

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

**Karen Long (00:08):**

Hello, I'm Karen Long. And you're listening to The Asterisk\*, a production of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. An asterisk is a reference mark indicating an omission. Today we are figuring out some of the holes in our knowledge with poet Victoria Chang. She grew up in suburban Detroit and lives now in Southern California. She won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 2021 for *Obit*, which also earned a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the PEN/Voelcker Award.

Anisfield-Wolf juror Rita Dove said of *Obit*, "At first one might think: What a gimmick, to force each poem into the narrow column of a newspaper obit! How can these compressed language gobbets be called poems anyway? And yet, after the requisite announcements (name of the deceased, time, cause of death), each obit plunges to the source of its bereavement, skewering as it darkens, until I'm left speechless, bereft, in Keats' 'vale of soul making.'" Well, Victoria Chang's newest published work builds upon that topic. She thought she'd left behind. It is called *Dear Memory: Letters on Writing, Silence, and Grief*, and came out in October 2021. Welcome, Professor Chang. Welcome.

**Victoria Chang (01:44):**

Thank you. It's nice to be here.

**Karen Long (01:46):**

It is such a joy to be in your presence again. And I think we could start with a poem. Maybe you would read for us something from *Obit*? "Subject Matter" perhaps?

**Victoria Chang (02:05):**

Subject Matter – always dies, what we are left with is architecture, form, sound, all in a room, darkened, a few chairs unarranged. The door is locked from the inside. But still, subject matter breaks in and all the others rise. My mother's death is not her story. My father's stroke is not his story. I am not my mother's story, not my father's story. But there is a meeting place that is hidden, one that holds all the maps toward indifference. Can pain be separated from subject matter? Can subject matter take flight and lose its way, peck on another tree? How do you walk heavily with subject matter on your back, without trampling all the meadows?

**Karen Long (02:56):**

Thank you. I feel the question is in such service of the grief and your thinking, and I've noticed a lot of questions in your writing. Some of your latest book are questions in the form of letters to relatives. And I'm wondering just generally by posing the questions, do you yourself feel closer to any answers?

**Victoria Chang (03:25):**

No, I think it's funny. I was just talking with a friend, a writer friend about this the other day, and we're talking about working on manuscripts and things that we're working on. And she said that for her, everything that she's working on tries to answer a question. And I thought that was really interesting because it got me thinking that, wow, just one question? <laugh> And then also it also got me thinking

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about how I don't feel like most of the questions that I end up trying to figure out, even if it's one central question, which for me is often not, they're just unanswerable. It's the, it's the query and that process. And I think that's, that's how I think about it ultimately. So I think asking questions is just another form of thinking and it's another form of refraction. And you know, I think my brain tends to work that way. So it's sort of like refract, refract, refract, and it's just sort of a fun pinball machine sort of thing that I enjoy doing in my writing and in life in general.

**Karen Long (04:38):**

It also invariably keeps you learning if you're asking questions.

**Victoria Chang (04:43):**

That's right, yeah. I think even the, some of the imperatives, you know, like even, or some of the declaratives in my writing, aren't really declarative, you know, they're actually questions. And sometimes I say things in a statement and I, and I hope that people who read it would be, I don't know. I don't know if that's true or not, but that is interesting. I had never thought about it that way, but maybe I disagree or, you know, I think it's more of a conversation. I think of my poems, whether they have question marks or periods at the end as conversations.

**Karen Long (05:17):**

Well, that makes me greedy for one more. So just flipping one page forward, there's a gorgeous reflection called "Friendships." Do you mind giving that to us as well?

**Victoria Chang (05:32):**

Friendships – died a slow death after August 3, 2015. The friends visited my father. They sat in chairs and spoke Chinese. Wore dictionaries for coats. Strange looks between spouses. The friends went home feeling good that they had done their duty, picked up odds and ends of words. Each had memories of offices, of seeing the other side of the sun. The visits lessened and lessened. They were being pursued by their own deaths. I wonder about the leaves and their relationship with fruit. Do the leaves care about the swelling of the fruit? Does the fruit consider the leaves while it expands? Maybe the leaves shade the fruit as it grows and the fruit emits fragrance for the leaves. But eventually, each must face its own falling alone.

**Karen Long (06:26):**

Thank you. I feel a distillation of philosophy in that.

**Victoria Chang (06:31):**

Yeah, no, I mean, I think I'm always interested in those large existential questions and in my spare time, when I have some, I'm always interested in reading contemporary philosophy. So I do spend a lot of time thinking about these kinds of things and in my, you know, it, it's my choice of, I guess, fun is reading philosophy. <Laugh>

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**Karen Long (06:56):**

Well, the notion of the fruit and the leaves accompanying one another and separating... is what an image you give us. I was less able to follow you with "wore dictionaries for coats."

**Victoria Chang (07:13):**

You know, my father had a stroke maybe well, 14 years ago and he just recently passed away. And you know, he lost, immediately he lost his language, so he had aphasia. And so just the vocabulary of language and dictionaries and things like that just follow me, or have followed me around over this last decade and a half or so. And, you know, I think there's also a little bit of the duality of two languages that may be in there too. And then something that always strikes me. And I'm not exactly sure if that's what I was thinking when I wrote that. And sometimes I write things that I'm not exactly sure what they mean, but I like the tone of it, so it's like a wash. But I'm thinking if I were to analyze my own poem, I think about how I just continuously marvel at the fact that there were so many people that were older than my parents by decades and were so much healthier.

**Victoria Chang (08:22):**

And so when I meet someone now, the age that my dad had a stroke, you know, he was in his sixties, I'm kind of looking at them and thinking, *wow, their brain is so sharp*. Or I know people who are in their eighties and nineties even, and when I speak to them, I was thinking, *wow, these people not only lived 25 more years or 20 more years than my mother, but they are so cohesive. Yes. And they're so sharp.* I'm always in awe of that for some reason because my dad died when he was in his sixties. His brain just collapsed. And so sometimes I just stare at people who are in their seventies and eighties and nineties even, and they're traveling or they're driving. So that's kind of maybe a little bit of seeing his friends coming and watching them all and thinking, just being in awe of their mental and physical capacities, you know, to this day, because many of them are still very healthy.

**Karen Long (09:25):**

And I was thinking about your father as an engineer, having another language and maybe they were bringing that into the room too.

**Victoria Chang (09:33):**

He had so many languages actually. He had Taiwanese, and he spoke Mandarin, and he grew up speaking Japanese – because the Japanese occupied Taiwan in the 1950s. So he grew up with Japanese culture and you know, the military around him in a Japanese name. And then English obviously.

**Karen Long (09:58):**

That makes me think about something that you said to Ilya Kaminsky, your friend and another Anisfield-Wolf poet, and you said, "I grew up in Michigan, it was assimilate or die." And so, I read *Obit* as your anti-assimilation work and I'm wondering if your poetic voice came to you in California because that pressure of invisibility and hyper visibility was alleviated enough?

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**Victoria Chang (10:45):**

Yeah, I think year by year it's aging and it's also being in spaces where I think I feel more comfortable - that I feel I can be myself and be bolder. I was just talking to someone last night about how you know, Asian Americans were all so different. Asian American women were all so different and the nuances are not even that nuanced. I know some Asian American women writers who are so bold and I just don't feel like I am, but what I would say is I am subversive. I am sneakily so, but then it kind of creeps up on you and then smacks you in the face, like a branch, you know? And so I think that I have a lot of playful and subversive tendencies, but growing up the way that I grew up, it took a while for those to reemerge. And now at this age I feel like I've been doing for a while now, whatever I feel like I want to in my writing, because that's really the only place I feel like I could just do whatever I want, take it or leave it kind of attitude.

**Victoria Chang (12:08):**

And so I'm always surprised when some people read it or it finds some readers, or in the case of *Obit*, it gets you know, recognized by people. Because I feel like so much of my writing is meant to be subversive in many ways. In terms of form, subject matter, how it's written, every way. I just think it's my personality to cause a little bit of trouble.

**Karen Long (12:36):**

I like the disruption.

**Victoria Chang (12:38):**

<Laughs> So yes, as I age that gets more powerful, but also, gosh, in my regular life, you have to behave certain ways and you're in these kind of white majority spaces and most of the time people think of you like you don't have any agency or control over your life on a daily basis. But here in this space, on this page, that's my freedom. That's an open field. And that's something I refuse to let go of.

**Karen Long (13:10):**

Freedom comes up a lot in your conversation about poetry and writing and the paradox of the form giving you the freedom. That the vessel ignites creativity is one of the things you said that Rita just commented on in the introduction, that "What is this?" And then she is seduced.

**Victoria Chang (13:33):**

That's right. <laughs> I think people's idea of poetry can be a little bit narrow sometimes, all of us. And you know, so we learn it in high school and maybe earlier, and then we're given all these things to read and I felt like all the prior elegies that had been written were fine. Beautiful. Some of them are some of my favorite poems, but I certainly don't feel like I needed to write any more of those. And it certainly wasn't a place that I came from, that I could even do. And so I think just doing something a little weird and quirky and different can throw people off. My poet friend Brian Teare and I were talking about how, even in the publishing field, it's like people want you to write the same book, essentially. Over and over and over again. And that's what they're comfortable with. And he and I don't do that as much. And he

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even less so than myself and I have such admiration for him as a writer, but also a creative person and thinker. And so I think that we like to subvert that expectation. And maybe somewhat consciously, but mostly it's just, I think our personalities. It's harder for other people to accept that because I think, I think you make people uncomfortable when you, when you do big changes like that.

**Karen Long (15:15):**

When we created the documentary to house your poetry during the pandemic, Henry Louis Gates Jr., the jury chair, said you were receiving this prize, "For giving strikingly original language to the universal experience of grief in a year in which too many lives have been lost." And you wrote this all before the pandemic. Has it acquired new meaning for your readers or for yourself in the present?

**Victoria Chang (15:54):**

I think one of the impetuses now looking back on this book was to feel less lonely because of the asynchronous quality of grief and the constant pressure of performance in our culture today. You know, it's like you have to hide how you feel and you're always... and given the sort of positions that I'm in in my daily life and also having younger children, I mean, you can't be crying all day long in front of them. That wouldn't be healthy for them. And so there's constant performance. And I just wanted to write a book that sort of undressed all of that, you know, and basically was a kind of book that I could immerse myself in and feel that loneliness dissipate a little bit for myself. And I had found so many other books people had written that gave me solace, you know, like a lot of nonfiction. So you know, Joan Didion obviously has written a ton about grief and Meghan O'Rourke's *The Long Goodbye* I thought was really wonderful, but those were all nonfiction.

**Karen Long (17:12):**

Right.

**Victoria Chang (17:13):**

And yeah, I read everything I could get a hold of because I was looking for someone to hold my hand.

**Karen Long (17:21):**

You mentioned *H Is for Hawk*, which is also in my pantheon of a daughter losing her father. And as she put it, trying to take "the nature cure" by manning a goshawk, training a goshawk. And there's some phrases that will never leave me from that beautiful memoir, which was complicated and the cure did not work, the medicine worked. And I was so relieved to read someone say that, some brilliant person say the medicine worked and not my own machinations.

**Victoria Chang (18:01):**

I think there's a tendency to want to stamp things out. And to look for some kind of cure-all. And I mean, even this time of COVID, you know, we're looking for vaccines and cure-alls and, you know, we're looking, we're always looking to fix a problem. But I don't really think of grief as being a problem. And I think of it as more being a process and a journey that we all experience. Some of us may have longer journeys or

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journeys that we experience more than once. So yeah, I mean, I think, looking for a cure is a recipe for failure. <laughs> I just don't think, I don't think it exists. I think you just live in grief along with living in joy and happiness and love, it's all intertwined and interlaced and needs to be together.

**Karen Long (19:07):**

And your question of how you carry this subject matter and not trample the meadow feels in conversation to me with Helen Macdonald a little bit.

**Victoria Chang (19:16):**

Yeah. And that too is also like a craft poem. So sometimes I'm thinking about writing related things too. Like in poetry, there are always these really interesting arguments going on. You know, poets love to argue and about things that no one else cares about, which some things are like, oh, what are people's feelings about this? The quote unquote project book, you know, they call it. And where subject matter, like in my book, *Obit*, grief as subject matter is very strong. And is that a good thing or a bad thing? And so that poem was a little bit kind of dealing with that pressure of like, well, I mean, clearly I'm writing about someone's death. And so how do you not let the subject matter sort of trump everything? And because we live in a capitalist society and so publishers and everyone else are going to want to focus on the subject matter. And so I just kept thinking about that throughout this process and thinking, well, you know what that means is you just have to really focus on the language and you have to make the writing really, really strong. And so that's kind of, that was also like a craft oriented poem as well.

**Karen Long (20:35):**

Fascinating. It was in conversation with your tribe.

**Victoria Chang (20:38):**

Yeah, totally.

**Karen Long (20:40):**

**And now we'll pause for a short break. The Asterisk\* is a project of the Cleveland Foundation to bring more readers and listeners into conversation with the best writers in English. In this case, recipients of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. We'll now return to the conversation.**

**Karen Long (21:00):**

So let's return to the page with an excerpt or maybe the full page of your letter to your grandmother.

**Victoria Chang (21:15):**

Okay.

Dear Grandmother,

Today I found a Certificate of Marriage and a translation of it by the President Translation Service. The date is July 26, 1939. Now I know your name: Miss Chang Chi-Yin. I also know you were twenty-seven

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and Grandfather twenty-six. I wonder if this was considered strange at the time, your being older than him.

I now know you were born on April 29, 1913. Seeing this date makes me cry. The tears are long and rusted. I have tried to tie them together into a long string toward your country. The farthest I've ever made it was Kansas. The tornadoes always break my tears.

Dear Grandmother, I now know you were born in Chingwan Hsien, Hopei Province. I google Hopei and see it is in the North of China, where all the good doughy food Mother used to make comes from – the bao zi, jiao zi, and shao bing. I can see how close you were to Beijing and Mongolia.

I learn that you were born one year after the Qing dynasty collapsed. I learn that you lived amid civil war. I wonder if this is why you took your children and left for Taiwan.

I can't find your town, Chingwan Hsien on Google because it's probably spelled another way. After more searching, I figure out it is likely Jing Wan Xian. But I still can't locate it on the map of Hopei, which I figure is also Hebei Province.

The certificate says you were united in matrimony at Chungking City, Szechuan Province. Google says there are thirty million people there. I try to imagine thirty million people who look like me. In that moment, grief freezes.

**Karen Long (23:03):**

I love that line, Victoria. It made me straighten my spine and think about this loneliness that those of us who've had a parent die know. And the connection you find through your research and, and this document is whatever the opposite of trivial is. That's the word I'm searching for — profound, I guess.

**Victoria Chang (23:34):**

Poignant to me too. The keywords.

**Karen Long (23:38):**

Bring them out. And here you are, I feel ready for this project in part because of your undergraduate studies.

**Victoria Chang (23:49):**

I think that's true. And I studied East Asian studies in college. I went to the University of Michigan — go Blue! — and loved, loved it, loved it so much and it was a period of deep exploration. And I really enjoyed learning, taking all those history classes and learning about the history of my parents' countries. I didn't want to study it later. I realized I didn't want to be a scholar in those areas, but it was so important to learn those things. And then to find all this material later, after my mother died, in these boxes it just sort of was fascinating to see her history and my dad's history, mirror whatever I learned in college, like point by point. And that was really a pivotal moment. I think that led me to write these letters to my ancestors and my parents and all these other people.

**Karen Long (24:50):**

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I think of their physical courage and their mental courage. It's awe inspiring.

**Victoria Chang (24:55):**

It is, isn't it? I just imagined these people in this country, you know, which was China and deciding like that moment, like meeting in a room somewhere and saying, *we have to go*. And here are the reasons why it's like, are you going, what do it's like? And then just think about that. And then you grab these tons of children. I don't even know how many siblings my mom had, but a lot. And you figure out how to get across the country to the south tip of China and then the boat and all that. I mean, we have so much technology today to get us from one place to another. And I just can't even imagine. And I guess my grandfather left later because, you know, he was in the Guomindang government. And so he left on supposedly one of the last planes out. And I was thinking that is so crazy. And that again, when you think about what's happening today in Ukraine, it's the same thing. Over and over. I can imagine it because I have in my parent's situation, but I can't believe that people are still going through the things that my parents had to go through.

**Karen Long (26:07):**

Right. It's ... *dismaying* doesn't even begin to cover what the catastrophe is that will live through generations.

**Victoria Chang (26:16):**

That's right. And yet we are sitting here, you know, in this really comfortable room in Charlottesville, Virginia, and we can't do anything or we can't really help in many ways. And our country isn't really doing anything substantial at least. And you feel guilty about all the comforts that you have. I mean, I felt that with my parents, even thinking about the suffering that they had to experience. And yeah, so the legacy, like just doing everything in my life towards that legacy, is a lot of pressure, but how do you carry their legacy with dignity and how do you honor their legacy? And so I talk to my own kids about that a lot. Your grandparents made a lot of sacrifices to be here and they suffered a lot. So how do you honor their legacy? You know, and I hope that keeps getting passed down from generation to generation.

**Karen Long (27:13):**

I think that one of the ways that you honored, if I could be so impetuous, is you went toward the thing that you were getting rocks thrown at you for as a child. So you had this like turnaround and face the hurt and then in *Obit*, where most of us slink away from the suffering, you turn around and face into it.

**Victoria Chang (27:44):**

I think people have this idea that poetry in particular should be, or could be, or usually is an aesthetically sort of aestheticized. You know, it's sort of beautiful and gorgeous and language is lovely. I think I tend to shove into the vessel of poetry, whatever that vessel looks like. Like maybe "*Subject Matter*," that's a little more realistic and a little uglier, you know. I just even think about the 19 days of my father's dying and how much ugliness there was in there within that. And I don't know why don't we talk about that stuff? You know, it's like people just, you just say, "Oh, my father passed away." That was 19 days of

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pretty crazy stuff that happened, you know? So I wrote this long poem that went day by day and was like a day book of those 19 days.

**Victoria Chang (28:45):**

And I, and I just name it. And I feel like so much of the way that I was raised, and also our culture is about silence, you know, and you're supposed to overcome all of these childhood, this or that, and overcome the grief and all the ugliness of what happened over that 19 days and 14 years. And my mother's illness. Why? You know, because it's, that's not really what happens. And so in some ways I think writing these books was about extending a hand to other people to say, I see you. I know this is what happened. And obviously there are variations and things, but I know how ugly this process can be and dying is not beautiful. And it's messy, it's complicated. You have to make really difficult decisions at really important times. And then you can't go back once you make those decisions and you have to watch other people suffer. Like you never imagined. And then after all of that, you have to face your own mortality. So it's not a beautiful process. And I don't really feel the need to talk about that beauty.

**Karen Long (29:57):**

Or tidy it up.

**Victoria Chang (29:58):**

No, what's the point? I don't see the point of that. You know, I think it's, I mean, I'm here for a short time. Why not speak the truth?

**Karen Long (30:07):**

That pulls into my mind a co-winner in 2021 Natasha Trethewey for *Memorial Drive*. Which is about her mother and her mother dying violently and the shame that cloaked that. And she names that book so poetically on the street in Atlanta, where her mother was slain that connects to the Confederate mountain, which is larger than Mount Rushmore - I learned through her book. And is an assault on Natasha herself and the subversion she hopes for, and I'm sharing for, is that *Memorial Drive* outlasts the Confederate mountain. And I'm wondering *Obit* is also a memorial to your parents?

**Victoria Chang (31:04):**

Absolutely. It's a memorial to them and all the people that have chosen or have been forced to migrate out of their home countries and everything that they've known. And also it really is in some ways, a memorial to all of our lives. There's such richness in every single person, every single person matters a lot. And I feel that I can only honor a few people in my own writing, but I hope that people, when they read it, it honors their parents, their grandparents, themselves, and their legacies. You know, I feel like connection is something that's really important to me. So I hope when people read my work, they think about their own parents, their own grandparents, their own legacies, and know that it's just so important that memory, but also their own experiences are really important. So I, I don't know, in some ways it's, you know, it's like I was writing a lot about my own experience, but the books I feel are, like

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kind of just saying, I see you and I see your background and your family legacies. And I hope that you spend a little time reflecting on your own lives, because they're important.

**Karen Long (32:36):**

I, as your reader, felt that and felt richer related to my ancestors. And there was an interesting conversation here at the Virginia Festival of the Book about ancestors, in which Robert Jones Jr., who wrote *The Prophets*, said that his first line came to him in a dream. "You do not yet know us." He keeps a pad by his bed. He feels very connected to the point that that visitation told him to put the ancestors as a chorus into his first novel. And Nikole Hannah-Jones working on the other side of the street in journalism pulling together the magnificent *1619 Project*, told me she had for the first time suffered writer's block and then got a line. And as a non-religious person, sources that line in the ancestors. Where is your relationship?

**Victoria Chang (33:46):**

I think my relationship with my ancestors is really wide open, only because I didn't know any of them. So I think of them as being larger than life, which is pretty much just what the imagination is. So my relationship with them is very imaginative. I can imagine what they looked like. I can imagine how they dressed and then looking at photos of people at those times in China and then also I found old photos of my dad, you know, he was Taiwanese. He only had one migration from Taiwan to the United States. So he just never felt quite as tormented as I think my mother seems to me growing up. But I found a whole bunch of his old pictures, but there's legacy and history there because the people from Taiwan are from the Southern part of China. And I found some old pictures looking at their clothing and put a few of them in *Dear Memory*. And I just loved their outfits. These beautiful long outfits and they're standing on this boat and I just looked at those photos for a really long time. And then I actually texted that photo to the one relative that I know a little bit better, which is my dad's sister. And she actually told me who those people were.

**Victoria Chang (35:14):**

Which was amazing. I was like, wow. Because otherwise I would've never known. And I just started texting her and talking to her after both of my parents were, my dad was incapacitated, my mom had passed away and, and asking her some questions and things like that has been super interesting. But in some ways I stopped asking her questions. I kind of like living in my own imagination.

**Karen Long (35:35):**

Yes. The co-creation of that as its own memorial.

**Victoria Chang (35:38):**

That's right. That's right.

**Karen Long (35:40):**

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One of the things that fascinates me about your work is your precision. I think of you having an MBA brain, your care with language, even your earrings are so speaking to my slovenliness at a different level, talk a little about the care.

**Victoria Chang (36:02):**

One of my friends recently said your poems are incredibly clear and I thought that was such a fascinating word because I think of them as being so slovenly to use your word and I'm all over the place. Like I'm perfectly happy jumping from one thing to another. Disjunction. I have about a thousand ideas in an hour. And I have that kind of entrepreneurial brain by nature. You know, I'm like, how about this? How about that? Ooh, have you thought about this and this and that? And it's like, I think my brain kind of works naturally that way. But I do think that word clear made me think yes, at the language level, there's this kind of crystalline shaved down to the bone, clear like a Lake Tahoe on a really gorgeous day. You could see that clearness and that clarity almost has a life of its own. So the clarity becomes a character in some ways. But yeah, I think, yeah, I think my writing is very worked over. I love working on a line over and over and over and over and over and over again. And so it's really fun. I feel like by the time it gets to the page, I've probably worked on it quite a bit and have like, like feet of paper that I've printed out and made changes and I print it out again and make more changes. And so I think that kind of precision could be what people are feeling.

**Karen Long (37:41):**

Yes. And I love listeners knowing that, because this notion that you recline under a tree and are visited by your muse is not what is happening.

**Victoria Chang (37:52):**

I think the muse comes in really spectacular ways, but the muse just gives you some base language and it's your job to take out your little tools, right? Your little writing tools, whatever they may be, and start chiseling away at that language to make it art. And the muse won't help you as much there. I think that's just work.

**Karen Long (38:21):**

Yes. Well, we like to wrap with a glimpse of what you're reading.

**Victoria Chang (38:27):**

What am I reading? Wow. I'm reading so much right now. So this year I'm poetry editor for the *New York Times Magazine*. And so that has shifted my reading a little bit more in that I'm mostly on the hunt. So I feel like what I'm trying to do this year is a little bit different than maybe what other people have tried to do over the past few years. And so I'm mostly looking for people who have not been in the *New York Times Magazine* before over the last maybe six or seven years. It's when it started, they started publishing poetry. And then I'm also looking for small presses and things like that. So Brian Teare and I were talking last night, we're already going to publish three poems by Nightboat.

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**Karen Long (39:19):**

Love Nightboat.

**Victoria Chang (39:20):**

Yeah. And so I hadn't realized that I had done that, but I'm obviously looking for smaller presses and things like that. And so I'm constantly reading books in translation. And so I had a little bit of contact with Dawn Michie, who gave me some suggestions and also will be publishing a poem that she translated. And then also just a lot of new poets, a lot of sort of underserved poets, a lot of international poets. So I'm kind of all over the place this year, which has been really lovely actually. But I take that work very seriously. And so I'm trying to include as many kinds of poets as possible and women. Black women Asian American women, native American women, international women, you know, I'm determined to keep that percentage higher than 50%, which is incredibly unusual. All fields across everything, you just get your spreadsheet out, do the numbers. So I'm determined to do that this year.

**Karen Long (40:30):**

If someone just read from outer space, they'd think there were 90% men.

**Victoria Chang (40:35):**

That's right. Absolutely. And across every field, people don't count. So they just have a feeling, but I am a counter. So I keep track and there are thousands of miraculous poets and so I'm determined to go find them.

**Karen Long (40:53):**

Thank you. And maybe a philosophy book?

**Victoria Chang (40:57):**

Oh, the philosophy book that I'm currently reading. And I also read a lot of art criticism. So I've been reading a lot of that as well, but this book I've been reading is called *Seeing Silence* by Mark C. Taylor. And you know, he explores and I'm just reading a part of the description, the many variations of silence by considering the work of leading visual artists, philosophers, theologians, writers, and composers, "To hear silence is to find stillness in the midst of the restlessness that makes creative life possible and the incapability of death acceptable."

**Karen Long (41:34):**

Well, that's a recommendation. Thank you. Thank you so much for today.

**Victoria Chang (41:39):**

Yeah, it was a pleasure to be here. Thank you.

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

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