

Marcus Smith and Lewis Lawson asked me to say a word about The Moviegoer. This meant ~~xx~~reading it, something I would not otherwise have done and had not done in years.

It is not that bad. I even enjoyed most of it and smiled a couple of times. Whether by good luck or providence, something worked. Or perhaps it was the purgative effect of having written two bad novels-- novels that were trying to live up to such and such a notion of what a novel should be-- and using the disgust to shrug it off, make a new start with a clear deck, so to speak, and a new plan. Or rather no plan: why not please oneself, follow one's own nose and not worry about how Dostoevski might have done it.

The good luck was the balancing of the two energies which go to the making of a novel, the energy of the "idea" and the energy of the story. When, as usually happens, one gets the better of the other, the idea imposing itself on the story and drying it up, or the story taking charge, ~~the story~~ getting the bit in its teeth and running away, the whole contraption lands in a ditch.

Here the story went its own way and yet, like a bright happy child, seemed to behave of itself and with no urging. I had been reading and writing about Soren Kierkegaard. Yet I did not set out to write a novel "illustrating a thesis", God help us, of the great Dane. There is no surger prescription for

disaster in any novel than to put it to ideological use, whether it be philosophical, Christian or Marxist.

Yet the adventures of ~~xxxxxx~~ that rather flat young man, Binx Bolling, with his girl friends, his movie-going, his formidable aunt and his fragile cousin Kate had an agreeable way of showing forth, often in surprising turns, Kierkegaard's "stages along life's way". What saved it from "philosophy" was Binx going his own way, that and the special flavor of some out-of-the-way districts in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast.

Offhand I would change only one thing. On the very last page Kate is saying good-by to Binx. She is terrified. The reader is supposed to gauge her terror by the elliptical conversation and her stopping to look at a cape jasmine. Perhaps he does. But ^{what} with the young novelist's ^{mortal} fear of saying anything straight out, I took care not to say she was terrified. Now I would add two lines just before the good-byes.

"I'm afraid."

"I know."

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