



Welcome to Hard Times

E.L. Doctorow

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1960 copyright. Random House, New York., 212 pages. 1 lb. (9 x 6 x .6 inches Paperback) . Title: Welcome to Hard Times by E. L. Doctorow. Literature & Fiction\Drama-Author's Debut Novel set in the Dakota Territory of the American Frontier. ISBN#0394731077

Welcome to Hard Times Details

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From Reader Review Welcome to Hard Times for online ebook

Judy says

Doctorow's first novel is a literary western. That's right. It was shelved in Westerns at my library. In truth, it is a philosophical though action packed story set in Dakota Territory during the wild, lawless days when the West was being settled.

The writing is taut and just about perfect. You can see, hear, almost smell the town of Hard Times and the characters leap to life. The "Bad Man from Bodie" rides into town, rapes the whores, then burns down the entire town.

Blue is the default philosophizing mayor. In penance for failing to defend his town from the Bad Man because he was not willing to kill the guy, he attempts to rebuild the town and to create a family by taking in Molly, one of the raped whores, as well as the young son of his best friend who died in the fire. Molly reminded me of Kathy from Steinbeck's East of Eden.

But evil has visited the town once and Doctorow creates some serious foreboding and foreshadowing. You know it's coming back. Quite a page-turner for such a philosophical book because the symbolism is embedded in the drama.

Ned says

This was a neat little fable of original sin in the wilderness of territory that was to become South Dakota. Blue, the de facto mayor and conscience of the "town", meets his nemesis in the form of a human malevolent wrecking crew. The "man" (satan, really) is unleashed on the dry plains and lays to ruin the best efforts of man. This is an origin story of father, mother and child struggle against the mighty force, one with a seething vengeance, one with angry devotion and mixed loved, and the protagonist Blue who holds out hope and gives his all. The years wintering in this bleak landscape, before the town is re-built, is profoundly frightful, yet spring comes and yields its eternal hope for progress. The three know the day of reckoning will come, and it contaminates their relationships, since deep down they know that they are alone and must face their adversary. This memory seethes and unsettles, constantly agitating their minds and eliminating any true peace of mind. The finale, though predictable, shatters all pretense and the chaos of the hordes explodes once the veneer of society is punctured (by the loss of the town's source of revenue). The town is the world, its people humanity, and the lonely Blue cannot hold the center – forever weakened by his heart's desire for mankind's beneficence. Only briefly, at the end, does he taste the sweet yet poisonous fruit of original sin..."and it was thrilling to concentrate my hate" (p. 204)

The backdrop will evince Dexter's "Deadwood", and the dialogue is true and the colorful characters biblical in the style of McCarthy. This is an entertaining parable where man's natural tendencies are laid bare and overwhelm the single, heart wrenching (and ultimately feeble) strivings of the one good man whose eyes are always on the buzzards circling in the hot skies above the vast plain stretching out to infinity.

Yes, I'll keep reading this author... expecting great things.

Laura says

GR friend Diane's quote when first starting this book, "The action starts on page 1 and never lets up." The first chapter reads a little like a comedy but that is short lived beginning with chapter 2. If you like fast-paced and action filled this would be a great book to take on. If you are looking for a happy book, keep in mind the title of this novel. Doctorow lays it all out for the reader to experience. This is a book Donald Ray Pollock revealed has influenced/shaped his work as a writer.

LeAnne says

Maybe like the miners who fed this old western town's economy, I needed to dig deeper. There is surely some profound philosophy in here showing us that there is nothing to fear but fear itself or that we are powerless to prevent evil from desolating the world around us.

But I stroll on the sunnier side of the street.

For me, this was an entirely plot driven novel, despite the dark message it carried. Joseph Conrad did a better job with Heart of Darkness in conveying that kind of idea. Lonesome Dove, while perhaps a more shallow western story, gave me characters that I felt deeply for.

I just didnt feel a dustmote of attachment for any of the characters. It was an ugly strip mine for me that never reached the vein others did. 3.5 rounded ip

Andy Weston says

Doctorow's story set in the wild Dakota hills is of the American west is not one that tells of heroes and acts of bravery, but rather the reverse. Blue has the de-facto title of Mayor is a small rural town when one day it is shaken by the visit of man intent of evil. With buildings burnt and many of its inhabitants killed, Blue takes on the rebuilding, along with the other survivors, the key characters in the book.

"I picture some reader, a gentleman in a stuffed chair with a rug under him and a solid house around him and a whole city of stone streets around the house - a place like New York which Molly talked about one night, with gas lamps on each corner to light ten dark, and polished carriages running behind the horses, and lots of fine manners...Do you think mister, with all that settlement around you that you're freer than me to make your fate? Do you click your tongue at my story?"

Blue is a very different character to the leads of other books about the American west at this time, an antihero. Molly is recovering from being badly burnt in the town's destruction, but is free with insults to the Mayor in what he should have done. Jimmy is a 12 year old boy whose father was brutally killed. As they and the other survivors piece together a life, the town has a resurgence as gold miners arrive. But Hard Times is not about to earn a change of name or fortune.

This is a hugely powerful story, and first published in 1960, it is easy to see why it has become a classic of recent times. It's start and ending are particularly strong. Doctorow describes his characters so wonderfully well that for the duration of your read of this short book you are caught up with their ordeal.

Helen says

"Nothing is ever buried, the earth rolls in its tracks, it never goes anywhere, it never changes, only the hope changes like morning and night, only the expectations rise and set. Why does there have to be promise before destruction?"

A western noir. An allegorical storytelling of the battle between good and evil with nobody winning. A story of false hope that life will get better. A story of people not able to face the truth. Do we run? Do we bury our heads in the sand? Or do we face the enemy regardless of the outcome?

Gripping and dark through and through. The last third of the book felt a little too long and belabored, like a very slow death, but if you can take it, I recommend Welcome to Hard Times.

Kirk Smith says

Well shoot, parties over and it just had to end. I really enjoyed the simple writing style, it suited the locale and the situation. Dang, reading a good western puts a smile on my face, it has to be kind of quirky like this, I'm not a fan of the true westerns (Louis L'Amour, Zane Grey, etc). I think Hard Times compares well with The Sisters Brothers, and The Good Lord Bird as being fun offbeat westerns, the type I'm fond of.

Shaun says

Coming across as a mixture of Blood Meridian and McCabe and Mrs. Miller, this revisionist western examines and undermines the myths of the American west while emphasizing the role violence played in carving out civilization. In a strange way, I was also reminded of J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians; the method of narration was quite similar. Mayor Blue's record-keeping is very reminiscent of the Magistrate's journal-keeping. In both cases, there is a town on a frontier fearing the invasion of an outside menace. Whereas in Coetzee's novel the threat of the barbarians is largely manufactured by the Empire, the Man from Bodie is a real menace to the town of Hard Times. This hidden jewel in Doctorow's distinguished career left me wondering why this book isn't more acclaimed. I went in expecting it to be a relatively minor piece in the career of the man who wrote Ragtime, The Book of Daniel, and Billy Bathgate, and instead discovered a work that can stand alongside any work of postwar fiction. It is so far ahead of its time that its looking behind you.

Jeffrey Keeten says

“One day you stepped in snow, the next in mud, water soaked in your boots and froze them at night, it was the next worst thing to pure blizzardry, it was weather that wouldn't let you settle.”

I read several Doctorows back in the late 1980s and never really clicked with him. His writing was fine; it just didn't blow my skirt up. For years though I have thought about picking up a copy of his first book Welcome to Hard Times. I usually like first books and I'm always intrigued with westerns that have been

written by people that usually don't write westerns.

E. L. Doctorow

Welcome to Hard Times starts off with a bang. "The Man from Bodie drank down a half bottle of the Silver Sun's best; that cleared the dust from his throat and then when Florence, who was a redhead, moved along the bar to him, he turned and grinned down at her. I guess Florence had never seen a man so big. Before she could say a word, he reached out and stuck his hand in the collar of her dress and ripped it down to her waist so that her breasts bounded out bare under the yellow light. We all scraped our chairs and stood up-- none of us had ever looked at Florence that way before, for all she was. The saloon was full because we watched the man coming for a long time before he pulled in, but there was no sound now."

The movie was released in 1967 starring Henry Fonda.

Edmund Burke once said "**All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing**". The men of Hard Times each reluctant to react, worried more about their personal safety than the security of the whole community failed to act. One man goes into the saloon with a piece of board intent on freeing Florence from the Man from Bodie. He staggers back out of the saloon, his head shattered and dies in the street. If other men had summoned the courage to go into that saloon with the one brave soul certainly things would have been different. I was reminded of one of my favorite movies High Noon. Hard Times was badly in need of a Gary Cooper character, but unfortunately the closest they had was a man named Blue. Blue was the pseudo mayor of Hard Times. He kept ledgers that tracked all the property and names of the individuals of the town. He settled squabbles. He was the only man who possibly could have rallied the men of the town and thrown the Man from Bodie from their midst. His highly developed sense of self preservation kept him from doing what had to be done.

Not every town has a Will Kane (Gary Cooper in High Noon).

The town burned. Women were raped. People were murdered while others huddled in uncertain safety unwilling to lend a hand to those in direct need of assistance. The Man from Bodie leaves in the swirling smoke of his own destruction.

Blue left with a handful of survivors is determined to rebuild the town. Blue digs down and builds a dugout using sod for walls. I have pictures of the sod homes that my ancestors made when they first came to Kansas. There was no wood just prairie and sod was the only building material available. The Dakota territory where Hard Times is located proved as bereft of lumber as the flat lands of Kansas.

Blue recruits people to town, a tent city grows up then expands into real buildings as lumber is hauled up from the railroad. He is intent on rebuilding the town for reasons beyond his own understanding. They hire a sheriff. Things are going well until the mine that provided most of the revenue for the town plays out. Quickly on the heels of that disaster The Man From Bodie shows up again. He picks up right where he left off. The sheriff attempts to intervene and is shot and killed by The Man From Bodie. This time due to the economic uncertainty the out of work miners lend a helping hand to dismantling the town.

Blue is more proactive, even comes up with a plan that takes down The Man From Brodie, but can do nothing to save his town from the rampaging miners.

There are many subplots that explores human behavior that I haven't mentioned. This book is about average people who fail to organize and stand as one against the embodiment of evil (The Man From Bodie) and never recover from the devastating results of their failure to act.

Howard says

4.5 *

THE MOVIE

I first learned that E.L. Doctorow had written a Western novel when I saw the film adaptation on television many years ago.

I always read the movie credits (doesn't everybody?) and back then they were much easier to read. That was because there were fewer of them (no gaffers, grips, or best boys), the lettering was much larger, and they were not scrolled.

So, when I read the credits for *Welcome to Hard Times*, I saw that it was based on a novel by E.L. Doctorow, which was published in 1960. Although the film was released in 1967, it had to be after 1975 that I saw it, because until the publication of *Ragtime* that year I had never heard of Doctorow, even though I later learned that it was his fourth novel.

To be honest, despite a stellar cast headed by Henry Fonda, I didn't think much of the movie. Maybe the problem was due to something else I recently learned. The film was originally planned as a TV movie. However, because of some rather graphic violence it was instead released as a theatrical film. Since I viewed the film on commercial TV (cable-TV arrived rather late in our area), the version I saw had to have had whole scenes edited from it.

But the problem could have been Doctorow's original story; he would not have been the first easterner who didn't understand the historical West. However, my interest was piqued by the fact that I knew that Doctorow never wrote another Western and, even more than that, I later learned that it had been his debut novel. I found it ironic that this easterner (born in The Bronx and died in New York), a philosophy major no less, had begun his career as a novelist with a story set in the Dakota Territory.

Ever since seeing the film I have been on the lookout for a copy of the book. Oh, I could have ordered a copy from Amazon, but being ~~stingy tight~~ frugal, I didn't want to pay ten dollars or more for a paperback when I anticipated that I wouldn't even like the book. Then just a couple of weeks ago I found a copy at the local used bookstore for only two dollars. It had taken only forty years or so to locate one, and since I happened to have a couple of dollars on me, I bought it.

THE BOOK

Let me say right off the bat, the book is much better than the movie. Not only was a good cast wasted in the movie, so was a good story. They and Doctorow deserved better.

Beginning with the very first paragraph in which we meet the Man from Bodie, it is apparent that we aren't in Zane Grey territory. The second paragraph takes things a step farther and we begin to realize that this is one of the vilest villains to be found in a Western novel – and I have read a lot of them. In fact, he may have no peer.

Unfortunately, there is no Gary Cooper type to make a stand at high noon and bring the bad man to heel. One

man, Blue, the de facto mayor of the town, demonstrates more courage in dealing with the brute than he is given credit for, but being severely overmatched there isn't much that he can do.

After the Man from Bodie kills six people (I think; I may have overlooked someone), he burns the town down. When he finishes the town is more cemetery than town

These events occur in the opening pages and therefore are not spoilers. They are the first things that the reader learns about the hardscrabble town of Hard Times, Dakota Territory, and what happened to it on that day.

After the Man from Bodie departs, most of the town's inhabitants do the same. With the destruction of the town there is nothing to keep them and the fear of the killer's return is a good reason to skedaddle.

Blue, on the other hand, does not leave. Instead he begins a campaign of encouraging people passing through to settle down and to help him rebuild the town. And some rather diverse characters do. Hanging over the town, however, at least among the original settlers, is the fear that the Man might return to the scene of his crimes, to rape, murder, and burn once more.

This is not a formulaic or what could be called a genre Western, the kind that down through the decades has been responsible for more published books than any other genre. Instead of a Western, it could be classified as an anti-Western. It is a book that individuals who normally shy away from Westerns might want to read.

It has hardly any stock Western characters. The main character is not a hero and, in fact, there are no heroes in the story, at least not in the traditional sense. Another important character is a prostitute, but she doesn't have the requisite heart of gold, but one more like stone. And a boy who is orphaned when the Man From Bodie killed his father turns against his father figure who has taken him in.

It is a grim allegorical tale that pits good against evil with the odds being heavily in favor of evil. Such a conflict has been written about countless times before, but Doctorow put a new twist on it.

“... Doctorow cleverly turns the horse opera stereotype on its head. If you are not a fan of sagebrush prose, don't let the notion that this is a “Western” dissuade you from reading this short, intense book. This is closer to Joseph Conrad than it is Louis L'Amour.” – David Abrams, author of *Fobbit* and *Brave Deeds* (*The Quivering Pen* blog)

Margaret says

kicks cormac mccarthy's ass

Tina says

This short first novel by E. L. Doctorow takes place in a Dakota mining town called Hard Times. It is a fit name for a place in the middle of nowhere with harsh weather, hard relationships, bad men and lawlessness. One of the most interesting westerns I have ever read because of its' plot. Hard Times is filled with desperation and hopelessness. Sounds like a cookie-cutter western? It's not, but to say more would give it all

away.

My rating: 5 stars. This book is classic worthy.

Diane Barnes says

"I told Molly we'd be ready for the bad man, but we can never be ready. Nothing is ever buried, the earth rolls in it's tracks, it never goes anywhere, it never changes, only the hope changes like morning and night, only the expectations rise and set. Why does there have to be promise before destruction?"

The Bad Man from Bodie is the villain in this book, but in reality he is just an embodiment for the evil that lies in men's hearts, for human nature gone terribly wrong. And the good people either ran in fear or just sat by and did nothing. Does that sound familiar? This book made my blood run cold.

This book was first published in 1960, and was E. L. Doctorow's first novel. There is no way he could have intended it as a warning about the things happening in our present day world, so maybe it's just me choosing to interpret it that way.

An incredible book any way you choose to look at it. You can read it as a western novel about the settling of a town, or as an allegory on the battle between good and evil. The last sentence blew me away.

LaViejaPiragua says

BIENVENIDOS AL OESTE DE VERDAD

Las novelas son los mejores vehículos para trasladarse por el espacio y el tiempo o, en palabras de Baudelaire, para "viajar sin vapor y sin vela". Lo que pasa es que no todas las expediciones son igual de valiosas, sólo algunas son capaces de conducirnos con la máxima eficacia a otras épocas y paisajes. Son esas las que de verdad consiguen sacarnos del sillón de orejas, del vagón del metro o de la cama para hacernos vivir vidas improbables (casi siempre imposibles) a miles de kilómetros y a muchos años o siglos de distancia.

"Cómo todo acabó y volvió a empezar", la opera prima de Doctorow, es una novela del Oeste, y además un ejemplo perfecto de vehículo espacio-temporal. Todos recordamos las películas sobre los primeros pobladores de las tierras salvajes del Oeste de Estados Unidos, historias de vaqueros, indios, sheriffs, forajidos, caballos, diligencias y tantos otros iconos que forman parte de la moderna mitología de aquel país. Pues bien, en este libro no encontraréis nada de eso, o mejor dicho, lo encontraréis todo, pero de una forma muy diferente a como nos lo han transmitido las películas. Porque en esta novela hay efectivamente vaqueros, un indio, un sheriff, un forajido, caballos, una diligencia, y más iconos todavía, porque también hay un "saloon", una mina e incluso una de esas tienda en las que se vende cualquier cosa. Pero nada es como nos lo han mostrado hasta ahora en el cine. Esos elementos aparecen en la novela, pero desprovistos de todo adorno épico y, por lo tanto, dotados de una enorme verosimilitud.

"Cómo todo acabó y volvió a empezar" cuenta la historia de un pequeño asentamiento de pioneros, cuyos habitantes no sólo luchan por sobrevivir, sino por convertirse además en un verdadero pueblo de los que figuran en los mapas y forman parte de las rutas de las diligencias; un pueblo que, con el tiempo, pueda llegar a ser una próspera ciudad. La vida allí no resulta fácil, pero el objetivo común de crear una comunidad

estable, parece compensarles todos los padecimientos.

Además de pintarnos este cuadro colectivo, Doctorow también nos cuenta con enorme maestría las pequeñas historias particulares de algunos de los personajes. Unas vidas más bien miserables y sometidas a innumerables pruebas en las que valores como el coraje, la lealtad o el sentido del deber son constantemente puestos en entredicho. Aunque Doctorow es uno de esos grandes nombres de la novela americana del siglo XX del que se espera cualquier genialidad, no deja de impresionar tanta calidad y madurez en una primera obra.

En cuanto el título, el original en inglés, “Welcome to “Hard Times” (“Bienvenido a Tiempos Difíciles”), juega con el nombre del pueblo, “Tiempos difíciles”. En esta edición española se opta inexplicablemente por un título descriptivo que se aleja por completo del original y que, no sólo no lo mejora, sino que resulta mucho menos gráfico e intenso que el primero. La pregunta sería ¿por qué hay que modificar un título a todas luces impecable? Siempre que se hacen estas cosas suele ser por motivos comerciales. A mí no me parece “Cómo todo acabó y volvió a empezar” más comercial que “Bienvenido a Tiempos Difíciles” o “Bienvenido a Hard Times”, si no se quiere usar el juego de palabras. Tampoco el título de la anterior versión en castellano de esta novela (Grijalbo, 1981) respetaba el original. En aquel caso se optó por “El hombre malo de Bodie”. Otro sinsentido.

Tfitoby says

I wanted a western in a noir style and I got it in spades.

Doctorow achieved in 155 pages what others spend 600 attempting; he has written a piece of literature in a popular style as an allegory for human nature whilst at the same time analysing what happened in Europe and specifically Germany in the 1930s, all the while making it an entertaining read. And this was his first novel!

Whilst this new title evokes a certain mood before you've even turned a page I think the original title of *The Bad Man From Bodie* has much greater effect after you reach then end. This Bad Man is the embodiment of all human evil and weakness, and in the face of such evil people have a habit of doing nothing. As far as revisionist westerns go this has to take pride of place in its rejection of the John Wayne ideal. There's a story that Clint Eastwood once wrote to John Wayne suggesting they work together on a western and in response John Wayne let Eastwood know in no uncertain terms that what he was doing to the genre was a disgrace. If that is true I'd hate to think what Wayne would think of the way Doctorow paints his western heroes in that case. These people are all weak, they are all cowards, and the novel is better for it.

The cover of my Pan edition calls it terse and bloodthirsty, the narration feels like the darker, more existential brother of Billy Wilders *Double Indemnity*, Norman Mailer called it '*a superb novel*' whilst the New York Times compared it to *Heart of Darkness* and called it '*taut and dramatic, exciting and successfully symbolic*', I cannot believe this book is not more widely read in the 21st century and I implore you all to read it now.

Shawn says

I never read a western quite like this. Well read and disturbing it is quite the book. It is too simple to call the hero in "Welcome to Hard Times" a coward. At times he seems like a principled pacifist, but his ideals and

actions do no one he knows any good. I liked the way Doctorow explored what happens when the helpless are prayed upon by pure irrational evil. It is not a pretty sight. Although I read the story in one weekend I would not call it a quick light read. The author's most famous book is "The March" and it has made its way on my to be read list.

Cynthia says

I love Westerns and Doctorow, as expected, turns out a great one especially considering this was his first published book. Blue, a hyper responsible, self appointed mayor devotes himself to keeping town records. People naturally turn to him when a mean gunslinger hits town. He fails them, horrible things happen, lots of scared people scatter and desert the town of Hard Times. Blue takes the few remaining people under his wing including the badly burned and terrorized lady of the night and an orphaned boy. He welcomes newcomers and entices them to stay and help him rebuild the town. The problem everyone spends their time waiting for the bad man to return. A black cloud hangs over Hard Times even as it grows again and Blue scribbles about it. If you like Westerns I'd advise against missing this one.

Craig Childs says

I once believed Larry McMurtry was the first author to write a true anti-Western, a demystification of the American West myth, but it turns out that honor should go to E.L. Doctorow who penned this hard little classic a good twenty-six years before anyone had ever heard of Lonesome Dove.

Welcome to Hard Times is the bleak, almost nihilistic tale of Mayor Will Blue, an aging coward living on the western frontier in the Dakota flatlands. Blue watches his friends murdered and his town burned to the ground by an unnamed gunslinger, unwilling to put himself in harm's way to stop it. Afterwards, he must take in the few remaining survivors and then attempt to rebuild the town from scratch, but Blue always fears the return of the Bad Man from Bodie and wonders if he will have the courage to fight back next time.

Like the best Westerns, this story tackles hard questions about man's ability to survive in harsh conditions, what it means to build and live in community, and the consequences of confronting weakness within oneself. You get the feeling that Blue's goals are doomed to failure from the outset—how can a sad man like this find love, or success, or even friendship in such a harsh landscape?—but you root for him because he tries so hard and his goals are noble.

Doctorow is doing for the Western what Cormac McCarthy did for the crime novel in No Country for Old Men. He strips the genre down to its bones and removes the pretense of even the possibility of happy endings. This is not a world where the weak are redeemed. Instead, as one character says:

“Truth is, if the drought don't get you and the blizzards don't get you, that's when some devil with liquor in his soul and a gun in his claw will ride you down and clean you out.”

In this time and space, even the concept of civilization can be shifting and illusory. Another great passage said this:

“Every time someone puts a little capital into this Territory I'm called in by the Governor and sent on my way.... If a man files a claim that yields, there's a town. If he finds some grass, there's a town. Does he dig a well? Another town. Does he stop somewhere to ease his bladder, there's a town. Over this land a thousand

times each year towns spring up and it appears I have to charter them all. But to what purpose? The claim pinches out, the grass dies, the well dries up, and everyone will ride off to form up again somewhere else for me to travel. Nothing fixes in this damned country, people blow around at the whiff of the wind. You can't bring the law to a bunch of rocks, you can't settle the coyotes, you can't make a society out of sand."

Unfortunately, the story falls apart in the third act. Like many authors, Doctorow seemed to be trying too hard to make a point rather than tell a story. He allows his thematic message—that civilization is a just false veneer, that all men are violent and anarchic by nature—to overwhelm and overshadow the natural narrative arc. Predictably, Blue's dreams for his new city fall apart, and the Bad Man from Bodie returns for a final showdown. The climactic situation devolves into almost satirical scenes of rioting, murder, and unrestrained mayhem that just did not ring true to the characters or the story itself.

Rick says

Not among Doctorow's best, but it's worth a read. Hard Times is a bleak place; survival is doubtful. But the human spirit hangs in, and the settlers hang on to each other. What else is there?

Xio says

"Nothing is ever buried, the earth rolls over in its tracks, it never goes anywhere, it never changes, only the hope changes like morning and night, only the expectations rise and set. Why does there have to be a promise before destruction?"

This simple novel, set in the Dakota flats well before statehood, is written simply and directly and somehow contains a few sharp insights and phrases to be found echoing through all of Tragedy. To be sure, these thoughts are not original. There is no originality to the tragic. However, Doctorow has put his American (screenwriter, at the time, though this was not originally a screenplay it was eventually turned into a -bad-film) spin onto the territory.

I read it in a matter of hours and though I guess it has an inevitability, felt caught up and this is entirely due to the writing, the gentle way he manages to unfold his take on the persistent (inspiring? maddening? I guess that depends on your philosophy) folly of humans.
