

New Student Spotlight

This fall we welcomed a new cohort into the UH Creative Writing Program and we couldn't be more excited! We sat down with a few of these terrific writers to get to know them a bit better.



Chris Flakus (MFA, Poetry)

What made you want to become a writer?

Along with posters of the rock and roll musicians that defined my youth, my walls were peppered with photographs and printouts of my favorite writers. Hemingway, Burroughs, Carson McCullers, and Julio Cortazar gazed down at me from my walls, each in various solemn poses, looking serious, clenching cigarettes between their teeth. But there was something otherworldly about them. I struggled to believe that these heroes were men and women of flesh and bone. It wasn't until I read *Jesus' Son* in my undergraduate writing workshop at the University of St. Edwards in Austin that I realized writers were made, developed over time and through hard work, and not simply born writers.



Ernie Wang (PhD, Fiction)

What was your first impression of UH?

I visited UH in March. From the airport, I took an Uber straight to campus. I got out of the Uber and breathed in Texas for the first time, and in that instant, I remember thinking: game over I'm coming here. Which is pure insanity. So I spent the next two days trying to be extra critical and observant. I observed the way Boz conducted his workshop with precision and empathy and actionable wisdom, the way Pete described his teaching philosophy, particularly how it pertains to the teaching of narrative form, and one I left feeling very excited about – which is also why I enrolled in his class this semester... What I thought would be a very difficult decision, in the end, turned out to be not difficult at all.



Aris Kian (MFA, Poetry)

Who is a writer that made you a writer?

Writers who have made me a writer are Ariana Brown, Ebony Stewart and Loyce Gayo, the trifecta of Black woman poets both on the page and in performance. Also, Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton, RJ Wright, and Jackson Neal.



Daniel Tompkins (MFA, Poetry)

Why did you choose Houston?

I applied last year and was rejected from the wait list, but the staff and faculty were so encouraging throughout the process that I decided to apply again this year. Glad I did!



Kim Philley (PhD, Fiction)

Name the writer that has influenced you most.

A writer that made me a writer: George Oppen.



Gabriella Iacono (MFA, Poetry)

Why did you choose UH CWP?

I chose UH because there's a vibrant and active writing community within the CWP and around Houston that feels very much like a small town community, although it's smack dab in the city. UH CWP creates opportunities for writers in ways that other programs do not (such as making a point to professionalize their writers), and they provide adequate support for their grad students.



Daniel Kennedy (PhD, Fiction)

Who is a writer that made you a writer?

I was motivated to write seriously after encountering Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. I then spent years trying to shirk McCarthy's influence, which had yielded a bunch of weak imitations. I'm currently enjoying the challenge of writing my first novel.



Katie Milligan (MFA, Fiction)

Why did you choose the University of Houston?

While there were certain characteristics of the Houston program that drew me to it in the first place, it was conversations with current students that really pushed my decision to come here over the edge. Every Houston student I spoke with described their time in the program as a game-changer, and a gift. Their enthusiasm and energy was infectious, and I'm thrilled to now be a part of that kind of community!



Josh Gregory (MFA, Poetry)

What project are you working on at the moment?

I am currently working on a collection of poems which narrate the emergence of a consciousness after the end of the world. I'm trying to investigate a definition of the self that is no longer coextensive with the category of the "human." It occurs to me that this task is one of mourning, a form of mourning without mercy, which teeters on the brink of what the mystics called prayer. It is therefore my greatest hope that these poems elucidate a certain definition of writing that is primarily and above all an act of witnessing; an activity with no "product" that, exactly by virtue of its own existence, erases itself.



Dan Hunt (MFA, Fiction)

How did your journey to becoming a writer begin?

In freshman year of high school, I had to choose my summer reading book from a list of fifty. I researched each book, read about each writer, and ended up choosing *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* by Michael Chabon. That choice changed everything.



Erik Brown (MFA, Poetry)

Biggest influence as a writer?

D.A. Powell. His early work really queered everything I knew about poetry, which opened up a lot of possibilities for me.

Should you have queries or wish to support the cwp: cwp@uh.edu