



Unconventions: Attempting the Art of Craft and the Craft of Art

Michael Martone

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Unconventions is a quirky and provocative miscellany that reveals Michael Martone's protean interests as a writer and a writing teacher. Martone has, shall we say, a problem with authority. His chief pleasure in knowing the rules of his vocation comes from trying out new ways to bend, blend, or otherwise defy them. The pieces gathered in *Unconventions* are drawn from a long career spent loosening the creative strictures on writing. Including articles, public addresses, essays, interviews, and even a eulogy, these writings vary greatly in form but are unified in addressing the many technical and artistic issues that face all writers, particularly those interested in experimental and nontraditional modes and forms.

Martone's approach has always been to synthesize, to understand and use any technique, formula, or style available. "I find myself, then," he writes, "self-identifying as a formalist, both and neither an experimenter and/or a traditionalist." In "I Love a Parade: An Afterword," Martone writes about not fitting in--and loving it--as he recalls the time he marched alone in a local Labor Day parade, as a one-person delegation from the National Writers Union. Elsewhere, in writings formally, stylistically, purposely at odds with themselves, Martone's expansive curiosity is on full display. We learn about camouflage techniques, how a baby acquires language, how to "read" a WPA-era post office mural, and why Martone sold his stock in the *New Yorker* and reinvested his money in the company that makes Etch A Sketch®.

Unconventions, then, is Martone's "Frankensteinian monster," a kind of unruly, hybrid spawn of the mainstream writing enterprise. "Writing seems to me an intrinsic pleasure, an end in itself first," says Martone. "The question for me is not whether my writing, or any piece of writing, is good or bad but what the writing is and what it is doing and how finally it is used or can be used by others."

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