

It's a guy thing about
a boy review essay



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Zachary Woodruff's "About a Boy" review titled "It's a Guy Thing", published September 8, 1998 in the "Tuscan Weekly", criticizes what, in Woodruff's opinion, makes the book entertaining and enjoyable yet not memorable and influential. The reader is presented with a short summary of the book's main storyline focusing on why and how Marcus is an awkward kid, Marcus's sources of misery and how Will fits into Marcus's life. Will is able to assist him due to Will's immaturity, which he employs as a tool to teach Marcus, whose development exceeds his age, how to be a child. The paradox of a grown man teaching a child how to in fact be a child is hinted in the book's title "About a Boy". Subsequently reading the book one realizes that the "boy" the title is referring to is more likely to be Will than it is Marcus, stressing Nick Hornby's cleverness.

Woodruff also points out Hornby's cleverness in naming the protagonist Will Freeman as it is an obvious definition of the character himself. If one were to break down the name and truly look at the words' definition one would find that Will Freeman does in fact live proudly by the lifestyle a free man with free will. Another main aspect Woodruff underlines is how Hornby did not aim for a cliché or extreme novel, which actually contributed to it. As opposed to other novels, the main relationship fixation in the book is not one between a man and woman but rather between a man and a child. Also another unique quality is that although one usually has preset notions concerning certain events in the book, they turn out nothing like one had expected which therefore makes the novel less predictable than others thus leaving the reader in astonishment. Hornby very rarely goes overboard with the plot as a whole although the opportunity to do so is available more than once.

Furthermore Woodruff highlights the effect of the informal, relaxed prose Hornby uses supposedly with the intent to illustrate the protagonist and his way of thinking.

What generally stands out of the novel as a whole is not its brilliance or wild imagination but rather its lack of those qualities and yet the reader's ability to connect with the characters on a certain level. Consequently the book is temporarily effective and pleasurable, nevertheless was unable to build up to a long term, deep idea for the reader. In order to grasp the attention and genuine intrigue of the reader, Woodruff is truly able to indulge in the review he is writing and do so for the reader as well. Rather than taking a solemn approach, he initiates the text with a sarcastic yet clever remark on the protagonist's name: " This week's winner for the most obvious fictional character name goes to Will Freeman. " (L.) Because a hidden message is unveiled that not many of the readers would have noticed prior to reading this review, it leaves the reader dazed and bemused from the start.

Throughout the review Woodruff seems playful and uses irony, and although that could be misinterpreted as " low quality", it is in fact more inviting.

Woodruff is able to get all of his views across to the reader in a way that the reader can understand and identify with his criticism. Another style in the language that contributes to Woodruff's easy-flowing, down-to-earth review is its register. The level of the language used is relatively colloquial.

Woodruff applies words like " dammit", " man", " butt-kicking" etc. which are considered slang/ taboo words.

Short forms are also used in Woodruff's review which is not to be used in formal language: " doesn't", " it's" etc. Other than that the language is fairly simple and comprehensible. The usage of such informal and easy language makes this review accessible to anyone and everyone. Woodruff also refers to expressions used daily that are easily able to stress the point one is attempting to make and yet is proficient in adding his own style; e.

. " cooler-than-thou". It derives from the expression " holier-than-thou", which is used to describe a person who thinks they are more morally righteous than others. So " cooler-than-thou" is to describe someone or something that believes to be better or superiorly cooler than others.

Through the general style portrayed by Woodruff, the review is playfully serious and allows certain hidden aspects and perspectives to surface. As Woodruff suggested in his review, Hornby attempts to demonstrate Will's character through the style of the prose the personal narrator uses in the book, e. g. : Will wrestled with his conscience, grappled it to the ground and sat on it until he couldn't hear a squeak out of it.

Why should he care if Marcus went to school or not? Ok, wrong question. He knew very well why he should care whether Marcus went to school. Try a different question: How much did he care whether Marcus went to school or not? Answer: not a lot. That was better. He drove home.

"- (Chapter 20, p. 159) This specific paragraph begins with a metaphor that allows us to really recognize how deeply Will is struggling with his conscience and yet how he is able to overcome its persistence and shut it up. Most of the sentences are elliptical and some are even incomplete serving the

purpose of truly projecting the way Will, among all people, thinks. One also finds himself stating questions in one's head and contemplating on them as is shown here as well. As one looks closely to the flow of Will's thoughts one recognizes that he is one to do whatever possible in order to avoid responsibility or the need to intervene into another person's life. He is confronted with emotions of caring for another person in this paragraph but finds a sneaky way to escape those emotions and trick himself into not caring.

He goes from asking himself whether or not he cares if Marcus were to go to school to which extent it is he cares, therefore making it excusable for him to just "drive home." Also Will's thoughts seem so be constantly jumping around from emotions to facts to escape mechanisms; he first states a question then comments on that question etc. Will is in a regular battle between his objectivity and his feelings. Conclusively since the narrator knows Will's thoughts it is omniscient, but on the other hand, the narrator's knowledge is limited as other people's thoughts and actions are only seen, described and often interpreted through Will's eyes.

Hence Hornby allows the reader to be linked to Will and understand what he is thinking but also provides the reader with an opinion of Will as an observer. Zachary Woodruff's review stated at the end that "...the book doesn't leave you with much to remember after you've finished." I must pronounce that I do not fully agree with this statement. It is justified to say that the book's all-in-all impact on the reader is not vast; however, it does exhibit multiple messages concerning varied, imperative and inalienable matters and truths in life. The focal points are the issues one faces when

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growing up, bullying, adults who are incapable of accepting responsibility, single parents, what it means to be an adult, children losing their innocence in dysfunctional families, the need for love and shared human relationships, and the fact that no man is an island. An adult and his maturity are not defined by age but by experience.

Therefore those who lack experience and lack the opportunities while growing up to learn to be responsible may never truly reach a decent level of maturity. In order to obtain the ability to be responsible one must be trained; it is a skill one must develop. To truly be responsible one must have acquired consciousness and awareness of one's maturity level.

The ability to be an adult at any age or to not be an adult at an age one would consider customary was projected by Marcus' maturity and ability to analyze and understand situations only mature people could and that Will was just as immature as any teenager despite his real age, and his unwillingness to take responsibility for anything for the majority of his life. Another message the book held for the reader is the difficulties of growing up, which can take place at any age. To grow up is to encounter new emotions and thoughts, to view issues from different perspectives and to endure pain and hurt in order to distinguish between good and bad. One begins to learn the "unwritten rules" about life and must develop certain skills in order to survive. The attainment of such skills primarily begins at home and later on is further developed according to the child's exposure. Consequently if the family is in some way dysfunctional then these skills may either never develop or develop too fast from a different source causing the child to miss out on its childhood. Every family faces its own difficulties and

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issues and the parents always come face to face with obstacles and in the end the child's ability to grow up in a healthy and natural way depends on the parents' qualification and strength when faced with these obstacles.

Many parents go through separation, divorce, abuse and many other things that may result in the parents not being compatible together leading to single parents. How one deals with being on one's own also fully relies on the parent as an individual. Single parents are in a difficult position be it by choice or by force. Naturally one is supposed to have both a mother and father when raising children and while the absence of one of those parents may not have permanent negative results on the child and may even be better for it, it will definitely make the job for the present parent much more difficult. According to the nature of the break-up the parent is carrying around emotions that may inflict on the relationship of the parent and the child. Due to these emotions the parent may not be competent enough to fulfill the roles required of a parent (e.

g. to be an instructor, friend, supporter etc. leading to the child being under more pressure to be the adult and take care of the parent. This is projected in the book as Marcus' mother, Fiona, is depressed and attempts to take her own life. As Marcus has to witness such an act he is put under more pressure as a child than he should be under, constantly worrying about how to take care of his mother. He obtains this role of an adult because he feels he needs to and at the same time is ripped of the innocent perspective one has on life at a child and is confronted with life's ugliness, pain and obscurity too early.

Bullying is another issue presented in the book that plays a crucial role in the development of children. According to a website focusing on bullying, bullying is defined as “ a pattern of behavior whereby one person with a lot of internal anger, resentment and aggression and lacking interpersonal skills chooses to displace their aggression onto another person, chosen for their vulnerability with respect to the bully, using tactics of constant criticism, nit-picking, exclusion, isolation, teasing etc. with verbal, psychological, emotional and (especially with children) physical violence.

There are many forms of bullying, some of which mentioned above, and it is not only the bullied that needs to be taken into consideration but also the bully him-/herself. The targets of bullies are usually those who cannot fend for themselves and who are considered vulnerable due to their small size or low self-esteem. All these are problems that should be addressed and worked on but also the bully is usually faced with a severe problem he is not consciously aware of or does not want to acknowledge and therefore expresses his frustration through most obvious means. Bullying has caused depression and even suicide amongst children as young as twelve years of age.

Its effects are severe and if not dealt with immediately could have lifelong consequences. The book also succeeded in highlighting the importance of the need for love and shared human relationships. Relationships teach a person certain things and help a person take on certain fundamental qualities that are required in life.

Through relationships and love one learns to be selfless, to share, trust, relate and connect. Also relationships can be a source of role-models or confidence i. e. the relationship between a child and a parent. Moreover a relationship between a man and a woman, be it romantic or merely friendly, can offer you a point of reference and motivation. All relationships help a person become who he is and allows a person to thrive being surrounded by people that care about him and believe in him.

As exemplified in "About a Boy" Marcus and Will's relationship had a huge impact on who they were as individuals and in fact helped them become who they were meant to be, as Rachael and Will's relationship broadened Will's understanding of life and the ability to care for someone as deeply as he did for her. Finally, the last message the book holds for its readers is the fact that "no man is an island". As portrayed in all the above mentioned messages of the book, everything and everyone is connected. All things take place as a consequence of something prior to it. The circle of life is that everyone gives and takes; we are all connected through a chain that is never-ending. We each have the ability to affect others; it is a power we each possess and also one that must be used carefully and responsibly. Many, like Will, attempt to go through their whole lives without affecting those around them as well as not being affected by anyone or anything.

However, it is inescapable and though it may make life more difficult or may cause more stress, it is what makes life worth living; the ability to change others lives and the ability to be changed yourself. Living in isolation, trying to live on an island defies the whole purpose of life and as projected in the book, when one embraces this chain it can affect your life in the best way.

But one must also beware that “no man is an island” as well, for we must not allow every single surrounding to affect us as individuals. One must find a gray area between being an island and being an ocean and find a way to embrace the world and yet at the same time not let it control you. I believe that although “About a Boy” is not an especially powerful book, it held some of life’s realities and left us with many issues that we must take into consideration. It was able to open up our eyes to truths one must be aware of. Because of this book I was encouraged to research such exceedingly crucial problems and learned so much about how to avoid such problems and how to deal with them.

Therefore the book, for me, definitely served the purpose of why it is I find it vital to read.