

Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*:
The Superficial or the Profound?

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ABSTRACT

Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938), presents an introspective view of Miriam Henderson's life during the early 1900s. Richardson developed an unusual writing style similar to that of James Joyce which became known as 'stream of consciousness'. It was a term she disliked and disputed, even though the term conveys the immediacy of the thoughts and impressions that the reader has to assimilate through her character Miriam Henderson. Previous literary readings of *Pilgrimage* have typically analysed this literary focus and style in relation to the feminine consciousness, cinematography, and the workings of memory.

This thesis examines the responses of Richardson's contemporaries: Virginia Woolf, May Sinclair, and Katherine Mansfield. Their reviews and comments of *Pilgrimage* are interesting to analyse as they reveal very different responses. Woolf and Mansfield suggest that the volumes are superficial and fail to achieve the aims that Richardson intended, while May Sinclair believes that they demonstrate considerable depth. I have taken these differing opinions as the premise of this thesis. I shall explore the depth versus the superficial by exploring different aspects of Miriam's life in the volumes. I have identified key parts of Miriam's life and self in order to explore this further: sensory life; social life; relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

'The reader is not provided with a story; he is invited to embed himself in Miriam Henderson's consciousness'.¹ Reviewers of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* were keen to highlight how consciousness was represented in the thirteen individual books. In her review of the first of the volumes, May Sinclair claimed that Richardson 'get[s] closer to reality than any [other] novelist' by focusing on the 'painfully acute senses' of Miriam's inner life.² Katherine Mansfield, in reviewing 'The Tunnel', described Richardson as having a 'passion for registering every single thing that happens in the clear, shadowless country of her mind'.³ Richardson's writing 'method [...] demands attention'⁴ because she created a new narrative concept. She attempted to translate into words what William James termed the 'stream of consciousness'. Virginia Woolf, a contemporary of Richardson, who was also

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 4 vols (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), III, 12.

² May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', in *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 442-448 (p. 443).

³ Katherine Mansfield, 'Three Women Novelists', in *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott, p. 309.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, (England: Penguin, 1992), p.15.

experimenting with narrative technique, explains that Richardson's narrative is a 'genuine conviction of the discrepancy between what she has to say and the form provided by tradition for her to say it in.'⁵

Despite her desire to produce an innovative text, there were difficulties, as John Mepham notes, 'partly from the unexpected lack of familiar narrative shape.'⁶ As a result, Richardson frequently used ellipses and omitted standard punctuation. However, many of the reprinted versions of the volumes were typeset with punctuation and speech marks which had been absent from earlier versions.⁷ It is interesting to consider that, even though these changes were made against Richardson's better judgment, the text possibly conveys consciousness more successfully now, simply because it is more accessible to readers. Nevertheless, despite an element of compliance to tradition by the addition of punctuation, many more innovative aspects remain. Richardson abandons the conventional approach to structure by her use of complex temporalities, writing in a continuous or perpetual present tense, even when she creates the past. This can often result in confusion for the reader. Gillian Hanscombe explains that the 'thematic structure is always implicit and is given no explicit support from the conventional devices of narrative, characterization, chronology or the delineation of milieux.'⁸

⁵ Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, p. 15.

⁶ John Mepham, 'Dorothy Richardson's "Unreadability": Graphic Style and Narrative', *Modern Language Notes*, 74 (1959), 494-501 (p.450).

⁷ Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.34.

⁸ Hanscombe, *The Art of Life: Dorothy Richardson and the Development of the feminist consciousness*, (London: Peter Owen, 1982), p. 27.

Richardson believed that her unconventional style and her narrative focus represented a feminist consciousness. She explained in her *Forward to Pilgrimage*:

Since all these novelists happen to be men, the present writer, proposing at this moment to write a novel and looking round for a contemporary pattern, was faced with the choice between following one of her regiments and attempting to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism.

(l. 9)

Clearly she wished to present an alternative to what men had already written and did not feel her writing could, or should, be less worthy than that of a masculine text. Bronfen writes that Richardson 'was inevitably concerned [about] the debates around femininity, with her stream of consciousness technique a mode of self-creation that was explicitly developed in opposition to the novels of H. G. Wells.'⁹ Richardson thought that a feminine text should differ from a masculine text because up to that point, women had been confined by the rules of the world and writing created by men. Therefore her text deliberately broke away from that confinement. Woolf testified to Richardson's success in fulfilling her intentions, describing her narrative as 'a woman's sentence, but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex.'¹⁰ Conrad Aiken later suggested that Richardson is 'practically the first woman novelist to make an exhaustive serial study of a single female character, and with entire, or almost entire, detachment and

⁹ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, (UK: Manchester University, 1999), p.231.

¹⁰ Woolf, *A Woman's Essay*, p.51.

honesty'.¹¹ Although Aiken had conflicting thoughts about whether her writing was subjective or objective he nevertheless implied that Richardson was thorough in her fictional creation of a female and her consciousness. Hanscombe writes:

Feminism [...] gives an opposing perspective, an awareness of alienation between the sexes and it protests against such a condition. It provides for women writers a focus of positive identification which can replace what they feel they unjustly lack: intellectual training, access to the world of public affairs.¹²

Richardson's belief in the need to obtain a voice could have stemmed from her unsettled feelings when in society herself. She personally experienced what Hanscombe described as 'an alienation between the sexes' and the prevailing custom of treating women as inferior. While fully realising Miriam as an independent character, there must inevitably be aspects of Richardson's own personality in her, and this is partially reflected by the author's very particular mode of representing a single perceiving subject. Most unusually, this subject alternates between first and third person – another cause of confusion for readers. In *Pilgrimage*, social alienation, coupled with loneliness and periods of isolation, reveals unusual degrees of perception and sensitivity in Miriam Henderson's personality, something I intend to address in a later chapter.

While Richardson was happy to see her narrative connected to a feminine voice she was less happy with the phrase 'stream of consciousness.' She saw it as a

¹¹ Conrad Aiken, "Richardson, Dorothy," *A Reviewer's ABC* (London: W. H. Allen, 1961), p. 329.

¹² Hanscombe, p. 23.

'death-dealing metaphor'.¹³ Shirley Rose explains that the term was used to illustrate the 'method of depicting reality from within the character.'¹⁴ A clear example of this is when she visits the church in 'Pointed Roofs' (1915): 'Chilly and feverish and weary Miriam listened "the encircling gloo-om" ... Cardinal Newman coming back from Italy in a ship... in the end he had gone over to Rome... high altars....candles...'.¹⁵ Miriam's internal world here is far more important than what is happening externally. Her thoughts change quickly from one subject to another, often with tenuous connections:

[Richardson attempts to] capture perceptual conscious experience *as it occurs* within the strict prism of Miriam's attention and understanding at any one time. Bergson himself made a similar distinction when discussing the ways in which a novelist might represent a character's psychic state at a given moment.¹⁶

All of us experience internal lives, a stream of consciousness that has its own time within the mind as opposed to real time. This is identified by Bergson as 'duration'.

Parson's explains Bergson's theory:

[Bergson] argues that there are two kinds of memory: "habit" memory, in which the mind consciously repeats to itself the scene of a previous event or experience, and "pure" memory or "contemplation", which is unconscious, imageless and only revealed in dreams or moments of intuition. The first is automatic and breaks up memory into separate observable instances, the second instinctive and spontaneous,

¹³ Gloria G. Fromm, *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.597.

¹⁴ Shirley Rose, 'The Unmoving Center: Consciousness in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Contemporary Literature*, 10 (1969), 366-382 (p. 366).

¹⁵ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4 vols 1915-1967, (UK: Virago, 2002), p. 72. All further references to these volumes are given after quotation in the text.

¹⁶ Parsons, p. 110.

in which memory is continuous.¹⁷

It is this 'continuous' memory that Richardson attempts to portray.

Richardson gained recognition for 'being the first, of getting closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close.'¹⁸ However, 'Richardson regarded the stream of consciousness metaphor as a wholly inaccurate description of the action of the consciousness [...] "Interior Monologue [...] at least carries a meaning".'¹⁹ Rose's article appears to be responding to Kumar's, 'Richardson and the Dilemma of "Being versus Becoming."' Rose takes the idea of 'fixed points'²⁰ and suggests that 'the whole movement of life depends upon an unmoving centre. The centre is unaffected by what issues from it, but its issue is dependent for existence on the changelessness of the core.'²¹ She also refers to Kumar's discussion of Richardson's preferred label, 'fountain of consciousness'.²² The idea of constantly becoming and never being, like a stream of life, flowing indefinitely, appears to unsettle Miriam. Her intellectual side 'attempts to find some fixed points lean[ing] towards "being" and an all-satisfying principle underlying reality.'²³ Despite Richardson's reservations, she was 'hailed as one of the pioneers, if not *the* pioneer, of stream-of consciousness method'.²⁴

¹⁷ Parsons, p. 111.

¹⁸ Rose, 367.

¹⁹ Ibid, quotes Stanley Kuntiz, ed., *Authors Today and Yesterday*, p. 367.

²⁰ Shiv Kumar, 'Dorothy Richardson and the Dilemma of "Being Versus Becoming"' in *Modern Language Notes*, 74 (1959), 494-501 (p. 496).

²¹ Rose, p.376.

²² Ibid, p. 370.

²³ Kumar, p.497.

²⁴ Elizabeth Podnieks, 'The Ultimate Astonisher: Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"' in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 14 (1994), pp 67-95 (p.67).

Nevertheless, her methods were not met with universal approval and several prominent critics expressed misgivings. Woolf admires the detail in *Pilgrimage* but she critiques the surface focus of Miriam's consciousness as Richardson presents it. In her review of 'The Tunnel' she wrote:

All these things are cast away, and there is left, denuded, unsheltered, unbegun and unfinished, the consciousness of Miriam Henderson, the small sensitive lump of matter, half transparent and half opaque, which endlessly reflects and distorts the variegated procession, and is, we are bidden to believe, the source beneath the surface, the very oyster within the shell.²⁵

She sees the complexity of Richardson's narrative, but, the 'half transparent and half opaque' suggests some uncertainty regarding the depth of the narrative: was it merely a simple stream recording thoughts, feelings and experiences as they occurred or did her narrative have hidden levels - the 'source beneath the surface, the very oyster beneath its shell'? Her comment 'we are bidden to believe' suggests some scepticism and she is clearly ambivalent about the narrative in 'The Tunnel'.

She directly questions the validity of Richardson's reality:

That Miss Richardson gets so far as to achieve a sense of reality far greater than that produced by the ordinary means is undoubted. But, then, which reality is it, the superficial or the profound?²⁶

She admits a sense of disappointment and challenges the concept even more

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, p.15.

²⁶ Woolf, p. 16.

directly: 'we still find ourselves distressingly close to the surface.'²⁷

Richardson's narrative continued to cause debate. Like Woolf, Sinclair recognised the details of reality as 'moments of Miriam's consciousness pass one by one, or overlapping; moments tense with vibration, moments drawn out fine, almost to snapping point.'²⁸ And Mansfield concurred when she said:

[It is] composed of bits, fragments, flashing glimpses, half scenes and whole scenes, all of them quite distinct and separate, all of them of equal importance. There is no plot, no beginning, no middle or end. Things just "happen" one after another with incredible rapidity and at break neck speed.²⁹

Sinclair does not have the same doubts about the concentration of details. People are 'presented to us in the same vivid but fragmentary way in which they appeared to Miriam, the fragmentary way in which people appear to most of us.' Miriam's consciousness is represented through her response or lack of response to visual details and sensory details, many of which are minor. Sinclair explains that 'You look at the outer world through Miriam's senses, and it is as if you had never seen it so vividly before.'³⁰ The reader comes to understand Miriam's perception and reception of the world through her senses and it becomes apparent that she has an unusually heightened sensitivity.

²⁷ Woolf, p.16.

²⁸ Sinclair, p.445.

²⁹ Mansfield, 'Three Women Novelists', p .309.

³⁰ Sinclair, p. 444.

According to George H Thomson, 'this fictional world [...] makes severe demands on a reader's understanding. Miriam Henderson's senses, emotions, and intellect respond in intimate detail to the world of her experience, opening it to us without prelude or explanation'.³¹ One of the reasons for this is that she has an unusually obsessive way of thinking and often becomes preoccupied with a particular subject. A constant theme is her fixation on fitting in with others, while at the same time trying to convince herself that she does not care. This paradoxical attitude will be discussed in chapter two, *Social Life*, but I shall now turn to a specific example of Miriam's obsession. This is when she discovers bicycle riding and attends a cycling school in book four of the novel, 'The Tunnel' (1919). Her attitude towards cycling at first is one of resentment: 'of course the man had thought I should take on a course of lessons and pay for them. I have to learn everything meanly and shamefully' (II.144). The positioning of the school also affects Miriam's view – the journey from the bus makes her quickly judge her surroundings: 'what an *awful* road going on and on with nothing on it' (II.144) and she proceeds to add that the 'people are absolutely awful'. Her quickness to judge can easily be put down to her anxiety about attending the school. She is unable to recognise this anxiety even though she regularly experiences it when confronting something new. Her coping mechanism here is to constantly remind herself that 'I shall soon forget it altogether' (II.144). Despite the fact she has made a bad start with her lessons, forgetting is not something she does in this instance. Her attitude changes when she is on the bike. She is now entirely focused on the minute details of what she must do: 'I must learn

³¹ George H. Thomson, *Notes on Pilgrimage*, (England: Elt Press, 1999), p. ix.

somehow to get my balance. To go along, like in that moment when he took his hands off the handle-bars, in knickers and a short skirt and all the summer to come' (II.146). Suddenly Miriam's surroundings 'shone with a greater intensity' (II.146). She cannot compare this enjoyment with anything: 'Friends and thought and work were nothing compared to being able to ride alone, balanced, going along through the air' (II.146). She has suddenly realised that the bicycle will aid her independence and increase her sense of autonomy. In a short time everything has changed: 'It alters everything' (II.149), Miriam says when talking to her friends, Mag and Jan. She talks about how it feels: 'D'you remember the extraordinary moment when you felt the machine going along; even with the man holding the handle-bars?' (II.148). A new world has opened up to Miriam. Not only is it fulfilling to her in itself, but she can share the experience with her friends, and this helps her to interact socially. It is not just with Mag and Jan that the interaction occurs, but also with Mr Hancock, her employer. Miriam explains that:

"Mr Leyton simply put me on the bicycle and sent me off. *He* rode round the other way and I had to go on and on. He scorched about and kept passing me."

Mr Hancock waited, smiling, for the more that stood in her struggling excited voice [...] "*I had* to go on, because I couldn't get off. I can wobble along, but I can't mount or dismount."

(II.173)

She is clearly unable to think about anything else and her enthusiasm has an endearing effect, because Mr Hancock is willing and happy to wait for the rest of her description.

Despite Woolf and Mansfield's uncertainty about the depth of Richardson's flowing stream, I believe that profundity can be found in the narrative by appreciating that the text is an elaborate mosaic – a kaleidoscope of details that combine to form a satisfying whole. In the following three chapters I will approach the representation of consciousness in *Pilgrimage* by reading Richardson's articulation of Miriam's sensory and imaginative mental processes as the result of her heightened sensitivity. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate that her unusual perception of the mundane and the superficial leads to the profound.

I will go on to explore some of the characteristics of Miriam's consciousness and personality and consider whether we can form an in-depth understanding of her nature, or if, as Woolf claims, there is only a superficial level to our reading. I intend to draw in more detail on contemporary critics, in particular Woolf, Sinclair and Mansfield. Chapter One, *Sensory Issues*, will examine Miriam's empirical sensations. Chapter Two, *Social Life*, and Chapter Three, *Relationships*, will attempt to understand Miriam's difficulties in relating to others in the light of her heightened sensitivity. Her inner life has been scrutinised by critics who have put forward various theories besides the feminine consciousness that I have already discussed. Many of them have focused on Bergson's theories but it is my intention to consider other aspects of consciousness in this thesis. In Watt's study of Richardson's cinematic narrative, *Dorothy Richardson*, she suggests that the narrative 'inscribes Miriam's visual field into its own more complex one. Miriam's perspective is shaped by the

visual technologies of her moment' – lantern slides and film.³² This is particularly relevant because it provides much evidence of Miriam's exceptional perception of details. Further criticism of significance includes, amongst others, Gillian Hanscombe's *The Art of Life*, which attributes much of Miriam's 'oddity' to feminism.

³² Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson*, (UK: Northcote House, 1995), p. 60.

Chapter One

SENSORY ISSUES

In this chapter I intend to demonstrate that Miriam's heightened sensitivity can be understood and identified by the in-depth portrayal of her immediate perceptual consciousness within the narrative of *Pilgrimage*. Susan Blackmore describes consciousness in her book *A Short Introduction to Consciousness* as a 'continuously flowing stream of sights, sounds, smells, touches, thoughts, emotions, worries, and joys'.³³ According to this then, we should be able to gain further insight into Miriam's inner world through an examination of her senses.

Woolf acknowledged this heightened sensitivity when she referred to 'impressions as they flicker through Miriam's mind, waking incongruously other

³³ Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: A Very short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 14.

thoughts'.³⁴ Woolf appreciated the fascination of these flickers of reality and accepted that the 'sense of touch, sight and hearing are all [...] excessively acute'.³⁵ However, in contemplating the quality of Miriam's consciousness she goes on to make a more critical point in her review of "The Tunnel":

We have to consider the quality of Miriam Henderson's consciousness, and the extent to which Miss Richardson is able to reveal it. [...] When we are in a position to make up our minds we cannot deny a slight sense of disappointment.³⁶

She feels that if Richardson's style works, then the reader 'should feel seated at the centre of another mind' and that we 'should perceive in the helter-skelter of flying fragments some unity, significance or design'.³⁷ These last three words, unity, significance and design are, perhaps, key to Woolf's feelings regarding the text. Unity is difficult to achieve when there are so many fragmented sections, even if they are placed deliberately to reflect the workings of Miriam's consciousness. In choosing to focus on these fragments, according to Woolf, Richardson abandons significance within the text and there is nothing to suggest one fragment is more important than the next. As Susan Gevirtz points out in *Narrative's Journey*, 'For Miriam Henderson, the future, the present, the past, and fictive time all exist simultaneously in various vertical palimpsestic arrangements.'³⁸ Woolf's view is that Richardson has 'sacrificed graces of wit and style for the prospect of some new revelation or greater

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, p.16

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Susan Gevirtz, *Narrative's Journey*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 3.

intensity'.³⁹ She feels that the 'figures of other people on whom Miriam casts her capricious light are vivid enough, but their sayings and doings never reach that degree of significance which we, perhaps unreasonably, expect'⁴⁰. Without unity and significance a text cannot maintain a satisfactory structure or design, so although she can appreciate Richardson's aim, Woolf does still wonder if the 'old method seems sometimes the more profound and economical of the two'.⁴¹

In her article, "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson", May Sinclair takes a more positive view, although she sometimes appears to question some of Richardson's methods. She writes:

Miriam is an acute observer, but she is very far from seeing the whole of these people. They are presented to us in the same vivid but fragmentary way in which they appeared to Miriam, the fragmentary way in which people appear to most of us. Miss Richardson has only imposed on herself the conditions that life imposes on us all.⁴²

However, when discussing the introduction to *Pointed Roofs* (1915) by Mr. J. B. Beresford, she reveals that she has a much greater appreciation of Richardson's ability to penetrate the hidden depths.

Reality is thick and deep, too thick and too deep, and at the same time too fluid to be cut with any convenient carving-knife. The novelist who would be close to reality must confine himself to this knowledge at first hand. He must, as Mr. Beresford says, simply "plunge in." Mr. Beresford says that Miss Richardson is the first novelist who has plunged in. She has plunged so neatly and quietly that even admirers of her performance might remain unaware of what it is precisely that she has done. She has

³⁹ Woolf, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sinclair, p. 443.

disappeared while they are still waiting for the splash.⁴³

According to Sinclair, Mr Beresford acknowledges that reviewers might feel the need to criticise, believing that Dorothy Richardson does not achieve sufficient depth, but he implies that they are missing the point. They are unaware of her real skill. It is interesting to note that, like Sinclair, Mr Beresford had difficulty with the original text: 'it is evident that when first faced with the startling "newness" of Miss Richardson's method and her form, the issues did seem a bit obscure'.⁴⁴ He apparently had to read it three times to reach an 'illuminating moment'.⁴⁵ Unlike Mr Beresford, Sinclair eventually decided that Richardson was not the 'first to plunge' but was following a growing tendency: 'Richardson has not plunged deeper than Mr. James Joyce'.⁴⁶ Ultimately, however, she believes that Richardson's method creates a 'high pitch of perfection'.⁴⁷ She can see a depth in the text which Woolf does not fully appreciate. Sinclair is aware that other novelists do not understand Richardson's writing and she knows that the fact that the 'novels have no art, method, form and formlessness irritates them', but she accepts that Richardson is 'not concerned with strict order of events in time' and that the fragmented way in which the text is presented to us is only a reflection on the way most of us observe other people.^{48, 49} She exclaims: 'I find it impossible to reduce to intelligible terms this satisfaction I feel. To me, these three novels show an art and method and form carried to

⁴³ Sinclair, p. 442.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 443.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 445.

punctilious perfection'.⁵⁰ Woolf and Sinclair mention the same techniques and details, but they are reading the text differently. Sinclair finds the text to be reassuringly realistic in its representation of consciousness where Woolf does not, but she also realises that Miriam's view is limited: 'Miriam is an acute observer, but she is very far from seeing the whole of these people'.⁵¹ She admires the way that the reader must work to piece together the mosaic in the same way as Miriam, seeing a design that Woolf perhaps misses. She can therefore appreciate the 'break with the design' that Woolf criticises at the end of "Honeycomb" (1917): 'Something happens, tragic and terrible. We are not told what it is'.⁵²

In an attempt to represent reality, Richardson demonstrates that Miriam's high level of anxiety leads to a heightened sensitivity. This is especially evident when Miriam is faced with new and unfamiliar situations. Fear of the unknown can create a heightened awareness of one's surroundings and this is particularly noticeable during the period Miriam spent in Germany in "Pointed Roofs" (1915) Book One. As Watts points out, *Pilgrimage* begins with Miriam's estrangement from home: 'it is associated with autonomy even as it inaugurates mourning'.⁵³ She must live amongst strangers and learn how others exist and communicate: 'Miriam must be both inside and outside part of life and yet its spectator, simultaneously, in order to write'.⁵⁴ By chapter four, in the hair-washing scene, she is beginning to become more certain of her own autonomy. She does not want her hair to be washed by someone else as it

⁵⁰ Sinclair, p. 443.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 446.

⁵³ Watts, p. 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

would impinge on her sense of personal dignity.

May Sinclair wrote that Richardson 'must not tell a story or handle a situation or set a scene: she must avoid drama as she avoids narration'.⁵⁵ Here, the hair washing scene *is* the drama, but it is carried out in the confined, subjective world of Miriam's consciousness. Every detail is recorded with precision and every sense of awareness is magnified to portray this event and her conflicting thoughts throughout. She thinks of telling them that they 'treat me like a child' (I.59), and clearly believes she is far too old for this treatment. She has had to grow up quickly since she left home, living in Germany and having to shoulder her family's financial worries – a constant pressure that weighs her down. She privately protests within herself: 'Ordering her, Miriam, to go downstairs and have her hair washed... by Frau Krause ... off-hand , without warning ... someone should have told her – and let her choose' (I.59). It seems reasonable to conclude that her fear of the unknown was influencing her reaction, but her thoughts show that she might have coped better if she had had prior notice. If she had had time to get used to the idea she could have prepared for it.

Miriam is aware that this new experience will involve somebody touching her head: 'Miriam's throat contracted. She would not go down. Frau Krause should not touch her' (I.59). Miriam explains that Sarah had always washed her hair before and the familiarity of Sarah's handling might have felt acceptable to Miriam. However,

⁵⁵ Sinclair, p. 443.

the boarding school in Germany presents a new experience, the sensation of someone new touching her head, and it fills her with fear: 'Out over the basin flew a long tail of hair and Miriam's anxious eyes found Millie standing in the further gloom, twisting and wringing' (I.60). The description of Miriam's surroundings becomes gloomier the nearer she gets to the basin. Her emotions are a combination of anger and anxiety. One moment 'Miriam's outraged head hung over the steaming basin' (I.60), and in the next 'she thought that the nausea which had seized her as she surrendered would, the next instant, make flight imperative' (I.60). Miriam visualises the experience by feel and sounds: 'her amazed ears caught the sharp bump-crack of an eggshell against the rim of the basin, followed by a brisk crackling just above her. She shuddered from head to foot as the egg descended with a cold slither upon her incredulous skull' (I.60). Miriam's acute senses make the whole experience harrowing. Sinclair's claim that Richardson 'must avoid drama as she avoids narration' seems at odds with this hair-washing scene.⁵⁶ The scene is full of drama within Miriam's mind and the vivid descriptions convey her anxiety to the reader as well. Sinclair did, however, point out that Richardson 'must not be the wise all-knowing author. She must be Miriam Henderson'.⁵⁷ Richardson achieves this remarkable aim by inhabiting Miriam's mind and emotions and conveying them with acute detail and depth. As a result the reader is able to gain insight into Miriam's consciousness.

While the hair washing scene presents a number of senses to the reader it is

⁵⁶ Sinclair, p. 443.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

clear that the volumes contain many other examples of heightened senses. Another instance can be seen in the scene of Miriam on the bus in “Backwater” (1916), in which she watches everything that goes by. Watts explains that ‘Miriam often finds in ancient city buildings and pavements, her link with nature: London as prairie, as harvest,’⁵⁸ and we can see this in her lyrical descriptions in the following passage:

On the left a tall grey church was coming towards them, spindling up into the sky. It sailed by, showing Miriam a circle of little stone pillars built into its tower. Plumy trees streamed by, standing large and separate on moss-green grass railed from the roadway. Bright white-faced houses with pillared porches shone through from behind them and blazed white above them against the blue sky. Wide side-streets opened showing high balconied houses. The side-streets were feathered with trees and ended mistily.

(l. 196)

Here the emphasis is on colour and textures – ‘moss-green grass’ – as well as structures – the ‘widening mouth’ of the road and ‘side-streets feathered with trees’. Richardson’s vibrant descriptions of the ordinary transport the reader into the reality of Miriam’s mind. As Sinclair says, ‘the intensity is the effect of an extreme concentration on the thing seen or felt’.⁵⁹ Katherine Mansfield likened Richardson’s rich details to a dragonfly: ‘who can tell, watching the dragonfly, at what point in its swift angular flight it will suddenly pause and hover, quivering over this or that? [...] And then, at the same instant, it is gone’.⁶⁰ The dragonfly image seems to demonstrate Mansfield’s belief that Richardson’s detail is superficial. At one moment

⁵⁸ Watts, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Sinclair, p. 445.

⁶⁰ Katherine Mansfield, ‘Dragonflies’, in *The Gender of Modernism*, (USA: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 310.

there appears to be a desire to portray depth, but in the next Richardson darts away, diverted by something else. This is very much in agreement with Woolf's opinion that 'we still find ourselves distressingly close to the surface. Things look much the same as ever. It is certainly a very vivid surface'.⁶¹ Perhaps the scene already examined offers some evidence that might support the opinions of Mansfield and Woolf. However, I feel that the sensitivity of Miriam's responses serve a much deeper purpose – an insight into her emotional make-up. This can be seen again in the complexity of Miriam's responses to sounds and music.

In 'Backwater', Miriam refers to her childhood when explaining her current struggles in dealing with sudden noises. Miriam is attending a firework display and the following conversation with Mr Parrow illustrates her general anxiety:

"It isn't," she explained a little breathlessly, in relief suddenly respecting him, allowing him to thread a way for her through the increasing crowds towards the open evening, "that I don't want to see the fireworks, but I simply can't stand the noise [...] I never have been able to stand a sudden noise. It's torture to me to walk along a platform where a train may suddenly shriek."

"I see. You're afraid of the noise."

"It isn't fear – I can't describe it. It's agony. It's like pain. But much worse than pain. It's-It's annihilating."

"I see; that's very peculiar."

[...]

"It was much worse even than it is now when I was a little thing. When we went to the seaside I used to sit in the train nearly dead until it had screamed and started. And there was a teacher who sneezed – a noise like a hard scream – at school. She used to go on sneezing – twenty times or so. I was only six and I dreaded going to

⁶¹ Woolf, p. 16.

school, just for that. Once I cried and they took me out of the room. I've never told anyone. Nobody knows."

(I.325)

Mr Parrow finds her unusually extreme reaction to sound 'very peculiar' though he does accept it and accommodates her desire to leave the firework display. Richardson vividly describes this sensation and the associated anxiety. Miriam's worry about the bangs leads to guilt and leaves her believing she 'ought not to have come, if she did not mean to see the fireworks. It was mean and feeble to cheat him out of his evening' (I.324). It is interesting that Miriam confesses this anxiety to Mr Parrow. This suggests she is attempting to trust him and desires to interact with him. She draws attention to her inability to explain to anyone why she used to cry in the classroom, by adding, 'I've never told anyone' (I. 326). It is not clear whether she is pleased with Mr Parrow's response to her confession but perhaps his response is not important. It could simply be a relief to her to have finally told someone, as she is not accustomed to confiding in others. Much of her suffering is borne in silence.

Other sounds, especially music, play a significant part in the text. Miriam's senses result in her being 'an acute observer' but music is a vehicle in which she is able to take a more active role outside herself.⁶² A significant moment in "Interim" (1919), when Mr Mendizbal is playing the piano, is her understanding of what others are feeling. His playing was of 'short fragments, unfamiliar things with strange phrasing, difficult to trace, unmelodious, but haunted by suggested melody' (II.345). And during this odd playing, Miriam begins to realise that the 'Baileys were growing

⁶² Sinclair, p. 443.

weary of listening' (II.336). It is worth noting here that Richardson was not just a novelist but also a film critic. She explained the importance of music in her *Close Up* column: it "'enhances the faculty of vision", [while] speech entails "the diminution of the faculty of seeing"'.⁶³ The episode of Mendizbal playing the piano enables us to see that music has given Miriam the ability to sense emotion in others without it being verbally expressed. Her previous understanding of the world through her senses is of external stimuli – almost in a detached way. Here her senses enable her to sense the subtleties of others through non verbal communication. It is possible that she picks it up through the 'unmelodious [...] suggested melody'. This scene is particularly interesting because Miriam's ability to perceive other people's emotions is a continuous struggle.

There is a curious difference between Richardson's understanding of speech and music. She says, when reviewing a film, 'Vocal sound [...], always a barrier to intimacy, is destructive of the balance between what is seen and the silently perceiving, cooperating onlooker'.⁶⁴ This could suggest her dissatisfaction with language as a means to communicate the consciousness. Richardson herself makes clear her own reservations on the subject of understanding verbal connections. She claims through her film column that 'without music there is neither light nor colour'. Although she is referring to film here, perhaps we could use the principle to suggest that her world is not fully alive unless there is music.⁶⁵ To further confirm this,

⁶³ Laura Marcus, *Cinema and Modernism*, ed. Laura Marcus, (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 150- 210 (p. 155).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Richardson added that 'accompanying music [to a film] is not an alien sound. It assists the plunge into life that just any film can give'.⁶⁶ She recognises a form of communication through music that supersedes words. In fact, it strongly implies that, in the matter of emotion, words hinder communication for Richardson.

Importantly, the scene with the Baileys also enables the reader to discern that Miriam's responses to her senses are not static. Sometimes they inhibit her, as at the firework night with Mr Parrow, and at other times they enable her to have a greater understanding of others. What may be an issue at one time may not be an issue at another. There is no fixed point where Miriam stands still.

Music also appears to lead Miriam to visual experiences and memories. The following scene illustrates this. When Clara Bergman, one of Miriam's students, reaches the piano, Miriam describes her in detail: 'how square and stout she looked and old, careworn, like a woman of forty' (1.43). She is only able to assess her on the basis of her physical presence. When Clara begins to play, however, Miriam loses interest in this and allows the music to transport her to a scene from the past, described through her senses; sight, sound and smell:

Miriam dropped her eyes – she seemed to have been listening long – that wonderful light was coming again – she had forgotten her sewing – when presently she saw, slowly circling, fading and clearing, first its edge, and then, for a moment the whole thing, dripping as it circled, a weed-grown mill-wheel ... she recognised it instantly. She had seen it somewhere as a child – in Devonshire – and never thought of it since – and there

⁶⁶ Marcus, p. 161.

it was. She heard the soft swish and drip of the water and the low humming of the wheel. How beautiful ... it was fading ... She held it – it returned – clearer this time and she could feel the cool breeze it made, and sniff the fresh earthy scent of it, the scent of the moss and the weeds shining and the dripping on its huge rim. Her heart filled. She felt a little tremor in her throat. All at once she knew that if she went on listening to that humming wheel and feeling the freshness of air, she would cry. She pulled herself together, and for a while saw only a vague radiance in the room and the dim forms groups about. [...] The trumpet notes had come back.

(I.44)

While Miriam often sees life in minute details, the music somehow enables her to see both the present and the past with enhanced sensations. The 'wonderful light was coming again' as a direct result of the music – a visual experience that she has felt before. The 'weed-grown mill wheel ... she recognised it instantly. She had seen it somewhere as a child – in Devonshire – and never thought of it since' shows the power of the music to capture past experience and bring it to the present in this cinematic way. Miriam's senses are completely alive; not just sight but hearing - the 'low humming of the wheel'; touch - the 'cool breeze' that she can feel; and smell - to 'sniff the fresh earthy scent.' Music here powerfully awakes a multitude of senses and memories in her consciousness.

Richardson's pleasure in music was matched by her interest in the cinema, and her acute observational powers must have been enhanced by the experience of film. This is reflected in her ability to create vignettes. Critics have given much attention to her ability to describe visual details with a remarkable sensual clarity. Carol Watts discusses this:

The narrative articulates itself through the presentation of specific technologies of memory which are themselves different forms of aesthetic production: architecture, photography, painting, cinematography. These are not in the text in any systematic sense, operating as much through allusion and fragmentary reference as by some fundamental design, but they are nevertheless one important means of understanding the aesthetic [...] logic of the novel.⁶⁷

Drawing attention to Richardson's cinematic style, Watts compares the fragmentary and visual writing to that of a scene in a film. There are plenty of examples throughout the volumes that read in this way. For example, in 'Pointed Roofs' she describes her surroundings: 'The West End street ...grey buildings rising on either side, angles sharp against the sky ... softened angles of buildings against other buildings' (I.416), and when she stays at Newlands house in 'Honeycomb' (1917):

Miriam roamed about her room from one to another of the faintly patterned blue hangings. Again and again she faced each one of them. For long she contemplated the drapery of the window space, the strange forest-like confusion made, in the faint pattern of tiny leaves and flowers, by the many soft folds, and turned from it for a distant view of the draperies of the bed and the French wardrobe. Sitting down by the fire at last she had them all in her mind's eye. She was going to be with them all night. If she stayed with them long enough she would wake one day with red bronze hair and a pale face and thin white hands. And by that time life would be all strange draperies and strange inspiring food.

(I.359)

The pictures she paints with words are strong with life and colour. It is possible to imagine the camera drawing in for a close-up of the curtains, dwelling on the patterns for a few seconds before returning to Miriam, who is waking as a different

⁶⁷ Watts, p. 12.

person.

An episode in 'The Tunnel' (1919) is rich with similar visual detail:

Mrs Bailey looked exactly as she had done the first time. It was the exactly the same; there was no disappointment. The light coming through the glass above the front door made her look more shabby and worn. Her hair was more metallic. But it was the same girlish figure and the same smile triumphing over the badly fitting teeth.

(II.11)

The description reveals a realistic, non-perfect image of Mrs Bailey, yet the warmth coming from the light above the door enables Miriam to see her and the situation in a different way. Miriam 'started at last on the journey up the many flights of stairs', perhaps this is a suggestion of Miriam's long-term plans to stay here. Although the 'day was cold [...] this house did not seem cold [...] the welcome of the place fell upon her' (II.11). The rich descriptions continue as Miriam opens the door of her room. She is struck by a powerful sense of familiarity. The reader realises that Miriam has seen this room before, perhaps when visiting to see whether she would like to rent it. Since Miriam's senses focus on minute details it is not surprising that her arrival at the room produces such strong feelings. But the familiarity is one that appears to present a base for Miriam:

These things are familiar because reality is here. Coming events cast *light*. It is like dropping everything and walking backwards to something you know is there. However far you go out, you come back... I am back now where I was before I began trying to do things like other people. I left home to get here.

(II.13)

Miriam's heightened senses allow her to feel welcome in this room and to believe that this is the centre of her life; the one constant thing that will be here no matter what happens. Her words, 'I am back now where I was before I began trying to do things like other people', suggest melancholy, but might be more an acceptance of her situation. Though the reader is not informed of Miriam's grief after losing her mother at the end of 'Honeycomb' we can assume that she is processing her feelings and grief, not by attempting to focus on them, but by finding a secure place where she feels she can safely exist. The contrasting descriptions of how the 'room asserted its chilliness' but also how the 'dark yellow graining of the wall-paper was warm' (II. 13), and later how, when she 'drew her eyes away from its confusion of rich fresh tones, the bedroom seemed very dark' (II.13), could metaphorically demonstrate her ambivalence about the situation. The cinematic images in this instance, I would like to suggest, are her senses concentrating on the present in an attempt to block the past. In losing her self in details she is taking comfort from her new but familiar surroundings which can enclose her. Silent film could easily capture the moment and atmosphere just as it is played in Miriam's consciousness. After 'shutting the quiet door she went into the brilliance of the window space. The outside world appeared; a long row of dormer windows and the square tops of larger windows below them' (II.14). The room radiates both warmth and coldness. But it also has an important opening, the window, allowing the light to come in and giving Miriam the opportunity to access the world. She can either view the outside or look away and avoid it. It is similar to her life, and she constantly dips in and out of these two options.

The luxurious details of everything that happens or does not happen to Miriam are recorded in Richardson's belief that the reader is as intensely interested as she is. Hanscombe writes, 'Richardson does not question [...] the reader's ability to recall at will any one detail of Miriam's total range of experience'.⁶⁸ There is an impressive precision in how Richardson describes Miriam's surroundings. She perceives the world in the detail rather than the overall picture. As Thomson says:

The result is somewhere between the product of the still camera and of the camcorder, a series of windows on experience, each vivid and detailed, but isolated. Thoughts, feelings and memories flood the scene, by turn distancing the focus or plunging it into close-up, until expansion exhausts the moment or episode. Curtain. A new episode. Frequently with no transition either in Miriam's thinking or in the reader's expectations.⁶⁹

Miriam's cinematic understanding of the world appears to be a mechanism that helps her to make sense of events that is otherwise confusing. Her perceived imagistic world enables her to process the information without necessarily understanding the full meaning of it. For example, the passage where she visits Mag and Jan is more than just a detailed description of her surroundings:

The dimly shining mysteries of the room moved about Miriam, the outside darkness flowing up to the windows moved away as the tall dressing-gowned figure lowered the thin, drab, loosely rattling Venetian blinds; the light seemed to go up and distant objects became more visible; the crowded bookshelf, the dark littered table under it, the empty table pushed against the wall near the window – the bamboo bookshelf

⁶⁸ Hanscombe, p. 18.

⁶⁹ George Thomson, *A Reader's Guide: Dorothy Richardson's 'Pilgrimage'* (USA: University of North Carolina, 1996), p 7.

between the windows above a square mastery draped to the ground with a table cover.

(II.83)

Clearly this is the sort of cinematography Watts was referring to: 'a specific technology of memory which is itself a form of aesthetic production'.⁷⁰ It is also a scene that demonstrates there is more than a surface level to the novels because it gives us a deeper understanding of Miriam's consciousness. The beginning of the paragraph mentions the 'outside darkness flowing up to the windows,' suggesting her anxiety about being in this unfamiliar territory. However, significantly, the narrative says: 'the shining mysteries of the room moved about Miriam' and 'distant objects became more visible.' It is possible that, amidst the anxiety, and without necessarily realising how she feels, Miriam is hoping that Mag and Jan will see the real her and maybe understand and accept her. It is as if the true Miriam can only be seen by others in certain light. Although she is unsettled in this situation she also appears to feel there is a chance of friendship here. On a previous occasion, Miriam confesses her confusion about the world: 'What is life? Either playing a part all the time in order to be amongst people in the warm, or standing alone with [...] a sort of edge of reality on everything' (I.320). Her awareness that she does not quite fit in leaves her isolated and confined to her own internal world for much of the time. The visual description of Mag and Jan's surroundings suggest a cautious optimism.

Miriam's heightened sensitivity has been shown to either inhibit her behaviour

⁷⁰ Watts, p.12.

or allow her to enjoy rich experiences. In the same way that her obsessions enable her to have access to relationships through her specific interests, like the bicycle riding, the senses give her opportunities to appreciate music and to think in a visual manner. Much of the 'helter-skelter' nature of Miriam's thoughts and observations that are critiqued by Woolf could be put down to her youth in the earlier books.⁷¹ There is also the effect of her mother's suicide , which she never explains in words, only impressions: 'The stillness went on and she lay for an hour tense and listening [...] At the end of the hour a descending darkness took her suddenly' (l. 487). Woolf responds to the lack of specific information with frustration, but Sinclair is full of admiration for this method: 'Here Miss Richardson "gets" you as she gets you all the time – she never misses once- by her devout adhesion to her method, by the sheer depth of her plunge. For this and this alone is the way things happen'.⁷² Richardson's writing, as seen through an examination of the senses in this chapter, hints at a much greater depth of experience in Miriam's consciousness than is immediately apparent. The following chapter, which focuses on Miriam's social life, delves beyond the superficial to explore the complexities of Miriam's reactions when she is in the company of others.

⁷¹ Woolf, p. 16.

⁷² Sinclair, 446.

Chapter Two

SOCIAL LIFE

Gillian Hanscombe has written that '*Pilgrimage* is clearly "different" from the novels preceding it', but asks whether 'its difference be adequately explained by reference to the fact that its author is a woman?'⁷³ John Mepham states that Richardson 'invented "feminine realism", and [...] portray[s] the life and consciousness of a young woman living beyond the scope of traditional romance and marriage plots, living with work, trauma and a life of white collar urban poverty.'⁷⁴ Not only was this unusual but, as Mepham also explains, the text itself was unusual: it is 'characterized [...] by visual style, with ellipses, gaps and italics as well as informal syntax mimicking the language of thought [...] Richardson experimented with unfamiliar visual style [...] in her punctuation and layout of the reported speech.'⁷⁵ With the text having such a confusing impact it is possible to see why Woolf and Mansfield felt *Pilgrimage* existed on a superficial level. The visual experimentation of the text layout and the break from the tradition to produce an entirely female consciousness would have created a barrier to accessing the depth.

⁷³ Hanscombe, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Mepham, p. 461.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

In her article 'Romance and the Heart' Woolf analyses her own responses to Richardson's writing in more detail, stating that 'there is no one word, such as romance or realism, to cover, even roughly, the works of Miss Dorothy Richardson. Their chief characteristic, if an intermittent student be qualified to speak, is one for which we still seek a name'.⁷⁶ Woolf's words suggest that Richardson's writing is unique because she has 'developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender'.⁷⁷ Woolf writes that this unique sentence is different to other attempts as Richardson 'has fashioned her sentence consciously, in order that it may descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam's consciousness'.⁷⁸ Woolf, here at least, does believe that Richardson's 'woman's sentence' accesses the depth rather than the superficial. The 'trophies' gained by this approach appear to be the minute details of ordinary life which, though 'we may dispute their size, are undoubtedly genuine'.⁷⁹ She understands the atmosphere that Richardson, being 'aware of life itself', was so clearly trying to create: she 'adds an element to her perception of things which has not been noticed before, or if noticed, has been guiltily suppressed'.⁸⁰ Woolf draws attention to the way in which Richardson writes about apparently irrelevant details when other important things are happening: 'a man might fall dead at her feet [...] and Miriam might feel that a violet-coloured ray of light was an important element in

⁷⁶ Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, p. 51.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

her consciousness of the tragedy'.⁸¹ At this point, Woolf appears to lose some of her admiration:

At first we are ready to say that nothing is important to Miriam Henderson. That is the way we generally retaliate when an artist tells us that the heart is not, as we should like it to be, a stationary body, but a body which moves perpetually, and is thus always standing in a new relation to the emotions which are its sun.⁸²

This constant shifting of the heart causes Woolf to question Richardson's narrative because she does it 'on an infinitely smaller scale' than Chaucer, Donne, Dickens.⁸³ What appears to be a supportive review develops into Woolf's conclusion that 'Miriam Henderson is pointing to her heart and saying she feels a pain on her right, and not on her left. She points too didactically.'⁸⁴ It seems to Woolf that the details are too insignificant – part of a mosaic whose overall pattern is never realised. The fragments are so diverse that Richardson fails to complete the picture. Woolf thinks the problem 'is the nature of Miriam's consciousness, which she again criticises for being more sensory and automatic than reflective'.⁸⁵

While conceding that it is easy to be diverted by the constant flow of tiny details that are sometimes almost overwhelming, I believe that an examination of the way Richardson portrays Miriam's social life will produce a much more complex picture. I intend to demonstrate that her contact with other characters in the books enables us to see beyond the apparent surface and access the depth that Richardson

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Parsons, p. 60.

intended.

It is helpful to see how Miriam views herself amongst others. From the beginning of the first volume, when she is a student-teacher in a girls' finishing school in Germany, the reader senses her anxiety and self-consciousness in social situations. The narrative focuses on what appear to be superficial elements. For example, when the servant brings in refreshments, she becomes diverted by words and languages: 'it gratified her to discover that she could, at the end of this one day, understand or at the worst gather the drift of all she heard, both of German and French,' (I.47). Miriam suddenly starts to think about slang: 'Pater had always been worrying about slang and careless pronunciation,' (I.47). Her moods dart fleetingly from one thought to another, reminding us of Mansfield's dragonfly. When Fraulein appears for the first time Miriam is so nervous that she seems to forget words: 'she could not remember the name of the thing she was making' (I.48). In her panic Miriam's thoughts scatter into what Mephram describes as 'strangely long and detailed descriptions of apparently insignificant items.'⁸⁶ For example, she thought 'of dressing-tables and the little objects of which she had made so many hanging to the mirror by ribbons; 'toilet-tidies' haunted her – but that was not it – she smoothed out her work' (I.48).

Miriam's social life is inextricably connected to her desire for isolation. Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that this is particularly the case in the early books, and

⁸⁶ Mephram, p. 454.

that, by the end of 'Honeycomb', the 'opposition between solitude and society remains unresolved'.⁸⁷ Given that Miriam's consciousness is profoundly affected by the senses, it would seem likely that the reason for her preference for isolation is that it is easier to deal with. She does not have to worry about the unpredictability of others. Hanscombe says that 'isolation may be lonely but it is not loneliness [Miriam] finds painful and, further, only isolation can give her the silence she demands for her own purposes'.⁸⁸ Yet, in contrast, Miriam's loquaciousness is constantly evident. When she forces herself into the company of others, leaving behind her safe solo internal life, she happily enters into the debates of others and apparently thrives on company. Nevertheless, she finds solace and comfort in the silence of the Quakers in Volume IV. In 'Dimple Hill' (1938), she recalls her 'sense of release and of home-coming in the unanimous embarrassed stillness, her longing [...] to exchange her status of visitor from another world for that of one born amongst them' (IV. 422). It seems that these opposite extremes grow out of each other. She has a need and a desire for the intellectual stimulation of others, but the excitement and effort then exhaust her and she seeks out the safety provided by silence, which is more comfortable and controllable. Earlier in 'Dimple Hill' she admires the scenery: the 'farmhouse and its meadows, the distant woods grown near, the little copse' and this makes her understand the paradox of her need for silence: 'Everything recedes as you approach, unless you come in solitude, unaccompanied even by memory' (IV 513).

⁸⁷ Bronfen, p. 123.

⁸⁸ Hanscombe, p. 14.

Miriam is constantly torn between the desire for isolation and the need to socialise, although both are unconscious at first. When she is alone she often reflects on her feelings about the difficulties of fitting into society. She wonders whether people really ‘take an interest in the things they said, or was it a trick, like “clothes” and “manners”’ (II.108). This comment reveals the dilemma that Miriam continuously faces; with her lack of experience in fitting into social situations she is unable to tell whether people are genuine or not. Interestingly, she herself fears that depth is lost by the continual distraction of unnecessary detail.

In Volume Two when Mr Grove arrives unexpectedly at Wimpole Street without any explanation, she is more aware of her social responses and critical of herself in a new way: “I meant to write to you – two or three times.” “Oh why didn’t you?” she responded emphatically ... Why can’t I be quiet and hear what he has to say? He must have wanted to see me dreadfully to come here like this’ (II.134). Here Miriam is putting herself into Mr Grove’s position. Her thoughts about him continue after he has left: ‘What it must have cost him to break in here and ask for me ... how silly and how rude I was I *can’t* believe he’s been [...] He’s seen me in the new life, changed ... and I’m not really changed’ (II.135). She is aware she has built a new life for herself and is more socially able, yet she feels unchanged inside. This is, perhaps what Shiv Kumar was referring to when he suggested that Miriam ‘finds herself caught inextricably between the two conflicting irreconcilable views of reality – being and becoming’.⁸⁹ Her self-criticisms might seem simplistic but they

⁸⁹ Kumar, p. 497.

demonstrate her desire to socialise and feel accepted. Once again, by conveying Miriam's surface reactions to the reader, Richardson succeeds in penetrating the core of Miriam's anxiety: how to socialise successfully and also retain her need for solitude.

Some of these episodes might appear fragmented and superficial, but the deeper insights come from Richardson's understanding of Miriam's awkwardness and her gradual self-awareness. The reader is able to appreciate her self-consciousness and empathise with her attempts to negotiate her way through the world. She persists with her efforts to fit in and feels increasingly frustrated by other people when she does not. She maintains a stubbornness throughout the books and, even as her experience increases in social situations, she reverts to her own view of language – that it can hinder communication. She thinks, 'Why would people insist upon talking about things – when nothing can ever be communicated?' (II.306). Once again, she is frustrated by their insistence on talking about trivial matters instead of saying what they want to say. She would prefer the depth to the artificial. She believes that 'she could see their minds so clearly; why wouldn't they just look and see hers instead of waiting for some impossible pronouncement?' (II.306). The natural progression of conversation in the instance with Mr Grove forces Miriam to analyse the current social environment.

Yet, despite her discomfort in social settings, Miriam does have a need for company. When at Mrs Bailey's 'she was happier down here with them [the other guests] than she would have been alone' (II.216) and in 'Deadlock' (1921) book six,

when Lucie Duclaux suddenly speaks to Miriam at the theatre: 'the shock of this unexpected advance arrested Miriam's rapid flight towards the harbour of solitude' (III.163). The instances of her communication with others become more frequent. What she eventually realises is that being intelligent makes her different. It is this that she blames for her difficulties in fitting in: 'Intelligent people. I suppose I am intelligent. I can't *help* it. I don't want to be different. Yes, I do-oh Lord, yes I *do*' (II.211). As readers we are very aware of her intelligence, and this implies that Richardson is conveying much more than superficial information. In fact, it is this very intelligence which saves Miriam because she is able to work things out in her mind and to learn from her mistakes. She continues to be ambivalent about whether or not she likes being in this position. Life would have been much easier if she had more easily fitted in, but she can also see the merits of being different and interesting.

It is not just Miriam who puts her social difficulties down to intelligence. At Tansley Street, where she boards, she has to face the other lodgers at meal times. She can learn from Mrs Bailey, who has now almost become like a mother figure to her. Miriam watches her and 'when the sounds she made were all that was to be heard, she responded to the last remark about the weather or asked some fresh question about it as if no one had spoken at all' (II.375). This is a technique that Miriam learns from and remembers later in 'Revolving Lights' (1923) book seven, when a 'hopelessness seized upon her as a useless topic sprang eagerly into her mind' (III.308). And she then 'helplessly [...] explained, in her mind, to the far off woman at her side that this bleak day coming suddenly in the midst of July was one

of the glorious things in the English weather' (III.308). Interestingly, Mrs Bailey later becomes confident that Miriam now fits in: 'I told you so. Now you're in the right place' (II.375). It would be reasonable to assume that Mrs Bailey is referring to the intelligence of the other boarders and feels Miriam is equal to them. Mrs Bailey's household has been the backdrop to much of Miriam's renewed learning after her mother's death but this does not mean it is easy for Miriam:

Mrs Bailey was sitting alone poised socially in a low arm-chair by the fire [...] Miriam came dutifully forward in response to the entrancement of her smile and stood on the hearthrug enwrapped in her evening, invaded by the sense of beginning it anew with Mrs Bailey [...] She could tell her now about Eve in great confidential detail and explain that she could not *at present* afford to come to Tansley Street. That would be a great sociable conversation and the engagement with Mr Bodoïn would remain untouched.
(II.361)

This passage reveals the complexity of social issues that Miriam is contemplating. It is interesting that she is *preparing* the conversation before launching into it. She thinks through the processes of conversation carefully. Mrs Bailey is engaged and Miriam appears to feel uncomfortable about this. To deal with the anxiety she chooses not to discuss it. She is, however, aware that she must find something else to say. All this is thought through while in the room with Mrs Bailey. Thinking about the conversation and possible consequences of what could be said illustrates Richardson's depth of understanding. It suggests that Mrs Bailey and Miriam have a comfortable relationship even if, at times, it is *uncomfortable*.

Even though she learns social etiquette by watching others, or from reading,

Miriam does not always follow the rules. A particularly unsuccessful handling of a situation is described in 'Deadlock'. Miriam has read an essay about employers and a clerk who is given a pension, and starts thinking about her own employment with the dentists:

It is *not* funny that prosperous people can use up lives on small fixed salaries that never increase beyond a certain point, no matter how well the employers get on, even if for the last few years they give pensions. [...] Well, I suddenly thought employers ought to know. I don't know what can be done. / don't want a pension. I hate working for a salary, as it is [...]

Anyway. The worst of it is that my employers are so frightfully nice. But the principle's the same, the frightful unfairness. And it happened that just before I went away, just as Mr Hancock was going off for his holiday, he had been annoyed by one of his Mudie books going back before he had read it, and no others coming that were on his list, and he suddenly said to me in a grumbling tone, "You might keep an eye on my Mudie books." I was simply furious. Because before I began looking after the books – which he had never asked me to do, and was quite my own idea – it was simply a muddle. [...] Well I know a wise person would have been in rage and would meekly have rushed about keeping more of an eye than ever. But I can't stand unfairness. It was the principle of the thing. What made it worse was that for some time I have had the use of one of his books myself, his idea, and of course most kind. But it doesn't alter the principle.

(III.178)

The kindness that has been shown to her by her employers somehow gets pushed aside and becomes irrelevant in the light of the principle of the matter. She focuses on the negatives of her employment in a way that she would probably have never noticed had she not read the essay: 'They sail off to their expensive week-ends without even saying good-bye, and without even thinking whether we can manage to have any sort of recreation at all on our salaries' (III.179). These things do not

appear to have bothered Miriam up until now. But now that she has thought about it she is determined, even obsessed in her desire to tell her employers exactly what they do wrong. In order for Miriam to get past this, she sees no other way but to tell her employers what she thinks:

I objected to spend[ing] a large part of a busy Monday morning arranging the huge bunches of flowers he brought back from the country. That was not true. I loved those flowers and could always have some for my room; but it *was* a frightful nuisance sometimes, and it came into the principle, and I wound up by saying in future I would do only the work for the practice and no odd jobs of any kind.
(III.179)

Again she deliberately ignores the kindness shown to her and puts aside her enjoyment of the tasks. She explains that she *should not* be doing any extra duties. She fails to think through the consequences of her complaint. She simply tells Michael Shatov that 'I've got the sack' (III.179). Shatov is more concerned about this result than Miriam and he speaks to her in a 'low frightened tone' (III.179). This scene illustrates the unusual way in which Miriam's mind works. She is resolute despite the unfortunate results, yet her actions reveal that she has learnt from past mistakes. She explains she was 'thinking about all sorts of other things; and seeing all kinds of points of view that seemed to be stated all round us by people who were looking on' (III.180). Despite her previous social naivety, she is determined to follow her own instincts. She admits a great respect for Mr Hancock by saying she always thinks of different points of view when talking to him and 'his point of view is so clear-cut and so reasonable that it reveals all the things that hold social life together' (III.180). Nonetheless, she cannot believe the situation has turned to 'this solemnity' (III.180).

After the events leading to Miriam's dismissal, she is reminded of the formal nature of the proceedings by the one month's salary that they offer. But it is only on what we assume to be her last day at work when Mrs Orly makes clear how sad they are to be losing her that Miriam begins to realise the impact of her actions: 'In her sweet little sallow face not a shadow of reproach; but lively bright sorrow, *tears* in her eyes' (III.183). And Mr Orly seems equally upset as he says, 'We're awfully sorry about this' (III.183). Miriam's social experience means she is currently aware that the situation requires her to say things that the Orly's are probably expecting her to say. She makes this clear: "'So am I," said Miriam seeking for the things they were inviting her to say' (III.183). This awareness is something that she lacks earlier in the volumes. Telling her employers what she thinks about them is courageous but, up until this point, she has not understood the implications of what she is doing. It is only by talking to Mr and Mrs Orly in this scene that it dawns on Miriam what has really happened:

'Hang it all, excuse my language, but y'know he's [Mr Hancock] done a good deal for ye.' 'All expectation of gratitude is meanness and is continually punished by the total insensibility of the obliged person' . . . 'we are lucky; we ought to be grateful' [...]

'Besides,' the same gusty tone, 'it's as good as telling us we're not gentlemen; y'see?' The blue eyes had flashed furiously.

Then all her generalizations had been taken *personally* . . .

(III.183)

Miriam is suddenly aware of why they have been so angry and dismissed her. But she believes she can attempt to resolve the situation. Mr Orly does not think it will be

possible for Miriam to set matters straight but she is determined. Mr Hancock reacts with reservation, clearly unsure as to whether Miriam will change her attitude towards them. Since Miriam has spoken her complaints out loud it seems that not only were they hurt by them but they also felt it would not be good for Miriam to work in an environment that she felt so passionately was wrong. Mr Hancock eventually comes to a decision:

“Well, as I say, that depends entirely on yourself. You must clearly understand that I expect you to fulfil all reasonable requests whether referring to the practice or no, and moreover to fulfil them *cheerfully*.”

“Well, of course I have no choice. But I can’t promise to be *cheerful*; that’s impossible.” An obstinate tightening of the grave face.

“I think perhaps I might manage to be *serene*; generally. I can’t *pretend* to be cheerful.”

(III.185)

Here Miriam is again struggling with the precise words. She takes them literally and feels it is not possible to promise to be cheerful. However, her resourcefulness saves the situation after she notices his face tighten. Her dislike of the word cheerful is replaced by a substitute; ‘serene’. This seems acceptable to her and also Mr Hancock. Her honesty continues and she begins to tell him whether she should stay and work there or not. It seems a little odd that she would choose this moment to tell him, having just been given her job back. But Mr Hancock takes it on board and acknowledges that ‘I know quite well the work here leaves many of your capabilities unoccupied’ (III.185). Her employers are aware of her intelligence and talents. In many ways they respect her and what they probably perceive to be her individuality. Miriam politely and innocently adds, ‘I want to say that I think it is kind of you to let

me air my grievances so thoroughly' (III.186). Given the situation and what Miriam originally said to them, it is a rather pleasing touch that makes the reader smile. Miriam's complex mind is surprisingly naive as she tries to add what she thinks is expected of her. Richardson's ability to trace the progress of Miriam's dawning social awareness in this incident leaves the reader in no doubt that she is in full command of her material. There is no possibility here that too many details lead to a lack of depth. The reader can follow Miriam's thought processes and see how she finally reaches a good decision.

Miriam eventually considers sharing a room with another person, in 'The Trap' (1925), in order to move into larger lodgings. Although Miriam shared a room in Germany in the first volume, it was not her choice, but here it is her own decision. However, sharing her space causes her to feel uncomfortable. She insists that a curtain must be put up between her and Miss Holland's bed. At first, they manage to muddle through and accept each other. Miss Holland understands Miriam to be 'a girl [...] unspoiled by worldly women, the dearest I know – with a man's mind' (III.479). This idea of Miriam's mind as having a 'man's mind' is not new. It seems to be the only way people can understand her and her intelligence. Miriam watches Miss Holland with curiosity on a daily basis: the way that the milk boiled over every day and she 'had somehow to make that mess disappear. Yet she always laughed' (III.479). Miriam feels that it 'seemed enough for her that she lived in the glow of another life. For that she seemed willing to pay any price in unseen labour' (III.479). Miriam is conscious of the fact that they are very different. For a while they manage their lives together in a manner which includes Miss Holland's acceptance of

Miriam's oddity. Their ability to continue this convenient relationship shatters after a conversation from either side of the curtain. After Miriam admits that she has not yet written a letter that Miss Holland had requested. Miss Holland responds "“Indeed?” What a strange sharp note’ (III.480). Miriam perceives Miss Holland to be angry and ‘speechless, her large frame, moving now impatiently about, a boiling wrath’ (III.480). Miriam also becomes angry and views Miss Holland in a different light: ‘her usefulness, to these wonderful acquaintances, [is] all she was worth’ (III.480). In that single instant she loses all respect for her. As a result an argument ensues:

“Had it been made to a *man*, your promise would at once have been carried out.’

Miriam forgot her anger in amazement at the spectacle of a chatelaine with a volcanic temper and a spiteful tongue. She searched her memory in vain for anything to equal the venom of this attack.

“After that, you count upon my asking him?” she said, feeling herself a dream, lost in pity before the revelation of the importance to Miss Holland of these club acquaintances.

(III.480)

Miss Holland cannot cope with this argument and begins to cry. In response Miriam ‘paused for a moment to be sure of the astonishing sound and fled from it, closing the connecting door. This she felt was the last depth of shame, to be involved, to have been subject to, this meanest of all abandonments’ (III.481). Miriam does not know how to react to Miss Holland's tears. The only thing she can think to do is to leave: ‘She and Miss Holland were separated now, utterly’ (III.481). Their argument has changed their relationship permanently. To Miriam the argument made things

clear, 'Miss Holland [...] despised her' (III.481). Her reaction is, by normal standards, extreme - an indication of her continued social naivety. She does not seem to understand that people sometimes have arguments. She has taken it to heart as if Miss Holland represents all the people throughout Miriam's life that have not been able to accept her for who she is. Richardson has skilfully built up a highly nuanced scene with an instinctive understanding of Miriam's reactions – a good example of her ability to produce depth rather than superficiality.

Miriam's social behaviour might seem to produce a superficial text in that there is no evidence that she analyses her feelings. Yet there are many examples of her desire for a greater understanding of others. Her need for company, accompanied by her social awkwardness, gives a realistic explanation for her mistakes and frequently offer humour and relief from the intensity of 'The Tunnel'. In her review of 'The Tunnel', as Mephram points out, 'Woolf's tone is correct and courteous, but underneath the surface there is a deeply sceptical reaction', and this appears to be her general response to Richardson's writing, although there is no evidence that she had read the first three books.⁹⁰ She is clearly expecting more from the novel: 'As we are on the fourth book, Dorothy Richardson must expect to find her reviewers paying a great deal of attention to her method – it demands attention as a door whose handle we wrench ineffectively calls our attention to the fact that it is locked'.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Mephram, p. 451.

⁹¹ Woolf, 'The Tunnel' p. 15.

It is possible to explain some of the apparent superficiality and Miriam's preoccupation with detail by the trauma of losing her mother. "In order for her to get her work done, and in order not to descend into depression at home, she has to restrain herself from thinking".⁹² This presents a good reason for her shallow and fragmented thoughts. 'Miriam is in a state of post-traumatic stress following her mother's suicide. Fragmentation and disorientation are aspects of life as it is experienced in shock'.⁹³ It seems as if after the death of her mother everything Miriam has gained from living independently from her family is temporarily lost. Her unspoken grief is represented by a backward step which becomes an unacknowledged depression: Miriam 'looked across the early morning distance, misty black and faint misty green.... Something had happened to it. It was not anything... That was the punishment... The landscape was dead' (II.109). Once again using the cinematic style explained by Watts, Miriam is representing her emotions with a bleak image. She is aware that 'things have changed' (II.108) and concentrates on small details, like the way her Newlands dress was now 'too old-fashioned' (II.109). Subconsciously she appears to acknowledge that the world has moved on without her while she has, in some respects, stayed in the moment before her mother's death. Her mind focuses on her lack of social ease: 'They are not my sort of people. Alma does not care for me, personally' (II.109). It represents her refusal to deal with anything more personal. Her obsessive thoughts about not fitting in, which add to her depression, paradoxically enable her to move forward. Mephram explains why the door described by Woolf appears to be locked when he identifies Miriam's

⁹² Mephram, p. 455.

⁹³ Ibid., p.456.

post-traumatic stress:

The stressed or traumatised person, in order to survive and keep going, sometimes concentrates on local and short-term meanings, on the practicalities of getting through the day. Someone who is unable to discern long-range meanings, arising from projects and aspirations which shape the day and give it broader significance, might fall back up on an obsessive focus on small details.⁹⁴

Because she focuses all her energy on her inability to fit in, she is distracted from the fact that her mother has died. Her need for solitude, which never lessens throughout the volumes, can be understood as a way for her to process her mother's death and to open the way for her to live her life again.

Gradually, however, Miriam's social skills are developing and leading to more friendships and relationships. One of these is her relationship with Michael Shatov and I intend to explore this further in the following chapter.

⁹⁴ Mepham, p. 456.

Chapter Three:

Relationships

Miriam's 'discoveries are concerned with states of being and not with states of doing. [She] is aware of 'life itself'; of the atmosphere of the table rather than of the table; of the silence rather than the sound'.⁹⁵ Woolf admires this approach, the psychological sentence, acknowledging that 'she adds an element to her perception of things which has not been noticed before'.⁹⁶ However, later in the same review, Woolf expresses doubts about whether this kind of sentence, with its emphasis on the details of the table rather than the atmosphere leaves out something about reality. As previously quoted, she says Richardson 'points too didactically'.⁹⁷ For Woolf, the details do not add up to a completed mosaic. In her essay, 'Three Women Novelists,' Katherine Mansfield has similar reservations:

'Anything that goes into her mind she can summon forth again, and there it is,

⁹⁵ Woolf, 'Romance of the Heart' in *A Woman's Essays*, p. 52.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

complete in every detail, with nothing taken away from it – and nothing added. This is a rare and interesting gift, but we should hesitate before saying it was a great one'.⁹⁸

In many ways, she is more openly critical than Woolf. Referring to 'The Tunnel', she asks: 'Why was it written? [...] One cannot imagine [Richardson] appealing to the reader or planning out her novel'.⁹⁹ However, an examination of one of Miriam's complex relationships with a man reveals a more subtle depth and perception than Woolf and Mansfield acknowledge. Some of the sensory descriptions are opportunities to suggest deep connections between Miriam and other characters. Relationships are a fundamental part of life and Miriam cannot escape this necessary interaction, despite her conflicting thoughts on her need for isolation. She does realise the importance of connecting with people, but, perhaps inevitably, experiences contradictory feelings towards them. While happiest when alone, she forces herself through social experiences that ultimately can and do lead to friendships. She learns from her close acquaintances and they help her develop stronger social skills.

Hanscombe explains that 'it is the Russian Jewish émigré, Michael Shatov, a fellow lodger in Mrs Bailey's house, who becomes Miriam's most ardent challenger in her personal battle of the sexes'.¹⁰⁰ He is a key figure in Volume III. There are important relationships later with Hypo Wilson, Amabel and Charles in Volume IV, but Michael is the first of Miriam's serious friendships. It is, perhaps, this relationship

⁹⁸ Mansfield, 'Three Women Novelists', p. 309.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Hanscombe, p. 67.

that offers her a first taste of genuine affection, accompanied by all the resulting irritation and frustration that can come from closeness with another person. As Hanscombe observes: 'he is the first man seriously to threaten the self-imposed isolation of her consciousness'.¹⁰¹ Miriam does not find the relationship easy but there are aspects that offer her enjoyment and enable her to discover benefits in other, future relationships. Hanscombe pinpoints Miriam's dilemma:

It is clear that, in her personal and social relationships with men, Miriam finds the female role she is expected to play both inhibiting and constricting. It is also felt to be deadly, since it threatens, on the one hand, the integrity of her consciousness, which is for her the definition of her identity and, on the other hand, the possibility of social integration, so that isolation becomes necessary for the preservation of identity.¹⁰²

Miriam's friendship with Michael epitomises this struggle to form a close bond with another human being, while resisting her conflicting desire for solitude and fear of losing her consciousness. Her developing closeness with him, though perhaps not immediately obviously complex, also demonstrates her determination to persevere.

Miriam's need for the challenge of deeper intellectual communication steers her towards Shatov. In this instance it is philosophy and literature that attract her and her desire to experience other cultures: 'the Russian Shatov is likewise credited with adding Russia to Miriam's mental map of Europe'.¹⁰³ She and Michael are first introduced to each other in 'Deadlock' when he becomes a lodger at Mrs Bailey's

¹⁰¹ Hanscombe, p. 67.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

house. Miriam feels that 'the hour had been such a surprising success because of a smattering of *knowledge*' (III.18). She feels comfortable talking with him from the beginning. However, she is nervous of discussing things with which she is not familiar and becomes anxious when Michael says, "I have always from the first been interested in philosophy." Then knowing that the fascinating thing was philosophy, and being ignorant of philosophy, brought the certainty of being unable to keep pace' (III.18). In this first meeting it seems that two important things have happened. Firstly, Miriam has been able to talk on an intellectual level and she places great importance on this. Secondly, she experiences a new type of anxiety, the fear that Michael knows more about his subject than she does. While this makes her uneasy, it also enables her to have more respect for him, a necessary requirement for a close acquaintance. These early conversations indicate their shared interest in academic subjects:

The hour of sitting accepted as a student, talking easily, the right phrases remembering themselves in French and German, would not come again; the sudden outbreak of happiness after mentioning Renan ...*how* had she suddenly known that he made the Old Testament like a newspaper? [...] Perhaps that is how students learned; reading and getting only a general impression and finding thoughts and words years afterwards; but then how did they pass examinations?
(III.22)

Michael and Miriam's discussions spark new ideas. Suddenly she experiences happiness. We are not told whether this is because she enjoys the discussion, whether it is because she feels inspired by Michael's intelligence, or whether it is a combination of both. There is no description of her happiness. The statement is simply made, after which Richardson proceeds to detail their discussion. The

attraction of intellectual discussion may also indicate her inability to deal with emotions. An interesting phrase is then used: 'for that moment they had been students together, exchanging photographs of their minds' (III.23). Chapter One of my study explored the cinematic images of Miriam's mind. Knowledge is exchanged between her and Shatov like an image, a photograph. The image could also suggest the transparent nature of their relationship, their ability to openly examine each other's thoughts. Perhaps Shatov is more open in his communication because he is foreign and does not understand the subtle messages sent out by people who do not speak his native language, who favour more inhibited responses. This suits Miriam's instant and straightforward reactions to conversations. For example, after debating whether or not to discuss Emerson, Michael describes his reaction: I "found myself *most*-interested in philosophy," he said, glowing warmly through his further wide-open eyes. "It was very good to me. I found myself most excited after our talk of yesterday. I think you too were interested?" (III.27). Michael is saying what he thinks and asking Miriam if his assumptions are correct. She does not have to guess what he means or read subtexts. Perhaps the transparency is more noticeable a little later in the passage when Michael says, 'I am very intelligent' (III.28). Here Miriam does realise that people do not normally readily confess to their strengths and so she 'hid her laughter by gathering up one of his books with a random question. But how brave. Why should not people admit to intelligence?' (III.28). She knows that society does not normally speak so straightforwardly but finds this aspect of Michael appealing. He does not understand or follow social etiquette, just as she does not. Even early on in this relationship she is, perhaps subconsciously, aware that their communication is different to that of those who stick to social rules. This inevitably

draws them closer. The passage seems to reflect Richardson's fascination with her own intelligence, which Mansfield discusses in her review of 'The Tunnel':

Richardson's 'concern is primarily and perhaps ultimately with herself. "What can I not see and remember and express!"¹⁰⁴ The implication here is that Mansfield is critical of Richardson's desire to show off, wanting to dazzle with her brilliance, without making any concessions to the need to charm or persuade the reader.

Miriam experiences much uncertainty during her growing friendship with Michael. This is perhaps best illustrated when Miriam and Michael arrange to meet to go into the British Museum. Miriam arrives at the agreed meeting place but he does not: 'she was relieved. She had done her best. Fate had saved her; her afternoon was her own' (III.54). It is perhaps odd that she should be pleased, rather than annoyed, that he is not there. As she leaves she walks into Michael who says, 'Ah, I am glad' (III.54). She studies how he looks:

Looking like that, she was now to take him in amongst the British Museum officials, and the readers she knew by sight and who knew her; introduce him to the librarian. She scanned him as he eagerly talked, looking in vain for the presence she had sat with in the drawing-room. The eyes had come back; but that was all, and she could not forget how brooding, almost evil, they had looked just now. They gleamed again with intelligence; but their brilliant beauty shone from a face that looked almost dingy in the hard light; and yellowish under the frightful hat peaked down, cutting off his forehead. He was gloveless and in his hands, grimed with walking in the winter streets, he held a paper bag of grapes which he ate as he talked, expelling the skins and flinging them from him as he walked. . . . He looked just simply disreputable.
(III.54)

¹⁰⁴ Mansfield, p. 309.

Here Richardson is describing Woolf's 'table' with much physical detail – the 'frightful hat'; the way he eats the grapes - and she uses that detail to create the 'atmosphere of the table'.¹⁰⁵ Her anxiety is transformed into images. Michael's appearance has altered from how she remembers him in the drawing-room at Mrs Bailey's house. His eyes are his only redeeming feature as 'they gleamed with intelligence' which is so important to Miriam. She is aware that there will be people in the British Museum and the library who know her, by sight at least, and she seems concerned about what they will think. Miriam's anxiety focuses on his physical appearance but could indicate the darkness and uncertainty of her mind. She seems ambivalent about the experience of their relationship. Sometimes when they are together, her anxiety becomes overwhelming but at other times she feels more relaxed. When they walk round the library she 'resented the librarian's official manner; the appearance of the visitor' (III.57). She criticises their surroundings even when they are having tea: 'those who came in twos and sat at the sequestered tables, maddening her with endless conversations at cross purposes from unconsidered assumptions, were defeated' (III.64). And she continues to see Michael in a negative light. As they sit together, she watches him 'pause to produce between his lips a saturated lump of sugar. She stared, horrified' (III.64). Eventually, her anxiety subsides and she is able to settle into the companionship that she had enjoyed at home. Miriam confesses that it was 'he who forced her to think. She reflected that solitude was too easy. It was necessary, for certainties [...] But the struggle to communicate certainties gave them new life' (III.63). She then realises

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, 'Romance of the Heart', p. 52.

that the 'extraordinary new thing was that she *could* think, untroubled, in his company' (III.63). Even she is aware of the positive influence he has on her life.

As their relationship develops, Miriam clearly feels more comfortable with Michael. At one point, when he is talking, she even thinks, 'it was as if her own voice were speaking' (III.111), which shows how well their minds work together. However, she still struggles with their closeness, which is perhaps why she focuses on his foreignness: 'he had not even known where he was; completely foreign, a mind from an unknown world, oblivious at her side' (III.113). She is often irritated by him, occasionally acting with a lack of consideration:

She increased her pace until Mr Shatov panted for breath as he plunged along by her side [...] "We had better rather at once take an omnibus," he shouted as they emerged into the Euston Road [...] "That goes only to *Gower* Street," thundered his following voice. She was in amongst the crowd at the corner and as again the bus lumbered off, inside it in the one remaining seat.

(III.114)

Whether it is an accident that she finds herself alone on the bus, or whether she leaves him through stubborn determination to do as she pleases, is not clear. But their physical separation allows her to satisfy her own need for solitude and, perhaps, illustrates the importance of recognising their individuality within the relationship. It also demonstrates Michael's long-suffering nature. It seems remarkable that he is willing to tolerate this kind of thoughtlessness.

As their fondness for each other grows, they spend more time together and

then Michael kisses Miriam. This episode again brings up the problem of Michael's background: 'he had kissed a foreign woman' (III.193), and he says, 'Do not forget I am a Jew' (III.193). This is an issue that continues to threaten their relationship until Miriam finally decides she cannot marry him. His Jewishness 'serves to underline her own English sense of self in absolute terms'.¹⁰⁶ However, her immediate response to the kiss is not entirely expected either. On the one hand, she does see that 'tomorrow they would take up life again with a stability; years at their disposal, as if imagining they have all the time in the world as they live out their lives together' (III.193). But at the same time 'the need for the moment was to have him out of sight, kill the past hour and return to the idea of him', suggesting that she wishes he had not kissed her and that the idea of him is more appealing than the reality. Despite this, they continue to spend time together. While walking in the 'green spaces of London [...] they saw and thought in unison, breaking their long silence with anecdotes, reliving together all they could remember of childhood' (III.196). Three pages on, after going to the opera together, her feelings still seem strong for him as they stand on the 'doorstep, side by side with his renewed silent appeal' (III.201). The passage then proceeds with contrasting images:

For a moment the dark silent house blazed into light before her. She moved forward, as he opened the door, as into a brightness of light where she should stand visible to them both, in a simplicity of golden womanhood, no longer herself [...] so differently identified with him in his new simplicity, going forward together, his thoughts and visions as simple as her own in the life now just begun, from which their past dropped away grey and cold, the irrelevant experience of strangers.

But the hall was dark and the open dining-room door showed blank darkness. She

¹⁰⁶ Watts, p. 53.

led the way in.

(III.201)

Mansfield's response to this kind of writing is to ask: 'how is [the reader] to judge the importance of one thing rather than another if each is seen in isolation?'.¹⁰⁷ She feels that there is an implied secret behind the method of Richardson's writing which you are being invited to share 'on the express understanding that you do not ask what the secret is'.¹⁰⁸ She has the uncomfortable suspicion that 'the author is no wiser than you, that the author is in love with the secret and would not discover it if he could'.¹⁰⁹ She feels that everything is too obscure, too unconnected. However, a careful analysis of the thoughts behind the apparently insignificant detail reveals otherwise. The first part of the passage shows the hope that Miriam feels when she is with Michael. She is aware that the 'brightness of light [is] where she should stand visible to them both', knowing she should not hide anything from Michael, and every part of her is visible to him. She twice says, 'moved forward' and the second time says, 'move forward *together*' (my italics) showing how she feels their relationship benefits them both. She is not standing still in life and together they will move into the future. However, this light is undermined by its juxtaposition with the last section where they are met by the darkness of the hall. Not just darkness but 'blank darkness.' Here Miriam 'led the way in' showing she is very much in control of this relationship. But the darkness into which they are walking suggests her uncertainty, fear or subconscious awareness that their relationship will not work out. For the reader it signals Miriam's unease and suggests that all is not well despite the

¹⁰⁷ Mansfield, 'Dragonflies', p. 310.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

apparent hope of the moment. Just a little further on there is a complete shift in how Miriam sees Michael. Suddenly his voice was 'different to hers' (III.202). She realises that 'they were too separate' (III.202). She says that 'if he were to touch her now, they would again be separated for longer than before' (III.202). It seems that his presence, although on the whole positive, makes Miriam feel claustrophobic at times.

While their relationship has many positive elements, Miriam's moments of separateness from Michael grow as time goes by, and this is exacerbated by the issue of him being a Jew. Michael's feelings for her continue: "Miriam, Miriam" he pleaded in hurried shaken tones close at her side, "remember I *did not know* that you would come" (III.204). He is indicating that he loves her but is troubled by his past relationships and so confesses them to Miriam. Her response is, "Well, I must go," she said briskly' (III.204). Her absence of affection here (an element of chill is introduced into the situation with the addition of 'briskly') and lack of desire to hear and respond to what Michael has to say is unusual for someone who has genuinely enjoyed a close relationship: 'the crushing of full realization, piling up behind her numbness, must pass over her. There was not much time. The train was carrying her steadily onwards and towards conversation with the unconscious Brooms' (III.204). She is aware of her social obligations and the need for contact with others despite her unsatisfactory conversation with Michael before boarding the train. John Mepham comments on the way that she speaks:

Miriam is not attempting to say what she is thinking but to speak in spite of her

conviction that any spoken words will be false to the complexity of her thought. Spoken words, she thinks, do not express the speaker's thoughts but are at odds with them. Social conventionality or politeness is unmasked as forced and anxious falsehood of which the speaker is herself unhappily aware.¹¹⁰

So Miriam, on her journey to visit her friends, is worrying about what her hosts will expect from her. These positive moments are counteracted by what appears to be a backwards movement in her relationship with Michael. She is aware of this:

The agony within her must mean that somewhere behind the mere statements, if she could but get through and discover it, there must be a revelation that would set the world going again; bring back the vanquished sunlight. Meanwhile life must pause, humanity must stay hushed and waiting while she thought.

(III.205)

It is possible that the close proximity of someone in her life has triggered depression. The passage above certainly implies this as she describes the 'vanquished sunlight' and how 'life must pause.' However, the next passage also suggests that an invasion of her space could be the cause: while still on the train, 'a grey-shod foot appeared on her small empty patch of floor. With the fever of pain that flooded her she realized that she could go neither forward nor back' (III.205). It is the foot that physically invades her space at this moment but it would seem to symbolise the difficulties of her relationship with Michael as a whole. Miriam's troubled mind could be focusing on the kiss because when she meets Michael again later she says, 'For pity's sake don't touch me' (III.210). Bronfen suggests that 'Shatov's request for

¹¹⁰ Mepham, p.460.

forgiveness for having had lovers before Miriam creates a gulf between them'.¹¹¹

Michael says, 'Remember I am no more that man. I was in suffering and in ignorance' (III.211). His past and his Jewishness forces Miriam to consider their future: 'what future could they have in unacknowledged disagreement over central truth?' (III.215). Michael says, 'Miriam, let us at once be married' (III.301), but she maintains that 'You *know* we can't; you *know* how separate we are' (III.302). His Jewishness gives Miriam an excuse to break off the relationship, but it is likely that the real reason for her refusal is her struggle with their closeness which seems to affect her more and more. Her ability to end the relationship, though questionable, is evidence of her growing maturity.

The closeness with Michael has helped Miriam to see that she can get along with people, using intellectualism as a stepping stone. Her later relationship with Hypo Wilson is also triggered by her intense desire to be intellectually stimulated. In one successful encounter with Hypo, after reading one of his texts and sharing her comments with him, 'she discovers the same ideas within herself and perceives Hypo as part of her own world'.¹¹² With experience she can access other minds and form real relationships, although, as Parsons points out: 'Miriam Henderson struggles constantly against the demands of work, friendships and relationships, reaching the point of breakdown before she decides that she must detach herself from all of them in order fully to realise her individual autonomy'.¹¹³ Her relationship with Hypo also inevitably breaks down in the end. When walking with him in London, she realises

¹¹¹ Bronfen, p. 42.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹³ Parsons, p. 86.

that 'Hypo's presence alters her experience of space, for London competes with Hypo, above all since his semantic encoding of the city cannot be reconciled with Miriam's own'.¹¹⁴

The experience she gains from her relationship with Shatov is invaluable. Mansfield and Woolf both criticise Richardson's obsession with 'bits, fragments, flashing glimpses, half-scenes and whole scenes, all of them quite distinct and separate, and all of them of equal importance'.¹¹⁵ They worry that 'there is no plot, no beginning, no end'.¹¹⁶ Yet it is possible to see a clear line in Miriam's relationship with Shatov. It develops from their first uneasy connection through a long period of understanding and communication until it reaches its unsatisfactory conclusion. There is much digression along the way, and darting of the dragonfly: 'Away it darts, glancing over the deep pool until another floating flower or golden bud or tangle of shadowy weeds attracts it, and again it is still curious, hovering over'.¹¹⁷ A typical example of this is in 'Deadlock' in the middle of Miriam's courtship with Shatov. The reader is startled by a completely new thought which is unrelated to anything that went before: 'It's not altogether personal [...] Until it is understood and admitted, there is a darkness everywhere' (III. 214). She is annoyed by a remark Shatov made to a woman who collided with her. We are not told what he actually said, but Miriam's reaction is extreme: 'She would go now onward and onward till she could get away over the edge of the world. There was nothing else to do' (III 214). She then

¹¹⁴ Bronfen, p. 87.

¹¹⁵ Mansfield, 'Three Women Novelists' p. 309.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Mansfield, 'Dragonflies', p. 310.

becomes diverted by the 'long corridor of London' (III. 215) before returning to the conversation with Shatov. Then she is diverted again in a tea shop 'appalled by the presence of a negro' (III. 215) and contemplates a new image of Shatov as an Englishman. She is jumping from thought to thought, digressing, while at the same time analysing her relationships with him. Richardson's 'darting' technique is much in evidence here, demonstrating the connections between human interaction and fast-moving thoughts. Richardson uses this method to probe, to analyse and discover the subtle details of Miriam's friendships.

After breaking up with Michael, Miriam falls further into depression, perhaps because subconsciously she knows she has lost so much: 'was there any one, who suffered quite in this way, felt always and everywhere so utterly different?' (III.315). It is not surprising that she feels like this – her route through life has not taken the same path as that of the rest of her family. In Volume I, Miriam, who had just attended her sister's wedding, saw that 'Harriet and Sarah had rushed out into life. They had changed everything' (I.467). But here, in Volume III, Miriam's life has also moved forward significantly and she has become capable of handling a greater variety of complex relationships. Her long association with Shatov has enabled her to develop many new skills.

Conclusion

Mepham describes Woolf's criticisms of *Pilgrimage* as 'correct and courteous but underneath the surface there is a deeply sceptical reaction'.¹¹⁸ One of the reasons for Woolf's scepticism seems to be that too many necessary things are omitted:

Chapters leading up and the chapters that lead down; [...] the scenes that are passionate and the scenes that are humorous; the elaborate construction of reality, the conception that shapes and surrounds the whole. All these things are cast away, and there is left, denuded, unsheltered, unbegun and unfinished, the consciousness of Miriam Henderson.¹¹⁹

Woolf is suggesting that Richardson has cut out all the essential ingredients of a novel that makes reading an enjoyable experience. She believes a writer's duty is to include passion and humour and evidence of structure. Without these the text fails to connect with its reader. Yet there is much evidence of these supposedly absent ingredients. As I have discussed in previous chapters, many of Miriam's responses to new situations are both passionate and heartfelt, if a little too spontaneous occasionally. Miriam's joy and passion can be seen in her delight in her new bicycle

¹¹⁸ Mepham, p. 451.

¹¹⁹ Woolf, 'The Tunnel' p. 15.

in 'Interim' (1919) book five. She 'flung down Tansley Street telling her news. Her conflict with the June dust and heat of the Euston Road had made her forget it. Back in her own world it leapt at her from every sunlit paving-stone; drawing her on almost at a run' (II.425). The news is running through her mind, making her forget the discomfort of the heat and dust, and she admits that in her own world there is nothing else that she is currently able to think about. She pictures herself riding:

Lifted off the earth, sitting at rest in the moving air, the London air turning into fresh moving air flowing through your head, the green squares and high houses moving, sheering smoothly along, sailing towards you changed, upright, and alive, moving by, speaking, telescoping away behind unforgotten, still visible, staying in your forward-looking eyes, being added to in unbroken movement, a whole, moving silently to the sound of firm white tyres circling on smooth wood, echoing through the endless future to the riding ring of the little bell, ground easily out by firm new cogs.

(II.426)

This very long sentence is written with momentum and excitement. We can feel Miriam's exhilaration as she imagines the movement of the bike. The passage continues with more visual descriptions of her riding on country roads. And it ends with her describing her obsession: 'consuming the evening time by leaving you careless and strong; even with the bad loose hired machine' (II.426). It is clear that cycling has overwhelmed Miriam's consciousness to the exclusion of everything else.

There are also many instances of humour: the way in which she jumps onto a bus and leaves Shatov behind and the episode where she fails to realise she is talking herself out of a job as she debates the unfairness of her work contract. The reader can't help but smile when she makes matters worse by saying to Mr Hancock: "I

loved those flowers and could always have some for my room; but it *was* a frightful nuisance sometimes, and it came into the principle" (III.178). When referring to 'chapters leading up and the chapters leading down'¹²⁰ Woolf seems to be implying that Richardson is not interested in the structure of the novel. Watts apparently agrees when she says: 'The sense of an ending seems to be wholly lacking from Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, a project that was to last all her life and which she refused to bring to a close'.¹²¹ However, she goes on to make sense of this apparent lack of shape: 'yet the novel is importantly an act of cultural memory, [...] and it is shaped by the conditions of its telling'.¹²² So Woolf's criticism may be partially true, but the wandering nature of the text is nevertheless valid, almost as an 'act of memory' and it is linked with Dorothy Richardson's desire to present the consciousness as an end in itself.¹²³

As quoted earlier in my study, Woolf's review recognises that there is a 'source beneath the surface, the very oyster within the shell', or as she also puts it, the 'sensitive lump of matter'.¹²⁴ She acknowledges the depth within the text, the gem within the novel, and yet questions whether this sensitivity is sufficient reward for all the reader's effort. She considers the sensitive lump to be 'half-transparent and half opaque'.¹²⁵ While this could be the case, I have suggested that it very much depends on how the reader views the narrative. Miriam's heightened sensitivity allows access

¹²⁰ Woolf, 'The Tunnel' p. 15.

¹²¹ Watts, p. 6.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, p.15.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

to and understanding of other aspects in her life – her social abilities and relationships and presumably reflects Richardson’s own ability to see life in a brighter, more immediate way than others. If we consider that it is this very sensitivity that gives the writing its depth then the text becomes far more transparent than Woolf suggests. Through Miriam’s sensitivity, the reader is able to experience the luxurious details that appear so abundantly. Every mundane aspect of life impacts on Miriam’s consciousness even if it is momentary; each detail is a tiny part of the whole mosaic.

Sinclair says, ‘It is as if no other writers have ever used their senses so purely and with so intense a joy in their use’.¹²⁶ Richardson’s descriptions are a network of piercingly vivid fragments that, in order to be understood fully, need to be brought together to create an elaborate mosaic. They form an overall picture but it is possible to miss this if the focus is centred on just one fragment. Sinclair clearly supported Richardson’s method and saw the depth that Richardson intended, explaining that the ‘intensity is the effect of an extreme concentration on the thing seen or felt’.¹²⁷ She goes on to say:

The first hand, intimate and intense reality of the happening is in Miriam’s mind, and by presenting it thus and not otherwise Miss Richardson seizes reality alive. The intense rapidity of the seizure defies you to distinguish between what is objective and what is subjective either in the reality presented or the art that presents.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Sinclair, p. 445.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 446.

The mosaic gradually takes shape, building up through the volumes, making sense of all the details. The text may sometimes appear slow and difficult to access as Richardson throws the reader into unexpected and unexplained situations. This is especially so in Volume II where Miriam grieves after her mother's death. There is no direct information giving a reason for the bleakness and slowness of the text here but it is implied. Richardson demands intelligence from her readers, the intellectual response that Miriam prizes so highly. It is as if Richardson is focusing on a black piece from the mosaic that doesn't quite fit into a blue section, but from a distance it becomes clear that there is a subtle changing of colour in the background. It seeps in and influences the final picture. Sinclair points out:

Nothing happens and yet everything that really matters is happening; you are held breathless with the anticipation of its happening. What really matters is a state of mind, the interest or the ecstasy with which we close with life. It can't be explained.¹²⁹

The details that enrich the narrative of *Pilgrimage* enable Richardson to create a feminine text, representing the female consciousness. This had not been done before and it did not go unnoticed by critics. Despite Woolf's reservations, she accepted and agreed with Miriam's view that 'to write books knowing all about style would be to become like a man' (II.131). Richardson was responding to the social conditions of the time, when most texts were written by men about men.¹³⁰ Sinclair reports the opinion of those who did not understand Richardson's attempt to produce the female consciousness. She said that, 'other novelists say that [...

¹²⁹ Sinclair, p. 446.

¹³⁰ Woolf, 'The Tunnel', p. 15.

Richardson's novels] have no art and no method and no form, and that it is this formlessness that annoys them'.¹³¹ However, she points out that this view depends on a conventional concept of beginning, middle and end and that *Pilgrimage* is a depiction of 'life going on and on'.¹³² Once the reader accepts that 'nothing happens,' it becomes easier to understand and see beneath the surface of the text.¹³³ It is worth noting that the effect is deliberate, constructed and magnified by Richardson's desire to help the reader understand Miriam's consciousness and to portray the intensity of her perceptions.

Appreciation of Richardson's writing must depend on the reader's personal response to the wealth of detail that Richardson pours out, seemingly indiscriminately. At the heart of the text is Miriam's perceiving consciousness, her ability to see everything with heightened sensitivity. This must reflect Richardson's own consciousness to a certain extent, since she would not be able to portray such unusual perception if she had not experienced some of it herself. In his introduction to Thomson's *Dorothy Richardson's 'Pilgrimage'*, Bluemel describes *Pilgrimage* as 'autobiographical fiction', but points out that discrepancies between Richardson's and Miriam's lives 'have weighty implications for our understanding of the novel'.¹³⁴ He highlights the way Richardson attempts to improve on 'masculine' experiments with time 'by recording in much more detail the ability of feminine consciousness to

¹³¹ Sinclair, p. 443.

¹³² Ibid., p. 444.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ George Thomson, *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's 'Pilgrimage'*, (England: ELT Press, 1996), p. xi.

expand and contract real world time'.¹³⁵ As Bergson says: 'If some bold novelist shows us [...] an infinite permeation of a thousand impressions which have ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we know ourselves'.¹³⁶ This is precisely what Richardson achieves. As Glikin tells us, *Pilgrimage* is more than a self-portrait: 'Miriam's memory unearths a set of facts lying in Dorothy Richardson's memory, more detached information about her family background than she ever recorded in explicit autobiographical notes'.¹³⁷ So any readings must inevitably shed light on Richardson's own life and her heightened consciousness. Woolf did have an appreciation of this, but in the end felt that there were too many other elements missing. So the result was not satisfying enough for her or Mansfield, although to Sinclair it 'reached a high pitch of perfection'.¹³⁸ The argument of this thesis is based on my belief that Richardson's writing is compelling and convincing. Each fragment of the mosaic can be read and appreciated in its own right, and there is enormous satisfaction in putting the tiny pieces together to create a full, vivid picture. It may still have puzzling and uneven edges, and sometimes seem to be incomplete, but it is an ever-expanding source of intellectual satisfaction that will never disappoint.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. xi.

¹³⁶ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, (New York: Dover, 2001), p. 133.

¹³⁷ Gloira Glikin, 'Dorothy M. Richardson: The Personal *Pilgrimage*' 78 (1963), 586-600 (p. 599).

¹³⁸ Sinclair, p. 443.

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