



This Business of Living: Diaries 1935-1950

By Cesare Pavese

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On June 23rd, 1950, Pavese, Italy's greatest modern writer received the coveted Strega Award for his novel *Among Women Only*. On August 26th, in a small hotel in his home town of Turin, he took his own life. Shortly before his death, he methodically destroyed all his private papers. His diary is all that remains and for this the contemporary reader can be grateful.

Contemporary speculation attributed this tragedy to either an unhappy love affair with the American film star Constance Dawling or his growing disillusionment with the Italian Communist Party. His Diaries, however, reveal a man whose art was his only means of repressing the specter of suicide which had haunted him since childhood: an obsession that finally overwhelmed him.

As John Taylor notes, he possessed something much more precious than a political theory: a natural sensitivity to the plight and dignity of common people, be they bums, priests, grape-pickers, gas station attendants, office workers, or anonymous girls picked up on the street (though to women, the author could--as he admitted--be as misogynous as he was affectionate). Bitter and incisive, *This Business of Living*, is both moving and painful to read and stands with James Joyce's *Letters* and Andre Gide's *Journals* as one of the great literary testaments of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Natalia Ginzburg once wrote that Cesare Pavese's "conversation could be pointed and invigorating like nobody else's. The observation will strike one as all too true after reading his extraordinary diaries. Whether meditating on matters aesthetic, philosophical, or romantic, Pavese brings to bear a metaphysical yearning and a dry, compressed expressiveness to rival that of Kafka, Weil, and Cioran. He aspired to an existence that would be utterly inaugural, suffused with a sense of revelation. His suffering stemmed from his inability to carry out the impossible task of raising his life and work to the level of myth. A year before his suicide, he mourned, "I wanted to go on, take it further, absorb another generation, become everlasting, like a hill." These journals are a bracing testament to that struggle."

--Tayt J. Harlin, Review of Contemporary Fiction

About the Author

Cesare Pavese (1908-1950), was educated in Turin. In 1930 he began to contribute essays on American literature to *La Cultura*, of which he later became editor. In 1935 he was imprisoned for anti-fascist activities. This experience formed the basis of *The Political Prisoner*. Between 1936 and 1940 nine of his books were published in Italy, these included novels, short stories, poetry, and essays. His books have been filmed and dramatized, and translated into many languages.

John Taylor is the author of *Paths to Contemporary French Literature* (volumes 1–3) and *Into the Heart of European Poetry*. He is the author of books of fiction, short prose, and poetry. He writes for the *Times Literary Supplement* and authors the "Poetry Today" column in the *Antioch Review*.

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