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Salvatore Marano

### Becoming a Sound Poet. Paul Dutton's Poetry in Performance

**Abstract I:** Poeta e musicista di formazione jazz e blues, membro dei *Four Horsemen* e di CCMC di Michael Snow, *performer* vocale per R. Murray Schafer, nel suo lavoro di *sound poet* Dutton mette in scena l'identità scissa, plurale, del soggetto canadese. Nei testi per solo *performance*, costruisce la sua poesia sonora negli spazi interstiziali fra musica, linguistica e semantizzazione della voce, e mette alla prova i limiti del sistema fonatorio fra click, diplo- e triplofonie, versi animali, silenzio.

**Abstract II:** Poet and musician with a background in jazz and blues, member of *The Four Horsemen* and of Michael Snow's CCMC, and vocal performer for R. Murray Schafer, in his aural work Paul Dutton stages the split, plural linguistic identity of the Canadian subject. In texts for solo performance, he builds his sound poetry in the interstitial space between music, linguistics and the semantisation of the human voice, while locating his probe of the phonatory system in the realm of clicks, diplo- and triplophonies, animal verses, silence.

**Keywords:** sound poetry, performance, phonotext, polyglossia, pun, identity.

S'il était possible d'imaginer une esthétique du  
plaisir textuel, il faudrait y inclure:  
"l'écriture à haute voix"  
(Barthes 1973: 88).

#### 1. The Phonotext

With the notable exception of the introduction to the poet's selected poetry by Gary Barwin (2015), the best accounts of Paul Dutton's work are provided by the author himself. Thus, in the excellent prefatory note to *Right Hemisphere Left Ear*, a collection of texts in prose, verse, visually oriented or for vocal performance, a condensed manifesto of poetics greets the reader with zero degree of theoretical jargon and a fair amount of operating instructions:

Poetry consists of language, and language consists of sound and sight, of idea and emotion, of intellect and body, of rationality and irrationality. It is my delight to explore all these elements of language and to incorporate them in my compositions. I am not in a camp. If an image seems to insist a visual expression I wish to allow it

to take that form. [...] Let's not imprison poetry on the page. Let's liberate it on the page. As music incorporates language [...], let poetry incorporate music. As visual art incorporates language [...], let poetry incorporate visual art. [...]

Some of my work best yields its effect through intellectual contemplation. Other of it through visual apprehension (I'm aware of the pun, but trust you'll be sympathetic). Still other of it through vocalization. Work with it, play with it, act on it. And most of all (ultimately, hopefully) enjoy it (Dutton 1979a: n. p.).

Keyword to this statement is *pleasure*, a notion semantically framed between the writers's "delight" of condensing emotions in formal constructs suitable to media other than print and the invitation to the audience to "enjoy" the traces of their presence scattered throughout the text. Between the lines of the principles guiding the author's approach to composition, the attentive reader can hardly miss that the interactive involvement required on her part addresses *le texte de jouissance* rather than *le texte de plaisir*, as Roland Barthes would have it; that is, "celui qui met en état de la perte, celui qui décomforte (peut-être jusqu'à un certain ennui). Fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques, du lecteur, la consistance de ses goûts, de ses valeurs et de ses souvenirs, met en crise son rapport au langage" (Barthes 1973: 23) as opposed to "celui qui contente, emplit, donne de l'euphorie; celui qui vient de la culture, ne rompt pas avec elle, est lié à une pratique confortable de la lecture" (Barthes 1973: 22-23). Dutton's art is aimed at removing the audience from its comfort zone to the uncharted territories of "aureality", as per the title of one of his books of poetry, where genre, form, medium and channel are reconciled with the human voice. What is apparent in his "oral soundwork", some of which extends to "the outer reaches of the technical and expressive potential of human utterance", is eminently true also of those pieces written in "more conventional forms of literary expression, however unconventionally practised" (Rowley 2023).

Most of Dutton's writing stems from the principle that whatever appeals to sight is first and foremost part of the domain of hearing<sup>1</sup>. Consider "Eye" (Dutton 2015: 76), a composition from the "New Poems 1991-2014" section of his most recent publication, *Sonosyntactics*. From the start, what the title announces as a poem connected with vision turns out to be a textbook example of "phonotext", Stewart's category describing "that articulatory stream which the interruption of script at lexical borders never quite renders silent, at least within a single syntactic period broken by no full pauses" (Stewart 1990: 28). Starting with the oldest pun in the English language, that here is functional to identify the poem with the poet – both the narratological first person and the actual human being who translates his feelings into words

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<sup>1</sup> Not all of it of course, but the notion of *continuum* is key to a better appreciation of his *modus operandi*: "First of all, my work doesn't in fact readily divide into 'sound performance and written': there are all kinds of gradations and overlaps. As well, there are plenty of similarities and differences *within* those two categories, not just *between* them: for one thing, I write print poems in no one style but throughout a wide range, including formal, free verse, minimal, narrative, with line breaks, run-on, found poems, etc. My sound poems range through a variety of styles as well. And then there are the visual poems, which are arguably as much drawn as they are written [...]. I like to refer to the whole field of visual poetry as 'drawing with the alphabet'" (Nyman 2016). See Paul Dutton's official site: <https://pducttonpoetry.wordpress.com> (consulted on 27/07/2024).

– the acoustic potential of the lines makes its way to the reader through the sustained tension between alphabetic notation and “sonographic resonance” (Khan & Whitehead 1992: ix):

Eye

The eye of the poem is not my eye,  
 its my not mine,  
 nor my I its –  
 if you see what I or it  
 mean or means,  
 whoever I am or is  
 and whatever you mean or are,  
 if you or I see whatever the poem means or is,  
 if it is at all, or means  
 whatever you think it means  
 what it says  
 what it means or sees,  
 if it sees,  
 if it says,  
 if it is  
 what you or I say it is,  
 whoever you or I may be –  
 I you or you me,  
 the poem either or,  
 the other me or you,  
 who else would be or see  
 what else could be  
 the eye of the poem is us,  
 and we its I  
 (Dutton 2015: 76).

Whatever homograph or quasi heteronym catches the reader’s sight has a counterpart both in the domain of homophony and in the polyphony of assonance and consonance. As a result, the polysemous nature of the composition as it appears on the page emerges from “endophony” (Stewart 1990: 28), the pragmatic action of silent speech, before the rational awareness of the elaborate turns of the syntax steps in. Caught in the plot of presence and absence, depending on whether we look at the text as a printed poem for the reader to enjoy or as a score for performance for the audience to attend, the interplay of visual and aural appreciation is expressed in the correspondence between the permutational dance of a limited number of letters on the page and the musical fugue or jazz improvisation on a narrow set of phonemes. In other words, the “idea of sonicity” (Khan 1992: 2) governing the logic of the poem takes place in the ear of Garrett’s *silent speaker* before it is shaped in her brain, as if Dutton rephrased William Carlos Williams’s famous formula as “no ideas but in *sounds*”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The famous line “Say it, no ideas but in things” opens the second stanza of “The Delineament of the Giants” (Williams 1963: 6).

“Eye” presents a variation on a theme that the author has been relentlessly exploring both in print and in sound poetry, at times by insisting on the same lexical hard core; most notably in “His Eyes, Her Eyes”, a text conceived for vocalisation that was first published in *Right Hemisphere Left Ear*<sup>3</sup> and subsequently recorded in the CD *Oralizations*. As part of the repertoire of the sound poet, the poem unlocks an orgy of sibilants in the colourful soundscape (Schafer 1977) created by the counterpoint of the vocal roundelay of the vowels and the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ – a favourite of Nichol, as per Dutton’s sound poem “For the Letter That Begins Them All, H (for bp)”<sup>4</sup> – to which a barrage of plosives is added in the crackling opening stanza for maximum impact on the audience. The high rate of articulation, purportedly designed to saturate the acoustic space of performance, results in a controlled interference of the redundant signifier with the nuances of meaning conveyed by the intricate syntax through which the line of reasoning of the poem unfolds.

The resulting undermining of a crystal-clear argument and the blurring of the sense created by the saturation of the senses is so much part of the authorial strategy that one of Dutton’s most emblematic phonotexts is entitled “Census” (Dutton 1979a: n.p.). The conflation of the inventory of the people inhabiting the here and now of the poetry reading – as Schechner (1988) would have it – and the sensory faculties at work in the live event is the mirror image of the clash between the graphematic activation of the etymological root of *sensus*<sup>5</sup> and the homophonic pun *census/senses*. In the incipit, dry and essential as the snap of two fingers, anagram and related strategies of letter substitution and word rearrangement literally translate into shifting graphematic sequences the verbal flow and rhythmic commutations of the spoken word, in which the active roles of author and audience, in tune with each other, make them as reversible as the shifters “you” and “me”:

you      me  
 five senses times two  
 ten senses  
 sense tenses  
 sentences ...

The constant attention paid by the author to the inner voice of print poetry extends from lines conceived as sound poems, or later included in the program of a poetry reading, to verses created primarily for the page. An extremely effective example is provided by “Lies” (Dutton 1991a: 10), the magnificent poem that opens up a collection of writings

<sup>3</sup> The title of the section of the book devoted to sound poems in which “His Eyes, Her Eyes” appears is a phonotext in itself: “favourite strains re: frains”, with a wordplay on *refrain* that is accomplished by reference to the obsolescent verb “frain” from Middle English *fraynen*, meaning “to ask” or maybe to the name “Frain” from the Gaelic *fraoch*, meaning “heather” given that Dutton is of Irish descent.

<sup>4</sup> Dutton (1991a: 52); the poem was subsequently recorded on the cassette tape *Full Throatle* and then on the compact disk *Oralizations*. Nichol loved the letter “h” so much that the editors of his 1994 reader titled it *An H in the Heart*.

<sup>5</sup> As in the stock phrase *sensus communis*, “held to unite the sensations of all senses in a general sensation or perception” according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensus](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensus) (consulted on 27/07/2024).

belonging more to the conceptual province of “aurature”<sup>6</sup> than, strictly speaking, to literature. Following an epigraph from the work of the Vancouver poet Gerry Gilbert, who significantly addresses the inner phonotextual quality of poetry (“there’s something about a photograph that doesn’t change & there’s something about a poem which does”), and inaugurating “Statementalities”, one of the various sections of the book anticipating the presence of music and voices (“Jazz”, “Vocagraphics”, “Double-Dutch Talk”), the poem is revealing for the contrast that it creates with its anchorage in the bookish tradition of modernist intertextuality and for the biographical resonances that it contains:

Lies  
for John Newlove

The lies we tell  
are not the lies we think we tell,  
deceiving, most of all, ourselves:  
not so much uttering lies  
as acting on utter lies  
unuttered.

The dedication to John Newlove, the Saskatchewan poet based in Ontario who in 1972 won the prestigious Governor General’s Award for *Lies* (1972), explains both the title and the unique status of the poem, which is at the same time a creative effort, a condensed review, a critical appreciation and a homage to a fellow poet who was former senior editor for McClelland & Stewart, the publishing house where Dutton himself worked as copywriter in the Seventies<sup>7</sup>. A canonical sestina, or rather a double tercet varying on Dante’s terza rima through a rhyme scheme, resulting from the repetition of the keywords “tell” and “lies”, more appropriate to the meditative tone of the text (AAbCCd), locates “Lies” in a sophisticated chiasm of correspondences. On the one hand, its prosody reflects the remarkable control of the poetic line that Newlove derived from his Modernist masters, whose subtle movements of the syntax are better appreciated when experienced as visible traces of inscription; on the other, the prominence of a keyword coming from orality such as “tell” in the first half of the stanza and the sudden piling up of three derivatives from *utterance* in the second (“uttering”, “utter”, “unuttered”) conjure up a force field of opposing stances where fiction – the conventional tenor of the metaphor of the lie in literature – is evoked in the suspended animation of the phonotext. The possibility offered by literature to turn deception into art, as per Newlove’s poetics in tune with the symbolist idea that

<sup>6</sup> John Cayley’s category is appropriate here, although, strictly speaking, it refers to the future regime of literature after the advent of electronics: “The grammatization of linguistic aurality – enabling indexed access and archive – will, for example, offer our cultures the potential to shift the central focus of its most significant and affective linguistic practice from literature to aurature, not ‘back’ but ‘forward’ to the support medium for language to which human animals are genetically predisposed” (Cayley 2018: x).

<sup>7</sup> Dutton was copywriter at McClelland & Stewart between 1971 and 1978, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/dutton-paul-1943-four-horsemen> (consulted on 27/07/2024).

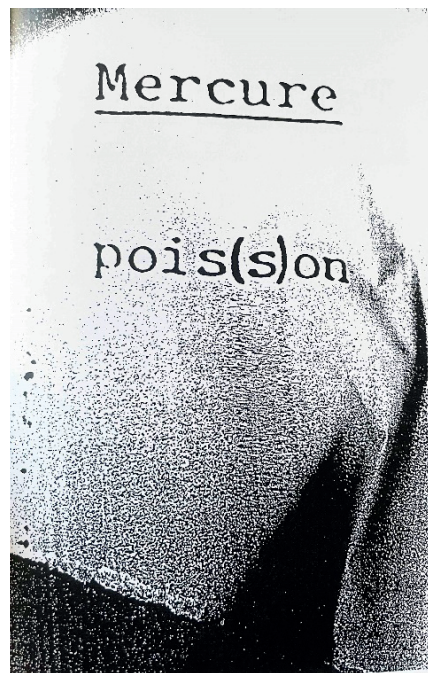
the supreme fiction points at the ultimate truth, is cast by Dutton against the portrait of the everyday life effects of mendacity on both personal relationships and the inner balance of the I systematically unsettled by the illusion of self-deception. The coexistence in the two halves of the poem of both visions is rooted in the human language, which makes lies and fiction equally possible, and whose ultimate reality sends the reader back to the voice, that ineradicable bodily presence looming as the constant fixed residue in the Gutenbergian world of paper and ink.

## 2. The Cycle of Sight and Sound

Dutton's practice of pure visual poetry, although extremely original, occupies a minor part of his work. Among the various explorations of the page as canvas with different tools of inscription – from the typographic and calligraphic poems where the words are variously arranged on the scriptural space, to the use of glyphs and the exploitation of the typewriter – *Partial Additives* (1994), a collection of minimalist poems on the serendipity of the secret life of the letters, stands out for the phonotextual qualities that highlight the conventional nature of language within the witty frame of understated humour. Like many of his most successful ventures, such as the role played in the sound poetry quartet *The Four Horsemen* (with bpNichol, Steve McCaffery and Rafael Barreto-Rivera) and the participation in the total improvisation band CCMC, featuring the late Michael Snow, where Dutton plays the harmonica and practices his radical "oral soundwork" with the human voice, the book is the result of a collaboration. An advanced and more comprehensive version of an earlier typewriter poetry collection, *Additives* (1988), the 1994 edition published by Writers Forum owes its visual magic to the xerox machine of Bob Cobbing, himself a formidable poet in the tradition of visual and sound art and a leading member of the British Poetry Revival of the 1970s. With a clever use of the brackets, words differing for one letter or, in the case of the so-called "Compound Additives", two or three are yoked together under titles chosen in such a way as to widen the semantic space of the poem to its further limits. In accordance with Dutton's idea that poetry exists as an event in motion – like life, Wallace Stevens would say – the book is defined in the Author's Note as "a work in progress" and the procedure employed in devising each poem is described as follows:

An additive is a substance that, when added in small quantities to another substance, changes that second substance into a third one. The additives in *The Additives* are the letters of the alphabet. I use the term also to refer to the individual poems; hence the title of this book, which constitutes a selection from the present body of such poems (Dutton 1994b: n.p.).

Among the inventive reworkings of one-liners such as "Reverberations" whose text – a phonotext of phonotexts, since the field of existence of all the poems that appears in the collection is located in the same interstitial space of Roman Jakobson's minimal pairs – is reproduced as a reverberative icon, the one that stands out is "Mercure", a stunning early achievement and a long-lasting presence in Dutton's repertoire till today. In Cobbing's magnificent rendition, it reads (Dutton 1994b: n. p.):



In a more advanced form than the one chosen for the opening poem in French – the visually centred, self-referential “Imprimerie” reading “enc(o)re” (Dutton 1994b: n. p.) – “Mercure” creates a polyglot semantic space by combining the two official languages of Canada in all the possible morphemic permutations of title and text into a hybrid Franglish koiné. The creation of *poisson* via the addition of the “s” to *poison*, one of the semes of mercury, a heavy metal that is lethal in case of prolonged exposure to it, retroacts on the title, now breakable down into *mer* (“the sea”) and *cure* (“care” and/or “therapy” in both languages), according to a procedure reminiscent of the homophonic translations of the Toronto Research Group (bpNichol and Steve McCaffery) and those of *Six Fillious*, a Fluxus happening in which Dutton took part at the Ear Inn in New York in 1979<sup>8</sup>. In like fashion, any *lector in fabula* who is willing to play the poet’s game can easily picture for herself an ecocritical scenario whereby a *cure* is required for the poisoning of the *sea* following the illegal spills of *mercury*, as it happened between 1932 and 1968 in Minamata Bay, where the criminal actions of the Chisso Chemical Corporation contaminated molluscs, crustaceans, fishes and, at the top of the food chain, an entire population. Besides, either the reader looks at the etymological origin of the letter “S” in the Egyptian hieroglyph for “tooth” or chooses Kipling’s fictional version of “How the Alphabet Was Made” (1902) in which the letter “S” is said to derive from the drawing of a snake – case in point, a sea snake or, better, the snake-like American eel – the powerful imagery associated with the additive generates an extra figurative layer in the already elaborate iconism of the visual poem.

If the above were the only semantic expansions of the poem, “Mercure” as such would be

<sup>8</sup> On the TRG, see Marano (2017). A recording of the *Six Fillious* reading (February 7, 1979) is available at PennSound: <https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Six-Fillious.php> (consulted on 27/07/2024).

a major accomplishment and a noteworthy addition (it is worth saying) to the author's lifelong concerns for ethnic and ecological questions, both cemented by his collaboration with composer and environmental activist Raymond Murray Schafer, once as a theatrical performer (in the pageant *Apocalypse*) and, more crucially, a second time as the creator of the vocal treatment for "Wolf Chant", a song from Schafer's magnum opus *Patria* (1966-2021), which Dutton recorded in *Full Throatle*<sup>9</sup>. Especially in this sound poem, reissued in *Oralizations*, the performer pushes the boundaries of his voice beyond the Katajjaq of the Inuits by reproducing with impressive mimetism and emotional power the barks and the howls of an animal that, once glorious in its fearful majesty but today at risk of extinction, is still sacred to all Native Americans.

It just so happens that "Mercure" is more than that, not only as one of a limited set of Dutton's poems whose records of its "alphabetic, grammaphonic, and live" (Bernstein 2009: 142) versions are documented, but also as a text that, after the success enjoyed by its performed version, has twice undergone remediation (Bolter & Grusin 1999) in its written form, according to different "contexts of readership" (Bernstein 1998: 8) and on the ground of the different functions accomplished in an editorial collective work and in an authorial selection of texts. As a sound poem, both in the self-released cassette *Full Throatle* and in the CD *Oralizations*, the script is expanded in order to free the full potential of the bilingual phonotext. Repurposed as richly articulated performance, according to the principle that "[p]erformance always exceeds script, just as text always outperforms audibility" (Bernstein 2009: 148), the sound poem lasts six minutes and forty-eight seconds, which in live versions easily exceeds seven minutes, as documented in the live recorded session at the *Word Aloud 6 Spoken Word Festival* in Durham, Ontario of November 2009, accessible on Youtube<sup>10</sup>.

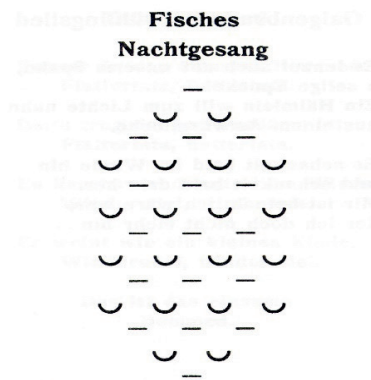
Performed by the author, "Mercure" brings the process of breaking down the words into progressively minimal components to its extreme consequences. All traces of textuality are pulverised in the invocation of "aural, sonic, musical and preguttural metaphors at the points where they are unable to speak, at the limits of language" (Khan 1992: 4), before the exhilarating process of total liberation of the voice brings back the text anew. By tentatively approaching the first letter of "poi(s)son," the performance starts with a low volume click, the repeated voiceless bilabial sound mimicking the production of air bubbles; the same attributable to an imaginary ichthyologos, should fishes talk, whose notational symbol of void and emptiness is reflected in the second letter of the poem, the "o" itself a graphic double of the digit "0" that is "zero". In turn, the reiterated accumulation of the click aimed at evoking a burst of bubbles has a typographic counterpart on the cover of *Sonosyntactics*, the book containing Dutton's selected poems in which "Mercure" appears in a two-part, second-degree remediation as both poem and self-referential script of itself containing the instructions for its performance. The elegant cover of the selected poems is a computer-

<sup>9</sup> In this important song, human and animal voices intentionally mingle. The first sound uttered by the poet is "A" suggesting the beginning of the alphabet despite the fact that the singer is supposedly a subject of primary orality culture. Note also that "Echo of wolf-howl/(wolf howl)/(howl)" is the fourth and final movement of Dutton's "Banff Suite" (Dutton 1991a: 22).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCaCHyj4ozk> (consulted on 16/05/24). Regarding recorded live events, see Auslander (2008).



processed colour rendition of a page from *The Plastic Typewriter*, Dutton's typewriter artwork whose bubble-like signs were originally produced by the strokes of lowercase "o", a sign also used for "0" in the minimalist keyboard of the Sears Roebuck Young Students Typewriter employed by the author. For the reader who connects "Mercure" to the modern tradition of historical avant-gardes, the live enactment of the poem creates a bridge with the graphic forerunner of Dutton's *additive*, Christian Morgenstern's proto concrete poem "Fisches Nachtgesang" (Morgenstern 1905: 25), whose diacritic signs in place of words or letters, make it appear more as a score than as a text:



While the performance is under way, Dutton's "probing of the limits of intelligibility and referentiality" (Perloff 2009: 98) through the technical mastery of vocalisation and overtone singing offers an immersive experience into the soundscape of the live event which eventually reconciles the audience with the open-endedness of language embedded in the printed poem. Whereas a reader looks for linguistic tools to unlock the semantic potential of deferred orality, a member of the audience fully appreciates the pragmatics of presence, since the live actualisation of a text works against the grain of prosody and is able to show the true colours of the phonotext. Equally, whereas a reader looks for meaning in free and bound morphemes, a member of the audience learns how to exploit the serendipity of the paragram the way the author did, by finding words within words, in the epiphanic combinations of the sounds buried within the phonotext. As a result, *poi(s)son* can be pronounced as if it were a compound of "pois" and "son" a synthetic portmanteau in Franglish where the eye (*pois*, "dots") and the ear (*son*, "sound") coexist in their phonological articulation, respectively, as *pwah* (i.e. *pha*, "yuck!") and *son* (both "sound" and "offspring").

The circular process of remediation from text to performance to text, first for didactic purposes, then for conceptual reasons<sup>11</sup>, opens up new hermeneutic scenarios, in which the

<sup>11</sup> First for the print resource to *Spoken Word Poetry* in 2014, then for his own selected poetry publication. Note the difference of register between an instruction manual: "'Mercure' (mercury) is performed by using special vocal effects on the phonemes (units of speech-sound) of the French word poison [*sic*] (poison) [...]" (Wilson 2014: 40) and a publication addressing a University audience, "The performance of 'Mercure', comprises an ornamental sequential buildup of the phonemes of the French word poisson [...]" (Dutton 2015: 70).

biocentric context of the ecocritical poem reveals a more intimate biographic moment<sup>12</sup>. If a son needs a mother, and if onomatopoeic interjection suggests language in formation, the mother/son complex evoked by the phonotext – *mère*, the phantasmatic presence brought to the son by sound (*son*) – displaces the *cure* as “care” and depicts the son as a child. Hence, the unexpected picture of the caring mother in her 1950s polka dot dress (*robe à pois*) who, having taken the temperature of his feverish son with a mercury thermometer, administers a disgusting medicine (cod liver oil? *Pwah!*)<sup>13</sup>. Beyond the stereotyped gender role in which the woman is cast, or the instant total recall of a typical childhood memory for a person of Dutton’s generation – he was born in 1943 – the literary resonances of the scene that has just been evoked extends beyond the page to the stage and, potentially, to the semantic *encyclopedia* of knowledge (Eco 1984) mastered by the poet and the audience. In *Partial Additives*, the only occurrence of a fatherly figure is in the classical Oedipal scene hinted at in “Patricide” whose text reads: “d(e)ad” (Dutton 1994b: n. p.). However, if we think that the kid is evoked by the French word for “sound” through the flickering signifier *son* between voiced and voicelessness, as in Roland Barthes’s *S/Z* (1970), we can as well ask ourselves whether Derrida would read the *cure* in “Mercure” the way he does with Plato’s *Phaedrus*, as an instance of the

[...] *pharmakon*. This “medicine”, this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be – alternatively or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent (Derrida 1981: 70).

The contiguity of the performed version of “Mercure” with the deconstructionist reading of a dialogue supporting the superiority of orality over literacy extends to the ambivalence of the poem. From print to sound poetry, “Mercure” oscillates in mercurial fashion between sight and sound, private regression to primal scene and public development of the authorial self. By evoking Hermes, the title highlights the performative potential of a poem whose proper context is the hermetic tradition of poetry as riddle<sup>14</sup>. Chances are that, had it been composed in the 1990s, “Mercure” would have been published by Mercury Press, the Ontario publishing house that one year after its foundation issued Dutton’s *Visionary Portraits* (1991b). At one time a concrete minimalist ecopoem and a “paleotechnic”

<sup>12</sup> On the biocentric, anti-anthropocentric qualities of ecopoetry, see Glotfelty & Fromm (1996) and Berdinesen (2018).

<sup>13</sup> “In my preschool years, when I got pissed off about something, I’d stomp up the stairs, blistering the air with the foulest language I knew: ‘Darn it! Rats! Brats! Stinkers and Bums!’ That, at any rate, is how I have always remembered it, but my eldest sister recently insisted, quite adamantly, that what I shouted was, ‘Darn it! Rats! Brats! Bums and Stinkers!’ And that has made me wonder if I perhaps reconstructed, from abiding family lore, my personal memory of my oft-repeated display of pique, complete with a mental image of my miniature self pounding up the staircase. Whether the memory I hold is truly mine or borrowed from accounts heard from family members, it’s clear that, somewhere along the way, I exercised a bit of aesthetic initiative, reversing the last two terms to create a skipper cadence” (Nyman 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Dutton’s poetry collection *The Book of Numbers* (1979), to mention a blatant example, is a sustained riddle from start to finish.

(McCaffery 1998: 168) sound poem where lallation meets the advanced exploration of the human voice in the avant-garde tradition of Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitters – and, in musical terms, of Luigi Russolo and John Cage – “Mercure” brings to the surface not so much the “unheard melodies” as the dissonances of the “graphonic tension” (Stewart 1990: 145-191) in a poem in Franglais. In so doing, it unveils its ultimate glocal vocation, whereby the archetypal frame of the Earth Mother guards at its core the linguistic trademark of Canadian identity. A Derridean “trace” illustrating the play of *différance* and a valuable addition (an *additive*?) to Charles Bernstein’s idea that

there is often no one original written version of a poem. Even leaving aside the status of the manuscript, there often exist various and discrepant printings. I should like to say textual performances – in magazines and books, with changes in wording but also in spacing, font, paper, and, moreover, contexts of readership; making for a plurality of versions, none of which can claim sole authority. I would call these multifoliate versions performances of the poem; and I would add the poet’s own performance of the work in a poetry reading, or readings, to the list of the variants that together, plurally, constitute and reconstitute the work (Bernstein 1998: 8).

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**Salvatore Marano** is Associate Professor of American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Catania. He has written on Walter Abish, Djuna Barnes, John Barth, William Burroughs, Hart Crane, William Faulkner, Amy Lowell, Mina Loy, Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, Mark Twain and is the author of *La rosa senza perché* (1991), *American Games* (2001) and editor of *Lo spazio obliquo* (2015), *Il velo di Maya* (2017), *Performance. Dal testo al gesto* (2019), *Boombox and the City* with Sebastiano Nucifora (2022) and *Other Americas* (forthcoming).  
[salvatore.marano@unict.it](mailto:salvatore.marano@unict.it)