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CML News

One of the strangest aspects of the pandemic has been its effect on the passage of time. Surely we are not alone in finding our memories suddenly sorted into categories of “before” and “during” Covid, while keeping hope alive for the “after” still to come. Remarkably, this will be our fifth issue produced outside the office, under circumstances none of us could have anticipated. We have surprised ourselves—finding and building technical skills to keep the wheels turning, summoning our best selves to bridge the logistical gaps created by de-location, and (as always) making discoveries about the world and the people in it along the way. As such, several pieces in this issue address the question of identity: shifting, constant, public and yet profoundly personal. How do you come to *know* a person, really? Contemplation, conversation, and perseverance. For our part, so much has changed in the world, but we remain (changed and unchanged) dedicated to our mission, bringing you the very best in contemporary writing.

Highlights

We've made it to summer, and there is good reason to be optimistic about the future: levels of vaccination are high, and major cities throughout the United States are beginning to reopen fully. Certainly, the human and economic toll has been steep, and it is only natural if some of us have a little exhaustion mixed in with our thankfulness, relief, and hope. Summer is a great time to get some much-needed rest and relaxation—not to mention catch up on Choice Magazine's latest offerings!

This issue might easily be called our “fiction issue” as it features no less than eight compelling and beautifully crafted short stories by **Steven Millhauser**, **Yohanca Delgado**, **Michael Knight**, and others. Among the editors' favorites are “Good-Looking” by **Souvankham Thammavongsa**, in which a boy accompanies his married father on a date with a lonely, recently divorced woman, and “Person of

Korea,” by **Paul Yoon**, in which an abandoned Russian-Korean teenager searches for his father on the prison island of Sakhalin in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. We also loved the highly suspenseful and meticulously researched tale, “The Snake Priest,” by **Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky**, in which a Russian and a British spy match wits in 19th-century Ghara, Sind (today a part of Pakistan).

Of course, we never forget poetry at CML. This issue brings you poems by **Ocean Vuong**, one of today’s leading American poets, as well as **Shaleigh Cochran Kwok**, **Stephanie Burt**, **Peter Leight**, and **Campbell McGrath**. In addition, **Rebecca Chace**, in “And Finally I’ll Say Goodbye,” offers a moving memoir of her mother, the recently deceased American poet Jean Valentine, who herself felt a strong creative bond with the great Russian female poets Anna Akhmatova and Bella Akhmadulina.

Three other memoirs are featured in this issue: In “The Union Waltz,” **Doug Crandell** poignantly recalls George, the boozy but good-natured scalawag of his childhood who not only teaches him to buck dance but to value his rural roots, roots that Crandell’s family, meanwhile, are anxious to outgrow and forget. In “Noo Jall,” **Clint McCown** remembers his years as the only non-Hispanic actor in the Puerto Rican Travelling Theater, which performed throughout New York’s Latin *barrios* in the turbulent 1970’s. In “Beat the Old Lady Out,” **Debra Gwartney**—widow of one of our favorite authors, Barry Lopez—looks back at a lifetime in which bread-making was her means not only of bonding with her daughters and other women but also of surviving difficult and traumatic experiences, including her late husband’s illness. “Even now,” she writes, “when nothing else will come together at work or at home or in the larger constellation of the world, I blend a few simple ingredients, set those in a hot oven, and wait to pull out a miracle of well-being.”

TOP PICKS

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has taken a staggering 600,000 American lives alone, it is easy to forget the remarkable advances in medicine, chemistry, and germ theory that have gradually doubled human life expectancy throughout the world since the 18th Century. “The Living Century,” by **Steven Johnson**, reminds us of how the discovery and introduction of vaccines, pasteurization, and antibiotics have helped humanity vanquish once widespread

and lethal illnesses such as smallpox, not to mention death from minor infections caused by simple cuts. But as Johnson points out, these triumphs are not merely scientific—to be truly effective, they require parallel (sometimes, belated) progress in social awareness and justice. Johnson gives us good reason to be grateful and hopeful—something we can all use these days.

And how about some sheer good fun, too? “Fast-Talking Times at the Addison Radisson,” by **Katy Vine**, takes us to America’s Auction Academy in Dallas, Texas, where their larger than life teacher, Mike “McGavel” Jones, one of the greatest living live-bid callers, trains them in mastering the rapid, hypnotic, tongue-twisting chants. This recording is supplemented with fascinating audio clips of Jones and two other legendary auctioneers, Ralph Wade and Maxwell Vera, in action.

Finally, we recommend **Lauren Markham’s** “The Crow Whisperer,” a fascinating story of her encounter with Yvette Buigues, a woman with an uncanny ability to interpret the moods and feelings of animals, from a murder of crows to a house cat. “Animals store pain and memories just like we do,” Buigues tells the author. “If you’re quiet, you’ll hear them.”

The D-B Beat

In Rebecca Chace’s short memoir, “And Finally, I’ll Say Goodbye,” the author recounts a visit to the home of Russian dissident poet Anna Akhmatova. The National Library Service’s BARD program includes a trio of works about and by Akhmatova:

- *Anna of all the Russias: The Life of Anna Akhmatova* [DB66087], a literary biography of the poet by Elaine Feinstein.
- *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova, volume I* [DB33626]
- *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova, volume II* [DB33627]

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