



# Lamb

By Bonnie Nadzam

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**Winner of the 2011 Flaherty-Dunnan First Novel Prize**

*Lamb* traces the self-discovery of David Lamb, a narcissistic middle aged man with a tendency toward dishonesty, in the weeks following the disintegration of his marriage and the death of his father. Hoping to regain some faith in his own goodness, he turns his attention to Tommie, an awkward and unpopular eleven-year-old girl. Lamb is convinced that he can help her avoid a destiny of apathy and emptiness, and even comes to believe that his devotion to Tommie is in her best interest. But when Lamb decides to abduct a willing Tommie for a road trip from Chicago to the Rockies, planning to initiate her into the beauty of the mountain wilderness, they are both shaken in ways neither of them expects.

*Lamb* is a masterful exploration of the dynamics of love and dependency that challenges the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood, confronts preconceived notions about conventional morality, and exposes mankind's eroded relationship with nature.

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## **Lamb By Bonnie Nadzam Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

### Questions for Bonnie Nadzam on *Lamb*

**Q:** *Lamb* deals with a complicated relationship between a child and an adult that blurs the lines between friendship and intimacy. How did you approach such a difficult subject?

**A:** The age difference between them is not that essential to me; what is essential to me is the way they communicate, the way Tommie is seduced by the same narratives and lies with which *Lamb* seems to seduce even himself. In this final draft, some of the more interesting work I think the age difference accomplishes involves the way it points to different kinds of human vulnerability on one hand, and on the other hand, a very common adolescent human desire—regardless of age—to experience at any cost something like beauty, something like love, something bigger than ordinary daily life seems to offer. That’s a powerfully seductive desire—and so ubiquitous it’s easy to miss it’s influence in our lives. It can be a helpful compass point, a misguiding force, or—as I think it is for Tommie and *Lamb*—both at once. Adolescence is really a state of mind, which Tommie is just entering, and which *Lamb* seems hopelessly trapped in—and it’s not something that’s easy to outgrow in contemporary American culture. I would hope beyond a knee-jerk reaction to the age difference, some of these issues would become more engaging for readers than, say, a mistaken first association with something like *Lolita*.

**Q:** David *Lamb* behaves badly at times, and yet, there is a sympathetic quality about him. Are you afraid that readers won’t understand your decision to portray him in a somewhat compassionate light?

**A:** Wow, no. That never crossed my mind. I wasn’t consciously trying to be compassionate, rather to show, as much as possible, that someone making decisions like *Lamb* doesn’t make them because he thinks or believes they are the wrong decisions to make. I do know other people—and recognize in myself—a capacity for self-delusion that can make almost any horrible thing seem like a good idea, perhaps even divinely inspired. There’s nothing special about *Lamb* behaving badly.

**Q:** *Lamb* has a voyeuristic feel. Was it a conscious decision to write in third person to give the reader some distance from what is unfolding?

**A:** The questions of who is telling it and why are as vexing for me as I imagine they’d be for any reader. Actually, it isn’t really a third-person point of view. It’s first-person, albeit a distant one, yes. Every now and then this narrator shows his or her hand. I would love to hear from some reader just exactly who this narrator is. Of course I have some theories, myself.

**Q:** *Lamb* decides to “save” Tommie by taking her into the wilderness. Do you think that nature played a role in the evolution of their relationship?

**A:** I think Tommie and *Lamb*, both, are hoping to find something that transcends ordinary life, or contemporary American culture—and not only their lives in it, but their dependency on and service to that culture, as well. To find it, they look to each other and to this odd, supposedly divine or special romantic friendship with each other; they also look out of the suburbs and into “the West.” Their assumptions about nature and life in the West are so convoluted it’s hard to tease them apart. For example, the very idealized

image of ranch life beyond Nebraska that Lamb paints for Tommie is what precludes that particular Western landscape from being an escape from anything like familiar American culture. They see more cattle, cattle tracks and cow patties than anything. The native and endangered species exist mostly in sentences, not in the world they're traversing. If their friendship seems somehow analogous to the state of what was once a "wild" landscape, I think that's only because it's not really possible for anyone—or any two—to be ahead of (or behind) their time. All of their longing and delusion are parts of the age in which they're living. There is no escape, there is nowhere to go. I do believe they experience some of this, too, about what is valuable—even miraculous—about their relationship and degraded landscape.

**Q:** Were there certain writers or books that you turned to for inspiration while writing *Lamb*?

**A:** I was studying Eighteenth Century literature for a PhD when writing this. Perhaps there's some Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding influence. I would love to think so. I hope there isn't any John Locke in it. I also read an embarrassingly huge amount of Louis L'Amour books while working on the manuscript.

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### **Featured Review by Aimee Bender**

**Aimee Bender is the author of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake***

Bonnie Nadzam's debut, *Lamb*, satisfies a reader on so many levels. For one, it reads like a thriller, and there's a tense and compelling drive to the prose that turns the pages. What will happen to this older man and this girl on the cusp of adolescence as they head into the American West? How unsettled will I be? But then there's no easy answer or moment to make it into an easy-to-dismiss kind of thriller--Nadzam makes sure to keep all the novel's territory in a delicate, complex and unsettling moral territory. I found myself wanting to have easier answers than were offered to me, and I truly appreciated being thwarted so expertly in this way.

And Nadzam's prose is just gorgeous--she writes about people and skies and mountains and landscapes with incredible precision and appreciation of beauty. A reader can swim in these sentences and soak up the landscape via the prose with great pleasure. Nadzam's operating on these three levels and excelling over and over in all three--her language is fine-tuned, she's keenly aware of plot and tension, and most of all, she refuses to compromise in terms of letting us, the readers, off the hook morally.

This is a remarkable debut, by a writer to watch. Both Tommy and Lamb are characters who linger with the reader, and I found myself caring deeply for Tommy, whose eagerness and vulnerability soar off the page.

What helps us grow and stretches us? What goes too far? Who are our teachers and who hurts us? Can a person be both, and how? What are the stories we tell ourselves? All these kinds of questions hover in the air long after the last page turns.

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### **Review**

"A disturbing and elusive novel about manipulation and desperate friendship." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"*Lamb* is a wonder of a novel. Bonnie Nadzam has offered an exploration of interpersonal and sexual manipulation and power that left me reeling. This is a novel about responsibility, complicity, blame, neglect, and finally love." —Percival Everett, author of *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* and *Erasure*

"*Lamb* is one of the most powerful and original novels I have read in years. Beautiful, evocative, and

brilliant.” —T.C. Boyle, author of *When the Killing's Done*

“Bonnie Nadzam manages to write gorgeous prose about people and skies and mountains while still creating tension and suspense on the level of a thriller, while also walking us into complex and delicate and unsettling moral territory with brilliant subtlety and insight. LAMB is a remarkable debut, by a writer to watch. I will be thinking about these characters for a long time.” —Aimee Bender, author of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

#### About the Author

BONNIE NADZAM has published fiction in many journals. Lamb is her first novel.

### Users Review

#### From reader reviews:

##### Raymond Dahms:

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