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Chris Ireland's Aphasic Poetry

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Noisy Nuisance: Chris Ireland's Aphasic Poetry

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feeding your *ears*
tasting your *eyes*
treating your *spirit*
touching your *soul*
Ireland and Pound

1. INTRODUCTORY remarks: the voices of language loss

1.1 Approaching aphasic poetry

When suffering from the language impairment of aphasia (Greek: αφασια = speechlessness), everyday sounds can turn into an almost intolerable noise, a stressful nuisance, a physical as well as psychological ailment creating a communicative border between aphasic patients and their environment. At the same time, aphasic language comes with its very own sounds: for instance, one may think of the stutter provoked by the anomic search for words or the use of phonetically distorted terms (so-called phonemic paraphasias), all of which can cause severe confusion and misunderstandings. In her poetry, UK-based writer Chris Ireland, who has been living with aphasia since 1988 (Ireland and Black 356), aesthetically addresses

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the various sounds of both the aphasic and non-aphasic world and the at times exclusive "barriars" (*sic*, Ireland and Pound 155–56) that may accompany them. By juxtaposing or rather merging rhetorical style with pathological symptoms, Ireland's poems eventually create an aesthetic equality that forms a counterpoint to the common (communicative) hierarchies between aphasic patients and their surroundings.

Interested in literary approaches to language loss, the paper at hand, which is anchored in the medical humanities while also touching on disability studies as two research fields particularly sensitive to impairment-related aspects of language, attempts to gain a better understanding of aphasic poetry. Using the example of selected works by Ireland, I will, to this end, analyze "aphasic" depictions of the sounds caused by both society and aphasia and will discuss their pathological, poetical, and sociocultural implications. Building upon that, I will conclude with a reflection on the question of genre in the context of poetic approaches to language impairment and will address the potentials and perils when approaching poetic forms of language impairment from the perspective of literary (sound) studies.

Katharina Fürholzer was a translator (Spanish), before pursuing Scandinavian studies, comparative literature, and American literary history (Munich and London). In 2017, she obtained a joint PhD (Münster and Ghent) for her thesis on the ethics of pathographies. Her postdoctoral project at the University of Pennsylvania dealt with the poetics of aphasia. She works at the University of Rostock at the intersection of medical ethics and the medical humanities.

Aphasiological explanations …

So, what exactly is aphasia? In clinical literature, this specific form of language impairment is defined as a disorder caused by a brain lesion after completed speech acquisition (adults who had a stroke or an accident), which can affect patients' communicative and social functioning. Depending on form and gravity, partial or total recovery may be possible, either spontaneously or with therapeutic help.

Aphasias can manifest in various ways, which are commonly divided into non-fluent and fluent forms. *Non-fluent forms* such as Broca's aphasia can be characterized, among others, by a heavily shortened style of speech, syntactically strongly reduced one- to two-word sentences, a lack of inflections and functional words (prepositions, declensions, or conjugations, which is called agrammatism or telegraphic style), an impaired speech that takes strong effect, and in times severe difficulties in finding words (anomia). Nevertheless, language comprehension usually remains relatively intact, and persons affected have a marked awareness of their disorder.

By contrast, *fluent forms* of aphasia such as Wernicke's can manifest in long, entangled, duplicated sentences, defective forms of inflection (paragrammatism), the use of phonetic or semantic neologisms and/or phonetically distorted or semantically incorrect words (paraphasias), and an excessive flow of speech (logorrhea). In difference to cases of non-fluent

aphasia, the language comprehension of persons experiencing fluent forms is oftentimes heavily impaired, which in very severe cases may even lead to word deafness (auditory verbal agnosia). Despite their at times heavy impairments, people suffering from fluent aphasia are often hardly aware of their disorder.[1]

Aphasias can be accompanied by psychosocial impairments such as social isolation, reduced self-esteem, or depression (Hersh). This is not least due to the fact that this impairment is often mistaken for an intellectual debility—a widespread misconception within society that has been disproved by modern aphasiology from its earliest beginnings (Broca 356; Wernicke 35; for more recent literature on this matter see, for example, Hallowell 45–48).

1.3. … and aphasic expressions

While aphasiologists are experts on the biological dimensions of aphasia and can thus help us to better understand its various syndromes and symptoms,[2] it is the patients who are experts on the psychological and social implications of their impairment. Not least thanks to the strong effort of research fields such as the medical humanities, disability studies, and narrative-based medicine, the healthcare sector as well as society have become more and more aware of how important it is to listen to the experiences of those directly affected. This awareness coincides with an increase of illness narratives and pathographies[3] on the book market: the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century registered a steep rise of personal accounts of illness and impairment—among which one will also find a broad range of books dedicated to lives coined by language impairment. Thus, when trying to understand what it is actually *like* to have aphasia, there is nowadays a multitude of sources on hand in which patients share their unique way of saying and seeing the world. Asian-American writer Christine Hyung-Oak Lee, for instance, describes the massive impact a stroke had on her linguistic faculty as follows:

> My internal editor was turned off. I wanted to scream out into the void, but eloquent words were gone, so what I screamed

1 For all symptoms see Code; Drummond 94–95, 146–52; LaPointe and Stierwalt; Papathanasiou and Coppens; Raymer and Gonzalez-Rothi.

2 I here refer to the biopsychosocial model as coined by Engel.

3 While the term "illness narrative" refers to factual or fictional stories about illness told by those affected, pathographies are commonly defined as (auto-) biographies centred on a person's illness; for differences between the two genres see, for example, Kleinman; Hawkins; Charon.

> was guttural and primal and, it turned out, my truest emotions, the ones unedited and unfiltered by my frontal brain, untouched by judgment and ordered thinking. It was my body speaking. (85)

As aphasia usually affects both language production and reception, also once familiar words may blur into an unidentifiable noise. American historian Harrianne Mills, who experienced non-fluent aphasia after a motorbike accident, recalls that she was "regularly bothered by a lot of what I would have described, had I been vocal, as noise. I am now certain that it was not noise at all, but words which I could not understand … I could not differentiate between words, laughter, car horns, and engines" (29). While some patients feel caught in an unstoppable cacophony, others associate their aphasic world with silence—a silence, though, that stands in no comparison to anything one might have experienced before. American PhD student Lauren Marks remembers this aphasic silence that followed a ruptured brain aneurysm as an all-encompassing "Quiet":

> I remember the Quiet.
>
> This was not a Quiet I had known before. It was a placid current, a presence more than an absence. Everything I saw or touched or heard pulsed with a marvelous sense of order. I had a nothing mind, a flotsam mind. I was incredibly focused on the present, with very little awareness or interest in my past or future. My entire environment felt interconnected, like cells in a large, breathing organism. To experience this Quiet was to be it. (3)

The aphasic struggle for words poses a threat to keeping one's voice heard in the world. In light of the communication problems aphasias can cause, it will come as no surprise that the majority of patients encounter difficulties when trying to make themselves understood in the world. A short anecdote by U.S.-American psychoanalyst and stroke survivor Ruth Resch illustrates what aphasic impairments can mean in everyday life:

> Discourtesy happens all the time in New York, but some days it is unbearable. At a coffee kiosk, a window opening on the side of an old building on the Upper West Side, I open my mouth, and the few seconds I need to retrieve, "Co..ff..ee…. mi…lk….. no….sug…ar…" are too much for the vendor. "Next!" he says to the man in line on the sidewalk behind me. I'm shunted away by his curt word. The man steps easily into my

place without a second thought to me and gives his order. I'm stunned, shunned, isolated. (32–33)

This randomly chosen example might expose the difficulties modern-day societies still have when confronted with language not corresponding to what is usually thought to be the norm.[4] (You will be happy to hear that Resch did not get discouraged and finally left with a coffee in her hands.)

2. The poetic sounds of aphasia

2.1. "Cebrelating" difference

Despite the at times severe impairments they cause, aphasias do not, however, necessarily mean the end of verbal and written communication (Behrns et al.). Arguing that aphasic language is not *deficient* but only *different* (Ireland and Pound 151), aphasic poet Chris Ireland explicitly emphasizes that she has "a language problem, not a communication problem" (Ireland and Black 355). Or, to quote from her poem "My [a]sphasia word," which also demonstrates the semantic richness that can accompany the pathologic confusion of phonetically similar terms:

My BRAIN is bigger than
My WORDS
Maybe loud cymbols in LIFE.
My WORD is bigger than
My BRAIN
Maybe viel visions insight. (Ireland and Pound 152)[5]

As Ireland's poem shows, somatic language loss and literary language production are not mutually exclusive. (And the poet is in good company in this regard, as also Nobel laureates Samuel Beckett and Tomas Tranströmer continued to write despite having aphasia, resulting in poetry that both mirrored the disease's destructiveness and its power to create new forms of expression.) However, as Ireland once pointed out, to find poetry, she first had to lose it: "I can't follow poetry, understand puns and

4 Reactions like the one Resch describes may lead to a broad spectrum of psychosocial impairments, such as reduced self-esteem, feeling of loss of purpose, hopelessness, depression, at times right up to suicidal tendencies. For correlations between aphasic language and mental health see Parr; Hersh 238; Code and Herrmann 111–25; Hilari and Cruice; Cahana-Amitay and Albert; Worrall et al.

5 All of Ireland's poems quoted in this paper stem from Ireland and Pound; going forward, only the page number will be given.

symbolism. I complain I lost poetry. My friends say I tapped on some new poetry, my own poetry" (357).

"[C]elebrat[ing] the language of aphasia by making poetry with aphasia spellings, words and ideas," and showing "the power, creativity and liberation of aphasia language and poetry" (145), Ireland's "new poetry" also gives aesthetic testimony to the heterogeneity of aphasic (sound) perceptions. As such, her poetic work is both an expression of the ailments and barriers of aphasia as well as a "cebrelation" of the creativity this language disorder may entail–as she explains:

Ireland's "new poetry" also gives aesthetic testimony to the heterogeneity of aphasic (sound) perceptions.

> CEBRELATION – from double meaning: cebrel—'thinker/ from brain; 'lating'—enlarging pleasure!
>
> Aphasia as a form of art. Creative—seeing and using joy of words. Using internal rhymth [sic], sounds, pauses and deeper multi-layered understanding. (147)

With that said, I would like to cast a closer look at these sonic intersections of poetry and aphasia by focusing on two aspects: first, the impeding barriers the "noisy" sounds of society may mean to those suffering from aphasia (section 2.2), and, second, the heterogeneity and meaningfulness of the sounds that encompass even the pathological "loss" of language (section 2.3).

2.2. (De-)Constructing barriers: societal sounds as aphasic noise

When trying to comprehend what the world sounds like when the speech centre has gotten out of order, Ireland's poem "DRUM RAP. NO – NO – NO – NO – NOISE A-GRAIN!!" gives a bleak answer:[6]

> *Drumming in my batty – brain,*
> *Slamming in their doory – drain …*
> *No – No – No – No NOISE, A-GRAIN!!* (155)

In Ireland's "DRUM RAP," the lyrical speaker rebels vehemently against the noise that seems to incessantly penetrate him or her from all sides. Over the course of the poem, the term of contention becomes its own program: in increasing intensity caused by its unaltered repetition, the negatory

6 As Ireland once noted, this poem "is the first poem using rhyme, very difficult with aphasia. So rhyme and rhymth [sic] and tempo, as a rap, limerick, bringing humour, problems in society, hopes. It took a long time, many drafts" (155).

word chain "No – No – No – No" ultimately merges into a roared, roaring "NOISE" and, hence, into the reason of its ailment. In the word immediately following, the already weakened boundaries between poetry and pathology are abolished for good: because what exactly is this presumed blending of "again" and "a grain?" Is it an expression of poetry or aphasia, is it symptom or style, is it a pathological paraphasia or a rhetorical portmanteau? In the context of aphasic poetry, the word is both at the same time and, building upon that, makes the reader aware that knowing the cause of its creation will have no impact on the associations and meanings evoked by its sound: when read as "No Noise again," the line strikes us as an expression of the lyrical speaker's want to free himself or herself from the unbearable "drumming," "slamming" sounds that threaten to drive him or her insane ("batty"). Read as "Noise, a grain," the line of verse also provides a metaphorical clue of what constant noise nuisances feel like, namely like a scrunching grain in the brain's gears, slowly but surely causing a nervous abrasion. As such, the figurative recourse to something as fine and purportedly insignificant as a little grain makes the reader aware that when the language (centre) is out of order, even small, inconspicuous sounds may turn into a torturing noise.

In the everyday life of aphasia, these "noisy grains" all too often become a communicative barrier. As Ireland explains:

> For aphasia people noise a big barriar [sic]. Not only "noisy environment" outside impede us – hurt us – stop us – stress us to relax/work whatever. But "NOISE" is as a technical term in language/reading development studies. What invades the person not able to understand – for example, too information/too much background noise/too many words/too much complex syntax/too technical terms. We need ramps in society for people with aphasia. (154)

In "ONLY BARRIARS"—a poem in which Ireland, as she annotates, plays with the sonic mixture of "barricades: hastily erected (defence) ramp across street" and the term "briar/brier: thorns/friar/fire" (154)—the writer poetically illustrates the degree to which these impeding noises are caused not by the disorder but by society. "*BARRIERS across 'silly – sane – society {uh!}*" (155) it says so accusingly, while the immediate, alliterative conflation "silly – sane – society" calls normative conceptions of sick and healthy, sense and nonsense into question. In light of the awareness raised by disability studies (for example, Shakespeare) for the fact that disorders are not least a consequence of sociocultural manners of conduct, it seems

astounding that people with aphasia still must face so many excluding barriers in their quotidian lives. "ONLY BARRIARS" suggests a possible reason for this grievance when it says:

> SOUNDS across mealy misery
> In our weary WORLD
> Since no time – no care – only scare
>
> *To 'ME' culture only* (155)

In a striking resemblance to the cited experiences of patients such as Ruth Resch, the stanza paints a grim picture of a society coined by egoism ("'ME' culture") and constant hie ("no time") in which the needs of those unable or unwilling to comply with this all too often escape notice.[7] In this context, Ireland does not need much more than the terse rhyme "no care – only scare" to also presage the psychological effects caused by such sociocultural patterns. With that said, "ONLY BARRIARS" ultimately presents itself as a poeticized emphasis on the social models of disability, according to which physical or mental impairments are not primarily understood as individual defects but (also) as systemic consequences of sociocultural patterns of obstruction.

2.3. Making (non)sense: The sounds of language "loss"

Are people with aphasia thus helpless victims of a society in which every sound is turned into an unbearable noise, an unintelligible roar? In poems such as "INSIDE OUT," Ireland opposes such hasty simplifications in no uncertain terms:

> *Washing my mind thoughts*
>
> *—ripple—ripple—still—still*
> *Balming sounds worms waves in head* (160)

By ascribing a "balming," soothing effect to sonic perceptions, the poem counters all too somber damnations of sound as an intruder tormentingly winding itself through the neural pathways of the brain. Instead, the juxtaposition of "washing," "ripple," and "waves" recalls the metaphorical origins of "sound waves" and associatively links sonic perceptions with the still ripple of a light swell that may softly wash over even agitated thoughts and calms senses and mind.

7 See also Ireland's depiction of "Aphasia, as foreign in ones language, as a language minority group, colonized by some kind of brain invading insult and often prejudized/discriminated in society" (160).

The complexity of the sounds of aphasia is explicitly illustrated in the poem "S–S–S–S–S–S. SIX NONSENSE SOUNDS (of Asphasia)":

I love Ssi - - - - Silly SOUNDS

Grup – blump – pissy
Mussy – luppy – TWITY
Niss – Tsychi – silly

NONSENSE *sounds? ! ?* (158)

In its very first line, the poem contests the notion of language disorders as merely dreadful ailments. The poem's beginning is thus a surprise *in medias res*. The lyrical speaker's assertion to "love" the "silly" sounds of aphasia insinuates an acceptance that—in what strikes one as a form of poetic self-empowerment—thwarts a reductive victimization of people with aphasia. This does not mean, however, that the pain caused by this disorder is kept secret. Instead, each stanza is dedicated to a different kind of aphasic sound, from "silly" to "sad," "shitty," "soothing," "sensual," and eventually to "survival sounds," each accompanied (in correspondence to the stanza quoted above) by $3x3^{8}$ examples of both "sense" and nonsense words of the English language. The poetic catalogue of sounds alludes to the complexity entailed by the aphasic language despite the neurological damages that caused them. While, for instance, the phonemic distortion of familiar words might at first glance seem like mere gibberish, the specific combination of interrogation and exclamation marks in the verse "Nonsense sounds? ! ?"—a line which, since it is repeated six times and also forms part of the title, is emphasized as one of the poem's most central components—calls into question any hasty assumption that aphasic language would lack sense or meaning. As Ireland points out in a comment on her poem: "The question is are they 'nonsense' words? What is nonsense

8 This sixfold sequence of the letter "S" in the title can be understood as a presumable allusion to the six sounds of aphasia that are then each illustrated by 3x3 sound examples. As this suggests, Ireland's poem is marked by a subtle play with numbers. The higher meaning of these numbers for the poem can only be speculated about. In a comment on her text, Ireland once linked the number six to her age when she—decades before she became aphasic—was sent to a speech and language therapist because of a lisp (157). Considering the poem's aphasic content and context, the dominant digit 3 can also be interpreted as an abstract reference to the semiotic triangle (Ogden and Richard) and the relationship between subject (speaker), object/referent (concept), and object designation (sign). While a more detailed discussion of this issue seems quite worthwhile in the context of aphasia, this paper does not constitute the appropriate place for such an endeavour.

or not?" (157). Yes, aphasia may produce incomprehensible words, but can the incomprehensible simply be equated with nonsense? The answer to this question already resonates in the poem's title: after all, the poem is not centred on nonsense *words* but *sounds*, and thence on the tones and overtones that connect language with life and fill it with meaning, and the poem's aphasic speaker has not lost the ability to play with these meaningful sounds at all.

> *Sooothe – sheer – shore*
> *Seea – sand –* RIPPLEY
> *Touchy – gentleey – warmrthe* (159)

Once again, these examples of the "*soothing Sounds / (of Asphasia)*" (159) represent Ireland's artistic mixing of already existing and newly coined words of the English language. Unimpeded by the symptomatic divergence from lexical norms, the alliterative sequence of familiar words and allegedly "nonsensical" paraphasias—paraphasias, however, that are loaded with sense and senses—elicit images, emotions, and sensations of a warm day at the beach, of the sight and sound of rippling water washed up at the shore, of a light breeze gently caressing the skin.

It is beyond debate that linguistic finesse, eloquence, or an extensive vocabulary all facilitate expressing our innermost stances toward the world. Nevertheless, a lexicon is only an aid (one even feels tempted in this regard to say, with Immanuel Kant, that it is rather a means than an end in itself), as meaning is: not only conveyed through words but, as Ireland's poem suggests, through sounds. When arriving at the borders of language, sound may turn into a new language, be it with regard to the tones and overtones accompanying various lexical items (morphemes, phonemes, lexemes, and others), specific use of interpunctuation, or, in a more metaphorical sense, the typographical design of, for instance, a written poem. Regarding the latter, Ireland's poem demonstrates that these "sounds" may be evoked quite clearly by a certain arrangement of black type on a white sheet of paper: constant italicization, mixed with selected capitalizations and indentations, as well as a play with dashes in various lengths, eventually create a specific "typographic sound" that contributes to the text's overall meaning. At the same time, all these various ways of playing with the sounds of language make the reader aware of the complex possibilities of individualizing expression: an example of this is the sixfold sequence of the letter "S" in the poem's title (a paratextual allusion, as one can assume, to the six sounds of aphasia). At first glance, the dashes separating the letters tempt one to read the sequence as a form of stutter; however, as the

rest of the poem insinuates, they may also be understood as a sustained hiss: as a—depending on modulation— "*Ssi - - - - Silly*," "*Ssa ——— sad*," "*SSh _____ shitty*," "*Sso _____ soothing*," "*Sse _____ sensual*," "*Ssu _____ survival*" sound (158–59). The poem's title alludes to the sense entailed even in putative nonsense, to the macrocosmic encompassed in the microcosmic, to the immense spectrum of ways to use even the smallest parts of language. As Ireland's poem therefore suggests, the "loss" of words cannot in the slightest be confused with a loss of meaning; we just have to listen to the sounds also entailed in a language out of order. In an indirect manner, the poem not only contrasts aphasic and non-aphasic language but also the language of words with the "language" of sounds—a language that can be understood by all and can thus build a bridge when more conventional forms of communication have come to a halt.

The "loss" of words cannot in the slightest be confused with a loss of meaning.

Just like or, to be more precise, *as* aphasia, Ireland's poems cause the readers to stumble, turn around, only to stumble once more, eventually leaving them with confusion, maybe even a wish for assistance in finding a way through the sonic maze. As expressions of the "barriars" aphasic patients encounter in their daily life, the poetic disruptions of norms and conventions eventually may vitiate the readers' faith in their language which once used to be such a familiar and strong matter of course. In doing so, Ireland's poetic sounds of aphasia indirectly confront the reader with the social dimensions of language disorders: after all, her poetic acceptance of the inherently unfamiliar sounds of aphasia causes a feeling of exclusion on the reader's part (from the text, the words, the meaning behind them) toward language, toward the community sharing this language, and ultimately toward oneself. What may remain is language disturbance—what may remain is aphasia. By translating the perceived as well as voiced sounds of aphasia into literature, Chris Ireland's work thus creates a "noise" that forces the reader to truly listen to, and empathize with, perceptions and expressions of people with aphasia. This "noise" also establishes a connection between pathologic perception and poetic reception and, along with that, a possible bridge between aphasic and non-aphasic worlds.

3. Concluding remarks: On captivating poems and methods

3.1. Experimenting with the idea of genre

In conclusion, Ireland's specific approach to language and literature presents poems as notational devices for the aphasic experience of language. Ireland's complex play with interpunctuation and typography or her use of

neologisms—which, in combination with the poems' intense exploration of the meaning of sound for the relationship between aphasic and non-aphasic persons, go far beyond mere wordplay—shift the poetic form into a representational articulation of the way aphasic patients can experience sounds and words, society and the world. Against this background, the question arises as to whether the aphasic method of Ireland's poetry can even be understood as a genre of its own. For various reasons, I would hesitate to make this claim. Although aphasia is characterized by specific symptoms which, in varying form and degree, are shared by the people affected, these symptoms can manifest in a unique manner.[9] In contrast to other forms of speech or language impairment, people experiencing aphasia thus do not share a common language (such as, for example, sign language), which makes it harder to create a feeling of being part of a community or culture (such as the deaf community or culture; see Padden and Humphries). From a literary perspective—which is, as I want to emphasize, the only perspective from which I am speaking in this regard—it therefore seems problematic to reduce the poetry of aphasic authors to official "rules," which also puts the idea of genre into question, as this would call for certain criteria shared by the texts ascribed to it. But are aphasic symptoms "enough" in this regard? Is there a common ground for subsuming the poems of aphasic authors into a mutual genre when the way symptoms manifest is dependent on the respective patient, person, poet? Or does this lack of official "rules," norms, or conventions in the poems written by people with aphasia constitute a genre of its own? These questions bear the risk of reducing the poetic text to a mere expression of symptoms—which would, as I would argue, not do justice to their artistic dimensions.

With that said, one might instead feel tempted to compare aphasic poetry with experimental poetry: literary experimentalism strives for the unseen, unknown, and unheard and aims to break rules and to redefine them (for an introduction to literary experimentalism see Cecire). Does not aphasic poetry comply with all that as well? While the poetry of aphasic authors such as Ireland may bear resemblance to literary experimentalism, I nonetheless see a difference: an experiment in general, as well as literary experimentalism in particular, is an exercise in control. Aphasic language is, on the contrary, defined by the *lack* of control: by an impaired

9 When looking for a word, patients may, for instance, rather resort to subjective associations than umbrella terms; a patient who had a dog as a child may thus not paraphrase "dog" with words such as "animal," "species," or "wolf" but with "childhood," "boy," or "home."

or even complete inability to control the syntactical, semantical, morphological, or other kinds of structure of what one wants to say. When it comes to aphasic poetry, we thus do not know if the rules were broken by the poet or the patient—and if they were broken on purpose or on accident, voluntarily or involuntarily. As long as an aphasic poet does not explicitly assign his or her work to experimentalism, the reader has neither the ethical nor poetological "right" to claim such a categorization. In the end, Ireland's work does not tell the reader what is symptom and what is style. It is precisely this ambiguity, this juxtaposition of pathology and poetry, that makes aphasic poetry so hard to grasp and deconstruct—and so intriguing for literary studies.

3.2. (Self-)Reflecting the borders of language

The question of how far aphasiologically-based sound studies can be applied to non-aphasic literature requires a more comprehensive answer than can be given in the context of this paper.[10] In light of what we can see by the example of Chris Ireland, I would nevertheless suggest that the aphasic disruptions of linguistic and poetic conventions—in a metaphorical and metaphysical sense—bears a certain resemblance to non-aphasic literature, especially when it comes to the genre of poetry. As Ursula Rudnick once said: "Unlike literary forms such as the novel and unlike philosophical analysis, poetry is not bound to a narrative structure … [P]oetry can mirror the fragmentation caused by destruction" (132). The history of poetry is permeated by a deep longing for finding the right, true connection between word and world, which all too often results in a harsh confrontation with the limits of language. This longing, which can express itself in a confusing and at times even alarming cacophony, can have a wide variety of causes. One might think of experiences such as grief or trauma, which are so consuming that they render one at a loss for words; or of the deep linguistic skepticism that may be triggered by, for instance, propaganda rhetoric; or simply of the artistic desire to explore and redefine supposedly rigid borders of language. Albeit in very different ways, all these different forms of poetry can question existing assumptions about the interrelations between language and world, between the self and the other, thereby also touching on fundamental issues of linguistic philosophy. Considering that aphasic language and poetry are inherently defined by a destruction of common notions of "normal" and "abnormal," of sense and nonsense, and, not least, of the (often unnoticed) "barriar"

10 A monograph dealing with this question is, however, in preparation.

between the self and the (marginalized) "other" in (quotidian, poetic, academic, medical) language and culture, it stands therefore to reason that the use of aphasiological concepts for literary analysis might lead to a deeper understanding of other kinds of poetry centred on the limits of language.

As I am neither a physician nor a patient, I can, of course, only make assumptions in this matter. Instead, as a literary scholar, I use the "medical" in a merely metaphorical sense to understand something about literature and language. It should go without saying that when resorting to clinical concepts for literary analyses, one must be utterly aware of the borders between the metaphorical and the medical. The literary cannot simply be equated with the clinical, not least to avoid wrongful pathologizations of a writer or a work (that the literary reading is [mis-]conceived as a medical diagnosis). Along these lines, a distinction Ireland once made cannot be emphasized enough: "POETRY breaks RULES (consciously); / APHASIA breaks RULES (unconsciously)" (Ireland and Pound 151). As this quotation makes abundantly clear, the disruptions and eruptions of "clinical" aphasia are expressions of a physiological impotence that can mean immense suffering for those affected. In contrast to that, in the poetry of non-aphasic writers, even apparently similar de(con)structions strike us as the deliberate result of an accomplished mastery of language. Nevertheless, despite their striking differences, non-aphasic poets approaching the limits of language may also experience an overarching struggle for control which might—not so much in a physical but metaphysical sense—result in notions of unintentionality. With that said, I would thus argue that the noisy nuisance created by both aphasic and non-aphasic disruptions of familiar ways of saying and hearing challenges allegedly self-evident interrelations between word and world. In this way, they allow us at least a vague glimpse into the creative promises waiting beyond the limits of linguistic norms.

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