

CML NEWSLETTER, ISSUE #356, FALL 2026

CML News

Since November 2009, CML has contracted with Talking Book Publishers (TBP), a recording studio in Denver, Colorado, to record each issue we create. Whether it's an intimate interview with a storied writer, a world-class poet's images and impressions of people, places, or nature, a short story layered with complex family relationships, or an informative piece on the everyday workings of finance, there is a voice at TBP that fits each piece.

Recently, we shared a lovely mid-town lunch with Gregg and Melissa Savage, the husband-and-wife team that makes this studio hum, and learned a bit about how the studio works today. Started by his father, Rudy, in 1965, Gregg joined the team in 2002 and has since brought on Melissa and other family members to stay abreast of the ever-changing and evolving technology of the NLS (including the new DA2 talking book players and bidding for talking-book contracts.) Scheduling and performing mountains of research hours for each book or CML article, managing home studio data transfers, and coordinating digital editing for corrections, team TBP has made every issue of CML a seamless and artful process. Looking to the future, Gregg and Melissa are excited about new opportunities in creating multi-lingual editions of books, and the emerging and surprising world of recording LitRPG (short for literary role-playing game) the studio has begun. Recording CML with our partners at TBP is a literary role that is not a game at all—it's a collaborative dance we are very grateful to step into.

Highlights

Welcome to our Fall Issue. We wish we had only uplifting stories to share, but lately, we feel the present acutely, every passing moment representing "close-packed detonations of panic," as **Dan Chiasson** writes in "Think For Yourself" his impassioned defense of the art of writing ("the most astonishing of all human technologies"). Even our national monuments are subject to detonation and desecration, particularly in Washington D.C., with the administration

proposing the closure and demolition of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Nevertheless, in such trying times we reach for words of wisdom and depth and find **Wendell Berry**—author, activist, and farmer, who, sadly, passed away in his “home place” of Port Royal, Kentucky on August 31, 2026—reminding us in “How to Be a Poet,” that “there are no unsacred places, there are only sacred places and desecrated places”; that we must “accept what comes from silence”; and that “patience joins time to eternity”. In “Less is Enough,” a foreword to the fiftieth-anniversary edition of his seminal book, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, Berry argues for the philosophy of “enough” versus runaway capitalist accumulation, consumption, and corporate hubris. “We have developed,” writes Berry, “a sort of vogue of billionaires, when the model of citizenship is set by such people as Elon Musk and Donald Trump. To be successful now is to achieve the satisfaction of one’s greed...” We are proud to have featured Berry’s writing in countless issues of CML. May he rest in peace.

In our pledge to affirm human dignity and creativity, we once again offer a rich selection of poetry and fiction by some of America’s—and the world’s—finest authors. **Terrance Hayes** and **Sharon Olds** highlight our poetry selections, as well as poems by **Richard Thomas Murray** and **Maya C. Popa**. Our fiction includes **Renée Branum**’s haunting story, “The Drive Out,” in which a young woman, driven by a core memory of female victimization, repeatedly struggles between passive witnessing and active intervention when encountering possible instances of abuse. **Neil Freudenberger**’s layered tale, “Accurate Witness,” depicts an elderly, widowed museum docent who, on a visit to her son, must revisit a suppressed and unspeakable trauma of her youth, threatening to undermine her outward account of a long and seemingly stable marriage. **Mark Jacobs** returns to CML with “Restos,” a story set in post-dictatorial Paraguay where the wounds of past human rights violations still fester and a doctor must choose between revenge and medical ethics. **Souvankham Thammavongsa**—another CML favorite—brings us her usual minimalist, crystalline prose in “Heart Hole,” exploring the fracture of a long friendship from the point of view of an increasingly offended narrator. But

is this narrator giving us the full story? As always, Thammavongsa allows each reader to fill in the mysterious, potential gaps.

If grief at the loss of a friendship is painful, grief at the loss of a spouse or partner is perhaps the ultimate human agony. And yet, this sense of inconsolable pain is not only a human trait—rabbits experience it too. In “The Love Bunnies,” **LydiaLyle Gibson** focuses on the rabbit Petunia, whose profound grief after the sudden death of her longtime companion manifests in immediate behavioral changes. Gibson learns that both rabbits and humans are inherently relational creatures in whom the need for love and connection are deeply intertwined with physical and psychological health.

What about the health of American science? **Adam Rogers** details a generational crisis and systemic collapse facing the U.S. research landscape as the traditional relationship between the federal government and the scientific community fractures. Rogers warns that widespread grant freezes, plummeting agency capacity, and a massive departure of federal scientists risk permanently eroding America's technological edge.

TOP PICKS

In his 1862 novel, *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo declared that "the sewer is the conscience of the city." In “The Conscience of the City,” sociologist and, yes, garbageman, **Simon Paré-Poupard**, reflects on his twenty years collecting trash in Montreal. Even as he earned advanced academic degrees in sociology, he kept returning to the grueling, dirty job for the sense of camaraderie and even freedom that it provided him. The essay explores working-class identity, masculinity, consumer society, and the systemic "social invisibility" of the workers who keep urban centers from collapsing into squalor.

From Paré-Poupard’s vivid physical descriptions of garbagemen and their work, we move to **Michael Carson**’s essay, “The Four-Body Problem.” Carson explores human physicality and perception and how we experience our bodies in "fits and starts," examining the inherent foreignness and distance we sometimes feel from our own physical limbs. Carson also recalls his personal history as a veteran,

attempting to process the deep, enduring physical disconnect left behind by his combat experience in Mosul, describing it as a lingering "womb of shadow and pain."

Jonathan Franzen's 2001 novel, *The Corrections*, marked the return of the sprawling, realist, American social novel after decades of literary Minimalism and Magic Realism. In 2010, Franzen was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine—a rare achievement for a contemporary writer. Now, in "A Talent for Seeming," condensed from a new novel-in-progress, Franzen follows Adele, a born-again Christian teenager from Butte, Montana, whose life shifts dramatically after she discovers a passion for theater under the mentorship of a charismatic, if unorthodox, high school drama teacher.

One of our most thrilling, nail-biting, yet deeply serious pieces is "The Stunt Pilot" by **Ed Caesar**. The piece profiles Timur Fatkullin, a champion Ukrainian aerobatic pilot who leads a team of civilian aviators defending Ukraine against nightly Russian drone attacks. Operating retrofitted aircraft equipped with thermal-imaging cameras and manual weaponry, the team engages in high-risk aerial combat reminiscent of World War II to intercept Shahed kamikaze drones. It is a tale of unflinching nerve and courage but also lays bare the brutality and desperate measures of an unjust war.

For generations, American kids supplemented their allowances by delivering local newspapers every morning before school. It was their first real job and taught them fundamental lessons in responsibility and economic management. In "The Paperboy's Secret," **Peter Hessler** reflects movingly on his own career delivering for the *Columbia Missourian*, starting at the age of nine, in 1979, a more innocent time in America. He recalls the grueling physical labor of delivering the newspaper in the dark, freezing, mid-Missouri winters, driven by childhood goals like saving up for a car and winning "Carrier of the Year". But as the memoir progresses, we begin to discover the even darker sides of these paper routes; and why the tradition gradually vanished from American life.

The D-B Beat

Wendell Berry's prolific career stretches from 1960's *Nathan Coulter* (his first of many writings centered on the people of the fictional town of Port William) to the forthcoming essay collection *Dispatches from Rural America*. His mind encompassed fiction, nonfiction, essays, and many rich collections of poetry, united by an abiding love for the land and those who care for it. Nearly three dozen works authored by Berry—including eight volumes of poetry, thirteen Port William novels and short story collections, and essays covering a lifetime of work and contemplation—in addition to myriad anthologies in which his writings are featured, are available for download via the NLS BARD system. Whether you're a long-time follower of Berry, or someone encountering him for the first time, we hope you'll ask your local reader advisor about the following titles:

- *Nathan Coulter* (DBC 32792)
- *The Unforeseen Wilderness: An Essay on Kentucky's Red River Gorge* (DBC 24558), produced by the Kentucky Regional Library
- *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (DBC 24559)
- *The Hidden Wound* (DBC 29411), produced by the Kentucky Regional Library
- *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979-1997* (DBC 17566)
- *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories* (DB 74927)
- *Our Only World: Ten Essays* (DBC 05594)
- *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry* (DB 91487)

And special thanks to... Mark R., from Bowie, MD, who wrote a lengthy email praising our work—he's been a listener (starting on flexible discs!) since beginning college in 1979—while also saying how much he's been enjoying CML's digital archives. In fact, the archives are helping him write articles about the Baby Boom generation by giving him a collective cultural overview of that period. Thanks for letting us know, Mark!