Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Poetic Artifice and the Struggle with Forms

Gareth Stuart Farmer

Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

University of Sussex

September, 2011

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: …………………………………………..

The University of Sussex

Gareth Stuart Farmer   D Phil

Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Poetic Artifice and the Struggle with Forms

Summary

This thesis examines the poetry and critical work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, arguing that her poetic project is characterised by her 'struggle with forms'. Forrest-Thomson developed many formal models of poetry in her critical writing which acted as ideals to be enacted in practice. The broad struggle in Forrest-Thomson's poetic project is, then, between the formal projections of theory and a variety of forms of poetic practice; between, that is, the fixed and totalising frames of theory and the local patterns of form and meaning which exceed the logic of an ideal model. This thesis examines the struggle between theoretical and practical forms through consecutive stages in Forrest-Thomson's career. First, I examine Forrest-Thomson's attempt to combine Romantic, formalist and modernist poetic theories in an early manifesto. Her early, conflicted theoretical perspectives, I argue, transferred to her poetry as tensions between a use of traditional poetic forms and a variety of free, formal modes. Second, I demonstrate how conflicts between traditional and innovative form in the poems were exacerbated by Forrest-Thomson's developing interest in artistic theory and concrete poetry. Third, I assess the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy on Forrest-Thomson's theory and practice, concentrating on her use of his notion of 'language-games' to inform collage-like poems and the idea that the poem is a 'context' absorbing and transforming others. At this stage, Forrest-Thomson's theory and poetry also exhibit tensions between modernist and post-modernist perspectives which induce an anxiety of losing control at the level of poetic form for which she compensates with an emphasis on traditional literary figures and forms. Fourth, I examine Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* as an example of a particular type of formalism where fixed metaphors of poetic form comprise both the polemical strength and conceptual weakness of her poetic theory. Lastly, I outline the struggle between formal and semantic control and excess in Forrest-Thomson's late theory and poetry, arguing that her quest for what she calls 'writing straight' is impeded by her conflicted assessment of the role and status of complex poetic form.

Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgements of gratitude must go to my supervisors. Peter Nicholls took me on as a D Phil student and has provided invaluable advice, support and friendship over the years. I have been extremely privileged to work with him. Sara Crangle kindly agreed to take on supervising responsibilities from 2008 and her advice and hard work have been gratefully received. I am extremely thankful to her for having the time and patience work closely with me and I shall carry her advice with me throughout my career.

I am very grateful to Anthony Barnett for generously allowing me access to documents in the archive of Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers and for his patient responses to all my enquiries over the years. I am also grateful to Jonathan Culler and the Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson for allowing me full access to unpublished documents and for always greeting my enquiries with generosity and kindness. Without the support of Anthony and Jonathan my research for this thesis would have been that much more difficult. Special thanks also go to Alison Mark for supplying me with materials, for her advice and for her excellent and pioneering scholarship.

I am grateful to many friends and colleagues for their stimulating and thought-provoking conversations over the years. My thanks go particularly to Andrea Brady, Becca Bramall, Jean Bramall, Jennifer Cooke, Laura Finch, Matt Ffytche, Annabel Haines, Michael Hansen, Doug Haynes, Roger Johnson, Michael Kindellan, Sam Ladkin, Anthony Levings, Bill McEvoy, Alec Newman, Richard Parker, Ian Patterson, Neil Pattison, J. H. Prynne, Luke Roberts, Karen Schaller, Robert Sheppard, Tim Shortis, Helen Slater, Keston Sutherland, Scott Thursdon, David Tucker and Claire Wintle. You have all taught me so much. Special thanks are reserved for Ben Pitcher, for his unerring friendship, support and inspiration since our time at Goldsmiths together.

I am very grateful to my loving parents for their unwavering support and to my sisters and their families for providing necessary cheerfulness during hard times.

Lastly, thanks are due to my wife, Ingrid, for her patience, love and support during the long years of my D Phil research. Simply put: without her, none of this would have been possible.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Works by Veronica Forrest-Thomson
CP – *Collected Poems*, (ed.) Anthony Barnett (Exeter: Shearsman, in association with Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers, 2008)
 'Dada' – 'Dada, Unrealism and Contemporary Poetry', *20th Century Studies* 12, (December 1974), pp. 77-93
IA – 'Irrational Artifice; A Problem in Recent Poetics' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 2 (1971), pp. 123-33
NA – 'Necessary Artifice: Form and Theory in the Poetry of *Tel Quel' Language and Style*, 6:1 (Winter 1973), pp. 2-26
PA – *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978)
PK – 'Poetry as Knowledge: The Uses of Science by Twentieth-Century Poets' (Cambridge: unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1971)

Unpublished documents
HTP – 'His True Penelope was Flaubert: Ezra Pound and Nineteenth-Century Poetry'
M – 'Attitudes and Beliefs', 'manifesto'. Unpublished document. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive
OI – 'Obstinate Isles: Ezra Pound and the Late Nineteenth Century'
VTP – *Veronica - Some Teenage Poems* unpublished document. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

Works by Others
B&BB – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964)
CBP – Simon Perril, 'Contemporary British Poetry and Modernist Innovation' (Cambridge: unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1995)
PI & PI II – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)
SP – Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975)
Z – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967)
VFT – Alison Mark, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Language Poetry* (Devon: Northcote House, 2001)

Index to Figures

All the figures were either scanned or photographed by myself. Thank you to Jonathan Culler and the Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson for permitting reproductions from Forrest-Thomson's work.

Page Numbers

Introduction

> [T]he concept of Artifice […] is the most important and the only which must have a capital letter. Artifice is the general term for the whole process by which poetry distances itself through technique from the world already given as natural in other languages.[1]

> The poetry of our century particularly requires a theory of the devices of artifice, such as apparently non-sensical imagery, logical discontinuity, referential opacity, and unusual metrical and spatial organisation, and an account of the relationships between various strata of artifice. The question always is: how do poems work?[2]

> [F]reedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation.[3]

> > Pattern, like a magnetic field,
> > is passionate in restraint; limits compress
> > significance; framed energy is sealed.
> > Objects, having nothing to express
> >
> > except themselves, attain intensity
> > in assumed balance, which alleges,
> > in face of our amorphous liberty,
> > the joy of everything with edges.[4]

The subject of my thesis is the poetry and critical writing of the Scottish poet and academic, Veronica Forrest-Thomson.[5] By the time of her death in 1975 at the age of twenty-seven, Forrest-Thomson had published four collections of poetry, a few translations and a number of critical essays.[6] Her last collection, *On the Periphery*, was assembled and published shortly after her death; whilst her full-length critical book, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* was issued by

---

[1] TSP, pp. 9-10.

[2] PA, p. x.

[3] T. S. Eliot, 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre', in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 35.

[4] 'Contours – Homage to Cézanne', CP, p. 27.

[5] Veronica Forrest-Thomson (1947-1975). Forrest-Thomson was born in Malaya to Scottish parents who moved back to Glasgow before she was one. See Alison Mark's VFT, pp. x-xii for an authoritative biography.

[6] The collections were: *Identi-kit* (London: Outposts, 1967); *twelve academic questions* (Cambridge: privately printed, 1970); *Language-Games* (Leeds: The University of Leeds School of English Press, 1971), and *Cordelia: or, 'A poem should not mean but be'* (Leicester: Omens, 1974). Some of her translations of the poets Marcelin Pleynet and Denis Roche were published in the literary magazine *Strange Faeces*, no. 16 (New York, [1974?]), pp. 109-112. For the essays published during her lifetime, please see my bibliography.

Manchester University Press in 1978.[7] In 1990, Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers published a landmark *Collected Poems and Translations* which gathered a number of her unpublished poems and translations alongside her published work.[8] This collection was followed in 1999 by a *Selected Poems*, whilst Shearsman Books recently re-issued a new *Collected Poems*.[9] Whilst her life was short, Forrest-Thomson assembled a voluminous and diverse body of theoretical and poetic work which brilliantly assimilated the intellectual questions of her day. Her poetic project absorbed and revised a great variety of poetic theories, informed by her wide-reading and intense scrutiny of poetry from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She offered to contemporary poetry, as James Keery observed in a prescient 1991 review of her *Collected Poems and Translations*, 'a unique voice' and there is no other poet quite like her in twentieth-century poetry.[10] For allies of comparable energy and commitment we have to look, as she did, to William Blake for his unique and vigorous poetry and theory, to Ezra Pound for his intense engagement with poetic history and his tireless experimentation, or to William Empson's innovative criticism and poetry. Whilst such claims may seem hyperbolic, particularly if we consider the relative quantities of work involved, Forrest-Thomson's commitment to poetry was at least as passionate as these forebears, and the breadth of her reading and learning were comparably impressive. Over the last thirty-five years, a variety of influential critics have returned again and again to Forrest-Thomson's work and there has been a small resurgence of interest in the early twenty-first century.[11] In a recent article on the American poet, Jack Spicer, Geoff Ward observed that Forrest-Thomson was 'probably the greatest loss to poetry and the discipline of English in the last half

---

[7] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *On the Periphery* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1976). The manuscript had been largely assembled and organised by Forrest-Thomson herself; she had even written a contents page. Wendy Mulford at Street Editions published the collection along with 'A Personal Memoir' by Forrest-Thomson's friend and mentor, J. H. Prynne.

[8] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Collected Poems and Translations*, (ed.) Anthony Barnett (London: Alladyce, Barnett, Publishers, 1990).

[9] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Selected Poems,* (ed.) Anthony Barnett (London: Invisible Books, 1999).

[10] James Keery, 'A Unique Voice', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), *P N Review* Vol. 17, no. 4 (Mar/Apr 1991), pp. 85-87.

[11] Such critics include Denise Riley, Isobel Armstrong, Colin McCabe, Brian McHale and John Wilkinson. A symposium on Forrest-Thomson's work was held at Christ's College, Cambridge on 17 January 2008 and its select proceedings were published in the *Kenyon Review Online* later that year. Articles are accessible via < http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/kro_vft_index.php>, retrieved 12 September 2011.

century'.[12] My thesis is a testament to my own conviction as to this sad loss and it also makes a claim for the continued relevance of her work in discussions of modern and contemporary poetry.

Whilst Forrest-Thomson's work has been examined sporadically since 1975, accounts of it vary widely, implying its distinction as well as its evasion of easy categorisation. So, whilst Keery refers to parts of *Poetic Artifice* as 'implicitly Platonic' and as well as containing 'structuralist solipsism', Alison Mark discerns in her critical writing the presence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories of intertextuality where, '[n]o longer regarded as an 'autonomous' object, the text is now read as a process'.[13] Similarly, Keery notes elsewhere that Forrest-Thomson's early poetry 'shows […] mastery of the 'Movement' style', whilst Ian Gregson sees in her poetry a 'diversity of talents' which incorporates 'lessons learned from modernist and postmodernist poetry'.[14] Her work also bridges the gap between the entrenched poetic politics from the 1960s to the 1980s. For example, Forrest-Thomson has gained support from both Peter Porter and Robert Sheppard, poets and critics who, as R. J. Ellis has outlined, held divergent and hostile opinions about the value of the 1987 anthology *A Various Art*, featuring poets such as J. H. Prynne, Andrew Crozier and Forrest-Thomson herself.[15] There is an abiding sense that Forrest-Thomson's poetic project does not quite fit into particular critical categories and of it representing a struggle *between* categories. Indeed, the diversity and sometimes contradictory nature of Forrest-Thomson's poetic project makes it

---

[12] Geoff Ward, "I announce the death of Orpheus' (Jack Spicer): Poetry and the Rift', *PN Review*, Vol. 36, no. 4 (Mar/Apr 2010), p. 82.

[13] James Keery, 'Blossoming Synecdoches: A Study of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Bête Noire* 10 & 11 (1990/1991), p. 113. Mark, VFT, p. 69.

[14] Keery, 'A Unique Voice', p. 86. Ian Gregson, 'Lost Love and Deconstruction: The Poems of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Verse*, 8.3/9.1 (Winter 1991/Spring 1992), p. 111.

[15] See R. J. Ellis, 'Mapping the United Kingdom little magazine field', in Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (eds.), *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 88. Ellis notes that Robert Sheppard attacked a review in the *Observer* by Peter Porter of Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville (eds.), *A Various Art* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987) for the *Observer* in his magazine, *Pages*: Robert Sheppard, 'Poor Fuckers: the New British Poets', *Pages* (May, 1989), pp. 161-3. For Porter's and Sheppard's praise and engagement with Forrest-Thomson's work see, for example, Peter Porter, 'Impeccable Bad Taste', review of *On the Periphery*, *Observer*, 12 December 1976, p. 27; Peter Porter, 'On the Best Battlefields No Dead Bodies', review of *Collected Poems and Translations*, *Observer*, 5 August 1990, p. 54 and Robert Sheppard, 'Artifice and the Everyday World: Poetry in the 1970s', in Bart Moore-Gilbert (ed.) *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 129-51.

exemplary of a type of 'late modernist' literature in English, most recently defined by Tyrus Miller as a transitory or liminal literary practice which interrogates modernist poetic strategies and ideas of form in relation to contemporary cultural and social developments.[16] Whilst Miller primarily examines poets and writers from the late thirties and forties, his definition certainly describes tendencies in Forrest-Thomson's work. Miller argues that late modernist texts feature what he calls 'a central paradox' located in 'its apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements and its consequent lack of a clearly defined place in the dominant frameworks of twentieth-century criticism.'[17] Is Forrest-Thomson's work modernist or postmodernist? Is it expressive of 'Movement' principles or deconstructive? Her theory and practice contains aspects of all of these modes, making them indicative of a late modernist struggle with forms.

If there is a consensus, then, to be gleaned from the small but burgeoning criticism on Forrest-Thomson's work over the last thirty years it is that both her poetry and critical writing are characterised by their inherent struggles. If the word struggle isn't used directly, its synonyms – tension, wrestle, conflict – are frequently employed. Unique conceptual and formal tensions exist, it is generally agreed, in both Forrest-Thomson's poetic theory and her poems, and there is also some consensus as to significant differences between her theoretical prescriptions for poetry and the function of her own poems. Whilst critical work to date has illuminated details of these inherent conflicts, my thesis diagnoses Forrest-Thomson's poetic project as characterised by a primary 'struggle with forms' and by its exemplification of the paradoxes of late modernist literature. The forms with which she struggled are both conceptual – theories of form derived from Aestheticism through to post-structuralism – as well as practical – where conventional modes such as the ballad and the sonnet, techniques such as rhyme and metrical inversion, and local phonetic and visual patterning all jostle for precedence. In her theory and poetry, Forrest-Thomson struggles, very often self-consciously – as in the excerpt from 'Contours' above – to reconcile, assimilate and synthesise conceptual and practical forms. Forms are 'passionate in restraint', as 'Contours' has it; Forrest-Thomson celebrates

---

[16] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

[17] *ibid.*, p. 7.

'the joy of everything with edges', but the lines spill over – 'limits compress / significance', 'attain intensity / in assumed balance'. Controlled form is always composed 'in the face of our amorphous liberty' which troubles the assumption of 'balance'.

A major conflict in Forrest-Thomson's poetic project is between the formal prescriptions of her theory and the way in which she uses form in practice. Forrest-Thomson developed her ideas about poetry from an early age, with theoretical statements appearing in a number of formats: an early expression of what she called her 'attitudes and beliefs' about life and art, prefaces to collections, formal essays, reviews, lectures as well as unpublished and published book projects, most notably her posthumously published, *Poetic Artifice*. All of this critical work, I argue, contains Forrest-Thomson's expressions of ideals of poetic practice. In developing her poetry alongside such theory, she self-consciously explored these theoretical ideals. However, as I shall argue, in her poetic practice she discovered and developed numerous innovative formal modes and techniques whose 'amorphous liberty' exceeded the idealised models of her theory. Whilst the sites and characteristics of these tensions are varied, I have chosen throughout this thesis to use a simple but powerfully significant binary in order to draw the distinction between Forrest-Thomson's theoretical ideals and her practice: the distinction between 'Artifice' and 'artifice'. As the opening epigraph reveals, Forrest-Thomson was keen at one stage to capitalise her 'most important' term, affording it a special, status in her theory, so much so that critics have referred to it variously as 'quasi-sacrosanct' and 'apical'.[18] But, as the epigraphs attest, she did not always capitalise her term; it appears in the first as a singular 'Artifice' and in the second as the pluralised 'devices of artifice'. The difference between these uses is indicative of one of the central tensions of Forrest-Thomson's poetic project: between the ideal represented by perfect models – a 'separate planet of Artifice' as she refers to it in *Poetic Artifice* – and the formal

---

[18] The term 'quasi-sacrosanct' is used by John London in a not particularly sympathetic review of the *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and the Art of Artifice', *Fragmente* 4, 1991, p. 81. In an elegiac but rather dismissive 1980 review of *Poetic Artifice* and Philip Hobsbaum's *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1979) (an interesting parallel), Hayden Curruth refers to '"Artifice," the apical term', before noting that 'I cannot see much difference between her Artifice and what I read twenty years ago of Northrop Frye's Convention'. 'Two Critics from Britain', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 88 No. 4 (Fall 1980), p. 656.

operations and relationships between the 'devices of artifice' in practice.[19] As such, I suggest throughout this thesis that the capitalised Artifice stands for what Miller has described in *Late Modernism* in relation to High Modernist myths of order as 'strong symbolic forms', those Platonic ideals of formal cohesion.[20] Such ideals conflict with a variety of innovative formal patterns and artifices in her poetry – such as sound patterning, rhyme, visual patterns – whose operations are unrecuperable and in excess of her ideals of Artifice. Whilst the tension between what could be called the general ideals of Artifice and the local patterns of artifice vary, the binary persists throughout her work.

Such tensions between theory and practice, and between ideal models of form and the messy contingencies of practice, are, of course, not new and have been diagnosed as part of the pre-history of literary modernism itself. In their essay, 'Modernist Poetry and its Precursors', for example, Peter Brooker and Simon Perril write that, '[Charles] Baudelaire's seminal essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1859-60) defines a split modernity; one half comprised of 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent', the other of 'the eternal and the immovable'.'[21] Brooker and Perril link Baudelaire's distinction to T. S. Eliot's later project, as they put it, 'to return the sordid new world to the faith it had lost' and where a 'redemptive order (the eternal and immutable)' could 'shore up and reshape the chaotic fragments (the fleeting, the contingent) of modernity.'[22] Brooker and Perril follow Peter Nicholls's location of this crucial split in modernity in his *Modernisms* which leads him to speculate whether the 'grounding of the aesthetic in an objectification of the other would constitute *the* recurring problems of the later modernisms?'[23] Nicholls refers to Baudelaire's objectification of the feminine as a figure of the other in order to shore up what he calls a 'closed model of the self'.[24] Such an anxious dialectic between the

---

[19] PA, p. 137.

[20] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 20.

[21] Peter Brooker and Simon Perril, 'Modernist Poetry and its Precursors' in Neil Roberts (ed.), *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 24. They are quoting from Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', reprinted in Vasiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (eds.), *Modernisms: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 107.

[22] Brooker and Perril, 'Modernist Poetry and its Precursors', p. 25.

[23] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4 – emphasis in the original.

[24] *ibid.*

control of objectification and the defence against the excesses of the world and others in the process of producing art is crucial to Forrest-Thomson's poetic project. She clings to the 'other' as an ideal of Form, objectified as a necessary backdrop to a modernist aesthetic, and in response to the perceived formal excesses of poetic practice and the possibilities of formal and semantic indeterminacy implied by a burgeoning postmodern context. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's poetic project assimilated contemporary ideas, it is my contention that she remained a formalist, a modernist and even, if I may be permitted an anachronism, an 'aestheticist', theoretically clinging to the concept of Artifice, whilst the fragments of the postmodern world, troubling as so many formal devices of artifice and theory, invaded her poetry.

The two most significant studies of Forrest-Thomson's work to date have highlighted the tensions in her poetic project. Alison Mark's PhD thesis, 'Reading Between the Lines: Language, Experience and Identity in the work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson' (1996), and her subsequent book, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Language poetry* (2001), argue that Forrest-Thomson's poetry and theory exist 'on the cusp of the movement from modernism to postmodernism'.[25] As such, Mark suggests that Forrest-Thomson extracted ideas and formal practice from each movement and, as Mark puts it, 'wrestled with philosophical and linguistic ideas of great complexity in the medium of poetry itself.'[26] For Mark, such wrestling was symptomatic of Forrest-Thomson pushing to the limits what she calls an '[i]nvestigative writing' in order to explore complex ideas of experience, identity and subjectivity and their representation in language.[27] Mark correctly identifies Forrest-Thomson's work as 'on the cusp' of modernist and postmodernist practice, but her thesis, and particularly her book, focus mainly on the latter. In particular, Mark makes some very useful links between Forrest-Thomson's poetic project and American language poetry. Whilst Mark's thesis looks, as it were, forward, I suggest

---

[25] Mark, VFT, p. 1. Alison Mark 'Reading Between the Lines: Language, Experience and Identity in the work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', (London: unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birkbeck, 1996). Whilst there are differences between Mark's thesis and her subsequent book, particularly in terms of detail, the central concepts relating to 'experience' and 'identity' remain the same. I refer primarily to her book throughout my thesis.

[26] Mark, VFT, p. 1.

[27] *ibid.*, p. 2.

that, whilst Forrest-Thomson's poetic practice and theory troublingly assimilated postmodern ideas and forms, these influences are always measured against her proclivity towards modernist and traditional form. Whilst Mark rightly points out that Forrest-Thomson sought to contribute to, as she puts, it, 'what she – with a nice eye for an oxymoron – called 'the tradition in innovation'', I examine the pre-history of this oxymoron and confront its implications for poetic form.[28]

The other important study of Forrest-Thomson's work is a chapter entitled 'Artifice and Arbitrariness in Veronica Forrest-Thomson's *On the Periphery*' of Simon Perril's PhD thesis 'Contemporary British Poetry and Modernist Innovation' (1995). In his chapter, Perril perceptively outlines a number of tensions in Forrest-Thomson's later poetry and theory. He argues, for example, that there is an inherent conflict between her self-conscious creation of a coherent sequence in *On the Periphery*, whilst the individual poems 'critique […] the logic of total structure'; he also outlines how her poems argumentatively 'wrestle […] with her theoretical conscience.'[29] Perril also draws attention to the 'power struggle' in Forrest-Thomson's long poem 'Cordelia: Or, 'A Poem Should Not Mean but Be'' between what he calls, somewhat awkwardly, a 'passionate but sassily unhysterical' feminine voice and the masculine 'representations of literary history'.[30] Perril's chapter is richly suggestive of Forrest-Thomson's unique, late modernist struggles and I engage in particular with his contention that there are what he calls 'two formalisms' set in conflict in the poems of *On the Periphery*.[31] These are Forrest-Thomson's faith in the creeds of structuralist arbitrariness of the sign, and what Perril calls her 'historical sense of artifice' and tradition.[32] As Perril suggests, the consequences of this broad conflict are wide ranging. They encompass clashes of synchronic and diachronic linguistic systems, tensions between broad ideas of structure and individual poems, as well as shifts between arbitrary and substantial meaning. Whilst I broadly agree with Perril's argument about these conflicts in Forrest-Thomson's later poetry, my argument maintains that they exist in her earliest theoretical work and poems, even if the terminology to describe them shifts and develops. Perril

---

[28] VFT, p. 2. Mark quotes from PA, p. 125.
[29] Perril, CBP, pp. 123 & 82 respectively.
[30] *ibid.*, p. 127.
[31] *ibid.*, p. 94.
[32] *ibid.*, p. 83.

suggests that Forrest-Thomson's formal sensibility 'progressed' in her later poetry towards the discovery of the 'absolute necessity of "artifice."' It is my argument that her conviction of this necessity was there from the start and was reaffirmed at every stage of her short career.[33]

My argument for the consistency of the broad formal struggle between Artifice and artifice in Forrest-Thomson's late modernist poetic project has been informed by my unique access to hitherto unexamined materials, all of which confirm the consistency and depth of her commitment to Artifice and to the divergence and struggle between her theoretical ideals and formal practice.[34] As to the methodology of my thesis: its trajectory is chronological, beginning with Forrest-Thomson's earliest extant writings and concluding with a discussion of her last published work. Whilst the stages of my analysis are united by my overarching conviction of the struggle between versions of artifice, each chapter examines her 'struggle with forms' from different angles. The complexion of Forrest-Thomson's struggle with forms shifts throughout her poetic project, but the broad condition of 'struggle' itself remains consistent. The stylistic struggles, conflicts and shifts of frame and attention in the poems constitute not only Forrest-Thomson's inimitable style but comprise what could be described as a 'Forrest-Thomsonian' voice. There is a seam of distancing self-consciousness throughout her poems which can be described as irony, elsewhere as wit, at other times "silliness" and very often as wry. As Miller has suggested, 'self-reflexive laughter' can be indicative of what he calls a 'limit experience'.[35] That is to say, a person's laughter reveals itself wavering around the limits of order and disorder. Laughter can codify recognition of the failure of certain ambitions, but can also tentatively re-establish a form of control or, as Miller puts it, a 'minimum self-confirmation'.[36] Such confirmation can also shore up a conviction as to the security of symbolic modes. In which case, wry reflection on form's failure can also be a revitalising statement as to its necessity. Whilst some of the comic tone is

---

[33] Perril, CBP, p. 71.

[34] Individual, unpublished documents are listed in my bibliography and described and discussed throughout my thesis. I am greatly indebted to Anthony Barnett and the Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive for granting me access a number of documents. I also gratefully acknowledge Jonathan Culler for making many of Forrest-Thomson's unpublished typescripts fully available to me.

[35] Miller, *Late Modernism*, pp. 49 and 48 respectively.

[36] *ibid.*, p. 49.

perhaps unwitting, Forrest-Thomson would soon embrace this tone as an important constituent of her late modernist poetic voice.

My first chapter examines a document of Forrest-Thomson's written at the age of sixteen entitled, 'Attitudes and Beliefs', alongside examples of her earliest poetry.[37] This document, which I tentatively call her 'manifesto', contains an uneasy combination of Romantic, formalist and modernist ideas which she tries to reconcile.[38] Her poetry of this early period imitates a range of poetic practice, from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Stéphane Mallarmé, and uses loosely traditional forms as well a variety of free, formal modes. There are many overlaps between Forrest-Thomson's theory and poetry – such as the association of 'natural' speech with traditional verse form – but her poems very often challenge her theory. At the close of the chapter I argue that Forrest-Thomson's early poetic project can be understood in relation to the poetry of Mallarmé, whose influence she lists in her manifesto. Forrest-Thomson's theory of this period exhibits a straining towards a model of poetic Artifice as a fixed and distanced mode, reconciling traditional form with a variety of innovative, internal patterns. Whilst she strives to attain such ideals in her poetry, their erratic forms constantly unsettle theoretical foreclosure.

Chapter two examines the legacy of key ideas from Forrest-Thomson's manifesto in the poetry of her first collection, *Identi-kit* (1967) as well as some uncollected early poems. As with her earliest work, these poems use both traditional and formally diverse modes. Forrest-Thomson developed and complicated her early poetic styles through her use of ekphrasis and through experiments with concrete form. I argue that her eclectic formal trials, inspired by a variety of theoretical pressures, led to a paradoxical reaffirmation of traditional poetic devices which are, as Forrest-Thomson put it in her preface to *On the Periphery*, 'poetry's defence and its strength'.[39] During this period, poetic technique and artifice were gradually replacing Forrest-Thomson's early interest in eclectic formal experiment and her earliest desire

---

[37] See chapter 1 for full details of this document.

[38] I am aware of the dangers of calling such a document a 'manifesto', particularly as it wasn't described by its author as such. I have chosen to use the term 'manifesto' as the document constitutes a valuable, punchy and fairly comprehensive outline of Forrest-Thomson's aesthetic beliefs, aims and values during her late teens.

[39] CP, p. 167.

to emulate a form of natural and direct lyrical expressivity. Forrest-Thomson was rapidly establishing a belief in the authenticity and authority of poetic Artifice and diction, although her sense of this diction was confused. Examining 'Movement' poets, such as Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis, Forrest-Thomson was convinced that they lacked what Donald Davie called 'proper conduct': an understanding of the importance of, and mastery of, traditional form.[40] Whilst her experiments were wide-ranging and frequently brief, she increasingly realised in practice that poets needed to find an alliance between the innovative and the traditional.

Forrest-Thomson's poems written between 1968 and 1971, which I have decided to call her 'Cambridge Poems', mark a decisive, formal break from her earlier work. The period in which she wrote the poems also saw an exponential development in her theory which assimilated an idealised version of the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, conceptions of poetic form derived from New Critical models, as well as select post-structuralist ideas. In chapter three, I examine the Cambridge poems and their attendant theories, demonstrating the increasing centrality in Forrest-Thomson's work of what I have called 'figural presence'. In short, detecting the potentially destabilising influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy and poststructuralist theory on her ideals of form, Forrest-Thomson's developed figures of an idealised model of the poem – as a 'language-game' and 'context' (both from Wittgenstein's philosophy) – and concentrated on the development of literary figures such as metaphor. Forrest-Thomson's poems of this period also display an ambivalent irony induced by an anxiety about the ostensible loss of control of collage-like poetic form. I relate this irony to modernist tropes of organisation and craft as well as postmodern figures of linguistic instability. In this chapter, therefore, I begin to confront the theoretical and formal features in Forrest-Thomson's work as it exists on what Mark calls the cusp of modernism and postmodernism. I argue that Forrest-Thomson resists the implications of the dynamism and instability of the contingent implied by Wittgenstein's philosophy and post-structuralism by the operation of an over-worked self-consciousness and figural presence.

---

[40] Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* and *Articulate Energy* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), p. 15.

In chapter four, I argue that Forrest-Thomson's posthumously published *Poetic Artifice* presents an emphatically formalist theory. I demonstrate that Forrest-Thomson's poetic theory relies on what Frederic Jameson has referred to as projections of formalism and structuralism, as well as what Jonathan Culler has called 'linguistic metaphors in criticism'.[41] In presenting my case for Forrest-Thomson's formalism, I examine her terminology and ideas in relation to the work of Roman Jakobson. As with both formalists and structuralists, Forrest-Thomson frequently presents a still and synchronic model of poetic Artifice which contradicts her arguments for the activity of the 'devices of artifice'. I examine this theoretical paradox in relation to Forrest-Thomson's own critical readings. Her criticism throughout *Poetic Artifice*, I argue, devalues the importance of the reader and elevates *intention*, what Michel Foucault has called the 'author function', and repeatedly affirms the unity of poetic form.[42] Forrest-Thomson is critical of structuralist's failure to engage with the unique characteristics of poetry, but this criticism amounts to her supplementing a 'myth of structure' for a comparable 'myth of Artifice'. Such a myth resembles other idealised tropes such as *tradition* and *convention*. Forrest-Thomson's poetic theory is, I argue finally, a form of aesthetic modernism, resisting both the awkward indeterminacies of artifices, and the troubling details of the outside world. Her argument in *Poetic Artifice* that poetry has the potential to transform the way in which the world is viewed is linked to formalist defamiliarisation and is an emphatically literary event leaving the world untouched. Forrest-Thomson's reluctance to relinquish both the ideological and formal principles of a modernist aesthetic and her ambivalence to cultural and social change provides further evidence for the late modernist characteristics of her poetic project.

My final chapter examines Forrest-Thomson's theoretical and poetic 'quest for style' as characterised by the fluctuation between control and excess. The previous chapters outline Forrest-Thomson's anxiety to assert control over her poetry, which

---

[41] Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Russian Formalism and Structuralism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. vix. Jonathan Culler, SP, p. 98.

[42] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 105. Rabinow reprints Josué V. Harari's translation of Foucault's essay, originally published in J. Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 141-160.

includes her own theoretical foreclosure. However, Forrest-Thomson's poetry repeatedly exceeds her theory's prescriptions, both in form and emotional affect. I examine sites of control and excess from a number of different angles. The chapter begins with a discussion of Forrest-Thomson's theoretical discussions of pastoral and parody, paying particular attention to their problematic simplifications of theme and style. I argue that Forrest-Thomson used parody as a way of controlling and containing literary styles as part of her struggle with form. Parody is also, I argue, a stylistic stepping stone towards what Forrest-Thomson describes in her preface to *On the Periphery* as writing 'straight'.[43] Through an analysis of the influence of nineteenth-century poetry and rhetoric on her poetry, as well as Forrest-Thomson's assimilation of tenets of Dadaism, I reveal that what she calls writing straight and her ambitions to write in the mode of the 'limpidly lyrical' are actually types of formal complexity which are almost impossible to achieve.[44] My chapter concludes with a discussion of one of Forrest-Thomson's last poems, 'Richard II', arguing that it achieves glimpses of the ideal practice of the 'limpidly lyrical' and a tentative accommodation of the contradictory presence of versions of Artifice. The 'limpidly lyrical' quality of 'Richard II' involves a late modernist resigned acceptance of the impossibility of many of her theories and is Forrest-Thomson's final, poignant accommodation of her 'struggle with forms'.

Forrest-Thomson's poetic project represents an important and unique contribution to the history of twentieth-century poetry. Her poetry and theory assimilated a variety of poetic and aesthetic theories and linguistic philosophies and is a case study in the trials of poetic forms and modes under the pressures of the theoretical shifts in English criticism from the sixties to the seventies. My thesis, therefore, shares with Perril a conviction that Forrest-Thomson's poetic project is an under-appreciated chapter in late modernist poetics. The term 'late modernist' can be aptly applied to Forrest-Thomson's work as expressed in a sense of nostalgia for aesthetic order resisting the temptations of contemporary theory. As her short career developed, Forrest-Thomson became increasingly convinced as to the relevance of traditional poetic artifice. Whilst her theory, and many of her poems, advocate a use of a variety of modernist poetic modes – 'free' verse, variable stanza use, sound patterns and

---

[43] In her preface to *On the Periphery*, CP, p. 168.
[44] Forrest-Thomson coins the term 'limpidly lyrical' in her article 'Dada', p. 81.

irregular clusters, repetitions, collage-like form and erratic line lengths – as well as indulged in the surfaces excesses of proto-postmodern poetics, she was also producing much more regularly traditional forms, many of which are associated with nineteenth-century practice. Many of Forrest-Thomson's poems, therefore, contain regular metre and line lengths, end rhymes and stanzas – so many traditional devices resisting total irregularity. The coexistence and clash of poetic modes represents what Miller describes in relation to Charles Jencks's theories of late modern architecture as an 'exasperated heightening' of the logic of the modernist project.[45] Forrest-Thomson's caricatured intensification of modernist practice throughout her critical and creative work returns her to Victorian verse, whose traditional form she perceived as a potential saviour for contemporary poetry. As Eliot writes in his essay 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre'' quoted at the head of this chapter, 'freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation.'[46] A little earlier in the essay Eliot writes that 'Swinburne mastered his technique, which is a great deal, but he did not master it to the extent of being able to take liberties with it, which is everything.'[47] The 'ghosts' of traditional forms ever reminded Forrest-Thomson that true freedom in verse is earned by a mastery of past modes; one can 'take liberties' only after one has worked hard towards mastery. Forrest-Thomson's poetic project is a testament to such hard work.

---

[45] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 9. Miller is referring to Charles Jencks, 'Postmodernism vs. Late-Modern', in Ingeborg Hoesterey (ed.), *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Post-Modernist Controversy* (Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 4-21.
[46] Eliot, 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre'', p. 35.
[47] *ibid.*

Chapter 1:
Early Struggles with Forms

> [M]an gains his real significance [...] by apprehending the significant patterns of objects and situations and by creating [...] imitations of the patterns of life.[48]

> I am fundamentally a sceptic [...] and believe that any system or theory limits one's apprehension of each individuated situation or object and distorts the perceptive faculties which are man's main reason for existing. However[,] it is a necessary evil to have some kind of theory or set of conclusions in order to protect oneself in moments of insecurity, from being enslaved by some-one else's theory [...][49]

> What can we say in the dumb presence of the hills,
> Their confidence from consciousness secure,
> Fulfilment free from pre-conception,
> Consummation without desire?
> To this our pattern-seeking souls
> Are shut.[50]

> [T]outes les fois qu'il y a effort au style, il y a versification.[51]

The subject of this opening chapter is Forrest-Thomson's earliest extant work which I shall be examining as the beginning of her struggles with and for form. Her struggles *with* theoretical perspectives and poetic form were, I suggest, part of her search *for* forms suitable to the objects of her attention. Forrest-Thomson was highly theoretical and serious about her poetic practice from an early age and her poems should be viewed as experimental investigations of theoretical problems and tests of the expressive capacity of poetic form. From the very start, her theory and poetry engaged with the work of select Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, William Blake and P. B. Shelley, as well as influential figures in the shaping of literary modernism: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Stéphane Mallarmé and Ezra Pound. The influence of Mallarmé on Forrest-Thomson's early work is particularly important here, as his own aesthetic struggle with poetic form in the service of an idealised theory complements her own poetic project. Whilst Mallarmé worked out

---

[48] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, manifesto (M), p. 2. See notes on this document below.

[49] M, p. 1.

[50] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'What ?   (untitled)', in 'Veronica – Some Teenage Poems' (VTP), p. 4. See notes below. The poem was also published, along with other, early poems in the *Adam International Review*, vol. xxxix, nos. 391-393 (London, 1975), p. 46.

[51] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Ouevres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard [Pléaide], 1945), p. 867. Quoted in Keith Bosley (ed. and trans.), *Mallarmé: The Poems* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 14. Bosley translates the lines as: 'every time there is effort towards style, there is versification'.

his theories over a long life of thought and practice, Forrest-Thomson engagement with such theories during her short life was limited but nonetheless comparably intense. In her earliest work, Forrest-Thomson struggled to create a coherent theory out of disparate influences and engaged with central questions about the nature of poetic form.

Throughout this chapter I draw on two recently discovered documents: an eighteen page annotated typescript entitled 'My Attitudes and Beliefs' written by Forrest-Thomson at the age of 16 (c. 1963), and a loosely assembled collection of typed and hand-written poems called, 'Veronica – Some Teenage Poems' (hereafter, VTP). Both documents were sent to Anthony Barnett by Veronica's mother, Jean Forrest Thomson, during his research for the 1990 *Collected Poems and Translations*.[52] 'My Attitudes and Beliefs', is comprised of five sections in which Forrest-Thomson seeks to isolate her personal and theoretical positions: 'My Attitudes and Beliefs – About Life in General'; 'Desirable Attitudes and Attributes'; 'My Ideas About Poetry in Particular'; 'Personal Poetry Projects and Purposes' and 'Work Guides'.[53] The document develops from an early précis of her general philosophical positions, to theories of poetry and a series of guidance notes for practice. For ease of reference, I have decided to refer to the document as 'manifesto' throughout this thesis, although I shall note where Forrest-Thomson uses particular subheadings. Whilst the term may seem slightly incongruous when compared with the mature documents of poetic movements over the centuries, the papers *do* amount to Forrest-Thomson's early expression of a personal *manifesto* for poetic practice. The manifesto was obviously a working document as annotations suggest that Forrest-Thomson returned to it in subsequent years, adding thoughts and changing or excising words and sentences.

---

[52] I am grateful to Anthony Barnett for letting me view these documents and for preserving them in the first place. During my conversations with Barnett, Jonathan Culler and Forrest-Thomson's brother, Miles Thomson, I have established that no other copies of these documents exist, the originals having been lost or destroyed. Unless otherwise stated, I have kept the lineation and punctuation of the originals, but have silently corrected some orthographic errors.

[53] The document is unpaginated and Forrest-Thomson switches between using single and double sides of the A4 paper. I have numbered the pages which contain typescript or handwriting, but this numbering is by no means authoritative.

VTP contains poems written between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two (c. 1961-1970).[54] Some of the earliest poems appeared posthumously in the *Adam International Review*, whist many of the later poems are published in her pamphlets and the two *Collected Poems*.[55] A number of both the typed and handwritten poems remain unpublished. As I shall show, these two documents are the earliest evidence of the struggles characterising Forrest-Thomson's poetic project.

Given what Drew Milne has described as the reticence of a number of poets associated with Cambridge to commit to the 'risks' and 'embarrassment' of manifesto writing, Forrest-Thomson's active engagement with theories of poetry from such a young age is intriguing.[56] This, despite the fact that Forrest-Thomson probably didn't intend for the manifesto to be a public document. But perhaps the *risks* involved in expressing such theories in public are that critics such as myself will scrutinise them for theoretical inconsistencies as well as overlaps with the poetry. Indeed, Forrest-Thomson's expressed 'attitudes and beliefs' about, 'life in general' as well as 'about poetry in particular' are frequently contradictory.[57] Such contradictions and tensions are, according to Janet Lyon's *Manifestoes*, part of the make-up of manifestoes in general.[58] The logic of the manifesto is, according to Lyon, 'double-edged', both questioning common assumptions and idealisms, but

---

[54] Many of the poems in VTP have dates and ages next to them written in what appears to be Forrest-Thomson's handwriting; she may, therefore, have collated the document herself. However, Forrest-Thomson's mother may have assembled and annotated the document after her daughter's death. VTP has page numbers, but these numbers only refer to the recto side of A4, despite the fact that there are numerous hand-written poems on the verso. As with the manifesto, I have decided to sequentially number the pages containing text.

[55] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'Poems of Youth', *Adam International Review,* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, (1975), pp. 46-9

[56] Drew Milne, 'Agoraphobia, and the embarrassment of manifestos: notes towards a community of risk', *Parataxis* No. 3 (Spring, 1993), pp. 25-37. Milne's polemical essay addresses what he perceives to be the apparent discomfort on the part of the poets involved in *The English Intelligencer*, a document of poems, letters and small articles edited by Andrew Crozier and Peter Riley and circulated among numerous poets associated with Cambridge between 1966-68, as well as those published in the anthology, *A Various Art*, to either explicitly state their poetic aims or associate themselves with any group or movement. Milne calls for a new 'community of risk' – for which *Parataxis* would be an organ – and a more overt articulation of poetic projects and ambitions. Whilst Forrest-Thomson is associated with the grouping of Cambridge poets – most notably by her inclusion in *A Various Art* – she never neatly fits into this category, if any of the poets do.

[57] M, pp. 1 & 8 respectively.

[58] Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

also 'promulgat[ing] the very discourses it critiques'.[59] 'Other' modes and aesthetic and political practice are decried in the service of a latent or, as Lyon puts it later in her book, 'unwritten […] "doctrine"'.[60] According to Lyon, manifestoes, particularly those associated with modernist movements, are sites of the 'intersection' of discourses and frequently act, as with Pound's imagism tract, as 'a simulacrum of struggle in the name of aesthetic elitism.'[61] Forrest-Thomson's manifesto is the 'simulacrum of struggle' amidst various poetic theories – from eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetics to tenets of formalism and modernism – in order to present an apparently cogent aesthetic agenda.

In the first epigraph to this chapter, for example, Forrest-Thomson argues that the artist must apprehend 'the significant patterns of objects and situations' in nature and create works which are '*imitations*' of these patterns. The relationship between nature and poetic forms evokes the poetic theories of Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley, the term 'significant' alludes to formalist terminology, whilst the idea that the poet should concentrate on rendering unique 'patterns' resembles tenets of literary modernism. Forrest-Thomson's theoretical struggles are transferred to her poems of this period which fluctuate between imitations of life and becoming, as she puts it, 'self-circuiting mechanism[s]'.[62] Forrest-Thomson's poetic practice also regularly contradicts her own theory: for example, her use of traditional forms and devices, as well as end-rhyme and metre, are *prescribed* rather than developed in accordance to, on the one hand, the 'uniqueness' of a situation in nature or, on the other hand, the impulse to create discrete material patterns. The poems themselves are formally equivocal, as if Forrest-Thomson was undecided as to which theoretical positions and formal modes to adopt. The arc of the manifesto, as well as this chapter, charts Forrest-Thomson's initial Romantic ideals through to her developing formalism and modernism and the moments of their conflicting overlaps.

---

[59] Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 3.

[60] *ibid.*, p. 131.

[61] *ibid.*, p. 6. Lyon refers specifically to Pound's 'Imagist' credos and to Mina Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, (ed.) Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982) pp. 269-71 among her other writings.

[62] M, p. 14.

Imitating Nature, Imitating Dictions

Theory has a central but paradoxical presence in Forrest-Thomson's poetic project: she believes in its necessity, but is simultaneously sceptical towards it. According to the youthful Forrest-Thomson, channelling Blake's Los, a 'system or theory' and a 'set of conclusions', 'limits' and 'distorts' man's natural 'faculties'; but, at the same time, a strong poetic theory and system can act as protection from the insecurities of the contingent and insurance against an unthinking enslavement to someone else's plans.[63] Theory will, as she writes, 'make my position clear and free me from further consideration of abstract problems so that I can get on with my work as a creator of concrete works of art'; or, as she puts it a little earlier, 'perceptions must be kept as pure, clear, and undistorted by pre-conceived ideas and interpretations as possible'.[64] Forrest-Thomson here displays the 'double-edged' qualities of which Lyon writes: a yearning for clarity free from abstraction which is achieved, paradoxically, by the refinement and certainty of theoretical abstraction. A central motif of Forrest-Thomson's poetic project, and the source of both its strength and limitation, is, therefore, an unresolved and ambivalent dialectic between the closed and circumscribed nature of structure – as theoretical frames and pre-conceived poetic form – and a concomitant freedom and violation of such form in response to unique situations.

Clarifying her position at this early stage in the manifesto amounts to Forrest-Thomson's assertion that a work of art will imitate the 'significant patterns' in nature. '[R]eal significance' is located, to her, in 'the pattern of the situations in life' and what she calls the 'pattern or 'inscape' of each individual object'.[65] Having

---

[63] Cp. Los's anguished cries in William Blake's 'Jerusalem': "I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's; / I will not reason & compare; my business is to create." Pl. 10, ll., 20-21 in William Blake, *The Complete Poems,* (ed.) W.H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), p. 644. In her 1971 article, 'Irrationality and Artifice', Forrest-Thomson refers to her own theoretical and poetic solution to the problems posed by the work of structuralists and offers a similar caveat: '[o]ne may recall Nietzsche's remark that it is necessary to construct a system for oneself in order to escape enslavement by the systems of others.' IA, p. 125.

[64] M, pp. 6 & 4 respectively.

[65] *ibid.*, p. 1.

forcefully established the existence of such phenomenal patterns, Forrest-Thomson argues, as the first epigraph to the chapter attests:

> man gains his real significance […] by apprehending the significant patterns of objects and situations and by creating objects and situations which have significant form and pattern of their own, imitations of the patterns of life, e.g. works of art, and rites.[66]

The poet is charged to produce equivalent patterns to those she perceives in nature; the 'significant patterns' of the world become the 'significant form' of art. The harmonic meeting of patterns in the world and in art is an equation comparable to Wordsworth's description in 'Tintern Abbey' of the poet's relationship with nature:

> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts […][67]

Wordsworth envisaged a phenomenal meeting of nature and 'language of the sense' in the mind of the poet. To Forrest-Thomson, such a connection occurs, but what is perceived are *patterns* in the world which are then transformed via artistic 'sense' into poetic form. A poem should, as Wordsworth puts it in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, ensure that 'ideas are expressed in language *fitted*' to the subjects dealt with.[68] Forrest-Thomson's position at this stage is that poetic form will be 'fit' when it imitates patterns in the world.

Forrest-Thomson's depiction of the status of nature and art is conflicted, with both being poised uneasily against one another. Whilst she follows Wordsworthian edicts, she simultaneously introduces terminology and positions which cannot help but elevate and separate art from nature. Like Wordsworth, Forrest-Thomson asserts art's purpose to elicit a greater perception of reality. But, as she says this, art is promoted above nature:

---

[66] M, p. 2.

[67] William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', in William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, (ed.) Derek Roper (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968), p. 141.

[68] Wordsworth, 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 26 – my emphasis.

> The purpose of a work of art is to express the significance and joy of existence by its pattern, rhythm, individuated form and by imposing an order on reality to elicit some perception of an order in reality.[69]

Art operates to 'elicit some perception' and reflect an 'order *in* reality.' Indicative of the precocious breath of Forrest-Thomson's reference, this passage alludes to Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry' where he writes of 'a certain rhythm or order' in the world which a poet is to perceive and for which they must provide an 'approximation' in order to give a listener 'an intenser and purer pleasure', bringing with it new perception.[70] However, whilst both Shelley and Wordsworth believed that, as the latter argued, the poem should 'follow the fluxes and refluxes of mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature', Forrest-Thomson betrays her formalist and aesthetic leanings when she insists on art's imposition of 'order *on* reality', which subordinates and comes before 'order *in* reality'.[71] To Wordsworth, a new perception is elicited by noting the trajectories of the mind meeting with natural form; to Forrest-Thomson, a greater perception of nature is enabled through the active *imposition* of form. Further, her phrase 'significant form' is taken from Clive Bell's formalist theories of art: 'these aesthetically moving forms,' Bell states in relation to the particular distillation of lines and colours comprising a work of art, 'I call 'Significant Form'.'[72] The uncertainty of whether the pronoun 'its' in the above indented quotation refers to art or existence is telling: pattern belongs to both and Forrest-Thomson's priority is unclear. Her manifesto displays the curious image of a poet as one who submits to the truthful apprehension and rendering of the world, whilst at the same time pursuing a formalism drawing the poem away from the world into its own self-conscious formal development.

A few poems in VTP seek to imitate 'the patterns of life', but these imitations are complicated both by Forrest-Thomson's self-conscious use of poetic devices and an implied irreverence towards Romanticism's potential naivety. For example, the

---

[69] M, p. 9. In a note in fountain pen above this comment, Forrest-Thomson wrote: 'also by exploring and recreating an experience to help artist & perceiver to live experience more fully'. The annotation highlights Forrest-Thomson's early belief in the propaedeutic or therapeutic function of art, something to which her theoretical work would increasingly return.

[70] P. B. Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in Ernest Rhys (ed.), *The Prelude to Poetry: The English Poets in Defence and Praise of their Own Art* (London: Dent, 1970), pp. 209-10.

[71] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 23.

[72] Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914), p. 8.

poem 'Accident', written at the age of sixteen, describes the aftermath of a car crash. The poem pulls in several directions as Forrest-Thomson attempts to faithfully render a scene, to suggest a form of phenomenal exhaustion, whilst all the while indulging in formal patterns which undermine an impassive reverence. Nature plays its part here, where a Romantic sentiment towards the violence that metonyms of the urban inflict on nature is comically reconfigured as nature's sly victory. In the poem, man-made mechanisms are associated with the apparent listless stupidity of a crowd peering at a car crash:

Accident

And is it come to this ?
The flaccid evening slackens
and relaxes among the debris;
The flatulent crowd deflates,
abates its curiosity.

Scattered like a jigsaw's parts
across the abstracted street,
a crumpled car;
No longer spinning, wheel and gears
clutched from the shaft
as one, in a distracted moment,
should pick a leaf to pieces.[73]

The poem begins *in medias res* with a bold 'And', as if depicting or mimicking the conclusion of long reflection. The curiously jarring '*is* it come' where we might expect '*has* it come' draws attention away from the consideration of what 'it' is (presumably the accident as the occasion for meditative verse), to the mangled syntax. The rest of the opening stanza is not so much description as airy riffs through /a/ sounds which create a tone of deflation. There is a degree of witty cynicism towards this 'flatulent crowd', whose 'curiosity', inevitable as a rhyme in ballad form, is peeked by any chance to gape at 'debris'. A Romantic gesture towards the unmediated depiction of simple people in their native habitats is exaggerated by comic and cynical deflation in both image and linguistic play.

---

[73] VTP, p. 6.

Whilst the two stanzas have similar assonant and consonant patterns – the /a/ and /s/ sounds, for example – there is a conflict between the 'flaccid evening' and crowd's phenomenal adoption of its peculiar afflation of the first and the sharply acute scene of the crash evoked in the second. Forrest-Thomson appears to be trying to describe the crash scene exactly, with a shift to imitation signalled by the rhythm of the triple trochaic feet and final stressed syllable of the first line. Phonetic patterns and images imitate the scattered glass of the accident: glass shatters like a 'jigsaw'; the short vowel sounds /a/ and /i/, as well as the plosive 't' of 'scattered', 'parts' and 'abstracted', phonetically conjure the sharp shards of glass. A few phrases also work to halt the scene against the movement of time. Stillness is achieved in lines describing the cessation of movement – 'no longer spinning' and 'crumpled car' – whilst the phrase 'distracted moment' evokes Wordsworth's 'spots of time' which, he argues, are glimpsed and used as an imaginative springboard to access the 'renovating virtue' of the Romantic moral.[74] Forrest-Thomson attempts a Romantic perspective by displaying a reverence in simple diction and a form of pastoral distancing in the distraction of a leaf-pick; she aims in fits and starts to subordinate the artificially mediated.[75]

The mood of the poem shifts again with the addition of some final lines, appended in ink to the typescript. The lines are darkly comical and they presage the development of a witty self-reflection: 'The spray of blood / in the grey gutter / Reaches almost to my feet.'[76] The lines could be read as a further, if macabre, extension of the crash and as a presentation of sharp nature's victory over the dull modern and its deflated people. The lines also operate as a bathetic and grotesque commentary and ironic distancing from youthful Romanticism. The present tense of 'The spray of blood' jeopardises the careful craft and implied memorial reverence of the scene. The

---

[74] Wordsworth: 'There are in our existence spots of time, / Which with distinct preeminence retain / A renovating virtue, whence […] our minds / Are nourished and invisibly repaired'. *The Prelude* [1805] ll. 208-10 and 214-5 respectively. In William Wordsworth *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (eds.) Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 428 and 430.
[75] For an interesting comparison with 'Accident', see Forrest-Thomson's later poem 'Pastoral' which features a curiously entangled admixture of the pastoral and the intrusively mechanical. For example: 'Through the long summer meadows' diesel fumes' and 'The gentle foal linguistically wounded / Squeals like a car's breaks'. CP, p. 123.
[76] VTP, p. 6. The lines are written in dark biro ink and were possibly written a few years after the original typescript.

rhyme of 'grey' with 'spray and the alliteration of 'grey gutter' undermine the potential seriousness of the crash whilst foregrounding the use of language. The inclusion of the speaker's feet in the last line also wrenches the descriptive perspective from the passive impartial to the personal, thereby diminishing the poem's earlier objectivity. The poem's shifting dictions and tones could be the consequence of Forrest-Thomson's youth and poetic immaturity or a commentary on an arbitrary and impossible romanticism. The lines demonstrate her witty struggle to find appropriate and consistent diction, register and forms, as well as her fluctuations between the desire to provide a faithful imitation or representation, to undertake forms of linguistic evocation, and to indulge in demotic play with disparate artifice.

The poem, 'What ?   (untitled)', written at the age of fifteen, displays a similar ambivalence. Whilst the poem contains reflections on the superiority of nature over both the human mind and poetic form itself, Forrest-Thomson is already of the artificer's party and, as with 'Accident', showing inklings of knowing it. So, whilst she describes nature's assets, her description is accompanied by a distinct pleasure in formal detail and incongruity as well as a wry self-consciousness. The curiously placed '?', slightly apart from its word (a practice continued throughout), heightens the experience of questioning and foregrounds the poem's equivocation.[77] Here is the poem in full:

> **What ?   (untitled)**
>
> What have we done better than the leaves
> That wither without weeping,
> Except to set apart heaven and earth
> And name the indifference of stars,
> Of seas that know not what
> Their tides erode ?
>
> Trees do not intend to die
> Nor flowers when they bud expect to rot,
> Wind stirs the grasses, nothing else.

---

[77] Compare the practice in 'Accident' quoted above. It is unclear why Forrest-Thomson chose to place her quotation marks like this, although she was learning French at the time and may have been following its written conventions.

> What can we say in the dumb presence of the hills,
> Their confidence from consciousness secure,
> Fulfilment free from pre-conception,
> Consummation without desire ?
> To this our pattern-seeking souls
> Are shut.[78]

The poem ostensibly celebrates 'dumb' (silent and non-verbal) nature as an alternative to man's 'pre-conception' and restrictive pattern making. Newton-like, humanity artificially carves up nature with names and categorical thought. The 'untitled' after 'What ?' wryly alludes to the opposition between naming (and the poetic act) and nature. The speaker's reaction against art's artificial imposition on nature evokes Wordsworth's stated opposition in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* between the artificial 'diction' of metrical poetry and the 'real language of nature' and his aim to write with language 'really spoken by men'.[79] However, in 'What ?' the stars are 'indifferent', the hills are 'dumb', and 'consummation' exists, rather boringly, 'without desire'. Such words and phrases signal the speaker's misgivings about the insipid and repetitious qualities of nature. A similar ambivalence operates in the poem's form. The poem appears traditional in that it has three similarly sized stanzas, short lines, capitalised initial words, and trochaic and iambic rhythms (if somewhat irregular); it also features poetic inversions and compressions such as: 'Nor flowers when they bud expect to rot' and 'confidence from consciousness secure'. But the stanza form, line lengths and rhythms are irregular and often abrupt – 'Wind stirs the grasses, *nothing else*.' The surface, or ostensible, features of the poem appear to be straightforwardly celebrating nature, but the form's irregularity and the sense that this is the most important subject of the poem asserts the primacy and pleasures of artifice and of 'pattern-seeking' over natural imitation.

Forrest-Thomson's characteristic wit lurks in lines such as the dead-pan, 'Trees do not intend to die'; such lines draw attention to the poem's mannered sentiment and diction. Forrest-Thomson also self-consciously caricatures her own occasionally naïve fidelity to what could be called the sanctity of poetic diction. The lines 'Of seas that know not what / Their tides erode ?', has a trotting, lyrical ballad quality,

---

[78] VTP, p. 4; *Adam International Review*, p. 46.
[79] Wordsworth, 'Preface', pp. 36 & 29 respectively.

but the image seems to strain towards bathos. Sandwiched between the 'indifferent' stars – which evoke Mallarmé's own frequent use of stars – and the stolid trees, the ballad rhythm of these lines seems complicit with affected naivety. The lingering and stretched question – which expands across the whole stanza – and the disjointed question mark heighten the sense of a disjunction between the use of a sincere and sanctified poetic diction and a wry self-consciousness. It is as if the form of the poem constantly reminds Forrest-Thomson of the impossibility of Romantic ideals.

Such self-consciousness pervades the poem's form. Here, as with many of her later poems, Forrest-Thomson foregrounds form over content, or, at least, form is the pre-eminent content. So whilst 'Accident' and 'What ?' may ostensibly celebrate a harmony between nature and man, with language as a subservient and transparent mediator, they are actually the site of an often witty struggle between forms, dictions, manners and modes; struggles which become the poems' dominant theme. As Forrest-Thomson knows, Wordsworth's so-called 'real language' was just another stylised idiom with its own inherently arbitrary rules and patterns. The answer to the opening question, 'What have we done better than the leaves[?]', is *poetry*. As Mallarmé frequently argued, and as the final lines of 'What ?' resignedly concede: to the inarticulate 'presence' of nature, 'our pattern-seeking souls / Are shut.' So why not, as with the emphatically formal closure of the abrupt last line, stop trying to render or capture natural processes and concentrate on the art of creating verse? The poem implicitly registers the answer to this question both during its composition, as well as in its explicit expression of the defiant riposte of poetic form: the alliteration of 'pattern-seeking souls' and the abrupt and arresting implication to 'shut' *up* about nature in the last line. To paraphrase Forrest-Thomson's own comments made in 1975, she realises in practice what her manifesto struggles with, but eventually concedes: artifice is inevitable and necessary, for without it there would be no poetry.[80]

---

[80] In her preface to *On the Periphery*, Forrest-Thomson argues that the collection's 'turning point comes in 'Pastoral' where I realise in practice what I have long known in theory: that it is precisely those non-meaningful aspects of language – rhyme, rhythm and stanzaic metre are only the most obvious – which are poetry's strength and defence', CP, p. 167. Contrary to Forrest-Thomson's frequent conviction as to the progressive nature of her theory, her poems are often the site of her most dramatic thinking, where stylistic developments are realised out of the struggles of ideas and forms.

Forrest-Thomson's conflicted representation of the relation between the world and artistic form, and the role of artifice in this relation, is further complicated by her theoretical and poetic engagement with the work of Hopkins. As the opening stanza of 'Accident' shows, Forrest-Thomson often employed the sound patterning and the 'sprung rhythm' of Hopkins's poems.[81] Forrest-Thomson refers throughout the manifesto to 'the pattern or 'inscape' of each individual object' and 'situation'.[82] Inscape is Hopkins's term for, as the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* puts it, the 'pattern of attributes in a physical object that gives it at once both its individuality and its unity'.[83] It is, as W. A. M. Peters defines it, 'the outward reflection of the inner nature of a thing, or a *sensible copy or representation* of its individual essence'.[84] Forrest-Thomson found in the term a convenient description of the latent structures of nature as well as a useful metaphor for poetry's imitation of such structures. The poet's job, so Forrest-Thomson suggests, is to provide a copy of the attributes in nature. However, as in much of Hopkins's own poetry, a faithful copy of nature usually gets subordinated to considerations of form.

Forrest-Thomson's poem, 'Resurrection', dated 1963 (when Forrest-Thomson was fifteen) and written in longhand, has an erratic style comprised of imitations of natural scenes, mimicry of Hopkins's rhythms and frequent sojourns into formal play. Forrest-Thomson describes a coastal scene with a 'deep sea' as well as a grass and flower-covered cliff over which the figure of Jesus walks. Jesus reminds the speaker of various literary heroes and she eventually, inexplicably, pushes him over the cliff.[85] Far from injured (he is Jesus, after all), he uses the opportunity to walk

---

[81] Daniel Albright has recently provided a lucid explanation of Hopkins's elusive notion of 'sprung rhythm': 'every foot begins with a stressed syllable, and the unstressed syllables, of variable number, are crowded together so that each foot takes exactly the same amount of time to pronounce'. Daniel Albright, 'Modernist Poetic Form', in Neil Corcoran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 30.

[82] M, p. 1 & 10 respectively.

[83] T. V. F. Brogan, 'Inscape and Instress', in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (hereafter PEPP), (eds.) Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 609 – my emphases.

[84] W. A. M. Peters, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 2. Quoted in Brogan, 'Inscape and Instress', p. 609.

[85] Forrest-Thomson writes: 'He was like Shakespeare and Shelley in his poetry / plus Sophocles and Sappho – not Plato – / I hate Plato – / With Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and / God together / I was afraid'. The flippant tone and literary iconoclasm in these lines resemble Forrest-Thomson's late poem 'Cordelia, Or: 'A Poem Should not Mean but Be''. In particular, the lines: 'As for this line I

'once more upon the waves'! Forrest-Thomson's literary and biblical iconoclasm distances her from Hopkins's devout verse and is also a gesture associated with a number of Victorian poets as well as, as Tuma has recently pointed out, with certain forms of literary modernism.[86] 'Resurrection' features spoonerisms, repetitions, uneven lineation and occasional absurdity, producing a much freer forms than those of other poems in VTP. The poem may have been a rough draft, but its rambling, eclectic style and its jaunty, wry rhythms prefigure Forrest-Thomson's later style. The poem begins with an erotic description of nature:

> On the cliff
> The subdued soft sighing of the kissing grass
> Stirred by a wind from the sea
> From the heaving breast of blue sea
> Green sea where red-eyed sharks prowl for prey
> And flounders flat against the deep sea sand where only flounders are
> Sleep dappled by the stream floating life by above
> Anemones purse their frondy lips in hungry censure of levity
> In fish
> A thousand insects die to make a necklace of their corpses
> How can you bear to touch if coral jewel [is?] corpses
> This wind spangled with the salt sea sweat
> Was [twisting?] again the tufted frantic grass
> And inciting the waves to crash their power in
> mutiny
> against rocks
> A single flower – dried up everlasting flower embraced
> With its roots the passive earth
> The day I met Jesus walking on the cliff.[87]

---

stole it from T. S. Eliot / And Ezra Pound and A. C. Swinburne. All very good / Poets to steal from since they are all three dead' (CP, p. 153).

[86] See, for example, A. C. Swinburne's vigorous atheism (and my citation below). See, also, Keith Tuma's discussion of the iconoclasm Mina Loy's sequence, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (1923-1925). Loy, *Last Lunar Baedeker*, pp. 109-75. Keith Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Relations* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 145-64. See, particularly Loy's poem, 'Christ's Regrettable Reticence' from this sequence which features wittily playful rhymes and interjections which amount to a deflation of Jesus's image: 'For a pale / pitiful housemaid […] Has told her / of   Gentle Jesus /   -- our excuse -- / He dipped his hand in the sauce-tureen / and allowed his disciples to do the same'. Loy, *Last Lunar Baedeker*, p. 149.

[87] VTP, p. 2.

The short line of the opening alludes to Swinburne's poem 'On the Cliffs', a poem which itself exhibits the subordination of general theme and form to a variety of locally developed formal patterns.[88] Whilst the opening themes and the erotic alliteration and consonance of 'kissing grass' and 'heaving breast' evoke Swinburne's poetry, the peculiar biblical and natural themes and environs are the pretexts for an imitation of Hopkins's poetic rhythm and sound patterning, particularly in 'The Windhover'.[89] In this poem, Hopkins charts the passage of a falcon as its flight captures the currents of the wind and is transported into an ecstatic meditation on Christ's splendour. Rather like Hopkins's cluttered sprung rhythms and sound patterns, Forrest-Thomson's 'Resurrection' keeps tripping over its own affected style; it is as if Hopkins's distinctive style is extended and comically undermined by its own momentum. In other words, Forrest-Thomson's descriptions and imitation cannot 'censure' her unwitting hunger for the 'levity' of formal play. The 'Sleep dappled' 'flounders flat against the deep sea' are an ironic reversal of Hopkins's 'daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon' in the 'steady air' in 'The Windhover'. Similarly, the delightfully bathetic 'where only flounders are' draws attention to the dead adjective, 'flounders', and 'flattens' out Hopkins's aspiration to soar in theme and form. The connection with Hopkins's poem is confirmed by Jesus's star presence in both, as 'The Windhover' is dedicated 'to Christ our Lord' and Hopkins's soaring falcon represents Christ himself. Forrest-Thomson's poem is, however, much more formally and thematically inconsistent, with the short lines – 'In fish', 'mutiny' 'against rocks' – breaking the rhythms, as if she loses interest in imitation and adjusts the poem's direction. The imitated styles are also confused and inconsistent, ranging from Swinburnian eroticism, through to natural patterns, to Hopkins's diction and, finally, to Forrest-Thomson's own playfully developing formal interests.

---

[88] See, for example, these lines from Swinburne's poem: 'Wan wild sparse flowers of windy and wintry spring / Between the tortive serpent-shapen roots / Wherethough their dim growth hardly strikes and shoots / And shews one gracious thing'. Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'On the Cliffs' in *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, (eds.) Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 178.

[89] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Selected Poetry*, (ed.) Catherine Philips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 117.

'Resurrection' is thus a complex fusion of Forrest-Thomson's description and imitation of an imagined scene, a caricature of Hopkins's style and a self-reflexive experiment with formal pattern making. The formal thrust of the poem starts energetically where momentum and movement are achieved via local pattern; hence the lines: 'The *s*ubdued *s*oft *s*ighing of the hi*ss*ing gra*ss* / *St*irred by a wind from the *sea* / From the h*ea*ving br*ea*st of the *bl*ue s*ea* / Gr*een* s*ea* where red-eyed *s*harks *pr*owl for *pr*ey'. The initial alliteration of the 's' is taken up in the internal consonance of 'ki*ss*ing gra*ss*'. The alliteration is continued with the first and last words of the next line, the latter of which then initiates a series of 'ea' vowel forms, first as assonance ('sea', 'heaving'), then as an eye-rhyme in 'breast' which also echoes the sounds of the 's'. The 'blue' then creates another alliterative pattern with 'breast' whilst the 'sea' gathers phonetic momentum in 'Green sea'. The angry, red-eyed sharks inaugurate another alliterative sequence as they '*pr*owl' for '*pr*ey'. The next lines, where 'flounders flat against the deep sea sand […]', captures the material integration of the scene: the scale shifts from the 'deep sea' to the 'above' which is then coupled with the phonetic and visual overlaps and connections between nouns and the repetition of 'flounders' and continued in the word 'floating'. The erratic line lengths and lack of general poetic framework and system defuses the poem's energy. The poem is long and mutable and its rhythm falters towards the end. The last two lines, for example, describe Jesus's exit: 'Exuberant over the horizon / He walked once more upon the waves.' The stilted rhythms of the first line, and the final resigned alliteration and iambic consistency of the second, contrast with the 'exuberant' and energetic rhythm and sound patterns of the opening.

Whilst 'Accident' and 'What ?' confirm Forrest-Thomson's interest in poetic structures and frames, with their use of regular line lengths and similar stanza form, 'Resurrection' displays *in extremis* her increasing experiment with local patterns of poetic artifice. As the final iambic line of 'Resurrection' seems to concede, what was needed was a fusion of traditional poetic devices with the intense formal experimentation offered by poets such as Hopkins in whose 'The Windhover', as Daniel Albright has recently noted, 'the sonnet form is twisted and pulled by the rhythm' and where 'the isochronous line introduces accelerations and hesitations, emphases, cuts turns – the very form of the bird's flight […] is incarnate in the word

flow.'[90] Whilst in 'Resurrection' Forrest-Thomson seems to adopt Hopkins's style much more impressionistically, what her other poems imply is that she was aiming for a fusion of energetic formal experiment – the accelerations and hesitations of which Albright writes – within traditional poetic frames and forms such as the sonnet and ballad.

Formal Innovation and Traditional Form

Forrest-Thomson's early theory and poetry register a form of crisis, to use a word made famous by Mallarmé.[91] Forrest-Thomson was stuck between formal modes, struggling to achieve a balance between conceptual and formal impulses. She realised that traditional poetic modes weren't going to serve a Romantic vision, as the desire to imitate nature struggled against the pursuit of formal pattern. So, alongside the exuberant formal experiment of 'Resurrection', most of the other poems in VTP have quite regular stanzas and line-length as well as sporadic end-rhymes and ballad metre. These ballads give the impression of Forrest-Thomson, as it were, testing the limits of a pre-defined form, dabbling with literary inversions and trying to understand the intricate effects of metre and rhyme. Hence, the opening lines of 'Time's Fool':

> If I tell you that I love you
> you will turn away.
> Patience is of the essence,
> the time's not right today.[92]

Or, the final lines from poem 'Il Faut', written at the age of fourteen, and affecting a form of Mallarméan weariness with life:

> So must we leave our youth, our life
> Though love and joy outcry,
> Don bravely coming sorrow's face
> And save our breath to die.[93]

---

[90] Albright, 'Modernist Poetic Form', p. 30.

[91] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', (trans.) Rosemary Lloyd, in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2010 [2nd edn.]), pp. 734-40.

[92] VTP, p. 10.

[93] *ibid.*, p. 1.

The above excerpts illustrate how Forrest-Thomson's poetic practice came full circle as a number of comparable ballad stanzas on the frustrations of love appear in *On the Periphery*. Compare, for example, the lines from 'Time's Fool' with a stanza from her late, 'Sonnet':

> If I say "I love you" we can't but laugh
> Since irony knows what we'll say.
> If I try to free myself by my craft
> You vary as night from day.[94]

Forrest-Thomson's use of the ballad mode certainly improved, as the awkwardly compressed and distorted style of the first two excerpts became the controlled, ironic diction of the last. Both the early and late ballad forms also register her longing for the freedom achieved from the pains of life by an investment in craft. But the labours of art are, as Peter Nicholls has observed in *Modernisms* of Mallarmé's poetic project, tainted by the resignation to their own failure; form is donned bravely, and sorrow is somewhat appeased by the expression of the injunction to 'save our breath to die' in metrical rhythms.[95]

The affected solemnity of Forrest-Thomson's early ballads, and her turn to traditional forms in which to express such poetic grief and within which to build up complex internal patterns, undoubtedly drew on Mallarmé's poems and critical writing. In the 'Work Guides' section of the manifesto, Forrest-Thomson wittily evokes Mallarmé's terminology when she lists him as a 'Master' and as a significant influence on her projected poetic projects.[96] The passage evokes Mallarmé's call for a type of poetry which creates what Forrest-Thomson calls a 'unity of atmosphere':

---

[94] CP, p. 141. Forrest-Thomson frequently used the sonnet as a medium for such themes and she experimented with the form from an early age. VTP, for example, contains two sonnets: 'A sonnet Shakespeare omitted to write' (dated, 8/3/1966) and, on the following page she writes a witty 'Modernised version of the same'. VTP, pp. 14-15 & 16-17 respectively.

[95] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 37. Of Mallarmé's project to create a unique book with 'virginal' language, Nicholls remarks that, 'he realises that such a project is doomed to failure, since the 'supreme' language will always be lacking. It is in this space between hope and failure that his work is situated'.

[96] As Bosley points out (*Mallarmé*, p. 32), Mallarmé frequently evokes the personae of the poet or creator as 'Maître', as in a parenthetical aside in the fourth of his *Plusieurs Sonnets*: '(Car le Maître

> Mallarmé – his technique especially assonance and patterning – *Un Coup de Dés* for visual relationships between words – impersonality – making a whole poem the expression of the nature of a chosen symbol achieving unity of atmosphere. Not, however, his obscurity, subjectivism, idealism.[97]

The extract contains the familiar manifesto logic: a demonstration of doctrinal precision by outlining the 'dos' in polemical contrast with an emphatic catalogue of 'don'ts'; an 'either/or discursive configuration', as Lyons refers to it which, 'makes it possible to mandate certain forms of […] production and unequivocally dismiss all others.'[98] The obvious struggles a poet would have to achieve such strictures in practice are clear. For example, a focus on 'assonance and patterning' and 'visual relationships between words' would require a super-poetic effort to express 'unity' in the 'whole poem'. Such prescriptions are forms of idealism which are difficult to achieve in practice.

Mallarmé's influence is displayed in the word choice, themes and forms of the poems I discussed in the first part of this chapter. For example, Forrest-Thomson uses Mallarméan tropes of stars and flowers when she describes in 'What ?' 'the indifference of stars' and also notes that 'Trees do not intend to die / Nor flowers when they bud expect to rot'. Stars are familiar figures in Mallarmé's poems which signify, as Bosley has suggested, a sense of visible but unreachable aspiration.[99] The sense of weariness engendered by a reflection on nature evokes a number of Mallarmé's poems. In 'Soupir' ('Sigh'), for example, Mallarmé writes of 'Et laisse sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie / Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon' ('And on dead water where the leaves' distress / Drifts tawny in the wind and carves a groove / Of cold').[100] Similarly, the dumb crowd of 'Accident' and the

---

est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx / Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore).' Bosley translates this, rather inelegantly, on the facing page as '(The Master took it to the Styx to drink / Tears for the Void regards all else as trash)', Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 170 & 171 respectively.

[97] M, pp. 17-18.

[98] Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 131.

[99] Referring to the phrase 'l'astre efficace' (effective star) in Mallarmé's poem, 'L'Après-midi d'un Faun', Bosley writes that it 'anticipates later symbols of the poetic process', Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 27. Later in the introduction, Bosley writes of an image in Mallarmé's *Plusieurs Sonnets* as '[t]he human star, the poet, is seen in the second sonnet as a swan trapped in ice', *ibid.*, p. 31. The connection between stars and the poet and poetic process is thus well established in Mallarmé's poems.

[100] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 90 & 91.

naively unsuspecting budding flower of 'What ?' deliberately allude to Mallarmé's celebrated passages from his 1896 essay, 'Crise de vers' (Crisis in Poetry/Verse):

> What is the point of the marvel of transposing a fact of nature into its almost vibratory disappearance according to the action of the word, however, if it is not so that there emanates from it, without the predicament posed by a near or concrete reminder, the pure notion.
> I say: a flower! And from the oblivion to which my voice relegates all contours, as something other than the unmentioned calyces, musically arises, the idea itself, and sweet, the flower absent from all bouquets.
> Contrary to the facile numerical and representative functions, as the crowd first treats it, speech which is above all dream and song, finds again in the Poet, by a necessity that is part of an art consecrated to fictions, its virtuality.[101]

Mallarmé's statements are complex and richly suggestive. He asks why a writer would want to use language as a mere representative counter to describe a concrete reality – 'as the crowd first treats it' – when such language cannot get near the truth of the emanations and suggestive qualities beyond language. The essence of a flower can only be suggested by its absence and through linguistic contours combined as in a musical phrase. Such suggestive associations are one thing in theory, but Forrest-Thomson knew along with Mallarmé the importance of traditional form in providing the necessary restraint for the creation of such linguistic suggestions.

What Forrest-Thomson desired was to find what has been referred to in relation to Mallarmé's complex poetic forms, as an appropriate 'matrix' combining the traditional and the new. Of this matrix and Mallarmé's hope for a virginal or pure verse, for example, Bosley notes of his early poem, 'Salut' ('Greeting') which begins 'Rien, cette écume, vierge vers / À ne désigner que la coupe' ('Nothing, this foam, virgin verse / Pointing out only the cup'), that it is a form of verse which is 'virgin' because, as he puts it, 'it is a closed system subject only to itself, [which] gives an account only of what is in the matrix – in contrast to the Positivist claim to present raw life, unprocessed by the imagination.'[102] Forrest-Thomson registers the necessity of the poetic matrix or framing form in the service of the creation of a distanced poetic fiction and to renew language.

---

[101] Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 740.
[102] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 54-5 & 22-3 respectively.

As such, Forrest-Thomson developed twin theories at this stage: the first, articulated in her manifesto, expressing the importance of what she calls 'concrete technique' and a form of hermetic, 'self-circuiting' poetry[103]; the second, exclusively developed in her poetry, but also implied by Mallarmé's practice, advocating the use of traditional forms as a frame in which to hold such self-circuiting patterns. In theory, the two appear to complement each other: traditional form and devices offer solid frames within which other, local formal patterns can circulate, both achieving a form of self-reflexive hermeticism. However, such a harmonic balance of forms is almost impossible to achieve. As the final epigraph to this chapter states, 'toutes les fois qu'il y a effort au style, il y a versification'; the effort towards a perfect style will always involve elements of versification.[104] Mallarmé's comments on the crisis in French poetry inaugurated by his fellow countrymen's relinquishment of the alexandrine, was echoed thirty years later in Eliot's comments on *vers libre*, quoted in the introduction to my thesis. Eliot describes the necessity of the 'constant evasion and recognition of regularity' where suggestive local and unique patterns are combined with the ever-present recognition of regularity.[105] Forrest-Thomson's poetic experiment and theory self-consciously evoke both Mallarmé's and Eliot's conviction that, as the latter put it, the 'only true freedom' is that which is achieved 'against the background of an artificial limitation.'[106] The choice to use traditional Artifice becomes the totalising frame in which to develop multi-layered levels of formal patterns of artifice.

An example from Mallarmé's poetry will be sufficient to demonstrate the type of balanced form Forrest-Thomson aspired to create. Here are the middle stanzas of Mallarmé's poem 'Le Pitre châtié' (The Clown Chastised), which, as Richard Weisberg has observed, is explicitly about the frustrations of the 'creative process'[107]:

---

[103] M, pp. 17 & 14 respectively.

[104] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 14.

[105] Eliot, 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre'', p. 34.

[106] *ibid.*, p. 35.

[107] Richard Weisberg, 'Hamlet and "Un Coup de Dés": Mallarmé's Emerging Constellation', in *MLN*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (May, 1977), pp. 781-2.

De ma jambe et des bras limpide nageur traître,
À bonds multipliés, reniant le mauvais
Hamlet! c'est comme si dans l'onde j'innovais
Mille sépulchres pour y vierge disparaître.

Hilare or de cymbale à des poings irrité,
Tout à coup le soleil frappe la nudité
Qui pure s'exhala de ma fraîcheur de nacre […][108]

With leg and arms, a limpid swimmer laying a snare,
leaping repeatedly, disavowing the bad
Hamlet! it seems as if within the wave I had
created countless tombs to vanish virgin there.

A joyous golden hand-clashed cymbal, suddenly
the sun buffets my nakedness – the exhalation
shed from my fresh mother-of-pearl in purity[109]

Mallarmé apparently constructs his poem around sound similarities, with images developing from local, contiguous detail. However, such similarities are just one part of the poem's complex structures – the images are cogent, if surreal, whilst tight stanzas and end-rhymes are maintained. The poem is, then, created using the triple impulse to find end-rhymes, to produce local patterns of sound and internally developing sequences as well as select words which continue the theme of the struggles of creativity. Notice, for example, the balance of /ei/ sounds in the opening lines which then form the dominant end-rhyme: 'jamb*e et* d*es*', 'tr*aî*tre', '-v*ai*s' and '-*é*'. The syntax of the third line is adjusted to foreground and compact the /o/ heavy sound pattern 'c*o*mme si d*an*s l'*on*de j'*inn*ovais' as well as the end-rhyme. The subject of the lines abuts the near perfection of the verse form and internal patterns as 'le mauvais' (the faulty) and the playfully incorrect 'l'innovais' (for 'innovait', pp. for 'innovate') create a faultless end-rhyme.

However, as is expected of any poem about the struggles of the creative process, all is not quite perfect. As Weisberg observes of the persona in this poem 'who has

---

[108] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 66.

[109] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, (trans.) E. H. Blackmore and A. M. Blackmore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11. I have given this translation as I prefer it to Bosley's version.

come to feel himself incapable of achieving pure mastery over his craft': '[t]he concept of reaching for an ideal chosen for its very elusiveness is furthered by an ensuing consciousness of paradox, complexity and artificiality.'[110] In other words, the developing intensity with which Mallarmé pursued the theoretical ideals of 'pure relations' and formal and thematic unity, only served to intensified the poem's paradoxes and the ever increasing intricacy between the artifice in the poem, thereby revealing the ideal to be more elusive than ever. Far from achieving the theoretical ideals, Mallarmé's poems are, as Nicholls notes in *Modernisms*, an energetic and productive illustration of their impossibility.[111] The intricate interaction and creative tensions between ideal Artifice and specific examples of artifice and form and content as well as the 'bonds multipliés' between internal patterns, exemplifies the types of tensions, paradoxes and pursuit of an elusive ideal Forrest-Thomson attempts to emulate in her own work.

Whilst the ballad form is a useful mode in which to test broad strictures of regularity – metre and alternate rhymes in four line stanzas – against internal patterning, the sonnet, Mallarmé's frequent mode of choice, is a much more complex terrain. A number of poems in VTP resemble types of sonnets, featuring three or four stanzas, each with three or four lines, and including the type of rhetorical and argumentative logic and phrases with definite shifts in perspectives sanctioned by conventions of sonnet composition. These pseudo sonnets – such as the poem 'Oida' and 'Ultimus' – self-consciously allude to symbols and images from Mallarmé's poetry, particularly the notion of literature as a transcendental saviour from the deathly grip of language. Forrest-Thomson's sonnet 'Oida' (which features Forrest-Thomson's own translation of the term to the side of the title), written at the age of seventeen, conjures Mallarmé from the start:

Oida   (Greek οἶδα, I know)

The world is empty, I must fill it,
The womb of poetry calls for another child,
I must enter it and be reborn.

---

[110] Weisberg, 'Hamlet and "Un Coup de Dés"', p. 781.
[111] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 37; see fn 94, 34.

> I will raise Lazarus from the dead again,
> Hold high the faith and hope
> to the world's wonder.
>
> Now he is yours.
> I can only raise him.
> You must give him charity
>
> For love is not in my hands,
> Only faith and hope,
> And Lazarus, though living,
> May yet sob
> for the safety of the tomb.[112]

The intimate formal movements of the sonnet form enable the development of the extended allegory of poetry being resurrected, like Lazarus, to tentatively 'Hold high the faith and love', whilst it is always overshadowed by the looming tomb of obscurity and death. The series of discrete but emphatic statements are permitted by the traditional logic of a sonnet's argumentative structure. Clearly, Forrest-Thomson associates the sonnet form with a 'womb' to be entered into in order to be reborn – a curiously Freudian image of the necessity of regression before progression. The sonnet form, the emphatic statements, and the images of the tomb, of rebirth and the 'faith and hope' of poetic resurrection, evoke Mallarmé's own *Plusieurs Sonnets*. For example, his sonnets feature numerous symbols of the fluctuation between the deathly and the transcendental. So the sonnet beginning, 'Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi', features the lines 'se tordent dans leur mort des guirlandes célèbres' (twisted in death of famous garlands, which Bosley translates as 'Charmed by laurels writhing on a tomb'), which contrasts with the end line where 'd'un aster en fête allumé le génie' (in Bosley's translation: 'genius of a festive star is flaring').[113] Similarly, the opening lines of another sonnet describe the triumphant victories of death: 'Victorieusement fui le suicide beau / Tison de gloire, sang par écume, or, tempête!' ('Victoriously fled fair suicide / A brand of glory, blood in foam, gold, storms').[114] Whilst 'Oida' evoke Mallarmé's themes and general form, other poems attempt the reconciliation of intricate patterns and the pressures of traditional artifice.

---

[112] VTP, p. 7.
[113] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 166-7.
[114] *ibid.*, 168-9.

A very early poem called 'Ultimus', for example, written at the age of fourteen, dramatises the uneasy dialectic between traditional form, and Forrest-Thomson's development of intricate internal artifice. The poem also features what would become Forrest-Thomson's characteristic self-reflection on composition itself. 'Ultimus' uses Mallarméan themes of the transience of life, death and love which are treated with inconsistent use of rhyme and traditional metres:

Ultimus

We talked of life, of love, of thought
And old, forgotten things.
At sunrise and by moonset
Time flew with eagles' wings.

We found a truth and thought it held
Then let it slip again.
In winter shade, in summer light, in joy by day, in grief by night
Our life went on in sight and sound
And love was lost and pain was found.

But now our day is over, dead.
For mortal things must die
And we are mortal, mortal both,
my other self and I.[115]

The poem is curiously ruminative for having been written by someone of such a young age. It dramatises the crisis between description and a type of formal expressivity. The persona relates that 'we talked' of numerous things, but there is growing sense that such subjects will be 'forgotten' as easily as day flows into night unless they are caught by the suggestive complexities of craft. Through craft, 'we found a truth', but there is always the chance that poetic form will 'slip again' and become subordinated to the concerns of description. The poem's rhythm builds through parallelisms and repetitions of phrases and clauses. The repeated iambs 'of life, of love, of thought' create a rhythm which is taken up in the second, five-line stanza and in the peculiarly long third line: 'In winter shade, in summer light, in joy

---

[115] VTP, p. 1.

by day, in grief by night'. It is not entirely clear why Forrest-Thomson chose not to cut this line in two. She may have used a long line to formally reflect the 'theme' of temporal monotony. Nevertheless, it exhibits a formal mastery in its well-constructed iambs. From this point on, Forrest-Thomson entwines the themes of self-reflective craft with the heady significance of holding off death. The subject of poetic composition itself is confirmed by the next line: 'Our life went on in sight and sound'. This makes a banal sense if referring outwards to the world of 'sight and sound', but it should be read as a self-conscious reflection on the poem's internal sight and sound parallelisms. The next line has the same number of monosyllabic words as the last and is a directly mirroring iambic tetrameter. Similarly, whilst the theme of mortality is reaffirmed in the final, summarising stanza, the repetitions of 'mortal' and the rhyming of 'die' and 'I' envelop the theme of complex poetic craft with the urgency of mortality. Whilst the sonnet begins a description of broad subjects of life, love and thought, there is a repeated affirmation that truth lies in the mysteries of craft and in what Mallarmé expressed as his 'principle aim […] to make the words of a poem self-mirroring' and aesthetically harmonised; harmony, that is, between traditional form and its intricate patterns.[116]

Forrest-Thomson's poem, 'Birth Certificate' imitates Mallarmé's internally developing patterns and their relation to broader form and also takes in his arguments about poetic purity. The poem, however, registers the failure of an ideal Artifice and aesthetic wholeness built from disparate relations between numerous internal formal patterns.

Birth Certificate

A name between a thought
and the shadow of another thought,
Statistics show it unexists
and cannot census it
or censor it
with blue or blood-red
preying pencils.

---

[116] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, (trans.) Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), p. 93. Quoted in Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 38.

> A bond of beauty was distilled
> in the vat of star tears
> and moon smilings,
> unobscured by the sun
> of high callous noon,
> a word in wordlessness.
>
> An uncut umbilical cord of intent
> was joined to the truth of time
> by a certain Presence in the host
> Who shall be nameless.[117]

The poem's form and themes self-consciously imitate Mallarmé. The poem reflects on the nature of a name, on the type of zodiacal attributes which will attach to a birth, and on a theme of breaking free from 'pre-established' patterns, as touched on in Forrest-Thomson's manifesto.[118] Several of the words operate in a ghost world of subtle pun reminiscent of Mallarmé's poems.[119] For example, 'census', 'preying' and 'smilings' are each peculiar words in this context; they are familiar and dissimilar at the same time. The word 'census' makes sense, but its use as a verb here is unusual; it is used to continue the theme of number, but it carries a ghost of the word 'censor' of the next line, implying silence which is strangely violent and which is enhanced by the 'blood-red' of the next lines. Forrest-Thomson implies that the formal rationalism of statistics, number and the expectations of certain formal modes and artifice cannot hold and secure the polysemy and slippery nature of words. The implication draws on Mallarmé's statement in 'Crisis in Poetry' on the 'facile numerical and representative functions' in opposition to the suggestive 'virtuality' of poetry.[120] '[P]reying pencils' is similarly ambiguous, conjuring images of religious ritual, of the insect 'praying mantis' and of the masses as 'prey' to the 'play' of numbers. The poem brings out these 'shadows' behind word use by the construction

---

[117] VTP, p. 8.

[118] See poems such as 'Gemini', 'Taurus', 'Aries' in Forrest-Thomson's *Identi-kit* (CP, pp. 14, 15 & 18 respectively) as well as her uncollected poem, 'Sagittarius' (her own star sign and written in longhand on her nineteenth birthday, 28th November, 1966; VTP, p. 20; CP, p. 36), for a continuation of the zodiac theme.

[119] Apropos the above footnote: see the opening lines of the poem, 'Gemini' which takes on the theme of the twins of this star-sign: 'When all's said and spun, / heads or tails? / it's all two / for I am a pun / on someone unknown.' CP, p. 14.

[120] Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 740.

of expectation by exploiting the playful meaning-making of sound and image-patterning constantly shifting the frames of attention.

The profusion of negatives in the poem mingles with a variety of recognisable Mallarméan words and concepts – 'names', 'shadows', 'stars', 'wordlessness'. Following Mallarmé's practice, style and theme are also intricately intermingled. The curious display of negatives evokes what Mallarmé describes in the section from 'Crisis in Poetry' cited above as an 'almost vibratory disappearance according to the action of a word' as well as a brooding sense of absence: 'Statistics show it unexists', 'a word in wordlessness', 'Who shall remain nameless'. These negative markers imply that the certification of identity are not so easily fixed and that the 'truth' lies somewhere in between a constellation of factors over which we have little control. The concise, epigrammatic lines are also reminiscent of Mallarmé's short poems. For example, the bond between natural elements – stars, moon, sun – and the human world, as well as the tears, allude to lines from Mallarmé's 'Tristesse d'Été: 'Le soleil, sur la sable…'; 'les pleurs'. [121] Whilst the beauty and wordlessness echo Mallarmé's 'Rondels': 'Si tu veux nous nous aimerons /Avec tes lèvres sans le dire / Cette rose ne l'interromps / Qu'à verser un silence pire' ('We will love if you so choose / With your lips although wordless / Only interrupt this rose /Pouring out a silence worse').[122] Forrest-Thomson was certainly adopting and adapting a number of Mallarmé's stylistic characteristics and struggling with their formal implications in the pursuit of ideal Artifice.

The way in which Mallarmé's formal practice and theoretical ideals translate into Forrest-Thomson's work is both awkward and comic. 'A bond of beauty', as she writes in 'Birth Certificate', becomes 'a word in wordlessness' just as being 'unexists' and is defined as a negative in between the positive census of colour patterns. Mallarmé's sense of the poem as comprised of mystically communicative pure relations informs this poem and emerges in the 'Presence in the host' of poetic form but which 'shall be nameless'. This presence is surely the word – name – released from its worldly 'bonds' and reconnecting with nothingness [le néant] in which, as Gerard Bruns has observed, 'Mallarmé was sure, the essence of beauty is

---

[121] Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, p. 20.
[122] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 152-3.

to be found.'[123] Mallarmé was the prime mover behind Forrest-Thomson's engagement with what she called a 'self-circuiting' poetic processes and with traditional poetic form. But, poems such as 'Birth Certificate' are elegant registers of the failure of each version of artifice, with perfect form only ever evoked in the negative and remaining 'nameless'. As in her poem, 'What ?', and 'Oida', the poem's certification as the 'Birth' of a new style is, as yet, 'untitled'.

The early manifesto adumbrates many of the aesthetic and theoretical concerns explored through Forrest-Thomson's later critical writing and poetry. Tensions and paradoxes exist in her early work between the impulse towards the use of traditional poetic form and the elaboration of a variety of patterns usually associated with free verse. Mallarmé is useful here as he struggled with similar creative tensions. He produced traditional verse, but also strove in this verse to create complex patterns which orchestrated a formal truth beyond representational language. In his preface to his most experimental work, *Un Coup de Dés*, Mallarmé emphatically repeats his allegiance to, as he puts it, 'the ancient line of verse, to which I still pay vows and attribute sovereignty of passion and dreams'.[124] Despite her early advocacy of a form of fidelity to the patterns of nature, informed by Romantic poetic theory, Forrest-Thomson's manifesto and, most expressly, her poetry consistently reaffirmed her allegiance to traditional poetic devices. But, as with Mallarmé, such an allegiance often strains towards an idealisation of, in Mallarmé's words, a 'pure form' or, in Forrest-Thomson's, ideal Artifice.[125] Perhaps a useful way of describing Forrest-Thomson's poetry is in relation to what the editors of the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* call Mallarmé's invention of the 'critical poem'. They define Mallarmé's essay 'Crisis in Poetry' as indicative of this genre, but they also state of his entire poetic project that 'the distinction between 'poetry' and 'theory' breaks down: every text is a lesson in how language works, weaving and unweaving the poetic act that it itself is in the process of not quite accomplishing.' [126] Forrest-Thomson was energetically investigating the nature of her own poetic act and was taking risks in formal experimentation, even if many of her poems did not quite

---

[123] Gerald L. Bruns, *Modern Poetry and Idea of Language: A Critical and Historical Study* (Champaign, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), p. 102.
[124] Quoted in Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 257.
[125] Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 740.
[126] I am referring to the editorial introduction to Mallarmé's essay, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 731.

accomplish their desired results. Nevertheless, as Mallarmé and Eliot understood before her, she apprehended the necessity of mastering tradition if she was to achieve true innovation.

FORWARD

This blunder of eQuato r has unfortunately
become os full of Mi n prists and
other errors in layabout that some
apology is owNed to t hose, noht readers
and contributors, who viewing the matter
from the other side oftthe stenc Il,
 may make insufferable allowance for the
conditions under whichi
                              it was conduced.
The lucubration's finos tical position
being , ot say the lest, paycarious, it

is UnaBLR to stand the cots of having its
 ostencils typed professionally and has
had to belie on the single-fingered
tightriping of the XXXXXX
debitor which was, PathoS $_8$:

 provoked unequable totthe task.
All that can, hterefore,be hoped is that
the lamentable result mayhhave the defect
of pausing some favourable review of
the aforesaid finastics $\frac{1}{2}$

$$v_F \quad t \, \tfrac{7}{8}$$

Figure 1: *Forrest-Thomson, 'Forward' to* **Equator** *6, Liverpool University Poetry Magazine (Liverpool, 1967)*. **Referred to on page 66 below.**

Chapter 2
Formal Innovation and Traditional Diction: *Identi-kit* and Uncollected Early Poems

> "Well I can't promise any, sort of, funny noises. Most of this is very traditional in that it rhymes, which will be quite a change."[127]

> [I]t is a paradox that some of the artists working along the experimental tradition from European Modernism – Dadaism and the Bauhaus included – have produced excitingly original work and even work which affirms more traditional values in art.[128]

> We are saying that the poet who undertakes to preserve or refine poetic diction is writing in a web of responsibilities. He is responsible to past masters for conserving the genres and the decorum which they have evolved […] He is responsible […] for purifying and correcting the spoken language. And of course he is responsible, as all poets are, to his readers; he has to give them pleasure, and also, deviously or directly, instructions in proper conduct.[129]

Many of the poems in Forrest-Thomson's first, full-length collection of poetry, *Identi-kit* (1967), as well as her uncollected poems, use what could be described as 'traditional' form; that is, they are comprised of stanzas, semi-regular end-rhymes and lines of neatly similar length. Most of these poems also have a cool, analytical tone. But Forrest-Thomson's insistent reference to the concrete values of art in her manifesto also precipitated an increased thematic and formal engagement with artistic theory and artworks as well as experiments with concrete poetry.[130] Her poems written between the ages of twelve to twenty, therefore, bear the formal tensions between the traditional and the concrete. Concrete poetry, as Alan Young argues in *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* can be considered one strand of poetic development from a form of Dadaist destruction of language. So, poets such as Ian Hamilton Finlay, Young observes, 'decided to abandon traditional syntax and structures' in their poetry in the pursuit of 'new

---

[127] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, introducing her reading at the Essex Arts Festival, University of Essex, 27 April 1967. British Library Sound Archive, ref. T7209. Information on the track listings are available via the British Library Sound Archive website, retrieved 21 July 2010, <http://www.bl.uk/nsa>. The transcription is my own.

[128] Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 212.

[129] Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 15.

[130] The 'noises' to which Forrest-Thomson refers in her introduction to the reading at the Essex Arts Festival were undoubtedly emitted by the concrete poet and editor of *Tlaloc* magazine, Cavan McCarthy, whose '4 Found Poems' and '3 Concrete Poems' are noted in The British Library Sound Archive track-listing as being performed before Forrest-Thomson's reading.

creative directions and a distinctive poetic language.'[131] Forrest-Thomson briefly experimented with concrete modes, buoyed by her engagement with art as well as her involvement with the poetry magazine *Tlaloc* in the mid to late sixties.[132] But, as I shall show, she wasn't willing to relinquish the communicative links and temporal aspects of syntax, nor totally discard the use of traditional poetic conventions. Where Forrest-Thomson's poems do become almost 'pure' concrete poetry (where language is used solely as material), she retained fidelity to syntax, sense making and traditional poetic tropes, providing internal instructions as to the, to borrow the poet and critic Davie's phrase, 'proper conduct' for reading the poem. Forrest-Thomson's poems written under the influence of art and concrete poetry were crucial in reaffirming, as Young suggests in the second epigraph to this chapter, 'more traditional values' in poetry.

But the question of what such 'traditional values' are was an important and vexatious one for Forrest-Thomson and one which she confronts in her later poems of this period. There were a number of conflicted opinions as to what constituted poetic value in the mid to late sixties. In terms of anthologised assertions of value, British poetry was represented by the 1956 *New Lines* collection edited by Robert Conquest and featuring 'Movement' poets; whilst A. Alvarez's *The New Poetry*, first issued in 1962, also contained Movement poets alongside the American so-called confessional poets Robert Lowell and John Berryman and other British poets such as R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes.[133] In his introduction to the latter volume entitled, 'The New Poetry, or, Beyond the Gentility Principle', Alvarez expressed his dissatisfaction with what he calls a 'disease so often found in English culture: gentility'.[134] This disease produced three types of what he called negative feed-backs

---

[131] Young, *Dada and After*, p. 212.

[132] *Tlaloc* magazine, edited by the concrete poet, Cavan McCarthy, ran from 1964-1970. See below for a more detailed discussion of this magazine and Forrest-Thomson's involvement with it.

[133] Robert Conquest (ed.), *New Lines* (London: Macmillan, 1956). A further, *New Lines II* anthology was issued by Macmillan in 1963. A. Alvarez (ed.), *The New Poetry* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1962). A second edition of the anthology was issued in 1966. A. Alvarez (ed.), *The New Poetry* (2nd edn.; Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1966). See Keith Tuma and Nate Dorward, 'Modernism and Anti-Modernism in British Poetry', in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 510-27, for an excellent outline of the anthologies of this period and for a useful discussion of the conflicting perspectives at stake in the editors' selections.

[134] Alvarez, *The New Poetry* (1966), p. 32. The introduction to both editions was the same.

in contemporary poetry: the use of devalued 'traditional forms, in a chic contemporary guise', a 'blockage against intelligence' and a resistance to what he calls, rather glibly, 'wild, loose emotion'.[135] Nevertheless, as the overlaps of selected poets illustrate, and as Andrew Crozier observed in his excellent 1983 essay, 'Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism', there are a great deal of similarity between the editors' selections as well as their exclusion of poetry influenced by modernist experiment.[136] Poets and critics such as Crozier and Eric Mottram, were crucial in bringing to the public's attention other poets and poetic modes from the forties to the seventies whose experimentalism and formal innovation contradicted the picture of British poetry painted by such mass-market anthologies.[137] What such critics polemically engaged with was the assumption that poetry should focus on lyrical expression, use refined metaphor, and be set in loosely traditional stanzas and form. Such a model of poetic practice necessarily ignored the influence of American poetry continuing modernist poetic principles, and marginalised the experimental and avant-garde practice of numerous British poets.[138]

Forrest-Thomson was one such poet who adopted and adapted certain modernist practices but, despite her formal experimentation, her poetry continually affirms her belief in what Davie calls in the third epigraph of this chapter, poetic 'diction', 'decorum' and 'proper conduct' which she would later work into her model of poetic Artifice. What Davie means by the term diction is, put simply, the sense that a poet uses an exact word and phrase which gives the impression of having been perfectly

---

[135] Alvarez, *The New Poetry* (1966), pp. 22-3.

[136] Andrew Crozier, 'Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), *Society and Literature 1945-1970* (London: Methuen & co., 1983), p. 217. See, also, Crozier's follow-up essay, 'Resting on Laurels' in Alan Davis and Alan Sinfield (eds.) *British Culture of the Post-War: An Introduction to Literature and Society 1945-1999* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 192-204.

[137] Eric Mottram was a critic and lecturer at King's College, London who was involved with, and wrote a good deal about, the 'British Poetry Revival' (BPR). See, particularly, Eric Mottram, 'The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75, in Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (eds.), *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 15-50. The BPR was comprised of numerous poets in the sixties and seventies who wrote modernist inspired poetry counter to the prevailing mainstream practice of what Robert Sheppard has succinctly described as the 'Movement Orthodoxy'. See, Robert Sheppard, 'Movement Poets and Movement Orthodoxy in the 1950s and 1960s' and 'The British Poetry Revival 1960-1978', in *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), pp. 20-34 & 35-76.

[138] Crozier, 'Thrills and Frills', p. 216.

selected amidst the clamouring presence of all others. He does not mean simply word choice but, as the third entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, '[t]he manner in which anything is expressed […] wording, phrasing; verbal style.'[139] 'Decorum' is a loaded and class-laden word, but its sense of best or most refined practice can certainly be associated with Forrest-Thomson's aesthetics, as I shall show. Keith Tuma and Nate Dorward have argued that Davie's *Purity of Diction in English Verse* was, in part, a 'manifesto for the Movement aesthetic principles'. I agree with this and also extend their suggestion that Davie's argument for a contemporary poet's responsibility to past masters and for poetic diction is a call for a re-evaluation of particular, traditional poetic devices.[140] It is telling that Davie's description of good poetic diction draws on what he calls the 'elaborate structure of poetic diction' found in George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589).[141] Far from a defence of Movement aesthetics, both Davie and Forrest-Thomson argue for much more elaborate and complex poetic techniques; for, in short, a form of rhetorical competence. Following Davie's lead, Forrest-Thomson felt that her poetic contemporaries of the mainstream did not take their responsibility to poetry seriously enough, despite their general use of traditional poetic forms.

Forrest-Thomson frequently asserted the necessity for 'traditional values' and for a serious use of poetic artifice – stanzas, rhyme and metre – which, according to her, were somehow used incorrectly by Movement poets. Keery has suggested that some of Forrest-Thomson's poems in *Identi-kit* show 'early mastery of the 'Movement' style', but the delight and concentration on formal experiment in her poems separates her work from the cool, philosophical and measured tone of many poems lumped

---

[139] 'diction', n. *The Oxford English Dictionary.* 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online.* (Oxford University Press). Retrieved 21 September 2011 <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

[140] Davie, *Purity of Diction* (2006), p. 15. Tuma and Dorward also quote these passages in 'Modernism and Anti-Modernism', p. 512.

[141] Davie writes that the use of proper diction will come, not from using 'language at random', nor from 'the whim of fashion', but from a type of selection which gives, as he writes a little earlier, paraphrasing himself, 'a sense of 'words thrusting to be let into the poem, but fended off from it'' (*Purity of Diction,* pp. 7 & 11 respectively). Davie cites Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) (Menston: The Scholar Press, Ltd., 1968) in the opening passages of *Purity of Diction*, and, echoing Eliot's sense of the dissociation of sensibility in poetry since the seventeenth-century, laments the fact that Puttenham's elaborate structures of poetry have 'broken down more and more, as the poets in practice have blurred the distinctions upon which that structure rested' (p. 7). For examples of Forrest-Thomson's own use of quotations from Puttenham, see her poems 'Antiphrasis' and 'Antiquities' in *Language-Games* (CP, pp. 84-6).

under the banner of 'Movement'.[142] Whilst Keery notes a formal similarity, I suggest that she discovered through poetic practice the necessity of fusing formal experiment with traditional poetic devices. My argument is not that Forrest-Thomson wanted an 'innovative tradition', but rather an emphatic reassertion of a type of poetic diction or decorum based on timeless poetic conventions. The motivation to retain a spirit of poetic Artifice, whether, as Davie puts it in the epigraph, 'deviously or directly', contributed to Forrest-Thomson's emphatic belief in traditional techniques.[143]

This chapter begins with an examination of the effect of artistic language and specific artworks on Forrest-Thomson's poetic form which is an extension of the pressures to imitate, enact and exceed theory discussed in the previous chapter. The distinct difference between these poems and Forrest-Thomson's earliest work is located in the particularity of the artworks with which she engaged. Forrest-Thomson's concrete poetry phase represented her emphatic riposte to much contemporary poetry and was also crucial in bolstering her defence of poetic Artifice. To deviously echo Mina Loy on the spirit of modern poetry emerging from the melting pot of American languages and spirit: '[o]ut of the welter of this unclassifiable speech' of formal experiment, the muse of Artifice was born, and her tongue had been stiffened with traditional values.[144]

---

[142] Keery, 'A Unique Voice', p. 86.

[143] My choice to use Davie here is informed by the strong evidence as to Forrest-Thomson's often competitive engagement with his writing. The Cambridge University Library copy of *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952, hereafter *Purity of Diction* (1952)) contains Forrest-Thomson's pencil underlines, ticks, cross references and annotations. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's annotations must have been written after the publication of *Identi-kit* (1967 – she was at Cambridge from 1968), she shares with Davie a certain conservative interest in the timeless values of poetry, perhaps engendered by her undergraduate studies.

[144] Mina Loy, 'Modern Poetry' (1925), reprinted in Lawrence Rainey (ed.), *Modernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 438: 'Out of the welter of this unclassifiable speech, whilst professors of Harvard and Oxford laboured to preserve "God's English," the muse of modern literature arose, and her tongue had been loosened in the melting-pot.'

Art and Poetic Form

Forrest-Thomson's interest in art is evident in the specific terminology and references used throughout the manifesto and VTP. As she puts it, poetry should create 'significant form and pattern of their own, imitations of the patterns of life, e.g. works of art, and rites'.[145] The influence of painting in shaping Forrest-Thomson's sensibility was described in a 1989 letter from her mother, Jean Forrest Thomson to the editor of the *Collected Poems and Translations,* Anthony Barnett. She describes Forrest-Thomson's chief interest in 'colours and composition, sometimes in a very delicate interpretation and at other times […] in strong illustrations in oil', and imagines that she can 'trace those two visually artistic qualities in many of the poems.'[146] A sometimes delicate, sometimes strong interest in blocks of colour and in both artistic and poetic composition are certainly evident in Forrest-Thomson's poems of this period, leading to a variety of formal tensions between her attempt to translate artistic technique into practice and her retention of traditional poetic modes.

A number of poems in *Identi-kit* use artistic language to describe scenes, images and the interrelation of a variety of objects. Titles often feature painterly subjects such as 'Point of View at Noon' and 'Provence', whilst descriptions have an art-like quality.[147] In 'Point of View at Noon', for example, Forrest-Thomson writes of 'mosaics of mottled leaves', whilst the first few lines of the second stanza of 'Provence' describe 'Mosaics of flesh / and kaleidoscope streets' which 'seem brilliant in perpetual noon'. Poems feature vivid and synaesthetic colours such as the 'pale-green thought', the 'pearl-pale thought' and the 'static dark-green thought' in 'A Reaction to Rings', or the 'dark drains warm bronze' in 'Provence'.[148] Many of the poems attempt a still-life quality, as in the lines evoking John Keats's Grecian urn from 'Point of View at Noon' – 'Framed in an unblinking eye / the scent seems no more living / or capable of movement / than the turquoise tendrils traced / on this

---

[145] M, p. 2.

[146] Personal letter from Jean Forrest Thomson to Anthony Barnett dated August 7th 1989. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive.

[147] CP, pp. 19 & 24 respectively. All quotations from these poems are from these pages.

[148] 'A Reaction to Rings, CP, p. 20.

quiet vase' – as well as the 'edges', 'patterns' and 'planes' of 'In the Greenhouse'.[149] 'January Morning', the first poem in *Identi-kit*, begins:

> Hot ha'penny sun pressed copper
> against the frozen-window sky;
> a metallic sunbeam falls
> with a clank of light across the eye.
>
> The world is winched on an iron chain,
> then whirled on a wheel of frost.
>
> Gables' only purpose to maintain
> angle of shadow flat and clear
> slanting the bright sharp snow.
> Birdsong rattles over the slates,
> a sudden jangling skeleton of sound;
> is still.[150]

A winter scene is described with emphatically artistic language and as comprised of intersections, blocks of colour and shapes. The 'world is winched', as if in an art gallery, 'on an iron chain'. The short, sharp and compressed phraseology and compounds – 'frozen-window sky', 'bright sharp snow' – affect the type of clipped precision found in imagist poetry as well as a painterly stillness where angles are 'flat and clear'. Here, poetic form and artistic practice complement each other, so the vivid lines, angles and colour contrasts and blurs of painting are mimicked in language by the dissonant 'clanks' and jangles of the end-rhymes between 'sky' and 'eye' and 'chain' and 'maintain' as well as the sibilance in the last stanza. The poem is a neat, if slightly static, attempt at a compressed, linguistic mimicry of painting. But the linguistic textures, such as the 'copper', 'metallic' and 'clank' clusters of synaesthetic imagery, already state a delight in, and the superiority of, poetic artifice and form.

---

[149] 'In the Greenhouse', CP, p. 17. John Keats 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' in *Selected Poetry*, (ed.) Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 177: 'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time, / Sylvan historian, who canst thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme'.

[150] CP, p. 13.

The poems of *Identi-kit* can be viewed as an extension of Forrest-Thomson's early attempt to accommodate external patterns and stimuli with traditional form. Whilst 'January Morning' looks out, as it were, to the world, albeit through the spectrum of artistic language, the subject of four of the poems of *Identi-kit* are actual paintings by Paul Cézanne and Paul Klee. These poems are 'ekphrastic' in the sense James Heffernan has defined as '*the verbal representation of a graphic representation*'.[151] Forrest-Thomson imitates aspects of the work of these painters and extends the implication of their artistic theory in poetic form. Forrest-Thomson may not have read the artists' theoretical statements, but their theory complements her early appreciation of the concrete qualities of art and the straining towards types of materially pure relations she learned from Mallarmé.[152] For example, in a letter to a friend in 1925, Cézanne remarked that: '[t]o paint is not to copy the objective world slavishly; it's to seize harmony between numerous relationships, to transpose them into an appropriate scale, and develop them according to a new and original logic.'[153] Similarly, in his early journals, Klee muses: '[t]o achieve vital harmony in a picture it must be constructed out of parts in themselves incomplete, brought into harmony only at the last stroke'.[154] Whilst Forrest-Thomson's poems ostensibly benefit from having a definitive object to imitate (as opposed to the amorphous and changeable demands of 'nature' in poems such as 'January Morning'), her simultaneous

---

[151] James A. W. Heffernan, 'Ekphrasis and Representation' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1991), p. 299 – emphasis in the original. See, also, James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). Heffernan's definition differs from the received wisdom of ekphrasis as literature which somehow artistically describes a scene – as in Homer's description of Achilles's shield in *The Iliad*, W. H. Auden's 'Shield of Achilles', or, indeed, Keats's Grecian urn (these examples are listed under the entry 'Ekphrasis' in the *PEPP*, p. 320). Heffernan seeks to distinguish ekphrasis – a verbal representation of a graphic representation – from poems, such as those listed above, which use painterly or iconic techniques. As he argues, William Carlos Williams's 'The Red Wheelbarrow', for example, owes its techniques to painting and photography but it doesn't describe any specific graphic representation and is therefore, to Haffernan, not ekphrastic.

[152] Forrest-Thomson may have been inspired to writes poems in response to Klee's work by the poet Christopher Perret whose poem, 'Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook' appeared in *Tlaloc* 11. The opening lines of the poem attempt to render the frenetic energy of Klee's notebooks: 'Momentum bangs / its bundle of drying flesh // on the bones: / a stick progressing / from tree to crawl // from leg to steeplechase // L E A P !', [u.p.].

[153] The comment is attributed to Cézanne by Leo Larguier in *Le dimanche avec Paul Cézanne* (Paris: L'Edition, 1925). Quoted in Paul Smith, *Interpreting Cézanne* (London: Tate Publishing, 1996), p. 51.

[154] Norbert Lynton, *Klee* (London, New York, Sidney, Toronto: Hamlyn, 1975), p. 22. The quotations are from Klee's journal (1908) published as Felix Klee and Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg (eds), *Tagebücher von Paul Klee 1898-1918* (Cologne, 1956), pp. 844.

imitation of artistic form, extension of artistic theory and self-reflective formal practice, alongside the ever-present demands of traditional form, creates a formally conflicted poetry.

Forrest-Thomson's 'Contours – Homage to Cézanne' exhibits a formal struggle between the techniques of painting and poetry. Heffernan describes the competition between artistic forms as the 'struggle for power – the *Paragone* – between the image and the word' where there is, as he writes, 'the sense of representational friction between signifying medium and subject signified'.[155] In Forrest-Thomson's poem, poetic form sometimes complements artistic practice, but very often conflicts with it.

Contours – Homage to Cézanne

Pattern, like a magnetic field,
is passionate in restraint; limits compress
significance; framed energy is sealed.
Objects, having nothing to express

except themselves, attain intensity
in assumed balance, which alleges,
in face of our amorphous liberty,
the joy of everything with edges.

But these tight contours owe
shape and definition to the eye
of inessential man who

from complication learns to simplify,
fuse form with what alone forms cannot show,
and in this act becomes as sure as they.[156]

Keery identifies 'Contours' as the poem which shows what he describes as Forrest-Thomson's 'early mastery of the 'Movement' style', stating that it is 'beguilingly reminiscent of Donald Davie'.[157] The analytical tone and the philosophical reflection on patterns, the paratactic and layered clauses of the opening stanza and her precise

---

[155] Heffernan, *The Museum of Words*, p. 136.
[156] CP, p. 27.
[157] Keery, 'A Unique Voice', p. 86.

phraseology and diction, do resemble some of Davie's themes and style. For example, in his poem 'The Mushroom Gatherers', Davie observes:

> Their attitudes strange: the human tree
> Slowly revolves on its bole. All around
> Downcast looks; and the direct dreamer
> Treads out in trance his lane, unwavering.
>
> Strange decorum: so prodigal of bows,
> Yet lost in thought and self-absorbed they meet […][158]

Davie detects a particular attitude from the mushroom gatherers and matches their 'Strange decorum' with subtle, poetic decorum, such as the /au/ sound echoes in 'around / Downcast', or the developing vowel patterns from /e/ through /a/ to /a:/ in the pentameter of the fourth line. However, there is a casual certainty and moralising in Davie's poem and it has much less emphatic artifice than Forrest-Thomson's own. The form of the poem is much more jagged and changeable than Davie's, as if she is aware that there is more to be expressed by poetic form. Both Davie and Forrest-Thomson used traditional forms, but Forrest-Thomson seems to pursue a comprehension of form's evocative power and concentrates on creating dense material patterns which conflict as the poem shifts perspectives.

'Contours' charts the development of perception from an objective description of rigorous artistic technique braced against the liberty of un-framed life, to the phenomenal perception of such by the eye. The move from description towards equivocal perception is marked by a formal turn to what might be called an enactment of Cézanne's techniques in language. The transition is signalled by the shift from the restrained and balanced opening two stanzas to the looser and simplified structure of the last two. Forrest-Thomson locates the effect of Cézanne's work in its 'restraint' where 'limits compress / significance' and 'framed energy is sealed'. The painting's patterns vibrate in its frame 'like a magnetic field'. The operations of form and colour in Cézanne's work 'attain intensity' by their function

---

[158] Donald Davie, 'The Mushroom Gatherers (after Mickiewicz)', in Alvarez, *The New Poetry* (1966), p. 95.

in a field of, as the painter puts it, 'original logic'.[159] Poetic form provides an analogous experience, as the strict ABAB rhyme scheme frames and dictates structure, syntax and word choice. Forrest-Thomson expresses the described joy of such form with the satisfying end-rhyming lines: 'assumed balance which *alleges* […] the joy of everything with *edges.*' However, the importance of an aesthetic frame is heightened, paradoxically, by the fact that it cannot restrain the enjambment: 'limits compress / significance', 'nothing to express // except themselves'. Linguistic and poetic processes strain against the static logic of frame, structure and form.

Forrest-Thomson uses poetic form to reflect the developing theme of perceptual tension. In contrast to the opening stanzas, the final two seem to deliberately falter and this is a consequence of the further loss of the frame of traditional devices and the troubling presence of the perceiver's eye. The same analytical tone and phraseology prevails – compare the phrases 'framed energy' with 'tight contours', for example. The absence of the artificial frame to 'compress / significance' and to re-emphasise the artifice of the subject, results in a confused and limp description of form: note the enervating line 'of inessential man who'. Form generates its own, internal life which is emphasised by the fact that the first line of the final stanza could have served as the last of the third by virtue of its end-rhyme 'simplify' with 'eye' of the second line of the third. Forrest-Thomson's choice to arrange and detach the lines in this way results in the premature expense of an intensely building rhythm. The poem sabotages its own formal consistency whilst illustrating the effects of formal clashes on the insecure foundations of a viewer's gaze. The numerous formal equivocations lead to a confusion of registers, tones and perspectives. The obligation that artificial form owes the gaze of the viewer is taken away by the last stanzas and this is shown by the abnormal delay of the /ou/ end-rhyme ('owe', 'show') as well as the /ai/ rhyme. The final line's 'surety' seems ironic, particularly as the poem ends with the feeble eye-rhyme between 'simplify' and 'they'. An internal conflict bathetically illustrates the necessity and inevitable

---

[159] In a letter to a friend in 1925, Cézanne remarked that: '[t]o paint is not to copy the objective world slavishly; it's to seize harmony between numerous relationships, to transpose them into an appropriate scale, and develop them according to a new and original logic.' The comment is attributed to Cézanne by Leo Larguier in *Le dimanche avec Paul Cézanne* (Paris: L'Edition, 1925). Quoted in Smith, *Interpreting Cézanne*, p. 51.

failure of poetic form to imitate artistic patterns. Here, Forrest-Thomson uses poetic form to reflect and develop the themes of struggles in perception and between styles.

The linguistic and formal unease displayed in 'Contours' also characterises three of Forrest-Thomson's poems inspired by Klee: 'Clown (By Paul Klee)', 'Ambassador of Autumn (By Paul Klee)' and 'Landscape with Yellow Birds'.[160] 'Clown' contains conflicting mixtures of formal description, critical interpretation, complex sound patterning and visual linguistic overlaps. But it is a curiously static poem, seeking merely to imitate Klee's formal practice.[161] 'Ambassador of Autumn (By Paul Klee)', on the other hand, has a similarly confused relationship with its source painting, but Forrest-Thomson seeks to translate Klee's technique into patterns of language and poetic forms whilst also retaining traditional poetic conventions such as stanzas and strictly observed line lengths:

Ambassador of Autumn (By Paul Klee)

Year's spectrum modulates
around the centre spectre.
Each single moment's tone
appears alone, yet signals
the gradation in the air
towards the centre spectre;

clears a half-uncovered curve
cold moon, negative reflector
of the centre spectre,

where gold reflects last light
frost-focused against white,
frail parody of sun.
Leaf held to itself firm
in pattern's final thread
about to snap,
fulfilled as things only may
whose sole future is decay.[162]

---

[160] CP, pp. 21, 25 & 52 respectively.

[161] See Sara Crangle, 'Curved Lines: Forrest-Thomson, Klee, and the Smile', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Crangle.php, pp. 16-22 for a useful discussion of this poem in relation to Klee's theory of the line.

[162] CP, p. 25.

Klee's painting is comprised primarily of horizontal rectangles of muted colours on a spectrum from green to pink. Lynton describes the painting as featuring 'delicately set down scales of blue watercolour, reminiscent of the Bauhaus students' exercises in tone but moving around the colour circle towards green and red'.[163] The only other shapes in the painting are the 'half-uncovered curve' of white, slightly left of centre and an orange orb to the right of centre. This orb sits atop a black vertical rectangle base making it resemble an autumnal tree. Klee's painting is composed of 'gradations' of colour and, in turn, Forrest-Thomson exploits the spectrum of her words' etymological, visual and phonetic modulations. The most obvious examples are 'spectrum', 'spectre', 'centre' and the root phrase 'centre spectre' to which the poem repeatedly returns. The phrase then generates rhizomic associations to 'tone' and 'signals' on the semantic level, but also the phonetic relations of 'reflector' and 'reflects'. The poem, like the painting, vibrates with multiple, internally generated patterns.

'Ambassador of Autumn' vividly dramatises a competition between formal modes and perspectives: the artwork and the viewer's gaze itself, a variety of formal patterns, and the frame of ostensibly traditional form. The poem develops a number of internal 'threads' and 'pattern[s]', ranging from the phrase 'centre spectre', to the sound and sight of 'o' clusters in the lines 'm*o*dulates / ar*o*und the centre spectre. / Each single m*o*ment's t*o*ne / appears al*o*ne' and 'cold moon, negative reflector'. As the phrase 'frail parody' hints, 'Ambassador of Autumn' is a caricature and expressive extension of Klee's technique. But formal and thematic parody are, at once, frail and equivocal. A reader's attention is drawn away from the source painting towards the poetic composition itself, but the poem exhibits a struggle to produce consistent internal structures. As if in response to the failure of formal continuity and to pressures exerted from a variety of angles, Forrest-Thomson returns to a use of end-rhyme, stanza division and line breaks. For example, end-rhyme dramatises resounding moments: the last section is topped and tailed by two end-rhymes with 'may' providing the phonetic resonance for the final 'decay'. These rhymes operate as holding frames, registering shifts of tone and tracing the

---

[163] Lynton, *Klee*, p. 37.

developing conflicts of formal dominance. As with Forrest-Thomson's 'attitudes and beliefs' expressed in her manifesto, what begins as an attempted imitation of external form results in, firstly, an excessive concentration on disparate poetic patterns and, secondly, ends up reaffirming the necessity of poetic Artifice. Forrest-Thomson's engagement with artworks and theory bolstered her conviction as to the potently expressive power of poetic form.

Concrete Poetry

Although her experiments with poetry's intersections with art frequently resulted in Forrest-Thomson's resort to traditional poetic artifice, her interest in concrete form continued to develop. The manifesto contains a number of references to concrete form and Forrest-Thomson met Cavan McCarthy in the late 1960s, whose *Tlaloc* magazine featured numerous concrete poets. The University College London Library archive of *Tlaloc* contains a number of Forrest-Thomson's concrete poem typescripts, but only two were included in the magazine.[164] In a statement in the archive, McCarthy explains that *Tlaloc*, named after an Aztec Rain god, ran for twenty-two issues between December 1964 and 1970.[165] Whilst many of the poems published in the magazine were concrete by poets such as Ian Hamilton-Finlay, Dom Sylvester Houédard and McCarthy himself, it also carried work by, in the terminology of the time, 'linear' poets such as Andrew Crozier, Brian Patten and the early poetry of the novelist Angela Carter. As McCarthy observes in his 'Statement' for the archive: '[i]t is important to note that "Tlaloc" was not a purely concrete magazine, but a magazine which deliberately mixed concrete and linear (or traditional or textual) poetry, often on facing pages.'[166] Whilst linear implies the retention of the temporal relations between words established by syntax and grammar, it also suggests the involvement of the conventions of poetic form. The term non-linear, on the other hand, implies the breaking of traditional linguistic and

---

[164] The UCL archive contains most of the back issues of *Tlaloc* magazine as well as miscellaneous documents relating to the publication. The archive is divided into three separate boxes and most of the documents (including the magazine itself) are unpaginated unless otherwise stated. Edwin Morgan, who knew Forrest-Thomson during this time, reviewed her *Identi-kit* in *Tlaloc* 15 (July, 1967), pp. 7-8.

[165] Cavan Michael McCarthy, 'Statement for the International Concrete Poetry Archive', UCL Archive Box 1, p. 1.

[166] *ibid.*

formal functions and the creation of others. The magazine's remit to include both linear and non-linear poetries led, inevitably, to poems which had both qualities, of which Forrest-Thomson's own were examples.

Forrest-Thomson expressed a broader context for her interest in concrete poetry on the 30th December 1967 when she and McCarthy produced a programme for an event at the Bristol Arts Centre called, *Veronicavan.* The programme outlined her poetic project to date in terms which evoke what Keery calls the 'archaic civil war'[167] between the avant-garde and the mainstream:

> Veronica Forrest was born in Malaya in 1947, but educated in Scotland with an early specialisation in Greek and Latin which has infected her with a, perhaps exaggerated, respect for impersonality and formal values in art. It was this which first aroused her interest in concrete poetry as an antidote to the formlessness and academicism of the Movement writers and the introversion of the so-called 'confessional' poets.[168]

Forrest-Thomson's confession of her 'exaggerated […] respect for impersonality and the formal values in art' echo her comments throughout her manifesto. At this stage, however, she also views such formal values as offering antidotes to the relaxed discursiveness and anecdotal content of Movement and confessional poets. Concrete poetry is conceived as an emphatic rejection of the apparent formlessness and introversion of much contemporary poetic practice. Forrest-Thomson's targets in this passage are undoubtedly those poets collected in *New Lines* such as Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis, but also poems by American confessional poets assembled in *The New Poetry*. The distinction between what Forrest-Thomson's perceives to be good form and bad form (or formlessness) is evident in the contrasts I noted above between degrees of formal experimentation in Davie's poem and her own. A loosely traditional form was not enough for Forrest-Thomson, particularly if the form merely served the introspective insights of a single, lyrical I. Forrest-Thomson's arguments against such poets were always simplifying and polemical. However, she clearly had reservations about what she perceived to be a degrading of the importance of

---

[167] Keery, 'A Unique Voice', p. 86.

[168] Cavan McCarthy and Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Veronicavan: program of a reading at the Bristol arts centre* 30 Dec. 1967, signed 'veronica forrest and cavan mccarthy' [all lowercase]. Unpaginated A4 programme featuring a statement and three poems by Forrest and a statement and four poems by McCarthy. Forrest-Thomson's comments are reprinted in CP, p. 164.

poetry's 'formal values'. At this stage, Forrest-Thomson decided to experiment with concrete poetry as an emphatic rejection of the formlessness and lyrical egotism of her poetic contemporaries. But her foray into concrete poetry was fleeting, and she was soon to return to the use of traditional poetic devices, her commitment to them bolstered by a renewed interest in formal experiment. Her concrete poetry was an exaggerated antidote to contemporary practice; a devil's advocate of form to reassert its necessity.

Forrest-Thomson's own concrete poems usually retain linear qualities; that is to say, her use of the mode not only resists its full implications, but also ends up revealing the importance of both poetic and sentential conventions. As the analytic and aesthetic philosopher and theoretician of concrete poetry, Max Bense put it, concrete poetry supplements conventional language organisation – dependent on 'analytical and syntactical' relations – for a mode which exploits the material dimensions of language. In the process of doing so, 'linguistic elements […] appear to be broken up into syllables, sounds, morphemes or letters, to express the aesthetic dependence of language upon their analytical and syntactical possibilities.'[169] Whilst the revelation of experiment can be used to fully break with 'syntactical possibilities', it can also refine an understanding of their potent potentiality. To the binaries of linear and non-linear, then, can be added the terms, respectively, the 'logico-discursive' or the 'analytical', and the 'analogical'.[170] The distinction between the analogical – that which builds relations based on material similarities – and the logical-discursive or the analytical – meaning and sense – describes Forrest-Thomson's conflict of attention in her poems. In an article on 'Concrete Poetry', R. P. Draper has discussed the distinctions between these binaries as one between the literary and the visual.[171] The poet who treats letters as 'simply materials for composition', he writes, will create graphics not poems.[172] On the other hand, the poet who,

---

[169] Max Bense, 'Concrete Poetry', in Mary Ellen Solt (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 73.

[170] The terms are used in Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatiari and Haroldo de Campos 'Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry' which originally appeared as 'Plano-Pilôto Para Poesia Concreta' in their journal, *Noigandres* 4 (1958) and is reprinted in Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, pp. 71-72. The authors refer to Pound's ideogram as a 'method of composition based on direct – *analogical*, not *logical-discursive* – juxtaposition of elements.'

[171] R. P. Draper, 'Concrete Poetry', *New Literary History*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter, 1971), p. 334.

[172] Draper, 'Concrete Poetry', p. 333.

insists that his purpose is to communicate through words, and to appeal to the literary imagination […] must occupy himself, not only with constructional principles, but also with the relationship between the pattern which he creates and the semantic content of the words, or even letters, used.[173]

Leaving aside the gender bias of the passage, Draper recognises that poets whose practices incline towards the literary manage to fuse 'constructional principles' with the attempt to stimulate the 'literary imagination'. Graphics cannot achieve this as they cede the linear entirely for the visual. Draper evokes a literary spirit with which a poet connects by retaining syntactical relations and the conventions of lineation as well as evoking traditions of reading. As Davie writes from an expressly literary angle: '[t]o abandon syntax in poetry is not to start or indulge a literary fashion; it is to throw away a tradition central to human thought and conduct, as to human speech.'[174] Forrest-Thomson experimented with the newly developed conventions of concrete poetry in order to counter what she viewed as the lazy fashions of Movement poetry, but she was always conflicted as to how much to cede to the concrete. Indeed, the problems with both, as Davie argues, is that they are fashions, and not associated with traditional poetic devices.[175] Whilst her concrete poems stray further towards the analogical end of the spectrum than any of her other poetry to date, she never relinquished the techniques of the logico-discursive, nor sacrificed the literary spirit for the purely visual.

---

[173] Draper, 'Concrete Poetry', p. 333-4.

[174] Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 84.

[175] See Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 11 quoted in fn 139, p. 48 above.

Visual Patterns

Forrest-Thomson experimented with some radical forms. In her poem, 'Landscape with Yellow Birds', for example, she developed an engagement with artistic patterns, but also the productive and intellectual conflicts between formal modes. Out of such conflicts emerge what would become a recognisably 'discursive' tone. 'Landscape with Yellow Birds' responds to Klee's picture of the same name (1923) by creating poetic patterns, first analogous, and then independent of the form of the painting. Unlike her previous poems on Klee's work, Forrest-Thomson produces what could be called a word-search concrete poem and retains only the minimal syntactic and sense-making relations. Klee's picture depicts a night-time landscape of muted red, yellow and green plants in the midst of which stand four white crescent shapes and a single circle. Arranged around this forestal scene are six yellow birds, perching, peering, foraging: one hides behind, and another stands upside down on, white-grey murky clouds at the top of the picture; yet another pokes its head above a fantastical, cactus-like bush; another scampers behind a hillock leaving only its tail on show. Klee was a master of creating rhythm in his paintings in which the eye is drawn towards different patterns of colour distributed across the canvas. The colour patterns are designed, as Klee wrote, to 'achieve vital harmony' between independent parts and this harmony is experienced by a sequential attention to different compounds as the viewer gazes on the picture.[176]

Forrest-Thomson attempts a typographic analogy for Klee's visual processes and manipulates a reader's attention as she seeks to find words and experience the shape of the text. Here is a reproduction of the original typescript:

---

[176] Quoted in Lynton, *Klee*, p. 22.

LANDSCAPE WITH YELLOW BIRDS

```
            v                              s
           is                            bk
        k feel                        bird fly
     yellow                           s    u
           e l                        kopey e
           e l                        eye
        sk op
           we

                          ?                    by
                                               i
                                            s r
                                           weed
     birds                                 s a
     leafly                                hsr
     a    i                             shaped
     d    c                             by dy
     e   ye                             e oe
     s   es                             s wl
           l                                 l
           l                              no
        no                                 w
        ww
```
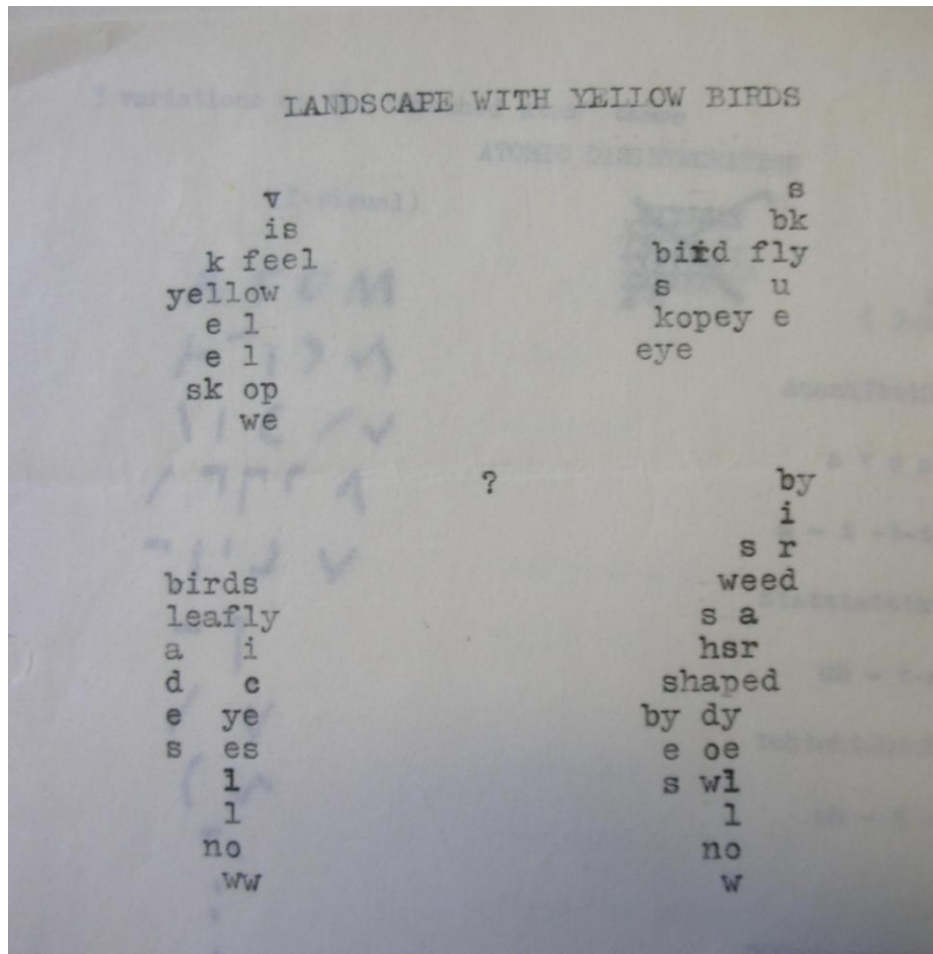
Figure 2: *Original typescript of 'Landscape With Yellow Birds' from the* Tlaloc *archive, UCL.*[177]

Viewing the poem iconically, we can read the four individual sections as resembling Klee's birds. Certainly the bottom right shape appears to depict a bird with 'by' and 'w' as wing-tips. However, rather than concentrating on producing an analogous poetic pattern for a pattern found in art, Forrest-Thomson thematically adopts the style of Klee's painting as well as describing a number of its features. The poem features a number of words complementary to Klee's colours and object: 'yellow', 'blue', 'bird', 'leaf', 'sky'. Curiously, the first of the letter columns in the poem contain the word 'kleek' placed vertically. This could be an imitative rendering of the yellow bird's squawk but it is also a witty 'signature' of the artist.

Forrest-Thomson's retention of the conventional or analytical mode is evident in her use of what could be called instructional words describing the action of looking at

---

[177] I have chosen to use the original typescript as the modern typography of the CP has not captured the quality, nor the exact justified lines, of the original.

Klee's picture: 'view', 'eyes', 'shaped'. The reader has to search for words, just as the viewer would have to study the picture to find the birds (a couple of whom are hiding), and this process is comically imitated by Forrest-Thomson in the phrase in the bottom left shape:

e   ye
s   es

The reader fills in the gap and reads 'eye s[e]es', just as the eye 'sees' and spots the words within their grids. Some word creations are more difficult than others and are forced on the reader by the momentum of internal relations of the poem itself. In the top right shape, for example, we might read 's / kopeye' as 'scope eye' which may refer to the eye's propensity to 'scope' the painting. Similarly, the 'no / ww' and 'no / w' of the bottom two shapes become emphatic 'nows', drawing attention to the conflict being created in the poem between an instantaneous view of the poem and a temporal reading. The conflict also forms part of Forrest-Thomson's self-reflective and discursive commentary at the heart of the poem – an awareness she would never relinquish – and which is revealed most emphatically by the question mark at its centre. The mark holds the poem together so that, visually, it resembles a mobile, with each of the shapes rotating around the centre; it is a central feature of the poem's structural integrity, drawing the outside shapes into an aesthetic whole. However, the question mark also injects the poem with equivocation, operating as a commentary on this type of poetic pattern and its effectiveness. To put it another way: the question mark is both a physical centre but also a 'sign' of ambiguity, uncertainty and, possibly, an acknowledgement by Forrest-Thomson of the failure of her project to *make* a concrete poem. The mark is, therefore, part of two, opposed poetic modes: the first is the concrete and simultaneous, the second is discursive or analytical. The poem is an illustration of the warring impulse and irreconcilability of both modes, but is also the experimental ground for Forrest-Thomson's developing understanding of marshalled poetic effect.

One of the poem's strengths comes from its typewriter font. *Tlaloc* was almost entirely mimeoed rather than lithographed and the magazine offers some spectacular experiments with the typewriter. The magazine features a number of examples of what Edwin Morgan termed 'typestracts' in relation to the concrete poet and monk,

Dom Sylvester Houédard. In *Concrete Poetry*, Solt quotes Houéduard's witty statement capturing something of the resigned acceptance of being on the margins of poetic practice: '[m]y own typestracts (so named by edwin morgan) are all produced on a portable olivetti lettera 22 (olivetti himself / themselves show sofar a total non interest in this fact'.[178] A typestract is, then, in the words of Stephen Bann, 'a graphic design built up from the signs available on the typewriter.' [179] Forrest-Thomson herself delighted in the possibilities and witty slips enabled by the typewriter, sometimes with hilarious consequences, as illustrated by her delightful 'Forward' to *Equator* 6 (1967) displayed in Figure 1 at the head of this chapter. In this 'Forward', she wittily plays with puns, homonyms and visual and verbal rhymes enabled by type, producing a Joycean verbo-visual mesh. Hence her wry observation about the magazine's possible financial trouble: '[t]he lucubration's finas tical position being , ot say the lest, paycarious'. Forrest-Thomson's '2 Staircase poems' exhibit two different types of typographic experimentation, the first of which is Forrest-Thomson's only poem to almost entirely relinquish syntactic sense. Once again, I offer a reproduction of the original typescript or typestract:

---

[178] Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, p. 46.

[179] Stephan Bann (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology* (London: London Magazine, 1967), p. 24.

```
                    2 STAIRCASE POEMS          FORREST


                            1
                            1
                      h e   1
        i x e s t r i a n g  1
                            le  s
                            li  p  s  t  e s p i r a
                            1
                            1
                            1
                            1
                            1


        sil

        ver

        esc

        ala

        tor

        sta

        ple

        s
        cal

        es

        ilv
        ers
        tap
        les
        cal
        ato
        r
```

Figure 2*: Original typescript of '2 Staircase Poems' from the* **Tlaloc** *archive, UCL.*

The shapes of both poems are an aid to semantics and enact that which they describe. The first unites the words 'helix', 'triangles', 'slips' and 'spiral' with some extra stitches in the form of 'es' (which could be part of 'helixes') and 'te' (after 'lips'). Within these words are others – 'lips', 'angles' – as well as the almost heard or seen, 'hell', 'string' and the words 'lie' and 'lisp'.[180] The 'helix' poem poses questions of where to locate the organisational centre of the material or, in other words, the level at which interpretation is controlled. If the ordinary assumptions of syntax are suspended along with their implied conventions of reading, then a reader must try to find another form of 'syntax' from relations established in the poem. The poem uses

---

[180] Cp. CP, p. 55.

what Draper describes as an 'axial principle' whereby, '[t]he axis itself becomes the norm from which variant departures take place, and it is out of this particular form of tension that meaning develops.'[181] In other words, axial arrangement of the central letter 'l' in 'helix' becomes a reading convention and norm from which form and sense can emanate. Whilst a reader may attempt to make linear patterns and sense-making sentences out of the poem, in 'helix' Forrest-Thomson *almost* totally relinquishes the strictures and expectations of the literary in pursuit of the purely visual. But a residual sense of wry, authorial control attaches itself to the flirtatious 'l i p s' and the ghost of 'test' in the letter sequence 't e s p'. Forrest-Thomson is affecting the limits of this mode in order to test out the possible parameters of the control of poetic form.

Forrest-Thomson's second, 'escalator' poem is iconic in that the words depict the operation of an escalator, with the steps and gaps representing the metal plates condensing and compacting towards the end of its customary circulation. The sense of the poem, if it can be described thus, is generated semi-syntactically and through a simple simile via juxtaposition – it describes a 'silver escalator' as like a 'scale': 'silver escalator staple scale silver staple scal (escal)ator'. Such poems reveal the historic roots of concrete poetry, as Solt points out, in both French experimental poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrams* and Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, as well as Pound's imagism and ideogrammic techniques.[182] Words and phrases are paired down to simple units generating relations by juxtaposition. Forrest-Thomson experiments with what Victor Shklovsky described as 'staircase construction' which incorporates such techniques as 'repetition', 'rhyme, tautology, tautological parallelism, psychological parallelism'.[183] The poem may also have been inspired by a (then) newly established concrete convention which Marjorie Perloff describes as the staircase structure, exemplified by a poem by Haroldo de Campos and where the 'visual placement' of single noun lines 'constellates' a banal phrase, making the

---

[181] Draper, 'Concrete Poetry', p. 338. Draper gives an example of his own poem, 'topspin', to demonstrate the technique.
[182] Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, p. 13.
[183] Victor Shklovsky, 'The connection of devises of plot-construction with general devises of style' (1919), quoted in L. M. O'Toole and Ann Shukman (eds.), *Russian Poetics in Translation, Vol. 4 Formalist Theory* (Oxford: Holdan Books, 1977), p. 23.

visual shape and spaces of the poem central parts of meaning making.[184] Whilst the staircase may have been a staple feature of much cubist and Dadaist art, Forrest-Thomson's poem lacks the revolutionary intent of the latter or the explosive, confrontation of the former as represented by Duchamp's revolutionary 'Nude Descending the Staircase, No. 2' (1912). Indeed, the poem is what Young would call a type of neo-Dada 'craftsmanship', barely disguising his indifference to pacified Dada spinoffs.[185]

Forrest-Thomson wryly takes the idea of visual placement producing meaning and the variety of parallelisms described by Shklovsky to their extreme in an incorporated commentary on the poem's actual physical placement on a specific page. Her commentary on composition, for example, is illustrated by the words 'sta // ple // s' and 's/tap/les' whose locations imply the position of the staples on a mimeographed book. Whilst Forrest-Thomson tests the concrete mode, then, there is always a slight distancing and extra-material frame in these poems – whether this is an internal, analytical commentary, a wry test of formal control, or a basic retention of syntactic relations. In other words, Forrest-Thomson cannot abjure the analytical from her practice for long, nor give over to the possibly revolutionary anti-sense of formal experiment. A containing frame can only be achieved by establishing some sort of consistently determined parameters of artifice and poetic form. As with her earliest poetry, Forrest-Thomson was already discovering in practice the necessity of poetic frames and matrices, as well as a syntactical and analytical use of language to establish useful poetic effects and meaning. Concrete poetic patterns may have their place, but only as a complementary part of much more complex and traditional poetic practice.

---

[184] Marjorie Perloff, '"Concrete Prose": Haroldo de Camposs Galáxias and After', Electronic Poetry Centre, retrieved 14 February, 2001, <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/perloff_decampos.html>, p. 2. Perloff uses Haroldo de Camposs's poem 'fala' as her example.

[185] Young, *Dada and After*, p. 216.

Contra Concrete: Re-establishing Literary Form

By the time Forrest-Thomson appeared at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in April 1975 (a few weeks before her death) she had been expressing her disaffection with concrete poetry for a few years. In the discussion she organised with the French poet, Michel Couturier entitled, 'Unrealism and Death in Contemporary Poetry', for example, she responded to Couturier's request that she clarify her sense of poetry as fiction. "Obviously – and apologies to anybody in the audience who are pro-these things", she begins, "I'm against the kind of poetry which pretends that language isn't language. I'm thinking specifically of Concrete poetry and other modes which treat words as physical objects."[186] To pretend that language isn't language is to dismiss its analytical and logical meaning, to cede entirely to words' materiality and to deny poetry its defining features of artifice. Forrest-Thomson develops this perspective in *Poetic Artifice*: '[c]oncrete poetry has carried discontinuity with ordinary language to its limits by seeking a point where language ceases to be language and becomes simply material, visual or aural, for making patterns.'[187] Having established the discontinuity with 'ordinary language', Forrest-Thomson argues, the concrete poets create a 'spurious' connection with the world of objects, a world language normally mediates.[188] Instead of using the resources of poetic technique – Artifice – to, as she puts it, 'create a new world through non-semantic levels', the concrete poets reduce language to a level which has, in her view, neither the strength of convention nor form to offer traditions of sense-making and transform poetic practice, as it were, from within.[189] Forrest-Thomson argues that by rejecting poetic conventions completely the concrete poets are unable to, what she calls, 'clean' language. 'The cleansing process', she writes, 'must come from Artifice, from within […] for the external world is filtered through the levels of technique'.[190]

---

[186] Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Michel Couturier, 'Unrealism and Death in Contemporary Poetry'. A forum at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, 18 April 1975, in the British Library National Sound Archive, ref. T6023. The transcription is my own.

[187] PA, p. 44.

[188] *ibid.*, p. 45

[189] *ibid.*

[190] *ibid.*, p. 47.

Forrest-Thomson's argument for the necessary cleansing process of Artifice is derived, most obviously, from Mallarmé. But she may also be alluding to Davie when he writes of the 'prosaic strength' he discerns in poems by Dryden and, latterly, Eliot's 'Little Gidding', which is, as he writes, a form of 'concentrated and discriminating' use of language 'which purifies the language as it uses it.'[191] Davie's term 'prosaic strength' isn't particularly clear, but it is associated with the type of poetry which refines language by a process of reductive reasoning in order to re-enliven it. Evidence for Forrest-Thomson following Davie's suggestion in her talk at the Cambridge conference is found in *Poetic Artifice* in which she discusses Eliot's 'Little Gidding' in relation to his comments on Dante, just as Davie does in *Purity of Diction*.[192] Both Davie and Forrest-Thomson inform their conception of purifying language with Eliot's own comments on Dante: 'the language of Dante is the perfection of the common language.'[193] Whilst Davie vaguely ascribes a certain perfection to Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Forrest-Thomson locates Eliot's power in his technical skill and his conscious use of traditional poetic devices in order to, as she puts it, 'remake his poems out of the dead language of his contemporary society and […] to mediate the new imaginative vision to his readers, assuming a double part in order to tread between innovation and intelligibility.'[194] Both Davie and Forrest-Thomson looked to canonical poets' use of traditional devices – to their 'recovery of the lost levels of Artifice', as Forrest-Thomson puts it – to define poetry's particular power.[195]

Forrest-Thomson had to go through her own process of purifying language or distilling it to its base essentials in order to reanimate her conviction as to the necessity of traditional poetic devices. Willard Bohn has written of the paradox of Dadaist destructive/constructive tendencies as a process by which, '[h]aving reduced

---

[191] Davie, *Purity of Diction*, pp. 57-8. There are two thick, horizontal pencil marks next to another pertinent section in which Davie writes of a comparable purification process in the Cambridge University Library copy of Davie, *Purity of Diction* (1952) p. 16: 'the poet who uses diction must be very sure of the audience which he addresses. He dare not be merely the spokesman for their sentiments and habits, for he must purify the one and correct the other.'

[192] PA, pp. 108-11; Davie, *Purity of Diction*, pp. 58-60. Cp. Graham Hough, 'Dante and Eliot', *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December, 1974), pp. 293-305 for a comparable contemporary perspective.

[193] T. S. Eliot, 'Dante', in Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose*, p. 217.

[194] PA, p. 110.

[195] *ibid.*

artistic expression to its bare essentials – sound and typography in poetry […] [Dadaist poets] began to experiment with new, uncorrupted forms.'[196] Whilst Forrest-Thomson would continue to imbue her poetry with a spirit of the destruction of complacently inherited conventions, the forms to which she returned were recognisably traditional. Earlier evidence of Forrest-Thomson's reservations about concrete poetry and her concomitant re-affirmation of the necessity of Artifice – although she didn't call it such at this stage – can be viewed in a number of what could be called post-concrete or neo-concrete poems. These poems still use concrete techniques, but they also exploit syntactic and poetic conventions in order to rejuvenate them. For example, 'Habitat', Forrest-Thomson's first poem to be published in *Tlaloc*, uses a technique Solt describes as a 'concrete permutational method' where variants of the same word mutate throughout the poem.[197] 'Habitat' also reasserts conventional poetic form and syntax as the proper 'habitat' for experiment:

Habitat

a bus

shelters

broken window

pains

---

[196] Willard Bohn (ed.), *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p. xvii.

[197] Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, p. 50. Solt refers to the type of concrete poem (and one of the most banal kinds) found on the games pages of tabloid newspapers where words are placed at the top of two columns and must be gradually transformed into each other by the staged swapping of single letters. In a poem by Emmett Williams, for example, after five 'permutations', 'SENSE' has become 'SOUND' - (SENSE – SONSE – SOUSE – SOUNE – SOUND) - and vice versa. (Printed in Emmett Williams (ed.) *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 311). Cp. Forrest-Thomson's poems 'fine' and 'Variations from Sappho' (CP, p. 51). Forrest-Thomson's calligraphic handwriting of 'fine' renders a number of words containing the root-word, 'fine'; it begins: '*fine / finite / finesse / infine, finitess'*. 'Variations from Sappho' was the only 'concrete' poem to appear in Forrest-Thomson's collection, *twelve academic questions* (Cambridge: privately published, 1970) p. 1. Interestingly, it was also the only poem *not* to be included in her collection, *Language-Games* (1971); clearly, she had moved on.

telephones

shadow-box

(trying to connect us)

stone flags

waver

trip feet

in heat

the street

gutters out

in building sights

- These are

our outside

of enough.[198]

Forrest-Thomson caricatures and parodies a repertoire of emphatically poetic techniques in order to draw attention to their activity. The double spaces and uniform structure, for example, force a ruminative delay over each word and line; the reader is induced to slow down in order to admire the puns and rhymes. Echoing structuralist theory, Forrest-Thomson disrupts what she describes a reader's 'convention expectations' of meaning making by bringing into conflict the appearance of words with an internal logic of meaning production.[199] The disjunctive effect is cumulative, so the phrase, 'broken window' exerts pressure on the lines, 'A bus // shelters', transforming the remembered word 'shelters' into 'shatters'.

---

[198] CP, p. 50. There is handwritten copy of the poem in VTP, p. 34.

[199] PA, p. 4 and *passim*.

Similarly, the pun on 'pains' refers backwards to the 'broken', but forwards to the possible 'painful' disconnect of two people. By separating the visual experience of the words from their sense, Forrest-Thomson draws attention to the way in which meaning is produced. As the poem develops, the cross-relations of words increases in complexity. The lines 'stone flags // waver // trip feet // in heat /// the street // gutters out // in building sights' stimulates a reader's urge to make syntactic sense out of these patterns; so 'stone flags' becomes 'flag stones' which 'trip feet' as they 'waver' (or melt/expand). '[S]tone flags' could also mean that the stone is 'failing' – 'flags' meaning becoming exhausted. The phrase 'gutters out' similarly transforms the 'heat' into an image of 'light' to which the 'sights' contribute. By caricaturing poetic techniques, Forrest-Thomson reasserts their manipulative power.

The concrete poet Eric Gomringer has described such caricaturing as the 'concentration and simplification' of poetic technique. [200] But such a distillation could also be described as the identification of a 'diction'. In *Purity of Diction*, Davie claims that the process of exposing poetic diction can only be achieved through imitation and caricature of style. Davie describes a kind of detachable diction when he writes that: 'there is no Miltonic diction in Milton; there is only Milton's style. For Miltonic diction we go to [James] Thomson' whose *The Seasons* were modelled on Milton's style.[201] In poems such as 'Habitat', Forrest-Thomson produces a gestural repertoire of poetic techniques which elicit a form of diction, formal practice and techniques she will later describe more emphatically as poetic Artifice. For example, the double line breaks over-emphasise the stanza breaks, so the traditions of stanza divisions and the expectations of changes or shifts in direction, meaning or formal considerations are heightened. Similarly, the small lines concentrate and simplify a traditional foreshortened poetic line and amplify the fact of poetry being written. The final section of the poem could be interpreted with reference to a line from another of Forrest-Thomson's poems, 'Computer 97/100 DV': 'For our inside is out to show'.[202] Just as the binary systems of a computer are 'out to show' in the homonymic translations of a sentence in 'Computer 97/100 DV', the over emphasised relations and patterns of poetic form in 'Habitat' need to be

---

[200] Eric Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation', quoted in Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, p. 67.

[201] Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 11. Someone, possibly Forrest-Thomson, has blocked off this quotation with pencil brackets in Davie, *Purity of Diction* (1952), p. 12.

[202] CP, p. 49.

enough to establish relations which enforce a certain meaning. What the elaborate performance of poetic form implies is that the only outside necessary is that surface shown by poetic pattern which has the minimal contact with a reader's conventional expectations. 'Habitat' is not pure concrete poetry, but it does ask a reader how far the outside is necessary in order to comprehend the surface and depth relations. The poem simplifies a poetic repertoire in order to argue for its significance.

In 'Habitat', Forrest-Thomson develops the local, material aspects of language whilst also exploiting both conventional forms and syntax and the expressive capacity of traditional form and artifice. One of the ways to reveal the expressive and powerful operations of artifice is to take apparently non-poetic language and render it in form. Poems such as 'Don't Bite the Hand that Throws Dust in Your Eyes' and 'Grapes for Grasshoppers' are constructed out of clichés, sayings and proverbs amusingly misused in poetic form.[203] Forrest-Thomson uses poetic artifice as a level of organisation with which to illustrate the capacity for conventional devises to transform the banal meaning of cliché. The poem 'Don't Bite the Hand that Throws Dust in Your Eyes', for example, combines a witty compounding of old saws with the punchy rhythm of internal and end-rhymes. The opening stanzas read:

> Tit for tat
> sits the cat-black
> kettle at
> a watched pot
> never boils.
>
> Bird in hand's worth
> dog and bitch
> in manger which
> will never save our stitch
> in time.[204]

The poem seems written for performance, as the short phrases 'kettle at', assonant and consonant patterns – 'watched pot', 'tit for tat' – as well as end-rhymes – 'bitch', 'which', 'stitch' – ensure a fast tempo. Forrest-Thomson exploits a reader's recognition of these phrases and impresses upon them her ingenuity and wit at their

---

[203] CP, pp. 47 & 48 respectively. Both poems are in VTP, pp. 11 & 12 respectively.
[204] *ibid.*, p. 47.

transformation. She refuses the easy transparency of such sayings, by, paradoxically, drawing attention to their constructedness. In the words of Pound's essay 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', Forrest-Thomson 'break[s] up cliché' and 'disintegrate[s] these magnetised groups that stand between the reader of poetry and the drive of it'.[205] The axiomatic rhythms of our every-day language are revealed and transformed by a poetic form. After the first line, the reader doesn't expect meaning in a conventional sense, but concentrates on the artistry in drawing all these together and in producing rhymes. So, when the final lines appeal: 'let you and me / make hay / while in sunless places / the human race is / cutting off its nose to spite its faces', a reader may miss the hovering lyrical sentiment behind the clamouring cliché. The poem registers Forrest-Thomson's distrust of such clichés and a purely material method as well as her desire to find a middle ground between them with the help of carefully organised poetic form.

As well as asserting the pre-eminence of poetic artifice, Forrest-Thomson's concrete and semi-concrete poems also comprise weapons in her first satirical attack of a type of domesticated poetry she refers to as formless and academic in her opening statement to *Veronicavan*. Her use of traditional form was as much to resist concrete poetry's abstractions as it was to oppose what she called in *Poetic Artifice* the 'spurious' connection with the world that she discerned in the Movement and confessional poets.[206] Forrest-Thomson's proud declaration in her *Veronicavan* statement of her specialisation in Greek and Latin are important here in establishing the background to her developing aesthetic elitism. She studied Greek and Latin at school and her early poems such as 'Oida' and 'Epicurus', some handwritten poems in VTP – 'The Greeks had a Word For It' and a sonnet about the fifth century Athenian statesman Cleon – as well as a number of her later poems, involve classical themes and incorporate quotations from Greek and Latin poets.[207] But such allusions hardly made her a specialist in classical studies. As Tuma and Dorward have written, the Movement poets were associated with types of lower-middle class 'shared

[205] Ezra Pound, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris: XI', *The New Age* 10, no. 16 (February 15 1912), p. 370. Quoted in Forrest-Thomson's unpublished manuscript, HTP, p. 1.

[206] PA, p. 45.

[207] VTP, pp. 7, 25-6 (CP, pp. 4506) & 5 respectively. See, also, 'Variations from Sappho' (CP, pp. 68-9), 'The Dying Gladiator' (CP, p. 113) and 'Since the Siege and Assault was Ceased in Troy', 'The Temptation' and 'The Exchange of Winnings' (CP, pp. 146-7).

cultural ideal[s] of civility and urbanity', were 'suspicious of or hostile to the 'difficulty' of Modernist predecessors' and wrote poems which 'used a plain idiom, [were] conversational in tone and sometimes pointedly low and unliterary'.[208] Forrest-Thomson's dismissal of these poets' formlessness is undoubtedly informed by her sense of the superiority of her understanding and use of poetic form which had been reaffirmed by her experiments with concrete poetry. For Forrest-Thomson, a poem should do much more than use prose syntax and loosely composed stanzas and should never subordinate form to the communication of an 'academic' thesis and message.

Whilst her other concrete poetry was a broad retort to such poetry, the poem 'Grapes for Grasshoppers' is a more directed and satirical attack. The poem fuses proverbs with axioms from Aesop's moral *Fables* in such lines as: 'There's no making omelettes without breaking glass', 'suck each day like an egg – Teach that to your gran' and 'All you'll get is a snake in the neck'.[209] The witty collapsing of old saws into one another demonstrates the contructedness of language and poetry as well as the artistry of poetic form. Exemplary lines from the poem are:

> I'm looking for gift horses in the grass,
> hack press or piebald ideas with pass-
> words to let me in to this pretty kettle of vipers.
>
> All you'll get is a snake in the neck.
> Take thorns from flesh and cricks from the tongue;
> pick your hand out of the plough while you're young.[210]

The irregular rhythm and end-stopped rhyme scheme seem to be designed to parody a defunct poetic idiom, as if the lack of scansion – 'looking for gift horses in the' – is redeemed by the full end-rhymes. The compression of pronouns and possessive pronouns – 'I'm', 'you'll' and 'you're' – seems deliberately un-poetic and lazy, particularly the rolling 'All you'll'. The 'hack press' and 'piebald ideas' offering 'pass-/words' to a 'kettle of vipers' conjure up images of falsity and duplicity as a direct attack on the Movement poets. 'Hack press' perhaps evokes Grub street and

---

[208] Tuma and Dorward, 'Modernism and Anti-Modernism', pp. 511, 512 & 513 respectively.
[209] CP, p. 48.
[210] *ibid*.

attendant grimy or hackneyed ideas.[211] The rose with a thorn and the 'cricks from the tongue' each imply that something is not what it seems. One can talk 'tongue in cheek' and 'in tongues'; this language, Forrest-Thomson implies, cannot be trusted. The poem's final couplet further parodies triumphant endings where sound and sense come together in a perfect end-rhyme: 'Polish a long spoon to taste your own *truth*; / for too many cooks are spoiling the *broth*.'[212] Forrest-Thomson's clunking eye-rhyme deflates any easy moral. Her targets in this poem are the staid literary modes as manifested in what she considered to be the tired conventions of Movement poetry, its clichés and its contemporary practitioners. Her almost clownish reconstruction of this cliché is designed to highlight the failings of her contemporaries and, specifically, the types of diction and artifice they lack.

Forrest-Thomson's attack on literary cliché is, therefore, directed in large part at the Movement poets' techniques, but it is also an emphatic rejection of the type of assumptions which a lazy use of poetic artifice implies. The first line of 'Grapes for Grasshoppers' is a re-write of Frances Cornford's poem 'To a Fat Lady Seen from the Train': 'Why do you walk through the world in gloves / Oh fat white lady whom nobody loves?'[213] Cornford's poem has been the object of a number of parodies as it lends itself to easy ridicule by presenting a certain poetic decorum as well as comprising patronising observations.[214] Indeed, Larkin, the object of Forrest-Thomson's most eloquent ire in *Poetic Artifice*, was an admirer of one of Cornford's poems.[215] Forrest-Thomson discusses Larkin's poem, 'Mr Bleaney' in *Poetic*

---

[211] Cp. Davie, *Purity of Diction*, p. 12 in which he questions Samuel Johnson's over-general use of the term, 'common use': 'it is certainly important to ask whether he appeals equally to the spoken usage of Gin Lane, of Grub Street, of the Cumbrian Fells and of Mrs Thrale's drawing room.'

[212] CP, p. 48 – my emphasis.

[213] I am grateful to Alison Mark for pointing out this allusion in VFT, p. 51. The lines from Cornford's poem (also quoted by Mark) are: 'O why do you walk through the fields in gloves, / Missing you so much and so much / O fat white lady whom nobody loves, / Why do you walk through the field in gloves'. Frances Cornford, *Collected Poems* (London: The Cresset Press, 1954), p. 20.

[214] See, for example, G. K. Chesterton's hilarious, 'The Fat White Woman Speaks', in John Gross (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Parodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 249: 'Why do you rush through the field in trains, / Guessing so much and so much. / Why do you flash through the flowery meads, / Fat-head poet that nobody reads.'

[215] See Maeve Brennan, *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 47. Brennan describes Cornford's poem 'All Souls' Night' as his favourite, and remarks that he included it in his selection for the *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 202.

Artifice, criticising it for its 'embarrassing' lucidity and deriding his presentation of a clear and unsympathetic theme.[216] According to Forrest-Thomson, the chief failings of 'Mr Bleaney' are that it draws on a reader's assumptions and relies on what she calls 'known orders' and social conventions rather than encouraging their 'questioning distance.'[217] These known orders are located in the spurious real which it is the poem's job to resist with intricate poetic form. Larkin's poem, Forrest-Thomson argues, 'fulfils the reader's expectations, leading him out towards the world and inviting him to think of it once more. But it does no more than that. It leaves poetry stranded on the beach of the already-known world'.[218] She implies that Larkin doesn't use techniques and form, as she does in her neo-concrete poems, to aid his 'meditations on the vanity of human wishes'.[219] A poet's reliance on their inert, fixed position and on a complacently accepted experience testifies, according to Forrest-Thomson, to a poem's lack of strong artifice which should 'lead us back into the poem so as to question the empirical orders on which it is founded.'[220] Forrest-Thomson's challenge to the already known and to poetry which relies on this elusive knowledge is linked to a common gesture in late modernist poetry during this period which sought to challenge the latent epistemological assumptions guiding mainstream poetry. The implication is that poetry which draws attention to the manner in which it is constructed is aware of the partiality of representation and will resist an interpretive reliance on the 'already-known world'. Forrest-Thomson's comments reveal her conviction that a certain poetic decorum, characterised by a primary fidelity and serious treatment of poetic form, will be poetry's defence against both formlessness and the complacent assumptions she associates with such practice. Larkin *et al*, according to Forrest-Thomson, lack such formal decorum – an appreciation of the better aspects of poetry – and she seeks to prove her superiority by the demonstration of the dominance of formal artistry over cliché.

---

[216] PA, p. 57. Larkin's bleak poem 'Mr Bleaney' describes the shabby, small and littered bed-sitting room of an old man who may have recently died. The persona of the poem who has taken over the room imagines the old man lying on his bed reflecting on whether 'how we live measures our own nature'. The poem concludes with a speculation as to whether the old man would have been 'pretty sure / He warranted no better' than his shabby bed-sit. Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: The Marvell Press, 1999), p. 102.

[217] PA, p. 58.

[218] *ibid.*, p. 59.

[219] *ibid.*, p. 58.

[220] *ibid.*

Identi-kit and the uncollected early poems continue Forrest-Thomson's developing interest in the activity of broad traditional forms of artifice, which provided models of practice, alongside her development of internal, concrete patterns. Forrest-Thomson's poetry reveals her allegiance to Davie's notion of a particular purity in the use of traditional poetic techniques. Her continued interest in poetic diction is evidenced in the excerpts I have provided from *Poetic Artifice*, but it is also apparent in a handwritten lecture she wrote around 1973 called 'Implications of Poetic Technique'. In the lecture, which is a condensed version of the arguments in *Poetic Artifice*, Forrest-Thomson assesses the implication of the uses of a variety of traditional poetic devices for contemporary poetry. Interestingly, Forrest-Thomson writes of '[J. H.] Prynne's opinion that Stevens wrote 'pseudo diction', a 'rhetorical imitation of poetry', which shuts out the reader by anticipating and dealing in the verse form with all possible responses to the form of words.'[221] Forrest-Thomson's use of Prynne here suggests something about her sense of how there can be more truthful poetic dictions which don't imitate but produce originality. Like Davie before her, Forrest-Thomson had a strong sense of poetic decorum and sought to critique those poets who neglected the value of Artifice. Such a position allies her both with a sixties and seventies avant-garde movement which rejected the domesticated and gentile poems of the mainstream. But her opinions and practice also illustrate her staunch traditionalism where she turned her own anti-Movement sentiments into a wholesale reassessment of traditional poetic devices.

What the poems of this period show is that Forrest-Thomson wanted to find a way of using traditional poetic devices which would tentatively accommodate the lessons she learned from her experiments with art and concrete poetry. Both modes separately fail to renovate poetic language, but their combination leads to a heightened poetic practice. Such a practice – amounting to the reconciliation of fixed and formal poetic conventions such as stanzas, equal line-lengths, metre and rhyme with local, material patterns – would later distil into her ideal of Artifice. In her early work, Forrest-Thomson's pursuit of concrete patterns became a safety mechanism

---

[221] Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'Implications of Poetic Diction', manuscript [u.p.]. I have not been able to identify a written source for Prynne's comments. It was most probably something he said in conversation.

against complacent absorption of traditional devices as well as lack of critical acuity in relying on the 'already known'. Even if she later rejected concrete poetry in theory, the welter of concrete patterns enlivened her project by bringing into relief poetry's defence and authority which lay in its Artifice.

TWELVE ACADEMIC QUESTIONS

Veronica Forrest

suffers from iambics which are only to.

be cured by contracting verbal hiccups,

the remedy of an addition to cream-cakes

 being precluded by the necessity of

maintaining the only poetic role at present

available to us – keeping our figures.

She hopes that the ineptitude $\frac{7}{8}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ of the

typing of these stencils will sufficiently

distraxct the attention of the many friends

and acquaintances whose words have been

stolen for inclusion in these poems. The

city of Cambridge has no legal mode of

revenge. Since the duties of the Seniot

Proctor do not include protecting it from

plagiarism. As for the illustrious dead,

whose names are here taken in vain, they

are well out of it.KEEP TYPE CLEAN.

300 copies published by the author

February, 1970

112, Huntingdon Road,

Cambridge (England ?)
DO NOT TYPE ABOVE THIS LINE

Figure 4: *Frontispiece from Veronica Forrest's collection* twelve academic questions *(Cambridge: privately printed, 1970)*

Chapter 3
'Keeping our Figures': Context, Form and Irony in the Cambridge Poems

> Most of these poems are obviously about the experience of being engaged in a certain activity, in a certain place, at a certain time: the activity, research in English Literature, the place, Cambridge, the time, 1968-69. The attempt has been to deal with these elements as part of a 'historical present' in which past language-forms, whether borrowed from poetry, letters, speech, or the dictionary, are made into a framework for a present act of articulation.[222]

> If modernist poetics are a mesh of interrelated statements, evaluations, and judgements, then late modernist writing is the product of the pressure of historical circumstances on that mesh, which threatens to fray or break at its weakest points.[223]

> A context in which we occur
> – "the slightly hysterical style of University talk" –
> teaches us our meaning[224]

> "Wittgenstein would say"
> > (L.W. 1889-1951)
>
> but he is dead;
> therefore and nevertheless
> can be said in literary monograph to say
> anything.[225]

Forrest-Thomson went up to Cambridge in 1968 to read for her PhD which she received in 1971. Her PhD thesis entitled, 'Poetry as Knowledge: The Use of Science by Twentieth-Century Poets', examined the poems and critical writing of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, William Empson and I. A. Richards as distinct forms of knowledge and in terms of their assimilation of scientific thinking and tropes. Forrest-Thomson's poems of this period record her intense intellectual development and contain quotations, notes, commentary and reflections on her present research. These poems, published in the poetry magazine, *Solstice* no. 9 (1969) and gathered in the two collections *twelve academic questions* (1970) and *Language-Games* (1971), represent decisive and distinctive evolutions in Forrest-

---

[222] 'Note' to *Language-Games*, reprinted in CP, p. 165. Underneath the excerpt Anthony Barnett comments: 'Printed following the poems in *Language-Games* (Leeds, New Poets Award 2, School of English Press, University of Leeds, 1971)'.
[223] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 19.
[224] 'The Blue Book', CP, p. 63.
[225] 'Idols of the (Super)Market', CP, p. 81.

Thomson's poetic style.[226] The poems – which I've decided to call her 'Cambridge poems' – are comprised of what she calls in the witty frontispiece to *twelve academic questions* displayed in Figure 4 overleaf, the 'stolen' words of friends and acquaintances as well as the "slightly hysterical style of University talk" from texts Forrest-Thomson encountered during her studies. Whilst Forrest-Thomson printed *twelve academic questions* herself, *Language-Games* was published by the University of Leeds School of English press as a prize for winning the second 'New Poets' award.[227] The latter volume features all but one poem from the former – 'Variations from Sappho', comprised of five playful fragmented versions of a Sappho poem – as well as an additional six poems, the first of which, 'Criteria for Continuing a Series', wittily and self-consciously remarks on the new poems' possible continuation from where *twelve academic questions* had left off. The poems constitute frames in which Forrest-Thomson tested the response of poetic form to the academic questions arising during this period of her rapid and intense intellectual growth.

Many of the Cambridge poems resemble collages, as Forrest-Thomson assembled disparate quotations into tentative unity. The collage-like form is a symptom of what she calls in the frontispiece her contraction of 'verbal hiccups' which is manifested in the poems in parataxis and erratic shifts of perspectives, tones and registers. But such collage quotations wrestle with the background of her greater pathology: she 'suffers from iambics' and continues to use what Ezra Pound calls, and to which Forrest-Thomson alludes, the 'stale creampuffs' of traditional form.[228] The abundance of imported quotation in the Cambridge poems are manipulated into stanzas, are arranged to produce full and eye-rhymes and are, most notably, spliced

---

[226] It is not clear why Forrest-Thomson chose not include the four poems published in *Solstice* in her two collections as they complement many of those included. The poems are: 'Fêtes Nationales & Zazie in the London Underground' (a reference to Raymond Queneau's novel *Zazie dans le métro* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) and Louis Malle's 1960 film adaptation of the same name), 'The Blue Book', 'Letters of Ezra Pound' and 'Epitaph for an Un-Named Priestess' (CP, pp. 61-67).

[227] See James Sutherland-Smith's useful account of this award in his letter 'Language Games', *PN Review*, Vol. 35, Iss. 6 (Jul/Aug 2009), p. 5. Sutherland-Smith notes that Edwin Morgan and Peter Porter were the judges of the award and that they were unhappy with the original short-list which had left Forrest-Thomson's collection out. As Sutherland-Smith remarks: '[t]he result was that Veronica Forrest-Thomson's work was rescued from the dustbin to which the conventional taste of the 1970s had consigned it.'

[228] Ezra Pound Forward to *A Lume Spento [1908] and Other Early Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 7: 'A collection of stale creampuffs. "Chocolate creams, who hath forgotten you?"'

into similarly sized lines. Indeed, freed from the necessity of verbal originality, Forrest-Thomson was able to concentrate on testing the elaborate structures of artifice.

The Cambridge poems are, I would like to suggest, battle grounds of form played out against a rapidly changing intellectual environment. Miller argues of late modernist literature, quoted in the second epigraph above, that the meshes of modernist form, to which, in relation to Forrest-Thomson, we may add the artifices of Victorian form, are threatened by the historical and intellectual environments or contexts in which they appear. As Forrest-Thomson writes in her frontispiece, 'cream-cakes [are] precluded by the necessity of maintaining the only poetic role at present available to us – *keeping our figures*'. Forrest-Thomson's pun brilliantly describes the figures which I argue she retains in order to reassert formal control. On the one hand, many of the Cambridge poems maintain the outward appearance, shape and figure of traditional forms. However, this period in Forrest-Thomson's poetic project is also marked by her fanatical scrutiny of poetic figures and tropes. As I shall show, Forrest-Thomson develops a set of reified and interrelated figures which stand in for her idealised Artifice – 'context', 'metaphor' and 'irony'. These figures are presided over by a figural presence in the form of Forrest-Thomson's self-conscious commentary and wit. The maintenance of such formal and figural strategies is designed to resist the implications of the twin threats to poetic form engendered by, firstly, Forrest-Thomson's use of collage and, secondly, the theoretical problems with which she engaged at this time.

The intellectual context from which the Cambridge poems emerged was concisely outlined by Forrest-Thomson herself in her note to *Language-Games*. In this note she also writes of 'the poems' underlying theme: the impossibility of expressing some non-linguistic reality, or even experiencing such a reality.'[229] As I have shown, Forrest-Thomson explored such preoccupations about the relationship of poetry and art to the world in her early poetry. But, at this stage, these themes were increasingly informed by her engagement with Ludwig Wittgenstein's insights into the

---

[229] CP, p. 165.

relationship between the world and language. As Forrest-Thomson continues in her 'Note', Wittgenstein's ideas are used,

> to explore the relationship between "pure" intellectual activity, in fields such as philosophy and theoretical science, and their appearance in an "applied" context, as one element among others in one's attempt to make sense of concrete experience. It seems to me that this interaction is best seen as a juxtaposition of varying ways of using language […][230]

On the surface of it, Forrest-Thomson's use of Wittgenstein's ideas complement the developing sophistication of her notion of how the poem can operate as part of an intellectual project to 'make sense of concrete experience'. But, in introducing Wittgenstein's ideas into her developing aesthetic theory, I argue, Forrest-Thomson exposes it to the threatening instabilities of the contingent. Wittgenstein's concept of 'language-games' – the idea that all uses of language are given meaning by the whole context in which such use occurs – emphasised the contingent nature of language over the generalisation of linguistic categories into theory. Forrest-Thomson takes the idea of 'language-games' and combines it with the notion of the poem as, as she puts it, '"applied" context', which then functions as an idealised poetic model. The notion of the poem as context operates in Forrest-Thomson's theory and practice as what Miller has called in relation to modernist literature, a strong symbolic form or figure which is a reaction to the potential threat of the implications of Wittgenstein's stress on the contingent.[231] So, as I shall show, Forrest-Thomson, in Wittgenstein's words, 'sublime[s] the logic' of the philosopher's anti-idealist theory.[232]

---

[230] CP, pp. 165-6

[231] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 20. Miller argues that late modernist literature is characterised by what he calls its 'growing scepticism about modernist sensibility and craft as a means of managing the turbulent forces of the day […] Late modernist writing weakens the relatively strong symbolic forms still evident in high modernist texts.' My argument is that Forrest-Thomson perceives such weakening of symbolic forms and attempts to revivify them through a heightened stress on figures and, ultimately, poetic craft.

[232] See Wittgenstein, PI no. 38: 'strange to say, the word "this" has been called the only *genuine* name; so that anything else we call a name was one only in an inexact, approximate sense […] This queer conception springs from a tendency to sublime the logic of our language – as one might put it.' Wittgenstein questions the logic of a model of language which requires 'this' and 'that' to be definitely referring entities. This can only happen if the logic of a particular case is 'sublimed' and made generally applicable. This is to (queerly) miss the particularity of the words' use in different language-games.

Forrest-Thomson's use of Wittgenstein's philosophy to shore up a poetic theory was in keeping with current literary-critical practice. Her PhD thesis was part of a new fashion of selectively using Wittgenstein to extend New Critical agendas, particularly models of poetry as quintessentially metaphorical. A glance at the bibliography of her thesis reveals the New critical and analytical philosophy texts with which she was engaging at this time.[233] In her thesis, Forrest-Thomson uses Wittgenstein's philosophy as part of an analysis of how scientific tropes and metaphors are assimilated into poetic practice. Metaphor, she argues, is 'a model for poetic language in general, by highlighting its nature as a juxtaposition of language contexts'.[234] Both Marcus B. Hester's *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (1967) and John Casey's *The Language of Criticism* (1966) provided comparable accounts of poetic language and metaphor which tentatively extended Wittgenstein's model to contribute to discussions of the specificity of a poem's linguistic activity.[235] The Cambridge poems feature a hyper-analysis of the construction of metaphor which reinforces figural presence and which is at certain points, and as I shall show in relation to Hester's book, incompatible with Wittgenstein's integrated philosophy.

---

[233] Her bibliography of 'Works of philosophical background', as she put it, included: J. L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); Max Black *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962); F. H. Bradley *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (London: Swan Sonneschein & Co.: 1893); Ernst Cassirer *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) and Suzanne K. Langer *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner, 1943). The subject of her thesis was science, and these texts reveal her analytical preoccupations with models, forms and the formal dimensions of aesthetics. For a fuller discussion of the influence of analytical linguistics on Forrest-Thomson's poetry see Gareth Farmer, 'Selection Restrictions, Individuals, Acorns and Oaks: Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Analytical Linguistics', *Kenyon Review Online,* retrieved 19 September, 2011 < http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Farmer.php>.

[234] PK, p. 112.

[235] Hester, *Meaning of Poetic Metaphor: An Analysis in the Light of Wittgenstein's Claim that Meaning is Use* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967) and John Casey *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966). The Cambridge University Library copies of both of these books contain numerous annotations in Forrest-Thomson's unmistakable handwriting; she was, quite literally, working out her theory with and against such writers' work. For other, near contemporary (to Forrest-Thomson), discussions about Wittgenstein's contribution to literary theory, see M H Abrams, 'A Note on Wittgenstein and Literary Criticism', *ELH*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1974), pp. 541-554 and M H Abrams, 'How to Do Things with Texts'*, Partisan Review*, 46 (1979), pp. 566-88. Wittgenstein's ideas still influence literary theory and practice, not least the work of Stanley Cavell, Marjorie Perloff and numerous creative writers. See, for example, Cavell's highly influential *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988). See, also, Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

Forrest-Thomson's self-conscious use of figures throughout the Cambridge poems and her struggle to create unity from disparate fragments are very often expressed through what was becoming a familiar figure of her poetry: irony. Irony is a frame within which warring fragments can be united, hence its status as a default mode of much modernist poetry and criticism. Particularly in modernist poetry, irony is indicative of the poet's projected, stable position in relation to her material – the figure of the poet trying to make all cohere. But irony can also be, as theorists of the postmodern suggest, a figure of instability within tentatively unified form. Forrest-Thomson both perceives and resists the fact that irony, as Bill Readings puts it of Lyotard's understanding of irony as 'figure', 'disrupts […] the possibility of literal speech or intention' and that its effect is located in the 'radical undecidability that it introduces to the question of intention.'[236] Whilst the Cambridge poems were written against a backdrop of theoretical indeterminacy and comprised of collaged materials, Forrest-Thomson maintains a self-conscious and controlled emphasis on order, wholeness and control and on what Lyotard calls elsewhere 'the solace of good forms'.[237] Forrest-Thomson's incredulity was directed towards the rapid crumbling of modernist metanarratives, with good forms and figures operating as her wry weapons in a reassertion of control.[238] Further, whilst many of the Cambridge poems are dominated by the figure of Wittgenstein, as the sequence of *Language-Games* develops, the poems begin to reassert literary value, first as self-conscious commentary on figure and then as a renewed emphasis on traditional poetic form. The later Cambridge poems thus assert what Forrest-Thomson hints at all along: that a concentration on and mastery of traditional poetic devices is poetry's saviour. As she puts it in the poem 'Idols of the (Super)Market' quoted in the third epigraph, Wittgenstein 'is dead' towards the end of the collection, his philosophy having been manipulated by literary theory (monographs) and practice to say 'any-thing' the poet wants.

---

[236] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 36.

[237] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (trans.) Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 81: 'The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms.'

[238] Lyotard has famously described the postmodern condition as being defined, in part, by an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.

The Poem's Context / The Context of the Poem

The poem becomes its own context.[239]

Forrest-Thomson's notion of the distanced framework of the poem was lent theoretical clarity by her engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy. As she states in her note to *Language-Games* quoted above, she started to conceived of the poem as 'a juxtaposition of varying ways of using language'.[240] The condensed argument of her 'Note' is that of her PhD thesis, one of the main aspects of which is the assessment of how fields of 'intellectual activity', such as 'philosophy and theoretical science', are particular language-games whose unique contexts of use can be transferred or absorbed into poetry. On the surface of it, as critics such as Alison Mark have argued, Forrest-Thomson seems to be advocating a poetry of dynamic and epistemological investigation where, as Forrest-Thomson herself states, 'questions of knowledge become questions of technique'.[241] However, her use of the term 'juxtaposition' in her note already signals a treatment of language as material to be arranged in the developing space of poetic form. Forrest-Thomson's poetic context was actually worked into what could be called an atomic model of the poem, using an image in Wittgenstein's own work. In *The Brown Book*, he describes the acquisition of language as the learning of 'systems of communication' of increasing communicative complexity. He observes that, '[t]he picture we have of the language of the grown-up is that of a nebulous mass of language, his mother tongue, surrounded by discrete and more or less clear-cut language games, the technical languages.'[242] Wittgenstein's atomic picture of a nucleus language-game, 'surrounded by discrete' other technical languages, informs Forrest-Thomson's description of the poem and its satellite discourses in such passages in her 'Note'. But whilst Wittgenstein would conceive of the language-game as a fluid and changeable phenomenon, Forrest-Thomson stressed the discreteness of poetic form and assessed how a language-game could be used as a framework for practice.

---

[239] Hester, *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor*, p. 98.
[240] CP, pp. 165-166.
[241] Mark refers to Forrest-Thomson's poetry as 'investigative', VFT, p. 2. CP, p. 165.
[242] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Brown), p. 81.

Forrest-Thomson's use of Wittgenstein's philosophy is, therefore, contrary to his thinking. Wittgenstein introduced the term 'language-game' (*Sprachspiel*) to revise his early 'picture theory' of meaning.[243] In *The Brown Book*, he argues that particular utterances are irreducible and asserts that language does not express meaning – it does not act as a conveyer of something separate to it – it *has* meaning.[244] To assert that a meaning is separable is to propose a *picture* of what is being said and which language stands in for. Such logic, Wittgenstein argues here and elsewhere, is part of a 'picture theory' of meaning whereby, as Anthony Kenny explains, 'language consists of propositions which picture the world' and where, '[p]ropositions are the perceptible expressions of thoughts, and thoughts are logical pictures of facts'.[245] Under such conditions, as Wittgenstein succinctly puts it: '[a] *picture* [holds] us captive. And we [can] not get outside it, for it [lies] in our language and language seem[s] to repeat it to us inexorably.'[246] The limited nature of propositional thinking cannot account for the multiplicity of understanding demonstrated by the varieties of language use. Wittgenstein's later philosophy revises a one-to-one correspondence between picture, fact and thoughts and critiques a way out of the captivity of the picture unnaturally circumscribing language-use in terms of a pre-defined model. Forrest-Thomson uses the term language-games to describe broad discursive fields marked by their separate and unique lexis such as science and mathematics, with poetry as itself a unique 'language-game'.[247] She borrows from Wittgenstein a proto-typical model of a language-game and applies this idea to the identity of a poem: the poem is a language-game whose use struggles to contain and distance the uses of language elsewhere. In practice, her experiment with 'use' in poetic form leads to a

---

[243] Whilst Wittgenstein's translators – G. E. Anscombe, G. H. von Wright and R. Rhees – do not always hyphenate the term, I choose to do so throughout this chapter.

[244] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Brown) no. 22, p.179. Cp. PI no. 329: 'When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought.'

[245] Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Pelican, 1975), p. 4. Kenny refers to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) [trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1961)] sections 3.5, 4 and 4.001. Wittgenstein proposed his picture theory of meaning in the *Tractutus* where, still in the shadow of the analytical practices of logical form of his mentor, Bertrand Russell, he figured a system of strictly delimited propositions, 'the totality' of which 'was language', no. 4.0001.

[246] Wittgenstein, PI, no.115.

[247] Part of my understanding of Wittgenstein's term is indebted to Hans-Johann Glock's useful *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 193-198.

series of tensions between contexts of intellectual activity and to the reification of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

The ways in which Forrest-Thomson's poems conflict with the theories on which they are based is complicated but, put simply: Forrest-Thomson imports excerpts from Wittgenstein's work to comprise a collage of quotations. These quotations are often accompanied by moments of self-commentary, whilst poetic form itself – line endings, enjambment and rhyme, the emphatically material use of words – also act as commentary on the imported ideas as well as assertions of poetic control. Further, by selecting particular quotations, Forrest-Thomson invites a reader to reflect on the poem as illustrating Wittgenstein's ideas. As such, Wittgenstein's philosophy is pictured as part of the *a priori* make-up and interpretive frame of the poem itself. Forrest-Thomson's selection of a quotation from *Zettel* in her poem 'The Blue Book' is important here as an illustration of this complicated process. The poem reads in full:

The Blue Book

Thus party with witte
party with nygraumancy
King's college is on fire;
I have an image of dining in hall with Dr. Dee.
We shall talk at a later occasion
of the way in which words and things may be connected.
Tonight we should like to say,
What the picture tells us is itself,
This language-game is played
instead of, We have this experience.

It patterns facts, names, architecture, dates
(As in the lawcourts in Paris
a motor accident is represented
by means of dolls.)
A context in which we occur
– "the slightly hysterical style of University talk" –
teaches us our meaning;
a fourth dimension for the blue
of that bound typescript.

> The gap between red and green
> is then grammatical;
> white objects through coloured spectacles.
> But though our syntax stains the window-glass,
> those stones across the court
> assert their tenses
> party per fess argent and vert,
> party per chevron or and gueules.[248]

The bulk of 'The Blue Book' consists of quotations or allusions to Wittgenstein's work, but these are decontextualised and disrupted both formally and by Forrest-Thomson's own devious introduction of her own material. Hence the last seven lines of the first stanza take snippets from Wittgenstein's *The Blue and Brown Books* but frequently interrupt his quotations. For example, Wittgenstein's 'We shall talk at a later occasion of Prof. Hardy saying Goldbach's theorem is a proposition […]', becomes Forrest-Thomson's summary of Wittgenstein's philosophical discussion: 'We shall talk at a later occasion / of the way in which words and things may be connected.'[249] Similarly, Wittgenstein's, 'I have an image of dining in hall with T.', is transformed into Forrest-Thomson's 'Dr. Dee.' (the Elizabethan mathematician and Dr. Davie, perhaps), whilst the last two lines of this stanza are abruptly interrupted by the sinful prepositional end and comma: 'of, We'.[250] Forrest-Thomson uses poetic form and internal commentary to make Wittgenstein say things.

Similarly, Wittgenstein's words are enclosed in an emphatically bibliographic and literary frame. The antiquated language at the beginning and end of the poem are from early modern sources. The first lines are an (almost) direct quotation from the poet, John Capgrave's *Life of St. Katherine*: 'Thus party with witte, party nygromancy / Sche pervertith oure lond in wondir wyse'.[251] The opening literary language establishes a theme of verbal alienation, which Forrest-Thomson enacts by distancing Wittgenstein's statements from his own work. Further, the closing lines feature the rarefied language of heraldry, describing the *division of the field* on

---

[248] CP, p. 63.

[249] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Blue), pp. 10-11.

[250] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Brown), p. 183.

[251] John Capgrave *The Life of St Katherine* (1463), (ed.) Karen A. Winstead, *Teams Middle English Texts* [online], Bk. 4 ll.859-860, retrieved 21 September, 2011 <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/katintro.htm>.

badges and shields.[252] Forrest-Thomson uses the aesthetic distance of language (its *olde* status) as a way of framing and formally commentating on a poem comprised of quotation. She signals a formal practice which both distances the poem from surrounding contexts and invites a reflection on how she makes these circumscribed scraps interact within poetic form.

Despite the disparate provenance of the lines, the whole poem is tentatively held together by a series of statements and prepositions: a casual tone sets up a familiar relation between a stable poetic persona and a generalised audience ('our', 'we') whilst the lines are arranged, forced even, into similar lengths. Wittgenstein's propositions are strained into paratactic poetic form. Faced with a dilemma of disjunction, a reader may search for statements which reflect on composition itself in order to make the poem cohere. Evidence for such self-consciousness is given in a few phrases. 'What the picture tells us is itself', for example, becomes a report about the poem: it *is* itself, and an attempt to find meaning beyond this may be purposeless. Similarly, the lines 'A context in which we occur / - "the slightly hysterical style of University talk" - / teaches us our meaning' act as an invitation to read the poem as an instance of such talk, of disconnected pseudo-intellectual statements combined 'hysterically' in one place.

Form and self-commentary, therefore, act as commentaries on Wittgenstein's ideas. The poem also invites a reader's reflection on how meaning is produced in one of two ways: inwardly, to the 'context' of the poem (as 'itself') and via the process of composition as a means by which to understand the poem; outwardly, to the sources of these quotations. As Charles Altieri has argued in an essay which uses Wittgenstein to resist post-structuralist ideas, Wittgenstein reverses the traditional emphasis of philosophy as 'speech from the outside' and as an abstract 'second-order discourse' and concentrates on language processes from within.[253] 'If we see from

---

[252] 'Party per' means 'divided by' and this is followed by the type of division edge, segments and colours of the shield. 'Fess argent and vert' means that the field is divided horizontally with bands of silver and green; 'chevron or and gueules' means that a field is divided by a triangular chevron with one part gold ('or'), the other red ('gueules'). E. Cobham Brewer, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, (ed.) Adrian Room (London: Cassel, 1996 [15th edn.]), pp. 511-13.

[253] Charles Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (Dec., 1976), pp. 1407-8.

without,' Altieri argues, apropos of Wittgenstein, 'there is nothing matching words and things but some form of faith and abstract justification. If we see from within, we see our words as tokens in a complex series of customary actions and exchanges.'[254] But, in Forrest-Thomson's redeployment of Wittgenstein, she has it both ways: internal poetic forms marshal particular poetic effects, whilst a thematic interpretation is already controlled by her selection of quotations about language-games and contexts and her incorporated commentary on such. In response to the interminable implications of uncontrolled linguistic activity, Forrest-Thomson produces her own analytical discourse by controlled poetic form and concomitant self-commentary.

A further illustration of the ways in which 'The Blue Book' battles with and pictures Wittgenstein's philosophical propositions comes in the form of Forrest-Thomson's incorporation of passages in which he discusses the picture theory of meaning. Forrest-Thomson's poem is, in part, defined, or receives definition, by the framework of Wittgenstein's philosophy; the poem is pictured as the site of its illustration. But Forrest-Thomson also battles to create a particular poetic context free from such a framework. The line, 'King's College is on fire' refers to a section in *The Blue Book* in which Wittgenstein examines the persistence of the picture theory of meaning in our understanding of how we use such sentences. Using the sentence in one circumstance, for example, might rely on what he calls 'ostensive definition' (a definition which points to an object for clarification). Here, defining 'King's College is on fire' would require pointing to pictures of King's College and a fire and combining the two.[255] However, as Wittgenstein points out – and to which Forrest-Thomson alludes in her lines 'We shall talk on a later occasion / of the ways in which words and things may be connected' –, in assuming that words always have connection with their objects (ostensive definition) we actually envisage what he calls 'the idea of a shadow being the object of our thought' where '[w]e imagine the shadow to be a picture the intention of which *cannot be questioned*, that is, a picture we don't interpret in order to understand it'. [256] In using language ostensively, we

---

[254] Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language', p. 1407.
[255] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Blue), p. 37.
[256] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Blue), p. 59 – my emphasis.

imagine fixed pictures which shadow our thought and which imply fixed language. Clearly Wittgenstein perceives such pictures to be illusory.

Forrest-Thomson ostensibly illustrates Wittgenstein's contentions in the line echoing a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: 'What the picture tells us is itself'.[257] The 'It' of 'It patterns, facts, names, architecture, dates' may have previously been the model and picture held in the mind, a 'general theory of propositions' by which the meaning is controlled, as Wittgenstein writes in his *Notebook 1914-16*, 'As when in the law-court in Paris a motor-car accident is represented by means of dolls'.[258] The context which teaches the meaning and to which this 'It' refers is the experience of using language in this particular, local way and in reading these particular lines. However, these sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* provide the ostensive definition of the poem itself – we understand Forrest-Thomson's allusions and how the poem may be illustrating them. At the same time, the lines, like the stones, 'assert their tenses' in the present of the poem. To use Forrest-Thomson's terms: there is a conflict between the broader philosophical syntax of Wittgenstein's philosophy, the way in which it is pictured as part of the interpretation of the poem, and the assertive syntax of the poem's lines. The resort to the heraldic language of the end of the poem assertively forecloses the context of the poem, at once producing a distanced poetic frame as well as containing pictures of Wittgenstein's own philosophical propositions. Forrest-Thomson does not illustrate Wittgenstein's ideas, but reifies them as part of a framed poetic act.

Whilst many of Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems may be read as providing illustrations of Wittgenstein's conception of language as an integrated, context dependent phenomenon, her commitment to poetic craft, to the creation of a poetic frames and her anticipation of his ideas as the interpretive matrix of the poem, resist the implications of such theory. Indeed, Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems are in a battle with Wittgenstein's ideas, with her default conception of poetic superiority

---

[257] PI, no. 523: 'What the picture tells me is itself'; note Forrest-Thomson's change of pronoun (from 'me' to 'us') which takes up Wittgenstein's sense that all language is 'public' (or that no language is private) and hence shared between 'us' and 'we'. The punctuation in the epigraph – 'What the picture tells us is itself, / This language-game…' is faithful to the CP version.

[258] Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, p. 7. Quoted in Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, p. 53.

as her most potent weapon. Where 'The Blue Book' illustrates Forrest-Thomson's containment, picturing and reification of Wittgenstein's ideas of context and language games, her poem 'Ducks & Rabbits' offers both an illustration and witty critique of one the philosopher's ideas. Forrest-Thomson's primary questioning of Wittgenstein's propositions is located in her foregrounding of a central and emphatically poetic trope of the metaphor. 'Ducks & Rabbits' wittily engages with the nature of perception and with Wittgenstein's idea of 'seeing as' – most notably by its use of footnotes – whilst creating a figural presence of internal commentary and a distancing metaphorical space. In short, whilst Wittgenstein argues that there is no qualitative or material difference in a shift of perception, Forrest-Thomson uses her poem to demonstrate the shadowy and metaphysical implications of both poetic form and metaphor. Here is the poem in full:

Ducks & Rabbits

in the stream;[1]
look, the duck-rabbits swim between.
The Mill Race
at Granta Place
tosses them from form to form
dissolving bodies in the spume.

Given A and see[2]
find be[3]
(look at you, don't look at me)[4]
Given B, see A and C.
that's what metaphor[5]
is for.

Date and place
in the expression of a face[6]
provide the frame
for an instinct to rename,[7]
to try to hold apart
Gestalt and Art.

[1] Of consciousness
[2] The expression of a change of aspect is the expression of a new perception.

[3] And at the same time of the perception's being unchanged.
[4] Do not ask yourself "How does it work with me?" Ask "What do I know about someone else?"
[5] Here it is useful to introduce the idea of a picture-object.
[6] A child can talk to picture-men or picture-animals. It can treat them as it treats dolls.
[7] Hence the flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought.

The poem undertakes a wry battle with the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The first stanza, as well as Forrest-Thomson's striking use of footnotes, ostensibly illustrate Wittgenstein's idea of 'seeing an aspect'. The rest of the poem emphatically resists the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy which flattens out perception as merely shifts in attention to surface features. On the contrary, Forrest-Thomson creates conceptual, linguistic and poetic frames comprised of qualitative and compounded fusions of imagery. I shall firstly briefly illustrate how the poem may be read and then outline how I think it should be read.

Critics such as Mark have interpreted 'Ducks & Rabbits' as an illustration of Wittgenstein's notion of 'seeing as'.[259] Forrest-Thomson is undoubtedly illustrating tenets of Wittgenstein's theory but the poem seems to, at the same time, resist the implications of this theory; it is a struggle played out across the poem. All of the poem's footnotes apart from the first are from section xi in *Philosophical Investigations* II in which Wittgenstein discusses 'seeing as'. In order to explore the peculiar perceptual experience that occurs when confronted with something ambiguous, Wittgenstein employs Joseph Jastrow's famous 'duck-rabbit' figure which can be seen as a rabbit's head or a duck's. Wittgenstein stresses that there is a difference between seeing a rabbit or a duck in this image and seeing the image *as* a rabbit or duck. The first is a straightforward report of visual experience; the second involves a more complicated process of what he calls a 'seeing an aspect': nothing has changed in the original picture but the experience of it.[260] In *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, Marie McGinn usefully explains that, in section xi, Wittgenstein was attempting to alter the received idea of how the concept of visual

[259] See Mark, VFT, pp. 32-8.
[260] See PI II, pp. 194-6.

experience functions.[261] Wittgenstein concludes that a difference between 'seeing' and 'seeing as' is simply one of the activation of discrete, what McGinn neatly calls, 'patterns of employment': 'what the concept of visual experience describes is not clarified by introspection, or by trying to imagine something, but by uncovering the patterns of employment that clarify its use in the language-game.'[262] The shift of understanding is away from an internal, private perception and towards a shared way of using an object in particular language-games. Wittgenstein argues that a difference in perception is *not* a matter of referring to what he describes in *Philosophical Investigations* II as an internalised spatial pattern or a copy, 'almost something like a *materialization'*, but to the way in which an object is arranged in a particular language-game.[263] As McGinn elucidates, Wittgenstein's philosophical target in these passages is that which asserts that the difference in the concept of 'seeing as' is based on a perceiver's reference to an internal or introspective state and something extra.[264] Instead of deploying something extra, he argues that the shift in the concept of visual experience is due to a use of certain contexts for an object.

'Ducks & Rabbits' illustrates these surface shifts in perspective in obvious ways. For example, the word 'stream' is doubly operative; it refers to a physical stream but is also a metaphor of the operations of conscious thought ('that's what metaphor / is for'). 'Stream' pivots between two senses, neither of which takes precedence, but in order for the second meaning to function a reader's eye must jump to the footnote. As soon as it does, the first meaning changes from a straightforward 'seeing' (or reading) a stream to a 'seeing as' (seeing the word *as* a stream): the reader can now *choose* to read the stream 'as' water or 'as' mental process. So the opening of the poem is apparently a neat extension of illustration of Wittgenstein's arguments. However, the lines 'tosses them from form to form / dissolving bodies in the spume' hints at qualitative linguistic fusions occuring when language is used poetically. Words dissolve into one another both phonetically and visually and, importantly, at the same time. Such complex puns and dissolves of language, which visually and

---

[261] Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 193-4.
[262] *ibid.*, p. 203.
[263] Wittgenstein, PI II, xi, p.199.
[264] McGinn, *Wittgenstein*, p. 195

phonetically create qualitative extra dimensions, elude the flattened out logic of ordinary language philosophy.

In the second and third stanzas, poetic forms and figures begin to further establish the poem's distance from Wittgenstein's philosophy. To take the third stanza first: despite the disparate quotations used, Forrest-Thomson asserts the formal integrity of the main body of the poem by both the form and meaning of the lines: 'Date and place / in the expression of a face / provide the frame / for an instinct to rename'. The end-rhymes enhance the satisfying rhythm where emphasis is marshalled by tactical metre. The line breaks create a tone of precision and provide exact emphasis to 'hold apart' the phrases and clauses. A photograph appears to be described where an 'expression' is stilled in a particular moment, 'Date and place'. The description is enhanced by the manner in which it is contained by the frame of a strict poetic form. The clamouring footnotes which always threaten to interrupt the integrity and momentum of integrated form – promising, that is, a shift of perception – are also, at the same time, establishing an intellectual context for the poem, providing ongoing, semi-integrated theoretical précis.

The second stanza of 'Ducks & Rabbits' redoubles poetry's riposte to Wittgenstein. It is comprised of lines lifted from a section of Hester's *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* entitled 'Extension of Wittgenstein's Analysis of "Seeing As" to Poetic Metaphor' in which he suggests that the operations of metaphor are contrary to Wittgenstein's thinking.[265] Hester views metaphor as producing a particular quality between different language-games which is qualitatively distinct from Wittgenstein's description of 'seeing as'. Forrest-Thomson, I'd like to suggest, follows this argument and realises it in practice. She may have written the poem with Hester's book in front of her as the Cambridge University Library copy contains her bold, blue fountain-pen mark next to the passage of interest. Note, for example, the similarity between the second stanza of the poem and Hester's description of the duck-rabbit:

> If A is like B, the duck like the duck-rabbit, and B is like C, the duck-rabbit like the rabbit, then A is like C, the duck like the rabbit. In Wittgenstein's

---

[265] Hester, *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor*, pp. 175-86.

example we are given B and the problem is to see A and C. In metaphor the problem is different though the aspect of seeing is similar. In metaphor we are given A and C and the problem is to see B. B in the duck-rabbit is the common *Gestalt* form between ducks and rabbits. In the metaphor B is the relevant senses in which A is like C.[266]

Hester draws a distinction between Wittgenstein's 'seeing as' and metaphor. As he writes of the bringing together of two figures: what is produced is either the substantial product of the clash between two different systems: contexts A and C combine and B emerges from their union, or it is the combination of the two factors: context A and C *become* context 'AC'. The first is something extra, something abstracted; the second is another context combining the two original elements. Wittgenstein's theory implies the latter whilst Hester argues that metaphor produces the former, extra dimension. What the 'metaphor / is for', as Forrest-Thomson puts it, is the same, in little, as what the poem is for: to re-frame objects of perception and the language of philosophy within a new poetic context which creates its own qualitative space through metaphor and which is contained through the use of the forms of stanzas, line endings and rhymes. Similarly, as with 'The Blue Book', the fact that Wittgenstein's ideas provide a frame for the interpretation of the poem and that this is controlled by Forrest-Thomson is further evidence for transformation of his philosophy into circumscribed theory.

Forrest-Thomson's concentration on the figure of metaphor as poetry's default defence against Wittgenstein's philosophy of ordinary language was perhaps her reaction to his indifference towards such figures and poetry in his writing. Wittgenstein has very little to say about poetry, and when he does refer to metaphor it is usually associated with symptoms of picturing, metaphysical and, to him, misleading thought. For example, in *The Blue and Brown Book*, Wittgenstein argues that when we believe that we are capable of doing something – multiplying in one's head is his example – we create a certain internal state which he associates with metaphor.[267] According to Wittgenstein, the language in which we discuss such a state is deceptively metaphorical. In an article on 'Wittgenstein and Metaphor', Jerry

---

[266] Hester, *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor*, p. 179. The book was based on Hester's Ph.D. thesis and lacks the benefit of a good editor, hence the erratic and often absent punctuation.
[267] Wittgenstein, B&BB (Brown), p. 117.

H. Gill suggests that the two stages of Wittgenstein's writing – the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* – are characterised by his different use of metaphorical language which accompanies his revised understanding of language. The *Tractatus*, Gill suggests, uses the metaphor of 'logical space' which is finite and 'bounded by limits'.[268] The *Tractatus* has a logical positive view of language as finite and limited. On the other hand, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Gill argues, 'language is spoken of in organic metaphors. Speech is seen as a dynamic phenomenon which is alive in the sense that it is always changing'.[269] The difference between Wittgenstein's use of metaphors signals his shift of perspective from the idea that language is an abstract system to a sense of its organic fluidity, integrated within the social world.

Such organic metaphors imply a Romantic idea of how metaphors themselves operate. As Terence Hawkes has outlined in his book, *Metaphor*, critics such as I. A. Richards in his influential *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, viewed all language as metaphorical.[270] So, as Hawkes writes apropos of Richards, '[m]etaphor is a function of *language*, not of picture making. It is not simply '…something to do with the presence of images, in the mind's eye' […,] it is the 'omni-present principle' of language.'[271] Such assertions, resembling Wittgenstein's own ideas, are contrary to Forrest-Thomson's use and understanding of metaphor. Forrest-Thomson is more the grammarian than the Romantic and her poetry demonstrates an interest in the logical form of figures. In fact, Forrest-Thomson seems more attracted to Wittgenstein's early understanding of language as an abstract system. For example, the lines in 'The Blue Book' – 'our syntax stains the window-glass, / those stones across the court / assert their tenses' – illustrate Wittgenstein's discussions in *Tractatus* involving a model of what Bertrand Russell describes in his introduction as a 'logically perfect language' comprised of 'atomic facts'.[272] 'A logically perfect language,' Russell writes, 'has rules of syntax which prevent nonsense, and has single symbols which

---

[268] Jerry H. Gill, 'Wittgenstein and Metaphor', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Dec., 1979), pp. 272 & 273 respectively.
[269] *ibid.,* p. 275.
[270] Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 57-63. I. A. Richards *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).
[271] Hawkes, *Metaphor*, p. 60.
[272] Bertrand Russell, 'Introduction' to Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, pp. x & xiii respectively.

always have a definite and unique meaning.'[273] In 'The Blue Book', syntax is given an equivalent function whereby an ideal vision of the interaction between objects in the world and objects in a sentence are stabilised around a model based on syntactic and grammatical relations. Even if she does so playfully, Forrest-Thomson's concentration on metaphor, figures, and her atomic understanding of the poem asserts the centrality of the poem's particular effects within a circumscribed space defined by the parameters of poetic form. Her ideas about poetry's expressive capacity are therefore contrary to Wittgenstein's later understanding of language.

Wittgenstein's linguistic critique does not fix or harden into theory, neither does it take account of the possible specificity of poetic language and techniques. Forrest-Thomson's theoretical and poetic engagement with Wittgenstein's ideas suggests that applying, enacting or using his philosophy to produce poetry, necessarily specialises this philosophy into theory. Another way of putting this is to say that Forrest-Thomson takes Wittgenstein's description of the language-game as a model and the activity and mastery of such language-games as something which a proficient poet possesses: they apply an *a priori* model or pattern of practice to the poem rather than, as Lyotard writes, 'working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*.'[274] As McGinn points out, Wittgenstein's description of the language-game involves 'acquiring a mastery of the practical ability to use language' over time; that is mastery of rules.[275] Reading Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems is a process of submitting to the mastery and rules of the pre-emptive poet fighting for control of her figures.

---

[273] Russell, 'Introduction', p. x.

[274] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 81.

[275] McGinn, *Wittgenstein*, p. 65.

'Keeping our Figures': Collage, Metaphor, Irony

Forrest-Thomson's poems incorporating Wittgenstein's propositions are accompanied by her emphatic assertions of poetic control – formal commentary, framed or anticipated matrices of interpretation and the default defences of poetic figures. Poems such as 'The Blue Book' and 'Ducks and Rabbits' contain quotations from disparate sources spliced into similarly sized lines and stanzas, whilst interrupting commentaries ensure a level of semantic coherence. If such poems have ostensibly regular form, other Cambridge poems are more visually experimental. *Language-Games*, for example, begins with the poem 'Michaelmas' which is comprised entirely of quotations from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Forrest-Thomson ingeniously questions and challenges the nature of the relation of metaphor and poetic language to ordinary, dictionary language. As Hawkes notes, apropos his commentary on Richards's theory, a fashionable notion during the sixties, taken from linguists such as Jan Mukařovský and popularised by books such as Winifred Nowottny's *The Language Poets Use* (1962), was that poetic metaphor was an extension of the linguistic possibilities in everyday language – 'language at full stretch' as Nowottny puts it – rather than possessing a special quality.[276] As 'Michaelmas' testifies, Forrest-Thomson was aware of theories of poetic figures and their relation to dictionary language and tested them in poetic form. In many of her Cambridge poems, Forrest-Thomson makes a special plea for the distinct, poetic use of language, enabled by the operations of poetic form. 'Michaelmas' begins:

Michaelmas

daisy:
> garden aster of a shrubbery habit

October:
> bearing masses of small purplish flowers

blackbird:

---

[276] Hawkes, *Metaphor*, pp. 70-1. Hawkes refers to Jan Mukařovský, 'Standard Language and Poetic Language', in Paul L. Garvin (ed.) *A Prague School Reader on Aesthetics, Literary Structure, and Style* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964), pp. 17-30 and Winifred Nowottny, *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone Press , 1962), p. 85.

<pre>
                    the ring ouzel
        crocus:
                     the autumn crocus
        moon:
                    the
                    harvest
                    moon[277]
</pre>

Dictionary definitions – '(*All quotations from the OED*)' as a footnote comments – are spliced and arranged to reveal the subtle interrelation and melding of words.[278] The colons after the entry words imply equations, whilst the lines, divorced from their original source, are forced into poetic association by emphatic juxtaposition. The final section – 'the / harvest / moon' – wryly implies that the simple sentence has a poetic significance, whilst the visual and phonetic double 'o' of 'moon' takes up and emphasises those in previous words. The visual poetic equations of 'Michaelmas' signal Forrest-Thomson's use of collage and the co-presence of her interest in literary figures. Forrest-Thomson's hyper-attention to the mechanics of figures throughout the Cambridge poems treats figures as a linguistic analyst might. Such a practice is, I suggest, a response to their potential and potent instabilities in relation to contemporary theory. Figures are used, to extend one of Miller's suggestive phrases, as metonyms of the lost 'symbolic forms' of modernism which the poet can use to reassert control.[279]

Describing the drift from modernist to post-modernist collage in her article, 'The Invention of Collage', Marjorie Perloff moves from descriptions of collage as always involving 'the transfer of materials from one context to another', to the more postmodern theory and practice of Derrida and John Cage where fragmented structures produce, 'a mode of detachment and readherence [*sic*], of graft and citation' which 'inevitably undermines the authority of the individual self, the "signature" of the poet or painter.' [280] The collage forms in the Cambridge poems are formally diverse, but most of them retain the poet's signature, reconstituted as a self-

---

[277] CP, pp. 73-4.
[278] *ibid.*, p. 74.
[279] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 20.
[280] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Invention of Collage', in *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 47 & 76 respectively.

consciousness about poetic figures and as explicit gestures of poetic mastery over disparate contexts. Witness these two examples; the first from 'Antiquities':

> The glamorous grammatical frames
> captions for a monograph on non-
> existent plates. Glue, paper,
> scissors, and the library together
> paste a mock-up of an individual
> history. The art of English Poesie?
> "Such synne is called yronye."[281]

And, these lines from the self-consciously titled poem, 'The Hyphen':

> Portraits busts and books
>   the "context in which we occur"
> that teaches us our meaning,
>   ignore the lacunae
> of a century
>   in their state-
> ment of our need to hyphenate.[282]

Both excerpts integrate quotations in different ways. 'Antiquities' retains roughly conventional sentence syntax, it is spliced into similarly sized lines with arbitrary breaks, has no metrical rhythm, and uses only the – slightly wry – half-rhyme between 'Poesie' and 'yronye'. The lines from 'The Hyphen' are more radically positioned, but this jagged form has no apparent internal motive apart from as a visual representation of a conflict of occurring contexts and of a method of parataxis. Both excerpts are explicitly about the creation of poetic and grammatical frames and the use of language as material to assert its operation as part of poetic form. The poems feature self-conscious hyphenation and cutting and pasting of linguistic fragments to create a tentative context 'that teaches us our meaning'. In such poems, Forrest-Thomson attempts to control the instability of the contingent by an overarching self-reflection on composition itself.

---

[281] CP, p. 86.
[282] *ibid.*, p. 88.

As 'Michaelmas', 'Antiquities' and 'The Hyphen' illustrate, many of the Cambridge poems are overtly about the mechanics of figural creation. In many of these poems, Forrest-Thomson examines the micro-creation of metaphor out of the fusion of local images as well as the macro-metaphorical nature of poetic form as a broad construction site for juxtaposition. Poetry's strength, Forrest-Thomson implies, is its capacity to create and control such figures. Her witty self-commentary on metaphorical construction frequently employs the analytical language by which metaphorical transference has been discussed from Aristotle to the present day. The results are often very funny, as in the poems 'Three Proper' and 'Two Other'. 'Three Proper' Forrest-Thomson writes:

> A cuts off
> B's arm, shaves
> it & sends
> it to C,
> C being the
> *logical* con
> stant, the
> situation we
> are to infer
> from terms
> in metaphoric
> relation.[283]
> …

>   The entailment
> relation between fact and fiction is perhaps
> called metaphor, (B is hirsute and hard-
> up.)[284]

Whilst in 'Two Other', Forrest-Thomson writes the matter-of-fact statement:

> A breaks
> down B's
> castle &
> C rebuilds
> it in Ari
> zona.[285]

---

[283] CP, p. 90.
[284] *ibid.*, pp. 90-1

Forrest-Thomson wittily foregrounds the architecture of the metaphorical equations as well as a poet's task to construct relations. Forrest-Thomson's ongoing interest in rhetoric and the operations of metaphor and the ways these are controlled by a poetic master are displayed in these poems. In 'Three Proper', Forrest-Thomson questions the connection between A and B, what lies between them as '*logical* con / stant', what is built out of them ('in Ari / zona') and the space 'between fact and fiction' that they create or occupy. Similarly, the opening and closing lines of both 'Three Proper' and 'Two Other' are quotations from a sequence of seventeenth-century letters between Edmund Spenser and Gabriel Harvey in which they discuss, among other things, versifying, the organisation and sequence of Spenser's and Sidney's verse, and the 'Earthquake in April last' to which the title page of 'Three Proper' refers.[286] 'Three Proper' also contains numerous references to Spenser's *The Fairie Queen* and of its containing 'Philosophy / and all that / in the world / was aye thought wittily.'[287] Forrest-Thomson combines serious interest in rhetoric and versification with a self-conscious wit, with the comic 'relief' running throughout the poem in the 'hirsute' theme. It is as if Forrest-Thomson wryly registers her own obsession with such things whilst also reinforcing their necessity. And wit itself is a symptom of control. As Miller notes in *Late Modernism*, wit and laugher are very often late modernist reactions to dramatise 'the fragility of modernist attempts to contain contingency and violence aesthetically, through literary form' but are also, at the same time, a form of 'minimum self-confirmation' in the face of such fragility.[288] Forrest-Thomson's poems – 'on the threshold of laughter', as Miller puts it – consciously draw attention to rhetorical and figurative tropes in recognition of their potential fragility (aware, for example, that Spenser's philosophical rhetoric is far

---

[285] CP, p. 93.

[286] The title and opening lines of Forrest-Thomson's poems are comprised of excerpts from the letters between the two men. The poems begin: 'Three Proper // and witte familiar letters / lately passed between two / Universitie men: touching / the Earthquake in April last / and our English reformed / Versifying' (CP, p. 90). 'Two Other // very commendable letters of the same / mens [sic] writing: both touching the fore / said Artificial Versifying and certain / other particulars.' (CP, p. 93). Forrest-Thomson quotes directly from Alexander G. Grosart (ed.), *The Works of Gabriel Harvey* Vol. 1 (New York: Ams Press, 1966), pp. 29 & 4 respectively.

[287] CP, p. 92. Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queene*, Bk. II, Canto ix, 53. in *The Faire Queene*, (ed.) Thomas P. Roache (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 325.

[288] Miller, *Late Modernism*, pp. 20 & 49 respectively.

removed from the serious real life of his present-day earthquake).[289] Nevertheless, her wit hides a serious appreciation of the continued necessity of figures to assert poetry as such.

Wit in Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems is a general tone which hides the troubling presence of another figural obsession: irony. Irony is present as both as figure and as a general mode throughout these poems and is a litmus test of her struggle to control poetic form in the context of intellectual developments during the late sixties and early seventies. Irony, like wit, is a codification of the attempt at critical control over context, simultaneously affirming consciousness as well as registering an anxiety. The history of the term irony is long and controversial, but it has distilled into broad themes. In her book on *Irony*, Claire Colebrook defines these themes clearly when she distinguishes between, firstly, the 'verbal and local irony' which operate as a figure in classical rhetoric and which persist to this day in certain treatises on poetics.[290] Forrest-Thomson's treatment of metaphor in her poems wittily engages with such rhetorical figures. Secondly, Colebrook describes an 'extended figure of irony which pervades an entire speech, text or personality'.[291] The example she gives of this latter is Socratic irony in which an ironic mode and strategy reveals something about the language of its subject. Whilst these two local and general forms of irony persist in diverse contemporary texts, there is a third type in recent theory which, as Colebrook remarks, has placed 'greater stress […] on irony that is undecidable and on modes of irony that challenge just how shared, common and stable our conventions and assumptions are.'[292] As Colebrook notes, many theorists have 'argued that our entire epoch, as postmodern, is ironic.'[293] This last form of irony encompasses the type which can stretch into demotic absurdity, but it also spans a whole spectrum from an aesthetic and distanced postmodernism to a politically committed approach which views irony as a means of re-establishing control over public and compromised language.[294] Forrest-Thomson's poetry

---

[289] Miller, *Late Modernism,* p. 20.

[290] Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 18.

[291] *ibid.*, p. 18.

[292] *ibid.*

[293] *ibid*.

[294] On the 'aesthetic crisis' of modernist irony and a postmodern aesthetic 'suspensiveness' which relinquishes the modernist necessity of overarching form, see Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins

features all three of the ironies Colebrook outlines, fluctuating between them; between, that is, a circumscribing, rhetorical irony, an ironic positioning about her subjects, and an irony which exposes itself to the effects of the contingent. Irony in the Cambridge poems signals an attempt at stability as well as a simultaneous recognition of, and resistance to, the tenuous essentialism of that stability.

Forrest-Thomson's fluctuating use of irony – as figure, mode and recognition of instability – reveals her poetic practice as constantly battling between modernist and postmodern modes. In what follows, I shall briefly outline Forrest-Thomson's treatment of irony as rhetorical figure, then turn to an examination of the potential instabilities of irony. I shall end by suggesting that Forrest-Thomson reasserts a modernist ironic positioning as part of her assertion of aesthetic control. I outlined earlier the influence of New Criticism on Forrest-Thomson's work where, in line with other contemporary critics, she combines a New Critical idea of context with that of Wittgenstein's. Of the former, in Cleanth Brooks's terms, irony is produced in the 'little drama' of the poem by the 'obvious warping or modification of a statement by the context.'[295] Irony occurs when a statement is deemed to mean the opposite of its literal meaning through the activity and force of the context. Establishing an opposite meaning requires that the putative context contains signs of stability to act as a forceful framework of intelligibility. In the terms of New Criticism, irony, like paradox, is a necessary feature of the organically-controlled poem; a high degree of sustained irony and contained poetic impulses characterises what I. A. Richards describes as poetry of the 'highest order'.[296] Subsequent criticism has, of course, questioned the grounds of this stability and Forrest-Thomson's work registers this shift whilst retaining remnants of New Critical idealism.

University Press, 1981). On the way in which irony has become a tool of empowerment or a curative against language's cooption, see the chapter, 'Echo, Irony and the Political' in Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000) pp. 146-184.

[295] Cleanth Brooks, 'Irony and "Ironic" Poetry', *College English*, vol. 9, no. 5 (Feb., 1948), p. 232. Whilst Brooks doesn't feature in the bibliography of Forrest-Thomson's thesis, she cites three books by his partner in crime, W. K. Wimsatt, including *The Verbal Icon* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

[296] I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924; London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 197.

Forrest-Thomson's use of quotations in her poetry leads to the numerous ironic mismatches between original meaning and the new context. Lines from the poem 'Zettel' illustrate such disjunctions. Midway through the poem, Forrest-Thomson writes:

> I love you.
> - the language-game
> with pronouns and
> "Confucius he say":
> The concept of a living being
> has the same indeterminacy
> as that of a language.
> Love is not a feeling.
> Love is put to the test
> - the grammatical test.
>
> Anyone who does not understand
> why we talk about these things
> must feel what we say to be mere trifling,
> thus:
> "It seems a bit of a fuss about nothing."
>   (she said after reading
>   *The Language of Criticism*)[297]

Forrest-Thomson's interpolation of Wittgenstein's comment from *Zettel* – 'Anyone who does not understand…' – in the poem is ironic in the sense that the original object of 'these' things is transformed from Wittgenstein's own discussion of object and shape recognition (in *Zettel*) to a speaker's reflections on love and/or reading habits.[298] To emphasise the re-location to the poem, Forrest-Thomson qualifies Wittgenstein's statement by reported speech. In the statement by this anonymous 'she', 'It', refers either backwards to love or bathetically points forwards to Casey's *The Language of Criticism* (a fellow assimilator of Wittgenstein's ideas to tenets of New Criticism). Irony, or an ironic tone, is created by the increasingly layered textual distance from the object of Wittgenstein's statement and its grammatical re-use. It is both controlled at the level of verbal form and rendered ambiguous by shifting referential stability.

---

[297] CP, p. 78.
[298] Wittgenstein, Z, no. 197, p. 34.

Other illustrations of irony's figural (rhetorically contained) as well as ambiguous presence in the poems occur when the figure is itself mocked. For example, the putative subject of the poem 'Antiphrasis' is implied by its title: antiphrasis means saying one thing and meaning another. The poem ends with quotation from Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*: 'By the figure *Ironia* which we call the *drye mock'*.[299] Throughout the poem, the speaker drily mocks the way in which such figures operate:

> I am working at the collation
> of these parallel texts
> "the t'one in ye proper simple speech
> and t'other by the figure of irony"
>
> (Thos. More, 1533)[300]

The 'collation / of these parallel texts' is a commentary on the technique of the poem itself and a demonstration of the knowing awareness of the artifice of the ironic figure. Forrest-Thomson's use of Puttenham is not necessarily dismissive as his writing on rhetoric provided her with models for poetic practice. Nevertheless, she is self-consciously witty about her fascination with these figures and about their implications for creating ambiguity. Lines towards the end of 'Antiphrasis', for example, draw on a definition which troublingly widens the rhetorical figure to create an ontological crisis:

> Each figurative speech forms
> "a contradictory outcome of events
> as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things."
>
> (OED)[301]

Similarly, the final line of the poem, 'Antiquities' is from the anonymously authored medieval text, *The Ordynarye of Crysten Men* (1502): "Such synne is called yronye".[302] Treating irony as a 'synne' extends its function. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition in the excerpt above as well as the medieval quotation signify

---

[299] CP, p. 84. The quotation is from Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, p. 157.

[300] *ibid.*, p. 83

[301] *ibid.*, p. 84.

[302] *ibid.*, p. 86.

the transfer of the ironic figure into something broader, effecting 'events' and the 'fitness of things', whilst the anonymous author of *The Ordynarye* views irony as contravention of the requirement to speak truth before god.[303] The circumscribed or contained ironic figure is also the unstable and troublingly excessive isotope in the rhetorical experiment.

Forrest-Thomson's awareness of the instability of a figural and positional irony indicates her percipient anticipation of subsequent, postmodernist commentaries on irony. As Bill Readings wittily observes of Lyotard's account of irony: 'irony's threat is that it takes the claims of language literally in order to undermine the possibility of literal speech, since to take the claim of the literal literally is to reveal the 'literal' as *itself a figure.*'[304] Forrest-Thomson recognises the possible uncertainties introduced by irony and attempts to compensate for them. To summarise her rear-guard action against the troubling status of irony in relation to Lyotard's insights: an ironic statement can be a general recognition of the instability of signification. Forrest-Thomson attempts to resist such instability by establishing imminent commentary and a gestural repertoire of containment and pre-empted knowing. As I have shown, Forrest-Thomson's ironic stance is usually predicated on the stability of self-expression which, as Candace Lang has observed in her book *Irony/Humour*, is essentially a Platonic notion.[305] In fact, Lang rejects irony because of its basis in apparently outdated notions of putative stability.

Humour, on the other hand, as a contemporary counterpart to irony, is a more fluid term and is associated with a turn to a textual play resisting the illusion of mastery of meaning. In her use of humour as a counterpart to irony, Lang draws on Jacques Derrida's resistance to the positions of the latter in his critique of philosophical texts. Derrida refuses irony due to its strategic resemblance to, as Lang puts it, 'the name of some imaginary new form of serious discourse whose claim to difference would

---

[303] The quotation on 'synne' appears in 'irony', n. *OED Online*, retrieved 21 September 2011. Forrest-Thomson probably got all of her historical quotations on irony from the OED. However, the 'synne' quotation also appears in Norman Knox, *The Word "Irony" and Its Context, 1500 – 1755* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1961), p. 41 which Forrest-Thomson may well have read given her interest in the figure.

[304] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard*, p. 36 – emphasis in the original.

[305] Candace D. Lang, *Irony/Humour* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 4-5 and, more generally, chapter two: 'Irony/Humour' pp. 37 – 69.

only constitute a new stereotype or discourse of mastery.'[306] Derrida, in other words, perceives irony as just another master discourse loitering to be taken seriously as the origin of pre-determined conclusions. In his writing, therefore, Derrida chooses instead to conduct a destabilising but never solidifying critique from within. Lang's broad contention is that, prior to Derrida's interventions, discussions of so-called Romantic Irony and treatises such as Wayne C. Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony,* rely on 'the elimination of a contradiction within the original utterance and/or between that utterance and its context, by transporting the true meaning of the expression *elsewhere* – that is, by treating it as a trope.'[307] In other words, there is a residual essentialism in the assumption and production of irony and the sense of an anterior mastery of the ironic meaning and tropes of order. Forrest-Thomson's own ironic gestures and internal commentary on her poetic procedures, I contend, adopt the necessary positional work of irony to reinforce what Peter Nicholls calls, in a summary of Lang's thesis, the 'intentional subject and […] master code'.[308] If Derrida offers the possibility that the loitering intent is a chimera, Forrest-Thomson attempts to the tame the wilful monster by outwitting it into a cage of self-reflection. In other words, Forrest-Thomson's excessive self-consciousness is designed to establish an ironic code as a resistance to what she senses will be symptoms of indeterminacy. Such a strategic resistance links her own work to modernist aesthetics and practice.

Forrest-Thomson's affiliation with modernist ironic codes can be compared to the work of Pound which would remain a strong influence on her thought and practice. For Pound, irony was a mode associated primarily with Jules Laforgue's style. In his 1917 essay on 'Irony, Laforgue, and Some Satire', for example, Pound presents Laforgue as the 'ironist who suggests that the reader should think'; irony contains within itself the propensity for its own distancing critique.[309] As Jane Hoogestraat

---

[306] Lang, *Irony/Humour*, p. 56.

[307] *ibid.*, p. 43. Wayne C. Booth, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974). As *A Rhetoric of Irony* implies, Booth is primarily interested in irony as a contained figure within a rhetorical process or act. Despite the formalist restrictions of his theory, his tracing of the characteristics of a 'stable irony' to contemporary 'instabilities' of the ironic figure remain useful.

[308] Peter Nicholls, 'Divergences: Modernism, Postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3 (September, 1991), p. 12.

[309] Ezra Pound, 'Irony, Laforgue, and Some Satire' (1917), in Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (ed.) T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 281.

has remarked, Pound's refinement of his poetic theory to coin the term 'logopoeia' was in response to his reading of Laforgue.[310] Pound somewhat awkwardly defines the term in his 1929 essay, 'How to Read':

> LOGOPŒIA, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation [….] It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode.[311]

Pound's emphases on the context, 'habits of usage' and the separable 'direct meaning' are perhaps unnatural distinctions, but his comments reveal the persistence in certain ideals of contextual control. Further, his jerky, prolix and neologistic way of getting to and defining the term is a syntactic and phenomenal symptom of the tricky and undependable identity of a poetic context. However, theoretically at least, the poem employing logopoeia will attend to language's aesthetic (material) content and set habits of usage such as clichés, inherited phrases and scraps of language into controlled, 'ironical play'.

Logopoeia is 'the dance of the intellect among words' and maintaining the dance step is, as Forrest-Thomson's poetry reveals, hard won. Pound's term is something of a litmus in tests of versions of modernisms and has been conscripted in the service of a variety of poetics. Hoogestraat's article on Laforgue's influence on Pound's poetics is useful in diagnosing Forrest-Thomson's own approach to the poem and to a poet's creation of irony. Hoogestraat argues for an 'original' understanding of Pound's use of the word logopoeia against critics who have attempted to conscript logopoeia as a post-structuralist poetics *avant la lettre*.[312] As Hoogestraat suggests, Perloff argues for Pound's advocacy of the 'dispersal of the speaking subject' and a concomitant poetics of non-referential free play which anticipates so-called language poetry.[313] For Hoogestraat, on the contrary, Pound's return to Laforgue is to revert to

---

[310] Jane Hoogestraat, '"Akin to Nothing but Language": Pound, Laforgue, and Logopoeia', *ELH*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), p. 259.

[311] Pound, 'How to Read', in Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 25.

[312] Hoogestraat, '"Akin to Nothing"', p. 259 and footnotes 1 and 7 (281 & 282 respectively).

[313] Hoogestraat is referring to Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. x: 'The Romantic and Modernist

the role of the poet as stylistic arranger. Laforgue operates for both Pound and, by extension, Hoogestraat, as an originator of style, an end and referential mode by which the ironic meaning is recoverable. For example, Hoogestraat argues that, in his *ABC of Reading*, Pound has a 'strong belief that a reader will both recognize all the relevant direct and indirect meanings of the words in play, and make the correct associations between the words in such a way as to recover […] the author's original meaning.'[314] Hoogestraat's designation of 'relevant direct and indirect meaning', as well as a faith in 'correct associations', dovetails with my own diagnosis of the same projected circumscription and authorial control over meaning and attitude in Forrest-Thomson's own poetry: she believes in intentionality and recoverable meaning as inscribed in the text, as well as in correct ways of reading poetry.[315] From the dizzy future of post-isms, Forrest-Thomson's poetic theory may appear outmoded. But, as her hyper-emphasis on figurative presence shows, her Cambridge poems perceptively register the difficulties of maintaining stability against the context of emerging post-structuralist thought.

The Return of the Literary

Forrest-Thomson's concentration on figures led to the insecurities and instabilities of irony which she sought to resist by an internal commentary on such figures. Whilst her creation of collage form and her assimilation of Wittgenstein's thought made the use of coherent, traditional forms and frames more difficult, her self-conscious thematic treatment of poetry and rhetoric maintained a thoroughly literary perspective. Such themes run throughout her Cambridge poems, but an early one, 'Letters of Ezra Pound' – featuring a number of quotations from Pound's letters – establishes the literary as her predominant subject.[316] Forrest-Thomson's poems are distinguished from Pound's, however, by her incorporation of an extra level of self-commentary on style which registers her discomfort at a possible lack of control. Forrest-Thomson's self-commentary, unlike Pound's own, represents what Margaret Rose has described as metafiction – that fashionable term – a process whereby, as

---

cult of personality has given way to what the new poets call "the dispersal of the speaking subject," the denial of the unitary, authoritative ego.'

[314] Hoogestraat, '"Akin to Nothing"', p. 262.

[315] See my next chapter for a fuller discussion of the 'author function'.

[316] D. D. Paige (ed.), *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907 – 1941* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951).

Simon Dentith neatly describes it, a text 'holds up a mirror to its fictional practices, so that it is at once a fiction and a fiction *about* fictions.'[317] 'Letters of Ezra Pound' begins:

> In order to be clear about aesthetic words
> you have to describe ways of living.
> said Wittgenstein
>   who was "indifferent to his surroundings".
> remembering the date (1969) on the calendar
> an attempt to condense the James novel
> (a young American T.S.Eliot,
> write him at Merton, Oxford.
> I think him worth watching
>   and
> his *Portrait of a Lady* is very nicely drawn.)
> in the literary scene of Allen Ginsberg
> (Apocalyptic tradition of Whitman, of course)
> could only be tried here
> (If you people at Cam can do
>   anything
> in the way of a milieu.)
> The need of old forms, old situations,
> as Yeats wrote (1929)
>   also,
> Ezra when he recreates Propertius
> escapes his scepticism.[318]

Pound may escape his scepticism by an unfettered and committed approach to and through 'old forms, old situations', but Forrest-Thomson's statement of such registers her own. A familiar Wittgenstein allusion is spliced together with quotations from *The Letters* and literary anecdotes.[319] The lines describing Eliot are

---

[317] Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 14-15. Dentith is referring to Margaret Rose, *Parody/Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

[318] CP, p. 64.

[319] Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Lectures on Aesthetics' in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, (ed.) Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), no. 35, p. 11. Wittgenstein writes: 'In order to *get* clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living.' The distinction between Forrest-Thomson's 'to be' and Wittgenstein's 'to get' signals a difference between their perspectives on language. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's 'to be clear' implies a working towards a definitive clarity; Wittgenstein's 'to get clear' gives the impression that the *process* of clarification itself reveals a clarity.

quoted verbatim from Paige's *The Letters* whilst those about the 'date' and 'Cam' are also Pound's statements, but with key nouns changed.[320] The condensing of the James novel is Pound's description of the style of *Mauberley*. In a letter to Felix E. Schelling in 1922 he wrote: 'Mauberley is a mere surface. Again a study of form, an attempt to condense the James novel'.[321] The suggestion that a style can be condensed into both describable and, therefore, usable patterns is a theme of Pound's logopoeia, of Forrest-Thomson's own poem and also characterises, as I have shown in terms of her affinity with Davie's principles of poetic diction in my previous chapter, one of her broad theoretical ambitions. Forrest-Thomson's poem is a 'study of form' and diction as well as the attempt to copy aspects of others' form and style. But, again, whilst Pound's technique was to try and transform style into his own, Forrest-Thomson incorporates comments on style into the poem. Unlike Pound's occasional, self-conscious interjections in the *Cantos*, the primary subjects of Forrest-Thomson's poem are cultivated literary style and diction, primarily those featured in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*: the 'nicely drawn' *Portrait of a Lady* and the 'Apocalyptic tradition'. An ironic tone affixes itself to external considerations of style and this is where poetic control is asserted.

The typography and arrangement of 'Letters of Ezra Pound' are forced into free verse, as if in parody of the visual arrangements of materials found in the *Cantos*. The poem operates as a schematic diagram of Pound's style rather than an emulation of it. Compare, for example, the opening of *The Pisan Cantos*:

> The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders
> Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed,
> Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano*
>   by the heels at Milano

---

[320] The quotation about Eliot is in Paige, *The Letters*, p. 81. Further, in a letter to Harriet Monroe dated 30 September, 1914 Pound praises Eliot remarking that 'It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calendar', p. 80. On 4th May, 1933, Pound wrote to John Drummond to advise on a possible new publishing venture and remarks: 'P.S. If you people at Cam. can do anything in the way of a nucleus, I'll do what I can to bring in the scattered and incongruous units of my acquaintance', p. 329.

[321] Letter to Felix E. Schelling, Paris, 8 July, 1922. 'Mauberley is a mere surface. Again a study of form, an attempt to condense the James novel'. Paige, *The Letters*, p. 248. On 'ironic distancing' through style see the introduction and first chapter, 'Ironies of the Modern', in Nicholls, *Modernisms*, pp. 1-23.

That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock
DIGONOS, Δίγονος but the twice crucified
               where in history will you find it?
yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper.
      with a bang not a whimper.
To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars.[322]

Pound's literary splices and details coalesce through a mixture of registers and tenses all connected by an attendance to a controlled rhythm and repetition, culminating the final, prose sentence and the delicately chosen last word. The details – from the founder of the Manicheans (Manes), Mussolini, to twice-born Dionysus and Eliot – complement each other as Pound builds cumulative images and resonances.[323] The shifts in form, so Pound wrote in *Letters*, were to 'facilitate a reader's intonation' as the words and phrases were poised and arranged to shift the pace of the work.[324] Forrest-Thomson's arrangement is less balanced and more erratic, although the foregrounded 'and', 'anything' and 'also' do emphasise a basic, conjunctive connection between fragments. The major difference between the passages is one of tone and register. Pound primarily pursues the subjects of uniting historical details and bringing them together into inter-illumination. So, in the lines above Pound pursues the fusion of the humble local and the fetid particular with a divine or sublime symbolism, developed through the imperial Mussolini turned on his heels and Eliot's famous deflation, and framed by the polarised images of the crippled 'peasant' and the 'Dioce' city in the 'stars'. Pound's indented lines enhance the contrast by highlighting the shift of emphasis – from the elegant sounding 'Ben and la Clara *a Milano*' to the demotic, 'the heels at Milano', for example.

By contrast, the opening lines of Forrest-Thomson's poem are awkward and lack any of the finesse of Pound's *Cantos*. As well as beginning with a banal, prosy excerpt from Wittgenstein, the resort to the standardised and homogenous past participle of reported speech, 'said' and the full stop and lowercase word are both abrupt and jarring. The dead-pan tone is enhanced by the seemingly banality of the quoted excerpt – '"indifferent to his surroundings"', the 'indifference' of the subject as well

---

[322] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1970, p. 445.

[323] Detail provided by William Cookson *A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Anvil Press, 2001), p. 132.

[324] Paige, *The Letters*, p. 418.

as the continuing neutral tense of the report, 'who was'. Similarly, the word 'remembering' creates a past perfect tense space which inharmoniously contrasts with the contemporary 'date (1969)' (Forrest-Thomson's present tense) and which parodically undermines Pound's original expression of the memory of seeing Eliot in 1914. The gerund – 'remembering' – also creates the anticipation of the complementary word, 'attempt*ing*' which would have been a more elegant expression, instead of 'an attempt'. The roughly arranged collage form is presided over by a faux authoritative tone ('Whitman, of course') and a scepticism attaches to the lines registering a discomfort of disunity. Pound's authoritative and emphatic statements on style as well as his style are imitated by Forrest-Thomson whilst her themes and poetic form also comment on the nature and necessity of literary style itself.

Forrest-Thomson draws attention to composition by selecting quotations *about* composition, such as: 'describe ways of living', 'the need of old forms, old situations'. Rather than organise the poem around the use of particular forms and setting up tensions between these forms as in her early poetry, Forrest-Thomson's emphasis here is on the subject of form and conscious arrangement. The poem exemplifies modernist practice but also anxiously stands back and reflects on itself *as* such. The dangling word 'and' illustrates this process most vividly:

> I think him worth watching
> and
> his *Portrait of a Lady* is very nicely drawn.)

The word is part of one original sentence, but Forrest-Thomson splits this sentence and uses it to exemplify the bringing together of clauses. In doing so, she creates tensions between the first and second clauses and, by extension, between all the details of the poem. At the same time, Forrest-Thomson comments on the operation of such a word in the poem as indicating the activity of writing a poem composed of fragments. The relative insignificance of 'and' is reversed and it becomes ironically vital in this poem: it describes and illustrates a commentary on composition itself; a conjunction as a symbol for a conjunctive mode. The poem is, then, doubly about style: it takes Pound's descriptions of style and tries to render these in a mode

comparable to his own as well as commenting on the process. The poem's parenthetical date and anecdote appropriation couched in a chatty idiom aims to transform 'old forms, old situations' into what Forrest-Thomson called in the 'Note' to *Language-Games* the 'historical present' and the 'present act of articulation' of the poem.[325] But this chatty style isn't entirely comfortable – as if the turn to the demotic of the present day is a bridge too far across what Andreas Huyssen has called the 'great divide' between high and low cultures indicative of postmodern practice.[326]

The processes I have been outlining are part of Forrest-Thomson's conscious and unconscious (or semi-conscious) struggle with form. She possesses, it could be argued, a bad faith in formalism and in the fact of its own clamouring anachronism in the late sixties when all around poets and theorists were beginning to lose faith in modernist symbolic modes and traditional form. Forrest-Thomson's ironic position both affects some of the surface features of Pound's style but also, pace Lyotard, registers its own discomfort. In the twilight of a faith in traditional form the ironic commentary in 'Letters of Ezra Pound' acts as a proxy and inadequate frame with which to contain the associations of the poem. The 'dance of the intellect' becomes a comic slow-dance with forebears, accompanied by the feeling that, as Forrest-Thomson writes at the end of the poem, 'to fall in love with one's teachers / that also is a matter of economy'. Here falling in love involves appropriation of the teacher's traits; but in the process of doing so, stylistic quirks are stripped of their original impact and subject to a new, ironical economy. But such ironic anxiety codifies Forrest-Thomson's restless adherence to literary principles and forms.

After a few poems featuring Wittgenstein's work in *Language-Games*, Forrest-Thomson's poem 'Idols of the (Super)Market' returns to the themes of 'Letters of Ezra Pound' in bringing a variety of fragments and quotations together to reflect on a selection of, she puts it, misquoting part of a novella by Henry James, '*Lessons of*

---

[325] CP, p. 165.

[326] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).

the Masters'.[327] The poem is a wry commentary on the inheritance of manners and decorum of particular literary figures and 'Idols'; as she puts it, those Masters who look to the 'Sacred Fount' to provide inspiration. Nevertheless, it also features reflection on poetic decorum and style which, I have argued, Forrest-Thomson took very seriously. Her seriousness about the necessity for a poet to learn from past masters and preserve traditional devices is evident in her continual return to such subjects throughout her poems. Pound was himself notoriously derisory about the state of 'Eng. Lit.' wherein writers' 'unrewarded gropings, hopes, passions, laundry bills, or erotic experiences' were frequently 'thrust on the student or considered germane to the subject.'[328] Forrest-Thomson, like Pound, was troubled by the impact of what she calls in the frontispiece to twelve academic questions the 'verbal hiccups' and quotations in her poetry, particularly those derived from Wittgenstein which brought with them a putative flattening out of language and made an attachment to metaphysical order and literary tradition more difficult to maintain. Forrest-Thomson, like Pound, was interested in the preservation of lessons on the refinement and definition of the poetic and on timeless aspects of poetic decorum. Considerations of literary decorum and its inheritance, manipulation and transgression are interlinked with Forrest-Thomson's continued development of her theory of poetic Artifice, even if this was done with her tongue in her cheek.

'Idols of the (Super)Market' incorporates quotations from W. B. Yeats and W. H. Auden:

> "Perfection of the life or of the work."
> > (W.B.Y. 1865-1939)
> "Perfection is possible in neither."
> > (W.H.A. 1907-)
> These are some of the
> *Lessons of the Masters*[329]

The quotations are from the Auden's essay entitled, 'Writing' in which he reflects on how a writer must keep their 'personal weaknesses and limitations' out of the text

---

[327] Henry James, *The Lesson of the Master and Five Other Stories* (London: Heinemann and Balestier, 1892).
[328] Pound, 'How to Read', in Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 15.
[329] CP, p. 165.

and argues for the peculiar decorum of literary form.[330] 'Idols of the (Super)Market' is a commentary on the usefulness of decorum and lessons of the masters for contemporary poetry and a confrontation of the 'traditional' with the assumptions of the modern. Against Auden's assumed decorum, Forrest-Thomson undertakes a deliberately indiscriminate cramming of the poetic trolley in this '(Super)Market' in a manner which violates poetic form and subject matter. But her erratic treatment of poetic decorum represents what Miller describes in relation to late modernist architecture as an 'exasperated heightening' of such themes in an inverted argument for their significance.[331] In the last part of this chapter I shall examine two final Cambridge poems as representative of the emphatic return of the literary and of Forrest-Thomson's growing security in the controlling capacity of poetic form over disparate sources and theories.

'Alka-Seltzer Poem' and 'A Fortiori'

Whilst the poems I have examined so far display Forrest-Thomson's attempt to control types of indeterminacy – instituted by Wittgenstein's writing or by poetic figures themselves – two poems in *Language-Games* bring all of her controlling devices together to display a confident master over such indeterminacy. The poems, 'Alka-Seltzer Poem' and 'A Fortiori', offer ironic commentaries on a poet's ability to control literary styles as well as incorporate theoretical frames within the poem. They both reveal Forrest-Thomson's highly self-conscious 'figural presence' and attempt at theoretical foreclosure as well as represent a return to traditional form and principles hinting at the future direction of her theoretical understanding of poetic form. 'Alka-Seltzer Poem' and 'A Fortiori' were, I'd like to suggest, inspired by Auden's essay on 'Writing' from which Forrest-Thomson's quotes in 'Idols of the (Super)Market'. 'Alka-Seltzer' is a manic illustration of poetic resources, whilst 'A Fortiori' includes within itself reflections on composition which are locatable to a

---

[330] W. H. Auden, 'Writing', in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 19. Forrest-Thomson wrote to Auden in 1965 and received a reply from him from Austria dated Sept. 8th 1965. Auden responded generously to Forrest-Thomson's (then 'Miss Forrest') request for advice on several poems which were subsequently selected for 'Identi-kit'. The letter includes advice on the use of adjectives and line endings in which Auden uses specific examples from Forrest-Thomson's own work. Thanks to Jonathan Culler for supplying me with a copy of this unpublished letter.

[331] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 9.

very specific theoretical source. The poems seek to illustrate, respectively, the control of internal poetic pattern within a framing form and the extent to which theoretical models can be incorporated to dictate a reading.

Towards the end of his essay, 'Writing', Auden considers poetry's didacticism and argues that:

> Owing to its superior power as a mnemonic, verse is superior to prose as a medium for didactic instruction. Those who condemn didacticism must disapprove *a fortiori* of didactic prose; in verse, as the Alka-Seltzer advertisements testify, the didactic message loses half of its immodesty. Verse is also certainly the equal of prose as a medium for the lucid exposition of ideas; in skilful hands, the form of the verse can parallel and reinforce the steps of the logic.[332]

Auden discusses didacticism and how verse is an elegantly disguised form of instruction whose formal characteristics enhance an argument. Those who resist didacticism in general must, for stronger reasons, resist didacticism in prose and, by extension, verse.[333] Auden's comments relate to Forrest-Thomson's explicitly didactic remarks in the poems from which I have quoted. Furthermore, the occurrence of the terms '*a fortiori*' and 'Alka-Seltzer' in such close proximity in Auden's essay, coupled with the fact of Forrest-Thomson's two poem titles, also alert us to subject matter which ties her form and style together. Forrest-Thomson undertakes an explicit critique of poetry's inheritance of certain styles and dictions and experiments with the potential creation of new knowledge and experience in didactic and circumscribed verse.

'Alka-Seltzer Poem' self-consciously illustrates the capacity of poetry to create new connections by certain formal techniques. Forrest-Thomson parodies the ways both poets and advertisers exploit certain formal tricks and words to sell a product,

---

[332] Auden, 'Writing', p. 26.

[333] The necessity of poetry to possess certain didacticism (albeit sometimes unwitting) is shared by Pound. See, for example, Paige, *The Letters* p. 248: 'I am perhaps didactic; so in a sense, or in different senses are Homer, Dante, Villon, and Omar, and Fitzgerald's trans. of Omar is the only good poem of Vict. era that has got beyond a fame de cénacle. It's all rubbish to pretend that art isn't didactic. A revelation is always didactic.'

whether it be simple indigestion relief or high art. The poem begins with seamless incorporation of a canonical line:

> With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
> the effervescence is subsiding. Drink
> before effervescence subsides. Inert
> liquid and undissolved tablets are dangerous.[334]

John Keats's 'Ode to A Nightingale' is evoked in the same way that poetry and rhetorical repetition is used in adverts.[335] Alka-Seltzer's famous catch-phrases during the seventies – 'plop plop, fizz fizz oh what a relief it is' and the camp, 'I don't know what's in it, but it starts working in a minute' (!) – were powerful and catchy mnemonics ensuring a memory of the product's message and of its relieving effects. As the speaker of 'Alka-Seltzer Poem' gnomically observes: 'The cause is physiology, and the effect, metaphor.' This is a wry comment on the processes of capitalist exchange in which a physiological experience is transferred into metaphors which are then packaged and sold back to a consumer in pleasing rhymes. But this is exactly what poetry does too with its dissolving of images into one another to create a new product.

Forrest-Thomson seems torn between a wry concession to poetry's complicity with both advertising and bad poeticising and an argument and demonstration of its merits. The hints for the latter come with her allusions in this opening section – to Auden, to Keats and also, I suggest, to Mallarmé's poem 'Salut'. At this time of her crisis in verse, Forrest-Thomson calls once more on the arch theorist of such crises. Mallarmé's poem begins 'Rien, cette écume, vierge vers / À ne designer que la coupe' ('Nothing, this foam, virgin verse / Pointing out only the cup').[336] As Bosley informs us, Mallarmé's sonnet 'has been described as champagne bubbles'.[337] Forrest-Thomson relocates literary styles and themes into a poem ironically describing of 'Une ivresse belle' (a beautiful drunkenness) as Mallarmé succinctly

---

[334] CP, p. 89. All quotations from this poem are on this page.

[335] Keats's poem contains the lines: 'With beaded bubbles winking at the brim / And purple-stained mouth'. Keats, *Selected Poetry*, p. 175. Forrest-Thomson may have been thinking of Keats's description that the 'dull brain perplexes and retards' (*ibid.*) when she imagines the speaker waking up with a hang-over!

[336] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, pp. 54 & 55.

[337] *ibid.*, p. 22.

puts it in 'Salut', in order to test her own ingenuity and the versatility of poetic form in a contemporary environment.[338]

Increasingly complex associations between words build up in the poem, dissolving into each other in wry mimicry of the advertiser's pill demanding to be swallowed. The constituents of metaphor must assimilate as a new, compound experience of Artifice.

<div style="text-align:center">

Alleviation

of the effects of over-indulgence
in alcohol or words is one of her
cloudy trophies. Silver tinsel hangs
like nets of frost, like votive
offerings for our escape from water
in all the shop-windows. "You can use,"
she said, "glue to stick it on with –
Durex." This metaphor requires completion
in a chemists' with a request for a packet
of Durofix (gossamer). For experience
is an active verb and the end
of poetry is activity. Hung-over
this morning in a gossamer net
of words, the bubbles wink & subside.

</div>

Forrest-Thomson delights in the associative activity of the intermingling of words and images, each dissolved into one another. Interconnections of images, sound and themes abound in this poem and there is also a tactical confusion of registers. A comic patterning of 'o's' bubbles throughout the poem, the longer /o/ vowel sounds superseding the shorter vowel patterns – /i:/, /i/ – of the start, as if mimicking the process of sharp initial fizz and subsequent bubbly expansion of a dissolving tablet. For example, the short, light vowels of 'b*ea*ded b*u*bbles w*i*nking at the br*i*m', become the longer 'o' sounds of '*o*ver-indulgence in alc*oho*l *o*r w*o*rds'. The pattern of 'o' becomes dominant, connecting other words and themes wittily related to Mallarmé's description of 'vierge vers' – 'fr*o*st, like v*o*tive', 'Dur*o*fix (g*o*ssamer)' – before asserting the putative subject of the whole poem which is revealed by: 'Hung-over / this morning in gossamer net / of words'. The interconnections of these

---

[338] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 54.

internal patterns lead to the comic effect of the confusion of language in the connection between Durex and Durofix. This linguistic insinuation then generates a third word, 'gossamer' which is transformed to describe the 'net / of words' and the state of a persona trapped by a hang-over. Confusion also results from the admixture of figures and grounds and extensions of metaphorical activity. 'Silver tinsel' is '*like* nets of frost' and '*like* votive offerings', but it becomes the active ground informing the 'gossamer net / of words' in which the persona is impossibly entwined. The banal process of dissolving Alka-Seltzer tablets becomes, as with Mallarmé's symbolic extension of every-day things, a metaphor for the activity of writing a poem. 'Alka-Seltzer' is *about* such activity, but it also comically rejuvenates literary metaphor of the winking bubbles by connecting them with contemporary and seemingly un-poetic images and subject matters. As far as 'Alka-Seltzer' shows, such literary practice is alive and well, if dogged by a slight hang-over.

Whilst Forrest-Thomson used 'Alka-Seltzer' as a testing ground to rejuvenate literary themes, images and metaphors, 'A Fortiori' challenges contemporary theory. If developments in post-structuralism were starting to destabilise a faith in the idea of a central, organising presence dictating readings of texts, Forrest-Thomson was already involved in emphatically reintroducing such presence at the level of poetic form. Her control over a reading, and therefore the newly ennobled post-structuralist *reader*, were transferred to a mastery of poetic artifice and to the willed production of a circumscribed poetic space. 'A Fortiori' is an elegant fusion of carefully controlled poetic form and a theoretical framework; the context of the poem is a poised accommodation of the literary with the theoretical. As such, it looks forward to Forrest-Thomson's concerns expressed in *Poetic Artifice* about the attempted reconciliation of structuralism with the emphatically literary, both of which are connected by their foregrounding of the figure, whether as structure or device.

If the poem's title was inspired by Auden, it received its critical frame from Jonathan Culler. In the second chapter of his *Structuralist Poetics*, Culler discusses A. J. Griemas's theory of structural semantics. Greimas proposes a theory of reading in which levels of coherence or 'isotopies' are established in the poem by certain patterns of repetition. Culler explains that a reader must select a 'series of sememes and then […] show how these sememes combine to form classemes' which make up

the dominant isotopies of the poem around which a reading is organised.[339] Culler summarises Griemas's theory this way: 'it should be possible to define a series of operations which would lead, in algorithmic fashion, from these minimal features to a series of readings for the text as a whole.'[340] Culler points to a few difficulties with the theory, primarily its diminishment of the importance of a reader's expectations and what he calls 'implicit models' for interpretation.[341] As Culler further suggests, it is extremely difficult to isolate single isotopic threads accounting for the complex intermingling of words and their transformation into metaphor.[342] Culler's argument is consonant with his broader perspective that the effect of metaphor cannot be wholly accounted for by evidence in the text and that textual unity is usually a product of the interpretive processes of the reader.[343] Culler's main argument with Greimas is, therefore, the location or level at which the recognition of semantic patterns are controlled. Forrest-Thomson's views are, on the contrary allied with Griemas's, as she locates the control of poetic transformation as far as possible in the poem itself.

As with 'Ducks & Rabbits', Forrest-Thomson incorporates critical commentary into the body of 'A Fortiori' whilst also producing the most consistently formal performance in all of her Cambridge poems. The poem's themes and form once more allude to Mallarmé although they are updated by their backdrop in contemporary theory. Forrest-Thomson also self-consciously draws on discussions of how a reader is able to interpret such poems. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers the definition of '*a fortiori*' as '[w]ith stronger reason, still more forcefully', from the Latin 'a', from and 'fortiori', stronger.[344] Correspondingly, one of the poem's dominant themes is the location of strength and reason which Forrest-Thomson implies can be controlled by the poem's internal form and embedded commentary. It reads:

---

[339] Culler, SP, p. 92.

[340] *ibid.*, p. 94.

[341] See my next chapter for a fuller discussion of Forrest-Thomson's perspectives on both the 'author function' and what she calls the 'latent intentionality of poetic language' (PA, p. 132).

[342] Culler, SP, p. 90.

[343] *ibid.*, p. 91 and *passim.*

[344] 'a fortiori', adv., *OED Online*, retrieved 23 September 2011.

A Fortiori

their fractured grace: the wind
disintegrates raindrops: the raindrops
dissolve, a metal grid, that falls.

If all meaning is diacritical, one
will see dualism in anything intelligible.

The eye is like Aprile, that falleth, a priori,
on the flower, the grass, the bird,
the fire-escape – its frame shifted by drops

that glance, with their bright eye-balls
fractured in the wind: the blank world
which its whiteness defends.

All dualisms are not equivalent
nor do they imply one another.

Whiteness defends the grass, the bird, the
raindrops, a light that falls refracts
our fractured grace: our glance: the wind.[345]

The language patterning, syntactic manipulation and lineation and carefully repeated but subtly shifted synonyms, intertwine in a number of key images. Various strands and patterns can be followed throughout the poem – the interactions between 'glance' and 'grace' which culminates in the terminal line: 'our fractured grace: our glance'; the movement from 'with' to 'wind' to 'which' to 'whiteness', which is then carried over in the pervasive sibilance of the last stanza; the change in texture of both the 'grass' and the 'bird' from their first appearance to their second and the way their material has somehow diffused across the lines. In Griemas's terms, words such as 'grace' are *sememes* which gather momentum through repetition of the same or similar words – 'grass', 'grace' and 'glance' – and which becomes an isotopy by which a broader meaning can be understood: the beauty and sublimity of a perceptual moment, for example.

---

[345] CP, p. 98.

However, the problem, as Culler argues in relation to critical interpretations of Mallarmé's 'Salut', is that in order to state such an understanding of the poem's intertwining of content with form, as I have just outlined, I must be using other assumptions about the words 'grace' and 'glance', bringing them together creatively in ways uncontrolled by the poem. Culler derogates one critic's interpretation of 'Salut' (in which the critic argues for the existence of certain isotopic patterns, following Griemas's model) as dependent on information outside the poem. Culler contends that:

> to read the sonnet as about writing [as the critic does] one requires considerable evidence from Mallarmé's other poems, which couple, for example, writing and negativity (*rien*) […] That is to say, if we imagine a reader who knows French but has no experience of poetry and its conventions and *a fortiori* no knowledge of Mallarmé's poems, it is impossible to believe that he would find, in reading this poem, a series of items which repeatedly propose that the poem be interpreted as about writing.[346]

Culler argues that, in order to read the poem as about writing itself, external ideas need to be imported. If a reader had no experience of poetry and 'a fortiori' no knowledge of Mallarmé, how would she read such a poem? Whilst Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* wasn't published until 1975, he had been producing papers on these subjects from the early seventies. It may not, therefore, be a coincidence that Forrest-Thomson uses the term 'a fortiori' as her title, along with its allusion to Auden.[347]

I will return to the above passage shortly, but in terms of the importation of external information, a reader of Forrest-Thomson's own poem may benefit from another passage from *Structuralist Poetics* in which Culler outlines Greimas's theory of the perceptual construction of cultural objects. Culler writes:

---

[346] Culler, SP, p. 89. Culler refers to François Rastier 'Sytématique des isotopies', in A. J. Griemas (ed.), *Essais de sémiotique poétique* (Paris: Larousse, 1971), pp. 80-106.

[347] Culler's SP was published in 1975 but his thesis was completed in 1972 – 'Structuralism: A Study in the Development of Linguistic Models and their Application to Literary Studies' (Oxford, 1972) – whilst an early version of the chapter on Griemas was published in *Centrum* 1:1 (1973), pp. 5-22. There are numerous parallels of both concepts and phrases between *Structuralist Poetics* and Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice*. See my next chapter for some examples.

the mind is subject to various constraints which define the 'conditions of existence for semiotic objects'. The most important of these is the 'elementary structure of signification' which has the form of a four-term homology (A:B: : - A: - B) and 'furnishes a semiotic model designed to account for the initial articulations of meaning within a semantic micro-universe'. *Since meaning is diacritical any meaning depends on oppositions*, and this four-term structure relates an item to both its converse and its contrary (black: white: :non-black: :non-white). This basic configuration holds also, Greimas argues, for the simplest representation of the meaning of a text as whole.[348]

In my next chapter I return to the potential organisation and conceptual power of such linguistic models and how they operate, like Wittgenstein's philosophy, as powerful containing metaphors in the development of Forrest-Thomson's poetics. Related to the quotation from Culler above, the images in Forrest-Thomson's poem – 'the flower, the grass, the bird, / the fire-escape' – are clearly created with Griemas's four-term homology in mind. The peculiar use of colons can be understood as Forrest-Thomson setting up homologous relations between images and objects which then mutate and shift throughout the poem. But the poem is not just an attempt to exemplify this theory, it exceeds it: the wind is not 'opposite' to the 'raindrops' and, far from being oppositional, they dissolve into mutual relation. Similarly, the 'whiteness' of the poem finds no opposition, and the word 'blank' ('black' in all but one letter) actually reinforces or defends the whiteness. The whiteness signals a link to Griemas but also Mallarmé as the line 'the blank world / which its whiteness defends' is a translation from the poet's 'Brise Marine' ('Sur la vide papier qui la blancheur défend').[349] The poem was created out of a highly literary and theoretical matrix consisting of Mallarmé, Griemas and both Forrest-Thomson's own and Culler's critical thinking about these writers. Forrest-Thomson exemplifies theories in her poetry but such illustration is overshadowed and superseded by her own internal commentary on the theory. In the second stanza Culler's own commentary on Griemas is used: 'all meaning is diacritical'.[350] Forrest-Thomson ironically

---

[348] Culler, SP, p. 92 – my emphasis. Culler quotes from A. J. Greimas, *Du Sens* (Seuil: Paris, 1970), p. 161.

[349] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 90. Keston Sutherland, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson for Readers', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved, 1 March 2010 <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Sutherland.php>, p. 7 notes the Mallarmé allusion.

[350] Culler's SP was published in 1975 but an early version of the chapter on Griemas was published in *Centrum* 1:1 (1973), pp. 5-22. The striking similarity between Forrest-Thomson's line and Culler's can perhaps be accounted for by one of two reasons: they were together whilst Forrest-Thomson was

challenges the reader to question whether, if we had no knowledge of this fact and '*a fortiori*' no knowledge of Mallarmé's or Griemas's theory, let alone Culler's interpretations of these writers, it would be possible to interpret the poem at all. In other words, how is the poem to be organised to be understood? Mallarmé, Griemas and Culler ask this question and Forrest-Thomson's response is that the answer lies in the poem itself.

Culler expresses reservations about the fact that the external contexts and frames of the poem are important in constructing meaning. Forrest-Thomson tests this, implying that if meta-interpretive comments are internally incorporated – the fact that the poem is 'about writing' as it says it is – then perhaps a poet can control the operation of interpretive models, wrestling the competence of reading the poem away from broad conceptual frames towards an internalised process. The figurative presence of self-commentary is a way of restricting the reliance upon external theory. As Culler asks at the end of the chapter: 'what guides one in the perception and construction of relevant patterns'?[351] He argues for the knowledge and competence which make up the 'additional experience' of reading a poem. With poems such as 'Alka-Seltzer Poem' and 'A Fortiori', Forrest-Thomson tests how far it is possible for the construction of patterns and interpretations to be controlled from within the poem itself and how poetic form operates to ensure such a process.

'A Fortiori' doesn't contain the ironic tone of previous poems which was always borne of the admixture of conflicting registers, a hyper self-consciousness about forms and themes and the witty attempt to wrestle external references from their original locations. Nevertheless, the poem still tussles with theoretical origins and with their attendant idealisms, in this case, structuralist theory. The elegance of 'A Fortiori' – its emphatically literary attempt at the reconciliation and integration of theory and its contained commentary – looks forward to the poems of *On the Periphery*. The poetic form of 'A Fortiori' – regular stanzas, compressed repetitions and parallelisms – as well as its literary allusions, also foreshadows the formal and

---

writing the poems on *Language-Games* so may have discussed Griemas's ideas in exactly these terms. Alternatively, Culler may have used this phrase in his thesis which he was preparing at the time and which eventually became 'Structuralism: A Study in the Development of Linguistic Models and their Application to Literary Studies' (Oxford, 1972).

[351] Culler, SP, p. 92.

lyrical complexity of her later poems. Forrest-Thomson was learning that, as she puts it in her 'Note' to *Language-Games*, 'the conflicts that arise from our constant attempt to integrate disparate levels of knowledge', required the marshalling presence of an authoritative will as well as the reliable framing devices of traditional poetic form and artifice.[352] Therefore, Forrest-Thomson's experiments with, and idealisation of, Wittgenstein's ideas was often offset, as with her concrete poetry phase, by a complex use of literary tradition; hence the difference between poems such as 'Ducks & Rabbits' and 'Letters of Ezra Pound'. But, the figural presence of a displaced ideal of Artifice is there throughout the Cambridge poems, signalled by Forrest-Thomson's frequent return to the poetic tropes of metaphor and irony. As the case of irony makes clear, keeping her figures also involved exposing herself to their troubling contingency. Whilst a New Critical irony was safely circumscribed within distanced poetic form, Forrest-Thomson also registered and resisted the troubling facts of its instabilities, tentatively invading her poetic project. To use Derrida's terms from his essay, 'Living On: Border Lines', the remnants of structural thoughts are manifested in Forrest-Thomson's frequent iteration of order and control in her poems and in her self-conscious critical circumscription.[353] Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems represent the struggle for the satiation of mastery as well as an almost unwitting and wry acceptance of the interminability of creative remnants from her contemporary environment.

Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems display the anxieties characteristic of late modernist literature, with their pervasive irony and wit, their repeated affirmation of symbolic forms, if only in their metonymic status as figures, and by their constant appeal to literary and traditional form. Such figures and forms which, in the Cambridge poems, survive assimilation to the flattening contingencies of post-structuralism, would persist with growing necessity into the last phases of her critical and poetic project. As she writes of the use of 'imaginative analogy' in one of

---

[352] CP, p. 166.

[353] Derrida writes: 'no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation. What I am referring to here is not richness of substance, semantic fertility, but rather structure, the structure of the remnant or of iteration.' Jacques Derrida, 'Living On: Border Lines', in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 81. Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 123.

poetry's rival discourses, science: 'there is no controlling context of internal relations in this kind of discourse which would prevent such an accumulation from becoming arbitrary. Such a guarantee can only be given by the necessity imposed on the poet of converting the arbitrary into the *artificial*; with artifice as a new kind of necessity.'[354] Her essay 'Irrationality and Artifice' articulates that which she was discovering in practice: the persistent importance and necessity of artifice – with all its attendant figures and devices – to establish the poetic context as such. 'Irrationality and Artifice' is, as Forrest-Thomson states, 'a plea for poetic convention'.[355] Her most emphatic 'plea' for such convention came in the form of *Poetic Artifice*, to which I now turn.

---

[354] IA, p. 130.
[355] *ibid.*, p. 123.

Chapter 4
Poetic Artifice and the Struggle with Formalisms

> What is needed for literary study is a hundred per cent of formalism and a hundred per cent of critical intuition. Like all counsels of perfection this one sets an impossible ideal. But I do not see why the study of forms should distract from genuine critical intuition, or why there should be competition between virtues.[356]

> We find ourselves ultimately before the conclusion that the attempt to see the literary work as a linguistic system is in reality the application of a *metaphor*.[357]

> To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition, in transcendental terms, of both the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition, and the aesthetic principle of the work's survival […] This usage of the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges under the protection of writing's *a priori* status: it keeps alive, in the grey light of neutralization, the interplay of those representations that formed a particular image of the author.[358]

Forrest-Thomson's theoretical writings contain 'counsels of perfection' comparable to those described by Geoffrey Hartman. The 'impossible ideal' of critical practice is the fusion of a heightened focus on the details of poetic form – a particular type of formalism – with the 'critical intuition' informed by conventional literary knowledge and practice. But whilst Hartman hopes that formalist and intuitive virtues will settle into a friendly dialogue, a competition between them is inevitable. This chapter will discuss Forrest-Thomson's posthumously published, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry*, the bulk of which was written between 1972-4 when she was a Research Fellow at the University of Leicester. I shall be concentrating on the ways in which her theory struggled to incorporate a variety of formalisms and on the consequences and implications for 'critical intuition' of her very particular 'study of forms'. Forrest-Thomson certainly understood her own critical practice as a fusion of a variety of approaches. For example, writing of the manuscript of *Poetic Artifice* in a letter dated 4th July 1972 to the editor of *Curtains* magazine, Paul Buck, Forrest-Thomson informed him that she was 'now in the middle of writing a book centred on William Empson but very post-structuralist orientated[,] a sort of *ars poetica*.'[359]

---

[356] Geoffrey Hartman, 'Beyond Formalism', *MLN*, Vol. 81, No. 5 (Dec., 1966), pp. 555-6.

[357] Jameson, *Prison-House*, p. viii.

[358] Foucault, 'What is an Author', p. 105.

[359] Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive.

Poetic Artifice was conceived, therefore, as adapting tenets of Empson's close critical reading to the procedural practice and philosophical positions of the post-structuralist project in a way which would amount to a new definition of the nature of poetry. Such an ambitious project was bound to lead to competing models of poetic form, linguistic philosophy and critical interpretation.

I should note at the outset of this chapter, which seeks to critique Forrest-Thomson's reliance on formalist models, that I believe *Poetic Artifice* to be a significant contribution to twentieth-century poetic theory. Where there are conceptual flaws, they are a product of Forrest-Thomson's lofty ambition; she may have overstretched her ideas somewhat but they are part of a noble quest. So whilst she sometimes polemically overstates her case – particularly regarding her poetic contemporaries – the risks of such polemic are necessary to bring into focus crucial questions about the value of poetic form. Indeed, the uniqueness of *Poetic Artifice* makes it a important document in twentieth-century studies both for its contribution to theory, but also as a record of a brilliant mind assimilating and struggling with burgeoning post-structuralist theory and attempting to square such theory with both a tradition of practical criticism and with an increasing belief in the value of traditional poetic form.

Many critics have appreciated the unique contribution *Poetic Artifice* makes to twentieth-century literary criticism, though from different perspectives. In a number of his essays, for example, Brian McHale has conscripted ideas from *Poetic Artifice* in the service of his ongoing and often brilliant taxonomy of postmodern poetics. His 1992 essay, 'Making (non)sense of Postmodern Poetry', for example, uses Forrest-Thomson's terms – 'image-complex', 'discursive-image complex' and 'thematic synthesis' – as schematic ways of organising and making sense of postmodern poetic practice.[360] McHale, it could be said, perceives in Forrest-Thomson's clear-sighted criticism an ally in his taxonomical critical project. Similarly, James Keery credits Forrest-Thomson's term 'disconnected image-complex', developed in the final chapters of *Poetic Artifice* in relation to the work of Eliot and Pound, as a lucid

---

[360] Brian McHale, 'Making (non)sense of Postmodernist Poetry', in Michael Toolan (ed.), *Language, Text and Context: Essays in Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6-35.

definition of a particular poetic genre.[361] But Keery also points out the contradictions in her theory, noting its terminological vagueness as well as the not always fully reconciled tenets of aestheticism, Romanticism and practical criticism informing her positions.

Marjorie Perloff's 1980 review of *Poetic Artifice* expresses opinions about the book which resonate with my own, although she demotes the importance of Forrest-Thomson's theory in favour of viewing the book simply as a historical document and, as she puts it slightly dismissively, a 'defence of the neo-Dada enigma poetry' of John Ashbery and J. H. Prynne.[362] Perloff praises the formalist and structuralist terminology of *Poetic Artifice* as allowing Forrest-Thomson to tackle the elevated position of a poet's biography in much practical criticism. But she also criticises Forrest-Thomson's 'unnecessarily rigid theoretical frame' as leading to an extremism in its emphasis on internal poetic processes; such a position is, as Perloff observes, 'as extreme […] as the one she attacks'.[363] Whilst this chapter follows Perloff's suggestion that the formalist and structuralist positions and models in *Poetic Artifice* are extreme, I suggest that such polemical certainty was necessary to aid Forrest-Thomson's reappraisal of the absolute and primary value of poetic form and tradition. Perloff's review ignores Forrest-Thomson's significant contribution to re-establishing the value and necessity of traditional, and particularly Victorian, poetic practices, but it is here that the value and significance of the book can be located.

I have chosen to discuss formalism*s* in this chapter as *Poetic Artifice* adopts and adapts versions of the formalist models developed by what Frederic Jameson calls the 'projections of the form[s]' of linguistics, formalism and structuralism.[364] These projections use, as Jameson explains, a synchronic and ideal model of language – Saussure's differential model of meaning and the structural relations between signified and signifier – as a metaphor for the literary text and its functions. Jonathan Culler discusses the 'linguistic model' in his *Structuralist Poetics* as having two

---

[361] Keery, 'Blossoming Synecdoches'', p. 116.

[362] Marjorie Perloff, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry', review of *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry*', *Contemporary Literature* 21, no.2 (1980), p. 291.

[363] Perloff, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry', pp. 291 & 294 respectively.

[364] Jameson, *Prison-House*, p. 88.

extensions into literary criticism. Firstly, it has been used as a 'source of metaphors' for what he calls in relation to Barthes's early writing, the 'adumbration of a system'.[365] This system is comprised of 'functional oppositions' and a putative centre of the system which 'functions as a principle of inclusion and exclusion'.[366] Secondly, the linguistic model can be used as a heuristic device which 'involves a more extensive application of linguistic concepts' and which 'takes the work itself as the investigation of a semiological system and attempts to formulate more explicitly the insights it provides.'[367] Whilst Jameson primarily viewed the formalist projections negatively, and Culler develops from the earlier structuralists a theory of poetics centred around readers' competence, Forrest-Thomson, I shall argue, used the linguistic model and metaphors to develop a positive blueprint and model of the poem and poetic Artifice. In doing so she uses both the model of a system of functional oppositions and also, as Culler puts it of the work of Gérard Gennette, 'derives a system from a corpus'; the corpus being historical and contemporary instances of poetic Artifice.[368]

Any attempt to definitively categorise the nature of poetry has its own inherent problems as such projects are predicated on the notion of unified poetic form as well as perennial categories of the poetic. In his essay, 'What is an Author?', Foucault notes the structuralist emphasis on the literary 'Work' as a supplement to the author-function, arguing that such an idea necessitates the analysis of 'the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships'.[369] However, he then poses the crucial question: '[w]hat is this curious unity which we designate as a work?'[370] Foucault's point is that structuralist theories contain shadowy unities – here the wholeness of the 'Work' itself – despite the apparent emphasis on local, 'internal relationships'. Forrest-Thomson's theory of poetic Artifice contains just such unities which the post-structuralist tenets of her theory threaten to undermine. For example, one of the problems that Forrest-

---

[365] Culler, SP, pp. 100 & 98 respectively. There are numerous overlaps between Culler's SP and PA, perhaps inevitably given their marriage during in the early nineteen-seventies. They divorced in 1974. Mark, VFT, p. xi.

[366] Culler, SP, p. 99.

[367] *ibid.*, pp. 103-4

[368] *ibid.*, p. 102.

[369] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 103.

[370] *ibid.*

Thomson's theory encounters is that the static, synchronic blueprints of poetic form are always in tension with the dynamic or diachronic movements of poetic process as well as the activity of reading. Relations between levels in a poem build and change over time; a reader may choose to include or ignore any number of details. Forrest-Thomson's anxious and authoritarian formalism struggles with the existence of such uncontrollable aspects. Her sense of poetic unity wrestles with the implications of the destabilising effects of reader-oriented criticism. As I shall argue, Forrest-Thomson's aesthetic re-write of tenets of formalism and post-structuralism was due to her discernment of a paradox emerging in much of this theoretical practice of the time, as structuralism's formal conciliations were undermined by post-structuralist incredulity towards total form. Perceiving the potentially destabilising lack of control shaking the formalist foundations of structuralist thought, Forrest-Thomson sought to re-establish control against the tides of potential multiplicity by re-asserting certain unities, including perennial Artifice.

In outlining these tensions in Forrest-Thomson's aesthetics, I will firstly sketch the broad aspirations of *Poetic Artifice*, concentrating on some of its terminology. I have selected a few of Forrest-Thomson's terms, taking these as exemplary of many of the problems of her broader lexicon. I shall then trace some details of formalist and structuralist theories into Forrest-Thomson's own, outlining some of their problems, for example the blindspots of interpretation and the contentious subject of intention and the author function. The chapter will end with a discussion of Forrest-Thomson's solution to the perceived problems of twentieth-century poetry which, as she had been discovering in practice for a number of years, she locates in poetic conventions, tradition and a poetic diction. I shall argue that Forrest-Thomson's theory is a form of aesthetic modernism with glimpses of nineteenth-century aestheticism. Questions as to the significance of poetic form and the way in which the poem is distanced from the external world raise broader issues about the psychological, social and political significance of poetry. The refined specificity of Forrest-Thomson's theory resists the broader application of poetry, even as she insists on art's capacity to transform the world.

The Necessity of Theory

Forrest-Thomson's preface to *Poetic Artifice* introduces a reader to the inherited as well as invented lexicon that she will use to describe and analyse poetic form throughout her study. But, as with her manifesto, she immediately acknowledges the possible flaws of a strong, new theory:

> If I seem to speak with confidence in the pages that follow it is because I am convinced that nothing is to be gained in this enterprise by modest disclaimers […] The tentative character of my proposals will be sufficiently obvious to any reader who reflects on them and discovers their limitations and inadequacies. I am trying to devise ways of analysing the various verbal and logical devices and the literary conventions which make up poetic artifice, and if we recognise from the outset the difficulty of formulating a theory about the relations between the different strata of poetic artifice, then perhaps we may simply plunge ahead on the assumption that any theory is better than none because the disagreements it provokes will pave the way for a more adequate theory.[371]

Her theory is both confident and tentative, offering a series of propositions which may well be inadequate; they are tactical limitations for the sake of 'formulating a theory'. Aside from these broad caveats, Forrest-Thomson's proposals also contain an integral conflict between the categorisation and analysis of 'various verbal and logical devices' and a formulation of a comprehensive 'theory about the *relations between* various strata of artifice'. The first requires a schematic description of poetic devices, whilst the second will try to account for the relations *between* these devices. In short, one will describe fixed terms, the other will postulate their relations. The first act belongs to formalist categorisation whilst the second is a form of hermeneutics. Interestingly, at almost exactly the same time as Forrest-Thomson was writing her *Poetic Artifice*, the Franco-Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov published an essay outlining the inherent contradictions of a structuralist criticism. As he wrote in 'The Structural Analysis of Literature: The Tales of Henry James': 'criticism seeks to interpret a particular work, whilst structuralism […] is a scientific method implying an interest in impersonal laws and forms, of which existing objects

---

[371] PA, p. ix.

are only realizations.'[372] Todorov, like Forrest-Thomson, and as Ann Jefferson has noted, felt that a positive taxonomy of terms could enhance criticism's understanding of literary form.[373] Nevertheless, the latent contradiction still remained and it was one with which Forrest-Thomson struggled.

Poetic Artifice, therefore, has two ambitions: to describe the devices and provide a workable way of accounting for the relationships *between* the devices. Both ambitions concentrate primarily on the formal properties of the poem, moving from, it could be said, the *what*, to the *how*. One of the conceptual difficulties of *Poetic Artifice* is that it constantly shifts between description of devices to an 'account of the relationships' as if they were part of exactly the same process. However, the *what* is part of a still, synchronic model of a poem, whilst the *hows* of interrelation require the movement of interpretation; and this interpretation is part of a reading process. Writing of Barthes's theory of literature expressed in his 1970 book, *S/Z*, Jonathan Culler observes: 'how easily reader and text switch places in the stories [Barthes] tells: the story of the reader structuring a text flips over into a story of the text manipulating the reader.'[374] Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice* flips back and forth in the manner Culler describes, between focussing on the poem's forceful imposition of poetic effects and a reader's own structuring of the poem. Before discussing the way in which Forrest-Thomson's hermeneutics are limited by her static model of the poem, I will first draw out some of her descriptions of poetic form in relation to formalist theory.

Forrest-Thomson's theory of poetic Artifice has many similarities to that of Roman Jakobson. A number of critics have noted this association between the tenets and language of Forrest-Thomson's theory and Jakobson's, including Marjorie Perloff and Alison Mark.[375] Similarly, Brian McHale writes in his review essay on *Poetic Artifice* that he was surprised to find only one reference to Jakobson in Forrest-

---

[372] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Structural Analysis of Literature: The Tales of Henry James', in David Robey (ed.) *Structuralism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 73. Quoted in Ann Jefferson and David Robey (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., 1982), p. 97.

[373] Ann Jefferson, 'Structuralism and Poststructuralism', in Jefferson, *Modern Literary Theory,* p. 97.

[374] Jonathan Culler, *Barthes* (London: Fontana Press, 1990), p. 118.

[375] Perloff, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry', p. 293. Mark, VFT, p. 12.

Thomson's book – such are the similarities in descriptions of structure and terminology.[376] McHale argues that Jakobson's ignoring of meaning differentiates his theories from Forrest-Thomson's where theme has a substantial role. However, as I shall show, on the matter of form, pattern and the model of the poem as system, Forrest-Thomson shares with Jakobson a good deal more than McHale allows.

As well as seeking to isolate what Jakobson calls the '*differentia specifica*' of poetry and of defining this, as he writes, 'in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behaviour', Forrest-Thomson defines the poem positively and substantially, as a complex system comprising the generative ideal, Artifice.[377] In her preface, for example, she provides a diagram of the 'various levels of the poem' and its 'strata of artifice' outlining the ways in which a poet creates relations between the levels and strata.[378] Forrest-Thomson's descriptions of the physical features of the poem are comparable to Jakobson's idea of the 'poetic function' which forms part of his general model of the six factors of any speech event and their equivalent functions. According to Jakobson's model, if the *poetic* function is prioritised, attention is drawn to the physical features of the communicative act. Jakobson famously wrote that the poetic function 'projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination'; in other words, a poetic verbal act will be comprised of words chosen and combined on the basis of their equivalence.[379] Material equivalence is constitutive of the poetic function *per se*, so that details such as syllable length, sound and even the visual similarity of words are no longer arbitrary aspects of selection, but the most important features.

---

[376] Brian McHale, 'Against Interpretation: Iconic Grammar, Anxiety of Influence, and Poetic Artifice', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 3:1 (1982), p. 143. Brian McHale has been one of the most lucid expositors of Forrest-Thomson's theory since his review of *Poetic Artifice* in 1982. However, whilst he compellingly uses Forrest-Thomson's theory to complement a reading and theory of post-modern poetics, he rarely explores its relation to both modernist and aestheticist or nineteenth-century poetic theory and practice.

[377] Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics' in *Language in Literature*, (eds.) Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 63.

[378] PA, p. xiii.

[379] Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', p. 71.

These poetic devices are what Forrest-Thomson calls the 'non-meaningful aspects of language' and the patterns of which they form part.[380] As with formalist accounts of poetic practice, Forrest-Thomson recuperates potential non-meaning into a positive poetic function. The non-meaningful is never, for Forrest-Thomson, the absence of meaning, but the inarticulate presence of meaning as yet unrecuperable to a delayed vision of unity. The non-meaningful promises closure, not openness of meaning; the negative 'non' is inseparably entwined with its opposite. So when Forrest-Thomson writes in her preface that she is to focus on the '*apparently* non-sensical' devices of poetry, she illustrates her procedure of developing from a concentration on poetic pattern, in the manner of a formalist critical stance, towards a new meaning interpreted through the filter of an initial focus on form.[381] She will deal with the sensical only after apparently non-meaningful poetic material and patterns.[382]

Forrest-Thomson's understanding of the interactions between layers and complex formal patterns in the poem also resembles Jakobson's descriptions of poetic parallelism. His own theory was developed in part from Gerald Manley Hopkins, the poet with whom Forrest-Thomson herself engaged in her early manifesto. In 'Linguistics and Poetics', for example, Jakobson cites a key passage of Hopkins's student papers of 1865:

> The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism […] But parallelism is of two kinds necessarily – where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic. Only the first kind, that of marked parallelism, is concerned with the structure of verse – in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of

---

[380] PA, p. 124. She also uses the term 'non-semantic' throughout PA.

[381] PA, p. x.

[382] For another perspective on non-meaningful levels of language see Charles Bernstein's 'Artifice of Absorption' in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 9-89. Bernstein argues that 'such elements as line breaks, acoustic / patterns, syntax, etc., *are* meaningful rather than, / as she has it, that they *contribute* to the meaning / of the poem' (p.12). Unusually for such a perceptive critic, Bernstein seems to mis-read Forrest-Thomson's meaning of non-meaningful here. She, too, instinctively knew that form has meaning beyond what Bernstein calls 'relatively fixed connotative or denotative meaning' (p. 12), hence her fanatical refinement of descriptions of the uniqueness of poetic function in order to try and express that which has remained inarticulable about form. See, also, Simon Perril, CBP, pp. 110-12 and Mark, VFT, pp. 4-5.

syllables, in metre the recurrence of a certain sequence or rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance and in rhyme.[383]

We can see here the insistent shadows of Victorian poetic theory and practice looming over formalist criticism. Both Jakobson and Forrest-Thomson share what could be called Hopkins's schematic passion. In the passage quoted by Jakobson, Hopkins insists that a heightened parallelism in structure 'begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense' or, as Jakobson dryly glosses, 'equivalence in sound, projected into the sequence as its constitutive principle, inevitably involves semantic equivalence'.[384] Form in both accounts is elevated to carrying equal if not more significance than content. Importantly, Hopkins singles out this thing called 'artifice' as a part of poetry which he then reduces to the generic 'parallelism'. This term describes the particular devices Forrest-Thomson would identify as 'poetic artifice': rhythm (syllabic repetitions and metre), alliteration and assonance and rhyme and all those features which stress 'equivalent relations'. Hopkins, Jakobson and Forrest-Thomson all stress the priority of artifice and parallel patterns as poetry's predominant and primary features.

Forrest-Thomson's invented term 'image-complex' also shares many similarities with the formalist concept of the 'dominant'.[385] The image-complex is, as Forrest-Thomson puts it, 'a level of coherence which helps us to assimilate features of various kinds, to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant, and to control the importation of external contexts.'[386] In other words, it is a cluster of features which, in linguistic terminology, places 'selection restrictions' on the interpretation of the poem.[387] In an article summing up the status of the dominant in formalist discussions of art, Jakobson describes it as the 'focussing component of a work of art: it rules,

---

[383] Humphrey House and Graham Storey (eds.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, *The Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 85. Quoted in Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', pp. 82-3.

[384] Hopkins, *The Journals*, *ibid*. Quoted in Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', p. 83.

[385] Perloff also draws this connection in 'Twentieth-Century Poetry', p. 293.

[386] PA, p. xii.

[387] 'Selection restrictions' are described by David Crystal as: 'in generative grammar, a syntactic feature which specifies restrictions on the permitted combinations of lexical items within a given grammatical context.' David Crystal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 300. So a word's connotations restrict its usage within certain grammatical constructions. In 'Against Interpretation' (pp. 155-6), McHale admits to a certain degree of confusion about the term, and it is slightly ambiguous. However, I think the term is clarified somewhat by its association with the terminology of formalism as well as analytical linguistics.

determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure […] The dominant specifies the work.'[388] Jakobson describes the phenomenon in historical terms, noting how it became a dominant aspect of a particular historical moment. Jan Mukařovský was more specific about its status in a single work, remarking in a 1932 essay that:

> The dominant is that component of a work which sets in motion and determines the relations between other components. The material of the poetic work is a network of different interrelationships of components […] However, this system has only to be shifted out of equilibrium by one specific point for the whole network (or system) of relations to be tensed in a particular direction and thus be internally organized.[389]

The idea that there is an internalised central figure which 'sets in motion' other aspects of the poetic text would have been an attractive one to Forrest-Thomson who, as my last chapter attests, was so interested in the status of poetic figures. The notion of a poem as a network of complex interrelations and which is somehow unified or controlled by an 'image-complex' were potent metaphors in Forrest-Thomson's critical thinking.

The image-complex is a device which controls the internal relations between different strata of artifice, setting in motion features of the poem. However, there is a latent conflict in Forrest-Thomson's use of the term due to its twin lineage in formalism and in the theory of Ezra Pound, and also to the way the figure both implies stasis and movement. On the one hand, the image-complex is, as Forrest-Thomson puts it, 'a level of coherence' aiding the 'apportion of attention'. On the other hand, Forrest-Thomson clearly had Pound in mind when she described the term in an unpublished essay entitled, 'The Separate Planet: John Donne and William Empson':

> "image" because the words used supply the critic with an image – not of course solely or even primarily, visual – of the non-verbal world; "complex" because these images are juxtaposed one with another in a complex of thought,

---

[388] Roman Jakobson, 'The Dominant' in *Language in Literature*, p. 41.

[389] Jan Mukařovský, 'Standard Language and Poetic Language', quoted in L. M. O'Toole and Ann Shukman (eds.) *Russian Poetics in Translation: Formalist Theory* (Essex: University of Essex Press, 1977), p. 34.

feeling, evocation of sense impressions, which the critic must sort out without destroying its complexity.[390]

The complexity of the image is informed by Pound's definition of 'an intellectual and emotional complex', but Pound's aesthetic was designed to still this complex in an 'instant of time'.[391] Pound's image is, as he argues in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 'the word beyond formulated language', or a neoplatonic space aspired to or gestured at by creative juxtaposition.[392] The intellectual and emotional details of the poem are, in Forrest-Thomson's theory, somehow *both* stilled – a juxtaposition and cluster of complexity – as well as dynamically active as part of the processes of interpretation, leading a critic to apportion their attention. The inherent tension in this perspective is highlighted by Forrest-Thomson's use of the word 'destroying' in the quotation above. Her theory calls for the co-presence of a juxtaposed tension of intellectual and emotional complexes, as well as the activity of the dynamic processes of interpretation in order to activate certain features of the poem. The one constantly threatens to destroy the other. Not only are there artifices for which Forrest-Thomson's theory cannot account, but she never fully reconciles the conflict between the static representation of interactive layers and the necessary dynamic processes of their interaction and interpretation.[393] Such a tension is heightened when the role of the reader is considered.

---

[390] TSP, p. 4.

[391] Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 4.

[392] Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 88.

[393] Comparable figures to Forrest-Thomson's image-complex can also be found throughout structuralist theory. See, for example, Michael Riffaterre's concept of the 'hypogram' which, as Johanne Prud'homme and Nelson Guilbert explain, 'is based on the Saussurean concept of the *paragram*. In Saussure's theory, this term designates a key word, or *theme-word*, whose lexical and graphemic constituents would be embedded and disseminated within the text. In other words, the text would be saturated with a phonic paraphrase of the theme-word […]'. Johanne Prud'homme and Nelson Guilbert, 'Text Derivation' in Louis Hébert (dir.), *Signo* [online], retrieved January 16 2010 <http://www.signosemio.com> – my emphasis. They are quoting from Michael Riffaterre *Text Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 76.

Ideal Reader, Ideal Poem

Forrest-Thomson was attracted to formalism and early structuralism for the neatness of their terminology, their pseudo-scientific nature, the formal cohesion such theories lent a literary text, as well as the possibilities for both reader's and author's control over material and poetic effects. *Poetic Artifice* is authoritarian and categorical, even if, as Forrest-Thomson concedes, such confidence has its limitations. Forrest-Thomson's exchange with an audience member during her 'Unrealism and Death' talk at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975 usefully characterises her sentiments towards the text, the reader and the poet themselves:

> **Audience member:** I'm not responsible for my readers' mistakes…
> **Veronica Forrest-Thomson:** [interrupting] Oh yes you are! It's your job as a writer to think of any [interpretation] possible – well you can't think of everything, but… If you talk about the writer you get into terrific problems about intention… [pause]
> The best way to find out about how a writer organises his work is to read it and analyse it.[394]

A writer is responsible for pre-empting as many interpretations as they can, whilst a reader must concentrate on the text, and only the text, if they are to understand the ways in which a writer 'organises his work'. A reader has to, as it were, follow the text's lead and do as they're told. As Forrest-Thomson concedes, her own conviction of an author's control could lead to 'terrific problems about intention'; but her knowledge of this fact only serves to lend her theory an extra, anxious dimension of dogmatic control. Forrest-Thomson's theory contains a circumscribed vision of the writer, the text and the reader exchanging ever-refined information and lexis about textual devices, all of which reify both the unity of the text and the mastery of the controlling poet.

A forceful, unified and cohesive model of the poem, the masterful author, and the passively following reader are all entwined; each a necessary cog servicing the

---

[394] Veronica Forrest-Thomson 'Unrealism and Death in Contemporary Poetry'; discussion between Forrest-Thomson and Michel Couturier (with audience participation) at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, 18th April 1975, British Library National Sound Archive, refs. T6023WR-7359W. The transcription is my own.

machine of poetic Artifice. Forrest-Thomson outlines the concept of 'naturalisation' in *Poetic Artifice* which serves to reinforce each of these figures, as the poet's technique compels a reader to attend to the intricacies of poetic form under the promise of a good and faithful interpretation; a reward in exchange for the dutiful attendance to form. Forrest-Thomson is aware of the potential instabilities introduced by a reader and develops a model of reading designed to counteract whimsical interpretation. She selects the word naturalisation for its antithetical relation with artifice, for to naturalise is to ignore, deny or try to contain the poem's artificiality by an overarching theme. 'Bad naturalisation', as Forrest-Thomson puts it, 'is an attempt to reduce the strangeness of poetic language and poetic organisation by making it intelligible, by translating it into a statement about the non-verbal external world, by making the Artifice appear natural.'[395] 'Good naturalisation', on the other hand, 'dwells on the non-meaningful levels of poetic language, such as phonetic and prosodic pattern and spatial organisation, and tries to state their relation to other levels of organisation rather than set them aside in an attempt to produce a statement about the world.'[396] Forrest-Thomson's polemical attack on 'bad naturalisation' is directed in large part at what she views as Empson's tendency to paraphrase poems. Whilst Empson's pioneering work in literary studies exerted a large influence on Forrest-Thomson, she criticises him in *Poetic Artifice* for treating poems as 'a step to the end of communicating ideas' and as 'thematic statement[s]' rather than attending to 'formal pattern, the metrical scheme, the rhythmical pattern, and the syntactic pattern.'[397] His interpretations, whilst accurate, were, as she puts it, 'reached by the wrong roads and supported by the wrong reasons.'[398]

Forrest-Thomson's language was new for its time, particularly the structuralist term 'naturalisation' or, later, 'recuperation', but the ideas update those popular in New Criticism.[399] For example, Forrest-Thomson's faith in the unity of the poetic text and her rejection of bad naturalisation resemble I. A. Richards's broad requirement to establish certain principles of literary criticism which attend to the particular and

---

[395] PA, p. xi. Cp. the numerous other words for such a process outlined in Culler's SP, p. 51.

[396] PA, p. xi.

[397] *ibid.*, p. 3.

[398] *ibid.*, p. 2.

[399] In the 'Unrealism and Death' talk just cited, Forrest-Thomson asks, rhetorically, 'may I introduce a fashionable term, recuperation'.

irreducible features of a poem and which avoid what Cleanth Brooks called the 'heresy of paraphrase'.[400] The unified or irreducible sense of the text is further entrenched in Forrest-Thomson's introduction of spatial metaphors into the processes of naturalisation, namely what she outlines in her preface as 'external expansion and limitation' and 'internal expansion and limitation'.[401] These, as Culler puts it of linguistic metaphors – and who himself discusses 'naturalisation' – function as 'principle[s] of inclusion and exclusion'.[402] Forrest-Thomson rehearses the obvious notion that the position a critic chooses to take in relation to the poem defines the limits of their reading. However, the language of her description bolsters the unified, static, and controlling nature of her poetic model. To unpack her phrases: 'external expansion and limitation' is where a critic takes a poetic statement as direct and literal and then proceeds to guide the whole poem's interpretation by this statement; such practice 'expands' the poem 'externally' (to biographical or other detail), but limits the possibility of other, contrary interpretations. Conversely, if a critic proceeds 'internally', marking the movement of rhyme and rhythm or the development of conflicting images, this process expands the possibility of the appreciation of formal semantic and intricacies of the poem, but also carries its own limitations, running the risk of failing to produce a coherent and unified reading. To Forrest-Thomson, the latter limitation is preferable. However, her terms – 'internal', 'limitation' – are spatial, and predicated on a stilled model of poetic form. The terminology, that is to say, testifies to the restrictions her own theory imposes on interpretations of the poem. Whilst the theory and interpretative method expand the capacity to dwell on formal features, the theory itself acts as a naturalising device, whereby the significance and functionality of details are governed by their assumed operation in a pre-defined, static model.

One of the broad themes of Forrest-Thomson's theory is the struggle to retain an ideal of intentionality; the twin ghosts of the ideal poem and ideal reader stalk *Poetic Artifice*, and neither presence is entirely convincing. Forrest-Thomson's awareness

---

[400] See I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), particularly 'The Chaos of Critical Theories', pp. 1-5. 'The Heresy of Paraphrase' is the title of the concluding chapter of Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947), p. 157-76.

[401] PA, p. xii.

[402] Culler, SP, p. 99.

of the trouble of intention does not stop her relying on it as a dominant figure in her model of poetic practice. 'The author', in Foucault's words, 'is […] the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.'[403] For Forrest-Thomson, the proliferation of meaning is halted in the strategic functioning of poetic form marshalled by the absent-presence of the poet to which the reader gives silent feasance. *Poetic Artifice* paradoxically rejects attempts to limit a text's interpretation by reference simply to an author's intention, but simultaneously praises an author's ability to supervise meaning or to create a poem which, in Michael Riffaterre's words, 'controls its own decoding'.[404] Forrest-Thomson's conviction of control is somewhat tempered with an equivocation, demonstrated in her tentative remarks in her 'Unrealism and Death' talk quoted above, and centred around the attempt to avoid the spectres of an 'intentional fallacy'.[405] However, she simultaneously argues that a poet *controls* and *masters* certain techniques whilst a reader diligently learns to recognise such techniques from the dogmatic poem. In other words, Forrest-Thomson neither rejects the author function, nor does she agree with Barthes's analogous belief that, '[i]n the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath'.[406] Whilst Forrest-Thomson asserts an unavoidable anteriority of any text, filtered as it is via innumerable other uses, language's lack of originality does not result, for her, in the death of origins.

Throughout *Poetic Artifice,* Forrest-Thomson implies that the poem contains within itself a codified intent which it is a reader's passive duty to identify. Her position is perhaps derived from the structuralist argument of Riffaterre who proposes the text's self-sufficiency whereby, 'the mythology we need for the text is entirely encoded in

---

[403] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 119.

[404] Michael Riffaterre, *Text Production* (trans.) Terese Lyons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 6.

[405] Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley (eds.), *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3-20.

[406] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (ed. & trans.) Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 147. See Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Burke argues for the inevitable and irrepressible existence of subjectivity in any text against the arguments of prominent post-structuralists.

the words of text'.[407] A reader need look no further than, as Riffaterre neatly puts it, the 'necessary […] verbal artefacts' of the poem's structure.[408] In illustrating what she means by the function of the image-complex, for example, Forrest-Thomson describes the activity of interpreting the Shakespearean metaphor, 'Out, out brief candle, / life's but a walking shadow'.[409] As she argues, a reader understands by the context of the passage that only certain features of candle are relevant (not that it's waxy, but that it's finite and frail). However, she also stresses that 'the level of coherence' is 'established by the lines' and that this 'tells us that only certain features of empirical candles are relevant to the passage'.[410] Such statements illustrate what Forrest-Thomson would later describe as the 'latent intentionality of poetic language' which she implies is the consequence of, as she puts it in relation to Graham Hough's essay, 'An Eighth Type of Ambiguity', 'the poet's intentions as someone who writes 'poems'' being transferred to the 'intentionality revealed in the structure of any actual poem's language.'[411] She makes an important distinction here which both reasserts a spectral author function but also bolsters her sense of a poet's choosing from a variety of static conventions, transfering their will onto formal control. Such a process is prior to meaning – the intent to use form is not the same intent to say something. She writes: 'The 'meaning' of a poem may have more to do with the 'intention' to write a poem with reference to particular variants in convention than the utterance itself.'[412] Forrest-Thomson's attention is on formal rather than semantic control and this distinction, she implies, studiously avoids the subject of a type of authorial intention mired by bad practical criticism. Her position is, of course, slightly disingenuous, but her use of the term 'latent' above is, in part,

---

[407] Michael Riffaterre, 'The Self-Sufficient Text', *Diacritics*, Vol. 3, no. 3 (Autumn, 1973), p. 44.

[408] Riffaterre, 'The Self-Sufficient Text', p. 44. Cp. Forrest-Thomson's '*Necessary* Artifice'. Both 'artefact' and 'artifice' stem from the Latin 'ars' (art) and 'facere' or, past participle, 'factus' (to make). *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (ed.) Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2008), p. 53. Whilst 'artefact' was Coleridge's invention (1821) and implies a stilled, crafted work of art, 'artifice' implies the technical skill and process of making. But 'artifice' contains within itself the stasis of its subsequent usage. As Keery points out in 'Blossoming Synecdoches', 'Forrest-Thomson's argument is Coleridgean in its elaboration and metaphysical implications', p. 112.

[409] PA, p. xii. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* Act 5 sc. 5 ll. 23-4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 204.

[410] PA, p. xii-xiii.

[411] *ibid.*, p. 132. Forrest-Thomson refers to Graham Hough, 'An Eighth Type of Ambiguity', in Roma Gill (ed.), *William Empson: The Man and His Work* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 76-97.

[412] PA, p. 132.

to distance herself from the trouble of overt intentionality. Her position is clear: the lines of the poem contain latent internal relations and the dominant or image-complex helps apportion attention in the process of interpretation. Despite her burying intent in the ambiguous realm of latency, the poet's will is nevertheless codified in poetic form. Forrest-Thomson's conviction requires an impossible and unnatural passivity on the part of a reader as well as an aesthetically stilled conception of poetic form.

Authorial intention or the 'design or plan in the author's mind', as Wimsatt and Beardsley put it, is, therefore, smuggled in by the back door by Forrest-Thomson's repeated assertion of a poet's control and mastery.[413] This assertion is often highly generalised – as in 'latent intentionality' – but she also locates very particular intentional effects in, for example, poems by J. H. Prynne and John Ashbery. For example, of Ashbery's poem 'They Dream Only of America', Forrest-Thomson argues that he uses the 'conventional level' of 'writing in stanzas so that he may be assured of a reader's applying the convention[s] of lyric poetry. Having aroused these expectations, these conventions, he proceeds to disrupt them.'[414] It is clear from such descriptions that, in the power relations of competence between a reader and a writer, Forrest-Thomson sees the latter as in control. If, as Culler suggests in *Structuralist Poetics*, '[s]tructures and relations are not objective properties of external objects; they emerge only in a structuring process', then Forrest-Thomson feeds a central coordinating structural principle into a vision of the poet as master of poetic technique and effect.[415] She is simply not willing to cede authorial territory to the claims of the early structuralists.

In his book *On Deconstruction*, Culler claims that Forrest-Thomson 'displays no interest in the behavior of individual readers', but, he argues, in order to explain how poems produce effects 'and to show how formal features [of the poem] block certain kinds of thematic synthesis, one has to describe reading'.[416] Culler pursues this line throughout his *Structuralist Poetics*: that textual effects are the product of the

---

[413] Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', p. 4.
[414] PA, p. 155.
[415] Culler, SP, p. 30.
[416] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp. 38-9.

activity of a reader referencing their hermeneutic competence. What he resists is the idea that textual effects are somehow innate to the text itself. I don't think Culler is quite right in suggesting that Forrest-Thomson doesn't discuss readers in her work, as spectral readers lurk throughout *Poetic Artifice*. However, whilst Forrest-Thomson does attack individual critical readers, the main figure proposed in *Poetic Artifice* is an ideal reader which is a projection of theory and of the text itself. Forrest-Thomson's polemical stance resists any particular reader's competence as well as any possibility that there would be readings deviant from her own. Culler calls for a description and an assessment of the way in which a reader uses a variety of external codes which enable a poem to be read in a certain way; Forrest-Thomson outlines a reading strategy to appreciate the internal intricacies of her poetic artifice. Both theories are prescriptive: Culler's theory represents a model for the possibility *of* reading; Forrest-Thomson's theory attempts to be a regulatory model *for* reading. So whilst her theory encourages the possibility of divergent reading by locating the object of attention within the formal features of the poem, Forrest-Thomson resists the full implications of such possibilities by reinforcing the spectral power of the author function and intent.

The Limits of Interpretation

Forrest-Thomson's theory prescribes both an ideal model of the poem and an accompanying ideal reader, both of which are somehow produced by the poet's intentionality, unifying poetic form around a spectral origin. But the model of the ideal poem, of the expressed intent of the poet and of the restricted role of the reader, lead to interpretive problems as she struggles to argue for particular formal effects whilst demoting or excluding others. To paraphrase a remark by Charles Altieri: '[her] instruments dictate the result of [her] inquiry.'[417] Forrest-Thomson's interpretation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 in the introduction to *Poetic Artifice*, for example, contains a strikingly ingenious but excessive over-reading of sound patterns or artifices in a way exactly mirroring Jakobson's practice, as I shall show. Her methods are similar to Jakobson's in many respects where, as Culler writes in a passage related to Jakobson's essay 'Poetry of grammar and grammar of poetry':

---

[417] Charles Altieri, 'An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Sept., 1983), p. 42. I've simply changed the gender of the pronouns in Altieri's sentence.

> The claim seems to be, first, that linguistics provides an algorithm for exhaustive and unbiased description of a text and, second, that this algorithm of linguistic description constitutes a discovery procedure for poetic patterns in that if followed correctly it will yield an account of the patterns which are objectively present in the text.[418]

The analyst, equipped with such an algorithm, 'need not worry about the status and pertinence' of their results of analysis, but needs merely to record their existence.[419] This process results in a form of self-mirroring criticism.

Forrest-Thomson's choice to use a sixteenth-century lyric as the site of the book's first detailed, critical reading is designed to evidence the perennial importance of certain poetic techniques and to establish the broad context for a subsequent demonstration of their persistence in twentieth-century poetry. The use of Shakespeare's sonnets for such formalist analysis is also remarkably common. For example, Jakobson's and L. G. Jones's account of Sonnet 129 offers a comparable model to Forrest-Thomson's practice where they break the sonnet down into 'four strophic units' in order to analyse the 'binary correspondences' between rhyme, metre, vowel patterns as well as thematic leitmotifs.[420] These then correspond, as the authors put it, to 'form a salient network of binary oppositions' giving the poem its symmetry.[421] In a similarly scientific vein, Forrest-Thomson, proceeding 'line by line as an analyst should before we see the lines as a whole', starts by identifying the image-complex, 'as stone' of the opening quatrain of Shakespeare's sonnet and explaining its link and function in the sound, metre, rhythm and syntax of the lines.[422] By isolating the first and last words of the lines of the first quatrain of Shakespeare's sonnet, Forrest-Thomson draws out tensions and oppositions of tense and reference which she relates to the 'sound/look' of vowel and consonant patterns; all of which 'feed back' into the line's increasingly complex structure.[423] Forrest-

---

[418] Culler, SP, p. 57. Roman Jakobson, 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry', in *Language in Literature*, pp. 121-144.

[419] Culler, SP, p. 57.

[420] Roman Jakobson and L. G. Jones, 'Shakespeare's Verbal Art in 'Th'Expence of Spirit'', in *Language in Literature*, p. 199.

[421] *ibid.*, p. 202.

[422] PA, p. 5.

[423] *ibid.*, p. 6.

Thomson illustrates the complexity of the intricate interrelation of levels of artifice by re-writing the opening quatrain to stress the 'anatomy' of each level in turn; for example, she retains the metre but changes the syntax or leaves the sound pattern whilst using nonsense words.[424] Writing of Jakobson's comparable methodology in *Structuralist Poetics*, Culler observes that 'to test whether patterns isolated are in fact responsible for particular effects one may alter the patterns to see whether they change the effects in question.'[425] In undertaking what was an established practice, therefore, Forrest-Thomson convincingly and impressively demonstrates the necessity and complexity of each of the levels to the overall effect of the poem.

Forrest-Thomson builds her argument around finding oppositions and connections or, in the terms of Jakobson, parallelisms, in single strata of artifice; but the ghosts of intentionality and unity linger. Despite her claim to centre her interpretation around formal considerations, the organisational source behind Forrest-Thomson's argument is a *conscious* use of refined and complex formal artifice in terms of a model of Artifice located somewhere outside the poem. She claims, for example, that Shakespeare's strategic use of deictic pronouns creates a referential 'equivocation' which is matched by 'syntactical and metrical equivocation' which creates semantic ambiguity.[426] Throughout her critical work, Forrest-Thomson frequently evokes a space opened up by equivocal deixis. For example, in her essay, 'His True Penelope was Flaubert', she writes of the opening word, 'That's' of Browning's poem, 'My Last Duchess: Ferrara', that it is anaphoric (referring outside), homophoric (referring to itself) and kataphoric (referring to the future) at the same time, '[s]o that a

---

[424] PA., pp. 5-7. I think Forrest-Thomson's use of the word 'anatomies' on page 5 is a deliberate reference to Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957). Though Frye is nowhere mentioned in *Poetic Artifice*, his absence is conspicuous.

[425] Culler, SP, p. 68. In 'Against Interpretation', McHale uses this 'altering' method (self-consciously after Forrest-Thomson) to critique Harold Bloom's apparent disinterest in poetic form (pp. 150-1). In a particularly cruel and derisory review of Forrest-Thomson's *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), John London arranges excerpts from PA into short lines to resemble poems in order to argue that his inventions are more 'amusing' and possess more 'Artifice' than an apparently 'prose' excerpt from Forrest-Thomson's poem, 'Group Theory'. John London 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and the Art of Artifice', *Fragmente*, 4 (1991), p. 82. London's argument is amusing insofar as it is based on a misunderstanding of Forrest-Thomson's theory as well as her poem. 'Group Theory' confronts the nature of identity, cross-dressing and the ideological power of pronominal designation through, among other features, a clash of prose and poetic forms. Forrest-Thomson knew exactly what she was doing by incorporating prose into her poetry.

[426] PA, p. 13.

multiple use of one word can give us a non-verbal scene.'[427] Here, the 'scene'
becomes three-dimensional by deictic ambiguity. So sure is Forrest-Thomson of
Shakespeare's targeted use of stress, equivocation, pattern and diction and of her
identification of formal shifts through the three stages of the poem's progress, that
she produces, as McHale has pointed out, an 'astonishing anagrammatic
interpretation'.[428]

Turning her attention to the third quatrain of the poem, Forrest-Thomson argues that
'something happens at the level of sound pattern' from the transition from the second
to the third quatrain and is precipitated in the line: 'The summer's flower is to the
summer sweet, / Though to itself it only live and die'.[429] Up to this point, Forrest-
Thomson maintains, the sound and formal patterns have emphasised the centrality of
the 'They' of the poem. However, in the third quatrain, Forrest-Thomson observes:

> The pattern of *x o* and *s* [of the previous quatrain] is interrupted in the phrase
> 'live and die', and it is interrupted with an *x i*.[430] We have to think about 'live
> and die' since it sums up 'their' activities and seems pretty comprehensive, so
> that whatever it is 'they' don't do must be an unusual thing. If we transfer this
> inference from the level of meaning to the level of sound pattern we can alter
> 'live' to make it conform to the *o* pattern which will give us the words that has
> been hovering over the poem since the first line: 'love'. What we have in the
> line 'Though to itself it only live and die' is the almost overt statement 'I love',
> for the fact that the pattern is interrupted with an *i* together with the reader's
> search for the 'I' in the poem make it an easy step to transfer the *i* from lower
> to upper case.[431]

Forrest-Thomson displays a faith in the phenomenal movement of form and its
creation of a kind of semantic affect. Both authorial intent as well as a reader's

---

[427] HTP, p. 40. Since writing the above passages, excerpts from Forrest-Thomson's HTP have been published in 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Three Essays' ed. Michael Hansen and Gareth Farmer, *Chicago Review*, no. 56:2/3 (Autumn, 2011), pp. 10-35.

[428] McHale, 'Against Interpretation', p. 156. McHale views Forrest-Thomson's over-reading (outlined below) as an example of her 'strange, even freakish, excesses in some of her practical analysis of poems' (p. 156). Whilst McHale is right to point out the excesses in Forrest-Thomson's writing, they are not freakish (a word which seems slightly gendered) but, rather, a logical extension of what she describes elsewhere as her 'fanatical' attention to formal detail (HTP, p. 29).

[429] William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (ed.) John Kerrigan (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 123. All quotations from the sonnet are from this page.

[430] Forrest-Thomson she must surely mean <u>*v i*</u>.

[431] PA, p. 14.

instructions are codified in the lines. Forrest-Thomson's main argument that the logic of formal pattern conjures the ghostly word 'love' from between linguistic gaps merely ends up confirming her own pre-established formal model. But the ghosts in her readings are her model of Artifice and the refined deity of the poet; the latter operating as 'the principle of a certain unity of writing', as Foucault puts it.[432] There is an excessive logic and studied application of a model in this reading which necessarily excludes other, more obvious, interpretations.

It is more convincing, for example, that Shakespeare's densely suggestive sonnet uses the innocence and lack of self-consciousness of the flower in comparison with a more sagacious and calculating 'basest weed' to reveal the complex theme of just rewards. Certainly, there is a strong connection in the sonnet between the status of the flower as metaphor and material. But in this case the importance of the sound/sight of the 'i' is *elevated* not demoted, as it creates the tensions between equivocal positions of doing right by using the contrasts between the emphatic /i/ sounds of '*i*tself', '*i*t' and 'l*i*ve' and the full /ai/ sound of the 'die'. Similarly, such tensions are reinforced by the jarring eye-rhyme with 'digni*ty*' of the fourth line: 'Though to itself it only live and die; […] The basest weed outbraves its dignity'. Shakespeare's sonnet tactically avoids a simple theme and both sound and sense mingle and clash to create a tone which implies moral equivocation. Forrest-Thomson is much more categorical about the poem's effects. She takes for granted that the reader will not only witness the word 'love', but that they will make the leap from the sound of 'i' and connect this with 'our' search for an 'I' in the poem. She is able to conceive of the easy 'transfer of inference' from levels in the poem by both her conviction of the poet's intention and because she is certain of her internalised, linguistic model and theory of poetic Artifice which pre-figure the way in which the poem *should* operate. [433]

---

[432] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 22.

[433] Cf. Jakobson and Jones's reading of Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 129' where they argue for the existence of a similar sound-pattern ghostliness as Forrest-Thomson. According to them, the name Will is 'anagrammaticalized' in a few later Sonnets (nos. 134-136) and they wonder whether Shakespeare's family name (in any of its multiple forms) might be present in the letters and sounds of the first line – 'Th' e*xp*ence of *Spir*it in a w*as*te of *sha*me'. They then speculate whether, as they put it, 'the terminal couplet with its thrice iterated /w/ and […] the words *well (*w.ll*) yet* (y) and *men* (m) could carry a latent allusion to William.' Jakobson and Jones, 'Shakespeare's Verbal Art', p. 213-14 –

Forrest-Thomson reverses a reading which would use form to confirm meaning, working instead from an inference of pattern deviation into meaning then back into the formal pattern. In other words, she draws on an intuition of the meaning of the activity of artifice as it has accrued during her reading of the poem and lets this guide her understanding of the assumed activity of subsequent patterns. But this guide is already her own model, derived from the ideal activity of Artifice she has projected on to the poem by perceiving the 'pattern of x o and s' its parallelisms elsewhere. Furthermore, these patterns are worked out in the *process* of reading the poem. There is a conflict between Forrest-Thomson's account of the means by which she accrues the evidence for her interpretation, via a process of reading, and her use of this evidence to back up an already-worked out model of the operation of Artifice. Any interpretation is obviously a dialectical interaction between these two, but Forrest-Thomson disingenuously presents her reading as a *process* whilst all the while merely confirming her static model of Artifice. Her literal application and conviction in the veracity of her linguistic model produces the conditions of its own reading, resulting in over-interpretation.

Once again, the idea of the poet-as-source is a theoretical anchor for Forrest-Thomson's reading. Turning her attention to the final lines of the sonnet – 'For the sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; / Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' – Forrest-Thomson argues: '[t]his recourse to the natural world implies that 'nature bears me out', but that external reference is absorbed by the poem, which comes to assert that 'nature bears me out because I am able to reorganise it in this elaborate pattern of Artifice.'[434] What she means by this is that Shakespeare's main motivation was to assert the perennial 'nature' of artifice (a delightful oxymoron not lost on Forrest-Thomson). But her conviction that this is his primary theme, that, in other words, form is more important than content, is a devious application of her own theory of Artifice and, in her terms, a 'bad naturalisation': a 'thematic synthesis' around the poet's conviction of his reorganisation of 'elaborate pattern'. Whilst she argues that 'external reference is absorbed by the poem', the twin

---

my emphases. Whilst such anagram hunting is common in assessments of Shakespeare's sonnets, Jakobson's and Jones's interpretation is (knowingly) excessive.
[434] PA, p. 15.

references of the platonic poet and the model of the poem still dominate: 'I' organises the poem in relation to his internalised and self-consciously evoked 'elaborate pattern of Artifice' both, presumably, from the outside. Forrest-Thomson expects a reader to 'bear her out' when she naturalises the poem in terms of her own overarching theory. Similarly, the fact that real lilies fester and smell doesn't matter. It doesn't matter as, she claims, the 'image brings the outside world into the poem and shows the subservience of external values to the re-organising Artifice of sound pattern and image-complex', whilst the intense formal patterning of the lines announces, she argues, 'the firmness of the poetic control.' [435] To Forrest-Thomson, Shakespeare is firmly of the artificer's party; an ally in her elevation of form.

Structuralism's Partiality

An emphatically formalist approach to poetry leads to the weaknesses of abstraction which repeatedly reminds its users of the threatening pointlessness of a theory merely, as Jameson puts it, 'drawing its own eye without realizing it'.[436] Whilst Forrest-Thomson's absorption of tenets of structuralist thinking extends the possibility of formalism to achieve a significance beyond self-confirmation, her partial reading of it leads to a comparably limited account of the poem, stripping away the referent to concentrate on the processes of signification. However, throughout *Poetic Artifice* and other essays of this period, Forrest-Thomson anticipates the hazards of structuralist abstractions by re-asserting the emphatically *poetic* nature of poetry in an argument stressing the centrality of conventions. Put simply: where formalism contributed to Forrest-Thomson's account of the operations of poetic form, structuralism provided her with theoretical reasons for concentrating on the processes of signification located in the manipulation of the material dimension of language. However, Forrest-Thomson frequently conceded that, whilst Barthes and Kristeva and other contributors to the journal *Tel Quel* provided a challenging, general critical account of language, they had very little to offer to an understanding of poetic practice and to the interpretation of poems in particular. Further, the reliance on structuralist accounts of reading, as outlined most lucidly in Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, on the anomalous, unstable and potentially infinite

---

[435] PA, p. 15.
[436] Jameson, *Prison-House*, p. 207.

types of readers' 'conventions', and Barthes's subsequent assassination of the author-function, represented a crisis for Forrest-Thomson's account of control and mastery of poetic form. She needed to find 'a host of conventions which we apply only in reading and writing poems'.[437] These she found in the resources of poetic artifice: poetry's traditional devices such as rhyme, metre and stanza use.

Forrest-Thomson wanted to re-affirm poetry's emphatic identity – a task structuralists rarely engaged with; as such, the influence of French critical theory on her work was filtered by what it could offer definitions of the poetic. In a letter from Cambridge to Paul Buck written during the summer of 1972 Forrest-Thomson remarked: 'I am exclusively *Tel Quel* orientated'.[438] The journal *Tel Quel* ran from 1960 to 1982 and was a forum for the publications of a group of highly active left-wing political and literary commentators. However, whilst Forrest-Thomson's orientation and attitude towards language was undoubtedly informed by *Tel Quel* writers like Kristeva, Barthes and Derrida, her position isn't exclusively informed by these essays; her application of their ideas to poetic theory necessitates their partial reading. In her 1973 article, 'Necessary Artifice: Form and Theory in the Poetry of *Tel Quel*', Forrest-Thomson argues that the *Tel Quel* writers enabled a comprehension of the 'theoretical investigation of language and of the differences which literary language can introduce'.[439] But a concentration of the exact characteristics and function of 'literary language', as she puts it, 'must underlie the

---

[437] PA, p. ix.

[438] Personal letter in Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive. Patrick Ffrench and Roland-François Lack (eds.) *The Tel Quel Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998) gives a useful overview of the diverse practices and development of the journal during this period, charting its Marxist and structuralist positions of the sixties through to its emphasis in the seventies on Maoism, dialectical materialist and radical political critique. Notable among the journal's contributors were the experimental poets Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Pleynet and Denis Roche. Forrest-Thomson refers to these writers throughout *Poetic Artifice* and wrote two articles dealing directly with their poetics and poetry (LPC and NA). She also translated select work which was published in the 1990 edition of the *Collected Poems and Translations* pp. 117-200. See Ian Patterson, 'Containers, Pulses, Lentils: *Tel Quel* and Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 27 September 2011, < http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Patterson.php > for an authoritative critical account of some of the translations. In another, undated, letter to Paul Buck, Forrest-Thomson anticipates future criticisms of her translations and (presumably) Buck's own reservations when she asserts: 'If you suppose the inaccuracies of exact word equivalence arise from inadequacy of my knowledge of French you couldn't be more mistaken'. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive.

[439] NA, p. 12.

development of a new literary practice.'[440] Forrest-Thomson's application of the theory displays the type of critical filtering described most memorably by Terry Eagleton as 'those erstwhile or essentially conventional critics who have scrambled with varying degrees of dignity on a bandwagon which in Paris at least has been disappearing down the road for some time.'[441] The extreme selectivity of English critics makes them, as he puts it, 'intellectual immigration officers' who examine the ideas from Paris for 'the bits and pieces which seem more or less reconcilable with traditional critical techniques'.[442] So, in 'Necessary Artifice', Forrest-Thomson writes that '[o]ne may feel sufficiently part of the "English context" […] to claim that it is in the area where poems are actually produced that the enterprise is most valuable and may, in what is after all a very different ideological climate, most readily be assimilated.'[443] Forrest-Thomson translates and re-directs tenets of the theoretical writings *Tel Quel* and their ideological concerns into an enterprise put to work in a different, aesthetic context.

Artifice is 'necessary' to re-establish literary technique in the face of a linguistic struggle for an origin of control highlighted by post-structuralist theory. One of the broad terms describing language's unoriginality is, of course, 'intertextuality'. In 'Necessary Artifice', Forrest-Thomson outlines this and other dominant tenets of the theorists of *Tel Quel*, all of which lead to the necessity of supplementary order: '*necessary* artifice'. Forrest-Thomson writes, given that, 'literature relies on [a] secondhand world of language […] how may literature escape from [the] parasitic position and constitute itself as a reality of language as it presents the world of reality in the process of construction, free from fixed meaning?'[444] A post-structuralist argument for the already-interpreted nature of language is taken for granted here. But Forrest-Thomson focuses on what a poet ought to do to escape knowledge of the poem's parasitism, namely: concentrate on the operations of poetic form and convention. The poem becomes to Forrest-Thomson, as it were, a struggle of conventions of use between those of 'ordinary' language, which is subject to the

---

[440] NA, p. 12.

[441] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 106. Cp., Forrest-Thomson's comment in TSP, p. 3: 'I do not intend to enter into the details of just where and how I get off the so-called "Structuraliste" bandwagon; for this would only confuse the issue.'

[442] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 107.

[443] NA, p. 12.

[444] *ibid.,* p. 11.

infinite deferral of meaning and tragically 'secondhand', and those conventions established by poetic form.

Forrest-Thomson refines the distinction between the expectations of the ordinary and the propaedeutic necessity of traditional artifice in 'Necessary Artifice' where she posits that the *Tel Quel* writers have provided three answers to language's unoriginality; the third she takes as part of her project to renovate poetic language: the systematisation of the arbitrary. 'First,' she writes,

> our distrust of language must be systematised; then, emphasis is placed on the process of producing meaning rather than on the meaning produced; finally, existing forms of language and existing poetic conventions may be exploited to produce a new kind of poetry that resists naturalisation by pre-established rules for producing meaning.[445]

In other words, the theorist must develop a theory which systematises the arbitrary connection between word and objects and concentrates on the signifiers freed from their status in relation to the signified. This process results, theoretically at least, in a language divorced from reference and from 'pre-established rules'. To resist the potential for nonsense, Forrest-Thomson calls for the supplementation of another set of rules in the form of 'existing forms of language and existing poetic conventions'. The word 'existing' is telling and demonstrates Forrest-Thomson's sense of a substantial status of form beyond its particular use. 'Poetic conventions' are the resources of poetic artifice outlined above, such as sound patterning, stanzaic division and enjambments. Forrest-Thomson's creative departure from the foundations of structuralist thought is to argue that, after accepting their broad conclusions, a poet must return to poetic conventions as a way of exploiting formal possibility without slavishly reproducing old conceptions of language's transparency; broadly, this is to supplement the structuralist's myth of structure with her own myth of Artifice. In doing so, the terms and practices of artifice become hardened into perennial conventions – so many terms from which a poet may pick.

There is a tension between Forrest-Thomson's account of these conventions as somehow immutable, perennial and static, and their inevitably contingent application

---

[445] NA, p. 12.

and status as part of the discursivity of poetic practice. That is to say, she assumes, or her theory makes it necessary to assume, that conventions have a stable function, whereas in practice they will always have a contingent, shifting and discursive significance depending on their location. But Forrest-Thomson's assumption or polemical argument for the stable functioning and 'timeless' significance of Artifice is symptomatic of her theoretical struggles as well as her idealism about form. As Perril observes in his thesis, Forrest-Thomson's poetic theory has 'two formalisms' within it:

> Saussure's formalism that establishes a linguistic structure that is built upon the insistence that a sign is not an independent, self-contained unit, and a formalism based upon literary convention that, precisely because it introduces a historical sense of past linguistic usage into the present, does allow the sign to break away from the structure of arbitrariness and function as a self-contained unit.[446]

Perril suggests that this latter formalism breaks from the first to enable words to have 'substance in their own right', which results in, as he writes a little later, 'literary convention undermin[ing] the principle of arbitrariness'.[447] The meeting of formalist and structuralist static models of system with temporal, or diachronic, conventions is precisely what makes Forrest-Thomson's theoretical struggle with forms unique and acute. Rather than suggest, as Perril does, that these conventions undermine arbitrariness, Forrest-Thomson imbues conventions with a timeless and static significance *within* her model of poetic Artifice, celebrating their arbitrary nature. Perril aligns the substantial nature of words as having independent significance beyond, before or behind the conceptual tyrannies of the linguistic model with Forrest-Thomson's argument for formal signification within her system of Artifice.[448] However, she perceives *form* as substantial, not words. It is the strength of the arbitrariness of formal devices, freed from the pre-established rules of

---

[446] Perril, CBP, p. 94.

[447] *ibid*.

[448] Perril draws on J. H. Prynne's 'Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words' (London: Birkbeck College, 1992) in which Prynne argues against the Saussurian assumption of differential meaning. Perril also refers to Prynne's memoir of Forrest-Thomson in which he states that Forrest-Thomson believed simultaneously in rhyme's significance as both an 'arbitrary surface feature of poetic expression' as well and at a 'phonetic, pre-ideational stage' (J H Prynne 'A Personal Memoir' in *On the Periphery* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1976); republished in *Jacket* 20 [online] retrieved January 30 2010 <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/pryn-vft.html>.)

ordinary linguistic practice which she systematises and which, in turn, make them an emphatic counter *to* such practice.

Tradition, Convention and Aesthetic Modernism

Forrest-Thomson's argument for such 'timelessness' is bolstered by her emphatically formalist and modernist perspectives. Throughout *Poetic Artifice*, poems and the genre of poetry, as well as the system of literary practice, are described as hierarchical, with evolution in any of these areas defined by the shift in the 'dominant'. Forrest-Thomson imagines a shift within twentieth-century poetry towards the use of devices and conventions which haven't been dominant since the sixteenth century; it is time, she suggests, for a new poetic renaissance centred around conventions. Forrest-Thomson's descriptions of poetic artifice and the individual poem's relation with conventions draw conceptual force from Eliot's idea of tradition as outlined in his 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. *Poetic Artifice* presents the case for what Eliot calls 'the historical sense' which manages to maintain a tentative co-presence of historical stasis and dynamic contemporary practice. As Eliot remarks, the historical sense 'involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.[449] Any poet 'beyond his twenty-fifth year' (and Forrest-Thomson was barely twenty-five when she wrote her book) must have a 'sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together.'[450] Eliot presents the sense of the 'existing monuments' which 'form an ideal order among themselves'; these are then 'modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them' where 'the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted'.[451] These monuments comprise part of what Forrest-Thomson calls the imaginary 'artifice of eternity' to which a poet must refer and from which she can select to inform practice.[452] Eliot's modernist aesthetics and conception of impersonality inform Forrest-Thomson's image of the uniting and controlling forces of poetic form. A poet must produce an

---

[449] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Selected Prose*, p. 38.
[450] *ibid.*, p. 38.
[451] *ibid*.
[452] PA, p. 17.

aesthetic distance through their techniques which are informed by a conceptual set of conventions which harden into an ideal of Tradition.

Whilst the influence of Eliot's tradition is clear, Forrest-Thomson's descriptions of the poet's use of conventions and their work's entrance into immutable literary history resembles Jakobson's writings on the evolution of literary style. Writing of the revolutionary development of artistic practices at the beginning of the twentieth century, Jakobson marvels at what he calls the 'extraordinary capacity of these discoverers to overcome again and again the faded habits of their own yesterdays' and their 'unprecedented gift for seizing and shaping anew every older tradition'.[453] Jakobson describes artistic evolution as a dynamic dialectic between old habits and traditions and a permanent individuality, 'shaping anew' between stasis and process. In Jakobson's model, this dialectic operates between contingent parts and a uniting whole. Forrest-Thomson's theory of poetic Artifice resembles what Jakobson calls the 'unique feeling for the dialectic tension between the parts and whole', with the 'whole' being both the poem itself and the 'image-complex' which unites strata of artifice. [454] The whole is also writing, literature and the Tradition itself, with conventions comprising their parts; as Forrest-Thomson writes early in her book: 'poetic Artifice does not change over the centuries in fundamentals'.[455]

Formalisms such as Jakobson's are characterised by what could be called a productive pathology of willingly naïve abstraction; the obsessive schematics of their systems are limited and limiting, but within the confines of their projections, they are convincing, sometimes dazzlingly so. Forrest-Thomson shares with Jakobson and other formalists a sense that the linguistic metaphor has a potent application and extension in 'real life'. Convention and tradition are those forms which enable the poet to, as Eliot puts it in his 1923 essay 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', confront the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'.[456] Forrest-Thomson echoes Eliot's sentiments in her preface to *On the Periphery* where

---

[453] Roman Jakobson ,'Retrospect' in *Selected Writings Vol. 2* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Moulin Publishers, 1972 [2nd edition]), p. 631. Quoted in Pomorska, 'Introduction' to *Language in Literature*, p. 4.

[454] Jakobson ,'Retrospect', p. 631 – my emphasis.

[455] PA, p. 6.

[456] Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', in *Selected Prose*, p. 177.

she refers to her own poems and innovation in general as being in the difficult situation of being 'on the periphery of traditional poetry'.[457] Nevertheless, she argues that such difficulty 'must confront any poet at this time who can take and make the art a new and serious opponent – perhaps even a successful alternative – to the awfulness of the modern world.'[458] This awfulness also extends, in Forrest-Thomson's view, to poetry which merely mirrors back the chaotic world to a reader. Her conviction is based on the straightforward confidence of language as the pre-eminent mediator of culture and society. Simply put, defamiliarising language defamiliarises the world.

Forrest-Thomson shares with Jakobson a belief in the potency and capacity of the linguistic model to alter perception. The section entitled 'Grammar and Geometry' of his essay 'Grammar in Poetry' concludes with the optimistic statement about 'how the poetic delight in verbal structures duly proportioned grows into a perceptive power leading to direct action.'[459] As all action, according to Jakobson, is comprehended via grammatical categories, an exploitation and transformation of traditional inventory of devices has the potential to grow into a rejuvenation of 'perceptive power' resulting in 'direct action'. Forrest-Thomson concurs with Jakobson's naïve hope for the oblique way in which the literary text can transform the world. For example, the preface to *Poetic Artifice* concludes with the claim that Empson is absent from her final chapter's 'programme for a *vital* contemporary poetry' because of his 'inability to accept that the future of poetry lies in the exploitation of non-meaningful levels of language.'[460] Jakobson's 'verbal structures' are comparable to Forrest-Thomson's 'non-meaningful levels of language': that is to say, both deal with the abstract material of language itself as potential meaning and the potency of its innovative arrangement.

The abstract positivism of the linguistic model, whose strength is derived from the fact that it can be extended and shifted into new, creative functions, is also its major weakness. The linguistic models by which to understand poetry and the

---

[457] CP, p. 167.

[458] *ibid*.

[459] Jakobson, 'Grammar in Poetry', *Language in Literature*, p. 135 – my emphases.

[460] PA, p. xiv.

corresponding models of comprehension of what poetry actually is, have what Jameson calls an isomorphous relation with reality or other languages and usually remain in this abstracted state.[461] In other words, despite their claims otherwise, neither Jakobson nor Forrest-Thomson after him make a strong enough theoretical connection or link with the world beyond their formal projection. Throughout *Poetic Artifice* and her other theoretical essays, Forrest-Thomson resists confronting the 'empirical world' of 'life, love, and cookery'.[462] Despite her mentioning of 'Marx, Freud, *The Golden Bough*, and contemporary developments in Anthropology and Linguistics' in *Poetic Artifice*, Forrest-Thomson only does so to further her argument 'that the human consciousness cannot get at reality itself without mediation.'[463] Unlike Foucault, who conceived of Marx and Freud as 'founders of discursivity', Forrest-Thomson reifies Marx's and Freud's thinking into patterns and structure to be applied throughout the ages.[464] These mediating patterns – ideological structures, levels of unconscious – are alike in their abstraction even if they are unlike in practice. Forrest-Thomson was deeply suspicious of psychoanalytical accounts of language and textuality. But, without such bridging theory, her account of poetry remains distanced and formalist. Her theory does not have the scope to make the social, dialectical or affective connections that, for example and as Alison Mark suggests, Kristeva was able to in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*; Kristeva's 'semiotic chora' of language permits, as Calvin Bedient summarises, 'instinct to infiltrate the symbolic medium of poetry itself.'[465] The lack of the important psycho-social bridge in her formalist theory leads to curiously unconvincing argument for language's capacity to transform without any substantial backing.[466] Despite Edward

---

[461] Jameson, *Prison-House*, p. 213.

[462] PA, p. 115.

[463] *ibid.,* p. 27.

[464] Foucault, 'What is An Author?', p. 114.

[465] Mark discusses Kristeva at length in VFT (see, particularly, pp. 67-70) and stresses that her work is a useful guide to reading Forrest-Thomson's poetry due to her development of the notion of intertextuality and her, as Mark puts it, her 'equation of textuality and subjectivity' (p. 70) which innovative poetry can extend and explore. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans.) Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 79. Quoted in Calvin Bedient 'Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification', *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Summer 1990), p. 807.

[466] See my next chapter for a discussion of Forrest-Thomson's poetic practice as part of a feminist critique of tradition. For a Lacanian perspective on Forrest-Thomson's poetry, see Suzanne Raitt, 'Love in the Time of Lacan: The Poetry of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Fragmente* 8 (Summer, 1998), pp. 16-26 and Alison Mark, 'Reading Between the Lines: Identity in the Early poems of

Larrissy's claim in a review of *A Various Art* that 'Forrest-Thomson's theories are more radical than her poems', it is her poetry, as I shall show in the next chapter, that offers glimpses of a revolution in poetic language.[467]

I'd like to suggest, finally, that Forrest-Thomson's theory is a form of aesthetic modernism, perhaps unwittingly divorced from social consequence and interaction. Indeed, the tradition she extols in *Poetic Artifice* is also emphatically male-dominated – a complicity which she wryly notes when she discusses her own poems using the pronoun 'he' to denote authorship: 'having had the effrontery to use my own poems as examples I now hide behind my role'.[468] Keery and Kim Stefans, two critics who clearly admire Forrest-Thomson's work, suggest that parts of her theory contain elements of the quasi-conservative, whilst the former also perceptively describes her 'covert aestheticism'.[469] As I have shown, Forrest-Thomson's conviction of the aesthetic distance of poetic form or, in Foucault's terms, the imagination of 'writing as absence' from the world, fulfils 'in transcendental terms […] the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition, and the aesthetic system of the work's survival.'[470] Forrest-Thomson also trades on an image of conventions which somehow possess an authenticity in need of restoration. This, in turn, explains the essential paradox at the heart of her aesthetics: her attempt to figure innovation through tradition or, in other words, her argument for innovative poetic practice which uses static poetic conventions. As she writes elsewhere in *Poetic Artifice*, reflecting a form of modernist primitivism: '[t]he poet will keep, by this appearance of simplicity, some contact with his tribe of readers, while his real complexity will give him contact with the important he – the innovating poet – and with his literary past.'[471] The descriptions of a tribe and of the 'real complexity', together with nostalgia for a past, are part of an argument for the special powers of

---

Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in Vicky Bertram (ed.), *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997), pp. 210-26.

[467] Edward Larrissy, 'Poets of A Various Art: J. H. Prynne, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Andrew Crozier' in James Acheson and Romana Huk (eds.) *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 71.

[468] PA, p. 124.

[469] Brian Kim Stefans, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and High Artifice', Jacket 14, July 2001, retrieved 3 March 2006 , <http://jacketmagazine.com/14/stefand-vft.html>. Keery, 'Blossoming Synecdoches', pp. 112 & 115 respectively.

[470] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 105.

[471] PA, p. 121.

the poetic resources to restore a unity or purity through the force of a poet's innovating will. This image of the shamanic poet reveals Forrest-Thomson's affinity to the sorts of inspired difficulties of modernist poetics. As Anthony Mellors has recently observed of the work of late modernist shamanic poets, '[l]ate modernist texts remain true to the modernist imperative that eclecticism and difficulty form a hermeneutic basis for cultural renewal'. [472] As such, what Mellors describes as the 'hermetic' work of Pound, Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne, exhibit a faith in the ontological force of poetry to transform the world. Where Forrest-Thomson differs from such late modernist poets is, I suggest, in her committed aestheticism. Whilst, as Mellors argues, late modernist 'belatedness involves a disavowal of the unifying and totalising gestures of modernist aesthetics', Forrest-Thomson relies on systematic unity and the role of traditional devices in shaping this unity as part of her model of poetry's strength. [473]

The system of poetic Artifice, with all its modernist trappings of mythical modelling and conventions aligned to an idealised tradition, resembles what Peter Brooker has characterised as 'traditionalist modernism' operating under the credo of 'making it old'. [474] This type of modernism promotes aesthetic distance and autonomy and is exhibited by certain texts by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Eliot and Pound, all of whom Brooker criticises. Rejecting the value of such aesthetic modernisms, Brooker argues instead for a critical concentration on a more dynamic and committed modernism, what he calls a 'new realism' exemplified by Bertolt Brecht's theory and practice which confronts social and political issues in public fora, rather than perpetuate what Brooker calls the static 'self-reflexiveness' of retreating modernisms and the 'aestheticism' of certain types of postmodernism. [475] Forrest-Thomson argues for a type of aesthetic modernism in her theory; indeed, she is one of its greatest apologists. In *Poetic Artifice,* she presents the poet as artificer and rhetorician who displays the world anew to her readers through a transformed relationship with language and poetic conventions. The poet struggles to impose a lost order and to re-

---

[472] Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 2-3.

[473] Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, p. 3.

[474] Brooker, *Modernism/Postmodernism*, p. 5. Brooker's position marks a contribution to a broad re-evaluation of modernism which had been occurring over the last ten or twenty years.

[475] Brooker, *Modernism/Postmodernism*, p. 28.

integrate with society by exploiting both 'ordinary' language (and those 'acceptable' conventions of which Culler wrote) and 'poetic styles of the past'. [476] Forrest-Thomson argues that poetic styles were once as naturalised as the conventional expectations a reader has today and that a loss of understanding of the use and interpretation of these conventions has precipitated a need for their re-exploitation.[477] In Eliot's terms, readers and poets have become dissociated from certain conventions and attendant sensibilities.[478] The distance from such conventions is both a nostalgia for a lost order and the grounds of innovation.

But to defend Forrest-Thomson's vision against Brooker's counter, committed modernism: there is a glimmer of expectation that poetic practice may affect some sort of metaphysical, if not physical, change. After all, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is, on a stylistic level at least, related to Shklovsky's 'making strange' with its expressed purpose to resist the what he calls 'algebrization' of the perception of the viewer or reader.[479] So there is perhaps a hope that this passionate engagement with poetic form could affect some worldly change. But in a very specific sense, speculation as to Forrest-Thomson's political commitment is besides the point: *Poetic Artifice* is a theory of *literary* practice. As she writes in her essay, 'Irrationality and Artifice': '*Artifice* is more akin to the traditional idea of "poetic diction" than it is to the concepts formulated by the French theorists'.[480] Such a claim illustrates her explicit return to ideas of diction and traditional practice which, as I have demonstrated in her early work, was her consistent preoccupation. Forrest-Thomson's expressly literary concerns in her theory struggle to hold off the potential destabilising influences of post-structuralism by both seizing the metaphors of structural control from formalism and structuralism and emphatically asserting the centrality of poetic conventions, even if they are unnaturally stilled within her model

---

[476] RA p. 229. The sentences in the quotation marks are Forrest-Thomson's own. She is quoting from Empson's own notes to the poem 'High Dive', William Empson, *Collected Poems* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 97-8.

[477] PA, *a passim*.

[478] T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Prose*, p. 64. The 'dissociation' is, of course, between feeling and intellect.

[479] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in Rick Rylance (ed.), *Debating Texts* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p. 48 and *passim*.

[480] IA, p. 126 – emphasis in original.

of Artifice; 'shapes cut out of lapsing time', as Davie has written.[481] As with her rejection of Freudianism and of psychological interpretations, Forrest-Thomson makes no claim to political or social commitment. As her friend and mentor, J. H. Prynne observed in a recent interview: politics, if anything, 'distracted her from her project'.[482] Prynne further remarked that 'language-games were much more important than what language did in reality' and, as such, the events in Paris in 1968 and the Maoist politics of the later *Tel Quel* were 'not on her radar'; for Forrest-Thomson, 'formal properties were more important.' When Forrest-Thomson appeals, in *Poetic Artifice,* for the conversion of the 'soiled language of the everyday world to a new language that will be clean', this cleanliness is linguistic and poetic, aspiring to the purity of Mallarmé and distanced from the world; it is in no sense deliberately ideological.[483] Transformation of society may have been a fringe-benefit of an increased sensitivity to linguistic mediation, but this wasn't her primary concern. A poet must apply herself to understanding and mastering poetic conventions; 'the rest', as Forrest-Thomson writes at the end of her preface to *On the Periphery*, echoing Eliot's admonitions to the last, 'is not [her] business'.[484]

Poetic Artifice exhibits the struggles and tensions between two conflicting versions of form. On the one hand, she presents a version of poetic practice represented by the timeless ideal of Artifice and comprised of layers of interacting artifice, plucked from the trans-historical space of convention. The poem is formally poised, with the clamouring contingencies of the 'external' world and their potential for multiplicity carefully shepherded by a poetic form which simultaneously asserts difference and continuity. Combined with the inherited conceptions of the role of the refined and impersonal author figure, absent but nonetheless controlling, like the God of creation paring her fingernails, Forrest-Thomson's vision amounts to an aesthetic

---

[481] Donald Davie, 'Two Analogies for Poetry', in Clive Wilmer (ed.), *Modernist Essays: Yeats, Pound, Eliot* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), p. 49. Quoted in Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 234.

[482] From a personal interview conducted 7 August 2009 in Cambridge.

[483] PA, p. 68.

[484] CP, p. 168 – I have changed the pronoun. The allusion is to Eliot's 'Little Gidding': 'For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business'. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959) p. 31

modernism.[485] On the other hand, however, Forrest-Thomson registers the instabilities of post-structuralist theory, not just in the implications of endlessly deferred meaning, but in the inconsistency and bad faith in form of much early theory. The instabilities introduced by post-structuralism are complemented by the irrepressible activity of process, both of a reader's procedure of reading the poem and the necessary dynamic movement of poetic form in time. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's emphatic argument and polemical stance are designed to assert the stability of her model of Artifice, her thesis is every-where undermined by the instabilities of the tensions and contradictions it inevitably contains. The 'counsel of perfection' offered by Hartman in the epigraph to this chapter as to the co-presence of a 'study of forms' with 'critical intuition', *always* represents a 'competition between virtues'. The competition operates on various levels: between the synchronic nature of the linguistic metaphor and the diachronic movement of both poetic practice and a reader's interpretation; between the static conventions and devices and the way in which these interact in practice; between the poet's liminal or spectral role straddling realms of the transcendental 'palace of eternity' and the dirty world in which their language operates and, finally, between the transhistorical tradition and the attempted innovations in present practice.[486] *Poetic Artifice* attempts to resolve these relationships with a forceful account of Artifice.

Fortunately, as I will show, Forrest-Thomson's poetry very often exceeds the hyper-imperialism of her critical theory, the rigidity and schematic surety of which threatens always to drag poetry back into the well-wrought urn from whence it had been trying for a number of years to escape. Forrest-Thomson's later poetic practice is characterised by the tensions exerted between the attempted control of poetic aspiration – that is, for the poems to enact certain tenets outlined in her theory – and varieties of excess. The surpassing of the dictates of theory already implied by the excessive artifice uncontained by Forrest-Thomson's model, is no more clear than in the problematic subject of the poet's biography, or at least, to measure this slightly, in the issues of experience and the empirical world. Her predilection, inaugurated by

---

[485] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 199: 'The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.'
[486] PA, p. 17.

her interest in Wittgenstein, for what Jameson refers to as 'mathematical formulizations, for graphs and visual schemata – so many Structuralist *hieroglyphs* designed to signify some ultimate object-language forever out of reach of the language of commentary' – can often result in an 'unhappy consciousness of style' in which a 'distance from self' is inevitable.[487] Whilst Forrest-Thomson's vision of Artifice may operate as a static and cumbersome theoretical form, containing poetic expression in its cage-like artifice, her later poetry displays a complexity and excess of tone, style and technique which the contradictory and conflicted terrain of her theory only partially foreshadows.

---

[487] Jameson, *Prison-House*, p. 209.

Chapter 5
Control, Excess and Writing 'Straight' in the Quest for Style

> For, as to theme, this book is the chart of three quests. The quest for a style […], the quest for a subject other than the difficulty of writing, and the quest for another human being. Indeed such equation of love with knowledge and the idea of style as their reconciliation is as old as the art itself […].[488]

> Jacob's 'little poem' shows the build-up of levels common to all poetry and goes beyond, into disconnected unrealism through which twentieth-century poetry must go in order to be able to use traditional levels again – and eventually to speak out 'straight'.[489]

> In [late modernist] works the vectors of despair and utopia, the compulsion to decline and the impulse to renewal, are not just related; they are practically indistinguishable.[490]

Forrest-Thomson's entire poetic project was a 'quest for style' informed by her intense scrutiny of poetic form and a breadth of theory which was energetically worked out in her experimental poetic practice. Indeed, the ongoing difficulty of the pursuit of style was, to Forrest-Thomson, inextricably and tragically entwined with the broader human projects of obtaining love and knowledge as well as, as she puts it in her preface, finding 'another human being'. Clearly, Forrest-Thomson felt that there was a lot at stake in her quest for style but that the difficulties were worth confronting. The poems of Forrest-Thomson's *On the Periphery* and her last, uncollected poems represent the diverse themes and formal modes she used in this quest. *On the Periphery* was published posthumously in 1976 from a manuscript assembled by Forrest-Thomson before she died. As her preface attests, the developmental sequence of the poems was important to her. As she put it:

> the graph of this book begins in the extreme of aleatory poems, moves into simple lyricism confronting the claims of the external world with stylistic simplicity, reaches, in 'The Dying Gladiator', an extreme of both technical and

---

[488] Forrest-Thomson, 'Preface' to *On the Periphery*, originally published in *On the Periphery* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1976) and re-printed in CP, p. 168.

[489] PA, p. 134. Max Jacob's 'little poem' is the famous excerpt from the poem 'Le Coq et la Perle' in *Le Cornet à Dés* : 'Comme un bateau naufragé est le poète âge / ainsi qu'un dahlia le poème étagé / Dahlia! dahlia! que Dalila lia.' Max Jacob *Le Cornet à Dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945 [22nd edition]), p. 50.

[490] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 14.

thematic complexity, and ends, in 'The Lady of Shalott', by recapturing the right to speak directly through the traditional ranges of rhymed stanza.[491]

The trajectory of her quest takes in the extremes of both the complexities of aleatorical experiment and moments of simple lyricism; like Pindaric odes, her poems often fluctuate between a number of modes. Her quest, then, involves extreme engagement with a variety of poetic styles in order to earn the right to 'speak directly'. For Forrest-Thomson, directness needed to be earned by an intense scrutiny of poetic form and could possibly be achieved, finally, in the curious liberation of the 'traditional ranges of rhymed stanza'. Forrest-Thomson's quest was a form of return, a Homeric journey back to what she calls a little earlier in the preface, somewhat paradoxically, the 'simple, and very complex, mechanisms [which] have been largely lost in English poetry since the 'twenties.'[492] Renewal of poetic style is located in a return to tradition and is only earned by prolonged exposure to the extreme hazards of experiment.

Forrest-Thomson's later poems incorporate and engage with eclectic subjects such as the structuralist and post-structuralist writings of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, the practices and theory of the French Nouveau Roman, broad literary and mythical themes, as well as the 'nightmare life-in-death' of desire and the conflicting emotions of investing in poetic craft itself which is, as she wryly notes, 'The only art where failure is renowned.'[493] As Forrest-Thomson suggests in her preface, the poems oscillate between simplicity and complexity of both subject matter and form. To borrow one of Forrest-Thomson's own phrases, simplicity and complexity are the 'bifurcated obsession' of these poems.[494] In these later poems she strove to distil and control theoretical ideas and the stylistic characteristics of other poets and to combine these distillations with traditional forms. But her desire for control is constantly in tension with the troubling extremes of subject matter – such as emotion, details from her experience and questions of identity – as well as form – diverse patterns and eclectic styles which elude her tacit desire for poetic unity.

---

[491] CP, p. 167.
[492] *ibid*.
[493] Quotations from 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'Strike', CP, pp. 136 & 135 respectively.
[494] 'On the Naming of Shadows', CP, p. 106.

This chapter charts Forrest-Thomson's ongoing confrontation between controlled simplicity and extreme complexity in her last poems by examining some of her terminology, strategies and ambitions, including the modes of pastoral and parody, a poetic genre she referred to as unrealism, as well as form of writing she referred to in a late essay as the 'limpidly lyrical'.[495] I also assess Forrest-Thomson's contention that the solution to the incessant movement between 'despair and utopia', as Miller puts it, or uncontrolled complexity and willed order, lies in traditional form. Whilst her later poems represent versions of strategies of control and containment which are always threatened by semantic and formal excess, Forrest-Thomson discovered in some of her last poems ways of reconciling simplicity and complexity to achieve a direct, formal clarity. In one of these last poems, 'Richard II', she achieved glimpses of a complex clarity which amounts to, I argue, a resigned accommodation of the aporetic co-presence of control and excess indicative of late modernist poetries and a glimpse of the reconciliation between contingent artifice and the ideal of Artifice.

Pastoral and Parody

Forrest-Thomson's quest for the simplification of complexity in both her theory and poetry drew on the ideas of pastoral and parody. As she wrote in *Poetic Artifice*, a successful poem will combine parody and pastoral to 'create a new technique'.[496] The terms are derived from William Empson's *Some Versions of the Pastoral* in which he defines pastoral as 'the process of putting the complex into the simple', whilst parody is the strategic distillation and use of others' styles.[497] Forrest-Thomson defines her own use of the terms in *Poetic Artifice*: 'Artifice involves two crucial notions: 'aesthetic distance' and 'content as form'. These two concepts find their analogy in pastoral as content […] and parody as technique'.[498] Both modes suggested to Forrest-Thomson a strategic distillation of subject matter and formal material which could be used to create a kind of hermetically distanced poetic form. Certain poets from both the nineteenth and twentieth-century offered examples of the successful combination of pastoral and parody. For example, in *Poetic Artifice* Forrest-Thomson praised A. C. Swinburne for 'creating, through formal techniques

---

[495] 'Dada', p. 81.
[496] PA, p. 137.
[497] William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 23.
[498] *ibid.*, p. 129.

that fictionalise external contexts, an artificial world […] It is a world which simplifies and exalts [pastoral] but also, and by the same token parodies.'[499] Both pastoral and parody imply poetic control – the first over subject matter, the second over style. In practice, however, subjects and themes are much more unwieldy, whilst the adoption, refinement and controlled use of poetic styles can lead to formally equivocal poems. In other words, whilst Forrest-Thomson perceived the use of pastoral and parodic modes as strategies on the royal road to the world of Artifice, her use of them in her poetry leads to curious clashes of subject matter and a use of eclectic poetic artifices and modes.

In *Veronica Forrest-Thomson*, Mark writes that Forrest-Thomson's 'discussion of the combination of pastoral and parody […] is her attempt to articulate an aesthetics of, and a future programme for, postmodern linguistically investigative poetry (though it is unlikely that she would have known or used these terms).'[500] Whilst Mark concedes that the term postmodern wasn't widely used (if at all) in Forrest-Thomson's time, her argument looks forward to a postmodern programme. But Forrest-Thomson develops her argument about the modal combination of pastoral and parody from an examination of nineteenth-century poetry by Tennyson, Swinburne and Rossetti among others. Indeed, Forrest-Thomson's turn to the pastoral was part of her nostalgic project to restore the power of traditional poetic forms to contemporary practice. As Terry Gifford notes in his book *Pastoral*, in a 1991 essay 'On Modern Pastoral', Andrew Lawson argued that the poets of *A Various Art* were characterised by their pastoral nostalgia which was articulated in a poetry of 'philosophical pastoral' and which harboured what Lawson calls a 'sensual scepticism pending further illumination'.[501] As Gifford suggests, Lawson criticises the poets of *A Various Art* for their Georgian pastoral retreat, but the idea of the pastoral obviously offered Forrest-Thomson a potent symbol of an aesthetic distancing from the modern world.[502] The ways in which Forrest-Thomson engaged with the pastoral differed from many of the refined and measured poems in *A Various Art*, primarily due to the status of parody as its complex rhetorical partner as

---

[499] PA, p. 118.
[500] Mark, VFT, p. 82.
[501] Andrew Lawson, 'On Modern Poetry', *Fragmente* 3 (1991), p. 41. Quoted in Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 172-3.
[502] *ibid.*, p. 172.

well as the ways in which the contemporary world always threatens to invade the pastoral idyll.

Forrest-Thomson wrestles with the complex commingling of pastoral and parody in poems such as 'Pastoral', 'The Garden of Proserpine', 'The Lady of Shalott: Ode' 'Not Pastoral Enough', the first three of which were collected in *A Various Art*.[503] But the modes are far from stable due to the overwhelming status of a self-conscious parody and the excess of material which always undermines the drive towards pastoral simplicity and aesthetic distance. Witness the first stanza of 'Pastoral', for example:

> They are our creatures, clover, and they love us
> Through the long summer meadows' diesel fumes.
> Smooth as their scent and contours clear however
> Less than enough to compensate for names.[504]

The poem begins with an exemplification of Forrest-Thomson's theoretical contentions. As the title of the poem suggests, she attempts to illustrate the simplifications of the pastoral and the poem also contains parody. 'Pastoral' is represented by the themes of 'creatures, clover', 'love', 'long summer meadows'', 'scent' and the alliterative 'smooth' 'scents' and 'contours clear', as well as the title. On the other hand, the alliteration throughout is excessive, as if Forrest-Thomson already and simultaneously parodies the attempt to write a straight pastoral. Hence, 'creatures, clover' and 'smooth as their scent' sound strange and produce incongruous images; diesel fumes oddly emanate from the 'summer meadows[']. Content – aspects of the pastoral idyll – are already part of a formal parody. The lack of, or confusion of, a possessive apostrophe in 'creatures' of the opening line, as well as the curiously pluralised 'meadows'', draws attention to punctuation and form and confuses reference. The four-line stanza and the half rhymes also abut against the apparent smoothness of the pastoral, producing an artificiality which the word 'however' awkwardly reaffirms. Further, the phrase 'Less than enough' is Forrest-Thomson's attempt to 'parody' cause and effect in a manner learned from

---

[503] CP, pp. 123, 137-40, 136-7 & 124 respectively.
[504] *ibid.*, p. 123.

Ashbery.[505] Thus far, then, the poem exemplifies Forrest-Thomson's theory of the complex co-mingling of pastoral and parody and their creation of aesthetic distance.

But Forrest-Thomson's own theory only takes a reader so far, and the poem exceeds it both formally and semantically. Discussing the opening lines of her own poem in *Poetic Artifice*, Forrest-Thomson writes that, in 'Pastoral', 'sound resemblance – 'clover'/'love' – is more important than meaning' and dismisses the meadow and flowers as part of unimportant 'external contexts'.[506] As she puts it in her discussion of the poem during her 'Unrealism and Death' talk at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in April 1975, her argument is that sound patterns 'erupt […] into the body of the poem and create […] a stopping place.'[507] Forrest-Thomson's comments imply that a reader lingers on the sound patterning. Whilst the use of abrupt and clustered sound patterns may arrest a reader's attention, Forrest-Thomson ascribes too much of the poem's effect to the surface patterns. For example, apart from the obvious point that a reader can gather sound patterns as they may, there are at least two other sticking points in the stanza, unanticipated by theory's prescriptions. The first comes last: 'Less than enough to compensate for names.' This line may be a parody of causality, but it is also a profound statement of equivocation and lack: 'less than enough' is not enough but not quite, certainly not enough to 'compensate for names', but almost enough. And *what* is it that's not enough? The pastoral images and smells? The verse itself? The answer is, of course, both, but neither covers the absent presence of a palpable lack represented by a something which isn't enough to compensate for the inadequacy of a name, the catch-all designator of identity. To highlight this ambiguity is not to suggest that Forrest-Thomson is wrong, but that, firstly, her poetry does more than she anticipates (which is inevitable) and, secondly, that the language very often operates *against* her strictures, not least in demonstrating the complex and conflicted interfusion of pastoral and parodic motifs and forms. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's theory may 'compensate' for excess and make room for it ('the

---

[505] In *Poetic Artifice*, Forrest-Thomson writes of Ashbery's poem 'They Dream Only of America' that 'cause and effect are parodied in [the line of the poem] '"Please," he asked willingly'.' PA, p. 157. John Ashbery, 'They Dream Only of America', *The Tennis Court Oath* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), p. 13.

[506] PA, p. 125.

[507] Forrest-Thomson 'Unrealism and Death in Contemporary Poetry'. The transcription is my own.

stopping point') as a positive quality to which to aspire, the poems are frequently unstable.

A further sticking point in 'Pastoral' is encapsulated by the intrusion of diesel in the above lines. The poems of *On the Periphery* very often register an emphatic and irreducible modernity and imminence which Forrest-Thomson struggles to contain. As she puts it in 'The Lady of Shallott: Ode': '[t]he modern conveniences won't last out'; but the facts of it are, and Forrest-Thomson knows this, they will.[508] In the first stanza of 'Pastoral', the renegade detail of 'diesel fumes' is just about contained within the dual process of pastoral and parody and is gathered up in poetic form. The second stanza of the poem continues their theoretical exemplification and make Forrest-Thomson's own, direct argument about this poem plausible.[509] However, the final stanza markedly shifts the poem's tone and form:

> Silence in grass and solace in blank verdure
> Summon the frightful glare of nouns and nerves.
> The gentle foal linguistically wounded
> Squeals like the car's brakes
> Like our twisted words.

An emphatic modernity is actually a fractured but nonetheless palpable register of what Denise Riley has suggested are forms of linguistic wounds due to violence of naming which cannot be gathered up in the 'stopping place' of the poem's aesthetic distance.[510] A perhaps *in*convenient presence inures to such words as 'frightful' and 'gentle' which affect a certain primness against which the linguistic violence ('glare of nouns and nerves') abuts. Similarly, the words '[s]queals' and 'car's brakes' arrest the '[s]ilence' and 'solace' of the pastoral possibility of the previous lines and deploy an emphatic emotional and psychological dimension of language to shake the lines free. The difference of these lines is aided, of course, by their shortness – comprising only one, final line in the version printed in *Poetic Artifice* – and the sibilant sound

---

[508] CP, p. 136.

[509] PA, pp. 125-6.

[510] Riley writes of types of linguistic wounds in *The Words of Selves*, *passim* and particularly chapter four, 'The Wounded Fall in the Direction of Their Wound', pp. 113-145. Riley describes the types of violence and uncertainty inflicted by grammar relations and the language of naming. In *The Words of Selves*, Riley suggestively conflates emotional, psychological and political affect with linguistics, arguing for their inextricable relation.

clusters and short vowels savagely sever the severe crash. But the internal, formal reasons for the poems breaking apart in this way, and those which emerge from a practical criticism approach – that the lines act as a wound to poetic form or a formal illustration of a crushing crash, for example – do not account for the emotional force of the lines.

Whilst the motive to exemplify the operations of pastoral and parody fuels the poem's production, the writing process takes over, inhabiting its author who then gives over to formal excess. What results is not fully an enactment of theory, but a register of the palpable and bodily affect of an incipient post-structuralist perspective on the power of language.[511] As Riley has more recently argued, the struggle with a 'feeling of dispossession' within language points to what she calls an 'unexamined rhetoricity' at its heart, an affect over which users possess little control.[512] 'Like our twisted words' can be viewed, as Suzanne Raitt has put it, as 'the drive to capture the interaction between language and reality' and as a parodic self-reflection on the word's elusive distinction from the world.[513] But the line also, as Mark has written, 'configures an unbearable emotional pain figured in language'.[514] Mark hints, quite rightly, that the site of this pain is Forrest-Thomson herself. But, to extend Mark's insight: Forrest-Thomson grapples to control how this pain is configured in the poetry which becomes more and more the difficult figure of instability stalking the poems, threatening the author's projected and theoretical control.[515] Whilst the words pastoral and parody are designed to amount to an aesthetic control and poetic

---

[511] See Riley, *The Words of Selves* on the inadequacy of particular theoretical terms – post-structuralism, for example – to account for the production of a palpable 'linguistic unease'. See, chapter one: ''Who, me?', Self-description's linguistic affect', particularly pp. 36-7 & 44-50. See also Denise Riley *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) in which Riley develops her ideas on the violence of naming.

[512] Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 2.

[513] Suzanne Raitt, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson Collected Poems and Translations', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 1:3 (1990), p. 305. Quoted in Mark, VFT, p. 85.

[514] Mark, VFT, p. 85.

[515] In the notes to this poem in CP, Barnett explains that in Forrest-Thomson's annotated version of *Omens*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Leicester, Jan. 1974), she wrote below the poem: 'my first head-on collision successfully averted' which is accompanied by a diagram of a near-miss between two people and a 'long vehicle' (CP, p. 180). Forrest-Thomson's fusion of a potential bodily crash or running into someone with getting run over by a lorry, reveals the traumatic association between the two events and the consequent, if the pun will be pardoned, *freighted* emotional significance of the poem.

distance – like the figures of the Cambridge poems – in practice they are unstable, bringing with them excesses of form and troubling, extraneous material whose presence Forrest-Thomson frequently struggled to resist.

Whilst pastoral offered Forrest-Thomson a model of the simplification of subjects to achieve a form of aesthetic distance, parody is a mode which attempts a distillation of other poets' styles in order to control and extend them as the material of a new poem. A spirit of parody pervades the poems of *On the Periphery*; parody, that is, of theoretical ideas as well as of the styles and modes of an eclectic selection of poets. The collection charts a trajectory through a predominant focus on theoretical ideas in the first section, to energetic literary-historical parody in the latter stages of the quest. Poems feature an abundance of references and quotations from a variety of poets, many of whose work has been parodied or who have produced parodies themselves. Such poets include Matthew Arnold, Lewis Carroll, Eliot, G. K. Chesterton, Pound, Robert Browning and the Rossettis as well as Empson and Swinburne. Parody, I'd like to suggest, involves a give and take between control and excess; hence its status as a defining aspect of Forrest-Thomson's poetry which contributes to the poems' equivocation and levity.

Forrest-Thomson's attempt to use parody as a distillation and control of others' styles is usually accompanied by an awareness that this control is potentially unstable. Parody, in this sense, is like irony in its potential to simultaneously stabilise the poetic act as a directed critique, but also introduce material into a poem which eludes a desire for formal mastery and coherence. As Forrest-Thomson argues in *Poetic Artifice*: 'parody […] is a form which leaves the poet his techniques but prevents him from using them seriously'.[516] Parody, therefore, has an integrally conflicted status. In many of Forrest-Thomson's poems, and despite her attempt otherwise, parody is too conscious of its own artifice to be the uninflected and serious occasion for expression; it is duplicitous and unstable and prevents writing straight.[517] Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche in his essay, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' is useful here as a way of characterising the

---

[516] PA, p. 77.

[517] See my discussion of 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode' and, especially, 'Richard II' at the end of this chapter for Forrest-Thomson's struggle to use parody seriously.

admixture of control and excess in Forrest-Thomson's poems. Whilst both parody and pastiche, as Jameson puts it, 'involve the imitation or […] mimicry of other styles', parody relies on the deviation of this style from a norm and has explicit motives of satire and mockery, while pastiche is neutral, a merely surface adoption of styles without intent.[518] Pastiche is, Jameson suggests, 'blank parody'.[519] Parody involves control; pastiche, like the structures of commodity exchange of which it is part, is all surface. Forrest-Thomson's equivocal relationship with the modes is demonstrated by her struggle at the level of poetic form. The tension between versions of parody manifest themselves in her poems' erratic forms, particularly those which confront themes and forms from literary history. Forrest-Thomson's 'Strike' is one such poem.

'Strike'

The poem, 'Strike', subtitled 'for Bonnie, my first horse', is a condensed literary quest '[t]o withered fantasy / From stale reality', as Forrest-Thomson puts it.[520] It depicts multiply intertwined journeys – a horse ride 'on a long road south' to university, a train journey, and a jaunt through mythical and biblical landscapes – all of which resolve around a 'canter' through literary tradition in a quest whose fulfilment remains elusive and whose end is only ever glimpsed. 'I was on some sort of quest', the poetic persona observes, and '[t]here was an I-have-been-here-before kind of feeling about it.' The expressed *déjà vu* is due to the multiple and eclectic allusions to literary monuments; the poem, as Jerome McGann observes, 'travesties the entire British tradition, travesties […] the deadly (so far as poetry is concerned) concept of the 'tradition' itself.'[521] And this is a wry, self-conscious clash with tradition in the hunt for its elusive control. The poem opens with long, cantering and allusive lines:

---

[518] Frederic Jameson 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Brooker, *Modernism/Postmodernism*, p.166.

[519] Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 167.

[520] CP, pp. 134-5.

[521] Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 173.

Hail to thee, blithe horse, bird thou never wert!
And, breaking into a canter, I set off on the long road south
Which was to take me to so many strange places,
That room in Cambridge, that room in Cambridge, that room in
 Cambridge,
That room in Cambridge, this room in Cambridge,
The top of a castle in Provence, an aeroplane in mid-Atlantic.
Strange people, that lover, that lover, that lover, that lover.
Eyes that last I saw in lecture rooms
Or in the Reading Room of the British Museum reading, writing,
Reeling, writhing, and typing all night (it's cheaper than getting drunk),
Doing tour en diagonale in ballet class (that's cheaper than getting drunk too).
But first I should describe my mount. His strange colour;
He was lilac with deep purple points (he was really a siamese cat).
His strange toss and whinny which turned my stomach
And nearly threw me off the saddle. His eyes
His eyes his eyes his eyes his eyes
Eyes that last I saw in lecture rooms
His eyes were hazel brown and deceptively disingenuous.
I got to know those eyes very well.
Our journey through England was not made easier by the fact
That he would eat only strawberries and cream (at any season).
And he wanted a lot of that.

The long lines, rhythm and comedic internal rhymes set the tone for this parodic adventure conducted on the uncertain saddle of a metamorphosing beast. The opening line alludes to Shelley's 'To a Skylark' which begins: 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit! / Bird thou never wert - / That far from heaven, or near it, / Pourest thy full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'[522] Forrest-Thomson ironically reverses Shelley's divinely soaring skylark into an image of a 'blithe', indifferent horse. The horse's subsequent, comic transformation into a greedy cat continues this bathetic metamorphosis. The first step to the elevation of literary history is a wry deflation of Shelley's aspiration. Forrest-Thomson is, as it were, using the momentum of subjects of literary tradition and ironically extending them in verse which becomes a parody of literary excesses.

---

[522] P. B. Shelley, 'To a Skylark (composed late June 1820)', in Duncan Wu (ed.), *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 941.

'Strike' captures the twin aspirations of a poetic control of traditional conventions and subjects and the attainment of immortality through form. But the formal excess and surrealism as well as the puns and repeated phrases of the lines hold the poem firmly in the realm of parody. 'Strike' is a parody of poetic conventions rather than an earnest attempt at emulating tradition itself. Whilst the quest begins under the influence of tradition, the lines get carried by surface excess, so the Reading Room tumbles into the sound patterns of 'reading, writing, / Reeling, writhing, and typing all night'. Alliteration generates the pleasing phrase 'deceptively disingenuous' which aptly describes the errant nature and tone of Forrest-Thomson's style. Similarly, the geographical quest from north to south is reflected by a referential shift from outside to inside the poem. The lines, 'That room in Cambridge, that room in Cambridge, that room in Cambridge, / That room in Cambridge, this room in Cambridge', for example, transform attention from an external reference – 'Cambridge' – to an internal overabundance of patterns and sound. The distancing from reference – where formal repetition shakes words free – is aided by deixis, so the external reference 'that' becomes an internally referring 'this'. The composition of the poem itself takes over the poem's described quest; the quest for style is Forrest-Thomson's para-mount, with the horse a convenient vehicle.

A series of stylistic caricatures set in long lines imitates the grandiosity of epic verse, or rather the style in which such portentousness is achieved. Perril notes that the poem 'self-consciously plunder[s] the past of English poetry, especially the late Victorian period with its unfashionable musicality and indulgence in high metrical forms'.[523] The excesses of Victorian poetry were indeed unfashionable to Georgians and modernists alike, but Forrest-Thomson takes their musicality very seriously, despite her wry indulgence. As she observes in *Poetic Artifice* of Edward Lear's poem 'Akond', one can 'find the world of Artifice in the nurseries of Victorian England'.[524] 'Strike', though, is somewhat ambivalent, containing a simultaneous embrace and ironic resistance to literary styles and dictions. Forrest-Thomson both reveals the machinations of such styles and sends them up. For example, the witty tone with which Forrest-Thomson discusses Browning's dramatic monologues in her unpublished book, 'Obstinate Isles: Ezra Pound and the Late Nineteenth Century', is

---

[523] Perril, CBP, p. 122.
[524] PA, p. 122.

transferred to a poetic mode which exposes formal indulgence in rhythms and rhymes, as if to display her measure and distillation of such style.[525] Her ambivalence, therefore, is a stylistic strategy of containment, distillation and control as well as a codification of the aspiration to exceed.

The lines of 'Strike' which allude to Browning exhibit Forrest-Thomson's wry control. For example, the next two lines of the poem conjure Browning's strange allegory, 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'. Forrest-Thomson's lines read:

> That hateful cripple with the twisted grin. But
> Dauntless the slughorn to my ear I set.

In Browning's poem, the narrator tells of his quest to find the Dark Tower. Along the way he is directed by a 'hoary' and 'hateful' cripple and comes across 'One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare' who 'stood stupefied, however he came there'.[526] Eventually, finding his tower, he announces his arrival through his slughorn.[527] The desiccated and uncanny landscapes through which the narrator travels are bathetically glossed by Forrest-Thomson as 'many strange places', with the horse's 'strange toss and whinny which turned my stomach' evoking Browning's vivid and stupefied nag. Forrest-Thomson parodies Browning's practiced and affectedly repetitious verse style in the lines which transpose the allegorical quest to the pained writing process of the Reading Room: 'reading, writing, / Reeling, writhing and typing all night'. The insistently repeated phrases – 'That room…', 'That lover…'and 'His eyes…' – evoke the propulsive manoeuvres in Browning's verse, exposing its intricacies as well as its thinly veiled eroticism; hence Forrest-Thomson's sly insertion of 'That lover' into her repeated phrases. Similarly, there is something absurdly indulgent about Browning's insistent repetitions in poems such as 'Through the Metidja to Abdel-Kadr' (another horsey quest):

---

[525] Whilst Forrest-Thomson charts Browning's influence on Pound's use of the dramatic monologue and the stylistic presentations of personae in OI, she does so with an extreme sharp wit and levity. For example, discussing Browning's poem 'Fra Lippo Lippi', she writes of how '[t]he pentameter limps and sags trying to accommodate the semblance of "dramatic monologue"', whilst his 'forced exclamations and inept attempt at dialogue' are, she argues, 'worse than Wordsworthian' (OI, p. 32.)

[526] John Woolford, Daniel Karlin and Joseph Phelan (eds.), *Browning: Selected Poems* (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 354, 356 & 358 respectively.

[527] Browning's lines are: 'Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set / And blew. "*Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came*."'*ibid.*, p. 366.

> As I ride, as I ride.
> With a full heart for my guide.
> So its tide rocks my side,
> As I ride, as I ride.
> That, as I were double-eyed,
> He, in whom our Tribes confide.
> Is descried, ways untried
> As I ride, as I ride.[528]

Forrest-Thomson adopts what could be called a gestural phonetic symbolism suggesting, via caricature, Browning's style. She replaces the strained sound and phrasal repetition in Browning's verse with her own, drawing attention to the poetic rhythm jogging the poem along and producing a jaunty poetic effect.[529]

Forrest-Thomson's quest for style continues in the poem's second section which is comprised of short lines from other poems brought together into an uneasy rhythmical arrangement. But her quest laments its own failures. Whilst this section creates an expressly literary fiction, the final passage of the poem describes the enervation and failure of this new realm: '[t]he only art where failure is renowned', directed, it seems, both at some nineteenth-century poetic indulgence as well as her own parody. Forrest-Thomson aligns her stylistic quest with a host of comparable, demotic quests, from the 'cosmic' motions of universe to passing a 'driving test'; from catching a train to attaining divinity and touching god. The poem contains, therefore, both divine and ideal aspirations as well as comic ('cosmic') failures: the struggle towards clarity and the promised land of a poetic ideal was only ever an aspiration, motivating a quest that was ultimately impossible:

> The timetables of our anxiety glitter, grow
> One in the alone. The cosmic ozones know
> Our lease is running out.
> Deserted now the house of fiction stands
> Exams within and driving tests without,

---

[528] Robert Browning, *The Early Monologues of Robert Browning* (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), p. 86.
[529] On her proof copy of 'Strike' to be sent back to the editor of *Omens* magazine in 1974, Forrest-Thomson adds in her own handwriting a further 'for Bonnie, my first horse' under the first subtitle. The editors of *Omens* and the CP have only printed one subtitle, but it appears that Forrest-Thomson wanted to ironically suggest the repetitions and parallelisms of such 'horsey' quests by repeating the opening subtitle.

> Shading the purpose from the promised lands
> No milk our honey.
> And the train we catch can't take us yet
> To the blind corner where he waits
> Between the milk and honey gates:
> The god we have not met.[530]

The last lines imitate Eliot's 'Burnt Norton':

> And hear upon the sodden floor
> Below, the boarhound and the boar
> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars.[531]

In Eliot's poem a pattern of connections unites the lowly boar with the universe, but only in the tenuous space of literature or, as Forrest-Thomson puts it, the 'house of fiction'. Forrest-Thomson contrives this space by piggy-backing (or, more properly, boar-backing) on Eliot and other poets' styles and themes. As with the last four lines, the syntax is self-consciously poetic. The inversions in the lines, 'Deserted now the house of fiction stands' and 'Exams within and driving tests without', for example, copy the dictions of nineteenth-century poetry and modernist *vers libre*. The biblical symbols of 'milk and honey' ('a land flowing with milk and honey' Exodus 3:8) are props to allegorise the 'promised land', and the train is a parodic motif to puncture a too-sincere poetic idiom.[532] As McGann observes, 'Strike' is a travesty of tradition or, more precisely, it is an exposé of the stylistic bricks and mortar from which its fictions are constructed. It is also the record of a journey towards '[t]he god we have not met' which is the ideal of immortality and a style. But, as Forrest-Thomson writes, the 'lease is running out' and the 'house of fiction' stands '[d]eserted'. Aspiration sits in the 'blind corner' which cannot be seen but only conceived. The aesthetic 'timetables' or patterns which dictate the paths of this quest fail to contain the anxiety inaugurated by the inevitable failure of the quest itself. Forrest-Thomson

---

[530] CP, p. 135.

[531] Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 15.

[532] Rather like the parody of Browning's 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' by W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman where news is sent not triumphantly by horseback, like Roland's to Ghent, but bathetically via telegram. W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman 'How I Brought the Good News from Aix to Ghent or Vice Versa', printed in Kenneth Baker (ed.), *Unauthorized Versions: Poems and Their Parodies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 55.

wrestles alone with the projected directions, but parody is not enough to secure the purpose of the quest's end.

The tone of 'Strike' is defined by its struggle: there is a strain between, on the one hand, the restrictions of traditional forms and the strictures of pastoral themes and, on the other hand, the threatening instability of parody and excessive poetic form. In his *Poetics of Sensibility*, McGann perceptively describes Forrest-Thomson's poetry as an inheritor of a strain of sentimental poetry whose presence has been elided by restrictive literary-critical descriptions of poetry of the Romantic period. This other, 'ecstatic' tradition – in contrast to the controlled passions of Shelly, Blake and Byron – McGann associates with Sapphic sentiment and describes as a 'poetry of failure', which recognises the general condition of loss.[533] Such poetry expends this loss not by resisting it, but by both formally and thematically indulging in it. McGann describes a neglected tradition of 'doomed writing' by such poets as Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson as well as Forrest-Thomson.[534] Such poets produce a type of sentimental poetry which does not retreat from its own failure but, rather, embraces it as part of the condition of poetry itself, incorporating, in the terms of Georges Bataille, a general loss within its own restricted economy.[535] Whilst McGann's analysis comes close to falling into the association of women's poetry with untamed hysteria, his observations on Forrest-Thomson's poem are useful.

To extend McGann's insights: Forrest-Thomson's expenditure of loss, reconfigured as indulgence in failure, can be seen in such lines in 'Strike' as 'What there is now to celebrate: / The only art where failure is renowned. / A local loss / Across and off the platform ticket found'. Here semantic failure is sentimentalised and celebrated and then extended in form: the short line 'A local loss' has a large space after, abruptly stopping the rhythm as if to evoke sympathy, whilst the next line carries the /o/

---

[533] McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*, p. 164.

[534] *ibid.*, p. 170.

[535] *ibid.*, p. 150. McGann draws on George Bataille's idea of the 'restricted and general economy' outlined in George Bataille, *The Accursed Share* Vol.1 (trans.) Richard Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991). Bataille argues that economic thinking has been restricted by its own ideal of total recuperable profit; such models merely fulfil their own theoretical ideals and are incompatible with the realities of economic profit. He postulates, on the other hand, that economic systems contain a necessary excess, or a loss without profit, which must be spent either willingly or gloriously through charity or catastrophically through war (Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, p. 21).

sound 'across and off' into poetic form towards a comic conflation of absolute failure with losing a train ticket. Perril has also suggested Forrest-Thomson's later poems incorporates loss and failure within the 'general economy' of her poetic practice. However, whilst Perril concentrates on the semantic and affective expenditure in the poems, much of the felt loss in 'Strike' is a stylistic lamentation for the loss of a pastoral and parodic ideal, the loss of a willed poetic control over other poets' words, and a loss in the form of a failure to achieve an unequivocal poetic style and a distanced Artifice.[536] These losses are, as Forrest-Thomson puts it, 'local' and expressed in the over-indulgence of local pattern and form. The tone and style of poems such as 'Strike' register the struggle between Forrest-Thomson's attempted control and restraint of a pastoral and parodic ideal and the embrace of poetic failure to attain poetic ideals and control linguistic affect.

McGann's description of a Sapphic poetic tradition evokes Forrest-Thomson's longest poem, 'Cordelia: Or 'A Poem Should not Mean, But Be'' in which a host of female literary figures, including Beatrice, Juliet, Clytemnestra and Veronica-Forrest-Thomson herself, are depicted as lonely and neglected, raped and murdered by literary and historical men.[537] As both Mark and Perril have suggested, questions and issues of gender and the feminine voice within literary tradition are inextricably tied up with Forrest-Thomson's stylistic and parodic struggle. 'Cordelia', Mark writes, is a 'parodic homage', but she also suggests that, in naming the poem after King Lear's third daughter, Forrest-Thomson ironically highlights 'daughterly silence and sacrifice to a demanding and deluded patriarch'.[538] Similarly, Perril writes that 'the weaponry deployed by "Cordelia" is parody; a subversive repossession of a very literary language that has designated the female role that of victim.'[539] I agree with both Mark's and Perril's identification of Forrest-Thomson's feminism with her battle with literary tradition, but I would add that her feminist politics are strikingly ambivalent towards the question of literary authority.

---

[536] In Perril, CBP pp. 113-22, Perril uses Bataille's *The Accursed Share* and Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' (trans.), F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1974), pp. 5-74 to argue that, in Forrest-Thomson's later poetry, particular 'Ear of Dionysios: Ode' and 'Le Pont Traversé', '[n]otions of loss and recuperation are major concerns' and that they contain a 'formal anguish that cannot be recuperated' (p. 113).

[537] CP, pp. 152-7.

[538] Mark, VFT, pp. 106 & 109 respectively.

[539] Perril, CBP, p. 128.

On the one hand, Forrest-Thomson repeatedly attempts to distil and master poetic styles in order to assert her own literary authority and this process is accompanied in poems such as 'Cordelia' by an ironic commentary on male literary figures. Similarly, Forrest-Thomson's vigorous and combative theory and poetry were part of her very real struggle to establish her voice in an intellectual time and context – sixties and seventies Cambridge and other universities – dominated by men; a context which perpetuated male-dominated canons. However, on the other hand, Forrest-Thomson's poetry and particularly her essays locate poetic authority and mastery in great nineteenth and twentieth-century poets, most of whom are male. For example, apart from a few allusions to Christina Rossetti in her poems, Forrest-Thomson demotes her in her critical writing in favour of her more stridently elaborate brother, Dante. Forrest-Thomson's feminism emerges as a complex part of her broader struggles with form. She knows that she is responsible for an investment in discourses on poetic authority which have systematically excluded women from the canon. Nevertheless, she continues to cite and use such authority figures and poetic traditions as part of her poetic project. Whilst the phrase poetic *master*y is inexorably tainted with gender bias, Forrest-Thomson perhaps hoped that her pursuit of such would demonstrate women's equal capacity to attain the neutral status of aesthetic expertise.

'The Garden of Proserpine'

Forrest-Thomson's poem, 'The Garden of Proserpine', continues her engagement with literary tradition in the hope of writing straight. The poem features parodies of literary forebears and struggles with ways of expressing the perennially troubling subjects of death and love. 'The Garden of Proserpine' is a literary-historical and stylistic quest to reclaim, as Forrest-Thomson puts it in her 'Preface', 'the right to speak directly through the traditional ranges of rhymed stanza.'[540] The poem has two parts. The first part is a sprawling and inconsistent canter through mytho-literary themes; the second part comprises six ballad stanzas containing ostensibly straight statements about the traumas of love. However, the ballad does not contain a form of

---

[540] CP, p. 167.

direct expression, but rather features a contorted and indirect lyricism filtered through, to borrow a word from Forrest-Thomson herself used in *Poetic Artifice*, the 'alembic' of a complex-into-simple artifice and echoing through various literary voices. [541]

Proserpine's Garden was, of course, a favourite visitor spot for numerous nineteenth-century poets, including Swinburne and Rossetti, and the eponymous heroine was also taken up by Pound in his early 'Canzon: The Yearly Slain', written in response to Frederic Manning's 'Koré'.[542] Forrest-Thomson's 'The Garden of Proserpine' features a number of literary allusions. It begins, for example, with an emphatic and combative appropriation of the opening of Shakespeare's ponderous and gloomy sonnet 129: 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action and, till action, lust'.[543] Shakespeare's sonnet ends with the line 'To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell', a theme which is taken up by Forrest-Thomson in her own final lines to 'The Garden of Proserpine: 'If it isn't your arms I'm heading for / It's the arms of gloomy Dis.'[544] Forrest-Thomson's attempt to write straight is, then, conducted by purloining excerpts from literary forebears; but these forebears are also filtered through her own critical interpretation. For example, during the period in which she wrote the poem – 1974-5 – Forrest-Thomson was also writing her 'Obstinate Isles' book on Pound. As with 'Strike', many of the quotations incorporated in the poem are also discussed in this critical work. There is, then, a high degree of self-conscious motivation behind Forrest-Thomson's use of certain quotations, heightening the anxiety to master forbears' work and to achieve certain poetic ideals and effects. In order to illustrate this intellectual filtering process, I have marked up the opening section of the poem to reveal the original sources of quotations (first italic) and their appearance in her critical writing (second italic):

---

[541] See PA, p. 96: 'Passed through the alembic of the disconnected image-complex, poetry is restored as Artifice, as a repertoire of techniques both inherited and created, whose value and continuity lie in their ability to undermine facile synthesis.'

[542] Swinburne 'The Garden of Proserpine' and 'Hymn to Proserpine' are the most obvious examples; Rossetti's 'Proserpine' and accompanying painting. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 195-7.

[543] Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, p. 141.

[544] CP, p. 140. The phrase, 'gloomy Dis' is from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 4.274: 'Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis'.

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action and, till action, lust ⎤ *- Shakespeare, Sonnet 129*
Until my last lost taper's end be spent
My sick taper does begin to wink
And, O, many-toned, immortal Aphrodite, ⎱ *- Sappho, 'Hymn to Aphrodite'* ⎱ *OI, p.29*
Lend me thy girdle.
You can spare it for an hour or so ⎱ *- Homer,* Iliad ⎱ *OI, p. 30*
Until Zeus has got back his erection.

Here where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot ⎱ *- Swinburne, 'The Garden of Proserpine'* ⎱ *OI, pp. 38-*
In doubtful dreams of dreams.
The moon is sinking in the Pleiades,
Mid Night; and time runs on *she said.*
I lie alone. I am aweary, aweary, ⎱ *- Tennyson 'Mariana'* ⎱ *HTP pp. 68-*
I would that I were dead.
Be my partner and you'll never regret it.
Gods and poets ought to stick together;
They make a strong combination.
So just make him love me again,
You *good old triple goddess* of tight corners. ⎤
And leave me to deal with *gloomy Dis.* ⎱ *- Homer* Iliad ⎱ *OI , p. 30*

The above illustrates how Forrest-Thomson's poem exists in what Marianne
Dekoven has called an often combative and fractious 'dialectic of embrace' with
poets of literary history, from Shakespeare, Swinburne, Tennyson and Sappho as
well as with her own critical writing.[545] The complex layers through which Forrest-
Thomson writes and which she incorporates into her poem are sources of her work's
strength. However, her use of parody and incorporation of allusions and her self-
conscious commentary on these quotations – in the poem as well as her critical work
– act as mediators, crippling her desire for uninflected expression.

---

[545] Marianne Dekoven, 'Modernism and Gender' in Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge
Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 180. Dekoven writes
of the 'dialectic of embrace of the empowered feminine along with violent repudiation of it' which
exists in an ambivalent male modernist misogyny. Whilst Dekoven refers to male modernist practice,
such a dialectic is apparent in Forrest-Thomson's 'Cordelia', where a feminine self is both asserted
and killed off, but also in her wry treatment of quotations from (male) literary history. The lines from
'lend me thy girdle' and the final two lines are directly relatable to a comment in her critical writing.
In OI p. 30, Forrest-Thomson writes: 'Persephone was neither a goddess nor (remember gloomy Dis)
a maiden; Aphrodite was a goddess by not maiden (remember the time in the Iliad when she lent Here
her girdle because Zeus couldn't get an erection).' In his CBP, Perril points out that the attribution of
the lines to Sappho, which were 'recovered during Swinburne's lifetime', were eventually proved to
be unfounded (p. 124).

In her unpublished critical work of this time, Forrest-Thomson continued to examine how far poets use formal poetic conventions to control external materials. In 'Obstinate Isles', for example, she observes of that Swinburne's poem, 'Hymn to Proserpine' is relies 'heavily on literary, mythological, theological echoes, that is, on external discourse which [Swinburne] is trying to bring under the rule of poetic conventions which are still not strong enough to dominate these forces.'[546] According to Forrest-Thomson, Swinburne's 'Hymn' is the site of the struggle to restrain and rule the force of external discourse with the tools of poetic conventions. Forrest-Thomson undertakes just such a struggle in 'The Garden of Proserpine'. For example, in the third and fourth lines, she vigorously transfers the thematic energy of Shakespeare's lines into a new poetic form by mirroring formal patterns in the original verse. So the /l/ sounds and alliteration of the third line and the /i/ clusters of the second take up those in the second and first lines respectively. Once the sounds have been mimicked, Forrest-Thomson ingeniously extends the line with the /e/ of '*e*nd be sp*e*nt' which imitates the 'tapering' of the light to which the short sounds of 'b*egi*n to w*i*nk' contribute. Shakespeare's lines are tactically appropriated as part of her own poetic form.

Similarly, the poem features moments of conflict between literary and contemporary idioms. Embedded quotation always has demotic and comic accompaniment and the literary rhythms and metres clash with jaunty conversational idioms. For example, the strong suggestion of post-coital expense in the opening lines is humorous, with the tapering energies of lust dissipating in the poem's structure (Zeus needs to get his 'erection' back). Similarly, Tennyson's woeful 'aweary, aweary' abuts the slang-like phrases, 'never regret it' and 'stick together' as well as the rueful, plain-speaking plea: 'just make him love me again'. This line is immediately followed by the jocular 'good old triple goddess' which serves to side-step the possible poignancy of the previous line and affect a casual relation with mythical detail.[547]

---

[546] OI, p. 24.

[547] The lines from 'lend me thy girdle' and the final two lines are also directly relatable to Forrest-Thomson's comments in OI: 'Persephone was neither a goddess not (remember gloomy Dis) a maiden; Aphrodite was a goddess by not maiden (remember the time in the Iliad when she lent Hera her girdle because Zeus couldn't get an erection)', p. 30. A little before this comment, Forrest-Thomson writes, in reference to the line 'Goddess and maiden and queen' in Swinburne's 'Hymn to

'The Garden of Proserpine' is a preparatory ground for the possibility of expression through poetic form, but direct expression is already compromised by its reliance on rhetorical and mythical-thematic conventions as well as Forrest-Thomson's own self-conscious theory; she cannot fully control the implications of each. The rest of the poem involves an ongoing conflict between the abstract subjects of 'Love, death, time, beauty', the role of the gods in their symbolisation, and the folly of artistic creation in bringing about the destruction of emotion, all achieved by deference to abstract patterns and literary formulas:

> Of all the follies that is the penultimate:
> To let our own inventions destroy us,
> The ultimate folly, of course, is not to let them destroy us.

A poet is caught between the penultimate folly of subsumption to one's inventions and the ultimate folly of the compulsion to keep inventing despite the inevitability of being destroyed. Forrest-Thomson builds tension by stretching lines out and using prose syntax and idiomatic language contrasting with the poetic language: 'Arrogant and imbecile senecans, unconscious / Of what is going on even in their own bodies / Old whatsisname stuck up on his pillar, / A laughing stock, the ultimate in insensitivity.' As Forrest-Thomson observes of Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine' in 'Obstinate Isles', the poem has been 'preparing' for a final statement on the contradictions and paradoxical follies of expressing emotion directly through literary and highly artificial form.[548]

Proserpine': 'Swinburne is using the traditional invocation to the triple goddess (he probably poured a libation as well) and echoing Sappho's "many-faceted, immortal Aphrodite" But he changed the order from the traditional "Virgin, mother, and queen", which would have fitted his metre equally well' p. 27. The opening lines of Swinburne's fine poem are 'I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love hath an end; / Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend.' Swinburne, *Major Poems*, p. 101. See Forrest-Thomson's witty appropriation in 'Cordelia': 'I have live long enough having seen one thing; / That term has an end' (CP, p. 153). See, also, Forrest-Thomson's comments on Swinburne's poem in PA, pp. 115-22.

[548] Of the six pages of Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine', Forrest-Thomson writes: 'Swinburne uses these pages to prepare us for the repetition [of both 'weep' and 'sleep']; he does not argue; he builds up a thickness and a momentum which gives his "I" in conclusion the weight of centuries of conflict between death and life, Christian and pagan, self-destruction and love. So that we cannot see the poem, in the end, as the utterance of one man, or the reflections and emotions of one man; it is in the strictest sense, a hymn, something universal, a total vision of the imagination and the world it creates in language.' OI, p. 35.

Forrest-Thomson argues in her 'Obstinate Isles' and 'His true Penelope' that
Pound's early poems and late cantos display his inheritance of the rhetorical
traditions of nineteenth-century poetry. To Forrest-Thomson, what she calls Pound's
'middle period' advocacy of the 'prose tradition in verse' was an aberration from his
rhetorical innovations.[549] The mixture of prose and poetic idioms – of rhetoric – in
'The Garden of Proserpine' is undoubtedly a wry test of the sincerity of rhetorical
traditions against later 'prose traditions'. Indeed in 'His True Penelope', Forrest-
Thomson draws on Pound's contention expressed in his essay 'I Gather the Limbs of
Osiris IX: On Technique', that 'technique is the only gauge and test of man's lasting
sincerity', and develops a line of argument advocating a form of sincerity aligned to
rhetorical complexity.[550] She argues of Rossetti's poem, 'The One Hope', for
example, that:

> what seemed at first a very commonplace use of stanza, line, phrase,
> arrangement, is now revealed as extremely sophisticated. I think we have to
> concede that Rossetti has passed the test of lasting sincerity of technique which
> sets him in a strong position with respect to other sincerities whatever, in the
> this artificial realm, these may be.[551]

'[O]ther sincerities' refers to emotion or sentiment, of course, and Rossetti is
forgiven any subsequent emotional identification as he has proven himself in the
arena of sophisticated rhetoric. Similarly, Forrest-Thomson writes of Arthur
Dowson's lyric, 'Amor Umbratilis', that his 'mask of direct lyricism in simple stanza
[…] forces us to recognise an attitude that is far from simple lyricism and a stanza
that is far from simple.'[552] As such, poetic sincerity and writing straight are aligned
to a poet's 'lasting sincerity of technique'. What may appear to be 'simple lyricism'
is perhaps 'far from simple'; it is a simplicity expressed through the complex
clarities of rhetoric. Forrest-Thomson is certainly aiming for such clarity, hence 'The

---

[549] OI, p. 1.

[550] Forrest-Thomson quotes Pound's maxim in HTP, p. 5 and throughout. Ezra Pound, 'I Gather the
Limbs of Osiris', *The New Age* 10, no. 13 (January 25 1912), p. 298. For the published versions of
Forrest-Thomson's comments, see '*from* His True Penelope was Flaubert: Ezra Pound and
Nineteenth-Century Poetry' in Hansen and Farmer (eds.) 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Three Essays',
pp. 10-13.
[551] HTP, p. 7.
[552] *ibid.*, p. 20.

Garden of Proserpine' concludes with a series of simple ballad stanzas affecting a rhetorical complexity and, therefore, a 'rhetorical sincerity'.

The end of 'The Garden of Proserpine' is preceded by a wry description of the journey through and for styles on which the poem takes a reader and its characters: 'So here we go for another trip and hold on to your seat-belt, Persephone'. The poem then continues:

> I loved you and you loved me
> And then we made a mess.
> We still loved each other but
> We loved each other less.
>
> I got a job, I wrote a book,
> I turned again to play.
> However I found out by then
> That you had gone away.
>
> My dignity dictated
> A restrained farewell.
> But I love you so much
> Dignity can go to hell.
>
> I went to hell with dignity,
> For by then, we were three.
> And whatever I feel about you,
> I certainly hate she.
>
> The god knows what will be the end
> And he will never tell.
> For I love you and you love me
> Although we are in hell.
>
> And what death had to do with it
> Is always simply this:
> If it isn't your arms I'm heading for
> It's the arms of gloomy Dis.[553]

---

[553] CP, p. 140.

The contrast between these stanzas and the sprawling, stuttering, derivative and equivocal form of the previous lines is dramatic. Has she prepared the way for direct, lyrical expression? It certainly appears that way, particularly the first line of the second stanza – 'I got a job, I wrote a book' – which seem direct statements about real-life circumstances. To follow this 'I' would be to ascribe the implied events directly to the poet and to create a narrative dramatising 'the problem of love', a problem which is, as Neil Pattison has recently observed, 'that love has been destroyed by infidelity'.[554] Pattison goes on to claim that Forrest-Thomson creates a solution which 'knows itself as no solution […] the poet fooling herself in the synthetic comfort of a ballad'.[555] Pattison interprets Forrest-Thomson's expressive lyric as the poet getting her poems '*into* the necessary contradictions of lyric's second-guess: performing knowledge of lyric's ironic prevention, *as a condition of the lyric's truth*.'[556] There is certainly a form of 'lyric truth' in the ballad stanzas but it is, as Pattison implies, one of contradictions and complexity rather than a directness.

One way in which rhetorical distance is achieved is in the layering of apparently personal circumstances within a myth narrative. There is an ongoing tension and dialectic between the local, speaking voice and voices from mythical and poetic history. Whilst the opening three stanzas appear realistic, the last three are defiantly fictional, so the 'I' could equally plausibly be Proserpine or any feminine spirit forced to reside in 'Dis' as punishment for transgression. Similarly, to use Mark's phrase, the 'affective charge' of the lines is developed by subtle operations of form which hold back a barely restrained rage.[557] The ballad form confers a pastoral naivety, a violent simplification through a self-denying form. Lines like, 'And then we made a mess' and 'I turned again to play', contain a thinly-veiled eroticism which quickly turns into rage: 'I certainly hate she'. Hate is petulantly non-

---

[554] Neil Pattison, ''The mirrors are tired of our faces': Changing the Subject in the Poetry of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 2 April 2010 <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Pattison.php>, p. 13. By the phrase 'second-guess', Pattison seems to mean that lyrical expression already anticipates the inevitability of its own artificiality by its expression through language and poetic form as well as by what could be called an ironic foreclosure of sentiment.

[555] *ibid.*, p. 14.

[556] *ibid.*, p. 1.

[557] Mark, VFT, p. 90.

descriptive, part of a child-like tantrum evoking a glibness which the ballad form enhances. But the suppression inherent in using such a banal word is potent. Similarly, Forrest-Thomson relies on the neat formal rhymes 'mess/less', 'play/away', 'farewell/hell', 'three/she' to confer a surface playfulness and humour which deliberately contrast with the circumstances described. To put it another way, the simple form of the poem is set in tension with its complex emotional content. The poem is not rhetorically complex and layered as Forrest-Thomson describes the work of her nineteenth-century forebears; rather the surface rhetoric conflicts with a palpable emotion whose affect is heightened by the apparent formal restraint, simplicity and mythical associations.

The lines 'My dignity dictated / A restrained farewell' are indicative of such formal restraint. She uses the word 'dictated', a forceful word abutting the implied elegance and restraint of the situation as well as the verse form itself. The word 'restrained' in the next line also strains against the verse pattern. Metrically, the line requires three syllables, but the two syllables of 'restrained' forces an unnatural stretching of the word. Its enunciation thus occurs through gritted teeth. The restraint intensifies a felt antagonism and contrast between the form and the content it is used to convey; between, that is, the formally naïve and pastoral and the experiential contingent. The repeated use of 'dignity' also reveals its oppressive force. It operates as a dictatorial formal and semantic injunction – *be dignified in manner*, *be dignified and elegant in mode* – in constant strain against the affected, faux naivety. An affective force is also constantly in battle with an intruding and deflating bathos enacted through chiasmus and thematic inversion: 'Dignity can go to hell' and 'I went to hell with dignity'. The poetic persona reclaims a 'dignity' which she knows is cold comfort and which is enabled by the elegant futility of formal inversion. The inversion also implies the push and pull of both form and content throughout, as well as between putative characters in the poetic mesh – poet to lover, poet to form, Proserpine to her abductor and ravager, Pluto. Fluctuations of metrical, thematic and personal control enhance the felt affect of the lines.

'The Garden of Proserpine' is an uncomfortable poem from start to finish. The formal pleasures Forrest-Thomson and a reader may derive from the rhyme of 'simply this' with 'gloomy Dis', and the breezy elegance with which the compact

neatness of the three syllable 'dignity' is rhymed with the pathos-full phrase of 'we were three', are tinged with an emotional affect outflanking the sincerity of rhetorical form. The ballad proves that Forrest-Thomson was unable at this stage to write directly without the crippling mediation of parodic self-consciousness. Forrest-Thomson was struggling towards such directness, despite its impossibility, but her self-consciousness about writing and her distanced and ironic take on traditional themes prevented unmediated expression. Whilst Forrest-Thomson incorporates a pastoral simplicity and a comical and parodic approach to certain mythical themes, the formal restraint is porous with emotional affect. Isobel Armstrong detects this emotional affect in her reading of Forrest-Thomson's poem 'Ducks & Rabbits' in her essay 'Writing from the Broken Middle: The Post-Aesthetic'. Drawing on Gillian Rose, Armstrong describes a poetic space opened up in Forrest-Thomson's poem as a 'broken middle' – the location of a new form of 'aesthetic experience' which 'hovers between self-enclosed autonomy and the absence of frame', where '[t]he struggle for the sign, the negotiation of codes and signifying systems' occurs, where 'irreconcilables reconfigure', and out of which emerges affective or melancholic 'leftover[s]'.[558] Armstrong's theory of 'writing from the broken middle' is useful in describing a type of 'post-aesthetic' of late modernism as a critique of post-structuralism. This post-aesthetic suggestively describes the characteristic quality of strained and almost melancholic space that Forrest-Thomson's struggle with form reveals. Amidst such melancholia, 'The Garden of Proserpine' also reveals the difficulties and inevitable contradictions of treating nineteenth-century subjects and poetic forms as 'seriously' as Forrest-Thomson desired without a self-consciousness and irreducibility of contemporaneity getting in the way. What Forrest-Thomson needed was to attempt the strategic unrealism she learned from Dadaist poets.

---

[558] Isobel Armstrong, 'Writing from the Broken Middle: The Post-Aesthetic', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1(1998), pp. 83, 76, 79 and 76 respectively. Armstrong develops arguments in Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

Dadaism and Unrealism

Forrest-Thomson's theoretical innovation in *Poetic Artifice* was to identify direct links between nineteenth-century poetry and aestheticism, tenets of the Dadaist poetry and contemporary poets such as Andrew Crozier, Prynne, as well as her favourite practitioner of the 'triumph of artifice', Ashbery.[559] However, her appropriation of Dadaism is part of her simplification, distillation and refinement of poetic theory and principles to situate her ideal of Artifice. As Kim Stefans has suggested, her project can be viewed as part of broader movements – such as concrete and language poetry – of 'civilizing Dadaism', a process by which Dadaist techniques are isolated and stripped of their cultural, social and political objectives.[560] Similarly, McHale has referred to Forrest-Thomson's theory and practice as aligned to postmodern, neo-Dada movements, whilst Keery comments on the 'political naivete' of her aesthetics.[561] And, indeed, Forrest-Thomson is not alone in such practice. In a letter to Hans Richter in 1962, Marcel Duchamp wryly noted how Dadaist originating impulses were aestheticised in neo-Dada art: '[t]his Neo-Dada art […] is an easy way out, and lives on what Dada did […] I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty.' [562] Richter himself comments that '[t]he Neo-Dadaists are trying to restore to the anti-fetish the attributes of 'art'.'[563] But, as Willard Bohn notes in a more sympathetic light, what inspired neo-Dada movements was the original Dadaist practices of simultaneous destruction and construction. As he writes: '[h]aving reduced artistic expression to its bare essentials – sound and typography in poetry; sound, gesture, and action in theatre; color and line in art – they began to experiment with new, uncorrupted forms.'[564] Following the 'spirit of Dada' (a frequently used amorphous term in discussions of neo-Dada), if not the ravished letters of their ironic laws, Forrest-Thomson reduced some of the poet's 'artistic expression' to their 'bare

---

[559] For Forrest-Thomson's discussion of the 'triumph of artifice' see PA, pp. 146-63.

[560] Kim Stefans ,'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and High Artifice', p. 5.

[561] Brian McHale, 'Making (non)Sense of Postmodernist Poetry', p. 6. Keery, 'Blossoming Synecdoches', p. 113.

[562] Marcel Duchamp, letter to Hans Richter dated 10th November, 1962, quoted in Hans Richter *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), pp. 207-8.

[563] Richter, *Dada*, p. 208.

[564] Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. xvii.

essentials' to explore a new mode of poetry. Indeed the ease with which Forrest-Thomson combines nineteenth-century poetic techniques with those of Dada illustrates her pre-eminent interest in style and how she selected those distillates of technique which suited her developing model of poetic Artifice.

The trajectory of Forrest-Thomson's quest for style involved an apparently paradoxical interest in Dadaist practice, with its obscure and destructive techniques pulling in the opposite direction to controlled poetic Artifice. Forrest-Thomson's partial selection of Dadaist practice is due to the control exerted by her theoretical model of the poem; that is to say, her theory of Artifice reclaims the potential disruption of contingent artifice by making it functional within the overarching machinery of poetic form. A comparable meliorising of Dadaist practice has been noted by critics of modernism. Vincent Sherry, for example, has perceptively observed of Pound's cantos of the twenties: '[t]he Dadaist impulse towards anarchic display is […] subjoined to a motive of art at its most seriously formal, its most traditionally serious.'[565] This form of radical modernism combines what Sherry calls techniques such as 'verbal deconstruction' and 'interlingual punning' with the high modernism of conscious craft.[566] Sherry concedes Pound's poetic failure, or at least the impossibility of his ambition. Forrest-Thomson's poems of this period possess similarly warring tensions: she exhibits a tendency towards uncontrolled excess (artifice) as well as the maintenance of a willed frame within which excess is contained and made functional (the ideal of Artifice).

Forrest-Thomson outlined her interest in Dada poetry in her 1974 article, 'Dada, Unrealism and Contemporary Poetry'. For her, poetry by Tristan Tzara and André Breton contained the necessary stress on the 'formal patterns of language, irrelevant to the communication of meaning'.[567] As such, a number of her poems attempt the 'formal patterns' of the Dadaist poets. But Forrest-Thomson soon discovered in practice that the frames of traditional Artifice were required. Two of Forrest-Thomson's poems testing Dada form are 'The Ear of Dionysios: Ode' and 'Le Pont

---

[565] Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 145.
[566] *ibid.*, p. 154.
[567] 'Dada', p. 78.

Traversé: Ode'. Both feature a number of styles, modes, allusions, vigorous word-play and complex formal patterns resembling, in the Dada poet and philosopher Julius Evola's phrase, a 'Dada Landscape' ('Dada paesaggio', the poem's original, Italian title).[568] Whilst many Dada poems aren't particularly formally radical – with concentration on prose-like association being more important – some, including those by New York Dadaist, Walter Conrad Arensberg, have forms which may have inspired Forrest-Thomson. For example, compare the opening lines of Arensberg's 'Theorem' with an excerpt from Forrest-Thomson's 'Ear of Dionysios: Ode':

> For the purposes of illusion
>
> > > the actual ascent of two waves
> > >
> > > transparent to a basis
> > >
> > > which has a disappearance of its own
>
> is timed
>
> > at the angle of incidence
> >
> > > > to the swing of the suspended
> > > >
> > > > lens[569]

Arensberg was clearly using the cut and paste technique to rearrange scraps of a scientific paper. There is a certain wit to the step down form of the last three lines, evoking the rhythm of descending thought with the waves. However, the form is otherwise uncontrolled. Compare Forrest-Thomson's 'The Ear of Dionysios: Ode':

> the steering veers
> > from shore to shore, I can give you
> metaphor for metaphor
> > any day and get away along the
> coastline of literary peaks
> > and threatening summits (Ben Ezra etc. –
> > > my crummy puns)[570]

Forrest-Thomson uses a comparable form to Arensberg and layers it with internal puns and overlaps. The last allusion is to Basil Bunting's description of Pound's

---

[568] Julius Evola 'Dada paesaggio' ('Dada Landscape'), in Bohn, *The Dada Market*, pp. 82-3.

[569] Walter Conrad Arensberg, 'Theorem', in Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. 13.

[570] CP, p. 128.

Cantos in his 'On the Fly-Leaf of Pound's Cantos' as 'Alps' which a reader should patiently sit before and 'wait for them to crumble'.[571] Forrest-Thomson's lines pun internally – literary 'peaks', evoking both attainment and a mountain top – as well as externally: 'crummy' chiming with Bunting's 'crumble'. Like Forrest-Thomson's horse in 'Strike', the relatively diminutive mountain, Ben Nevis, undermines Bunting's description of the Cantos as imposing Alps. The poem also draws attention to itself as an exchange of metaphor within literary form and, as with Forrest-Thomson's Cambridge poems, the poem becomes a commentary on both the epic attempts of Pound as well as the modes and manners of his epic. Sound patterning is the dominant artifice in 'The Ear of Dionysios: Ode' with form as a visual pun alluding to a type of modernist poetic practice. But, as with her Cambridge poems, Forrest-Thomson keeps returning to the use of stanzas and end-rhymes and traditional devices in order to frame her experiment. 'The Ear of Dionysios: Ode' ends, for example with a nine-line stanza concluding with an end-rhymed and metrically rhythmic couplet: '(Yeats') from mind to tree, but can't leap out of irony / That they keep grace with such as she.'[572]

Whilst 'The Ear of Dionysios' fluctuates between formal modes, Forrest-Thomson's elegiac poem 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode', has a wildly loose form. The poem, whose title means 'the bridge crossing' and alludes to a Parisian bookshop, was designed to be a 'Memorial to the deportation' of Jews under Hitler, and to Max Jacob himself who was abducted and interned by the Gestapo at Drancy, that horrendous halfway house to the concentration camps, where he died in 1944.[573] The poem's main device is translingual punning and the affect is uncontained; as Perril has suggested, Forrest-Thomson deliberately and wilfully creates an 'irreducible loss' out of unrestrained artifices.[574] But such poetic form, like that of her concrete poetry phases was *le pont traversé* towards a tamed version of Artifice.

---

[571] Basil Bunting 'On the Fly-Leaf of Pounds Cantos', quoted in William Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Anvil Press, 2001), p. xxi.

[572] CP, p. 129.

[573] *ibid.*, pp. 130-1. See Patterson, 'Containers', for a useful discussion of this poem. I am grateful to Patterson for identifying the allusion of the title.

[574] Perril, CBP, p. 117.

Jacob has been, as Forrest-Thomson herself pointed out, 'classified as a 'Cubist''
poet, particularly by Gerald Kamber in his *Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism*
with which Forrest-Thomson was familiar.[575] Forrest-Thomson wasn't troubled by
classification, only with how such poet's contributed to her ideal of Artifice. What
follows is the opening section of the poem as well as some other, indicative excerpts:

Le Pont Traversé: Ode

> an estimated 75% of Chinese restaurants
> in Paris are used as cover for spies. De spies.
> Replies to official questions were various,
> ranging from "we used to have some spies but
> they left; they didn't say where they were going;
> every restaurant has its ups and downs"
> to "sorry, no spies, but very good Peking duck".

> Je suis la victime et le bureau

Memorial to the deportation. Whose? Jews. Yours. Ours. I consider
this an insult to my staff about whom I am most particular; there
are no spies here; anyway spies don't exist.
White blocks   black lines stone by   steel grille   by grille   line by
line across the white and black block of the page.

[…]

> This is in memory of Max Jacob,
> paysan de Paris à paraître. Apparaîtra le pari et paresse d'être de la
> vie. La paresse de siècles m'envahit avec son révolver à cheveux
> blancs: animula vagula blandula   hospes comesque corporis   quae[576]

The poem is what could be described as an oblique elegy: elegiac fragments are
caught, captured and echo in the thick memorial of the poem. Forrest-Thomson
produces a palpable affect through a hyperabundance of elegiac overlaps. She builds
a variety of internal sound and image patterns, uses a clash of idioms and
perspectives and incorporates a range of languages, punning between each. As well

---

[575] Gerald Kamber, *Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins
Press, 1971). Forrest-Thomson was greatly indebted to Kamber's book for her understanding of
Jacob's poetic techniques. See, for example, PA, pp. 132-3. Forrest-Thomson also quotes from this
book in 'Dada'.
[576] CP, p. 130.

as the elegiac themes evoking details of Jacob's life, the self-generative prose style resembles Jacob's work. For example, in 'A la recherche du traitre' (Searching for the Traitor) in *Le cornet à dés,* Jacob writes:

> *à la signification cabalistique de ces chiffres. C'est Paul qui*
> *est prisonnier des Allemands pur avoir trahi son colonel   :*
> *en quelle époque vivons-nous? le 21, le 26, le 28 sont des*
> *chiffres peints en blancs sur fond noir avec trois clefs. Qui*
> *est Mlle Cypriani? encore une espionne.*[577]

> *the cabalistic significance of those numbers. With Paul a prisoner*
> *of the Germans because he betrayed his colonel. What era are we*
> *living in? 21 26 or 28 are in white on a black background with*
> *three keys. Who is Miss Cypriani? Another spy.*[578]

Jacob develops ideas and images through the local movement of sound, visual features and suggestive analogies, all based on equivalence. As Nicholls notes in *Modernisms*: 'Jacob's prose poems exploit [associations] in a deviously playful way, with the structure of the text shaped less by reference than by phonetic and semantic association.'[579] In the above excerpt, the 'signification cabalistique' is taken up both in the repetition of supposedly 'significant' numbers and the 'espionne' mystique, but also by the /i:/ and /a/ sounds and clusters of letters. The name Cypriani, with its letters and visual presence, seems inevitable within this linguistic environment. Forrest-Thomson both copies and literalises Jacob's associative technique. In the opening section of the poem proper, for example, she finds a comparable word for the Jacob's 'Mlle Cypriani' to echo with 'spies' and develops a little narrative from this linguistic material. She also refers to Jacob's own self-conscious style and describes the process of writing and filling the page itself, as Jacob comments on writing and the constituents of script which 'sont des chiffres peints en blancs sur fond noir avec trois clefs'. The descent of the poem into Latin after a variety of translingual puns reveals either its plunge into nonsense and absurdity or Forrest-Thomson's ironic return to a higher, learned language. The poem can be read in

---

[577] Max Jacob, *Le cornet à dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 28.

[578] Max Jacob, *Selected Poems,* (ed. & trans.) William Kulik (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1999), p. 32.

[579] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 270.

either way and this is primarily as it is a text which appears totally out of control. Forrest-Thomson's other poems inspired by Dada were much more circumscribed.

'The Ear of Dionysios: Ode' and 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode' lack the consistent framing of poetic Artifice and, as such, they cannot, in Forrest-Thomson's formulation, be 'rhetorically sincere'. Forrest-Thomson's theory prescribes the use of stanzaic form to control and contain Dadaist modes. Hence, in *Poetic Artifice* she argues that the lack of 'solidarity with the tools of past Artifice […] vitiates much historical and Dadaist writing'.[580] As she writes in her 'Dada' article, the advantage of Ashbery's poetry over Jacob's and over the use of prose is *poetic* form: Ashbery, Forrest-Thomson claims, 'can go further than Jacob because he is writing in verse.'[581] In short, Forrest-Thomson perceives poems such as Jacob's as lacking the control requisite to communicate much beyond the delight of surface, linguistic play or, as with 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode', the overwhelming but indistinct and uncontrolled emotional and psychological trauma of linguistic 'expenditure', to use Perril's word after Bataille, and violence. 'Unrealist' poetry establishes its own space and provides limitations and another order to those offered by the narrative and mimetic conventions of Realist literature. But, for Forrest-Thomson, Dada poetry didn't go far enough.

Other poems such as 'In Memoriam Ezra Pound', written in a neo-Dada style, have similar internal sound and image density, but also possess stanzaic form, rhythm and the emphatic use of line-endings. Hence the last section of the poem reads:

> He is not here he has outsoared the shadow
> of our right. 'Tis life is dead not he. And
> ghastly through the drivelling ghosts on the bald
> street breaks the blank day of critical interpretation
> staining the white radiance of eternity, every
> little pimple had a tear in it, a fear of many
> coloured glass, the noise of life strains the white
> radiance of an elegy. How does the stress fall
> on an autumn day. Remember remember the first
> of November where history is here and nowhere:

---

[580] PA, p. 127.
[581] 'Dada', p. 86.

> the room in Poictiers where no shadow falls
> on the pattern of timeless moments. Forget
> the gate of white is the gate wherein our past
> is laid. These books are radiant as time
> against the shadow of our night where no
> shadow falls. He is not dead.   Instead.
>
> Give me back my swing. O Ferris wheel.[582]

Here, Forrest-Thomson fuses the unrestrained style of 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode', with the formal restraint of the stanzas and line endings of poems such as 'The Garden of Proserpine'. Abrupt enjambments – 'shadow / of our night', 'bald / street', 'white / radiance' – effect a reclamation and folding in of literary allusions: Wallace Steven's 'The Emperor of Ice Cream', Jacob's *Le Cornet à Dés*, Shelley lamenting Adonais-Keats and the 'drivelling ghost' of Tennyson, caught standing outside Arthur Hallam's 'Dark house'.[583] These gloomy allusions prepare for the last lines. Here, the space between 'dead' and 'instead' evokes the abrupt but inevitable death the elegy so emphatically evades. But this formal impact – a form of 'rhetorical sincerity' – is rapidly undermined by a whimsical apostrophe to the 1949 film *The Third Man*.[584] Aspects of verse technique, particularly sound and sight repetitions (the key of 'o', as Forrest-Thomson repeatedly writes), gather the lines up into what might be called a 'complex rhetorical sincerity affect' evading irony and the playful surface of literary contortions.[585]'In Memoriam Ezra Pound' marshals some of the linguistic affect built up in 'Le Pont Traversé: Ode'; strategic use of enjambment heightens the palpable abruptness or shock of death. Forrest-Thomson was getting close to her stated aim of sincerity by using the resources of rhetoric to achieve what I have called oblique elegy. But the complexity she desired was only to be found in her category of what she called the 'limpidly lyrical'.

---

[582] CP, p. 132-3.

[583] Wallace Stevens, 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 64; P. B. Shelley 'Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.', verse LII, in Wu (ed.), *Romanticism: An Anthology*, p. 972; Alfred Lord Tennyson 'In Memoriam A. H. H' in *Selected Poems* Aidan Day (ed.) (London: Penguin, 1991), verse VII, p. 135

[584] *The Third Man* dir. Carol Reed (London Film Productions, 1949). The film contains a famous scene in which Holly Martins (Joseph Cotton) meets the elusive Harry Lime (Orson Wells) before a Viennese Ferris Wheel.

[585] In PA, Forrest-Thomson writes of 'our favourite key of o', p. 160.

Limpidly Lyrical

In her 'Dada' article, Forrest-Thomson distinguishes Dadaist obscurity from other types of obscure poetry such as that of Stevens or even Donne.[586] Drawing on her idea that Dadaist poetry includes 'the refusal to accept the norms of realistic intelligibility', Forrest-Thomson insists that Dada poetry is not obscure at all but is 'limpidly lyrical':

> Its level of meaning becomes opaque only when its extreme formal complexity is brought to our notice by the level of convention […] Obscurity on the level of convention nullifies the limpidity with which meaning has seemed to be applied to the non-verbal world. In this respect, Dada poetry rejoins such conventionally artificial forms as the villanelle, rondeau and sestina.[587]

According to Forrest-Thomson's wilfully simplified understanding of Dadaist poetic style, such poetry substitutes or nullifies semantic limpidity – language carrying a transparent message – for a formal clarity. Opaqueness and simplicity are somehow produced by formal complexity comprising line endings, rhyme and stanza breaks; paradoxically, clarity is achieved through a complex resistance to conventional meaning. Forrest-Thomson's connection between Dada poetry and forms such as the villanelle is confusing given Dada's apparent resistance to such formal categories and modes. However, she links the modes for the way in which both resist conventions of sense-making: the Dadaists produce obscure poems based on non-rational system; using a villanelle and sestina is to use artificial modes which subordinate sense to considerations of form. However, such simplification is, as I've stated, all part of Forrest-Thomson's quest for the distillation of a particular style.

Forrest-Thomson's phrase 'limpidly lyrical' is worth pausing over. 'Lyrical' is, of course, a broad term but, in general, describes a simple song or poem which, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, 'express[es] the poet's own thoughts and sentiments'.[588] Whilst definitions of what constitutes the lyric are many and disparate, I think Forrest-Thomson uses the term to describe a form of expressive simplicity. 'Limpidly', as the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the adverb,

---

[586] Cp. Forrest-Thomson's discussions of 'rational' and 'irrational' obscurity in chapter two of PA.
[587] 'Dada', p. 81.
[588] 'lyric', n. *OED Online*, retrieved 19 September 2011.

implies a limpid manner. Examples of the use of the word come from J. J. Lowell on Goethe: 'limpidly perfect as are many of his shorter poems' and Robert Browning: 'He's … limpidly truthful'.[589] Browning's use of the word implies moral transparency, where Lowell's usage associates it with perfection. Forrest-Thomson's understanding of the term resembles the latter. Of the adjective, limpid, the first definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* uses the word in relation to fluids and defines it as 'free from turbidity or suspended matter; pellucid, clear'.[590] The second of these definitions – pellucid – is closest to a common understanding of the term. But the word also has figurative connotations of cleanliness or chastity. Forrest-Thomson may have got the word from Pound who, in one of his editorial footnotes to Ernest Fenollosa's essay, writes: '[s]tyle, that is to say, limpidity, as opposed to rhetoric.' [591] But whilst Pound draws a distinction between style and rhetoric, Forrest-Thomson collapses the terms into one another.

Forrest-Thomson uses the term throughout her critical writing on all but one occasion in relation to complexity of form. For example, in 'His True Penelope', she writes of the 'limpid simplicity' of some of Dowson's stanzas which, nevertheless, have a 'rigorous' formal logic.[592] Limpidity is associated with a type of 'rhetorical sincerity', with the limpid quality owing more to clarity of formal expression rather than meaning. Forrest-Thomson implies that she views in Dadaist poetry, and in the work of poets she herself calls neo-Dadaists such as Prynne, Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and Sylvia Plath, a limpidly lyrical quality tied up with formal complexity.[593] Such a description of the poetry of Ashbery and, particularly, Prynne, is surprising given the poets' notorious difficulty and complexity; similarly, O'Hara's and Plath's work are far from straightforwardly transparent. The limpidly lyrical is, then, a paradox and possesses, as Forrest-Thomson puts it, 'a lyrical quality while apparently destroying

---

[589] 'limpidly', adv. *OED Online,* retrieved 19 September 2011. J. R. Lowell *Among my Books*, 1st ser. p. 280. Robert Browning, *Inn Album* iii, p. 84.

[590] 'limpid', adj. *OED Online*, retrieved 19 September 2011.

[591] Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1918), in Rainey (ed.), *Modernism: An Anthology*, p. 101.

[592] HTP, p. 19. The exception to her association of the limpidly lyrical with positive formal complexity is when she describes the 'limp and limpid vision of Mr Larkin' in PA, p. 59. Nevertheless, elsewhere in PA she praises what she calls 'disconnected imagery' for preserving 'limpidity in obscurity' (p. 80). Limpidity must be achieved via association with formal complexity.

[593] Cp. PA, p. 69.

lyricism'.[594] Such paradoxical clarity is also infused with the ideology of purity in French poetry and poetic theory of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, not least in the work of Mallarmé's aspiration for *poesie pur*.[595] But whilst Mallarmé's aspirations for an ideal language undoubtedly influenced Forrest-Thomson's project, the clarity or limpidity she implies is more than a gesture at the silence beyond language; form somehow achieves a clarity which is emphatically expressive.

Writing of O'Hara in her 'Dada' essay, Forrest-Thomson notes in his poetry a certain tone which she describes as emanating from 'a self-conscious distancing from any meaning and which results from the dominance of formal pattern as this is seen in the assured handling of sound and different line lengths.'[596] Of the poem, 'Three Airs', Forrest-Thomson contends that O'Hara achieves a distancing from the emotional content of the poem by the imposition of form, but which at the same time manages to convey a certain 'lyrical content'. However, Forrest-Thomson's evidence is confusing; take, for example, lines from O'Hara's poem: 'Oh to be an angel (if there were any!) and go / straight up to the sky and look around and then come down // not to be covered with steel and aluminium / glaringly ugly in the pure distance'.[597] The image fusion is deliberately incongruous so the lines convey a whimsical, tentative and tender tone which is not entirely the activity of the 'pure' content. Forrest-Thomson's treatment of O'Hara's lines is more of a projection than one backed up by the poem's form as the excerpt derives most of its limpidly lyrical quality from its subject matter: the surreal aspiration to be, like an angel, beyond the brash ugliness of the city and free from the slick and duplicitous surfaces of city living. Forrest-Thomson locates an expressive limpidity in handling of form, with form itself somehow containing a clarity of expression. Whilst such a limpidly lyrical quality remained a distant goal in most of Forrest-Thomson's poetry, one of her final poems provides brief glances at what she meant, where a balance between

---

[594] PA, p. 139.

[595] Forrest-Thomson's refers to the capacity for concrete poetry to 'purify' language by distancing it from referential dirt (see PA, p. 72). However, towards the end of PA and throughout the rest of her critical work, her use of the words clean and purify have a definite French, modernist connotation, encapsulating the desire for a 'pure language'. See, also, PA, pp. 139-40.

[596] 'Dada', p. 89.

[597] Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems*, (ed.) Donald Allen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 298-9

control and excess is tentatively glimpsed, and the paradox of the directly expressive clarity of form is almost achieved.

'Richard II', Controlled Excess and Complex Simplicity
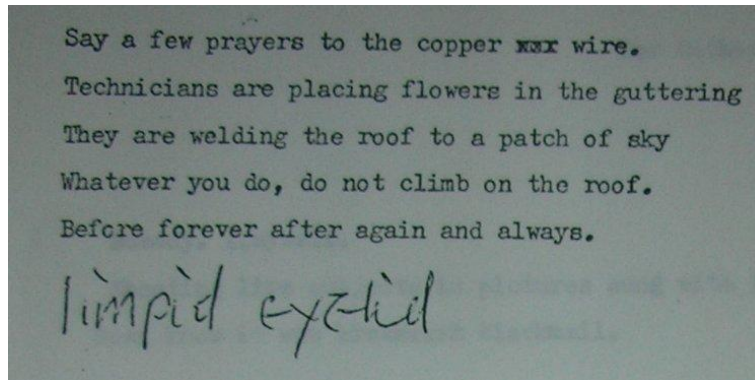
Figure 5: *Original typescript of 'Richard II' with phrase added by Forrest-Thomson*

Poetry exhibiting the quality of the limpidly lyrical possesses a certain tonal and stylistic clarity which has less to do with a simplicity of message than an expressive quality achieved through formal control. In her final poem, 'Richard II', I'd like to suggest, Forrest-Thomson achieved glimpses of her projected quest for a style which was a form of indirect lyricism; the limpidly lyrical is only achieved 'lit at a slant', as Denise Riley has written.[598] In the poem, Forrest-Thomson tentatively combines all of the stages of her theoretical ambitions which coalesce in a formal and tonal clarity absent from the warring styles of most of her other poems. In 'Richard II' there are glimpses of a reconciliation between the poem's formal artifices and her theoretical idealisms and frames of controlled Artifice. Similarly, whilst I and other critics have referred to the emotional and experiential excess in many of Forrest-Thomson's poems, 'Richard II' possesses a certain resigned clarity. It stages and marshals its own palpable affect by both the creation of a poised surreal environment and distanced poetic space, as well as carefully controlled artifice. The poem's pastoral simplification and distillation of themes and styles and its parodic

---

[598] Denise Riley, 'Knowing the Real World', in *Parataxis: Modernist and Modern Writing* no. 4 (Summer, 2003), p. 16. Forrest-Thomson died on the 26th April, 1975, the night before she was due to read 'Richard II' at Southwark Cathedral as part of the (then) annual 'Poems for Shakespeare' event. See Anthony Rudolf's account of Forrest-Thomson's absence in the introduction to his edited *Poems for Shakespeare 4* (London: Globe Playhouse Publications, 1976), pp. 7-10. The volume is dedicated to Forrest-Thomson's memory.

manoeuvres do produce tensions, but these send a reader back into the poignantly self-reflective poem. Whilst there are glimpses of clarity, the poem is also an allegory of the late modernist poet gripping onto ideals of order and form when all around such ideals are crumbling. To paraphrase Miller, the poem represents form as potential ruin, whilst poignantly trying to retain its strengths.[599] However, whilst Miller presents writers such as Beckett despairing at the void, Forrest-Thomson achieves a tentative clarity and also reaffirms her interest in traditional form.

Forrest-Thomson herself outlined some of the themes of 'Richard II' in an introduction she wrote for the Shakespeare event. In the introduction, she rehearses her opinion expressed throughout *Poetic Artifice* that 'at the present time poetry must progress by deliberately trying to defeat the expectations of its readers or hearers, especially the expectation that they will be able to extract meaning from a poem.'[600] Forrest-Thomson's critical energy operates in a more carefully circumspect way in 'Richard II', where resignation to covering old themes with old techniques becomes a sombre transformation of style. Importantly, in this introduction Forrest-Thomson also stresses her conviction that ideas must be mediated or transformed into 'technical devices', where themes become 'points in [the poem's] organisation as a metrical formal structure.'[601] As I shall show, one of the binding strengths of 'Richard II' lies in its controlled metre and formal structure.

In order to stage her tactically distanced unrealism, Forrest-Thomson uses the pastoral device of the 'house of fiction'. She also draws on the excerpt from Shakespeare's *Richard II* in which the eponymous king ponders the meaning of portentous music drifting into his room to signal the poem's themes of tensions between circumspection and aspiration.[602] Richard's disengaged, dream-like state and his complex hallucinations are captured in tactical tensions between the real and surreal of the poem's opening lines which describe an inspection of a dilapidated house:

---

[599] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 14. Miller writes of 'late modernist's already belated relation to high modernism as ruin.'

[600] CP, p. 169.

[601] *ibid.*

[602] William Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second,* (ed.) Peter Ure (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), Act V, sc. v. ll. 1-66, pp. 169-73.

The wiring appears to be five years old
and is in satisfactory condition.
The insulation resistance is zero.
This reading would be accounted for by the very damp condition of the building.
If you come up the stairs on the left side you will see
A band of dense cumulous massed on the banister.
Whatever you do, do not touch the clouds.
Forever again before after and always.[603]

'Deserted now the house of fiction stands', as Forrest-Thomson writes in 'Strike'.[604] The 'house of fiction' metaphor drives the opening of this poem and it is a convenient spatial location in which to stage the struggle between a textual environment and the intrusions of an excessive world. The poem reads as if it is the beginning of a journey around an imaginary space with a tour-guide narrating to a fictional audience who may or may not be the reader. The poem represents its own diminutive 'quest'. The internal tour-guide's interpretation of the scene is tentative and partial, hence the caveat 'accounted for' by the present conditions of the house which takes in the peculiar conditions. Hence, too, the dilapidated and porous house: its textual 'insulation resistance is zero' and it is liable to let in 'dense cumulous' meaning 'massed' on the structural artifice. The house metaphor and the narrative contain the poem on its journey into 'unrealism', whose distanciation from the real is accessed through sur-real imagery of 'clouds massed on the banister'. There is tension between the real – the opening could be a simple walk around a house – and the unreal; between, that is, the containing control of narrative and journey conventions on the one hand, and the destabilising surrealism on the other. This tension between control and excess is complemented by the emphatically demotic long line, the containment of the short lines of the opening, as well as the more metrical arrangement of the final two lines. The real is both constrained (lineated) and excessive, just like the clouds. An emphatic timelessness is attempted by the line 'Forever again before after and always', which becomes part of what Mark has

---

[603] CP, p. 158.
[604] *ibid.*, p. 135.

neatly described as a 'mutating refrain of temporal deictics' throughout the poem.[605] However, the jaunty rhythm of the line coupled with its lack of punctuation give it a fluidity and temporality which abuts its semantic timelessness. The control of the unreal, of artifice and containing metaphors is everywhere interrupted by the massed, excessive real.

The complex-into-simple process of the pastoral idyll, here transferred into the image of a 'house of fiction', is complicated by the intrusion of an emphatic world. One way to complement the pastoral mode – the simplification of details in order to transform through technique – is, as Forrest-Thomson argued, by using parody. The next lines in the poem comprise a form of serious parody achieved in metrically controlled lines:

> In the light of the quiet night and dark of the quiet noon
> I awoke by a day side and I walked in time's room.
> To the end of the long wall and the back of the straight floor
> I stepped with my years' clutch and the dark of my days' doom.
>
> For the sight of the deep sad and the swell of the short bright
> Bid me flee waste of the time web and the long hand
> On a life's weft and the grey warp in the year's cloak
> For a long shade laps a short stand.[606]

Ian Gregson has quite rightly suggested that these lines comprise a 'parodic use of a portentous poetic idiom'. [607] However, Gregson's implication is that Forrest-Thomson is exclusively mocking 'portentousness'. Rather, the poem offers both parody, with its anxious commentary on the superficiality of pastiche, *as well as* a self-reflection about the possibility of writing 'straight' through particular idioms and styles. The first stanza's accumulating noun phrases and its directional and spatial words lead us with the narrator through this gloomy place; additionally, the long, brooding vowel patterns, particularly the /u:/ and /o:/ sounds, give the lines a

---

[605] Mark, VFT, p. 62.

[606] CP, p. 158.

[607] Ian Gregson, 'Lost Love and Deconstruction', p. 115. Gregson adds that the poem 'resembl[es] that of Dylan Thomas' which I don't think is quite right, although Thomas was a master at creating fantastical poetic worlds.

density, captured in the final 'dark of my days' doom'.[608] A reflective poignancy attaches itself to the phrase 'years' clutch' and 'dark of my days' doom', with the curious, apostrophaic pluralisation contributing to the sense of accumulated despair. The compressed phrases and syntax, coupled with accumulating triple rhythms, effect a dense and sonorous mood and a contained and constrained style. But the second stanza is a parody of the style of the first; it is a commentary on the superficiality of portentous excess as well as a poignant resignation to style.

Forrest-Thomson's self-parody in the second stanza adopts the phrasing of the first but destabilises content. However, the metrical order of lines (their Artifice), hold off the potential instabilities of artifice's free play. To assert the shift to self-conscious parody which, as Richard Poirier has written, 'makes fun of itself *as it goes along'*, the second stanza recycles words from the first – 'time', 'long', 'year's' – in different constructions.[609] Similarly, the rhythm generated by the preponderance of lighter /i/ and /i:/ vowel sounds – 'B*i*d m*e* fl*ee* waste of the t*i*me' – is abruptly halted with the 'short bright' sounds of 'short stand'. The line, 'a long shade laps a short stand', is a deliberately and parodically 'poetic' description of a banal lamp; its florid excess parodying the cultivation of the previous lines. Unlike in earlier poems, however, the effect of this to-and-fro between idioms – the serious and the demotic, the poetic and the faux-poetic – is highly controlled within regular metre. It is as if, here, Forrest-Thomson refuses to relinquish formal control to the impulses of local artifice and self-aware mockery; a metrical elegance restrains excess and fuses the demotic and poetic in an uneasy, but stable, embrace. Metre becomes a baseline poetic practice from which Forrest-Thomson gathers her strength.

Whilst her self-parody in her previous two quatrains tentatively controls Artifice and artifice, the next stanzas, which continue the four-line, metrical rhythms used

---

[608] Forrest-Thomson may well have been thinking of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam A. H. H' when composing these lines, particularly his evocation of Arthur Hallam's 'Dark house'. Tennyson, *Selected Poems*, p. 135: 'Dark house, by which once more I stand / Here in the long unlovely street'. As I stated above, Forrest-Thomson alludes to this poem in 'In Memoriam Ezra Pound' and she discusses Tennyson at length in both OI as well as her long essay. Veronica Forrest-Thomson 'Pastoral and Elegy in the Early Poems of Tennyson', in Hansen and Farmer (eds.) 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Three Essays', pp. 48-76.

[609] Richard Poirier, *The Performing Self* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 27 – emphasis in the original.

previously, introduce a shifting and uneasy dialectic between form and content. At once, a poignant content of nostalgic stillness and reflections of perception reneges against formal momentum, whilst a formal clarity and control struggles to hold together a detritus of fragmented images. The push and pull between these phenomena produces a powerful poise and a clarified affect of complex longing.

> The step to and the step back from the still glass in the long wall
> Flung the glance wide from the old field and the brown scene.
> And the glance broke at the pale horse on the glass turf
> While the door swung where the window should have been.
>
> With the ghosts gone and the wall flat as the clock's tick
> With a blood stopped and a bone still I squeezed glue from my cold glove
> And I turned back to my smashed self and the few looks pierced my own doll
> From the back-lash of the time brick and the last wall of an old love.

The lines develop by discrete moments of perception, aided by the triple rhythms and noun-phrase clusters. But there is a type of formal sense and clarity in the lines, or a rhythmic poignancy, which abuts the surreal confusion of imagery with which Forrest-Thomson attempts to still the scene. Traditional form – stanzas, consistent lineation and end rhymes – once more hold the lines tightly together. But the formal momentum conflicts with the images which produce a claustrophobic sense of stasis or paralysis – 'step to and step back', 'still glass', 'door swung', 'blood stopped', 'bone still' – charged with a bitter nostalgia – 'ghosts gone', 'back lash', 'time brick', 'old love'. The jocular insistence of the metre seems self-mocking – a rhythmical reassertion of time's passing against the stolidly stilled scene. And yet the formal consistency and poise of the lines also represent a type of clarity and control, with the fractured images which threaten to spill out in several directions; a sort of perceptual detritus is forced together in clarified form. These exhausting fluctuations in the lines and images ultimately produce a form of resignation.

In the above quatrains, Forrest-Thomson achieves a kind of clarification of expression through a poignant accommodation of control and excess. In her article 'Woolf's Cesspoolage: On Waste and Resignation', Sara Crangle outlines the evolution of a form of resignation from the complex dialectic between waste and sanitation in late modernist writing. In some of Woolf's late writing and Beckett's

work, what Crangle calls 'a modernist propensity for aestheticising waste' is answered by a willingness to relinquish the expulsion of waste resulting in a 'resigned' accommodation, as she puts it of Beckett's narratives, of the 'self resigned with the waste matter generated by that very self'.[610] Such a 'regressively progressive formula' results in Beckett's work accommodating its own waste and producing the quality of being 'fragmented (if begrudgingly entire)'.[611] The resigned acceptance of the fragmented with the entire in Crangle's formulation characterises the formal and thematic paradoxes I have outlined in the above passages. The 'smashed self' of the speaker, as well as the curious returns of symbols of 'old love' and longing are resignedly accommodated in complex form. Similarly, the renegade alliterations and sound patterns, are gathered up by the repeated insistence of stasis in the imagery. It is as if Forrest-Thomson's quest for style comes to an unsatisfying end, reflecting only glances of clarity and a 'smashed self' in the linguistic shards. The 'pale horse' on the brittle and unforgiving 'glass turf' evokes the bathetic nag of 'Strike'; but this time the horse's metamorphosis is not into a Siamese cat, but 'squeezed glue from a cold glove', which is a not entirely comic image as 'cold' somehow cools the humour. The conflict of momentums has the effect of flattening out the perspective in the lines, where a glass-like glaze pervades. The lines 'ghosts gone and the wall flat as the clock's tick / With a blood stopped and a bone still', for example, achieve a stillness and curious indirect clarity; a 'flat as a clock's tick' doesn't make immediate sense, but rhythmic repetition has a lulling clarity tinged with sadness.

The poem is a powerful and sad self-reflection on loss; as Gregson has observed, it is 'a kind of elegy for coherent meaning'.[612] But it is also an elegy for lost or dilapidated form and poetic practice with the fluctuating forms charting the persona's reactions to this loss in reactions which range from a resigned acceptance or confusion to emphatic assertions of traditional form. In *Late Modernism*, Miller draws on Walter Benjamin's writing on modernist fiction and demonstrates that, whilst he identifies two tendencies in modern (1930's) fiction – a desire for purity

---

[610] Sara Crangle, 'Woolf's Cesspoolage: On Waste and Resignation', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 40:1, 2011, p. 17.

[611] *ibid.*

[612] Gregson, 'Lost Love and Deconstruction', p. 116.

and 'formal mastery' on the one hand, and a work using a 'heterogeneity of materials [and] montage techniques' on the other – the two modes exist in the particular historical period in 'tense coexistence'.[613] Miller traces the existence of the simultaneous presence of these two modes into late modernist literature, viewing it as a defining condition of late modernist style. In 'Richard II', and in a number of Forrest-Thomson's late poems, these twin desires are set in tense co-existence. But as her display of metrical skill in the quatrains shows, formal mastery and an attendant desire for unity and order, were central and persistent ideas in her practice.

Whilst control and excess reach a tentative accord in 'Richard II' and a poetic diction is not undermined by an excessive demotic idiom as in other poems, there is still the sense of a wry acceptance of the distance of the poem from a glimpsed ideal of practice. Forrest-Thomson's poetic aspirations and apparent resigned acceptance of possible failure share a number of similarities with the work of Pierre Reverdy. For example, writing of Reverdy's poem, 'Fausse porte ou Portrait' in *Modernisms*, Nicholls describes a similar process of poignant and unfulfilled desire:

> The frame, then, does not lead to a place of safety and coherence we crave but triggers instead a sense of loss […] Here as in many of these poems, fragmented phrases under high syntactical tension produce a world tipped towards hallucination, a world of part-objects and half-glimpsed presences.[614]

As the two quatrains examined above reveal, Forrest-Thomson's poem contains numerous fragmented images and objects, glimpsed pieces of glass and detritus, and its noun phrases build tensions in syntax which creates a comparable unreal 'world tipped towards hallucination'. However, 'Richard II' is unable to sustain this type of

---

[613] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 15. Miller refers to Walter Benjamin, 'Krisis des Romans: Zu Döblins Berlin *Alexanderplatz*', in Gesammelte Schriften III (ed.) Hella-Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 230-6.

[614] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 273. Forrest-Thomson doesn't mention Reverdy's work anywhere in her critical writing. However, given O'Hara's enthusiasm for Reverdy – 'A glass of papaya juice / and back to work. My heart is in my / pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy' – Forrest-Thomson's passion for O'Hara and the preponderance of French poetic theory and images in her work, the Reverdy connection is plausible. For example, Reverdy's own poetry contains an abundance of phrases resembling Forrest-Thomson's own, such as 'nos yeux', 'ton regard' 'et ses yeux', 'mes yeax' as well as sublimely surreal and poignant images such as: 'Les voix qui revenaient de loin / Rappelaient ta vie en arrière / Mais le chemin qu'il aurait fallu refaire était trop long / Les voix familières trop tristes / Les yeux qui te regardent sont sinistres / On ne peut plus avancer'. Pierre Reverdy 'Galeries' in *The Penguin Book of French Verse: The Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 207.

theoretical stasis. The poem's sense of loss is both of the type that Nicholls describes, that is of a sense of 'coherence' and of pastoral simplicity, but also of the always-anticipated failure to achieve a directness of expression through a stylistic indirectness, accompanied (however slight, as in 'Richard II') by an ever-present and resigned self-consciousness and parody.

The witty resignation continues in the final lines of the poem. Here Forrest-Thomson's use of tactically controlled metre is relinquished and replaced with a prosy syntax which blithely continues the 'house of fiction' metaphor. It is as if her energetic attempts at using traditional form have been set aside.

> In the joinery timbers there is a new infestation
> And a damp-proof course is urgently needed.
> Say a few prayers to the copper wire.
> Technicians are placing flowers in the guttering
> They are welding the roof the patch of sky
> Whatever you do, do not climb on the roof.
> Before forever after again and always.
>
> limpid eyelid[615]

The poem comes full circle, returning to a description of a dilapidated 'house of fiction', which is now infested with Forrest-Thomson's poignant exemplification of poetry's own disintegration and inadequacy throughout. A resigned and funereal end is evoked in the small lines, four of which are full sentences, terminating in full stops, as well as the wry call for prayer for the copper wire and the technicians' placement of mourning flowers. Surreal images continue with the 'welding the roof to a patch of sky' symbolising (but failing) to finally conjoin the world to the structural artifice of the poem. The repeated imperative 'do, do not', reaffirms the sense of paralysis of the poem, which the second-last line of deictics – collapsing temporal dimensions, but trotting along in time nevertheless – enhances. And the poem would have ended on such a poignant, ambiguous and unfulfilled feeling had it not been for the dangling after-thought of the phrase 'limpid eyelid' added on in black pen to the end of the typescript (Figure 5) .

---

[615] CP, p. 159.

The disconcerting phrase, 'limpid eyelid' captures Forrest-Thomson's wry contentment to exist within the paradox of control and excess. Like the final line of 'In Memoriam Ezra Pound', the phrase is formally out of place, deferring the end of the poem. It is also nonsensical, as how can an eyelid be transparent? But there *are*, of course, cogent ways of reading the phrase into the poem. For example, James Keery has argued that the phrase, 'isolated by a stanza break at the end of [the poem], seems in its deployment a paronomastic paradox consciously modelled on a salient trope of Ashbery's, 'the lake a lilac cube''.[616] Keery memorably calls Forrest-Thomson's phrase one of her 'switch-back rides of personal detail and [...] off-cut personal allusion.'[617] Although he doesn't locate this 'personal allusion' beyond her will to obscurity, the term 'switch-back' is useful as it implies the ability to trace the function of the phrase within the operations of poetic form. Forrest-Thomson herself wrote of Ashbery's 'lake a lilac cube', that it has 'no existence outside the play of its vowel sounds and place in the poem's structure'.[618] So there is perhaps a connection between Forrest-Thomson's own apparently meaningless line and Ashbery's own play with sound patterns. '[L]impid eyelid', for example, perhaps continues the 'l' pattern started in 'always', implying that resonating lack of closure and the deferral of sense through material interminability. But this is probably a 'bad naturalisation'.

Forrest-Thomson's phrase also recalls Reverdy's innumerable 'yeux' as well as the line from 'Fausse porte ou Portrait': 'Doigt sur la paupiere humide' or, in Reverdy's translation, 'Finger on damp eyelid'.[619] In Reverdy's poem, the image conveys a tragic, unwilled self-reflection against which the persona struggles ('I am the lamp guiding myself / Finger on damp eyelid / In the midst / The tears flow in this space / Between four lines / Mirror').[620] Similarly, the phrase resembles Mallarmé's concise descriptions of altered and fluid perceptions and, in particular, the lines 'Yeux, lacs avec ma simple ivresse de renaître' and 'De ma jambe et des bras limpide nageur traître' from his poem 'Le Pitre châtié' (The Clown Chastised) which I discussed in

---

[616] Keery, 'Blossoming Synecdoches', p. 120

[617] *ibid.* Ashbery, 'They Dream only of America', p. 13.

[618] 'Unrealism', p. 24. Cp. Forrest-Thomson's commentary on Ashbery's poem in PA, p. 154-6 where she refers, rather excessively, to the phrase's 'block-like resistance to empirical meaning.'

[619] Pierre Reverdy, 'Fausse Porte ou Portrait' in *Plupart du Temps* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), p. 219. Reverdy's translation is cited in Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 272.

[620] Quoted in Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 272.

my first chapter.[621] To provide my own loose translation of the lines: 'Eyes, lakes with my simple drunkenness reborn' and 'Clear my leg and arm limpid swimmer traitor'. The lines contain both 'yeux' and 'limpide' and are similarly peculiar and dream-like constructions. However, whilst these allusions may reconstruct possible sources, Forrest-Thomson's phrase is more ambiguous than the French poet's, and much more unsettling.

'Richard II' provides glimpses of the willed reconciliation between control and excess, of the harmonic relationship between the aspirational projections of theory, the activity of artifice in practice, and of the creation of an unfettered and transformative fictive realm of the unreal. However, I would like to end by suggesting that the phrase 'limpid eyelid' is Forrest-Thomson's compressed description of indirect lyricism: a limpidity and clarity which is always precluded by the operations of formal carapaces. The poignant styles exhibited in 'Richard II' are created out of the conditions of the struggle for style and the product of this ongoing, creative pursuit is, ultimately, the compromise of the indirectly lyrical. Forrest-Thomson's stylistic vision of a form of transparent complexity is always precluded by the thickness and complexity of the 'eyelid' of artifice. The struggle towards the light and insight of stylistic transparency, glimpsed throughout the brooding 'Richard II', as well as the always impending threat of the opacity of form, drive Forrest-Thomson's poetic production. 'Richard II' is the site of Forrest-Thomson's intense struggle to achieve clarity through complexity and this struggle is, at the same time, the scene of her most sustained stylistic insight.

My reading of Forrest-Thomson's phrase is complemented by her own interpretation of Sylvia Plath's poem 'Purdah' in the concluding pages of *Poetic Artifice*. Forrest-Thomson's use of Plath's poetry to conclude her 'theory of twentieth-century poetry' may seem surprising. Indeed, in a concluding essay on a number of 'books received' in the magazine, *Spindrift* 1, Paul Smith expresses surprise at Forrest-Thomson's attraction to Plath's 'veneer of pained and broken meditativeness', asserting: 'I think it's quite plain that Sylvia Plath shares the unthinking humanism [and…]

---

[621] Bosley, *Mallarmé*, p. 66.

sentimentalism which Ms Forrest-Thomson imputes to Ted Hughes.'[622] However, it was Plath's artistry to which Forrest-Thomson was attracted. Furthermore, Forrest-Thomson wanted to reclaim Plath's work from an interpretative culture of bad naturalisation which sought (and still seeks) to foreground the biographical rather than formal significance of her poetry. 'The worst disservice criticism can do poetry,' Forrest-Thomson argues, 'is to try to understand it too soon, for this devalues the importance of real innovation which must take place on the non-semantic levels. Criticism's function is eventually to try to understand, at a late stage, even Artifice.'[623] The phrase '*even* Artifice' alerts us to the sometimes chimerical nature of Forrest-Thomson's idealised term. However, her reading of Plath's 'Purdah' records how the content and form of the poem evade a reader's desire to read the poem as representative of a 'state of mind'; evading, that is, a reader's advanced expectations about the poetic message.

Of the poem's final line, 'The cloak of holes', Forrest-Thomson writes: 'I think we should all be agreed that a cloak of holes does sound rather terrifying, but why? Because it is a contradiction in terms: a cloak made of holes.'[624] Similarly, of all the formal intricacies of Plath's poem and the final line, Forrest-Thomson argues (and this is the last sentence of her book), that they send a reader, 'back inside the poem again – to its fictionalised 'I' for an explanation of the 'cloak of holes'; the 'I' is clothed in its negation. But like all true artificers, 'I' remains enigmatical, presenting only the words on the page.'[625] Forrest-Thomson's own 'limpid eyelid' is a comparable contradiction in terms and asks a reader to linger in and accept its contradictory status. Further, the phrase presents an 'eye' (I) which is clothed by the 'eyelid' of perception's negation. The phrase, just like Plath's 'I', is enigmatical, sending a reader curiously 'back inside the poem' for possible explanations but which always fall short. Forrest-Thomson may well have been trying to find a phrase comparable to Plath's own to conclude 'Richard II' as well as to exemplify her own theory of poetic artifice. Whilst many of her other poems exceed her own theoretical projections, 'Richard II' finally provides a glance at what 'real innovation' in

---

[622] Paul Smith, 'Trajectory Harm', *Spindrift* 1 (1977), u.p.
[623] PA, p. 161.
[624] *ibid.*, p. 163. Sylvia Plath 'Purdah' in *Collected Poems,* (ed.) Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 244.
[625] PA, p. 161.

Forrest-Thomson's terms looks like: a complex but controlled fusion of formal modes creating a tentative aesthetic unity and clarity.

The limpidly lyrical is, therefore, a form of complex clarity achieved through sustained simplification, restraint and resignation. In Forrest-Thomson's final, dangling phrase, the ever-present and paradoxical status of formal complexity is represented by the eyelid which always threatens to elude an aspiration for direct limpidity of expression. Forrest-Thomson's struggle with forms was very often a process of resistance which, in modernist literature, translated into difficulty, whilst, in late modernist literature it becomes a tactical, if resigned, assertion of formal unities in the face of their rapid destruction. The aspiration towards the pastoral was one step in the direction towards resistance, with parody – the mode by which literary quotations and conventions are turned inside out – an accompanying stance from which to shake language free and to reconstitute poems from the tatters of others' styles. Forrest-Thomson's poetic aspiration for poetry to resist the conventions of realism and of a reader's conventional reading practice was another form of resistance. In the pursuit of the unreal, Forrest-Thomson also willingly, but very often *unwittingly*, discovered the ways in which the theoretically external – the emotional and situational – return as part of a poem's formal complexity and as part of language's affect. Many of these poems lose control of their emotional charge and external details burst through as a production of the clash between control and excess itself. Whilst emotional and biographical detail emerged in some of the later poems as part of renegade artifices escaping the theoretical projections of a theory of Artifice, in 'Richard II' Forrest-Thomson discovered a way of controlling, or reconciling herself to, this troubling detail through, as she puts it in her preface, 'extreme[s] of both technical and thematic complexity' which no longer resist the impossibility of writing straight. Whilst poems such as 'The Garden of Proserpine' dramatise Forrest-Thomson's awkward style and her failure to reconcile traditional form with contemporary expression, 'Richard II' is her most direct statement of poetic intent and in which she achieves partial glimpses of the clarity for which she long struggled. But this clarity does not arrive as a simple meaning, the light of insight penetrating the obscuring eyelid, but as a cryptic assertion, 'lit at a slant', of the absolute necessity of formal complexity – with traditional forms as part of this mix – and the inevitability of opacity.

'Richard II' offers a tentative glance at the aporetic co-presence of theoretical ideals of Artifice and their performance in disparate artifices. The limpid lyric is achieved by a passionate and committed understanding of the intricate characteristics of a literary tradition and their distillation and use in practice. In 'Richard II', the strain of restraint produces the plaintively lyrical, or the 'unexamined rhetoricity', to use Riley's phrase, of language.[626] And this rhetoricity was not just linguistic affect, but was tied to the intricate details of poetic Artifice that Forrest-Thomson so long laboured to refine. As she wrote in an impassioned but resigned passage in *Poetic Artifice*:

> The only coherence, finally, is on the level of technique. I think that 'our metaphysics' is this new technique of disconnected imagery which is the doom of the fate of the twentieth-century poet, who must simultaneously be detached and involved with language. This means that he has all the tricks of rhetoric and the skills of language but he must not make the mistake of thinking that they solve anything […] Before he can appropriate the external world he must deny it to himself, and this requires him to 'learn', as one of Empson's poems has it, 'a style from a despair'. He must develop new techniques in order in the end to be able to use the old; as Bradley said of the speculative philosopher, to converse with shadows he must himself become a shade.[627]

In 'Richard II', Forrest-Thomson achieves a forceful coherence of technique through her assumption and mastery of 'all the tricks of rhetoric and the skills of language' she could muster over such a short life. But the poem also contains a resigned acceptance that all this labour will not solve the problems of linguistic mediation and the inevitable doom of the necessarily difficult 'new technique'. 'Richard II' is demonstrably written in a style learned from a despair and yet it also carries a clarity of knowledge inscribed in its technique. In the potent techniques of 'Richard II', Forrest-Thomson achieved the resigned insight that the struggle for expression and the struggle with poetic form is, and ever was, the defining condition of her style.

---

[626] Riley, *Impersonal Passion*, p. 2.

[627] PA, p. 86. Empson, 'This Last Pain', *Collected Poems*, p. 53: 'What could not possibly be there / And learn a style from a despair.'

Conclusion

> The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne[628]

> La literature ici subit une exquise crise, fondamentale.[629]

Forrest-Thomson's 'Richard II' is one of her last and certainly her most potent expressions of late modernist resignation where she glimpses a theoretical ideal for which she long strove, but realised in practice that such symbolic unity was always just beyond the reach of poetic craft. The poem distils all the skills acquired in her quest for style and manages a tentative answer to the aporia of fusing the framing devices of traditional form and the innovations of arbitrary poetic patterns. In 'Richard II', Forrest-Thomson achieves a complex formal and expressive clarity; it is the crowning accomplishment of a life dedicated to poetic craft. 'Richard II', along with other late poems such as her remarkable 'Canzon', a study in the pains of love and poetic craft which ends with a translation of a sestina of the medieval poet Arnaut Daniel, demonstrate that it was only against a background of an intense scrutiny of poetic form that expressive clarity could be achieved.[630] So, whilst 'Richard II' contains a poignant despair there is always the sense of a faith and investment in poetry's traditional techniques as a poet's saving grace.

There is a curious and suggestive passage in Mallarmé's essay 'Crisis in Poetry' which summarises Forrest-Thomson's own ongoing struggle with forms and which offers a comparable faith in the hard-won results of poetic labour as well as the necessity of traditional techniques. In his essay, Mallarmé celebrated the fact that modern French poetry was opening itself up the possibilities offered by what he called the 'délicieux à-peu-près' (as Robert Greer Cohn translates that phrase, 'delightful approximations (subtle modifications of rhyme, rhythm…))' free from the strictures of the alexandrine. However, Mallarmé still believed in what he called 'la tradition solemnelle' or the solemn tradition of metre and rhyme as that which was

---

[628] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, in Larry D. Benson et al (ed.) *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), l. 1, p. 385. This quotation, written in Forrest-Thomson's hand, was reproduced on the last endpaper of the *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990).

[629] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de vers', in *Divagations* (Paris: Carpentier, 1897), p. 236. Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé's* Divagations: *A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 232: 'Literature here [in France] is undergoing and exquisite crisis, fundamental.'

[630] CP, pp. 150-1.

'beautiful in the past' and which was the basis of poetry's value.[631] Despite his radical *Un Coup de Dés*, Mallarmé wanted to achieve what Cohn calls a poetry of 'new-old balance'.[632] As such, Mallarmé argues (in Rosemary Lloyd's translation) that,

> prosody, with its very brief rules, is nevertheless untouchable [*intraitable d'autant*]: it is what points to acts of prudence, such as the hemistich, and what regulates the slightest effort at stimulating versification, like codes according to which abstention from flying [*voler*] is for instance a necessary condition for standing upright [*droiture*]. Exactly what one does not need to learn; because if you haven't guessed it yourself beforehand, then you've proved the uselessness of constraining yourself to it.[633]

Mallarmé is conflicted about prosody – it is untouchable or, as Cohn translates his phrase, 'proportionately unyielding', and fixed, guiding a form of prudent practice. Yet the codes of prosody are at the same time arbitrary and, unless fully mastered, are a useless constraint. As Cohn glosses, '[t]his is the old truth of "either you have got it in you or there's no point trying via rules."'[634] The word, 'voler' means both to fly and to steal, whilst 'droiture' can mean both physical and moral uprightness.[635] Mallarmé's implication is that, just because one chooses not to use metre does not, in itself, imply that this will result in superior poetry. His rhyming of *voler* and *droiture* in the poetic prose of his essay subtly reinforces the power of poetic techniques and illustrates the potent co-presence of transgression and prudent practice, intermingling as part of poetic form. Whilst the risks of maintaining traditional codes and outdated decorum are high, a knowledge of their complex etiquettes can still enhance poetic practice.

As I have shown throughout this thesis, Forrest-Thomson shares both Mallarmé's acute sense of the crisis facing poetry in the face of theoretical and poetic developments, but also his abiding faith in traditional forms and modes. To hold such antiquated or, perhaps, quaint beliefs in the value of poetic form and of traditional technique in the context of burgeoning postmodern practice was bold and

---

[631] Cohn, *Mallarmé's* Divagations, p. 238.
[632] *ibid.,* p. 236.
[633] Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 735.
[634] Cohn, *Mallarmé's* Divigations, p. 235.
[635] Editors' comments in Mallarmé, 'Crisis in Poetry', p. 735, fn. 9.

risky, and necessarily made Forrest-Thomson a late or, perhaps, belated modernist. The centrality of Eliot's *Four Quartets* and John Ashbery's poems of *The Tennis Court Oath* (the collection which Harold Bloom described derisorily as 'calculated incoherence') in Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice*, links her convictions to Marjorie Perloff's polemical argument in her *21st-Century Modernist: The "New" Poetics* about the persistence of modernism in contemporary poetry.[636] To Perloff, early modernist avant-garde practice had been deferred until later in the century by the distractions of global crises and a persistence of types of domesticated mainstream poetry and free verse. Perloff schematises mainstream poetry as comprised of loose stanzas, the avoidance of metre and rhyme, and the presentation of a single lyrical 'I' expressed in natural and colloquial language.[637] By contrast, Perloff discerns a contrary practice in poets as Susan Howe, Lynn Hejinian and Charles Bernstein, whose complex and variable poetic forms, strategies of resistance and difficulty, modes of defamiliarisation and collage techniques, rejuvenated an avant-garde and early modernist aesthetic located in Eliot's early 'Preludes' and 'Prufrock' poems. To Perloff, the superiority of the work of these poets is located in their complexity, where sound, visual techniques and sense work together in increasingly intricate ways. Conversely, poets such as Delmore Schwarz – a comparable scapegoat for Perloff as Larkin is for Forrest-Thomson – and the 'New Critical' poets such as Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, may have produced a kind of surface or 'metaphysical modernism', but they could not approach the formal complexity of Eliot's early poems. [638] 'The language-game' of Eliot's poetry, Perloff remarks, 'is one Delmore Schwartz never quite mastered.'[639] But if we extend Perloff's logic, Eliot's metrical experiment is never mastered by any of the poets she cites as the inheritors of early modernist poetry. Certainly, as Perloff points out, Bernstein and Steve McCaffery continue the avant-garde practice of Dadaism, but they do not engage with Eliot's innovations with traditional form.[640] To Perloff, late (or deferred) modernist practice is located in avant-garde experiment. To Forrest-

---

[636] Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 175. Quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 269. Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

[637] Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*, p. 158.

[638] *ibid.*, p. 159.

[639] *ibid.*, p. 160.

[640] 'Bernstein is nothing if not a Duchampian', Perloff observes (*ibid.*, p. 178).

Thomson, who also used Dadaist practice as a model for experiment, such practice must carry with it the burdensome but liberating devices of traditional form.

Forrest-Thomson takes traditional form much more seriously than Perloff's neo-modernists. Her seriousness, I suggest, is in part a product of her very different aspirations to those of the language poets; she wanted to assess the implications of traditional form in the context of the modern world. Her own poems were learned from a despair at the demise of such traditions and register, as I have suggested, what Miller describes in relation to late modernism's 'tenuous hold on the borderland' as 'a mortifying jolt' of the awareness of form's fragility, whilst also seeking to re-enliven such forms so that they 'may yet work to stiffen and preserve.'[641] As she wrote in her preface to *On the Periphery*, her poems are in the 'stylistic situation' of being 'on the periphery of traditional poetry'.[642] But, she argues, this difficulty 'must confront any poet at this time who can take and make the art a new and serious opponent – perhaps even a successful alternative – to the awfulness of the modern world.'[643] Forrest-Thomson's strong affinity to Eliot is proven in this passage. The imperative, 'must', registers her seriousness, whilst her conception of poetry as a sincere and 'serious opponent' and a possible alternative to the modern world, alludes, as I noted earlier, to Eliot's argument in 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' for the necessity for strong symbolic forms.[644] Furthermore, as Eliot argued in theory and demonstrated in practice, art will only be a 'serious opponent' if it maintains a sustained engagement with poetic tradition. Poets must not imitate but must understand their craft and its powers. As Eliot observed in 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre'': 'freedom is only true freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation.'[645]

Such freedom cannot be attained by imitating the styles of others; such practice, as Mallarmé also implies, would be uselessly constraining. In a letter to Louis

---

[641] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 64.

[642] CP, p. 167.

[643] *ibid.*

[644] T. E. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', in Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose*, p. 177: 'Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators […] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'

[645] T. S. Eliot, 'Reflections on 'Vers Libre'', p. 35.

Zukofsky dated October 25th 1930, Ezra Pound derisorily describes his own derivative poetic contemporaries as 'plenty of chaps meaning / What they say (with no lit. capac.)'.[646] A few days later he sent another letter to Zukofsky lamenting the 'mess caused by reaction against these dilutes. I mean the Tennysonian sonnet etc. now being done, and NOT so well done as in 1898.'[647] Pound bemoans the lack of literary capability of the Georgian poets as well as the mess and misconception about poetic craft the dilutions of Victorian poetic practice causes to those who haven't quite mastered their art. The work of poets of the late nineteenth-century such as Lionel Johnson or Arthur Symons who returned to the Tennysonian sonnet is of more value than the diluted practice of the Georgians. As Forrest-Thomson's return to the poetry of Tennyson, Swinburne, Rossetti and Dowson and her tracing of the influence of late nineteenth-century poetry on Pound in her unpublished essays testify, Victorian poetry offered a defence against the dilutions of the modern. But Pound was writing in 1930 and Forrest-Thomson's task to revivify some of the value of nineteenth-century practice in a contemporary environment in which metre, rhyme and controlled stanzas were relics of antiquity was a much more audacious ambition. Nevertheless, she displays a faith in the possibility that the inevitability of late modernist resignation could be forestalled by a wholesale investment in a pre-modernist aesthetic.

As Daniel Albright has recently perceptively observed, modernist poetic form was a result of poets' sustained scrutiny of, and revisionary dialogue with, nineteenth-century poets' own innovations in rhyme, metre and stanza use.[648] Modernist poetry is distinguished from Victorian poetry by what Albright calls its 'preoccupation with self-conscious technique' and of the poet's use of 'artifice exposing its own artificiality'.[649] But those modernist poets who took Victorian innovation seriously consciously sought to extract their insights and update them to contemporary practice. In modernist poetry, Albright suggests, free verse and experimental forms were combined with an anxious and shifting commitment to the value of traditional

---

[646] Ezra Pound, Letter to Louis Zukofsky, 25th October 1930, in Barry Ahearn (ed.), *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky* (New York: New Directions, 1987), pp. 49-50. Quoted in Perloff, *21st Century Modernism*, p. 154.

[647] Ezra Pound, Letter to Louis Zukofsky, 28th October 1930, *ibid.*, p. 57.

[648] Albright, 'Modernist Poetic Form', pp. 24-41.

[649] *ibid.*, p. 26.

forms. Forrest-Thomson's relation with Victorian, modernist as well as postmodernist poetic experimentation is similarly partial, as a faith in a variety of traditional forms constantly confronted contemporary theories which brought into question the status of such forms. But her insistent scrutiny and commitment to the absolute necessity of traditional form makes her a particularly unique late modernist, perhaps a late-Victorianist. The conditions were ripe for such a Victorian revival as, as Andreas Huyssen has observed, post-structuralist critical writing of the early 1970s which, as he puts it, 'privelege[d] aesthetic innovation and experiment', used as its quintessential models classical modernists such as Flaubert, Proust and Mallarmé.[650] Forrest-Thomson's poetic project returns to the pre-history of modernism, and she takes seriously the nineteenth-century values of poetic craft, even if such idealism struggles to survive in the 1970s and beyond.

And so we come full circle to Mallarmé, just as Forrest-Thomson kept circling back to his work as an ideal model of practice. As I have shown, to Forrest-Thomson, Mallarmé's poems fulfilled his ambition for poetry to accommodate both tradition and innovation discovered by dedication to craft. Whilst much post-structuralist theory was returning to classical modernists as exemplars, Forrest-Thomson adopted this fashion and combined it with the lessons learned from her scrutiny of Victorian and modernist craft to create a new style. Forrest-Thomson's unique project as both a theorist and poet was to expose herself to the contingencies of practice in the hope of finding a poetry which could use traditional values to write out straight in a contemporary context. One of her last poems, 'In Memoriam', dedicated to the Victorian librettist and poet, W. S. Gilbert, captures both her late modernist potent admixture of humour and despair, but also her deft illustration of the capacity of regular and traditional poetic form to distil and clarify lyrical sentiment in a way which, as in 'Richard II', builds up a palpable formal affect.

The poem's title, of course, alludes to Tennyson's own 'In Memoriam' in which he strained to capture his despair at the loss of his close friend through the medium of highly intricate verse form.[651] Forrest-Thomson's 'In Memoriam' adopts Tennyson's four line stanzas to create her own memoriam to craft; its lines are distanced by the

---

[650] Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', pp. 38 & 39.
[651] Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A. H. H.', *Selected Poems*, pp. 130-224.

frames of traditional artifice, but porous enough to express a universal longing and despair.

In Memoriam
for W. S. Gilbert

Such is my dream but what am I
An infant crying in the night
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry

That everything should grow divine
If you and I could see and know
The world in one another so
If you were mine.

If you were mine to see and know,
No limit on this world of thine
Be caused by mine,
Except what you would choose to do.

You choose to do what you do show
You take the world away from mine
And make all thine
Hurting me by slow by slow.

Hurting me by slow by slow
When freedom, truth and skill of mine
Could make us great and strong in thine
I know,

The world could be our own I know
If you gave up the hurt of thine
And made life mine.
Apart from you the dark is mine

Such is my dream; but what am I
An infant crying in the night
And infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry

Such is my dream but what am I
An old acquaintance of the night,

> But I could make all darkness light
> If you would try.[652]

'In Memoriam' is a powerful homage to poetic form and its potential for expressive clarity and truth. But it is also the space of the expression of a resigned despair at the futility of one's labour. The poetic diction trips up expression, the fourth lines of stanzas falter into silence, repeated phrases and whole lines outflank line endings and melt each stanza into one another. And yet, the poem's stanzas, metrical regularity, its parallelisms and refrains, make it an intricate example of Forrest-Thomson's struggle towards Artifice and ideal poetic form; if only she could hold off the clamouring despair. With 'In Memoriam', Forrest-Thomson marshals all of her 'truth and skill' to fulfil a dream that craft will, as she expresses it in her preface to *On the Periphery*, catch the object of her desire. But, as she also wryly notes, 'of course, being caught as a poetic fiction, as a real person he is gone.'[653]

The ABBA ABBA rhyme scheme of 'In Memoriam' captures most pertinently Forrest-Thomson's late modernist hope to shore up the ruins with Victorian poetic craft. The scheme, learned from Tennyson, is both highly regular and seductive, but is also, as Tennyson's poem attests, seemingly interminable. With 'In Memoriam' we witness the repeated reiteration of an ancient and noble form trying 'slow by slow' to express a crippling despair. The persona knows at the outset that the craft is futile and that her language is tipped with despair; but the longed for dream keeps forging ahead, sustained by the momentum of rhyme, metrical rhythm and repetitions. Poetic craft persists, despite a resigned knowledge that satisfaction will ever be delayed and that craft, no matter how elegantly wielded, will not fulfil her dream of unity with the object of her desire. But perhaps, as Forrest-Thomson seems to suggest, there is a hope that the equation of her hard-won 'freedom, truth and skill' will achieve a form of immortality. Few other poets in the sixties and seventies took the risks involved in the serious practice of traditional poetic modes nor had the ambition or breadth of intelligence to try and find a new poetic style from the models of the past. Whilst Forrest-Thomson's life may have been short, the lessons she

---

[652] CP, p. 149.
[653] *ibid.*, p. 168.

learned from her intense struggle with poetic form will have a long-lasting significance.

Bibliography

Note:

Any study of Forrest-Thomson is indebted both to Anthony Barnett and Alison Mark for their scholarship and bibliographies offered in, respectively, the *Collected Poems and Translations* and VFT. Without their pioneering work, identifying and assembling Forrest-Thomson's materials for consideration would have been that much more difficult. All unpublished typescripts and manuscripts are copyright Jonathan Culler and the Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson. My bibliography of Forrest-Thomson's work does not list individual poems published in individual magazines unless I have specifically referred to them in my thesis. I refer the reader to either of the above books for more definitive bibliographies. In listing Forrest-Thomson's unpublished materials, I have followed Mark's category descriptions in the excellent bibliography to her thesis, 'Reading between the lines: language, experience and identity in the work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson' (London: unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birkbeck, 1996), pp. 298-300 adding documents where new ones have emerged.

Bibliography Veronica Forrest-Thomson

As Veronica Forrest

Forrest, Veronica, *Identi-kit*. London: Outposts, 1967

---. Contributor's note and 4 poems: 'Fetes Nationales & Zazie in the London Underground'; 'The Blue Book'; 'Letters of Ezra Pound'; 'Epitaph for an Unnamed Priestess', *Solstice*, 9, Cambridge 1969, pp. 3 & 20-4

---. *twelve academic questions*. Cambridge: privately printed, 1970

---. 'Habitat', in *Tlaloc* 15, 1967, u.p.

---. 'Silver Escalator', from '2 Staircase Poems', in *Tlaloc* 17, 1968, u.p.

---. and Cavan McCarthy, *Veronicavan: Program of a Reading at the Bristol Arts Centre, 30 December 1967*, u.p.

As Veronica Forrest-Thomson

---. *Language-Games*. Leeds: The University of Leeds School of English Press, 1971

---. 'Poetry as Knowledge: The Use of Science by Twentieth-Century Poets'. Cambridge: unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1971

---. 'Irrationality and Artifice: A Problem in Recent Poetics', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 2, 1971, pp. 123-133

---. 'Beyond Reality: Orders of Possibility in Modern English Poetry', *Fuse* 1, 1972, pp. 20-3

---. 'The Ritual of Reading *Salammbô*', *Modern Language Review*, 67, 1972, pp. 787-98

---. 'Levels in Poetic Convention', *Journal of European Studies* 2, 1972, pp. 35-51

---. 'Au-delà du Réel: La poésie Anglaise moderne à l'heure du choix', (trans.) Michel Canavaggio, *Chroniques de Part vivant*, 29, 1972, pp. 24-5

---. 'Necessary Artifice: Form and Theory in the Poetry of *Tel Quel*', *Language and Style*, 6:1, Winter 1973, pp. 2-26

---. (trans.) '2 Poems' by Denis Roche; 'one text' by Marcelin Pleynet, *Strange Faeces*, 16, [1974?], pp. 109-114

---. *Cordelia, or 'A Poem Should not Mean but Be'.* Leicester: Omens, 1974

---. 'Rational Artifice: Some Remarks on the Poetry of William Empson', *Yearbook of English Studies* 4, 1974, pp. 225-38

---. 'Dada, Unrealism and Contemporary Poetry', *20th Century Studies* 12, December, 1974, pp. 77-93

---. 'Poems of Youth', *Adam International Review,* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 46-9

---. 'A Letter to George Fraser', *Adam International Review,* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 49-50

---. 'Richard II', in Anthony Rudolf (ed.) *Poems for Shakespeare*, 4. London: Globe Playhouse Publications, 1976, pp. 24-5

---. *On the Periphery.* Cambridge: Street Editions, 1976

---. *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978

---. 'La Planète séparée: John Donne et William Empson' (trans.) François Maguin, in John Donne, Cahiers de l'Herne: Less Dossiers H. Paris: l'Age d'Homme, 1983, pp. 213-44

---. *Collected Poems and Translations*, (ed.) Anthony Barnett. London: Alladyce, Barnett, Publishers, 1990

---. 'Rational Artifice: Some Remarks on the Poetry of William Empson', in John Constable (ed.), *Critical Essays on William Empson*. Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993, pp. 465-78

---. *Selected Poems,* (ed.) Anthony Barnett. London: Invisible Books, 1999

---. 'Swinburne As Poet: A Reconsideration', *Jacket* 20, 2002, retrieved 21 September 2011 <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/vft-swinb.html>

---. *Collected Poems*, (ed.) Anthony Barnett. Exeter: Shearsman, in association with Alladyce, Barnett, Publishers, 2008

----. 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Three Essay' (eds.) Michael Hansen and Gareth Farmer, *Chicago Review*, no. 56:2/3, Autumn 2011, pp. 7-76

Unpublished Materials

Manuscripts:

(All: Jonathan Culler, The Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson)

---. Letters to Paul Buck, editor of *Curtains* magazine dated 27 June 1972; 4 July 1972; 25 July 1972; 26 July 1972; 4 August 1972, Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Pomes' – Notebook self-titled 'Pomes', containing drafts of Forrest-Thomson's later poems. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Implications of Poetic Technique: Poetic Form in the C20', Lecturer notes

Typescripts:

(All: Jonathan Culler, The Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson)

---. 'My Attitudes and Beliefs', Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Veronica – Some Teenage Poems', Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Preface' to *Cordelia, or 'A Poem Should not Mean but Be'*, Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Pain Stopped Play or "The Twilight of the Gods for the Star"', draft of 'Cordelia, or 'A Poem Should not Mean but Be', Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Richard II', poem with amendment in Forrest-Thomson's hand, Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

---. 'Pastoral and Elegy in the Early Poems of Tennyson'

---. 'Swinburne as Poet: A Reconsideration'

---. 'His True Penelope was Flaubert: Ezra Pound and Nineteenth-Century Poetry'

---. 'Obstinate Isles: Ezra Pound and the Late Nineteenth Century', chapter summary, introduction and chapters 1-3 of a proposed book

---. 'Winter Trees', review of Sylvia Plath, *Winter Trees*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971

---. 'All this fiddle: English poetry in 1975'

---. 'Realism and Unrealism as Poetic Styles: Some Examples from the late Nineteenth and mid-Twentieth Centuries'

---. 'After Intelligibility: Poetic Sense in the Work of Roland Barthes'

---. 'Two Poems by Denis Roche: Analysis According to the System of Poetic Artifice'

---. 'Linguistics and Poetry'

---. 'The Separate Planet: John Donne and William Empson' original typescript of 'La Planète séparée: John Donne et William Empson' (published 1983)

Sound Material:

---. Reading at Essex Arts Festival, 27 April 1967. British Library, National Sound Archive, ref. T7209WR

---. Reading at Cambridge Poetry Festival, 17 April 1975, British Library, National Sound Archive, ref. T6013WR

---. with Michel Couturier, in Contemporary Poetry' at Cambridge Poetry Festival, 18 April 1975, British Library, National Sound Archive, ref. T6023WR-7359W

---. 'Sound Archive', transcript by Gareth Farmer of 'Unrealism and Death'

Bibliography

Abrams, M. H., 'A Note on Wittgenstein and Literary Criticism', *ELH*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Winter, 1974, pp. 541-554

---. 'How to Do Things with Texts', *Partisan Review*, 46, 1979, pp. 566-88

Albright, Daniel, 'Modernist Poetic Form', in Neil Corcoran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 24-41

Altieri, Charles, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 91, no. 6, Dec., 1976, pp. 1397-1423

---. 'Tractatus Logico-Poeticus', *Critical Inquiry*, 33, 2007, pp. 527-42

Alvarez, A., (ed.), *The New Poetry*. Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1962

---. (ed.), *The New Poetry*. Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1966, [2nd edn.]

Armstrong, Isobel, 'Feeling and Playing', *Adam International Review* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 50-1

---. 'Writing from the Broken Middle: The Post-Aesthetic', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1998, pp. 62-96

Arnold, Matthew, *Poetry and Prose*, (ed.) John Bryson. London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1967

Attridge, Derek, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James* Joyce. London: Methuen, 1988

Auden, W. H. *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987

Austin, J. L., 'A Plea for Excuses: A Presidential Address', *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society* 57, 1957, pp. 1-30

---. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001

Bann, Stephen, (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology*. London: London Magazine Editions, 1967

Barnhart, Robert K., (ed.), *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 2008

Barry, Peter, 'The Enactment Fallacy', *Essays in Criticism* 10, 2, 1980, pp. 94-104

Barthes, Roland, 'L'Éffet du Réel', *Communication* 11, 1968, pp. 84-89

---. *Critical Essays*, (trans.) Richard Howard. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972

---. *Mythologies,* (trans.) Annette Lavers. New York: The Noonday Press and Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1972

---. *S/Z,* (trans.) Richard Miller. London: Jonathan Cape, 1975

---. *Roland Barthes*, (trans.) Richard Howard. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977

---. *Image, Music, Text,* (trans.) Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977

---. 'The Reality Effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, (trans.) Richard Howard.

Bell, Clive, *Art*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1914

Bendient, Calvin, 'Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification', *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 16, no. 4, Summer, 1990, pp. 807-29

Bergonzi, Bernard, *Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990

Bernstein, Charles, 'Artifice of Absorption', *A Poetics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 9-89

Black, Max, 'Metaphor', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 55, 1954-5, pp. 273-294

---. *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962)

Blackmore, E. H., and A. M. Blackmore (eds. and trans.) *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems and Other Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Blake, William, *The Complete Poems*, (ed.) W.H. Stevenson. London: Longman, 1971

Bohn, Willard, (ed.), *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993

---. *Modern Visual Poetry*. Newark: University of Delaware Press: London: Associated University Presses, 2001

Booth, Wayne C., *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974

Bosley, Keith, (trans.), *Mallarmé: The Poems*. London: Penguin, 1977

Bowie, Malcolm, *Lacan*. London: Fontana, 1991

Brennan, Maeve, *The Philip Larkin I Knew*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002

Brooker, Peter, (ed.) *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Essex: Longman, 1992

---. and Simon Perril, 'Modernist Poetry and its Precursors', in Neil Roberts (ed.), *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 21-35

Brooks, Cleanth, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947

---. 'Irony and "Ironic" Poetry', *College English*, vol. 9, no. 5. Feb., 1948, pp. 231-37

Browning, Robert, *The Early Monologues of Robert Browning*. London: J. M. Dent, 1900

Bruns, Gerald L., *Modern Poetry and Idea of Language: A Critical and Historical Study*. Champaign, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001

Capgrave, John, *The Life of St Katherine* (1463), (ed.) Karen A. Winstead, *Teams Middle English Texts* [online], retrieved, 21 September 2011, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/katintro.htm>.

Carruth, Hayden, 'Two Critics from Britain', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 88 No. 4, Fall 1980, pp. 655-8

Caton, Charles E., (ed.), *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963

Chomsky, Noam, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T Press, 1965

Cohn, Robert Greer, *Mallarmé's* Divagations*: A Guide and Commentary*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990

Colebrook, Claire, *Irony*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006

Conquest, Robert, (ed.), *New Lines*. London: Macmillan, 1956

---. (ed.), *New Lines II.* London: Macmillan, 1963

Coppock, Simon, 'Making Love and Omelettes', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Selected Poems*. London: Invisible Books, 2001. *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 5120, 2001, p. 24

Cookson, William, *A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. London: Anvil Press, 2001

Cornford, Frances, *Collected Poems*. London: The Cresset Press, 1954

Crangle, Sara, 'Curved Lines: Forrest-Thomson, Klee, and the Smile', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Crangle.php>

---. 'Woolf's Cesspoolage: On Waste and Resignation', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 40:1, 2011, pp. 1-20

Crozier, Andrew, 'Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), *Society and Literature 1945-1970*. London: Methuen & co., 1983, pp. 199-233

---. *All Where Each Is*. London: Agneau 2, 1985

---. and Tim Longville (eds.), *A Various Art*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1987

---. 'Resting on Laurels', in Alan Davis and Alan Sinfield (eds.), *British Culture of the Post-War: An Introduction to Literature and Society 1945-1999* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 192-204

Crystal, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language*. London: Penguin, 1999

---. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Culler, Jonathan, 'Structuralism: A Study in the Development of Linguistic Models and their Application to Literary Studies' (Oxford: unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1972)

---. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975

---. *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*. London: Paul Elek, 1974

---. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983

---. *Barthes*. London: Fontana Press, 1990

Davie, Donald, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1952

---. 'Two Analogies for Poetry' (1962), in *Modernist Essays: Yeats, Pound, Eliot* (ed.), Clive Wilmer. Manchester: Carcanet, 2004, pp. 47-52

---. *Purity of Diction in English Verse* and *Articulate Energy*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2006

Davies, Paul, 'A Poem and Its Context', *Textual Practice* 22:4, 2008, pp. 635-656

Dentith, Simon, *Parody*. London: Routledge, 2000

Derrida, Jacques, 'Living On: Border Lines', in Harold Bloom et al. *Deconstruction and Criticism*. New York: Seabury, 1979, pp. 75-175

Donne, John, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (ed.) John Hayward. London: The Nonesuch Press: New York: Random House, 1949

Dowson, Jane and Alice Entwhistle, 'Disruptive Lyrics: Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Wendy Mulford and Denise Riley', in Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 153-68

Draper, R. P., 'Concrete Poetry' in *New Literary History*, vol. 2, No. 2 *Form and its Alternatives*. Winter, 1971, pp. 329-340

Dunn, Thomas L., 'Resignation', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Autumn, 1998, pp. 56-76

Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology*. London: Verso, 1978

---. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996

Eliot, T. S., *Collected Poems 1909-1935*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954

---. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1965

---. *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964

---. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot,* (ed.) Frank Kermode. London: Faber and Faber, 1975

Ellis, R. J., 'Mapping the United Kingdom little magazine field', in Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (eds.), *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 72-106

Empson, William, *Some Versions of the Pastoral*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1968

---. *The Collected Poems*, (ed.), John Haffenden. London: Penguin, 2001

Farmer, Gareth, ''The slightly hysterical style of University talk': Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Cambridge', *Cambridge Literary Review* 1.1, September, 2009, pp. 161-177

---. 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson's 'Cordelia', Tradition and the Triumph of Artifice', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 1.1, September, 2009, pp. 55-78

---. 'Selection Restrictions, Individuals, Acorns and Oaks: Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Analytical Linguistics', *Kenyon Review Online* , retrieved 30 August 2011, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Farmer.php>

Fenollosa, Ernest and Ezra Pound, 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.' *Modernism* (ed.), Lawrence Rainey. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 99-112

Ffrench, Patrick, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel (1960-83).* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995

Forrest Thomson, Jean, letter to Anthony Barnett dated August 7th 1989. Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers Archive

Foucault, Michel, 'What is an Author?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 101-120

Fraser, George, 'The Man Within the Name: William Empson as Poet, Critic and Friend', in Roma Gill (ed.), William Empson: The Man and His Work. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. 52-75

---. 'Veronica: A Tribute', *Adam International Review,* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 43-5

---. 'A Napkin with Veronica's Face, not Christ's', *Jacket* 20, retrieved 5 November 2007, <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/vft-fras-napkin.html>

Gill, Jerry H., 'Wittgenstein and Metaphor', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Dec., 1979, pp. 272-84

Frye, Northrop, *The Anatomy of Criticism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990

Glock, Hans-Johann, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996

Gombrich, G. H., *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1991

Gregson, Ian, 'Lost Love and Deconstruction: The Poems of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Verse* 8.3 & 9.1, 1991 & 1992, pp. 111-16.

Grosart, Alexander G., (ed.), *The Works of Gabriel Harvey* Vol. 1. New York: Ams Press, 1966

Gross, John (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Parodies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010

Gubar, Sandra M. and Susan Gilbert (eds.), *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979

Hares-Stryker, Carolyn, *An Anthology of Pre-Raphælite Writings*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997

Harrison, Martin, 'An Introduction to Veronica Forrest-Thomson's Work', in Denise Riley (ed.), *Poets on Writing in Britain 1970-1991*. London: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 216-21

Hartman, Geoffrey, 'Beyond Formalism', *MLN*, Vol. 81, No. 5, Dec., 1966, pp. 542-56

Hawkes, Terence, *Metaphor*. London: Methuen, 1972

---. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen, 1978

Heath, Stephen, Colin MacCabe and Richard Prendergrast (eds.), *Signs of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics*. Cambridge [s.n.], 1971

Heffernan, James A. W., 'Ekphrasis and Representation' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, no. 2, Spring, 1991, pp. 297-316

---. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993

Hester, Marcus B., *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor: An Analysis in the Light of Wittgenstein's Claim that Meaning is Use*. The Hague: Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967

Hobsbaum, Philip, *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1979

Hoogestraat, Jane, '"Akin to Nothing but Language": Pound, Laforgue, and Logopoeia', *ELH*, Vol. 55, No. 1. Spring, 1988, pp. 259-85

Hopkins, Gerard, *Selected Poetry,* (ed.) Catherine Philips. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998

---. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works,* (ed.) Catherine Philips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

Huyssen, Andreas, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *New German Critique* 33, Autumn 1984, pp. 5-52

---. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986

Jacob, Max, *Selected Poems,* (ed. & trans.) William Kulik. Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1999

Jakobson, Roman, *Language in Literature*, (eds.) Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987

Jameson, Fredric, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972

---. *Fables of Aggression. Wyndham Lewis: The Modernist as Fascist*. London: Verso, 1979

---. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1991

Jameson Frederic, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Peter Brooker (ed.), *Modernism/Postmodernism.* Essex: Longman, 1992, pp. 163-79

Jefferson, Ann, and David Robey (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*. London: Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., 1982

Jencks, Charles, 'Postmodernism vs. Late-Modern', in Ingeborg Hoesterey (ed.), *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Post-Modernist Controversy*. Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 4-21

Kamber, Gerald, *Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971

Keats, John, *Selected Poetry,* (ed.) Elizabeth Cook. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996

Kenny, Anthony, *Wittgenstein.* London: Penguin, 1973

Keery, James, 'A Unique Voice', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), *P N Review* Vol. 17, no. 4, March & April 1991, pp. 85-87

---. 'Blossoming Synecdoches: A Study of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Bête Noire* 10 & 11, 1990 & 1991, pp. 109-22

---. "Jacob's Ladder' and the Levels of Artifice: Veronica Forrest-Thomson on J. H. Prynne', *Jacket* 20, retrieved 12 March 2006, <http://www.jacketmagazine.com/20/vft-keery.html>

Knox, Norman, *The Word "Irony" and Its Context, 1500 – 1755.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1961

Lang, Candace D., *Irony/Humour*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988

Larkin, Philip (ed.), *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973

---. *Collected Poems*. London: The Marvell Press, 1999

Larrissy, Edward, 'Poets of *A Various Art*: J. H. Prynne, Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Andrew Crozier', in James Acheson and Romana Huk (eds.), *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 63-79

Lawson, F. Q., 'The Outrageous Friend', *Adam International Review,* Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 52-3

Leary, Paris, 'To a Dead Girl', *Adam International Review* 391-3, Vol. xxxix, Nos. 391-3, 1975, pp. 51-2

Leighton, Angela, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Legacy of a Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007

London, John, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and the Art of Artifice', review of *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), *Fragmente* 4, 1991, pp. 80-7

Loy, Mina, *The Last Lunar Baedeker,* (ed.) Roger L. Conover. Manchester: Carcanet, 1982

---. 'Modern Poetry' (1925), in Lawrence Rainey (ed.), *Modernism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 437-440

Lyon, Janet, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999

Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984

---. *Discours, figure*. Paris Editions Elinksieck, 1985

Lynton, Norbert, *Klee*. London, New York, Sidney, Toronto: Hamlyn, 1975

McGann, Jerome J., 'Rossetti's Significant Details', *Victorian Poetry*, 7:1, 1969, pp. 41-54

---. *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972

---. *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*. London: Clarendon Press, 1996

McGinn, Marie, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*. London: Routledge, 1997

McHale, Brian, 'Against Interpretation: Iconic Grammar, Anxiety of Influence, and *Poetic Artifice*', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 3:1, 1982, pp. 141-58

---. 'Making (non)sense of postmodernist poetry', *Language, Text and Context: Essays in Stylistics*. London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 6-35

---. 'Postmodernist Lyric and the Ontology of Poetry', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1987, pp. 19-44

McKie, Michael, 'Ashbery or Lowell?', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth Poetry* (1978). *English* Vol. 31, no. 140, Summer 1982, pp. 162-8

Macdonald, Dwight, *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm and After*. London: Faber and Faber, 1960

Macmillan, Dorothy, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry I: Rachel Annand Taylor to Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy Macmillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, pp. 428-43

Mallarmé, Stéphane, *Divagations*. Paris: Carpentier, 1897

---. *Ouevres completes*. Paris: Gallimard [Pléaide], 1945

---. 'Crisis in Poetry', (trans.) Rosemary Lloyd, in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2010 [2nd edn.], pp. 734-40

Malle, Louis. Dir. *Zazie dans le Métro*. Pathé Films, 1960

Mark, Alison, 'Hysteria and Poetic Language: A Reading of the Work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1994, pp. 264-77

---. 'Reading between the lines: language, experience and identity in the work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson'. London: unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck, 1996

---. 'Reading Between the Lines: Identity in the Early Poems of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in Vicky Bertram (ed.), *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, pp. 210-26

---. 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Toward a Linguistically Investigative Poetics', *Poetics Today*, 20.4, 1999, pp. 655-72

---. *Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Language Poetry*. Devon: Northcote House, 2001

---. 'Poetic Relations and Related Poetics: Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Charles Bernstein', in Romana Huk (ed.), *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003, pp. 114-27

Miller, Tyrus, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999

Milne, Drew, 'Agoraphobia, and the embarrassment of manifestos: notes towards a community of risk', *Parataxis* No. 3. Spring, 1993, pp. 25-37

---. 'The Art of Wit and the Cambridge Science Park', in Richard Crawford (ed.) *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 170-87

Morgan, Edwin, 'Poetry and Virtual Realities', in Richard Crawford (ed.), *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 27-47

---. Review of Veronica Forrest, *Identi-kit* (1967), *Tlaloc* 15, July 1967, pp. 7-8.

---. 'Unfinished Poems: A Sequence for Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in *Poems of Thirty Years*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1982, pp. 372-82

Mottram, Eric, 'The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75, in Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (eds.), *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 15-50.

Muckle, John, 'A Ton of Feathers', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Collected Poems* (2008), *PN Review* 187, May 2009, pp. 68-9

Nicholls, Peter, 'Divergences: modernism, postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard,' *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, September, 1991, pp. 1-18

---. ''Arid Clarity': Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 32, 2002, pp. 52-64

---. *Modernisms*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

Nowottny, Winifred, *The Language Poets Use*. London: Athlone Press, 1962

O'Hara, Frank, *Selected Poems,* (ed.) Donald Allen. London: Penguin, 1994

O'Toole, L. M. and Ann Shukman (eds.), *Russian Poetics in Translation, Vol. 4 Formalist Theory*. Oxford: Holdan Books, 1977

Paige, D. D. (ed.), *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*. London: Faber and Faber, 1951

Patterson, Ian, 'Containers, Pulses, Lentils: *Tel Quel* and Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Patterson.php>

Pattison, Neil, ''The mirrors are tired of our faces': Changing the Subject in the Poetry of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, < http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Pattison.php>

Perill, Simon, 'Contemporary British Poetry and Modernist Innovation'. Cambridge: unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1995

Perloff, Marjorie, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985

---. 'Twentieth-Century Poetry', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (1978), *Contemporary Literature* XXI, 2, 1980, pp. 291-96

---. *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991

---. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996

---. *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002

---. *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003

---. '"Concrete Prose": Haroldo de Camposs Galáxias and After', Electonic Poetry Centre, retrieved 30 August 2011,

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/perloff_decampos.html>

Peters, W. A. M., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948

Plath, Sylvia, *Collected Poems,* (ed.) Ted Hughes. London: Faber and Faber, 1981

Poirier, Richard, *The Performing Self*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1971

Porter, Peter, 'Impeccable Bad Taste', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *On the Periphery* (1976), *Observer*, 12 December 1976, p. 27

---. 'On the Best Battlefields No Dead Bodies', review of Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), *Observer*, 5 August 1990, p. 54

---. 'Hearts and Sleeves', *Observer*, 27 January 1974, p. 30

---. 'Two Voices for our Time', *Observer*, 23 January 1983, p. 47

Pound, Ezra 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris: IX', *The New Age* 10, no. 13, January 25 1912, p. 298-9

Pound, Ezra, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris: XI:', *The New Age* 10, no. 16, February 15 1912, pp. 369-70

---. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1948

---. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* (ed.) T. S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1954

---. *A Lume Spento [1908] and Other Early Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964

---. *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*. New York: New Directions, 1970 [5th printing]

---. 'The Serious Artist', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, (ed.) T. S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1974, pp. 41-57.

---. *Selected Poems 1908 – 1969*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977

---. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1998

Press, John 'Review' of John Lucas (ed.), *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*. Sussex: The Harvester Press: New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978 and Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (1978), *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 31, No. 124, Nov., 1980, pp. 495-7

Prynne, J. H., 'Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words', The William Matthews Lectures. London: Birkbeck, 1992

---. *Collected Poems*. Freemantle and Northumberland: Freemantle Press and Bloodaxe Books, 2005

---. "A Personal Memoir." *Jacket* 20 retrieved, 5 February 2009, <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/pryn-vft.html>

Puttenham, George, *Arte of English Poesie* (1589). Menston: The Scholar Press, Ltd., 1968

Queneau, Raymond, *Zazie dans le metro*. Paris: Galliamard, 1959

Rainey, Lawrence, (ed.), *Modernism: An Anthology*. Oxford Blackwell, 2005

Raitt, Suzanne, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Collected Poems and Translations*' in *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 1, no. 3, 1990, pp. 304-8

---. 'Love in the Time of Lacan: The Poetry of Veronica Forrest-Thomson', *Fragmente* 8, Summer 1998, pp. 16-26

Read, Sophie, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson's Acts of Articulation', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, < http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Read.php>

Readings, Bill, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991

Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh (eds.) *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. London: Arnold, 1998

Richards, I. A., *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936

---. *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1986

Riffaterre, Michael, 'The Self-Sufficient Text' *Diacritics*, Vol. 3, no. 3, Autumn, 1973, pp. 39-45.

---. *Semiotics of Poetry*. London: Methuen, 1978

---. *Text Production* trans. Terese Lyons. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983

Riley, Denise, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000

---. *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005

Rimbaud, Rimbaud, *Collected Poems*, (ed.) Oliver Bernard. London: Penguin, 1986

Rizzuto, Anthony, *Style and Theme in Reverdy's* Les Ardoises du toit. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1971

Robinson, Peter, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson: *On the Periphery*', *Jacket* 20, retrieved 5 November 2007, <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/pbs.html>

Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979

---. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989

Rose, Gillian, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992

Rose, Margaret, *Parody/Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction*. London: Croom Helm, 1979

Rossetti, Christina, *The Complete Poems*, (ed.) Betty S. Flowers. London: Penguin, 2001

Russell, Bertrand, 'Introduction' to Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) (trans.) D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuiness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, pp. ix-xxii

Shelley, P. B., 'A Defence of Poetry', in Ernest Rhys (ed.), *The Prelude to Poetry: The English Poets in Defence and Praise of their Own Art*. London: Dent, 1970, pp. 207-41

Sheppard, Robert, 'Artifice and the Everyday World: Poetry in the 1970s', in Bart Moore-Gilbert (ed.), *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 129-51

---. *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004

---. 'Parody and Pastoral', *Jacket* 20, retrieved 5 November, 2007, <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/vft-shep,html>

Shklovsky, Victor, 'Art as Technique', in Rick Rylance (ed.), *Debating Texts*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987, pp. 48-56

---. 'The connection of devises of plot-construction with general devises of style' (1919), in L.M. O'Toole and Ann Shukman (eds.), *Russian Poetics in Translation, Vol. 4 Formalist Theory*. Oxford: Holdan Books, 1977

Solt, Mary Ellen (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968

Sontag, Susan (ed.), *A Roland Barthes Reader*. London: Vintage, 1993

Spenser, Edmund, *The Fairie Queene*, (ed.) Thomas P. Roache. London: Penguin, 1987

Smith, Paul, 'Trajectory Harm', *Spindrift* 1, [1977 ?], u.p.

Smith, Paul, *Interpreting Cézanne*. London: Tate Publishing, 1996

Stefans, Brian Kim, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson and High Artifice', *Jacket* 14, retrieved 14 January 2009, < http://jacketmagazine.com/14/stefans-vft.html>

Stevens, Wallace, *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984

Strawson, P. F., *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Methuen, 1969

Sutherland, Keston, 'Veronica Forrest-Thomson for Readers', *Kenyon Review Online*, retrieved 30 August 2011, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kro/vft/Sutherland.php>

Sutherland-Smith, James, 'Language Games' letter, *PN Review*, Vol. 35, Iss. 6, July/August 2009, p. 5

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *Major Poems and Selected Prose,* (eds.) Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004

Tennyson, Alfred Lord, *Selected Poems*, (ed.) Aidan Day. London: Penguin, 1991

Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Structural Analysis of Literature: The Tales of Henry James', in David Robey (ed.), *Structuralism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 73-103.

Tuma, Keith, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Relations*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998

---. and Nate Dorward, 'Modernism and Anti-Modernism in British Poetry, in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 510-27

Ward, Geoff, "I announce the death of Orpheus' (Jack Spicer): Poetry and the Rift', *PN Review*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Mar/Apr 2010, pp. 79-84

Waugh, Patricia (ed.) *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Weisberg, Richard, 'Hamlet and "Un Coup de Dés": Mallarmé's Emerging Constellation', *MLN*, Vol. 92, No. 4, May, 1977, pp. 779-96

Wheale, Nigel, 'Review' of Veronica Forrest-Thomson *Collected Poems* (2008), *The Use of English*, 60.2, Spring, 2009, pp. 170-4

Wilde, Alan, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981

Williams, Emmett (ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. New York: Something Else Press, 1967

Williams, William Carlos, *Selected Essays*. New York: New Directions, 1969

---. *Collected Poems II 1939-1962*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2000

Wiman, Christian, 'The Story of our Days', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 105, No. 1, Winter, 1997, pp. 118-23

Wimsatt Jr., W.K., and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1964

---. 'Lectures on Aesthetics', in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (ed.) Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966

---. *Zettel*, (trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967

---. *Philosophical Investigations*, (trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991

Woolford, John, Daniel Karlin and Joseph Phelan (eds.), *Browning: Selected Poems*. Harlow: Longman, 2010

Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (eds.) Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1979

Wordsworth, William and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (ed.) Derek Roper. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968

Wu, Duncan (ed.), *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999

Young, Alan, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981