

## The Reluctant Radical: *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.<sup>1</sup>

The epigraph to this chapter is a transcription of the twenty-year-old Veronica Forrest-Thomson—or Veronica Forrest as she was then known—introducing her reading at the Essex Arts Festival on 27 April 1967. Her voice is gentle, but her light Glaswegian vowels register a degree of irony, as a flicker of a smile can be heard on the phrases ‘funny noises’ and ‘quite a change’. Her soft reading of her poem, ‘Through the Looking Glass’—‘Mirror, mirror on the wall / show me in succession all / my faces, that I may view / and choose which I would like as true’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 29)—would have been a change indeed, as the other poets on the bill were the anarchist, Beat and mescaline-inspired poet Harry Fainlight, the Tzara translator Lee Harwood, and the editor and concrete poet Cavan McCarthy.<sup>2</sup> The ‘funny noises’ were probably McCarthy’s, whose performance for the evening included poems such as ‘Did You Have a Good Time’ and ‘Put Her on the Table’, as well as ‘3 Concrete Poems’ and ‘4 Found Poems’. No doubt Fainlight also produced some noises of his own. In the teeth of such normalised radicalism, Forrest-Thomson’s own ballad metre seems radically traditional; her rhythms and rhymes about the falsity and play of public identity are either quaintly anachronistic or defiantly traditionalistic.

Forrest-Thomson’s poems of her first full collection, *Identi-kit* (1967a) and her ‘uncollected early poems’ are written on the periphery

of a range of poetic styles, movements and art practices, as she selected those formal features and subject matters which complemented her nascent poetic theories and identities. If George Gordon Byron asserted of Alexander Pope's verse that 'poetry is in itself passion, and does not systematise' and that it 'assails but does not argue' (Moore 1844, 708), Forrest-Thomson's early poems all constitute a polemical argument for poetry in general as well as offering focused critiques of specific poetic practices; the hyper-self-reflexivity of these poems provide immanent commentaries on the value and veracity of poetry and poetic form. As I shall outline, Forrest-Thomson used poetry as argument in part to counteract a prevailing trend, expressed in Byron's prescriptions and still dominant in the sixties and seventies, that poetry should be unsystematic, non-prescriptive and, above all, a codification of naked passion rather than cognition; in other words, from an early age she was systematically deconstructing romantic myths about creativity and writing poetry. But Forrest-Thomson also dialectically brought together a range of styles in order to assess and reaffirm central poetic values, which would be the foundations of poetic theory and practice for the rest of her life. As with her later more prominent work, these early poems directly engage with literary-critical debates, with literary history, with questions of poetic etiquette, decorum and identity politics, with other art forms, and offer a burgeoning critique of mainstream British poetry. Her poems are, contrary to Byron's prescriptions, strategic interventions in poetic practice and argumentative assertions of certain poetic values.

The Liverpool University Poetry magazine, *Equator*, featured a few of Forrest-Thomson's poems and she also supplied the witty foreword reproduced in Fig. 2.1 at the start of this chapter, which captures the strains in her work at this time between formal etiquette and play and between traditionalism and radicalism. The puns, typos, malapropisms, visual tricks and wit of the foreword explore the limits of formal and verbal expressivity as well as poke fun at the material conditions of marginal literary practices and productions—'The lucubration's finas tical position / being, ot say the last, paycarious, it // is UnaBLR to stand the cots of having its / ostencils typed professionally'. The foreword is laid out in 'layaboaut', semi-free verse lines, with the tactical typos and 'Mim prists', dramatic shifts of line length and section variation parodying the poetic grammar of much modern poetry. Phrases such as 'whichi / it was conduced' and 'single-fingered / tightriping' draw attention to the conscious radicalism of poetic form; the former implying an interrupted

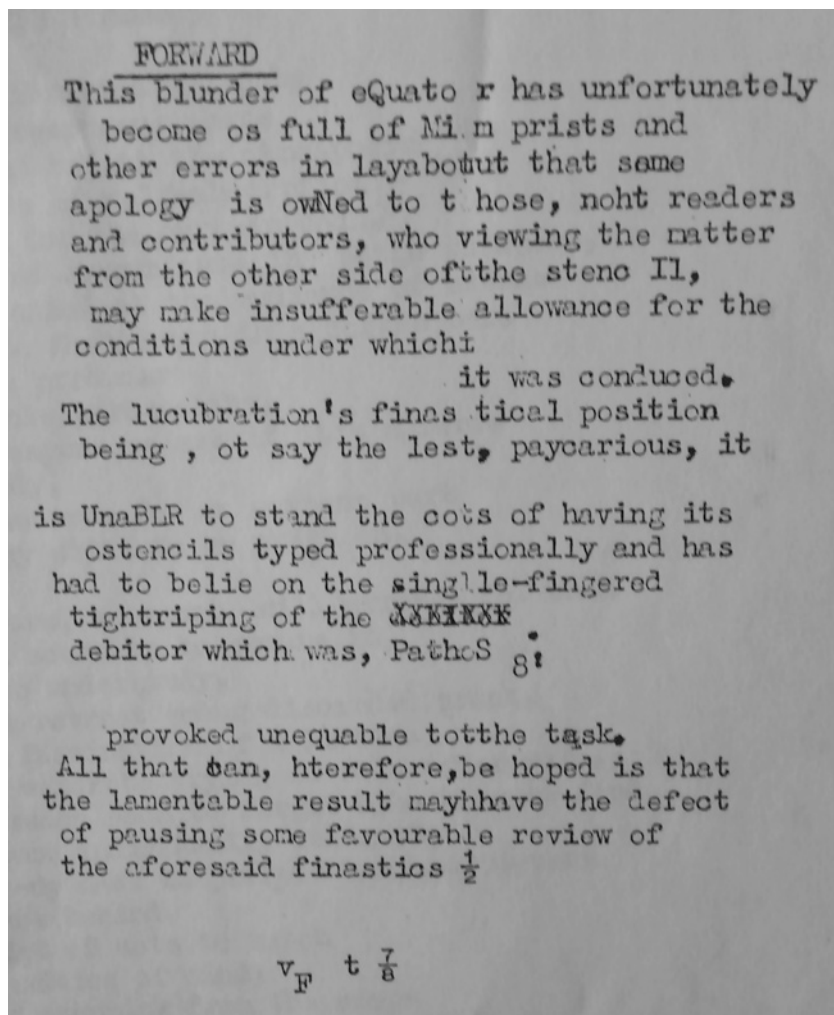


Fig. 2.1 'Foreword' to *Equator* 6. Source Forrest-Thomson (1967b)

thought to break the line apart and create a 'poetic'-looking section; the latter delighting in its creative use of the typewriter as well as its sound patterning, image generation and puns ('tight riping', as well as cheekily

erotic [r/i/ping], is a novel description of the writing up or editing process (i.e. the ripening [r/ai/ping] into the tightness of poetic form, for example)). The foreword captures all the key features of Forrest-Thomson's early interventions into poetic practice and theory.

Her early poems already contain the literary-critical sensibility and hyper-reflexive aesthetics developed in her later life. This chapter will start with an examination of Forrest-Thomson's poetic interactions with art practices before discussing the ways in which she engaged with concrete poetry. Both of these phases were accompanied by Forrest-Thomson's testing of the capacity of conventional poetic devices to control and contain meaning. As I will suggest in the final section of this chapter, Forrest-Thomson's reaffirmation of conventional poetic practices and artifice illustrate her attempt to negotiate her own path between and through radical and traditional poetic practices, as well as her often contradictory adoption of their concomitant literary-critical ideologies. Such self-reflection about form differentiates Forrest-Thomson's work from many of her contemporaries; her poems are stages in an argument about the utility, function and significance of certain formal values. In other words, her art-inspired and concrete poems are challenges to what poetic form can do in response to other aesthetic practices.

### ART AND POETRY: *PARAGONE*

The influence of painting in shaping Forrest-Thomson's sensibility is clear throughout *Identi-kit*. James 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' (Heffernan 1993, 136). A sometimes delicate, sometimes strong interest in blocks of colour and in both artistic and poetic composition are evident in Forrest-Thomson's poems of this period, leading to formal tensions between her attempt to translate artistic technique into practice and her retention of poetic modes. Her interest in art is evident in the specific terminology and references used throughout what I call her 'manifesto' entitled, 'My Attitudes and Beliefs', as well as in the poems of 'Veronica—Some Teenage Poems'. As she puts it in the former, poetry should create 'significant form and pattern of their own, imitations of the patterns of life, e.g. works of art, and rites' ('My Attitudes and Beliefs', 2). In her art poems, Forrest-Thomson grapples with the incompatibility

of still artistic form and the necessary linearity and movement of language, poetic form and the interpreting mind.

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’, while descriptions have an art-like quality. ‘Point of View at Noon’, for example, features ‘mosaics of mottled leaves’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 19), while the first few lines of the second stanza of ‘Provence’ describe ‘Mosaics of flesh / and kaleidoscope streets’ which ‘seem brilliant in perpetual noon’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 24). Poems feature vivid colours such as the ‘pale-green thought’, the ‘pearl-pale thought’ and the ‘static dark-green thought’ in ‘A Reaction to Rings’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 20), or the ‘dark drains warm bronze’ in ‘Provence’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 24). Many of the poems attempt a still-life quality, as in the lines evoking John Keats’ 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 quiet vase’—as well as the ‘edges’, ‘patterns’ and ‘planes’ of ‘In the Greenhouse’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 17).<sup>3</sup>

While many of these poems look 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 Heffernan has defined as ‘the verbal representation of a graphic representation’ (Heffernan 1991, 299). Forrest-Thomson imitates technical elements of the artists’ paintings and extends the implication of their artistic theory in poetic form. Forrest-Thomson may not have read the artists’ theory, but their reflections complement her early appreciation of the concrete qualities of art.<sup>4</sup> 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’ (Smith 1996, 51).<sup>5</sup> 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’ (Lynton 1975, 22).<sup>6</sup> Forrest-Thomson’s poems ostensibly benefit from having a definite object to imitate (as opposed to the amorphous and changeable demands of ‘nature’ in poems such as ‘January Morning’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 13)), but her simultaneous imitation of artistic

form, extension of artistic theory and self-reflective formal practice, alongside the demands of poetic rhythm, result in a formally conflicted poetry.

Forrest-Thomson's 'Contours—Homage to Cézanne' exhibits a formal struggle between arts, where poetic form sometimes complements artistic practice but very often conflicts with it. The poem charts the development of perception from an objective description of rigorous artistic technique braced against the liberty of unframed life, to the phenomenal perception of such by the eye:

*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.

(Forrest 1967a, 15)

The move from description towards equivocal perception in this sonnet 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 opening two stanzas to the looser 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 in a field of, as the painter puts it, 'original logic' (as in Note 5). 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 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 reflects the developing theme of perceptual tension through poetic form; the poem dramatises a phenomenological loss of control. The final two stanzas deliberately falter, enacting a loss of the frame of conventional devices and the troubling presence of the perceiver’s eye. Forrest-Thomson sabotages the poem’s own formal consistency while 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 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—Homage to Cézanne’ also characterises two of Forrest-Thomson’s poems inspired by Klee: ‘Clown (By Paul Klee)’ and ‘Ambassador of Autumn (By Paul Klee)’. ‘Clown (By Paul Klee)’ 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.<sup>7</sup> ‘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 language and poetic forms while retaining poetic conventions. Klee’s painting is comprised 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’ (Lynton 1975, 37). The only other shapes in the painting are the ‘half-uncovered curve’, as Forrest-Thomson describes it,

of white, slightly left of centre, and an orange orb to the right of centre (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 25). 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 (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 25). 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 (By Paul Klee)' 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 conventional form. The poem develops a number of internal—to quote from the poem—'threads' and 'pattern[s]', ranging from the phrase 'centre spectre', to the sound and sight of 'o' clusters in the lines 'modulates / around the centre spectre. / Each single moment's tone / appears alone' and 'cold moon, negative reflector' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 25). As the phrase 'frail parody' towards the end of the poem hints, 'Ambassador of Autumn (By Paul Klee)' caricatures 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 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. The poem ends:

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.

(Forrest-Thomson 2008, 25)

End-rhymes dramatise 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 developing conflicts of formal dominance. What begins as an attempted imitation of external form results in, firstly, an excessive concentration on disparate poetic patterns and, secondly, a reaffirmation of the necessity of poetic Artifice.

### (ALMOST) CONCRETE POETRY

Forrest-Thomson’s interest in experimental poetic forms led to a brief concrete poetry phase. But she could not give herself fully to the concrete camp as to do so would be to relinquish the possibility of poetic discursivity. In other words, pure concrete poetry could not argue as effectively as a form of impure concrete poetry which kept one foot in the conventional in order to offer a sceptical eye on the formal proceedings. Sceptically concrete, or critically concrete, or (almost) concrete might be other ways of describing Forrest-Thomson’s practices during this time. Her manifesto, ‘My Attitudes and Beliefs’, contains a number of references to concrete form, and she met Cavan McCarthy, whose *Tlaloc* magazine featured numerous concrete poets, in the late 1960s. The University College London (UCL) Library Archive of *Tlaloc* contains Forrest-Thomson’s concrete poem typescripts, but only two were included in the magazine (8). 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. As McCarthy observes in his ‘Statement’ for the archive, the magazine contained linear poems with regular syntax and grammar, non-linear poems, which break linguistic and formal functions, as well as poems that possessed both qualities, of which Forrest-Thomson’s own were examples (McCarthy 1982, 1). Forrest-Thomson’s argumentative and polemical poetry suited the magazine’s remit to offer a testing ground for the expressive spectrum of poetic form.

Forrest-Thomson expressed her interest in concrete poetry on 30 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 that evoke what Keery (1991, 86) calls the ‘archaic civil war’ 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.

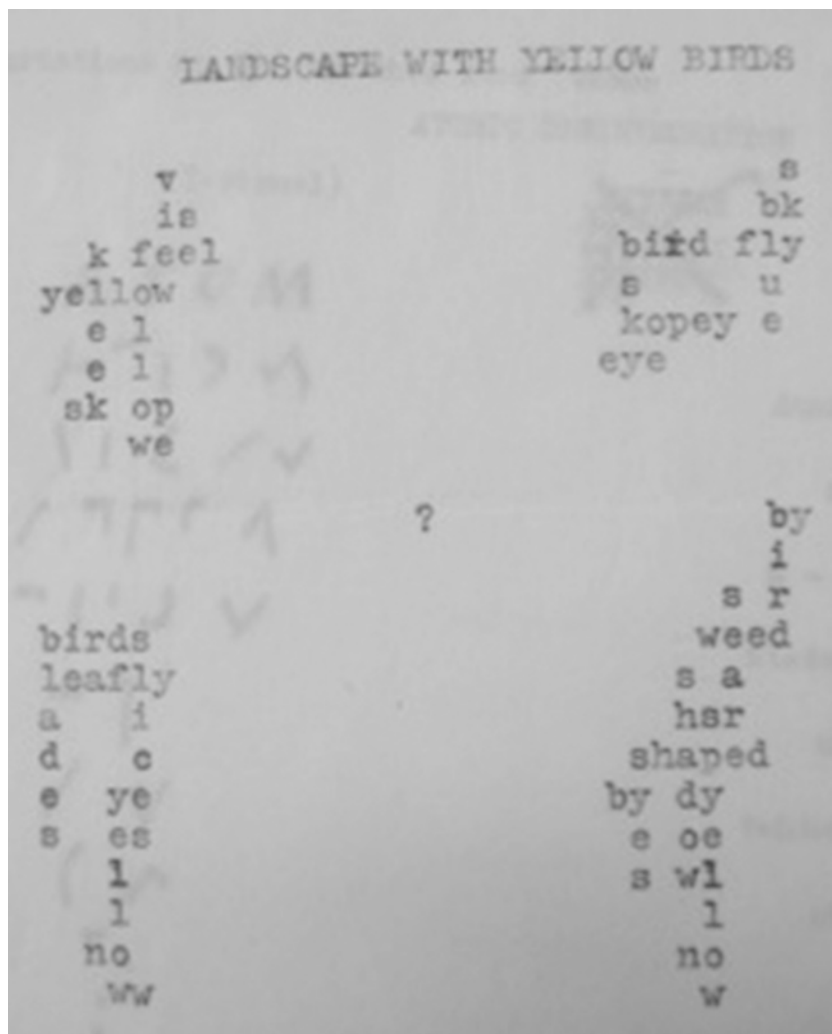
It was this which first aroused her interest in concrete poetry as an antidote to the formlessness and academicism of the Movement writers and the introversion of the so-called ‘confessional’ poets. (Forrest and McCarthy 1967, up)

Forrest-Thomson wanted to offer antidotes to the relaxed discursiveness, anecdotal content and formlessness of much contemporary poetry. Her concrete poetry was an exaggerated antidote to contemporary practice; a devil’s advocate of form to reassert its necessity.

During this brief phase, Forrest-Thomson wrote concrete poems dramatising the productive and intellectual conflicts between formal modes. Out of such conflicts emerge what would become a recognisably discursive tone. ‘Landscape with Yellow Birds’, for example, 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 forest 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 hops behind a hillock leaving only its tail on show. Klee was a master of creating rhythm in his paintings, where 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 (Lynton 1975, 22).

Forrest-Thomson performs a typographic analogy for Klee’s visual processes and seeks to manipulate a reader’s attention as they attempt to find words and experience the shape of the text. Figure 2.2 is a reproduction of the original typescript.

Viewed iconically, the four individual sections of the poem can be said to resemble Klee’s birds. Certainly the bottom right shape appears to depict a bird with ‘by’ and ‘w’ as wing-tips. 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



**Fig. 2.2** Original typescript of 'Landscape With Yellow Birds'. *Source* The *Tlaloc* Archive, UCL Special Collections Archive, Box 1:1. (The original typescript is better than a reproduction as the modern typography of the *Collected Poems* (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 52) has not captured the quality, nor the exact justified lines, of the original. The original typescript of Forrest-Thomson's 'Atomic Disintegration' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 53) can also be seen coming through the paper from the sheet.)

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 concrete poems usually retain linear qualities. 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 (Bense 1968, 73). 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' (Bense 1968, 73). While experiment can be used to fully break with 'syntactical possibilities', it can also refine an understanding of their potent potentiality. As Donald 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' (Davie 2006, 84).<sup>9</sup> While Forrest-Thomson's concrete poems strayed towards the analogical end of the spectrum, she never relinquished the techniques of the logico-discursive, nor sacrificed the literary spirit for the purely visual.

Forrest-Thomson's retention of the conventional or analytical mode is evident in 'Landscape with Yellow Birds' in what could be called instructional words describing the activity of looking at 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 these processes are 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 imperative ‘nows’, drawing attention to the conflict being created 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, 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 introduces 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 clash produces an analytical node at the heart of the poem and the formal conflict opens up a space of critical reflection immanent in the poetic process. 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.

Forrest-Thomson’s ‘2 Staircase Poems’ exhibit two different types of typographic experimentation (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 55). The second, ‘escalator’ poem illustrates her conscious engagement with literary history and her programmatic argument—through form—about the relative merits of certain forms. The poem iconically depicts 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’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 55). Forrest-Thomson’s aesthetic agenda is revealed in these poems—as with most of her work—through her incorporation of an internal commentary on composition. In this poem, she wryly takes the idea of visual placement producing meaning and the variety of parallelisms to their extreme by commenting on the poem’s actual physical placement on a specific page. Her observation is marked by the words ‘sta // ple // s’ and ‘s/tap/les’, whose locations imply the position of the staples on a mimeographed book

(Forrest-Thomson 2008, 55). While Forrest-Thomson tests the concrete mode, then, there is always a slight distancing and extra-material frame—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 submit 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. Concrete poetic processes and practices may have their place, but only as a complementary part of much more complex and conventional poetic practice.

### CONTRA CONCRETE: RE-ESTABLISHING LITERARY FORM

When Forrest-Thomson appeared at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in April 1975 (a few weeks before her death) she entirely dismissed concrete poetry. 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.’<sup>10</sup> 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’ (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 89). Having established the discontinuity with ‘ordinary language’, Forrest-Thomson argues, concrete poets create a ‘spurious’ connection with the world of objects, a world language normally mediates. Instead of using the resources of poetic technique—Artifice—to, as she puts it, ‘create a new world through non-semantic levels’ (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 90), 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. 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' (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 92).

Forrest-Thomson's argument for the cleansing process of Artifice has a currency in various strains of modernist aesthetics, with the notion of purifying language coming most obviously from Stéphane Mallarmé. Forrest-Thomson may also be alluding to Davie when he writes of the 'prosaic strength' he discerns in poems by John Dryden and, latterly, in 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' (Davie 2006, 57). Davie's term 'prosaic strength' isn't particularly clear, but it is associated with poetry that refines language by a process of reductive reasoning in order to re-enliven it. 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' (Eliot 1975, 217).<sup>11</sup> While 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 conventional 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' (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 164). Both Davie and Forrest-Thomson looked to canonical poets' use of conventional devices—to their 'recovery of the lost levels of Artifice', as Forrest-Thomson puts it—to define poetry's particular power (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 164).

Forrest-Thomson cultivated her own processes of purifying language or distilling it to its base essentials in her poems; in doing so she reanimated her conviction as to the necessity of conventional poetic devices. While she would continue to imbue her poetry with a spirit of the destruction of complacently inherited conventions, the forms to which she returned were recognisably conventional—stanzas, equal line lengths, metrical rhythms and end-rhymes. Earlier evidence of Forrest-Thomson's reservations about concrete poetry and her concomitant reaffirmation 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.

Forrest-Thomson's first poem to be published in *Tlaloc*, 'Habitat', for example, uses a technique Mary Ellen Solt describes as a 'concrete

permutational method' where variants of the same word mutate throughout the poem (Solt 1968, 50).<sup>12</sup> 'Habitat' also reasserts conventional poetic form and syntax as the proper 'habitat'. The poem reads:

*Habitat*

a bus  
shelters

broken window  
pains

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.<sup>13</sup>

Forrest-Thomson uses both caricature and parody to highlight a repertoire of poetic techniques. These modes are examples of what Miller has described as the 'exasperated heightening' or a self-conscious laughter characteristic of a late modernist tone and register (Miller 1999, 9). In



poems such as ‘Habitat’, Forrest-Thomson steps back and wittily analyses her practices in the service of making an argument for the necessity of poetic artifice. Rather like the furniture and household gizmos sold in the newly created Habitat store, Forrest-Thomson riffs on the new poetic fashions in order to create something a little different, which reaffirms the value of design itself.<sup>14</sup> And, again, the reader is provoked into becoming part of her argument. The double spaces and uniform structure of ‘Habitat’, 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 in *Poetic Artifice* as a reader’s ‘conventional expectations’ of meaning making by bringing into conflict the appearance of words with an internal logic of meaning production (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 44).<sup>15</sup> 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’. Similarly, the pun on ‘pains’ refers backwards to the ‘broken’, but also 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-relation 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.

In ‘Habitat’, Forrest-Thomson develops the local, material aspects of language while also exploiting both conventional forms and syntax and the expressive capacity of conventional form and artifice. As she outlined in *Poetic 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.<sup>16</sup> Poems such as ‘Don’t Bite the Hand that Throws Dust in Your Eyes’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 47) and ‘Grapes for Grasshoppers’ (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 48) are constructed out of clichés, sayings and proverbs amusingly misused in poetic form.<sup>17</sup> Forrest-Thomson uses poetic artifice as a level of organisation with which to illustrate the capacity

for conventional devices to transform the banal meaning of clichés. 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 clichéd and domesticated poetry she refers to as formless and academic in her opening statement to *Veronicavan*.

### ARTIFICE AND THE FIGHT FOR LITERARY DECORUM

On the surface of it, a number of these early poems appear to follow the trends of the time. Keery, for example, identifies 'Contours—Homage to Cézanne' as exhibiting the 'early mastery of the "Movement" style', stating that it is 'beguilingly reminiscent of Donald Davie' (Keery 1991, 86). Davie was certainly encamped with the Movement poets, but his *Purity of Diction* also offers a broader argument for a re-evaluation of conventional poetic devices. As Keith Tuma and Nate Dorward (2004) write, the Movement poets—Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Kingsley Amis, for example—were associated with types of lower-middle-class 'shared cultural ideal[s] of civility and urbanity' (p. 511), were 'suspicious of or hostile to the "difficulty" of Modernist predecessors' (p. 512) and wrote poems which 'used a plain idiom, [were] conversational in tone and sometimes pointedly low and unliterary' (p. 513). The analytical tone, the philosophical reflection on patterns, the paratactic and layered clauses of the opening stanza and Forrest-Thomson's precise phraseology and diction in 'Contours—Homage to Cézanne' 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 ...  
(Alvarez 1966, 95)

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. Forrest-Thomson avoids Davie's casual moralising tone and his urbane backgrounding of artifice with an upfront, aggressively playful self-consciousness. The form of 'Contours—Homage to Cézanne', for example, is jagged and changeable, as if Forrest-Thomson was not willing to sacrifice the complex expressivity of poetic form for transparent moralising. Both Davie and Forrest-Thomson use conventional poetic metre, rhythms and rhyme schemes, but she pursues her obsessive comprehension of form's evocative power, concentrating on creating dense and conflicting material patterns. Her critical intelligence cannot let language rest, so she squeezes out as much denotation, connotation, and semantic and formal echoes as she can from her words and phrases. Unlike Davie, who refines any conflicting views out of existence in order to present a measured tone, Forrest-Thomson goes in the opposite direction, showing, as it were, her workings. As such, Forrest-Thomson's radicalism comes from within convention; complacent modernity is critiqued from within.

Forrest-Thomson was cultivating a scholar's distrust for leisured middle classes dabbling in poetry and this would be amplified by her imminent experience at Cambridge. She resisted the abstractions of concrete poetry, as well as what she called in *Poetic Artifice* the 'spurious' connection with the world that she discerned in the Movement and confessional poets (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 95). Forrest-Thomson's proud declaration in her *Veronicavan* statement of her specialisation in Greek and Latin establish the background to her developing aesthetic elitism. She studied Greek and Latin at school and some handwritten poems in 'Veronica—Some Teenage Poems'—'The Greeks had a Word for it', 'Oida' and a sonnet about the fifth-century Athenian statesman Cleon, an unpublished poem 'Epicurus' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 45–46)—as well as a number of her later poems, involve classical themes and incorporate quotations from Greek and Latin poets.<sup>18</sup> But such allusions hardly made her a specialist in classical studies. Forrest-Thomson's dismissal of Movement 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 a message.

While her other concrete poems offered a broad retort to such poetry, the poem 'Grapes for Grasshoppers' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 48) 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'. The witty collapsing of old saws into one another illustrates 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 into 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.

(Forrest-Thomson 2008, 48)

The irregular rhythm and end-stopped rhyme scheme are 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. Compressed pronouns and possessive pronouns—'I'm', 'you'll' and 'you're'—seem deliberately unpoetic, 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 attendant grimy or hackneyed ideas.<sup>19</sup> 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*' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 48, emphases added). Forrest-Thomson's clunking eye-rhyme deflates any easy moral; 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 poetic practice during this time takes direct aim at the primness and staidness of mainstream poetry. Such a position aligned her with 'Mersey Beat' writers who were themselves learning lessons from American Beat writers and artists in reacting to, resisting and poking

fun at the polite establishment figures. In reaction to such ethical formalism, countercultures of loose, casual and carefree poetics emerged, many of which were based on American models. Hence, Adrian Henri's affectedly cool and streetwise lines in 'Poem in Memoriam T. S. Eliot': 'I'd been out the night before & hadn't seen the papers or the telly / & the next day in a café someone told me you were dead' (Henri 1967, 43). Such poetic practice levels its casual register and loose lines at the fustiness of the establishment. But, unlike these writers, Forrest-Thomson's own radicalism sent her back to a reaffirmation of conventional poetic devices rather than to the casual and free practices of many of her culturally radical contemporaries. Forrest-Thomson's attack on literary cliché is directed in large part at the Movement poets' techniques, but it is also a rejection of the type of assumptions and lazy practices of other so-called radical poetics.

For example, the first line of 'Grapes for Grasshoppers' is a rewrite 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?' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 48).<sup>20</sup> 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 featuring patronising observations.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Larkin, the object of Forrest-Thomson's most eloquent ire in *Poetic Artifice*, was an admirer of at least one of Cornford's poems.<sup>22</sup> Forrest-Thomson discusses Larkin's poem, 'Mr Bleaney' in *Poetic Artifice*, criticising it for its 'embarrassing' lucidity and deriding his presentation of a clear and unsympathetic theme (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 104).<sup>23</sup> 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' (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 104). 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' (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 105). Larkin does not use techniques and form, as Forrest-Thomson does in her neo-concrete poems, to aid his 'meditations on the vanity of human wishes' (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 105). A poet's reliance on their 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’ (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 105). 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 that 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 to, and serious treatment of, poetic form, will be poetry’s defence against both formlessness as well as the complacent assumptions she associates with such practice. Larkin and others, according to Forrest-Thomson, lack such formal decorum and 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.

*Identi-kit* and the uncollected early poems continue Forrest-Thomson’s twin interests in conventional forms of artifice as well as radical form. But all her experiments reaffirm—even if unwittingly—her allegiance to Davie’s notion of a particular purity in the use of conventional poetic techniques. Forrest-Thomson was a peripheral radical and peripheral traditionalist; she adapted certain modernist practices, but this often affirmed her own belief in what Davie had started to refer to as poetic ‘diction’, ‘decorum’ and ‘proper conduct’, aspects of which she would later work into her model of poetic Artifice. In *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, Davie described poetic diction in quasi-ethical terms:

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. (Davie 2006, 15)

‘Decorum’ is a loaded and class-laden word, but Forrest-Thomson expresses the sense of best or most refined practice in her aesthetics. *Purity of Diction* offers a broader argument for a re-evaluation of conventional poetic devices. Good poetic practice, for Davie, draws

on what he calls the ‘elaborate structure of poetic diction’ found in George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* (1589).<sup>24</sup> Davie and Forrest-Thomson argue for complex poetic techniques far exceeding those of the restrained verse of Movement poets; they argue, in short, for a form of rhetorical competence. Following Davie’s lead, Forrest-Thomson critiqued mainstream poets’ abjuring of their responsibility to poetry, despite their general use of conventional poetic forms and despite their pseudo-moralistic quibbling. Forrest-Thomson’s motivation to retain a spirit of poetic Artifice contributed to her growing sense of the importance of poetic conventions.

Forrest-Thomson’s analytical sensibility about the codes, manners and grammars of poetic production were honed in a context of radicalism that she simultaneously espoused and rejected. Both conventional poetic practices as well as radical poetics can become mannered, laboured and clichéd. In order to avoid this complacency, Forrest-Thomson needed to retain her peripheral status as well as her restless cynicism towards defaulting into tired poetic modes. Such a mood of simultaneous inhabitation and disaffection with culture was part of a broad, society-wide shift noted by the American critic Lionel Trilling and expanded on by Patricia Waugh in her 1995 study, *Harvest of the Sixties*. For Waugh, ‘the insight [of Trilling] that the theme of all modern literature since Romanticism has been its own quarrel with modernity seems now to be almost commonplace in literary criticism’ (Waugh 1995, 22). As she writes: ‘Trilling observed that, in a disenchanted world, literature expresses the “disenchantment of our culture with itself”’ (Waugh 1995, 22).<sup>25</sup> To that we might add that such disenchantment is perpetuated by a disingenuous inhabitation of the culture that results in an unthinking espousal of its forms and ideologies. Waugh examines what she calls this ‘culture of disaffection’ though various countercultural movements and angry young men, but what is interesting about Forrest-Thomson’s experience of literary culture at this time is her simultaneous rejection as well as selective reaffirmation of the modes, conventions and orthodoxies surrounding her.

Forrest-Thomson’s experiences at Liverpool University and her poetic experiments during this time made her poised and ready for Cambridge. The poetic conflict between tradition and innovation I have outlined in *Identi-kit* and her other, uncollected poems, reflected a pervasively pungent admixture of cultural elitism and deconstruction of the values of the old guard which pervaded Cambridge at the time. While the syllabus in Cambridge was still very traditional, there were lots of radical thinkers

inhabiting these syllabuses (and little houses) whose natural inclination was to undermine such orthodoxies. This inaugurated an intellectual crisis of identity that Davie writes about pugnaciously and which Forrest-Thomson inherited. Like Davie, Forrest-Thomson defended traditions and conventions and the pieties that went along with them (a kind of diluted Leavisite vision of polite culture) while hating both the snobbishness or priggishness accompanying such positions as well as a good deal of the literature that was a product of this stifling education. The formation of the canon, in such organs as Leavis' *Scrutiny*, was, as Davie outlines in his memoirs, a process of systematic exclusion. ('Every issue [of *Scrutiny*] made me a present of perhaps a dozen authors or books or whole periods and genres of literature which I not only *need* not read, but *should not*' (Davie 1982, 78)). But both Davie and Forrest-Thomson were marginalised by their own backgrounds and interests; Davie was attracted to a middle-class Movement aesthetics; Forrest-Thomson to concrete poetry (albeit briefly), unfashionable nineteenth-century poetry of high artifice, difficult modernist poetry and, most heretical of all, structuralism. But both wanted to conserve aspects of tradition and extolled it, knowing that there was something valuable and resistant in the inutility of pure, Cambridge scholarship. Both conflictively, or tentatively, inhabited the robes of tradition, all the while clutching their rental stub, ready to return them at any time. One of the ways in which both coped with the high seriousness of Cambridge was through wit, humour, irreverence or what Davie liked to call 'caprice' (Davie 1982, 20, 28–29, 136). The irreverence of the insider/outsider is doubly operative; like irony, it controls while it cajoles. Forrest-Thomson's poetry, her shy remarks at the Essex Arts Festival and her foreword to *Equator* register this peripheral anxiety or cynicism. Her creative work during this rich period represents a hyper-critique of the conditions which make it possible; her work bears the marks of a bad faith of endurance, with arch seriousness and witty irony entwined into its scar tissue. With wit honed in the margins of conventional and experimental poetic practices, Forrest-Thomson was ready for her Cambridge adventure.

## NOTES

1. Veronica Forrest-Thomson (1967b) 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, <http://www.bl.uk/nsa>. Accessed 25 April 2017.
2. Harry Fainlight (1935–1982) was an Anglo-American poet who shared a poetic sensibility with the American Beats. His short life between New York and London involved hanging out with Ed Sanders and Allen Ginsberg and founding various countercultural magazines. Lee Harwood (1939–2015) was a Brighton-based poet and translator who also had long-lasting connections with New York poets, in particular John Ashbery. He was also a friend and translator of Tristan Tzara, spending some time with the Dadaist in Paris before his death in the 1960s. Cavan McCarthy (b. 1943) is a Brazil-based editor, bibliographer, concrete poet and educator. He founded *Tlaloc* magazine in the early 1960s, which featured some of Forrest-Thomson's work.
  3. John Keats 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': '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' (Keats 1996, 177).
  4. Forrest-Thomson may have been inspired to write 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 !' (*Tlaloc* (11): up).
  5. The comment is attributed to Cézanne by Léo Languier in his 1925 work, *Le dimanche avec Paul Cézanne*. Paris: L'Édition.
  6. The quotations are from Klee's journal (1908) published in Paul Klee, *Tagebücher von Paul Klee 1898–1918*, edited by Felix Klee and Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 844. Cologne: Dumont, 1957.
  7. See (Cragle 2011) for a useful discussion of these poems in relation to Klee's theory of the line.
  8. 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: 1967a): 7–8.
  9. My choice to use Davie here, and in my discussion towards the end of this chapter, is informed by the strong evidence of Forrest-Thomson's often competitive engagement with his writing. The Cambridge University Library copy of *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952), for example, contains Forrest-Thomson's pencil underlines, ticks, cross references and annotations.

10. Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Michel Couturier (1975), '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.
11. See *Poetic Artifice* (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 161–164); Davie, *Purity of Diction* (Davie 2006, 58–60). Cf. Graham Hough, 'Dante and Eliot' (Hough 1974, 293–305) for a comparable contemporary perspective.
12. Solt refers to the type of concrete poem 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 (reproduced in Williams 1967, 311). Cf. Forrest-Thomson's poems 'Fine' and 'Variations from Sappho' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 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* (Forrest 1970, 1). Interestingly, it was also the only poem *not* to be included in her collection, *Language-Games* (1971); clearly, she had moved on.
13. I have typed this poem using the handwritten version in 'Veronica—Some Teenage Poems', 34. For a published version of the poem see Forrest-Thomson 2008, 50.
14. The first Habitat—a furniture and contemporary home design store—was founded by Terence Conran in 1964 in Chelsea, London. By the late sixties there were stores all over the UK and Europe, including one in Liverpool where Forrest-Thomson lived at this time.
15. See also Chaps. 6, 'Literary Competence' and 7, 'Convention and Naturalization' of Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* for discussions of the structuralist notions of literary competence (Culler 1975, 113–39).
16. In Chap. 1 of *Poetic Artifice* (Forrest-Thomson 2016, 64–7) Forrest-Thomson takes a dull article about the BBC from a newspaper and splices it up in order to reveal the operations of poetic form.
17. Both poems are in 'Veronica—Some Teenage Poems', 11 and 12 respectively.
18. 'Veronica—Some Teenage Poems', 7, 25–6. See also 'Variations from Sappho' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 68–9), 'The Dying Gladiator' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 113) and 'Since the Siege and Assault was Ceased in Troy', 'The Temptation' and 'The Exchange of Winnings' (Forrest-Thomson 2008, 146–7).

19. Cf. Davie (2006), 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'.
20. Alison Mark notes this allusion (Mark 2001, 51). The lines from Cornford's poem 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' (Cornford 1954, 20). Both Cornford and Ludwig Wittgenstein are buried in the Ascension Parish Burial Grounds off Huntingdon Road, Cambridge; her hero and villain occupy the same plot. Forrest-Thomson lived at 112 Huntingdon Road in the early 1970s while doing her Ph.D. At the time of writing, I live four doors down.
21. See, for example, G.K. Chesterton's hilarious, 'The Fat White Woman Speaks': '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' (Gross 2010, 249).
22. See Maeve Brennan, *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (Brennan 2002, 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* (Larkin 1973, 202).
23. 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 bedsit (Larkin 1999, 102).
24. 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" ' (Davie 2006, 7 and 11 respectively). Davie cites Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) 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' (Davie 2006, 7).
25. Waugh quotes from Lionel Trilling, 'On the Teaching of Modern Literature' (Trilling 1967, 19).

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