



The Seventh Week

clarion west fall workshop report 2016

CLARION WEST 2016

MEET TEAM ARSENIC

NEILE GRAHAM (CW 96)
WORKSHOP DIRECTOR

AND HUW EVANS (CW 12)
WORKSHOP ADMINISTRATOR



This summer's workshop was Clarion West's 33rd consecutive class, and the students chose arsenic, the 33rd element of the periodic table, as a guiding idea. Given its combination of lethal and curative properties, arsenic served as a powerful image of the transformation that the class experienced during the workshop. Six of the students (and one of the workshop staff) now wear the alchemical symbol for arsenic, the class sigil, as a tattoo. It was chalked on the walkway to the house, and appears on their t-shirt with an entwined snake.

The students came to us from Australia, India, New Zealand, Wales, and the United States (Utah, Minnesota, California, Illinois, North Carolina, and Washington), but it took them no time at all to discover and inhabit the shared Clarion West universe.

The workshop's first week began with writing assignments from instructor Paul Park, who then used the students' products to fuel discussions of the craft. He guided them to dig deeper into stories, to

understand their fundamental workings and to learn to recognize possibilities far beyond the author's conscious intentions. Discussion, writing, re-writing, dissecting, and deconstructing were the orders of the week and the students took to the work with zeal.

In week two, Stephen Graham Jones launched the class into full-bore story workshoping using Clarion West's version of the Milford/Clarion critiquing method. He set them ever more keenly on the scents of their next great works of fiction, and they followed the trail, hungry for every scrap of wisdom they could devour along the way.

Elizabeth Bear led the class through the perils of their third week, drawing more—and better—stories and critiques from the students' over-stimulated and often exhausted brains than they'd have imagined possible. And when the work was done, she rewarded them with invaluable career advice, writerly wisdom, and restorative drams of humor and well-earned praise.

The students not only survived the halfway point of the workshop (in spite of attack naps, late-night plotting, late-night drinking, and a vicious summer cold that did the rounds), but triumphed. They worked past fatigue, day after day, to inspire one another to greater feats of writing as their fourth week instructor, N.K. Jemisin, led them into strange new landscapes of their own creation. She guided them to delve deep into their imaginations as they sculpted, furnished, and peopled their newborn worlds.

Sheila Williams taught week five, our traditional editor week. After soaking up the instruction of four professional authors of speculative fiction, the students had a chance to demonstrate the skills they had gained to a different kind of reader: the kind who routinely decides which stories are ready to be shared with the world. Throughout the week, Sheila taught the students about navigating the business of short story publication and how to see stories from an editor's perspective.

Unfortunately, our scheduled sixth- ➤



THE CLASS OF 2016

Back row: L-R: Jon Lasser, Emma Osborne, C.A. Hawksmoor, Gunnar Norskog, Mitchell Shanklin, Taimur Ahmad, Betsy Aoki, Alex Filipowicz, T. Jane Berry

Middle row: S. Qiouyi Lu, Shiv Ramdas, Jessica Silbaugh-Cowdin, N.K. Jemisin (instructor), Gabriel Teodoros, Paul DesCombaz

Front row: Elizabeth Bartmess, Cadwell Turnbull

Missing from photo: Octavia Cade, Lora Gray (photo by Evan J. Peterson)



Gabriel Teodoros and DJ Riz Rollins

► week instructor, Geoff Ryman, had to cancel his travel to Seattle due to visa and health complications. Michael Swanwick, story doctor extraordinaire, generously agreed to step in, and gave the students one final gift: X-ray vision. He taught

them to see the skeletons of their stories' arcs—where their stories' bones are missing, broken, or in need of reinforcement—and then helped them to visualize and evaluate all possible remedies so the stories could emerge into the world strong and whole, ready to carry readers where the authors want them to go.

In our second year in this sorority house, we were much more prepared for how it works as a workshop home. We did have a plumbing crisis the first week (picture us wrangling a huge wet/dry vac just outside the classroom as Paul taught). The weather was supportive and remained for the most part Seattle-temperate. We were delighted to have Joe back as our marvelous cook and the wonderful Esther keeping the house clean. This year's workshop assistants were Lauren Dixon (CW '10), Evan J. Peterson (CW '15), and Katie Sparrow (CW '05). Everything happened with their able help and that of our other generous workshop volunteers: hosting parties, driving the students, arranging a

musician DJ as a celebratory lead-up to N.K. Jemisin's reading at the downtown Seattle Public Library, and moving the workshop into and back out of the house.

We also need to thank our generous Mystery Muses who shared their time and expertise with the students. This class also had a full schedule of Mystery Muses over Skype that the students themselves arranged, so this year's class had Muses from all over the world.

Everything came together in that magical way that the workshop does, such that our community seems to be accomplishing its own worldbuilding, writing another chapter in the powerful story that goes far beyond the six weeks. And this is what we want for the students now that the workshop is over: that they have gained and strengthened their powers to see and understand the work ahead of them and to imagine, pursue, and achieve the world of the writing careers that they desire. ♦

In Students' Words

"IF REGULAR WRITING CLASSES ARE LIKE NUDGING A BARGE in the right direction, Clarion West is the equivalent of plucking the barge out of the ocean and placing it in orbit around Mars." —**T. Jane Berry**

"CLARION WEST WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE; not only was I embraced by a family that I know will support me for years to come, I also learned so much about myself and realized that I had the strength to commit to my own writing journey."— **S. Qiouyi Lu**

"IT WAS HONESTLY ONE OF THE BEST EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE. I felt completely supported and was able to focus on writing and workshoping and critiquing and, most of all, engaging with my wonderful classmates. There was something incredible and special about having the class identify the strengths and weaknesses in my work over the course of the workshop. They saw a range of styles and voices from me, so could take a big-picture approach to reading my work, which is something that the occasional critique partner would probably struggle with." — **Emma Osborne**

"I WAS THROWN HEADFIRST into a huge community of writers, editors, and publishers at many stages of their careers who were surprisingly, almost jarringly, welcoming and eager to pass on their experiences and insights." — **Alex Filipowicz**

"CLARION WEST EXCEEDED ALL MY EXPECTATIONS, which were not modest to begin with. I thought my writing skills would be sharpened, but my entire process was re-molded. I imagined we would have fun, but discovered new levels of euphoria. I thought I'd emerge from Clarion West a better writer, but I've come away a better human being. I expected lifelong friends, but found family." — **Gunnar Norskog**

"I CAME HOME LOADED WITH SO MUCH GLITTERY INFORMATION about craft and the writing industry that I'm sure I'll still be sifting through the experience years from now and discovering new treasures."— **Lora Gray**

Clarion West Writers Workshop

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2016 Reading Series

From our earliest days humans have always told stories. Perhaps that's why it's such a pleasure to listen to authors read their work aloud—it recalls nights of sitting around fires, telling stories to keep the darkness away—or invite that darkness in,



Michael Swanwick

to be held up and examined through the lens of stories.

In keeping with this tradition, the Clarion West Summer Reading Series invites the community to join our instructors for six evenings of storytelling and talking about the process and craft of writing during the workshop every year. This past summer, two of our readings were at the Seattle Central Library, including a night of music and story with N. K. Jemisin and DJ Riz Rollins. Also at the library was Michael Swanwick, who told a story of scientific advancement, time travel, and love.

At the University Book Store, standing room only crowds greeted Paul Park, Stephen Graham Jones, Elizabeth Bear, and Sheila Williams. While the crowds have grown over the years, the space in the upper floor of the bookstore still feels



N.K. Jemisin

intimate. Questions and answers fly back and forth after the readings, and there's always a chance to get books signed after the readings end.

The Summer Reading Series is a way to bring our amazing instructors and the broader community together, connecting writers with readers in ways that recall those nights around the fire, listening to master storytellers work their magic. We couldn't do it without our partners for the ►

readings, especially the University Book Store and the Seattle Public Library for their time and space, and we could not do it without the eager fans who come to listen.

If you attended a reading this summer, we thank you and hope you had an excellent time! If you didn't have a chance to see the readings this year, videos of some of the readings will be posted on our YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/clarionwest) this winter.

We hope to have you join us for the readings in 2017—see the schedule below—and watch for more information this coming spring. ♦



Elizabeth Bear



Stephen Graham Jones sign a book for Board Chair Vicki Saunders (CW 09)



A 2016 reading audience at the University Book Store

Summer Reading Series 2017



June 20
Daryl Gregory



June 27
Kij Johnson



July 4
John Chu



July 11
Connie Willis



July 18
Daniel José Older

Please join us for six evenings of fiction and discussion during the Summer Workshop in 2017: For more information about the instructors and updates on reading locations, please visit clarionwest.org/events/readings. ♦



July 26
Pat Cadigan

(photo credits: Daryl Gregory by Steve Williams 2008, Daniel José Older by John Midgley, Pat Cadigan by Ellen Datlow)

Alumni News

The Clarion West Alumni News has gone digital! Visit clarionwest.org/community/alumni-news for monthly updates on what our alumni are up to. If you have news of your own to share, please email it to alumni@clarionwest.org. You should receive a reply within two days letting you know in which edition of the Alumni News your news will appear. If you don't hear back, try again—sometimes email goes astray, and we definitely want to hear from you. ♦

Summer Workshop Fee Increases

Every year the costs of the workshop increase—from housing to food to everything in between. Everything simply costs more. Starting with the 2017 workshop we will be raising prices to help keep up with our expenses. The application fee will be **\$60** (discounted to \$35 for applications received by February 10, 2017), and the total cost for tuition, room, and partial board for 2017 will be **\$4200**.

Clarion West is still one of the most affordable workshops of its type around, due to the support we receive from our community and the concerted efforts of our staff to control costs. Many of our students receive scholarships to cover part or all of the cost of the workshop, and we thank the people and organizations that make it possible for students to attend who might not be able to afford the workshop. ♦