

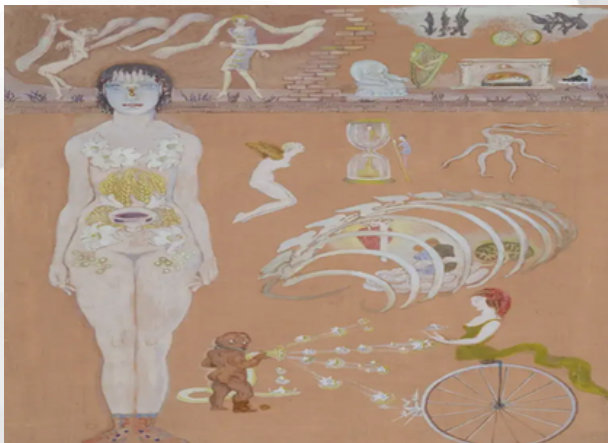
The Divergent Mind in 20th Century Transatlantic Poetry

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My research critically examines the neurocentric model of identity as it appears in contemporary neurodiversity studies and seeks to complicate it through insights from literature—specifically, twentieth-century transatlantic poetry. The rise of neurodiversity as a movement was shaped by both scientific and political developments, including advances in neurology that foregrounded conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia as neurologically distinct ways of being, as well as advocacy from identity-based movements such as queer and disability rights activism. These same materialist assumptions about the brain's role in identity can be traced in poetic developments of the period, where poets engaged with scientific discourse and reimagined embodiment through formal experimentation.

Twentieth-century poetry has a distinct relationship with language, one that values ambiguity, texture, and resistance over seamless expression. This makes it particularly well suited to be revisited through a contemporary lens like neurodiversity, which enables us to read its gaps, interstices, polysemantic allusions, and playfulness not as aesthetic failures but as deliberate, sustained engagements with cognitive divergence. Poets of this period experimented with new, scientifically inflected prosodic forms that were intimately tied to notions of embodiment, both as a means of expanding poetic form and as a way of interrogating the cultural implications of scientific progress.

The increasing dominance of physicalist theories of mind—encapsulated in the assertion that “the mind is as the brain does”—found an aesthetic counterpart in the way poetic form foregrounded materiality over meaning.



*Pictures by Mina Loy



In contrast to the affective and rhetorical excess of late Victorian poetry, this is a poetry of objectivity and formal constraints. Its embodied quality allows for a reading through the lens of disability studies, with the poem as a linguistic body. Constraints, here, become impairments, and the perceived inaccessibility of "difficult" poetry serves as a textual analogue for the supposed arhetoricity of the "disabled" or neurodivergent subject.

Another key parallel that allows for such analogous readings is how twentieth-century poetry privileged the material aspects of language—its 'gestural' properties like sounds, rhythms, and line breaks—over its semantic or referential dimensions, just as materialist interpretations of the mind privileged the neurological basis of identity.

The concept of "cerebral subjectivation," as articulated by Fernando Vidal and Francisco Ortega, underscores how the brain came to be understood as synonymous with the Self, reinforcing a neurocentric model of personhood that poetry both engaged with and challenged.

I am currently examining the neurodivergent resonances in the works of modernist poets Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy, as well as postmodernist poets John Ashbery and Tom Raworth.

Their poetry does not merely reflect the scientific discourses of their time but also disrupts and reconfigures them, offering alternative models of cognition and embodiment. I intend for my research to contribute to the field of literary neurodiversity studies while offering a novel perspective on twentieth-century poetry.



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