

“She was Out in Eternity”: Dorothy Richardson’s Feminist
Revision of Classical Hollywood Cinema in *Dawn’s Left Hand*

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There is eager silence in the hall during the stay of the oblong of clear print...whether beginning: “Throughout the ages mankind has—” or “Avarice is the cruelest—” or “In a remote village of the Pyrenees, far from—”. When we have read we know where we are supposed to be going; we have grown accustomed to finding our places in the long procession of humanity [...] [But] we can substitute our own [captions], just as within limits we can remake a bad film as we go. With half a chance we are making all the time. Just a hint of any kind of beauty and if we are on the track, not waiting for everything to be done for us, [...], we can manage very well. [...] Now and again a film gathers us in without any clear hint beyond the title. This we love. We love the challenge. We are prepared to go without a hint even in the title. We are prepared for anything. We trust the pictures. Somewhere sooner or later there will be a hint. Or something of which we can make one, each for himself. The absence of any hint is a hint we are ready to take.

—Dorothy Richardson, *Close Up*, “Captions” 165

In this contribution to the first volume of *Close Up*, an influential film magazine first published in 1927, Dorothy Richardson describes the thrill felt by silent cinema goers when curly letters appeared on the screen to introduce the film’s setting, suggest a theme, or confirm a timeline: in short, to set viewers on their narrative journey. But Richardson believes audiences need not depend upon these verbal cues. She understands an urgent need for viewers to assert their critical agency by supplying “hints” derived from their own visual experience when films decline to do so. In her final contribution to *Close Up*, published in June 1933, Richardson suggests that “the power of the Film” lies in its “continuous performance, going on behind all invitations to focus upon this or that” (209). Under the title “Continuous Performance,” Richardson’s articles in *Close Up* advance a new theory of film that, consonant with the general aims of the journal, aimed to preserve and explore alternatives to what has come to be called the classical Hollywood style. Like Richardson, the contributors to *Close Up* were devoted, in Ann Friedberg’s words, to “challenging the dominant prejudices of the film industry” – by defining its limits, they hoped to surpass them. But where the magazine focused less on politics than on “experimentation in aesthetic form” (Friedberg 9), Richardson identified the “dominant prejudices” of film production specifically with the patriarchal structures that also dominated the art of the novel.

Richardson's response to patriarchal standards in the novelistic tradition is well-documented; her feminist project as a fiction writer is self-consciously debated in *Dawn's Left Hand* between Miriam Henderson, the female protagonist, and Hypo Wilson, a literary incarnation of H. G. Wells and the epitome, for Miriam, of the male novelist. Readings of Richardson as a feminist novelist have thus dominated critical discussion. For instance, in her 1923 review of Richardson's *Revolving Lights*, Virginia Woolf praised the depth of Richardson's form: "She has invented, or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender" (qtd. in Parsons 94).¹ Despite her own interest in film, what Woolf and subsequent readers have failed to note, however, is that Richardson develops her response to male artistic production by drawing on her experience of film. Investigating film and fiction simultaneously, Richardson implicitly links the two on the basis of their patriarchal structures. Richardson began contributing to *Close Up* in 1927 while simultaneously commencing work on *Dawn's Left Hand*, the twelfth chapter of her thirteen-volume project *Pilgrimage*.² In her experimental fictional form she borrows from mainstream film to create a feminist mise-en-scene with which to examine both film and fiction.

I pursue two interrelated claims: I argue that Richardson assembles profoundly absorptive scenes composed largely of her characteristically lengthy sentences and that these passages are analogous to the "deep focus" provided by a camera. Richardson believed that "in its insistence

¹ In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf lamented that "no sentence had been shaped, by long labor, to express the experience of women" (x). For Woolf, female authors – including Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot – were working with the "clumsy weapon" that was the traditional "man's sentence" of the nineteenth century (76). But *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, comes six years after Woolf claimed Richardson had perfected the woman's sentence.

² *Close Up* enjoyed a relatively short life, publishing its first issue in July 1927 and ending its run in December 1933, while *Pilgrimage* traces an arc of Richardson's career spanning from 1915 with the publication of the first volume, *Pointed Roofs*, to the publication of the final volume, *Clear Horizon*, in 1935.

on contemplation... [film] provided a pathway to reality” (“Film Gone Male” 206), and a “contemplative aesthetic”³ is distinctly visible in her fiction. At the same time, rather than soliciting the full immersion of a passive spectator, Richardson’s absorptive scenes foster the viewer’s sense of freedom within the imagined world and thus simultaneously promote a form of critical self-consciousness that disrupts the ideological consolidation of the subject often associated with filmic absorption.⁴ In *Dawn’s Left Hand*, Richardson’s mise-en-scene produces a non-hierarchized literary space, one which offers a democratic mode of readership and spectatorship in contrast to the directed gaze that characterized cinematic realism and the classical Hollywood style.

Classical Hollywood cinema claims to be realistic but is a secretly authoritarian mode in which the hand of the creator has been hidden. To combat the audience passivity that classical cinema seeks to produce, Richardson invokes filmic devices to reveal their manipulative potential. The resulting mise-en-scene of her fiction acts as a rejoinder of sorts to film’s failure to “compel the co-operation of the creative consciousness of the audience” (Richardson, “Continuous Performance” 161). Few critics have engaged with the explicitly filmic qualities of *Pilgrimage*. In *Dorothy Richardson*, Carol Watts begins to connect fiction to film in her examination of Richardson’s depiction of modern urbanity, and Laura Marcus’s introduction to an edited collection of *Close Up* contributions is significant for its outlining of Richardson’s film

³ In her explorations of the “mystic” qualities of Richardson’s *Close Up* contributions, Jenelle Troxell usefully terms Richardson’s absorptive mode her “contemplative aesthetic” and though I am indebted to her insight that Richardson is working against the passive “spectatorship typically associated with female viewers” to instead “promote a state of active contemplation” (65), I use this concept to interrogate the feminist potential of Richardson’s filmic *fiction* more deeply. Troxell’s essay references volumes of *Pilgrimage* but is mostly limited to Richardson’s *Close Up* column.

⁴ See for instance Jean-Louis Baudry’s “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” in which he argues film’s basic effects “[set] up the ‘subject’ as the active center and origin of meaning” (286).

theory. Marcus identifies the feminist potential of Richardson's film aesthetic and connects her *Close Up* articles to *Pilgrimage* primarily by exploring the relationship between fiction and the silent cinema. But shifting our attention to Richardson's invocation of the cinematic mise-en-scene deepens our understanding of her critique of both film and fiction as male-dominated forms of expression and offers a fresh approach to the formal qualities of her work.⁵

Revising Masculine Realism in Patriarchal Fiction

Though twentieth-century cinema also encompassed avant-garde and experimental film techniques that often eliminated narrative altogether, Richardson primarily seeks to revise the patriarchal discourse of classical Hollywood cinema. She promotes a mode of positive absorption (rather than defamiliarization through full disruption) that is designed to negate the ideological effects of "realistic" continuity editing. Thus, Richardson does not offer an avant-garde alternative in her fiction; rather, she creates a modified realism.⁶ Through her deep-focus mise-en-scene, Richardson worked "to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism" (Richardson, "Preface" 486). It is important, then, to review, for a moment, the novelistic tradition Richardson wishes to revise.

⁵ Film theorists such as Joseph Warren Beach or Rachel Connor argue modernism was greatly influenced by film. In contrast to this model, Andrew Shail, in *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism*, suggests that many modernist texts feel cinematic as "a product of the application, to *film*, of the formalist aesthetics associated with fully formed modernism during the late 1920s" (4, emphasis added). Richardson's absorptive focus in *Dawn's Left Hand* works antithetically to classical Hollywood films despite borrowing heavily from cinematic devices of representation.

⁶ Critics who posit avant-gardism as the best defense against classical Hollywood cinema (for its experimental forms, resistance to traditional narration and plottedness, and more) tend to focus on the intrinsic qualities of film. That is, they resist "realism" because it is created through cinematic manipulation. But turning our critical eye toward the conscious spectator – as Richardson does in her *Close Up* contributions – eliminates the need for radically revised realism. Audiences demonstrate they are capable of interpreting film effects regardless of how "real" they may seem.

Though Richardson self-consciously critiques male writers such as H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett in *Dawn's Left Hand*, the notion of the scenic approach to modern narrative in the history of the novel has been associated, primarily, with Henry James. Understanding this history will allow us to identify the ways in which Richardson revises the male novelists through her denigration of Hypo Wilson. Scholars have recognized links between Richardson and James – and indeed, Miriam reads *The Ambassadors* (1903) in *The Trap* (1925), the eighth volume of *Pilgrimage*.⁷ However, even though, as I have mentioned, Richardson does not embrace avant-garde alternatives to realism, ultimately she also resists the realist aesthetic championed by James. In *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock credits James with perfecting the “dramatic” fictional form in which “the recording, registering mind of the author is eliminated” (112). Lubbock writes that in James’ novels, “his own part in the narration is now unobtrusive to the last degree; he, the author, could not imaginably figure there more discreetly” (165). This “one-sided vision” is the result of a highly crafted narrative apparatus, one which refuses to violate the character’s consistent point of view by revealing the overarching fictional form created by the author (166). In contrast, Richardson is uninterested in the same level of craftedness in fiction because the “dramatic” method of writing ultimately aligns with the editing practices she condemns in classical Hollywood cinema. Richardson does not defer to a patriarchal version of realism; rather, she underscores the fictional aspects of her project by revealing the decisions she is making as a writer. Most noticeably, throughout *Dawn's Left Hand* Richardson italicizes phrases and passages seemingly at random and disrupts the unified, Jamesian point of view by shifting between third-person narration and Miriam’s first-person perspective. Richardson’s

⁷ Mhairi Pooler has identified a relationship between James and Richardson but in her article, “Of Language, of Meaning, of Mr. Henry James,” she seeks to connect the two writers on the basis of their autobiographical styles. Leon Edel also links Richardson to James by claiming that through Miriam, Richardson mirrors James through her focus on a single character’s point of view.

random shifts, which have no discernible pattern or formal contribution, remind readers of the presence of the author and prevent them, for a flickering moment, from falling into passive spectatorship.

Turning away from the Jamesian tradition, Richardson draws in *Dawn's Left Hand* specifically upon Virginia Woolf's 1925 essay "Modern Fiction" in order to position her work against the patriarchal discourses of both film and fiction. In this essay, Woolf criticized male novelists – specifically Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy – for being materialist writers: "It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us" (2). Conjuring a nondescript woman traveling by train in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923), Woolf further argued that "Mr. Bennett, alone of the Edwardians, would keep his eyes in the carriage. He, indeed, would observe every detail with immense care. He would notice the advertisements; the pictures of Swanage and Portsmouth; the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons... One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description" (14). For Woolf, Bennett merely described his characters rather than provided them with a rich internal life and she condemns this novelistic practice. In *Dawn's Left Hand*, Hypo suggests to Miriam, "Women ought to be good novelists. But they write best about their own experiences. Love-affairs and so forth. They lack creative imagination" (240). By focalizing the entirety of *Pilgrimage* through Miriam, Richardson creates a version of realism that accounts for women's experience and is thus incompatible with the "masculine realism" she identifies in both cinematic production and fiction. In a 1928 *Close Up* article, Richardson begins: "Among the gifts showered upon humanity by the screen and already too numerous to be counted, none has been more eagerly welcomed than the one bestowed upon the young woman who is allowed to shine from its surface just as she is" ("Continuous Performance" 174).

Richardson saw potential for democratized viewership in both the material and aesthetic spaces opened up by film. The non-hierarchized, non-directed environment she envisions for the future of film in her *Close Up* articles is enacted in her fiction.

Richardson's Film Theory: Advancing a Feminist Perspective

Given the dominance of visual tropes in James's theory of the novel (e.g., "point of view"), it is not surprising that Richardson, writing in the wake of film, aligned the "masculine realism" of James and his epigones with a longer history of the novel and with the patriarchal structure of classical Hollywood cinema. This mode of film making, which David Bordwell dates from 1917 to 1960, overlaps with the publication of both Richardson's fiction and her contributions to *Close Up*. Bordwell argues that within this cinematic moment, the "paradigmatic aspect" of film produced a "Straight Corridor" of predictable patterns. Classical Hollywood narration was created via selections from "a historically constrained set of more or less likely options" ("Narrative" 28). For Bordwell and other film theorists, "golden age" films are most often characterized by the "classical omnipresence" of the camera; the dominance of narrative over spectacle; continuity editing or invisible cuts; and a syuzhet/fabula (plot/story) pattern of highly plotted events chronicling the experiences of primarily male protagonists.

Viewing this normalized set of options as inherently hierarchized, feminist film critics such as Laura Mulvey have examined the essentially "phallogentric order" of classical Hollywood cinema to identify revisionary strategies for understanding film's patriarchal history. This line of argument, I will show, is anticipated in Richardson's implicit critique of the cinema in *Dawn's Left Hand*. In *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1975), Mulvey triangulates feminism, film, and "a political use" of psychoanalysis, drawing specifically upon Freud and Lacan, to explore the ways in which the male gaze is sustained through filmic techniques to reinforce a sexist

ideology grounded in prevailing perceptions of sexual difference (14). For Mulvey, “the unconscious of patriarchal society” has dominated classical Hollywood cinema and produced the image of woman as an object of desire. Woman “stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other” (15). She is thus “bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (Mulvey 15). Responses to Mulvey’s work have critiqued her concept of the woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” and complicated her interpretation of the gaze. For instance, Gaylyn Studlar has re-examined the pleasure which Mulvey understands as intrinsically derived by the male viewer. In working toward a “theoretical space” for film criticism, the most important aspect of Studlar’s revision of Mulvey is her emphasis on “a less deterministic account of women’s response to classical narrative cinema” (3). Studlar also borrows a psychoanalytic framework to argue that, in fact, spectatorship relies upon a “masochistic aesthetic” (3). This passive form of viewership is shared by audiences of all genders as they derive “cinematic pleasure” from the sense of powerlessness caused by film. Though their critical approaches diverge, Studlar and Mulvey both recognize a patriarchal dimension in classical cinema and are thus invested in articulating theoretical alternatives with which to explore the potential future of film. Mulvey, for instance, claims she is “attempting a theory and practice which will challenge this cinema of the past,” or the classical Hollywood style (18). In this way, both Mulvey and Studlar are continuing the general project of *Close Up* which aimed, as early as 1927, to “resist solidification of a too-rigidly fixed institution” (Friedberg 4).

Richardson anticipates Mulvey’s emphasis on the persistence of “the unconscious of patriarchal society” in cinema when she writes that film, despite “its thousand and one

potentialities,” often serves as “a mirror for the customary” (“Narcissus” 202). Responding to film in her fiction, she adapts some cinematic techniques while eschewing others in order to produce a feminist revision of the patriarchal constraints in classical Hollywood cinema and in the dominant tradition of the novel. In her contributions to *Close Up*, Richardson advances two related film ideologies that take fictional form in *Dawn’s Left Hand*. First, Richardson’s theory of film introduces a model of democratization through a specifically feminist lens. Second, she is also invested in using her fiction to subvert the manipulative editing practices of classical Hollywood cinema. This style of film aimed to produce a form of “realism” through continuity editing, or the use of invisible cuts, to hide the inevitable manipulation of the editing process. In striving for a sense of coherence and unity within the narrative, continuity editing naturalizes the guidance of the editor. Through her absorptive scenes, Richardson seeks to interrupt this mode of continuity editing and instead allow readers to wander through *Dawn’s Left Hand* without the guide of a directed gaze. Normally one would associate the disruption of continuity editing with the revealing of editing *as* editing – that is, with the disruption of the aesthetic illusion of continuity which encourages absorption. But Richardson does not aim to interrupt absorption: her contemplative aesthetic approaches an ideal of “genuine choice” rather than providing the simulated experience of choice provided by continuity editing.

Recognizing the masculine qualities of film and fiction as a cultural dominant, Richardson nevertheless sees in film a potential space for viewership that is at once feminized and democratized. In her *Close Up* contribution “The Increasing Congregation,” she lists “weary women of all classes,” “pleasant intellectuals,” “happy youth,” “elders,” and “the stone-deaf” as castes of people who seek refuge in both the material and the imaginary space of the cinema, “this strange hospice risen overnight” (171). But for Richardson, the most important aspect of

film is that “in its quality of being nowhere and everywhere,” and in “something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming,” the space of the cinema was “essentially feminine” (“Film Gone Male” 206). Richardson posits the masculine as the authoritarian masquerading as freedom whereas the feminine is a genuinely democratic mode characterized by inclusivity and free choice. She expands this model, seeking to redefine the male-gendered dimension of the institution of film by emphasizing the critical agency of women. In her first “Continuous Performance” article she describes a Monday afternoon, for this was the day new films were released. “But it was also washing day,” Richardson writes:

[A]nd yet the scattered audience was composed almost entirely of mothers. [...] There was almost no talk. Many of the women sat alone, figures of weariness at rest. Watching these I took comfort. At last the world of entertainment had provided for a few pence, tea thrown in, sanctuary for mothers, an escape from the everlasting *qui vive* into eternity on a Monday afternoon. (“Continuous Performance” 160)

Here, Richardson’s language risks categorizing the film viewing experience not as an example of feminine agency and critical awareness, but as a form of escapism which reinforces a prevailing sphere of domesticity under the guise of collectivity. The silence of the female spectators additionally implies both a detachment from community and a communal detachment. And yet more is at work in this passage. Though Anne Fernihough claims “Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* is scathing about ‘women’ in the collective,” (78), Jenelle Troxell counters this position. She argues theatre-going women are “stealing time for their own well-being—and pleasure. In her description of these women slipping away on washday, Richardson alludes to the rebellious spirit incited by the cinema” (Troxell 55). By illuminating the everyday-ness of the cinematic experience, Richardson “recognizes the cinema as... a place of empowerment” for all viewers. But by dismantling the “stereotype of the passively receptive female spectator,” Richardson especially advocates for a female audience, and in *Dawn’s Left Hand* she further underscores the

agency of the female spectator by limiting the reader's perspective to Miriam's consciousness alone (Troxell 55).

In her *Close Up* contributions, Richardson draws on the concept of a female spectator with critical agency by critiquing the continuity editing of the classical Hollywood style for its emphasis on realism. Bordwell writes that "limiting film to some notion of realism would impoverish mise-en-scene" (*Film Art* 113), but he concedes that a film's "principal innovations" in the classical Hollywood style generally "take place at the level of the fabula," or the creation of "new" but still highly-plotted narratives, rather than by deviating from realistic norms ("Narrative" 27). In striving for this sense of consistency, Bordwell concludes that classical film narration inevitably conforms to realism and, as a result, "proceeds to reduce signs of its self-consciousness and omniscience" ("Classical" 32). Continuity editing does not allow us to "see gaps" – it uses invisible cuts to make the editing apparatus subservient to the narrative. Concealing the editing process means "we never question the narration, hence never question its source" (Bordwell, "Classical" 33).

For Richardson, this style sets a dangerous precedent because continuity editing is inherently undemocratic and encourages audience passivity. She condemns the directed gaze of classical Hollywood cinema, the source we do not question, and instead seeks a medium "upon which the imagination of the onlooker could get to work unhampered by the pressure of a controlling mind that is not his own mind" ("Pictures and Film" 188). This vision requires an active and critical spectator:

It is claimed that the people who flock to the movies do so because they love to lose themselves in the excitements of a dream-world, a world that bears no relationship to life as they know it, that makes no demand upon the intelligence, acts like a drug, and is altogether demoralising and devitalising. Such people obviously know very little about the movies. ("Pictures and Films" 189)

Richardson argues that even as audience members are absorbed into the dream world of film, they are capable of recognizing cinema as an artificial medium or a construction of reality. Richardson's need to dismantle the "controlling mind" of invisibly edited cinema echoes her assertion that spectators are prepared for "the absence of any hint," for supplying their own individually developed "hints" or interpretations of a film ("Captions" 165). Her claim that film makes a "demand upon the intelligence" reveals her belief in critically aware spectators.

At stake in Richardson's emphasis on providing the evidence of editing is the understanding that though traditional film "contributed to the change in the mental climate wherein Everyman has his being," it was often an "insidious" education that did not privilege critical inquiry (Richardson, "Spoon-fed" 204). Richardson suggests films have the potential to be "spoon-feeders of an Everyman who becomes more and more a looker and listener, increasingly unwilling to spend his leisure otherwise than in being entertained" ("Spoon-fed" 202). She fears that this "enlightenment without tears," the mode of living vicariously through film without having to examine the true realities of the world, risks forfeiting the gifts of "attention and concentration, of perspective. [...] The awakening of the imaginative power, the gift of expansion, of moving, ever so little, into a new dimension of consciousness" ("Spoon-fed" 205). Richardson believes film can "awaken" spectators' intrinsic critical capacities rather than passively "empower" them. But she nevertheless argues that not all viewers are capable of resisting film's invitation to complacency. Richardson wishes to attend only to the kind women who transcend the "temple of stillness" the cinema will become if it merely perpetuates received conventions – women, that is, who are ready to understand that they have been locked into the sedentary "path that men have reached through long centuries of effort and of thought"

(“Continuous Performance” 176). Richardson’s ideal female subject, then, exemplified by Miriam,

clearly does not need the illusions of art to come to the assistance of her own sense of existing. Instinctively she maintains a balance, the thing perceived and herself perceiving. [...] She takes all things currently. Free from a man’s pitiful illusion of history, she sees everything in terms of life that uncannily she knows to be at all times fundamentally the same. [...] Not all the wiles of the most perfect art can shift her from the centre where she dwells. (“Continuous Performance” 176)

This “centre” reappears in Richardson’s fiction as the key component to critical awareness, or to entering into the “new dimension of consciousness.” She rejected the application of the term “stream of consciousness” to her writing style, arguing against the fluidity implied by the “stream” metaphor.⁸ Richardson instead wrote that the mind’s “central core, luminous point, (call it what you will its names are legion) tho more or less continuously expanding from birth to maturity, remains stable, one with itself thruout life” (qtd. in Winning 41). In calling for spectators to resist “all the wiles” of even “the most perfect art,” Richardson offers a modified form of realism and cautions viewers against the tendency to be overwhelmed by the power of classical Hollywood cinema’s “realistic” worlds.

Richardson’s Models of Passive and Active Spectatorship

In challenging the power of continuity editing, epitomized by the stream-like tracking shot, Richardson is not attempting to completely disrupt the realistic effect for which continuity editing is designed. Rather, she preserves this sense of realism while adding levels of critical awareness without jolting us outside of the aesthetic experience. In the opening pages of *Dawn’s Left Hand* Richardson allegorizes the two models of spectatorship at issue in her *Close Up*

⁸ In *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James defends his conception of the “stream” metaphor by claiming consciousness “flows” and “does not appear to itself chopped up in bits” (12).

essays. She begins by introducing an example of a passive audience member through the perspective of a train passenger.⁹ Richardson is here invoking a deeply historical connection between trains and movies. In *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Lynne Kirby theorizes the relationship between cinema and the railroad as one which is typically gendered male because the train has been read as a metaphor for phallogentrism (1). Kirby further accounts for cinema's fascination with the railroad by arguing that "as a machine of vision and an instrument for conquering space and time, the train is a mechanical double for the cinema and for the transport of the spectator into fiction, fantasy, and dream" (2). For Richardson, this "dream" – the world of the film – is typically a patriarchal one. Through Miriam, Richardson introduces a critically aware consciousness capable of interpreting this world and establishing a place both within and outside of its male-dominated structures. Richardson re-writes the traditional railroad scene to eliminate its power to enchant spectators. She also explores additional figures of mobility – the flight of birds and the journey of a tram – to destabilize the centrality of the tracking shot while simultaneously borrowing this filmic technique to create a contemplative mise-en-scene.

It is not a coincidence, then, that the first sentence of *Dawn's Left Hand* introduces a quintessential train sequence: "He had said *the* train, as if there were no other" (131, emphasis in original). For by utilizing a railroad mise-en-scene, Richardson aligns her fiction with a larger cinematic tradition dominated by both masculine and "realistic" editing histories.¹⁰ Within the

⁹ Richardson includes other examples of the passive spectator in *Dawn's Left Hand*. Though Miriam has true feelings for Amabel, she too wields a distinctly cinematic gaze as Miriam feels she is being "set and kept upon a pinnacle" in Amabel's presence (191). Amabel is posited as a classical Hollywood spectator "posed in contemplation" (216), "sitting in judgment" (240), "demanding statement" (242), and "in awe" of Miriam (251).

¹⁰ Lynne Kirby notes that "the association of the locomotive with male identity was established in childhood, or rather, boyhood. Both the cult of the model train and popular boys' fiction from

train station setting, Richardson's primary example of a passive spectator is Mr. Orly, a man waiting for the train who "desperately refus[ed] to show any sign of awareness. [...] He was unconscious of his consciousness. Had been trained away from it" (132-33). In this way, Richardson equates the uncritical model of classical Hollywood spectatorship with a masculine consciousness. But she also argues (perhaps punningly) that passive spectatorship is the result of being "trained away" from cultivating awareness. In *Close Up*, one of the only films Richardson specifically references is the Lumière brothers' 1896 short film *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*. In this silent film, composed of one long shot, a train enters La Ciotat at an angle that positions it as entering the screen and then moving toward the audience. Richardson describes it as "an early 'animated picture,' a little fogged and incessantly sparking, of a locomotive in full steam making for the *enchanted spectator*" ("Narcissus" 202, emphasis added). The film legend surrounding this motion picture claims audience members were so frightened by the realistic quality of the scene that they fled from their seats.¹¹ Scholars such as Martin Loiperdinger have questioned the truth of this legend, and Richardson too might argue that audiences, however "enchanted," are capable of interpreting the train as a representation of reality. Indeed, Richardson describes *The Arrival* as an example of "a finished reproduction that we are seeing, so that part of our mind is at ease" ("Narcissus" 202). The "ease" of viewership

around 1880 to World War I firmly linked masculinity with railroading" (78). Throughout the twentieth century, advertisement campaigns by Lionel and other train companies similarly marketed their products as "anchor[s] for a heterosexual masculinity" to male adolescents (Kirby 78).

¹¹ For instance, in 1994, Hellmuth Karasek wrote in *Der Spiegel*: "One short film had a particularly lasting impact; yes, it caused fear, terror, even panic... It was the film *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat*... Although the cinematographic train was dashing toward the crowded audience in flickering black and white (not in natural colors and natural dimensions), and although the only sound accompanying it was the monotonous clatter of the projector's sprockets engaging into the film's perforation, the spectators felt physically threatened and panicked" (qtd. in Loiperdinger 89).

identified by Richardson and the “transportation” into filmic fantasy described by Kirby both speak to the passivity created by the patriarchal model of continuity editing, which creates “enchanted spectators,” such as Mr. Orly. For Richardson, “the onlooker is a part of the spectacle” – she is more interested in evoking a quality of experience which is both inside and outside at once (“Popular Film” 177). Indeed, Richardson is herself a part of the spectacle in the sense that she participates in its creation. As she wrote in *Close Up* in 1927, “we are making all the time” (“Captions” 165).

Waiting for Miriam at the end of the train journey is Hypo and by using a novelist as the primary male character in *Dawn’s Left Hand*, Richardson explicitly enters her work into conversation with the dominant novelistic tradition while also foregrounding a distinctly cinematic sense of spatiality. She enacts spatiality specifically through her use of the male gaze and in this way extends the connection between passivity and patriarchy. Richardson wishes to expose the constraints against which Miriam is struggling to assert her critical agency. Mirroring the limitations that Richardson perceives as intrinsic to both Jamesian fiction and the classical Hollywood style, Hypo exemplifies patriarchal models of spectatorship that attempt to circumscribe female subjects both physically and intellectually.¹² But throughout *Dawn’s Left Hand*, Miriam ultimately proves capable of appropriating the spectator’s gaze – even turning it upon herself – and she condemns the dominant fictional discourse by reversing the subject of physical objectification. Miriam’s feminine consciousness is dynamic and multitudinous. She is

¹² The mental stagnation Miriam experiences while in Hypo’s presence also takes on a spatial quality as Hypo continually seeks to fit Miriam within womanly “types” and she equates being in his company with suffering in an “imprisoning circumstance” (*Dawn’s Left Hand* 168). Hypo’s objectification of a female subject, Miriam, thus extends beyond her physical form as he also attempts to diminish her intellectual capacities and critical agency. Hypo, who is “intent on directing [Miriam’s] blank and wavering feminine consciousness” (240), only understands her in terms of womanly archetypes such as the passive companion, female novelist, and subservient lover.

provided with multiple “frames” with which to view her various selves. However, Miriam’s task is to prevent one version of her “self” from subsuming the others, especially if the dominant iteration is one which risks indiscriminately emulating the ideals of society. Richardson writes that, “[Miriam] felt it,” the need to be viewed as desirable and attractive, “coming forth in response to the demand, thoughtlessly and effortlessly” (192). Miriam feels the threat of imitating patriarchal definitions of womanhood. However, by turning her gaze away from her female body and toward Hypo’s, she revises the cinematic gaze which was traditionally directed toward women. Miriam notes that “[Hypo’s] body was not beautiful. She could find nothing to adore [...]. The manly structure, the smooth, satiny sheen in place of her own velvety glow was interesting as partner and foil, but not desirable” (*Dawn’s Left Hand* 231-32). In addition to her critique of Hypo’s physical form, Miriam describes him as a man who is “fatal to the feminine consciousness” (264) and asserts “a lifetime might well be spent in annotating the male novelists, filling out the vast oblivions in them” (240). By connecting her dissatisfaction with Hypo’s physical appearance to the objectionable qualities of male novelists’ writing, Miriam’s gaze eliminates any privileged status – authorial or physical – which a male form might previously have enjoyed. Miriam’s urgent need to footnote the male novelists speaks to their impoverished fictional rhetoric. The inadequacy of their experiences lies in their being shared only by other members of male-dominated fictional discourses.¹³

By setting the opening scene of her novel *within* a train car, Richardson ultimately dismantles the metaphor of the train as phallus, and she does so by using the patriarchal space of

¹³ In film, Laura Mulvey argues that “from a feminist point of view,” the dominant patriarchal ideology is recognized as being composed of assumptions: “‘truths’ about the meaning of sexual difference, women’s place in society, the mystery of femininity and so on” (125). Richardson exposes a similar set of assumptions at work in the novelistic tradition by critiquing the realist male writers who, like Hypo, believe women writers should have a limited repertoire of fictional devices from which to choose.

the train carriage to define female consciousness. She completes her allegory of spectatorship by juxtaposing the wholly docile, uncritical perspective of a “small woman” in gray against the analytical consciousness typified by Miriam. The small woman with whom Miriam shares a carriage

lived [in] a world that had never been made strange to her by any sort of astonishment over the fact of its being there at all. [...] She was following the set shape of her life with a sort of uninspired gusto that had nothing to do with the quality of the passing moment. Did not seem to know that moments were passing and her life passing. [...] She talked undaunted by groans and irrelevant statements, as if reciting: a fluent stream¹⁴ of well-worn words dying unconsidered into each other. Miriam’s own voice breaking forth...sounded, in comparison, like song. (134-35)

Richardson wishes to encourage in the reader an absorbed yet analytic consciousness whose analogue she finds in women’s expansive response to film. But this passenger follows “the set shape of her life” as if executing a script and represents the passive, uncritical spectator. She is incapable of maintaining the responsive model of spectatorship outlined by Richardson, of recognizing herself as “the thing perceived and herself perceiving” (“Continuous Performance” 176). This small woman, whose consciousness is aligned with that of Mr. Orly, is transported by the train into a world which arouses neither interest nor suspicion. In contrast, Richardson writes that Miriam, not the train, “sped along, feeling the sharp air expand once more limitlessly across the snows to which she had said farewell” (*Dawn’s Left Hand* 131). Miriam, rather than being transported by the train into a manipulated filmic world, *embodies* the railroad trope and appropriates its power of mobility. Miriam is, in fact, travelling on the train previously described by Mr. Orly as “*the* train, as if there were no other. It must be the one great train of the night” (*Dawn’s Left Hand* 131). Yet it arrives to the station an hour behind schedule. Richardson

¹⁴ By describing the small woman’s uncritical thoughts as a “stream,” Richardson links her consciousness to a mode of passivity.

demonstrates the failure of this masculine trope to “transport” – physically or psychologically – the empowered Miriam.

Miriam’s vision is characterized by various analogs to the tracking shot, such as a bird’s line of flight, and is also subjected to framing devices which mimic the controlled view of a camera. Richardson consciously employs these filmic techniques in order to contrast Miriam’s expansive vision against the classical Hollywood style’s “constrained set of options.” After an unsatisfactory sexual encounter with Hypo, Miriam seeks solitude and observes her reflection in a mirror:

At the edge of her circle of vision as she stood before the mirror with arms raised to her head and eyes intent upon the shaping of her hair, birds appeared, three moving specks far off in the farther corner of the scene framed by the open window. Without shifting her gaze she saw them as they came forward downwards towards the center of the sky. In the form of an elongated triangle they flashed by near at hand and disappeared beyond the window’s nearer rim. And the sight of them as they passed had smitten through her as though she were transparent and left her thrilled from head to foot with the sense of having shared their swift and silent flight. And as surprising and as new as this vivid experience was the way she had taken it: noting it in passing and, while exultantly her consciousness declared that last night’s lonely journey through uninhabited darkness had carried her into a way of being that would find its own responses in this dead-seeming world, going on doing her hair. (259)

Miriam’s *interpretation* of this experience of spectatorship, “the way she had taken it,” is as “new” and “vivid” as the experience itself. She finds pleasure in the everyday experience of doing her hair in front of the mirror while being aware of much more: the birds passing in the window, and the yield of her previous night’s journey, which has produced a particular “way of being.”¹⁵ The frames of the mirror and the window imply two distinct visual perspectives within

¹⁵ By privileging such everyday experiences, Richardson also seeks to expose the gender inequalities that are inherently reproduced by the plottedness of the classical Hollywood style. If a plot is to be found within *Dawn’s Left Hand*, it would likely revolve around the homoerotic relationship between Miriam and Amabel. But I wonder if we might also consider the dangers intrinsic to reading sexual encounters as climactic. Richardson was criticized for her apparent “squeamishness” surrounding representations of sexuality – though Miriam apparently loses her

the scope of Miriam's vision: one is the reflected image of herself fixing her hair; the other is of the window in her peripheral vision, with birds passing through the outdoor space onto which the window opens. The narrative point of view of classical film was traditionally the long shot (such as of the railroad) or the medium close-up (emphasizing the subject's face), and these manipulations of perspective allowed the "viewer's rate of comprehension [to be] absolutely controlled" (Bordwell *Narrative* 30).¹⁶ In contrast, Richardson moves in a less expected manner between center and periphery – between the mirror and the birds – to disrupt the control of the classical cinematic perspective and to emphasize Miriam's satisfaction with her own vision.

By eliminating the directed view of the camera, Richardson eliminates hierarchies of vision within her fictional scenes. In classical Hollywood style, the desired homogeneity of the fictional world leads to an unself-conscious omnipresence of the camera. That is, narration is collapsed into camerawork (Bordwell, "Classical" 30). As A. Lindsley Lane argues, in this way, the camera has "all-seeingness" and "stimulates, through...subject matter and setup, the sense within the percipient of 'being at the most vital part of the experience – at the most advantageous point of perception' throughout the picture" (95). In the bird scene from *Dawn's Left Hand*, the string of prepositions which describe the birds' flight "forward downward towards" the edge of

virginity to Hypo and has a romantic attachment to Amabel, these scenes are left largely ambiguous. But Richardson's reluctance to describe sexual encounters is strategic. Hypo's assumptions about womanly experiences reveal both the literary and critical biases intrinsic to maintaining the plot-like structure of classical Hollywood cinema, or the gendered "marriage plot" of standard fiction. The impending failure of Miriam's "love affairs" with either Hypo or Amabel (despite being plucked from her "own experiences," as Hypo suggests) demonstrates a resistance to privileging the typical "events" which might be thought of as defining a woman's existence.

¹⁶ Though Bordwell discusses the rarity of both the "bird's eye view" and "inconsistently angled eyelines" in classical Hollywood cinema (*Narrative* 28), Richardson incorporates both of these perspectives into her novel in the bird scene in her effort to destabilize centralized points of view.

the window also depict the movement of the train at La Ciotet station.¹⁷ Linking the flight of the birds to the familiar image of the train creates a vivid sense of space in the sense that we can initially locate the birds within the window frame and grasp their motion, a vector, in relation to where Miriam stands before the mirror. However, though attention is drawn to the window as a framed representation of distant motion, this screen-like image does not direct Miriam's vision. The contrast between Richardson's narrative rendering of passive and active spectatorship is highlighted in her account of Miriam's point of view. Miriam remains stationary but observes the birds "without shifting her gaze" – the literal perspective of the scene is complicated as the birds are simultaneously presented as "specks" in the distance and as "near at hand." Richardson is reluctant to privilege a foreground image (the mirror) over the peripheral focus of the birds and instead creates a field of concurrent visions. In her effort to destabilize centralized points of view, Richardson's deep focus democratizes the viewing space by providing material for each reader's unique interpretation.

In the "bird scene" reproduced above, Richardson introduces an experience of simultaneity that contradicts the "controlling mind" behind classical Hollywood cinema. This scene, moreover, takes on additional resonance when considered in conjunction with the shifting frames, or windows, of a tram in the closing scene of the novel. Miriam's later experience aboard the tram emphasizes her power of un-directed vision. Just as the bird scene references Miriam's relationship with Hypo through "last night's lonely journey through uninhabited darkness" (259), the tram scene also begins with a verbal underscoring of Hypo's lingering influence by recalling again "the strange darkness of last night's journey" (265). In both cases, references to her "lonely

¹⁷ In the silent film, the locomotive enters the screen from the upper-right corner and the camera angle makes it appear to journey forward (toward the audience) until it reaches the bottom-left corner of the screen.

journey” with Hypo locate Miriam’s consciousness as an alternative to everything associated with the ways in which Hypo, a representative of patriarchal narrative structures, experiences and writes about the world. Her expansive vision is further unfolded as she boards the tram:

The scenes framed by the windows grew beautiful in movement. [...] Watching them, [Miriam] was out in eternity, gliding along, adding this hour to the strange sum of her central being. [...] All the places she had known came unsummoned before her mind’s eye with an intimate new warmth of welcome, each equally near and accessible and equally remote; so far away that several could be focused at once, pictured for a moment in their places before they moved and mingled in a confusion of impressions all joyously claiming the same quality: a freshly plumbed interest that promised to have increased when again she should drop back into them in an interval such as was being provided by the journey. That brought her to London without any sense of transition from one place to another. (266-7)

In this passage, Richardson’s long sentences mimic the deep focus provided by the traditional tracking shot.¹⁸ Miriam’s ability to focus several scenes at once while also keeping them “in their places” conjures images of photographic film, or the exposure strip which captures moving pictures through still shots. But because each “scene” from her past is “equally near and accessible and equally near and remote,” Miriam does not subordinate any one experience to another. In its depiction of an “impression” of mobile scenes, the tram scene serves as an intensification of the absorption created through the earlier framing passage.

In one of her final contributions to *Close Up*, Richardson suggests the permanence of the cinema within our cultural fabric and writes that new generations of film viewers will never know a world without this medium. She recognizes the cinema is still a fledgling genre and that to succeed, it requires critically aware audiences who will continue to develop the form beyond

¹⁸ In her review of *Revolving Lights*, Woolf links Richardson’s lengthy sentences to her creation of a feminine sentence. She describes Richardson’s syntax as being “of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes” (qtd. in Parsons 94).

the purposes of entertainment. She feared that film's future was a "masculine destiny" ("Film Gone Male" 206), but ultimately asks:

Has it occurred to [critics of film viewership] to reflect that film-audiences, popular picture audiences, growing by the bread they have eaten, are maturing, are themselves cultivating and improving the medium from which they have drawn life? And that these audiences seen in the bulk, disregarding single, exceptional individuals, are much more capable of appreciating the wares of museum and gallery than were, in the bulk, their pictureless predecessors? ("Spoon-fed" 205)

Richardson's earlier mentioned "trust in the pictures" ("Captions" 165) is confirmed here through her belief in both the active spectator and in the potential for cinema to be both critical and inclusive. By positioning her female protagonist within Hollywood cinema – a model still entrenched in patriarchy – Richardson reveals Miriam's resistance to this structure by simultaneously invoking and subverting specific aspects of the classical style. Her fiction thus reads as an example of her film theory come to fruition.

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