Editor’s Note

This time last year, we shared what I said was the strangest
Editor’s Note I had ever written. We were five months into the
pandemic then, the world turned strange around us. The pandemic
has been with us a year and a half now, and our lives have all been
changed in ways both small and large.

What has remained constant in this unprecedented time is
the way in which stories—whether they are poems, fiction, or non-
fiction—continue to uplift, comfort, entertain, and engage us. In
this issue, we present the best work submitted to our 43rd Nimrod
Literary Awards, the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction and
the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry. Here you’ll find a fine and di-
verse collection of fiction and poetry, beginning with that of our
Award winners. This year, we honor Celine Aenlle-Rocha, Paula
Closson Buck, Emily Rose Cole, and Julie Marie Wade. Our final
judges for 2021 were fiction writer Rilla Askew and poet Geoffrey
Davis, and I want to share with you what they had to say about their
winning selections.

Of Katherine Anne Porter Prize-winner Celine Aenlle-Rocha’s
winning story, Fiction Judge Rilla Askew says, “I was engaged
with ‘White Black People’ from the first page—taken at once with
the narrator’s voice, the compelling heft of her story, her keen ob-
servations and unspoken, trembling-just-below-the-surface trouble.
Angela May traces her own story and that of her alluring Aunt May
in a tale that spans generations, time, and place, from the wounded
history of Opelousas, Louisiana, to 1980’s Manhattan. Novelistic in
scope, and yet compressed and spare as the best in short fiction,
this piece hits the reader from all sides: a wry coming-of-age tale,
a wrenching story of family and unanswered yearning, and, under-
pinning all, America’s substratum of race and color. At once subtle,
funny, piercing, and narratively compelling, this story rewards on so
many levels.” She shared these thoughts about Second Prize-winner
Paula Closson’s Buck’s work: “Taking the ruined landscape of the
Cypriot ghost town of Varosha for her canvas, the author offers up
complex meditations on the nature of personal and collective grief.
At once realist and non-realist, grounded in the chaos and illogical
destruction of war and ethnic cleansing, overlaid with the mono-
chromatic uncertainty of these apocalyptic pandemic days, ‘The
Inventories’ is a story mythic in scope, delicious in language, rich in its understanding of human frailty and grief. In the end, the tale affirms what is required for even the most wounded to heal.”

Poetry Judge Geoffrey Davis finds much to admire in Pablo Neruda Prize-winner Emily Rose Cole’s winning poems. “These poems,” he writes, “instigate what I consider to be one of the pinnacles of our art—an embodied sense of witnessing another voice wading through the vulnerable interplays between darkness and light. Especially upon finishing ‘The Miss Sally Sonnets,’ I feel as though I’m ineffably closer to participating in the kind of listening that will serve me tomorrow. Bless this poet.” About Julie Marie Wade’s Second Prize-winning poem, he says, “I celebrate this writer’s tribute to the internal choruses that we carry, and the resonant verve of putting them in candid concert with each other. The way her ‘slanted crown’ series moves through diverse tenors of head/heart-space— insecurity, humor, irreverence, nostalgia, annoyance, hope—feels like a balm against some ubiquitous fallacy of singularity. Feels like grace.”

It’s not only the winners we honor in this issue, but also the honorable mentions, finalists, and many semi-finalists. Here you’ll find a fine selection of work that delights with its originality and depth, that offers solace for the losses—both large and small—we have all sustained over the past year and a half, and that always offers new and thought-provoking perspectives. These pieces have brought us hope, understanding, and enjoyment, and we are pleased to share them with you in this issue, Awards 45.