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## ARTICLE

# 'Linguistically Wounded': Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Sylvia Plath, and the Limits of *Poetic Artifice*

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Based on the archival evidence of Veronica Forrest-Thomson's annotations to Sylvia Plath's 1971 collection *Winter Trees*, as well as a 1972 typescript of Forrest-Thomson's review of *Winter Trees*, which she never published, this article argues that Forrest-Thomson's engagement with Plath's late poetry played a crucial role in the development of her theory of 'poetic artifice'. Yet I contend that the poems of *Winter Trees* by no means offer themselves as self-evident exemplars of such a theory, and I explore this disjunction by juxtaposing Forrest-Thomson's revisionary account of Plath in *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry*, which posits the poems 'Daddy' and 'Purdah' as anti-confessional works of art that clearly indicate their own 'unreality', against the *Winter Trees* review, which is more critical of Plath's 'compromises'. Because Forrest-Thomson's aesthetic project is further complicated by her own development as a poet, I also consider a selection of poems published in the 1974 Omens Poetry Pamphlet *Cordelia: or 'A poem should not mean but be'*, in order to explore an elided, yet suggestive, relation between feeling and theory in her poetry. Finally, I argue that this relation, which Plath's 'Purdah' would seem to both prefigure and sanction, signals the presence of a reticent 'linguistic emotionality' in Forrest-Thomson's work that not only contests the authority of her male modernist models, but also anticipates contemporary critical discourses in experimental poetry and poetics.

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**Keywords:** Veronica Forrest-Thomson; Sylvia Plath; aesthetics; Artifice; linguistic emotionality; affect; anti-confessionalism

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## Introduction

Veronica Forrest-Thomson's decision to make Sylvia Plath the focus of the final pages of *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century*, originally published by Manchester University Press in 1978, was a polemical move in that she sought to read Plath

against the grain of then-contemporary criticism, as an anti-confessional poet whose poetry 'clearly indicates its own unreality'.<sup>1</sup> Yet this move was not recognized as such when critics initially received the book. Marjorie Perloff, for instance, argued in her 1980 review that *Poetic Artifice* had simply miscalculated Plath's abilities. Although 'Forrest-Thomson quite rightly distinguishes between Hughes's frequent poetic posturing and the more integral visionary poetry of Sylvia Plath', Perloff wrote, '[...] I think she overrates Plath in the process'.<sup>2</sup> More successful, in Perloff's opinion, were contrasts that Forrest-Thomson drew between Ted Hughes's *Crow* and John Ashbery's 'They Dream Only of America'. The concluding section of the review underscored the Hughes-Ashbery tensions, thereby implying that it was Forrest-Thomson's engagement with these male 'contemporaries', rather than with Plath, that constituted her 'eloquent defense of what we might call the New Anglo-American Poetry'.<sup>3</sup> The issue of Forrest-Thomson's relationship to the sole female poet addressed in *Poetic Artifice* (other than herself) was swept under the rug by Perloff, and Forrest-Thomson's readings of 'Purdah' and 'Daddy' were written off as errors of judgment by a 'gifted young critic' who had written a 'not quite satisfactory book'.<sup>4</sup>

And yet it was not so long before other readers began to view *Poetic Artifice* as more than satisfactory. In contradistinction to Perloff, Charles Bernstein characterizes *Poetic Artifice* in his 1992 text 'Artifice of Absorption' as 'remarkably precocious', 'uncompromising', 'fierce', and 'enormously moving', praising Forrest-Thomson's engagements not just with Ashbery but also with J.H. Prynne.<sup>5</sup> He is also impressed by 'her critique of the flaws inherent in "confessional" poetry—she speaks of the "suicide poets"—from whom she is at great pains to exclude Plath'.<sup>6</sup> It is especially questionable to assume that Forrest-Thomson's analysis of Plath can be classified in a less advanced interpretive category than her 'very acute'<sup>7</sup> engagement with Ashbery, as I demonstrate in this essay through recourse to previously unexplored material from Forrest-Thomson's archive at Girton College, Cambridge.<sup>8</sup> In particular, I propose that Forrest-Thomson's annotated copy of *Winter Trees*, a collection of poems written by Plath in the last nine months of her life and published by Faber and Faber in 1971, as well as her unpublished review of *Winter Trees*, written in 1972 and preserved as

a typescript in the archive, reveal that Forrest-Thomson's engagement with Plath's poetry likely played a crucial role in the development of her theory of 'poetic artifice', despite a general lack of scholarship on the relationship between these poets.

My broader argument in the following pages is that Forrest-Thomson was working in the 1970s to claim Plath for a formalist, experimental tradition that could be best understood according to her own theory of 'poetic artifice'. At the same time, she was unable to theorize this gendered power play within the terms of her aesthetic project. It is interesting to note, then, that Forrest-Thomson critiques Plath for a similar 'blind[ness]' in *Poetic Artifice*, even as she pays 'tribute' to her poetry proper: 'unfortunately Sylvia Plath [...] was unable to recognize in theory what she knew in poetic practice. We need not to be so blinded, however [...].'<sup>9</sup> Through her close readings of Plath, and anticipating many of Jacqueline Rose's criticisms in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Forrest-Thomson also sought to push back against the discourses of 'confessionalism', 'extremism', and psychic suffering that had negatively shaped interpretations of Plath's poems even before her suicide in 1963, but which had especially come to circumscribe Plath's reception during the early 1970s, when Forrest-Thomson was composing *Poetic Artifice*.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the poems of *Winter Trees* also do not offer themselves as self-evident exemplars of 'Artifice', despite the fact that Forrest-Thomson concludes her book with a reading of Plath's 'Purdah' in which she praises the speaker for 'remain[ing] enigmatic, presenting only the words on the page'.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, 'Purdah', in particular, and *Winter Trees*, as a whole, can be seen to pose difficulties for both Forrest-Thomson's theory and her poetic practice. Nor can it be assumed that Forrest-Thomson herself was unaware of the disjunction between her characterization of Plath in *Poetic Artifice* and her 1972 review of *Winter Trees*, in which she is far more critical of Plath's perceived inconsistencies and a lack of self-awareness as a poet. This disjunction gives rise to multiple questions: Why, in spite of numerous objections to Plath, does Forrest-Thomson offer such a laudatory reading of 'Purdah' in the final pages of *Poetic Artifice*, as well as an admiring analysis of the poem 'Daddy', first published in the 1965 collection *Ariel*? How are we to make sense of the interpretive

constraints that Forrest-Thomson employs in order to produce her aesthetic argument that we should *not* read Plath as a confessional or 'extremist' poet?<sup>12</sup> The following analysis seeks to address these questions by examining the relationship between Forrest-Thomson's aesthetics and her poetics in the years between 1971 and 1975.

### **A 'New Kind of Subject'**

The year 1971 was a promising one for Veronica Forrest-Thomson. At the age of twenty-four, she completed her doctoral thesis, *Poetry as Knowledge: The Use of Science by Twentieth-Century Poets*, and received her PhD in English from Girton College, Cambridge. Also in 1971, Forrest-Thomson published 'Irrationality and Artifice: A Problem in Recent Poetics' in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, which established the basis of the argument that would become *Poetic Artifice*. The special kind of 'Artifice' that Forrest-Thomson conceived in this article differed both from irrationality, 'in being based on systematic procedures', and from rationality, 'in the fact that these procedures are an attempt to articulate a structure that is more fundamental, and in many ways destroys the normal procedures of rational discourse'.<sup>13</sup> Understood positively, as a transformative capacity to fictionalize or make strange (she was influenced by Viktor Shklovsky's concept of '*ostranenie*'),<sup>14</sup> rather than negatively, as dissembling (unlike Milton's 'artificer of fraud'),<sup>15</sup> her theory of artifice would, she believed, allow poets and critics alike to transcend the limiting binary of rational versus irrational discourse. Articulating, and struggling to articulate, this 'concept of *artifice*' would be the rest of her life's work.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally in 1971, Forrest-Thomson was awarded the 'New Poets' prize for her Wittgenstein-influenced collection *Language-Games*. Yet despite emphasizing scholarly 'questions of knowledge' and 'questions of technique' in an appended note to *Language-Games*, Forrest-Thomson also acknowledges in this same note that the poems included are equally about the quotidian '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'.<sup>17</sup> She concludes by stressing not just the theoretical 'importance of "subject" in a poem' but the conscious experience of 'human identity'.<sup>18</sup> This 'new kind of subject,' she declares, 'will be one that can be approached and even defined in terms of formal experimentation', by

'smashing and rebuilding the forms of thought'.<sup>19</sup> The fabrication of a poem, she argues, then 'becomes the record of a series of individual thresholds of the experience of being conscious; they form the definition, or affirmation, in time and in language, of human identity'.<sup>20</sup> In this revealing passage, Forrest-Thomson attempts to articulate 'individual thresholds of [...] experience', or affective registers, that she senses are intrinsic to the creation of poetry. At the same time, she holds this statement at bay, qualifying it through her assertion that the explicitly poetic consciousness must register itself as 'formal experimentation'.

The term 'experimentation', as Forrest-Thomson is referring to it within the context of *Language-Games*, would therefore seem to be not merely a method for generating an avant-garde aesthetics, but also an index of 'human identity', even if that human, to speak with Barthes, only 'apprehends himself *elsewhere*', as 'a dispersion of energy in which there remains neither a central core nor a structure of meaning'.<sup>21</sup> And so it would appear that Forrest-Thomson was already faced, in *Language-Games*, with a tension inherent to the word 'experiment' itself. The noun 'experiment' can be defined as the 'action of trying anything, or putting it to proof; a test, a trial'.<sup>22</sup> Yet in the transitive sense, to 'experiment' is simply 'to experience; to feel, suffer'.<sup>23</sup> To 'experiment' in this second sense is synonymous with the sensuous experience of touch, which is what Judith Butler has identified as the 'animating condition of sentience' and 'actively animating principle of feeling and knowing'.<sup>24</sup>

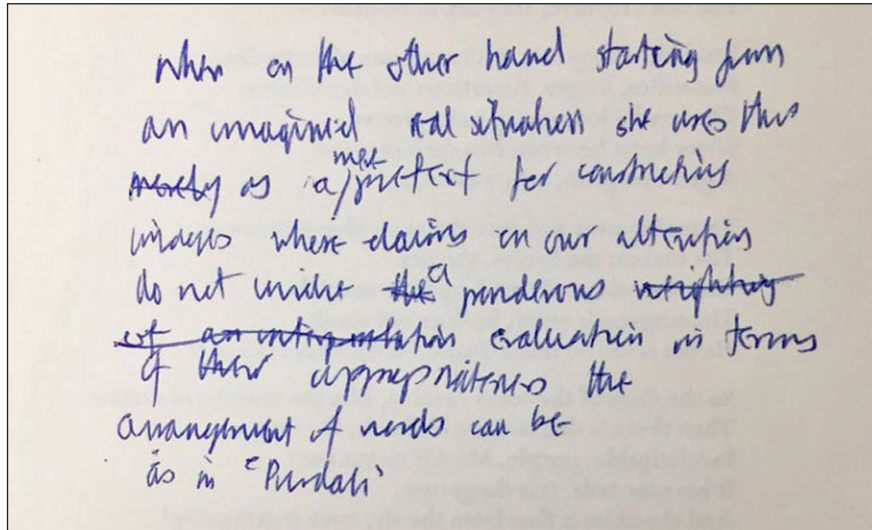
Any such relation between 'feeling and knowing' is something that Forrest-Thomson actively avoided theorizing in both 'Irrationality and Artifice' and *Poetic Artifice*, and this had implications, also, for her poetry, as Gareth Farmer explains in his recently published study *Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Poet on the Periphery* (2017): "Affective levels and parodic excesses unanticipated or positively resisted in theory emerge during the process of composition."<sup>25</sup> Yet the mutual relation that Butler underscores between cognition and emotionality was, I argue, crucial to Forrest-Thomson's developing poetics, as particularly evidenced by her poem 'Pastoral', which I discuss in the final section of this article. In other words, although Forrest-Thomson's note suggests that 'experience' and 'experiment' are inextricable for her as a poet, this does not mean that she was able to resolve the question of *where* and

*how* to place the emphasis: in bearing witness to the sensuous experience of the everyday? or in a kind of 'epistemophilia' or desiring passion for knowledge?<sup>26</sup> It is in an effort to negotiate between the two, I suggest, that Forrest-Thomson begins to consider the poetry of Plath in earnest, as a poetic model and potential exemplar of her developing theory of 'poetic artifice'.

### Reading and Reviewing *Winter Trees*

In addition to completing her dissertation, publishing *Language-Games*, and testing the waters of 'poetic artifice' in 1971, Forrest-Thomson also purchased a copy of Plath's collection *Winter Trees* while she was still at Cambridge, as indicated by the inscription on the front-leaf of her personal copy, which reads: '11/71 Cantab'.<sup>27</sup> *Winter Trees* contains poems written by Plath in the final year of her life, many of which Ted Hughes chose to omit from the original edition of *Ariel*, first published in 1965.<sup>28</sup> One poem that Hughes omitted from *Ariel*, but included in *Winter Trees*, was 'Purdah', which appears to have significantly influenced Forrest-Thomson between 1971 and 1975, as evidenced by the fact that she annotated it in her personal copy of *Winter Trees*, referred to it at length in her 1972 unpublished review of *Winter Trees*, and concluded *Poetic Artifice*, which she finished drafting in 1974, with a close reading of it. In order to consider Forrest-Thomson's developing engagement with Plath during this crucial period of the early 1970s, I turn, first, to the handwritten annotations and the unpublished review.

If you travel to the Girton College archive and turn the pages of Forrest-Thomson's copy of Plath's *Winter Trees* for yourself, then the younger poet's active, critical engagement with Plath becomes immediately and physically evident, for this volume is annotated throughout in hastily-written and self-cancelling scrawl, the kind of writing intended for private inquiry rather than public presentation. In one of her longest, most complementary annotations [see **Figure 1**] below the final lines of 'Purdah', she writes that when Plath starts from 'an imagined real situation' but uses it as 'mere pretext for constructing images where claims on our attention do not involve [...] a ponderous evaluation in terms of their appropriateness the arrangements of words can be as in "Purdah"'.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 1:** Veronica Forrest-Thomson's annotation to Sylvia Plath's 'Purdah', in her copy of *Winter Trees*.

Credit: Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 1/5/6.

What Forrest-Thomson appreciates in 'Purdah' is the way in which its language abjures the burdens of linguistic 'appropriateness', by which she seems to mean the rational evaluation of syntax and imagery in particular.

Yet despite this instance of approbation, Forrest-Thomson's annotations in *Winter Trees* tend more generally towards the critical. In her annotation at the bottom of 'Childless Woman', she writes that poem 'disintegrates into an uneasy extravagance'.<sup>30</sup> She asserts that the 'worst' aspect of 'Mystic' is its 'contamination of imagined state of mind or situation'.<sup>31</sup> She annotates the last two stanzas of 'Lyonnesse' and 'Thalidomide', respectively, with the scribbled comments 'spoilt' and 'spoiled'.<sup>32</sup> And in the margin of Plath's radio play, 'Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices', she remarks that the following three lines render the 'world of experience she [Plath] is against'<sup>33</sup>:

I saw the world in it—small, mean and black,  
 Every little world hooked to every little world, and act to act.  
 A blue day had budded into something.<sup>34</sup>



But does 'Every little world hooked to every little world, and act to act' in fact return us to the everyday 'world of experience' that Forrest-Thomson so desires to leave behind? Forrest-Thomson's annotations to 'Thalidomide', 'Lyonnesse', 'Mystic', 'Childless Woman', and 'Three Women' suggest that she believes that 'contaminations' in Plath's poetry ought to be read as failures of self-awareness on the part of the poet. Yet she is also clearly conflicted in her reading of 'Three Women', for her annotations also indicate that she is drawn to this play's effort to approach the 'mean and black' nature of lived experience, as evidenced by the fact that she underlines 'The incalculable malice of the everyday'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, at the end of the play, in an apparent attempt to resolve the contradictions that she seems to have experienced in her reading of it, Forrest-Thomson writes: 'dialectic between positive and negative in experience symbolized archetypically by this'.<sup>36</sup> This statement, I suggest, is not so much a resolution of the problem of rendering experience as poetry, but a gesture of suspension—for Forrest-Thomson is clearly struggling to square her own desire to use poetry as a means of 'recording [...] a series of individual thresholds of the experience of being conscious' (as she states in her note to *Language-Games*) with her emergent theory of 'Artifice'.<sup>37</sup>

For this reason, we can also read Forrest-Thomson's annotation that 'Three Women' renders the 'world of experience she is against' as signaling the commencement of an act of poetic refashioning and appropriation. That is, I wonder if the 'world of experience' is not something that Plath herself is categorically 'against', but rather something that Forrest-Thomson is seeking to actively oppose with a view towards her own aesthetic theory. Considered in this light, it would appear that as early as 1971, Forrest-Thomson was fashioning a new Sylvia Plath for herself, and, in doing so, trying to preempt the ways in which Plath's poetry might not conform to a theory such as Forrest-Thomson's own.

A similar tension exists in Forrest-Thomson's unpublished review of *Winter Trees*, which opens by way of a pointed question: 'How are we to read poems, like the best in this collection, that juxtapose a play of words completely free from reliance

on any empirical reality and an apparent extreme of direct personal statement?'<sup>38</sup> Forrest-Thomson maintains that '[t]his question remains unanswered despite the battery of interpretation and controversy that too frequently obscures the real nature of Sylvia Plath's later work'.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, she refuses to let the problem go. Whereas another reviewer might allow for free 'play of words' as well as 'direct personal statement' within the context of a single poem, Forrest-Thomson is unwilling to accept Plath's poetry in which she senses overt reliance on the empirical nature of lived experience, because she believes that poetry ought to 'question the assumptions of its readers and of the world it is presumed to share with them'.<sup>40</sup> If this questioning fails to occur, 'art', she argues, 'will cease to be creative at all' and '[w]e shall be trapped in the world "small, mean and black["] [...] which is the enemy to imaginative exploration'.<sup>41</sup> In the *Winter Trees* review, then, Forrest-Thomson is categorical in her rejection of the 'direct personal statement' and remains hostile to the lines from 'Three Women', for her intention is to read Plath's poems entirely against the grain, by forcibly extricating them from 'the empirical framework in which discussion of them has hitherto largely taken place'.<sup>42</sup> She rejects Edward Lucie-Smith's characterization of Plath as an 'Expressionist', and she opposes David Holbrook's claim that Plath's work 'involves us in entering into her own distorted view of existence'.<sup>43</sup> She takes issue, too, with Robert Lowell's famous introduction to *Ariel*, in which he praises a similar distortion or 'extremism', asserting: 'These poems are playing Russian roulette with six cartridges in the cylinder'.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, and this, perhaps, is her most contrary move, she argues that Plath's own statement that 'one should be able to control and manipulate experience' is, in fact, 'inapplicable' to many of Plath's poems, in which 'the precise fantasy of the imagery undercuts an interpretation that would make it merely the expression of a state of mind'.<sup>45</sup>

Following this series of objections, Forrest-Thomson turns to focus on 'Purdah'. This portion of the poem is reproduced in *Poetic Artifice*:

Jade—  
 Stone of the side,  
 The antagonized

Side of green Adam, I  
Smile, cross-legged,  
Enigmatical,

Shifting my clarities [...]

A concatenation of rainbows.

I am his.

Even in his

Absence, I

Revolve in my

Sheath of impossibles,

Priceless and quiet

Among these parakeets, macaws!

O chatterers

Attendants of the eyelash!

I shall unloose [...]

I shall unloose—

From the small jeweled

Doll he guards like a heart—

The lioness,

The shriek in the bath,

The cloak of holes.<sup>46</sup>

In her unpublished review, Forrest-Thomson provides us with a proto-typical reading of 'Purdah' as an exemplar of 'poetic artifice'. On the one hand, the poem clearly represents 'the situation of a woman in purdah', or in seclusion for religious reasons.<sup>47</sup> Forrest-Thomson observes that the speaker of the poem 'presents to "the bridegroom" only her external surfaces; she is hoarding up her real self which will

be loosed against him once she is able to reach an articulation of it[s] images of violence and irrationality'.<sup>48</sup> Yet 'this imagined situation', she argues, 'is simply a pretext for constructing images that interact with each other and claim our attention to their shifting relationships as a value independent of empirical reference'.<sup>49</sup> Forrest-Thomson also notes that 'abstract terms', which is how she characterizes Plath's 'clarities', 'visibilities', and 'my/Sheath of impossibles', are 'set up as tentative points for thematic summation among a profusion of physical details'.<sup>50</sup> This 'play of contrasts among levels of language' begins to take precedence over the imagined situation, she suggests, and therefore over the 'ponderous desire to evaluate language in terms of reality', so that the final three lines of the poem appear entirely 'free from emotional extremism': from any concrete and empirical 'I'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, the victory of the poem appears to be that it has extricated itself from 'the self, the poet or other persona'.<sup>52</sup>

Yet this reading of 'Purdah' in the unpublished review of *Winter Trees* is offset, as in the annotations to *Winter Trees*, by sharp criticism of poems that 'compromise between non-empirical freedom and a desire to anchor this in a real situation'.<sup>53</sup> Forrest-Thomson argues that when such a compromise occurs, the poem's language inhabits a purgatory or 'limbo' between 'exact description and detached fantasy, getting the worst of both worlds'.<sup>54</sup> In particular, she criticizes Plath's 'Childless Woman', 'Thalidomide', 'Mystic', and 'The Rabbit Catcher' as instances in which the 'real situation' that ostensibly serves as each poem's pre-text proves itself 'too powerful for even the most daring images'.<sup>55</sup> In other words, these are poems in which 'experience' thwarts fictionalization or defamiliarization and, hence, overwhelms 'Artifice'.<sup>56</sup> As an example of the 'banality and forced poeticalness' that result, in her view, from such a 'compromise', Forrest-Thomson cites two passages from 'Lesbos':

The baby smiles, fat snail,  
From the polished lozenges of orange linoleum [...]

The impotent husband slumps out for a coffee.  
I try to keep him in,  
An old pole for [the] lightning.<sup>57</sup>

The 'banal' vision of the 'husband 'slump[ing] out for a coffee' and clichéd domestic references to 'polished lozenges of orange linoleum' seem to particularly offend Forrest-Thomson's aesthetic sensibility. The concluding paragraph of the review can, finally, only be read as a patronizing jab at the less sophisticated reader of Plath: 'It should perhaps be made clear that, for those who like their poetry realistic, this volume contains two perfect poems in this genre, "By Candlelight" and "For a Fatherless Son" as well as her play for radio, "Three Women"'.<sup>58</sup> This ironic critical appraisal negatively clarifies Forrest-Thomson's desire, more evident in *Poetic Artifice*, to isolate a contrasting, more experimental Sylvia Plath from the naïve expectations of poetic realism.

### **Theory and Practice: or the Limits of 'Artifice'**

Forrest-Thomson begins *Poetic Artifice* by asserting nothing less than that her project is to address those aspects of poetry that are 'most difficult to articulate'.<sup>59</sup> Everyday language, she argues, gives 'information' and speaks about 'states of affairs' in the world; in contrast, poetry (when properly understood and executed) relies on 'elusive' and 'non-semantic' features of language, including 'apparently non-sensical imagery, logical discontinuity, referential opacity, and unusual metrical and spatial organization', which she characterizes as 'devices of artifice'.<sup>60</sup> Yet despite her structuralist predilection for categorizing different discourses or types of language, Forrest-Thomson concedes in the preface of *Poetic Artifice* (echoing her appended note to *Language-Games*) that the 'difficult' task of assessing the relationship between 'poetry' and the 'external world' is the 'major problem of this book'.<sup>61</sup> It is for these two reasons (because of poetry's relationship both to 'artifice' and to the 'external world'), I suggest, that Forrest-Thomson chooses to conclude her final chapter of *Poetic Artifice*, entitled 'Pastoral and Parody', with a reading of 'Purdah'. It is also, perhaps, for these reasons that Forrest-Thomson effects a purely laudatory reading of Plath in this chapter: not just because it serves her own aesthetic project, but also because of the way in which it intervenes in previous Plath criticism. (Although this is not, of course, something that Forrest-Thomson ever directly acknowledges.)

In this reading of 'Purdah', Forrest-Thomson focuses on the way in which the poem's final lines rapidly 'transition from a rampant beast (empirical imagery) to a

mythological murder (discursive imagery) to "The cloak of holes", in order to argue that the poem's 'discursive imagery negates the empirical but simultaneously asks to remain partly empirical: a cloak'.<sup>62</sup> This reading is possible, she argues, because Plath's final 'The' 'suggests a symbol' and thus 'sends us back into the poem again – to its fictionalised "I" for an explanation of the cloak of holes': an explanation, importantly, that is not forthcoming.<sup>63</sup> Farmer links this reticence to the subversion of 'a reader's advanced expectations about the poetic message', arguing that Forrest-Thomson's reading of 'Purdah' 'records how the content and form of a poem evade a reader's desire to read the poem as representative of a "state of mind"'.<sup>64</sup> In Plath's refusal to elucidate symbolic significance lies the negative power of the 'I' as a 'true artificer' who 'remains enigmatical, presenting only the words on the page'.<sup>65</sup>

In *Poetic Artifice*, the new concept that arises out of Forrest-Thomson's desire to address the relationship between the external world and poetry is the 'image-complex'. The 'image-complex' is 'the node' of the poem 'where we can discover which of the multitude of thematic, semantic, rhythmic, and formal, patterns is important', allowing us to 'distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant' and 'control importation of external contexts' into the world of poetic language.<sup>66</sup> Although indebted to the way in which Ezra Pound theorizes his early imagist period, the influence of T.S. Eliot nevertheless more directly explains Forrest-Thomson's deployment of the image-complex throughout *Poetic Artifice*. Her reliance on Eliot is particularly evidenced by her juxtaposed reading of *The Waste Land* with David Gascoyne's 'The Rites of Hysteria'. In her unfavorable analysis of 'The Rites of Hysteria', Forrest-Thomson argues that Gascoyne fails to tell us 'how to organize the images' and so 'the only recourse is to treat them as empirical images—as references to the world—which, because they are so incomprehensible, reflect a state of chaos on the world', and hence, a kind of untransformed 'irrationality'.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, she proposes that *The Waste Land* produces a different and more productive poetic effect, as evidenced by Eliot's 'unreal city' passage, which uses 'bizarre and near-nonsensical imagery' and yet, in her estimation, still 'takes good care that this be related to the other levels of Artifice'.<sup>68</sup> Although she acknowledges that the phrase 'I had not thought death had undone so

many' echoes both Dante and Baudelaire, Forrest-Thomson argues the blending of these historical figures with contemporary London produces a newly 'fictionalized' context of the poem. In *The Waste Land*, that is, the 'I' may be 'Dante, Baudelaire, Eliot as poet, Tiresias as Eliot's persona [...], and all of these simultaneously'.<sup>69</sup>

The powerful influence of Eliotic impersonality also extends to Forrest-Thomson's poetry, as confirmed by a page from Forrest-Thomson's 'Pomes' notebook. 'Pomes' contains handwritten working drafts of her poems, including 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which reveals itself to be an early version of 'Cordelia: or, "A poem should not mean, but be, first published in her 1974 Omens Poetry Pamphlet"'. This is evident from the fact that the line 'I, Helen, I Iseult, I Sappho who was queen'<sup>70</sup> in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' subsequently becomes 'I, Helen, I Iseult, I Guenevere/I Clytemnestra and many more to come' in the published poem 'Cordelia'.<sup>71</sup> So why does Forrest-Thomson drop her homage to Eliot's essay in favor of the title 'Cordelia: or, "A poem should not mean, but be"'? Partly, perhaps, because the development of this poem involves a turning away from Eliot and towards Plath, even as Forrest-Thomson seeks to co-op aspects of the former poet's impersonal aesthetics. The final version of 'Cordelia' still pays overt homage to the depersonalized, Eliotic 'I' through its layering of personae and its ironically distanced evaluation of the relationship between the poet's oeuvre and her domesticity: 'Especially if one may be plumber as well as poet/And thus unstop the drain as well as writing/*Poetic Artifice* [...]'.<sup>72</sup> Yet in 'Cordelia', Forrest-Thomson also introduces lines that, subverting the amorous dialogue of *Romeo and Juliet* ('It was the nightingale, and not the lark,/ That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear'),<sup>73</sup> constitute a striking trace of 'Purdah':

[...] I, Helen, I Iseult, I Guenevere,  
 I Clytemnestra and many more to come.  
 I did it, I myself, killing the King my father  
 Killing the King my mother, joining the King my brother.  
 It is the kick, my love, and not the nightingale  
 I like larking up kicks myself  
 But not kicking.<sup>74</sup>

The highly-stressed confession 'I did it, I myself, killing the King' clearly evokes the conclusion of 'Purdah' in which Plath's evasive speaker generates 'The shriek in the bath' that alludes to Clytemnestra's cold-blooded murder of her husband in Sophocles' tragedy *Agamemnon*. Yet does Forrest-Thomson's 'I', like the speaker of 'Purdah' (or so she argues), remain 'enigmatical, presenting only the words on the page'?<sup>75</sup>

Both impersonality and artifice seem to be undercut in 'Cordelia' by a kind of linguistic appetite or emotionality that is most directly evidenced in the doubly articulated verb ('killing' and 'Killing') on which this passage turns; such an interpretation is also suggested by the construction of the word 'k-i-ll-i-ng' itself, which includes two lowercase 'i's: a micro-reiteration, as it were, of the self-inculpating utterance: 'I did it, I myself'. Further contributing to the sensation of an acquisitive linguistic impulse or appetite is the fact that Forrest-Thomson's speaker, in a further perversion of Hamlet's cutting words to Gertrude ('A bloody deed—almost as bad, good-mother,/As kill a king and marry with his brother'),<sup>76</sup> does not merely confess to 'Killing the King' and 'joining [...] my brother', but to killing both 'my father' and 'my mother'. She also engulfs (in order to expunge) an overwhelmingly male canon, including Dante, Botticelli, Cavalcanti, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, A.C. Swinburne, Shakespeare, Richard II, J.H. Prynne, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Homer, Freud, Lacan, John Donne, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Aquinas, and all of Camelot, while 'fictionalizing' herself as a questing heroine of mythological stature: 'I Veronica did it, truth-finding, truth-seeking/Muck-raking, bringing victory'.<sup>77</sup> In these passages, Forrest-Thomson's assertive 'I' seems to get the better of the poem's clever wordplay ('I like larking up kicks myself/But not kicking'), even to the detriment of 'Poetry'.

A self-conscious negotiation between feeling and theory is arguably more successfully rendered in Forrest-Thomson's poem 'Pastoral', which she analyzes in the final chapter of *Poetic Artifice* alongside Plath's 'Purdah' and 'Daddy'.<sup>78</sup> The final stanza of 'Pastoral' deploys the pathetic figure of the 'gentle foal' to highlight a paradoxical play between linguistic insufficiency and linguistic power:

Silence in grass and solace in blank verdure  
summon the frightful glare of nouns and nerves.



The gentle foal linguistically wounded,  
squeals like a car's brakes, like our twisted words.<sup>79</sup>

The idyllic, 'grass[y]' landscape of the poem serves to 'summon the frightful glare' not of 'nouns and verbs' ('verdure' anticipating 'verb'), but of 'nouns and nerves', that is, of 'words' which are always already vehicles of feeling, 'twisted' by emotion. 'Pastoral' is also notable in that it recalls Plath's poem 'Words', which Ted Hughes selected to conclude *Ariel*.<sup>80</sup> The ironized pastoral imagery of a 'gentle foal linguistically wounded' particularly evokes the final stanza of Plath's poem, in which she likens verbal articulation (or the mechanical clack of the typewriter) to the sound of 'indefatigable hoof-taps':

Words dry and riderless,  
The indefatigable hoof-taps.  
While  
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars  
Govern a life.<sup>81</sup>

Words are exhausting, this stanza seems to imply; because we cannot master them (they are 'riderless'), they will likely master us. Yet why effect such a message while preserving the metaphor of an untamed horse rejecting human authority? Why, in other words, does Plath offer her reader such a metaphor, if what she wants to suggest is 'blank' artificiality or, indeed, resigned fatalism ('fixed stars/Govern a life')?

There is a resonant contradiction inherent in 'Words' whereby the simultaneous performance of affect and affectlessness combine to produce a poem in which the speaker appears overwhelmed by feeling even as she assures us—and, presumably, herself—of the inert status of 'Words dry and riderless', much in the way that Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay 'Experience', tells his reader 'I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature'.<sup>82</sup> Is Emerson mourning the loss of his affect more than the loss of his son? My answer is an emphatic negative, because of the fact that the statement that one is unable to articulate or even experience grief does not necessarily negate grief itself. This is an affective condition that Denise

Riley, like Emerson, probes in her elegy for her son, 'A Part Song', when she bluntly renders the displacement of grief by boredom ('But by now/We're bored with our unproductive love,/and infinitely more bored by your staying dead') and mocks the impotency of apostrophic address ('I'll cry "Oh bee!" to you instead -/Since my own dead, apostrophized,/Keep mute [...]').<sup>83</sup> As Sharon Cameron argues in 'Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience"', 'feeling survives the complaints of its being cancelled. Emerson is conceding with one part of himself what he is disputing with another'.<sup>84</sup> The same intractable paradox, I argue, is true of Riley, Plath, and Forrest-Thomson.

'Pastoral', of course, is a poem, not a personal essay, and Forrest-Thomson would surely object to my introducing Emerson's autobiographical prose as a means of parsing her 'poetic language'. Yet 'Pastoral' engages with precisely these kinds of questions and contradictions, even if Forrest-Thomson never found a way to theorize this aspect of her poetics. It is all the more interesting, then, that when Forrest-Thomson discusses 'Pastoral' in *Poetic Artifice*, she performs a dispassionate, impersonal analysis, as if the poem has no connection with her whatsoever. She even refers to herself in the third person: 'Whatever the relation of Dada to Swinburne, Lear, Tennyson, and Forrest-Thomson [...]'.<sup>85</sup> She then goes on to analyze the poem on purely formal grounds, arguing that the 'gentle foal' is 'important' not for his 'physical being', but 'for his *entle oal* sounds'; these sounds are meaningful, she emphasizes, because they are echoed in the phrase 'linguistically wounded', which she describes as 'crucial' for both 'the theme and for the rhythm' of this poem.<sup>86</sup> The fact that the foal's physical being is usurped by the sound of his name is a 'pretty paradox in view of the poem's theme', she suggests, 'since the poet is saying (thematic synthesis) just that: pre-occupation with linguistic problems prevents contact with the physical word world'.<sup>87</sup> In her reading of 'Pastoral', Forrest-Thomson acknowledges that 'the foal looks remarkably like a traditional symbol used to give the kind of empirical instance in a discursive argument that we saw in Donne and Eliot'.<sup>88</sup> However, she argues that something different is happening in the poem, which she explains by invoking the poetic genealogy of Dada, lauding its 'concrete meaninglessness' as a 'fundamental aesthetic experience'.<sup>89</sup> Such an 'aesthetic experience', she argues, is shared by the notions of 'aesthetic distance' and 'content as form' that are crucial to 'poetic artifice'.<sup>90</sup>

## 'Linguistically Wounded'

Yet 'Pastoral' cannot fully be explained by either lineage: neither by the amped-up meaninglessness of Dada, nor by the more traditional metaphysical conceits of Donne and, by extension, Eliot. Forrest-Thomson's jarring imagery of a helpless young animal 'wounded' by something 'linguistic' rather than physical suggests, instead, that we ought to take seriously her reticent engagement with the kind of affective experience that Plath 'fictionalizes' in her best poems. One might even go a step further and advocate for an unacknowledged register of feeling in Forrest-Thomson's late poetry that not only contests the authority of her male modernist models, but also anticipates contemporary critical discourses in experimental poetics, including the work of Riley and other practitioners and theorists.<sup>91</sup>

To begin with, we might identify a related, albeit more fully investigated, register of feeling in the Canadian poet Lisa Robertson's 2016 collection *3 Summers*, which grapples with the same tension between linguistic materialism and emotionality that Forrest-Thomson explores in 'Pastoral' and Plath confronts in 'Words':

When I learned grief, its arms changed  
 into the forelegs of an animal  
 and bark climbed upwards to sheath its hips  
 I also longed to be under  
 that bark, I longed for my own hoofs. Then  
 I threw off my green coat and I clenched my hands  
 and I throve  
 and thriving shamed me.<sup>92</sup>

In these lines, which channel both Plath's impossible yearnings ('I also longed to be under/that bark') and Forrest-Thomson's self-conscious punning ('I throve/and thriving shamed me'), linguistic 'play' and 'direct personal statement' appear inextricably entangled. Thinking and feeling twine like Daphne, producing the metaphorical conceit of yet another hoofed creature as the speaker expresses her passionate desire to become a 'grief' that she has already ostensibly 'learned' or cognized, but which

she nevertheless has yet to fully undergo (this is what both Emerson and Riley assert they cannot do). I wonder, also, if the stuttering advance of the awkward 'th' sound that Robertson traces across the second half of the passage, through 'throw', 'throve', and 'thriving' (a trio that likewise implies the humorous conjugation of an imaginary verb), rhythmically underscores the same kind of shame that Emerson experiences as he senses the shallowness of his 'grief'—an emotion that Robertson's speaker allegorizes as half animal, half tree, its 'forelegs' impeded by a 'sheath' of 'bark'. Through its linkage of thinking and feeling, or learning and longing ('When I learned [...] / I also longed'), Robertson's lines provide us with a contemporary model for how Forrest-Thomson's late poetry might mine an anti-confessional emotionality that, in at least one sense, is licensed by Plath.

Recent criticism also shows us ways in which such a reading might be both theoretically and practically tenable. Rei Terada's effort to uncouple 'emotion' from 'expression' in her book *Feeling in Theory* (2000); and, specifically, her argument that it is only the 'ideology of emotion' that 'diagrams emotion' in terms of expressivity, or as 'something lifted from a depth to a surface'; allows us, for instance, to read a poem like 'Pastoral' as tracing a poetry neither confessional nor purely formalist.<sup>93</sup> Riley's own *The Words of Selves* (2001) and Isobel Armstrong's *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000) advocate for a similar interpretation of linguistic emotion as crucially distinct from unmediated confessionalism. Observing similarities in the temporal structures of 'lyric guilt' and 'linguistic unease', Riley speculates freely about the possibility of 'a surface emotionality of language itself'.<sup>94</sup> And Armstrong advocates for a 'cognitive reading of emotion' that draws on the revisionary Hegelianism of Gillian Rose, arguing that 'Rose's new understanding of mediation releases discussion from the experiencing consciousness of the subject and moves to what consciousness does [...] [to] the structuring movement of thought and feeling'.<sup>95</sup>

It is essential to underscore, here, that both Riley and Armstrong make explicit reference to the poetry of Forrest-Thomson in their criticism; indeed, her poems seem to offer a kind of impetus or guide for them as they work to unfold their theoretical arguments. In the opening chapter of *The Words of Selves*, which focuses on the

'linguistic affect' inherent in 'self-description', Riley begins her subsection on 'linguistic emotion' by quoting lines from Forrest-Thomson's 'Pastoral' as an epigraph. And in the second chapter of *The Radical Aesthetic*, which takes up Rose's philosophical concept of the 'broken middle', Armstrong draws on Forrest-Thomson's 'Ducks & Rabbits' poem (published in *Language-Games*) in what she explains is 'a choric way, to punctuate a developing thesis'.<sup>96</sup> In one of these italicized interludes, Armstrong explicitly advocates for Forrest-Thomson's poetics as capable of bridging the gap between thinking and feeling, or emotion and knowledge. She asserts: '*An epistemic passion fuses emotion and cognition inseparably. Forrest-Thomson recognizes the hybridity of emotion-knowledge in her Wittgensteinian footnote: understanding is "half visual experience, half thought"*'.<sup>97</sup> This 'choric' reading of Forrest-Thomson clearly contributes to Armstrong's assertion later on that, rather than merely focusing on the 'prosody of the body', we ought to explore '*the reproduction of the conditions of affective life within the text itself*'.<sup>98</sup> For Armstrong, the 'struggle for form' itself then becomes a 'condition [...] of arousal', at once aesthetic and indivisible from feeling.<sup>99</sup> As Farmer notes, this 'aesthetics of the "broken middle"' involves 'an affective and intellectual negotiation of the will to aesthetic closure with the simultaneous acceptance of excess'.<sup>100</sup> Forrest-Thomson's theory of 'poetic artifice' arguably remains circumscribed by categories defined by the 'broken middle' of modernity. Yet poems like 'Pastoral', and, to a lesser extent, 'Cordelia', appear to derive from a less easily codified poetic impulse and to seek out what we might describe as a more 'radical aesthetic'.

Keeping in mind these formulations offered by Terada, Riley, and Armstrong, all of whom productively work to uncouple emotion from uncomplicated, monoglossic expression, let us turn, finally, to Forrest-Thomson's 'Canzon: *For British Rail Services*'. The first six-line stanza verges on the kind of 'direct personal statement' that Forrest-Thomson so adamantly objects to in her review of *Winter Trees*, as evidenced by affirmations like 'I know', 'For myself', and 'I doubt':

I know I am not the only to suffer the pains of love.  
 But this I also know: that each who loves thinks it so.  
 For myself I can only say,  
 I doubt if any other

Has suffered more than myself  
From this overloved desire.<sup>101</sup>

Later on in the poem, the possibility of 'direct personal statement' is partially affirmed through lines that seem to operate according to the sentimental lure of the popular ballad: 'I desire to love/You and be loved by you'. Here we might think of the overdetermined complacency of a lyric like 'I will love being loved by you', which concludes Oscar Hammerstein's song 'I have dreamed', written for the Broadway musical *The King and I* and famously 'covered' by Frank Sinatra. Yet apostrophic address in 'Canzon' is undercut by the foregrounding of 'love' with 'desire', a move which indicates that this statement is not really about empathetic communion or intimacy. Rather, a narcissistic form of longing seems to displace the possibility of 'love' altogether, for we are met, yet again, with the strange admixture of linguistic voracity ('so much', 'so much') and ironic distance ('I desire [...] you/Who cancel out my play') previously observed in 'Cordelia':

I desire to love  
You and be loved by you  
Who cancel out my play  
Being so much another  
Being so much yourself  
Away from my require.<sup>102</sup>

This paradoxical comingling is underscored by the way in which the verb 'require' is awkwardly employed as the final grammatical object of the stanza, thereby gaining belated primacy over the difficult 'You' who is 'so much another'. What happens, this poem finally seems to ask, when a specific desire for the equitable division of love's labor is overwhelmed by a need or 'require' that exceeds the declarations of its possessive speaker?

## Conclusion

*Poetic Artifice* takes the risk of presenting Sylvia Plath's poems, not as confessional, but, rather, as 'exponents of Artifice', as works of art that clearly indicate their own 'unreality'.<sup>103</sup> Such a reading not only belies the extent to which Forrest-Thomson modifies her views of certain aspects of Plath's writing; it also challenges us to

reconsider the way in which we adjudicate the value, and objectives, of Forrest-Thomson's own poetry. From the vantage point of the present day, it is clear that Forrest-Thomson did not allow herself a way of conceptualizing the tension between the affective and impersonal qualities that together, with her propensity for formal experimentation, define her poetics. Instead, in keeping with the post-structuralist vogue of the moment, and also as a means of pushing back against the expressive confessionalism that she found so problematic in Ted Hughes, as well as in 'Messers. Lowell, Berryman, Gunn, Davie, Larkin, Alvarez, Hobsbaum and Mrs Sexton', she choose not to theorize the relationship between the avant-garde experimentalism of her poetry and the agonistic 'I' that so often pervades it.<sup>104</sup> In this article, I have therefore sought to extrapolate this theoretical gap in order to suggest that she was crucially attracted to capturing, and articulating as poetry, a register of affective experience that she observed in Plath's late poems, and which Riley, for instance, has more recently described as 'linguistic emotionality': a speculative concept that might allow us to rethink the relation between Forrest-Thomson's poetics and aesthetics. 'My very self-description, even if it looks like my own confessional intimacy, has been sent to me by invitation', Riley argues, for 'I'm steeped in the world's words already [...]'.<sup>105</sup> Forrest-Thomson's poetry discloses this same impossibility of extricating oneself from the 'world's words', from its 'kicks' and 'larks', its 'power to hurt', and its cheapening of 'overloved desire', even if she was unable, or unwilling, to theorize the 'linguistic wound' she writes: 'You check my every move/By being what you will do/And not what I could say'.<sup>106</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. Gareth Farmer (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), p. 221. All citations are taken from this most recent version and not from the 1978 version published by Manchester.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Perloff, 'Twentieth Century Poetry', *Contemporary Literature* 21:2 (1980), p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'Artifice of Absorption', *A Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 10 (see footnote).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Perloff, 'Twentieth Century Poetry', p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> This archive was established at Girton College, Cambridge in 2013 after Jonathan Culler donated the majority of her papers to the College in 2012. It has recently been expanded to include books

from Forrest-Thomson's personal library, which were donated by the University of Birmingham in 2015.

- <sup>9</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 222.
- <sup>10</sup> Rose especially takes issue with John Holbrook's 1976 study *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and Existence* for turning Plath into a clinical case study (Holbrook's book was circulated in manuscript form among analysts), and she argues that his work is 'supremely representative of the sexual imaginary precipitated by Plath's work'. In contrast to Holbrook and many others, Rose works to address the 'fantasy' surrounding Plath 'without [...] turning her into a case'. She believes that 'we need a conception of [Plath's] writing as neither marshalled nor fragmented, neither surplus order nor a hysterical body pouring out of itself'. A similar desire is at play in *Poetic Artifice*, although its methods are markedly different. See Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 2014), pp. 17, 14.
- <sup>11</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 226.
- <sup>12</sup> In *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Jacqueline Rose notes that '[Al] Alvarez places Plath, along with Robert Lowell, at the forefront of a new movement of poetry which he calls "Extremism". He sets this movement against what he sees as the middle-class, welfare-state gentility of Britain after the war. Plath and Anne Sexton were the only women poets included in Alvarez's 1966 revised edition of his anthology, *The New Poetry*, first published, as part of his definition of this type of writing, in 1962' (21).
- <sup>13</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'Irrationality and Artifice: A Problem in Recent Poetics', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 11:2 (1971), p. 127.
- <sup>14</sup> See Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 15–21.
- <sup>15</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 388 (IV.121).
- <sup>16</sup> Forrest-Thomson, 'Irrationality and Artifice', p. 126.
- <sup>17</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Language-Games* (Leeds: School of English Press for University of Leeds, 1971), p. 33.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 168, 143.
- <sup>22</sup> experiment, n.'. OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:3578/view/Entry/66530?rskey=g21LtA&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 12, 2017).
- <sup>23</sup> experiment, v.'. OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:3578/view/Entry/66531?rskey=g21LtA&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 12, 2017).
- <sup>24</sup> Judith Butler, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche', *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 42.
- <sup>25</sup> Gareth Farmer, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson: Poet on the Periphery* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 137.
- <sup>26</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 2000), p. 136.
- <sup>27</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 1/5/6.
- <sup>28</sup> As is now well-known, despite being aware of Plath's intended sequence for the *Ariel* poems, Hughes decided to alter the order, omitting twelve poems and adding others. Had *Ariel* been published in accordance with Plath's vision, it would have opened on the word 'love' and ended on the word 'spring'. See Marjorie Perloff, 'The Two Ariels: The (Re)making Of The Sylvia Plath Canon', *The American Poetry Review*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1984), pp. 10–18.



- <sup>29</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 1/5/6. This is my transcription of Forrest-Thomson's annotation to her copy of Plath's *Winter Trees*. I am indebted to Gareth Farmer for helping me to decipher Forrest-Thomson's handwriting in this note.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Winter Trees* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 42.
- <sup>35</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 1/5/6. For this line from 'Three Women', also see Plath, *Winter Trees*, p. 49.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Language-Games*, p. 34.
- <sup>38</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 4/3/2/7. This typescript of Veronica Forrest-Thomson's unpublished review of Sylvia Plath's *Winter Trees* is 5 pp. total. Quotation taken from p. 1.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Forrest-Thomson is quoting Lowell's introduction to Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (New York: Harper Collins, 1961), p. viii.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Forrest-Thomson quotes Plath's statement that 'one should be able to control and manipulate experience' from a 1962 interview with Peter Orr, which Forrest-Thomson does not cite. It can be found in *The Poet Speaks: Interviews with Contemporary Poets Conducted by Hilary Morrish, Peter Orr, John Press, and Ian Scott-Kilvery* (London: Routledge, 1966). She is responding to Orr's question: 'Do your poems tend now to come out of books rather than out of your own life?'
- <sup>46</sup> Plath, *Winter Trees*, pp. 17–19. Reproduced in Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 224.
- <sup>47</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 4/3/2, p. 3.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Forrest-Thomson's positive take on the relationship between 'fictionalization' and poetic language runs counter to Jonathan Culler's more recent assertion that lyric ought to be understood as a non-fictional linguistic event. Rejecting the notion of pure fictionality, he asserts: 'To claim that lyric is not, at bottom, a form of fiction seems a significant advance and in particular helps to identify the disadvantages of the most prominent current theory of lyric, which treats the poem as a speech act of a fictional persona: the fictional imitation of a real-world speech act'. See Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 7.
- <sup>57</sup> Plath, *Winter Trees*, pp. 34–5.

- <sup>58</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 4/3/2, p. 5.
- <sup>59</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 41.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>62</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 225.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- <sup>64</sup> Farmer, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson*, p. 192. Farmer also proposes that we see something similar happening in the phrase 'limpid eyelid', which concludes Forrest-Thomson's final poem, 'Richard II': '[...] the phrase ["limpid eyelid"] presents an "eye" (I) which is clothed by the "eyelid" of perception's negation' (193).
- <sup>65</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 226.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84–5.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>70</sup> Girton College Archive, Cambridge, Papers of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, GCPP Forrest-Thomson 4/2/2. This is a Xerox copy of the original 'Pomes' notebook which Jonathan Culler lent to Anthony Barnett in June 1989. This notebook covers dates circa 1969 – circa 1973, and the poem 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is penned towards the end of the notebook, so it was likely written in 1973.
- <sup>71</sup> Forrest-Thomson, 'Cordelia: or "A poem should not mean but be"', in *Collected Poems*, edited, with notes and variants, by Anthony Barnett (Exeter: Shearsman Books in association with Allardyce Book, 2008), p. 156. For ease of reference, I do not cite the page numbers of the poems from the Omens Poetry Pamphlet, but rather from the *Collected Poems*.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>73</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997), p. 916 [III.v.2–3].
- <sup>74</sup> Forrest-Thomson, 'Cordelia', p. 156.
- <sup>75</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 226.
- <sup>76</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 1720 [III.iv.27–8].
- <sup>77</sup> Forrest-Thomson, 'Cordelia', p. 156.
- <sup>78</sup> For a slightly different and expanded angle on 'Pastoral' in relation to 'pastoral' and 'parody', see Farmer, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson*, pp. 136–39.
- <sup>79</sup> Forrest-Thomson, 'Pastoral', p. 125.
- <sup>80</sup> Thanks to Peter Nicholls for calling my attention to this resonance.
- <sup>81</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 85.
- <sup>82</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Experience', in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, selected and edited by Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 200.
- <sup>83</sup> Denise Riley, *Say Something Back* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 6.
- <sup>84</sup> Sharon Cameron, 'Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience"', in *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 54.
- <sup>85</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 181.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* Farmer helpfully parses the 'word world' relation in an extended editorial note to *Poetic Artifice*: 'In the 1978 edition of *Poetic Artifice*, the word, "word", appears instead of the correct, "world". [...] Given Forrest-Thomson's persistent and dogged insistence on poetic artifice making the language used in poetry (and contained in poetic form) as creating a "distanced" aesthetic realm [...], as well as her whole-

hearted subscription to linguistic mediation of the world and thought (*pace* Wittgenstein and post-structuralism), the accident of the use of “word” instead of “world” is prescient’ (181). This is especially the case, he observes, in light of the poem ‘Pastoral’ and its ‘linguistically wounded’ foal (181–82).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> For a related discussion of Riley and Forrest-Thomson, see Farmer, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson*, p. 138.

<sup>92</sup> Lisa Robertson, *3 Summers* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2016), p. 24.

<sup>93</sup> Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the “Death of the Subject”* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 57. In the opening paragraph of her chapter on ‘Linguistic Unease’, Riley argues for ‘a surface emotionality of language itself which is carried, simply and broadly, on that level, and that this is somehow acutely in play when it comes to writing; that there’s a lyrical guilt as well as a linguistic unease, the two knotted into each other through the curious temporal effects common to both’ (57).

<sup>95</sup> Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic*, pp. 115–116, 17.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>100</sup> Farmer, *Veronica Forrest-Thomson*, p. 131. For an additional outline of Armstrong’s application of Rose’s concept of the ‘broken middle’ to post-modern theory and aesthetics, and, specifically, to Forrest-Thomson, see pp. 131–132, 188.

<sup>101</sup> Forrest-Thomson, ‘Canzon’, p. 150.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice*, p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>105</sup> Riley, *The Words of Selves*, p. 33.

<sup>106</sup> Forrest-Thomson, ‘Canzon’, p. 151.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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