



Bronfen, Elisabeth.

DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S ART OF MEMORY. SPACE. IDENTITY. TEXT.

(Trans. of *DER LITERARISCHE RAUM. EINE UNTERSUCHUNG AM BEISPIEL VON DOROTHY M. RICHARDSONS ROMANZYKLUS PILGRIMAGE.* Tübingen: Niebauer, 1986.)

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254 pp.

The translation of Elisabeth Bronfen's book on Dorothy Richardson, published fourteen years ago in German, constitutes an outstanding contribution to scholarship on *Pilgrimage*. Since its publication in German, there has been a feeling among Dorothy Richardson's readers and scholars that Bronfen's work should be available to a wider readership. In fact, the announcement of this translation was greeted with great enthusiasm by the majority of delegates to the Conference "Dorothy Richardson and Modernism", held at Queen Mary and Westfield College (University of London) on 11th June 1999. In the context of this Conference, mainly featuring postmodern interpretations of Richardson's work, Bronfen's monograph was felt to be a serious and thoughtful survey of Dorothy Richardson's fiction, carried out from a more traditional approach. Bronfen's preface acknowledges the doubts that may arise when one is publishing "a piece of scholarship based on work done in a rather different form more than a decade ago in another language". However, she also points out that "precisely because *Pilgrimage* has been recuperated from oblivion primarily as a voice of feminine modernism, the philosophical underpinnings to Richardson's work are sometimes overlooked". It is precisely to call attention to the philosophical issues present in *Pilgrimage* that is precisely the task of Bronfen's book, whose subtitle, *Space, Identity, Text*, highlights the importance of "how identity emerges as a result of both corporeal as well as cultural enspacement" (vii). In her preface to the translation, Bronfen explains that she has chosen not to reformulate her discussion of the importance of corporeal emplacement, psychic topologies, and spatial textuality in terms of the more recent terminology dealing with these issues, in the hope, she says, that the phenomenological discourse she had initially used might invigorate

the current debate due to its unfamiliar ring. However, she has updated her bibliography, notes and appendix of critical literature on Dorothy Richardson including references to texts published between 1986 and 1999.

The author finds a principle of unity for *Pilgrimage* in the semantization of textual space, and the study of these aspects was in 1986, as it is in the year 2000, a rescue from a critical preoccupation mainly focused on biographical and feminist studies. By calling attention to an analysis of space, Bronfen demonstrates that *Pilgrimage* contains both intellectual and formal coherence. Her exploration of how tangible and metaphorical spaces are used, functionalized and semanticized in *Pilgrimage* could be taken as a valid model for the creation of a model for describing literary space in other works of fiction. The book is tightly structured around three parts of space: actual, material spaces, metaphorical spaces and textual space/ spatial textuality.

Part one provides an analysis for space in *Pilgrimage* in its more literal and tangible sense, focusing on the localities inhabited by Miriam, especially the correlation between location and human existence. The interior spaces of houses, churches, flats, cafés, restaurants and clubs and exterior spaces like gardens, fields, and streets are systematically classified and explained. Here Bronfen draws on the theoretical approaches of phenomenologists such as Binswanger and Heidegger, architecture theorists such as Bloomer, Moore, and Norberg-Schulz, and literary critics such as Bachelard, Lotman, Lodge, and Bakhtin. Thus, the author attempts to establish the precise relation between space and character development. The subject's mood alters the expression of the world, so that any change in experience brings about a change in the subject's experience of the spatiality of the world. In *Pilgrimage*, Miriam's moods are transposed onto her lived surroundings, which come to register her emotional state: "This correlation between spatial situation and psychic reality gives voice to the fact that an expansion of the psychological horizon [...] is mirrored by a corresponding expansion of the spatial horizon" (58). For Miriam, her room is a place that engenders a feeling of transcendence which heightens and accumulates impressions. However, neutral space involves an ecstatic transcendence into nowhere, which disperses and scatters thought and does not encourage any transformative synthesis. Only in her room can Miriam convert transcendental experiences into writing and transform an experience of dematerialisation or of experiencing places simultaneously into artistic representation. Bronfen adopts Elisabeth Ströker's tripartite model of phenomenological existence, which discusses the subject's enspacement according to three experiential modes: atmospheric space, action space and

contemplative space. Finally, part one concludes by discussing *Pilgrimage's* remembered and imagined spaces, which provides an adequate transition to the second part, entitled "Metaphorical spaces".

In part two, Bronfen draws upon Goodman's definition of world-making in order to describe Miriam's cognitive strategy. The spatial self-consciousness of *Pilgrimage* is highlighted by maintaining Richardson's terminology, such as "surface", "inside pattern of life", "world within", "centre", and "distance" among others. For Bronfen, *Pilgrimage* possesses an organizing principle that makes it unfair to read it as a random succession of Miriam's impressions and feelings: "The text is not a mere accumulation of Miriam's immediate impressions; rather it depicts 'her own images' and expresses her mode of organizing experience and of understanding it by organizing it" (114). Miriam "recognises that it is not by rejecting the world completely, but rather by upholding a dynamic interplay between subject and world, that she will preserve her own reality [...] as well as those moments of ecstasy, 'happiness and realization' which may only be experienced in solitude" (131). For Miriam, solitude is not conceived as a place of recognition of the real, but as a place which actually effects a recreation of reality. She imagines her own world as a synthesis of different irreconcilable aspects belonging to the outside world. Her self-image is in an intermediary position that is caused by her desire to share in multiple worlds. The treatment of memory in *Pilgrimage* involves presenting time as space. Thus, Miriam's understanding of her own past is conceived as a spatialization of time. Her creation of a coherent autobiographical narrative involves substituting a method of ordering events temporally for one which is determined spatially.

Part three, "Textual space/ spatial textuality", provides a spatial analysis of the text itself. This discussion is theoretically supported by Eco, Frank, Genette, and Barthes, and it explores issues such as the relation between speech and writing, space and textual time, and between writer, reader and the text. In Bronfen's view, the reader must be prepared to engage in creative writing. Textual omissions encourage the reader to appropriate the spatial experiences and reconstruct the significance of events. In this part, Bronfen's argument reaches its highest degree of abstraction after a laborious dissection of the most literal and tangible spaces in *Pilgrimage*. The final chapter concentrates on a discussion of the formal treatment of spatial textuality and its implications for the reader.

Although Bronfen's detailed readings of some passages from *Pilgrimage* are sensitive and fair, a lack of precision can be felt in her statement that "Miriam does not associate London, her room at Mrs Bailey's nor her work

as [sic] the Wimpole Street practice with role-play and pretence" (124).¹ In fact, London is sometimes seen as a massive theatre for the performance of fictional works. In *Revolving Lights*, London's porticoes are referred to as "permanent exits and entrances on the stage of the London scene; [...] on the pavements, the trooping succession of masked life-moulded forms, [...]" (240). Miriam's work at the Wimpole Street practice is also far from being free of role-play. Bronfen herself contradicts her previous assertion on page 126—"the precise significance of role-play, which is necessary in order to participate successfully in Hancock's social world, now becomes clearer, since it is seen in direct relation to a specific understanding of reality which Miriam can accept"—and page 132—"Miriam's recognition that she is capable of entering the masculine world only by practising a certain degree of deception is not confined to Hancock's 'social world'". In fact, the dentists' world is a privileged site of theatrical displays. Thus, in *Deadlock*, Miriam mentally compares "a society novel" (52) with a conversation that is taking place between her and the dentists about a bizarre hat that she is wearing while they are having lunch. Mr Leyton tells Miriam that her hat looks like "a musical comedy" (*Deadlock*, 51) and Miriam is glad about "the pantomime effects" of her hat (*Deadlock*, 52). Miriam places herself on a superior level to that of the dentists by adopting a detached and patronizing attitude and claiming that she has access to both their theatrical displays and the real situation behind them:

the shifting of the love-story into the midst of the Wimpole Street household, making her room like a little theatre where at any moment the curtain might go up on a fresh scene. Knowing them all so well, being behind the scenes as well as before them, she had watched with a real cruel indifference, [...]. The acting of the play had been all carefully according to the love-stories of the sentimental books, would always be, for good kind people brought up on the old traditions [...]. They were all proud of playing these recognizable parts. (*Revolving Lights*, 274)

Miriam ironically considers the dentists "one and all bright figures of romance" (*Revolving Lights*, 243) and she herself is identified as a heroine of romance when her sister Sarah presents her to the Babingtons as "a sister who had chosen not to marry into Harley Street" (*Clear Horizon*, 392).

Bronfen's book requires careful and slow-paced reading, so that the various theoretical approaches on which the author draws can be satisfactorily understood in relation to the copious textual evidence provided. The exhaustive thoroughness of *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory* makes it a

monograph of invaluable significance for the study of the textual space of *Pilgrimage*. Its translation into English will undoubtedly be welcomed by Dorothy Richardson's many English-speaking enthusiasts and should enliven the ongoing debate on her work.

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1. The translation of Bronfen's *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory* is plagued with misprints. Eleanor Dear is referred to erroneously as "Eleonor" on several occasions (112 and 124), Vereker is called "Vereka" (153), Guerini is called "Guerinin" (173) and Mendizabal is called "Mendizabel" (180). Sometimes omissions—"instead emphasising" (162)—or repetitions mar the translation, such as in the following sentence: "[. . .] during her stay in London, Miriam talks to Amabel about Richard Roscorla with Amabel, [. . .]" (161) Elizabeth Ströker's three experiential modes of phenomenological existence—atmospheric space, action space and contemplative space—are quoted as "the space of human action, the space of human action and the space of human contemplation." (47) The sentence beginning "For, by shifting her gaze on to the spatial dimension" on page 186 lacks clarity and seems to be translated inadequately. Some misprints include "perpection" (28) (perception), "particalar" (61), "mannner" (73), "contians" (95), "listening for the first tune"—instead of "for the first time"—(118), "her work as the Wimpole Street practice" (124), "immitable" (162), "Bernecke Rare Book Library" for Beinecke Rare Book Library (172), "one of the key's to Miriam's poetics" (167), "ecstasy" (181), "intelligible though spatialization" (187), "representating" (191), "Hanscome" for Hanscombe (231), "a second of feminist criticism" (231), and "Gevritz" for Gevirtz (241). Finally, Bluemel's *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism* is quoted as *Experimenting on the Border of Modernism* (241) and Fromm's article "Through the Novelist's Looking-Glass" is quoted as "Through a Novelist's Looking-Glass" (241).

Works Cited

Richardson, Dorothy. 1992. *Pilgrimage*. 1915-1967. 4 vols. London: Virago.

