

## **FORM AND MEANING IN DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON'S *PILGRIMAGE***

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That Dorothy Richardson does not occupy the position in modernist fiction that many critics believe she deserves has something to do with the difficulty of including her works in the syllabus. Unlike Joyce or Woolf, no single novel by Richardson can adequately represent her achievement and neither students nor teachers can be expected to tackle her thirteen-volume sequence. This is what Llantada has brilliantly done; she begins with a brief biographical note and goes on to place *Pilgrimage* in the modernist context. She reviews contemporary critical opinions that perceived the innovative method of the first volumes and compared it to that of avant-garde movements in the arts. Llantada traces central modernist features in Richardson from the presentation of a fragmentary surface (itself the result of new scientific concepts) to the underlying presence of mythological topoi and the romantic idea of the artist as shaman. Llantada succeeds in the difficult task of presenting a clear picture of the multiple connections of modernist fiction to ideas drawn from myth, religion and science and singles out the descent to the underworld, embodied by Persephone, Orpheus and Odysseus as especially productive of meaning. The formal characteristics of *Pilgrimage* (disconnectedness, plot interruptions and ellipses) are also traceable to modernist influence, and the same can be said of the use of myth to give meaning to the chaos and fragmentariness of life (28).

Chapter 4 (“Textual Analysis of *Pilgrimage*”) is to my mind a major contribution to Richardson studies, since it offers a comprehensive and at the same time nuanced

account of the narrative devices in the sequence. Llantada begins by identifying *Pilgrimage* as a “modernist stream-of-consciousness novel which uses narrative techniques such as narrated monologue or free indirect speech, psycho-narration, quoted monologue and paralepses” (31). She deploys concepts developed by Gérard Genette, Dorrit Cohn, Mieke Bal, Wayne Booth and others in her analysis of Richardson’s innovative methods of presentation and narration, but does not fail to notice her debts to previous masters of the art of fiction, for example, Richardson’s appropriation of Henry James’s notion of the dramatic scene or the importance of *The Ambassadors* as a prototype of focalised narration (37, 39). But it is the use of free indirect style in the sequence that takes up a good deal of space in the chapter, and rightly so since we are dealing here with one of the central narrative techniques of modern fiction which has Jane Austen as one of its early pioneers, a fact Llantada does not mention, which is surprising since she is obviously familiar with Booth’s *Rhetoric of Fiction*. Besides the thorough analysis of the fluctuating relations between narrator and protagonist in the thirteen novels, Llantada offers the reader a number of tables that visualize the main techniques and metaphors as well as some thematic aspects.

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The narrative analysis is interrupted by a section on the quest myth and the *Bildungsroman*. This seems surprising at first, but is justified by the fact that a quest narrative “implies thinking about the quester’s future—in the form of anticipations—and it also means gathering together the most significant episodes of the past [...]— in the form of analepses” (68). Llantada goes on to study the temporal techniques (ellipses and pauses besides the two already mentioned) that shape the structure of *Pilgrimage* as a *Bildungsroman*, and at the end of this section she also provides tables that sum up the use of narrative time in the sequence. This important chapter concludes with the analysis of cinematic techniques and of letters. After this comprehensive and persuasive study of the various narrative devices in *Pilgrimage*, Llantada engages in what she calls “mythical analysis of *Pilgrimage*”, one that focuses on archetypal and religious motifs and that serves as an introduction to what I take to be the most debatable aspect of this study: the position granted to the Tarot as the structuring principle of *Pilgrimage*.

Llantada points out that the Tarot as a representation of the archetypal hero’s quest pattern was often used by visionary writers and shows in a chart the correspondences between the instalments of *Pilgrimage* and the arcana of the Tarot. Thus, *Pointed Roofs* corresponds with The Fool, *Backwater* and *Honeycomb* with The Magician, *The Tunnel* with The Papess and The Empress, *Interim* with The Emperor and The Pope, *Deadlock* with The Lovers and The Chariot, and so on. As is usually the case with archetypal criticism, the connections that the critic establishes are as difficult to prove as to disprove, since the evidence is often too slight and general. To give just two examples, when discussing the correspondence

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with *The Fool* in *Pointed Roofs*, Llantada observes that both Miriam and *The Fool* “have memories of what they are leaving behind, memories that will urge them onwards in their search to recover what they are about to lose, their primeval innocence” (112). This of course could be said of many protagonists, particularly in the *Bildungsroman* tradition. Equally unconvincing is the link the author establishes between Miriam’s experience of herself as separated from the rest of the world in *The Tunnel* and *The Papers* (132).

These objections do not detract from the overall value of the book which, as I stated at the beginning, is a major contribution to Richardson studies. It is a pity that such a scholarly work should lack an index. In a footnote on page 33 William James is identified as Henry James’s elder brother, which seems to me unnecessary for the intended readers of the book. *Form and Meaning in Dorothy M. Richardson’s Pilgrimage* is avowedly textual and as such fulfills its aims. Nevertheless one sometimes misses some more references to the rich and complex historical context in which the sequence was conceived and which is bound up with Miriam Henderson’s experience.