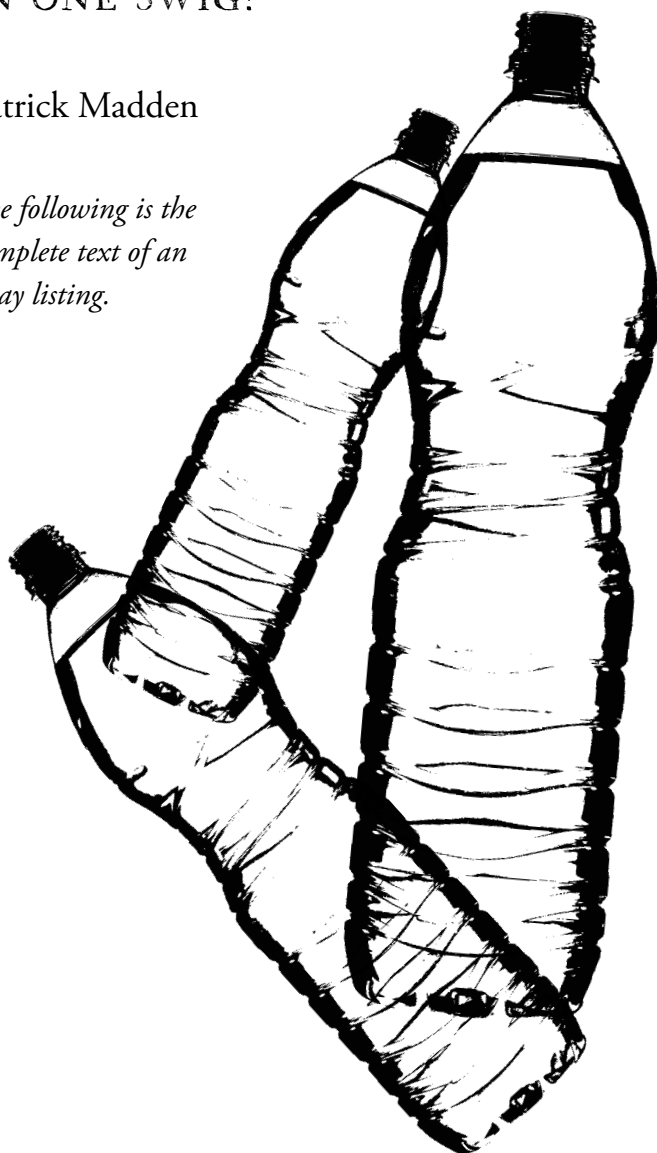


Writer Michael Martone's Leftover Water

IMBIBE LITERARY GENIUS
(DOZENS OF AUTHORS)
IN ONE SWIG!

Patrick Madden

*The following is the
complete text of an
eBay listing.*



You are bidding on approximately 8.3 ounces of Dasani water (plus backwash) in a 20-ounce plastic Dasani bottle (lot number NOV0909 TOC0931L3). This was left by writer Michael Martone on Wednesday, March 25th, 2009, after a reading at Brigham Young University, during which Martone read the “Contributor’s Note” where he talks about his mother writing his school assignments “G# Minor 7th in the Second Inversion” and “Seventeen Postcards from Terra Incognita.”

Why should you want Michael Martone’s leftover water, especially when Elvis’s may come up for bid again? You may recall from one of Martone’s “Contributor’s Notes” that:

In his role as host of a reading, he is often faced with what to do with the leftover water of his guests...Martone is left behind to secure the room, coil the microphone cables, clean up, kill the lights. Part of the cleaning up part has always included the disposing of the evening’s water. Often the lecture halls and auditoriums are not outfitted with a sink. Indeed, the whole point of the headache of providing water in the first place has been the fact that the hall is not in close proximity to sources of water. So Martone has found that he has fallen into the habit of finishing the water himself, drinking the dregs from the glasses or bottles left by the readers, like a priest ingesting the leftover Eucharist at the end of Mass. Martone does this more out of a sense of neatness and order, but, he supposes, there is some of the spirit involved as well. He has witnessed some really amazing performances, listened to the work of famous and remarkably gifted writers. And he has drank their leftover water. Perhaps a part of him believes some of that talent and skill will find its way into his own metabolism through this communion with greatness. It is a kind of inoculation, by means of this tainted fluid, with the cooties of the greatest. Martone hopes, as he drinks, that its inspirational properties, if not the medicinal ones, have ‘taken.’”

So, you’re securing decades’ worth of literary genius—“the cooties of the greatest”—all at once, through the cooties of this pioneering collector. Whose DNA might you find swirling in this literary stew? Gordon Lish, Tobias Wolff, Mary Karr, David Foster Wallace, William Gass, Jane Smiley, Lewis Hyde, Susan Dodd, Susan Neville, Tony Earley, Louise Glück, Dean Young, Louise Erdrich, Charles Baxter, AND MORE! Plus, with over eight ounces of the muse-juice, you can pass it around at your next writers’ group meeting and still have liquid to spare. Save it a few years, collect other writers’ backwash, spit in it yourself, resell it on eBay and make your money back, do what you want to do: you bought it; it’s yours.

Whatever you do with it—whether you gulp it down in one swig, savor it a sip at a time, share it with friends, or simply place it as a trophy on your writing desk—you may be assured of immediate inspiration and better literary output, followed by fame and adulation, and most likely a hefty advance on your next book, not to mention the royalties from the movie version, starring Sean Penn and Winona Ryder.^{1*}

In addition to this priceless H₂O, the winning bidder will also receive a handwritten Postcard of Authenticity from Michael Martone congratulating him/her on his/her wise investment and certifying that the leftover water is indeed Martone’s.

1 *Results may vary; seller makes no guarantee, expressed or implied, of literary potion’s actual effectiveness at making your writing better.

Q: Does Martone floss? Apr-01-09

A: Allow me, instead, to answer the two questions I think you're really asking: (1) Did Martone floss soon before drinking, thereby limiting the quantity of valuable food morsels floating in the water? **A:** No, he did not. The water is sufficiently infested. (2) Why is flossing important? **A:** If you're like me, then you may floss occasionally, when you remember and aren't too tired, without much gusto. But hear ye my sad tale: Now I've got "deep pockets"—and not the kind that begets prodigal spending—which means "deep cleaning" from the dentist, which hurts, and requires quarterly instead of biannual visits, which most insurance companies won't quite cover, which does some damage to those "shallow pockets" most writers have, which brings up this interesting note from the dictionary—"floss: v. intr. to flirt; to show off, esp. (in later use) by flaunting one's wealth, possessions, etc."—a thing Michael Martone most certainly does not do.

Q: I'd like to inquire about the safety of this product...has Martone been tested for Insanity and other transmittable mental conditions? Apr-01-09

A: You are hoping, perhaps, to catch some of what he has? Some of that "benign neurosis" (to borrow a phrase from George Higgins) called "writing"? That's understandable. It is, after all, a rare individual who will hole up for hours, conversing only with himself, spinning stories and ideas from gossamer words, lining them up neatly (or putting them in a cage to fight to the death), straining for communication. If at the microscopic level our atoms never quite touch, then maybe words and diseases are all we have to reach one another.

Q: Are there any visible signs of Martone's interaction with the water bottle (floating particles, teethmarks on the cap from opening it, etc.)? Apr-02-09

A: I submit into evidence the video stills of Martone drinking from this very bottle of water. From that point to now, I will submit my own spotless record of honesty and truth-telling, even down to my choice of literary genre. Dr. Martone has also agreed to send to the winner a handwritten Postcard of Authenticity suitable for framing or recycling. Of course, you are free to hire your own forensics expert to verify the water bottle's authenticity. Next time you see Martone, simply pluck one of his long gray hairs to get your DNA match. As for the other writers whose germs are also likely swimming in this swill, you'll simply have to believe Martone. We do.

Q: Hello, madcabre...(though I wonder who you are). This is Vince Gotera, editor of the North American Review. Michael Martone is one of the NAR's contributing editors, so we are very interested in your auction. ;-D But I'm really writing because I wondered if I could import your eBay auction text, pictures, and Q&As into my blog? <http://vincegotera.blogspot.com> As you know, after 90 days your auction will go poof, so I'm offering eternal access by Michael's fans (and yours) to your wonderful joke/spoof/moneymaking scheme. Possible? —Vince Apr-03-09

A: Hello Vince! Of course. That sounds like a wonderful plan. We're fans of the North American Review here in Utah, and we're all for cyberimmortality!

Q: Would it be possible for Martone to personalize the Postcard of Authenticity? Apr-04-09

A: Ooh yeah. It's a handwritten postcard from Michael Martone telling you (a) that the water is authentic; (b) that you're awesome; (c) don't drink it all now; save some for later.

Q: How will you ship this leftover water of Michael Martone's? Will certain precautions be taken, it being not just water, which is, speaking from personal experience, tricky enough to ship, but also a unique collector's item? Thank you for your time. Apr-04-09

A: In order to keep would-be mail thieves off the trail of this valuable and unique collector's item / literary potency potion, I will mail the bottle, padded by Styrofoam™ "peanuts" or bubble wrap, in an inconspicuous corrugated cardboard box of indeterminate dimensions. Contrarily, I am happy simply to spill the water in a major river upstream from you, at a preappointed time, or to simply leave the bottle uncapped outside in the sun for several days so the water evaporates and rejoins the Great Cycle of Life, to then rain down and bless the earth and her inhabitants with deeply moving ideas and inspirations (I'll have to charge a little extra to do my rain dance to make the winds blow the clouds from Utah toward your home).

Q: What color is the water? Apr-04-09

A: Color, when understood beyond the 64-variety Crayola box, is essentially the eye-brain's perception of a certain wavelength range of electromagnetic radiation (approx. 390–730 nm), which we call visible light. An object's color, then, basically consists of the wavelengths of light that it reflects or transmits (as opposed to absorbs). Other factors, such as viewing angle, reflectiveness, source-light, etc. can also influence color perception. In the case of water, small amounts, such as the approximately 8.3 ounces offered here for auction, tend to be viewed as "clear." Yet, as you no doubt remember from your high school physics course, water tends to absorb the longer wavelengths of light (the red end of the visible spectrum) while allowing the shorter wavelengths (blues) to pass through. This effect is enhanced by particulates suspended or dissolved in the water. Water may also reflect ambient light (from

the sky, the table it's placed upon), thus offering the curious viewer a soothing spectrum of grays or browns. I highly recommend viewing your Michael Martone Water in a variety of settings and under a variety of circumstances. Perhaps the most rewarding would be this: place a shining flashlight horizontally in a darkened room. Face the same direction as your flashlight beam, a few steps to the side. Hold your Michael Martone water at arm's length in front of you at a 45-degree angle. Turn the bottle, tilt it a little this way, a little that way, raise it, lower it, to find the optimal viewing position. Soon you should see, on the right side of the water, a red sliver; soon you will recognize the rainbow! And thus we see that Michael Martone's leftover water is all colors.

Q: I have seen the pictures of Michael Martone you have posted. How can I be sure that the Michael Martone who gave the reading was the Michael Martone who wrote the book Michael Martone? Does the Michael Martone who will write the postcard of authenticity of the water come with any kind of certificate that he is indeed Michael Martone or the Michael Martone? Apr-04-09

A: "But how do I know that there is not something different altogether from the objects I have now enumerated, of which it is impossible to entertain the slightest doubt? Is there not a God, or some being, by whatever name I may designate him, who causes these thoughts to arise in my mind? But why suppose such a being, for it may be I myself am capable of producing them? Am I, then, at least not something? But I before denied that I possessed senses or a body; I hesitate, however, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on the body and the senses that without these I cannot exist? But I had the persuasion that there was absolutely nothing in the world, that there was no sky and no earth, neither minds nor bodies; was I not, therefore, at the same time, persuaded that I did not exist? Far from it; I assuredly existed, since I was persuaded. But there is I know not what being, who is possessed at once of the highest power and the deepest cunning, who is constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving me. Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this proposition (pronunciatum), I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind."



Q: Is this your only Martone item or will you be auctioning other collectibles? I'm most interested in Martone's water from AWP conferences or pieces of toast with the burnt silhouette of his pompadour...Apr-04-09

A: Thank you for bidding and asking this intriguing question, though I have to take issue with your characterization of Martone's hairstyle. The pompadour, which I've just researched a tad (<http://www.lordoflaughs.com/pompadour.htm>), is short on the sides, combed up in front and back on top, forming a kind of smoothly rounded forehead shelf. Think Elvis, Roy Orbison, James Dean. If you're interested in making your own pompadour (while you still can; I'm beyond this possibility), you may find the instructions at <http://www.geocities.com/pompadour101/instructions.html> useful. Additionally, you may find it interesting/frustrating to learn that the pompadour is named for Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, who was King Louis XV's mistress in the mid-eighteenth century. Did she wear her hair like this? Not according to the portraits. So why do we trace the etymology of the hairstyle to her? Because "she introduced these styles." Whuh? To make a long story short: I am hoping the exclusivity of this Martone Memorabilia will send its auction price skyrocketing. I have nothing else to auction (at this time).

Q: This is delicate, but I have to ask. Does Martone ever sell other fluids, as in, fluids, you know, that have already passed through certain of his bodily channels? I don't want to come right out and name what I'm looking for, but you get my drift? Apr-04-09

A: You mean tears? You must mean tears. I can't think of anything else you might be referring to. The good news is, YES, I believe I recall Martone, moved by his own poetical prose, eyes glistening, a drop meandering slowly from his moist ducts to the tip of his nose, gathering mass, tensing, testing the limits of molecular cohesion until, in the exact moment that he unscrewed the cap of his 20-ounce Dasani water bottle, the teardrop dripped and dropped—plop—right into the open mouth of the vessel.

Q: In question eight you refer to him as "Dr. Martone." When I graduated from his program, last year, he was Michael Martone, M.A. What institution within the past year granted the great one his doctorate? And what is he now a doctor in? Is he a real doctor (the medical kind)? Apr-04-09

A: You're very observant! The truth is, there are plenty of "doctors" who don't have doctorates or medical licenses. To wit: Dr. Pat Robertson, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Demento. Samuel Johnson, for instance, left Oxford without a degree and though his friends long sought to obtain for him some document of his erudition, he received his master's only just before he published his monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755 (he was 46). His honorary doctorate degrees came a decade and two later, long after he'd acquired his honorific nickname. William Hazlitt didn't much like Dr. Johnson's writings, but James Boswell sure did: "Had Dr. Johnson written his own life, in conformity with the opinion

which he has given, that every man's life may be best written by himself; had he employed in the preservation of his own history, that clearness of narration and elegance of language in which he has embalmed so many eminent persons, the world would probably have had the most perfect example of biography that was ever exhibited. But although he at different times, in a desultory manner, committed to writing many particulars of the progress of his mind and fortunes, he never had persevering diligence enough to form them into a regular composition." This is just fine by us. He wrote essays, not memoir. Super. Anyway, who'll be the first university to confer an honorary doctorate on Michael Martone? Perhaps it'll be Brigham Young. I'll ask.

Q: Hi, I'm interested in acquiring the Martone water for my rare waters collection. But I'd like to know, where did the water originally come from? I'd appreciate any information you can share about its origins. Apr-04-09

A: Leaving aside questions of "origins" for the moment, the water in Martone's water bottle was taken from the Atlanta, Georgia, public water supply before it was purified by "reverse osmosis" (essentially straining through a filter) and "enhanced" with trace amounts of magnesium sulfate, potassium chloride, and salt (sodium chloride). The Coca-Cola company, which brings us Dasani water, assures us that "DASANI is water—pure and essential. DASANI helps you embrace life with a fresh, optimistic outlook. As basic as breathing, DASANI quenches thirst naturally and deliciously." I'm feeling better already. (Do they realize that they're claiming that Dasani is as basic as breathing?) As for the origins of water on Earth, well, even Wikipedia doesn't quite know the answer, so I can't help you there. I will say, though, that thank goodness there is water on the earth, or how could we live!

Q: What is it with universities in the western United States that they must put an intial on the side of a mountain face overlooking the campus below? Apr-05-09

A: Sheer boredom.

Q: I collect Dasani products and Dasani-brand memorabilia. Michael Martone I'm not familiar with. Can you please provide more details about the bottle itself? Thank you! Apr-05-09

A: I'm glad to know that this item has broad appeal to all sorts of collectors. The bottle at one time contained 20 fluid ounces OR 1.25 pints OR 591 milliliters of water. Now, not quite so much, because this Martone fellow drank a bit more than half. The bottle is roughly a cylinder, tapered at the top into a narrow spout, with five "knobs" at the bottom, for greater stability. The bottle measures approximately 8 inches high, 3 and 5/8 inches at its largest diameter. It is made of relatively clear polyethylene terephthalate, with a translucent blue shrink band around its middle. This band says such things as "Dasani," "a product of the Coca-Cola Company" (in script), "NON-CARBONATED crisp, fresh taste. Dasani is filtered through a state-of-the-art purification system and enhanced with minerals for a pure, clean taste that can't

be beat” (I’ll say; not when you mix in the remnants of the best literary minds of our nascent century!). You can get a cash refund for this bottle in California; you can get 5 cents for it in Hawaii and Maine; but you cannot get a refill. The plastic above the blue band is decorated with relief patterns in the Art Deco style. Between two parallel bands of two outdentations each, we find the cypher “SOSOSOSOSOSO,” which one might easily take to be a cry for help until one notices that there is no second S; therefore one is forced to conclude that the sculpture is a comment on the content, that it is “so so.” Above this declaration of mediocrity, we find four large S figures marching counter-clockwise as a symbol of the Coca-Cola company’s disregard of what is trendy or faddish, like selling bottled water. Finally, atop it all, there is a blue cap, separated from its still-present blue safety band. The cap includes around its circumference 24 Gription™ grooves to help you open the bottle, plus a few more decorative esses up top. It is a fine, fine specimen indeed.

Q: Re: Trophy You suggested Martone’s water might do well as a trophy to be displayed on something such as a desk. But don’t you think that it might feel more at home in a well-lit, specially designed cabinet complete with a plush velvet cushion lined in gold trim? If interested, please send me a query denoting any other decorative flourishes you have in mind. As for the cabinet’s security, I have some big ideas that involve a special heat-&-nose hair-activated locking system. (Note: the laser-printed display plaque would come free of charge!) Apr-05-09

A: This is the thing about which I am talking! If we, as a race of bipedal, opposable-thumbed, wondering, pondering creatures, have thus far limited ourselves to Velcro shoe fasteners and decorative lunchboxes, then we have surely missed our potential. Just imagine what wonders we might yet discover/invent if we combine our ideas and our skills to fashion a world in which seemingly ordinary, even disposable things are given their proper due as miracles of existence without which life would remain empty or perhaps only just under half full, approximately 8.3 ounces out of a possible 20, let’s say. But with collaboration and ingenuity, plus maybe a little bit of capital supplied by the great worldwide garage sale that is eBay, we can subvert our species’ most widespread and more wrongheaded notions. What was it that Montaigne said? (Don’t worry; I’ll tell you; just let me look it up.) He said “From the most ordinary, commonplace, familiar things, if we could put them in their proper light, can be formed the greatest miracles of nature and the most wondrous examples.” And what was it that Charles Caleb Colton said? He sent a tribute to you, dear questioner: “Some men of a secluded and studious life have sent forth from their closet or their cloister, rays of intellectual light that have agitated courts and revolutionized kingdoms; like the moon which, though far removed from the ocean, and shining upon it with a serene and sober light, is the chief cause of all those ebbings and flowings which incessantly disturb that restless world of waters.” You will forgive the gendered language of that benighted past, I pray.

Q: Besides that it belonged to and was sipped upon by Michael Martone (who himself has sipped upon the water of many illustrious writers), is there anything else that makes this particular water unique? Does it have an interesting smell, for example? Is it somehow wetter than normal water? Will it make a strange sound when swished or gargled? Apr-05-09

A: The only way I know of to test water for wetness is to bathe in it, so that’s what I did (making sure to funnel the resultant drip back into the bottle), and, sure enough, it’s wet! Perhaps it’s even wetter than the water I usually get from my shower; I don’t know. While bathing, I also took the opportunity to sniff the stuff, which seems not to smell like anything but water. By the way, I do not recommend “sniffing” water, as the liquid cannot be processed by human lungs, the oxygen in the water molecule remaining stubbornly attached to its two hydrogens. In my case, my organism reacted rather violently to the introduction of H₂O into my nasal cavity, causing me to jerk quickly and sneeze the water back out of my nose, along with a collection of sputum that I’d been harboring in the upper reaches. This, too, was collected back into the bottle, which I then swished and gargled, to test your hypothesis about strange sounds. I have good news to report: whether it was the water or my wife, there were certainly strange gagging sounds accompanying my experiment. What’s more, with these tests I seem to have increased the volume of liquid in the bottle nearly 0.2 ounces! Talk about more for your money!

Q: A few years ago at the AWP in Austin, Michael Martone was played by one of his students. The student gave Michael Martone’s reading, wore Michael Martone’s nametag, and generally put across the idea that *he was* Michael Martone. My question, then, is: how do we know that this water touched the REAL Michael Martone’s lips? Certainly your pictures and your postcard could be faked. And then if I were to drink this water, I would not be imbibing literary greatness, which would inspire in me great works of the pen, but con artist greatness, which might inspire me to great works of the short or long con. Are you okay with this potential life of crime should your product be a fake? Apr-06-09

A: The quick answer is Yes! Whether literary genius or criminal/mischievous proclivities, it is all the same to me. I walk away with my (so far) \$12.03, minus posting and purchase fees to both eBay and PayPal, and laugh my way to the bank. But your question takes me beyond my good friend Descartes, to whom I’ve already referred. Did you know: a quick, superficial search for “Michael Martone” on <http://switchboard.com/> produces phone numbers and/or addresses for up to 81 individuals? Michael Martones populate many of our fifty states, though it would seem, from a cursory glance at the data, that most of them reside in the Northeast. In Alabama, last known residence of the Michael Martone in question, there is only one, which thereby proves my contention that this water was indeed sipped by THE Michael Martone, quad erat demonstratum. If you’re still not convinced, try a Google images search for

“Michael Martone” (in quotation marks). Then try it without the quotation marks. Either way, the results are the same: along the top row of recollected images, we find a picture of former Vice President of the United State Dan Quayle, known mostly for his boyish good looks and spelling difficulties. There are also, within the first page of results, a picture of a strapping young man on Facebook and/or a Michigan judge. A judge would simply get himself into too much trouble impersonating a well-known writer. And thus we see that whether this water be authentic or not, even the REAL Michael Martone is quite a literary huckster, so you’re exposing yourself to conniver’s germs either way. What an adventure!

Q: In the head-on the picture of (not yet Dr.) Martone drinking from the item, his expression is clearly one of barely suppressed rage. I was wondering if you have any knowledge about what so ignited his fury. I’ve often heard him described as a rather gentle, genial being, but evidently that’s not the whole story. Do you have the whole story? Apr-06-09

A: As you have suggested, there is always more to the story. To understand Martone’s apparent “fury,” we would do well to consult the oracle (Internet) to trace the etymology of that term. It turns out that the Furies were born from the severed genitalia of Uranus, long, long ago. According to The Iliad, their purpose is to “punish whoever has sworn a false oath,” which once again confirms this auction’s fundamental claim that the water is legitimately Michael Martone’s. Beyond that, and leaving aside for a moment all talk of vengeance and snake-hair, Mr. Wikipedia assures us that “[The Furies] represent regeneration and the potency of creation, which both consumes and empowers.” This is an apt description of literary genius, no? I would like to add that R.E.M lyrics are often very difficult to decipher, but I once did a pretty decent job of figuring out “It’s the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine),” which includes the line about “with the Furies breathing down your neck.” This may have been my first encounter with the Furies, though perhaps not with fury. I have a friend whose brother, instead of giving an actual “speech” to his graduating high school class, stood at the podium and sang this very song from start to finish, then just sat down. I don’t think I would have had the guts to do that. In fact, I didn’t. I made a reference to the students in Tiananmen Square, basically saying that we, the Whippany Park High School class of 1989, had it easy, so we should try to DO something with our lives. And here I am, doing this auction.

Q: Clearly, the leftover water of Michael Martone, writer, is worth many more times than its value when purchased from, say, a 7-Eleven. Does the seller have plans for what to do with his money? Apr-06-09

A: All profits will be used for the advancement and glorification of the essay in the world.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for distilling the writing-enhancing particulates of Martone, et al. from the water so that a successful bidder might turn this little plastic factory into a goldmine through massive synthetic reproduction of said particulates? Also, does “Writer Michael Martone’s Leftover Water” have any effect on pets? Apr-06-09

A: Your second question first: the seller makes no warranty, expressed or implied, about Writer Michael Martone’s Leftover Water’s effect on pets. There. That said, sure! Give it a try! There are painting elephants and sign-language-using gorillas, so why not!? As for successfully distilling writerly particulates: I recommend you boil the liquid at exactly 100 degrees Celsius until all the water has vaporized. In your pot, you should find a whitish film. Carefully scrape this caked-on residue with your index fingernail, then soak your contaminated finger in a new bottle of water for seven minutes or until the white film has dissolved completely. Repeat this process until your pot is completely clean. I suspect you can make several gallons of WriterWater at a concentration of 19–23 parts per million. Good luck!

Q: As you insinuated before, by drinking this water we may imbibe greatness. I had questions about that greatness. Does the greatness get better with age? If it does increase in genius quality, is it like a fine wine or is it like an old parchment? If I win the bid, would you suggest drinking the water right away so as to acquire the amalgamated greatness or should I let the water age and drink it after a year or two? Apr-06-09

A: The great thing about literary greatness is that it DOES improve with age. What’s even greater is that this greatness greatens whether it’s sitting in a bottle in your trophy case or coursing through your veins. Except in cases of dementia or self-plagiarism, literary greatness continues to grow until death (in some cases, even after death). So go ahead and drink up now. (By the way, I notice that you haven’t actually bid on the water; you won’t be drinking anything if you don’t pony up!)

Q: Been talking to a buddy of mine about the possibility of cloning Dr. Martone using the DNA left behind in the dry spit on the top of that bottle of water you got. Think that will work? Also, perhaps we can clone the DNA of the other writers who swim in Dr. Martone’s spit. Don’t you imagine? Apr-06-09

A: Imagine all the people!

Q: In what little time remains (in this auction and, perhaps, in life), would the seller—the original collector of the leftover water of writer Michael Martone—care to tell us a bit about the seller’s self? Apr-06-09

A: We are Legion. ☹