

# Happy Work: An Interview with Lila Matsumoto

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Lila Matsumoto was born in Japan and raised in the USA. After studying English Literature at Vassar College, she moved to Scotland in 2007 to study for an MLitt in Scottish Literature at the University of Aberdeen. She moved to Edinburgh in 2009 and completed a PhD dissertation on Gael Turnbull and Ian Hamilton Finlay at the University of Edinburgh.

While in Scotland, Matsumoto became an active participant in an experimental poetry community spread primarily between Glasgow and Edinburgh, supporting its development as a poet, editor, and curator of poetry and multimedia events. The latter included the little magazine and reading series *SCREE* and the performance series *Syndicate* (coorganized with Samantha Walton and Jo Walton), which brought together poets, musicians, and visual artists to create new multimedia

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Contemporary Women's Writing

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pieces. Matsumoto also helped to curate the *Outside-In Inside-Out Poetry Festival* in Glasgow in Autumn 2016. Introducing an anthology of innovative verse by poets based in Scotland in 2017, Peter Manson noted the importance of *Syndicate*, *SCREE*, and *Outside-in Inside-Out* – among many other projects – in fostering a Scottish innovative poetry scene that was “more alive and exciting than it’s been in a generation” (“An Introduction” 3).

Since 2016 Matsumoto has lived in Nottingham, where she is currently Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nottingham. She convenes the Nottingham Poetry Exchange reading series and coedits the poetry and arts magazine *FRONT HORSE*. The landscapes and communities of Scotland continue to inform her poetics and creative networks. However, as Manson points out, these are also exemplary of the peripatetic, postnational framework that defines contemporary innovative poetry scenes: “[i]t’s a connected world, and these poets have made their own connections among the increasingly eclectic and internationalist experimental writing communities” (3).

Matsumoto’s publications include *Urn & Drum* (2018), *Soft Troika* (2016), and *Allegories from My Kitchen* (2015). Her poetry and criticism have also been published in a variety of journals and anthologies, including *Jacket2*, *Poetry London*, *Tripwire*, *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, *Zarf*, *Archive of the Now*, and *HixEros*. A series of booklet poems inspired by the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth (*At the House of a Female Friend* and others) was included in the exhibition *Wordsworth and Bashō, Walking Poets: Encounters with Nature*, held at the Kakimori Bunko Gallery in Itami, Japan in 2016. Matsumoto’s radio essay “Horn Dance” was presented on BBC Radio 3 in December 2018.

Matsumoto’s poetry can be broadly assessed in the context of “innovative poetry,” of the kind that was initially fostered by the British Poetry Revival of 1958–75, and by the American L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement of the same era. Some of the writers associated with this tradition, or creative approach, appear in two anthologies entitled *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK*, published in 1996 and 2015, and edited by Maggie O’Sullivan and Emily Critchley, respectively. Like much of the work included in those anthologies, Matsumoto’s writing thus has its deeper roots in Anglo-American modernism and is defined by the qualities of grammatical and thematic complexity that this connection might imply. Gertrude Stein and Denise Riley are among the most frequently cited precedents for, and influences on, Matsumoto’s writing.

This broad-brush analysis, however, does little to capture the musicality, lithe brevity, and intense scrutiny of the small-scale world – human and nonhuman – that distinguish Matsumoto’s practice. Commenting on the themes of her work as a whole, Calum Gardner notes that “[it] has returned repeatedly to a concern with oikos, the household, which is the root of economy – one’s ability to manage the household resources or keep one’s house in order, eventually generalised out to the political and into a science” (19). Alexa Winik, reviewing *Urn & Drum*, notes this same Intimistic preoccupation, commenting on the “continual reclamation of

natural and domestic spaces” in that collection. But Winik sees these passages not so much as fragments of socioeconomic analysis as the pretext for encoded speculations on the nature of desire and subjectivity, and the entwinement of both with “the secret lives of objects”: “[b]y examining the potentialities in seemingly static objects, [Matsumoto] ultimately reveals a rich spectrum of human vulnerability reflected, namely the daily unspeakable realities of death and unfulfilled desire, the urn and the drum.” Alexandra Campbell, discussing Matsumoto’s poem “Islet,” engages with her “object-oriented” writing as a form of eco-poetics, less concerned with what objects tell us about ourselves and the societies we inhabit, than with what we habitually fail to spot about the nonhuman world: “Matsumoto urges the need to adopt a renewed attention to the world in order to glean its full meaning” (16).

Other critics, more attentive to the formal aspects of Matsumoto’s writing, have found in its singular grammatical constructions and linguistic registers a kind of *sui generis*, soft-pedaled absurdism. Ian Seed notes of *Urn & Drum*: “Matsumoto is a master at combining the abstract and concrete, the philosophical and descriptive. The absurdism becomes soft and understated, inviting us to imagine something we have never thought about before and to tell ourselves a new set of stories.” Reviewing *Allegories from My Kitchen*, Colin Herd finds that “[a]bsurdity of expression and surprise characterise many of the poems, Matsumoto maintaining an extraordinary deadpan tone even while delivering some really bizarre linguistic turns.”

Matsumoto has frequently sought out, or created work in the context of, overlaps with other artforms, particularly music. A frequent performer of her work, Matsumoto has presented her poetry in a variety of unconventional contexts, including music festivals and on record. Her performance duo Cloth with Matthew Hamblin performed at the *Supernormal* music festival in Summer 2019, and in 2018 Food People, the music group she performs in with Matthew Hamblin and Greg Thomas, released an album featuring her poetry, *Vetch*, on the experimental music label Chocolate Monk.

This interview was conducted via email during December 2017 by Greg Thomas. A critical introduction was added by the interviewer in August 2019.

## Objects

**GT:** Your forthcoming collection *Urn & Drum* features lots of objects, the first two of which appear in the title. At various points, notably in the selection from *Allegories from My Kitchen* and in the section entitled “Landish,” the collection has the quality of an inventory or checklist of objects. What is the significance of objects to your poetry, and what are the influences on this aspect of your work?

LM: I've always been interested in captions and labels that describe images and objects in museums, on the back of products, on television. Maybe I've been conditioned to notice them. I moved to the U. S. from Japan when I was 6 and my mom always had the closed-captioning on the television to help the family learn English. The delay of the captions, the mismatch of the text to the moving image, and the attention paid to sound effects and pitch or tone of voice were often funny. I remember watching *Kindergarten Cop*, *Headline News* with presenter Lynne Russell, George Bush Senior making a speech, etcetera, and enjoying how the liberties taken or mistakes made by the captioner sometimes created surreal meanings or situations. The possibility of creating poetry as responses to objects was exciting for me. It also presented a totally different way of experiencing objects, not just the art object but any cultural object. Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* was a revelation in its ostensible response to objects but with the connection sometimes being really abstruse, musical, as if the words were objects in themselves. Later I was really taken by Stephen Rodefer's poem sequence *Daydreams of Frascati*, his texts alongside drawings by Chip Sullivan.

## Style

**GT: There is an interesting tension in your work between a style of delivery which seems quite intimate and direct – often first-person, conversational in tone, adopting the grammatical trappings of aphorisms or anecdotes – and the recalcitrance, or perhaps dreaminess, of some of the images that are conjured up. It seems that there is a resistance to, or perhaps rather an attempt to skirt or flit around, language; I am thinking especially of *Soft Troika* here. Would you agree, and, if so, what is the context for this aspect of your work? Is a kind of almost-clarity something you're interested in rendering? Again, what are the influences here?**

LM: Once I was eating a pack of crisps and the back of it said something like "Hi, let me get off my tractor and tell you about my potatoes that you are now eating." I know that's a commodity gimmick, but it amused me to have this language hold me captive in this scenario of being spoken to by the "potato maker." Copywriting must be such a strange job, to create trust or desire or whatever within this prescribed space. Maybe poetry's not that different. I really like it when you are reading a particular mode of text and it veers away from your expectations for it. The music critic Byron Coley's reviews, for example, are weird, succinct, and wonderful – they don't strike me as reviews but as small odd poems. Frances Stark is also an influence. The "genre" of *The Architect and the Housewife* is unidentifiable. It's written in what you may call an intimate way, a kind of mock life-writing maybe, the artist telling you about her house and sofa cushions, and it's also essayistic, meshed in art and intellectual

history. The reader is always questioning the *form* of the piece, and the shift from trivial to philosophic is an incursion that's strangely pleasing. In terms of dreaminess or the "almost-clarity," I am interested in language that resists fast knowing. I like the short stories of Tatyana Tolstaya, for example, and I always wish to write like her.

In *Soft Troika* I am experimenting with forms of address and specifically the framework of the review. Tom Leonard reviewed Christian Boltanski's exhibition at the Tramway Gallery in Glasgow in 1994. His review, published in the magazine *Modern Painters*, was a transcription of a tape recording of his reactions, which are tangential and irrelevant, charting his awareness of his body walking around the exhibition, etcetera. So the poems in *Soft Troika* are set up as reviews, but ones given by somebody with questionable expertise and/or authority. John Hall's conceptualization of writing as a mode of enquiry is something I totally embrace. As someone not trained in art criticism and unaccustomed to writing about art objects, the mode of reviewing led my attention and writing down unexpected paths.

## Women

**GT:** The poem "Born in Flames," which opens *Urn & Drum*, refers to "centuries of women's work" (8). More generally the first section of the collection, "Happy Work," seems to be concerned with women's work and is punctuated with images of women mostly engaged in domestic labor. How much, and how consciously, is the book about women and women's work? Is the interest in domestic imagery which comes across in "Oikos, The Household" (*Urn & Drum* 53–62), and in *Allegories from My Kitchen*, a self-conscious, self-reflexive one, or is this simply the content that suggests itself to the authorial voice? (Figure 1)

**LM:** Very consciously. The sequence "Happy Work" can be described as ekphrastic poems in that the texts respond to or engage with the images that they sit next to. Other people (Katy Hastie, Daisy Lafarge) have written eloquently about the gendered dynamics and historical conventions of ekphrasis, and the ways in which there are correspondences between the silent woman and the mute art object, which is "given" a voice by the responder (who is typically male). In this sequence I wanted to respond to objects explicitly depicting women at work, so I typed in "women working" and variations of this into the search box of the Wellcome Collection image website. Some of the results were unsurprising: women giving or assisting in birth, nursing, and doing domestic duties like cleaning and cooking. But others were less expected, like the female bullfighter or the Chinese medical diagnostic tool.

I'm interested in what kind of work is understood as art as opposed to labor. In her essay "The Nourishing Arts," Luce Giard asks why the "menial" task of cooking, long associated with the feminine hearth, is not comparable to the more "exalted" arts. Why are most award-winning chefs male? Work can be boring, back-breaking,



**Fig. 1.** Illustration from “Happy Work” (*Urn & Drum* 8). With acknowledgments to the Wellcome Library, London.

mind-numbing. It can also be imaginative and interesting, and maybe these possibilities are latent in work’s repetition and required skills. The title, “Happy Work,” is from a phrase by Maria Montessori, who founded the Montessori educational system that prioritizes creativity and play over more rigid or formalized learning.

## Magazines

**GT:** You are not only a poet but also the erstwhile editor of *SCREE* (2010–14) and now coeditor of *FRONT HORSE* (2016–). In what ways is editorial work creative work? Do you see the curation of poems in a magazine as a creative role, and how?

LM: When I was ten or eleven, I had 13 pen pals and probably wrote multiple letters each day. This was before the internet had really taken off. My pen pals lived in places like Duluth, Minnesota; Waco, Texas; Augusta, Maine; and Newton, Massachusetts. I also had a pen pal in England and another in France – I don't remember the cities they lived in. When I was writing my PhD thesis on the little magazines *Migrant* [edited by Gael Turnbull and Michael Shayer, 1959–60], and *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse*. [or *POTH*, edited by Ian Hamilton Finlay and Jessie McGuffie, 1962–68], it struck me that these poetry magazines were very much like the pen-pal network I had, uniting people with similar interests, i. e. learning about other people, their views and motivations, through writing. Gael Turnbull and Michael Shayer, the editors of *Migrant*, described the little magazine as a semi-private conversation or a poem in rehearsal. I really agree with this because it was through editing *SCREE* that I learned about poetry beyond text-object. I mean poetry as not just poem but as activity, work, conversation. I wasn't very good at it at first. It was really satisfying to ask poets I admired if they wanted to contribute to my magazine, and for them to say yes. But beyond this it was a twisty learning process. I had this idea from *Migrant* that I wanted to type up each poem I received as the master copy – which would then be Xeroxed though, rather than mimeographed. This proved to be arduous because my typewriter had a very stiff S and an erratic space bar. So I literally body-experienced each letter of each word of each poem in *SCREE*. I also spent countless hours in front of the four Xerox machines at the Edinburgh University library, moving on to another machine after jamming one with my color double-sided A3 prints. I guillotined off a section of my hair in the paper cutter. I had conversations, short and long, with the poets about their poems in the magazine. It was really edifying. After a couple of issues of *SCREE* I think I became a bit better at curation, at understanding the relation of the paratext to the text; and I started to sharpen my own tastes, hopefully without forming orthodoxies in my mind. I began running a reading series. So editing *SCREE*, and now co-running *FRONT HORSE* with Matthew Hamblin, is in one sense a way to learn about other people's work and also to create a shared space or endeavor, a context, for human relation.

## Networks

**GT: What poetry scenes, communities, and/or networks helped you to define and develop your work, and to what extent did this happen as the result of collaboration and conversation with other poets? Which poets and editors in Scotland have you found particularly inspiring and encouraging of your work?**

LM: The poetry community that I was part of in Scotland was absolutely essential to my poetry education. I moved to Edinburgh in 2009 and met Samantha Walton, Jo Walton, Colin Herd, Iain Morrison, you yourself, and nick-e melville. We started a

monthly poetry workshop group called Poetry in Progress, which was the first time that I had ever workshopped my poems. It also made me a better reader of other people's work. The opportunity to discuss poetry, not just theoretically but in terms of line breaks and typography, was valuable for me. It was an exciting time, to write within the context of others' practices and thinking. There were lots of avenues for presenting work, from poetry magazines like Colin Herd's *anything anymore anywhere*, little magazine fairs organized by Sandra Alland, the poetry performance night *CAESURA* run by Graeme Smith in Edinburgh, *Verse Hearse* in Glasgow curated by Calum Rodger and Stewart Sanderson, and readings organized by J. L. Williams, who was the events programmer at the Scottish Poetry Library. This is just a speculation, but I think that our distance from London and Cambridge was important to the Scottish "scene," and I don't mean this patriotically. There was a sense that away from the historical or traditional centers, the margins were left to do as we liked, however self-willed this conceit may have been. The idea of Body Presence Solidarity, which I picked up from Richard Price, was important in the articulation of a poetry community where we attended each other's events and read each other's latest poems. There are a lot of poetry initiatives happening right now in Scotland that I am excited about, like the magazine *Cumulus*, edited by Katy Lewis Hood and Dom Hale, the artist-led publishing platform MAP, and Colin Herd's magazine *Adjacent Pineapple*.

## Art

**GT: A lot of your poetry responds to visual art: I'm thinking of poems such as "Little Big One" (*Urn & Drum* 38), which responds to Philip Maltman's eponymous painting. You have also worked as a critic on concrete and ekphrastic poetries, and on Ian Hamilton Finlay's *POTH*, which is a magazine obviously centrally concerned with visual form and literary form in conjunction. What do you find that this focus on interplay across media – thinking specifically about your responses to visual art – brings to your work?**

LM: I think one of the best aspects of doing poetry is that the flexibility of the activity allows for unexpected stuff to happen. My research into *POTH* led to further research on the intersection of poetry and visual art: Fluxus, artists' books, film poetry. I'm interested in people like Vito Acconci and Ulises Carrión, poets who were also artists and publishers, crossing media, experimenting with placing their poems in arts contexts and vice versa. Carrión is a really intriguing figure, definitely a transnational artist. His ideas about the book as a discrete form of poetics was a huge influence for me in thinking of the poem's position or status not just on the page but placed within the cultural and material object of the book, and how seriality, pace of reading, transportation, etcetera, all contribute to the poem's effects.





**Fig. 2.** Lila Matsumoto and Rocio von Jungenfeld perform *Rocks* at the Master's Festival, Edinburgh College of Art, August 20, 2014. Image credit: Samantha Walton.

So my research into historical conjunctions of visual and literary forms has led me to making hybrid visual-literary work such as poem booklets, film poems with artists Mairi Lafferty (*Byword*) and Adam Butcher (“Strawflower”), poem performances with Rocio von Jungenfeld (*Rocks*). My lack of expertise in visual art means that I get to collaborate with other people, which is one of my favorite ways of making work! (Figure 2)

In terms of my ekphrastic work, as I said earlier, I find responding to objects stimulating, even if that object isn't real. Sometimes I place the image that I responded to alongside the poem; other times I remove the referent, as it were. One of my favorite poets is Denise Riley. Her description of color, texture, and movement I think is extraordinary. I think it's her attention to the visual that makes her metaphors catch you unawares. There is a line of hers that I've pressed into my brain: “Let the sun rush in me / like a tree of scarlet leaves / that I may not be so gracelessly / dark with a conceit of strangeness” (“The Ambition” 55).

## Sculpture

**GT: During 2015–17 you collaborated with the sculptor Hannah Imlach on a series of responses to renewable energy production models on the Isle of Eigg, North Uist, and the Monach Isles in the Hebrides. This partly involved creating poems in response to Imlach's kinetic sculptures. One of these sculptures, *Nautilus Turbine*, was a response to the hydroelectric energy schemes used on Eigg, following a series of interviews with the island's residents conducted by Imlach and yourself. Another, *Tide Quern*, focuses on the relation between marine energy devices and quern-stones in North Uist; you wrote the poem “Recce” in response to this piece. What did you find interesting and rewarding about your projects with Imlach? How did working with a sculptor**



#### Recce

In the gallery each object rests at the epicentre of a venerable radius.

You are a vanguard or a pilgrim carrying out a surgical strike on the icon. Your image reflected on its surface measures your distance and proximity.

Stay with the object and its worldly weight. You suppose that there is a working, a choice that made the action that made the shape.

A 'working' is a gerund, noun made from verb. Crystallised here are the motions which yielded: heating, burning, cutting.

You can experience something and you can sense it. You can imagine yourself in a situation. And maybe that imagined place and what it made you think was more potent than the experience.

**Fig. 3.** Hannah Imlach, *Tide Quern* (powder-coated stainless steel, Perspex, birch plywood and fixings, 2017); Lila Matsumoto, "Recce."

**inform your own practice? Is there something that linguistic creativity can learn from nonlinguistic, and how do you feel your own work has responded to nonlinguistic creative modes such as sculpture? Is there an ecological sensibility behind your desire to respond to other media (a desire to get beyond an inhibiting taxonomical engagement with the natural world)? (Figure 3)**

LM: Sculptures are made by manipulating materials, through the three-dimensional modeling of an object. From the poet's perspective, the idea of engaging with materials in this kind of dynamic and bodily way is appealing. It licenses the fantasy of the pliable, finely crafted object, which the poem hardly ever is.

Working with Hannah has expanded the provenance of poetry for me. In her practice and work, which are site-specific and engage with scientific development and climate change, Hannah regularly works with engineers, scientists, and gallery workers. The genres of her research are mutable. Collaborating with Hannah has opened my eyes to the scope of research in creative writing. Our recent project in North Uist, where we researched local modes of renewable energy production, involved working with botanists, geologists, historians, and the art gallery Taigh Chearsabhagh. The knowledge that our collaborators shared has been integral to my work on this project. It has made me reimagine the material that is poetry, and I think back to Hall's idea I mentioned earlier about writing as a mode itself of research, rather than the necessary outcome. The trespass of poetry onto nonliterary contexts is exciting. One key point of reference and inspiration for me has been the writing of environmentalist and philosopher Val Plumwood. She places storytelling and poetics at the heart of critical thinking about our environments, as ways of experiencing ecological crises in a way which is, as she says, radical, open, and nonreductive.

I'm interested in the ways that Hannah's approaches and thinking about matter could be applied, if not directly then diagonally, to poetry. Working with a sculptor has enabled matter to matter to me more. The deep concern with the physical properties of materials in Hannah's practice, and the centrality of the role of the human body in releasing the latent function of objects, are particularly intriguing ideas relatable to poetics. As you say, how do you translate nonlinguistic creativity to the linguistic? I'm still at the early stages of this, but one aspect I've been thinking about is how the sculptor's craft can give insight into the potential of materials to change through manipulation, time, and environmental factors. It also draws attention to the relationships, real or speculative, that people have to this malleable condition.

## Music

**GT: A recent poem of yours, "Princess of Flexible Bamboo Scattering Light" (*Urn & Drum* 33), appears on the record which you, Matthew Hamblin, and I have released under the name Food People. How has your collaboration with musicians and your work as a musician informed your poetry? What happens to a poem when it is used in a musical context?**

LM: I've played violin from a young age, but I hadn't really thought about the intersection of music with my own poetry until a few years ago. In 2013 Samantha Walton, Jo Walton, and I ran a poetry performance series called Syndicate in Edinburgh with New Media Scotland, where we invited artists, musicians, and performers to present cross-media

solo or collaborative work. I learned a lot from that series, with poets using music or sounds in different ways: Holly Pester, Justin Katko, Iain Morrison. Dorothy Butchard introduced me to the work of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, a collective of artists making what can be called “digital poems,” melding music with text animation.

The texture of a poem totally changes with the addition of music or sounds. There are so many permutations of poetry/music presentation. Recently the band which we are both in, Food People, performed a piece responding to Peter Manson’s poem “Sourdough Mutation” in collaboration with the artist Matt Wright, who made the visuals.<sup>1</sup> That was a mixture of live performance, prerecorded sounds made using coding conceits on the poem, and a PowerPoint projecting the corresponding sections of “Sourdough.”

Taking poetry out of its poetry context is fun. What happens when poetry hangs out somewhere else besides books and poetry readings? I’m thinking of the work of poet Claire Potter with guitarist Bridget Hayden. As you mention, some of my poems, and yours, are on Food People’s upcoming release on Beartown Records. I am reading my poem, but the pitch, tempo, phrasings, etcetera, have been manipulated by our bandmate Matthew Hamblin, so that it’s not a “poem read over music.” I like the instantaneous transformation of sound when I use an effect pedal with my violin. So Food People is in one way an effect pedal for my poetry.

### “Scottish Poetry”

**GT: Do you feel there is anything about your work that places it in a specifically Scottish context? You are not Scottish, but you have lived in Scotland, and there are responses and references to Scottish – especially West-Coast and Hebridean – landscapes and places in your work. To what extent do you see your work as rooted in, or responsive to, Scottish literary genres or canons: concrete poetry, minimalist and postobjectivist poetry, eco-poetry, etcetera? Are there any other geographically or culturally specific definitions with which you’d like to associate your work? How useful do you feel these labels are, and on what terms are you interested in using them? What is the risk of stereotyping, and what are your sensitivities around this?**

LM: I don’t consider myself a “Scottish” poet, but I wouldn’t consider myself a “Japanese,” “American,” or “British” poet either. At the same time, my work has been and still is, to some extent, rooted in the Scottish context, because that is where I developed as a poet. The poetry networks, publications, performance platforms, editors, and poetry friends that supported me were predominantly based in Scotland. I still maintain connections there (I moved to England in 2016), and they are important to me. At the moment I am making work in collaboration with Hannah Imlach, of course, who is based in Glasgow. For the past few years we have been making collaborative work in response to various coastal environments in Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> This performance was given at Pollok Ex-Servicemen’s Club, Glasgow on October 27, 2017, as part of the *Peter Manson Symposium*, University of Glasgow, October 27–28, 2017.

But it's not just a geographic circumstance either. Much of my understanding and thinking about poetry has been shaped by the crossing of poetry and visual arts in Scotland in the 1960s and beyond, especially through my PhD research into Ian Hamilton Finlay and concrete poetry. Scotland has always been a hub for visual poetry activity: contemporary poets like Nick-E Melville and Julie Johnstone really inspire me with their publications.

I had a conversation recently with the poet Lisa Samuels, who calls herself a "transnational" poet. I think this is an interesting adjective and raises questions about what it is to be labeled a poet from a particular country. In one sense it's an assignation, a kind of claiming of being part of a team, and that your activity will belong to that team's depository: like REF for universities! Or maybe it's just a biographical tag of origin or current residence or whatever, but one that inevitably cues up preconceptions or stereotypes. After a poetry reading once, someone asked me why I don't write poems about my Japanese heritage. If I were a Scottish poet, would I invariably write about kilts and bagpipes? I don't think so.

### "Women's Poetry"

**GT:** Again, what is your level of comfort with this category? Do you think that descriptions of poetry by recourse to gender can be counterproductive: essentializing in the very act of making space for the voices they identify? You mentioned Denise Riley earlier, and I am thinking of her line "The Savage is flying back home from the New County / in native-style dress with a baggage of sensibility" ("A Note on Sex" 7).

LM: I think the category of "women's poetry" has a similar reception today as "nature poetry." There are expectations of coziness, poignancy, an appeal to authentic experience – maybe even ease of reading. Meanwhile there's so much poetry by women and "nature poetry" that defies these expectations. Scott Thurston's article in this journal, and your own article in this issue, examine some of the tensions around the "women's poetry" category, especially through the prism of experimentalism, or what we may call "nonmainstream" poetry. Every time we carve out a category, even in a spirit of recognition or celebration, we risk a kind of ghettoization.

So in answer to your question, I wouldn't like to have my own poetry filed under "women's poetry." At the same time, I am a woman and a poet, and I think platforms like *Tender*, edited by Rachael Allen and Sophie Collins, which publishes work by writers and artists identifying as female, are important. Unfortunately poetry, mainstream or not, is still dominated by male voices, so conscious efforts still need to be made to encourage publications and performances by women.

## Conflict of interest

As is made clear throughout this interview, the interviewer is a collaborator of Matsumoto. He has performed and recorded with her as a musician since 2017 and has performed and written poetry periodically with her since 2009.

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