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ARTICLE

"Sourd-Muet": The Poetics of Non-Communication in Peter Manson's 'Sourdough Mutation'

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This article explores the formal characteristics of, and some possible motivations for, what I call 'non-communication' in Peter Manson's 2014 poem-sequence 'Sourdough Mutation'. Initially, I consider the distinctions between the compositional mode which defines this sequence and those which had characterised Manson's previous poetry and prose – this distinction resting on a unique attentiveness in 'Sourdough Mutation' to the visual and sonic surfaces of language – before enumerating some of the grammatical, visual, and phonetic effects which generate this emphasis. I consider some potential influences on this aspect of the work, turning first to concrete poetry and secondly – and at greater length – to the Symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. The main critical contention of this article is that 'Sourdough Mutation' partly constitutes a formal homage to the grammatical and phonetic playfulness of Mallarmé's poetry, an homage which could not have been incorporated into the translations of that poetry which Manson was concurrently producing because of his primary focus as a translator on the work's semantic dimensions. Defining 'Sourdough Mutation' as 'neo-symbolist' on this basis, I consider some potential readings of the sequence's political significance. Like Julia Kristeva's reading of Mallarmé's poetry, the non-communicative register of 'Sourdough Mutation' might manifest a disturbance in the boundaries of the socially-mediated linguistic subject, with revolutionary implications. However, I acknowledge the tendency of this 'Kristevan' reading to lead to repetitive analysis of experimental poetry, and in conclusion offer an alternative, more contextually attentive "political" reading of 'Sourdough Mutation', presenting its processes of formal permutation as analogies for the systems of financial exchange which precipitated the 2007–08 economic crash.

Keywords: Peter Manson; Stéphane Mallarmé; symbolism; concrete poetry; sound poetry

Peter Manson's 2014 collection *Poems of Frank Rupture* is dominated by the long poem-sequence 'Sourdough Mutation', almost a hundred pages of initially very short verses, separated by bullet-points, whose size and complexity increase as various processes of grammatical, phonetic, and visual manipulation are enacted upon the text.[1] This is the final published result of an ingenious compositional mode which Manson had been working with since the late noughties, whose difference from those which define his previous work is perhaps one of the sources of 'rupture' indicated by the collection's title.

Speaking of his practice in an interview published in 2006, by contrast – just before work on 'Sourdough Mutation' had begun – Manson stressed the continuity of approaches between the types of work he had produced up until that point: on the one hand his verse-based practice – what he called his 'formal poetry' – and on the other the stochastically arranged, microscopic documentary prose of *Adjunct* (2005).[2] 'The same processes are at work in both kinds of writing: the formal poetry [like *Adjunct*] is often built on found language and is full of deliberately distracting word-collocations which mess with the reader's attempt to parse the text'.[3]

What the compositional mode of 'Sourdough Mutation' has in common with these other two, perhaps, is that tragi-comic materialism which Jeremy Noel-Tod ascribes to Manson's practice as a whole in an essay published in 2007:

> In its refusal of metaphysical consolations, the tenor of Manson's poetry is tragic. Yet its ideal (to remind us of our materiality) also recalls Bergson's mechanico-human definition of the comic: 'our attention is suddenly recalled from the soul to the body'.[4]

In a fundamental way, 'Sourdough Mutation' expresses this same desire to emphasise the material bases of poetic expression, thereby subverting any attempt to glean metaphysical insight from the text (as if poetic expression were the manifestation an immaterial soul or intelligence). But the difference is in the type of material base – the body, as it were – that Manson draws attention to in each case. Both the 'formal poetry' and *Adjunct*, that is, seem to emphasise the contingency of poetic or literary expression on particular moments of embodied cognition, whereby other fragments of thought and language are shown to be floating around the "literary" ones. It is,

in other words, partly the human body (especially the human brain), as the site of literary cognition, which is foregrounded. The aim, as Manson puts it, is to show that 'art is matter … it's marked by consciousness': 'I'd like art to approach the complexity of the human mind as closely as possible, if only to remind myself that things as complex as the human mind are materially possible'.[5] In 'Sourdough Mutation', by contrast, the body emphasised as the vessel of literary thought is that of language itself. In other words, rather than being jogged from transcendental speculation by bathetic word combinations suggestive of 'the complexity of the human mind', we are assailed by curious grammatical, phonetic, and visual tricks which draw attention to the marks on the page in front of us, and their implied renderings in sound, as further material containers for, and barriers around, literary expression.

As a preamble to clarification of this point, it is worth noting that many of these tricks are exclusively visual in effect, others exclusively sonic. A whole gamut would therefore be lost to both the textless listener and the silent reader, which is presumably why Manson's prefix to the poem-sequence imagines an ideal audience of '*speakers reading*'.[6] Reproducing an entire verse chosen not quite at random from around the middle of the sequence might give a useful sense of their cumulative impact:

•

toy yacht ungrateful
some emotional tome

comet tail garlic
split chloroform rag

outsourced ludicrous eel
over eyesource sister shunned

of yore arrived to bank
occlusive visual is well lucid

pellucid yod jealous idiot
toadies in pain step up

to the brie oche
choir be thought puppets

emetic ketamine enematheque[7]
•

Leaving the protean semantic imagery to one side for the time being, we might attempt to isolate and enumerate some of the techniques in play here and elsewhere in the sequence. One simple device employed throughout 'Sourdough Mutation', for example, is the re-grafting of parts of words onto other words positioned further down the page, as when the *o-m-e* of 'some' reappears in 'tome' and 'comet'. In other cases, word-sections are reversed before reinsertion: that same *o-m-e* is inverted to form the start of 'emotional', the first four letters of which – *e-m-o-t* – are flipped back round to make 'tome'. Scanning down the page, we find more subtle or disguised variations on the same effect: 'step up' in reverse, with the help of an extra *p*, become 'puppets'. At other points in the sequence, the two halves of a word are swapped around before reinsertion, as when 'alpine' reappears as 'pineal' in the verse below:

•
torn rain
from alpine
hen and
pineal chicks[8]
•

Or, what re-emerges in a later word is the *sound* rather than the spelling of a previous one:

•
aphorist fog hat

a fat forest hog[9]
•

In this poem, one of the shortest and most mesmeric in the sequence, 'a forest' appears not – or not primarily – to indicate the presence of trees, but as an almost-homophonic replacement for 'aphorist'. Camouflaging the permutational effect, Manson swaps round the opening letters of 'fog' and 'hat' to make 'hog' and 'fat', whose order of appearance is also switched, the two words dispersed across the second line leaving us – almost, it seems, by accident – with the arresting image of 'a fat forest hog'.

In some cases, there seems to be a more pronounced kind of visual play at work, whereby words and phrases don't reappear as grammatical reshufflings of previous ones but as literally flipped, mirrored, or otherwise visually manipulated versions of earlier graphic constructions. Attempting to parse the phrase 'debriding|no outward pram', we might latch on to the binding associations of birth and motherhood to explain the presence of the last word, but *pram* is also a near-perfect 180-degree rotation of *ward*.[10] Similarly, while the couplet 'bigger splash pool||=stye at the lash root' offers us the apposite closing image of a swollen eyelid, *lash root* appears not only to indicate the expected location of a stye, but also as a degraded visual repetition of *splash pool* (as that equals sign perhaps indicates): the *r* of 'root' seems like the vestigial or root-like form of the *p* of 'pool', the closing *t* like an *l* which has sprouted a pair of arms and crawled out of the water.[11]

Most of the lines just glossed certainly offer the kinds of 'distracting word-collocations' which Manson referred to in his 2006 interview. But these semantic connotations seem curiously like the by-product rather than the driver of the compositional process, which seems, to some extent, to have foregone semantic value altogether as a determinant of word-choice, the poem appealing primarily by the shimmering visual and auditory surfaces which the process generates. One obvious reference-point for such an approach to literary composition is concrete and sound poetry: in this sense, given that Manson has lived and worked in Glasgow his entire life, 'Sourdough Mutation' might be considered a contribution to that genealogy of Scottish visual and sonic poetry whose roots extend back past the 1960s experiments of Ian Hamilton Finlay, Edwin Morgan, and Tom Leonard to the mellifluous phonetics of, say, Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Water Music'.[12]

Without necessarily rejecting this nationally-oriented narrative, on the evidence just offered this piece has relatively little to do with the minimalistic variant of concrete poetry primarily associated with Scotland (thanks largely to Finlay's influential approach to the style) and far more to do with the so-called 'dirty concrete' associated with Bob Cobbing and other concrete poets based in London and the south-west of England from the 1960s onwards.[13] In interview with Allen, Manson described Cobbing's work in particular as a 'big influence', and Manson has a stronger biographical connection to this school of British concrete poetry, having published his first two collections through Cobbing's Writers Forum press.[14] Certainly, the techniques of visual and sonic permutation which define 'Sourdough Mutation' – generating the impression of an endless, prodigious, almost insentient process of growth and decay – seem to owe something to Cobbing's 'processual' poetics, by which endless visual and sonic versions of single poems were generated across years and decades, by an ongoing process of improvisatory performance and reworking.[15] The effects of rotation and reversal just outlined are also influenced, by the author's own admission, by Dom Sylvester Houédard's rotating and reversible poems, published in *Begin Again* (1975).[16]

As an exclusive interpretive framework for 'Sourdough Mutation', however, concrete poetics seems far too constrictive. At this stage, it might be therefore worth relaying a comment of Manson's during an interview in his flat in 2010, that the phrase 'sourdough mutation' was in part intended as a phonetic echo of the French term "sourd-muet", meaning "deaf and mute".[17] Not just the Francophone source, but the way the title both alludes to and, in a sense, offers the results of an idiosyncratic or laborious translation process, prompts us to consider 'Sourdough Mutation' in the alternative context of Manson's long-term project translating Stéphane Mallarmé's poems in verse, a two-decade-long endeavour finally coming to fruition around the time 'Sourdough' was written. Supporting that inference, the title of the collection in which the sequence appears, *Poems of Frank Rupture*, is built around a phrase – 'frank rupture' – lifted from Manson's version of Mallarmé's 'Canticle of Saint John', a poem describing the decapitation of St. John the Baptist.[18] Indeed, in offering this reference, the title places the collection in allusive relationship not just to Mallarmé's work, but to the wider era of symbolist experiment in poetry and painting, which pre-empts

the obsession of so many twentieth-century poets with musical and visual effects and synaesthetic exchange. The image of St. John's beheading, that is, is the subject not only of Mallarmé's 'Hérodiade' sequence – the three-part cycle incorporating the 'Canticle' – but also of paintings by Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavanne, for example, and of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, with its Aubrey Beardsley illustrations.[19]

It is likely, in fact, that the visual and sonic play of 'Sourdough Mutation' pays homage both to the renaissance of visual and sonic poetics during the 1950s–70s and to the first iteration of those experiments during the late nineteenth century. More specifically, the sequence seems to channel some of the creative impulses cultivated through the Mallarmé translation project, but which could not find expression in the published results of that project. In the afterword to his 2012 edition of Mallarmé's *Poems in Verse* – in which his translations finally appeared – Manson explained that they were, in the end, almost forced to be 'unashamedly semantic'.[20] With specific reference to the issue of rhyme, he writes:

> [R]hyme is one of the most powerful resources available to a poet engaged in original composition … as a means of moving forward into the potential space which will be the poem…. I don't think that rhyme is capable of playing anything like the same generative and exploratory role in the making of a translation. The semantic ghost of a completed poem in the source language already haunts the space of the translation – the translator knows what it is that has to be said, and in these circumstances rhyme can have only the negative function of distorting it in the service of virtuosic display.[21]

Extrapolating slightly, we might infer the statement that a poet composing original verse can allow the semantic content of language to be determined by pre-emptively imposed principles of phonetic and formal arrangement, whereas the translator's first duty has to be to that content itself. This is not to say that rhyming poetry cannot be translated into rhyming poetry, and so on, but working with poems of such polyvalent semantic qualities as Mallarmé's, it seemingly became impossible for Manson to find words which would remain faithful to all the original nuances of semantic meaning while simultaneously attending to the complex sonic and formal patterning of the work.

Manson's version of the 'Canticle of St. John', for example, is as 'unashamedly semantic' as his afterword implies:

as frank rupture
rather holds in check or settles
the old argument
with the body[22]

Here, by contrast, is Mallarmé's version of this stanza, that describing the moment of decapitation:

Comme rupture franche
Plutôt refoule ou tranche
Les anciens désaccords
Avec le corps[23]

In Manson's version, neither the perfect rhyme of 'franche'/'tranche', nor the assonance of 'désaccords' and 'corps', or the apparent shrinkage of one word into the other, are approximated. While the results certainly bears out Manson's aim of making Mallarmé 'sound like interesting modern poetry', this semantic fixation seemingly came to denote a certain inadequacy to task for their author.[24] This is implied by the various fringe projects spawned by work on the *Poems in Verse*, including *English in Mallarmé*, an alternative edition of the *poésies* in which every syllable except for those with English meanings is blanked out.[25] My thesis, in short, is that 'Sourdough Mutation' partly constitutes a similar kind of supplementary creative labour, mimicking the formal permutations epitomised by the movement from 'désaccords' to 'corps' in a way which could not have been incorporated into the work of direct translation.

Moreover, if we think about 'Sourdough Mutation' as a neo-symbolist poem, we can begin to skirt around the whole question of what it is supposed to *mean*. According to the symbolist credo which can be read into Mallarmé's 'Crise de Vers' ("Crisis in Poetry"), an emphasis on the extra-semantic dimensions of poetic expression might indicate a desire to cultivate – or at least to register as an impossible

ideal – what Mallarmé calls a 'supreme language', incorporating and transcending the modalities of other artforms, especially music:[26]

> The difference from one work to another offers as many lessons set forth in an immense competition for the true text, between the ages termed civilized or—lettered.
>
> Certainly I never sit down on the terraces to hear a concert without glimpsing amidst the obscure sublimity some sketch of one or other of humanity's immanent poems or their original state, all the more comprehensible for not being spoken, and I see that to determine its vast line the composer experienced that easy suspension of even the temptation to express it.[27]

The impression generated here, with self-conscious imprecision, is of a compulsion towards some eternally and objectively valid mode of expression, which would forego symbolic systems *per se*. That aim might seem to be emulated by certain passages from 'Sourdough Mutation', in which the process of visual and sonic mutation is interrupted by, or overlaid with, a strange, first-person voice emulating religious testimony (admittedly, in the below case, complicated by the fact that the first three lines are adapted from the 1971 Can song 'Mushroom'):[28]

> ….
>
> when first I saw
> the mushroom head
>
> dead though I was
> I saw that my caul be tanned
>
> and shade in the flash
> my gingko
>
> a poet
> tattooed[29]
>
> •

The formal-compositional engine continues to whir at this point, but this passage is less obviously characterised by visual and sonic trickery than those surrounding it. And in spite of the comically arcane quality – and the pop-cultural source – the sudden appearance of the lyric *I*, and of conventional tense and syntax, endows the passage with an earnestness of tone suggesting a half-serious yearning to cultivate some new-minted, trans-symbolic mode of address. This desire for expressive rebirth seems borne out in the reference to birth-cauls – amniotic sacks – in the fourth line, and in the closing image of the poet tattooed, which perhaps invokes an uncorrupted or unmediated language of the body: the word made flesh.

Of course, this reading messes with our sense of Manson the materialist, the authorial persona for which there is, tragically and comically, nothing beyond the plane of waking experience that poetry might aspire to access. There is no equivalent in the semantic field of 'Sourdough Mutation', for example, to Mallarmé's 'azure', that ascetically-defined 'beyond' or vanishing point of subjective cognition which both attracts and repel the poet's attention, compelling its synaesthetic adventures.[30] The semantic ballast of Manson's sequence, by contrast, is a hotchpotch of random words, phrases, and clichés, which seem to appeal because of their very earthly banality (I'm thinking, for example, of the way in which a Beatles song-title is buried in the phrase 'anxiety etiquette to ride peridot').[31]

However, this distinction between the two poets' work arguably rests on the most conservative possible analysis of Mallarmé's: the idea that its multimedia effects encode a kind of decadent mysticism. For Julia Kristeva, by contrast, the shattering of first-person univocal perspective in Mallarmé's poetry – partly through the foregrounding of language's formal and material qualities in a way which undermines its semantic values – is an instance of what she calls, in her 'Prolegomenon' to *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the 'explo[sion of] the subject and its ideological limits': '[b]y exploding the phonetic, lexical, and syntactic object of linguistics, this practice not only escapes the attempted hold of all anthropomorphic sciences, it also refuses to identify with the recumbent body subjected to transference onto the analyser'.[32] The mode of expression which Kristeva identifies here, and which she associates with 'a particular type of modern literature' – including the work of

Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, and Artaud[33] – does not involve the manifestation of some Platonic or Hegelian Ideal but the eruption into subjectively-configured expression of the Freudian drives of the pre-subjectified body, those underpinning Kristeva's notion of 'chora'.[34] This, in turn, has potentially revolutionary political connotations, because 'linguistic changes constitute changes in the *status of the subject*—his relation to the body, to others, and to objects'.[35] In a similar way, we might argue that that the apparent yearning towards a pre-symbolic language of the body in sections of 'Sourdough Mutation' indicates an ideologically-loaded straining at the boundaries of subjective perception, an attempt to access a non-subjective or even non-human cognitive space, which would disrupt humanist or anthropocentric sense while remaining fixed within an imagined material reality.

While keeping this argument in play, however, it is worth acknowledging that the Kristevan notion of revolution in poetic language has been subject to extensive critique, including – to take a recent example focused on British innovative poetry – by David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy. For these authors, critical accounts of experimental poetry which posit a Kristevan semiotic register as the basis for any and all semantic ambiguity or formal play risk the implication that 'all experimental literature is doing the same thing'. It thus:

> [R]isks minimising and marginalising its impact and playing into the hands of those who argue that the avant-garde is a repeatable style. The materiality/disruption argument becomes even more problematic when one attempts to attach it to ideas of revolutionary agency. How can something that can only be experienced and identified as disruption of an established order be the starting point for a radically different system?[36]

Bearing this in mind, I want in conclusion to posit another reading of 'Sourdough Mutation's' potential political significance, one more attentive to the social-historical context of its composition, and to the *particular* formal qualities of the metapoetic processes at play in the work: which, as we have seen, is defined by strung-out permutational linkages, carrying forward echoes or husks of previous linguistic constructions by burying them in new ones.

This reading is encouraged by Manson's remark, in an email sent in 2015, that 'a lot of [*Poems of Frank Rupture*] was written while watching the economy fall apart circa 2008', and proceeds on the assumption that the visual and sonic permutations of 'Sourdough Mutation' do not denote the explosion of the authorial subject, but constitute a precisely controlled authorial metaphor.[37] These almost pathologically locked-in systems of phonetic and visual interplay, that is, undertaken with little regard for their relationship to any semantic object – for the non-linguistic world which it is language's job to relay – might partly mimic those systems of myopic exchange which precipitated the global financial crash of 2007–08, by which particular monetary assets – say, not-yet-paid-off subprime mortgages – became more and more detached from any real-life source, and thus from any semblance of functional accuracy. As 'Sourdough's' patterns of linguistic exchange become ever more complexly self-referential towards the end of the sequence, some moment of collapse or rupture starts to seem inevitable. And it was, of course, a similar point of breakage in this system of exchange or onselling – the sudden disintegration of faulty representative systems, as debtors defaulted on payments and the chimerical nature of financial assets was revealed to frightened investors – that the rupture in global capital commenced. As systems of representation broke down all around him, the poet watched from the shade of his ginkgo, perhaps, sourdough mutating in the kitchen cupboard, and felt compelled to offer some tangential creative response.[38]

Notes

1 Peter Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', in *Poems of Frank Rupture*, by Manson (Brighton: Sancho Panza, 2014), pp. 9–95.

2 Peter Manson, *Adjunct: An Undigest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Review, 2005). Craig Dworkin explains that 'Manson constructed the book largely through the accumulation of a large quantity of source material, including diary-like jottings, quotidian observations, and a range of found material, from library catalogues to product packaging labels' (Craig Dworkin, 'Poetry Without Organs', in *Complicities: British Poetry 1945–2007*, ed. by Robin Purves and Sam Ladkin [Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2007], pp. 168–193 [172]). 'The placement of the sentences in *Adjunct* was made according to a random number generator, which determined their dispersal. Specifically, by multiplying the number generator's three decimal figure output by the number of pages in the project's notebook, Manson obtained a page number and a rough estimate of where on the page the entry should be placed' (Dworkin, p. 172).

3 Peter Manson, 'Hold that Golem' [interview by Tim Allen], in *Don't Start Me Talking: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*, ed. by Tim Allen and Andrew Duncan (Cambridge: Salt, 2006), pp. 276–86 (285).

[4] Jeremy Noel-Tod, 'Not Joking Exactly: Peter Manson and the Poetry of Crudity', *Chicago Review*, 53:1 (2007), 116–25 (p. 119).

[5] Manson, 'Hold that Golem', p. 282.

[6] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 9.

[7] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 64. In this and other cases, the second bullet-point in fact appears on the following page, doubling as the introductory bullet-point for the following verse.

[8] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 14.

[9] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 44.

[10] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 45.

[11] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 53.

[12] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Water Music, in *Scots Unbound and Other Poems* Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1932), pp. 5–9.

[13] Steve McCaffery has described dirty concrete poetry as involving, amongst other things, 'a preference for textual obliteration rather than manifestation' and 'a different tendency towards openness and closure'. With specific reference to Canadian poets of the 1960s–70s, he adds that 'it was the closure of the text, its reified condition as object, framed and/or paginated that was frontally engaged' by dirty concrete (qtd. in *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*, ed. by K. David Jackson, Erica Vos and Johanna Drucker [Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996], p. 400).

[14] Peter Manson, 'Hold that Golem', p. 278; Peter Manson, *iter atur e* (London: Writers Forum, 1995); Peter Manson, *me generation* (London: Writers Forum, 1997).

[15] Cobbing seemingly first used this phrase in relation to his own practice in the title of his 1982 collection *(Processual) One* (London: Writers Forum). I offer a fuller account of this aspect of Cobbing's work in a review article published in this journal, Greg Thomas, '*Boooook: The Life and Work of Bob Cobbing* by William Cobbing and Rosie Cooper (eds.), London: Occasional Papers, 208pp. 2015', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 9:1 (2015) 8: pp. 9–15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/biip.36.

[16] Peter Manson, personal interview, May 30, 2010; Dom Sylvester Houédard, *Begin Again: A Book of Reflections and Reversals* (Brampton: LYC, 1975).

[17] Peter Manson, personal interview, May 30, 2010.

[18] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Canticle of Saint John', in *The Poems in Verse*, by Mallarmé, translated by Peter Manson (Oxford OH: Miami University Press, 2012), pp. 87–89 (87).

[19] Mallarmé, 'Hérodiade', in Mallarmé, *The Poems in Verse*, pp. 60–89; Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*, 1874–76, watercolour, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Pierre Puvis de Chavanne, *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, 1869, oil on canvas, Barber Institute, Birmingham; Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley (1894).

[20] Peter Manson, 'Afterword', in Mallarmé, *The Poems in Verse*, pp. 280–85 (280).

[21] Manson, 'Afterword', p. 281.

[22] Mallarmé, 'Canticle of Saint John', translated by Manson, p. 87.

[23] Mallarmé, 'Cantique de saint Jean', in Mallarmé, *The Poems in Verse*, p. 86.

[24] Manson, 'Afterword', p. 281.

[25] Peter Manson, *English in Mallarm*é (N.p.: Blart, 2014). As Ellen Dillon notes in her introduction to the text, the recurrence of certain syllables and words establishes what might seem like the groundwork of a narrative, or at least a cluster of associable images: "[a]nts swarm the following pages, along with more than one "rat" and a "louse tin", before the poem's human characters begin to muster. There is, as well as a "son", a "ma" and a pa".' (Ellen Dillon, '*Ta vague lit rat*: An Introduction to *English in Mallarm*é'. In Manson, *English in Mallarm*é, p. i–vi [iii]).

[26] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de Vers', translated by Rosemary Lloyd, in Lloyd, *Mallarm*é*: The Poet and His Circle* (Ithica; London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 227–33 (230).

[27] Mallarmé, 'Crise de Vers', p. 232.

[28] This connection was pointed out by Robin Purves in his plenary paper, 'Peter Manson, Fungus Chicken', at the Peter Manson Symposium, University of Glasgow, October 28, 2017. The Can lyrics in question, from the album *Tago Mago,* are: 'well [/when] I saw mushroom head|I was born and I was dead'.

[29] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 49.

[30] See, most obviously, the poem 'L'Azur', which closes on the line '*Je suis hanté.* L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur!', translated by Manson as '*I am haunted.* The Blue! The Blue! The Blue! The Blue!' (Stéphane Mallarmé, 'L'Azur'/'The Blue', translated by Manson, in Mallarmé, *The Poems in Verse*, pp. 46–49 [48–49]).

[31] Manson, 'Sourdough Mutation', p. 73.

[32] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller, introduced by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 15.

[33] Kristeva, p. 15.

[34] '[T]he *chora*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality. Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. Although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively possessed: as a result, one can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form.' Kristeva, p. 26.

[35] Kristeva, p. 15.

[36] David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women's Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970–2010: Body, Time and Locale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 42.

[37] Peter Manson, personal correspondence, May 25, 2015.

[38] When I visited Peter Manson to interview him on May 30, 2010, a batch of sourdough bread was indeed fermenting in the kitchen cupboard, described as 'the original' for 'Sourdough Mutation'. A small ginkgo plant, admittedly not big enough to offer any 'shade', was perched on the windowsill, and was the subject of a discussion touching on Paula Claire and Bob Cobbing's "readings" of plants and rocks during the 1970s.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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