

## REMEMBERING HOWARD FINN: 1957–2025

*Scott McCracken*

I first met Howard around the turn of the millennium, when he organised a conference at Queen Mary University of London devoted to Dorothy Richardson. Richardson was then, if anything, even less known than she is now. Howard was among her most committed and rigorous advocates. She was the subject of his doctoral research at Queen Mary under the supervision of Morag Shiach. At the time of the conference, Howard was still completing his PhD. So erudite and knowledgeable was he that he already had the authority of an established scholar. The event brought together major figures in Richardson scholarship, including Gillian Hanscombe, Jean Radford, Laura Marcus, Carol Watts, and Jo Winning; many of whom met there for the first time. It turned out to be a turning point in Richardson studies, leading to the establishment a few years later of the Dorothy Richardson Society, which in turn became the foundation for a substantial collaborative undertaking: the Oxford edition of Richardson's complete works. Howard played a vital role from the start. He reviewed new monographs on Richardson, wrote articles on Richardson and suffragism and Richardson and the Quakers; and he contributed a chapter that compared Richardson with May Sinclair and Gertrude Stein in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, edited by Morag Shiach. Material originating from his meticulous research on the ninth chapter-volume of *Pilgrimage*, *Oberland*, will form an important part of the edition. He was a regular contributor of articles and reviews for this journal. He curated the first Dorothy Richardson exhibition at the Remaking the New: Modernism and Textual Scholarship conference in 2017.

Having spent several years teaching English in Japan, Howard re-entered academia as what was then called a 'mature' student. Today we would use a less loaded but less evocative term and call him a 'non-standard entry' student. It is fair to say that there was nothing

standard about Howard. Not only had he read everything about Richardson, but having read deeply across twentieth-century literature and film history, he seemed to have read everything about everybody. His knowledge extended to the most obscure and unknown experimental writers and directors of the twentieth century. Long before they became fashionable objects of academic study, he was reading mid-century authors such as B. S. Johnson, Ann Quin, Christine Brooke-Rose, Anna Kavan, Wilson Harris. A collector of books, music, films, and all lost causes, he also had an unparalleled knowledge of avant-garde cinema, music, and Tottenham Hotspur Football Club.

Quietly gregarious, he loved conversation and would often drop in to a colleague's office around five o'clock for a chat that would quickly become a deep discussion, choosing his topic carefully depending on his interlocutor. There were many Howards. I never knew the passionate Spurs fan because he knew I had no interest in football. In any case, in a department dominated by Arsenal supporters, he kept his fandom below the radar. In his conversations as in all aspects of life, he was unfailingly kind and considerate. It was characteristic that when it turned out that an elderly member of the Dorothy Richardson Society meetings was the novelist Eva Tucker, it was Howard who had read two of her little-known experimental works written in the 1960s, and it was Howard who always made sure a taxi was found for her at the end of the day. Just before she died, he took the time to interview Eva for this journal, leaving us an invaluable record of both of them in conversation.

Howard's classes at Queen Mary were legendary, particularly his seminars, where his depth of knowledge, seriousness of purpose, and enthusiasm for textual difficulty created a rare kind of intellectual atmosphere. He appreciated his students—his feedback sometimes rivalled the length of the essay itself—and his students—who had little idea that they were acquiring knowledge they would get in few other places—appreciated him. His classes on James Joyce's *Ulysses* were 'adored' according to one former student, as was

his sense of humour, his infectious laugh, and his ‘idiosyncrasies’. There was no place he would not go in discussion, and his students loved him for it. He was as generous to his colleagues as he was to his students. One new member of staff remembers him bounding up at the end of his first lecture on a modernism course, coffee in hand, to engage him in conversation about its content. The young lecturer took it as a compliment, and, of course, it was.

All topics, academic or otherwise, were an opportunity for pleasurable intellectual engagement. His preferred time for conversation was late afternoon or early evening. He was notoriously nocturnal, reading late into the night and often not appearing until lunchtime. One of his favourite topics was politics. He once described himself as a ‘fallen Marxist’, though he might be better understood as an old Bennite, a Lexiteer who would argue earnestly against the European Union and for national sovereignty. He liked disagreement but was never dogmatic. He observed the politics of his younger colleagues with a mixture of nostalgia and wry, melancholic detachment, affectionately referring to them in private as ‘the Maoists’.

When I think of Howard, I remember a summer afternoon not long ago, when he was already ill though not yet seriously. Typically, he had come onto campus to pick up a book and we decided to go for a coffee. We decided to sit down outside and when I asked him what he wanted, he said, ‘You know, I’ve never had a frappuccino, I’ll have one of those’. As it happened, neither had I, so we sat there in the sun, two ageing men drinking iced coffee, chewing over the topics he chose because he knew we would both enjoy them. Not football, not music, not even film, because I do not know enough—just literature and politics, including of course his latest thoughts on Dorothy Richardson. As always, he was wise, funny, slightly melancholy, especially about politics—but ever himself.

At only sixty-eight, Howard was taken from us far too soon. He deserved a healthier, happier, much, much, longer retirement. Yet there is some consolation in thinking that he lived his life the way

he had wanted. With his books, his films, his late nights, his old-school teaching, and his handwritten feedback laboriously typed into the university software, he was always his own person, old fashioned in the best possible sense—from another age in some ways, or perhaps he just took from our age the bits he found interesting, and did not see the point in the rest. Those of us who were lucky enough to work with him, study with him, or simply share in his conversations will remember not only his formidable knowledge but his generosity, his humour, and his kindness. He knew how to work and how to live, or rather how to do both while doing neither—because intellectual endeavour was never work to him, it was a way of life.

*Articles and Reviews on Dorothy Richardson by Howard Finn*

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