

## EDITORIAL

*Scott McCracken*

In this year of global pandemic, the journal is a little shorter than usual. Covid-19 has affected all of us, but in very different ways. For some, the best psychological defence has been to withdraw into a world of books and writing. For others, confinement brought extra burdens, childcare, home-schooling, caring for sick friends and relatives and little time for anything else. For those on the front line, the disease has been a whirlwind that has upended normal life. A younger Richardson would have been closer to the epicentre of things in London, exposed to infection at a time when few could afford to stop working. And it is easy to imagine Richardson in her middle and later years hunkering down in Cornwall, fearful of Alan Odle's vulnerability, battling with an inefficient stove in a primitive kitchen.

Richardson did live through a pandemic. At the time of the 1918 influenza, known familiarly as the 'Spanish flu', she was already forty-five, therefore not as much at risk from a strain that threatened the very young most. But she was not unaffected. As the second wave swept through London, her close friends, Benjamin and Veronica Grad became dangerously ill. On 24 October 1918, Richardson wrote asking for help from the novelist Hugh Walpole, then working for the Ministry of Information.

My poor little Grads are in dreadful trouble again. Influenza found them, already very hard pressed & in debt, laid them low, with two Nurses & a daily doctor. Veronica nearly died & has come out temporarily a helpless invalid, almost unable to stand or walk, & the eternal doctor still in attendance. He [Benjamin Grad] is almost out of his mind with worry & sleeplessness & the expectation of the dissolution of his department.

The epidemic lasted until the spring of 1920. Richardson herself may have succumbed in the spring of 1919. On 12 March, she wrote to Edward Garnett:

I should like very much indeed to come down to Chelsea & discuss the weather. But I am just struggling feebly out of the grip of a

lingering flu – & my work, & housework & shopping & catering use me up.

That she refers to ‘my work’ suggests that she was able to continue writing, despite her other tasks. Her rate of productivity in these years was astounding, publishing five chapter-volumes of *Pilgrimage* in four years. Two days later, she felt well enough to invite Garnett to tea.

Only a very few of Richardson’s letters survive from this period, so we don’t know what other impacts the epidemic had on her life; but, as Peter Fifield shows in his recent book, *Modernism and Physical Illness: Sick Books*, reviewed in this issue, disease is an everyday aspect of life in *Pilgrimage*, analysed with the same attention Richardson devotes to all aspects of the quotidian. The question of care pervades Miriam’s life, as she tries to free herself from the expectations that weighed on young women at the turn of the century. As Fifield argues, the problem of what an equitable distribution of care, across class and across gender, would look like is one of the many questions *Pilgrimage* poses for its readers. As we observe the inequities Covid-19 has brought to light and then intensified, those questions persist. The dense phenomenology Richardson achieves in her ‘investigation of reality’ still counts as one of the great literary experiments of the twentieth century.

It is therefore gratifying that the first volume of the Oxford Edition of the works of Dorothy Richardson was published in 2020. As the acknowledgements in the volume show, the edition builds on decades of research and has been a team effort by a group of established scholars and newer researchers who have come to maturity while working on the project. Further volumes of Richardson’s letters and *Pilgrimage* will appear in the next five years. In the meantime, it is worth noting the decision of the editors to return, not to the 1938 collected editions, but to the first edition of each chapter-volume. These are often more experimental in their use of punctuation and structure than the 1938 edition and preserve *Pilgrimage* as an evolving project, in which Richardson is consistent in her inconsistency, trying out new techniques at each stage of the process. Earlier critics have mistaken this inconsistency as a form of inattention or even sloppiness, but recently discovered archival material shows that Richardson deliberately varied her use of punctuation even in the same chapter-volume. *Interim* is the prime example. It is not that the 1938 edition is in any way conventional. It is just that it represents a different kind of experiment. In using the first editions as copy texts, the editors have

chosen to preserve each chapter-volume at its first moment of publication and reception but are also paradoxically producing an entirely new edition of *Pilgrimage*, one never before published in a collected form.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, as this issue attests, Richardson scholarship has not stopped. In a compelling article, Annika J. Lindskog looks afresh at the representation of consciousness in *Pilgrimage*, a topic that has long preoccupied Richardson criticism and has seen renewed interest since the centenary in 2018 of May Sinclair's essay, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', where she first described *Pilgrimage* as an example of 'stream of consciousness'.<sup>2</sup> While Sinclair's phrase caught the public imagination, Richardson herself detested the metaphor and Lindskog suggests that when reading *Pilgrimage* it is best to change the terms of the debate and use two of Richardson's own concepts: 'contemplated reality' and 'memory proper'. These better explain *Pilgrimage*'s unconventional shifts in narration, from third to first person, and between different temporalities. Lindskog compares Richardson's 'memory proper' to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*. Where in Proust memory is involuntary, in *Pilgrimage* memory is active: 'It is not released by physical objects but is reached through contemplation of an expanding self'. Her article advances both our understanding of Richardson's representation of consciousness and the relationship between two of the great exponents of the long modernist novel.

Florence Marie's much-needed article directs our attention to some of Richardson's most neglected writings, her early 'sketches' or 'middles', published in the *Saturday Review* between 1908 and 1914. These have often been understood as apprentice or practice pieces, examples of Richardson coming to writing rather than worthy of critical interest in their own right. Marie argues that not only has their experimentalism been overlooked, the genre of the sketch itself deserves a closer critical examination. Richardson's use of second person narration in plotless depictions marks a radical innovation in prose writing. Though the sketches might at first appear to be rough outlines, Marie's close readings show their use of imagery and rhetorical devices make them closer to prose poems. There

---

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Dorothy Richardson, Volume IV: Pilgrimage 1 & 2: Pointed Roofs and Backwater*, ed. Scott McCracken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', *Egoist* 5, no. 4 (April 1918): 57–59.

is, without doubt, a relationship between the sketches and *Pilgrimage*; elements from some of the sketches make their way into the later chapter-volumes, yet Marie suggests they are not just a preparation for the longer work. Their representation of time and space alone invites further consideration. As Marie writes:

space in them is not conceived as an arbitrary backdrop but as a sentient world the narrative voice is part of, immersed in, and affected by to the point that, at times, she ceases to be a subject to become an event.

The article makes a persuasive case for Richardson criticism to give the sketches themselves more time and space.

This issue rounds off with a review of three recent monographs in which Richardson's work plays a significant role. The review speaks for itself, but one aspect of the books is worthy of an immodest note here. All of them make use of this journal, citing a wide selection of the articles published over the last thirteen years. For this editor at least, it is both gratifying and encouraging to see the work of Richardson scholars bearing fruit and to know that the excellent research published in these pages is becoming part of a wider recognition of Dorothy Richardson's significance.