



## Little Labors

By Rivka Galchen

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**Rivka Galchen's *Little Labors* is a droll and dazzling compendium of observations, stories, lists, and brief essays about babies and literature**

Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*? a key inspiration for Rivka Galchen's new book? contains a list of "Things That Make One Nervous." And wouldn't the blessed event top almost anyone's list?

*Little Labors* is a slanted, enchanted literary miscellany. Varying in length from just a sentence or paragraph to a several-page story or essay, Galchen's puzzle pieces assemble into a shining, unpredictable, mordant picture of the ordinary-extraordinary nature of babies and literature. Anecdotal or analytic, each part opens up an odd and tender world of wonder. The 47 Ronin; the black magic of maternal love; babies morphing from pumas to chickens; the quasi-repellent concept of "women writers"; origami-ophilia in Oklahoma as a gateway drug to a lifelong obsession with Japan; discussions of favorite passages from the Heian masterpieces *Genji* and *The Pillow Book*; the frightening prevalence of orange as today's new chic color for baby gifts; Frankenstein as a sort of baby; babies gold mines; babies as tiny Godzillas ...

Little Labors—atomized and exploratory, conceptually byzantine and freshly forthright—delights.

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## Little Labors By Rivka Galchen Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“*Little Labors* is a short, beguiling book about babies. About babies in art (with wrongly shaped heads), about babies in literature (rare, often monstrous), and about the arrival of a baby in author Rivka Galchen’s apartment. It is not a novel, nor a memoir, nor exactly is it an essay. It is more a wunderkabinett of baby-related curios. There are anecdotes about the effort of obtaining a passport for the baby, about homeless men’s reaction to the baby, about a mean neighbor who repeatedly asks whether the baby is abnormally large. There are lists, of authors with and without kids, and of “mother writers” which includes Elena Ferrante and Sarah Manguso, and also, “two of the most celebrated,” Karl Ove Knausgaard and Louie C.K. There are ruminations on class, taste, Godzilla, Rumpelstiltskin, the color orange, screens. It is a peculiar book, and astonishing in its effect.” (Boston Globe)

“No training wheels, no banisters, no practice breaths, Galchen drives right in to a fantastical series of meditations, observations, mysterious epiphanies, and failures of belief brought on in a mother, presumably Galchen, caring for her infant daughter, often called “the puma.” Galchen does something more profound than tackle motherhood; she utterly reinvents and reanimates the subject.” (Christopher Bollen - Interview Magazine)

“An engaging mind offers reflections on being a mother, being a writer, and having a baby.” (Kirkus Reviews)

“Galchen is, for my money, one of the most gifted stylists writing in American English today. Her funniness is otherworldly; she is the reigning champion of litotes, or understatement for effect. Preternaturally deft, Galchen can do almost anything with next to nothing.” (Los Angeles Review of Books)

“As Galchen adeptly demonstrates, the pram in the hall is no longer the sombre enemy of good art?ignoring it is.” (Gavin Tomson - *Maisonneuve*)

“This essay collection from fiction and science writer Rivka Galchen is not your mother's motherhood lit. Brief, gemlike reflections on adjusting to life under the rule of a baby daughter (called ‘the puma’) are interwoven with literary and historical references. It's a book that will ring both familiar and strange.” (Anya Kamenetz - NPR)

“Rivka Galchen (*Atmospheric Disturbances*) brings both humor and serious inquiry to this collection of short vignettes about the curious nature of babies and the experience of becoming a mother [...] Each literary morsel is imbued with Galchen’s unique wit and charm. The book is an endearing compilation of social criticism, variously contentious, commonplace, funny, and incisive.” (Publishers Weekly)

“Galchen is an elegant and careful writer.” (Slate)

“A book of extraordinary savour, with nearly every sentence calling for an emphatic underline. [...] *Little Labors* is a declaration of power in a culture where pregnant women and women with babies are cast under a cloak of invisibility until they normalize: the baby becoming autonomous, the mother less obviously attached to a source of endless vulnerability. (Galchen mentions how on *I Love Lucy*, the actors weren’t even allowed to utter the word “pregnant.”) Her story is a surreptitious rejection of that invisibility, claiming her own power as mother by disappearing her partner completely. In doing so, she sends her own stark message of the

way mothers are often deleted from the narrative, and the sense upon finishing this tiny tome is that it is indeed very small, but not in the least bit minor.” (The National Post)

“In *Little Labors*, a highly original book of essays and observations, Rivka Galchen writes, “The world seemed ludicrously, suspiciously, adverbially sodden with meaning.” The birth of her daughter, she observes, “made me again more like a writer ... precisely as she was making me into someone who was, enduringly, not writing.” [...] I adore Galchen’s quiet, and the bravery of this book’s fragments. You get the sly sense reading this book that you are not seeing the whole writer; there is a sleight of hand ? something only partially revealed ? so that the fragments glow more. Her kaleidoscopic subjects leap from the literary to the mundane and back again. In discussing the form of “The Pillow Book,” an 11th-century miscellany written by a Japanese lady of the court, Galchen writes that she associates the book with “the ‘small’ as opposed to the ‘minor.’” This is an important distinction, and, I think, a defense of her own form. [...] Galchen writes of children: “Their arrival feels supernatural, they seem to come from another world, life near them takes on a certain unaccountable richness, and they are certain, eventually, to leave you.” Given the tenderness of that situation (life’s richness or design flaw), how can we as writers, and as people, not pay attention? I am happy that Galchen did, and I am confident that many mothers (and other sleepless readers) will pick up this book and feel that they have found an unexpectedly intimate friend.” (The New York Times Book Review)

“To read Rivka Galchen is to enter a wonderland where the bizarre and the mundane march in unlikely lockstep.” (Michael Lindgren - The Washington Post)

“A brilliant young writer.” (Elle)

“Galchen’s sentences catch your attention and hold it with a tight fist: Delicious.” (Alan Cheuse - NPR)

“Galchen has a knack for taking a thread and fraying it, so that a sentence never quite ends up where you expect.” (James Wood - The New Yorker)

#### About the Author

RIVKA GALCHEN’s 2008 first novel *Atmospheric Disturbances* and her 2014 story collection *American Innovations* were both New York Times Best Books of the Year. She received her MD from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. “Conspicuously talented” (Time), Galchen lives in New York City.

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#### James Goodman:

Book is written, printed, or outlined for everything. You can recognize everything you want by a publication. Book has a different type. We all know that that book is important matter to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading ability was fluently. A guide *Little Labors* will make you to be smarter. You can feel a lot more confidence if you can know about every thing. But some of you think which open or reading some sort of book make you bored. It is not necessarily make you fun. Why they might be thought like that? Have you seeking best book or appropriate book with you?

**Jennifer Jones:**

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**Marcy Madison:**

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**Dena Ramirez:**

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