

*Editor's Note*

This year marks the 45<sup>th</sup> year of the *Nimrod* Literary Awards: the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry and the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. I've been working with *Nimrod* since our 1999 issue *Awards 21*, and every year I'm filled with anticipation as we start reading material submitted for the prizes. What stories will delight us? What poems will make us reflect in new ways? The answers are always a surprise, and it's that aspect of the Awards that I love best. This year, we're once again thrilled to publish the exceptional work we found, beginning with that of our winners: Jeevan Anthony Narney, Diana Cao, Carol Dines, and Dashka Slater. Our 2023 final judges were poet Tarfia Faizullah and fiction writer Shobha Rao, and I would like to share their thoughts about the pieces they chose as Awards winners.

Poetry Judge Tarfia Faizullah wrote this about Pablo Neruda Prize-winner Jeevan Anthony Narney's poems: "I'm very impressed by the convergence of modernity and depth in Jeevan Anthony Narney's poems. That convergence results in poems that are wise, savvy, self-aware, and insightful. These poems also glimmer with moments of levity that, in a lesser poet's hands, might read as glib or insincere—but Narney is an expert at letting life speak for itself, a skill which requires a unique combination of heart, confidence, and command of both form and feeling. I'm moved by the narrative perspective here as well; many of the poems are told from the point of view of an adoptee with Indian origins. These poems are essential stories, delivered masterfully."

About Second Prize-winner Diana Cao's poem, she said, "I am amazed at the formal acuity in Diana Cao's crown of sonnets titled 'Sick Days: Sonnet Corona.' The title alone piqued my interest in its invitation to allow the reader to observe the dailiness of illness. These poems travel both far and deep, and the obsessive nature of the form converges beautifully with the kind of focus and attention that illness requires. By the end of it, I felt I had emerged from a profound journey in which both the body and spirit are challenged, only to discover that survival is not romantic, or idealizable, but an action one lives to show up for, regardless. This crown is nothing short of a miraculous achievement."

About her selection of Carol Dines's story "On Ice" as First

Prize-winner of the Katherine Anne Porter Prize, Fiction Judge Shobha Rao shared this: “It is a rare thing to read a propulsive story that also has a profound stillness at its center. By having Ellie’s struggles to conceive punctuated by Chiapas’s being stuck on a diminishing ice floe, along with her desperate attempts to save him, ‘On Ice’ pits the most powerful forces in life against one another: impending destruction with the lust for creation. The story is also an ingenious contrast in a vast array of emotional and physical stakes. And each of these stakes is deftly and subtly raised with each sentence. The reader is rooting for Chiapas to be saved and for Ellie to conceive and for Ellie and Michael’s marriage to survive and for Ari and Stu’s relationship to survive and for Ari to find a job and for Stu’s nightmares to end—we are rooting for characters we never even meet. An astonishing feat.”

She also found much to praise in Second Prize-winner Dashka Slater’s story, saying, “‘The Ruddy Fruits That Still Remain’ is a deeply felt meditation on memory and mortality, and the ravages of both. Bertie’s aneurysm becomes a powerful focal point for Meg to begin a journey of understanding, not just of her mother, but of herself. The contrasting characterizations of Meg and her brother, Paul, are brilliantly evocative of human fragility in the face of life’s losses, and perhaps also its gains. The final scene of Meg swimming in the ocean and going past the waves is cleverly detailed, as the reader is left not with a dramatic epiphany, but what is far more beautiful—the quiet acceptance that is life. A lovely story of the forces that make us who we are.”

In addition to the prize-winners, we honor work by our 2023 honorable mentions, finalists, and many semi-finalists, as well as poetry and prose sent as general submissions throughout the year. Here you’ll find tales ranging from the (mis)adventures of two schoolgirls whose art gets them into trouble to deep dives into the fractured relationships between parents and their adult children. Several authors offer poems that examine the immigrant experience; others engage in explorations about women’s bodily autonomy. Ghosts appear in these pages, along with singing goats and the sticky sweetness of walnut jam, and each piece brings us something new and fine. So get reading and enjoy *Nimrod’s Awards 45* issue!