

Dinnerview: Cortney Lamar Charleston

written by Danielle Susi | March 14, 2018



Cortney Lamar Charleston is the author of *Telepathologies*, selected by D.A. Powell for the 2016 Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize. He was awarded a 2017 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation and he is also the recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem, The Conversation Literary Festival and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. His poems have appeared in *POETRY*, *New England Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *TriQuarterly*, *River Styx* and elsewhere. He currently serves as Poetry Editor at *The Rumpus*.

Here, he balks at the unbaked macaroni & cheese, snacks on music, and rightfully declares Taco Bell as a lifestyle.

On his all-time favorite meal:

I suppose my answer depends on your interpretation of the word “meal.” My favorite dish, from childhood until this day, is baked macaroni & cheese; my maternal grandmother would always have some prepared for Sunday dinner following church services, and everything about it, in my eyes, is perfection. It is the standard by which I judge all macaroni & cheeses and all of them fall short, some of them woefully (also, if you’re not baking it then I don’t know what you’re doing with your life).

With that said, if you use “meal” to refer to my all-time favorite dining experience, then I think that would belong to the Valentine’s Day dinner I had at a little restaurant called Marigold in West Philly. I was just a broke college student at the time, but I got reservations at the restaurant which had an excellent chef working in a quaint house not far from campus; I was really trying to show my partner, who at the time I’d been seeing for about eight months, a fantastic and memorable experience, so even though I had hardly anything in my bank account, I splurged. We got all dressed up and went over and found ourselves to be the youngest couple in the venue, a pattern that’s only repeated itself in many of our out-on-the-town dinners

since then. We ate by candlelight and had a rather diverse seven courses (or was it nine?), with an amuse-bouche between each. I can't even remember the specific dishes at this point, other than oysters (which I was having for the very first time), but I remember that food being impeccable, the service lovingly attentive and the memory absolutely priceless.

On what the light looks like during his favorite meal of the day:

Since it's winter: pitch black. I'm a dinner person above everything and in these days, God turns off the lights by 5:00 PM, maybe even 4:30 PM. I'm okay with it though. I feel like Batman when I'm eating under darkness (as he surely must do because... Batman).

On snacking while writing:

I'm not really a snacker at all, and certainly not when I'm writing. If anything, I'm usually ear-feast when the words are flowing, so if a rapper's bars qualify as a snack like chocolate ones do, then that's the only appropriate answer.

(Ugh. Why am I so boring?!!)

On his go-to late-night snack:

If I have a late night vice, it's definitely Taco Bell. But please understand that Taco Bell is not a snack, it's a lifestyle. Recognize.

On his food quirks:

I'm a very patient person and I'm often able to delay gratification. I'm pretty sure this quirk started on my dinner plate; ever since I was very young, I would always save my favorite food on the plate for last, finishing on a high note. That habit has stuck with me to this day. I also used to be very meticulous and eat my food in sequence, never mixing the flavors together, but I grew out of this at some point. Maybe I'll bring it back for old time's sake.

On his final meal request:

A bit of a morose question, don't you think? I'll be a good sport and say that I'd be eating my Granny's full Christmas spread with the rest of my family, my friends who want to come kick it one last time, and, of course, my partner. Chance The Rapper as well because he seems like he might be good company and will probably bring something from Harold's Chicken with him; it can't be a last meal without that.