

CML Newsletter ISSUE 351, Summer 2025

CML News

The members of the board of the Lucerna Fund, our institutional home, met on the first Friday in May for their annual meeting. This year, after the standard accountant's and investment company's reports, all three editors of CML were given the opportunity to share their personal highlights of 2024. We editors have no real restrictions over what we can publish, or how we go about increasing circulation, or what ideas get sparked with our "reading caps" on. From the inaugural issue of CML in 1962, when LuEsther T. Mertz's project was just starting out, she gave the editors full creative discretion. She never suggested topics, commented on pieces chosen, or interfered with the editorial process in any way. Today, this freedom resounds in the enthusiastic response the board shows for all the ins and outs of the choosing we do. We had a lively discussion, and were encouraged once again to "carry on!" Thanks always to LuEsther and to the supportive board of the Lucerna Fund. We look forward to seeing you again next year!

Highlights

We welcome summer amid a flood of day-to-day news reports and comments about rapid changes happening in our world. It has sometimes felt like whiplash. Some of us, though, found solace in an ancient ritual called a conclave, which announced that a new Pope had been elected (the first pontiff from the United States and only the second from the Americas.) Former Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost has taken the name Leo XIV, following the style of the 19th-century pontiff, Leo XIII, whose encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Latin for "Of New Things," established social teachings on the rights of labor and duties of capital. This 1891 document spoke to the "current of revolutionary change" that was boiling in the world at that time. Many feel we are in a similar time, when disruptions in climate, upheavals in long-established systems of government and society, and the unabated suffering from wars throughout the world, need fresh attention. CML offers you words from this changing world—words we hope bring your mind and attention to "something new."

In this issue, we are proud to offer a new long poem by the celebrated Vietnamese-American poet, **Ocean Vuong**. "16" movingly evokes not only the

poet's adolescence but the 16th U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, who wanders through our own troubled political moment, remembering the terrible struggles of the Civil War and his decimating personal losses. Our other poets in this issue are equally notable: Palestinian poet **Nasser Rabah**; 1980 Nobel Prize winner, **Czesław Miłosz**; and the acclaimed **Rebecca Foust**, a former lawyer who returned to poetry at the age of 50.

Our summer issue includes powerful, striking fiction. **Frank Bourne's** "Roger" portrays a struggling slacker's encounters with an odd but affecting customer at their coffee-shop job. "Everyone is Innocent," an excerpt from **Elias Khoury's** *White Masks*, depicts a harrowing episode in the life of a Lebanese soldier during the early years of the civil war that ravaged the country from 1975 to 1990. **Kate Petersen's** "The Iowa Tooth Fairy," takes us back to 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, as two researchers race against the clock to gather vital data needed for winning the peace in a nuclear era. Acclaimed Irish author **Colm Tóibín** brings us the heartbreaking "Five Bridges," about an undocumented Irish immigrant on the eve of self-deporting from the United States after over thirty years in the San Francisco Bay area.

In this issue we also feature two non-fiction pieces by renowned fiction writers: "The Tsadik, The Roshe, and The Ugly" by the Nobel Prize winning **Isaac Bashevis Singer** is a frank, down-to-earth meditation on the changing language of morality from absolute to ambiguous. In "Scott," **Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings** recalls her one encounter with the legendary author F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is celebrating its centennial anniversary. Rawlings, author of the classic young adult novel, *The Yearling*, portrays Fitzgerald as a fascinating blend of generosity, humor, brilliance, and boundless vanity.

Genius and vanity were also traits of another great American artist, conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. In "The American," **David Denby** explores Bernstein's life and achievement, his identity as both an American and a Jew, his championing of American music to European audiences, and especially his devotion to the music of Jewish composer Gustav Mahler, which he strove to make a permanent part of the Western musical canon through his engagements with the Vienna Philharmonic and other historic opera houses where Mahler made his name.

While some human beings seek glory, others embrace their solitude and shun society. An extreme example of this was the eponymous subject depicted in

Sam Anderson's fascinating "I, Leatherman." Anderson attempts to retrace the steps of a man who wandered alone between New York and Connecticut throughout the mid-19th century clothed in an outfit cobbled out of leather scraps, living in caves, and speaking in grunts and rudimentary language. Despite this fearsome appearance the "Leatherman" became an accepted, even welcome, visitor, and ultimately a regional legend.

Just as fascinating as rediscovering the Leatherman's secret caves is a recent exploration of the "Carnegie apartments" and the unsuspected life they sheltered. In "The Secret Apartments at Carnegie Libraries," **John Freeman Gill** reveals the existence of residential apartments inside Carnegie-funded branches of the New York Public Library system. These spaces, which were utilized between 1901 and 2005, were designed to house the custodians who stoked the enormous coal furnaces that kept the libraries warm in winter. While the children and grand-children of these custodians grew up with magical memories of unfettered access to the library collections at night, the actual labor involved for the custodians was back-breaking and exhausting.

Secret too was the intelligence training camp in Ritchie, Maryland during World War II. Scores of operatives learned the skills required to survive behind enemy lines, including commando tactics and various foreign languages. In "A Ritchie Boy from Training to War," **Victor Brombert**, a polyglot exile from Nazi-occupied France, recalls his rigorous training at Ritchie, where he specialized in interrogations of potential spies and saboteurs, learning how the ambiguities of both spoken and body language could mean the difference between innocence and guilt, life and death.

Vivid, memorable language is a must for radio sportscasters, who make baseball and other games come to life for listeners (as opposed to TV viewers). In "Howie Rose" by **Joshua Dubler**, we meet one of the most famous and beloved sportscasters of our time, a die-hard Mets fan, some of whose catch-phrases, such as "Put it in the books!" have become immortal.

TOP PICKS

In this issue, we bring you two remarkable short stories that were penned by authors primarily famous for their singing and songwriting.

Chico Buarque, a beloved Brazilian singer who began his career in the Bossa Nova and Tropicalist styles of the 1960's, has received numerous awards for his plays and fiction, including the Camoes Prize, the highest distinction in Portuguese literature. In his short story, "The Cousins from Campos," we witness the gritty life of a struggling family in Rio de Janeiro. The sometimes naive but sensitive narrator observes the social injustice, cruelty, failure and family dysfunction surrounding him, all the while theorizing about, and longing for, the father he has never known.

Older than Chico Buarque by ten years, but also a star of 1960s and 70s popular music, Canadian **Leonard Cohen** wrote highly respected poetry and fiction. In the short story "Begin Again," Cohen gives us a captivating first-person narrator, whose discovery of his infirm and long-lost grandfather transforms his own lonely, isolated existence. "An old love," the narrator says, "had returned, carrying me back to my own, spilling over the whole street, mixing with the descending night and rendering it fragrant."

Finally, what is more fun—and more American—than a marching band? Yet behind the celebratory and rhythmic joy of these ensembles lies an often painful, grueling, quest for perfection, not to mention fierce competitiveness. **Burkhard Bilger's** "Stepping Out" takes us all the way from ancient Sumeria to contemporary Indiana in this exploration of "the great remainder bin of American adolescence," which takes all comers and seeks to answer the eternal question: "How do you take a group of feckless, unrelated youths and turn them into a unified force? How do you teach them discipline and common purpose? You make them march."

The "D-B Beat"

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, author of "Scott," gained renown for the vivid portrait of her home state of Florida in *The Yearling*—available on BARD as DB 33466. She, Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway all shared an editor, Max Perkins, and wrote movingly and prolifically about the worlds closest to their hearts: for Rawlings, that was her home, Cross Creek. If you're interested in more of Rawlings' beloved works, ask your local advisor about the following titles:

- *Blood of My Blood* (DB 56371), Rawlings' first, autobiographical novel, unreleased until 2002

- *South Moon Under* (DBC 28502)
- *Cross Creek* (DBC 08181), Rawlings' autobiography
- *The Sojourner* (DBC 17162)
- *Short Stories* (DB 39028)

And special thanks to... **Bill Moyers**, who died on June 26, aged 91, for giving CML unlimited access to "anything he wrote or produced then or in the future." This great good fortune came about after meeting former CML Editor-in-Chief Sandra Mochson at a talk he was giving for the American Society of Magazine Editors. Up to that point, CML had often included Moyers' writings and programs in an issue, but this required asking permission for each—a time-consuming process! He subsequently became a great fan of CML and would often recommend it. We at CML echo the words of Ms. Mochson who wrote, "he was an extraordinary, ethical, caring human being: so sad he's gone. We need more like him in the world."

Happy Summer reading from Alfredo, Mike, Jay, Raquel, and Annie!