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For Immediate Release

Fifteen Elected to Texas Institute of Letters

Members of the Texas Institute of Letters have overwhelmingly approved fifteen new writers to join the ranks of the TIL, a distinguished honor society founded in 1936 to celebrate Texas literature and recognize distinctive literary achievement.

The TIL's membership consists of the state's most respected writers – including winners of the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, and MacArthur “Genius” grants and many other awards. Membership is based on literary accomplishments and is granted only through an election by existing members.

The 2017 honorees are Celeste Bedford Walker, David Bowles, Bobby Byrd, Lee Merrill Byrd, Cary Clack, Joe Ely, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Elizabeth Harris, Cliff Hudder, Baine Kerr, Attica Locke, C.M. Mayo, Elaine Scott, Thad Sitton, Rosalyn Story.

“This is one of the largest and most impressive groups of writers to come into the TIL in single year,” said TIL President Steven L. Davis. “For those elected it means that you have the respect and admiration of your fellow writers, which is a very significant level of recognition.”

New members will be inducted at the upcoming TIL annual meeting, to be held in El Paso April 7-8. For more info visit the TIL website: www.texasinstituteofletters.org

Texas Institute of Letters: 2017 Inductees



CELESTE BEDFORD WALKER

Houston-based playwright and the winner of several prizes. *The New York Times* has praised her work as “well-crafted...vigorous social satire.” Best known for *Camp Logan*, her historical drama based on the 1917 riot by black soldiers in Houston. *Camp Logan* was performed at the Kennedy Center and heralded by the *Washington Post* as “a textbook example of how to simultaneously entertain and educate an audience.”



DAVID BOWLES

Longtime resident of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the author of over a dozen books that include poetry, translation, and young adult literature. His book *Flower, Song, Dance: Aztec and Mayan Poetry* won the TIL's Soeurette Diehl Fraser Award for Best Translation in 2014. His most recent young adult book, *The Smoking Mirror*, was named the 206 Pura Belpré Honor Book by the American Library Association.



BOBBY BYRD

Poet, essayist, editor, and co-owner/operator of Cinco Puntos Press in El Paso, one of the most respected small independent presses in the U.S. He has received fellowships from the NEA and the Lannan Foundation along with a D.H. Lawrence Fellowship. His books of poetry include *On the Transmigration of Souls in El Paso* and *The Price of Doing Business in Mexico*



LEE MERRILL BYRD

Poet, fiction writer, and co-owner/operator of Cinco Puntos Press, which has brought the literatures of the borderlands to a national audience and won numerous honors, including the American Book Award for excellence in publishing. As a writer, she has received a Dobie-Paisano Fellowship, two Southwest Book Awards, and also the TIL's Stephen F. Turner Award for the Best First Work of Fiction.



CARY CLACK

Journalist, San Antonio native, and a widely admired editorial columnist for the *San Antonio Express-News*, where he won many awards for his journalism, including the Katie Award for Best General Column. His first book, *Clowns and Rats Scare Me*, was a collection of his columns published Trinity University Press. He is currently finishing a second book for Trinity, *Dreaming US: Where Did We Go From There?*



JOE ELY

Grammy-winning singer-songwriter who grew up in Lubbock and became a founding member of The Flatlanders along with a solo career that saw him named the Texas State Musician in 2016. He is also the author of two books: his memoir *Bonfire of the Roadmaps* (UT Press) and a coming-of-age novel, *Reverb: An Odyssey*, both of which demonstrate that he is as uniquely talented as a literary author as he is as a songwriter.



ALICIA GASPARD DE ALBA

El Paso native and a poet, essayist, and fiction writer who has won numerous awards for her fiction, including the Premio Aztlán, the Rudolfo Anaya-endowed literary award for an emerging Chicana/o writer. Her subsequent novels include *Sor Juana's Second Dream* and *Desert Blood: the Juárez Murders*. Her work has been translated into several languages and has been adapted to play, opera, and screenplay.



ELIZABETH HARRIS

Novelist and short story writer who grew up in Fort Worth and taught creative writing at UT-Austin for several years. Her first book, *The Ant Generator*, won the John Simmons Prize awarded by University of Iowa Press. Her second book, *Mayhem: Three Lives of Women*, won the Gival Press Novel award and was a finalist for the TIL's Jones Award for Best Fiction.



CLIFF HUDDER

Conroe-based writer who teaches at Lone Star College. His work has received the Barthelme and Michener Awards, the Peden Prize, and the TIL's Short Story Award. His novella, *Splinterville*, won the 2007 Texas Review Fiction Award. His latest novel, *Pretty Enough for You*, was named to Lone Star Literary Life's "Top Ten Texas Fiction Favorites, 2015."



BAINE KERR

Houston native and prominent attorney known for his work on behalf of women sexually abused by college athletes and recruits, which has led to significant national reforms. He is also a fiction writer who studied with Wallace Stegner at Stanford during the Ken Kesey years. His writing has received prizes, been collected in *Best American Short Stories*, and he has authored two best-selling legal thrillers: *Harmful Intent* and *Wrongful Death*.



ATTICA LOCKE

Author of three acclaimed novels of literary crime fiction, two of which are set in her hometown of Houston. Her first novel, *Black Water Rising*, was shortlisted for the Orange Prize. Her second, *The Cutting Season*, won the Ernest Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. Her latest, *Pleasantville*, received the Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction. She is also a screenwriter and supervising producer for the popular TV series, “Empire.”



C.M. MAYO

El Paso native and an award-winning literary journalist, novelist, poet, and translator. Her first book, *Sky Over El Nido: Stories* won the Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction. She has received three Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Awards. Her novel *The Last Prince of the Mexican Empire* was named by *Library Journal* as one of the best books of the year. She is currently finishing a new book about far West Texas.



ELAINE SCOTT

Longtime Houston resident and the author of 25 children’s and young adult books, winning many stellar reviews and literary prizes. Her books present scientific information to children in ways that fascinate and engage rather than bore and overwhelm. She has received the TIL award for Best Children’s Book along with over two dozen other significant national honors.



THAD SITTON

Noted expert on folklore and oral history, and the author/co-author of 16 books, most of which focus on his native deep East Texas. His books include *Backwoodsmen: Stockmen and Hunters Along a Big Thicket River Valley*. He has received two T.R. Fehrenbach Awards from the Texas Historical Commission along with a TIL award for best scholarly book for *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow*.



ROSALYN STORY

Violinist for the Fort Worth Symphony and author of three books. Her history, *So I Sing: African American Divas of Opera and Concert*, inspired the PBS documentary, “Aida’s Brothers and Sisters: A History of Blacks in Opera.” Her two novels, *More Than You Know* and *Wading Home: A Novel of New Orleans*, have garnered strong critical praise for their lyrical language, clever plot turns, and powerful evocations of love and family.