



Modern Lovers

Emma Straub

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From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Vacationers*, a smart, highly entertaining novel about a tight-knit group of friends from college—their own kids now going to college—and what it means to finally grow up well after adulthood has set in.

Friends and former college bandmates Elizabeth and Andrew and Zoe have watched one another marry, buy real estate, and start businesses and families, all while trying to hold on to the identities of their youth. But nothing ages them like having to suddenly pass the torch (of sexuality, independence, and the ineffable alchemy of cool) to their own offspring.

Back in the band's heyday, Elizabeth put on a snarl over her Midwestern smile, Andrew let his unwashed hair grow past his chin, and Zoe was the lesbian all the straight women wanted to sleep with. Now nearing fifty, they all live within shouting distance in the same neighborhood deep in gentrified Brooklyn, and the trappings of the adult world seem to have arrived with ease. But the summer that their children reach maturity (and start sleeping together), the fabric of the adults' lives suddenly begins to unravel, and the secrets and revelations that are finally let loose—about themselves, and about the famous fourth band member who soared and fell without them—can never be reclaimed.

Straub packs wisdom and insight and humor together in a satisfying book about neighbors and nosiness, ambition and pleasure, the excitement of youth, the shock of middle age, and the fact that our passions—be they food, or friendship, or music—never go away, they just evolve and grow along with us.

Modern Lovers Details

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From Reader Review Modern Lovers for online ebook

Larry H says

If as The Beatles said, "All you need is love," then why does it make everyone so crazy? Emma Straub's tremendously enjoyable *Modern Lovers* looks at love and sex and relationships among two intertwined families, and how we sometimes let our past history affect our present and our future.

Zoe, Elizabeth, and Andrew met in college, and the three of them, along with another fellow student, Lydia, formed a band called Kitty's Mustache, which gained some notoriety while they were at Oberlin. Elizabeth and Andrew became a couple fairly quickly, while adventurous Zoe was the lesbian everyone wanted to sleep with, and Lydia hung around the fringes, keeping most of the trio at arm's length. But as college bands do, the group disbanded, although Andrew and Elizabeth got married, and Lydia became a star on her own.

Fast forward more than a few years later. Elizabeth and Andrew live down the block from Zoe and her wife, Jane, in a Brooklyn neighborhood. Their teenage "cool" has definitely chilled, and been replaced by the same woes everyone has—raising children, financial concerns, marital challenges. When Elizabeth is contacted by a film producer interested in making a film about Lydia's life, wanting not only Elizabeth to allow the film to use the band's best song (which became a hit for Lydia a few years later), but also for the trio to allow their lives to be portrayed in the film, it causes some tension between Elizabeth and Andrew, who isn't interested in reopening that chapter of his life.

Meanwhile, the two couples are surprised when Zoe and Jane's brash daughter, Ruby, begins a relationship with Elizabeth and Andrew's son, Harry, which coaxes him out of his shell and encourages him to act spontaneously for the first time. But anxiety over their children's relationship takes a back seat, for as summer unfolds, the couples struggle with trust issues, questions about the future (and their futures), and how much the past should stay in the past.

"People didn't take turns having difficult moments; they came all together, like rainstorms and puddles."

I'm a fan of Emma Straub's. I really liked her last book, *The Vacationers*, and found this book a sweet, compelling, and thought-provoking read, even if the characters can be a little annoying. (But isn't that the way people are in real life as well?) I thought Straub really did a great job capturing the dramatic and the quiet moments of long-time marriages and friendships, and how people choose to deal with the crises (real or imagined) they're faced with. It's also an interesting look at trying to find your purpose in life even as you're nearing 50, or whether you're defined by the successes you had earlier in life.

This book doesn't really pack any surprises, but it's an enjoyable, well-written read. It made me smile, it made me nod my head from time to time, and it definitely got me invested in what was happening to the characters. Straub is a talented writer, and she's written another book that's really worth reading.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

Snotchocheez says

3 stars

If you strip Emma Straub's novel *Modern Lovers* down to its essence, you're left with a contextually similar

midlife crisis novel as her earlier *The Vacationers*, with a little less humor, and a much less enchanting locale (I've nothing against Brooklyn, or the gentrified, artsy section of Flatbush known as Ditmas Park, but it can't possibly compare to the exotic surroundings of Mallorca.) This is not to say I disliked this book; I was just hoping for something a little more substantive than pseudo-hipsters grousing about their lives starting to fall apart. Of the adult couples here (Zoe and Jane, gay restaurant owners; and Elizabeth and Andrew, a real estate agent and her husband with a trust fund), neither are nearly as compelling (even with Ms. Straub creating for them a brush with musical fame from their Oberlin College heyday) as their kids, Harry and Ruby. *Their* teenage modern love story (with just the right levels of snark and candor) kept me engaged and pleased with the book; the plot threads with their parents, though, just didn't quite do much for me except evoke feelings of wishing I was re-reading *The Vacationers* instead of this.

Jessica says

I really like writing book reviews, and I'd like to think I'm not so bad at it. But I think I struggle the most with reviews of three-star books. That's because they tend to be very average books that leave me with very little emotion one way or another. I'm not so excited about them that I have to tell everyone to read them *right now*, but they didn't piss me off enough that I have anything to rant about. And that's exactly how I feel about *Modern Lovers*. It just didn't leave an impression with me that I have a lot to say...

I was super excited to read this because I enjoyed *The Vacationers* and it's gotten its fair share of buzz. The plot description sounded intriguing: Three middle-aged college friends/former bandmates uncover secrets as their near-adult children strike up a relationship. It seems to be jumping on the recent trend of blurring the line between "complex" characters and outright unlikable ones. I'm not so sure that I'm really a fan of that trend: if a protagonist is going to be a jerk, I just want to be able to understand why and I don't think that's always happening. But that's all just a matter of personal preference and maybe other readers are enjoying that kind of thing more.

Emma Straub is a pretty good writer – her prose is fun and engaging. The real reason I didn't enjoy this more is just that it didn't really go anywhere. Despite occasionally being charming, the characters were mostly kinda one-dimensional – especially Andrew – and the plot was all build-up with no pay-off. Things happen – the kids get together, the adults are approached by an agent wanting the rights to their story for a bio pic about the friend who actually found fame before her untimely death, they experience marital tensions and ennui – and then the book ends with just a very brief mention of what happens next for each character, like the one-sentence descriptions that flash next to characters' faces at the end of a movie. I got to the end with a shrug and that was that.

This is a perfectly fine book that might be the perfect thing for the poolside, but it just never rose above "fine" for me. I wouldn't discount it – I swear, it's by no means bad – but I doubt it's ever going to be the first that pops to mind when someone asks for a recommendation.

Ami says

Really a 4.5 star book.

I've been a huge fan of Emma Straub's writing for a while, and this one is her best yet. Set in a Brooklyn that's so recognizable to me that I actually checked to see if some of the restaurants exist in real life (not that

I can tell), this story of teenage love and married parents manages to be both funny and deeply true about love and relationships. I simultaneously wanted to be the teenagers, with their understanding but deeply involved parents, and the adults, with their fabulous jobs and secrets.

If you've never read her before, I highly recommend this one--and if you have been a fan, this is a book to save for reading on vacation.

Paromjit says

This novel examines the nature of friendship, relationships, sex and love, as they affect two families living in Brooklyn, New York. Elizabeth, Andrew, Zoe and Lydia met in college and together formed their band, Kitty's Mustache. They were the height of cutting edge cool. Zoe is a lesbian, Lydia kept her distance from the others, whilst Elizabeth and Andrew became a couple. The band fell apart, Elizabeth and Andrew got married, and Lydia forged a separate successful career.

Now Andrew and Elizabeth live close to Zoe and her wife, Jane, preparing to confront the fact that nothing has prepared them for middle age. They face problems associated with shortage of money, raising children, and the rise of marital discord. Ruby and Harry, the children from their respective marriages start a relationship which causes their parents some discomfort. The couples struggle to come to terms with the past, worry about the future, the rising tensions in their relationships as their lives fall apart and try to come to terms with the evolving nature of their identities.

The characters in the novel can be irritating at times but this is often a reflection of real life. Straub casts a sensitive and insightful eye over the nature of marriage, the problems with adjusting to getting older, questions of identity, and coming to terms with the past. It can be hard to accept that it is now the turn of your children to be all that you thought you were, and appropriate the mantle of being young, cool hipsters. I found this a light, engaging and entertaining read. Many thanks to Penguin Michael Joseph for an ARC.

? Kim ? says

Yay! I won! :) Thank you Goodreads First Reads!

Chrissie says

I'm just not sure about these manufactured stories of things that never happened to Emma. For me, even fiction should be kind of based on some authentic experiences and I think that's what's lacking in Emma's books - the wisdom conveyed from authentic experiences in real life, then translated symbolically into fiction. Things ring hollow in this book, much like in her other books.

But I suppose the main reason Emma has a book contract and attention fawned on her is due to her famous poppa, Peter Straub. The publishing industry, like the film industry and many others, is very nepotistic. If you have a charming personality and a "pedigree", some publishers will ignore that the writing is not the best they can get behind. Putting out Emma's mediocre books becomes a way the editors and publishers please Poppa Straub and others in the circle of money and influence. The crew of wealthy folks at parties in the Hamptons and elsewhere - the closed circles. Same as Wall St. - the rich getting richer and the middlemen at

publishers making cultural decisions far above their station. Cronyism and favoritism bends smarter choices.

There are so many better novels out there that should be published long before this latest contrived book. Sadly, too many great writers are ignored, while Emma continues to get paid large amounts for writing soap operas and beach books. Pabulum. It is entirely all too absurd.

And it is really easy to see how many friends and family are packing 5 Star reviews on here for Emma, with little or no regulation by the site.

Ah, but this life is Corruption. Some have eternal light, others endless night. New York City - the rich... and then most of the rest of us.

lp says

Wow was this terrible! Why did I think Emma Straub was an amazing writer all this time? I think I was fooled by her classy author photo, she looks fantastic.

These people drove me fucking crazy. They are the most annoying caricatures of Oberlin students you could possibly imagine. And I don't care if that was Straub's intent, it literally pained me to think I was respecting them by giving them my attention. Their problems were so boring and were tied up so neatly. (I actually cannot decide who had the most boring problem, it's so hard to make that call.)

Jane closed her eyes. "With the patio. We could have outdoor seating on the side."
"Exactly." "Zoe reached over and slid her arms around Jane's waist, folding herself into Jane's lap. "A new project. A new baby."
"A new baby made out of butter."
"Best kind," Zoe said, nuzzling as in close as she could, and then even closer.

Ew. It's like the last scene in a *Full House* episode.

The worst part about this book was that stuff kept on happening that made me say "that would NEVER happen like that." The one example I can think of immediately is one that happened at the end of the book. (view spoiler)The whole contract for the movie thing was whack. It all was.

I did finish it, though.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

3.5 Stars

My face the entire time I was reading *Modern Lovers*

(Aren't I adorable?)

Let's just snag a little quotey quote from the book in order to explain what you're getting into with this one, shall we?

“The novel will be inspired by the tropes of classic love stories such as Romeo and Juliet and Tristan and Isolde, set in modern-day Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, with two neighboring families falling in and out of love simultaneously.”

The families in question are Elizabeth, Andrew and their son Harry, as well as Zoe, Jane and their daughter Ruby. The now middle-aged adults have been friends since college, when they (along with Lydia, rest her soul) became one-hit wonders with a little diddy called “Mistress of Myself.” Lydia’s membership in the 27 Club finds a Hollywood producer requesting the remaining bandmates to sign off on the story. And that’s where our tale begins. Readers quickly discover the much sought after “life rights” are merely a jumping off point in order for us to get involved in the lives of Zoe and Jane, restaurateurs on the brink of divorce – Elizabeth and Andrew, a successful real estate agent and her manboy husband – and Harry and Ruby, former playmates as toddlers – potential sex partners as teens.

This isn't anything that's going to change your life, but much like *The Vacationers* my reaction upon finishing was

I have to say, Straub is a master when it comes to making the location be almost like an additional character. Last year she made me dream of vacationing in Mallorca. This year she has me wanting to rob a bank in order to purchase an old house in Brooklyn

It appears as though Straub has found a formula for her stories. While sometimes this gets tiring or seems kitschy (*cough Dean Koontz and the god blasted dog cough*), her ensemble casts and detailed settings have made my experience with her books two for two. If you're looking for a summer read, this one might be a winner – especially if you're like me and are no longer allowed to use the waterslide due to last year's unfortunate incident

Diana Pasgas says

The thing about this book is it is largely about adults reminiscing on how much cooler they were when they were young. I found myself wishing I were reading a different book, one about their younger years, so I could better understand how each of them became so self-centered and insufferable. Especially Andrew. Yet I still read it to the end. Have no idea whether I loved or hated it, but I finished it, so that's something.

Dan Damaska says

Hipster mid-life crisis and teen love, not exactly riveting material. Some funny moments, but mostly one great big white people problems blog post.

Elizabeth says

privileged brooklynners experience middle-age ennui. cue the world's smallest violin.

Rachel says

I honestly can't believe the amount of glowing reviews and recommendations for this book.

The characters, the plot, all of it - completely uninteresting. I had no feelings towards the characters. Both they and their stories were underdeveloped, despite being overwritten by Straub. At times I was shocked at how juvenile some of her writing was. One of the narrator's inner thoughts: "it was funny. But not ha-ha funny." ???

Very repetitive passages as well. How many times did we need to have the same conversation between Elizabeth and Andrew regarding the contract before something actually happened?

By the end I was so frustrated that I had spent any of my time on this and angry at myself for being swayed by positive reviews.

Emer says

At some moments in our life it's just our right to be completely irrational right??? I mean I know in my heart and soul that this book deserves more than one star.

I know it.

The author invested so much time in writing it, there were developed characters, a plot, good writing..... Surely I should award this two stars at least and be on my merry way???

But there's just one teeny, tiny little problem....

I hated it.

Okay. So maybe I didn't completely hate "it" but more the whole reading experience. I'd finish a chapter and say UGHHH!!! And there were seventy something chapters so that's a lot of ughhh!!! I didn't like any of the characters in this book. They were all so tiresome. However, usually that's not a problem. I don't need to like characters. Sometimes it's more interesting reading about characters that you don't like / people that you can't relate to. But usually in books like those the story keeps me interested. This, sadly, did not. These characters frustrated me so very much. It's a book about upper middle class New Yorker-type ageing hipsters (two

couples & long term friends) with their clichéd life crises and dramas and their hipster teens with *their* clichéd life crises and dramas, and I just did not and do not care. I wanted to throw my book at them SO VERY VERY OFTEN!!!

And the story....

Meh... whatever!

Been there, read that, have the t-shirt...

So maybe if the structure of the book had been to my liking I could have found some enjoyment. But the chapters were too short!! You'd have a chapter about character one that lasted on average three pages and then the next chapter would be about character two, the next about character three etc. And instead of creating a "can't stop reading / constant page-turning experience", it made the book too choppy. It lost that lovely flow and rhythm you get from a good book. So hence I'd get to the end of each chapter and just feel annoyed!

But the book did have one or two lovely moments. There were some beautifully written passages about a disintegrating marriage. This one in particular stood out to me.

"She walked with stiff legs into the hall and peered into the other bedrooms. There was no sign of either her wife or her daughter. 'Guys?' she called, her voice loud and clear. The house was empty. This is what it would be like for the rest of her life - calling into empty rooms and waiting for responses that weren't coming. Getting married was the easy part, even though they'd had to wait until Ruby was twelve to do it legally. When they got together, it was all balloons, all hope. Now that they knew what the future held - what the future looked like - it was much harder. Why couldn't everyone stay young forever? If not on the outside, then just on the inside, where no one ever got too old to be optimistic."

"Why couldn't everyone stay young forever? If not on the outside, then just on the inside, where no one ever got too old to be optimistic." I really do love this thought. Do we lose optimism as we get older? Does our hope ebb away with the passing years???

So I know I've probably rated.... okay definitely rated (yikes!!)... less well written books with a higher rating but this one was just so disappointing to me. And maybe that's the biggest reason for my low rating. I had been eagerly looking forward to reading this. It sounded right up my street as I usually like family saga type books or those ones about people that all live within the same neighbourhood...just sadly not this time.

one star

Obsidian says

Please note that I gave this book 1.5 stars and rounded it up to 2 stars on Goodreads.

Something nice: I liked the cover and the first few chapters of the book actually flowed together okay. That said, this book was too all over the place for me to ever get a handle on while reading.

I am going to try to quickly summarize and apologize in advance if nothing makes any sense. Three longtime friends (Elizabeth, Andrew, and Zoe) all were part of a college band that wrote a hit song that their now dead friend (Lydia) is famous for she still gets kudos for even though Elizabeth was the one who wrote it.

Now in their 40s (I assume, I refuse to look up people's ages) the trio is asked about signing away their rights in order for a movie to be made about Lydia's life.

While that plot plays out, we also have Zoe unhappy with her decades long marriage to her wife Jane and is struggling with what to do next. Zoe's wife Jane is a chef who is primarily focused on work and jealous of anyone that Zoe pays attention to for more than 5 minutes.

Although Elizabeth is happy in her marriage, she is going through a case of what if's right now. Andrew is in the middle of a mid-life crisis that he is trying to cure by going to the most fake yoga teacher ever. Then we have Elizabeth and Andrew's son who has a long simmering crush on Jane and Zoe's daughter, Ruby.

So there are six people in this book and it was so not fun to have to read through six separate POVs. All of characters felt like they were in a different book.

Elizabeth was apparently a great songwriter, but the only clue readers are given is that she writes a song that keeps repeating the words "I am calm, calm, calm" and that's all we get. I mean if you are going to make a character a great songwriter, maybe have an actual song for readers to read.

Also we kept hearing about how the song Lydia is known for Mistress of Myself was great too, and once again, we don't see any lyrics to that song either. There was a lot of "tell" going on in this book and not enough show.

Zoe and Jane are barely in this book. Zoe apparently hasn't really loved her wife since their daughter was born. Since Ruby is now 18, that means she has stayed married to someone for almost 18 years she doesn't really care for at all. Jane is jealous and cooks. That's all I got about her character. The character of Harry was interesting, but seriously naive and gullible as anything. Ruby was almost an ass through the whole book. In the end, she seems to be the only one with any sense in this book.

The writing was just okay. Each chapter was pretty short. The overall plot about Lydia's song and movie didn't fit in this book at all. At one point I wondered why Emma Straub just didn't include Lydia's POV since everyone else was in here.

The flow was terrible. Trying to juggle six different character POVs just didn't work at all. The book was all over the place. Reading about two couples going through some hipster nonsense was not an engaging read. Reading about two teenagers wasn't interesting either. None of these people really had anything to complain about in their lives.

The setting of Brooklyn has never been so unappealing to me in my life. Nothing about Brooklyn comes alive in this book. Most of the action takes place in people's homes, a restaurant, or Harry and Zoe's SAT course. I needed something to make the story jump out at me. Instead everything falls flat.

The ending of this book wraps things up via newspaper articles and no, just no. I have a hard time believing any of these things since we don't see an inking for the set-up to these stories except for Jane and Zoe.
