

## ISSUE 350, Spring 2025 NEWSLETTER

### CML News

Just after the winter issue closed, we got the sad news that two of our CML ‘family members’ had died. **Larry Condon** and **Lois Miller**. Mr. Condon had, most recently, been a Vice President on the Lucerna Fund Board, where he shared his wealth of experience and never-ending support for our project, which his dear friend LuEsther T. Mertz started. Ms. Miller was the long-time Administrative Assistant at CML—the master of the day-to-day—that kept subscribers informed, bills paid, phones answered, and morale high. They will both be deeply missed.

This issue feels like a milestone, being our 350th, and though we are each a bit older, and some less-than-sweet life experiences have weighed down each of us in the past year, we still feel that we’re all in this together. We hope you know that includes you. Thanks for joining us on the journey.

### Highlights

Spring brings with it uncertainty and upheaval this year. After a long winter, ice melts and the body awakens, and everything once frozen is filled with astonishing movement again, straining to escape last season’s lingering chill. The future is uncertain, but we know what keeps us going: writing that frees the spirit. As author Ursula K. LeGuin is quoted in one of this issue’s pieces: “...if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we’re partisans of liberty, then it’s our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can.” Welcome to our Spring issue!

In America and throughout the world, poetry, against overwhelming odds, continues to thrive. In this issue, we include poems by **Camille Carter**, **Nick Flynn**, and **John Kinsella**, as well as by the late **Carolyn Marie Rogers** (1940–2010), a major figure of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, and a founder of Third World Press, the largest Black-owned publishing house in the United States. Equally powerful is this issue’s offering of fiction, including work by **Lauren Groff**, a living master of the American short story form, as well as by **Daniel Mason**, **Ali Smith**, and **Sheila Heti**, whose “The St. Alwynn Girls at Sea” tells the fantastic tale of a girls’ school that takes to the North Atlantic Ocean aboard a ship during a time of war. Fans of fiction will also enjoy the stimulating interview with novelist

**Claire Messud**, conducted by another great fiction writer (a CML favorite, in fact), **Souvankham Thammavongsa**.

Some of the greatest fiction writing is to be found in children's books. **Katherine Rundell**, in her remarkable, thought-provoking piece, "Why Children's Books?" surveys children's literature in English from its earliest origins in Tudor times to the modern era, when emphasis changed from admonitions and warnings to, as Rundell writes, "the actual desires of actual children". Children's books, she makes clear, are not just for children. "There are good books which are only for adults," she quotes poet W.H. Auden, "because their comprehension presupposes adult experiences, but there are no good books which are only for children."

Nor is a craving for sweets exclusive to children! In "Such Sweet Sorrow," **Caity Weaver** admits to an obsessive sweet tooth, one which compels her to hoard and binge on such childhood treats as Gushers, Dunkaroos, Swedish Fish, and, to her husband's great consternation, "Strawberry Sensation Fruit Roll-Ups with Tongue Tattoos on Every Roll." In an attempt to understand her cravings and possibly discover a healthier diet, Weaver embarks on a journey to an Austrian sanatorium, to do battle with their radically meager, tasteless, and above all, sugar-free rations.

Among the saints, too, there were child-like visionaries, perhaps none more beloved than St. Francis of Assisi. **James Parker** offers a lively review of **Volker Leppin's** important new biography, *Francis of Assisi: The Life of a Restless Saint*. "Now that kindness is countercultural," Parker writes, "we need [Francis's] extremes of wild charity to pull us back toward it." From the late medieval Italy of St. Francis, we turn to Italy of the Renaissance and a curious question: what did it *sound* like? While buildings, documents, and works of art from the era survive, how can historians reconstruct the daily sounds of the past? Can these sounds be explored, paradoxically, by what the society *silenced*? Women, of course, were among those most readily silenced, either by being sent to cloisters to avoid expensive dowries, or to institutional homes as punishment for supposedly immoral acts. **Erin Maglaque** reviews a fascinating new book by **Julia Rombough**, *A Veil of Silence: Women and Sound in Renaissance Italy*. "Their silence," writes Maglaque, "was loud; it echoed throughout the city. Nearly half of Florence's noblewomen were cloistered."

In our own time, it is the homeless who are often silenced or reduced to social invisibility. In “The Invisible Man,” **Patrick Fealey** offers a disturbing and heart-wrenching account of living in his car in Rhode Island, despite his career as a respected journalist. Suffering from manic depression as well as from the side effects of a slew of medications, Fealey is routinely harassed by the police, often at night, when he struggles to sleep in Walmart parking lots or near the beach. Fealey’s firsthand account is a startling call for us to acknowledge and protect the inherent dignity of our homeless neighbors.

Betting on sports, like homelessness, is nothing new in America; it might even be called a cornerstone of American culture. What has changed is the rise of technology enabling bettors to place wagers anywhere, any time. **David Hill’s** “Sportsbook Nation” takes us on an immersive journey through this often bewildering world, with its own arcane practices and language. Hill (a native of Hot Springs, Arkansas, where sports gambling has long been a fixture of everyday life) examines the upheavals resulting from its nationwide legalization through the stories of bookies, casino operators, as well as “courtsiders,” people who go to live sporting events and place bets on the outcomes via smartphone.

## **TOP PICKS**

In our previous issue (#349), we brought you **Rebecca Bernard’s** poignant short story, “The Flirt,” which portrayed a grieving mother, named Marcia, seeking to recapture the soul of her teenage son, Ryan, lost to a tragic fire. Now we bring you the pendant to this story, “The Theft,” in which we see the loss from the perspective of Marcia’s husband, alone in a Maryland suburb while his wife is away at the business conference described previously. Oblivious and isolated, the husband falls prey to a half-hearted home invasion that triggers memories and questions about his deceased son and about his own success, or failure, as a father.

One of our most fascinating pieces in this issue is “A Man of Parts and Learning” by **Fara Dabhoiwala**, a forensic journey that unlocks the forgotten life of 18th-century Black scholar and scientist Francis Williams. Studying the details (and x-rays) of a painting long falsely understood as a mocking portrait of a former slave in the wig and garb of an English gentleman, Dabhoiwala rescues Williams’s true achievements, including his firsthand confirmation of the greatest scientific

discovery of the era. In our own era, **Sarah Khattry's** "Experiments in Light" presents an immersive and compelling memoir of her early pursuit of quantum physics, before she became the award-winning creative writer that she is today. Khattry takes us with her into the deep bedrock of the Cold Atom Physics Lab at Dartmouth College, working to observe new states of matter produced when elements are subjected to intense pressure and temperatures nearing absolute zero. The language of quantum physics takes on its own unique beauty in this piece, which recounts not only scientific experimentation, but a journey to gain knowledge both of one's self and the humbling possibilities of unknowable, nearly infinite alternative lives. "You could call this a spasm of regret in the life of a could-have-been physicist," Khattry writes. But it also reminds her "of all that lies beyond what my embodied self can access, and I just call it a gift."

### **The "D-B Beat"**

With every issue of CML, we work to bridge the divide between the worlds of literary fiction and nonfiction, each presenting their respective challenges. In this issue, we present a pair of award-winning UK-based authors whose writing struck us as exemplary of their respective forms: Katherine Rundell's nonfiction, and Ali Smith's short fiction. For more of each writer, consider *Super-Infinite*, Rundell's biography of the early modern metaphysical poet John Donne, or her brilliant collection of short essays on endangered species, *Vanishing Treasures*, several of which have appeared in our past issues. Alternatively, for lovers of fiction, each volume of Smith's *Seasonal Quartet* is available for download. Written and released in the tumult of the Brexit referendum, the cycle portrays a nation in the midst of rapid change, through the perspectives of interconnected characters confronting their own personal transformations. Go ahead and ask your local reader advisor about the following titles:

- *Super-infinite: the transformations of John Donne* (DB111048)
- *Vanishing treasures: a bestiary of extraordinary endangered creatures* (DB125931)
- *Autumn* (DB89049)
- *Winter* (DB95193)
- *Spring* (DB96015)
- *Summer* (DB100537)

And special thanks to... **Amy Elakman** and **Sarah Smedley** from the Palm Beach County Talking Book Library in West Palm Beach, FL. We met Amy (virtually) while we were giving a presentation on Choice Magazine Listening at last year's Accessible Pharmacy Services Blind Health Expo. In addition to asking for our brochures, she inquired if we'd be willing to give a similar Zoom presentation to a group of *her* patrons. We were thrilled, and a date was set. On February 19, 2025, we CMLers shared some basic facts about our history and production process, answered questions, discussed ways to download, and even read a poem. It was a wonderful meeting, and as always, we got quite a boost from getting to meet and hear from our subscribers! If you're part of a reading group or community organization by or for people with print disability, we'd be happy to do the same for you. Get in touch!