

'SHE HOVERED BETWEEN TWO WORLDS':
THE DISSOCIATED WOMAN IN
DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S SHORT FICTION

Daisy Flynn

In 1918, May Sinclair described Richardson's writing using the phrase 'stream of consciousness'.¹ This quote has clung to Richardson's work, often being cited to support the argument that her prose imitates a stereotypically 'feminine', uninterrupted flow of thought. This misconception is present in George Johnson's 1990 thesis 'The Early Influence of Second Wave Psychology on British Prose Fiction', in which he chooses not to focus on Dorothy Richardson because:

the 'new' psychology influenced only one main aspect of [her] writing. [...] Although her exposure to dynamic psychology parallels May Sinclair's in many ways, the psychological influence appears primarily in her development of a stream of consciousness technique. Her use of the subject matter of psychology is not as varied as Sinclair's or Beresford's and she is, therefore, not as much of a thematic innovator as they were.²

In contrast, this article argues that Richardson's writing, particularly her often-overlooked short fiction, shows a deep and complex engagement with second wave psychology. Richardson disputed the 'stream of consciousness' label May Sinclair had branded her with:

it's not a stream, it's a pool, a sea, an ocean. It has depth in greater depth and when you think you've reached the bottom there is nothing there, and when you give yourself up to one current you are suddenly possessed by another.³

¹ May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', *The Egoist* 5, no. 4 (April 1918): 58.

² George M. Johnson, 'The Early Influence of Second Wave Psychology on British Prose Fiction' (PhD, McMaster University, 1990), 17.

³ Vincent Brome, 'A Last Meeting with Dorothy Richardson', *The London Magazine*, June 1959, 29.

Richardson's image of the choppy, changing currents of consciousness resists the notion of one fixed identity or harmonious internal voice. Her short stories are scattered with metaphors of surface and depth that hint at an expansive many-layered model of consciousness; in 'Ordeal', for instance, the protagonist is suddenly brought back 'to the present surface of life, away from the state of being into which she had just plunged'.⁴ Sinclair's choice of the singular 'stream' to describe Richardson's style seems even stranger when we consider that she had also written, in 1917, about the multi-directional complexity of consciousness:

though our selfhood would seem to remain inviolable, our individuality holds its own precariously, at times, and with difficulty [...]. The facts of multiple personality, telepathy and suggestion, the higher as well as the lower forms of dream-consciousness, indicated that our psychic life is not a water-tight compartment, but has porous walls, and is continually threatened with leakage and the flooding in of many streams.⁵

This notion of 'individuality' as precarious is also an urgent concern in Richardson's writing. Her short stories expose the incongruence between the ill-fitting blueprints of female subjectivity offered to women in the early twentieth century, and their authentic selves. Her depiction of consciousness more closely echoes Sinclair's concept of a selfhood 'continually threatened with leakage and the flooding in of many streams' than the image of a singular stream.

Take, for instance, the following paragraph from 'Tryst', in which the dizzying syntax suggests a mind moving in many different directions at once:

⁴ Dorothy Richardson, 'Ordeal', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 73. Claire Drewery also comments on the trope of surface versus depth in Richardson's short fiction: 'throughout Richardson's fiction her endeavours to communicate, through intelligible language, moments of transcendent insight as well as the daily fluxes, nuances, thoughts and perceptions of the inner life reveal a continual dialectical tension between surface impressions and a deeper, spiritual "reality": "The Failure of This Now so Independently Assertive Reality": Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic in Dorothy Richardson's Short Fiction', *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 4 (2011): 112.

⁵ May Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 375.

after all, the promise she had given herself as the door slammed behind them, just before she had fallen off into that heavenly doze, given with her eyes upon Hokusai's Wave – arrived for Christmas and set up on the mantelpiece as if to remind her, with the coming of the New Year, that on any day the sea was just too far off – to go out and breathe for a few minutes the air under a sky that today stood high and clear, could, if she chose, in any case be kept. If not before tea, then after.⁶

The psychological effects of the distractions and pressures of domesticity are suggested by the complex constructions of the first sentence: the phrase 'the promise she had given herself [...] to go out and breathe' is interrupted by labyrinthine clauses that disorient the reader, evoking the sensation of being conflicted and deterred from one's desires. Richardson's use of the subjective and reflexive pronouns 'she' and 'herself' also gesture towards two selves at work within the protagonist: one who longs to escape domesticity, and another who feels bound by a 'duty' to direct all her energy towards the household.

Micki Nyman comments on this sense of duty and how it shapes Richardson's form:

Richardson's fiction attempted to explore women's consciousness, not in order to essentialise how a woman is supposed to think but to represent ways that women continually reposition their thinking in opposition to the limitations imposed upon them.⁷

The continual repositioning of women's thinking in relation to limitations such as conventional domesticity is a concern that Richardson's short fiction returns to again and again. What Virginia Woolf called Richardson's 'psychological sentence of the feminine gender', rather than redoubling old stereotypes of femininity, offers a diagnosis of something profoundly disturbing about female experience.⁸ Her short stories

⁶ Dorothy Richardson, 'Tryst', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 56.

⁷ Micki Nyman, 'Sexuality and Subjectivity in Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"', *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 44, no. 1 (2011): 108

⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'Romance and the Heart', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 19 May 1923, 229.

highlight psychological obstructions and fragmentations, splittings and doublings, with their characters displaying what we might now call ‘dissociative states’.

Richardson’s depiction of consciousness is informed by a wealth of theoretical knowledge. From a young age, she was exposed to contemporary discourses surrounding psychology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Her father was a ‘deeply interested spectator of the doings of science, never missing a gathering [...] of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, of which he was a member’.⁹ In sixth form, Richardson took a newly introduced ‘class for the study of logic and psychology’.¹⁰ Then, as a young woman in London, she made contact, ‘through the medium of books and lectures, with the worlds of Science and Philosophy’.¹¹ Stephen Heath writes that Richardson was ‘fully aware’ of the importance of psychoanalysis in terms of its ‘new conception of sexuality and its particular methods for exploring and understanding the psychical apparatus’, and indeed Richardson’s nonfiction writing evinces her long-standing interest in new medical and psychological theories.¹² In *The New Freewoman* (1913) she writes on the ‘illuminating [...] brochures’ of Dr. Paul Carton, a self-dubbed proponent of ‘occult science’, while in *The Freewoman* (1912) she discusses the evolving dialogue surrounding the ‘disabilities of women’.¹³ In ‘Leadership in Marriage’ (1929) she deploys Jung’s theory of *persona* and *anima*, while in ‘A Sculptor of Dreams’ (1924) she ponders sleeping and waking ‘cerebration’ at length.¹⁴ She was close friends with Winifred Bryher, who was analysed by Hanns Sachs, and who wrote on psychoanalysis for her magazine *Close Up* (to which Richardson

⁹ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Data for a Spanish Publisher’, in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 131.

¹⁰ Richardson, ‘Data’, 135.

¹¹ Richardson, ‘Data’, 137.

¹² Stephen Heath, ‘Dorothy Richardson and the Novel’, in *Teaching the Text*, ed. Susan Kappeler and Norman Bryson (London: Routledge, 1983), 139.

¹³ Dorothy Richardson, ‘The Conversion of a Specialist’, *The New Freewoman* 1, no. 9 (15 October 1913): 174; Matthew Ramsey, ‘Alternative Medicine in Modern France’, *Medical History* 43 (1999): 311; Dorothy Richardson, ‘The Disabilities of Women’, *The Freewoman* 2, no. 39 (15 August 1912): 254–55.

¹⁴ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Leadership in Marriage’, *New Adelphi* 2 (August 1929), 347; Dorothy Richardson, ‘A Sculptor of Dreams’, *Adelphi* 2 (October 1924), 426.

also contributed).¹⁵ In 1920, Richardson reviewed her friend Barbara Low's book *Psycho-Analysis: A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory*.¹⁶ In this same year, French psychologist Pierre Janet gave three lectures at the University of London, and it is the influence of Janet's ground-breaking theory of dissociation that can be heard most keenly in Richardson's short fiction.¹⁷

Janet, who coined the term 'subconscious', was described as 'the world's foremost authority on hysteria' in a 1910 article, 'The New Mind Cure Based on Science'.¹⁸ From his study of hysteria stemmed his most influential contribution to the field, the theory of dissociation, which he proposed in his 1889 doctoral dissertation *L'Automatisme Psychologique*. Janet 'defined dissociation as a lack of integration among two or more different "systems of ideas and functions that constitute personality"'.¹⁹ For instance, a memory or emotion might become dissociated if it contradicts a person's cohesive worldview and sense of self. The non-integrated aspects of a patient's consciousness can become 'isolated from the habitual personality', resurfacing instead in subconscious or 'somnambulistic' states such as hypnotism, dreams, intrusions and flashbacks.²⁰ In the most extreme cases, he posited, dissociation might lead to the successive existence of multiple personalities. This theory came about as a result of Janet's interactions with Lucie, a patient who had been diagnosed with hysteria: 'Janet's initial psychological experiments with Lucie demonstrated that she could perform several actions and perceive a number of sensations apparently unconsciously'.²¹

¹⁵ Heath, 'Richardson and the Novel', 139.

¹⁶ Johnson, 'The Early Influence of Second Wave Psychology', 218.

¹⁷ Johnson, 'The Early Influence of Second Wave Psychology', 261.

¹⁸ Onno Van der Hart and Barbara Friedman, 'A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage', *Dissociation: Progress in the Dissociative Disorders* 2, no. 1 (1989): 5; H. Addington Bruce, 'The New Mind Cure Based on Science', *The American Magazine*, October 1910, 777.

¹⁹ Ellert R. S. Nijenhuis and Onno Van der Hart, 'Dissociation in Trauma: A New Definition and Comparison with Previous Formulations', *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 12, no. 4 (2011): 417, quoting Pierre Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria; Fifteen Lectures Given in the Harvard Medical School* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1907), 332.

²⁰ Onno Van der Hart and Rutger Horst, 'The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet', *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, no. 4 (1989): 407.

²¹ Van der Hart and Horst, 'The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet', 400

According to Michael Cotsell 'Janet is at the very heart of Modernism from about 1890 to the late 1920s, as a direct influence on other thinkers and on literary authors; as an indirect influence, and as the central expression of a psychiatry that affected many modernist writers and thinkers'.²² May Sinclair writes about Janet at length in the aforementioned *A Defence of Idealism*, just one year before writing her review of *Pilgrimage* and two years before the publication of Richardson's first short story.²³ Sinclair elaborates on Janet's theory of dissociation over six pages, and states that:

all lapses and losses of a present memory or aptitude (barring physical lesion or decay), all perversions of instinct and desire, all suppressions, obsessions and possessions, all cases of double or multiple personality, are states primarily and essentially of dissociation.²⁴

Richardson was always alert to the patriarchal contexts within which the theories she consumed were embedded. Even as a schoolgirl, she approached her lessons in psychology with 'uneasy scepticism'.²⁵ As a young woman in London, she describes the 'archipelago' of thought with which she came into contact as:

the habitations of fascinating secret societies, to each of which in turn I wished to belong and yet was held back, returning to solitude and to no one, where alone I could be everywhere at once, hearing all the voices and chorus. The clear rather dictatorial voice of Science-still-in-its-heyday still far from confessing its inability to plumb, unaided, the nature of reality.²⁶

This scepticism and sense of alienation seems to stem from a keen awareness of the hyper-masculine context in which these theories are formulated – the 'enclosed academies of males' that she is dismayed to see all around her.²⁷ This is something that she explores further in a 1932 essay 'Continuous Performance: The Film Gone Male', in which she censures

²² Michael Cotsell, 'Modernism without Janet?' paper presented at the annual conference of the Institut Pierre Janet (Berlin, 2005), 1–2.

²³ Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 290, 352.

²⁴ Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 290–96; 291.

²⁵ Richardson, 'Data', 136.

²⁶ Richardson, 'Data', 137–38.

²⁷ Richardson, 'Data', 138.

‘those women who never question the primacy of “clear speech”, who are docile disciples of the orderly thought of man, and acceptors of theorems’.²⁸ Wanting never to be a docile disciple herself, Richardson consumed scientific theory critically; in this way, her outlook resembles the approach that she describes being taken by ‘the Feminists’ in her 1912 article ‘The Disabilities of Women’: ‘they have agreed that what the doctors say is true enough as far as it goes, but [...] they have refused to accept masculine readings of life, masculine schemes of value’.²⁹

Richardson extends Janet’s investigation into ‘the strangeness, complexity and concealed aspects of the modern subject and the effect of violent, overwhelming attacks on the self’, by focusing on the gendered subject.³⁰ She interrogates Janet’s theory by applying it to the intimate, everyday lives of ‘normal’ women, appealing to her own lived experience. Whereas Janet studied ‘psychological automatism’ (another term for ‘dissociation’), in patients with hysteria because they ‘exhibited it to an extreme degree’, Richardson’s writing begins to ask *why* this correlation might be.³¹ She interrogates the societal constructs and conditions that might make one person less able than another to embrace all aspects of their identity and lived experience – in other words, what ‘different factors’ might ‘disturb the integrative capacity’, leading to a sense of alienation from the self.³² Her short fiction goes where theory alone could not; art must pick up where science left off, because ‘the scientist, for his business of observation and experiment, is obliged to isolate one set of facts, to tear them from the context of reality’.³³ Art, which eludes the ‘facts, discovered by Man and submitted to [woman]’, provides the opportunity for an intervention.³⁴ In this article, I will look at the ways in which Richardson’s short fiction attempts to ‘plumb [...] the nature of reality’, transgressing and expanding the parameters of Janet’s discourse.³⁵

²⁸ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance: The Film *Gone Male*’, in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 423.

²⁹ Richardson, ‘Disabilities’, 254.

³⁰ Cotsell, ‘Modernism without Janet?’, 6.

³¹ Van der Hart and Horst, ‘The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet’, 401.

³² Van der Hart and Friedman, ‘A Reader’s Guide to Pierre Janet’, 7–8.

³³ Richardson, ‘Disabilities’, 254.

³⁴ Richardson, ‘Leadership’, 346.

³⁵ Richardson, ‘Data’, 138.

Split Selves

The concept of the ‘successive existences’ of multiple ‘nonintegrated’ personalities (or ‘subsystems within the personality’) is at the heart of Janet’s dissociation theory; this concept also lingers throughout Richardson’s short stories and is one of the most pronounced ways in which Richardson’s writing appears to be in dialogue with dissociation theory.³⁶ Van der Hart and Friedman offer a useful breakdown of dissociative personality division:

dissociation [...] leads to the splitting off or doubling (dédoublement), separation and isolation of certain psychological regulating activities. These dissociated systems of activities (states of consciousness) vary in complexity from a simple image, thought or statement and its attendant feelings or bodily manifestations to the alter personalities of patients with multiple personality disorder.³⁷

The ‘splitting off’ and ‘doubling’ of aspects of consciousness is a consistent motif in Richardson’s short stories. Jesse Matz argues that Richardson’s ‘new concept of consciousness’ entails a ‘fragmented, and dispersed selfhood’, while Gloria Fromm claims that Richardson ‘liked to imagine secret reservations, concealed inner lives [...] especially in her occasional short stories’.³⁸ It is in Richardson’s female protagonists, often alienated by monotonous domesticity or restrictive social ritual, that we most clearly see the effects of this ‘fragmented and dispersed selfhood’ at work. Many of them experience detachment and the sensation of observing themselves from the outside or are conflicted by the incongruent impulses of separate aspects of the self. For instance, the dying woman in ‘Death’, anticipates that the doctor is about to see ‘her secret life [...] come up and out’.³⁹ Richardson often links this detached sensation with the pressure to perform a certain self; this is displayed by Fan in ‘Ordeal’, who ‘recalled the shock of finding the life all about her no

³⁶ Van der Hart and Friedman, ‘A Reader’s Guide to Pierre Janet’, 5; Nijenhuis and Van der Hart, ‘Dissociation in Trauma’, 440.

³⁷ Van der Hart and Friedman, 7–8.

³⁸ Jesse Matz, ‘Dorothy Richardson’s Singular Modernity’, *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 1 (2008), 10; Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 338.

³⁹ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Death’, in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 105.

longer her concern, the cold dry horror of the prospect of getting through the days and playing her part'.⁴⁰

Richardson's 'Tryst' narrates one woman's process of being – to use the terminology of Richardson's 'ocean' of consciousness – 'suddenly possessed by another' submerged but successive aspect of herself.⁴¹ At the emotional crux of 'Tryst' is a splitting, or doubling, of the nameless protagonist's consciousness, as the tryst in question is between the protagonist and a dissociated aspect of herself that she discovers through an excursion to the coast. She is compelled to go on this excursion because of 'the promise she had given herself – a promise to get a breath of fresh air, but which also involves something inarticulate, 'something else. Something besides just sniffing the air. Urgent. Not stating itself'.⁴² She is unable to consciously parse this thing that drives her. As the narrative progresses, the protagonist's dissociated self – her submerged, desire-pursuing personality – begins to dominate, even though it is in conflict with her 'rational' self:

But already it must be too late even to pop outside.
Yet she found herself hurrying, eager.⁴³

The sense of divergence is heightened by the structure here, with these two sentences both beginning on indented new lines. That the protagonist is said to have 'found herself hurrying', suggests that she is observing her own behaviour from the outside, as if not totally in control of it. This idea of a shifting power dynamic between opposed aspects of consciousness is central to Janet's theory of *idéés fixes*, explained here by Van der Hart and Horst:

Fixed ideas (*idéés fixes*) are thoughts or mental images which assume exaggerated proportions, have a high emotional charge and [...] are isolated from the habitual personality (or personal consciousness). [...] When they dominate consciousness, they are enacted in real life. [...] Since they are dissociated, the individual is often, at least temporarily, unaware of them. These ideas manifest themselves in

⁴⁰ Dorothy Richardson, 'Ordeal', 72.

⁴¹ Brome, 'A Last Meeting', 29.

⁴² Richardson, 'Tryst', 56.

⁴³ 'Tryst', 56.

dreams, and during dissociative episodes such as hysterical attacks, somnambulistic states, and via automatic writing.⁴⁴

These ideas ‘assume exaggerated proportions’ because they are unable to be integrated and processed normally, and therefore become dissociated. In Richardson’s short fiction, these often manifest as things that seem quite minor at first (such as, in ‘Tryst’, a need to be out in nature) beneath which lie more profound concerns (like the desire for independence or freedom of expression). Forbidden or stifled by patriarchal society, these fixed ideas bubble to the surface in the form of ‘dysfunctions’ of consciousness or behaviour.

In ‘Tryst’, it is clear that the protagonist’s habitual response is to bury any thought or feeling that cannot be integrated with the image of a perfect wife and mother. Even as she reaches the sea, the potentially epiphanic moment is interrupted by the thought of her family’s need of her: ‘There it was. She here. And at this moment the three would be nearing the house’.⁴⁵ The sentence ‘she here’, which seems connected to the abstract ‘it’ of the previous sentence, is given no verb, no real place to land before the focus is wrenched back towards the family. This self-splitting and self-denial reflects Richardson’s description of conventional marriage in a 1929 essay, she argues that ‘woman’ is expected to perform ‘the characteristic [...] of being all over the place and in all camps at once’.⁴⁶ Richardson puts this down to ‘life’s apparent determination to have her [woman] in both worlds, life’s compulsory extraversion of this inward-turned being by means of ceaselessly distributing her consciousness over things’.⁴⁷ Richardson saw this dynamic at work within her own parents’ marriage, as she remembers how, after the stress of seeing ‘the dreaded form of [her] father, [...] his voice, urgent’, her mother ‘would take up her twofold task of sympathy with our happiness and the protection of my father from further disturbance’.⁴⁸

The protagonist of ‘Tryst’ suffers from the psychological demands of domesticity. As she turns towards home, she finds ‘herself longing for a

⁴⁴ Van der Hart and Horst, 406–7.

⁴⁵ Richardson, ‘Tryst’, 58.

⁴⁶ Richardson, ‘Leadership’, 347.

⁴⁷ Richardson, ‘Leadership’, 346.

⁴⁸ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Journey to Paradise’, in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 127.

little extra time. Time to dispose of her elastically expanded being, to reassemble the faculties demanded by the coming enclosure'.⁴⁹ Richardson's use of the word 'expanded' emphasises that the protagonist, in pursuing her repressed desires, has transgressed her fixed, singular identity. In order to 'reassemble' a performance of housewife, she must dispose of the unacceptable excess, pushing it down again into the dissociated realm of her psyche.⁵⁰ The incompatibility of these split selves is exemplified by the sense of tension as the protagonist 'hovered between two worlds', unable to fully inhabit both at once.⁵¹ Claire Drewery argues that 'Tryst' 'negotiates the space between the literal inside and outside within the consciousness of its protagonist [...] who discovers an extended sense of self through a walk at a liminal time: twilight, to a liminal place: the seashore'.⁵² I would add that this 'extended' self, though it glimmers at the borderlines of her consciousness, is forbidden from being integrated into daily life, and therefore must be turned away from as the protagonist re-enters domesticity: she 'felt, with the sounding of her own voice, the door of her inward life close against her as surely as the house door clicked onto its latch'.⁵³

It could be said that the protagonist of Tryst's dissociated, desire-pursuing side is able to dominate at the start of the narrative because she's in a sort of 'somnambulistic' state. At the opening of the story, she wakes up with a start and thinks, 'goodness! Nearly teatime'.⁵⁴ Unwittingly, her body-clock (internal, private, personal), drawn to the 'heavenly doze', has rebelled against the universal, societal clock, which, for her, tolls its mandate of domestic duties.⁵⁵ This opening signals a disruption of perception and time that steers the narrative, becoming more intense the further the protagonist impulsively walks towards the coast, away from

⁴⁹ Richardson, 'Tryst', 59.

⁵⁰ In 'Leadership in Marriage', Richardson alludes to the performativity involved in maintaining a stereotypically wifely image: 'it is perfectly possible for a woman to assume a shape imposed by her husband, or [...] a series of shapes imposed by a series of husbands' (347).

⁵¹ Richardson, 'Tryst', 60.

⁵² Claire Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 23.

⁵³ Richardson, 'Tryst', 60.

⁵⁴ Richardson, 'Tryst', 56.

⁵⁵ Richardson, 'Tryst', 57.

'her enclosed daily life'.⁵⁶ The woman's behaviour brings to mind Richardson's account in 'A Journey to Paradise' of her own 'longing to escape the life [she] know', as the desire to 'escape' comes over the protagonist uncannily, like a dream.⁵⁷

Richardson would have been well aware of the psychological significance of sleep at the time of her writing. Psychologists such as Janet used the term 'somnambulism' to refer to trance-like states that patients (often suffering with 'hysteria') might fall into, or that might be induced through hypnosis. Explaining Janet's use of the term, Van der Hart and Friedman write:

in the generic sense, somnambulism refers to that state of mind in which people are so absorbed in their inner experience that congruent contact with external reality is lost. When they do respond to something in the outer environment, it is perceived as playing a role within the domain of the inner experience.⁵⁸

At times in 'Tryst', we see this kind of total absorption, as the landscape becomes like a mirror for the protagonist's 'inner experience'. In one such moment, she is 'gazing down', as 'her spirit reached down' at the 'modest stream' that 'had called to her with its small clear voice just in time for the display of its unaccustomed glory'.⁵⁹ She sees this river as a 'lovely little wanderer; [...] unseen, alone' ... 'obscure [...], invisible unless one craned over, stagnant and voiceless in summer and choked with weeds and reeds'.⁶⁰ Here, her 'spirit' reaches down as if in recognition of her own oppressed 'glory', her own 'clear voice', that is present beneath all that might choke it. Like the stream, she has followed an impulse, acting 'alone, unseen, [...] obscure'. This somnambulistic 'oblivion' allows her to forget her restrictive, fixed identity, for a fleeting moment.⁶¹ When she is forced to return to this restrictive identity, the language she uses to describe her transgressive spirit evokes again the image of the stream: when she is back inside her house, we are told that 'her stricken exaltation [...] was

⁵⁶ Richardson, 'Tryst' 59.

⁵⁷ Richardson, 'Journey', 127; Richardson, 'Tryst', 60.

⁵⁸ Van der Hart and Friedman, 'A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet', 6.

⁵⁹ Richardson, 'Tryst', 58, 59.

⁶⁰ Richardson, 'Tryst', 59.

⁶¹ 'Tryst', 59.

quenched, its tracks covered'.⁶² As 'to quench' can mean 'to put out or extinguish the fire or flame of (something that burns or gives light)', this wording links the protagonist's exaltation back to the stream, which is described as a 'thread of molten rosy gold in the gully's deepening twilight'.⁶³ In this closing moment, the image of the stream, a light in the 'deepening' darkness, at the sight of which the protagonist had 'felt her heart bound within her', is also quenched.⁶⁴

Richardson had an enduring fascination with the liminal space between sleeping and waking, and the aspects of the self that might be accessed within it. In a 1909 sketch 'The Wind', she described the moments after a deep sleep as 'surprising consciousness as its richest brimming'.⁶⁵ In 1924, she wrote an article entitled 'Sculptor of Dreams', in which she described an experience 'that has hinted itself time and again', of having

wakened from the deepest of deep sleep. [...] Wakened, and at peace, and only sufficiently aware of the surrounding world to know that one is awake [...] to find myself, there is no other way to put it, busily alive in the past, and at the same moment onlooker at myself living.⁶⁶

This experience, whose echoes can be heard in 'Tryst', bears much resemblance to the notion of somnambulism in which 'contact with

⁶² Richardson, 'Tryst', 60.

⁶³ 'Quench, v.', in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2019); Richardson, 'Tryst', 59.

⁶⁴ Richardson, 'Tryst', 59.

⁶⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'The Wind' [unsigned], *The Saturday Review* 108 (4 December 1909): 691.

⁶⁶ Richardson, 'Sculptor', 425–26. In 'Pilgrimage and the Space of Dreams', Laura Marcus explores the subversive potential of a 'class of sleep- or dream-states in *Pilgrimage*' that 'come closest to the experience Richardson recounted in "A Sculptor of Dreams"', and which 'are linked to sleeping "out of place" or "out of time": that is, to sleeping outside and/or to sleeping during the day': *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 1 (2008): 68. Sarah Kingston also highlights the significance of the moments in *Pilgrimage* when Miriam 'does not sleep "properly" (with regularity and at night)', arguing that Miriam's 'refusal 'to abide by "normal" sleep practices' runs counter to certain male characters' desires for her to become 'the traditional woman who prioritises marriage and Motherhood': Sarah Kingston, 'The Promise of Restlessness: Sleep and Gender in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 8 (2016): 5.

external reality is lost'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Richardson links this experience to the sensation of being 'onlooker' at oneself, an image which hints at the existence of multiple selves or a split consciousness. The concept of multiple, split selves that Richardson gestures at here, one which is also a cornerstone of dissociation theory, is explored from the very start of 'Tryst', as well as throughout Richardson's short stories. This shows that Richardson's writing – whether directly or through the zeitgeist – is interacting with and extending burgeoning dissociation theory. Richardson writes women whose dissociated desires arise in somnambulistic states not because they are intrinsically pathological, but because that's the only place in which they *can* arise; they are driven by a forbidden impulse, something akin to what Richardson describes as her 'longing to escape from the world of women'.⁶⁸

Silence and the Unspeakable

Personality division, Nijenhuis and Van der Hart explain, outwardly 'manifests in dissociative symptoms that can be categorized as negative [...] or positive'.⁶⁹ I have taken 'negative' symptoms, comprising 'functional losses [...] such as dissociative aphonia', as my focus for this part of the paper, assessing Richardson's textual representation of 'the unspeakable' in its many forms.⁷⁰ According to Stephen Heath, Dorothy Richardson's writing suggests that 'women share a common silence, a common elsewhere to assertion and position'.⁷¹ Many scholars have commented on the theme of silence in *Pilgrimage* (Annika J. Lindskog, for example, argues that '*Pilgrimage* constantly reverberates around different aspects of silence, both in its content and in its form');⁷² it is Richardson's short stories, though, that perhaps most strikingly illuminate the 'common silence' that many women share, with their succession of female protagonists experiencing aphonia and inarticulacy in a wide variety of ways. Resisting fixed meanings through their brief, fragmented form, these short stories perform an elusiveness of language that reflects the lived experience of many women for whom free, direct expression is restricted.

⁶⁷ Van der Hart and Friedman, 'A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet', 6.

⁶⁸ Richardson, 'Data', 137.

⁶⁹ Nijenhuis and Van der Hart, 'Dissociation in Trauma', 418.

⁷⁰ Nijenhuis and Van der Hart, 430–31.

⁷¹ Heath, 'Richardson and the Novel', 138.

⁷² Annika J. Lindskog, 'Dorothy Richardson and the Poetics of Silence', *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 5 (2012): 7.

In 'Continuous Performance: the Film Gone Male', Richardson invites her reader to ponder why voicelessness can be such a gendered experience: 'women [...] are humanity's silent half, without faith in speech as a medium of communication'; even, she continues, if women 'talk incessantly from the cradle onwards', they are still 'as silent as the grave', because they 'use speech [...] in the manner of the façade'.⁷³ Richardson's short stories illuminate the effects of this conflicted relationship between women and language. We see speech used as a façade, for instance, by the 'Tryst' protagonist, who 'rais[es] her voice' at the end of the narrative in order to fill the 'vacuum created by the absence of her usual jest', and acknowledges, with 'the sounding of her own voice', the quenching of her 'inward life'.⁷⁴ In 'Haven', we witness the stigmatisation of female expression: Purling projects an expectation of mute self-erasure onto his landlady Miss Tillard, who he anticipates will be 'concentrated upon him and his needs, creeping about, muting, on his behalf, the sound of all her doings'.⁷⁵ He admires the 'tonelessness' of her voice, celebrating the fact that she presents herself to him as 'serene', 'featureless and withholding', that she 'vanish[es]' after laying lunch out for him, and that 'unless summoned she will not appear'.⁷⁶ When Purling declares 'here, at least, is indeed the perfect landlady. Better, even, than the trained deaf mute for whom, again and again, he has despairingly yearned', he is fetishizing Miss Tillard's performed absence of personality.⁷⁷ In Richardson's own life, also, she remembers how her father would trigger a self-silencing, self-erasing impulse in the rest of the family: 'all of us, including my mother and the servants, reduced to eager and not always mute helplessness, were pendant upon his omniscience, excited, frightened, and but for him, lost utterly'.⁷⁸

A less legible form of silence affects 'Fan' in 'Ordeal'. As she waits in the nursing home, she hears noises of 'pain and death' nearby but is unable to register them, because her consciousness is obstructed by an enigmatic 'something' 'waiting within the quietude of the room'.⁷⁹ Richardson uses

⁷³ Richardson, 'Continuous Performance', 423, 424.

⁷⁴ Richardson, 'Tryst', 60.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'Haven', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 87.

⁷⁶ Richardson, 'Haven', 78, 79, 80, 79.

⁷⁷ Richardson, 'Haven', 81.

⁷⁸ Richardson, 'Journey to Paradise', 125.

⁷⁹ Richardson, 'Ordeal', 71.

the word 'something' in an interesting way throughout her short fiction. In 'Visitor', the news that the Berry's disabled aunt is coming to stay affects the atmosphere of the household in an unnameable way: 'because Aunt Bertha is coming, something has come into the room. Making it different'.⁸⁰ In 'Sunday', the protagonist's complex and unresolved feelings of duty and resentment towards Josephine, who 'reminded me in her spitefully unconscious vindictive spoil-sport way that it was my turn to go to Grannie's', is expressed through the ambiguous phrase, 'something leapt from me towards her'.⁸¹ And in 'Tryst', the protagonist is drawn outside because of 'something else. Something besides just sniffing the air. Urgent. Not stating itself'.⁸² Drewery categorises Richardson's writing as part of 'the newly emerging writing styles through which modernist writers experimented with the inner life', which 'attempted to create textually something which was incapable of being verbally articulated or fully reproduced through textual equivalent'.⁸³ Arguably, Richardson's repeated use of words such as 'something' makes them mean more than their simple denotation; she begins to create a layered texture of significance, indicating a specific pattern of inarticulacy in the lives that she writes.

'It' is another seemingly neutral word out of which Richardson creates a texture of significance. In 'Visitor' the relatively distant 'something' that 'has come into the room', morphs into an 'it' as the atmosphere intensifies: 'Mother and Mary [...] will take it with them. Yes, it is going away. There will be plenty of room for it out in the hall'.⁸⁴ Through the progression of these sentences, the 'it' gains increasing power and agency: from being the object of the first sentence (passive to the subjects Mother and Mary), 'it' then becomes the subject of the second sentence, before appearing to take on an intrusive physical dimension in the third. In Richardson's story 'The Garden', 'it', like an *idée fixe*, again takes on 'exaggerated proportions'.⁸⁵ A flower in the garden is described in the following way:

⁸⁰ Dorothy Richardson, 'Visitor', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 2.

⁸¹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Sunday', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 25, 26.

⁸² Richardson, 'Tryst', 56.

⁸³ Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction by Women*, 86.

⁸⁴ Richardson, 'Visitor', 2.

⁸⁵ Van der Hart and Horst, 406–7. See n.53.

it was Nelly on a stalk. She went nearer to see if it would move away. It stood still, very tall. Its stalk was thin. She put her face down towards it to keep it down. It had a deep smell. She touched it with her nose to smell it more. It kissed her gently [...]. It knew all about the other part of the garden.⁸⁶

This abundance of 'it's, combined with the anthropomorphising language, obfuscates the referent, increasing the story's uncanny atmosphere. The 'it' then gains a capital letter ('far away down the path where it was different It could come. It could not get here'), which further imbues the word with an ominous presence.⁸⁷ Drewery writes, 'in Richardson's 'The Garden', 'It' relates to an unnameable, elusive and also shifting presence which represents a source of fear to the child'.⁸⁸ The source of the child's fear shifts elusively because the original frightening experience or memory has been dissociated, causing it to hover in the background of consciousness, suggesting itself through a multitude of images signified by the unfixed potentiality of the word 'it'. Richardson writes that 'It was always in other parts of the garden. [...] Always sounding in the empty part at the end'.⁸⁹ Through her manipulation of language, Richardson allows the child's fear to *sound*, even though it is unspoken.

Many of Richardson's characters experience inarticulacy because frightening or socially unacceptable thoughts and emotions have become dissociated from their conscious minds. In 'Summer', however, we are presented with a moment of profound catharsis – an outlet of vocal and emotional expression – at the culmination of the narrative. In the very final scene, the protagonist observes a funeral procession while abroad with her aunts. Their ingrained attitude of shame relating to public displays of emotion is evident, as they 'all went upstairs and stood concealed behind [their] window curtains' to watch in secret.⁹⁰ From this vantage point, the protagonist sees a woman, held up on either side, who 'staggered and plunged along' behind the coffin, and from whom were coming 'terrible cries'.⁹¹ So unused to such open expressiveness, the protagonist is

⁸⁶ Dorothy Richardson, 'The Garden', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 22.

⁸⁷ Richardson, 'Garden', 23.

⁸⁸ Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction*, 22.

⁸⁹ Richardson, 'Garden', 23.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Richardson, 'Summer', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 47.

⁹¹ Richardson, 'Summer', 47.

shocked, and at first thinks that ‘they ought not to let [the woman] go’ into the church, but then something seems to shift in her:

The cries died away into the little church. There was silence again, but the cries seemed to resound and fill the sunlit landscape ... They were the *right* cries; the *outbreak* of grief; not in a room; full and free out there in the sun, where she used to talk to him. They went out over the mountains explaining the songs of the birds and the happiness everywhere.⁹²

In this moment, the protagonist learns to see what she had previously thought of as an ‘indecent’ physical and vocal display of emotion as a cathartic and essential part of nature. The cries that continue to resound within her mind are *right*, and the grief is an *outbreak*, because the emotion is allowed to flow out ‘full and free’ and be acknowledged publicly, rather than being privately contained ‘in a room’. Simultaneously, the protagonist becomes hyper-aware of her own enclosure (emphasised by the fact that the short clause, ‘not in a room’, is restricted on either side by semicolons); she betrays a desire to transgress these physical and emotional restrictions as her mind’s eye moves outwards, gazing ‘out there in the sun’, and then ‘out over the mountains’.

In contrast to the instinctual cries of the grieving woman in ‘Summer’, the unspoken taboo of Grannie’s encroaching death in ‘Sunday’ hangs in the air, creating an atmosphere of expressive paralysis. Even though a submerged part of the ‘Sunday’ protagonist wants ‘to cast [herself] on [her] knees and weep aloud in anger’, her external self performs a stilted, muted ‘normality’: ‘Grannie sighed. I smiled towards her’.⁹³ This ‘false face’ that she is required to present is like a kind of death, as she is left feeling like ‘a ghost meaning nothing’.⁹⁴ In ‘Summer’, Richardson hints towards a healthier model of expression than the one imposed upon and internalised by the ‘Sunday’ protagonist and many more of her female characters. Sadness, Richardson argues, must be integrated, and fears allowed to be expressed, in order for ‘the songs of the birds and the happiness everywhere’ to be fully felt.⁹⁵ This draws similarities to Janet’s view that ‘a cure’ for dissociative tendencies equates to ‘an increasingly integrated

⁹² ‘Summer’, 47.

⁹³ Richardson, ‘Sunday’, 29.

⁹⁴ Richardson, ‘Sunday’, 27.

⁹⁵ Richardson, ‘Summer’, 47.

personality'.⁹⁶ Richardson, though, highlights the societal barriers that make this kind of integration difficult; she suggests that women will continue – consciously and subconsciously – to self-mute and internalise shame about their emotions until society's attitude towards them shifts.

Flashbacks and Intrusive Thoughts

I will now turn to Richardson's engagement with the next category of symptoms in Janet's theory of dissociation, namely, those described as 'positive' (rather than the previous chapter's 'negative') phenomena:

Positive dissociative symptoms involve ideas, reactions, and functions of one dissociative part that intermittently intrude upon one or more other dissociative parts. The symptoms, among others, include dissociative flashbacks and full re-experiencing of traumatising events, as well as intruding voices, thoughts, movements, and emotional or physical feelings.⁹⁷

'Positive' symptoms appear in Richardson's short fiction, not just in individual stories, but as a recurring feature of her characters' lived experience, creating a pattern of symptomology that draws all of her stories together. Frank O'Connor suggests that the short story form 'enables us to distinguish past, present and future as though they were all contemporaneous'.⁹⁸ This is clearly evident in Richardson's short stories, which problematise the categories of past, present and future through the motif of intrusive memories, images and thoughts. In 'Excursion', the narrator explains, 'just now, I felt the shock of it pass through me like an electric current. It is not memory', before adding, 'certain conditions, certain states of being, especially favour re-entry into what we call 'past moments'? But they are not past'.⁹⁹ This negation of the terms 'memory' and 'past' alludes to the ways in which previous experiences can feel like an active, living part of daily consciousness. The terms 'shock' and 're-entry', suggest that the protagonist of 'Excursion' feels passive to the associations and images that intrude suddenly upon her. The repeated transgression of psychological and temporal boundaries in Richardson's

⁹⁶ Van der Hart and Friedman, 'A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet', 9.

⁹⁷ Nijenhuis and Van der Hart, 'Dissociation in Trauma', 431.

⁹⁸ Frank O'Connor *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 22.

⁹⁹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Excursion', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 101, 102.

short fiction is one of the ways in which it challenges and expands the definitions of ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ consciousness.

In ‘Visit’, the root of the protagonist Berry’s uneasiness is never made explicit; it is concealed from herself and from the reader, but persistently hinted at. We feel it when she approaches ‘a cottage, hidden in dark creepers’: ‘as Berry goes up the little path, the strange cottage seems to be one she has been into before. She knows she has never been into it, she feels her face suddenly get unhappy because she must go again into a place she doesn’t like’.¹⁰⁰ Here, it is not just the cottage that is ‘hidden’, but also some dissociated fear within Berry. Alongside the familiar self-splitting (Berry ‘feels her face suddenly get unhappy’, a detached witness to her own body’s processes) this scene triggers a sensation of temporal dissonance in Berry, as if she is living through something in the past for the first time – a forgotten memory. This chimes again with Richardson’s notion of the liminal space between sleeping and waking in ‘A Sculptor of Dreams’, which she describes as a kind of ‘intensive living where, as onlooker, I had inquisitorial view both backwards and ahead. As actor, my known self [...] was living through whole strands of life, [...] and was at the same time aware of the inquisitor presenting them’.¹⁰¹

Richardson’s short stories are shaped by memories, thoughts and sensations that, having been submerged, reappear in disturbing ways; these hidden things resemble Janet’s *idées fixes*, which can also be described as ‘traumatic memories’.¹⁰² According to Janet, the traumatic memory is ‘subconscious’, but when it arises in dreams, in crises, or in somnambulisms, ‘we find again the initial terror’.¹⁰³ Berry’s unspoken fear, stirred by the ‘cottage, hidden in dark creepers’, emerges more intensely in the ‘black darkness’ of night:

The chair. No, no, NO! I won’t see the chair. [...] Berry pokes her eyelids, to make colours. Where do they come from, these pretty

¹⁰⁰ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Visit’, in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 13.

¹⁰¹ Richardson, ‘Sculptor’, 426.

¹⁰² Onno Van der Hart and Martin Dorahy, ‘History of Trauma and Dissociation’, European Society for Trauma and Dissociation, n.d., accessed 20 July 2019.

¹⁰³ Cotsell, ‘Modernism without Janet?’, 13, quoting from Pierre Janet, *L’Automatisme Psychologique* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie, 1889), 351–53 (translations by Cotsell).

colours? When the colours are gone, the Chair is there, inside her eyes, with Great-Uncle Stone sitting in it. Dead. Like Eliza said they found him.¹⁰⁴

Berry ‘pokes her eyelids’ in an attempt to control what she is seeing, but she can’t stop the intrusive image of Great-Uncle Stone from forming in her mind’s eye. The repeated ‘no’s mark the conscious internal dialogue attempting to exclude the frightening image but being overwhelmed by it. The next morning, Berry seems shaken by this experience, and her attempts to control her thoughts persist. She ‘washes very slowly, to be staying as long as possible, with her back to the room, in this corner where the morning comes in with the roses. Not talking to pug. Just being altogether Berry’.¹⁰⁵ The strange combination of an infinitive and a present participle in the phrase ‘to be staying’ reveals that Berry’s perception of the stability of time and place has become warped. Berry’s fears manifest as intrusive neuroses because she is barred (by social convention) from expressing, or even feeling, them freely: in ‘Visitor’ (which was published as a pair with ‘Visit’ in the September 1945 edition of *Life and Letters*) we are told that Berry ‘will learn always to be pale and quiet and suddenly smile all over her face when she speaks’.¹⁰⁶

For many of Richardson’s women characters, their feelings of fear and sadness become separated from habitual thought, making themselves heard instead through seemingly ‘irrational’ intrusions into their consciousness. Where Janet puts this kind of dissociation down to an ‘individual[s] lack [of] capacity to integrate adverse experiences in part or in full’, Richardson suggests that the pressures and rules of a gendered existence may be the cause.¹⁰⁷ ‘A Stranger About’ maps the different ways in which men and women might process daily events, tracing the impact of gender upon perception. The women in this story experience a fear of actual intrusion into their home which, derided and undermined, manifests psychologically as intrusive thoughts and images. When the protagonist Carnetha hears about the ‘queer lookin’ chap around dunes

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, ‘Visit’, 17. Note how ‘Chair’ is capitalised, like ‘It’ in ‘The Garden’.

¹⁰⁵ Richardson, ‘Visit’, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Richardson, ‘Visitor’, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Nijenhuis and Van der Hart, ‘Dissociation in Trauma’, 418.

[...] sharumblin' along', she immediately imagines the worst: 'there's murderers, now. Just plain murderers. For the fun of it. *Everywhere*'.¹⁰⁸

In this story, it is easy to trace Richardson's response to the discourse surrounding 'hysteria', which framed femaleness as inherently pathological.¹⁰⁹ Richardson challenges biological, essentialist arguments for the aetiology of female neuroses by putting Carnetha's quality of life, rather than her body, under the microscope. When Carnetha's husband Jack mocks her frightened reaction to the man on the dunes, she responds,

You'm a man. Things is different for you. You've got to think of me here. Alone with the children. And night comin'. If you was me, you'd think of plenty things you've no call to bother with in your strength.¹¹⁰

What makes Carnetha perceive things differently from her husband is the stuff of daily life for so many women: isolation, learned fear, and the need to be always mindful of her children's wellbeing as well as her own. Jack reacts to Carnetha's fear dismissively, telling her to 'keep sensible' and that 'it's all a bag o'nonsense'.¹¹¹ He calls the man on the dunes 'Mr Nobody', thus designating Carnetha's fear as something not-to-be-spoken.¹¹² This atmosphere of oppression triggers detachment in Carnetha, meaning that, as she goes about her housework, 'the sounds of her activities come to her this afternoon as if they were being made by someone else'.¹¹³ Despite attempting to channel her focus towards chores, Carnetha's domestic routine fails to suppress her 'lurking fear':

in the stillness of the orderly home, she feels her fear return with new power. The cottage, its every room clear to her inward eye in a single glance, seems no longer her own, belongs to itself. To the madman making his way towards the village. Rubbish.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Richardson, 'A Stranger About', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 62.

¹⁰⁹ In 'The Disabilities of Women', Richardson writes about the evidence against 'orthodoxy's list of the "inherent disabilities" of women', which she describes as 'worth a very great deal to the Feminist movement' (255).

¹¹⁰ Richardson, 'Stranger', 63.

¹¹¹ Richardson, 'Stranger', 62–63.

¹¹² Richardson, 'Stranger', 63.

¹¹³ 'Stranger', 63.

¹¹⁴ Richardson, 'Stranger', 64.

Performing the role of housewife only exacerbates the agitation of her dissociated self. Equally, the 'stillness' of the home only amplifies the clamour of her fears. Carnetha's intrusive thoughts about 'the madman' burst into the narrative in staccato sentences, clashing against the internalised mocking voice that tells her that these feelings are 'rubbish'.

In this portrayal of Carnetha's consciousness as persistently disturbed by intrusive thoughts of 'the madman', Richardson's writing foreshadows the work that has only recently begun to be done on the interstices of gender and trauma theory. Feminist psychotherapist Maria P. P. Root coined the term 'insidious trauma' in 1992, which describes 'the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment, but which do violence to the soul and spirit', and which occur 'for each non-dominant group in society'.¹¹⁵ The systemic violence to the spirit of Carnetha and her daughters is evident at the end of the narrative, when the daughters' vulnerability becomes a point of concern. Carnetha's intrusive thoughts attach themselves to Thealie as she thinks, 'supposin' [the madman] was to come sudden up the path behind her?'.¹¹⁶ Carnetha's eldest daughter Ruth is also affected by the fear, as evinced by her silence: 'Ruthie isn't talkin' like she mostly do'.¹¹⁷ When Jack returns, Carnetha and Ruth have locked the house in panic, having both mistaken a neighbour for the madman. Jack laughs at them, and Carnetha thinks, 'all very well for men to laugh', while the girls are left 'standing by, giggling their fear into nowhere'.¹¹⁸ That Thealie and Ruth must giggle their fear into 'nowhere' emphasises the lack of outlets through which women can, without derision, express any emotion considered messy or irrational. In this narrative, Richardson shows how dismissing a woman's emotions as irrational only serves to exacerbate the pressures on her to think and behave in a certain way; this may then cause certain aspects of her personality to become dissociated, and therefore to later intrude in seemingly 'neurotic' ways, creating a vicious cycle of 'irrational' behaviour and societal condemnation.

¹¹⁵ Laura Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', *American Imago* 48, no. 1 (1991): 119–33. This formulation also bears similarities to Elizabeth Howell's notion of the 'pathological normal': *The Dissociative Mind* (London: Routledge, 2005), 16.

¹¹⁶ Richardson, 'Stranger', 65.

¹¹⁷ 'Stranger', 65.

¹¹⁸ 'Stranger', 67.

The protagonist in 'The Garden' is also confronted by an intrusive image of a male intruder – in this case the folkloric 'Spring-heeled Jack jump[ing] suddenly over the hedges'.¹¹⁹ But instead of being a story about a mind disturbed by a number of intrusions, 'The Garden', permeated with a hallucinatory atmosphere, is narrated as if the entire story is itself an intrusive memory. The fear of the protagonist is signified in a variety of indirect ways, such as through the description of the anthropomorphised plants, the 'pretty *pretty* flowers', which 'all put their arms round [the protagonist] without touching her. Quickly'.¹²⁰ In relation to the naïve and vulnerable protagonist, there is something inappropriate about the flowers, that 'quickly said they loved her' and 'kissed her gently, looking small', especially considering that after this interaction the protagonist wonders whether 'perhaps now it would go away'.¹²¹ Accompanying this description is an obscure, foreboding reference to 'the other part of the garden' in which the 'bent-over-body of Minter' is found, 'Old Minter alone with the Ghost'.¹²² In this uncanny space, the boundary between bliss and horror is distressingly thin.

The trope of the garden crops up repeatedly throughout Richardson's short stories. In 'Ordeal', the protagonist, confronted with her own mortality, experiences flashbacks of 'all the garden [...] beauty she had ever known, [...] so that what she saw was not any single distinct scene, but a hovering and mingling of them all'.¹²³ In 'Death', the narrative closes with the last thing seen by the dying woman: 'the garden, the old garden in April, the crab-apple blossom, all as it was before she began, but brighter...'.¹²⁴ In 'Sunday', the garden represents something that the protagonist wishes she could communicate to her grandmother, but can't:

if she could see into the middle of my head she would see the lawn of her old garden and the stone vase of geraniums and calceolarias in the bright sunlight, and would stop. [...] The unconscious stare of

¹¹⁹ Richardson, 'Garden', 23.

¹²⁰ Richardson, 'Garden', 21.

¹²¹ Richardson, 'Garden', 22.

¹²² 'Garden', 22.

¹²³ Richardson, 'Ordeal', 73.

¹²⁴ Richardson, 'Death', 107.

her faded blue eyes as she moved and stood about the garden all
meant.¹²⁵

Here, the punctuation cutting short the sentences after ‘stop’ and ‘meant’ suggests that the significance of the garden memory has not been – or perhaps cannot be – fully processed by the protagonist, that it lingers in some sub-verbal part of her consciousness. The recurrence of the garden image means that to read Richardson’s short stories as a collection is almost to be submerged in a consciousness into which the image repeatedly intrudes. That the garden image transcends the boundaries between one story and another, drawing connections between the consciousnesses of so many of Richardson’s female protagonists, also speaks to Richardson’s description of consciousness as ‘a pool, a sea, an ocean. It has depth in greater depth and when you think you’ve reached the bottom there is nothing there’.¹²⁶ Consciousness, she argues, is not a linear stream, but a multi-directional, boundary-less expanse.

At the end of ‘Visit’, Berry looks for a ‘garden [...] to forget yesterday in’, and finds nothing, until she passes through a secret door:

Berry runs up the bright green grass. Into nowhere. Sees the wind moving the grass. Feels it in her hair. No one knows about this hill. No one knows it is there. Near the top she stands still, to remember how it looked from the door; long, long ago. It will always look like that. Always. Always.
[...]
Pug looks down at her, standing still, waiting. Berry hides her face in the grass, to be alone.¹²⁷

For Berry, the garden fulfils her desire to be ‘nowhere’, and ‘alone’. This corresponds with the desire of many of Richardson’s female protagonists, who feel compelled to escape the enclosed domestic realm by striding out into nature (see, for instance, the protagonist in ‘Seen from Paradise: ‘suddenly I knew I must be out again, alone, if only for a moment, in the Cornish night’).¹²⁸ This would suggest that the symbol of the garden

¹²⁵ Richardson, ‘Sunday’, 27.

¹²⁶ Brome, ‘A Last Meeting’, 29.

¹²⁷ Richardson, ‘Visit’, 20.

¹²⁸ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Seen from Paradise’, in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 89.

represents a longed-for freedom from the strictures of society. Yet the story of 'The Garden' itself, far from being a scene of calm solitude, is overflowing with anthropomorphised figures, intimating that it may be a replaying of the moment that this fantasy of complete solitude was corrupted. It could be said, then, that the intrusion of the garden image into the protagonists' consciousnesses indicates their longing to return to an impossible state of safety and independence, 'as it was before [they] began, but brighter', before the sinister realisation that 'far away down the path where it was different It could come'.¹²⁹

By sculpting these, what could be termed 'moments of madness' into an ecosystem of meaning, Richardson gives value and authority to aspects of consciousness which are often either condemned or derided. Although she depicts characters, such as Carnetha's husband Jack, who deny the lived reality of women, her writing represents the often-fraught interior world of woman's consciousness as one that is equally as real and important as the exterior, physical world.

Conclusion

Far from Johnson's claim that 'her use of the subject matter of psychology is not as varied' as her Modernist contemporaries, Richardson's short stories engage with the novel theory of dissociation on a complex level.¹³⁰ Not only do they examine the role of personality division in the lives of everyday women, but they also explore the specific symptomatic manifestations of this division – the silent losses and the unwanted intrusions that abound in these texts. The influence of Janetian theory can be felt in the way that Richardson writes her female characters' consciousnesses as fractured, haunted, and containing unresolved and often hidden multitudes. Just as evident is Richardson's criticism of this theory; she argues that the pressure for women to always be attentive to others' needs, and to deny their own, leads to a heightened level of dissociation, the symptoms of which are then painted by society as indicative of an inherent pathology or inferiority.

Through her prose, Richardson crafts her own theory of dissociation, one that is rooted in the everyday, and that offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between dissociation and gender than Janet is able to provide. Her writing doesn't just argue that dissociation exists, it also

¹²⁹ Richardson, 'Death', 107; 'Garden', 23.

¹³⁰ Johnson, 'The Early Influence of Second Wave Psychology', 17.

suggests *why* it exists. The symptomology of her short fiction leads us to diagnose a sickness, not in women, but in society. By challenging and redrawing Janet's theory under the lens of gender, Richardson foreshadows the work of contemporary trauma theorists, illuminating the 'every day, repetitive, interpersonal events that are so often the sources of psychic pain for women'.¹³¹ Her short fiction illustrates the many ways in which these stressors can warp and restrict a woman's sense of self. In this way, Richardson begins to address the following, still-pertinent question posed by Brown: 'do we act as handmaidens of the status quo, saying that only those already ill suffer from cultural toxicity, or do we name as poisonous those institutions of the society which might sicken anyone?'.¹³²

¹³¹ Brown, 'Not Outside the Range', 129.

¹³² Brown, 132.