



The Picturegoers

David Lodge

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Lodge's first published novel.

The Picturegoers Details

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Author : David Lodge

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From Reader Review The Picturegoers for online ebook

Yak says

Just reread this, which is Lodge's first novel, and a very good one two, esp. knowing that it was published when he was 25. A nice combination of interesting characters, plot-lines tying the together, and implied commentary on religion, movies and families at the dawn of the rock-n-roll era in England. Highly recommended.

Avalina Kreska says

David's vivid, descriptive style of writing hooked me from the get-go, the psychological character depths of these disparate people's lives I enjoyed. However, I only gave it four stars because towards the end, the most sinister character suddenly changed attitude, this could have been expanded upon rather than leaving it to our imagination (especially as psychology was David's style throughout). The book ended with one of the main characters going home which was a kind of damp squib that ended too early. I wanted to see what would happen next, so there was definitely room for a sequel . . .

Heather says

A fascinating first novel, an interesting insight into life in the 1950s that almost makes you feel as if you were there. Not without a shock factor (the thoughts that go through the head of the knife-wielding teddy boy who attacks Bridget). It's interesting (if perhaps not altogether convincing) to follow how Mark moves from being a lapsed Catholic to deciding to test his vocation, considering that most narratives move in the other direction. Fans of Lodge's later novels will find much of interest here.

Margaret Pitcher says

Enjoying this. I found it in one of my boxes of old books and it makes me want to read more of his books. Life in pre- computer, pre- car and telephone for most people, times.

Yes, this was great. Being born at the end of the fifties to a Mum who was brought up in a strict RC family (and never quite recovered), this had lots of resonances for me. I love books about London and this draws a picture of a post war city, still peppered with bomb sites, people who didn't starve, but who had little opportunity or money for leisure, so the romance of the pictures still played a big part in brightening their lives. And the cinema in furthering their romances.

There is a vignette of the poor parish priest going to the pictures and seeing the 'wrong' film which is very funny. The antidote to Fifty Shades!

Paulisbored says

It's well written and neatly put together but there was little emotional investment in many of the characters. There are almost too many to care about making it seem a little forced at times. He's written much better.

Emily says

I was going to read *The Picturegoers*. I started with the forward, where David Lodge made several compelling arguments against reading his first novel. So I read something else.

Phrodrick says

For many years I looked forward to the newest release of the orange spine, Penguin editions of novels by David Lodge. So it was that I first read *Picturegoers* back when this reprint of his 1960 novel was so issued. I have now read it twice. I enjoyed both reads.

In his introduction Lodge tells us that this was his first published book. He admits to the fact that this is a somewhat raw first attempt. In the second read I got a whiff of this as an author's first publication on page one. Within a few pages, I was too engrossed in the various characters who will develop across this continuous slices of life novel.

The novel builds around a number of people who almost all have as their common ground, the aging Palladium Theater, last of the grand British theaters of the Berkley's Empire. Fittingly we first meet Mr Brinkley. He is the manager of this barely surviving movie house. He too is aging and like his movie house not entirely gracefully.

Gracefully is perhaps a key word for this book. While the movie house is used as a place to meet Lodge's ensemble cast, the major concern of the book is Catholicism. It will be the various aspects of this religion and life in 1960

1960's England that will be the main interest of *The Picturegoers*. The center of this discussion is lapses Catholic and Graduate student of English, Mark Underwood and his romantic interest former Convent nun Clare Mallory. Mark is living at the Mallory's a good and good hearted Catholic family. Members of this large family, including the parents and several of the siblings will also be part of this character studies that will together be the plots, or rather competing plot lines of this book.

Other characters include the Parish Priest, a man almost too innocent to be believed. A almost as innocent couple dealing with his pending induction into the military and the fact that in their day and time a dating couple had to adhere to strict limits on their time together. The Movie house is home to a dangerous pervert and is being studiously avoided by a religious fanatic who fancies himself a rival for Clare's attention.

Over all Lodge juggles his separate and mixed lives with agility. He introduces light and dark in ways that build tension and leaves the reader uncertain about the various outcomes.

The major reversal between Mark and Clare is not entirely convincing. Other resolutions tend towards the too pat. Otherwise *The Picturegoers* is a well-constructed entertainment. More than entertaining it asks the

reader to seriously consider several aspects of believe in general and Catholicism in particular. Books that make a point of treating the reader as an intelligent person play to something I most want from a writer.

Against the legitimate claims against weaknesses in its resolutions and the occasionally overly florid language should note that this is early David Lodge, he gets better.

Stela says

I have always said, almost in wonder, that David Lodge is his best reviewer. “In wonder” because it is known that the authors (even those with a background in literary studies) are usually the worst critics of their works, maybe because they fail to understand that their creations tend to acquire a life of its own after they finished it ?. But not David Lodge – his observations are always insightful and revelatory. Moreover, he never tries to influence the reader, so they are also trustful.

It is the same for *The Picturegoers*, his first novel, for which he wrote an *Introduction* at the second edition and which he looked upon with indulgence, pointing out its inherent faults with affection and with a quiet pride for his young accomplishment:

Like most first novels, it tends to be a receptacle for whatever thoughts and phrases the author was nurturing at the time of composition, whether or not they are relevant. There are some improbabilities and clichés in the characterization where I was obviously out of my depth. (...) if there are people who wish to read the book, I am not sufficiently embarrassed by it any longer to want to stop them; but it is offered as a curiosity, a piece of apprentice work, and a document of its time, with all its original flaws and blemishes untouched.

And all Lodge’s fans will be pleased to find indeed his untrained but equally mesmerizing voice in this novel, and will be happy to establish correspondences with his later works – the Catholic faith obsession, the coincidence as a narrative tool, the mismatched couples, the humour, etc. Furthermore, its best feature is the reconstruction of a place we have some vague memories about – the cinema hall of our childhood, crowded and dirty and noisy and so attractive!

There are also some very good portraits, in his unmistakable caricature style, that mixes unexpectedly cartoon and reality, like in hybrid films that put together animation and actor playing:

The only shadow cast across that first, pleasant evening was a rather grotesque and ominous one – the dog-like facial silhouette of Damien O’Brien, with the sloping lines of his forehead, nose and jaw almost parallel. One could forgive his ugliness – though it was difficult not to be disgusted by the small pale eyes, the rough, scurfy skin, the yellow crowded teeth – if he hadn’t been so insufferably oblivious of it himself.

Overall, a pleasant reading for anyone, and an interesting one for those who like David Lodge’s writing

enough to want to see how it all began.

Judy says

The Picturegoers is David Lodge's first novel and it read very much like one. He has continued to release novels for over 40 years, was short-listed twice in the 1980s for the Booker Prize, and always gets respect from British book reviewers. Therefore he is included in My Big Fat Reading Project. Therefore I read his first novel.

The charming aspect of *The Picturegoers* is its portrayal of the end of an era when everyone went to the movies because there was not yet any television. The movie theater of the novel works, somewhat awkwardly, as a micro-environment for several disparate characters and their stories.

The key character, Mark Underwood, is a self-centered literature student who comes to board with a Catholic family. Mark falls in lust with the family's eldest daughter (a convent-raised 19 year old recently rejected in her desire to become a nun) and pretends to return to the church from which he had lapsed. As the daughter falls in love with Mark and becomes a modern woman, Mark falls back into Catholicism and decides he may become a priest.

I think this rather TV sitcom type plot was meant to be tongue in cheek, but it made me queasy. David Lodge admits as much in his introduction to the 1993 Penguin reissue. So I will continue to read his novels as I move through the decades and see where he went from here.

Colin says

This was David Lodge's first novel, and although not without flaws, was a very enjoyable read. Many of the themes that predominate in his later books are present, but are presented in a more social realist way. There is social comedy, but it isn't as pronounced as in *The British Museum is Falling Down* and the books that followed. Out of print for some time I was pleased to find this by chance in a second hand bookshop in Brigg. Although these days pretty much any book can be found and ordered within minutes through Amazon, there's still a lot of pleasure to be had from happening upon books you didn't know you were looking for on the shelves of second hand book shops.

Pip Jennings says

I first read this many years ago & had completely forgotten it, but after reading David Lodge's memoir "Quite a Good Time to be Born" I was curious to re-read it. I had forgotten how 'catholic' is. It is in harmony with the time in which it is set & very enjoyable & funny in places. Well worthwhile.

Annie Cole says

‘On paper’ this book was made for me, yet I didn’t enjoy a single page. I tick all the boxes as target audience:

Resident of Brockley (‘Brickley’ in the book) ?

Avid ‘picturegoer’ ?

Catholic upbringing ?

Penchant for the vintage ?

So what went wrong?

Firstly, this is a very masculine book, and an adolescent male one at that. Testosterone-driven characters leer with a salacious gaze at females who exist solely for their benefit. This doesn’t make for pleasurable reading.

More broadly speaking, it has not stood the test of time. It’s not just phrases like “tart”, “negro” and “invalid” being banded about either. The style of the whole thing just seems very dated, like a now unfunny sitcom that was once fashionable. Rather than vintage charm, we find ourselves cringing at times better forgotten.

In the introduction, David Lodge tells us that this was his first book, and is somewhat apologetic about the quality of writing (which does not bode well!) His inexperience shows through the dumping of many ideas without allowing space for them to be fully realised.

It’s a shame, as the vignettes style has proved successful with modern romantic comedies, but doesn’t work here. There are numerous characters following different paths, yet only two of them are given any development, so the rest are surplus to requirement. We simply don’t care and it’s frankly boring to read!

That’s not to say that there aren’t some interesting themes operating behind the scenes. I would have loved to have read more on:

- The comparison of church and cinema
- Cinema’s metamorphic role in the lives of individuals
- Cinema’s social ethics and its place in society

In the end, though, it turns out that this wasn’t for me as it was deemed to be. I see it as a missed opportunity.

Raymond says

In this excellent first novel, the author gives a nice impression of London in the 1950s. It is a bit dated and too Roman Catholic. Still, David Lodge is always a treat. In this book, you recognise many of the themes developed in his later work.

Lucie Novak says

Fun

Pascale says

Very much a young man's book, full of angst about sex and the Meaning of Life, but quite charming and worth reading if you love the mature David Lodge. The role-reversal between Clare, who loses a great deal of her religious zeal when she falls in love, and Mark, who finds his religious vocation (possibly) through his acquaintance with Clare and her jolly Irish family, is really a little too pat. Indeed, one of the flaws of this book is that it is too neat, finding ways for all the characters to move forward and be accounted for, even the angry would-be rapist Harry, who turns into a decent chap the first time a girl asks him to dance with her. It's only too easy to see why Lodge hesitated to allow a reprint of this title: while strong on structure, it lacks subtlety. Yet it is quietly enjoyable in its own way, especially if you want to be reacquainted with the musty smells of Britain before the Swinging Sixties.
