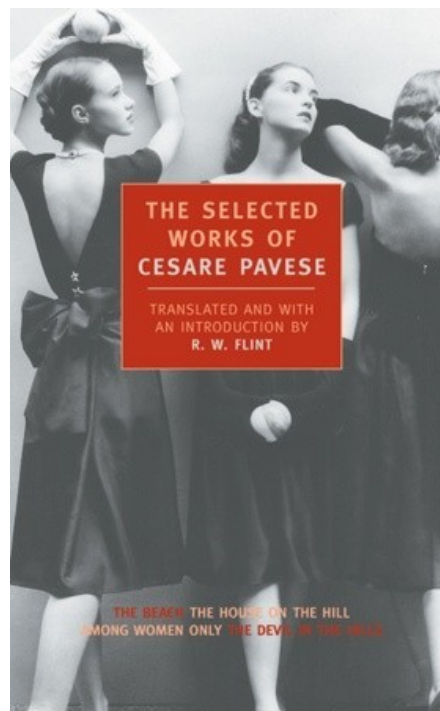




## The Selected Works

*Cesare Pavese , R.W. Flint (Translator)*

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### The Selected Works Cesare Pavese , R.W. Flint (Translator)

"There is only one pleasure, that of being alive. All the rest is misery," wrote Cesare Pavese, whose short, intense life spanned the ordeals of fascism and World War II to witness the beginnings of Italy's postwar prosperity. Searchingly alert to nuances of speech, feeling, and atmosphere, and remarkably varied, his novels offer a panoramic vision, at once sensual and finely considered, of a time of tumultuous change. This volume presents readers with Pavese's major works. *The Beach* is a wry summertime comedy of sexual and romantic misunderstandings, while *The House on the Hill* is an extraordinary novel of war in which a teacher flees through a countryside that is both beautiful and convulsed with terror. *Among Women Only* tells of a fashion designer who enters the affluent world she has always dreamed of, only to find herself caught up in an eerie dance of destruction, and *The Devil in the Hills* is an engaging road novel about three young men roaming the hills in high summer who stumble on mysteries of love and death.

### The Selected Works Details

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## From Reader Review The Selected Works for online ebook

### Nick says

I remembered Pavese with great fondness from my youth as someone who captured inarticulate peasants with compassion, somewhat like Grazia Deledda or Giovanni Verga but in the post-World War II context. Evidently, I was actually reading someone else. This volume is made up of four novellas or novels centered around Turin and the countryside around it, not far from the Italian Riviera. The narrators are both articulate and stricken by ennui. With one exception, they are concerned with entertaining themselves on the beach, by having usually passionless affairs, and opening boutiques. This is less the sideline on Italian Neo-Realism that I remembered than a wholehearted plunge into a provincial variety of the glittering world that Fellini would examine in the sixties (to be fair, Pavese beat him there by a decade). The exception is "The House in the Hills", which captures the confusing time after the fall of Mussolini but before the Allied Armies liberated the entire country; that gives the reader people who are fighting for their country against an occupying force. That does not include the narrator, who is himself cruel and spends much of the latter part of the book hiding and fleeing. Still, "The House in the Hills" is a relief among all the self-obsession of the other pieces in the book. The narrator in "The House in the Hills" at least tries to save some of those around him. The other three pieces convey a vision of an atomized, meaningless society that must at least have contributed to Pavese's suicide, which is usually attributed to the end of an affair with an actress.

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### Isla McKetta says

Of the four novellas collected here, I fell most deeply in love with *The House on the Hill*. The relationship between that story and early Calvino is palpable and exciting, but the story itself is better still. *The Devil in the Hills* is more Fitzgerald and I came to love its characters. I rated the book five stars for those two stories alone. *The Beach* is similar enough to Bolano's *Third Reich* that I've enjoyed reading them in tandem, though I don't know that I would love either in isolation. *Among Women Only* left me flat and I kept wishing the narrator had been a man because Pavese never really pulls off the feminine point of view (any feminine point of view).

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### AJ says

My criteria for not finishing a book is this: if I put it down to read another book, look upon it with dread, and avoid opening it again by reading other books instead. I finished *La spiaggia*, which wasn't too bad, but couldn't get through *La casa in collina*, and decided I didn't care to.

Maybe when my Italian is good enough, I'll try it in the original Italian. I found the English translation to be lacking; enough prepositions were incorrect that I wonder how well-translated the book is.

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### Robert Wechsler says

So far, I've read the first two novellas in this collection. *The Beach* (1942) didn't grab me at all, so I moved on to *The House on the Hill* (1949), to which I give 5 stars. Its first-person narrative by a Turin teacher grasping for certainty during a transitional period in the Second World War is characterized by short

sentences, abrupt transitions and, most of all, constant anxiety. It captures a transitory wartime situation as well in a serious way as Josef Skvorecky's *The Cowards* captures it (in Czechoslovakia) in a comic way.

But *House* is not nearly as enjoyable to read. The style is simple, but the reading is difficult, sometimes painful, because one shares the narrator's uncertainty (especially if, like me, one does not know the history he was living through) and anxiety. The narration often doesn't make sense, not in the usual way. It's not about sense, it's about feelings, about the anxieties of war, about its emotional rather than physical violence. There is little action, people come and go, and where they are and whether or when they'll return is always up in the air.

*The House on the Hill* is truly a great, singular novel.

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## William1.2 says

### *The Devil in the Hills*

What a difference this is from the last work I read in this collection, *The House on the Hill*. See below. This is essentially a coming of age story. Pieretto, Oreste (!), and the unnamed narrator are spending a last summer in and around Turin before their lives intervene. One night, to beat the heat, they head for the hillside outside the city. Pieretto wants to intellectually dominate the others. His arguments have the spin of casuistry. Several consist of the most reprehensible clichés about the nature of women. On the hill they run into Poli, a young man their age, but unlike them rich, seemingly dead at the wheel of his car. Poli is blasted on cocaine. After his Lazarus-like resurrection they begin a series of dubious road trips. Joining them on the last of these is the older Rosalba, who later goes gunning for Poli with a dainty derringer. As reader's we then enjoy an interval without the spoiled Poli, whose absence yet looms, or Rosalba. It's August now and our young men have retired to the country life in Orestes's village. There are long days of sunbathing and hiking and drinking wine. We visit Orestes's cousins, self-reliant men of the earth. Then it's time to resume our connection with Poli. His family's vast landholding, brambled over, is no longer productive. Deeper and deeper we go into the realm until chaotic nature yields to the manicured estate. The story takes a turn here that's one part domestic vitriol of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and one part lost-generation inertia of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. You'll love Gabriella, Poli's wife--oh yes, he's married-- with her biting malice. She makes Lady Brett look like a girl scout. The last half, especially when Oreste either seduces or is seduced by Gabriella, makes for positively excruciating suspense.

### *The House on the Hill*

An absolutely searing narrative set amid the WW2 fighting as it passed through Turin, Italy. Corrado, a schoolteacher, leaves Turin every evening for the surrounding upland, where much of the populace has taken refuge from bombing by the British. He has taken a room in a house owned by two women, a mother and daughter, and the latter pines for a more intimate connection with him. Meanwhile, at an adjacent house he rediscovers Cate, his lover of ten years ago, and her son, Dino, who may also be his son. Events are unrelievedly horrific and spur considerable reflection on the part of narrator, Corrado. The war is made wretchedly complex by the joint mayhem produced by the Germans, the Fascists (cast adrift when the monarchy asks the Allies for an armistice), the partisans or underground, and the Allies. The story is harrowing, deeply moving, and without false sentiment. It's very lively with lots of vivid action and penetrating insights into the Italian political circus. It's unlike anything I've ever read relating to the Italian campaign. In my view it's the gem of this collection so far, though I've yet to read *The Devil In the Hills*, and may be Pavese's prose masterpiece. (He was also an extraordinary poet. See, especially, *Hard Labor*, translated by William Arrowsmith.) I'll reread this one.

### *Among Women Only*

A successful Italian couturier returns to Turin where she began her long difficult ascent from poverty to the monied classes. Clelia, our narrator, has worked her way up from nothing. Having attained material success and the access to society it brings, she is not a little resentful to find that it's lonely at the top. A single successful woman in the male dominated culture of 1950s Italy, she is utterly without women peers. This is highlighted by a chattering housekeeper she can't abide in an early scene. She is essentially a misfit in this highly misogynist culture. The novel, in part, is about class in postwar Italy. The prose is lean and admirably unadorned, but there's a certain lack of fluidity in the story's early going, a creakiness. It's a minor flaw that soon dissipates. It would be nice to hear from a fellow GR member with Italian whether or not they think this reflects Pavese's prose, or if it is a failing of the translation. I wonder, too, if Pavese ever read Hemingway. It's quite possible since the author was a prolific translator of English novels into Italian. All the flitting about the Piedmont region by Clelia and her "leisured" friends reminds me of the perigrinations of Jake Barnes, Lady Brett, et. al in *The Sun Also Rises*. *Among Women Only* has just that same sense of meaningless busyness, empty reveling, and pervasive boredom. Undergirding the general sense of disappointment and disillusion is the story of the attempted suicide of Rosetta, one of the partiers, whose lesbianism isn't taken seriously by either herself or others. Her sexual preference is seen as legitimate only to the extent that it staves off the boredom in a pinch. Rosetta is having difficulty negotiating her denial. She's a serious person, unlike the others who simply seem to wish to be in perpetual motion, eternally distracted, and the one character other than Clelia I wanted to learn more about.

### *The Beach*

This story is about codes of behavior between men and women--and men and men--in mid-20th century Italy. Though published in 1941 there is no sign of war in the text. We begin with the narrator lamenting the loss of his male friend Doro to marriage. This has caused a rift between them, which the narrator mends by going to Genoa, where the happy couple now live, and apologizing. They renew their friendship. Doro returns to Turin for a boisterous night, which culminates in someone discharging a firearm. Afterwards, both go to the beach where new wife Clelia awaits. The narrator, known only as the "engineer," instead of staying with them, takes a room nearby. Outside his window a large olive tree thrives amidst the cobbles. He meets Doro and Clelia almost every day on the beach. It is summer. Also there is one Guido, often referred to as "friend Guido," as if to emphasize his lack of friendliness, who is there simply for Clelia. Waiting for his moment so to speak. Guido is a rogue. He keeps a mistress nearby whom Clelia will have not have in her house. Also at the beach by chance is a former student of the engineer, Berti, who at 15 is just starting his heady days of womanizing. Berti is the pre-Guido. They are two separate points along the womanizing continuum. Doro by contrast is utterly unlike the two Guidos. He loves and trusts his wife, though they fight (off stage), and it is this fighting that the somewhat nosey narrator seems to want to clear up; not realizing the happy couple's unwillingness to revisit the matter after the heat has passed. Doro is without guile or jealousy. He paints watercolors of the sea. He denigrates his talent. The prose is sensual, replete with omissions that might have told us more. The story merits multiple readings.

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### Laura says

If NYRB, Susan Sontag, and Italo Calvino all tell me to read the same book, I'd be a fool not to.

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### Andrew says

The stories of this book reminded me a lot of Michelangelo Antonioni's films in that they both tend to portray a kind of "cultivated boredom" (to borrow a phrase from the book.) Rich, young Italians doing relatively nothing, discussing, enjoying travel, wine and other little bourgeois pleasures.

Where Antonioni is memorable, I don't think Pavese is apt to stick in my head. The writing is good, and carries the same attention to small detail that's also present in Antonioni, but the stories just aren't that interesting.

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## Stefanie says

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## Amy says

The House on the Hill is really beautiful and atmospheric.

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## Patty says

I liked all four novellas, but the two middle ones- 'The House on the Hill' and 'Among Women Only'- were my favorites. quotes:

'The House on the Hill'

*It was summer and I remembered other evenings when I was sleeping in the city, evenings when I also came back down late at night, singing or laughing, when thousands of lights outlined the hill or the city at the end of the road. The city was a lake of light. We were living in the city then. We didn't realize how short a time we had. Friendships and long days to spend in the most casual meetings, we had plenty of both. We were living, or so we thought, with others and for others.*

...

*As I ate I thought of the meeting, what had happened. I was more struck by the interval, the years, than by Cate. It was incredible. Eight, ten? I seemed to have reopened a room, a forgotten cupboard, and to have found another man's life inside, a futile life, full of risks. It was this that I had forgotten. Not so much Cate, not the poor pleasures of those days, the rash young man who ran away from things thinking they might still happen anyway, who thought of himself as a grown man and was always waiting for his life to begin in earnest; this person amazed me. What did the two of us have in common? What had I done for him? Those banal, emotional evenings, those easy adventures, those hopes as familiar as a bed or a window- it all seemed like the memory of a distant country, of a life of agitation; thinking back, one wondered how it could have been possible both to enjoy and betray it in that fashion.*

...

*That now familiar disorder, that silent floundering and crumbling, was a sort of moral holiday, a crude revulsion from the intolerable news of the papers and radio. The war raged far away, methodical and futile. We had fallen, this time with no escape, into the hands of our old masters, now more expert and bloodstained. The jolly bosses of yesterday became ferocious in defense of their skins and their last hopes. Our escape was only in disorder, in the very collapse of every law. To be captured and identified was death. Peace, any kind of peace, at least imaginable during the summer, now seemed a joke. We had to see our fate through to the end. How far away the air raids seemed. Something worse than fires or ruins had started.*

He survives with a soul left to bleed out. Feelings of nostalgia, insouciance, and waiting. I think the most

striking trait of this novella is the narrator's sense of waiting that never leaves; early on he recalls how in his youth he was "always waiting for his life to begin in earnest". We don't learn if he ever felt that it did, just that now he was preoccupied with a different waiting: a waiting for the war to end... This waiting never finds relief in the novella, not even in its final passage:

*I don't believe that it can end. Now that I've seen what war is, what civil war is, I know that everybody, if one day it should end, ought to ask himself: "And what shall we make of the fallen? Why are they dead?" I wouldn't know what to say. Not now, at any rate. Nor does it seem to me that the others know. Perhaps only the dead know, and only for them is the war really over.*

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