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# Symbiosis

a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations

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Simon Perril

Two Slices of Toast: Emptiness  
and Disappointment in  
Peter Manson and Andrea Brady

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First published in SYMBIOSIS 11.1 (in April 2007)

2nd electronic edition published in 2009 by Humanities-Ebooks LLP

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

Tirril Hall, Tirril, Penrith CA10 2JE

Essays published in Symbiosis are subsequently digitized  
for the benefit of the author (80%) and the Journal (20%)

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ISSN: 1362-7902

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SIMON PERRIL

## Two Slices of Toast: emptiness and disappointment in recent works by Peter Manson and Andrea Brady

This essay represents an attempt to situate the work of two contemporary poets, Andrea Brady and Peter Manson, doing so by tracing a strain of concerns variously articulated in nineteenth century France via Arthur Rimbaud, ones which make their way into mid-twentieth century America and Canada through Jack Spicer and George Stanley, and on into twenty-first century Britain. Brady is an American poet living and working in London; Manson is a Scottish poet living and working in Glasgow. Both of these poets participate in a complex dialogue articulating a sensibility between hope and disappointment; Manson through a chapbook of translations of Stéphane Mallarmé; Brady through a book of poems negotiating a strain of contemporary indifference which she partly anchors in the context of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. This essay foregrounds the dialogue between disappointment and hope by recourse to the philosopher Ernst Bloch.<sup>1</sup> But first: a brief history of toasts to emptiness and disappointment.

### LAYING THE TABLE—A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE POETICS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Arthur Rimbaud wrote ‘Qu’ est-ce pour nous?’ in 1872, a year after the Paris Commune, and his opening question ‘What does it matter for us, my heart’ is not answered until the next stanza’s dissociative ‘Nothing!’<sup>2</sup> (125). The answer also heralds the first of no fewer than twenty-two exclamation marks in a poem of six quatrains. They stake the poem’s outrage so forcefully, one might imagine such marks as downturned ‘i’s stuck into white page-flesh in the frenzied realisation that this is the only realm upon which he can authentically commit such violence.

What is nailed here is vanguard rhetoric itself. The voice rails against