

Under the Influence #2, Son of Kid of Baby

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“What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;”

– Juliet, Act II, Scene II of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

In school, we're taught we can give things names and in doing so cast a sort of spell, that we can create a shared understanding of what it is we're talking about. But that teaching isn't necessarily borne out by reality. Names, as Juliet might have mused four centuries ago, aren't always what they're cracked up to be.

Take Literary Modernism (essentially New-ism), a catchy vaguery that was (and is) the literary world's response to the sweeping technological changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably the assembly-line approach to mass-killing World War I had made possible. Woolf and Joyce, Faulkner and Kafka—these disparate writers were all modernists, “new” writers who, maybe mimicking the destruction all around them, attempted to confront technology's impact on humanity by blowing the literary world apart. Modernists made literature so varied (and often weird compared to what had gone before) no one could succinctly categorize what was being done. We weren't dealing with realism, for example: People were waking up as cockroaches. But we weren't dealing with realism's glitzy twin romanticism either: People were waking up as cockroaches. What we were dealing with was a world in which people could wake up as cockroaches and you could still get a decent story out of it.

Modernism wasn't the end of weird, though. Nor, in fact, was it the end of technology's dizzying advance. To television and splitting the atom, critics responded with yet another new term, one we're quite familiar with today: Postmodernism. Maybe their thinking was that with a little more time, and another buzzword (After-New-ism?) to distract people, they'd finally be able to figure things out? But they didn't. Or, rather, haven't.

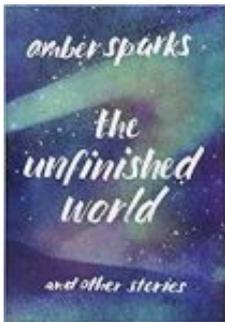
They (and we) stumbled through the next three-quarters of a century (flight and spaceflight, the Internet, AI, robotics, and genetics) mumbling “blah blah Thomas Pynchon blah postmodern blah” and “Blah blah postmodernist David Foster Wallace blah blah blah”, until we wound up on the cusp of something else without being clear not just what that was, but on what had come before it or even before that. If Modernism was a baby who never got a name besides Baby, Postmodernism was its kid, Kid. All of which leaves us where and with what? Postpostmodernism, I guess, Son of Kid of Baby, or something like that...

Now for the good stuff. This month's group of influences kicks off with literary magician Amber Sparks and her admiration for the Baroness von Blixen, Isak Dinesen. Much as I hate to admit it, I think we may owe Twitter a debt of gratitude for Amber's contribution. But I'll leave it at that. Enjoy...

Isak Dinesen

by Amber Sparks

I prefer the title ‘storyteller’ to ‘writer,’ so self-professed storyteller Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) is my literary heroine. In her books, she transforms the traditional fairy tale into something much wilder, stranger, and more savage. I love that she turns that hoary old advice on its head and she tells, rather than shows, and thank god for an old-fashioned bard. As *the Paris Review* says, “Outside the canon of modern literature like an oriole outside a cage of moulting linnets, Isak Dinesen offers to her readers the unending satisfaction of the tale told.” Her collection *Seven Gothic Tales* was the first I ever read, in print, that felt like someone was spinning me stories on a dark and shadowy night.

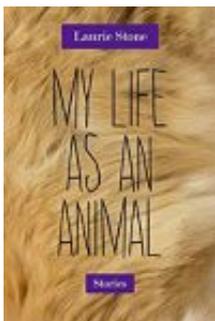


Amber Sparks is the author of two short story collections and a novella. Her work mostly lives at amvernoellesparks.com, and she mostly lives @amvernoelle on Twitter, much to her chagrin.

Lydia Davis

by Laurie Stone

One day the man I live with read me "The Bone," a story by Lydia Davis. The narrator, now divorced, remembers a fish bone caught in her husband's throat. Attempts to dislodge it fail. A doctor extracts it with a tiny hook. The doctor is Jewish and the husband, also a Jew, speak in French about being Jews. I said, "What's it about?" The man said, "Irritation is at the center of everyone's life, irritation that can neither be coughed up or swallowed. The narrator recalls connection in a time of loneliness." I said, "I would never have understood that in a million years." Thus began my romance with the mysterious, layered moments and gloomy hopefulness of the Davis short story.



Laurie Stone is author most recently of *My Life as an Animal, Stories*. Her stories have appeared in *Tin House*, *Evergreen Review*, *Fence*, *Open City*, *The Collagist*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Creative Nonfiction*, among other publications. She is at work on *The Love of Strangers*, a collage of hybrid narratives. Her website is: lauriestonewriter.com.

Kathy Acker

by James Reich

—Empire—of—the—Senseless—Artaud—Rimbaud—Apropos—Foucault—YoHoHo—Homosexuals—Hemophilia—Haitians—Heroin—4H—Tattoo—Voodoo—Hoodlum—Cyborg—Appropriate—Inappropriate—Disappopriate—Autate—Fornicate—AIDS—CDC—CIA—Discipline—Anarchy—Colony—Imperial—Empirical—Empire—Orphan—Lansian—Algerian—Reagan—Urchin—Cancer—Neuromancer—Exotic—Dancer—Necromancer—Pirate—Muscle—Manacle—Motorcycle—Radical—Tears—Punishing—Nourishing—Eidetic—Emetic—Schreber—Freud—other—Father—Multinational—Flesh—Rose—Cunt—Blood—Phenomenology—Sade—Samedi—Theory—Rejects—Revolution—Robot—Effigies—Elegies—Class—Corpus—Rope—Rats—Dead—Fish—Fuck—Form—Intention—Language—Transnationalism—Rape—Travesty—Tricky—Transvestite—Code—Body—Failure—Drastic—Classicism—culpt—Scalp—Scalpel—Mastectomy—Masts—Masks—Modernist—Pain—Postmodernist—Pimps—Love—Persia—Poems—

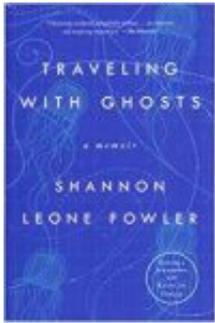


James Reich is the author of five novels including the forthcoming *The Song My Enemies Sing*, *Soft Invasions* (2017), and *Mistah Kurtz! A Prelude to Heart of Darkness* (2016) from Anti-Oedipus Press. He is the publishing editor of Stalking Horse Press and has a Kathy Acker tattoo.

Elizabeth McCracken

by Shannon Leone Fowler

Another writer recommended Elizabeth McCracken's *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination* when I was writing my own memoir. It begins with a suggestion that she "should write a book about the lighter side of losing a child. (This is not that book.)" What follows taught me that books can be deeply sad and profoundly beautiful at the same time. Her words are unflinching and unapologetic. Writing about the death of my own fiancé, I was surprised by the universality of grief. And the ending of McCracken's memoir perfectly encapsulates life after losing someone you will always love.

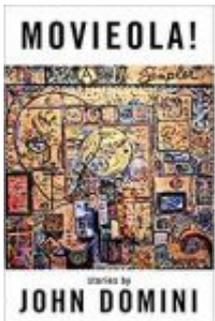


Shannon Leone Fowler is a marine biologist, writer, and single mother of three young children. She's researched Australian sea lions, taught in the Bahamas and Galápagos, studied killer whales in the San Juan Islands, and spent seasons in both the Arctic and Antarctic. Originally from California, she lives in London. Her memoir, *Traveling with Ghosts*, is out now in paperback.

Donald Barthelme

by John Domini

Donald Barthelme left us any number of nourishing lines. He can make a meal out of just two words, like “monkscloth pajamas” from *Snow White*. Yet for such protein, he dug deep. I mean his gift may seem all surface: the Tharp-sharp wit, the Flying Wallenda rhetoric, leaping from blunt to dandified. Yes, but his true cornucopia was the passions. All his challenges to narrative norms, baroque and Euro in “The Indian Uprising,” folksy and cartoonish in “The School,” one way or another evoke familiar quandaries. Even those monkscloth pajamas — what’s their story? Who’s doing penance, night after lonely night? One hopes the poor guy at least finds a good Barthelme story to sustain him.



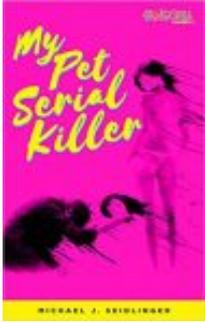
John Domini's latest book is *MOVIEOLA*, a collection of linked stories. In 2019 he'll publish the novel *The Color Inside a Melon*.

J.G. Ballard

by Michael J. Seidlinger

I remember the copy of *Crash* a bandmate brought to practice—the blue cover with its iconic head-on collision, the irresistible premise of people turned on by car accidents. Of course, I was on board with Ballard: as if I'd read him before I'd even picked up one of his books. *The Drought*, *The Drowned World*,

The Crystal World, Cocaine Nights, Atrocity Exhibition, Crash, you name it, I read it. Ballard's books fueled my passion for exploration, the desire to question sexuality and technology. More than that, he taught me to transform an urge into a fully fleshed-out piece, an idea into an entire novel.



Michael J. Seidlinger is an Asian-American author of a number of books including *Standard Loneliness Package*, *My Pet Serial Killer*, and *The Fun We've Had*. He serves as Library and Academic Marketing Manager at Melville House, Editor-at-Large for *Electric Literature*, and is a member of The Accomplices. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, where he never sleeps and is forever searching for the next best cup of coffee. You can find him online on Facebook, Twitter (@mjseidlinger), and Instagram (@michaelseidlinger).