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CML News

A whole year—from the first rumors to the endless statistics, from the least among us to the kings in their castles, from the first Hallelujah to the last Amen—a whole year when all of us have had to live a new reality. Whew! We are hopeful that the pieces we have chosen (from a veritable tsunami of information and writings) illuminate the interesting, funny, engaging, joyous, and yes, even painful, aspects of our strange and challenging times.

Highlights

Spring is here, and, possibly, as more and more Americans get vaccinated, we are turning a corner in the pandemic. We're not out of the woods yet, however, and parts of the world are experiencing a third wave, but there is reason for some cautious optimism compared to last year. We hope that you and yours continue to be safe and have access to a vaccine in your area.

One of our first pieces in this issue, "The Covid-19 Manhattan Project," by **Ed Yong**, explores how the Covid-19 vaccines were developed with record-breaking speed. "No other disease," Yong writes, "has been scrutinized so intensely, by so much combined intellect, in so brief a time." But Yong notes that the pandemic also resulted in much wasted funding and sloppy research as self-interest and ambition among some researchers undermined scientific rigor and the search for truth.

Obviously, the pandemic is neither the first nor the last existential threat to humanity. In the 1930's, an economic depression, and waves of severe drought in the prairies, ravaged the American populace. There to bear witness was the great photographer Dorothea Lange, who created what are now considered among the most powerful and most iconic historical documents of that troubled era; for much of her career, she battled government bureaucracy, censorship, and gender discrimination. **Valeria Luiselli** provides an absorbing account of Lange's life and work in "Things as They Are."

Here at CML we have long been fans of nature writer **Barry Lopez**, who passed away on Christmas Day, 2020. **Fred Bahnson's** "The World We Still Have" is an in-depth interview with Lopez conducted in 2018. Lopez, though already terminally ill at the time, exults in the mystery and beauty of life. "I can't feel at home if I'm not physically engaged with the world," he tells Bahnson. "I don't want to be inside a building looking at things in display cases." In the interview, Lopez also speaks candidly about the traumatic sexual abuse he suffered as a child.

As always, CML brings you a rich selection of fiction and poetry. In this issue, we offer you powerful short stories by **Wendell Berry**, **Daniel W. Moniz**, and **Barbara Klein Moss**, as well as poetry by **Jericho Brown**, **Joel Peckham**, **William Wenthe**, and others. Speaking of poetry, we also bring you "The Poet of Kyrgyzstan," by **Erica X. Eisen**, a fascinating essay about Kenje Kara, author of the Kyrgyz national epic, *Manas*. A remarkable audio clip at the end of the piece allows you to hear Kara circa 1903 performing lines from his epic to members of a stranded Russian expedition.

In the midst of a pandemic we definitely need humor and levity—and an occasional bag of Doritos, too, as **Sam Anderson** reminds us in his delightful "Eating Chips." **James Parker** also sings the praises of restorative breaks in "Ode to Naps." "If you have space for oblivion in your day," he writes, "a sleep pocket, jump into it, by God; seize the nap." We heartily agree!

TOP PICKS

Two of our most engaging pieces focus on remarkable young women. In "Promised Land," by **David Owen**, we meet Molly Burhans, a 31 year-old cartographer who sees a way to harness the Catholic Church's vast resources by understanding them in their geo-spatial contexts: through maps. A devout Catholic, Burhans has tried to persuade the Vatican to map the nearly two hundred billion acres of land that the Church owns, a breathtaking project never fully attempted before.

In "Sounds of Nепantla," **Francisco Cantú** journeys to the South Texas cities where the legendary Selena Quintanilla-Pérez—known simply as "Selena"—grew up to become the foremost interpreter of "Tejano music," blending traditional Mexican music and American pop sounds. Selena catapulted Mexican-American—and Latinx culture as a whole—to the forefront of American

consciousness. Murdered at the age of 23, she has become the object of pilgrimages and a kind of sanctification by legions of fans who continue to see her as “a beacon of hope, a transformative influence.” Cantú considers Selena the embodiment of “Nepantla,” a Nahuatl word that means “in-betweenness,” in the way that she encompassed both American and Mexican worlds.

Another top pick for us is the short story, “The Rat,” by emerging writer **Yohanca Delgado**. A young Latinx woman who has recently lost her mother struggles to survive economically and emotionally in New York City, caught between the desire for magical consolation and the need to accept the reality of adult life and its inevitable pain.

The D-B Beat

Occasionally in our selections, we miss the opportunity to commemorate a great living author while they are still with us. Barry Lopez is one such author whose many pieces of sublime nature writing have enriched CML over the years. We have always been awe-struck by its power to transport readers into the wider world, but also for its humbling frankness and insight into the human heart. His passing last year prompted us to revisit his work, much of which is available for download through the National Library Service’s BARD program:

- *Horizon* [DB 98318]
- *Crossing Open Ground* [DB 29406]
- *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* [DB 23024]

And Special Thanks to...Marion F., from Stony Brook, NY who told us she appreciates the range of subjects we include in every issue and will sometimes take her player for walks on the beach. Ignoring the table of contents, she is pleasantly surprised as each piece starts. She commended us for our work and said listening to CML “takes me to another place. Thank you all.”