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The Treefrog Tattler

from Leapfrog Press

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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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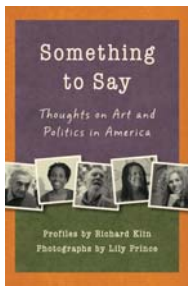
Face Time in the Age of E-Books by Li Miao Lovett

As a debut novelist, I'm lucky to have a publicist working on behalf of my book. But we writers know that unless you're Stephen King, books don't just sell themselves. Long after the honeymoon of seeing our book out and thinking "Hey, I'm a published author" it's up to us to pound the pavement and meet our audience.

My first job out of college was peddling drugs, the legal kind. Now my product is my book -- which won't cure ailments except for boredom and ennui. Face time is important even in the age of the Internet and e-books on the rise. I've made a few cold calls at local bookstores, and found out that booksellers are generally friendly. They haven't sent me away with a flourish of the hand, as some of the busy doctors' offices did when I represented a drug company.

I stopped by Borders in my hometown a few months before my book came out, and noticed that an entire bookshelf display dedicated to new fiction hard covers had been taken down. Chatting with a bookseller about this, I mentioned that my novel would be coming out, almost as an afterthought. He encouraged me to contact their book buyer. That was a serendipitous meeting, not a page out of my sales training manual.

As a pharmaceutical rep, I would be lucky to gain access to a medical office, where I'd wait until the doctor appeared to deliver my 30-second pitch. This came right out of the sales training videos: "So, Doctor, when you see that cholesterol patient who needs to 'up' his good HDLs, will you prescribe our drug Zaxalax?" (All successful meds have the letters X or Z, which the actual drug did not.) *Up yours*, I'm sure the doctor was thinking, on a few occasions.

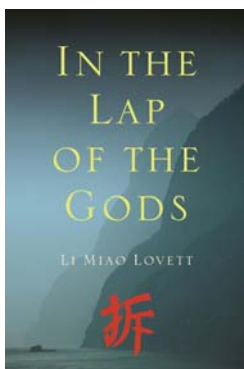


What I learned from those years of schlepping drug samples was that I needed to be genuine, and not sound like a walking commercial. Or the pesky telemarketer that you can easily hang up on. And the other lesson: I'm one fish in a big sea, so busy people need a good reason to give me a minute of their time. Months later, that same bookseller put me in touch with the general manager at this Borders. He was interested in reaching out to the diverse community of local bibliophiles, tourists, college students, and Chinese Americans who make up large numbers here. (That narrows my hometown down to a few places in the U.S.)

I tried something new at this reading: a slide show with photos from the ghost towns of the Yangtze where all these people have been displaced by the dam. And here's the other thing: my story can't be about "all these people" -- 1.4 million Chinese, to be precise. It's about a widower who now scavenges for a living. He rescues an abandoned baby girl on the eve of flooding. My photos capture the real life background of the novel: the ancient town of Fengdu reduced to rubble, a mother and her adopted boy, village women spinning rope. At other readings, people asked to see my photos so they can grasp these places that no longer exist. While it's not par for the course in fiction readings, I figured it's good to give the customer what he or she wants.

Another program about the rise of e-books aired today on public radio. It was all about the customer. We keep thinking that technology will replace paper, human contact, everything that we cast off as old school. Come on. Can we really replace people? Where will we go, if computers mediate every experience in the human world? For a new author, it's a lot of work to do readings, to schlep myself out to there as I'd once schlepped so many pill boxes. But this face-to-face thing is intoxicating, more so than that other Face-thing.

Li Miao Lovett is an award-winning writer whose essays and stories have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, Stanford Magazine, Earth Island Journal, and on KQED public radio. She has organized events for Words Without Borders showcasing the works of dissidents and censored writers. Her novel of contemporary China, [In the Lap of the Gods](#), was published by Leapfrog in November 2010. Visit Li's website, limiaolovett.com. Read the first two chapters [here](#).



Leapfrog News & Reviews

The profile "Quincy Troupe's American Gumbo" from Richard Klin and Lily Prince's [Something to Say](#) (April 2011) will be published in this spring's issue of *Rain Taxi Review of Books*. The profile of Howard Zinn, "A Great Faith in Human Beings," was published in the spring 2010 issue of *The Bloomsbury Review*.

Suzanne Kamata's [Losing Kei](#) (Leapfrog Press, January 2008) will be translated into Russian and published by Ripol Publishing.

Li Miao Lovett (*In the Lap of the Gods*) will be a featured speaker at the [International Rivers Foundation](#) to commemorate the [International Day of Rivers](#) on March 14.

Vickie Weaver, author of [Billie Girl](#) (September 2010), appeared on WISH TV's [Indystyle](#) (channel 8, Indianapolis) to show viewers how to make Billie Girl's famous cherry pie.

Michael Mirolla will be reading at the Italian American Writers Association reading series in New York in April 9, where he will officially launch [The Facility](#) in the US.

Please view our [Events Page](#) for upcoming author events that may be in your area.

The Leapfrog 2011 Fiction Contest is in full swing, with excellent entries coming in every day. See the [Contest Page](#) for details.

New Reviews

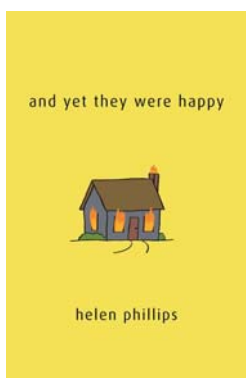
AND YET THEY WERE HAPPY Helen Phillips (LeapLit, May 2011)
Read the first fable [here](#). See the [book trailer](#). Visit the author's website: [helencphillips.com](#).

"Helen Phillips' brashly experimental debut novel charts via linked fables the course of a young couple who fall in love, survive many floods, get married, have fights, make mistakes, and create a family -- the whole shebang revealed in completely surreal yet oddly everyday prose."

--*Elle*

"The story of the world unfolds in bursts of imagination, tied together with the flavor and thematic structure of fables. The collection is made up entirely of two-page short stories, clumped together by theme. The first, "The Floods," introduces the end of the world by water, starting with a blowout party to which everyone's invited, and ending with a Snow White-inspired rumor that all the apples have been poisoned. "We hear of babies born with traces of twenty-seven poisons in their umbilical cords," Phillips writes. "We sit in the kitchen, eating nothing." There's quite a lot of humor in these stories, although it's very dark comedy indeed. And there's a lovely bit of universality to certain sections, some of the best being themes that examine fights, failures, mistakes and punishments. In the middle, between "The Floods" and "The Apocalypses," Phillips dwells on the cycles of family with a section that shines a light on the journey from bride to mother to the raising of offspring. Others are disturbing, portraying hauntings, monsters and other fantasies in ways that have to be read, and not described. Phillips' unique worldview and clarity of language make every story a treat, be it miniature portraits of Anne Frank or Charlie Chaplin, or a sad instructional manual about how to rid oneself of all possessions."

--*Kirkus*



"Milestones -- emotional, familial, biblical -- feature heavily in Phillips's imaginative debut. The stories are organized around themes -- floods, fights, punishments, "the Helens" -- and embark on marvelous flights of character and metaphor: in "flood #2" as the waters are rising, a despairing Noah walks into a bar, muttering, "I didn't get them all," while in "fight #2," a battling couple repeatedly take on bizarre transformations, he, for instance, into a rainstorm and she into a fire. The narrator of "fight #5" invites a statue of the Virgin Mary to a cup of tea, only to feel sharp disappointment at Mary's remarks regarding the narrator's emotional needs. The "far-flung family" episodes consist of an anecdote about ancestors building a covered wagon and heading west, and one about the king's daughter who has married "the clever yet dirty craftsman." "The envies" concerns the jealousy of two sisters of "The girls in Maxfield Parish

paintings," while "mistake #5" compels the narrator to find Santa, only to be rebuffed by the bitter old man. Mothers, weddings, and monsters are all treated with irreverence in this cunning work that winks at reality as it carves out its niche deep in fable territory."

--*Publishers Weekly*



The Art of Politics: An interview with Richard Klin and Lily Prince by Sarah Murphy

In his forthcoming book, *Something to Say: Thoughts on Art and Politics in America* (April 2011), author Richard Klin profiles 15 artists of varied media, seeking their input on "the intersection of art and politics."

His subjects range from poet Quincy Troupe to Pete Seeger to the late Howard Zinn, who died in January 2010. The artist Lily Prince photographed the subjects in black and white portraiture.

"The idea of art and politics has always attracted a lot of debate and conversation. There's also something very American about even having a discussion on fusing activism with art. It would be hard to imagine artists in, say, Mexico or Turkey, grappling with the concept of political art," he said.

"So, I wanted to go to the source: speak to active, political art-makers and ascertain what their feelings were." He added that he tried to be as expansive as possible in his definition of what is considered "political," avoiding political jargon.

Klin said his subjects were enthusiastic and generous, and no encouragement for participation was necessary. He made initial contact by a combination of sleuthing, Internet searches and luck, and they literally opened their doors, welcoming him and Prince into their homes and worlds.

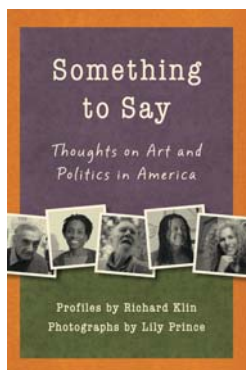
What surprised him most was their optimism and work ethic, despite whatever adversity they faced.

"Pete Seeger was blacklisted. Howard Zinn flew combat missions in World War II and was active in one political struggle after another. Yoko Ono faced the most vile sexism, much of it motivated, I think, by anti-Asian feelings. Quincy Troupe's formative years were underscored by an enormous amount of racism," Klin said.

"Who could blame them for feeling exhausted or despairing? Yet, they still carry on, as active as ever. Howard Zinn was obviously giving interviews right up until the end. It's awe-inspiring."

Klin was raised in an "intellectually vibrant" household, and was a voracious reader from a young age.

"Both my parents taught, my father painted in his spare time, and the



Writers on Writing
Wrong Is Part of the

Palette
by Michael S. A.
Graziano

For most of us language is something that mainly comes in through the ears and out the mouth. Even when we read, we imagine hearing it. When we write, we imagine saying it. Good writing has a rhythm that is derived from speech. It flows. It sounds in our heads like a voice telling a story. That is why extremely pedantic writing, the kind up with which we will not put (to borrow from Winston Churchill), is difficult to read and communicates poorly. Grammatical looseness, colloquialism, a bit of the vernacular, a roughness around the edges, will send English teachers into a rant and suck the red ink right out of the editor's pen, but when used carefully can actually contribute to good writing. It can provide readability and linguistic diversity. It lends *voice*. Note added: The present paragraph is not a good example. Dang nab it.

house was full of books. Nobody thought it was odd that a 12-year-old was reading *Candide*," he said.

Klin recalls reading John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* as the first time he was impacted by the power of art.

"I remember being absolutely devastated at the ending. It wasn't a pleasant feeling, but there was also the deep-down realization that somebody created these words, these characters; a writer had so much power, he could really affect someone's emotions," he said.

Klin gave Prince creative authority when it came to the portraits for *Something to Say*.

"The photographs were in the same spirit as the writing. I didn't want to do a cut-and-dried Q&A; the idea was to convey a sense of the artists and their art. Lily is a painter, and her photos weren't intended as an exercise in photojournalism; there was a painter's ethos, and I think it very effectively adds a sense of each interviewee."

Prince said she primarily let the subjects speak to her through the photos, rather than controlling the outcome.

"It was important to me to photograph people in their own space whenever possible, so that the energy of their personal environment could come through. People tend to be more relaxed that way, and when the subject in a portrait is more relaxed, it enables his or her essence to shine through," she said.

"Also, when in their own home or studio, the objects that fill their daily lives help inform us of who they are."

For the others, she created settings in which she felt they would connect, and also convey something about their essence.

"I shot the cartoonist Jen Sorenson in a comics store in New York City, right under some cartoon lunch boxes, for she loved *Peanuts* when growing up," she said. "Pete Seeger is placed outside near his beloved Hudson River in his hometown."

Prince feels that black and white photography is a more evocative medium than color.

"It allows for the spirit of the sitter to emerge without the distraction of color. And the contrast of black and white creates more drama," she said. "The drama that is created by light and shadow seems to be a more natural, albeit theatrical, expression of emotion."

[Something to Say](#): Thoughts on art and politics in America (Leapfrog Press, April 2011). Artists profiled: Pete Seeger, the late Howard Zinn, Ron Nyswaner, Maysson Zayid, Quincy Troupe, Freddy Rodriguez, Gini Reticker, Jen Sorensen, Sheryl Oring, Jacqueline Woodson, Didi Emmons, John Yau, Franklin Stein, Alicia Svigals, and Yoko Ono.

Richard Klin's writing has been featured on NPR's *All Things Considered* and has appeared in the *Forward*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, the *Bloomsbury Review*, *Parabola*, *Chronogram*, and online at *January*, among other places. Klin is known for his interview-profiles, which have included David Shapiro, Noam Chomsky, Hugh Nissenson, and Russell Banks, among many

others.

Lily Prince has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally and has been awarded commissions by numerous hotels and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. She is an associate professor of art at William Paterson University. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine, the *Newark Star-Ledger*, *New American Paintings*, and other media.



Make Your Own Video Trailer

by K. Stephens

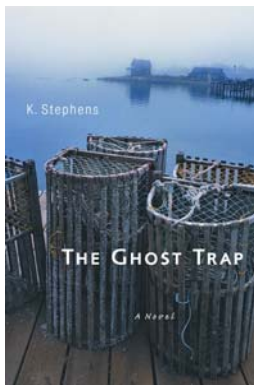
Book trailers are one of the hottest things authors can have in their promotional tool kit. While anyone can use the technology to generate one, it takes a different understanding of how to pitch your plot to an audience in a two-minute movie, using well-placed images, video, music...and striking micro narration.

In looking through a lot of video trailers online, I found a lot of homemade (iMovie) trailers but had never before found a quality, free video generating site with knockout production value, until I stumbled across Animoto (www.animoto.com). What I loved about this site was how crisp and technologically sophisticated the videos were without us having to know how it all worked. It's drag and drop. You select from a range of video styles. You upload your own video clips and photographs. You control the types of effects, backgrounds, and transitions with the click of a button. You pick the music you want to use (either your own mp3 or their library of 12 genres.)

Like most online services, Animoto offers a free option (you can basically experiment with creating a 30-second video but can't export it) and then offers two higher levels -- the Plus version: \$5/month and Pro version: \$39/month. However, there's one more option they don't outwardly advertise. You can create a video and pay for each one individually (I think my 1.5 minute video was like \$3 or \$4), which is the most ideal option if you just want one book trailer. With this option I was able to share it to Facebook/Twitter and other online platforms directly from Animoto, as well as export its embedding code to my own website, Amazon and Goodreads. The only downside is that you can't get rid of the Animoto logo at the end of the video unless you are willing to pay the Pro price. It hasn't been a big issue anyway. Try it. I'd love to see what other writers come up with and maybe we can all showcase it on Leapfrog's site!

K. Stephens is a Maine culture writer and author of [The Ghost Trap](#) (LeapLit, 2009). You can see her book trailer [here](#), or [read the first chapter](#). Visit K's website, www.theghosttrap.com.





Upcoming Titles

How to Stop Loving Someone

Joan Connor (LeapLit, October 2011)

Winner, 2010 Leapfrog Fiction Contest adult fiction

"Excellent and lively. There is a sharp wit in many of these stories, the apt metaphor, the turn of phrase that pleases and surprises." --Marge Piercy, poet, novelist, and memoirist.

"[C]andor, bracing wit, and the kind of skewering insight that could kill if she let it." --Rosellen Brown, author of *Half a Heart*

Connor's collection investigates love and loss, sex, family, and the ways they echo back through memory, sometimes to comfort and sometimes to bite. Some comic, some dark, the stories range from lyrical to laugh-out-loud funny. The title story is a mock self-help manual on how to fall out of love. "Men in Brown" is a rollicking account of a woman infatuated with her UPS man. "Aground" is a dark account of male lust and violence on a lonely island in Maine.

Joan Connor is the author of three previous story collections: *History Lessons*, *We Who Live Apart*, and *Here on Old Route 7*.

Paradise Walk

Mary Malloy (LeapSci, November 2011)

The eagerly awaited sequel to [The Wandering Heart](#), *Paradise Walk* puts historian Lizzie Manning in England once again. Following the path of a medieval pilgrimage, Lizzie finds unexpected danger. Chaucer may have based his "Wife of Bath" on a real woman, whose descendant holds certain artifacts. But can the investigation lead to something more sinister? Are the bones of St. Thomas Becket, believed to have been destroyed nearly 600 years earlier, hidden in Canterbury Cathedral, and is someone willing to kill to protect the secret?

Praise for *The Wandering Heart*:

Malloy mixes history and fantasy with flair and delivers a wonderfully satisfying puzzler." --*Publishers Weekly*

"Mystery a la gothic . . . Historian Malloy does her research proud, inserting humanity into the too-often dry history some of us suffered through in school." --*Mystery Scene*

Mary Malloy is the author of four books on maritime history: *Devil on the Deep Blue Sea*, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, *Boston Men on the Northwest Coast*, and *A Most Remarkable Enterprise*.

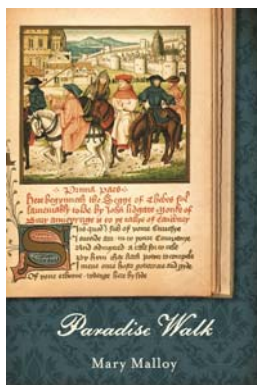
Riding on Duke's Train

Mick Carlon (LeapKids, January 2012)

Winner, 2010 Leapfrog Fiction Contest children's fiction

Nine-year-old Danny, recently orphaned, hitches a ride on a train one



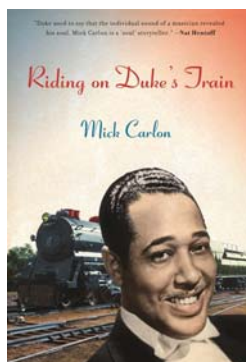


night in 1937 Georgia. Turns out the train belongs to Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra, who bring the boy to Harlem. Through Danny's eyes, the reader meets some of America's finest musicians: Johnny Hodges, Rex Stewart, Tricky Sam Nanton, Cootie Williams, Ivie Anderson, Barney Bigard, Harry Carney, and, of course, Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. The boy later accompanies the band on its 1939 European tour, when the musicians are briefly held in Germany. Says the noted jazz critic Nat Hentoff: "I knew Duke Ellington for over 25 years. Duke was my mentor. The Ellington in this book is the man I knew."

"Duke used to say that the individual sound of a musician revealed his soul. Mick Carlon is a 'soul' storyteller." --Nat Hentoff

"A ripping good yarn. . . . Plunges the reader into the world of Duke Ellington and the America of 1939." --Brian Morton, author of *The Penguin Guide to Jazz*

"Wonderfully convincing and authentic characterizations. . . . A thoroughly enjoyable read." --Dan Morgenstern, author of *Living with Jazz*



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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