

The Seventh Week

clarion west writers workshop • spring 2020

Opposites Attract: A Co-Interview on Craft

A Conversation between
Tina Connolly &
Caroline M. Yoachim
2020 Six-Week Instructors
(both CW '06)

When we were planning our first class together — a one-day workshop about writing a story from start to finish — we quickly discovered that we approach story creation very differently. Caroline tends to start from a concept or idea, and Tina tends to start from a character or emotion. Although at first this led to confusion about how we should structure the class, it quickly became the focus of our co-teaching method, because we could provide a wide variety of methods for how to get into a story, how to finish a story, and what to do when you get stuck.

Tina Connolly: So, Caroline! Tell me more about how you usually come up with a new story to write.

Caroline M. Yoachim: My stories nearly always start with an abstract idea. For example, "The Archronology of Love" started from the question: What if we could dig through layers of time the way archaeologists dig through dirt? I think



Tina Connolly

about which aspects of the idea I want to highlight in the story — the idea that sometimes the process of manipulating data destroys it, the ways in which we construct narratives, the relationship between perception and memory and reality, etc. Then I pause and recognize that all of this is very abstract and has no characters in it. My next step is to think about how to take these abstract concepts to a more personal level. But you tend to start at the character level, right?



TC: Correct! For me, I often have a character start talking in my head. Even



Caroline M. Yoachim

if I have an idea for a situation, I don't feel I have a grasp on the story itself until I understand what the protagonist is like and what they want. For example, I started "The Last Banquet of Temporal Confections" shortly after the 2016 election. I had a box of cookies on my desk from a Planned Parenthood fundraiser that was run by a group of women-run bakeries. So that was the kernel of inspiration, and then I wrote the scene where Saffron is in the bakery, offering people different temporal pastries. Until I started to understand what she was afraid of, and how she wanted to be braver and effect change, I didn't know how to construct her story.

CMY: That is fascinating to me because it is almost the opposite of my process — I usually can't figure out what the characters want and what they are afraid of until I've written a large chunk of the story. I reverse engineer what the character motivations are to make it seem realistic that they'd do ►►

► the things I needed to create a satisfying story arc. I'm a very linear writer, so I have trouble jumping to a later scene if I get stuck on something. When I'm stuck in the middle of a story, I find it helpful to leave notes in brackets (e.g., <dialog here> or <fix this later>) so that I can push past the point where I'm having trouble.

TC: Whereas I will often have giant bracket scenes that are like [cool stuff happens here]! For me, that comes second to figuring out the overall character arcs.

Once Caroline and I figured out that we were approaching stories from almost opposite directions, we started to understand why sometimes we would find writing advice that simply did not work for us. It helped us figure out how to coach other writers — some who come at stories from Caroline's side, and some who come from my side — because we get stuck in entirely different places. If I'm stuck, it usually means I've lost sight of what the character wants. I need to back up and figure out what she's trying to do. But if I give Caroline that advice ...

CMY: Well, it depends on where I am in the draft. If I'm stuck in the early part of creating a first draft, thinking about what a character wants is entirely not helpful. How can I know what the character wants if I don't already know what they did? However, for *revisions* it can be hugely helpful to have a beta reader identify a broken character arc. For me, the structure of a story is shaped around the satisfying resolution of the idea. But in order for the story to work overall, the character arcs must also be satisfying.

TC: Another thing I try is letting my characters just talk/argue with each other for a while. Most of the rambling will need to be deleted in revisions, but if you're someone for whom dialogue comes naturally, it can be a great way to see what new ideas and relationship difficulties you encounter!

CMY: One of the things Tina and I realized is that all the pieces — character,

idea, plot, etc. — need to be there. We just put the pieces into the story in very different orders.



Illustration by Anna & Elena Balbusso from "The Last Banquet of Temporal Confections", Tor.com

**Really,
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TC: Yes! People often try to categorize a completed story as "plot-driven" or "character-driven." But I've found it's much more useful to have every writer ask themselves: "How do I, personally, get into this story?" Stories (in general) should have characters! Who do things to advance the plot! You need all the pieces in the

end, but taking time to assess what kind of writer you are can help you figure out how to start, and complete, stories.

Speaking of completing stories ... one thing I liked about *The Good Place* finale (no spoilers, I promise!) is that they took the time to make sure both the plot and character arcs were nicely wrapped up. Caroline, I seem to remember you telling me that you have an idea what ending you're aiming for early on, correct?

CMY: Yes! I think of endings as needing to be a balance between unexpected and inevitable. Too unexpected and the ending will feel like an unearned twist. Too inevitable and the reader will see it coming a mile away and get bored. For me, the easiest way to achieve that balance is to know what the ending will be before I write the middle — that way I can plant whatever information the ending requires as I am writing, to be sure it doesn't come out of nowhere.

It doesn't always work that way though — I've written "zero drafts" or exploratory drafts in order to discover the ending ... but then in revisions I nearly always end up going back and rewriting most of the story.

TC: I generally have an idea what ending I'm aiming for as well — but that might be the ending to the character arc, not the plot arc! Back to "Temporal Confections" — I knew I wanted Saffron to find the courage to act, but I had no idea HOW she was going to do it as I wrote the story. Once I figured it out, then, like Caroline, I had to work through the whole story again and make sure everything made sense.

We want to end by saying that talking through our different approaches to writing — and being each other's beta readers — has been really great over the years! We've gained a deeper understanding of our own processes, and have been able to learn from each other's strengths. Really, we wish someone would come up with an easier way to write stuff! But since they haven't, we figured we'd each offer a few of our favorite tips to try when we get stuck. Maybe one of our approaches will work for you! ♦

The 2020 Clarion West Write-a-thon Is Coming!

June 21–July 31, 2020



Every day, Clarion West alumni, supporters, and community members write the future. We take notes, write in journals, sketch characters, and edit. What are we writing? Novels. Poetry. Story drafts. Game scripts. Graphic novels. Plays. Children's books. Articles and essays. From first contact with aliens in the U.S. Virgin Islands to vampires in Istanbul, we create stories and worlds every day. The Clarion West Write-a-thon is our time to set our personal writing goals, large or small, and accomplish them together.

It's time to grab some more coffee, renew your goals, and power up (or sharpen up) your devices — we have writing to do! Register for the Write-a-thon online at <https://www.clarionwest.org/writeathon/> beginning June 1, 2020.

We hope that you'll join us! There is no entrance fee or fundraising requirement to participate in the Write-a-thon. However, it is our biggest annual fundraiser, and just like a walk-a-thon, participants are challenged to raise money on behalf of Clarion West by asking friends and family to sponsor your creativity and craft.

Our total expenses for the Clarion West Six-Week Summer Workshop are currently about \$6,764 per student. These costs are projected to go up steeply in 2021, when we will be moving into a fully ADA-accessible facility — we are excited about this long-overdue ADA-accessible housing and classroom!

What to expect from the Write-a-thon:

- A personal Write-a-thon page to promote your work, your writing, and your goals;
- Development of writing discipline through goal setting and accountability;
- Support through weekly updates and encouragement;
- Our first organized chat rooms for conversation, inspiration, and support;
- Badges, and more!

If you are uncomfortable with asking for donations or currently unable to make a donation, it's no problem — set your personal writing goals and write with our community. Just by participating, you help Clarion West, and donors will likely find you!

Every year, we anticipate writers joining us from all over the world, from India to Australia to our hometown of Seattle. Every writer has different goals: A little every morning. Once a week during a writing sprint. 1,000 words a day. These goals are entirely up to you. Use the time to generate new material or finally dig into research. Feel free to make special personal offers for your donors, such as drafts of your work, poetry, or adorable cat photos



Registration begins
June 1

<https://www.clarionwest.org/writeathon/>

(just be sure to follow through!). Whatever your goals, genre, or experience level, you will be an active part of an ever-expanding community of writers.

You make it possible for people from all over the world to attend and afford Clarion West. Our public outreach programs are fully supported by grants and donations from individuals. Your participation in and proceeds from the Write-a-thon provide unrestricted support for our Six-Week Summer Workshop, year-round classes and workshops, and public outreach events.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to participate in an international community, set and achieve goals, and activate your writing like the superpower it truly is! ♦

Announcing New Staff!

MARNEE CHUA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2019, Neile Graham retired as our workshop director after nineteen years guiding students and instructors through Clarion West and beyond. Taking over



from her is Jae Steinbacher (CW '14), who has been training with Neile for the past two years and is already an integral part of the

organization with their attention to detail and commitment to the success of the workshop. Jae is a graduate of North Carolina State University's MFA program and received a 2017 North Carolina Arts Council Artist Fellowship in literature. Their work appears in Terraform, Escape Pod, and PodCastle. "Chimeras" was a Notable Story for *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2016*, edited by John Joseph Adams and Karen Joy Fowler.

With Jae moving into the role of workshop coordinator, they left the workshop administrator position open. I am very pleased to

announce that Rashida J. Smith (CW '05)

has already stepped into this role. Rashida is the former editor of GigaNotoSaurus, 2017 Hugo Finalist for Best Semiprozine.

Under her pen name, Jasmine Silvera, she is the author of the Grace Bloods romantic urban fantasy series, including the novels *Death's Dancer*, *Dancer's Flame*, and *The Talon and the Blade*.



Mission Statement

We support emerging and underrepresented voices by providing writers with world-class instruction to empower their creation of wild and amazing worlds. Through conversation and public engagement, we bring those voices to an ever-expanding community.

As we grow to meet increasing demands on our programs, we have also filled the following three part-time positions in 2019/2020:

Elly Bangs (CW '17) has taken on the position of database specialist, taking over for Kate Schaefer

(CW '92), who has managed the position as a volunteer for eleven years. Elly has several short stories published in anthologies, online magazines, and other places. Her first novel, *Unity*, has been acquired by Tachyon and is awaiting publication.



Janna Silverstein joined us last summer to take over the contract manager position to manage the copyrights of Vonda N. McIntyre. Janna is an award-

winning science fiction and fantasy writer and editor with a number of anthologies and short stories to her credit. Her latest project is *The Complete Kobold Guide to Game Design, Second Edition*.



Vicki Saunders (CW '09) has stepped down from the board and her volunteer

work as art director for Clarion West to formally take on the role of our art and communications director. Vicki is a Seattle-based writer and editor, past board chair of Clarion West, and brings years of professional experience to the position. ♦



Clarion West Writers Workshop

2020 Board of Directors

Tod McCoy | *Chair*
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Kyra Freestar | *Copy Editor*

As Important as Anyone Else's Story



An Alumna Interview
With Maura McHugh
(CW '06)

NISI SHAWL (CW '92)



Clarion West alumna Maura McHugh has written and published plays, podcasts, poetry, prose, comics, and film scripts — so far. In 2006 she received the Gordon R. Dickson Memorial Scholarship to attend our Six-Week Summer Workshop, and in the years since, she has racked up nine award nominations, including one from the British Fantasy Society, and two outright wins: in 2014 the Arcade Award for Best Irish Writer (Comic Books), and in 2015 the Irish Comic News Award for Best Irish Writer Published Outside of Ireland. Though she's the author of dozens of short horror, science fiction, and fantasy stories, McHugh's best-known work is in comics, and she's recognized internationally as a feminist force to be reckoned with in this genre, one even more rabidly defended by self-styled gatekeepers than SFFH. Anybody of the opinion that these genre territories are No Woman's Land is in for a witty and original surprise when they read her work. Nisi Shawl interviewed McHugh for The Seventh Week to find out more about her process, inspirations, desires, and advice.

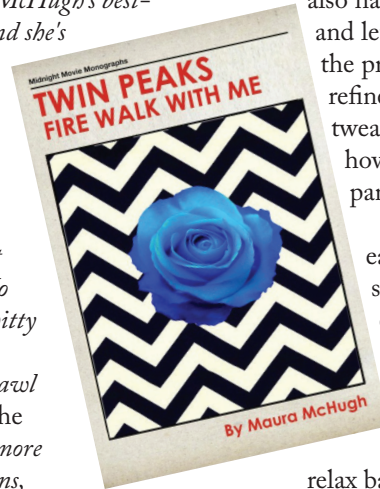
Nisi Shawl: Do you have a favorite form of writing? What makes it your favorite?

Maura McHugh: All of them allow me to strengthen different skill sets, especially when I find a form particularly challenging. While prose is a strong love of mine, I think comic book writing is closest to my heart. With prose I have control over everything, but when writing for comics (or film, or theatre), I understand that this is the beginning of a collaborative process in which other people will use my work as a springboard into a greater project. Writing for comics is quite technical, as you have to break down your story depending on the number of pages, and consider what parts of the narrative you are going to

describe for the artist to draw. You must know which details are relevant and which you are going to let the readers imagine for themselves.

Nothing beats the thrill of seeing the artist's images based on what you have outlined. I'm always happy to answer questions and help where I can, but also I must allow the artists to bring their strengths as visual storytellers to the project. They have expertise in this field, and I'm always delighted when they riff off what I've suggested to produce something more inventive. Sometimes you also have input on the coloring and lettering, and in this way the process becomes one of refinement, where you can tweak the dialogue once you see how the artist has drawn the panels.

Dialogue has to be earned, as it's taking up space; it forces me to be economical and choose wisely. But after writing comics it's always wonderful to return to prose and allow myself to relax back into having more room to breathe.



NS: When you were accepted into Clarion West, you'd already had at least one story professionally published. What were you seeking at Clarion West? Did you find it?

MM: I knew I needed some way to expand and push my writing, and I intuitively felt that attending Clarion West would be good for me. I wanted to connect to other writers and intensively immerse myself in the writing process. I wanted to challenge myself. All of these things happened and more!

NS: Would you like to return to Clarion West as a student? As a teacher?

MM: I've had dreams in which I was back at Clarion West! It's one of those crucible experiences that gets etched into your subconscious. You are stressed, vulnerable, in a new city and setting with 17 strangers. But you can't go back, only forward. In autumn 2018 I did a comic book residency in Angoulême in France in which I had to ►

► completely create (write, draw, color, letter) a large two-page comic in the company of nine other European artists over ten days. It was incredibly intense and pushed me very hard, but I completed the pieces. I learned so much about myself in a short period of time. It reminded me a lot of Clarion West and has strengthened my resolve to apply for more residencies.

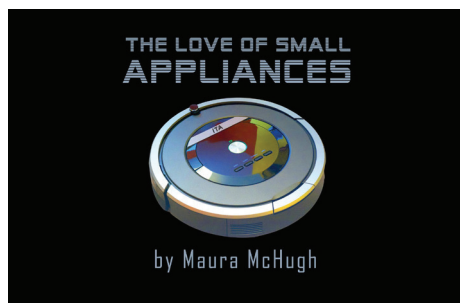
Late last year I taught a one-day comic book workshop at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, in the Netherlands, and that was an amazing experience. By the end of the day each of the groups had created some kind of comic book narrative, and it was humbling and inspiring to be part of that process. So yes, I'd love to teach Clarion West some time.

NS: Are there topics you find more compelling than others because you're a woman?

MM: I am deeply interested in women's lives and how many of them are silenced or repressed. I am not immune to that pressure either. This is a deep source of story ideas, and yes, it easily fits with horror.

Years ago I had a moment when I realized that if I wrote stories with male protagonists I would probably sell them easier. It wasn't a happy realization, but it made me determined to ensure I was giving women — and other genders — a fair shake in my work. Sometimes a story arises organically in your mind and the protagonist may seem fixed, but I often interrogate my choices because my mind is a mire of biases.

NS: Do social media platforms help or hinder you as a writer? Are there



I am deeply interested in women's lives and how many of them are silenced or repressed.

any social media tips you want to give emerging writers?

MM: I've been having a long, serious think about my use of social media over the last couple of years. My background is in IT, so I've had a relationship with these technologies since their inception, and what I'm concerned about is how they shape the way we think and the way we interact with others. I think you should be authentic on social media, but remember it's just like standing in the middle of an arena with a loudspeaker speaking to a vast number of people. And many accounts are merely bots, or trolls. Everyone has their own relationship with social media, so figure out what you're using it for

and what impact it has on you. It should benefit you or expand your horizons. And always remember these are technologies built by companies that are exploiting our use of them for gain. Don't have any illusions on that front.

At this point I use Facebook (lightly), Twitter (often), Instagram (moderately), and LinkedIn (professionally). I often get a lot of entertainment out of social media, so I've no intention of curtailing my use completely, but I have rules about how much I use it, especially when I'm busy. Time spent on projects, with family or friends, and enhancing my mind/fitness gets priority. I don't subtweet or vaguebook. I'm often tempted to do so, but once I question my motives I usually don't.

NS: Any words of advice or encouragement for those seeking careers in comics or other fields related-to-yet-distinct-from horror, fantasy, and science fiction?

MM: If your field of interest requires collaboration, then get out and meet people. Social media and Internet contact is all well and good, but go to any local comic book jams, conventions, festivals, theatre groups, or meetups that tally with your interests. Talk to people, forge connections, and start making a project. It's immensely satisfying, and you learn from doing.

All creators have projects that fail or just don't get off the ground. Don't obsess over what doesn't work; focus on creating something new. Eventually, one thing or another is going to click. Have faith in yourself and the unique story you want to tell. It's just as important as anyone else's. ♦

Online Workshops in Development

Jae Steinbacher
Workshop Coordinator

This spring, April 3–May 8, 2020, Clarion West will be holding its **first four-week short fiction workshop online**, led by JY Neon Yang (CW '13). The Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy award finalist will work closely with a small group of students to



facilitate workshop and critique of a story of 7,500 words or fewer. We encourage six-week workshop alumni or others familiar with Milford-style critiquing to sign up. Neon has short fiction at Tor.com, Uncanny Magazine, Lightspeed, and Strange Horizons. Their Tensorate novellas from Tor.com Publishing (*The*

Black Tides of Heaven, *The Red Threads of Fortune*, *The Descent of Monsters*, *The Ascent to Godhood*) have received many accolades. Also a Lambda and Otherwise (formerly Tiptree) nominee, Neon graduated from the University of East Anglia with an MA in Creative Writing and currently lives in Singapore.

More online classes are in development for the fall — watch for them online! <https://www.clarionwest.org/2019/09/14/announcing-clarion-west-online-workshops/> ♦

Inclusive Buildings House Great Writing and Lasting Memories

Creating the
Capacity to Be
— and Stay —
Accessible



MARNEE CHUA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If buildings hold memories, what must the narratives of thousands of unique speculative fiction stories do to a place? Stories drafted, critiqued, cried over, and submitted at the very edge of late-night deadlines — do the shades of old stories and secrets haunt the walls of old Clarion West dorm rooms? Do you wonder who has been missing from these narratives?

The question of who will be whispering their secrets and sharing their stories has been restricted to those who can navigate a house with stairs. Not only students, but also instructors have been blocked from bedrooms and classrooms on our current premises. The workshop — and the stories created within — will never be truly inclusive unless we can accommodate all qualifying students who wish to attend. That's where you come in.

One of the ways you can support us is to spread the word, helping us fill all of our classes and promote our alumni as their stories are published. Another way that you can support Clarion West is to become a monthly donor and help provide sustained and unrestricted donations year-round. When you become a monthly donor, you become a reliable source of monthly funding for our programs and workshops throughout the year. This is a powerful way to support our current and future endeavors. To make an automatic donation each month to Clarion West, simply check the "Make This Recurring (Monthly)" box on the PayPal donation form: <https://www.clarionwest.org/donate/>.

In 2021, as we move the Six-Week Summer Workshop

**We want to make
sure each future
Clarion West
campus, short-
term or long,
is accessible to
all writers and
instructors.**

into accessible facilities for the first time, we hope you all will help us create new narratives for the workshop. We will be looking to our community to provide

guidance and support as well as to help draft new opportunities for our writers and their readers. In 2019, Clarion West received a significant bequest from the estate of Vonda N. McIntyre. With this bequest, we intend to begin building our capacity, over the next three years, to move into an accessible facility and to remain in accessible facilities thereafter.

The bequest alone will not provide the organization with the financial sustainability to make this move. The bequest will help us build staff time, create new programs, and weather the initial costs of moving into an accessible facility. It will help us build a strong fundraising program that will ensure we can do more for the writers we aim to support. And in 2020, we will hire our first fundraising coordinator to help us manage these goals.

The Clarion West Six-Week Summer Workshop has not always been located in the same house or facility. It has been held in several dorms and classrooms at Seattle University and in three sorority houses. The food was not always as amazing as it is now (thank you, Joe!). Each new building that we occupy will hold the memories of stories and tears and laughter for years to come. We want to make sure each future Clarion West campus, short-term or long, is accessible to all writers and instructors. Someday, maybe the facility will be our own. We

hope you'll join us on the journey to creating lasting memories wherever we go. ♦



Inclusive ramp/stairs, M Museum, Leuven, Belgium



Reading audience at the
Seattle Public Library

2020 Summer Readings and Interviews

- 7:00 pm
- Free of charge
- Tuesdays in Seattle
- ASL Interpreters
at Every Reading

JUNE 23 Andy Duncan



His fiction has been honored with a Nebula Award, a Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, and three World Fantasy awards. A South Carolina

native and Clarion West graduate, he teaches writing at Frostburg State University, which promoted him to full professor in 2019.

University Book Store
4326 University Way NE

Supported by the Leslie Howle Fellowship

JUNE 30 Eileen Gunn



is a short story writer, essayist, editor, and the author of two story collections. Her fiction has received the Nebula Award and the Sense of Gender

Award and has been nominated for the Hugo, Philip K. Dick, and World Fantasy awards and short-listed for the James Tiptree Jr. Award (now the Otherwise Award).

Seattle Public Library Central Branch
1000 Fourth Avenue

Supported by the Vonda N. McIntyre
Memorial Fellowship

JULY 7 Tina Connolly & Caroline M. Yoachim



Tina Connolly's stories and novels have been finalists for the Hugo, Nebula, Norton, Locus, and World Fantasy awards. Her stories have appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Tor.com*, *Uncanny*, *Analog*, *Lightspeed*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Women Destroy SF*, and many more.



Caroline M. Yoachim's short stories have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Uncanny*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Clarkesworld*, and *Lightspeed*, among other places. She has been a finalist for the Hugo, World Fantasy, Locus, and multiple Nebula awards, and her stories have been reprinted in multiple year's best

anthologies and translated into several languages.

Seattle Public Library Central Branch
1000 Fourth Avenue

JULY 14 Nalo Hopkinson



Her fiction has received the Campbell and Locus awards, the World Fantasy Award, and the Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the

Fantastic. She currently lives in California, where she is a professor of creative writing and a member of a faculty research cluster in science fiction. In 2018, she was awarded Eagle-Con's Octavia E. Butler Memorial Award.

Seattle Public Library Central Branch
1000 Fourth Avenue

Supported by the Sally Klages Memorial
Fellowship

JULY 21 Neil Clarke



is the creator of the acclaimed online magazine *Clarkesworld*. The magazine has received multiple awards, including

Hugo, World Fantasy, and British Fantasy awards. Neil is also a seven-time finalist for the Hugo Award for Best Editor (Short Form) and three-time winner of the Chesley Award for Best Art Director.

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JULY 28 Ted Chiang



His fiction has won four Hugo, four Nebula, and four Locus awards, and has been reprinted in *Best American Short Stories*.

His first collection, *Stories of Your Life and Others*, has been translated into 21 languages, and the title story was the basis for the Oscar-nominated film *Arrival*, starring Amy Adams. His new collection, *Exhalation*, is a New York Times bestseller.

Hugo House
1634 11th Avenue

Supported by the Susan C. Petrey Fellowship ♦