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## Foreword

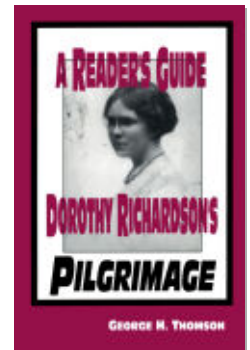
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Thomson, George H.

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## FOREWORD

SEVERAL YEARS AFTER the 1938 "collected" edition of *Pilgrimage* appeared, Dorothy Richardson was still contemplating improvements for her incomplete, twelve-part novel. In a letter to an admirer, she bemoaned the constraints her innovative narrative method placed on her ability to give readers an overview of her heroine's adventures. She acknowledged that readers deserved some practical help with the narrative, some guidance through "direct information," even while she refused to provide that help. This most voluble and prolific of writers concluded that her silence on this matter was "the necessary price" of her enterprise.

Each of *Pilgrimage's* readers, no matter how canny, has had to pay that "necessary price" in full as he or she worked to discover the coherence of Richardson's almost overwhelmingly detailed, incredibly long, autobiographical narrative. With the publication of George H. Thomson's *Reader's Guide*, that high price needn't be exacted any longer. Thomson shoulders a large portion of that costly burden, teasing from the material of Miriam Henderson's capacious memory and all-absorbing consciousness the realistic grid of historical time that structures the narrative about her. Whether readers tuck the *Reader's Guide* beneath their knees while dipping in and out of a favorite volume of *Pilgrimage*, or whether they keep it standing at attention beside their computers while writing scholarly studies, they will benefit from its function as supplemental memory without relinquishing any of the pleasures of being kept "on the stretch," as Thomson puts it, by the demands of Miriam's reality and Richardson's methods.

The recent blossoming of studies on *Pilgrimage* and on the contributions of women modernists may provide the critical context that both insures and requires publication of a study like this. As Richardson's name increasingly enters into articles and conversations that attract more diverse audiences, curious, nonspecialist readers will seek out *Pilgrimage*. If the apprentices to Richardson are not patient, they may be dismayed by the narrative's demands. On the other hand, veteran

readers of *Pilgrimage* who relish these demands may be skeptical about the need for a guidebook. These readers should recall their own first encounters with the novel and the contexts that directed them to it. Most likely, they were reading similar kinds of books by writers like James or Joyce or Proust or Woolf or very different kinds of books by writers like Wells and Bennett and Galsworthy. To acknowledge the advantages of approaching *Pilgrimage* through any of these writers is to acknowledge, with Richardson, that her most democratic of books is likely to attract the broad following it deserves only if practical help is offered.

The advantages the *Reader's Guide* offers general readers should not diminish its appeal for *Pilgrimage's* "expert" critics. Anyone who has fallen into *Pilgrimage* and found it compelling enough to risk the demands of writing about it publicly, certainly would have been grateful for this book's construction of a comprehensive chronology, index to characters, and select bibliography. Thomson's map to *Pilgrimage* will continue to prove useful to readers regardless of what attracts them to Richardson's magnum opus: its mysticism, feminism, and socialism; its experimental forms, filmic techniques, and new realist inventions; its portraits of London Zionists, Fabians, bohemians, prostitutes, and beggars; its Quakers, bourgeois tourists, lawyers, dentists, scientists, school girls, matrons, and writers. In its attention to the diversity of details of person and place and time, the *Reader's Guide* promises to provide a meaningful backdrop for the increasingly diverse questions and approaches that readers bring to their understanding of Richardson's project and its place in contemporary literary studies.

This backdrop can support such diverse approaches largely because Thomson reads *Pilgrimage* the way Richardson wrote it: with a calendar before him. He demonstrates that *Pilgrimage's* fictional world is built around a carefully reconstructed realistic time scheme that permits precise dating of events at almost every turn of the novel. This reading of *Pilgrimage* provides answers to innumerable questions: How old was Miriam when she began working in the dental surgery in *The Tunnel*? How many months elapse between the beginning of *The Tunnel* and the end of *Honeycomb*? How is the loss of time between volumes significant? How is it related to Richardson's increasingly fragmented, temporally extended treatment of events in individual books? Each answer that the *Reader's Guide* provides to these questions is carefully supported by reference to events in the text. And since *Pilgrimage* is

autobiographical fiction, these answers are consistently analyzed in relation to the chronology of events in Richardson's life.

Thomson's analysis of the meaning of discrepancies between Dorothy Richardson's life experiences and Miriam Henderson's fictional ones raises questions about other discrepancies in *Pilgrimage's* treatment of time that have weighty implications for our understanding of the novel. Isn't the point of *Pilgrimage*, after all, to reject the "current masculine realism," and with it, the ingenious, contrived experiments with time that, in part, made Richardson's male contemporaries so famous? Or on the other hand, isn't the point of *Pilgrimage* to mimic and improve upon that very "masculine" invention by recording in much more detail the ability of feminine consciousness to expand and contract real world time? The contradiction between these assumptions about the "point" of *Pilgrimage* becomes one of the central questions explored by Thomson's study of Richardson's unreal realism. This book removes the anxiety but not the mystery of our encounter with this contradiction by convincingly mapping out the methods and contents that define the two co-existing and co-creating realities of Miriam's consciousness and her world's calendar.

In many ways, the attention of recent studies to the former—the subjective, psychological reality of Miriam's consciousness—is precisely what demands our attention to this study of the latter: the world's calendar. Another way of putting this is to say that *Pilgrimage's* modernist contexts have taken critical precedence over its realist debts and innovations. Thomson's *Reader's Guide* encourages us to reexamine the details of time, place, and person in the novel and let them interrogate and renew the literary critical categories like "modernism" or "realism" that, inevitably, come to determine readers' approaches to the novel itself. This model of reading delivers to us a *Pilgrimage* that is defamiliarized because it shifts our emphasis from style to content, from modernism to realism, experiment to history. By making us aware of the possibility of that shift, *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's 'Pilgrimage'* does more than serve as a long-awaited reference tool; it also reminds us of the way Richardson's luminous multi-volume novel participates, despite or even because of all its difficulties of time, in the ongoing debates about the critical practices and literary priorities of modernity.

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