

*Editor's Note*

Endings and beginnings have power—in narratives and in our daily lives. We mark the beginnings and endings of everything, from baby showers to funerals to our first kisses to the last songs on albums. Sometimes endings and beginnings offer stark definition, a clear demarcation of *then* and *now*. Sometimes—often, in fact—they are connected, with an ending also signaling a beginning or vice versa. In this issue, *Endings and Beginnings*, a host of talented authors explore beginnings and endings and the excitement, disappointment, complications, and joy they bring with them.

Here you'll find work that presents familiar beginnings and endings in new and compelling ways as well as work that illuminates smaller, unique kinds of endings and beginnings. Angela Sucich weaves a fairy tale for a daughter being born into a world in turmoil, while Sarah Carleton writes of holding vigil around a dying friend's bed. Katie Culligan mixes an examination of Impressionist paintings with the story of the end of her athletic career—and how that end helped set her on a new path of courage and survival. Pam Baggett describes the universal pain of losing a parent, via a walk through a shopping mall and finding nothing “that can make this new life fit,” while Bethany Schultz Hurst evokes the strangeness and beauty that can be found in ruins, in her portrait of another mall, this one abandoned. In other pieces, a man eats the pears canned by his late mother as Y2K approaches, a family scatters the ashes of deceased members after keeping them much longer than expected, and a woman in a world ravaged by a familiar-yet-not-familiar pandemic translates Morse code as a lifeline to connection. These are just a few of the stories of endings and beginnings—and the amalgamation of the two—that fill these pages.

We're also pleased to publish the poetry and fiction selected as winners and honorable mentions of the fourth Francine Ringold Awards for New Writers. Named for *Nimrod's* longtime former Editor-in-Chief, the Francine Ringold Awards honor the work of writers at the beginning of their publication careers, something we're especially passionate about, as part of our mission to discover and promote work by new writers. This year's winners are poet Suzie Eckl and fiction writer Sruthi Narayanan. Their

winning works and the works of our Ringold honorable mentions are unique, thought-provoking, and beautiful. All are writers to watch, and we feel certain that you'll be seeing much more from them in years to come.

I'll note that, when we chose our 2021 theme in the last days of 2019, we couldn't have imagined the ways in which the next year and a half would make the theme relevant, even centered. As I write this, we are making headway against the coronavirus pandemic, but it still grips the world and brings thousands of endings each day in the form of lost lives. Yet it has also brought with it the hope of new starts and new ways of living—and it has brought a renewed appreciation for the way literature connects, consoles, and revitalizes us.

And so we hope that you enjoy the poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction in this issue, and that it brings you inspiration, solace, respite, and, above all, pleasure after what has been a time of many endings, but also, we hope, many new beginnings.