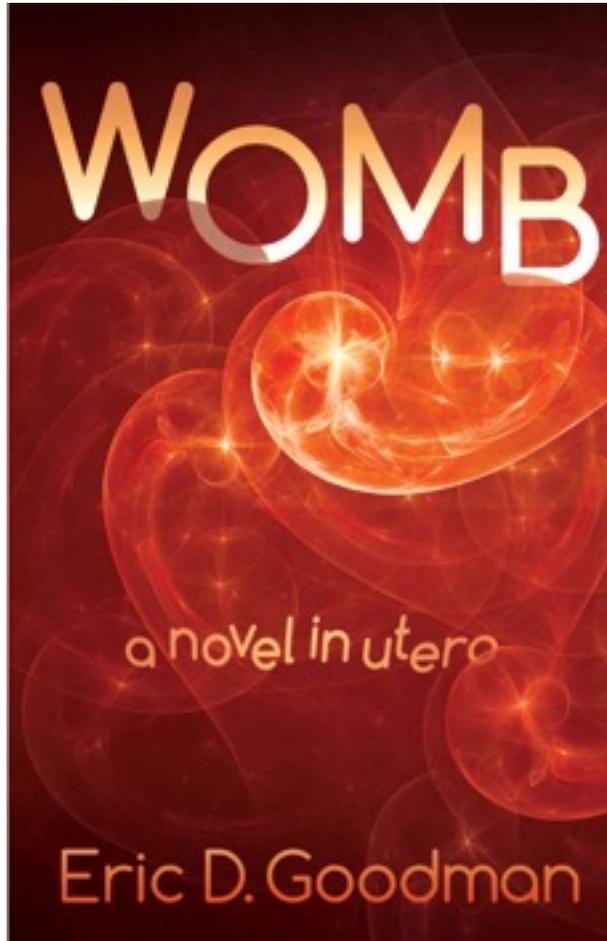


Womb

a novel in utero



by Eric D. Goodman

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About The Novel

Quick Pitch:

Explore the world from a unique viewpoint. *Womb* reveals how easily life can be lost and, just as easily, how life can be celebrated.

Description:

Penny is reluctant to tell her husband, Jack, that she's pregnant. With dead-end jobs and unfulfilled lives, she believes that they're not ready to support a child. When Jack finds out the truth about their child's conception, Penny must reevaluate the priorities in her life. With unpredictable twists and thought-provoking fetus commentary, the narrator shares his bumpy journey to birth from the all-knowing perspective of the womb.

About Eric D. Goodman



Short Bio:

Eric D. Goodman has been writing practically since he emerged from the womb. In addition to *Womb: a novel in utero*, Eric is the author of *Tracks: A Novel in Stories* and *Flightless Goose*, a storybook for children. His short fiction, travel stories, and nonfiction have been widely published. Born in California, he's lived in Baltimore for nearly 20 years, where he writes about trains, exotic animals gone wild, and life in utero, among other subjects. Find him at www.EricDGoodman.com or [www.Facebook.com/EricDGoodman](https://www.facebook.com/EricDGoodman).

Long Bio:

Eric D. Goodman is an American writer of literary and commercial fiction, children's literature, travel writing, and nonfiction. He has been writing practically since he emerged from his mother's womb. When a short story assignment turned him onto the craft of fiction writing in the third grade, he was hooked. Born in San Jose, California, Eric lived from coast to coast and overseas before settling in Baltimore, Maryland, which he has called home for nearly 20 years.

Eric regularly reads his fiction on Baltimore's NPR station, WYPR, and at book festivals and literary events. His work has appeared in a number of publications, including *The Baltimore Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Writers Weekly*, *The Potomac*, *Grub Street*, *JMWW*, *Scribble Magazine*, *The Arabesques Review*, *Syndic Literary Journal*, *Brooklyn Voice*, *The Literary Nest*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Crack the Spine*, and *New Lines from the Old Line State: An Anthology of Maryland Writers*, among others.

Eric is the author of *Womb: a novel in utero* (Merge Publishing, 2017), *Tracks: A Novel in Stories* (Atticus Books, 2011), and *Flightless Goose*, a storybook for children (Writer's Lair Books, 2008). *Tracks* won the Gold Medal for Best Fiction in the Mid-Atlantic Region from the Independent Publishers Book Awards (IPPY).

Eric co-founded the popular *Lit & Art Reading Series* at the Watermark Gallery in 2007, which he continues to curate and run several times each year. He also publishes *Writeful: a weblog for writers and readers*, which he began in 2005.

Learn more about Eric and his writing at www.EricDGoodman.com. Enjoy his blog at www.Writeful.blogspot.com. Like him at www.Facebook.com/EricDGoodman.

Q&A

Why do you write?

Eric: I write because I need to. I think you'll find that a lot of writers would give you the same answer, or similar answers. For me, writing is like an impulse, something as much a part of me as my sense of self.

Steinbeck said: "I nearly always write—just as I nearly always breathe." It's like that for me. I like to say, "I don't just write for a living; I live for writing." That's very true. I don't need to write every moment of every day—I love to spend time with my family and friends, in good conversation. I love to travel, to explore, and to read books and watch movies. But even when I'm not writing, the writer inside me is at work, examining every detail as potential material for a short story.

Womb isn't your conventional novel, given that its narrator isn't even born as the story progresses. What inspired you to write a novel like *Womb*?

Eric: I've written my share of conventional stuff, too, and probably will again. But I find that I'm drawn to unusual things. My first novel was a "novel in stories," with stand-alone chapters that merged to form a novel. Other books I've written (still in progress) include a young child narrator (after the leader of a workshop said it couldn't be done and put me up to the challenge), a story from multiple points of view that include people and animals, and an infiltration book in which readers don't know who the narrator is until the end.

A literary agent once asked me, "Why don't you just write a regular book with one narrator and a story that goes from A to B." I have and will. I just find that I like a challenge of weird perspectives and structure.

Like trying to narrate an entire book from inside another person?

Eric: Exactly. I started the first draft of *Womb* a decade ago. At the time, I had just finished reading Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* and was impressed by her narrator. In the first line of the book, she matter-of-factly explains that she was murdered when she was 16. That inspired me to come up with an unusual narrator of my own. I didn't have to look very far for a muse, because my wife was pregnant with our second child, Alex. I'd also been reading scientific literature about how babies can listen and react to stimuli outside—music, voices, activities. A unique narrator was born.

Is there a social or political message to this book?

Eric: No. That's the elephant in the womb that I feel like I should address: this book is in no way meant to take a political stand on the pro-choice/pro-life issue. But it does come up in the book since it's a relevant subject that can't be avoided. The mother is considering getting an abortion, and the narrator, obviously, wants to survive. In part it's just his survival instinct, but beyond that he feels he can make life better for his parents by sharing what he knows. Some characters try to persuade his mom in one direction, others offer conflicting advice. But that is subtle, and not the point of the book. The seed of this story is really about one character's personal struggle and his desire to meet his parents on the outside and help better their lives. If the book does have a social message, it's probably best described in the narrator's voice. "The meaning of life is this: Chill. Relax. Enjoy it right now, because it will be over before you know it."

Explain how a baby can have the knowledge and perspective needed to narrate a book.

Eric: The premise is that a person in utero is still connected to the collective consciousness—the things that are generally known by all people of a society. When a child is born, the brain has to devote resources to bodily functions, motor skills, and learning to do things. But while still in utero, the brain is fully free to explore. The narrator knows universal things, like classic literature and film, philosophy and science, but not specific things outside the collective consciousness, like what the neighbors had for dinner or what the aspiring author across town wrote last week. So the main character has his own reality as a person, and can tap into the general knowledge that would probably make him a champion on *Jeopardy!*

That's an interesting theory.

Eric: Of course, it's fiction. Alice Sebold probably doesn't believe people can look down from heaven to follow their murders, but it makes for good storytelling. J.R.R. Tolkien didn't believe that dragons and hobbits really existed—although I did read a recent article about hobbit-like remains being discovered, so you never know.

Do you have a writing routine?

Eric: When it comes to writing, and probably life in general, I'm an extremist. I'm all for balance, but I tend to balance in weeks, not days or hours. I've never been a "write every day" author. For example, if I'm working on a first draft, second draft, or revisions of a novel, I'm full in. I take time off from my day job (writing nonfiction) and work 14-hour days for a few days or even a few weeks at a time. When I'm on these writing spells, I submerge myself in the subject. I read books related to the subject, watch documentaries and movies that relate. I talk about it and drive my family crazy. Then, I put it on the back burner and don't think about it for weeks or months—sometimes years—at a time. Then, I might go a few weeks or months when I'm not writing fiction at all. Nonfiction writing is still a part of my daily work, but it's easy for me to put my fiction aside without feeling like I'm neglecting it. I think that time on the back burner is an important part of the process. Meanwhile, things are germinating in the back of my mind, too, so when I come back to my manuscript, I do so with fresh ideas.

You mentioned that you wrote the first draft of *Womb* 10 years ago. That's a long time on the back burner.

Eric: I don't plan it that way, but since I tend to have a lot of projects on the back burner at a time, sometimes they take that long from first draft to publication. It was the same with *Tracks* and *Flightless Goose*. When I'm submerged in my writing, it usually only takes me a month or so to write a first draft. But then it goes on the back burner, sometimes for years before I see it again. I'd say *Womb* went through a few rewrites during that 10-year period, but part of the process was finding an agent and finding a publisher. I probably have about 10 novel drafts in metaphorical drawers right now. Hopefully some of them will see the light of day—publication—within a few years of writing. But there are others that may be 30 years old by the time they're published, if they're published at all. I take the long view.

You've probably heard that Ian McEwan has a new book out narrated by a baby-to-be. What are your thoughts on the competition?

Eric: I've always admired Ian McEwan's fiction and look forward to reading his book, *Nutshell*. I don't see it as competition. In fact, I think readers of one will enjoy the other. I'm certain our books are very different, even if they share similar narrators. It's funny, but I think it's common for authors to come up with truly original ideas only to find out that someone else has done it, too. When *Tracks* came out, the novel-in-stories was out of style, but by the time it was published, they were in again. My next book, *Setting the Family Free*, involves wild animals being released into cities and communities, and, as I was finishing the first draft, James Patterson's *Zoo* was published.

It couldn't have been more comic timing: I was at the airport, coming home from a writing residency where I had just finished the first draft of the novel, and I saw *Zoo* at the airport bookstore. Very different premises and presentations, but similar on a surface level, just like with

Womb and *Nutshell*. This kind of thing happens all the time. I hope that *Womb* and *Nutshell* will share common readers and that the novels complement one another.

What are you working on now?

Eric: I imagine I'll be spending a lot of time promoting *Womb*, doing readings, interviews, and book events. In addition to fiction, I usually have some travel writing in the works as well. Right now, I'm working on some armchair travel stories about my recent time in China, Portugal, Estonia, and out west.

As for fiction, I have a few books in various states of revision. One is *Setting the Family Free*, about a private reserve of exotic pets being released into the community of Chillicothe, Ohio. Part of the novel follows the Sheriff and his assembled team of hunters and animal experts as they track the lions, tigers, bears, leopards, panthers, wolves, and other dangerous animals as far off as nearby Portsmouth and Columbus. Part of the novel follows the zookeeper and his wife. Other sections are in the form of fictional news broadcasts, newspaper articles and excerpts, press conference transcripts, political tapes, and quotes from experts and eyewitnesses. Some chapters are told from the perspective of the animals themselves.

Another book I'm actively working on is my first thriller, *The Color of Jadeite*, set in China. In it, a retired federal worker turned private eye goes on a treasure hunt in China—from Beijing to Shanghai, Xi'an to Hangzhou—trying to find a Ming-era artifact belonging to Emperor Xuande, and getting into a lot of trouble in the process.

I'm working on another children's book, too. But for now, the focus is on *this* child: *Womb*.

Author and/or publisher is available for interviews, guest blogs, readings, etc.

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