PILGRIMAGE, *OBERLAND*, 'SLEIGH-RIDE': LENGTH, GENRE, AND PROSE IN DOROTHY RICHARDSON

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The work of Dorothy Richardson transgresses conventional notions of literary genre. In her autobiographical sketch 'Data for a Spanish Publisher', she recalls being 'shocked and puzzled' at an editor's suggestion that she should write a novel:

> The material that moved me to write would not fit the framework of any novel I had experienced. I believed myself to be, even when most enchanted, intolerant of the romantic and the realist novel alike. Each, it seemed to me, left out certain essentials and dramatised life misleadingly. Horizontally. Assembling their characters, the novelists developed situations, devised events, climax and conclusion. I could not accept their finalities.[1]

Yet Richardson went on to create an entirely new kind of framework for the novel, avoiding such devices and 'horizontal' form, with the thirteen-volume prose work *Pilgrimage*, arguably the 'longest "novel" written in English'.[2] While Richardson denied that *Pilgrimage* or any of its thirteen constituent parts were novels, her resistance to the existing conventions of the genre broadened the definition of the novel, and simultaneously created a radically new form of prose writing, famously described by Virginia Woolf as the 'invent[ion]' of 'a sentence we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender'.[3]

While Richardson is best known for *Pilgrimage*, she also wrote almost 200 short stories, sketches, and essays, and her prose style and formal experimentation were also transposed to these works. This short fiction

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[1] Dorothy Richardson, *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), 139.
[2] Claire Drewery, 'The Failure of This Now So Independently Assertive Reality: Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic in Dorothy Richardson's Short Fiction', *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, no. 4 (2011): 135.
[3] Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing* (London: Women's Press, 1979), 191.

has received little critical attention. Yet, it is in its own way as formally experimental as *Pilgrimage* and equally transgressive of genre boundaries. For example, the innovative narrative of 'The Garden', an ontological contemplation of nature from the perspective of a very young child, has elements of imagist poetry, as well as similarities of form and content with Virginia Woolf's short story 'Kew Gardens' and her autobiographical 'A Sketch of the Past'. Indeed, 'The Garden' could be either or both a sketch or a short story. It describes Richardson's autobiographical 'bee memory', a motif that runs through many other of her short works and that is also central to *Pilgrimage*, introducing an intertextual dimension to her oeuvre. Such intertextuality extends in a different manner to the stories 'Visit' and 'Visitor', which were published in a magazine side by side, featuring the same characters, and further disrupting genre by functioning 'as if they are two chapters' extracted from a novel that doesn't actually exist.[4]

One particular Richardson short story takes such disruption of genre boundaries even further. 'Sleigh Ride' is a four-page narrative published in 1926 as a free-standing short story in a magazine, an essentially plotless, stream of consciousness narrative describing part of a journey through a mountain landscape. However, the next year, this same text, almost entirely unaltered, was published within the *Oberland* chapter-volume of *Pilgrimage*.[5] The primary genre categories of prose fiction are dissolved here in that this is at once a short story, a travel sketch, and a segment of a novel, *Oberland*, which in turn is often denoted as merely a 'chapter' or 'volume' within a wider, 2000-page novel, or *roman-fleuve*, *Pilgrimage*. 'Sleigh Ride' is a short story whose text is not only similar to that of a novel, but identical, in so far as it actually constitutes a part of one, and as a result of this, certain fundamental stylistic distinctions between the short story and novel, such as the former's lack of detailed description, are negated. Everything present in 'Sleigh Ride' is also present in *Pilgrimage*.

'Sleigh Ride' functions both within and outwith its context as part of *Oberland* and *Pilgrimage*, raising the question of what is lost, what is altered, and even what is gained from its isolation and publication as a stand-alone short story. It can be compared with other autonomous short stories by Richardson, such as 'Summer', with has similarities of form and content. The first half of this article focuses on image, epiphany, and narrative

[4] Trudi Tate, 'Introduction', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago Press, 1989), xxviii.
[5] Tate, xxiv.

technique in 'Sleigh Ride. The second half examines more abstract notions of formal structure, such as the oft-neglected importance of length in literature, and its aesthetic consequences, particularly in regard to the genres of the modernist short story and the long modernist novel. For all of Richardson's radical formal innovations, the most immediately, and physically, obvious one is simply the extreme length of her novel. 'Sleigh Ride' can be read as an enactment of Richardson's approach to both her own long novel and to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, of which she wrote: 'the riches of a single page . . . [a]re enough'.[6]

Image

'Sleigh Ride' is a very short short story. Its plot is little more than its title suggests. The third-person narrative relates, through the free indirect thought of the unidentified protagonist, a sleigh ride through a mountainous landscape. It has only one line of dialogue, in German, and only an implication of setting, with the description of architecture in the final lines suggesting that this is somewhere in German-speaking Switzerland. There are no particular events, only one other barely-sketched character, and the stream of consciousness narrative remains focused on the observation of the weather and the sights of the journey, with little recollection of memory or introspection, just an instinctive response to the landscape.

Read in the context of *Pilgrimage*, the reader would know that the protagonist is an Englishwoman, Miriam Henderson, and that the narrative takes place in the early years of the twentieth century and relates a short, final, section of a long journey from London to Switzerland, where she will holiday. In Richardson's long novel, this journey represents an important move from one physical and psychological state to another, from a domestic, urban, workaday environment to an exotic mountain holiday resort. According to Howard Finn, this holiday narrative, which takes up the whole *Oberland* volume of the novel, functions as a significant 'interlude' within *Pilgrimage*, a term that in his definition 'refers to something which is dependent on what comes before and after'.[7] Yet in 'Sleigh Ride' there is nothing before and after; it is divorced from any such

[6] Gloria Glikin [Fromm], 'The "I" and the "She"', *Adam International Review* 31, no. 310–11–12 (1966): 41.

[7] Howard Finn, 'A Charming Light Interlude?', *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, no. 1 (2008): 119.

context, raising the question of how *Oberland*, or a mere four pages of it, might function in isolation.

With the reader unaware of Miriam Henderson, or of the previous 1,500 pages of *Pilgrimage*, the narrative of 'Sleigh Ride' begins *in medias res*. However, this, and the lack of context are not so incongruous here in that they are typical characteristics of the modernist short story, as already established at this point by James Joyce and Woolf amongst others.[8] In fact, 'Sleigh Ride' conforms to many of the common traits of this genre: it is largely plotless, it contains an element of epiphany involving nature and perception, and it employs free indirect thought, aspects that will be examined elsewhere in this essay.

Yet there is a further congruity here regarding 'Sleigh Ride's enforced use of *in medias res* and withheld information techniques, in that *Pilgrimage* itself actually operates in a similar way, its strict adherence to a single-focaliser free indirect thought narrative ensuring that there can be no real exposition. Miriam's circumstances cannot be easily explained, or her past reiterated, at any convenient point in the novel because such narrative as, in this particular instance, 'it was February 1906, and her holiday destination of Oberland, Switzerland lay ahead' would not naturally pass through her consciousness. This is one of many ways in which 'Sleigh Ride' and *Pilgrimage* together illustrate a consistency of dynamic and technique between the modernist short story and the long modernist novel. The further implications of Richardson's narrative technique will be explored later in this article.

In place of plot or dialogue, 'Sleigh Ride' is dominated by image. Clare Hanson writes that just as the emergence of the modernist short story embodied a movement 'from 'teller' to indirect free narration, and from 'tale' to 'text', it also involved a change of focus from 'discourse' to 'image'.[9] It has already been set out that 'Sleigh Ride' is highly representative of the former two developments, here the main substance of the short story is the image. The narrative is made up of a series of images, as in the following passage:

[8] For an overview of such characteristics see Clare Hanson, *Short Stories & Short Fiction 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 55–56.
[9] Hanson, 1.

> The colour was going and the angular shadows, leaving a bleakness of white, leaving the mountains higher in their whiteness. One there towered serene, that seemed at its top to walk up the deepening blue, a sharply flattened cone aslant, pure white. She watched it, its thickness of snow, the way from its blunted tower it came broadening down unbroken by crag, radiant white until far down its pinewoods made a little gentleness about its base.[10]

The emphasis on changing colour and light, which continues throughout the story, accentuates the idea that images are truly the subject here, or, as Thomas Staley writes of *Pilgrimage*: 'Miriam's images are not mere ornaments but exist in themselves'.[11] There is first a 'bleakness of white' and then 'radiant white', while 'whiteness' becomes a quality ascribed to the mountains and their grandeur. There is much not only of the language of imagist poetry here, a genre defined by Ezra Pound as expressing a 'complex of emotion in an instant of time', but also of its cadence.[12] Staley continues: 'As to the diction of *Pilgrimage* it reflects the unclouded rhetoric of an imagist poem [. . .] T.E. Hulme's theory of communication between human beings only by means of images seems to be inherent in this extraordinary *roman-fleuve*: a moment of revealed truth rather than a structure of consecutive events or thoughts'.[13] It follows that rather than being simply on opposite extremes of formal structure, 'Sleigh Ride' and *Pilgrimage* both operate similarly: the former offers images and several moments of revealed truth, while the latter operates as an extremely long series of images and moments of revealed truth, or epiphanies, with neither work having any clear beginning, middle, or end.

This is not to say, however, that 'Sleigh Ride' represents more than a tiny fraction of the aesthetic and emotional range of *Pilgrimage*. The story has a distinctly romantic character, representing one extreme of the polarity in Richardson's work between the mystical or transcendent and the everyday.[14] While this dialectic is a consistent trait in modernism, for

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[10] Dorothy Richardson, 'Sleigh Ride', in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago, 1989), 38–39.
[11] Thomas Staley, 'A Strange Anachronism', *Adam International Review* 31, no. 310-11–12 (1966): 49.
[12] Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Longman, 1992), 146.
[13] Staley, 'A Strange Anachronism', 49.
[14] Drewery, 'The Failure of This Now So Independently Assertive Reality: Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic in Dorothy Richardson's Short Fiction', 115.

example in *Dubliners* and *Mrs Dalloway*, modernism arose partly out of a sharp opposition to Romanticism, and such transcendent elements rarely extend to the high German Romanticism evident in the following passage of 'Sleigh Ride':[15]

> When she had pronounced her 'Wunderschön,' she sat back released from intentness, seeing the scene as one who saw it daily; and noticed then that the colour ebbed from the mountains had melted in the sky. It was this marvel of colour, turning the sky to a molten rainbow, that the driver had meant as well as the rubied ridges that had kept the sky forgotten (39).

The image of the rainbow traversing the mountains after the mist has been 'broken from above' (38), suggests something mystical and divine, a sense reinforced in the passage's evocation of two of the most canonical works of Romanticism, Caspar David Friedrich's landscape painting *Gebirgslandschaft mit Regenbogen* and Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, whose libretto states that: 'Suddenly the clouds lift [. . .] from their feet a rainbow bridge of blinding radiance stretches across the valley [to Valhalla] glowing in the rays of the evening sun'.[16] This particular association is accentuated in the *Dawn's Left Hand* volume of *Pilgrimage*, in which memories of Oberland come flooding back to Miriam upon her attending a Wagner production in London, with language that further evokes both Miriam's inner response to the sunset in 'Sleigh Ride' and Wagner's depiction of Valhalla: 'Oberland again; its golden light, and its way of making its outer world conform to its inner. Something of heaven, precarious'.[17]

The connection of Oberland to Wagner in Miriam's consciousness is further borne out during the performance later that evening, when: '[t]urning to the stage, [Miriam] saw golden light'.[18] Oberland reoccurs intermittently throughout the later volumes of *Pilgrimage*, functioning as an objective correlative, as 'a golden life within [Miriam's] life' although, as Finn proclaims, what exactly this represents 'remains bewildering [sic]

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[15] Michael Whitworth, 'Modernism and Romanticism', in *Modernism*, ed. Michael Whitworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 63–66.
[16] Casper David Friedrich, *Gebirgslandschaft Mit Regenbogen*, 1810, oil on canvas, 1810, Museum Volksgang, Essen; Richard Wagner, *The Rhinegold/Das Rheingold* (London: John Calder, 1985), 90.
[17] Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, vol. 4 (London: Virago Press, 1979), 157.
[18] Richardson, 4: 172.

profuse'.[19] Nonetheless, at its root is a series of transcendent moments of experience, or epiphanies, invoked by images of the sublime, with implications of the mystical and divine.

The alpine images of 'Sleigh Ride' can be seen as functioning autonomously within the short story, yet also as having a wider, more complex function within not only *Oberland*, but within Richardson's *roman-fleuve* as a whole, contributing to the structural unity of *Pilgrimage*, which is manifested in recurring motifs and emotional correlatives more than in traditional plotlines or character development. This is not to deny the fact that *Pilgrimage*'s overall structure is also informed by the pattern of development found in the *Künstlerroman*, while simultaneously maintaining an open-ended and fragmentary form. However, this wider context is not essential to 'Sleigh Ride', any more than any other images or motifs or text in *Pilgrimage* might be considered shorn of their full meaning or proper context due to that work's unfinished, incomplete, nature. As with an imagist poem, the brief series of images comprising 'Sleigh Ride' is capable of functioning artistically in isolation from any other text.

Epiphany

The epiphany, or the 'single moment of intense or significant experience' typically forms the 'structural core' of the modernist short story, including in the case of Richardson, as previously set out.[20] However, perhaps one point of difference between 'Sleigh Ride' and her deliberately-constructed short stories can be illustrated in the latter's more concrete moments of epiphany. While these are still very much modernist, abstract 'epiphanies', they are more foregrounded within the narrative than those in 'Sleigh Ride', and form a clearer 'structural core'. For example, in 'Summer', a story very similar in content and tone, the protagonist's response to the mountain landscape is more verbalised, more developed:

> Before the end of the journey the moon was up above the low mountains. Their shapes went slowly by. I remembered that I had not seen mountains before. But when I called back the moment of seeing them, they had always been there. They were *there*; they had come out of me into the sky; a part of me that I knew, in the sky. At

[19] Finn, 'A Charming Light Interlude?', 142.
[20] Hanson, *Short Stories & Short Fiction 1880-1980*, 55.

> one place there was a white torrent flowing down. I leaned out and heard the rush of it. The air rushed over my face (45).[21]

The temporal shift in the narrative's first person recollection - 'when I called back the moment' - provides a space for self-reflection and perspective that is necessarily absent from Richardson's usual stream of consciousness technique in 'Sleigh Ride' and *Pilgrimage*. 'Sleigh Ride' relates a similar epiphanic response to such a landscape, but without any attempt to analyse or contextualise it, only to express it as it is felt in real time: 'The mountain lights were happiness possessed, sure of recurrence' (40). In turn, the revelation in 'Summer' that mountains had always been '*there*', inside her, carries a mystical and psychological weight characteristic of the modernist epiphany: abstract, yet rarely expressed so lucidly, and with such immediacy, as it is here. There is an elemental weight to the passage, suggesting perhaps precognitive dreams, or the concept of folk-memory, but what is clear is that this is a relation of the sublime, both externally, in the landscape itself, and internally, in Miriam's response to it. In both these stories, as well as in much of *Pilgrimage*, epiphany comes from nature, from light, and is also enabled by the act of travel, by seeing new cultures and landscapes, and by seeing familiar things in a new context, not only new externally, but new internally, with the fresh perspective and psychological space that travel and holiday bring. This similarity of content and narrative dynamic regarding epiphany again strongly associates the core of Richardson's short fiction with the core of *Pilgrimage*. As Jan Marsh writes: '[Richardson's] real identity is found in moments of mystical illumination arising from the beauty of sense experience'.[22] Such epiphanies are a driving force of Richardson's short and long fiction alike, and can be fully expressed by her within a single page of text.

The only real element of plot structure in 'Sleigh Ride' arises from its climax, which is shaped by Miriam's arrival at her destination, and also causes an epiphanic moment. This is not only a physical arrival, but gives a sense of psychological arrival, or return, which is expressed by her response to the village's Gothic architecture:

> Up this steep road they went in a slow zigzag that brought the mountains across the way now right now left, and a glimpse ahead,

[21] Richardson, *Journey to Paradise*, 45.
[22] Jan Marsh, in *Penguin Companion Literature: Britain and the Commonwealth*, ed. David Daiches, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 442.

> against the sky, of a village, angles and peaks of low buildings sharply etched, quenched by snow, crushed between snow and snow, and in their midst the high snow-shrouded cone of a little church; Swiss village, lost in wastes of snow (40).

To the reader of *Pilgrimage* this architecture might immediately be taken as another objective correlative, connecting back to Miriam's time living in Hannover, fifteen years earlier, which is the subject of the novel's first volume, pertinently titled *Pointed Roofs*. The language describing these buildings, 'sharply etched' with 'angles and peaks', and a 'high snow-shrouded' church steeple rising out of the snow, connects them to the mountain landscape, the 'cone' of the church echoing the 'cone' of a mountain, and in turn connects Germanic culture to the Germanic nature that has made up the narrative of 'Sleigh Ride' thus far. This village is expressed as an uncountable noun, as if 'Swiss village' were an abstract emotion or state of mind, possessing innate qualities. Furthermore, the importance of such architecture to Miriam is expanded upon and expressed in slightly more concrete terms elsewhere in *Oberland*:

> And oh! that first glimpse that had begun it all, of Brussels in the twilight from the landing window; old peaked houses, grouped irregularly and rising out of greenery, bringing happy nostalgia. Gothic effects bring nostalgia, have a deep recognizable quality of life. A gothic house is a person, a square house is a thing . . . [23]

However, in 'Sleigh Ride', the sharpness of such images and the emotional response to them, and the insistence of cadence in depiction, still manage to express much of this notion, despite the even greater degree of abstractedness. Carol Watts's assertion that 'Germany in part is a state that Miriam 'achieves'" is borne out in these passages.[24] According to Watts, not only does it function as the setting for parts of *Pilgrimage*, but '[o]n another level Germany offers [Miriam] at certain moments a particular mode of experience - aesthetic, contemplative, epiphanic'.[25] In 'Sleigh Ride' this is communicated not only by imagistic language and Richardson's 'controlled intensity of emotion', but also by formal

[23] Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1979, 4:25.
[24] Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), 8.
[25] Watts, 9.

structure.[26] In repositioning Miriam's response to the village as the climax of a short story, her response is thereby foregrounded, and its sense of epiphany heightened. To take this further, the act of isolating these four pages as a short story might also be seen as an accentuation of their importance, and in this sense 'Sleigh Ride' represents a distillation of *Pilgrimage*'s concern with image and epiphany.

These intertextual implications further complicate the boundaries of Richardson's writing across different publications. This is exacerbated, as Drewery notes, by 'implicit connections' between characters of 'apparently discrete stories', and this connection can be extended to events.[27] For example, Miriam's memory and contemplation of Belgium quoted above is also very similar in tone and content to the following related by the narrator of 'Summer':

> [A]lone for the first time in Brussels [. . .] I walked up and down the rue where these shops stood with houses in between them. They were real and my own for the first time [. . .] I saw picture after picture; the white marble reredos at Lißege; the high facade of Louvain Cathedral; a strange echoing street of high, flat-fronted houses in Malines; Bruges facades standing at angles to each other in different lights, unfathomable lacework in stone shutting you in for ever [. . .][28]

The epiphanic experiences of Miriam and the narrator of 'Summer' in Belgium are both related to image, specifically to images of Gothic, uncanny, 'irregularly' structured architecture: 'strange echoing' streets, a towering cathedral, and masonry so ornate that it is described as 'unfathomable lacework in stone', bringing 'happy nostalgia' while 'shutting you in for ever', thus implying that these image-memories are permanent entities in both protagonists' lives. Just as the autobiographical element in *Pilgrimage* complicates its genre distinction, in that it reflects the life events of the author to an extent which is unusual in a novel, in this passage the autobiographical content of other of Richardson's works is

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[26] Storm Jameson, 'More on D.R.', *Adam International Review* 31, no. 310-11–12 (1966): 24.

[27] Drewery, 'The Failure of This Now So Independently Assertive Reality: Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic in Dorothy Richardson's Short Fiction', 135.

[28] Richardson, *Journey to Paradise*, 43.

shown as forming an intertextual thread. A common trait of this material is an epiphanic moment, triggered by an image, and such moments shape the skeletal plots of 'Summer' and 'Sleigh Ride', as well as occurring continually, without obvious pattern, throughout *Pilgrimage*.

Narrative Technique

In her review of the *Revolving Lights* chapter-volume of *Pilgrimage*, Virginia Woolf wrote that Richardson:

> 'has invented [. . .] a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes [. . .] [she] has fashioned her sentence consciously, in order that it may descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam Henderson's consciousness.[29]

This new sentence contravenes conventional grammar and syntax just as Richardson's books and stories transgress conventional genre and form. The gendered aspect of this was fully recognised by Richardson, who considered that the novel, 'founded on an idea", and 'mutable' was a masculine genre, while she sought a genre and a sentence that would 'express the immutable'.[30] The abandonment of these conventions allows her to follow the consciousness of Miriam, in the manner already set out in this essay. The form of the sentence is made to conform to Miriam's consciousness, rather than vice versa. The use of the ellipsis in 'Sleigh Ride' is typical of *Pilgrimage*, and also an important general trait of the modernist short story, in that the ellipsis expresses both the natural wanderings of the mind, with all its uncompleted thoughts, and also 'characterises the modernist epiphany', 'signal[ling] something odd, outside normal experience', in that such an epiphany resists language.[31] The ellipsis expresses the inability of language to accurately communicate certain heightened, and perhaps mystical, experiences, such as Miriam's

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[29] Woolf, *Women and Writing*, 191.

[30] Dorothy Richardson cited in Gillian E. Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: Women's Press, 1987), 42.

[31] Drewery, 'The Failure of This Now So Independently Assertive Reality: Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic in Dorothy Richardson's Short Fiction', 60.

response to Gothic architecture.[32] Such open-endedness of syntactic form is mirrored by *Pilgrimage*'s open-endedness of narrative and structural form, which is represented by the transposition of four of its pages to form 'Sleigh Ride'.

As set out previously, this technique precludes the usual narrative means of revealing important background information and plot exposition, or of simply reminding readers of pertinent events that occurred 1000 pages or so previously. This integrity and strict adherence of the prose in representing Miriam's stream of consciousness, and the authenticity in expressing her abstract thoughts in relation to often mundane everyday life, allied with the avoidance of traditional plot, are among the main reasons why *Pilgrimage* is regarded as such a 'difficult' text and why, for example, *The Penguin Companion to Literature*'s entry on Richardson even concludes that '[*Pilgrimage*] is, in the end, boring and difficult to read'.[33]

Again, there is a paradox here, in that the supposed structural formlessness of *Pilgrimage*, in line with many long modernist novels, is actually made up by an extreme formal unity of narrative technique. The approach is uncompromising, and its consistency of application is one reason why a tiny shard of *Pilgrimage* can function as an autonomous work of literature. In this sense, in line with Richardson's reading practice for *À la Recherche*, *Pilgrimage* can be seen as a fluid collection of *units* of prose writing, which could be read in any order. The boundaries of such units could be marked perhaps by a single scene, a chapter, the amount of text a reader might absorb in one sitting, or, in the most quantitative sense, as Gloria Fromm's description quoted earlier suggests, by the arbitrary section of text contained on an individual page. This notion will be explored further in the next section.

All of this serves to focus attention on the prose of Richardson's work, the *writing* itself, as opposed to the structural organisation and plot, and, in turn, on a philosophical level, serves to express the importance of the *moment*, and of how individual human consciousness experiences it. While 'Sleigh Ride' and *Pilgrimage* differ quite extremely in length, they are,

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[32] Drewery, 123.

[33] Jan Marsh, 'Richardson, Dorothy (Miller)', in *Penguin Companion Literature: Britain and the Commonwealth*, ed. David Daiches, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 442.

conversely, both reducible simply to individual stretches, or units, of Richardson's prose writing.

Structural Disorder

In an essay comparing Richardson's and Proust's long novels, Gloria Fromm relates Richardson's personal reading method for the latter:

> She was reading *À La Recherche* as she wished for her own *Pilgrimage* to be read: opened anywhere, and immediately involving a reader who knew nothing of it. She herself was the kind of reader who did not need Proust's assurances in *Du côté de chez Swann* that ultimately his novel would be seen to have the structured unity that a Frenchman's should. For her, the riches of a single page of Proust's text were enough.[34]

This section examines 'Sleigh Ride' in light of such a view, considering its publication and framing as a short story as an embodiment of such an approach to, and a reading process for, *Pilgrimage*, in which an isolated four pages can be 'enough'. It considers the aesthetic implications of literary length, and applies them to this idea, while drawing comparisons with the genre characteristics of the long modernist novel and the modernist short story.

The idea that one page of Richardson's novel should be enough is not, of course, to suggest that only one page need have been written to fulfil all of its purpose, but that one page can stand for itself, outside of the rest of the work, in a similar way that it is taken for granted that a single page, or poem, in a collection of lyric poetry such as *Les Fleurs du mal* can do so. While *Pilgrimage* may have a single, continuous narrative running throughout it - the adult life of Miriam Henderson - and while it has some of the overall structural elements of a typical *Künstlerroman*, a small fragment of it can still have autonomy, not only in terms of its aesthetics, but also in being able to fully express particular ideas. Describing Richardson's approach to her volumes of Proust, Fromm writes:

> She had at them 'piecemeal, leaving them all over the room, and read them in the same way, taking up the first handy volume and opening at random'. In 1928, she reported that her third serious reading [. . .]

[34] Glikin [Fromm], 'The "I" and the "She"', 41.

> of two volumes at a time, one from each end, [had] nearly reached the middle.[35]

This kaleidoscopic evocation of reading order recalls Richardson's previously quoted use of spatial language to object to the 'horizontal' structure of the conventional novel, 'horizontal' there describing the literary and philosophical implications of a standard bourgeois 'goal-oriented' progression through life as expressed in, for example, a typical *Bildungsroman*. Harmoniously, it also echoes somewhat Virginia Woolf's espousal of modernist writing, 'Modern Fiction', with its imperative to:

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday.[36]

Woolf's novels may lack a conventional plot, but her 'prismatic' representation of consciousness (implying inexhaustible perspectives and depth, and a randomness of events) is expressed in works that are nonetheless highly structured.[37] In comparison, Richardson's works not only abrogate traditional notions of plot, but also avoid any sense of pattern or structure. Michael Bell takes this further, arguing that despite such similarities, Richardson is at face value 'directly opposite' to Woolf in that her fiction is 'both long and aesthetically uncontained to the point of being unfinished'.[38] Thus, following her reading of *À la recherche*, Richardson was encouraged that her own long novel could also be approached at random and read out of order, an idea that goes beyond modernism and even anticipates the radical postmodernist cut-up technique of Kathy Acker and William Burroughs half a century before its time.[39] Moreover, it almost precisely foreshadows one of the definitive works of postmodern literature, B. S. Johnson's loose-leaf novel *The Unfortunates*, conceived in the author's words as a 'solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness' by managing to subvert 'the

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[35] Glikin [Fromm], 42.
[36] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, (London: Vintage, 2003), 148-9.
[37] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 121.
[38] Michael Bell, 'Towards a Definition of the Long Modernist Novel', *Modernist Cultures* 10, no. 3 (2015): 295.
[39] Glikin [Fromm], 'The "I" and the "She"', 41.

technological fact of the bound book', which 'imposes an order, a fixed page order, on the material'.[40]

In this sense, 'Sleigh Ride' constitutes an enaction of Richardson's favoured reading method for *Pilgrimage*. It repositions a small fragment of *Pilgrimage*'s text in an isolated context, as a short story in a magazine, before the publication of *Oberland*. This reading practice is paradoxical. On the one hand it overrules literary form, at least in the sense of structural order, implying that the order of pages in a novel is random and insignificant. On the other, this process serves to foreground the effects of structural order, and the very issue of form. The overall effect is to shift the emphasis from the narrative order onto the text itself, to emphasise consciousness, to attain a psychological realism, and, on both a literary and a philosophical level, to subvert the idea of a 'horizontal' structure.

Long and Short

As well as the first literary narrative termed as 'stream of consciousness', *Pilgrimage* is one of the longest novels in the English language. The reputation of Richardson and Proust as writers of length highlights a certain incongruity; the length of a literary work is one of its most elemental facets, yet length is commonly ignored or taken at face value within literary criticism. Theorists of the short story, a genre established in the mid nineteenth century, have done something to redress this, yet everything from the novella to the long novel has remained largely unexplored in this regard.[41]

That the form of very long prose literature tends to resist lucid critical analysis is addressed by Virginia L. Smyers and Gillian Hanscombe, who contend that 'It's easier [. . .] to construct the theory of Imagism from H.D.'s poems, for instance, than [. . .] to deal with Dorothy Richardson's prose; partly because the lyric has an ancient and discrete form and the novel does not'.[42] The form and structure of the novel, and especially of the long modernist novel, defy easy analysis. To use Richardson's own term in *Pilgrimage*, describing texts that Miriam must translate, they

[40] B. S. Johnson, 'Introduction to Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 11.
[41] Bell, 'Towards a Definition of the Long Modernist Novel', 282.
[42] Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940*, 188.

constitute: 'the shapeless mass'.[43] This is surely why length is more usually discussed in relation to the short story than the long novel, even though both fields are closely connected.[44]

Michael Bell suggests the 'long modernist novel' is a genre, one not characterised merely by a novel's empirical length but by length as a formal property of the novel itself.[45] Such works typically thematise time. Bell comments on the temporal implications of the word 'long', pointing to the overwhelming preoccupation with time in modernist fiction', such as, for example, in the single-day timespan of both Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and Joyce's long modernist novel *Ulysses*.[46] In certain novels set out as typical of this genre, such as *Pilgrimage*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, the disruption of conventional lengths of narrative, and of a clearly structured beginning, middle, and end, leads these particular works to be not only unfinished, but unfinishable, and therefore having a truly open-ended structure.

Furthermore, Bell argues that this thematising of time suggests a paradoxical interrelation between the longest and the shortest forms of fiction, which can be applied to *Pilgrimage* and 'Sleigh Ride'.[47] Scott McCracken and Jo Winning argue that modernist fiction signals the 'unrepresentability in narrative of long duration', in that 'extended time is often figured by brevity, the fullness of experience by absence or an empty space', and therefore 'modernist short fiction [. . .] has more in common with long modernist fiction than might first appear to be the case'.[48] The narrative technique of *Pilgrimage* precludes such temporal novelistic stock phrases along the lines of, for example, 'The next few months followed a similar routine, passing largely without incident', and as a result the narrative must be fragmented, following, in George H. Thomson's phrase, a 'method [. . .] of exclusion and compression'.[49] Scenes of Miriam's life are: 'opened up and amplified [and] typically isolated, their relationship

[43] Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, vol. 3 (London: Virago Press, 1979), 142.
[44] Bell, 'Towards a Definition of the Long Modernist Novel', 269.
[45] Bell, 285.
[46] Bell, 283.
[47] Bell, 283.
[48] Scott McCracken and Jo Winning, 'The Long Modernist Novel: An Introduction', *Modernist Cultures* 10, no. 3 (November 2015): 278.
[49] George H. Thomson, *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1996), 6.

one to another implied only', an idea which echoes Katherine Mansfield's description of the volumes of *Pilgrimage* as 'nests of stories'.[50] In this sense, a scene such as Miriam's sleigh ride functions in a similar way, whether isolated within a short story, or still isolated but collected together with countless other scenes spanning a period of twenty years within a long novel.

Relating the characteristics of the long modernist novel to aspects of the prose style discussed in the previous chapter, McCracken and Winning draw a comparison with Franco Moretti's related concept of the 'modern epic'. Moretti writes that: 'Every sentence, and almost every word, of the stream of consciousness is a world in itself: complete, independent. Every paragraph, a digression in miniature – which continues to expand, like the one we have just read, because there exists no 'organic' fetter to hold in check'.[51] This resonates in particular with Hanscombe's description of Richardson's 'new' sentence as the 'technical unit' that served as the foundation of her vision.[52] In one sense, in such long modernist novels the stream of consciousness *is* the subject, rather than the external events of the plot, and therefore a 'complete, independent' unit of narrative can be reducible to one sentence, or stretch over 4000 pages. This is played out in the way that four of *Pilgrimage*'s over-2000 pages can also function as a short story.

Moretti continues: 'It is the logic of mechanical form: the potentially infinite addition of [. . .] Dos Passos, [and] Musil [. . .]. And indeed, for Joyce, 'to work' at *Ulysses* basically means to extend *Ulysses*, until the day when the printer loses patience'.[53] While *Ulysses* parallels elements of Homer's epic, only to refuse its climax, *À la recherche* and *Pilgrimage* are unfinished, and perhaps unfinishable, novels, their 'unfinished state [. . .] part of [their] immanent logic'.[54] They were the life's works of their authors, and they were added to until they were no longer able or willing to write; 'an extrinsic fact thus assumes responsibility for putting an end

[50] Thomson, 7; Hanson, *Short Stories & Short Fiction 1880-1980*, 57–58.
[51] Franco Moretti, cited in McCracken and Winning, 'The Long Modernist Novel', 280.
[52] Hanson, 40.
[53] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London ; New York: Verso, 1996), 151–52.
[54] Bell, 'Towards a Definition of the Long Modernist Novel', 293.

to the infinite form'.[55] *Pilgrimage* can be seen in this sense less as a fixed, complete work of literature, than as an accumulation of text that 'accepts its unfinished condition as intrinsic', and allows for fragmentation, in the form of 'Sleigh Ride', for example.[56]

The notion of fragmentation in this respect not only subverts the assumption that form is fixed, and finalised upon initial publication, thus challenging the sovereignty of any literary work, but it also foregrounds the concept of the fragment itself. The fragment was a sub-genre of the early short story, particularly the Gothic short story, in which text was presented as if it were a discovered fragment of a larger document, a technique intimating that aside from something being subtracted from 'Sleigh Ride', some ineffable qualities may also be added; a sense of obscurity and mystique consistent with modernist techniques such as withheld information, yet conversely also relating back to the Gothic. In writing about the Gothic fragment genre, Allen W. Grove contends that the fragment is: 'the quintessential unit that creates both the poetics and politics of Gothic fiction. After all, almost universally Gothic texts are fragmented, interrupted, unreadable, or presented through multiple framings and narrators. Gothic novels tend to highlight their own incompletedness and the unreliability of their narrators'.[57] Gothic literature, similarly to Romanticism, is generally considered almost antithetical to modernism, yet the effects of the fragment genre noted here are remarkably similar to the modernist traits previously set out. In particular, the fragmentation of *Pilgrimage* in the formation of 'Sleigh Ride' is consistent with its interrupted, fragmented, unreliable, and allegedly unreadable narrative.

Conclusion

'Sleigh Ride' represents Richardson's disruption of literary genre and form in a great variety of differing ways. It is a short story, perhaps better termed in its plotlessness as a piece of modernist short fiction, in the manner of both a travel sketch and a prose poem, that also constitutes a fragment of a novel, which itself constitutes a fragment, or sub-novel, of a largely autobiographical 2000 page *roman-fleuve*, whose writer fervently denied to

[55] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 152.
[56] Bell, 'Towards a Definition of the Long Modernist Novel', 295.
[57] Allen W. Grove, 'To Make a Long Story Short: Gothic Fragments and the Gender Politics of Incompleteness", *Studies in Short Fiction* 34, no. 1 (1997): 1.

be a novel. In this manner, and in light of Richardson's narrative technique, and of her reading practice for Proust, *Pilgrimage* might be viewed as a mass of 2000 open-ended pages, incomplete by design, as variable *units of prose* and approachable on a spectrum: as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as a series of independent sub-novels, as brief scenes, or as single pages. In that 'Sleigh Ride' is a fragment, it foregrounds both Gothic and modernist forms and aesthetics, and refers back to a pre-modernist nineteenth century genre, while simultaneously portending postmodernist literature with its intertextuality and plagiarism (for example Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations*) and in its disruption of order (for example B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*).

This disruption highlights the similarities between the longest and the shortest forms of fiction, in which both extremes are incapable of bearing traditional literary narratives. The re-framing of text creates a new beginning and a new ending within *Pilgrimage*, which in turn serves to foreground the elements that Storm Jameson sees as its foundation: the 'extraordinarily sharp visual memory which allows [Richardson] to evoke a scene, [with] vivid detail and her controlled intensity of emotion'.[58] Most notably, the publication of 'Sleigh Ride' as a short story can be seen as an enactment of Dorothy Richardson's approach to prose fiction, in which structural unity and order are of secondary importance, and 'a single page [is] enough'.

[58] Jameson, 'More on D.R.', 24.