CURIOUS ATTRACTIONS
Curious Attractions

Essays on Writing

Debra Spark
Acknowledgments

The essays in this volume started life as lectures for the students at Warren Wilson’s MFA Program in Writing. I’m grateful to the staff and members of that program for offering me, through the years, a reason to compose my thoughts on writing matters. I’m particularly grateful to Peter Turchi, who not only hired me to teach in the program but also suggested I collect my essays in book form and then graciously led me to a publisher.

Thanks, too, to the editors of the The Writer’s Chronicle for first publishing many of the essays in this volume; to Julie Checkoway for commissioning “Triggers in Fiction” for her anthology Creating Fiction (Cincinnati: Story Press, 1999); and to Charles Baxter and Peter Turchi for reprinting “Getting In and Getting Out” in Bringing the Devil to His Knees: The Craft of Fiction and the Writing Life (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Finally, this book is dedicated to Garry Mitchell, my husband and always patient first reader.

# Contents

THE TRIGGER 1  
*What Gives Rise to a Story?*

GETTING IN AND GETTING OUT 16  
*First Words on First (and Last) Words*

SPEAKING OF STYLE 33

CRY, CRY, CRY 55  
*Handling Emotion in Fiction*

CURIOUS ATTRACTIONS 74  
*Magical Realism’s Fate in the States*

ASPECTS OF THE SHORT NOVEL 89

BORDER GUARD 105  
*Fabulism in Stuart Dybek’s “Hot Ice”*

STAND BACK 123

CHEER UP—WHY DON’T YOU? 145

NOTES 165