

WRITER'S BLOC

A DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDENT PUBLICATION

Winter 2017-2018

WRITER'S BLOC

A DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDENT PUBLICATION

Editor

Kaitlin Ruiz

Associate Editors

Crystal Arredondo

Samantha Delarosa

Madeleine Garza

Andrea Martinez

Angela Pineda

Darcy Ramirez

Mikaira Rheubottom

Krystin Torres

Robert Trujillo

Faculty Sponsors

Katherine Orozco-Verderber

Kenneth Price

Winter 2017-2018

Copyright © 2018 Texas A&M University-Kingsville
Department of Language and Literature
700 University Blvd. MSC 162
Kingsville, Texas 78363-8202 U.S.A.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may
be reproduced in any form by any
means without prior written
authorization of the publisher.

Support for *Writer's Bloc* is provided
by student activities fees from
Texas A&M University-Kingsville
and by the TAMUK Department of
Language and Literature.



Table of Contents

Lesson in Bird Watching , Anthony Botti	1
The Memory Broker , Katherine Orozco-Verderber	3
(Memo to Cashiers) , Zara Raab	4
Los estudiantes , Lile Fraga	5
interpretations of red wine and darkness , David Speiring	6
Belief In Birds , TWIXT	7
Starry silence , Darren Demaree	8
Midnight: December 15th , Katherine Orozco-Verderber	9
The Ghost of Murrieta , John Brantingham	10
caliente , Dana Stamps	12
Heavy Expectations , Plaserae Johnson	13
Grand)father Clock , Zara Raab	14
Apocalyptic Mourning , Katherine Orozco-Verderber	15
The Women's Peace March , Robert Cooperman	17
Hitchhiking with the Major , Robert Cooperman	18
A Cold Winter Song , Darren Demaree	19
A Black Woman's Words – Racism , Plaserae Johnson	20
from a summer journal , Anthony Botti	21
Riding The Wind Horse Home , Darren Demaree	23
Credo Quia Absurdum , Dana Stamps	24
Full Focus , TWIXT	25
The Day I Got To Know GOD , Angela Carrozza	26
The Devil's Dictionary , Dana Stamps	27
All hail the micro-seconds of newness , TWIXT	28
December Night , Anthony Botti	29
the remains of the day as a bowl of cold polenta , David Speiring	30
Arbitrary Fog , Katherine Orozco-Verderber	31
Lazarus Reconsiders , Anthony Botti	32
the view from my kitchen window in winter , David Speiring	33

Cherry Blossoms in Cambridge , Anthony Botti	34
Time Travelers , Katherine Orozco-Verderber	35
Rainy Night , TWIXT	36
Forest Falls , Dana Stamps	37
K5, [P10, K10) repeat to last 5sts, K5 , Anthony Botti	38
Gin Rummy , Anthony Botti	40
Contributors	42

Lesson in Bird Watching

I flip through holiday cards by the bay window, that ritual cord every December bonding my dispersed

family. His face springs out at me from an old photograph that my sister has enclosed.

On the back of the black and white polaroid, my father's handwriting curls at the bottom right

corner *Summer 1976* on the front porch. Last August his sudden death was like falling down

a flight of stairs. In the last few months I have sat guard over my father's old letters sealed up

in a drawer, the knotted ball of his waiting words to me. This afternoon in a wedge

of sun counting chickadees and nuthatches at the feeder during the annual Christmas bird count,

I ask what would he now say to me here at my cold desk.

Has anyone ever seen an aging bird?
I stare out at the winter sun

dropping to the west, only to be startled by a thump of soft breast, frantic wings against the pane

of glass. The bird hits the ground and is not moving. I bolt
outside. Leaning over the body with its wild

heart still racing in my fingers, will I have to dig
a grave in the icy ground? Or just cover it

with snow? All at once, it lifts off
—so close I feel its wing brush my cheek—

to a high branch on a pine, now its figure just a blotch
of red against the green. My eyes follow this cardinal crossing

the open sky. I stretch out
my right arm, as if I too had wings to let go.

Botti

The Memory Broker

There is a man
Standing in the middle of a street
That no one has ever been on.
He holds a clock in his hand,
And though the hands don't move,
We feel time moving inexorably forward,
Perhaps struggling to continue.
He holds time as much as he can,
And holds things precious to us all.
He is the Memory Broker,
And he takes to give.
But what he takes are the soft memories,
Lit by fireplaces,
And the warmth of immature love,
And replaces it with the horrors of what you've forgotten.
The flash of that knife
In the middle of your living room.
Or perhaps the weight of that faceless person
As they pinned you to the ground.
These trades are dark ones,
His hands stained dark rust
But as far as you tell,
His clock is clean.

Orozco-Verderber

(Memo to Cashiers)

Over the counter

bills will swim toward you, twenties tens,
Now and then from a glinting one hundred
comes the wink of a spectacled Franklin
taut and spotless on the dais. Eye on fraud,
score and scratch the intaglios, and squint
hard in every fish's mouth for marks
telling tales of unfounded bass or sharks
noon to seven o'clock, day in, day out:
Wonder, did your mother after birthing
look to your mouth for a silver spoon?
Did she ask what a mere female brings,
And plot some forgery of higher worth?
We've shopped for a thing or two – that's real –
and there's no doubt: Currency runs the till.

Raab

interpretations of red wine and darkness

as a child I believe I sat in the wrong chair
and its contours and cushions shaped
my backside all wrong and it made my body act funny
its winged back looked like it was stolen from an angel

I didn't fully understand the chair's impact on me
until I tried to walk and my hips refused to hold up my weight
and I fell headlong into a long lapse of lassitude
and because of it I learned to crave darkness and solitude
I tried to sleep in the chair
I studied darkness surrounded by moon glow
I thought about how I could add a merlot-purple sheen to the
moonlight

my friends had women but I had darkness

I spill that darkness on my clothes
and I hope red wine covers
all that's unessential about it

Speiring

Belief In Birds

Only the shadows of whatever casts
them streak in my peripheral vision
and their unseen objects vaguely appear
only in the space of my assumptions.

TWIXT

Starry silence
Then the moon
Drops inside
Rainy skies

Golden fireflies
Fan the wind
Blinking lanterns
Full of meadow
Starlight

Misty shadows
Moonlit rivers
Mountains rising
In a turning
Crystal globe

Demaree

Midnight: December 15th

On midnight
In the middle of December,
The world halts for a few moments.
We aren't sure why,
Nor do we realize our helpless suspension.
And still we linger there,
Our eyes drifting toward the now unmoving stars
As the world around us crashes to a silent,
Slow-motion halt.
How queer must it look to whoever is watching us,
That we stop and stare up at the sky
And ponder the big picture
While all of the little pictures crash,
Explode,
And burn around us.
Instead we can't see the earth for the stars
At midnight
In the middle of December.

Orozco-Verderber

The Ghost of Murrieta

The day before Ahn is taken off the boat and given to the men in San Francisco, her master tells her to make everyone believe she is Chinese, and she knows somehow then that there is no husband waiting for her and there never was. She has felt this for months now, but she didn't want to think about it.

She is sold to a man in San Francisco, warned that if she complains her parents will suffer. She knows this is almost certainly not true, but what does this matter. She knows that if she says anything that she will suffer and that's enough.

Her new home is above a bar in San Francisco. At night, when she is not performing her duties, she listens to the men downstairs laughing and yelling, and she wonders what they are doing. She knows they are all drunk because they stink of it when they come up to her. She knows that they are lonely and angry at the same time. She knows that they are far away from their homes.

In the mornings, she helps to clean the bar downstairs. Behind the bar is the head of Murrieta floating in a jar of whiskey. One of her jobs is to clean the fingerprints off the glass. She does it without looking at the man's face.

Her boss tells her to be careful not to drop the jar, that Murrieta was a great and terrible man, and she doesn't know how someone could be both great and terrible at the same time. It seems like an idea that could only exist in a world like this one. He had a hand with only three fingers in another jar. He laughs and tells her not to steal coins from the till because he has cursed the entire bar, and if she does, Murrieta will haunt her forever and bears will come out of the forest to eat her.

She doesn't know if this barman is a witch or not. She doesn't know if this is a place where evil magic can happen and demons walk the earth, but what does that matter. Every morning, she sees the head in a jar that people fondle and hold as they drink and laugh. She knows that this is a place where something like that can happen, and that is enough.

Brantingham

caliente

(for brandy)

if i were a boy
who could piss in the snow
writing my name
i would become a bullfighter
or a quarterback

if i were a boy
then i would be lord byron
with the women
seducing them as often
as i now seduce men

if i were a boy
then it would be no different
because libido
is what makes me ask
why i am not

swear to god
if a man flirts with me
on the freeway
and he wants to go all the way
i am down for sex
on the hood
with the engine running
in a parking lot

Stamps

Heavy Expectations

Heavy, heavy!
Is the weight on my shoulders.
Expectations,
Formed these ponderous boulders.
They won't let me rest.
They won't allow a break.
Forcing me to be the best,
with each move I make.
Heavy, So heavy!
Why do you get more enormous?
Seems you get worse!
Your faith's so ginormous,
Heavy! Heavy! You are.
The credit's to you,
I wouldn't be thus far!

Johnson

Grand)father Clock

for my father

Your heart, your clock,
has quickened, and stopped.
How many years? Thirty?
since your dad, granddad to me,
fell to silence in his chair?
He followed his firstborn there,
my uncle buried beneath a wall.
Gone, too, your sister Estelle,
May be her ashes are spread
on some rocky ledge
where land meets the sea;
I can't think where she's laid.
Oh, pressures of the blood!
Boy of winch and pinewood,
you now live in death,
who marched through Europe
on dime rations of escalope,
known for vigor and genius,
there in that savage place.
Stethoscope like a clock
tolls for me the time to stop,
wheel of catch and release,
the clock wise device.
Now you' re ashes dispersed
above a cliff of yellow grass.

Raab

Apocalyptic Mourning

What are the four horsemen
If they have no horses?
Does the Pestilence spread slowly,
So excruciating that you can feel the plants wither
Around your feet as you stand in a field?
Or is the Pestilence of a different order?
We believe nothing,
Cherish nothing,
Love nothing.
Does War ravage slowly,
Ineffectually,
But hideously, as he usually does?
Or is he a contagious disease
That spreads through touch,
Through ignorance?
His hooks are not a bayonet
But they pierce skin just the same.
And you will ravage yourself trying to get free.
Famine moves much the same as she always did.
Perhaps now you don't see her as she sneaks up behind you
And slowly tightens her hold around your throat
Until nothing can pass but her master, Death.
Her graceful fingers claim as many lives as she did before
And perhaps more now.
Instead of collecting the pieces of the war-ravaged
And the bones of the starved,
She takes in the dead of night,
Without any warning.

We all thought the horses were disastrous,
But their hooves on our streets
Were the warnings we needed to hide.
No more now.

Orozco-Verderber

The Women's Peace March: Cambridge, England, 1970

When I arrived at Claire's parents' house – a long walk from Cambridge's train depot – her mother had just blown in, almost tearing the door off, like Dorothy's Kansas whirlwind.

"A shame you couldn't have been there, darling," she stroked Claire's still feverish face, recovering from mono, while she shook my hand and invited me into her kitchen for a spot of tea. "Or perhaps you'd prefer something with a bit more oomph," she smiled, then turned back to Claire.

"You would've loved the energy, the police shifting foot to foot like little boys needing the loo, while we marched up to the nuclear facility's gate, waving placards, shouting anti-Nuke slogans, and demanding they shut down that portal to hell. Some of the women chained themselves to the fence. They'll be there all night, and I promised to bring food. Bob, dear, would you be a lamb and help ferry meals?"

"Absolutely," I gushed like Old Faithful, though out of the corner of an eye, I saw Claire shaking her head in warning. Still, the possibility of getting busted in Merry Olde England was nothing compared to my weaseling out of Vietnam a few months earlier,

because, moron that I was, I now believed myself safe from any and all of life's catastrophes.

Cooperman

Hitchhiking with the Major: England, 1970

He was out of Royal Army central casting:
his immaculate trouser pleats bayonet-sharp,
his swagger-stick rested in the backseat,
while he drove me to Stanford's British campus,
where Simon, a best friend I'd just met, invited
me to crash in his dorm room while he traveled.

The Major told me about his service in World War II,
about being an observer in Israel in 1967,
and when he started on Vietnam, I cringed,
but he didn't hallucinate Commies under beds.

"You chaps have gotten yourselves into a pickle
in that godforsaken jungle. Leave as gracefully
as you can." From his lips to Nixon's ears.
At the campus gate, we shook comradely hands,
and I thanked him for the ride and the history lessons.

"Count yourself lucky," his parting advice,
"to avoid that cock-up in Southeast Asia.
The Six-Day War?" he went on, "Bloody foolish
of the Arabs to invade Israel: willing to fight
to the last man, woman, and child for the country
we were stupid to carve out for them in '48.
The Arabs will never forgive the Israelis, nor us,"
he drove off before I could argue.

But now, decades later, hell, maybe he was right.

Cooperman

A Cold Winter Song

Glittering snowflakes
Fall
In drops of light
Warmed by the sun
Filtering through
Another cold winter day
When hard winds blow
Down the empty road
Through shivering trees
Across the fence..
They fall silently
Whispering drops
Of heavy snow

Demaree

A Black Woman's Words – Racism

A social and political matter.
No improving actions,
just continuance in chatter.
Y'all aren't delusional.
Blacks can too be exceptional.
The words we too write are legible.
If you cut me I too bleed red!
How's it the 21st century,
and racism still isn't dead?
Your minuscule mind thinks pigment in my skin makes me inferior .
Discrimination is in occurrence, because you believe you're superior.
Then you wonder why blacks are so furious.
'Cause you choose to ignore a problem so serious.
Not by choice,
am I the voice, of my race.
We're devastated.
I'm also sorry...
for the other targeted groups that are hated.
I can merely tell you I am exhausted!
To hold on to the human race,
'cause it's not lost yet.
Presently, I'm less of judgment,
and my acceptance has grew.
As a black woman,
that's all I will say to you.

Johnson

from a summer journal

-Blackhead Trail, Monhegan Island

On the third day we woke
to drenching fog
and the rising arguments
of waves in Elfin Cottage.

By noon the sun lifts
the cover over the Atlantic

sky. It's time to set out to hike around
the island. Up on the cliffs edge, we stumble on a young
gull out of its nest, licked
by the salt air, wobbling
on a thin ledge.

In the blowing mist
the sea washes up the brusque
dialogue from this morning, the wind
taking what's unsaid

between us. On the trail the afternoon opens up.
Splintering through the tips
of the pines, the light is there waiting
for us. Too hot to talk, I hold out
my hand. My look back and a nod of your chin
seem the best form of conversation
where the surf below comes in loud.

We turn left to start down
to the shore line. What is swept

away, erased on the coast
is as important as what remains. Wave

upon wave washes up kelp,
a crab leg, a stone, perfectly round in our private
silence. I put this one in my pocket. By high tide
the sand is swabbed clean.

Botti

Riding The Wind Horse Home

The air, broken air, was too hard to breathe.
The white wind horse was wild, climbing higher
Above clouds that stretched from mountain to sea
Under the sun that was redder than fire.
Bright sun! soon the moon will bring back tonight
And autumn's first cold that mingles with snow
But the journey we follow is endless
—a quest for your love and that love's red rose.

It blooms in tomorrow, my father.
It blooms in a garden beside Heaven's door
And a ghost holds a lantern in welcome
And our spirits are light, our trust is gold.
The horse does not hurry – it dances.
Your smile is the victory I dreamed of.

Demaree

Credo Quia Absurdum

The earth is flat, and anyone who disputes this claim is an atheist who deserves to be punished.

--- Abdel-Aziz Ibn Baaz (Saudi Arabian Sheik, 1993)

How long must men & women consume shit
before we all OD? How long can the planet Earth endure
druggy plunder, trainspotting ... clean! clean! But I®

work for Alpha, Inc., drink poison Kool Aid
from the bombastic big boys who say they gotta sell it!
We swill the punch of tooth decay and diabetes
just to get along, or be left alone, unmolested by thugs-o '-serve,
taste the high fructose gush coldly slide across tongue,

down throats - *cut them!* Where did that come from?
With switchblade or guillotine, heads of the haves should roll!
O the Memorex ... *politics, tics, tics.*

With no Alien to help, just crying, and a left-
over silence of bacteria and cockroaches forever that stinks
of silly evil, duh; duh. So giddy up, DADA! Pop.

Stamps

Full Focus

I look, and the objects accept the look
and only change to increase in detail.

TWIXT

The Day I Got To Know GOD

An otherwise ordinary morning, 8:45 on a Tuesday – going against traffic on 1-84–flying at 75 mph. Such Freedom. I almost forgot you lost yours.

As I merged onto the ramp heading eastbound the car swerved (what the hell just happened?) Yet, I didn't question it right away–still in a dream-like phase–two months since you were locked away.

I got to know God on this day, as I pushed the brake pedal, did a 180-spin and landed in tumbleweeds. Startled, but still irrationally calm, as I pulled myself together, finger-combed my hair and turned back around onto safe interstate ground. An 18-wheeler sped passed & stared, while in the weeds, and I thanked You, God. I have been spared...

If the vehicle went left, it would be demolished,– all though confident I'd walk away to the shoulder lane. If the sedan slipped (a wet maple leaf? It didn't rain.) I'd crash into a guard rail with busy highway underneath. I truly, truly thanked You.

I exited onto local streets, reviewing the event play-by-play in my head, at every stoplight (many on the main drag) counted every blessing up to this Blessed day.

Carrozza

The Devil's Dictionary

Ambrose Bierce concocted dictionary epigrams for giggles. His iconoclastic jokes: knowledgeable,

loved. Memorable notions, often playful, quickly recruited sympathetic temperaments.

Ultimately, very weird xeric yarns zigzag along bedeviled categories. Debauched ... evil ... foolhardy

... grave? Hellish in jest, King Lexicographer muscles neophytes over, peasants. Quotations rule!

Satire today, undeniably vital, will Xerox yesterday's zeniths. Ambrose Bierce, cool.

Stamps

All hail the micro-seconds of newness
stranded in a rope of activities
that develop the picture-perfects
as are seen in transactional skims scooped.

TWIXT

December Night

The trees know first. An ice storm is moving in.
I'm still holding back trouble I've carried
around in my mind for two days. Yet
some worries are always there. Must admit
it has felt like an empty year. At midnight
I come to bed in pitch black, but nothing
Brings relief in the clinging cold.
All night I live with cracking branches, the wind
refusing to die down, and still awake
at four a.m. with my brain beating
under this blurred sky. The slim birches, stripped
of color, flex down and over in the freezing
darkness. then the sky clears, the white
trunks straighten by dawn, as in any storm.

Botti

the remains of the day as a bowl of cold polenta

in the morning from my window I watch the lake waves
struggle toward the beach as they resist against the vacuous water weight
I have so many thoughts at once about lunch and dinner
that they short each other into an amnesia-like white out
so much even a songwriter blanks on verse
and the song seems like it fell from the radio's speakers
both of us are beyond the help of facts and humor and even miracles

noon looks like blue bands of silver-shaded light coming through my windows
I pretend it's a Persied daydream that leopards from the sky to my dark hallway
good I think because that leopard might prey on my cold polenta
freeing my hunger for something new and fresh

as I walk the air crackles around my head with the insects' verbal incense
it makes me hungry to eat and not to create and to dine

clouds wool over the sky and a cold wind ducts beneath them
and pours wave after wave of cold air over my face

back at home I cut the cold polenta into squares and I put them in a hot oven
later I'll dip them in a sauce made from green peas broccoli and olive oil
until that time I'll recline on my sofa and keep warm dreaming
dreams handsome as a dozen eggs in the green grass

Spiering

Arbitrary Fog

Fog curls around the curves of my hands
As my knuckles edge between pink and white.
She's watching me,
Her eyes closed
And yet open.
I can feel her judgment,
Her derision.
The fog tightens its hold and pushes my hand.
The shovel penetrates the earth,
And roots and weeds come with it.
It's the deep, soft soil I'm after.
The cold mulch that matches the
Fog escaping my mouth.
Perhaps, if you plant the dead
And you water them enough,
Something beautiful will grow from it.
I chuckle, the sound deep in my throat.
The fog settles around my neck.
Nothing will grow here but those same weeds,
No matter who I plant beneath them.
Perhaps that, like so much of life
Is arbitrary.
She can't watch me now,
And a smile creeps over my face.
But the weeds always will.

Orozco-Verderber

Lazarus Reconsiders

John 11: 1-45

"Lazarus, come out," a voice opening
in the dark. Just

hours before, the dead
were moving closer to me, their blurred
faces rising from their graves. Even

that spring Martha could not
steady my tremor
before I held the knife? Already

after four days my body had let
go of the light into a lengthening
darkness, the blood
had crusted around the delicate
underside of my wrist. I was curled up
in this tomb in heavy waves of sleep in a thin
silence like an indrawn
breath. *Leave me here for stillborn,*

I beg.
The boulder slides to the left. A crack

of cold light seeps in.
Air rushes through the crypt,
my eyes blink in the shock
of the morning sun, exploding
in on me at once – oh yes, the world.

Botti

the view from my kitchen window in winter

I watch a turkey vulture perch
on a maple tree's limb
it seems both
of us are snow and ice weary
and I want the air
to warm my breathing
and for my breathing
to warm the air

the bird waits for the snow
and ice to melt
to reveal
winterkill's dry remains
the wind ruffles
its feathers
while I choke
on the heated air

Spiering

Cherry Blossoms in Cambridge

-portrait of a friend with AIDS, 1992

The last memory I have of you is standing
on Putnam Avenue under tender trees in late
April, a cluster of flaring blossoms shouted out
to your new lover stepping away *come back,*
come back. You bent a long branch down
to your face. Leaning up
against the rough bark in the wrinkled
light, I heard you mutter under your breath
go anywhere I cannot
follow you. Later that day a spring storm brought
down a dark afternoon, tense buds smacked
to the cold ground under a sky torn
by clouds. On Thursday you called
to tell me how the next
day in the shy sun you scooped up
the tree's pink casualties off the red brick
sidewalk, rubbing their tight
fists in your palm. Once your diagnosis was let
out, you knew nothing could be brought back
after the blowing rain ripped
through the tree before the modest
shoots had even time to break open.

Botti

Time Travelers

I cannot steady my hands
I am, paradoxically, more myself
And yet a complete stranger.
How do you still the hands
Of an unsteady, broken heart?

I have a knife to my own throat
A noose fixed under my jaw
I am waiting
For someone to pull the blade
To kick the chair from beneath
My bloody, worn feet.

We are exhausted of this fight –
Of forcing a relationship
Between ourselves and country.
We feel out of place, out of time.
Time travelers from an idyllic future
That we never get to live in.

Orozco-Verderber

Rainy Night

What this is is transparent and not this.
Please see past it to what you must now see.

TWIXT

Forest Falls

My chartreuse Prius
was parked only forty yards
from the river,
and I didn't have to hike
far before, in all directions, not a man-
made thing was in sight

except for graffiti
on every boulder, pine trees carved
with initials (or worse),
and food trash,
enough Styrofoam
to resemble snow, guttering
the bank.

Who-loves-who
or my-gang-rules-this-vicinity
shouted out
via spray paint
which only a dedicated
digital photographer
could ever hope to disguise.

Tagged, the rocks
echoed the violence of soda cans
still advertising.

Stamps

K5, [P10, K10) repeat to last 5sts, K5

–knitting pattern for a baby blanket

Your voice unspools inside me knitting
on the porch while bats crisscross
the yard- The blow-up
that morning at Dad's funeral is as burnished
as a scar on that old elm tree we used to play kick
the can under. I'm halfway through a blanket
for a friend's baby, using lopi wool
skeins hunted down in Iceland

last winter. I thought we had reached
a truce in that old family quarrel. Yet
my fingers will not
allow me to rest, the wooden
needles ticking knit 10, purl 10
into a basket
weave design. Just

now I have lost count
of the rows and notice a dropped
stitch, a hole at the top. I won't
deny that hurt
blossoms over the years, but you have developed
a kind of affection for your airtight
anger. Tonight I'll spend

time unpicking, unraveling yarn
row by row to get back to where the pattern
went wrong, pulling apart our tangled

feelings. Let's trade in our resentment, a chance to do it all over, to be knitted back together right this time.

Botti

Gin Rummy

Over the years certain handpicked
days are preserved
in my memory where I'm pulled back
through family history to sort
it all out. In the summer of Carter's oil crisis

I'm sprawled on my stomach
on the back porch, *The Hobbit* cracked
open. Her easel hovers over me, oil paints mingle
with honeysuckle that flirts up
on the breeze. Now that the dishes are washed,
my mother lights up
a Marlboro, settling in the orange lawn
chair, her crossed leg
jiggles as she stretches for the worn deck
of cards on the banister. *Let's play gin rummy,*
shuffling with her strong
knuckles before dealing. I scan

the ten cards held tight to my chest.
There's no three of a kind
in my hands, no cards of the same suit
in sequence. *Learn to have more of a poker face,* whispering
to me through her exhale of smoke
that scribbles in the air. On my turn to pick up,
no cards of the same rank.
I discard the five of clubs. No straight
flush after drawing again. *Let's start
over,* I blurt out. But mother just
sweet-talks me, you'll never be dealt

a perfect hand. By next
summer she had already packed up
the paint brushes and canvases to tend to her large family, left
just with her pencil sketches at the kitchen
table, abstract doodles on the margins of our homework
pages. That day I'm reminded
by her every time I cut
the cards, seeing her hands in mine, that you must
play the cards you're dealt.

Botti

Contributors

Anthony Botti

Anthony Botti's poetry has appeared in *Comstock Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Cider Press Review*, *Old Red Kimono*, *The Rockford Review*, and *Peregrine*. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts, where he works in health care management.

John Brantingham

John Brantingham's work has been featured on Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac* and *The Best Small Fictions 2016*. He has seven books of poetry and fiction. He is currently working on a collection of flash fiction pieces with Grant Hier that covers the entire history of California, and he teaches poetry and fiction at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park and Mt. San Antonio College.

Angela Carrozza earned her B.A. in Literature in the mid-90s from SUNY Purchase, with grad-level coursework at Sarah Lawrence College and Manhattanville College. She recently retired from a 20-year career as an art model to pursue other interests, such as interior decorating and business. Her work has appeared in past issues of *Writer's Bloc*, *California Quarterly*, and *The Poets Espresso*. An Italian native, she lives in suburban New York.

Robert Cooperman

Robert Cooperman's latest collection is *Draft Board Blues* (FutureCycle Press), with *Their Wars* forthcoming from Aldrich Press. In *The Colorado Gold Fever Mountains (Western Reflections Books)* won the Colorado Book Award for Poetry. Cooperman's work has previously appeared in *Writer's Bloc* as well as in *The Texas Review* and *Mississippi Review*.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing). His seventh collection *Two Towns Over* was recently selected the winner of the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and is due out March 2018. He is the managing editor of the *Best of the Net* anthology and *Ovenbird Poetry*. He lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife and children.

Lile Fraga is an aspiring teacher of future readers and writers, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies (with a concentration in English Language Arts and Reading) at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She is also a wife and mother of three. Lile is a proud and active member of Sigma Tau Delta Gamma Phi and TAMUK's Kappa Delta Phi. She anticipates graduating in the fall of 2018, after which she hopes to work with children, and someday adults, to share her passion of reading and writing. In her spare time, Lile enjoys reading anything to do with anthologies, love, mystery, poetry, and fantasy. She writes about events close to her heart and likes to include experiences that she knows others may be able to relate to. Her goal is to make a difference in some way with anyone she comes across.

Plaserae Johnson

Born in Glendale, Arizona, Plaserae Johnson has regularly contributed to *The South Texan*, Texas A&M University-Kingsville's student-run newspaper. She has been published in Texas A&M University-Kingsville's journal of women and gender studies, *Tapestry*. Plaserae searches for any opportunity to display her talent and passion, and currently updates new pieces on her website, Perceptual Plaz. Her ultimate goal as a writer is to become professional and win the highest of awards.

Katherine Orozco-Verderber is a south Texas poet, playwright, and novelist. Her other works have been published in *Paper Tape Magazine*, *Inkstay Magazine*, *The International Words of Womyn Anthology*, and by Fountainhead Press. Currently, she is the co-creative director of Zero Untitled Films/Productions.

Zara Raab

Zara Raab has published two full-length books, *Fracas & Asylum* and *Swimming the Eel*, and two chapbooks, *The Book of Gretel*, and *Rumpelstiltskin, or What's in a Name?* At one time a contributing editor to *Poetry Flash* and *The Redwood Coast Review*, her book reviews and poems have appeared in *Verse Daily*, *River Styx*, *West Branch*, *Arts & Letters*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Critical Flame*, *Prime Number*, *Raven Chronicles*, and *The Dark Horse*. She grew up in rural California, and is now settled in the Berkshires in western Massachusetts.

David Spiering

David Spiering's full length poetry collection *My Father's Gloves* was published in 2010 by Sol Books of Minneapolis. His work has been printed by *Poetry East*, *The Mid-American Poetry Review*, *The Chiron Review*, *The 2ndHand*, and *The Red Rocks Review*, among others.

Dana Stamps, II

Dana Stamps, II. has a bachelor's degree in psychology from California State University, San Bernardino and has worked as a fast food server, a postal clerk, a security guard, and a group home worker for troubled boys. His chapbook *For Those Who Will Burn* was published by Partisan Press. His work has been published in *Rattle*, *Chiron Review*, *Front Range Review*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Trajectory*, *Slant*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Sierra Nevada Review*.

TWIXT

TWIXT is the mononym-onym of poet Peter Specker; he has had poetry published in *Margie*, *The Indiana Review*, *Amelia*, *California State Quarterly*, *Emry's Journal*, *RE:AL*, *Pegasus*, *First Class*, *Pot-pourri*, *Art Times*, *The Iconoclast*, *Epicenter*, *Subtropics*, *Quest*, *Confrontation*, *Writers' Journal*, *Rattle*, *Prairie Schooler*, *The Prairie Journal (Can)*, *Stand (UK)*, and *Tulane Review*, among others. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

*Writer's
Bloc*

Texas A&M University-Kingsville
Department of Language and Literature
700 University Blvd. MSC 162
Kingsville, Texas 78363-8202 U.S.A.