

PREFACE

Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Poet on the Periphery was written out of a pressing need to bring to the forefront of literary studies this important poet and theorist, to demonstrate Forrest-Thomson's centrality to contemporary debates in poetics and to argue for her importance in shaping and informing the understanding of the operations of poetic form and practice to this day. Forrest-Thomson died at the agonisingly young age of twenty-seven in 1975, but left behind a body of critical and creative work which continues to intrigue scholars, poets and general readers alike. One of the defining features of all Forrest-Thomson's work—prose and poetry—is her brilliant and engaging fusion of high seriousness with deflating bathos and wit. Forrest-Thomson wore her intelligence on her sleeve and pulled few theoretical punches when it came to the serious business of literary aesthetics and poetics. Nevertheless, despite her archly intellectual and critical aspirations, her poetry and theory are veined with wit, humour and intellectual play, and are stimulating, challenging and enlightening in equal measures. Such an intriguing recipe of style is why I continue to be sharpened and enlivened by her work.

As a scholar who has been dedicated to Forrest-Thomson's work for a number of years, I have been fortunate to talk to a number of people who met Veronica during her short life. As I suggest in my Introduction, the accounts of those who met her confirmed my suspicion that Forrest-Thomson was a brilliant and unique individual in life, just as she was a tenacious and obsessive arguer (to use a term from her lifelong sparring partner, William Empson) in print. While those who knew her are able

to share memories, we do not, alas, have her side of the story, except that which exists in writing and on the too few sound recordings of her readings and debates. But, thanks to Jonathan Culler and the Veronica Forrest-Thomson Archive at Girton College Library, Cambridge, it is no longer only her published critical writing and poetry that we can consult, but many other materials which remained unpublished at the time of her death. These include an early ‘manifesto’ entitled ‘My Attitudes and Beliefs’, written between the ages of sixteen and nineteen; typescripts for a number of essays; half a book on Ezra Pound and nineteenth-century poetry; lavish and witty annotations and notes in her own books; letters; lecture notes; her final ‘Pomes’ notebook containing drafts of a number of poems from *On the Periphery*; as well as a variety of photographs. Despite having pored over these documents for a number of years, I continue to discover interesting details about, among other things, the ways in which Forrest-Thomson developed her thinking, about her reading and translating habits, about her proclivity to wittily argue in the margins of her own and others’ books (including those in the Cambridge University Library), and about her resolute dedication to the work of A.C. Swinburne. I will continue to revisit her work for a long time to come and it is hoped that *Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Poet on the Periphery* will open up debates on the importance of this young poet and scholar to the history of twentieth-century poetry and poetics.

This book would not have been possible without the help of a number of dedicated and supportive people. With many thanks to Professor Jonathan Culler, literary executor of the Veronica Forrest-Thomson Estate, for his support, assistance and patience during my years of research on Veronica’s work. It was with his sanction and supply of materials that myself, the Librarian (Frances Gandy) and Archivist (Hannah Westall) at Girton College Library, Cambridge, set up the Veronica Forrest-Thomson Archive in 2013. I greatly appreciate Jonathan’s generosity and kindness over the years. Thanks to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, who stuck with this project and who gave me excellent feedback on the various incarnations of the manuscript. I am also grateful to Tony Frazer of Shearsman Books for agreeing to publish *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* in 2016, which is a fine edition and finally makes available this important book for a dedicated readership. Thanks to Peter Nicholls and Sara Crangle who offered incredible supervision for my Ph.D. on Veronica at the University of Sussex. I am grateful to

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