

## WRITING OUTSIDE THE BOX

John Rember. *MFA in a Box: A Why To Write Book*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Dream of Things, 2011.

Through explorations on family, place, grief, race, violence, travel, and love, John Rember's *MFA in a Box: A Why to Write Book* explores the inner sanctum of a writer's life. Why does one thing lead to another? Why does metaphor weigh you down? Lift you up? Rember suggests, "The final step is when you realize that writing is all artifice, and when you're good enough at artifice, you can pay attention to what lies beneath it."

A writer needs practical, technical skills to create, but a writer also needs the ability to observe, to bear witness not just to the outside world but also to the inner life. Through textual examples, and examples from his own life, Rember takes us on a journey that challenges inner and outer demons.

Rember's practical advice includes various rules for writers: "That guy with the flaming sword is your friend"; "If Zeus's punishment for your defiance seems not to fit the crime, just remember that your liver will be as good as new tomorrow"; "Dream as a god, write as a mortal. They're not called deadlines for nothing"; "You will not get to listen to a discussion of your book during Thanksgiving Dinner, unless you've

written a book about turkeys. Don't write a book on turkeys."

Rember's irreverent yet helpful tips are matched with deep knowledge. Rember confirms and affirms that after reading, one needs to sit down and write. And then revise. Another trick, intuitive but set out here with gusto, is to live with authenticity and without fear. Confront others, but most of all: confront yourself.

As we all know, becoming a writer involves becoming a reader. It's true whether your aims for writing are more immediate—teach Intro to Creative Writing—or more fantastical—write a novel that wins the National Book Award and Pulitzer in the same year. Either way, Rember's words will steady your path.

—Renée E. D'Aoust

