

THE



INTERVIEW

Senior Editor Charles Pinch with Charm Chandler

Metafiction is one of the most interesting developments in postmodernist literature—the story within a story in which the author is as much participant as writer. But it’s a genre that’s not easily mastered. The balance between the real author and the fictional participant is key and it takes a skillful hand indeed to pull it off. By virtue of its nature metafiction too easily slides into the esoteric and can quickly become boring. The master of this quixotic genre is, of course, Donald Barthelme. Charm Chandler’s story ‘By Charm Chandler’ Fiction # 15, is, along with Nick North’s ‘World at Large’ (Issue 3) among the best examples of this genre I’ve read. He goes one better by having the pluck to claim not only the story but the title as well. His facility is dazzling, his craft bewitches and well...he charms.

So Welcome, Charm!

CP: *What inspired you to become a writer? How old were you when you wrote your first story and do you remember what it was about?*

CC: Reality had always been a mysterious unknown to me. By that I mean, what inspired me to become a writer is quite literally, the marvelousness of simply existing. Everything is just so, well, yeah. You know? Imagine that my broad sweeping gesture is calculated by labanotation and we all just nod solemnly and gesture some sign of the _____, take your pick. Anyway, impossible paranormal experiences also helped me. Those curious encounters made me realize that whether I admit it or not, there is more to the here-and-now than this physical body. Thus, I began the path of being a writer. The specific instance in which I remember the solidification of this dream was when a good friend of mine (whose name shall remain anonymous, but here is a hint for myself and them: the royalty of bees) was writing during silent time in the library. Intrigued, I had asked them, whatcha doing? The reply, of course: Oh, I'm writing. It was such a simple answer, and then the rest, as they say, is simply fate and destiny. As for the first story I wrote, it had something to do with an urban fantasy, a city, and...the occult? Otherwise, if not that, then, the draft of from a lover of Alice in Wonderland, whose story was inspired by the *The Looking Glass Wars* by Frank Beddor. It will make an appearance again in my future works, so please consider this vague-posting as a hint and a tease.

CP: *Where do you get your ideas and what triggers your creative imagination? Who were your literary influences along the way?*

CC: If I ever had to diagnose myself with anything, it would be maladaptive daydreaming. I constantly mix all the sentient and sapient experiences with an unfolding of everything, all at once, and enact each possibility in my daydreams. In that way, the why's and the how's of a story blend together for me, similar to the concept of the Nonoverlapping Majesterias (because, I think, everything is just overlapping, over and over again). I want all these impossibilities. My literary influences were probably Lewis Carroll, then upon learning some rather shifty things about him, it changed to Erin Morgenstern. But honestly, I cannot even remember all the influences anymore. Just vague and far-off things, all over the world, primarily from Asian culture (I say Asian, because if I listed everything, that would be another short story). Also, is it weird to thank intangible beings as being a source of literary influence? Despite how, some of them are absolutely terrifying! Also, a shout out to Ann Lauterbach and her Night Sky essays.

CP: *As a biracial author what influence does your Filipino cultural heritage play in the creation of your work? In terms of language do you find there is a cross over? How important is language in the context of your fiction?*

CC: Honestly, I do not even know what it means to be Filipino/Filipino-American/Filipino-From-Which-Tribe means anymore. However, in some ways I count myself lucky because the fusion of Filipinonesses means that I can enjoy all-over-the-world influenced Filipino cuisine with chopsticks, amidst the background of whomever stayed in the Philippines during the colonization eras, while listening to modern day music and then switching over to baroque whenever I am bored. I do not mean this to be too negative, as the perspectives are staggering and overwhelming, and makes me appreciate the peculiarities of my writing. Regarding the crossover of language(s), I urge anyone curious about the complexities of my answer to just type in a search engine: "Tagalog loanwords", and hunt for the Wikipedia page. Mix that in with

something such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and ten other linguistic concepts, and life feels like some abstract platonic shape of shapes with humans just somewhere in the configurations. In terms of how language has influenced both myself and my works, I have studied Japanese for five years; Mandarin for two; and Turkish for one, so there's a hybridization of those three with my Tagalog and English. Joyfully, sometimes my diction and syntax blend together to form this off-kilter experience in my works.

It is also why I encourage everyone to talk to themselves when alone. Say all the strange things you would like to read in a work, simply because you can. Who's looking? Me? Probably.

CP: *You may have heard us rag on FOTD about the duplicitous nature of MFA programs. Do you think good writing can be taught in the classroom? What's your personal feeling about Creative Writing courses and how do you feel they impact on emerging writers today?*

CC: What a delicious question. I was thinking about obtaining an MFA in poetry for evil reasons (do you think that leaving certain types of poetry in haunted places would manifest intangible entities? I hope so!), and to this I would say...that the creative writing classes in academia focus too heavily on the structure of a story and the interactions of story, character, and plot, but nothing about the words themselves. That sounds strange to say, but I think that to understand the nature of a word in relation to its diction and syntax is what I would love to see return in writing courses. Of course, I have yet to even return to academia to pursue an MFA, but my overall gripe with the system is that there is not enough exposure to the technical aspects of storytelling, such as grammar, wordplay, puns, and the list goes on. Then, my secondary gripe is that there are not enough stories that want to be forbidden, or banned, intentionally. Then, my thirdly gripe is that there are not enough stories that would act as attractors of the impossible (because it is my delusional belief that if you structure a story a certain way, you can set up a domino effect of evocations, and summon intangible things [either literally or metaphorically, whichever works]).

CP: *What do find the most difficult when it comes to writing, and, on the flip side, what is easiest? Do you have a routine when you write? Do you know what you want to say before you begin or do new ideas and directions emerge during the process? Do you frequently revise?*

CC: Transition sequences have always been difficult for me. I know that A \square B \square C, and I can understand why and how, but writing it out? Do I just get to skip time references or... What I find most easiest for me is allowing myself to write in random parts of the document whenever I feel the intuitive urge that there's something calling me from the past/present/future/timelessness of the work itself. I just write it down, and if it connects, I call that the interaction between a fate and a destiny. The emergence of all the ideas unfolds in all directions, so I have to keep switching between notes to ensure that all of the what-ifs, when contrasted with the actually-is, can mingle together. Do I frequently revise? I do. Because every revision is a separate branch. My most important revisions are reserved for grammatical purposes, as well as ensuring that the word count ends on a number I enjoy (or could be used for occult purposes).

CP: *Is there any type of writing or style you don't like?*

CC: Any sorts of extremisms that lends itself to technical writing—no, perhaps it's an overabundance of purple prose—no, um. I don't know. Perhaps, a writing style that is too direct? Please, tease my brain.

CP: *What are your three favourite books?*

CC: *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Italo Calvino, and *The Tao of Craft: Fu Talismans and Casting Sigils in the Eastern Esoteric Tradition* by Benebell Wen.

CP: *Thank you, Charm for an enlightening look into your world and writing. You're an amazing talent and it was a privilege to publish your story. Keep writing!*