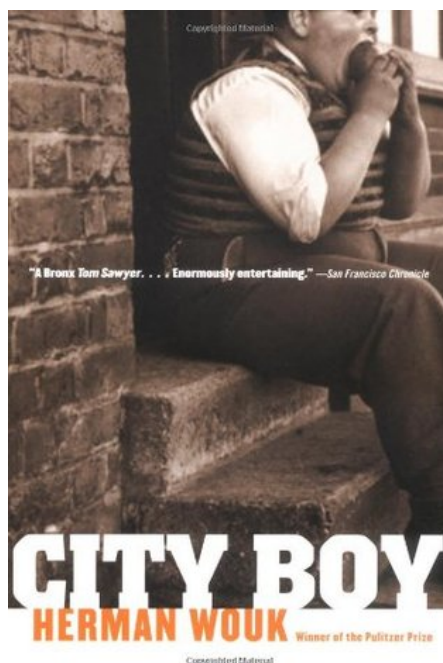




City Boy

Herman Wouk

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'City Boy' spins a hilarious and often touching tale of an urban kid's adventures and misadventures on the street, in school, in the countryside, always in pursuit of Lucille, a heartless redhead personifying all the girls who torment and fascinate pubescent lads of eleven.

City Boy Details

Date : Published May 15th 1992 by Back Bay Books (first published 1948)

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Author : Herman Wouk

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Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Classics, Humor, Literature, Jewish, Young Adult, New York, Coming Of Age, Novels

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From Reader Review City Boy for online ebook

Todd Cannon says

I can't remember exactly how I came upon this book but I was surfing around on the internet about a week ago and discovered it. I think I had heard of it before because the main character's name, Herbie Bookbinder, sounded familiar to me, but I had never read it.

This is the story of the last half of the school year when Herbie is 11 and the summer that follows it when he goes to a summer camp run by his school's principal. It takes place in 1928 and is told from Herbie's point of view with observations and explanations by the author. Some have compared it to Tom Sawyer and I see the comparison.

Although, I never lived in a big city like New York and I never went to summer camp I was able to relate to Herbie and his adventures and experiences. How many of you remember childhood superstitions and rituals? How many of you guys have been in love with the "cute little girl" and done stupid things to impress her? How many of you have complained the whole time you were participating in something (In Herbie's case summer camp.) and then looked back on it with fondness?

Herbie is neither completely the hero nor the villain. That, I think, is why his story is so engaging and so enjoyable. I could not put the book down and felt every joy and every disappointment along with Herbie as the book progressed.

Anna says

Fine book for teens.

Karen says

I loved the first half of the book. The second half had a really long train wreck (not literally) that was hard to get through. I knew once he stole the money it would be downhill from there. I felt so bad for Herbie. I just wanted it to end. Some lessons are hard to learn and it had a good message but it is not my kind of book.

Bruce says

I read this as part of my "read everything ever written about the Bronx" kick, but found that it also fit into another one of my favorite subgenres: boy's stories in which the underdog rises above his station and becomes a hero.

The big difference, though, is that most authors in this genre are hacks, while Herman Wouk is a great writer. His main character, Herbie Bookbinder is a fantastic creation, and it takes little imagination to make the jump from the bookish Herbie to an imaginary "Hermie" Wouk growing up in a similar situation. Because of this grounding in reality, Herbie's heroics aren't really reliant on deus ex machinae, astounding coincidences, or the like. Rather, they are completely realistic, and all the more enjoyable for that reason.

Al says

What a terrific read! I've read several of the author's books and this one is definitely one I'd read again. There were several spots that struck me as hilarious and I found myself in tears I was laughing so hard. It's a quick read so check it out. You won't be sorry.

Jennifer Forsberg says

I liked City Boy, although the romance of the 11 year old boy was obviously fictional. My own 11 year old would never have romantic feelings, right?

Mariel says

Lots and lots of thanks to El for mentioning City Boy in her review of The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. How did I go through all of my life without ever hearing of this book? This is my favorite kind of book! I mean, I've read A Tree Grows in Brooklyn several times.

I can see why one book reminded her of the other. They share a soul of bittersweet pain. Like if it hurt too much to fall in love but your days are too long without it and you never stop looking for someone or something else to fill the sharp edges of the bottomless pit. You can't help it. It doesn't matter that it couldn't be returned. The world must work for the pursuit of happiness. Also, fat boys who fall in love a lot and live in the Bronx. City Boy has been out for a long, long time. My grandparents could have read it in their youth (they probably didn't. My grandfather gave me a lot of books and this was not among them). It has been reread. Where have you been? What about me?!

I wanted a comfort read but it had to be a special kind of comfort read. No Mary-Sues so fantasy was out. If I was going to feel the sting of my inferiority complex it would have to be a hell no. Maybe a sweet pain kind of comfort read like Blue Castle or 'Oscar'. Sometimes I really love this website. I really loved City Boy. I feel like I'm in a young person's world and not as the adult or the kid. Maybe scanning the room for someone to root for, rather than relate to, and there's Herbie Bookbinder.

I probably would have hated Herbie if I was one of his class mates. It was enough that he comes from a family with money. I would have resented that. I wouldn't have identified with him as I should, or seen past the front he put up to protect himself. The first time he used his "garbage gang" status to bully me I would have started doing impersonations of him for the class before the bell rang (I was only secretly nice). Think hall monitor or patrols, if you're American. I guess the UK and Oz versions are prefects. It sounds a lot like patrols. Prefects are respected, right? (My UK school knowledge is all due to Harry Potter.) I was a patrol as a last pick for the last term of the school year. Hardly prestigious. I used it to leave class early. I was like Herbie. He used it for freedom in the halls. He was not in the top tier of school authoritative system with the garbage band. He was a laughing stock. He couldn't really bully anyone with his position and tried to do it anyway. So much for the freedom. So I was saying that if he tried to use his pitiful position of litter clean up staff to tell me where I could and couldn't be between classes it would have been over for us. He was also the teacher's pet and can you get worse than that?

I guess City Boy does have an air of teacher's pet about it in Wouk's writing. He's the adult that feels pity for

poor, fat Herbie. The good kind of pity! Not the kind that is like feeling like shit after you've been caught crying. Wouk sees the longing in his eyes and hopes that things will be better for him some day. The best part about City Boy is that it isn't from Wouk's place and the teacher's pet stuff is mostly in the background. Thankfully it really sucks to be Herbie. We are in Herbie's place. Maybe he's looking at us for something to relate to. He falls in love with a girl he can't have. There's no way that's the end of it. That is going to be his life. Yes! (I'm sadistic. Hey, I told you I have an inferiority complex.) He goes to summer camp and he gets in a lot of trouble. I haaated summer camp (I only went for two and a half days).

I loved the lying. I loved the stuff that I would have hated Herbie for when I was a kid. The way he tried to talk himself into the rules of the way things worked. Getting out of trouble, staying ahead. A lot of talking out of and figuring out what works by trying it out. That's the way to live! The sharp edge void living stuff. It's great to see it from that place instead of seeing the swotty fat boy who has rich parents with a high priced lawyer. It'd be easy to squint and picture an adult Herbie I'd hate. But I know he can be so miserable and now I love him because I know he's more than that. If only one could feel like the teacher at the front with the wider view more often (as opposed to the kid caught sneaking around ugh).

City Boy gets shit for being too rosy viewed about Jewish life in the Bronx in the 1940s. But we already know life sucks! It's not rosy to take a look at this kid and see the hope and the pain stuff. It's going to be lots and lots of that! Just because it is a happy kind of misery read. It's my kind of comfort read is what it is. You aren't embarrassed because someone saw empathy and I don't know what color that is but it probably isn't rosy.

Listen, Herbie has moments like this:

He was not seen again that merry morning, for he spent it lying on a flat rock near the shore, hidden by thunderbrush. A lonesome, quiet situation, you might say, yet he had plenty of company. Misery sat at the fat boy's right hand, and Shame at the left; and they made the morning mighty lively for Herbie between them."

I'd do my encouraging smile for Herbie now. I hope he fucks up a whole lot more.

P.s. Okay, so I don't think it is a good idea to be too hard on Lucille. She's only eleven. The plot blurb is ridiculous. It's not like there weren't boys doing the same thing. There was one in my class who had a different girlfriend every day.

P.s.s. I recommend Fat Kid Rules the World if you like City Boy. That book is awesome.

Dan says

My favorite coming of age novel about a charming 11 year old boy in the Bronx, circa 1925. His trials and tribulations still ring true today. The book has real wisdom and is the best depiction of the mind of a boy I know.

Tim Ganotis says

This was enjoyable. A simple story of a young boy in the Bronx, and his adventures at school, at summer camp, perusing a love interest, and dealing with bullies. Very Tom Sawyer-esque, straightforward, readable and entertaining.

Liz says

I've been a Wouk fan for years, so I'm not sure how I missed this little charmer, one of his earliest works. My boyfriend found it in a library sale and bought it for me for a quarter. Money well spent, particularly since a quarter will no longer buy you candy and a "frap." Ha.

Katherine says

With the first paragraph of this coming of age book, the image of Herbie Bookbinder is almost enough to make any group of teenage girls "aw" in choral. A chubby, broken-hearted boy who detests everything about female kind finds love in a red-head named Lucille and spends the rest of the book running through his thoughts and problems in his young adolescent life. I personally quite enjoyed this book from the very beginning. With it's long and complex sentences, Wouk provides enough clarity for each setting and description of character to allow me as a reader to see the world of Herbie's 11 year old life. The use of alliteration in this book is a constant, as seen in one of my favorite sentences "Bulldog, Bulldog" was duly sung in draggy discords."

With the way this book allows you to see into the heart and mind of the main character and his life in the 1920's, I can only say that this is a book that I highly recommend for people of all ages.

J. C. says

An all time favorite book. Read it when I was young, and have reread it several times since. Recommended to all who like the author, like New York, and/or like semi-autobiographical novels.

Gary Makufka says

This story is labeled as a novel. Herbie Bookbinder is real! Why isn't this book considered a classic? I could read this book over and over and never get tired of it. During these uncertain times, nostalgia is so valuable and Herbie Bookbinder and his friends makes the reader feel hopeful again. Thank you Herman Wouk!

Heather says

I came across this one at a thrift store in Estes Park. I had never heard of it and didn't expect much, but ended up loving it. It's a funny, coming-of-age story about an overweight Jewish boy going to summer camp and trying to win a girl's heart. Very well-written, with subtle humor and recognizable characters.

George Ilsley says

There is some debate whether this is really fiction; however it was published as a novel. If it was written today it would be considered YA and I have rated it as such. It is a little whimsical and suitable as a moralistic lesson for earnest teenagers.

Alana says

I loved this little book.. an easy and pleasant read, and a nice escape (from dreary, cold January) to the summer of 1928 in the Bronx. Reminded me of all the pleasures of being a kid again.

Brian Zantop says

A nice little read. Herman Wouk has become one of my favorite writers over time as the winds of war and war and remembrance are epic monster novels. But this was a completely different feel of course being about an 11 year old boy. The preteen humor and situations are hysterical because I once thought that way too. Just a solid story for any age really.

Felix says

"When I discovered City Boy, I wasn't fat, I wasn't Jewish, my family wasn't working class, and I never went to summer camp, but at thirteen, runty, effeminate, four-eyed, unathletic, and often the new kid in class because my father moved us around too much, I understood humiliation." -James Magruder

<http://thestoryprize.blogspot.com/es/...>

John says

Years ago I loved *The Winds of War*, *War and Remembrance*, and *Inside, Outside*. Then I was disappointed by *The Hope* and *The Glory* and quit reading Wouk's books. Recently my son put me onto *City Boy* and, seeing it had been written early in Wouk's writing career, I thought to give it a try. I'm really glad I did. Wouk has a way of describing the life events of children that really rings true with wit and humor.

Here is an example involving the book's hero, Herbie, and his on again, off again girl friend, Lucille. They are together inside the top of the Statue of Liberty and Davey, a handsome neighborhood friend of Lucille's, has just strode by and conversed briefly with Lucille, to the discomfiture of Herbie:

"'O.K.,' he said bitterly. 'Why dontcha go home with him? He lives right on your block. Cliff [Herbie's cousin who is nearby] an' me'll have more fun without a girl taggin' along, anyway.'

"'Herbie, why are you so crazy? I hardly ever spoke to Davey. I don't even know which is his house. Are you going to spoil all our fun again?'

"The previous occasions implied by the word 'again' were not specified. But Herbie was placed in the class of a surly brute with the simple word, and was silenced. These are devices that a little girl is incapable of learning or inventing. She knows them as a wasp knows how to build a nest."

Insights such as those conveyed by the last 2 sentences of this sample are sprinkled liberally throughout the book. They are a delight to read and ponder. If you like the little snippet I've quoted, you will love this book. Get it. Read it. You won't regret it.

E says

This was a good book. It reminded me of Tom Sawyer.
