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The Treefrog Tattler

from Leapfrog Press

November 2011

In This Issue

Bringing out Baby
--Writing *In the Lap of the Gods*

by Li Miao Lovett

News

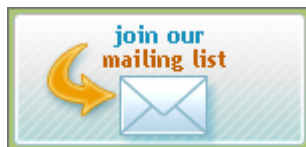
Reviews

Featured Title

Upcoming Titles

Writers on Writing
Succinctness in Writing
by Michael S. A. Graziano

Read past issues of
The Treefrog Tattler
[September 2011](#)
[July 2011 \(The Contest issue\)](#)
[May 2011](#)
[March 2011](#)
[January 2011](#)



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Welcome to *The Treefrog Tattler*, the semi-monthly newsletter of Leapfrog Press. Here you will find information for writers, Leapfrog news, author interviews, and more. To submit an article, writing tip, or news for inclusion in the *Tattler*, email leapfrog@leapfrogpress.com.

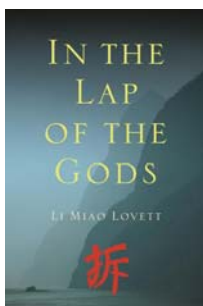
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Bringing out Baby: Writing *In the Lap of the Gods* by Li Miao Lovett

Writing a novel is a birthing process, and regardless of gender, writers understand the experience of bringing a literary baby into the world. I had a lot to learn about babies, fictional and otherwise, before embarking on my first novel, *In the Lap of the Gods*, which opens with an infant girl abandoned beside the rising Yangtze. I was intrigued by the idea of lost landscapes from the building of China's Three Gorges dam, and touched by the personal stories of displacement affecting nearly a million and half people. Writing fiction is a process of discovery; I read all the articles and books I could get my hands on about the fabled Yangtze River, the consequences of dam building for ordinary Chinese citizens. The characters are not explicitly based on anyone I know, so at each step I thought about their actions and the flow of the story using an emotional litmus test: why would Liu take on the Herculean task of raising a foundling, if he didn't feel the emptiness of losing his wife and unborn child?

In the midst of writing the novel, I traveled to China to witness the dramatic changes in this region first-hand. It was important to do this ground truthing; in the Three Gorges, many shops were smaller than I imagined, postage-stamp sized, yet more popular than the posh department stores around the corner. Having dreamt up my characters, I met some of their real life counterparts during my visit, including a toddler abandoned as a

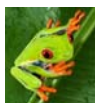


baby. Since the publication, the veracity of themes in my novel has been played out in the world's theater. Through the parallel story of farmers resisting seizure of their land for dam building, I tried to portray the economic disparities which lead to uprisings against the government. It's a familiar theme for our times.

Like many writers, I find inspiration through reading great authors. I'm not concerned about another writer's voice seeping into mine while I'm working on a book. Rather, their sensibilities bring forth elements that I desire for my work, a touch of humor to temper tragedy, the sense of pacing, the possibilities for weaving together storylines. While writing my novel, I read *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, by a well-known Chinese novelist from the same region as my father. Author Mo Yan manages to tell the history of 20th century China through fiction, and makes you laugh and cry at the antics of a young man caught in the cogs of change. I love the writings of Wallace Stegner, whose stories of people and place, from Saskatchewan to San Jose, are enduring. They strike an emotional chord; whether it's the voice of a young boy on the farm or a young man in wartime, Stegner shows a remarkable sensitivity to the human condition.

Often, it's the struggle that turns us toward the pen. Here's where parenting differs from fiction writing: you'll do things to your characters that in your right mind would never wish on your kids. It's my greatest joy as an author to hear that my character's dilemmas feel real to my readers. They know; they've ridden the waves of love and loss, and in the people who inhabit these pages they see a bit of their own resilience in the face of change.

Read more about Li Miao Lovett and her writing at limiaolovett.com.



News

See our Featured Title section for a fun question and a chance to win a copy of Mary Malloy's *The Wandering Heart*.

Leapfrog was founded going on 20 years ago on Cape Cod, the easternmost tip of Massachusetts, surrounded on three sides by water. In December, Leapfrog will relocate. We will settle for the next 20 years, and hopefully more, on the southern shore of Lake Erie, in the town of Fredonia, N.Y., in an office just across the street from the State University of New York at Fredonia campus. Other than more snow and less humidity, Leapfrog will remain pretty much the same in its new office in "[the land of the brave and the free](#)."

The 2012 Leapfrog Fiction Contest opens on January 15. The finalist judge this year will be [Lev Raphael](#). This contest is open to Adult literary, mainstream, and science fiction; and, in the Children's division, middle grade and YA fiction. See our [contest page](#) for details.



Lev Raphael is the author of 20 books, including novels, memoirs, and story collections. Read more at levraphael.com.

Writers on Writing
Heart in Writing
by Michael S. A. Graziano

It is difficult to be succinct. All the forces push authors the other direction. Editors, readers, and authors all have strong expectations about length. Sometimes those expectations are conscious, but the more pernicious ones are under the surface. Stories are teased into two or three thousand words. Novels, depending on the genre, are padded with a comfortably rounded belly anywhere from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand words. We're all engaged in fitting the form. The harder task is to ask what the story itself needs and to write just that much and no more. When the inner logic of the story dictates the length, when the extra words are scratched out, when the clutter scenes are cut, a novel can turn out half or a third the normal length. Gobs of lugubrious character development, the kind that distracts from the underlying themes of the story and very often distracts from the truth of the characters themselves, accounts for a vast amount of belly fat. Efficient novels are admittedly inconvenient from the perspective of publication. They don't fit the mold. Editors don't like

Watch a clip of [Mick Carlon's introduction to Duke Ellington](#) at a concert of Ellington's songs. (*Riding on Duke's Train*).

Read and watch "[Celebrating 40 years: An African refugee's journey to Australia](#)." Tewodros Fekadu is the author of *No One's Son* (April 2012).

Michael Mirolla (Berlin; The Facility) just launched his novella [The Ballad of Martin B.](#) with Quattro Press in Toronto.

[The Last Notebook of Leonardo](#) by B.B. Wurge was awarded first prize in pre-teen fiction by The Moonbeam Children's Book Awards.

Read a review of Mick Carlon's *Riding on Duke's Train* in the [Barnstable Patriot](#).

Read "[Mary Malloy Taps Medieval World for Murder Most Foul](#)," a full-page article about *Paradise Walk* in the *Cape Cod Times*.

Read "[A Trip on the Carlon Express](#)," an article about Mick Carlon's teaching, in the *Cape Cod Times*.

Read an interview with Richard Klin (*Something to Say*) in "[6 Book Publishing Experts Voice Their Views](#)" in BookMarketingBuzzBlog.

Suzanne Kamata's story "Pilgrimage" has been selected for a "Best of..." anthology of stories published in [Cicada](#). (Suzanne Kamata is the author of [Losing Kei](#)).

Read [Is Spirituality a Byproduct of Evolution?](#) and [Does the Eternal Soul Exist?](#) by Michael Graziano (*God Soul Mind Brain*) in The Huffington Post.

Read [New Black Eagle Jazz Band: 40 Years of Jazz \(Mick Carlon on the noted traditional jazz band based in New England\)](#) in *Jazz Times*, by the author of [Riding on Duke's Train](#).

Read an interview with Helen Phillips ([And Yet They Were Happy](#)) in [The Tottenville Review](#).

Read an interview with Michael Graziano (God Soul Mind Brain) in [Green Heritage News](#).

[Leapfrog author events near Falmouth, Mass.](#)

December 3, 11-1: Mick Carlon will read from and sign copies of *Riding on Duke's Train*. Eight Cousins Bookstore, Falmouth, Mass.

December 3, 2-4: Mick Carlon will read from and sign copies of *Riding on Duke's Train*. Market Street Bookshop, Mashpee, Mass.

Please visit our Events page for our many upcoming author events around the country. If you are on the West Coast, look for appearances by Li Miao Lovett (In the Lap of the Gods) and Mary Malloy (Paradise Walk).

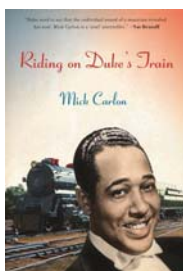
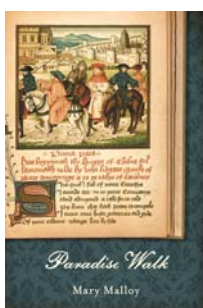


Reviews

PARADISE WALK

them and sales are difficult. But the art is better. Alas for the perennial choice between art and career success.

 Michael Graziano is the author of [The Intelligent Movement Machine](#) (Oxford University Press), [God Soul Mind Brain](#), and the diminutive yet epic novellas [The Love Song of Monkey](#) and [The Divine Farce](#) (Leapfrog Press).



Mary Malloy * November 2011

Read the opening [here](#)

Publishers Weekly

Malloy loads her...second Lizzie Manning mystery (after 2009's *The Wandering Heart*) with literary history.... British scholar Alison Kent has inherited a reliquary holding what are said to be the bones of St. Thomas à Becket as well as the journal of an ancestor of hers known as "the Weaver," who might be the model for Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Too frail to make the journey herself, Alison hires American history professor Lizzie Manning to walk the pilgrimage route and glean further evidence for a scholarly publication. Lizzie is thrilled to find the Weaver's secret mark on artworks at key sites, but when she uncovers a generations-old conspiracy to hide and protect Becket's real bones, she puts both of their lives in peril. **This unconventional mystery will most satisfy those who enjoy intellectual puzzles like Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*.**

RIDING ON DUKE'S TRAIN

Mick Carlon * January 2012

Read the first two chapters [here](#).

Kirkus

Utilizing his encompassing knowledge of Ellington's music, personnel and decades-long touring, Carlon...presents a kid's-eye view whose drama centers on the band's 1939 European tour.... Danny, orphaned at 9, stows away on Duke's tour train.... Danny narrates a life of touring: exciting, sometimes boring, rich with musical highs and adoring fans worldwide. Tension ratchets during the tour abroad, as Belgians hide machine guns in haystacks and Nazis detain the band's Scandinavian-bound train for hours in Hamburg. Carlon unflinchingly characterizes the Nazi hatred of "Niggermusik." Two references to the n-word contextualize it appropriately, as a reprehensible tool of Nazi hate speech. In schools where students are lucky enough to experience classroom jazz studies, this title, combining rich musical history and a "you are there" approach, is a natural.

HOW TO STOP LOVING SOMEONE

Joan Connor * October 2011

Read the opening of the first storey [here](#).

Midwest Book Review

An insightful and original collection that offers anything and everything to think bout love and our lives.

AND YET THEY WERE HAPPY

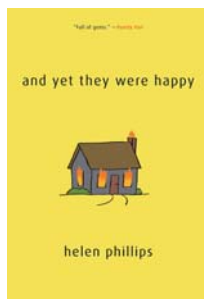
Hellen Phillips * May 2011

Read the first two fables [here](#).

Art Faccia

Review by Rebeccah Haze

The title says it all: Helen Phillips' lovely little book "And Yet They Were Happy" is the story of a young couple who, despite inhabiting a strange and unstable world, manage to find refuge in their apartment and in one another. They retain their sense of humor and of childlike wonder as they navigate a collage of oddities that looks an awful lot like the USA circa 2011. Their world is populated by the likes of Bob Dylan, who doesn't quite live up to his hype; Anne Frank, who means well but is unable to teach a group of mothers-to-be how to fly; Noah, who is still haunted by the ark fiasco and is occasionally driven to drink; and Helen Phillips herself, in several different incarnations, who is trying to better



understand herself both as an artist and as a woman. Realistic stroke by realistic stroke, Helen Phillips has painted a surreal world. Or perhaps it is the other way around.

"And Yet They Were Happy" is an exposé within a love story. Through the young couple's eyes, and woven together by the progression of their relationship, it depicts human experience in all its shades, colors, and tricks of the light. Two sisters wish that they could inhabit an old painting. Projections are made onto the lives of the models on the cover of the LL Bean catalog. Nine oranges on the side of the highway are contemplated. This is life and it isn't - it simultaneously depicts the places we have all been and the places that we have all imagined in half-waking states but realized, after a cup of coffee, can never be.

In short, "And Yet They Were Happy" will confirm that the reader is not crazy. Because it sheds light on the more peripheral areas of consciousness, it creates a lovely feeling of understanding. It is like meeting an old friend for coffee or picking up a familiar melody; like watching history repeat itself or listening to a song that lines up with the music in your own head. I know that I, personally, felt a strange closeness to Helen Phillips by the time I had finished reading the book.

I would recommend "And Yet They Were Happy" to anyone who can appreciate both quality literature and the fragility and absurdity of life. (Yes, I'm paraphrasing Tolstoy.) Call it a gallery of marvels or call it a mural on a wall that goes on forever. Breathe. Even when the oranges you identified with are crushed by the wheels of a large vehicle, life will go on.

Whether Helen Phillips has written a novel or a collection of two-page vignettes is up for debate; my personal opinion is that she has done both and neither. The blurb on the cover of the book reads "a gallery of marvels" which suggests a series of impressive but presumably unrelated vignettes. The back cover of the book, however, bills it as a novel. In lieu of an "index" per se, on the book's back pages, you will find a long list of the various literary magazines where two-page vignettes were published prior to the book's completion. I refer to "And Yet They Were Happy" as a "book" because that is the only title that absolutely fits. "And Yet They Were Happy" is, for the time being, in a class by itself. Only time will tell whether or not it will inspire some number of similarly structured works.



Featured Title

How are King Arthur's knights, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, St. Thomas Becket, Henry VIII, a sexist tour-book writer, and the modern, independent woman all connected?

Through fifteen hundred years of mystery.

--A grisly secret kept for six hundred years by a mysterious triumvirate

--A monogram found on ancient weavings, statues, and stained-glass windows across England

--A fictional woman created in the twenty-first-century image...620 years ago

--An intrepid historian retracing the pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral, gathering clues -- and deadly enemies--along the way

PARADISE WALK

Mary Malloy

Let the woman tell her tale.

PARADISE WALK

A Lizzie Manning Mystery

Mary Malloy



Available now

[Read the prequel](#)

Win a FREE copy of the first Lizzie Manning Mystery, *The Wandering Heart*.

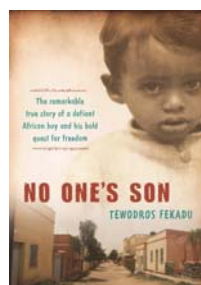
Send in your best answer to this question: If the remains of Thomas Becket were actually saved from Henry VIII's marauders -- as persistent legends claim -- who would have done so, and where could the remains have been hidden all this time?

Send your answer to marymalloy@leapfrogpress.com. The winner will also have the opportunity to ask Dr. Malloy three questions about her books, and receive a personal answer by email.



Upcoming Titles

No One's Son a memoir by Tewodros Fekadu * April 2012



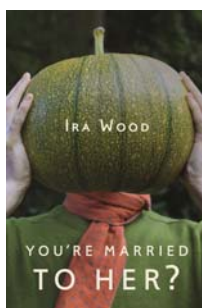
Born in the midst of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Civil War, Tewodros "Teddy" Fekadu survives abandonment and famine as his family flings him unwanted across borders and regions, into orphanages, and finally onto the streets of Addis Ababa. Spanning five countries and three continents, this is a tale of

defiance and triumph, and also of family love.

"An affirmation of life and the indestructibility of one man's will to make the most of it." --Ian Wynne, author of *The Pawn and Shadows by My Side*, former editor of Amnesty International's *Human Rights Defender*

"Teddy's life spans continents, cultures, ancient and urgent conflicts. We are doubly fortunate that he has the gifts to describe them so vividly."
--Phillip Adams, *The Australian*

You're Married to Her? essays by Ira Wood * August 2012



In a wildly self-skewering but oddly sympathetic narrative voice, Wood reimagines his early years with Marge Piercy in a series of chronologically linked essays, never failing to raise the question that few failed to ask: You're Married to Her?

With the brazen candor of Toby Young's *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*, and the wicked lunacy of David Sedaris, Wood tells tales of his first true love, who he told his parents were dead; his wildly idiotic affairs; his childhood dependence on speed; running for public office on a lark-and winning-only to find himself responsible for the government of a small town. Thirty years later he's still married to Her, confident enough to share, and laugh at, what men do when their behavior slips to the level of their self-esteem.

We welcome news from our authors and contest winners. Please let us know of your upcoming book events, new reviews, publication news, and anything else writing related.

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