

## *FOTD Cofounder Charles Pinch with Salvatore Difalco*

*A renegade rogue riding roughshod over CanLit (hear the disagreeable phonic ‘clunk’ when you say the word?) Salvatore Difalco is a widely and wildly published eminence gris whose writing is not regional but global. He describes his style or approach as satirical with a dollop of surrealism. Okay, but he forgot to add brashly articulate, patrician without being elitist and wide ranging in his choice of themes. He also demonstrates a triumphant mastery over craft. I mean why wouldn’t I want to interview this dude? Oh yeah, and any raga who emails me in Italian goes to the front of the line. Allord, benvenuto, Sal. Aprezzo la tua partecipasione e voglio ringraziarti per le tempestive risposte alle mie domande. Quindi, iniziamo... (His story We Are Not Happy is published in this issue.)*

CP: *What inspired you to become a writer?*

SD: Even though I was born in Canada, I grew up in a Sicilian immigrant enclave in the ragged north end of Hamilton and could only speak an Italian/Sicilian dialect when I started elementary school. So early on the English language became this charged thing for me—challenging and fascinating and complex and seemingly bottomless. But also the key to understanding the nearly incomprehensible world around me. In contrast to the euphonies and open vowels of Italian, its music felt (and feels) more concrete and kinetic. My interest in the language, combined with an overactive imagination, made writing a natural outlet for my particular mix of quirks and energies. By high school I knew I wanted to be a writer. I studied English in university and for a minute thought I might become an academic. But my true passion was writing, so I took a deep breath and went with it.

Despite all the physical and psychological obstacles, appalling lack of success and shattered expectations, several brushes with poverty and even homelessness, I wrote and wrote and continue to write. I’ve had a few books published and many periodical publications. That said, most Canadian journals and many American ones with an MFA bias won’t publish my work, for whatever reason. Maybe it’s not worthy haha. But at this point, quite frankly, I don’t give a fuck. Acceptance from certain quarters would not change my life or boost my self-esteem one iota. In truth, many of those journals publish shit I find utterly unreadable or objectionable or horrifically woke or just plain fucking bad—so it makes little sense to keep seeking validation from them. Nevertheless, I plan to plow ahead with my work and pursue finding a home or homes for it until I can’t. I have no one to impress but myself, no one to motivate me but myself. Admittedly I get enough stuff published in respectable journals to keep me engaged, keep me coming back. Fortunately there are sufficient markets and venues for even the most experimental or radical work. And some folks actually like my writing, or so they say. Doesn’t matter. I took the plunge way back when, understanding the risks and the potential for failure and obscurity. If I’ve had to

eat a lot of shit in the process, so be it. I'm sure I'm not the only one. The only thing I can do—even at this late stage—is endeavour to write better haha.

*CP: Do you find yourself drawn to any particular themes or issues in your stories and how would you characterize your writing?*

SD: I consider myself first and foremost a satirist, with a side of surrealism. I find the world of humans full of absurdities and incongruities that beg savaging and caricature. I'm drawn to themes of detachment, alienation, mental derangement, drug abuse and violence, but often through a satirical lens. That said, I've written about many things, in many formats, not always dark. And to be honest, my aims are often more aesthetic than narrative—how words look and sound and form patterns. I started out writing poetry with a modicum of success and some of its tendencies have stuck. Finding the sweet spot between absurdity and lyricism has often been the thing. Probably with mixed results, but you try shit, don't you?

*CP: What's your feeling about MFA degrees in creative writing and do you think they help or hinder the fledgling writer?*

Hm. I only took one writing course back in my university days and it was too much like therapy or a Twelve-Step program. MFAs weren't offered there, but I would have never taken that road anyway. I find many wannabe writers, especially bad or earnest or overachieving ones, to be boring and monomaniacal, and quite useless as friends or colleagues, or even as passing acquaintances. Knowing myself, rubbing shoulders with them for an extended length of time would not have gone well. Reading the work of most MFA grads, I am struck at how similar they sound, how tepid, how earnest, how technically precious but bloodless and, above all, politically correct. These are people you would hate to engage at a party, I suspect. Perhaps I'm unfairly generalizing. But from the mountain of MFA material I have read, it is my impression that most of these stories and poems seem mass-produced by some species of soulless collective, or a fucking algorithm. I've tried to analyze that phenomenon, for about fifteen seconds, and concluded that if you find something weak, or terminally tedious, you don't necessarily need to find out why it is so. Sometimes less is enough. It reminds me of a lot of contemporary music. Is it just me, or is it really utterly vapid and forgettable? Maybe I'm just old haha. Of course many excellent writers have emerged from MFA programs, but my feeling is that they would have likely emerged without them. Meanwhile, multitudes of mediocrities throng the lit world, taking up a lot of oxygen. That's the downside. I don't mean to sound so harsh about it—well, maybe I do.

*CP: Who were your formative influences as a writer (this can also include style)? And what writers do you especially admire and why?*

As mentioned, I started out as a poet and early on fell under the spell of Wallace Stevens, and later John Ashbery. A few early poems managed to get published. But at some point—perhaps frustrated by countless rejections and personal dissatisfaction with my work—I started writing stories. I had studied Beckett, Joyce and Flann O'Brien in grad school, and I can't deny their influence on my prose, or at least my prose aims. Flann O'Brien in particular sharpened my comic and satiric sensibility. *The Third Policeman* is my favourite novel, the wicked humour and

beauty of the prose nonpareil. But Samuel Beckett was and is my guy and back in the day I got deep into his work, particularly Murphy and Watt.

Lately, I've been writing a lot of flash fiction, which allows my poetic yearnings greater leg room than is the case with longer work: my influences in the short-short form have been Kafka, Isaac Babel, Robert Walser, Lydia Davis, and Thomas Bernhard, writers I truly love.

*CP: As a Canadian writer do you consider yourself a part of Can Lit? How would you describe the state of Canadian literature today?*

SD: No. Can Lit has never been kind to me or receptive to my work and I find myself in the bizarre predicament of having been all but cancelled in Canada—admittedly for telling a few of Party Members to go fuck themselves, but what can you do. So most Canadian periodicals won't publish my work and forget about book publishers. My book-length manuscripts (including three novels) get returned unread if returned at all. But no; I have never been and never will be a part of that flat-assed, pig-nosed mafia. To be honest, I dislike most Canadian writing. I really do—particularly those dreadful, milky award-winners, but across the board. Except for a few rare exceptions, most of it sucks ass. Most of it is fucking embarrassing. Most of it offends me. I liken reading it to plunging sewing needles in your eyes. I mean, considering the writers that I love, what other conclusion can I draw? Except for Alice Munro and Atwood, none of it makes the cut. None of it. My favourite Canadian writer was and always will be Farley Mowat. The rest of them can suck my dick.

*CP: As a writer, what are your habits? Do you try to write a certain number of words each day or just when you feel 'inspired'? Are you a morning or night writer? Do you have any 'rituals' as a writer ie: no booze? Lots of coffee? Smoke? No stimulants at all? Jerk off?*

SD: Generally, I try to write every day. I'm an early riser, so I'm usually up at dawn with my French press and Kicking Horse Three Sisters ready to go. I stopped smoking tobacco years ago, but now and again, if I can't get going, or I want to be less logical or direct with what I'm writing, I will puff a joint of good sativa to get myself properly fucked up and sideways. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I think the key is to think less and let your fingers do the work. After you write the first sentence, the second comes, and then the third. And so on. And you keep hammering away until you have many lines and something almost readable or funny or horrible starts to materialize. I don't really have a word count in mind when I write, but if it's going well or I get on a heater, I grind away until the juice wears off or I need nourishment. I'm very disciplined when facing a deadline or working on a specific project. Nothing can tear me away from the work when that's happening. But lately, having just finished a bunch of frenetic short stories, I've been a little at odds about what to write next. It's as though I sense something big or truly fucked up is about to happen and I'm not quite sure how or if to proceed. These are strange times. What's next? But barring the unthinkable, I'll get back to it soon.

*SD: What advice would you give to a budding writer?*

Write.

*You write and think beautifully, Sal. It's an honour publishing you.*

*Charles Pinch*

Cofounder/Senior Editor FOTD