



Funny Boy (Harvest Book)

By Shyam Selvadurai

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Funny Boy (Harvest Book) By Shyam Selvadurai Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #746749 in Books
- Published on: 1997-06-19
- Released on: 1997-06-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .75" w x 5.31" l, .68 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 320 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Set in Sri Lanka, this poignant coming-of-age novel charts a boy's loss of innocence as he grapples with family conflict, political realities and his homosexuality. At seven, narrator Arjun Chelvaratnam hates sports and enjoys wearing his aunt's jewelry and playing the role of bride in imaginary weddings; yet his playmates' taunts of "girlie-boy" and "faggot" don't seem all that different from the monickers that attach to other children (e.g., "fatty-boom-boom" and "Diggy-Nose"). But when Arjun enters his teens, his worried father, a wealthy hotelier, sends him to a strict private academy, hoping it will force his son "to become a man." Instead, Arjun, rebelling against a sadistic principal, strikes up an intense friendship with a fellow renegade pupil, Shehan, who is rumored to be gay. After their first sexual encounter, Arjun's immediate feelings are anger and guilt, but he gradually comes to accept his sexuality and his love for Shehan. The story is shot through with the tensions and bloody violence between Sri Lanka's Buddhist Sinhalese majority and its Hindu Tamil minority. In loving Shehan, a Sinhalese, Arjun, who is Tamil, breaks two taboos. Retribution follows, and in 1983 Arjun and his family migrate to Canada as penniless refugees. With deft humor and a keen eye, Selvadurai, who was born in Sri Lanka and now lives in Toronto, captures his protagonist's difficult passage into his own identity-of which his homosexuality is just one component. And it is with deep, wistful feeling that he ties that story to larger themes of family and country. Author tour. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

Although this falls into the crowded coming-of-age category, Selvadurai adds the foreign, funny, and unusual in a novel that is as personal as it is political. While growing up in Sri Lanka amid Tamil and Sinhalese conflicts, Arjie, a young boy who likes to play with dolls and girls, observes the social constraints abhorred and perpetuated within his own family and in society at large. Through the details of family life, the intimacies and exchanges, Selvadurai, much like E. M. Forster, reveals truths subtly, with poignancy and grace. Selvadurai has created an endearing character in Arjie, an impish boy who is always in trouble with his rigid parents, yet gains the confidence of "outsiders," those attempting to rebel against foolish social injustices: an aunt almost ready to reject family and social pressure by marrying a Sinhalese man; a schoolboy who is sexually abused by the head prefect and who wants to disclose his own homosexuality. Arjie's witnessing of prejudice and violence shatters his security by degrees, awakening him to the acceptance of his own gay identity and his isolation from both his family and conventional society. *Janet St. John*

From Kirkus Reviews

A marvelous first novel, about growing up gay in Sri Lanka, that displays a precociously assured command of structure, pace, and tone. Selvadurai's protagonist and narrator is Arjun ("Arjie") Chelvaratnam, the second son of a prosperous Tamil family who cast a common disapproving eye on Arjie's avoidance of other boys and their games, and on his disturbing preference for playing "bride- bride" with the neighborhood girls and trying on his favorite aunt's clothing and makeup. Arjie's emotional passage--through both a fractious boyhood and a culture marked by ethnic conflict and recurring violence--is charted in a series of elaborately developed extended episodes that Selvadurai handles with an almost casual mastery. Such episodes include Arjie's hilarious confrontation with a stentorian playmate and rival (whom he mockingly titles "Her Fatness"); his fascinated observation of a young aunt's foredoomed flirtation with a young man their family can't accept; his incipient crush on a handsome young family employee; and eventually his experiences at a Dickensian boarding school (which, Arjie's father had proclaimed, "will force you to become a man"), where he discovers both sex and the courage to defy the abuses practiced by those who

wield arbitrary power ("How was it that some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust?"). Selvadurai can make family squabbles resonate with almost epic force and weight, and his beautifully manipulated plot powerfully expresses the manifold connections among familial, political, and sexual identity and destiny. Arjie himself is only the most appealing of a dozen or more generously observed and vividly rendered characters. And, almost as an incidental bonus, the novel delicately, knowingly records the subtlest permutations of mistrust and contention among Sri Lanka's Sinhalese (Buddhist) and Tamil (Hindu) populace. First-rate fiction, from a brilliant new writer whose next book cannot arrive here quickly enough. The Toronto-based Selvadurai has already won the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award for 1994. -- Copyright ©1996, *Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mike Yerkes:

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