

Mira Gonzalez on being labelled

October 24, 2016 - Mira Gonzalez published her first poetry collection, *i will never be beautiful enough to make us beautiful together*, in 2013. It was a finalist for The Believer Poetry Award. In 2015, she released a collaborative book with Tao Lin called *Selected Tweets*, which is what it was, among other things. Mira's mother is the artist Lora Norton, and her stepfather is Black Flag bassist Chuck Dukowski. She's very good at Twitter.

As told to Brandon Stosuy, 2747 words.

Tags: [Writing](#), [Poetry](#), [Culture](#), [Technology](#), [Identity](#), [Success](#).

I started writing around the time Twitter started to be popular. I attribute most of my success to having Twitter. Social media, in general, was my main way of getting my writing out there and garnering a following. So, on one hand, I'm thankful to social media. I obviously love it and use it everyday, and I definitely wouldn't be where I am without it, but it's hard because you can't really make money off just tweeting or instagramming.

If you're somebody who's popular enough online, you'll get recognized. That's a thing that happens. It's not like I'm such a huge celebrity that everyone's going to recognize me, but I've had it happen a few times already, where people who I don't know come up to me and are like, "Are you the girl who drank weed lube?," and I'm like "Oh my god, yeah, that's me."

If I were to get a regular job that's something I would struggle with. I live in Los Angeles, a big city where people read things like *VICE*. I've always used my real name on social media and in my writing. It's not like I can go out and use a different name and no one will know who I am. Any job will be able to Google me.

It leaves me with the option of finding a job based on my Twitter account. Finding a job that happens because of my social media presence. It does offer opportunities, in that it's easier for me to get certain jobs because I'm popular on social media. But it also limits me in terms of being able to get a job that wouldn't want me to be the way I am on social media. If I need to pay my rent and have to go out and get a job at a coffee shop, that's something that becomes a lot harder once you have a presence online. I know a lot of people who struggle with this.

Of course, I think it goes both ways. A lot of people want to publish and read my writing because they follow me on Twitter and like what I tweet. So they say, "Well, hey, if I like what you tweet they'll probably like what you write." Which is generally true. On one hand, it helps me get people asking me for writing, but on the other hand, I've been pigeonholed into different categories over the years because I'm a female on social media.

When I first started writing was when Alt-Lit was a thing. That got destroyed after a while—there was that scandal with an Alt-Lit editor who was basically a sexual predator. When I first started coming up in writing, I was good friends with Tao Lin, who was seen as the figurehead of the movement. So I was lumped in with that. It's a category that caused a lot of bigger publishers, or more traditional publishers, to view you as crap. It was like, "Oh, she's just another Alt-Lit whatever, another Tao Lin follower."

There were a lot of people who did emulate Tao in a not so original way, but there were also a ton of writers in that movement who are nothing like Tao. Myself included, I think. But we're still lumped into that category, which caused publishers to look at me and the group of people I was friends with as unworthy of traditional publication. Which was hard, because as a writer, the main goal at the end of the day is, "I want to get published by Random House," or whatever.

It caused us to have to create our own publishing world, and a lot of people own small presses because of that.

They started to promote books within our circle of friends, because no traditional publishing houses wanted to support us. We were young and we were writing in ways that are traditionally viewed as vapid.

That was a hard category to be put into. Then after Alt-Lit died, more recently, people started using this term "Sad Girl Twitter." There are a lot of women—me or Melissa [Broder] or Darcie—who are tweeting about being sad or being depressed or whatever on Twitter. Anytime a publication writes about women on social media it ends up using this term "Sad Girl Twitter," which lumps a lot of women into the same category. We're all tweeting about our own subjective experiences and trying to cope with them, and it puts a label on us. Like we're vapid and have enough privilege to be sad and to tweet about being sad, and all we do is tweet about being sad. It feels like a modern equivalent of when people would call women hysterical. It's another way for people to say that women's stories and women's feelings and everything about living as a woman is inherently unworthy of expression.

Being lumped into these categories has happened throughout my writing career; there's been one category or another that people want to put me into. A lot of other women, who are my friends or not my friends, also get lumped into these categories of confessional writing or blah, blah, blah that men don't get lumped into.

For some reason, it's still shocking to people when women want to tell their stories and when women are unashamed of telling their stories and of talking about things like mental illness or eating disorders. Generally when things like this are spoken of, it's in the context of a doctor's office or in a really dreary, dark tone. For women to be actively making light of their terrible situation really intimidates and scares people.

I think that's where the "Sad Girl Twitter" comes from. I think it's also where the Alt-lit category came from, honestly. I think that traditional literature didn't know what to do with our style of writing so they dumped us into a category where they were able to say, "Oh, they are just young and vapid so who cares enough to publish us."

That caused us to prosper in a way, though, because we all made our own publishing houses. At the same time, I think that traditional literature will continue to try to put a name on groups of young people who are making art that's scary for them. It groups them in ways that makes it seem like their work isn't as valid as other types of work.

The financial thing is hard. The reason Twitter's such a good platform, and a platform so many people prosper on, is because it's free. You don't have to pay to read it and you don't have to pay to join it, so people like me, who start out not having a following at all, can garner a huge following, just by the merit of our tweets. Not by merit of having enough money to pay for the site or having connections or anything like that. That's really where a lot of the beauty of Twitter lies.

At the same time, I'm giving a lot of content to Twitter and I'm not getting paid for it. If I was in a situation, working for a magazine, giving that much content for free would be crazy. There are things like Patreon, where you could set up a system where people could pay you to do something like tweet, but it's a problem I haven't really discovered the answer to... it's the model of Twitter itself. Everything about Twitter relies on the fact that it doesn't cost money, and that you don't earn money from it. That's the beauty of it. It's a hard thing, because you can garner huge amounts of success on Twitter and then still struggle to pay your rent.

It's like the only way really to monetize it is to use Twitter to get another type of job, which not everybody can do. I think a lot of jobs, the gatekeepers to a lot of jobs, are people of a different generation, and they maybe view Twitter as something unimportant. Whereas most of the time the people who are tweeting are not necessarily people who want a career managing social media.

Most of those people want a career writing or want a career editing or something like that. It's really hard because a lot of people don't view Twitter as a valid writing platform. When you go somewhere and say "I want a job being a writer," and you show them your Twitter account, "well," they say, "you're good at tweeting so why don't you do social media." When in reality, it's just writing on a different platform.

Mira Gonzalez's 5 favorite twitter accounts:

@33333333433333

@sosadtoday

@bradlisti

@BATHSmusic

@perfumegenius

Mira Gonzalez's 5 influences/inspirations:

ina may gaskin

my mother

rupaul

marijuana

babies (all species, but especially human ones)

People say there's Twitter and then there's writing. I think that's one of the main problems of people not being able to earn money off of Twitter. When you have that dichotomy, you can't then make the jump that says people who are good at tweeting are probably also good at writing. Even though that's a reasonable jump to make.

Because a lot of people aren't able to make that leap, people like me, who are on Twitter, are pigeonholed. We don't get serious jobs. It's getting better. It's improving as time goes on, but often times having a popular, funny Twitter account is nothing but an impediment in terms of getting a job.

I feel like that will only change when the way people view writing on the internet period changes. "Sad Girl Twitter" and Alt-Lit exist because they are types of writing that only exist on the internet and are only popular because of the internet. And for somebody like Jonathan Franzen who denies the internet as an art form—he's going to view those people as shit heads that nobody cares about. That's maybe because the internet is so new and because writing on the internet is so new, it's really hard to change that viewpoint. Especially amongst older generations.

It's so new that when it comes time for people of my generation are going to running for President, it's going to be a normal thing that we can look back in our tweets and be like, "Oh, here's a funny tweet they posted," or look back at their tweets and be like, "Damn, they were never funny even when they were a teenager," or whatever. That's a weird thing that really nobody is used to yet.

I think that people who are successful on Twitter will not be able to easily gain monetary, real life success until we get to the point where people of my generation can do things like run for President. Because once people who are born in the the age of the internet, grow up and start to have to do important things like being in office, being part of the government, that's going to force society to accept this idea that everybody has social media, that this is something that everybody's doing. Some people are better at it than others and it's not something that you have to hide from your employer. Not something that you have to pretend doesn't exist. It's something that if you're good at it, you should have a better chance at succeeding in the real world.

The reason it's not like that now is just because it's too new. It's obviously deeply ingrained in the culture but the actual technology of it is... It's too brand new for everybody to take it as seriously as something like publishing a book.

I published a book of tweets. I did it purposely thinking about how people don't take Twitter seriously. It's interesting. It's writing in the barest form. Twitter is 140 characters. Then you have something like a haiku for example, and that's 5-7-5. It's a similar format to Twitter in that it's a certain number of syllables and Twitter's a certain number of characters. If you think about it in its most essential form, Twitter is just another form of poetry. It's another way of formulating a thought.

Coming up with new ways to formulate thoughts has been happening in literature since forever. That's a common thing. But I think Twitter's different because it doesn't exist on paper. It's always going to exist online in

this non-physical way and that's a hard thing for people to grasp, because there are still people who are alive who didn't grow up with the internet. The internet is relatively new to them, but I do think that once it gets to the point where everybody on earth has grown up with the internet, it will change.

Whether or not Twitter is still popular at that point, I do think it will be viewed as literature. Especially 200-300 years from now. There are certain Twitter accounts that you read and think: "This is genius, this is so fucking funny." Like, "This is so politically fascinating," or whatever.

I'll be shocked if those didn't go down in history as genuine literature. With my book, *Selected Tweets*, that's what Tao and I were trying to do, right down to how we decided to bind the book. It's bound in leather. It has a silver/gold stamped title. It looks like a bible, essentially. That was purposeful in terms of making it look like a valuable piece of literature. You pick up the book and you say think "This must be something important, because it's leather bound and it has gold stamps on it, just like a bible does."

What we wanted to show there, was once you take Twitter out of the context of being reliant on this relatively new form of technology, there's no difference between Twitter and any other kind of literature. This is something I get made fun of for a lot. People don't like it when I say that. They think it's corny.

But Twitter is art. Twitter is writing. It does feel a little bit corny to say that, but at the same time, it would be foolish to deny the literary merit of tweets and to deny the historical significance Twitter will have. When I say Twitter, I mean Twitter, but I also mean the internet as a whole. I think that memes, for example, are strange time capsules. Memes are a sort of thing that only make sense when you understand the technology surrounding it and when you understand the culture of the internet at the time.

When you take, something like a "Rick Roll," for example, it's the kind of thing that will be taught in history classes to show the genesis of internet humor. A "Rick Roll" is obviously something that relies on the technology of clicking on a link, something that might not exist in 200 years.

There will definitely be a section of history books, not only to teach people what memes are, but to teach people how the technology at certain points lead to specific types of humor.

It's fascinating to me. It's important to me now even though I might not be alive in the time it's an important historical artifact. But there are people who are saying things like, "Twitter is stupid" or "Writing on the internet doesn't matter," and they're going to feel very foolish some day. It's the future of humor, of writing, of everything.

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Fact

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