 (Summer 2004), 3-45.

beyond the received habits of her own culture into new ways of thinking and feeling. As a consequence, English itself becomes strange to Miriam, a recognition that must surely have contributed to Richardson's experiments with form in *Pilgrimage*.

If Marie disentangles two key aspects of Richardson's modernism, the importance of other European literatures to her art and the formal modes of estrangement that disrupt cultural norms in *Pilgrimage*, Richard Ekins' task in his article, 'Dilemmas of Placing and Dating in Blue Plaque Research: The Case of Dorothy Richardson in Bloomsbury (1896-1907) – An Essay in Grounded Theory and the Social Construction of Knowledge', is to account for the social and scholarly processes required for Richardson's material return to London's streets in the form of a blue plaque. Ekins meticulously details the discussions and decisions taken by the Marchmont Association, which has undertaken to rediscover and make visible the history of the area around Marchmont Street in London. Ekins recounts the deliberations of the Association and the Richardson Society as they weighed the contradictory evidence about Dorothy Richardson's residence in Woburn Walk, then Woburn Buildings in the early 1900s. Drawing on Grounded Theory, he subjects the process to a sociological analysis and then reflects further on that process in a companion piece, 'On Memory, Forgetting and Dorothy Richardson: A Theoretical Companion Piece'.

Howard Finn offers a much sadder reflection on the death of the novelist Eva Tucker last November. Eva had long been a champion of Dorothy Richardson, a stalwart supporter of the Richardson Society and a contributor to this journal. In a moving piece, Finn remembers interviewing her for *Pilgrimages* and recounts Eva's Quaker Memorial service, an event that underlined the importance of Quakerism in Eva's life. Richardson's accounts of Quaker meetings were one aspect of *Pilgrimage* that drew Eva to its chapters, where silence and silences play such an important role. In memory of Eva Tucker, we dedicate this issue of *Pilgrimages* to her life and work, with much gratitude for her tireless efforts to speak up during those years when silence gathered around Richardson's reputation.