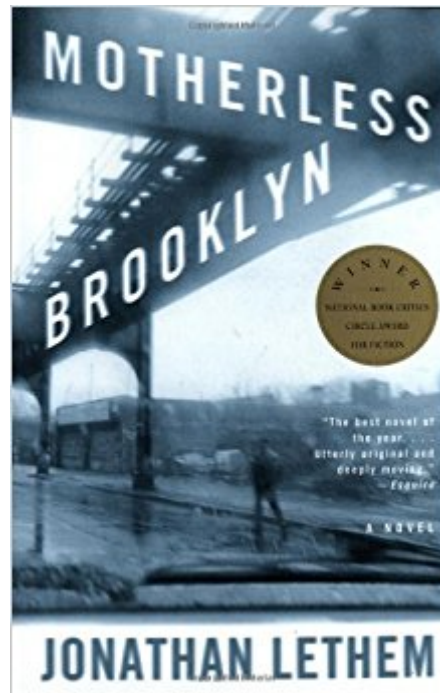




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Motherless Brooklyn



Synopsis

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award. A compelling and compulsively readable riff on the classic detective novel from America's most inventive novelist. Brooklyn's very own self-appointed Human Freakshow, Lionel Essrog is an orphan whose Tourette impulses drive him to bark, count, and rip apart our language in startling and original ways. Together with three veterans of the St. Vincent's Home for Boys, he works for small-time mobster Frank Minna's limo service cum detective agency. Life without Frank Minna, the charismatic King of Brooklyn, would be unimaginable, so who cares if the tasks he sets them are, well, not exactly legal. But when Frank is fatally stabbed, one of Lionel's colleagues lands in jail, the other two vie for his position, and the victim's widow skips town. Lionel's world is suddenly topsy-turvy, and this outcast who has trouble even conversing attempts to untangle the threads of the case while trying to keep the words straight in his head. Motherless Brooklyn is a brilliantly original, captivating homage to the classic detective novel by one of the most acclaimed writers of his generation. A New York Times Notable Book.

Book Information

Series: Vintage Contemporaries

Paperback: 311 pages

Publisher: Vintage (October 24, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345803396

ISBN-13: 978-0345803399

ASIN: 0375724834

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 345 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #54,191 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Books > Travel > Africa >

General #103 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists

#1050 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > Amateur Sleuths

Customer Reviews

Pop quiz. Please complete the following sentence: "There are days when I get up in the morning and stagger into the bathroom and begin running water and then I look up and I don't even recognize my own ____." If you answered face, then your name is obviously not Jonathan Lethem.

Instead of taking the easy out, the genre-busting novelist concludes this by-the-numbers string of words with toothbrush in the mirror. This brilliant sentence and a lot of other really excellent ones compose Lethem's engaging fifth novel, *Motherless Brooklyn*. Lionel Essrog, a detective suffering from Tourette's syndrome, spins the narrative as he tracks down the killer of his boss, Frank Minna. Minna enlisted Lionel and his friends when they were teenagers living at Saint Vincent's Home for Boys, ostensibly to perform odd jobs (we're talking very odd) and over the years trained them to become a team of investigators. The Minna men face their most daunting case when they find their mentor in a Dumpster bleeding from stab wounds delivered by an assailant whose identity he refuses to reveal--even while he's dying on the way to the hospital. Detectives? Brooklyn? Is this the same Lethem who danced the postapocalypso in *Amnesia Moon*? Incredibly, yes, and rarely has such a departure been pulled off with this much aplomb. As in the "toothbrush" passage above, Lethem sets himself up with the imposing task of making tired conventions new. Brooklyn accents? Fuggetaboutit. Lethem's dialogue is as light on its feet as a prize fighter. Lionel's Tourette's could have been an easy joke, but Lethem probes so convincingly into the disorder that you feel simultaneously rattled, sympathetic, and irritated by the guy. Sure, the story is a mystery, but *Motherless Brooklyn* could be about flower arranging, for all we care. What counts is Lionel's tic-ridden take on a world full of surprises, propelling this fiction forward at edgy, breakneck speed.

--Ryan Boudinot --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This entertaining play on the hard-boiled detective tale features an unlikely gumshoe with Tourette's syndrome, which compels him to count, tap and make strange vocalizations at inopportune moments. Such ticks could seem gimmicky, but Lethem writes it, and Buscemi performs it, with such style that the compulsions seem an endearing idiosyncrasy (though not to the Tourettic's cohorts, who call him "Freakshow"). Regretfully, it's hard to grasp Lethem's wordplay as it goes whizzing by--Buscemi enunciates at great speed to convey the frenetic activity inside the man's head. Lionel Essrog works with three other young men for Frank Minna's small-time detective agency ("Minna men," Lionel calls them) masquerading as a car service ("No cars!" the boys respond whenever the phone rings). Lionel was saved from an orphanage by Minna, so when his mentor is killed on a job, Lionel is devastated and determines to solve the crime. The chase takes him from a zendo on Manhattan's Upper East Side to a resort on the Maine coast as he follows a character he can identify only as "the giant." Buscemi convincingly conveys the accents of Japanese Zen masters and Brooklyn mobsters, along with Lionel's verbal acrobatics, all without losing the noirish ambience Lethem is gently riffing. Listeners may find themselves unable to turn off

their Walkmen and put this one down. Based on the Doubleday hardcover (Forecasts, Aug. 16, 1999). Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very good. One of the joys of semi-retirement and commuting on the bus is the opportunity to read more and different things. My son recommended Jonathan Lethem so I took a look at his novels and picked this one because it won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. I was intrigued after reading some reviews. The protagonist is a story tic-ridden, Tourettic underling who becomes a detective to solve the murder of his boss. I'm not a big detective genre reader (I've enjoyed some Elmore Leonard) and at first thought the premise seems too weird to work, but Jonathan Lethem comes through. The first two sections describing how Lionel Essrog's boss Frank Minna met his demise and the reflection on how Minna gathered and honed his "Minna Men" from an orphan's home in Brooklyn was compelling reading. I can tell I have a good book when I feel the need to read past my normal bus stop; then I slow down my reading so I don't finish too soon; This book met those criteria. Lethem does a very good job of describing his characters and describing their motivations, interactions, and dialog. His description of Brooklyn is also great. Lethem's description of Lionel eating some Uni and a bowl of lemongrass soup is worth the read in itself.

For a Brooklyn guy, that's enough to pull you through this strange but intensely human detective story, whose Tourette's-victim protagonist eventually tic's his way into your mind and heart. If you're in the mood for something quite different, carried off spectacularly (like a great actor always in character), then you will remember this book and be glad you read it.

Never read anything quite like it. Refreshing, fun, impossible to forget. Aching for a series featuring the narrator, this detective with Tourette's syndrome.

if you don't know much about Tourette's Syndrome this will give you more than a glimpse. It's also splendidly plotted, satisfyingly human and oddly fun.

As I'm sure you've heard or read, this book's protagonist and narrator suffers from Tourette's Syndrome, and his verbal tics seem to require the spontaneous creation of Joycean wordplay. This *sounds* like a recipe for a pseudointellectual disaster of a mystery novel, complete with unnecessary MFA-level artsy flourishes, but Lethem is a very fine writer and he not only makes it

work, it works very well indeed. While the plot didn't quite have me on the edge of my seat, the loving, finely drawn characterizations of Lionel, the narrator, and his struggle with the crossed wires in his head, kept me captivated to the very end.

Don't think twice. Read this book! Wonderfully narrated by a man with a tic who will take you into his Tourette Syndrome mind as he struggles to find the truth after his mentor & boss is killed. In the narrator's world the perception of others (he's crazyman) defines and separates him to the extreme. With the death of his boss he is forced to find and trust his own self to survive. Well done and worthy of all of the critical acclaim, this a character and book you don't want to miss!

One more reason that I am a big fan of Lethem. He can write anything.

A detective with Tourette's? Seriously? Yes, and he is smart, engaging, so human and funny. For the people like me who read one mystery after another it is a pleasure to get out of the formula and into new territory . I recommend it.

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