

GEORGE H. THOMSON

Harold Fromm

After the publication of her biography of Dorothy Richardson in 1977, Gloria Fromm moved on to what was to be called *Windows on Modernism*, a major endeavour involving years of work to produce a collection of Richardson's letters. Sometime around 1982-3 Gloria stumbled on a piece of writing by or a bibliographical allusion to George H. Thomson in connection with George's own burgeoning work on Richardson, triggering a snail-mail correspondence between them bolstered by phonecalls between our residence in North Barrington, Illinois, and his home in Ottawa, Canada.

My memory is that their first actual meeting subsequently took place at one of the annual conferences of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in Chicago, which also introduced us to George's wife Dorothy, both of them academics at the University of Ottawa. What ensued were an overnighter at our home after one of the conferences as well as our visit not long after to their comfortable house on the Rideau canal in Ottawa.

But for me, a deeper personal relationship with the Thomsons in general and George in particular did not really begin until after Gloria's death in 1992, when George and Dorothy drove from Ottawa to North Barrington to spend a week working in Gloria's study exploring (with their meticulous scholarly skills) all of the papers in her file cabinets and the books on her shelves. We were fortunate to own a photocopying machine that enabled George to copy a pile of documents to take back to Ottawa where, by then, his own intensified work on Richardson was moving into high gear as he assumed the mantle he implicitly inherited from Gloria as a result – her ideal successor.

For George and me the project was inevitable: Gloria had met in San Francisco with the University of Georgia Press in 1991 at the

last MLA conference she and I attended together, where her proposal for *Windows on Modernism* received enthusiastic endorsement. Her manuscript was in an advanced stage but was nevertheless in need of close to two years of work as George and I put our heads together exploiting the rapid exchanges made possible by the newly available email technology. Without George's almost fanatical biographical and bibliographical skills, the extensive footnotes the manuscript badly needed as well as the tracking down of obscure historical details in the life and environs of Richardson would hardly have taken place. What was the restaurant Richardson referred to in one letter? Who was the nameless or actually named resident of Trevone that she alluded to in another? What was the tenor of the relationship between Rose Odle and Sheena Odle?

Fortunately, I was able to give George a great deal of firsthand impressions, since I had met and come to know many of the principals in the Dorothy Richardson story during the years Gloria and I were visiting the UK on research missions. Moreover, George and Dorothy read many hundreds of letters in our files from Owen Wadsworth, Norah Hickey, Pauline Marrian, and many others – about which I was able to supply details. (These letters are now at the Ransom Center at the University of Texas.)

The Thomsons visited me twice since my move to Tucson in 1998 and I have flown to Ottawa three times, been hosted at their house, wined and dined, taken around to myriad old and new landmarks, the parliamentary buildings, the National Gallery, the Canadian Museum of History, and the heart of downtown Ottawa with all its charm.

Though we talked much on the phone and exchanged many emails, George and I never met in person again after his wife Dorothy's death in 2009. But I keep having momentary flashes of wanting to talk to George, even as I think with regret of our final conversation not long before *his* death, when the damage of a stroke had drained all his ebullient affect.

I owe it all to Dorothy M. Richardson.