

# UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

## CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

### New Student Spotlight

This fall we welcomed a new cohort into the UH Creative Writing Program and we couldn't be more excited! Read on to learn a bit about some of our first-year students.



Tayyba Maya Kanwal (MFA, Fiction)

**What project are you working on at the moment?**

I'm writing new stories for and revising a linked short story collection set in the Pakistani diaspora in the Middle East and the US. I'm also revising a novel that straddles Houston and Lahore.



Nick Almeida (PhD, Fiction)

**Why did you choose UH CWP?**

When I first encountered Barthelme's *Sixty Stories*, I experienced a wash of incredulity, like, No way a human wrote this. To me, those stories were closer to alien transmissions. How can fiction appear seamless, zipplerless, buttonless, and nonetheless come from hard work and study? Today I see that paradox as central in a writer's work and central in our training as PhD students here in UH CWP: a stable concoction of artistry and scholarship.



Ryan Bollenbach (PhD, Poetry)

**How did your journey to becoming a writer begin?**

My journey to becoming a writer began as an attempt to learn more about art so I could find more interesting approaches to playing the drums, so in that respect it began when I started playing my friend Peter's drumset at the age of fourteen.



Hannah Kelly (MFA, Fiction)

**Name the writer that has influenced you the most.**

I'd say Shirley Jackson has been my biggest influence. I discovered her in an undergrad Gothic literature class, and have held on ever since! I love her interiority, her love for mad characters, and how she shows complicated images of female sexuality. Plus her writing is super creepy which is always a plus in my book!



Lisa Wartenberg (MFA, Fiction)

**Biggest influences as a writer?**

I have long been inspired by Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Karen Russell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Shirley Jackson. I am chomping at the bit to get even better acquainted with the work of Carmen Maria Machado, Lydia Yuknavitch, and Jesmyn Ward—all of whom I find sensational.



Fey Popoola (MFA, Poetry)

**Why did you choose Houston?**

Houston reminds me a lot of East London, where I was born. I love walking around and seeing people who look like me, and not feeling like an intruder in my own neighborhood.



Joy Priest (PhD, Poetry)

**What was your first impression of UH?**

How engaged and brilliant the faculty are! Several faculty members reached out to me upon my acceptance with enthusiastic commentary on my application materials—things they would've caught only through an in-depth review of these materials. Upon my visit, I sat in on Professor Prufer's craft class, where I participated in a brilliant discussion, and I remember feeling that this is the kind of study of poetry in which I want to be immersed.



Adele Elise Williams (PhD, Poetry)

**What project are you working on at the moment?**

Currently, I am fine-tuning my first poetry manuscript, *Wager*, a collection which wrestles with my perceived failures as a woman, as a recovering addict, as a daughter to a devoted Catholic mother, and as a sexually damaged body. *Wager* features the oppression of the female body and uncomfortably exposes how that body can be an agent of its own demise.



Erin L. McCoy (PhD, Poetry)

**What project are you working on at the moment?**

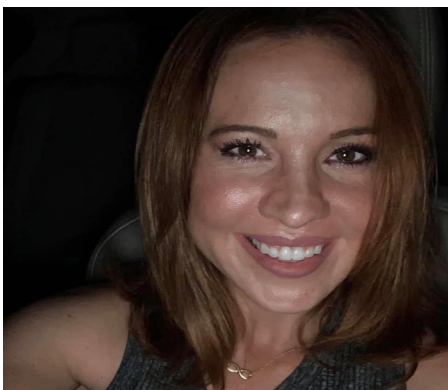
Right now, I'm working on three separate book projects. One is a more personal, first-person-driven collection of poems structured around the path of a comet. The second explores mechanisms of dehumanization and uncanny experience with its starting point being the story of the great auk, a flightless seabird driven to extinction in the mid-1800s. The third is a novel-in-verse.



Addie Eliades (MFA, Poetry)

**Biggest influences as a writer?**

Economic, psychological, &c. phenomena; songwriting musicians like Lana del Rey, R.E.M., Jenny Hval, Lucy Dacus, Talking Heads, The Smiths, Mitski...; contemporary artists like Ed Atkins, Helen Marten, Tabita Rezaire...; Zen poetry/koans; Language poetry; Spanish & Latinx languages/cultures/writers; expressions/wordplay; everyone in UHCWP; Lisa Russ Spaar, Rita Dove, Paul Guest, Lindsay Turner, John Ashbery, Brenda Shaughnessy, Dean Young, Chus Pato, Claudia Rankine, Lorine Niedecker, Anne Carson, Fred Moten...



Katherine Smith (MFA, Fiction)

**Why did you choose UH CWP?**

For several years I'd been taking community workshops at Inprint and other local writing organizations. I began with nonfiction and gradually began to engage more with nonfiction. I kept noticing that the best instructors and mentors were MFA/PhD students and grads of UHCWP. They had a way of bringing out the best in almost every participant and I thought "This is the kind of writer I want to be." When I decided to get more serious about output and publishing, I knew my next step was the MFA and the only program I was interested in was Houston.



Pritha Bhattacharyya (PhD, Fiction)

**Who is a writer that made you a writer?**

Leslie Epstein. Bitterly honest, but unwaveringly supportive, Leslie taught me to hold my work to the highest standard and encouraged me to continue writing. I hold him and his opinion in the highest regard.