

Poets & Writers

2016 Amy Awards

Ebony E. Chinn

Laura Fairgrieve

Sally Wen Mao

Amy Meng

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Dropped Call

after Mckendy Fils-Aimé

You give a diatribe about immigration
like our relationship is the exception.
I begin to lose the signal
and I decide not to call you back.
You leave a message.
An attempt to seal a gap
a missed call sought to fill.
You talk about Ted Kennedy
being a no good playboy
like he's the one who's done me wrong.
I lose a signal while searching
for food near Brown's campus.
I tell you this to ease the abandonment.
I know that's not what you wanted.
I write now, sometimes about you.
I don't tell you that I'm not eager
to move towards a strong signal.
My phone carrier is a scapegoat.
It knows the truth. I hang up
pretending I'll call you back.

Laura Fairgrieve

Driving in the Dark- a divorce of light and matter

What leaned into us then like a
bat wing stretched across the windshield
torn off at the root
or maybe a broken umbrella
it was piecemeal and scared
what inked its Rorschach onto our eyelids
soft-toed and quiet
and crawled into the bottom of our stomachs
to sit and wait like a fat bowl of milk
or a velvet sea
what unfurled in the rearview mirror
like a fine-toothed jacket of nighttime

it was tired of our stillness, our patience
it jerked us forward and apart, it would not
let us fit back together
when I saw it I reached over
I thought I felt a snake inside of you
when I skimmed the skin of your arm
miles of tendons rippled like electrical wires
a monsoon of summer winds and bird shit
a concatenation
frissoned from inside of you and

the chalky grin of the roadside
unfolded its arms, it gathered us in.

Sally Wen Mao

The Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt Super Voice Girl

Super girls drink melamine.
Melamine in scandalous milk

infects us / titillates us
until the red mouth bursts open
into a sewage of cherry petals.

Super girls, submit
your audition tapes: give us

your milky songs
sung in unmolested hours,
all the sad karaoke bars
in every spring city.

Sing, like sprained
finches, drive us mad with yearning
and dull the thrum of the mic.

Raise your shy voices, girls;
gorge on little gospels.

We'll raise our glasses to our lips,
toast to you, and quaff.

* * *

Super girls wear iris-enlarging contacts
so the black universes of their pupils
sap all light. Touch every chandelier crystal.

Every camera flash enters. Their eyes stolen
like torn irises. I'm in the live audience
where they feed us live girls for supper.

The stage rinses us with its pulse. They step

out, broken hearts and all, warbling
for forgiveness. "Are you not my beloved?"

they ask, and we say *yes*, believing them.
Heat soaks our clavicles. Today I wave a torn
pennant for my sisters who stammer,

who get voted off stage, on fours before four
million, who wipe dirt off the altar of a cartoon,
for my sisters who float on eternal gondolas

drinking melamine from boxes, summer
wilting across their flat chests, their vocal
chords drowned in potable water.

* * *

Super girls outperform their mothers.
Their mothers, of nondairy diets.
Their mothers, who snuck soy before dawn,

before the fields were razed, the time
when milk meant imperial muscles, thicker
hair, thighs, rounder infants. Their mothers

dreamt of dairy baths, curdling cheeses
out of reindeer milk, arms taut as Mongolian
nomads, wolf totems thirsting for yogurt still.

So super girls were raised on dairy products
for their sinuous bodies. Super girls get epithetic
eye fold surgeries. Give them your blessings,

mothers, even as the lighting smothers them.
Even if it pins them like flies to the territory
between camera and mouth. Where does flesh

end and fantasy begin? It's in the umber
that carves the fold above the eye, how it flutters
like mayflies in its mesh of nerve endings.

* * *

The camera pans to your vulnerable self.
The self you want to hide is a sad pretty thing
with spindles under its eyes. It has webbed

fingers. Out of its throat, a croak. Lashes plucked
from waterline, a moat of tears you hide
in your flask. Is this half-dead girl good to sing?

What do you say, lonely girl? What are you afraid of?
The audience is listening. Think on your feet,
now: what do you sing for? Go ahead: recite the list.

*My ghost brother and sister. The vale where I was born
ashamed. My mother who gave me the milk
she couldn't drink. My bedridden story has yet to begin.*

Amy Meng

Inside-Out Joke

There was never a man with ribs like a bear
whose shucked glasses left
his face raw and tender as a nerve.
He never lifted the gentle brand
of love to me to see how I wore it.
I made our bed disappear like a lungful of air
divided among the cells.
He drew across me like a rock igniting.
It was difficult for me to be so new.
It was difficult to be cancelled like a light
switch. I've kept the lace
of memory in absolute darkness.
Now I wish I remembered
whether you held my hand and how.

Ebony E. Chinn was born and raised in New Jersey. She studied Anthropology and African American Studies at Temple University where she became a McNair scholar. She is a Callaloo Fellow, a Poetry Assistant Editor for *Drunken Boat*, and a Fiction Editor for *The Missing Slate*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *H_NGM_N* and *Callaloo*.

Laura Fairgrieve has an MFA from Adelphi University, where she currently teaches composition. Her work has appeared in *East Coast Ink*, *Words Dance Publishing*, *Village of Crickets*, and is forthcoming in the *Bitchin' Kitsch*. She lives in Brooklyn.

Sally Wen Mao is the author of *Mad Honey Symposium* (Alice James Books, 2014). The recipient of a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from Kundiman, Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Hedgebrook, Vermont Studio Center, and National University of Singapore, she holds an M.F.A. from Cornell University. Her work is published in *Poetry*, *A Public Space*, *Tin House*, the *Missouri Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2013*, among others. She is the 2016-2017 fellow at Dorothy B. Cullman Center at the New York Public Library.

Amy Meng's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming from publications including: *Gulf Coast*, *Indiana Review*, *The Literary Review*, and *Pleiades*. She is a Kundiman Fellow and poetry editor at *Bodega Magazine*. She teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and manages Paragraph, a co-working space for writers.