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## Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

# Following Manson: Papers from the 2017 Peter Manson Symposium at the University of Glasgow

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A brief introduction to the work of Peter Manson and the papers delivered at the 2017 Glasgow symposium dedicated to his work.

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**Keywords:** Introduction; Articulatedness; Pareidolia; Peter Manson

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Peter Manson (1969-) is a poet and translator of poetry from Glasgow. He is the author of several volumes of poetry including *For the Good of Liars* (Barque Press, 2006), *Between Cup and Lip* (Miami University Press, 2008), *English in Mallarmé* (Blart Books, 2014) and *Poems of Frank Rupture* (Sancho Panza, 2014), and of the prose-work *Adjunct: an Undigest* (Edinburgh Review 2006; ubuweb 2001). Recent poetry includes *Factitious Airs* (Zarf editions, 2017) and a collaboration with Mendoza, *WIND-SUCKERS & ONSETTERS: SONNOTS for Griffiths* (MATERIALS, 2018). Manson is also a translator of poetry from French: his translation of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Poesies*, twenty-five years in the making, was published as *Stéphane Mallarmé: The Poems in Verse* in 2013 (University of Miami Press). Further translations include Mallarmé's *The Marrying of Hérodiade* (Free Poetry, 2016) and early poems by Théophile Gautier, *Darkness* (2018). With Robin Purves, Manson co-edited the poetry magazine, *Object Permanence*, from Glasgow, between 1994 and 1997, establishing vital transatlantic links between experimental poets from the UK and Ireland and the US. In October 2017, a symposium dedicated to Manson's poetry and translations was held at the University of Glasgow, including an evening of celebratory readings and music, and a poetry reading by Manson. This special issue of the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* collects essays extending many of the papers given that weekend.

This editorial is in three parts. First, Ellen Dillon discloses the personal impact of her compulsive engagement with Peter Manson's work on her life as a reader and scholar, then Tom Betteridge reads 'Gray Squirrel' from Manson's early pamphlet *Birth Windows*.<sup>1</sup> These are followed by an introduction to each of the seven essays collected in this special issue.

Many thanks to The Andrew Tannahill Fund for the Furtherance of Scottish Literature, The W.P Ker Fund, the Scottish Network of Modernist Studies and the School of English, Dublin City University for their support. Thank you also to everyone who contributed music, readings and papers to the Peter Manson symposium, and to all of the attendees. Thanks especially to our co-organiser Colin Herd for working tirelessly to accommodate the symposium at the University of Glasgow, to Robin Purves for his extraordinary plenary talk, and to Denise Bonetti and Maria Sledmere for their report on the weekend's events. Finally, our deepest gratitude to Peter Manson for his generosity, solidarity and inspiration, and for the poetry. We are also grateful for permission to use his artwork and fractals in this issue.

### **'Against boredom, for The Boredoms': an attempted introduction to Peter Manson**

My half of this introduction marks the end point of over six years spent immersed in the work of Peter Manson, whose poetry and translations were central to my PhD research. For this reason, writing my part has been unexpectedly difficult, as I have found myself wanting to write more than it is possible to say in half an essay in one single human language. Although this has proven frustrating, not least to my co-author and editors, it seems somehow fitting for its subject. There is nothing more exquisitely meaningful to me than Peter's work, and its strange beauty lies in an excess of meaning that makes any attempt to give a global overview of it feel like trying to explain human language itself from a vantage point outside of language. Reading this work has taught me to read more closely than I would previously have imagined possible. While it seemed impossible to get far enough outside the work to scan it from above, so to speak, getting lost inside a single poem and spending a long, long time learning to move around in its net of carefully-textured layers seemed a better way to go.

On several occasions since finishing my thesis I have heard people, in different conversations and different countries, describe being moved to tears by a Peter Manson poem. This seems to occur most often in the context of a reading or recording. In the face of work that elicits full-body responses from tears to gales of laughter to the sensation of fizzing right out of one's own skin, shaping coherent reactions in words of standard human language is difficult. That the authors of these essays have managed to do so seems, in retrospect, miraculous. In a way, the musicians and poets who contributed to the symposium's evening of performances had the less impossible task. It somehow seems fitting to respond with music or poetry to a kind of magic that comes alive in Manson's work and that fights valiantly to elude scholarly explication. Sarah Hayden's lecture-poem captured this dilemma with perfectly mansonian levels of self-deprecating hilarity. From Vicky Langan's DJ set to Food People's virtuoso musical reworking of 'Sourdough Mutation', via poetic responses from Jow Lindsay Walton, Nicky Melville, Sarah Hayden, John Hall, Mendoza and Nat Raha, the joyously generative potential of engagement with Manson's work resonated.<sup>2</sup>

As often proves to be the case, Manson himself has offered the most considered overview of the complexities of his own work. In an interview prior to reading at Sarah Hayden's *Entropics* series in Southampton, he offered the following primer to his potential reader in answer to the question 'What is your work for, and what is it against?':

It is for complexity, for sensory and semantic overload, for humour, maybe particularly the slapstick humour of linguistic mishap, for demonstrating the personal and even emotional continuity that underlies all the mess and blurt and dislocation – not a deodorised avant-garde, but a writing that emerges from the crises and particularities of one body and as many minds as will fit in it. It is against the poem as a small, luminous narrative vignette, against decorative simile and metaphor, against boredom. For The Boredoms.<sup>3</sup>

It honestly feels presumptuous to elaborate on what is already the most perfectly succinct, moving and hilarious introduction to this work. All I can add is that this writing, emerging from one body and its many minds, creates space for itself within other bodies. Within these other bodies it unfolds its words and worlds, opening and expanding minds as it goes. Sometimes this opening unleashes tears and laughter. Sometimes it is a full-body fizzing. Sometimes it is the compulsion to spend four years obsessively rereading the same poem in an attempt to keep the greatest number of possible meanings in play at one time, convinced that some undreamt of palace of meaning will take shape from the fragments of sonic and verbal matter. I don't know any other work in a language-based artistic medium that is so generative of feeling and unexpected meaning within the minds and bodies of its readers.

My own first encounter with Manson's work was in a review of his translation *Stéphane Mallarmé. The Poems in Verse* in 2012. The review quoted his translation of a line that had obsessed me since my teens, 'Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore', rendered as 'Abolished bauble inanely echoing'. It captured a wry wit that's often smoothed out of Mallarmé in translation, while preserving a great deal of the line's dense sonority. This set me off in search of Manson's translations, a quest that turned into an apprenticeship in the contemporary innovative poetry of Britain and Ireland, a field of which I had been entirely ignorant up to that point but one that has become my home in the years since.

This is Manson's greatest gift: readers might find a way into his work through contemporary British innovative poetry, via Goldsmith and Dworkin's anthology of conceptual poetry, in the context of the company of poets here and across the Atlantic with whom he shares affinities, or through an interest in twenty-first century permutations of Oulipian constraints. The shape the work takes on for the reader will, at first, be formed by the angle from which they approach it. But the reader who responds with reciprocating openness and generosity will find their world infinitely expanded. This encounter offers the occasion for a never-ending apprenticeship. In a blog post on his residency at 'Little Sparta', Manson made the following statement about his own work:

I suppose my basic working fantasy as a language artist is that I might be able to make a work of some complexity whose meaning would largely arise from the shared matter of the language, the meanings of words that we could all be expected to know and their patterned interaction as the poem, a thing to be sounded out time and again but never completely known, not replaceable by anyone's idea of it.<sup>4</sup>

It is a sentiment that's echoed in my head on more than one occasion as I have found myself guiltily trying to pin down fleeting references to pigments and thwarted pop stars in 'Sourdough Mutation'. The guilt is assuaged somewhat by the knowledge that there is no one reader whose idea of Manson's work could be commensurate with the work itself. All readings are provisional, constrained by the frame they're viewed through and the reader doing the viewing.

In the afterword to *The Poems in Verse*, Manson expressed the hope that, in the choices governing his acts of translation he had been able to limit himself to what he described as 'a permissible minimum of pareidolia'.<sup>5</sup> Pareidolia, the act of discerning familiar patterns or shapes in unrelated sense data, may be an unusual phenomenon to evoke in the context of literary translation, being more often associated with cloud-monsters or Jesus's face in baked goods, but it is a useful concept to keep in mind when engaging with his translations and his own poems. The mind seeks form, and when confronted with seeming formlessness we try to find familiar shapes and patterns. The beauty of reading and listening to Manson's poems is that these patterns have been painstakingly woven into their visual and sonic fabric for the reader to trace, following the path that brought them to the poem in the first place. One of the great joys of the symposium was the chance it offered to follow fellow poets and scholars along their paths made by reading Peter Manson.

### **Following 'Gray Squirrel'**

During his set for UnAmerican Activities #6 (hosted by Queen Mary University in 2014), Peter Manson read several poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Prefacing his reading, which is available to listen to on Andrea Brady's Archive of the Now website,

Manson says that he loves, in his words, the 'articulatedness' of the Hopkins poems; 'I love the way they feel', he continues, 'when I *speak* them'.<sup>6</sup>

'Articulatedness' is a quality that speaks to the active dynamism of the verb 'to articulate' rather than relatively instrumental, eloquent, 'articulate' speech. In phonetics, 'to articulate' refers to the physical production of phonemes in the interaction of breath, tongue, palette, teeth and lips, and the channelling of breath by the consonants that interrupt, condense, or propel forward vowel sounds. 'Articulatedness' is a quality shared by poems that actively foreground the work of the vocal apparatus, secured at least in part by an intensification of the poetic contribution of language as sonic material and the importance of its activation in performance. However, 'articulatedness' also suggests the quality of 'having-been-articulated'. I want to speculate then that 'articulatedness', despite invoking the act of articulation, is a quality tied not to speech but to writing; 'having-been-articulated' is a quality of certain written poems, whether or not they have been performed.<sup>7</sup>

'Articulated' things are also wonky: the articulated bus, the articulated lorry. To be 'articulated' is to have a dynamic range of motion. To make a lorry 'articulated' allows it further extension, increases the load it can carry and the suppleness with which it drags itself around corners. In anatomy, to be 'articulated' is to have a pivot, rotary or trochoid joint. To have articulated joints is to be able to open jars of pickles or shake your head. 'Articulatedness', then, in poetry is about keeping active the dynamic, often contradictory, embodied forces we must sometimes efface in the transfer of 'articulate' speech.

As a naïve framework through which to read some of Manson's own poems, then, it has been helpful to me recently to think of the 'inarticulacy' of some of his work, which many of the contributors to this special issue explore, as being generatively accompanied by 'articulatedness'. This is a shape that appears to be present in Manson's own reflections on his writing process, not least in his interview with Tim Allen in *Don't Start me Talking* (2007): 'Eventually... I found a synthesis where I could use my formal interest in the language surface almost to "distract" myself from the often quite personal material being drawn underneath'.<sup>8</sup> The tense mutual implication of this 'personal material being drawn underneath' and its somehow audible

imprint, indirectly rendered in the material comprising the various language surfaces of his poems, is one of the primary impetuses behind Ellen Dillon and I's interest in Manson's work. In a roundtable discussion at the recent 'Therapy and Experimental Poetry' Symposium, organised by Vicky Sparrow and hosted at Birkbeck (September, 2019), and to which Ellen alludes above, this strange relation also arose as a primary factor in the peculiar and intense emotional experience of reading Manson's poems, with many delegates testifying to the 'therapeutic' effects their various readings had produced for them. In what follows I am going to performatively chart the development of one such reading, working through the first poem of Manson's early pamphlet *Birth Windows* (Barque Press, 1999), collected in *For the Good of Liars* (2006), and attempting in the process to examine some of the remarkable ways in which Manson mobilises the sonic material of language, and, speculatively, to what ends.<sup>9</sup>

#### GRAY SQUIRREL

One acts in progress ray-tracing  
these place values aver  
I see to excavate  
lidded intima the try-on  
the tiniest mouthful of git. I siphon—  
the blade allowed *what?*  
him in pathos  
heimatlos Dave-tracer  
his graceless bacillus  
laid open              green scree  
as in idiot not idea  
I be tree top the veering thought  
then the handle of this which the rat fell  
keen anvil, not ceiling  
alone it  
the samphire link ruptures  
the kernel scene

three two four nut operative  
 in the service of speech is availed of  
 the eye in saline, guttering  
 cell foam is closing its suction dump  
 years later  
 when all up  
 used service prevails  
 a lettrist innerspace Ribbentrop pact  
 began into seed  
 too cold to return to  
 centaur/peter/in-tray<sup>10</sup>

'Gray Squirrel' is *Birth Windows*'s opening poem. It is one of the few poems in Manson's oeuvre to my knowledge with these formal characteristics: short lines, a pervasive sense of collage, minimal punctuation, unanchored discrete sections allowed to meld into one another. They give an 'occasional' feel to this poem, as if we are witnessing the event of its writing, observing it unfold step by step; this is a poem with a strong sense of forward propulsion without the constraints imposed to varying degrees across much of Manson's other work.

One of the most straightforwardly odd things about 'Gray Squirrel', for example, is its plethora of half-rhymes, near homophones and tight sound patterns, which weave tighter together a series of otherwise ostensibly disparate threads. For example, there are some carefully woven word-strings in the poem that help to organise it at the level of sound, lending it a coherence in the ear that it otherwise appears to resist initially at the level of sense. When voicing and listening to the poem we experience a recapitulation of 'av' sounds and their modulation through 'values', 'aver', 'excavate', 'Dave', 'anvil', 'avail', 'prevails', and on the other hand, the brighter, open 'ay' sound running from 'Gray' through 'ray', 'place', 'blade', 'Dave', 'grace', 'laid', 'saline', and 'later'.

'Gray Squirrel' consistently returns to sound in order to begin itself anew. As well as the protracted word-strings drawing the poem together, then, there are also discrete sound clusters in the poem which appear, in this reader's fancy, to work

carefully through the five vowels. As well as the 'ay' string, we also have the cluster following 'graceless' on the E sound, through 'green scree', 'tree' and 'veering'. I is foregrounded initially through 'lidded intima' to 'git', then through the repeated 'id', occluded in 'laid' before baring all in 'idiot' and 'idea'. O is harder to make a case for, seeing as it is threaded all the way through consistently from 'One' through 'pathos', 'heimatlos', 'open', 'alone', 'foam' and 'closing' before its open-mouthed cry in the poem's penultimate line: 'too cold to return to'. U is made prevalent in the cluster of stressed syllables through 'rupture', 'nut', 'guttering', 'suction', 'dump' and 'up'. These clusters and strings perform coming into speech: acquiring language and learning the mechanics of its material activation in the vocal apparatus (the tongue given a full workout of the mouth, as Manson would have it). They also foreground the language surface's 'distractive' process of composition: many of these words are formed from the phonemes and sonic material of the words preceding them. 'green scree' seems to be formed from scanning 'graceless' forwards and backwards, for example, anticipating the prosody of 'Sourdough Mutation' (2014) elucidated by Greg Thomas in his article, included in this special issue, "Sourd-Muet": The Poetics of Non-Communication in Peter Manson's "Sourdough Mutation", and by my co-editor Ellen Dillon in her work on Manson and pareidolia.<sup>11</sup>

'Gray Squirrel' appears to begin by unpacking the etymology of 'squirrel', which can be followed back to the Greek '*skiouros*', from '*skia*' meaning 'shade' plus '*oura*', 'tail'. 'Ray-tracing' both recapitulates 'Gray' and reprograms the squirrel's 'shade-tail'. This idea of a creature seemingly propelled forward by its shade or shadow invokes two technical definitions of 'ray-tracing'. In computer graphics, 'ray-tracing' ensures accurate renderings of light refraction, reflection and shadow by 'tracing the path of light as pixels in an image plane'.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, 'ray-tracing' can refer to the tracing of radio signals either refracted or reflected by the ionosphere: which radio waves fragment on their way to their destination, and which ones are reflected back towards their source? (The sonic material of Manson's poetry is of course barely extricable from its visual instantiation: radio waves and light waves are subject to the same laws, and both can refract.) It is tempting then, as it often is, to read 'One acts in progress ray-tracing', as a shrouded declaration of poetic process:

the act of writing, in this poem, is resolutely *in progress*, moving forward step by uncertain step, attentive to shadows (of the unconscious, perhaps), and to language's capacity for refraction and reflection.

The tentative entry of the first-person pronoun, following the initial third-person subject, 'One', furthers this sense of precarious wandering: the first is 'I siphon—'. What needs to be 'brought up' by siphoning? The speaker is unable to simply play on the pipe (siphon is derived from the Greek for pipe, '*siphōn*'), they must suck on it, conveying fluency upwards and out from elsewhere. But it is feels important at this stage, given the manner in which our attention is consistently drawn to the sonic scraps, fragments and giblets that coalesce into words, that the '-phon' in siphon signifies 'sound', from its root in Greek, and more specifically a unit of perceived loudness, invoking the speaker's attempt to listen out for sounds emanating from elsewhere, from a condition of statelessness or eradicated homeland ('heimatlos'), alongside the perhaps dispiriting silence suggested by the protracted, flatlining em dash immediately following it. For now, I would just like to highlight the poem's preoccupation with the 'not-quite-surrealist' dialogue with the unconscious I mentioned above: the pun on 'id' seems clear from 'laid open [...]' to 'as in idiot not idea'. 'Dave', 'him in pathos', tracing away in exile, charting a course through the proliferating bacillus bacteria of the unconscious; 'green scree' merely the hillside rubble falling short of the *green screen*'s assured edges, the blank page on which many poets might seek to project a pre-verified 'idea'.

Sound, 'progress' and the unconscious are further elaborated at the poem's centre, where we find the second entry of the 'I':

I be tree top the veering thought  
then the handle of this that the rat fell  
keen anvil, not ceiling

'I' becomes a Gray Squirrel, listening out above the canopy, swaying in the wind, from atop the veering thought to 'handle'. I read these lines primarily as concerning attentiveness to sound. The pun on 'ear' in 'veering' suggests that the listening process by which thought comes, so to speak, is precarious, keeping an ear out for

unconscious elements, the ‘graceless bacillus’ of an ‘id-’ belonging to ‘him in pathos’. I read anvil, then, as the anvil of the middle ear, just beyond the eardrum, responsible both for receiving vibrations and transmitting them on to the stirrup, which meets the cochlea. The sound of ‘handle’ comes back in its near(ish) homophone, ‘anvil’, drawing the process of poetic naming, if we accept ‘handle’ as a synonym for ‘name’, under the apprehension of sound vibrations by the ‘anvil’ bone. Sound seems to be consistently foregrounded despite the poem’s latent but dynamic, shifting arguments. ‘Gray Squirrel’ establishes an indissoluble link between being attentive to unconscious matter via ‘listening’, and the transmission of that signal in sound via the auditory distraction offered by the movement from one word to the next.

In order to knit together all of these threads and start concluding some things, I want to focus a little on ‘samphire’. It seems important that samphire is both bacillusy and tree-toppy. There is a metonymical evolution of multiplying frondy-ness from the bacillus’ proliferation, through the ‘green scree’ and fractal-like ‘tree top’ to the ‘samphire link’. This coagulation of sense is evolved in sound too: we have another pun on ‘ear’ in ‘bacteria’, to join the ‘veering’ of the thought atop the tree, and, most importantly, a further reference to sound transmission in the ‘amp’ of samphire. This ‘amp’ also anticipates the ‘lettrist innerspace Ribbentrop pact|began into seed’. The 1940s French avant-garde movement Lettrism demanded a ‘new amplic phase in poetry’,<sup>13</sup> in which ‘direct auditory understanding’ is sought by ‘liberating poetry from prose’, emphasising, at the cost of ‘sense’, the oral, physical effects of sound, pointing towards pure sound symbolism perhaps. Referencing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR, ‘Gray Squirrel’ joins this immersion in language’s pure sonic material and its ‘vibrations against [our palettes]’ in a non-aggression treaty, destined to be broken, with ‘innerspace’ or reflective consciousness of self; one side, we are to suppose, violently claiming the territory of the other. The idea here might be that despite attending closely or primarily to the sonic material of language distractively, innerspace is nonetheless carried through in indirect form.

However, ‘samphire’ is most importantly another name for Peter Manson, which is the name of the poet, of course, but also the name of his father, who died when he was eleven months old, an event which is referenced with varying degrees of

directness from Manson's poems of the late nineties up to 'The Baffle Stage' in *Poems of Frank Rupture*. Samphire derives from the French *sampiere*, which means St. Peter's herb. In 'samphire link', then, Manson consolidates both an evolving image series concerning multiplicity and proliferation from bacillus onwards and the poem's preoccupation with sonics and listening (through 'amp'), now extended as a reference to the sonic properties of both his own name and the name of his late father. My route through the syntax of this section of the poem is 'alone, it, the samphire link, ruptures the kernel scene'. I read 'samphire link' then, given the explicit references to psychoanalysis throughout Manson's oeuvre, as a response to Jacques Lacan's theory of the-name-of-the-father, which, very broadly, posits that the child's entry into the symbolic realm, into language, into 'the social', is only guaranteed by the intervention of the father in the pre-symbolic union of mother and child. This element in Manson's work is explored by Robin Purves in 'A Distraction, during Peter Manson'<sup>14</sup> and in his article collected in this special issue, 'Peter Manson Fungus Chicken', which draws on his plenary talk from the Peter Manson symposium.

As the 'third' term, the father draws the child into language, socialising them, at the same time as they ban incest with their mother, establishing law, language and sociality in one fell swoop. But in lieu of a real referent for the father figure named 'Peter Manson', Manson's poems of this period, it is tempting to speculate, seem to posit the sonic matter of the name 'Peter Manson' as the bridge between pre-linguistic union and the child's stuttering, fragmenting entry into the social symbolic realm. In any case, as Purves suggests, by sharing the name of his father, Manson's own entry into language is characterised by absence and loss. Manson's poems seem to rehearse, stage and perform this entry into language via sonics again and again. For example, the poem's starting point, 'One', fragments into 'three two four nut operative' at a particularly beguiling point in the poem, which should be clue enough that 'three two four' is also another way of saying 'Peter Manson', posing here as the Gray Squirrel nut operative. An inversion of the riddle of the sphinx from the myth of Oedipus, 'Peter', as father, is indexed to 'three', the elderly person walking on three legs, 'Man-' the upright 'two' and '-son', the baby on 'four' legs. The inversion suggests this poem's movement towards childhood, perhaps to the

process of language acquisition, here to be thought only alongside sonic linkages to the name-of-the-father.

I want to start pushing a little beyond the (porous) bounds of this one poem, by returning to its centre. The line ‘keen anvil, not ceiling’ is especially interesting to me because it ties sonic material and the workings of the inner ear to birth and coming to language. When reading ‘Gray Squirrel’ initially I agonised over ‘not ceiling’, eventually annexing it with all of the other language in the poem that resisted most forcefully my desire to parse it – ‘the blade allowed *what?*’, ‘when all up|used service prevails’, etc. But then in an abortive attempt to write about *Birth Windows* as a whole I began to read more seriously the three translations of Mallarmé included in *Birth Windows*: ‘The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire’, ‘Summer Sadness’ and the second poem in Stéphane Mallarmé’s ‘Triptych’, ‘Surgi de la croupe et du bond’, here translated as ‘In Vitro’.<sup>15</sup> The line I found striking is ‘Moi, sylphe de ce froid plafond’. Manson’s unorthodox, generative translation in the version of ‘In Vitro’ in *Birth Windows* is ‘Me, sylph of the Petri dish!'; fifteen years later in his translation of the *Poesies*, Manson will revert to the relatively direct translation ‘I, sylph of this cold ceiling!’<sup>16</sup>

My understanding of some of the peculiar and engrossing ways in which Manson’s poems wield their sonic material then is in part dependent on the fanciful conviction that, in ‘Gray Squirrel’, ‘not ceiling’ is emphatic. It signifies an occluded Petri dish, not mentioned explicitly but present as the lidded housing for the bacillus, and later as the ‘in-tray’. The Petri dish is the clinical environ of birth or becoming, but the place of birth is resolutely auditory in this poem. It is obvious, perhaps, that ‘Petri’ is yet another name for Peter Manson, and it is quite clearly articulated in this poem by its sonic proximity to the final words: ‘peter/in-tray’. Just as the name ‘Peter Manson’ comes to signify only its own acoustic matter, and loss, the clinical place of birth signified by ‘Petri dish’ is the *sound* ‘Petri’.

So in the poem’s final line, a three-part exercise in the pun, we find ‘centaur/peter/in-tray’. Associations built on shared sound multiply, but the reader is invited to hold them together rather than deciding between them. The hybrid ‘centaur’ is also, of course the centre: the assertion of a unity and of a fundamental split are articulated at the same time; we might think back to the ‘samphire link’ both

rupturing the ‘kernel scene’ and circumscribing a place of birth; or of the ‘Ribbentrop pact’ as a kind of unified disjunction ‘begun into seed’. ‘Peter’ is clearly the name as well as the verb ‘to peter’, as in to peter out; part-assertion of one’s name, part dispirited acknowledgement of mortality, and finally absence. The poem also peters out, as the sound associations that give the ‘not-quite-surrealist’ unconscious its voice proliferate and then die off as the Petri dish bacilli do. Or, the poem peters out in the office ‘in-tray’, a message yet to be acknowledged, perhaps left forever unread – ‘no one listens to poetry’,<sup>17</sup> writes Jack Spicer. But ‘in-tray’ is also ‘entry’. The poem both ‘centres’ Peter Manson’s entry into language and signals the dissolution of the ego in the complex, distractive writing process sounding out both idiot and idea. This poem’s particular mode of inarticulacy, in its grounding in the sonic matter comprising its ‘articulatedness’, and in the privilege it affords to the transformation of acoustic matter, presents an experience, in the wake of loss, of something like the rebirth of subjectivity in sound.

### **Essays included in this special issue on Peter Manson’s poetry and translation**

Robin Purves’s essay, derived from his keynote address at the symposium, also centres Peter Manson’s entry into language while tackling concepts and methodologies that are central to an understanding of Manson’s work with a combination of deftness, humour and love that is entirely fitting to their subject. In its exploration of the interplays of mycology and psychology, it models the kind of close reading that yields unexpected riches when brought to bear on any aspect of Manson’s creative output, from his earliest visual creations through his translations and across the range of his prose and poetry. Any one moment or image can be mined for insight into the processes, materials and meanings underlying its creation, offering up tools to take on a wider-ranging voyage through Manson’s work. There is so much to take away from Purves’s essay that it is tempting to just be done with it and reprint it by way of introduction. In order to stave off potential *mise en abyme*, this overview will limit itself to gesturing at a group of insights of Purves’s that illuminate and echo central concerns of this collection of essays: the inextricability of sight and sound

throughout Manson's work, the use of a 'prosthetic I' derived from found sound and language, the deep and fundamental connection between negation and naming and, perhaps underlying all of these relations, the generative function of replacement, where new rightness is created by putting the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Stewart Sanderson's essay, 'Bright Discontinuities: Peter Manson and Contemporary Scottish Poetry', acknowledges that critical work on Manson tends to link his poetry to an international, or at least British, avant-garde, and sets out a compelling argument that situates Manson's work within a specifically Scottish context. Sanderson draws on Alice Tarbuck's analysis of the centrality of the rhythms, and more specifically the vowel sounds, of Glasgow English, to the material of Manson's poetry, yielding much of its strange beauty. He proposes Edwin Morgan's translations, inspired by 'a sense of close and deep obligation to the other poet', as a point of comparison with the range of Manson's Mallarmé translations, from the semantically faithful *The Poems in Verse* to the materially faithful experiments of *English in Mallarmé*. Sanderson also notes the importance of Manson and Robin Purves's journal *Object Permanence* in bringing work by Morgan and a host of such Scottish contemporaries as Tom Leonard, Drew Milne and Thomas A. Clark into the orbit of fellow experimental poets from outside Scotland. Sanderson makes a compelling case for Scottish poetry as one of Manson's many generative *milieux* for reasons far beyond mere proximity on the shelves of the National Library of Scotland.

Samantha Walton's article 'Slow Motion Cucumber Decay in Fridge' is concerned with the realisation of 'ecological thought' in poetry. Reading *Adjunct: an undigest*, Walton examines the ways in which this text, by recognising and reflecting on its own 'matter' as an object in the world, asserts its 'textual-material self-referentiality' in a way that foregrounds both language's emanation from matter and its status as matter itself. Writing from an ecocritical perspective, and engaging ideas from a wide-ranging, critical account of new materialism, Walton explores the various formal innovations by which *Adjunct* is thinkable as an example of 'textual recycling' and the manner in which they comprise an 'ecological act'; for Walton, *Adjunct* is text as compost. But Walton's article also contextualises the peculiar, bodily subjectivity

that resolutely holds sway across *Adjunct's* shards and fragments as a further ‘long-modernist’ destabilisation and disruption of the lyric I; following Donna Haraway, this subjectivity for Walton is also ‘compost-ist’. Text-as-compost, body-as-compost, subject-as-compost: *Adjunct* propagates, for Walton, a ‘transcorporeal’ kind of subjectivity that reveals the lyric I as a processual, porous ‘assemblage’, the enmeshment of the human in ‘an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster’.

Rebecca Varley-Winter’s essay, ‘Colouring écriture féminine in Peter Manson’s translations of Mallarmé’, begins by drawing on feminist colour theory, where connections are proposed between colour and the erotic in the writing of Audre Lorde, Pipilotti Rist and Meiling Cheng. She offers a parallel between the translator’s relationship with the sensual dimension of the source text and these writers’ erotics of colour. She reminds the reader that Kristeva proposed Mallarmé’s poetry, centred on multiple possible meanings, as the exemplar of *écriture feminine*, and goes on to suggest that translation, by keeping the source text’s multiplicity of meanings in play, occupies a space that is feminine. Varley-Winter then excavates the origins of Mallarmé’s signature colour, *l’azur*, before proposing that Manson’s translation choices work towards maintaining a tension between embodiment and disembodiment that is often smoothed out in overly-abstract renderings of Mallarmé in English. She traces this tension through Manson’s colour choices, especially ‘self-coloured cinders’ for what could be more prosaically rendered ‘monotonous ash,’ naming this fruitful drift between source and translation, after Manson, a ‘kinship in across’.

Greg Thomas’ essay, “‘Sourd-muet’: The Poetics of Non-communication in Peter Manson’s ‘Sourdough Mutation’”, also takes Kristeva’s reading of Mallarmé as a point of reference. Thomas finds Kristeva’s conclusions insufficient and sets out to offer a more political reading of Manson’s long poem, situating it in the context of the financial crises of 2007–2008. It sets out to distinguish the techniques employed in ‘Sourdough Mutation’ from practices employed elsewhere in Manson’s poetry and prose, suggesting that the former work’s extreme focus on language’s visual and sonic material properties serves as a carefully constructed barrier to literary expression. Thomas reads the poem’s title as a play on *sourd-muet*, or deaf-mute, and frames it as a

commentary on 'synaesthetic exchange' at the heart of Manson's twenty-year project of translating Mallarmé, making a convincing argument that 'Sourdough Mutation' is a form of 'supplementary creative labour' to Manson's more semantic Mallarmé translations. Thomas proposes that this work strains at the boundaries of subjective perception before suggesting that it is, in fact, better understood as a 'precisely controlled authorial metaphor', intended to mimic the forms of flawed and ultimately chaotic exchange that precipitated the global financial collapse of 2007–8.

Rob Kiely's article 'Null-Exit Pamphleteering, or #VALUE!' is also interested in the relation between poetry and the economy. Kiely reads fragments from Peter Manson's *Adjunct: an undigest* and 'The Baffle Stage' on the basis of the historical imbrication of writing and accountancy. Kiely commits throughout to unfolding 'the impact of ecological and economic relations on our lives and on our poetry'. The essay's initial focus is Manson's detournement, in *Adjunct: an undigest*, of one of Samuel Beckett's comments in 'Dante ... Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', 'Literary Criticism is not book-keeping': 'Actually,' writes Manson in *Adjunct*, 'literary criticism is book-keeping'. Kiely uses Manson's consistent references to Beckett throughout *Adjunct*, alongside its persistent registering of debts and credits, to question the relation between accounting as a 'tool for extracting value from others by allocating debt' and the practice of literary criticism; throughout, Kiely is especially interested in how Manson's poems engage the relation between meaning and debt. Reading *Adjunct* as in part a work of literary criticism, Kiely argues that it returns its reader often to the ways in which its author is subject to valorisation, but without submitting the subjectivity that emerges in the writing to accountancy's drive to commensuration and equivalence. *Adjunct* shears accountancy of its abstractions, and we are constantly recalled, Kiely argues, to the historical situatedness of the life of the author, and to the bodies and minds on which valorisation operates. Kiely then speculatively intensifies the connections between poetic form, the history of accountancy and value more broadly in his analysis of Manson's rhymed satire against his own ego, 'The Baffle Stage', arguing that rhyme, following Mayakovsky, can be read as a circuit of credit and debt, and, moreover, as an exploration of the 'lived constraints of austerity' imposed following the 2008 financial crash.

Finally, Callie Gardner's article, "Falling Awake": Peter Manson's Catachresis', explores the 'productive wrongness' of Manson's relatively recent poetry in *Poems of Frank Rupture* (2014) and *Factitious Airs* (2016). Gardner is committed to outlining the peculiar effects of Manson's errant/erroneous misuse of words, and more broadly to examining the capacity of poetries that incorporate this misuse aesthetically both to undermine the stifling effects of performative 'correctness' and its accompanying authority, and to fulfil the responsibility among poets to revitalise language. Gardner argues that the ancient rhetorical category of 'catachresis' – the deliberate misuse of words – helps us to understand the particular manner in which Manson's poems achieve these effects, and in the process draws a contemporary 'functional definition' of catachresis from Manson's sequence 'Sourdough Mutation': 'Knowing "how to pick names", but persisting in a semantically disordered manner'. Gardner discusses lingams, ambulant faeces and roses across sections conceptualising the lipogrammatic, rhetorical and grammatical operations of catachresis. Just as Kiely does with Beckett, Gardner draws important correspondences between Manson's poems and poetics and a significant poetic fellow-traveller, in this case Gertrude Stein, drawing on Quintillian and Putnam too in order to offer a rigorous account of catachresis's importance in reading productively wrong experimental poetries.

We hope that this collection of essays will suggest starting points to the reader as yet unfamiliar with Peter Manson's work, that those who are already readers might find some productive new paths to explore, and that all readers, following Manson, will discover that 'joy curls around meaning's painterly skitters.'<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay draws on two papers. The first is 'Following "Gray Squirrel": Reading Peter Manson's *Birth Windows*', given at the University of Nottingham Poetry Series, April 2018. The second is 'Articulatedness, Material and Mourning', given at the 'Therapy and Experimental Poetry' symposium at Birkbeck, University of London in September 2019. Thanks to Lila Matsumoto and Vicky Sparrow.

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete and eloquent overview of these performances, see Sledmere and Bonetti's review "Allowing one's metaphors to mix": Performances and Perspectives at the Peter Manson Symposium, University of Glasgow, 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017'. <<https://poetry.openlibhums.org/article/id/759/>> [accessed 05/03/20].

<sup>3</sup> <<https://entropicsblog.wordpress.com/peter-manson/>> [accessed 05/03/20].

<sup>4</sup> Peter Manson, 'Missing Data'. <<https://petermanson.wordpress.com/2016/09/19/missing-data/>> [accessed 05/03/20].

- <sup>5</sup> Peter Manson, in Mallarmé, S *The Poems in Verse* translated by P. Manson (Ohio: Miami University Press, 2012), 285.
- <sup>6</sup> A recording of this reading is available to listen to and download on Andrea Brady's Archive of the Now website: see <<https://www.archiveofthenow.org/authors/?i=59>> [accessed 21/01/2020]. See also a tangentially relevant discussion of the relation between the 'articulatedness of meaning' and 'emotional intensity' in George K. Zipf's *The Psycho-Biology of Language: An Introduction to Dynamic Philology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 203.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Articulatedness' might then sit alongside Charles Bernstein's insistence on *aurality* rather than *orality*, or the sound of *writing* itself rather than the 'speech' that distinguishes itself from it: 'By *aurality* I mean to emphasize the sounding of the *writing*, and to make a sharp contrast with *orality* and its emphasis on breath, voice and speech — an emphasis that tends to valorize speech over writing, voice over sound, listening over hearing. *Aurality precedes orality*, just as language precedes speech. Aurality is connected to the body—what the mouth and tongue and vocal chords enact—not the presence of the poet...', see Charles Bernstein, 'Introduction', in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–28, 13.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter Manson, and Tim Allen, 'Hold that Golem', in *Don't Start Me Talking* (London: Salt Publishing, 2007), 281.
- <sup>9</sup> See Tom Betteridge, 'Peter Manson's Language Surfaces', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 100(1) (2018).
- <sup>10</sup> 'Gray Squirrel', in *For the Good of Liars*, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> This forms the basis for chapter four of the unpublished PhD thesis *Abstraction in Contemporary Poetry: An Apprenticeship in Reading* (Dublin City University, 2019). <<http://doras.dcu.ie/22907/>> [accessed 05/03/20].
- <sup>12</sup> Jon Peddie, *Ray Tracing: A Tool for All* (New York: Springer, 2019), 40.
- <sup>13</sup> Isidore Isou, 'Characteristics of the New Amplic Phase in Poetry', trans. David W. Seaman. <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/letrist/isou-m.htm>> [accessed 05/03/20].
- <sup>14</sup> Robin Purves, 'A Distraction, during Peter Manson', <[https://www.academia.edu/13074799/A\\_Distraction\\_during\\_Peter\\_Manson](https://www.academia.edu/13074799/A_Distraction_during_Peter_Manson)> [accessed 05/03/20].
- <sup>15</sup> 'In Vitro', in *For the Good of Liars*, 18.
- <sup>16</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *The Poems in Verse*, trans. Peter Manson (Oxford: Miami University Press, 2012), 183–4.
- <sup>17</sup> Jack Spicer, 'Thing Language', in *my vocabulary did this to me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, eds. Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 373.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Twenty for Baselitz's '45" in *Between Cup and Lip* (Ohio: Miami University Press, 2007), 18.

## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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