

INTERVIEW ISSUE 12

{FICTION}

Senior Editor Charles Pinch with Rory Hughes

*From the moment I began reading **The Whiskey Sour**, published in this issue, I knew I was in the presence of an extraordinary writer. There is a certain, unmistakable magic in this story that leaps up from the page and draws you in, a kind of gravitational pull. Like the best literary artists, Rory wears his talent lightly on his sleeve and makes us believe that one of the most challenging stylistic devices is as easy as your next breath. Don't believe it. Only the best talent can make it work. And Rory Hughes is that best talent. Welcome, dude!*

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?

RH: I can't be the only person with this backstory, but I was 22 and reading William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* on acid and thought to myself, maybe I could be a writer. I guess I look back on that moment with both fondness and crippling regret. I tried writing my first story at that exact moment and it was nonsense, but I kept writing more nonsense and over ten years I revised and edited and compiled all the nonsense into a novel which I hope to be publishing soon.

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

RH: I get a lot of ideas in the shower, and it took me probably too long to realize ideas came to me in the shower because, well, you don't do anything in the shower, you just stand there, getting wet. So I tried this outside of the shower, dry and clothed, doing absolutely nothing, and it works, the ideas come. We don't find a lot of opportunities to just do nothing these days, but I recommend it. Besides that, I get a lot of concepts from non-fiction, specific topics I'm interested in diving into and writing about.

My literary influences, there's so many, I tend to absorb a lot, to a fault. Some of my biggest, though: Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, Chuck Palahniuk, Bret Easton Ellis, Thomas

Pynchon, William Burroughs, Hubert Selby Jr., Irvine Welsh, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. British TV satirists like Charlie Brooker and Chris Morris as well.

CP: *'The Whiskey Sour' is a finely crafted portrait of a drinker whose psychology is poignantly and beautifully laid bare. By the end of the story he has become someone we know. You used 'stream of conscious' to tell your story and your use of this technique is a perfect fit. Alas, it's much maligned literary device because so much can go wrong. Was there any particular reason you choose to it? Was it easy to write? What drew you to this particular character study?*

RH: Well, that's very kind of you to say. At the time, all I can say is, my brain was malfunctioning in a variety of ways, I couldn't think clearly or logically and my mind just felt like a cocktail of shit: I think that's how the idea of the cocktail, in this case a whiskey sour, got kind of wrapped up into this idea of relentless, unhelpful, thoughts. If I'm in a state like this, sometimes I can manage to distract myself with something creative or channel the way of thinking somehow. I thought this time I would just completely run with the wayward mental processes and see what happened.

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?*

RH: I don't know how much of an authority I can be on the subject, but I do believe people connect more with literature, music, art and film when they find it themselves. I think we're stubborn in our formative years. We don't care what elders or teachers or lecturers think is good, we'll find it ourselves and decide.

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?*

RH: The easiest part of writing is the writing, having a drink or a smoke or whatever, blasting some music and just letting loose. The hardest part is waking up the next morning and editing it into something readable. Sometimes that can take more than a few revisions. That's pretty much my routine. I always go in with at least one idea and sometimes that idea will stretch out to several pages, more often, just a paragraph.

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

RH: There's lots of types of writing I don't like: genre fiction, romance, whodunits, soft sci-fi, high fantasy, but that won't always stop me reading it. I'm also a big fan of what we sometimes collectively agree is *bad* writing. I sometimes learn more about the craft from that than I would reading the classics.

CP: *What kind of writing especially fires your enthusiasm?*

RH: I like satire, dystopian concepts, anything weird or off-kilter, I get a big kick out of all things taboo or morally questionable. I also like being confused or disoriented. I feel like certain literature has this ability to make you feel like you're experiencing multiple things at once, which you can't get from visual mediums like film and television. It's hard to explain, and it's possible I just don't know how to read properly.

CP: How do you see the future of literature, especially fiction?

RH: I think in earlier internet days, there was a developing interest in interactive fiction and hypertext fiction and that sort of thing but it never stuck. People always worry about the "screens taking over" and I do too but I think we've gotten to the point where we're as reliant on screens as we are desperate to get away from them whenever we can. Books have always been a form of escapism, and I think, in whatever way, they always will.

CP: Thanks so much Rory for an illuminating interview. It's been a pleasure and all of us at FOTD are honoured by your presence here.