

[Dinnerview: Cynthia Manick](#)

written by Danielle Susi | January 6, 2021



Cynthia Manick is the author of *Blue Hallelujahs* (Black Lawrence Press, 2016) and editor of *Soul Sister Revue: A Poetry Compilation* (Jamii Publishing, 2019). She has received fellowships from Cave Canem, Hedgebrook, MacDowell Colony, and Château de la Napoule among others. Winner of the Lascaux Prize in Collected Poetry, Manick was also awarded honorable mention for the 2019 Furious Flower Poetry Prize. She is founder of the reading series [Soul Sister Revue](#); and her poem “Things I Carry Into the World” was made into a film by [Motionpoems](#), a organization dedicated to video poetry, and has debuted on [Tidal](#) for National Poetry Month. A performer at literary festivals, libraries, universities, and most recently the Brooklyn Museum, Manick’s work has appeared in the Academy of American Poets *Poem-A-Day* Series, *AGNI*, *Callaloo*, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (LARB), *The Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere. She currently serves on the editorial board of Alice James Books and resides in Brooklyn, New York.

Here, she talks about the variety of crunchy things she snacks on while she writes, condemns eggs in the “in-between-state”, and looks forward to boarding a poetry ship to Mars.

On her all-time favorite meal:

Every time I think of a favorite meal—it’s never just one. It really depends on who I’m with and what kind of mood I’m in. When I was little, between the ages of 8 and 12, I used to visit my paternal grandmother. Sometimes it would be a short visit or if it was in the summer; I’d stay for a couple of weeks. On Fridays we’d have a fish fry with spaghetti. So, when I visit my mom now, and she happens to make it, it’s my favorite meal. You know a meal is good when you want to say *close the door, I don’t wanna be bothered*. My mom also makes salmon patties (some cultures call it salmon croquettes) with grits and that’s my favorite comfort meal. When I think of friendships and poetry, my favorite meal is a crusty French baguette, virgin olive oil with pepper and

chives, cut apples, olives, and soft-ripened cheese. That meal feels like fresh air, conversations about the way language works, and laughter. I think in a lot of African American households food is synonymous with care. *Do you have enough on your plate? To take home? Is there enough meat on your bones?* Really means, you are family, and our table is open. While we don't have much, we can share what we have. So, to me, eating a meal with someone is about care and connection.

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

Typically, my favorite meal of the day is dinner. Usually I eat late, when the sun has set and work from my day job is done. I'll put away my laptop, watch something funny or science-fictiony, or I'll read a romance novel or a book of poetry. So, the light is almost dark and full of departing shadows. Or the light from the television is neon and the light to read my book is pale so I can pretend I'm in the stacks of an old library. I read an article once about mindful eating—so I try to pay attention to the way flavors combine.

On snacking while writing:

Once a mentor told me that if you're writing something good or difficult, you'll suddenly become ravenous or remember something that just *you have to do*, as a way to avoid confronting the page! I don't know if that's true or not, but if I want to continue writing I like to snack on plantain chips, Lance peanut butter crackers, Brookside's dark chocolate covered blueberries or pomegranates, Cracker Jacks or its off-brand counterpart, cherries, and in the summer I love the old fashion Italian ice that use to come with the wooden spoons?? Trader Joe's has a great organic watermelon version.

On her go-to late-night snack:

During the pandemic, I've fallen back on an old favorite—grilled cheese with American and swiss. Sometimes I'll add mushrooms or sometimes I'll dip it in some blackberry jam. Another go-to snack is franks with Bush's baked beans. Now this is a meal from growing up when the paychecks were *really* thin, but it's a classic. It used to be made with Campbells pork n' beans but they messed up the recipe a couple of years ago, so my family had to abandon them.

On her food quirks:

My siblings could tell you how annoying I am about certain things (laughing)—no chocolate chip or Oreo cookies without milk; no skim milk because my grandmother used to drink it and it looks like water; no soft-boiled, over easy, or poached eggs—do you want your eggs to be a liquid or solid!? Cause I can't deal with the in-between state; no okra (despite my southern roots) it just looks and feels slimy to me; and for some reason I always balk at eating corn and macaroni and cheese in the same meal (I feel like I'm tempting the gods with all that yellow on one plate!) Now quirky things that I love—chunky peanut butter and jam on cornbread or pancakes (my maternal grandmother called them flap jacks), peanuts with a Pepsi or Coke, Bolthouse cilantro avocado dressing on tacos, Trader Joe's Fig and Olive

Crisps, sweet tea but semi-sweet, and *Häagen-Dazs vanilla swiss almond ice cream*.

On her final meal request:

Let's pretend that in this hypothetical scenario I'm having this last meal because I'm boarding a poetry ship to Mars and this is my last meal on earth. For my birthday, I usually celebrate it for two weeks. I don't do the traditional party, instead I have lunch, brunch, or dinner with a different friend or a set of friends every day. So, in this hypothetical scenario, I'm having a ten-course meal with whiskey and wine pairings with family and friends. I'm eating a summer salad in a variety of colors, pumpernickel rolls with apple butter, pumpkin and sweet potato soup dished out from an actual pumpkin (this happened at a poetry residency in Mandelieu-la-Napoule, France), lemon dill salmon cooked in parchment so everyone has their own to unwrap, steak sliders on little garlic heroes, vegetable rolls, chocolate cake with ganache and shavings, macaroons, a cup of tea, and then there has to be music for dancing.