MICHAEL HANSEN & GARETH FARMER

Introduction

By the time of her death at age twenty-seven, Veronica Forrest-Thomson (1947–75) had produced a remarkable body of poetry and criticism. Her most influential work, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry,* published posthumously in 1978, turned sharply against critics of the previous generation, notably William Empson, and against emergent strains of historicism. The book is an exhaustive (and sometimes exhausting) defense of "all the rhythmic, phonetic, verbal, and logical devices which make poetry different from prose." According to Forrest-Thomson, such devices are responsible for poetry's most significant effect—not pleasure or ornament or some kind of special expressivity, but the production of "alternative imaginary orders." Artifice "absorbs and transforms" language, and thereby alters our experience of the world language mediates. To see this potential requires the suspension of dominant forms of interpretation—paraphrase, conceptualization, contextualization. Forrest-Thomson calls such critical response "bad naturalization." "Good naturalization," on the other hand, begins at the level of non-meaningful structure itself, moving outward to semantic content and eventually to the "external world." By a process of "expansion and limitation," artifice acts as a sort of filter that enables insignificant external elements to be discarded from interpretation.

As these idiosyncratic terms attest, this is an ambitious and peculiar theory. At a time when literary studies is struggling, often clumsily, to find new ways of talking about form, *Poetic Artifice* feels remarkably vital. The essays in this portfolio represent an application of this theory to nineteenth-century verse, an archive examined only in passing in *Poetic Artifice*: "One might say...that both the poetry Pound recognised, such as the Cantos, and the poetry he repudiated, such as early Canzoni, are relevant to our situation today. This matter must wait for another book, though, which will concern Pound, the 'Nineties, and the great fictionalisers, Tennyson, Swinburne, Rossetti, who lie behind them." The book she alludes to, "Obstinate Isles" (1973–75),

exists only as an outline and small group of draft chapters. Even in this rough state, the manuscript is tantalizing. If *Poetic Artifice* was largely concerned with Modernism and its heirs—among them John Ashbery, Andrew Crozier, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Forrest-Thomson's teacher J. H. Prynne—"Obstinate Isles" is concerned with its precursors. As she explains in the draft introduction, "I hope, by a detailed consideration of Pound's early poetry in relation to the latter half of the nineteenth century, to help English criticism to touch bottom independently again; the most obvious means is an examination of the devalued qualities of those conventions that lift poetry away from the commonplace and which both the theme and the form of late nineteenth-century poems do stress."

"His True Penelope Was Flaubert: Ezra Pound and Nineteenth-Century Poetry" is a condensed version of this project. We believe it was written concurrently with "Obstinate Isles" and may be an attempt to work its arguments into an article. The essay is too long to include in full; excisions are marked by section signs. We print the first of two parts from "Lilies from the Acorn," the manuscript's unfinished chapter on Rossetti, as a companion to "His True Penelope." (The second part ends midsentence.) Forrest-Thomson's microscopic reading of "Death-in-Love" and her articulation of "allegory without a literal level" must stand in this portfolio for the kind of analysis she performs elsewhere in the manuscript. "His True Penelope" provides crucial context for this analysis, and we suggest reading it first. The final essay, "Pastoral and Elegy in some Early Poems of Tennyson" (1973–75), is distinct from the "Obstinate Isles" project. Like so much of Forrest-Thomson's work, it represents an attempt to come to terms with aspects of Empson's thought, in this case his definition of pastoral as the "process of putting the complex into the simple." Forrest-Thomson identifies in Tennyson's neglected early poetry a curious combination of pastoral with elegy. She argues that this invented genre enables a distinctive kind of "fictionalization" in which landscape and object and character tend to blur. "Elegiac pastoral" transforms directed grief into generalized mood, absorbing past and future in a timeless present.

The essays exist only in single versions, and are clearly drafts. They have been edited for clarity. Edits are primarily orthographic and grammatical; in some instances, sentences have been slightly

adjusted on a case-by-case assessment of Forrest-Thomson's intentions. Readers interested in locating other work by Forrest-Thomson should consult Alison Mark's excellent bibliography in *Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Language Poetry* (2001).

This portfolio was made possible by assistance from the Nicholson Center for British Studies at the University of Chicago. We thank Jonathan Culler and the Estate of Veronica Forrest-Thomson for permission to print the essays. Thanks are also due to John Hoffman and, especially, Kate McIntyre for crucial assistance in preparing them for publication.