



Mentors, Muses & Monsters: 30 Writers on the People Who Changed Their Lives

Elizabeth Benedict

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Edited and with a contribution by Elizabeth Benedict, thirty of today's brightest literary lights turn their attention to the question of mentorship and influence.

For Denis Johnson, it was Leonard Gardner's cult favorite *Fat City*; for Jonathan Safran Foer, it was an encounter with Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai; Mary Gordon's mentors were two Barnard professors, writers Elizabeth Hardwick and Janice Thaddeus, whose lessons could not have been more different. In *Mentors, Muses & Monsters*, edited and with a contribution by Elizabeth Benedict, author of the National Book Award finalist *Slow Dancing*, thirty of today's literary stars discuss the people, events, and books that have transformed their lives.

When Joyce Carol Oates describes her public-rivalry-turned-wary-professional-acquaintanceship with Donald Barthelme, we are privy to the sight of one of today's most important writers being directly affected by another influential writer. When Sigrid Nunez reveals what it was like to be Susan Sontag's protégé, we get a glimpse into the private life and working philosophy of a formidable public intellectual. And when Jane Smiley describes her first year at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1974, she offers an intimate portrait of a literary milieu of enduring significance for American literature.

Rich, thought-provoking, and often impassioned, these pieces illuminate not only the anxiety but the necessity of influence—and also the treasures it yields.

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