Veda Carmine-Ritchie in Conversation with Kanako Shimizu



Kanako Shimizu is an emerging trans poet, artist, and full-time editor born in Hiroshima, now based in New York City. Their work has been featured in Notre Dame Review and The Baltimore Review*, and they were a Fall 2026 finalist for the Brooklyn Poets Fellows program.*

NDR: Between the chickens, Mary's tibia, and the sparrow; there seems to be a corporeal presentness to your poetry—What function does the body, or rather physicality itself, supply to the three poems of yours published in issue 61 of *NDR*? Do you find the corporeal to creep into the majority of your writing?

KS: *What a thoughtful question. In all three poems included in issue 61, the body—physicality—is put under stress, functioning as a site of lust and decay; gluttony and famine; Godly vessel and sick thing. I find these tensions potent and demanding—and shameful. When writing these poems, I found myself thinking a lot about Julia Kristeva's description of abject horror, too: how the sight of your mortal body can stir a deep disgust and fascination. I tend*

to write a lot of poems that contend with the body—as an acre, a walnut, a crucifix. Most often, the body is a landscape: a marshy armpit, duned skin on a pocked cheek, arm hair as reed grass. I love feeling like the islanders clambering on top of poor, tied-up Gulliver. I love thinking of the body stretching beyond where it does, reflecting the landscape around it.

NDR: I absolutely see the body being stretched to a scale that is beyond comprehension—there is this feeling of being zoomed in so closely to the anatomical functions. Then, alongside the description of Mary's tibia, in your poem "Noli me tángre" we face the idea of a body as being able to hold, and therefore lose, purity—which feels quite mystical alongside the functional. We see the speaker begin to yearn, or rather to promise themself repeatedly. Can you tell me more about the interaction between purity, the body, and the speaker in this piece?

KS: *In a way, this poem is about the symbolic and the real—or, as you stated it, the mystical and the functional. The inactive, inert body and its parts can be transformed into a symbol, even Mary (Magdalene) can be made pure again, as her pulled tooth is pure. Her dry tibia is pure—silent—still. Meanwhile, the real living body is a vessel that collects sin like dust wherever it goes. The body is owned by self, the symbol (purity) by others. How can one change over its ownership or divest from its sinfulness? I imagined this poem as a confessional for a teenage sinner, who thinks about shedding sin through this strange and human logic: by being still, docile, void, by becoming the symbol. I imagined it, too, to be in conversation with another poem published in* NDR*, "The Double Gyres," which thinks about Yeats' symbolic gyres, inversions, sex, and cycles of time and life.*

NDR: How does your poetry converse, or rather, interact with purity? How does your interpretation of the gyres transform the definition of purity?

KS: *In "Noli me tángre," purity stands opposite sin. In many ways, it's in line with the Catholic understanding of purity and tabula rasa, that the two moments we are pure are at birth and in death, that all human activity between breeds sin. The sparrows-as-gyres in "The Double Gyres" are less concerned with purity and sin, despite the sand-hole baptism and intercourse witnessed in the space they share. I don't think the poem necessarily transforms purity, but offers a scene opposite—no purity, no sin—in the way a gyre does.*

NDR: How does movement reveal itself in these three poems? Is it a tool or a state of being?

KS: *Hmm, this is a hard question! Here are my initial thoughts. In all three poems, movement is dually emancipatory and dangerous. Movement in the jostled truck is what kills the chickens in "Indigo, Blue"—but their final act (one last glance) includes a scene of paradise. Measured movement carries Mary's bone in "Noli me tángere," while its disorderly twin promises to avail the speaker to purity. In "The Double Gyres," movement appears in sex and cleanliness—while what's beyond (unseen, unsaid) is death. In these ways, movement is both a state of being and a tool. It is uncontrollable, almost compulsive—with moments of target practice: when we stop by the road, when we promise to be pure, when we choose.*

NDR: Finally, who are some writers and artists whose work has been fueling you lately?

KS: *I am perennially inspired by Mina Loy for her Dionysian and modernist ways. She has always been one of my favorites, so explosive and experimental in what a poem was, is, and can be. What sexuality and poetic intimacy is, can be. Recently, I picked up Robert Pinkney's* The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide *(1999) and have felt a new desire to better understand and undertake iambic pentameter, which I hope to explore in newly developing work. Other inspirations have included Jill Osier for her clairvoyance, Alice Notley for her sonic scape and opacity, and Dawn Lundy Martin for her visceral power. Most importantly, I am pushed forward biweekly by a group of great poets that I have the honor of meeting with—Juanita Brunk, Charlene Hoey, and Lola Sinreich—whose writing and insights that challenge and delight me. We all write very different poems that I get to hold in gentle and ardent reverence. We meet in a dark bar in the city and workshop poems over tin cans holding hot french fries. It is my personal heaven.*