

CML NEWSLETTER, ISSUE #355, SUMMER 2026

CML News

This year's annual board meeting of the Lucerna Fund—which supports CML in both operational finances and its mission to keep our magazine anthology completely free, literary, and educational—met in late April in the hallowed halls of The Yale Club in NYC. This august institution comprises 22 floors of a late 19th-century brownstone, reserving one whole floor for a library filled with historical books, documents, and memorabilia from Yale University's nearly 300 years of existence. Our appointed space, a floor-to-ceiling book-lined conference room, left us with a great sense of grandeur: we felt not just privileged to enjoy this space, but we were reminded of the high calling and importance of our work, and the myriad stories we strive to share. Our greatest hope is that you consider CML as important—in keeping you informed about current affairs, connecting you to historical events, always uplifting the best of our shared humanity. Happy reading.

Highlights

Welcome to our summer issue. The United States and the broader global community remain ensnared in a web of interlocking crises, from a frail and fragmenting peace deal with Iran, to continuing bloodshed in Ukraine. There has been a severe Ebola outbreak in Africa, exacerbated by a lack of approved vaccines or treatments for this novel strain, and the New World Screwworm, an agricultural pest devastating to livestock and wildlife, has returned to Texas for the first time since its eradication in the 1970s. (The dismantling of USAID at the start of the current administration has contributed to both crises.) Domestically, we continue to grapple with intense political polarization, rising inflation, as well as fears of the rapid development of artificial intelligence, which could reshape job markets.

AI could also change the very nature of what it means to be human. “You think the human is so special,” says Japanese roboticist **Hiroshi Ishiguro**, pushing back against Western anthropocentrism in “How Human is Human?” an interview

conducted by **Fontini Markopoulou**. “We do not believe that.” Yet, paradoxically, by constructing robots—some modeled uncannily on himself and his daughter—Ishigouro feels that he can better study human beings themselves. “Develop the robot,” he says, “and see if you can feel the humanity there to understand what humanity is.”

CML for its part is truly committed to human experience, dignity, and expression. This is why we give so much space in our issues to creative writing, which bears witness and gives voice to our struggles, to the beauty, even, of our suffering. In this issue, we feature no less than eight outstanding poets, including **Tishani Doshi**, **Carol Frost**, **Sandra M. Gilbert**, and the popular **Bob Hicok**, a CML favorite. This issue also includes a remarkable prose piece by the early 20th-century German poet **Rainer Maria Rilke**, “Primal Sound,” which considers poetry as an ultimate fusion of the senses, liberating the cosmic music hidden within all things.

Our fiction offerings are equally powerful, including **Shauna Seliy**'s “The Summer Kitchen,” in which the sudden arrival of a mysterious boy claiming kinship disrupts the delicate routine of a large, tight-knit Irish family, and **Melissa Sojourner**'s “Queen of the Rodeo,” a moving tale of a young saddle-maker as he navigates the loss of his brother, for whom he donated a kidney, and the complex, repressed love he feels for his brother's widow, all while helping an adolescent amputee regain her ability to ride horses. **Thomas Pierce**'s “Roy & Ronda & Me” blends science fiction and humor to consider the nature of selfhood, connection—and the afterlife! We were also struck by **Grey Wolfe LaJoie**'s story, “Entry,” which compellingly captures the disorientation of a convict released, after years of imprisonment, into a free yet baffling new world.

Continuing the theme of incarceration, **Marianne Bevan**'s harrowing essay, “Ghosts of the Small Rooms,” recounts her experience as a young government researcher interviewing incarcerated women, their reported traumas triggering her own darkest memories as well as a stark realization of the possible limits of empathy. The limits of empathy are also explored by **Tomas Unger** in his profound meditation on the biblical tale of Jonah, “Jonah Afloat in Time.” Though shown mercy repeatedly by God, Jonah resents the grace that God offers the people of

Nineveh, whom Jonah has been sent ahead to warn. Jonah has lost, Unger writes, “the capacity to pity others, the self-forgetting wish to see pity's work done in the world.”

Another CML favorite, **John McPhee**, now in his 95th year, returns in this issue with Volume Six of his “Tabula Rasa,” a series of short, largely humorous reflections and memories, including his time as a kitchen worker at summer camp, his run-in with a mean-spirited Philadelphia tax collector (whose motto he imagines as “First, do harm”), and a surreal encounter with a cobra at a zoo that makes McPhee move to rhythms he compares to composer Maurice Ravel's infamous *Boléro*.

TOP PICKS

In “What We Hold,” historian **Jill Lepore** explores the creation of the Declaration of Independence by detailing the seventeen drafts and compromises that shaped the final document. She highlights how the Continental Congress edited Jefferson's original text, removing, among other passages, a powerful and unambiguous exhortation of slavery. Reading it, it is difficult not to wonder how the nation's history might have been different had Jefferson's powerful—albeit blatantly hypocritical—words had been retained.

Lydia Davis is one of today's most admired writers of fiction, as well as being a highly esteemed translator of Flaubert and Proust. Pioneering a radical, minimalist style that is characterized by startling precision and control, yet at the same time composed of rhythmic sentences that suggest poetry, Davis has deeply influenced many of the most notable writers of our time, including David Eggers, Jonathan Franzen, and the late David Foster Wallace. Her short story “Family Life at Clinton Street” creates a kaleidoscope of the domestic memories, mundane habits, and petty feuds of a multi-generational New England family of the early 20th century, the house itself becoming a self-contained cosmos that not only holds but shapes the family's desires and conflicts. As a bonus, we include **Eleanor Wachtel's** revealing interview with Davis from 2008.

If the dangers of AI are uppermost in the world's fears these days, so too should be prediction markets like Kalshi and Polymarket, which turn real-world events into constant financial wagers, resulting in what **Christopher Beam**, in “Wanna Bet?”, calls a “gamifying” of truth. The article explores the subculture of users who spend their time tracking real-time data, political moves, and economic policies to find a financial edge on highly specific "Yes or No" propositions. Ultimately, the prediction markets function as a form of unregulated, addictive gambling, with potentially catastrophic results for individuals. Equally worrying is how these markets can fuel—or be influenced by—fake news and misinformation, making reality itself questionable, a veritable casino.

The D-B Beat

For this semiquincentennial summer offering, we're excited to feature two authors whose lives' work have helped define our contemporary understanding of ourselves and the United States as we mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Jill Lepore, whose work appears many times in CML's catalogue, has written extensively about America's legal, social, and political history, contending with topics such as the Constitution, our founding principles, nationalism and the Tea Party. John McPhee, renowned essayist and mainstay of modern literary life, has written countless works on overlooked topics, including freight transport, the American shad, and the basketball star-turned-U.S. Senator Bill Bradley. If any of these subjects strike you, ask your local reader-advisor about these titles this summer, all available for download via NLS BARD:

From Jill Lepore:

- *We the People* (DB 133309), read by the author
- *This America* (DB 95388), read by the author
- *These Truths* (DB 93063), read by the author
- *The Whites of Their Eyes* (DB 72434)

From John McPhee:

- *Uncommon Carriers* (DB 63727)

- *The Founding Fish* (DB 57081)
- *A Sense of Where You Are* (DB 49261)

And special thanks to...**Mary K**, of Lakeworth, FL, a 35-year subscriber who loves the variety of CML, usually dropping everything she's doing to listen. "I love it! I just love it!" she sang. We are grateful for such praise.

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