

NIMROD



WINTER
2026

POEMS BY
Rachel Hadas, Amit Majmudar,
Shane McCrae, the winners of
the Pablo Neruda Prize, and others

FICTION BY
Jaia Hamid Bashir, Harriet Burns-Chalmers,
Otis Fuqua, and the winners of
the Katherine Anne Porter Prize

ESSAY BY
Esther Allen

A Boy Gets Jolted at The Franklin Institute, 1976

The shadow box contained a slithering of glassy eels,
a mineral called "fulgurite," the legend read. Shocked quartz.
Stone lightning. Like something Ben might once

have caught with kite and key but dug up from the dirt,
instead. As if Jove's thunderbolt had pulverized a loud-mouthed mortal
into freaks and streaks of pebbled crystal, I decided,

with all those tales from Mrs. Glaser's class on Greece
and Rome aflutter in the showcase of my head. Did I stumble on
those bone-like rhizomes when my mother made me take

a science course in town, on Saturdays, to get me out from underfoot?
I gawked at a finger-smudged vitrine that whispered
just to me about the javelins of cloud-spawned force,

far hotter than the surface of the sun, that sometimes smite a beach
and trigger silica to sinter, vitrify, and fuse, forging
gritty dendrites in the sand to cool. They can penetrate

for yards beneath the soil—the label added
as a bonus fact. Then eons passed before another squall exposed
the chthonic wound, a ramifying splat of electricity

and crunch. But I'd forgotten all about this prodigy—
excavated, pruned, displayed—which gagged my boyish wonder
with disgust and purged all memory from my head,

as if Medusa's glare had petrified my eyes. Until today that is,
when my computer zapped my hand with three sharp static shocks.
They jolted every neuron in my brain and kicked my focus

backwards to a primal milk of love and hate: the squealing writhe
of me against my mother's skin; and her, repelled
by this insatiable third son; a greasy

elver rasping at her breast.