

‘FOR I HAVE TRIED TO EXPRESS SOMETHING  
ELUSIVE-TANGIBLE, TANGIBLE-ELUSIVE’:<sup>1</sup>  
ACTUAL AND METAPHORICAL SEASCAPES IN  
DOROTHY RICHARDSON’S *PILGRIMAGE*

*Florence Marie*

The letters Dorothy Richardson wrote to her friends from 1916 onwards, especially those she sent from Cornwall, often refer to the sea or describe a seascape.<sup>2</sup> One of her very first letters to Alan Odle reads:

Just below, a little steep lane goes blazing in the hot sun down to the port, a width of white sand shut in by towering brown cliffs. Far out is the frilled edge of the sea. The cliffs look sleepy in the glare. You can just hear the crying of the sea-gulls & see them hovering like snowflakes above the edge of the tide. The sea is wet & misty - no line where it joins the sky.<sup>3</sup>

Whether she liked the cottages where she and Alan Odle spent a few months in Cornwall each year partly depended on whether they looked onto an expanse of water or not. When they did not, she bemoaned the fact. When they did, she rejoiced:

a small bungalow looking straight out to sea ... an unobstructed view of these immense headlands, one behind the other. The passage of the light, in all the varying weathers & skies, across the expanse is a sufficient occupation.<sup>4</sup>

Occasionally in her letters sea metaphors are used to speak of life or books: ‘Don’t feel you must write. You have not been flung into an unknown sea’;<sup>5</sup> ‘I like your letters so much. Something hard and clear in

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Richardson to Ogden Heath, April 1932, in *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson* ed. G. G. Fromm (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 237.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Fromm, 11, 31, 45, 107, 125.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson to Alan Odle, September 1916, in Fromm, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Richardson to ‘Owen’ Percy Beaumont Wadsworth, in Fromm, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson to Alan Odle, June 1917, in Fromm, 15.

them, sea under shadow of rock'.<sup>6</sup> In her autobiographical sketch 'Journey to Paradise' written in 1928 Richardson goes into raptures about the seashores of her childhood – in particular the sea in South Devon – rounding her memories up in a heartfelt outburst: 'To this day when in London I prepare for a swift rush to the coast I know that I am going, not casually to the sea, but marvellously to the seaside; the seaside that is one place and has no name'.<sup>7</sup> A year before writing 'Journey to Paradise', Richardson's first column for the avant-garde film journal, *Close Up*, was about a movie, the memorable part of which was for her the breaking of waves on the shore: 'a tide, frothing in over the small beach of a sandy cove, and for some time we were allowed to watch the coming and going of those foamy waves, to the sound of a slow waltz, without the disturbance of incident'.<sup>8</sup> The liminal space of the beach, the hypnotic repetition of wave after wave, and their soft rhythmic dance are all recurrent features of seascapes in Richardson's letters and non-fictional writing.

The sea mattered deeply to Richardson and 'Journey to Paradise' makes it clear that it had been dear to her since childhood, but what is the significance of the sea in *Pilgrimage*? At first sight, this might seem an odd question. The place usually associated with Richardson's long novel cycle is London, the setting for seven of its thirteen chapter-volumes. According to Jean Radford, Richardson was the 'first woman novelist in the history of the English novel to give the city this kind of attention'.<sup>9</sup> London is where Miriam gets the opportunity to broaden her horizons and see beyond the limited perspectives of her early sheltered life. Besides, as I have argued elsewhere, the flux and rhythm of this urban space had an influence on the form and style of the work itself.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, other places appear in *Pilgrimage* either because a chapter-volume is entirely or

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<sup>6</sup> Richardson to E. B. C. Jones, Spring 1928, in Fromm, 149.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Bowler, *Literary Impressionism: Vision and Memory in Dorothy Richardson, Ford Madox Ford, H.D. and May Sinclair*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 137.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Florence Marie, 'Une Œuvre de Londres : Pilgrimage de Dorothy Richardson', *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, no. 47 (1 November 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.1947>.

partly set in suburbia (*Backwater*, *March Moonlight*),<sup>11</sup> in a foreign country (Germany in *Pointed Roofs* and Switzerland in *Oberland*), in the countryside (*Honeycomb* and *Dimple Hill*), or because from time to time Miriam goes to the seaside on a day trip or on holiday.

Like London, the sea is a metaphor as well as a place in *Pilgrimage* and, as with London, the sea is often a figure for intense experience. This is no doubt linked to Richardson's biography, but also, as I intend to show, part of the intellectual context in which she lived, the 'cultural matrix': that 'offers axioms for understanding when one reads literary texts and when one seeks meaning in the world'.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century many scientists (Hermann von Helmholtz and John Tyndall among others) were interested in the unseen structures of phenomena such as light, radiation, and sound frequencies, often using comparisons with waves in explanations to a lay audience. As I will show, these scientific writings may have had an influence on Richardson, providing her with a theoretical framework for her ideas about the representation of consciousness, albeit in a poetic and idiosyncratic way. My third contention will be that the representation of the sea in the novel could also be read meta-narratively in so far as it helps the reader understand how Dorothy Richardson who strove to produce 'a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism'<sup>13</sup> anticipated on what Deleuze and Guattari were to define as 'smooth space' as both opposed to and complementary to 'striated space' in *Thousand Plateaus*. To illustrate this opposition, the two philosophers contrast felt fabric versus woven fabric, Riemannian space versus Euclidean space, nomadic forces and sedentary captures, the haptic versus the optic.<sup>14</sup> Elaborating the concept of 'smooth space', they point out that the sea is 'a smooth space par excellence' moved by the wind, the sun, the stars.

*From the actual seascapes to the metaphorical ones*

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<sup>11</sup> Tanya Pikula, 'The Thrills of Modernity: Representations of Suburbia in Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage Series', *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, no. 8 (2016): 27–53.

<sup>12</sup> Allen Thiher, *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Foreword', in *Pilgrimage*, vol. 1 (London: J. M. Dent, 1938), 9. From here on page numbers in text.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 523–51.

Richardson's protagonist, Miriam Henderson, visits the sea at the end of *Backwater*, when she spends a few days with her sister, Eve, in Brighton (I 306-320), and in the last chapters of *Honeycomb* when she returns to the same seaside resort on a fatal visit with her mother (I 478-487). In *The Tunnel* Miriam spends a day on the east coast with her friends Mag and Jan (II 212-216); in *Deadlock* she stays at her sister's boarding-house on the coast east of Sussex (III 89-102); and in *Revolving Lights* she catches sight of the sea each time she is at the Wilsons' in their new house on the south east coast. There are also moments when Miriam remembers the summers she spent at the seaside while still a child (I 315, 320; II 90, 212). These memories often return when she revisits the sea later on in her life. For instance, when in Brighton with her sisters, Miriam recalls the seascapes of her childhood: 'Here and there in the long sunlit hours of the holiday by the Brighton sea, Miriam found the far-away seaside holidays of her childhood' (I 315). She feels a longing to be alone, and is reminded of a similar episode when she was six and went out on her own and felt a 'strange independent joy', 'remembering with a quick pang a long, unpermitted wandering out over the cliff edge beyond Dawlish, the sun shining on pinkish sandy scrub' (I 316). The seaside is a place where past and present overlap.

Sea bathing is mentioned in passing (I 320, 483), but the sensations of the body swimming in the water are never described; the reader is simply told that Miriam feels fresh afterwards: 'bathing from eleven to twelve, sitting afterwards fresh and tingling and drowsy in canopied chairs near the band' (I 320). On the whole the sea is gazed at either from a cliff, the promenade or the beach and listened to rather than enjoyed by Miriam while she is in it. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, lying on the beach – which is what Miriam does with her two friends in *The Tunnel* (II 212-216) – was hardly deemed acceptable.<sup>15</sup> Miriam's falling asleep on the beach (II 212) is a transgression tantamount to the pleasure she takes in roaming the city streets at night, risking being mistaken for a prostitute. No wonder she insists on the fact that she has fallen 'asleep': the adjective is repeated five times in ten lines together with the verb and the noun 'sleep'. Yet she feels elated: 'Asleep! She had slept in broad sunlight, at the foot of the little cliff' (II 212). On the whole then Miriam rarely leaves the shore; the open sea is hardly ever mentioned. On the contrary, the recurrent references to cliffs in these vignettes underline the proximity of the sea and the coast

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<sup>15</sup> Eldon N. Van Liere, 'On the Brink: The Artist and the Sea', in *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition: The Sea* (Dordrecht, n.d.), 269–86, 278.

and the idea of the liminal. The surface of the sea seen from a certain distance prevails. The senses present in evocations of the sea are the sense of sight and the sense of hearing, as is also the case in Miriam's evocations of London.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, London and the sea have a lot in common. Both are intangible, insubstantial, and elusive, perceived impressionistically: 'registering what she saw'; 'the registration of impressions' (I 430, 431). This is one of the reasons why Rebecca Bowler considers that even though 'Richardson never labelled her aesthetic aims as impressionistic ones', what she wrote was a form of literary impressionism.<sup>17</sup> This is also why there are no pictorial descriptions of the seascape as such. One can speak of a pictorial description when there are certain identifiable features: a framing device – a window, a door – creating a closed form, an emphasis on the idea of stasis, with verbs of state or past participles, use of deictics and hints at pictorial techniques.<sup>18</sup> In *Pilgrimage*, the sea is usually registered visually either through the sunlight playing on it or through the colours of the water. Nowhere is space organised as uniform perspectival space. During Miriam's stay in Brighton the reader comes across the following sentences: 'the unruffled glare of the open sea', 'the bright blue and gold ripples seen from the beach', 'the rippling stripes of bright blue and bright gold' (I 312); 'the darkness of the afternoon sea streaked by a path of gold' (I 430); 'the sparkling ripples', 'the gleaming ripples', 'the water just below her eyes, transparent green and blue and mauve, salt-filmed' (I 478); 'the sunlight was dancing on [the waves]' (I 487).

While at her sister's boarding house on the coast east of Sussex for Christmas, Miriam notices 'the breaking of the brilliant seaside light upon the varying house-fronts behind the promenade' (III 89). During her holidays with the Wilsons, she mentions 'the joyful brilliant seaside light' (III 263); 'the sea glinting at your side' (III 338); 'the sea sparkled to itself' (III 345); 'the glinting sea' (III 348); 'the splinters of gold on the rippling blue sea' (III 349); 'the sea glimmered in the remaining light' (III 354); 'the great spread of glistening sea' (III 366). All the verbs of light, precise and varied as they are, only give an overall impression of the seaside scenery, the light on the water and the shading difference in colour as the day goes

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<sup>16</sup> Marie, 'Une Œuvre de Londres'.

<sup>17</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Liliane Louvel, 'La Description Picturale. Pour Une Poétique de l'Iconotexte', *Poétique*, no. 112 (November): 475–90.

by. Although one cannot refer to these passages as pictorial descriptions – they are more like recurrent mentions – one is nevertheless reminded of the effects conveyed by impressionist paintings.<sup>19</sup> I am thinking in particular of Monet's attempt to register insubstantial elements such as air, light, water and atmosphere and more specifically of his Etretat paintings in the 1880s. Interestingly enough, when Miriam tries her hand at painting, she recalls some 'sea-scenes at Weymouth and Brighton' (I 431): 'sunset, the red mass of the sun, the profile of the cliffs, the sky clear or full of heavy cloud, the darkness of the afternoon sea streaked by a path of gold, bird-specks, above the cliffs above the sea.' (I 430) She only ends up producing 'a confused mass of shapeless images' (I 430) and feels frustrated, 'angry and cold': 'The painting was thick and confused, the objects blurred and ran into each other' (I 430) The same type of criticism was levelled at Monet's paintings when they first appeared in exhibition precisely because the traditional ordered pictorial space was being undermined by the 'registration of impressions' (I 431). Besides Miriam herself is aware that 'her thoughts of the great brow and downward sweep of the cliff and the sea coming up to it was not a picture, it was a thing' (I 431).

The sea is both looked at and listened to. When Miriam is in Brighton, in Sussex, or on the south-east coast, the rhythm of the waves is registered aurally through sibilance: 'the sea tumbling heavily far below' (I 306); 'hearing their soft sound' (I 478); 'The cool sound of the waves flumping and washing against the pier', 'the flump-wash of the waves had a cheerful sunlit sound', 'The sound of the waves was muffled. They were beating and washing outside in the sunlight' (I 480); 'There was a soft sound somewhere ... The sea. The tide was up, washing softly ... The sound of it would be clearer when the light was out ... drowsy, lazy, just moving, washing the edge of the beach ... cool, fresh' (I 487); 'the faint familiar roll and flump of the south-coast tide', 'the waves tumbling in over the grey beach' (III 89); 'the sound of the sea' (III 253, 332). While paying attention to the soundscape of the sea Richardson makes use of fricatives, nasals, semi-vowels, cadence, and rhythm so as to recreate it for the reader. As Richardson writes of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the text should not simply be read, it should be listened to, as if it were a poem because it is

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<sup>19</sup> 'The Impressionists dissolved forms. They painted blurry "impressions" of objects modified by changing light and atmospheric conditions': Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 195.

‘a medium whose close texture, like that of poetry, is everywhere significant’. She adds ‘are we to *listen* to *Finnegans Wake*? Not so much to what Joyce says, as to the lovely way he says it, to the rhythms and undulating cadences of the Irish voice, with its capacity to make of every spoken word a sentence with parentheses and to arouse, in almost every English breast, a responsive emotion?’<sup>20</sup> The sibilance created using the letters ‘s’ and ‘f’ is soft and soothing, never hinting at stormy weather. The aural verbs, which are less varied than the verbs of light, are equally untroubling and not so precise: ‘tumble’, ‘wash’, ‘beat’, ‘flump’. The emphasis is once again on a sunny, peaceful sea in constant motion.

In most of these scenes a sense of gladness and well-being prevails. This may relate to Richardson’s memories of her childhood. In ‘Journey to Paradise’ she recalls the ritual of going to a seaside resort with her parents each summer as a little girl and the ‘fine, fine shingles of the Devon beaches, the recurrent sound of them under the tide, the infinitely refreshing hiss and wash as they are lifted and dragged backwards by the waves, and the echoes of this sound in the red caves and tunnels.’<sup>21</sup> Since the emphasis is on the character’s ‘[p]rimary perceptions, grasped unawares before any interpretation’, which are typical of a child’s perception, the evocations of the sea are neither specific nor revealing of the different subtleties of Miriam’s moods.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, her memories of the sea and seaside resorts are steeped in happiness. The visual and aural sensations associated with the sea convey a sense of immediacy typical of childhood. These episodes have the spatial dimension described by Elisabeth Bronfen: Miriam’s ‘childhood self’ resurfaces and ‘[Richardson] seeks to describe the pre-reflexive spatial experience of her heroine, or [...] she is concerned with the description of extreme egocentricity, when the mutual implication of subject and space is utterly unimpeded’.<sup>23</sup> One way of doing this is through the use of the present participle – ‘tumbling’, ‘washing’, ‘flowing’, ‘flumping’ – to represent the instantaneity of what is being described, but also to give the impression that this is taking place out of chronological time, all the more so as this seems to have no purpose. It has been suggested that the present participle might be the

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<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Richardson, ‘Adventure for Readers’, *Life and Letters To-Day* 22, no. 23 (July 1939): 426, 428.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *Journey to Paradise*, 122.

<sup>22</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 66.

English equivalent of the French infinitive, which according to Gilles Deleuze is a characteristic of language meant to express haecceities, that is to say something that exists independently of linear time.<sup>24</sup> The seaside is one of the places where ‘the endlessness of the passing moments’ (III 196) and ‘the extraordinariness of the world being there’ (III 324) strike Miriam most. Her amazement, renewed each time, cannot be stolen from her, because it is intrinsic to her deep sense of self discovered while she was still a child: ‘But her thoughts of the great brow and downward sweep of the cliff and the sea coming up to it was not a picture, it was a thing: her cheeks flared as she searched for a word—it was an experience, perhaps the most important thing in life—far in away from any “glad mask,” a thing belonging to that strange inner life and independent of everybody’ (I 431). The vocabulary used in these sentences is vague, as it always is when Miriam tries to define the unnameable lying beyond the superficial appearances of life. As Mhairi Pooler has argued, images of open spaces such as ‘endless garden’ enable Miriam to bypass linear time and link the meaningful episodes of the past with those in the present.<sup>25</sup> I would add that the seaside is one of the open spaces that recur in the text to ‘stabilise what might otherwise become a directionless swirl of impressions’ as is the case in Miriam’s paintings.<sup>26</sup> The paradigmatic axis of *Pilgrimage* combines with its syntagmatic axis and the metaphorical imagery of the sea becomes even more fruitful.

The sea is a discreet *leitmotiv* in *Pilgrimage* gathering together some of the elements that appeal most to Miriam: the claim of light and colours moving and flowing on a surface, the idea of a form of underlying permanence, and the sense of astonishment so vital to her own sense of self. This could explain why some links are made, somewhat surprisingly at first sight, between the sea and London. On one of the first occasions the city is mentioned in *Pilgrimage*, at a time when Miriam does not live there yet, the unlikely association is made explicit through metaphor and sibilance: ‘And London there, all round; London ... London was a soft, sea-like sound’ (I 413) When Miriam is working for the Corries in

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<sup>24</sup> Mathieu Duplay, ‘Gaddis / Deleuze: Jeu, Coup de Dés, Hasard’, *Deleuze-Chantier, Revue Théorie-Littérature-Enseignement*, no. 19 (2001): 11–27. Haecceities are not so much subjects as singularities that are pre-individual, impersonal and a-subjective.

<sup>25</sup> Mhairi Pooler, *Writing Life: Early Twentieth-Century Autobiographies of the Artist-Hero* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 148.

<sup>26</sup> Pooler, 148.



*Honeycomb*, London elicits from her the same kind of response as wide open spaces – ‘Her blood leaped and sang as it had done driving across the commons’ (I 413) – the same commons that earlier were compared to a sea:

the soft beauty that had retreated to the horizon [...] was spreading back again across the whole expanse and coming towards her [...] But it was big enough to be full of waves and waves of something real, something cool and true and unchanging (I 394).

The connection between London and the sea is both direct and indirect.

Comparisons between London and the sea are repeated on several occasions in chapters that take place in London but with the difference that the metaphorical sea of London – ‘the tide of London life’ (III 233, 447), ‘the currents of her London life’ (III 265) – become that which Miriam plunges into (III 237, 239), immerses herself in, and revels in between trips to the seaside. The sea is always present in London, a metaphor for life. Thus Miriam in *Backwater*, is ‘in the Perne boat, still taking an oar and determined to fling herself into the sea’ (I 329), or ‘in the midst of the tide flowing from the clear window, a soft fresh tide of sunlit colours [...] a sea rising and falling with her breathing’ (I 417). In *The Tunnel*, she longs ‘to stand for a moment the tide in which they lived’ (II 103), or is ‘borne along unwearied upon a tide that flowed out in glistening sunlit waves over the sunlit shores of the world.’ (II 197). In *Interim*, the ‘tide of her own life flowed fresh all about her’ (II 318), and later the ‘tide of café life flowed all around her’ (II 396). In *The Trap*, she is ‘launched in a tide flowing brightly to music. Launched with her own hands still steering the fragile barque ...’ (III 466).

It might be thought that the metaphor of the tide is so hackneyed that it becomes a cliché the reader hardly pays any attention to, but Richardson does not just use the word figuratively, but also literally in order to reawaken its semantic power. Language is made of forgotten metaphors and their power can be reactivated so that what is written is seen and felt as well as understood. Richardson’s idiosyncratic use of punctuation is one way she compels the reader to see and feel. The sea imagery of the chapter-volumes set in London is attentive not only to the syntagmatic axis in the narrative, but also to the paradigmatic axis that links the metaphors, making light of the strictly chronological order and reuniting what is separated by several pages and, in some cases, hundreds of pages in the

text. Sea images function like *la petite phrase*, the little musical phrase in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, or what E. M. Forster calls 'rhythm':

the function of rhythm in fiction [is] not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope.<sup>27</sup>

In *Pilgrimage*, the rhythm of the sea helps the reader hear and feel the rhythm of London. If, in one sense, the sea metaphor is unoriginal, it resonated at the time because of the relationship between Richardson's conception of consciousness and its intellectual context.

*From cultural matrix to Richardson's conception of consciousness*

The volumes from *The Tunnel* to *The Trap* are set in London and the periods concerned cover ten years (from 1896 to 1905). Though the name of John Tyndall (1820-1893) is mentioned only once, when Miriam admits that she has never read him and only knows him by name (II 284), his ideas had been in the air since the 1860s, when he started popularising the theories of Hermann von Helmholtz. According to George H. Thomson, Miriam's ideas about the human eye in *Interim* (II 408) echo those of Helmholtz.<sup>28</sup> Tyndall developed theories about the wave-like structure of light, sound, and heat from his observations of water, theories which he popularised through public lectures and books such as, *Heat* (1863), *Sound* (1867), and *Light* (1873). In a lecture given in the United States, he explained:

In the earliest writings of the ancients we find the notion that sound is conveyed by the air. Aristotle gives expression to this notion, and the great architect Vitruvius compares the waves of sound to waves of water. But the real mechanism of wave-motion was hidden from the ancients, and indeed was not made clear until the time of Newton. The central difficulty of the subject was, to distinguish between the motion of the wave itself, and the motion of the particles which at any moment constitute the wave. Stand upon the seashore and observe the advancing rollers before they are distorted by the friction of the bottom. Every wave has a back and a front, and, if you clearly seize the image of the moving wave,

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<sup>27</sup> E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 2005), 148.

<sup>28</sup> George H. Thomson, *Notes on Pilgrimage: Dorothy Richardson Annotated* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1999), 129.

you will see that every particle of water along the front of the wave is in the act of rising, while every particle along its back is in the act of sinking. The particles in front reach in succession the crest of the wave, and as soon as the crest is past they begin to fall. They then reach the furrow or *sinus* of the wave, and can sink no farther. Immediately afterwards they become the front of the succeeding wave, rise again until they reach the crest, and then sink as before. Thus, while the waves pass onwards horizontally, the individual particles are simply lifted up and down vertically. Observe a sea-fowl, or, if you are a swimmer, abandon yourself to the action of the waves; you are not carried forward, but simply rocked up and down. The propagation of a wave is the propagation of a *form*, and not the transference of the substance which constitutes the wave. The *length* of the wave is the distance from crest to crest, while the distance through which the individual particles oscillate is called the *amplitude* of the oscillation. You will notice that in this description the particles of water are made to vibrate *across* the line of propagation.<sup>29</sup>

On the several occasions Miriam goes with Mr Hancock to the Royal Institution in the late 1890s, the lectures they attend are about 'light, heat, electricity, soundwaves' or 'the waves of light' (II 100, 106), which may be a tribute to Tyndall's influence at the time: he had been a member of the Royal Institution from 1853 to 1886 and had delivered 307 afternoon lectures. Thus Richardson's use of the sea-metaphor can be partly explained by the cultural matrix in which she lived. At the time writers and scientists did not 'live in two distinct cultures' and scientific ideas, present in magazines, were accessible to the lay reader.<sup>30</sup> As Gillian Beer explains, Tyndall conveyed 'to the general readership information about current scientific world' through metaphors that 'could be symbolically reapplied'.<sup>31</sup> The success of Tyndall's books and the articles he published in magazines meant that:

The idea of the universe as waves, of the parallels between light, heat, and sound, and the single process expressed through them, enters late nineteenth-century writing with a fresh urgency. Flux, the vortex,

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<sup>29</sup> John Tyndall, *Six Lectures on Light Delivered in the United States in 1872-1873* (London: Longmans, Green, 1873), 51–52.

<sup>30</sup> Thiher, *Fiction Refracts Science*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Gillian Beer, *Open Field: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 311–12.

the ocean, the aura, the ‘sea of forces flowing and rushing together’, as Nietzsche called it, so important in modernism, are all elements of a repertoire shifting across fields.<sup>32</sup>

Virginia Woolf’s work – in particular *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931) – is often thought to have been influenced by Tyndall’s theories and the idea of ‘the universalising of wave theory (as thermodynamics continued to be called) to account for all phenomena’.<sup>33</sup> We probably could say the same for Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*. But that is not the whole story.

In the last volumes/chapters of *Pilgrimage* Miriam opts for Being over Becoming, but throughout the text she associates death in life with being stuck and life with what moves and changes. In *Deadlock*, for example, she feels that ‘Life pinned her motionless, in pain’ (III 205); later life is ‘a motionless absurdity’. At the end of *The Trap*, she resolves:

I must create my life. Life is creation. Self and circumstances the raw material. But so many lives I can’t create. And in going off to create my own I must leave behind uncreated lives. Lives set in motionless circumstances’ (III 508).

Stability (Being) should not be exclusive of change. It is precisely because Miriam has a centre, something stable in her heart of hearts, that she can be on the move and ‘sail forth and see people’: ‘Wanting people to come to me, hear the tinkle of my tea-things, sink into the world a bright little afternoon-tea scenes makes on Sundays for people who have no centre’ (III 439). One should not immerse oneself anywhere in particular so as not to sink and die; one should keep on coming and retreating so as to preserve one’s own centre. Thus, Mhairi Pooler speaks of ‘the seemingly contradictory expression of stability and movement that informs [Miriam’s] notion of consciousness’.<sup>34</sup> Any ‘sheltered life’ and any taking of sides are tantamount to motionlessness, absurdity and death. This fear of what is fixed may well have been triggered by the second law of thermodynamics, summarised by Beer as ‘when equilibrium [is] reached life must cease’.<sup>35</sup> Tyndall condensed the idea when he wrote ‘as soon as

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<sup>32</sup> Beer, 313.

<sup>33</sup> Beer, 298.

<sup>34</sup> Pooler, *Writing Life*, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Beer, *Open Field*, 300.

equilibrium, in regard to heat, has been established we shall have, as [William] Thomson has pointed out, not peace, but death. Life is the product and accompaniment of change'.<sup>36</sup> Miriam does not want any fixed and rigid pattern, considered as lethal; she yearns for mobile and multidimensional stability. The sea could well be a spatial equivalent of what she is striving after (in the same way as London is, which is why the comparison between the two is valid). Indeed, going nowhere in particular, that is to say bypassing linear movement and time, the sea – as well as the commons (I 394) and London – represents stability and change at the same time: 'waves of something real, something cool and true and unchanging' (I 394). The sea is the opposite of motionlessness; it is mutable and protean but never unidirectional. The rhythm of the waves is a pure form of continuous change, advancing and retreating only to dissolve. At the same time, however, waves represent permanence, the sea from which the waves and the tides emerge is always there: 'Water is the type of our destiny because it metamorphoses without ceasing the substance of being'.<sup>37</sup>

We know that in *Pilgrimage* the bee memory set in a garden is synonymous with Miriam's discovery of her sense of self out of the time and substance of her being:

[...] the moment of standing, alone, in bright sunlight on a narrow gravel path in the garden at Babington between two banks of flowers, the flowers level with her face and large bees swinging slowly to and fro before her face from bank to bank, many sweet smells coming from the flowers and amongst them a strange pleasant smell like burnt paper. . . . It was the same moment. She saw it now in just the same way; not remembering going into the garden or any end to being in the bright sun between the blazing flowers, the two banks linked by the slowly swinging bees, nothing else in the world, no house behind the little path, no garden beyond it. (II 212)

It is an 'epiphanic moment'. As Carol Watts puts it, 'The child's consciousness discovers itself in a rapturous and animistic compact with

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<sup>36</sup> John Tyndall, *Hours of Exercise in the Alps* (London: Longmans, Green, 1871), 291.

<sup>37</sup> Heather Asals, 'The Voices of Silence and Underwater Experience', in *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition: The Sea: From Elemental Stirrings to Symbolic Inspiration, Language, and Life-Significance in Literary Interpretation and Theory*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1985), 305.

the natural world'.<sup>38</sup> This moment out of time, however, is not restricted to the garden Miriam has also had such epiphanies by 'the seas and cliffs of her childhood':

She could see and feel them now, as long as no one spoke and the first part of the morning remained far away. She closed her eyes and drifted drowsily back to the moment of being awakened by the sudden cry. In the instant before her mind had slid back, and she had listened to the muffled footsteps thudding along the turf of the low cliff above her head, waiting angrily and anxiously for further disturbance, she had been perfectly alive, seeing; perfect things all round her, no beginning or ending . . . there had been moments like that, years ago, in gardens, by seas and cliffs. Her mind wandered back amongst these; calling up each one with perfect freshness. They were all the same. In each one she had felt exactly the same; outside life, untouched by anything, free. She had thought they belonged to the past, to childhood and youth. In childhood she had thought each time that the world had just begun and would always be like that; later on, she now remembered, she had always thought when such a moment came that it would be the last and clung to it with wide desperate staring eyes until tears came and she had turned away from some great open scene with a strong conscious body flooded suddenly by a strong warm tide to the sad dark world to live for the rest of her time upon a memory. But the moment she had just lived was the same, it was exactly the *same* as the first one she could remember [...] (II 212-13)

The metaphor of the sea in *Pilgrimage* unites past and present, change and permanence, motionlessness and stability, the notion of one's self, and the possibility of sailing forth with the certainty that the centre will not be damaged in an irretrievable way, that is without the fear of losing oneself in the process.

Indeed the image of the waves used at the time by von Helmholtz and Tyndall to explain light, sound and heat may also have seduced Dorothy Richardson because of the emphasis the two physicists put on the individuality of each wave. The waves all come from the same sea, but each of them has its independent course: 'The laws of thermodynamics, in particular, set a puzzle that moved in contrary directions and engaged those outside the scientific community, suggesting at once an energetic

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<sup>38</sup> Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), 21.

rush towards inertia and a teased-out system of interpenetrating waves that produced systems of extraordinary complexity without losing the individual impulse'.<sup>39</sup> Even though Richardson was interested at times in a form of connectedness with a distance between the waves, in her work the accent does not fall on the unity of all things (as it tends to do in Woolf's *The Waves*) but on the quality each wave has to be unique and 'independent of everybody' (III 431) and to escape on its own: 'Each one moves singly. To join the movements of others is harmful until you have moved yourself. Movement is with the whole of you' (III 475). Thus the polysemous image of the wave(s) can also encapsulate Richardson's conception of one's self: each individual self is like a wave on the surface of the deep blue sea, independent and untouched, while at the same time worked upon by something which comes from below the surface.

For if the sea is a surface of waves and lights it is also the deep, that which is hidden and unknown, invisible and unheard: 'The joy of making statements not drawn from things heard or read but plumbed directly from the unconscious accumulations of her own experience' (III 255). This traditional association was not new at the time and it was used by the scientists to refer to 'what lies beyond the reach of our unaided senses' (air waves, acoustics, radiation or 'psychological realism').<sup>40</sup> This can be seen as a potent metaphor for what Miriam is striving for when in her confrontations with Michael Shatov she insists on seeing beyond the surface, probing into 'the "something" that lies beneath life's façades'.<sup>41</sup>

With these ideas in mind, one can better understand Richardson's dislike of the phrase 'stream of consciousness.' As summed up by D. Gillespie, '[she] objects to the metaphor because it does not suggest unity, centrality, stability, and depth sufficiently well, [and] offers "a pool, a sea, and ocean," [...] as alternatives'.<sup>42</sup> Richardson was not the only one who played on the analogy between the activity of the mind and the image of the sea. Scientists before her had done the same and others would continue to do so.<sup>43</sup> The metaphor of the sea is apt because unlike that of the 'stream' it does not convey any sense of tendency or closure, an idea Richardson

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<sup>39</sup> Beer, *Open Field*, 257.

<sup>40</sup> Beer, 296.

<sup>41</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Diane Gillespie, 'May Sinclair and the Stream of Consciousness: Metaphors and Metaphysics', *English Literature in Transition* 21, no. 2 (1978): 137.

<sup>43</sup> Beer, *Open Field*, 313; Thiher, *Fiction Refracts Science*, 227.

insisted on in her review of *Finnegans Wake*: ‘most narrative that seek to record the experience of consciousness will contain their origins and finales in one vast, perpetual middle. If, like *Pilgrimage*, those narratives adopt the stream-of-consciousness form, endings will always be a problem, because consciousness can never separate itself from the present and thus can never assume a position outside of the “now” of the narration’.<sup>44</sup> Miriam’s consciousness is expansive and in flux, always changing and yet repetitive, continually becoming, forming and re-forming, flickering and fluttering, sometimes engrossed in the registration of alluring impressions and yet deep; it is a process without an end and yet with a sense of shapeless stability. The sea metaphor condenses so many contrary elements that it can help the reader to grasp Richardson’s definition of consciousness but also what was at stake when he/she embarks upon reading *Pilgrimage*.

#### *Pilgrimage as a seascape*

Rebecca Bowler has shown how appropriate and at times problematic the metaphor of the ‘patchwork’ (‘a bright moving patchwork’ [III 323]) can be when Richardson outlines her ‘aesthetic model’.<sup>45</sup> I contend that Richardson uses the sea metaphor for the same end.<sup>46</sup> Recording ‘the experience of consciousness’ was at the very core of her work and as we have seen the sea metaphor can account for Richardson’s conception of consciousness; thus it is also logical that it should be used for the art of writing.

While explaining the art of translation to Michael Shatov, Miriam speaks of one of Maeterlinck’s books:

she had learned most of her French by reading again and again for the sake of the long, even rhythm of its sentences, one book; that this was the only honest way to acquire a language. It was like a sea, each sentence a wave rolling in till the *light* shone through its *glistening* crest, dropping to give way to the next oncoming wave, the meaning gathering; accumulating, coming nearer with each rising falling rhythm; each chapter a renewed tide, monotonously repeating

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<sup>44</sup> Richardson, ‘Adventure for Readers’.

<sup>45</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 126–27.

<sup>46</sup> Among the other examples of smooth space given by Deleuze and Guattari is ‘patchwork’, a ‘piece-by-piece construction’ in all directions. *Thousand Plateaus*, 525.



throughout the book in every tone of *light* and *shade* the same burden,  
the secret of everything in the world (III 128)

All the elements we have noticed so far while focusing on the presence of the sea are to be found in this passage: the evocation of the light and the water, the repetition of the present participle and the emphasis put on the idea of rhythm, the idea of simultaneity and the resistance to closure. Bowler comments that what matters for Miriam is that Maeterlinck ‘communicates his meaning about the light and flowing tide of the inner life by making his prose imitate it’.<sup>47</sup> But Miriam’s comment might not be simply about Maeterlinck’s book. It could be read as a meta-textual comment on *Pilgrimage* itself, the structure of which is paradoxically based as it is on Miriam’s ‘shapeless outpourings’ (III 255).

Many critics have commented on *Pilgrimage*’s apparent lack of structure. Carol Watts writes that Richardson’s method appears ‘to lack both form and design. Experience is ‘registered, but not, as the critics pointed out, synthesized’. As Woolf complained Richardson’s work, ‘lacked a fundamental unity’.<sup>48</sup> Jo Winning describes the modernist text as ‘fragmented, plural, resisting closure’.<sup>49</sup> For Elisabeth Bronfen, ‘most of the episodes may be read separately from each other’,<sup>50</sup> a characteristic that Richardson valued, as is made clear in her essays on modernist reading and writing, ‘Adventure for Readers’ and ‘Novels’. In ‘Adventure for Readers’, she writes of *Finnegans Wake*: ‘any single strip may be divorced from its fellows without losing everything of its power and its meaning’.<sup>51</sup> At first sight *Pilgrimage* does lack structure, but not if one considers that its model is the sea itself, a sea that challenges Euclidean geometrics and hard physics.<sup>52</sup> If one considers that each volume/chapter is like a tide, one no longer expects it to go anywhere in particular in the same way as a tide does not go anywhere. Tides do follow each other chronologically speaking, but they have no direction so that there is no ‘sense of ending’ when the tide is over. What matters is the tide itself, not where it comes from or where it goes, if it goes anywhere, but the moment of the tide

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<sup>47</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> Watts, *Dorothy Richardson*, 5, 7, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>50</sup> Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> Richardson, ‘Adventure for Readers’, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Thiher, *Fiction Refracts Science*, 38.

happening. Indeed, even though the idea of linear time is present in the sentence about Maeterlinck's work ('the next oncoming wave'), it is instantly negated by the presence of present participles that point to simultaneity and succession at the same time. Besides the tides that are the chapter-volumes remain disconnected and un-cemented, just like 'a bright moving patchwork' (III 323): each tide is important in itself not simply as a necessary step towards another one and each tide preserves 'the real moment' of Miriam's life (III 255). There may be no homogeneity between the different, juxtaposed patches, but there are rhythmic repetitions on the paradigmatic axis. Not everything is sacrificed for the benefit of 'sharp expressiveness';<sup>53</sup> and a certain form of fluidity is preserved ('this constant making and re-making'<sup>54</sup>) as the activity can be never ending and is seen as an ongoing process ('a moving patchwork') rather than a finished result.

Repetition is intrinsic to the metaphor of the tide, but not repetition without difference. The rhythm of the waves is never the same, as Forster puts it, a rhythm is not a pattern. Emile Benveniste also rejects a general misunderstanding of rhythm, stressing that rhythm should not be thought of as a regular alternation of elements in a binary system, but as a movement susceptible to change at any time and in any direction, which welcomes what is different and new. In discourse, this means a 'configuration of the speaking subject'.<sup>55</sup> Thus readers must be on the alert to follow the rhythm of each sentence/wave and each tide/volume/chapter. To do so they should plunge into the ocean that *Pilgrimage* is, immerse themselves in the sea of words, and sometimes 'abandon [themselves] to the action of the waves'<sup>56</sup> so as to let themselves be rocked hither and thither by the rhythm of each wave and each tide. But the very nature of the text, like the rhythm of the sea, which is forever different, also implies that the reader is not a passive swimmer but an exertive one. He or she is asked 'to plunge, provisionally, here and there; enter the text and look innocently about'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> 'With every finished vignette there came a sense of ending. Sacrificed to its sharp expressiveness were the real moments of these people's lives [...]' (III 225)

<sup>54</sup> Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 127.

<sup>55</sup> Emile Benveniste, 'La Notion de "Rythme" Dans Son Expression Linguistique', in *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 327–35.

<sup>56</sup> Tyndall, *Six Lectures on Light Delivered in the United States in 1872-1873*, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Richardson, 'Adventure for Readers'.

Interestingly enough the verb ‘plunge’ is also used by one of *Pilgrimage’s* first readers. In his introduction to *Pointed Roofs*, J.B. Beresford writes:

In the past, we have attempted a separation of two main categories in fiction, and in most cases the description of realist or romantic has been applicable enough. Neither can be applied in their ordinary usage to Miss Richardson. The romantic floats on the surface of his imaginings, observing life from an intellectual distance through glasses specially adapted to his own idiosyncrasies of taste. The realist wades waist deep into the flood of humanity, and goes his way peering and choosing, expressing himself in the material of his choice and not in any distortion of its form. Miss Richardson is, I think, the first novelist who has taken the final plunge; who has neither floated nor waded, but gone head under and become a very part of the human element she has described.<sup>58</sup>

Here we might read ‘plunge’ as becoming an active reader who ‘co-construct[s] narrative meaning’ from a text whose narrative waters are polluted: ‘*Pilgrimage* – whether through abrupt shifts in tense and point-of-view, innovative use of punctuation, or incorporation of blank space – seeks to pollute, rather than purify, its narrative waters.’<sup>59</sup>

Taking all these elements into account, we can see that, while trying to ‘produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism’,<sup>60</sup> Richardson did her utmost to undermine the ‘striated space’ of masculine realism she equated with lethal fixity and return it to the ‘smooth space’ whose model ‘par excellence’ is the sea. In *Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari oppose ‘striated space’ to ‘smooth space’: ‘Smooth space is filled by events and haecceities. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties’; ‘it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation’ and its ‘changes in direction may be due to the nature of the journey itself’.<sup>61</sup> Smooth space is characterized by the continuous variation and formlessness of free action. Writing a text which was like a sea or an ocean was for Dorothy Richardson a way of giving her reader a sense of freedom by avoiding the traps and the patterns of realistic

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<sup>58</sup> J. D. Beresford, ‘Introduction’, in *Pointed Roofs* (London: Duckworth, 1915), vii.

<sup>59</sup> Scott McCracken and Elizabeth Pritchett, ‘Plato’s Tank: Aestheticism, Dorothy Richardson, and the Idea of Democracy’, *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, no. 6 (2013-2014): 98.

<sup>60</sup> Richardson, ‘Foreword’, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 524–28.

fiction; she did not represent the images of life but something akin to the intensities of the moments, 'something elusive-tangible, tangible-elusive', and the creative potential at the heart of life, that is to say precisely what seascapes had given her in the first place.