

‘LIKE A GREETING IN A VALENTINE’:
SILENT FILM INTERTITLES IN DOROTHY
RICHARDSON’S *PILGRIMAGE*

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In *Dawn’s Left Hand* (1931) Miriam returns home to find ‘I love you’ scrawled in soap across her mirror. Noticeably white on a dark background, the silent film intertitle-like words trigger a reconstruction in her mind of how they came to be there which impresses her so strongly that it seems to be projected, cinematically, in front of her:

looking out through the eyes of her body at the shadowy semblance left in the room: the figure of the girl secretly and swiftly coming and going, in outdoor garb, cloak or loose coat, something swaying and flowing with her movements, unEnglishly.¹

Several commentators have recognised cinema’s influence on Richardson’s fiction. Carol Watts’ study, *Dorothy Richardson*, for example, offers an excellent overview of the connections between Richardson’s film writing and her thirteen ‘chapter-volume’ novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*. Watts concludes that film offers Richardson an ‘alternative alphabet’² with which to write: a new visual syntax of flashbacks, close ups, dissolves and montage³ that aid Richardson’s desire to express the move ‘into [the] new dimension of consciousness’⁴ that she felt film also presented. Watts does not, however, consider Richardson’s explicit interest in film as an intertitled medium. This article will demonstrate that intertitle styles, structures and functions were an important aspect of the

¹ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, Vol.IV, (London: Virago, 1979), pp.196-7

² Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House in association with The British Council, 1995), p.72

³ Ibid, p.76

⁴ Dorothy Richardson, ‘The Film Gone Male’ (March 1932), in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, Laura Marcus (eds), *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, (London: Cassell, 1998), p.206

new cinematic language that Richardson began to use in her fiction and that their influence was ideological as well as aesthetic.

As Laura Marcus has identified in *The Tenth Muse* (2007), her pioneering study on modernism and film, the proper function of the silent film intertitle was a subject of much debate in the 1910s and 1920s amongst critics and theorists linked to the literary avant-garde as well as those in 'the trade'.⁵ Richardson joined the debate with 'Captions' (September, 1927), her third column piece for *Close Up* (1927-33), a British magazine that advertised itself as the first to be 'devoted to films as an art'.⁶ In a letter to Bryher, one of the *Close Up* editors, in June 1927, Richardson proposes 'Captions' as an argument 'for and against'⁷ and in her column she expresses the concern, prevalent at the time, and shared by Virginia Woolf, and *Spectator* film critic, Iris Barry, that film 'needs only the minimum of informative accompaniment'. However, she also displays a contradictory liking for the 'strange news' intertitles can bring 'of which within reason we can never have too much', and reports eagerly awaiting the first 'oblong of clear print'.⁸

Richardson rejected the traditional role of the film critic in her column. Writing to Bryher before she undertook the role she fears that her ideas are 'simply about seeing movies regardless of what is seen', and indeed she rarely refers to specific films, only singling out Charles Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925) and Douglas Fairbanks' *The Three Musketeers* (1921) as examples of silent films showing after cinemas had converted to sound.⁹ Situating herself as a spectator, one of a 'congregation',¹⁰ Richardson's central concern in her column is, as Carol Watts has argued, the 'form of "contemplation" she understood film to offer'.¹¹ 'Captions'

⁵ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.9.

⁶ Donald et. al. (eds), p.8

⁷ Gloria G. Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.135

⁸ Donald et. al. (eds), pp.164-5

⁹ Letter to Bryher, Spring 1927, in Fromm p.134.

¹⁰ Dorothy Richardson, 'There's No Place Like Home' (November 1927), in Donald et. al. (eds), pp.168-9

¹¹ Watts, p.59

documents Richardson's sense of the experience of watching an intertitled film, and one aspect she relishes is the opportunity intertitles provide for the audience to have creative input. While she recalls films where the intertitles 'ha[ve] been the better part, presenting, bright and new, truths that in our keeping had grown a little dim', she also allows that in films 'damaged by their captions [...] we can substitute our own'. Richardson emphasises her sense of film's fluidity, shaped by creative response to the extent that 'we can remake a bad film as we go. With half a chance we are making all the time'. The audience must gather 'hints', 'each for himself', and though Richardson's 'test of the film' is that the 'wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein', she stresses that 'each will take a different journey'.¹²

For Richardson, one source of the hints with which the audience-collaborator can make the film is the intertitle, and this structure suggested one way she could also enable or provoke reader collaboration in her fiction. Before considering exactly how intertitles impacted on Richardson's fiction, however, I will briefly outline the various functions intertitles had in the silent film era more generally.

The first intertitled films appeared from 1902 onwards, as the demand for narrative films that were longer than early novelty films such as those produced by the Lumière brothers in the 1890s, and required multiple shots, necessitated some explanation beyond the main title.¹³ However, the first attempts – series of tableaux illustrating summary intertitles – seemed to betray film's potential as a new narrative medium, and sparked the first debates on the 'legitimate function'¹⁴ and placement of the intertitle. Hollywood director, D.W. Griffith devised the 'narrator-system' of cinema, which used editing to manipulate the images so that they

¹² Richardson, 'Captions', in Donald et. al. (eds), pp.164-5

¹³ Kristin Thompson has documented the transition from primitive to classical Hollywood style, 'from a narrative model derived largely from vaudeville into a filmmaking formula drawing upon aspects of the novel, the popular legitimate theatre, and the visual arts' ('From Primitive to Classical', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p.157

¹⁴ Thompson, 'The Formulation of the Classical Narrative', *ibid*, p.184

could tell their own story as much as possible,¹⁵ and from 1910, as dialogue intertitles first came consistently into use, characters could also take on more of the narration themselves. However, explanatory intertitles that set the place and time of the action, established relationships, and explained motivations or complex emotions that could not be conveyed in mime, remained in general usage, with increasing levels of sophistication, until the end of the silent era. In addition to these functions, Kristin Thompson has noted the development in the early 1910s of the intertitle that piqued curiosity rather than explained the action, in the manner of chapter headings in fiction, such as ‘The crowning insult’ or ‘An opportunity for revenge’.¹⁶ And Anita Loos, a Hollywood screenwriter, perhaps now more generally known for her bestselling novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), became famous in 1916 for what was dubbed the satirical or ‘literary’ intertitle. This utilised a narrative voice that worked outside the plot, generally for comic effect, exposing pillars of society to satire, subverting narrative conventions, and making cheeky associations through wordplay.

Intertitles enabled directors to cut unnecessary shots establishing time, place or relationships, and thus helped to improve a film's pace and rhythm. As such, intertitles became as integral a part of silent film grammar as continuity editing, montage and the close up. They also profoundly affected the spectator's experience as they provided the narrative frame through which the rest of the film was perceived, a key source of Richardson's hints. One objection, however, particularly to the placement of dialogue intertitles in the middle of scenes, was that, as A.R. Kennedy, one 1912 commentator suggested, ‘The spectator gets the effect of the actors “holding the pose” while he reads the leader [...] The continuity of the scene is broken and the illusion is spoiled’.¹⁷ One remedy was not to cut away at all but to title the scene in the manner of modern subtitles used for foreign-language films. It was

¹⁵ André Gaudreault, ‘Showing and Telling: Image and Word in Early Cinema’, in Thomas Elsaesser, Adam Barker (eds), *Early Cinema: Space, frame, narrative* (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), p.279

¹⁶ Thompson, ‘The Formulation of the Classical Narrative’, pp.185-6

¹⁷ Cited in Thompson, *ibid*, p.185

used to great effect during the chariot race in Fred Niblo's *Ben Hur* (1925), where a conventional intertitle literally would have stopped the horses in mid-career. However, 'subtitles' like these remained a rarity. Writing in 1930, Krows suggests the reason for this was psychological.

The spectator appreciates best when he is able to concentrate; and his mind is so constituted that he concentrates best on one thing at a time [...] to re-study the orientation of characters and their varying facial expressions and at the same time attend their speech presented in this fashion was a little like dividing one's attention over a three-ring circus.

According to Krows, intertitles artificially mimic the brain's propensity to 'dim[...] unrelated parts' of a scene in the theatre, or a page in a book, and in fact work to aid concentration further by 'complete elimination of the scene for a brief interval'.¹⁸ As I shall demonstrate in a later section of this essay that considers Richardson and 'Silence', this silent-era separation of the verbal and visual elements of film, which enabled audiences to achieve a fuller appreciation of both, was a concept that Richardson sought to emulate, arguably in life as well as in her fiction.

By the early 1920s, when Richardson first became a regular filmgoer, attempts were being made further to integrate intertitles into the visual fabric of film through the use of 'art titles' and subject-appropriate typography. Illustrating intertitles enabled them to present further levels of meaning. We are immediately aware in *The Gold Rush*, for example, that 'Georgia', announced throughout by a luminous intertitle adorned by a rose, is the romantic interest of the film.

Appropriate typography also helped to create the film's atmosphere. German expressionist films such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), widely shown in British cinemas, inspired producers across the world to use jagged writing for

¹⁸ Arthur Edwin Krows, *The Talkies* (USA: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp.99-101

horror, or flowery or voluptuous styles for romance. Dialogue titles too, though generally not illustrated, utilised several methods to suggest speech effects. In addition to representing foreign accents and dialects by certain word combinations and spellings, tones of voice were suggested by varying type size, animated letters and the use of capital letters, underlining, italics, and bold. Most of these effects are used, and spoofed, in Paul Leni's *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). Shouts of 'HELP!' in quivering capital letters zoom larger to fill the whole title, while single words wobbling and bumping down from the top of the title, 'Gosh what a spooky house!', signify a voice breaking with fear. Exposed to an eclectic mix of films at the local cinemas she faithfully patronised in St John's Wood, London, and Padstow, Cornwall, Richardson would have been familiar with all of these intertitle uses and effects.¹⁹

Three concerns had preoccupied Richardson since she began her *Pilgrimage* project in 1915: the struggle to define and convey consciousness and memory; typography and the visual nature of words; and silence. These preoccupations provided a frame for much of her film writing for *Close Up*, and thinking about them in cinematic terms influenced her ideas in *Dawn's Left Hand*, the chapter-volume Richardson was writing at the same time as her film column, making it the most cinematic of her books. *Dawn's Left Hand* is not of course like a Hollywood film. There are no introductory intertitles that, 'when we have read we know where we are supposed to be going',²⁰ and, as with all her chapter-volumes, the narrative is mediated through Miriam's consciousness and deliberately avoids establishing relationships in advance as Miriam would not think that way. However, Richardson does give hints, and Richardson's presentation of such hints and her

¹⁹ In a 1928 letter to Tommy and John Austen, she reports seeing at her 'small local hall', 'between melodramas, an excellent one-reel film of a weird bird newly arrived from Central Africa, with a beak like an alligator. Martin Luther is on at the vanguarding Avenue Pavilion & is to be followed by Epstein's (the French Epstein) Fall of the House of Usher, done from Baudelaire's trans. of Poe'. (The letter is clearly dated 12 Aug 1928, although George H. Thomson has shown that the letter probably dates from September 1928 [Thomson, unpublished annotations]).

²⁰ Richardson, 'Captions', p.164

manipulation of narrative structures demonstrate her understanding of how an intertitled film functioned.

Consciousness, Memory and 'Continuous Performance'

'Continuous Performance', the title of Richardson's column for *Close Up*, references cinemas where the programme was repeated and audiences could enter at any point. Laura Marcus notes Richardson's use of this aesthetic when she begins her first column with an ellipsis '...So I gave up going to the theatre', as if starting *in media res*.²¹ However, for Richardson, film's ability to be continually performed had much more wide-ranging implications, for her fiction and for the nature of consciousness itself.

In a review for *Close Up*, Bryher notes the singular experience of *Dawn's Left Hand* where 'in each page an aspect of London is created that like an image from a film, substitutes itself for memory, to revolve before the eyes as we read'.²² Richardson had struggled to find a sufficient metaphor for the workings of memory in each chapter-volume before *Dawn's Left Hand*.²³ In *The Tunnel* (1919), she describes the sensation of memory the morning after a dance: 'your mind full of pictures and thoughts, and the evening coming up again and again, one great clear picture in the foreground of your mind' (II 129). In *Deadlock* (1921), Miriam's thoughts are arranged as if on a theatre stage: 'The scenes she watched opened out one behind the other in clear perspective, the earlier ones remaining visible, drawn aside into bright light as further backgrounds opened' (III 78). And in *Revolving Lights* (1923), memory is a patchwork quilt: 'Fragments of forgotten experience detached themselves, making a bright moving patchwork as she watched, waiting, while she passed from one to

²¹ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p.344

²² Bryher, 'Dawn's Left Hand' (December 1931), Donald et. al. (eds), p.209

²³ Carol Watts has identified that Richardson's narrative 'articulates itself through the presentation of specific technologies of memory: architecture, photography, painting, cinematography'. Although she suggests that 'These are not present in any systematic sense' (Watts, pp.12-13), I would argue that there is a clear sense of a progressive search for improved metaphors to convey her idea of how memory works.

another and fresh patches were added, drawing her on' (III 323). In each image it is essential that all of her memories are visible at once. For Richardson the past is continually present, colouring our everyday consciousness; Miriam's dismay in *Deadlock* that Shatov has had previous sexual encounters is not alleviated by his protestation that it is all in the past: 'Can't you see that there is no past? [...] It is crowding all round you [...] It's more solid than the space of air between us. I can't get through it'. (III 211).

In *Dawn's Left Hand*, influenced by 'continuous performance', Richardson finds the perfect metaphor for this sense in film:

The memories accumulated since she landed were like a transparent film through which clearly she saw all she had left behind; and felt the spirit of it waiting within her to project itself upon things just ahead. (IV 141)

Though credited as the first writer to use 'stream of consciousness' in her fiction – May Sinclair was the first to use the term in a 1918 review²⁴ – Richardson criticises the term as 'perfect imbecility'. For her consciousness 'sits stiller than a tree [...] a central core, luminous point'.²⁵ In her memory-as-film metaphor Miriam's luminous consciousness works like the bulb in a projector, playing her memories in continuous performance with her present and future. That film, with its intertitles, presented Richardson with a new perception of memory and how it could be represented becomes clear if we compare two chapters in which Miriam is preoccupied with remembering: the final chapter of *Revolving Lights* where she remembers her stay with Hypo and Alma; and Chapter 5 of *Dawn's Left Hand* where Miriam meets Amabel for the first time and spends a Sunday morning remembering the events of Mrs Redfern's party the night before.

In *Revolving Lights*, memory is still 'a spread embroidery of sunlit scenes' (III 396) and the more traditional narrative stitching is clearly visible. The narrative shifts robustly between remembered

²⁴ Watts, p.5

²⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'Dorothy M. Richardson', in Stanley J. Kunitz (ed.), *Authors Today and Yesterday* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co, 1933), p.562

scenes – mostly conducted in dialogue – and the physical present where she is at work in the dental surgery, framed by paragraphs in a narrative past tense: ‘The second afternoon, Hypo stretched out on the study lounge’ (III 388); or a present tense in which Miriam considers the implications of what has occurred: ‘He misses nothing. That is his charm’ (III 393). In the chapter in *Dawn’s Left Hand* there are no such demarcations. Like film, shot or ‘accumulated’ in the past, her memories are continuing to play themselves out ‘now’ on the ‘screen’ of her mind.

Richardson draws our attention to this aesthetic after the opening section of the chapter: the first encounter with Amabel. Miriam is glad not to have made a definite appointment to meet her again. Kept ‘complete in itself’ without referring to a future event, ‘the little scene’ can take its place in film-reel like ‘long continuous distances of past and future’, free to play in the ‘continuous moment’. Illustrating this point, the next paragraph details Miriam dressing for ‘Mrs Redfern’s evening’ and ‘Waking next morning’ (IV 176) with no break between them, as if they are a contemporaneous event. In the following paragraphs, ‘merging’ into thoughts of herself as all ages at once – ‘This person who had stood for the first time alone [...] between the banks of flowers’ as a child, is also ‘This person, who was about to take a lover’ – is the general present tense ‘fun of dressing for these gatherings’ (IV 177-8). This phrase signals, but so gently that the reader can easily miss it, the shift to Miriam remembering the evening at Mrs Redfern’s that had been elided between dressing and waking in the earlier paragraph. However, the scenes now described, weighted with present participles or lacking verbs altogether, are both that evening and every evening at Mrs Redfern’s, playing in continuous performance in Miriam’s memory:

And then, with eyes filming over as though she were going into a trance, announcing, as consciousness forsook her, as if by way of apology for those so far gathered at her weekly meetings, in the manner of one heralding a Messiah, ‘He is *coming*’, and a sigh expressing the end for ever of effort and responsibility, eyes still closed and lips ecstatically smiling. (IV 178)

Without structured shifts in time or conventional use of tenses, Richardson achieves the effect of past, present and even future, as Miriam also remembers imagining next week's 'Undisturbed space, high above the quiet street' (IV 185), happening simultaneously: the images of one projected, as if through film, onto the screen of the others. Initially disorienting for the reader, Richardson requires us to take hints, which, like her perception of intertitles, guide us back to truths that have 'grown a little dim'. We are reliant on time phrases, such as, 'It was Sunday' (IV 177) and 'To-day, being Sunday' (IV 185), to signal the return to the actual present, from which we, in creative collaboration with Richardson, are able to reconstruct the events of the evening and determine their significance. One example, as we shall see later, is the connection between Amabel and flowers.

Richardson uses intertitle-like short phrases throughout *Dann's Left Hand*, and, like the intertitles in films, they perform a variety of functions. The 'short phrase' was not an entirely new aesthetic to Richardson, however. Previous chapter-volumes are dotted with words in quotation marks, or separated from the rest of the passage with a full stop. The first occurrence, 'voluntary incongruity', to describe Miriam's sister's 'buffoonery' happens in parentheses early in *Pointed Roofs* (1915) but its status is clearly explained: 'she quoted to herself as she watched her' (I 22). The early phrases often appear in Miriam's thoughts as she is speaking to people; 'unnatural infatuation' is clearly quoted from a conversation with the Pernes (I 329), while in later chapter-volumes, Miriam has developed her own store, describing Mrs Staple-Craven's face at dinner as 'milk and roses', (I 371) and Mr Mendizabal, 'Jaunty and debonair' (II 391). Quotation marks become a way of distancing herself from words, as if in ironic comment. In *Oberland* (1927), she creates a damning depiction of a man through her use of such quotations as "charm" and "wit" [...] "with an eye for a pretty face," [...] backed by "means" and "position" (IV 82).

In *Dann's Left Hand*, however, these phrases develop new functions, separated from the narrative by similar means –

quotation marks, full stops, and also now colons, and italics – but not working as quotations or comments, or as a means of emphasis which was Richardson's previous use of italics. The phrases '*Coercion*. The unpardonable crime', 'It was his worst fault?' and 'Philosophising: [...]' are spliced into a passage like intertitles, appearing on separate lines, and, as a visual reference to intertitles in the narrative suggests, 'coming as if from outside her mind and gleaming for an instant in the murky darkness' (IV 218). Coming from an outside source of narration and gleaming cinematically in the darkness in a similar manner to the words, 'I love you', discussed at the beginning of this essay, they act as explanatory intertitles to the longer lines of thought and action. Other phrases function as intertitle-like labels, elucidating longer passages like the time phrases in Chapter V. '[S]unlit primroses' (IV 177), appears almost as a climax, separated from an excursion in memory about the day they were seen by a semicolon, and 'hatless: residents' explains the implication of the visual description of 'a small group standing close at hand' (IV 174).

Separated from the rest of the narrative these phrases draw attention to themselves, almost as word objects. In Laura Frost's study of Anita Loos, the Hollywood screenwriter famous for her intertitles, Frost perceives how Loos' intertitles work as visual objects in their own right. For example, the intertitle, 'Ain't he the REEL hero', inserted after Douglas Fairbanks saves the day in *His Picture in the Papers* (1916), needs to be seen to get the pun. In *Dawn's Left Hand*, when Miriam sees Amabel for the second time, her 'Smoothly draped sheeny dark hair framed the flower-fresh oval face and heightened the "jasmine" white of the column of neck' (IV 187). Not simply an adjective, the quotation marks jolt 'jasmine' out of the flow of visual description and we read it as a word as well as see the image of the flower. When Miriam first meets Amabel her dress is described repeatedly as 'glowing silky rose-red [...] the rose-red gown shone' (IV 175). Between the rose and jasmine the text is scattered with memories of flowers in springtime – 'anemones' and 'cowslip balls', the 'sunlit primroses' (IV 176-7). When Amabel appears, 'looking as though she had blossomed from the air' (IV 187), and several chapters later she is also signalled as, 'blossoming' (IV 217), the highlighted 'jasmine'

has the effect of calling all these flowers into mind at once. Connecting backwards, we realise that these flowers have all been related to impressions of Amabel, initially only by proximity on the page to 'the memory of the girl' (IV 176) but more forcefully a little further on in the passage as 'a vision of the girl' cuts across a renewal of Miriam's 'sense of spring' (IV 185). '[J]asmine', then, alerts us to the flower as the girl's sign, announcing her significance to Miriam as 'love interest' in a similar manner to Chaplin's rose-illustrated 'Georgia' title cards in *The Gold Rush*.

The Inseparables - A Word makes a Picture, a Picture tells a Story

Central to Richardson's conception of intertitles in 'Captions' is the idea that word and image are not distinct:

The artist can no more eliminate the caption than he can eliminate himself. Art and literature, Siamese twins making their first curtsy to the public in a script that was a series of pictures, have never yet been separated. In its uttermost abstraction art is still a word about life and literature never ceases to be pictorial.²⁶

Richardson repeats herself three years later in *John Austen and the Inseparables* (1930), an essay on book illustration. That she can align the art of film with that of the illustrated book is suggestive in itself about the extent that Richardson felt cinema was a pictorial-textual and not merely pictorial medium. In *The Inseparables*, she states even more emphatically that abstract art 'must tell some kind of tale'. Each art functions by creating a play in the mind: either a picture suggesting a story or a word suggesting an image. Found together in an illustrated book, Richardson believes illustrations influence our reading before they 'become one with the text':²⁷ a composite memory.

²⁶ Richardson, 'Captions', p.165

²⁷ Dorothy Richardson, *John Austen and the Inseparables* (London: William Jackson 1930), pp.15-17

When Miriam reads an illustrated book in *Interim* (1919), Richardson suggests a further level of readers' creative involvement still.

She guessed the story from the illustrations and dropped into the text halfway through the narrative. No woman who did typewriting from morning till night and lived in a poor lodging could look like that ... perhaps some did ... perhaps that was how clerks *ought* to look ... she skimmed on. (II 309)

The play in Miriam's mind, as she considers how realistic the woman's appearance is and its relevance to her, is separate from the story told by the illustrations or the text. Laura Marcus has suggested a parallel between Richardson's ideas about the reception of dialogue intertitles as 'the swift voice within the mind', in a 1929 *Close Up* column, 'Dialogue in Dixie', and the concept of 'internal speech' in contemporary film theory.²⁸ However, it might be more profitable to make the connection here in reference to Richardson's ideas about the creative relationship between word and image. In 'Problems of Film Stylistics' (1927), Boris Eikhenbaum suggests that 'perception and understanding of a motion-picture is inextricably bound up with the development of internal speech, which makes the connection between separate shots. [...] He must continually form a chain of film-phrases, or else he will not understand anything'. Eikhenbaum explicitly does not relate 'internal speech' to the way we read texts, which is the connection Marcus was making. Although he excuses 'dialogic' intertitles, he deplores expository intertitles as they interrupt the 'flow of internal speech, thus forcing the viewer to turn into a temporary reader and *remember* what the 'author' informs him in words'.²⁹ For Richardson, however, internal speech continues making 'chains' through, or even because of, the interruption. The internal voice questions what it has been given, as Miriam does in *Interim*, 'No woman who did typewriting [...] could look like that',

²⁸ Marcus, p.354

²⁹ Boris Eikhenbaum, 'Problems of Film Stylistics' (1927), *Screen*, 15, 3 (Winter 1974/5): 14-15

and 'remake[s]' films with bad captions or bad pictures; as Richardson argues in 'Captions', 'we can substitute our own'.³⁰

Once the film has been seen, the chains of texts and images made into the viewer's personal version of the film by internal speech 'become one' in memory in a similar manner to the experience of reading an illustrated book. Richardson required us to be spectators and form our own chains in Chapter 5 of *Interim*, but she makes one composite film-phrase for us later in *Dawn's Left Hand*, splicing together a 'caption' with the visual scene:

Civilization, she told herself going slowly upstairs, and the helpless, wild, unconscious shriek of a patient coming round from nitrous oxide in a downstairs surgery seemed to her the voice of the western world in its death-throes, *depends upon the stability of molars*. (IV 213, my italics)³¹

This montage of text, stairs and shriek (easily presented in silent film as another 'picture' and 'pianist's staccato chord'³²), conjoined as if in memory, reveals a finished perception – the western world in its death throes – made by a mind's 'internal speech' that has already been put to work.

That for Richardson, words and images are more intimately connected still, is evident from her interest in typography. One of the silent film pleasures she outlines in 'Captions' was seeking out the clues suggested by the design and lettering of the title cards:

At last we are confronted with a title, set, like a greeting in a valentine, within an expressive device. We peer for clues. Sometimes there is no clue but the title, appearing alone in tall letters that fill the screen, fill the hall with a stentorian voice. Thrilling us. We know we are being got, but not yet at what vulnerable point.³³

³⁰ Richardson, 'Captions', p.165

³¹ Richardson first uses this phrase in a book review in 1918: 'A Spanish Dentist Looks at Spain', *Dental Record*, XXXVIII (1 August 1918), pp.343-345.

³² Dorothy Richardson, 'Musical Accompaniment' (August 1927), Donald et. al, p.163

³³ Richardson, 'Captions', p.164

Throughout *Pilgrimage* Miriam's world is full of expressive forms of writing: on posters, shop signs, in letters and books. Yet Richardson's most extended explorations of the impact of words as visual objects and stimulus for images occurs in *Dawn's Left Hand*, when Miriam receives two written communications from Amabel. One is the words 'I love you' written on the mirror. Richardson precedes Miriam's realisation with a detailed visual description of the lettering.

Holding up the candle she found lettering, large and twirly, thickly outlined as if made with chalk or moist putty, moving with a downward slope across the centre of the strip of glass.

[...]

'I love you', it said.

[...] her consciousness arrived in the moment and paused, looking out through the eyes of her body at the shadowy semblance left in the room: the figure of the girl secretly and swiftly coming and going, in outdoor garb, cloak or loose coat, something swaying and flowing with her movements, un-Englishly. (IV 196-7)

Amabel has declared her love, as all silent film heroines would, in 'twirly' letters on (a substitute for) an intertitle. Miriam receives them first as a visual impression, noticing their feminine, romantic, typographic style and unconfident downward slope, before she registers their meaning. As it registers, it triggers her consciousness, the 'luminous point', to project a 'shadowy semblance' of her lover in the room. The intertitle-like words compel Miriam to become both author of and audience to the cinematic scene playing out how the words came to be written.

A letter from Amabel affects Miriam even more intensely. The strangely detached script, with 'Gaps' in between the individual strokes of the letters, requires 'Letters and words to be put together by the eye as it went along' (IV 214). Carol Watts has noted the use of cinematic techniques such as slow motion and close up in this passage,³⁴ but Richardson also demonstrates her

³⁴ Watts, pp.65-6

awareness of the ‘expressive, before its meaning appeared’ (IV 215) typographic quality text could have, particularly as it is used in German Expressionist-inspired films, or even animated, ‘vibrating behind this effort to drive feeling through words’ (IV 217), as in *The Cat and the Canary*. Distinctions between word and image are collapsed utterly as each letter is ‘a picture’ that signifies ‘one of the many poses of [Amabel’s] body’. These word-pictures ‘called her directly to the girl herself’ (IV 215), triggering the creation of the figure of Amabel as the words, ‘I love you’, also did, although this time on the screen of the page rather than in the room.

Silence

Close Up was published from 1927-33, straddling the years that saw the changeover from silent to sound cinema. The first successful sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, opened in the USA in October 1927, three months after the first *Close Up*. According to James Donald, ‘*Close Up*’s raison d’être was being undermined at the very moment the magazine came into being’.³⁵ Several of *Close Up*’s writers had difficulty accepting the changes to film aesthetic sound would bring and Richardson was more resistant than most. In her first column she contrasted the experience of theatre with silent film where the players, ‘acting *at* instead of *with* the audience’, destroyed the cooperative ‘inner relationship’ built in the cinema, where film was ‘as intimate as thought so long as it is free from [...] the alien element of sound’.³⁶ While she considered simple musical accompaniment an enhancement of the visual experience, she had two concerns about speech films: first that they would interfere with the audience’s creative freedom, ‘The onlooker too overwhelmingly conducted?’;³⁷ second, that, in a stance similar to Krows’ idea that intertitles allow for improved concentration, having to concentrate on listening to the spoken word would lead

³⁵ James Donald, Introduction to Part 2, ‘From Silence to Sound’, in Donald et al. (eds), p.79

³⁶ Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance’, p.161

³⁷ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Almost Persuaded’ (June 1929), in Donald et al. (eds), p.192

to 'the diminution of the faculty of *seeing* – cinematography is a visual art reaching the mind through the eyes alone'.³⁸

Speech's potential to disrupt our visual reception and internal interpretation of events was something that had preoccupied Richardson before her thinking for her *Close Up* column. In *Pilgrimage*, Miriam is extremely influenced by Maurice Maeterlinck's chapter, 'Silence', in *The Treasure of the Humble*, first translated into English in 1897. Maeterlinck argues that there can be no 'real communication' between people 'by means of words'.³⁹ Miriam attempts silences with her lovers Shatov and Hypo but they are failures; Shatov is afraid, and Hypo breaks their most serious silence in *Dawn's Left Hand* in entirely the wrong spirit: 'Having given her the chance of steering the conversation [...] he now resumed his usual role in any shared experience: conductor, perpetually defining' (IV 225).

The episode shares ideas with Richardson's column-piece, 'The Film Gone Male'. Any attempt at 'clear speech', linear and essentially male, denies the collaborative communicative possibilities of silent consciousness, which she extends in her column to silent film:

in its quality of being nowhere and everywhere, nowhere in the sense of having more intention than direction [...], everywhere by reason of its power to evoke, suggest, reflect, express [...] something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming, [silent film] was essentially feminine. In its insistence on contemplation it provided a pathway to reality.⁴⁰

'Too overwhelmingly conducted', Richardson suggests that speech film, like Hypo's insistence on speech, with its 'inability to express several things simultaneously' (IV 164), interferes with the potential for creativity in an audience that is engaged in silent contemplation. Richardson demonstrates this at the beginning of

³⁸ Richardson, 'Dixie', p.194

³⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble* (1897), trans. Alfred Sutro (London: George Allen, 1903), p.4

⁴⁰ Richardson, 'The Film Gone Male', p.206

Dawn's Left Hand, when, travelling by train, Miriam's conversation with a fellow passenger is 'driving away' internal images of 'remembered Paris' and the Oberland mountains, and the external view from the window. When they part and Miriam finds herself in silence, the mountains 'filled her eyes', projected from her mind onto the sky (IV 134-135). Miriam is able to attend to the multiple strands of her consciousness at last, and silent film provides Richardson with the means to express this multiplicity.

'No one can see and hear to perfection at the same moment' (IV 170), Miriam declares in *Dawn's Left Hand*, as, attending an opera, she chooses to sit facing away from the stage, and Richardson expresses this sentiment with similar force in *Close Up*:

Recall that an intense concentration on listening will automatically close the eyes. That for the perfect seeing of landscape, work of art, beloved person, or effectively beautiful person, we instinctively desire silence. And agree, therefore, that there neither is, nor ever can be, any substitute for the silent film. Agree that the secret of its power lies in its undiluted appeal to a single faculty.⁴¹

Miriam experiences the difficulty of concentrating on sound and visuals together at several points in *Pilgrimage*, missing the first parts of conversations as she is preoccupied with 'her observation[s]' (II 265). Yet it is not until *Dawn's Left Hand* that Richardson writes this separation into her narrative. At the opera, Miriam is persuaded to look at the stage part of the way through the performance and the narrative turns immediately from an aural description of the 'bath of music', to a visual description of Senta at her wheel, 'Singing her sunlight and her being and her happiness', accompanied by an intertitle-like phrase in quotation marks: 'Tragically brief' (IV 171-3).

In contrast to her relationship with Hypo, Miriam's interactions with Amabel, which abound with feminine silences, mimic the structure of a silent film, the verbal kept as distinct from the visual as if presented separately on intertitles. When they first meet

⁴¹ Richardson, 'A Tear for Lycidas', p.197

speech is delayed as Amabel moves, 'so elegantly from pose to pose', pausing 'motionless in a final pose' (we could think perhaps of Kennedy's concern about 'holding the pose' as an intertitle intersects a scene), before she speaks her first line: 'You were talking of socialisme'. It was standard practice never to let two speech intertitles run together, and Richardson also re-establishes her visuals, 'head side ways down-bent as if listening', before Amabel's next words, the spelling and disjointed syntax indicating her French accent: 'I would like, so much, to hear more of theece' (IV 175). At their second meeting, Amabel seems aware of the power of keeping her visual beauty separate from speech, allowing Miriam to appreciate her in silence as she stands, 'wordlessly, for fear of risking by sound or movement its own full effect' (IV 187).

Amabel declares her love in writing and their meetings are dominated by silence. Each of their exchanges, therefore, appear to Miriam as they would to a silent film audience. In the position of spectator to her own affair, with the verbal and pictorial elements of it kept separate and therefore exposed to her full concentration, she is free to make her own Eikhenbaumian chains of meaning from Amabel's written text and physical presence using her internal speech. While Eikhenbaum suggests that part of the success of silent film is the development of internal speech – 'this new type of mental labour which does not normally develop in everyday life'⁴² – Miriam has quested for relationships that allow experiences such as this ever since reading Maeterlinck. Amabel's sense of silence is what she values about this relationship: 'in herself and the girl, with them when they were together, somehow between them in the mysterious interplay of their two beings, the reality she had known for so long alone, brought out into life' (IV 217). Richardson could be describing her relationship with silent film; she values, in its intimate, collaborative communication, an idea of what consciousness might be that she has had herself for some time. The tragedy, if we can call it that, is that just as silent film had given her the means to express it, her ideal relationship was being lost to sound.

⁴² Eikhenbaum, p.13

Silent film intertitles had a significant impact on Richardson's narrative style in *Dawn's Left Hand*, her most cinematic novel. Conductors, but, as part of the visual flow, not overwhelmingly so, intertitle forms take their place in the chains of interpretation involved in the spectator-reader's making of a film or Richardson's text, anchoring strands of film-memory, as in Chapter V of *Dawn's Left Hand*, creating new connections, as with 'jasmine' and civilisation's reliance on dentistry, and enabling a non-linear, collaborative relationship. While Richardson mourned the loss of this relationship with the arrival of sound, she looked forward to articulating new forms of relationship and new conceptions of consciousness and memory in her final chapter-volumes, *Clear Horizon* (1935), *Dimple Hill* (1938) and *March Moonlight* (1967).