



**THE SELECTED  
WORKS OF  
CESARE PAVESE**

TRANSLATED AND WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION BY  
**R. W. FLINT**

**THE BEACH THE HOUSE ON THE HILL  
AMONG WOMEN ONLY THE DEVIL IN THE HILLS**

NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS  
CLASSICS

## THE SELECTED WORKS OF CESARE PAVESE

CESARE PAVESE (1908–1950) was born on his family's vacation farm in the country outside of Turin in northern Italy. He graduated from the University of Turin, where he wrote a thesis on Walt Whitman, beginning a continuing engagement with English-language literature that was to lead to his influential translations of *Moby-Dick*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Three Lives*, and *Moll Flanders*, among other works. Briefly exiled by the Fascist regime to Calabria in 1935, Pavese returned to Turin to work for the new publishing house of Giulio Einaudi, where he eventually became the editorial director. In 1936 he published a book of poems, *Lavorare stanca* (*Hard Labor*), and then turned to writing novels and short stories. Pavese won the Strega Prize for fiction, Italy's most prestigious award, for his novel *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*) in 1950. Later the same year, after a brief affair with an American actress, he committed suicide. Pavese's posthumous publications include his celebrated diaries, essays on American literature, and a second collection of poems, entitled *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi* (*Death Will Come and Will Have Your Eyes*).

R. W. FLINT translated, edited, and introduced *The Selected Works of Cesare Pavese* in 1968 and *Marinetti: Selected Writings* in 1971. He has contributed interviews, essays, translations, and reviews on Italian writers to various journals including *Parnassus*, *Canto*, and *The Italian Quarterly*. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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*New York*

This Is a New York Review Book  
Published by The New York Review of Books  
1755 Broadway New York, NY 10019

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Pavese, Cesare.

[Novels. English. Selections]

The selected works of Cesare Pavese / translated and with an  
introduction by R.W. Flint.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-940322-85-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Pavese, Cesare—Translations into English. I. Flint, R. W. II.  
Title.

PQ4835.A846 A238 2001

853'.912—dc21

2001005156

ISBN 0-940322-85-4

Cover photograph: George Platt Lynes, *Untitled* (detail)  
Courtesy of The Estate of George Platt Lynes and the Kinsey Institute  
Cover design: Katy Homans

Book design by Lizzie Scott  
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.  
1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

November 2001  
www.nybooks.com

## INTRODUCTION

*Pavese's nine short novels make up the most dense, dramatic and homogeneous narrative cycle of modern Italy, and also—I will add for the benefit of those who think this factor important—the richest in representing social ambiances, the human comedy, the chronicle of a society. But above all they are works of an extraordinary depth where one never stops finding new levels, new meanings.*

—ITALO CALVINO, in *L'Europa Letteraria*,  
December 1960

When Italo Calvino's memorial essay appeared in 1960, all of it written in the same uncompromising spirit, I was a happy man. It gave me a solid native peg on which to hang a discussion of Cesare Pavese, whose work I had begun to love, admire, and translate some years before. Pavese was already a popular writer in Italy in 1960 and had been often praised, but Calvino's testimony came from a novelist I liked, a younger man who had known him well, enjoyed his company, and had joined the publishing house of Einaudi in Turin to work with him.

Digging Pavese out of his passionate, tormented era, the decade from 1940 to 1950, is like trying to find someone in Pompeii while the lava is still hot. It goes without saying that this was one of the bloodiest and most dramatic decades in Italian history since the Risorgimento. The neorealist movies of the Forties, *Open City*, *Bicycle Thief*, *Paisan*, *Shoeshine*, and others, were the first exported witness to the rejuvenating effect of those agonized years. A small miracle had happened. Part of an industry normally given over to kitsch had broken loose and become suddenly eloquent with reality, with a sober, delicate, and disabused affection for the

real Italy of the moment, a country soaked in despair, riddled with hypocrisy, but a land of heroes nevertheless. In Italy, this short cinematic flowering was forgotten (except by the better directors) almost as soon as it faded from the screen. But many non-Italians must have wondered if there were not perhaps a literary equivalent of those films, a writer who dramatized the entire era with a freshness and inwardness beyond their scope. And one with the foresight and skill to project his work well ahead of his age.

There was indeed such a writer, and Cesare Pavese is clearly the man. He did his best work precisely between 1940 and 1950, and then, in August 1950, not long after winning his country's chief literary prize, committed suicide. Identification with an era could hardly go further than that.

This selection from Pavese's quite extensive *oeuvre* includes four novels, three of which—*The House on the Hill*, *Among Women Only*, and *The Devil in the Hills*—certainly make up the main body of his fiction. If Calvino's "homogeneous" has any force, it applies to these works, which belong to what Italian critics call Pavese's bourgeois novels (a term adopted here with no polemical intent whatever). Two ambitious novels that frame these three—*Paesi tuoi* (*The Harvesters*) of 1941 and the culminating *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*) of 1950—are of considerable interest and should be read, in better translations than any now available, in conjunction with *Dialoghi con Leucò* (*Dialogues with Leucò*) of 1947, contemplative dialogues "spoken" by characters from classic mythology, elegantly translated by Professors William Arrowsmith and D. S. Carne-Ross; and with *Lavorare stanca* (*Hard Labor*), his poems of 1936, also translated by Professor Arrowsmith. That Pavese was among other things what can be called a mandarin cannot and should not be denied. But a cultivated Italian highbrow, especially one devoted like Pavese to Giovanni Battista Vico, the first great modern theorist of history and culture, is never satisfied unless he can revive the purest classic terrors and ferocities, at least once in his career, in some contemporary form. *Paesi tuoi* and *La luna e i falò* approach that goal in radically different but related ways. Vico had written, as Pavese records in his diary, that the peasant agriculturalists of classic times were the most cruel of all social classes. Agreeing with this judgment on

the basis of his wanderings among the Turinese hills, Pavese undertook to illustrate it in ways that seem irresistibly melodramatic to modern readers both inside and outside Italy. In *Paesi tuoi* there's a certain affected monotony; a young writer's stagy crassness, in *Luna*, plot rather than language is finally self-defeating—a jumble of effects and genres each exquisitely handled, but each stubbornly separate from one another. Pavese's vital interests belonged to the urban middle and working classes, and this bears crucially on the choice of language throughout his work.

Turin is as he was: industrious, clenched in a feverish and stiff-necked preoccupation, and, at the same time, indolent and given to wandering and daydreaming. Wherever we go in the city that resembles him we find our friend starting back to life; in every angle, on every street corner we expect to meet his tall figure in its dark cloak, his face barricaded behind his collar and his cap pulled over his eyes.

Thus the novelist Natalia Ginzburg in an affectionate memoir of her old colleague at Einaudi, Pavese, "whose conversation could be pointed and invigorating like nobody else's." And to commence with Turin, the city that he made into one of the absolute places in modern literature, is to commence with politics. In the general helplessness of any Italian city to throw off Fascism without aid from outside the country, Turin thought it had a mission to win with the pen what nobody could win with the sword.

In that most industrialized and therefore, in many ways, most turbulent city under Fascism, politics were the heart of the matter. Antonio Gramsci, Italy's first and still most important Communist writer, won a scholarship to the University of Turin in 1911 from his native Sardinia and spent most of his active life in the city. An eloquent liberal, Piero Gobetti, started a vigorous polemic against the Fascists in Turin as early as 1922, as a result of which he suffered a violent physical reprisal and died soon afterward in Paris, in 1926. But the movement he founded in Paris, *Giustizia e Libertà*, continued to be a rallying point for Pavese and his friends. Gobetti had become a local legend when intellectuals elsewhere

hardly knew what was going on, when Mussolini was still pinning medals on Gabriele D'Annunzio, the rapidly fading hero of Fiume, a once remarkable poet luckless enough to have taken Fascism almost as seriously as he took himself.

Throughout Pavese's boyhood there had been fierce labor troubles. Later, at secondary school (the *liceo* is often an Italian's real education, after which comes specialization at a university), at the university, at work as a tutor, as a translator from English, and eventually as a member of the new leftist publishing house of Giulio Einaudi, he naturally fell in with the most active younger anti-Fascists. One of these was Leone Ginzburg from Odessa, a schoolmate like most of his friends, later a professor of Slavic at the university and husband of Natalia Ginzburg; he was arrested in 1934 for clandestine activities, released for a time, arrested again, and died under torture in prison in 1944.

Pavese's literary studies in secondary school—in the class photograph he sits well front and center, the moody young genius—took place under a forceful old-fashioned Risorgimento liberal, Augusto Monti, himself a novelist of merit, who shaped the minds of two decades of young middle-class Turinese. Some of Pavese's working-class tutees and friends were early casualties in the war. The unrelenting heat of all this turmoil, its constant upshot in the direct action as war threatened and eventually arrived, helps explain the air of drivenness, of impending trouble and enforced prudence, in much of his work.

In 1914, when Pavese was six, his father, a former judge in the city, died of a lingering brain tumor. In 1918 the vacation farm at Santo Stefano Belbo where the novelist was born had to be sold. His capacity for worry seemed to have been further increased by an absence of much emotional support from his widowed mother and his married sister, although he lived with his mother until her death in 1931 and then with his sister's family. (In the diary he gallantly exonerates his parents from any faults in his upbringing, but a typically Piedmontese diffidence in both women can be read between the lines. Family feeling among the Piedmontese is often a matter of what one doesn't do, the freedoms one allows, rather than what one does.)

Pavese emerged from the conditioning of the Thirties, an era

when the better part of Italian decency went gradually underground, speaking in his books a new language of his own: a terse, pungently oblique domestic language of “small” people living apparently small lives, the inflections of whose speech carry the full weight of the times. This kind of vigorous disguise, too vigorous for the muddled heads of officialdom, is an old Italian specialty, particularly in the north. During the Thirties and Forties, Pavese had translated some ten contemporary American novels, as well as *Moby-Dick*, *Benito Cereno*, *Moll Flanders*, *David Copperfield*, and Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

To shape his language and summon up a new social class both to speak the language in his books and later to read it, he made use of many literary devices for keeping distance, lyric, elegiac, and panoramic. But from the beginning he had very positive and (for Italy) original ideas about the shift of interest from the nineteenth-century novel of character to the twentieth-century novel of “static essentials,” where character is a relatively fixed quantity that doesn’t so much change as slowly reveal itself under stress. This theory perfectly suited Pavese’s temperament in any case. He accomplished all this on a new, mysteriously hypnotic, subterraneanly moving, telescoped scale that freed him in turn to loosen and roughen his syntax, to mimic Piedmontese speech without resorting to dialect, to compress, scramble, and foreshorten at will—to fuse the homely, the lyric, and the panoramic with extraordinary tact.

Pavese had chronic asthma, sometimes painfully at night, which took the place of traditional TB in stimulating his appetite for reality, *pari passu* with his keen and growing sense of language. He was more in love with Joyce’s “pathos of small circumstances” than any Italian novelist since Svevo. And capable of rising to a dry, quietly powerful eloquence, verbally but not emotionally understated, that condenses “an extremely sheer and compact richness of inner motivations and universal ideas,” in Italo Calvino’s words. Sometimes it may be an overwhelming image, like the looming outline of the hill Superga outside the window in the last paragraph of *Among Women Only*; or the whole last chapter of *The House on the Hill*, which immensely deepens and expands nearly every motion (except comedy) that his prose has made in the earlier chapters.

The key to Pavese's stamina must lie in this vital tension between the (now) self-evident demands of anti-Fascist decency and the ambitions, always somewhat exotic in Italy, of a full-scale novelist. But as a matter of plain fact, of the four works collected in this volume, three of them—*The Beach*, *Among Women Only*, and *The Devil in the Hills*—contain no politics at all in the usual sense. The last two are usually treated, in varying tones of approval or disdain, as his "bourgeois" novels. *The Beach* is in many respects a trial run for *The Devil in the Hills* of seven years later. A quick survey of the longer novels may provoke the conclusion that Pavese gives the upper classes a pretty rough time. He liked Scott Fitzgerald so much that he once confided in a letter that he didn't dare translate him, as he had not translated Hemingway for the same reason. He was also fond of Proust. But he lived in an atmosphere far less smitten with the glamour of wealth than Proust's or Fitzgerald's. In *Among Women Only*, the upper classes are represented by a fumbling pair of industrialist parents, assorted demi-lesbians, and half-vicious hangers-on. In *The Devil in the Hills*, their spokesman is a drug addict far gone with tuberculosis. In *The House on the Hill*, we see them through the eyes of an elderly pietist, Elvira, an adolescent prig, Egle, and others of their kind. Pavese's class prejudice is the truly Arcadian feature of his work—pure, arbitrary, and selfless. He often ignored it in his life—he had several prosperous friends—and argued against it in his fiction; but it was always there when he needed it most.

When someone asks the narrator of *The House on the Hill* if he believes in Italy, the narrator answers: "Not in Italy. In the Italians." Everything Pavese touches in the novels is seen chiefly as it affects his narrators' lives, and they in turn "speak" for the newly mobile, newly restless, supposedly rootless peasant-proletarian class of the cities, often established in middle-class jobs like teaching; a "class" he created virtually single-handedly for Italian fiction.

Needless to say, Pavese did not, one fine morning, suddenly notice this class and begin writing about it. His literary beginnings followed all the usual steps. But the igniting spark was American:

You are the peach of the world! Not only in wealth and material life but really in liveliness and strength of art which

means thought and politics and everything. You've got to predominate in this century all over the civilized world as before did Greece, and Italy, and France. I'm sure of it.

(Letter, April 1930)

Pavese's "English" letters in 1929 and 1930 to a Piedmontese friend in Chicago, who sent him American books by the several dozen, were certainly his quaintest, the sort of English the first really literate Italian computer will write after it has been liberally programmed with Americans from Walt Whitman to Damon Runyon. He had written his doctoral thesis on Whitman in 1930 ("I succeeded barely in finding something I wanted for my degree's thesis about Walt Whitman. You don't know, I'll be the first Italian to speak at some extent and critically of him. Look me over, I'll almost reveal him to Italy"—in a letter to the same friend).

But Pavese intended to be as subversively heterosexual as Whitman had been the opposite. His whole sense of a new age, of movement, civilization, and true ease depended, as he wrote in a letter, on "overcoming our sacrosanct Piedmontese misogyny." Whitman inspired him with visions of mixing the lyric and the panoramic, of exploring a new private self that might become a new national self, a documentary art that might be poetically liberating. As a chronic walker, Pavese also shared Whitman's, so to speak, locomotor sympathies. His first book of poems, *Lavorare stanca*, saw him beginning to use his newly stretched "American" senses to celebrate the misfits, the workers without hope—farmhands, sand diggers, beggars, seamstresses, whores, etc.—whom he had begun to see and meet during his constant walking and bar-sitting on the city's outskirts.

His middle-classness is important, however, in the light of a common literary faith of the day, expressed by Alberto Moravia in an essay on Verdi, that everything good in Italian life comes from either the peasantry or the nobility. This romantic creed seems even shakier when one remembers that Italy itself was essentially bourgeois vis-à-vis the rest of Europe during the high Renaissance. Moravia, to be sure, has made himself abundantly clear about his own definition of Italian middle-classness, in *The Time of Indifference*, in nearly everything he has written. His

version of the petty vanity and pusillanimousness that opened the road to Fascism differs very little from Pavese's in books like *Among Women Only*. But Moravia's middle class always has two strikes against it; Pavese's is a far less predetermined quantity. Like many others at the time, uneasily, ambiguously, without much illusion (vide *The Devil in the Hills*), Pavese shared this feeling for the peasants, the peasants of Verga and D'Annunzio at any rate. He kept scanning his own nature for telltale hints of peasant origin. But in a crisis he invariably took the city man's part, and this required courage and imagination. In the best books, his theme was often a city man's or woman's education at the expense of a latent savagery in the peasants; something that destroyed continuity and made intelligent contemplation—Pavese's true love—a feeble and spasmodic affair.

Turin is one of the best cities in Europe for framing this drama, a city laid out by the Romans in their Augusta Taurinorum, whose straight-lined gracefulness and alpine changeability are shot with memories of half a dozen pasts. It is also the city where class distinctions are most fluid, where workers are constantly streaming into the factories from the country, where the oldest families don't mind soiling their hands with commerce and management. Add to its normal restlessness the violence of Fascism and the war and you can see why Pavese's endlessly debated middle position was a very live option. He often chose the outskirts as his theater and starting point (see the opening of *The Devil in the Hills*) because it symbolized his contempt for the twin official cults of *strapaese* (super-country) and *stracittà* (super-city). What wonderfully silly names! The cultural battle under Fascism was mostly a pillow fight of empty counterpositions in which, however, every third, fifth, or ninth government pillow might contain a bomb. Hence his reluctance to deal with even the normal politics of the factories. Like a traveling mountebank from Fellini's *La Strada*, he set up his booth on the periphery and controlled his action from that relaxed retreat.

Pavese's conversion to Communism was an extremely reluctant, hesitating affair, caused as much by personal loyalties as by intellectual persuasion. He wrote a few inspirational pieces for the Third Page of the Communist paper, *L'Unità*, and even won a

Communist literary prize. But the discomfort of his allegiance becomes positively comic in some passages of Davide Lajolo's biography, *Il vizio assurdo* (*An Absurd Vice*), when this gentleman, as intellectually doctrinaire as he is personally generous, nearly flays the hide off Pavese—most fraternally—for his petty evasions. It should be no surprise, since choices had to be made, that this volume passes over his two most overtly Communist novels, *The Companion* (1948) and *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950). Although the latter especially has many fine things in it, both of them show how Pavese's peculiar center of gravity was disturbed whenever he thought he should paraphrase an official line or veer too close to socialist realism or create an ideological hero like Nuto, the sententious carpenter-clarinet-player in *The Moon and the Bonfires*. It matters little that this character was taken from a living model (who, incidentally, was interviewed by Norman Thomas di Giovanni and claimed to have found Pavese an utterly baffling character). Nuto is still a bore when he preaches.

If one overlooks these doctrinaire excesses—and who during those years avoided them?—one finds in Pavese a novelist lucky in nearly everything essential for the kind of fiction he was born to write. He was even fortunate in two periods of exile that took him away from the city at critical moments. The first, in 1935, was to Brancaleone Calabria in the extreme south, where he was sent as a punishment for his editorial role at the anti-Fascist Einaudi magazine, *La Cultura*—a rather mild chastisement as reprisals went in the Thirties. It separated Pavese from an apparently hard-boiled young woman whom he had fallen in love with and hoped to marry, and who, from her effect on the novelist during his winter months in a tiny Calabrian village (all his letters from that time survive), sounds like very bad medicine indeed. She had used his mailbox in her clandestine work for the Communist underground and was obviously a prime model for his fictional women in many of their traits.

Pavese's sentence was commuted from three years to ten months, and he came back to Turin to learn from a friend that his innamorata had married someone else the day before—at which point he passed out cold on the station platform. Later that year, his book of poems, *Lavorare stanca*, for which he entertained great

hopes and on which he had worked exclusively for several years, was published in Florence, sponsored by the novelist Elio Vittorini. It met with complete silence. Professor Arrowsmith explains this failure at length and quite plausibly in his introduction to his above-mentioned translation, *Hard Labor*. Knowing the poems in the Arrowsmith translation, or better still in the original, adds immeasurably to the experience of reading the fiction. They are, in any case, something in the nature of short atmospheric sketches or stories. Many are reminiscent of nothing so much as the poetic naturalism of Edward Hopper—an ultimate narrative austerity for Italian poetry, but scarcely a problem for Americans.

Between his Calabrian interlude and his self-decreed exile in 1944, Pavese's only significant publication was *Paesi tuoi*, in 1941, a solid popular success whose innovations were beautifully calculated to offend nice-minded critics and bring down a verdict of "Americanism" that stuck to him for the rest of his life.

After a short stint in Rome for Einaudi, Pavese returned to Turin late in 1943 to find the Einaudi office closed and his friends dispersed. His second year-long exile, to a family farm high in the hills at Serralunga, was another subtle mixture of the voluntary and the involuntary. He had tried to enlist in the army before the guerrilla war but was turned down for physical reasons. These same reasons were enough in themselves to discourage his joining the guerrilla war later. To stay in the city during the bombing seemed pointless. But joining his sister's family out of danger, in a longed-for rustic setting, brought on a series of inner crises—Leone Ginzburg's death in 1944 contributing to them—that eventually worked themselves out in his masterpiece, *The House on the Hill*, and supplied the germ of all his later work. Of this *Wunderjahr* he wrote on January 9, 1945: "A strange, rich year . . . with much deep thought about the primitive and savage, which has begun some notable work. It could be the most important year of your life so far." It could indeed.

There are two moderately distinct clusters of ideas in Pavese's work which are worth discussing. During his last year he often told correspondents that they could find a summary of his life in "La Belva" ("The Wild Beast") from *Dialogues with Leucò*. It evokes

the meeting of Endymion and Artemis on a mountaintop in moonlight. Pavese's Artemis signifies many things in his intimate life:

She stands there before me, a lean, unsmiling girl, watching me. And those great transparent eyes have seen other things. They still see them. They *are* those things. Wild berry and wild beast are in her eyes, and the howling, the death, the cruel turning of the flesh to stone. I know the spilled blood, the torn flesh, the voracious earth, and solitude. For her, the wild one, it is all solitude. For her the wild animal is solitude. Her caresses are like the caresses one gives a dog or a tree. But, stranger, she looks at me, looks at me—a lean girl in a short tunic, like a girl from your own village.

Pavese assumes that you, the reader, the stranger, know the girls of your "village" as he knows his shy and decisive Piedmontese, that women are not the merely generic creatures of not-so-distant French ancestry that they so often prove to be in Italian novels. Antonioni knew his business when he chose *Among Women Only* as the basis of his first ambitious movie, *Le Amiche* (*The Girl-friends*). Fundamentally, I think, Pavese was defending the Italian woman's right to be independent without needing to be omniscient, neither sheep nor bully nor Earth Mother.

*Sex. Love. Death.* Pavese's suicide in 1950 soon after a very briefly happy affair with a young American actress was supposed to imply that he had something, if not original, at least extremely touching, to say about this holy triad. He lit up this murky ground with bright aphoristic flashes (W. H. Auden called him "one of the masters of the aphorism" in a review of the diary) but worked no miracles; the ground remains murky. What we have is an impressive account of a characteristic modern dilemma that spares no one, not even Italian geniuses.

His sufferings are continually being defused and disinfected by a very genuine hostility to *all* cults of suffering, whether literary, religious, military, or what have you. In that, Pavese was original and sane on the Italian scene. Otherwise the love-sex-death triad was largely humus for his work, a subplot that he could hardly have avoided if he had wanted to. His life and work followed a clearly

visible curve of energy that reached its peak in 1944 at Serralunga and declined rapidly after 1949. Nearly everything he did in 1950 suggests a man beyond help. And how natively Piedmontese it was that work should have been his undoing, the very ecstasy of work he was forever denouncing in his fellow townsmen.

A chief source of suspense in the fiction is the hope Pavese arouses from the first paragraph of each book that his narrator will sooner or later rise to the occasion with a genuinely magnanimous word or act. The moral warts and blemishes he endows his narrators with are themselves engines of suspense, craftily deployed. Nowhere is this more entertaining than in *The Beach*. In his later, more committed years, he tended to look down on this novella. Structurally it may break apart into two only distantly related sections. Every page, however, is needed to establish the Pavese voice in its peculiar rough-hewn delicacies, to prepare the reader for the wonderfully edgy, funny, and pathetic final episodes. The last nine chapters are as resonant as anything he did later.

What to say about *The House on the Hill* in a short space? Too much or too little. It's altogether the least mannered of Pavese's novels, but events that move the action and affect the narrator directly may now require some explanation. The "Republic," of course, was the abortive Republic of Salò under Mussolini and the Germans that opposed the legal government of the King, Marshal Badoglio, and the Allies from September 1943 until April 1945. As a novel almost free of melodramatic devices (such as Poli's TB in *The Devil in the Hills*), the least dependent on overarching symbolism, the most deeply felt in the lengths to which every theme and sequence is carried well beyond craft into the higher reaches of art while the author's feet stay firmly planted on the ground (indeed, they seem to grow into the ground), *The House* is a thoroughly noble book whose nobility is its least obtrusive feature. If ever, the cool breeze from Arcadia that sometimes blows at the height of such overwhelming human breakdowns can be felt in this novel. A sign of its mastery is one's lack of objection to the way he casts off fully realized people like Cate, Dino, Elvira, Fonso, and the others. Much as we like them, we are drawn into the argu-

ment until we agree to its final need for a swept stage. The egotism of his procedure, like Dante's, emerges as the ground of his strength.

*Among Women Only* is nearly, but not quite, the inversion of everything in *The House on the Hill*. Yet the choice of a feminine theater is also his most energetic pledge of faith during the general postwar collapse. The two books have very similar heroines. No doubt Cate of *The House* would turn out to be as complete a cultural philistine as Clelia (Pavese's closest friend for many years was a painter; not all of Clelia's opinions are his own). Whether these are real women, or, as Calvino jocularly complained in a letter to Pavese, a stable of Houyhnhnms, of Pavese's got up in wigs, false breasts, and breath reeking of pipe tobacco, the reader must decide for himself.

*The Devil in the Hills* requires a short excursus about Pavese's classicism as it bears on his Americanism of the Forties:

Your classical knowledge stems from the Georgics, D'Annunzio, and the hill of Pino. To that background you added America because its language is rustic-universal . . . and because it's the place where town and country meet. Yours is a rustic classicism that could easily become prehistoric ethnology.

(Diary, 1943)

To Pavese, D'Annunzio meant two distinct things: first, the kind of cultural adolescence he wanted to conquer in himself and which, for literary purposes, he did conquer; second, on a more vital level, the elegant and precise sexualizing of nature and country life for which Italian literature is much in his debt. In rural matters D'Annunzio has been the Italians' pocket Freud. And if Pavese had so little to say about Freud, it was because he himself wanted to carry D'Annunzio a stage further into urban rationality. Pavese read the Jungian ethnologists, but Jung himself was not in his line. In *The Devil in the Hills* we watch him weave with D'Annunzio-trained finesse a tent of poetic-symbolical speculations within which his loose summer carnival can take place.

"Where town and country meet . . ." This doesn't seem an exciting prospect until his "Americanized" late adolescents start talking, and then one realizes that whatever he may do with the

theme, he is not going to sentimentalize it. By 1948, when the book was planned, Pavese thought he had pretty well worked his way through Marxism proper and was embarked on the most serious utopian ideas for the post-Marxist world. But he was conservative even about Marxism and tried to keep all he had learned. How can town and country meet was now his theme.

In the elegiac potency of the long Greppo sequence—he begins his farewell-to-the-Greppo cadence as early as Chapter 24 of a thirty-chapter novel—one is reminded of how much of his fiction is an elaborate series of leave-takings and strategic withdrawals. A clear autumnal frost seems to mark the whole *oeuvre*. In *The Devil in the Hills*, a book drenched in echoes from literature of every period, I think one can see that Pavese is being elegiac about fiction itself, in a way that strangely combines the clarity of Joyce's *Dubliners* and the all-accepting spirit of *Finnegans Wake*. In other words, he seems aware that fiction has little more to divulge except its own essence, the continuing possibility of writing it well, of broadening and simplifying its effects until it becomes the permanent possession of whoever reads it early enough in life. Fiction, in Pavese's view, is passing out of the realm of revelation into that of initiation—but it must keep at least the full potency of that ideal.

*The Devil in the Hills* is his answer to the charge of "decadence" that followed closely the charge of Americanism. In Poli he drew what he hoped was a credible young Milanese who would also have a little of Dostoevsky's Myshkin and Mann's Hans Castorp in his nature but whose fate would relieve the author of the suspicion of being an irresponsible "Nietzschean." There is, however, a parallel to Nietzsche in the alpine air of looking down from a height on Europe that Pavese has, of composing something at once prophetic, instructive, entertaining, and devoutly nonviolent at heart. Should we listen? Fifty years after Pavese's death, I don't know how not to.

—R. W. FLINT

*First printed 1968, revised 2001*