

★ **Goodbye Lemon**

ADAM DAVIES. Riverhead, \$14 paper
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When Jack Tennant, a frustrated 32-year-old adjunct lecturer and part-time women's shelter night supervisor, returns to a Baltimore suburb to confront the wealthy WASP clan he cut off contact with 15 years before, we know what to expect: emotions will erupt, secrets will be revealed and some resolution will be found. Yet Davies (*The Frog King*) makes it all happen in such a fresh, smart way the conventions of this conceit are almost forgotten. Ostensibly visiting to help care for his father following a debilitating stroke (and to satisfy his girlfriend, Hahva, who thinks he needs closure), Jack sees his return as his last chance to confront the old man—who is fully conscious but entirely paralyzed. Jack blames his father, Guilford Tennant, a stern ex-marine and alcoholic industry executive, for Jack's brother Dexter's death at six (Jack was five; Dexter was known as Lemon) and for ending Jack's chance to study piano at Juilliard. Of course, things don't develop as Jack expects, and how Jack gets to the point of wanting to love his father "exactly the way he deserves" is a story that soars on the same jet stream of inspired wordplay and literary tics that made *The Frog King* a dazzling read. Bitter, smart and soaked in dark humor, Jack and his narrative harbor enormous heart. (Aug. 1)

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH ADAM DAVIES

Looking and Spilling

Adam Davies's polarizing single-guy-in-the-city debut, *The Frog King*, had Brett Easton Ellis comparing him to Jay McInerney. His follow-up, *Goodbye Lemon*, out in August, earned a starred review in *PW* (May 8).

How did *The Frog King's* reception affect the development of your latest novel?

I had lived and worked for so many years in freakish, Gollumish solitude, and then all of a sudden the book was being discussed in newspapers and magazines and on TV and radio. One reviewer reproduced my photo with the caption, "Even this guy's author photo is irritating." A reader sent me a Polaroid of *The Frog King* impaled with an ice pick. I had no resistance to bad press and these responses depressed me for weeks. And a positive review elated me—to the point of uselessness at the keyboard—for weeks also. It took me a while to stabilize.

What do you think you did right in *Goodbye Lemon* that you didn't in *The Frog King*?

When I was editing *The Frog King*, I realized that one of my favorite words is apparently "apotropaic." It means "intended to ward off evil." I used it about seven times. It's absurd. I had to delete six of them, and it broke my heart a little bit. In *Goodbye Lemon* I didn't use it once. I think *Goodbye Lemon* is also fuller. And funnier. Maybe sadder.

How closely does the dysfunctional clan in *Goodbye Lemon* resemble your own family?

In the novel the father suffers a totally debilitating stroke and his estranged son, must come home to help. In real life, my father came within days, possibly hours, of dying. Our relationship at that time was agonized, but when he came so close to death, I discovered that he was not the man I thought he was. And neither was I. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Calpurnia warns Scout to be careful as she carries a silver pitcher of coffee. "Don't look at it and you won't spill it." But I think she wanted to spill it. I know I do. Ultimately, like most writers, I think, I had to. *Goodbye Lemon*, I suppose, is my way of spilling it.

What's next?

I am working on a third novel, a romantic comedy/heist story about a security guard. I've been doing a lot of research on the international black market for stolen art and "testing" museum security. I've staked out some galleries, I've fiddled with a few items at the Met. So far, so good: no scuffles, no arrests. No one's on to me anywhere. You aren't running a picture, right?

—Marc Schultz

