

Editor's Note

This year marks the 44th year that *Nimrod* has hosted the *Nimrod* Literary Awards: the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction and the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry. The Awards are a special way to honor the work of outstanding poets and fiction writers. We're always excited by the poetry and stories we receive, and 2022 is especially exciting because we opened the Awards to international submissions for the first time this year. We're thrilled to share the work of these exceptional writers with you, beginning with that of our Award winners. This year, we honor Lory Bedikian, Angela Kirby, Ellen Rhudy, and Treena Thibodeau. Our final judges were poet Kaveh Bassiri and fiction writer Toni Jensen, and I would like to share with you their thoughts about their winning selections.

Poetry Judge Kaveh Bassiri had this to say about Pablo Neruda Prize-winner Lory Bedikian's poems. "These moving and tender lyric meditations," he writes, "work wonderfully well together as a poignant homage to the poet's immigrant parents, who were each like 'a seed far from its fruit' on 'roads which know no differences of seeds, bullets, coins.' Writing with the 'immigrant ink stains,' their daughter bears witness to the devastating personal tolls of civil unrest, war, and exile. . . . She finds 'the land of amber, turquoise . . . in the candy wrappers of mother's purse.' She charts their map of 'life in sun spots' and brings us their words and songs in Armenian ('Karoun Karoun'), taking us back to where it 'began on farmland in Lebanon' and Syria, where the pines 'spied the window.' She collects the morsels of memories and puts them in the ark of language. What we end up with is not sentimental elegies and odes but powerful and subtle portraits that are honest and tragic, as if 'the black hole is home' and 'lesions are gold.'"

About Second Prize-winner Angela Kirby's work, he said, "In a fierce and unsettling long poem in nine parts, the writer's compelling voice engages the language of liturgy (Requiem Mass) and science ('for every action (the blow) there is an equal and opposite reaction (the hand print)') in order to witness and expose a family history of abuse and violence. It begins with a haunting, short lyric about the 'slaughter' of fresh-cut Christmas trees with 'skirts raised and dried past caring.' It moves through the fear of death (timor mortis),

the day of wrath (dies irae), and crying (lacrimosa) to a call for liberation (libera me). 'Mercy' is redefined, vividly and defiantly, as 'molassesed chicken feed . . . the day's only sweet,' 'a hazel twig pocketknifed . . . before striping the bare backs of your legs,' 'sister's nightgown unbuttoned, collarbones wings in the moon,' and 'the back of a hand coming right at you.' The poem ends with a villanelle that insists the perpetual light (lux perpetua) 'be your night,' and we count ourselves lucky to have found this lantern of words as our light."

Fiction Judge Toni Jensen shared this about her First Prize-winning selection: "The best short stories most often offer surprises in language, imagery, character development, or plot. In the story 'My Mother Says This House is Haunted,' Treena Thibodeau offers surprise after surprise in all these areas and provides an added bonus of wry, dark humor. A teenager named Thorn struggles with an absentee father and a mother who believes their house is filled with ghosts. Though ideas of ghosts and hauntings fill the story, Thibodeau infuses the whole with light and comedy as balance. By the ending, readers will feel for Thorn and also be surprised by him. Through language so precise and images so startling, Thibodeau crafts a story that sticks."

She also found much to admire in her choice for Second Prize, saying, "In Ellen Rhudy's short story 'You Women in the Mountains,' the women of a monastery admit men into their space during a landslide that walls them off from the world and also kills a bear. There's tension aplenty and beauty, as well—in the setting and language and imagery. The narrator's life changes its whole trajectory during the story, and yet the language delivers all in an understated, measured way. The effect of this contrast is transporting. It's as if the story relies heavily on pacing and timing—of deaths, of landslides—but also exists in forest time, also exists out of time. Rhudy's deft hand delivers a memorable story of what it's like to be in a community and also the inverse, what it means to be exiled."

In this issue we honor not only the winners, but also the honorable mentions, finalists, and many semi-finalists. Here you'll find a fine selection of work that ranges from musings on motherhood and non-motherhood, to explorations of LGBTQ+ identity, to reimagining of art through ekphrasis, to celebrations of love in all its forms. So dig in and enjoy *Nimrod's Awards 44* issue!