

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 diverse 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 observations 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, underpinning 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 monochromatic 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 43*.