



TWENTY-FOUR NEW MEMBERS INDUCTED INTO THE TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12, 2026

Members of the Texas Institute of Letters have overwhelmingly approved twenty-four new writers to the TIL, a distinguished honor society established in 1936 to celebrate Texas literature and recognize distinctive literary achievement.

The TIL's elected membership consists of the state's most recognized and serious writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, journalism, songwriting, and scholarship. The membership includes winners of the MacArthur Fellowship, Man Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prizes in drama, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as prizes awarded by PEN, and dozens of other regional and national award and grant-giving institutions.

The 2026 inductees are Adrianna Cuevas, Carlos Kevin Blanton, Char Miller, David Wright Faladé, Diane Wilson, Dianna Hutts Aston, Glenn Shaheen, James Wade, Jasminne Méndez, Jim LaVilla-Havelin, Katherine Center, KB Brookins, Liliana Valenzuela, Lise Olsen, Lynne Kelly, Mary Helene Specht, Maurice Chammah, Mike Blakely, Patty Griffin, Peniel E. Joseph, Rebecca Sharpless, Roberto Tejada, Steve Earle, and Tomás Q. Morín.



Adrianna Cuevas is an author of children's books whose work draws on fantasy, historical fiction, mystery, and horror. Her debut novel, *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, received a Pura Belpré Honor, and her books have earned multiple starred reviews and appeared on more than twenty state and international reading lists. Cuevas lives in Austin where she has raised her family and taught Spanish and ESOL.



Born in Freer, **Carlos Kevin Blanton**, historian of Texas and Mexican American history, is the Barbara White Stuart Professor of Texas History at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of widely read public essays on the practice and direction of historical scholarship, and books including *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836–1981*, winner of the TSHA Tullis Book Award.



Char Miller is a writer, historian, and editor who lived in Texas for more than three decades, teaching at Trinity University from 1981 to 2007. The author or editor of more than a dozen books, he is a leading scholar of environmental and urban history and continues to write extensively about Texas from his position at Pomona College, including *West Side Rising*, his study of San Antonio's 1921 flood.



Born and raised in Borger, **David Wright Faladé** has crafted work that includes historical fiction, young adult literature, and journalism. A Dobie Paisano Fellow, Fulbright Scholar, NEH awardee, and Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Award recipient, he is a professor and Distinguished Professorial Scholar at the University of Illinois. Faladé's novel *Black Cloud Rising* appeared on the *Best Of* lists of numerous national publications.



Raised on the Texas Gulf Coast, **Diane Wilson** is a lifelong Texan whose books spotlight the state's coastal landscapes and working communities. A fourth-generation bay shrimper, she is the author of *An Unreasonable Woman*, *Holy Roller*, and *Diary of an Eco-Outlaw*, widely recognized nonfiction works focused on the environmental and civic life of the Texas Gulf Coast.



Dianna Hutts Aston is a lifelong Texan who has lived and worked around the globe. A student of environmental science at Baylor University and former journalist, she is known for her acclaimed nature-science picture books, beginning with *An Egg Is Quiet*, widely regarded a modern classic of children's nonfiction. *A Shell Is Cozy* was named one of the best books of the twenty-first century by *Kirkus Reviews*.



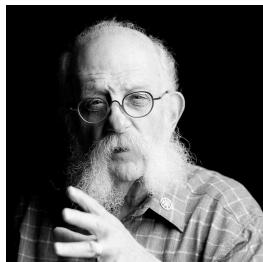
Glenn Shaheen's first poetry collection, *Predatory*, won the prestigious Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize. His subsequent books have included *Unchecked Savagery*, *Energy Corridor*, *Carnivalia*, and *Bright Eyes*. Shaheen's work regularly depicts the people, places, and landmarks of Texas. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Prairie View A&M University and is the founder of Tram Editions, which publishes chapbooks by emerging writers.



Lufkin-raised, Hill Country-residing **James Wade** began his writing career at his hometown newspaper nearly 20 years ago. While contributing to more than a dozen magazines and journals, James has published five novels, including Spur Award winners *Beasts of the Earth* and *All Things Left Wild* and in 2025 the heralded, East Texas-set coming of age story *Narrow the Road*. He is the spring 2026 Dobie Paisano Fellow.



Two-time Pura Belpré Honor Award recipient **Jasminne Mendez** is a Dominican American poet, playwright, author of books for children and adults, translator and audiobook narrator. Her most recent publication, *The Story of My Anger*, is a 2026 NAACP Image Award Nominee for Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens, and her previous books *Islands Apart* and *City Without Altar* have been honored by the TIL.



A central figure in San Antonio's literary community, **Jim LaVilla-Havelin** is a poet, educator, organizer, and author of seven poetry collections, including *West*, *Tales from the Breakaway Republic*, and *Mesquites Teach Us to Bend*. LaVilla-Havelin has coordinated National Poetry Month San Antonio since 2008, and through projects such as VIA Poetry on the Move he has made poetry part of daily public life.



New York Times bestselling novelist **Katherine Center** is a native Houstonian whose fiction has been labeled by Jodi Picoult as “the balm we need in the world right now.” Educated at Vassar College and the University of Houston Creative Writing Program, she is the author of twelve novels, including *The Bodyguard* and *Things You Save in a Fire*. There have been numerous film adaptations of her work, including *The Lost Husband* and *Happiness for Beginners*.



Based in Austin, **KB Brookins** is a poet, memoirist, and cultural worker whose writing examines queer life in Texas and the American South. A recipient of the ALA Barbara Gittings Literature Award, a Lambda Literary Award, and the Texas Institute of Letters Award for Best First Book of Poetry for *Freedom House*, they earned an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin and currently serve as artist in residence at the ACLU of Texas.



Poet, translator, essayist, and journalist **Liliana Valenzuela** grew up in Mexico City but is a longtime Austin resident and University of Texas alumna. A poet who writes in Spanish and English, Valenzuela has translated works by Sandra Cisneros and others. She has been active in the Macondo Writer's Workshop and received the national Alicia Gordon Award for Word Artistry in Translation.



Lise Olsen has lived in Texas more than twenty years and is a senior investigative reporter and editor whose work has appeared in the *Texas Observer*, *Inside Climate News*, and the *Houston Chronicle*, as well as in documentaries. Her book *Code of Silence* won the Carr P. Collins Award for Best Nonfiction book from the TIL. Her second book, the true crime account *The Scientist and the Serial Killer*, is a national bestseller.



Middle grade novelist **Lynne Kelly** received the American Library Association's Schneider Family Book Award—which honors “a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences”—for *Song for a Whale*. In addition to her four books for young readers, Kelly has worked as a sign language interpreter. She grew up in the Houston area and lives there today.



An Abilene native, novelist **Mary Helen Specht** was a Dobie Paisano Fellow before winning the Texas Institute of Letters Best First Fiction Award for *Migratory Animals*. Her debut was also praised by TIL members Ben Fountain, Stephen Harrigan, and Debra Monroe. Specht's second novel, *Medlark*, arrives in summer 2026 from Ballantine Books. She directs the creative writing specialization at St. Edward's University in Austin.



Journalist **Maurice Chammah**, who grew up in Austin, has reported on the death penalty, prisons, and courts in Texas with The Marshall Project since 2014. He was part of a team that won a 2021 Pulitzer Prize. His book, *Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty*, won numerous awards and was named a *New York Times* Editors' Choice book.



Hill Country-based novelist **Mike Blakely** crafts fiction that reimagines historic Texas and the American West. The author of 20 books, Blakely has served as president of Western Writers of America and has been recognized by WWA's Spur Awards as both a novelist (*Summer of Pearls*) and as a songwriter. His songs have been recorded by Alan Jackson, Gary P. Nunn, and Raul Malo, among others.



Singer-songwriter **Patty Griffin**, a longtime Austin resident, has won two Grammy Awards and half a dozen other nominations—most recently for her 2025 album, *Crown of Roses*. In 2023 the Americana Music Association honored Griffin with an award for Lifetime Achievement For Songwriting. Her compositions have been recorded by artists including Joan Baez, Solomon Burke, The Chicks, and Emmylou Harris.



Peniel E. Joseph holds the Barbara Jordan Chair in Ethics and Political Values and is the founding director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at UT Austin. He is the author and editor of eight books on African American history, including *The Third Reconstruction* and *The Sword and the Shield*, which inspired the eight-part National Geographic Television series *MLK/X*. He received the Texas Writer Award from the Texas Book Festival in 2025.



Rebecca Sharpless is a native Texan and professor of history at Texas Christian University. She has been described as a “pathbreaking scholar” in the field of domestic culture in the American South. Honors include the T.R. Fehrenbach Award from the Texas Historical Commission and the Liz Carpenter Award for the best book on Texas women’s history. She also has co-edited several books, including *Texas Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*.



Poet, translator, essayist, publisher, editor, and cultural critic **Roberto Tejada** has lived in Texas since 2010. He is a distinguished professor in the University of Houston School of Art’s Program in Art History and the Department of English’s Creative Writing Program. Tejada has authored six volumes of poetry and six volumes examining the art of Latinx photographers, among many other works. His ongoing cultural research focuses on the Rio Grande Valley Latinx community.



Steve Earle is a Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter who was raised near San Antonio. His songs have been covered by Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Joan Baez, Robert Earl Keen, and Guy Clark. Earle has won three Grammys in the folk and Americana categories and has been nominated sixteen times. He was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in 2025. He’s also the author of a short story collection, *Doghouse Roses*, and a novel, *I’ll Never Get Out of This World Alive*.



Poet, translator, and professor **Tomás Q. Morin** grew up in South Texas and teaches creative writing at Rice University in Houston. He is the author of three poetry collections, has translated Pablo Neruda’s *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, among other works, and has published a memoir about his childhood, love, and survival. He is a fellow of the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.