

Under the Influence #1, The Origins Issue

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I remember the clarity of that day's sky, horizon-filling and cornflower blue, the sunshine that dominated the quad beyond the windows of the university library. Which is ironic, since I was inside paging through back issues of literary journals. Maybe I remember the sky so vividly because of what I found in those magazines.

There was one in particular—an issue of Daniel Halpern's *Antaeus*—in which renowned writers were asked to list their literary influences. No descriptions were asked for, no qualifications allowed, just the influences in series after each writer's name. Suzy Novelist: A, B, and C. Johnny Shortstory: X, Y, and Z.

In browsing those lists, which went on for pages, I first came across many of the names I'd become familiar with in the years that followed, names like Beattie and Calvino, Welty and Borges, Mishima and Munro. As these and other names appeared time and again, I began to draw conclusions about who the important writers were, the ones other writers cared about, the masters that *had* to be read. This day, I think, is where my fascination with literary influences began.

Fast forward a couple decades and here I am, editing this feature for *Entropy*, this project we're calling *Under the Influence*. Am I trying to relive the magic of that day in the library years ago, the sense of discovery born of that back issue of *Antaeus*? Absolutely. Which doesn't invalidate this exercise by any stretch. I want you to experience those feelings, too; among them the vast sense of literary possibility I felt that day.

The basic challenge of [Under the Influence](#) is simple enough: Write one hundred words on an author of your choice, a *master* (gender-neutral, living or dead) who has influenced your work. Based on the feedback I've gotten; however, this is harder to put into practice than it sounds. Which, I must admit, pleases me just a little. OK, more than a little.

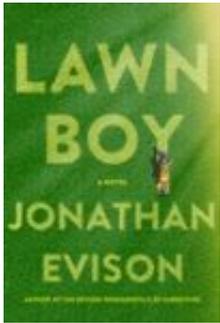
These relationships shouldn't be easy to describe. They are, after all, some of the most important we have as writers. Often built over long years and at great, sometimes epoch-spanning distance, these are love affairs in a way, love affairs that take place beyond the confines of the physical world. And if, in fact, these relationships constitute literary love affairs, the letters that describe them must be love letters of a sort. Informative, inspiring, and as with any love letters, far more revealing about their writers than the intendeds, this is *Under the Influence #1*.

John Fante

by Jonathan Evison

When I was seventeen, fresh out of high school with lofty literary (though zero academic) aspirations, and Teddy Dreiser and Somerset Maugham weren't speaking my language, I lucked upon John Fante, who came to me by way of William Saroyan, who had apparently been a drinking buddy of Fante's. I still

have a stolen first edition library copy of Fante's 1939 *Ask the Dust*, which virtually cemented my status as a hopelessly young alcoholic misfit, determined to starve himself in the name of literature. Fante soon became my new literary idol, joining Vonnegut and Dickens. Where Vonnegut's protagonists were loveable puppets, and Dickens' were well drawn cartoons, Arturo Bandini was the most fully realized, deeply flawed, intensely human protagonist I had yet to encounter--like an immigrant Holden Caulfield, without the safety net of wealth, and the post-war American ennui. Bandini was hungry like me. Bandini was fear and arrogance, outrage and tenderness, lust and greed, and vulnerability; all the fires that burned in my own adolescent heart.

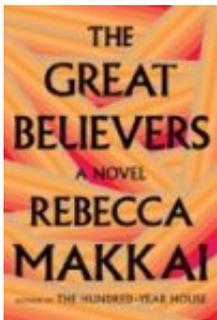


Jonathan Evison is the author of *All About Lulu*, *West of Here*, *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*, *This is Your Life*, *Harriet Chance!*, and most recently, *Lawn Boy*. He likes to drink beer in his garage.

William Shakespeare

by Rebecca Makkai

It's not just Shakespeare but this one moment of Shakespeare, in the fifth act of *Henry IV, Part 2*. To oversimplify, people are in the country talking politics. Davy is a servant whose only function is to serve wine and fetch papers, but when London is mentioned, he gets, out of nowhere, the line "I hope to see London once ere I die!" In nine words, the Bard gives this smallest of character's backstory and soul. And throws the court intrigue into high relief as well. It took years to soak in, but that's the line that taught me to write character.

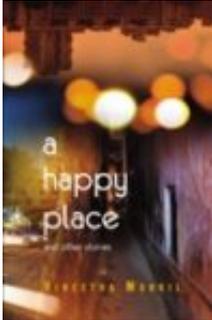


Rebecca Makkai is the author of the new novel *The Great Believers* (out 6/19) as well as *Music for Wartime*, *The Hundred-Year House*, and *The Borrower*. Her work has appeared in *Best American Short Stories* and has won a Pushcart Prize. She lives in Chicago, where she's Artistic Director of StoryStudio.

Anthony Doerr

by Vineetha Mokkal

Anthony Doerr's short stories, elegantly crafted and deeply felt, have taught me invaluable lessons on the art of compression. Watching him handle the short story form and the novel with dexterity inspires me to push the boundaries of both. His prose celebrates the infinite possibilities of language. Reading it has been a revelation, an epiphany, a life-changing experience. His Pulitzer-winning novel, *All the Light We Cannot See*, filled with achingly beautiful sentences, vivid characters, rich detail, and stunning imagery burns like a beacon in front of me every time I sit down at my desk to write.

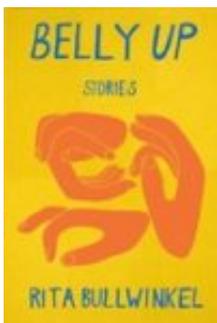


Vineetha Mokkil is the author of the collection, *A Happy Place and Other Stories* (HarperCollins, 2014), listed as one of the Ten Best Works of Fiction of 2014 by *The Telegraph*. Her stories have appeared in *The Santa Fe Writers' Project Journal*, *Asian Cha*, *The Jellyfish Review*, *The Bombay Review*, *The Missing Slate*, and *The Bangalore Review* among other journals. Her novel, *For Birds the Sky*, set in 1950s Tibet and contemporary India, is forthcoming. She is currently at work on a collection of short stories about women, men, desire, power, and technology in the modern world.

Jaimy Gordon

by **Rita Bullwinkel**

Jaimy Gordon is a writer who builds her worlds with language. The words she deploys in the mouths of her characters are not only part of the world, but the fabric of it. In this way, all of her landscapes are unexpected, completely other, and magnificent. All of her work is brilliant. I especially adore *The Bend*, *The Lip*, *The Kid*, in which a Providence, RI inmate is convinced he can tell who is evil by the bend in their penis, and *Bogeywoman*, in which the frightfully charismatic and lovesick Ursula Koderer escapes Camp Chunkagunk (aka Tough Paradise for Girls).

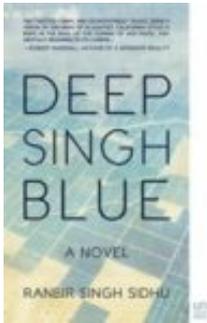


Rita Bullwinkel is the author of the story collection *Belly Up*. Her writing has been published in *Tin House*, *Conjunctions*, *BOMB*, *Vice*, *NOON*, and *Guernica*. She is a recipient of grants and fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, Brown University, Vanderbilt University, Hawthornden Castle, and The Helene Wurlitzer Foundation. Both her fiction and her translation have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. She is an Editor at Large for *McSweeney's*. She lives in San Francisco.

Brigid Brophy

by **Ranbir Sidhu**

Judge a book by its author photo, I told myself, pulling the Penguin paperback *Hackenfeller's Ape* off the shelf. I'd never heard of Brigid Brophy, but that year, 1986, I decided to only read books by authors who were blanks to me. In the photo, she lunges at the camera, out of focus. Her work would transform mine, as would her frankness about bi-sexuality, animal rights, and her own death, which she minutely chronicled. In the novel *Flesh*, she renders the gradual transformation of a London art dealer into a Rubens nude, while in another, *In Transit*, well, everyone is...

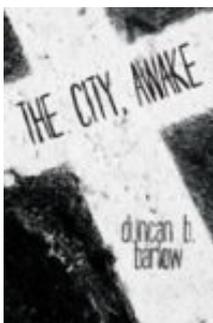


Born in London, **Ranbir Sidhu** emigrated to the US in 1981 and studied archaeology at UC Berkeley. In 1998, he moved to New York City, where he lived for sixteen years, publishing widely, and winning a Pushcart Prize and a NYFA. His books include *Deep Singh Blue*, *Good Indian Girls*, *Object Lessons (in 12 Sides w/Afterglow)* and *The Fabulary*. His most recent is *Hacking Trump*. Among many jobs, he has worked as the assistant to Edward Albee, and once spent a year assisting Joanna Steichen, widow of renowned photographer Edward Steichen, catalog her personal collection of photographs.

Bruno Schulz

by **duncan b. barlow**

How does one find the mythical in their own work—short circuit the self so that they might mature into childhood? Bruno Schulz taught me to crack the universe open upon the sharp edge of language, unfurl the golden yolk of each moment, find mythical wonder in the mundane. *The Street of Crocodiles* could be read as a guide showing authors how to stay in the moment, in order to see the events around them, *drenched in honey*, their passage through our plane of sight not as target, but as a dancing subject of fascination, their movements magical.



duncan b. barlow is the author of five books, including *Of Flesh and Fur* and *The City Awake*. *A Dog Between Us* is forthcoming from Stalking Horse Press. He's played music with Endpoint, BTGOG Guilt, the aasee lake, Good Riddance, and many more. He is currently the Publisher of Astrophil Press and Managing Editor of *South Dakota Review*.
