Cesare Pavese Mythographer, Translator, Modernist

A Collection of Studies 70 Years after His Death

Iuri Moscardi
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Series in Literary Studies

VERNON PRESS

www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Literary Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022947701

ISBN: 978-1-64889-087-1

Cover design by Vernon Press using elements designed by JL G from Pixabay.

Contents

Introduction

Iuri Moscardi
The Graduate Center, CUNY

2020 was an important date for Cesare Pavese and for those committed to his study: the 70th anniversary of his death. This round anniversary was especially remarkable because it coincided, in Italy, with the end of copyright protection on his books, which were republished with new introductions and critical essays starting from the beginning of 2021 by many presses (among which Einaudi, for which Pavese worked, with managerial responsibilities, up until his death).[1] The anniversary provided an extraordinary excuse to reconsider his human and intellectual character: not only books *by* Pavese appeared,[2] but also

[1] Being the publisher already detaining Pavese's copyrights, Einaudi began to republish the entire Pavese catalogue in 2020 and continued through 2021 and 2022: all the books have new covers, designed by Manuele Fior, and new introductions by authors and scholars. These are: N. Lagioia for *Tra donne sole*; T. Scarpa for *Le poesie*; Wu Ming for *La luna e i falò*; D. Di Pietrantonio for *La casa in collina*; D. Starnone for *Il mestiere di vivere*; P. Giordano for *Il diavolo sulle colline*; N. Gardini for *Dialoghi con Leucò* (Torino: Einaudi, 2020). F. Piccolo for *Prima che il gallo canti*; N. Terranova for *Paesi tuoi*; C. Durastanti for *La bella estate*; E. Gioanola for *Feria d'agosto*; L. Nay and G. Zaccaria for *Il compagno* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021). *Il carcere* was published without introduction (Torino: Einaudi, 2022).

[2] Mimesis published Pavese's university thesis, *Interpretazione della poesia di Walt Whitman*, edited and with an introduction by V. Magrelli (Milano: Mimesis, 2020). The writer P. Di Paolo edited for Newton Compton *La luna e i falò*, *La casa in collina*, and two collections of novels (*I capolavori*) and poems (*Poesie. Lavorare stanca, Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi*) (Roma: Newton Compton, 2021). L. Nay and C. Tavella edited *Prima che il gallo canti*, E. Mattioda *La luna e i falò*, and N. Terranova introduced *Il mestiere di vivere*, published together with *Il taccuino segreto*, edited by S. Renna (Milano: Rizzoli, 2021). *La luna e i falò* has also been adapted as a graphic novel (Latina: Tunué, 2021). S. Ritrovato edited *Dialoghi con Leucò* and S. Scioli *La luna e i falò* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2021). Adelphi published *Dialoghi con Leucò* with a conversation between the historian C. Ginzburg and G. Boringhieri (Milano, 2021). Aragno published for the first time in a bound volume *Taccuino segreto* (Torino, 2020), edited by F. Belviso, with introductions by A. D'Orsi and L. Mondo (the latter discovered these notes and published them in 1990 on the newspaper *La Stampa*, provoking a scandal among critics because Pavese expressed admiration for Nazis and disdain for Partisans). Finally, Garzanti (Milano, 2021) is publishing Pavese's books in an ongoing new series, enriching them with thorough introductions and exhaustive notes. So far, it has released *Prima che il gallo canti* (edited

books *on* him,[3] including this one. Seventy years is indeed a span of time that allows for the aim of the present collection: deeper reflections about the role and the figure of Pavese as an Italian and European intellectual.

Born in 1908, Pavese became one of the most relevant intellectual figures of the first half of the Twentieth century: he dedicated his entire life to literature, a goal he pursued with tenacity until his very last days. As he wrote in one of the most famous entries of his diary, published as *This Business of Living*: "Literature is a defense against the attacks of life" (Pavese 2017, 117; a note from November 10th, 1938). In Pavese, life and literature were inextricably tied: since all of his attempts at starting a family failed, he had convinced himself that he would never achieve any form of virile ripeness.[4] So, literature became the only pursue in which he found a sense of purpose. Pavese tried to find meaning in and through literature in many ways: he was one of the most versatile intellectuals of the Twentieth century, always seizing opportunities in the most innovative trends of culture and literature. He graduated in Humanities from the University of Turin in 1930 with a thesis on Walt Whitman's poetry, among the first studies on Whitman in Italy, proving an expertise in American literature which was rare even among academics. Then, he began to translate US authors, a pioneering activity that allowed Italian readers to discover masterpieces like Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1932); John Dos Passos's *The 42nd Parallel* (1934) and *The Big Money* (1938); John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1938); Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1938) and *Three Lives* (1940); and William Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1942). In those same years, he composed the

---

by G. Pedullà, with an afterword by F. Musardo), *La luna e i falò* (edited by M. Schilirò, with an afterword by F. Musardo), and *Il mestiere di vivere* (edited by I. Tassi, with an afterword by A. Carocci), which contains also the juvenile journals *Un viaggio felicissimo* and *Frammenti della mia vita trascorsa*, as well as *Il taccuino segreto*.

[3] Minimum fax republished D. Lajolo's *Il "vizio assurdo"* (Roma, 2020), Pavese's first biography, with an afterword by A. Bajani who interprets Pavese's suicide as a gesture that gave meaning to his life. M. Masoero published *Noi non siamo come i personaggi dei libri* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2020), the correspondence between Pavese and Nicola Enrichens in 1949-50. R. Gasperina Geroni analyzed Pavese's production in reverse chronological order in *Cesare Pavese controcorrente* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020). Finally, the academic journal *Ticontre* has published two issues (13, 2020 and 15, 2021) on the source of Cesare Pavese's literary inspiration between rational and irrational elements.

[4] As a perennial and final admonishment, he chose a verse from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the epigraph which opens his last novel, *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950): "Ripeness is all." This deep connection between life and literature is the reason why many studies focused so extensively on Pavese's suicide, which was considered as the event that could have explained his entire psychology and – consequently – the human reasons behind his conception of life, mirrored in his literary production.

poems of his first collection *Lavorare stanca* (*Hard Labor*, 1936; second, extended edition: 1943), which marked his originality, and his detachment, from the most common poetic styles of his time, like Hermeticism. From 1939, he started writing a series of novels that increased his popularity to the point of making him one of the most prominent writers of his generation. In the meantime, in 1938, Giulio Einaudi had hired him for his press, founded only five years before: Pavese spent the rest of his life working there, holding positions as diverse as translator and editor of translations from English, director and creator of collections, head of the Rome branch of the company, and director.[5] When it seemed that he had finally reached the recognition he deserved, by being awarded the coveted Strega Prize (the most prestigious Italian literary honor) in 1950, Pavese took his own life. Fascinated and tempted by the idea of suicide, as his letters and diary show, his lifeless body was eventually found on August 27th, 1950, in a hotel room in Turin.

In the following decades, this event became one of the most relevant elements on which critics focused their studies on the author. As Brian Moloney wrote,

> most critics have chosen not to regard Pavese as an historian of his own time, and have tended instead to focus more on the Pavese 'case' than on his works, as the titles of their books indicate: *Il vizio assurdo*, *La maturità impossibile*, and so on. Inevitably, the authors of titles such as these have tended to see Pavese's works as the expression of his unresolved personal problem and failures, which were indeed many and to which his suicide inevitably drew attention. (Moloney 2003, 111)[6]

Pavese has been widely received among English-speaking readers and scholars since the 1950s, as the early translations of his books' show. The decade that opened with his suicide saw the translations of: *The Moon and the Bonfire* (*La luna e i falò*) in 1952 and again in 1953 (with the presentation by the literary

[5] As previously mentioned, Einaudi was also the original publisher of all of Pavese's books: only *La spiaggia* (*The Beach*) was published by a different press, Lettere d'Oggi, in 1942.

[6] In this passage, he is referring to some of the most famous essays and studies on Pavese: *Il vizio assurdo* was the first biography of the writer, written by Davide Lajolo and published in Italy in 1960 (English translation: *An Absurd Vice. A Biography of Cesare Pavese*, translated and edited with an introduction by Mario and Mark Pietralunga, New York: New Directions, 1983); *La maturità impossibile. Saggio critico su Cesare Pavese* is an essay written by R. Puletti (Padova: Rebellato, 1961) in which the author chooses the deeply biographical perspective of 'maturità' to analyze the entire Pavese's production.

critic Paolo Milano);[7] *Among Women Only* (*Tra donne sole*) in 1953;[8] *The Devil in the Hills* (*Il diavolo sulle colline*) in 1954;[9] *The Political Prisoner* (*Il carcere*) and *The Beautiful Summer* (*La bella estate*) in 1955;[10] *The House on the Hill* (*La casa in collina*) in 1956;[11] *The Comrade* (*Il compagno*) in 1959.[12] The interest in his work remained constant in the following decades,[13] as showed by R.W. Flint's *The Selected Works of Cesare Pavese*, published in 1968,[14] and, most recently, by Tim Park's new translations of *The Moon and the Bonfires* and *The House on the Hill*.[15] As soon as Pavese's last novel, *The Moon and the Bonfires*, was translated, Frances Frenaye reviewed its 1953 translation on The New York Times (see Frenaye 1953), while Leslie Fiedler wrote, in 1954, the first study of Pavese, a real presentation of him to English-speaking refined readers (see Fiedler 1954). Both Frenaye and Fiedler understood Pavese's literary and intellectual relevance: the former defined him "a young writer more worthy of note than many others tossed up by its post-war vogue" (Frenaye 1953, 4) and the latter cast him as "the writer who moves her [of Italy] newest authors most deeply, who seems to them, indeed, to have defined their newness, their very function" and "the best of recent Italian novelists, though so far less known and honored in our country than Moravia, Vittorini, Berto or Pratolini – in some

[7] Translated respectively by L. Sinclair (London: John Lehmann) and, with the more adherent to the Italian title *The Moon and the Bonfires*, by M. Ceconi (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young).

[8] Translated by D. D. Paige; London: Peter Owen.

[9] Translated by D. D. Paige; London: Peter Owen.

[10] Both translated by W. J. Strachan and published in London by Peter Owen.

[11] Translated by W. J. Strachan; London: Peter Owen.

[12] Both this and *The House on the Hill* were translated by W. J. Strachan (London: Peter Owen).

[13] In their introduction to their translation of Pavese's biography written by D. Lajolo, Mario and Mark Pietralunga pointed out: "Since 1960, Pavese has been the subject of interest in many sectors both in America and in England. He is highly regarded in universities even outside the specialization of Italian studies; articles on him have been published in the most varied periodicals, and his poems have consistently appeared in journals and magazines" (Lajolo 1983, 11).

[14] New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux; the book was re-printed by New York Times Review of Books Classics collection in 2001: it contains his translations of *The Beach*, *The House on the Hill*, *Among Women Only*, and *The Devil in the Hills*.

[15] Both published by Penguin Classics in 2021.

quarters even ranked under a sentimental entertainer like Guareschi, the creator of the insufferable Don Camillo[16]" (Fiedler 1954, 536).

Nevertheless, these studies are also emblematic of what has become a typical characteristic of many critics: focusing on selected – sometimes even a single – aspects of Pavese's intellectual and biographical individuality, using them as the perspective through which they put forth their analysis of him and his work.[17] As Dough Thompson wrote, studies and articles on Pavese "continued

[16] Elio Vittorini (1908-1966), writer, translator, and consultant, author of the novel *Conversations in Sicily* (1941) and editor of the anthology *Americana* (1941); Giuseppe Berto (1914-1978), writer and screenwriter, author of *Incubus* (1964; transl. William Weaver); Vasco Pratolini (1913-1991), writer; Giovannino Guareschi (1908-1968), Italian journalist, cartoonist and humorist, author of the anti-Communist priest Don Camillo; Alberto Moravia (1907-1990), famous Italian novelist and journalist. It is worth mentioning here that, for Fiedler, Pavese was much more important – as an author – than Moravia, who in 1954 disdainfully defined Pavese on the prestigious newspaper Corriere della Sera as "decadent" ('Pavese decadente', *Corriere della Sera*, 22 December, p. 3).

[17] This is a very synthethic catalogue: I. Calvino's *Pavese: essere e fare* (*L'Europa letteraria*, 5-6, 1960); L. Mondo's *Cesare Pavese* (Milano: Mursia, 1961); R. Puletti's *La maturità impossibile* (Padova: Rebellato, 1961); the monographic issue of the journal *Sigma* with the contributions by L. Mondo, M. Guglielminetti, C. Gorlier, G. L. Beccaria, F. Jesi, S. Pautasso, and G. Barberi Squarotti (1964); D. Fernandez's psychoanalytical approach in *L'échec de Pavese* (Paris: Grasset, 1967); A. Guiducci's *Il mito Pavese* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1967); G. Venturi's *Pavese* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1969); E. Gioanola's existentialist analysis in *Cesare Pavese. La poetica dell'essere* (Milano: Marzorati, 1971); T. Wlassic's *Pavese falso e vero* (Torino: Centro Studi Piemontesi, 1985), a complete analysis of Pavese' oeuvre; M. Rusi's *Il tempo-dolore: per una fenomenologia della percezione temporale in Cesare Pavese* (Padova: Francisci, 1985) and *Le malvagie analisi. Sulla memoria leopardiana di Cesare Pavese* (Ravenna: Longo, 1988); S. Pautasso's *Cesare Pavese, l'uomo libro. Il mestiere di scrivere come mestiere di vivere* (Milano: Arcipelago, 1991); M. de Las Nieves Muñiz Muñiz's *Introduzione a Pavese* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1992); V. Binetti's *Cesare Pavese: una vita imperfetta. La crisi dell'intellettuale nell'Italia del dopoguerra* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998); M. Guglielminetti's *Cesare Pavese romanziere* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000) in Einaudi's complete collection of Pavese's novels; B. Van den Bossche's *'Nulla è veramente accaduto'. Strategie discorsive del mito nell'opera di Cesare Pavese* (Leuven-Firenze: Leuven University Press-Cesati, 2001); Pavese and Poggioli's *«A meeting of minds». Carteggio (1947-1950)*, edited by S. Savioli (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2012); G. C. Ferretti's *L'editore Cesare Pavese* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017), a study of Pavese's relevance as editorial manager at Einaudi; A. Comparini's *La poetica dei* Dialoghi con Leucò *di Cesare Pavese* (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2017), in which the author traces the complete history of the book and proves why it was so relevant for Pavese, whom conveyed all the major themes of his literary production in it; C. Pavese's *L'opera poetica. Testi editi, inediti, traduzioni* (Milano: Mondadori, 2021), edited by A. Sichera and A. Di Silvestro with L. P. Barbarino, C. D'Agata, M. Grasso, M. C. Trovato, and E. Vitale, a monumental collection of Pavese's juvenile poems and poetic translations. Pavese's

to use his writings to underscore particular theses about the failed life and the complex psychology of the man," forgetting that "Pavese's works and not the author's private life were what mattered ultimately." But, Thompson concluded, avoiding this "personalised approach" (Thompson 1982, IX) is the most difficult challenge in attempting a study of Pavese, because the Piedmontese author himself also wrote extensively on his own writing and left us his journal and letters, which were published posthumously in Italian in 1952 and in 1966.[18] He was also, as mentioned before, a versatile intellectual, whose commitment to literature took different forms. For this reason, the best way to look at him, 70 years after his death, cannot be – in my opinion – too narrowly focused: given his intellectual eclecticism, a comprehensive study of Pavese ought to include different approaches devoted to different aspects of his life and his writings. These are the guidelines that I followed while selecting and editing this collection of essays: each of them follows a single path, and the intertwining of all of them builds a more comprehensive representation of Pavese.

A first selection of essays is devoted to the relationship between elements of reality and Pavese's writings, and it includes essays by Salvatore Renna; Maria Concetta Trovato and Antonio Garrasi; and Monica Lanzillotta. In "Cesare

---

biographies are D. Lajolo's *Il vizio assurdo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1960; Roma: Minimum Fax, 2020), considered not very reliable because of the presence of some unverified data; L. Mondo's *Quell'antico ragazzo* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006; Parma: Guanda, 2021), more objective; English readers can read L. Smith's exhaustive profile *Cesare Pavese and America: Life, Love, and Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). The new editions of three of Pavese's books by Garzanti (Milano, 2021) are relevant because of their interdisciplinary approach and detailed commentary (introductions and notes are lengthier, in term of pages, than the texts). G. Pedullà focuses on the narratological techniques employed by Pavese as a novelist in *Prima che il gallo canti*. Previous interpretations considered the book as autobiographical: Pedullà frees it from the harsh criticism it received from politically engaged critics, who saw an alter ego of Pavese in the protagonists' political irresolution. I. Tassi analyzes the experimental identity of *Il mestiere di vivere*, Pavese's journal. Instead of focusing on literary models (like G. Leopardi's *Zibaldone*), he defines its experimental nature as both personal outburst and literary manual for his own poetic. M. Schilirò's introduction to *La luna e i falò* follows a thematic approach, navigating a novel built on a series of oppositions: landscape vs story; remaining vs leaving; identity vs knowledge.

[18] Pavese, C. (1952). *Il mestiere di vivere*. Torino: Einaudi; translated by A. E. Murch as *This Business of Living: A Diary, 1935-1950* for British readers (London: Peter Owen, 1961) and as *The Burning Brand: Diaries 1935-1950* for American readers (New York: Walker, 1961). Pavese, C. (1966). *Lettere 1924-1950*. Torino: Einaudi (vol. I, *Lettere 1924-1944*, edited by L. Mondo; vol. II, *Lettere 1945-1950*, edited by I. Calvino); partially translated by A. E. Murch as *Selected Letters, 1924-1950* (London: Peter Owen, 1969).

Pavese and the Landscape of Myth," Renna focuses on Pavese's *Dialogues with Leucò* (1947) to analyze how Pavese expresses some of the most profound meanings of his works through a particular description of physical elements, which makes the book's setting a powerful symbolical element, a literary landscape built upon ancient authors (Hesiod, Virgil, and Ovid). In "'The cats will know': Suggestions for a Representation of a Mythological Animal World in the Works of Cesare Pavese," Trovato and Garrasi rely on Jungian psychology and on cultural anthropology to focus on the symbolic importance of the traditional human-animal dichotomy in Pavese. Many animals are included in Pavese's narratives: Corrado, the protagonist of *The House on the Hill*, has a dog named Belbo; in the poems written in 1950, Pavese mentioned the cats; finally, in *Dialogues with Leucò* the ferine animals embody the contrast between rational and irrational elements. Trovato and Garrasi's is thus an innovative approach to the study of animal representation in Pavese. Finally, in "The «donne vestite per gli occhi» in Cesare Pavese's Creative Production," Lanzillotta re-interprets Pavese's poetic and narrative production, providing a detailed analysis to trace the specific trope of the prostitute. The writer thoroughly depicts this figure in his entire production, since his first poems until his last novel, describing many aspects of her role: from the physical appearance of many prostitutes to the places where they conduct their business. In Pavese's poetics, the figure of the prostitute embodies three main literary themes, all of them crucial in his production and in his psychology: the urban modernity; the alter ego of the Self; and the rite of passage from adolescence to maturity.

A second group of essays focuses on Pavese and translation, and it includes critical analyses by Kim Grego and Mark Pietralunga. In "Cesare Pavese the Americanist Translator: A Chronology of the Myth," Grego draws a complete picture of Pavese's translations. She aims to deconstruct the myth of Pavese as an Americanist, which was perpetuated by critics in the years after his death and crystallized him as a static figure. On the contrary, she analyzes the historical, cultural, and social contexts within which Pavese grew up and how these factors influenced his formation to reach a more objective and nuanced study of him as a translator. For this reason, she emphasizes his translations from Greek and English, considered marginal by the critics because of their experimental character. In "Learning from the Past: Cesare Pavese's First Steps with the American Publishing World," Pietralunga focuses on a more specific time span. He discusses the reception of Pavese's works by the American publishing world in the years 1945-1960. He studies the correspondence related to Pavese's works from publisher Alfred A. Knopf and the papers of the literary agent Sanford J. Greenburger to show how the negotiations and translations from Italian into English raised by publishers and critics may have resulted in limiting a more widespread success of Pavese in the United States.

A third and final group of essays includes the works by Francesco Chianese and Carlo Tirinanzi de Medici: they rely on literary theory and philosophy to provide innovative comparisons between Pavese and other writers or literary movements. In "Recognizing Oneself in a Distorted Mirror: The Irresolvable Transnational Distance and Proximity Between Pavese and Pasolini," Chianese follows in the footsteps of critics such as Ettore Perrella in proposing a reading of Pavese through Lacanian and postcolonial theories. Through these approaches, the author addresses Pavese traumatic encounters with otherness, which inspired his interest in ethnography and anthropology, and the difficulties of a writer in 1930s Italy. According to the essay, Pavese's search for a balance between the pre-capitalist irrational and American consumerism hides a more thorough desire to escape from the radical experience of irrationality represented by Fascism. This contrast is the basis upon which Chianese builds his comparison between Pavese and Pasolini, another author who represented the passage from a pre-industrial to an industrial world in the 1950s and 60s. In "Pavese Between European and American Modernisms," Tirinanzi de Medici deals with one of the most interesting critical discussions among Pavese's scholars, the one regarding his inclusion in the Modernist movement. Despite critics having always considered him as a non-Modernist, Tirinanzi de Medici's analysis of Pavese's works shows peculiar Modernist features (a diffused sense of loneliness, the relevance of psychoanalytical stance on the self) and techniques (the multiplication of points of view, myth as part of the textual structure, conflict among chronological planes), which put them in dialectical relationship with other philosophical and literary traditions, such as Vico's historicism and ethnological studies. From this lens, Pavese's Modernism can be studied in relation to American Modernism, typically associated with authors such as Faulkner, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, and Anderson.

These three groups of essays cover – in innovative ways – different aspects of Pavese's literary production. I found particularly interesting how all of them rely on interdisciplinary approaches. By establishing connections between different Pavese's books or between Pavese and other writers or literary movements, as well as by contextualizing the role that translation played for him, they provide a new representation of Pavese. The conclusions reached by their authors prove indeed the role played by Pavese for the literary culture of his time; more importantly, they show his relevance as a European intellectual, a role that has not been studied very thoroughly so far. I hope that the essays gathered here could serve as a stimulus for new research in this direction, which will emphasize the role of Pavese as a poet, a writer, and an intellectual who always lied at the intersections of different, apparently opposed trends (such as tradition vs modernity; myth vs history; Europe vs America; and so on). And who, despite all the apparent difficulties and contradictions, was always

able to reshape them in innovative materials for his own writings and reflections.

Bibliography

Fiedler, L. (1954). "Introducing Cesare Pavese". In *The Kenyon Review*, 16(4), pp. 536-553

Frenaye, F. (1953). "The Traveler Returns". In *The New York Times*, 24 May, Section BR, p. 4

Lajolo, D. (1983). *An Absurd Vice. A Biography of Cesare Pavese*. Translated and edited with an introduction by Mario and Mark Pietralunga. New York: New Directions

Moloney, B. (2003). "Ontology and History in *La luna e i falò*." In Riccobono, R.; Thompson, D. (eds.) *"Onde di questo mare:" Reconsidering Pavese*. Market Harborough (UK): Troubador, pp. 111-120

Pavese, C. (2017). *This Business of Living. Diaries 1935-1950*. London: Routledge

Thompson, D. (1982). *Cesare Pavese. A Study of the Major Novels and Poems*. Cambridge (UK)-New York: Cambridge University Press

Acknowledgments

I would like to spend a few words on the origins of this collection. I originally organized a panel on "Cesare Pavese 70 Years After His Death" for the 2020 AAIS (American Association of Italian Studies) / AATI (American Association of Teachers of Italian) joint conference. After selecting four proposals among the many compelling submissions that I had received, the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the plans for the conference, as it did with many other aspects of our individual and collective lives. Thankfully, the editorial board at Vernon Press offered me an opportunity to transform the critical conversation that we envisioned having during our panel into this volume, which, in partial addition to the essays I had originally selected for the AAIS/AATI panel, includes invaluable work by a larger number of scholars. In this way, what was conceived for a specific event can now be read by a broader audience, further benefitting from the multiple perspectives on Pavese offered by the authors: if the medium changed, the purpose of this discussion and the meticulous care which myself and all the authors put into our efforts didn't. For this reason, I want to thank the editorial staff at Vernon Press who patiently and generously followed the development of this collection, always providing support and help through their precise comments and helpful directions. I would also like to thank all the authors for having been so understanding. Despite the difficult moments in which this project was conceived and developed, they always showed professional and personal commitment by submitting their proposal, essays, and revisions in a timely fashion and by being patient. I strongly believe that all their contributions provide new perspectives and directions on the study of Pavese, within and outside the United States. Most importantly, all their essays show the relevance that Pavese still has for them and the modernity of his writings and his work, more than 70 years after his death. This, I believe, is the best legacy a writer could ever leave.

Chapter 1

Cesare Pavese and the Landscape of Myth

Salvatore Renna
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Abstract

The essay dwells on the relationship between myth, literature, and landscape in Cesare Pavese's work and, especially, in his mythical rewriting, *Dialoghi con Leucò*. Moving from the most recent theoretical works on classical reception, it shows how Pavese's mythical landscape is directly influenced by ancient myth and, moreover, how this reinterpretation relies on some specific features of landscape as it appears in ancient mythological narratives. Thus, the paper emphasizes both Pavese's awareness in refashioning the ancient world and argues how his epiphanic and mythical landscape can be interpreted as an example of literary landscape.

Keywords: Myth, Landscape, Pavese, Reception, Epiphany

* * *

1. Introduction

In recent years, scholars have made incredible progresses in the hermeneutics of Cesare Pavese's focus on classical myth, since both Italianists and classicist have deeply investigated what could be considered as a twofold interest. As it is clear even from a quick overview of Pavese's work, his *Arbeit am Mythos*, as Blumenberg (1985) would put it, involves two different aspects: on the one hand, it consists of a theoretical elaboration, which originates in his diary and is later developed in the second part of *Feria d'agosto* (1946) and, later on, in various articles published in different journals after the end of WWII; on the other hand, this interest is realized in a very peculiar form in *Dialoghi con Leucò* (1947), which includes 27 dialogues between heroes and gods of the classical world.[1] Thus, the personal reinterpretation of ancient myth carried out in *Dialoghi* stands out not only as Pavese's particularly beloved work (as he

[1] For a detailed and complete analysis see Van den Bossche 2001; Comparini 2017.

himself clearly stresses in Pavese 1966b, 196), but also as the most important and meaningful poetical realization of a close relationship with classical antiquity (which dates back to his high-school years), as it is precisely through this mythical re-writing that Pavese achieves a deeper level of expression.

In this essay, I will take on a specific theme linked both to the theoretical and to the poetical sides of Pavese's elaboration about myth: landscape. In particular, I will first analyse a few theoretical points in which the author emphasizes the importance of landscape in his poetic and how this element explicitly relates to classical myth; secondly, I will focus on two dialogues from *Dialoghi con Leucò* which explicitly thematize the importance of landscape for a true and deep poetical communication (which becomes, therefore, mythical); finally, moving from the most recent works on the relationship between landscape and literature both in the modern and in the classical world, I will discuss if this representation of landscape could be considered as a literary landscape and, moreover, which typical features of landscape in classical myth helped Pavese to develop his own theory of mythical landscape.

My reading moves from the newest critical insights on the author's work. From a broad point of view, my close reading of the two dialogues will idealistically become part of the in-depth analysis of single or multiple dialogues, which have recently shown the complexity of Pavese's active reworking of classical materials.[2] More specifically, the attempt to further problematize landscape and its relation to literary myth will enrich a few significant studies on this topic. Bart Van den Bossche, moving from *Landscape and Memory* (1995) by Simon Schama, stressed how, after the war, Pavese interprets landscape as "the result of an unconscious sedimentation of ontogenetic and mnemonic situations," showing the awareness that "landscape is not only experienced through senses, but […] it is always formed of different strata of rock and soil, as also of strata of representations and cultural memory" (Van den Bossche 2001, 293). For the critic, Pavese creates what he describes as a "continuous meditation about the metamorphosis of 'nature' into 'landscape', namely the transformation of pure matter into a semiotic artifact, full of cultural memories and sedimented meanings" (Van den Bossche 2001, 293). In addition to this, the combination between real places and Greek mythical counterparts, as it emerges several times from the diary (like in Pavese 2014, 254, 257, 316, 332, 337, 345, 350-351, and 378), illustrates the will to "form and develop a proper mythical setting, rooted […] in his cultural background, in his perceptive habits, which in their turn emerge

[2] See Bazzocchi, 2011; Lanzillotta, 2011, 2014, and 2020; Cavallini, 2014b and 2018; Marchese, 2014; Mirto, 2016 and 2019; Manieri, 2017; Sichera, 2017; Van den Bossche, 2018; Battaglino, 2019; Coppola, 2019; Renna 2020.

from the clash between a certain cultural imagination and the concrete biographical circumstances" (Van den Bossche 2001, 302), while Giusto Traina stressed how Pavese's work is characterized by an aesthetic perception of landscape, that creates a poetic in which "the awareness of the mythical value of landscape itself coexists with a distinct attention towards the realistic side of landscape" (Traina 2014, 26).

Developing these assumptions, in the last section, I will approach the subject from a different point of view, which will constitute a totally new view on the topic. In fact, I will address the question of mythical landscape in relation to the theoretical debate around the connection between literature and landscape and, moving from the work of Michael Jakob, I will show to what extent Pavese's one can be read as a literary landscape. Moreover, I will tackle the question of landscape in ancient Greek myth and I will provide new insight on the author's reading of classical myth by emphasizing how the literary representation of landscape in *Dialoghi con Leucò* is directly linked to some of the most important features of the epiphanic landscape of Greek myth, as it appears distinctly in the work of Pausanias and Hesiod.

2. Santo Stefano Belbo, 1942

In a letter written in 1942 to Fernanda Pivano from Santo Stefano Belbo, the little village of his childhood, Pavese describes an epiphanic episode, that is the moment in which he discovered the need for myth. The finding is fundamental, and it lies at the heart of everything he will write from that moment on. While reading Virgil's *Georgics* among the vineyards, he understands that he needs a literary tool to translate into literature the feeling of what he calls "fantasy of extraordinary power," namely the possibility to express poetically the deepest level of reality, such as "[…] the feeling of being caught up in a fantasy of extraordinary power, as though a complete understanding of them was quickening to life within me. I feel I am an infant again, but an infant, rich in memories of sights and sounds from those early days" (Pavese 1969, 218-219). Not surprisingly, in fact, this realization triggers a revaluation of all he had written before. For him, all of his previous writing, generally considered neo-realistic, makes no sense anymore, since it is not able to literary represent the sensation that he is feeling in this moment. Furthermore, he is also dominated by this new sensation: since his aim is to transform everything into poetry, he understands he does not have the proper language to do that, or, at least, he did not have it until now. That is why, shortly after, he explicitly calls myth into play:

> I know my true purpose in life was to express all that in poetry. Not an easy thing to do. My first efforts were feeble, composed on stereotyped

> patterns, completely failing to reveal the individuality of those trees and this landscape as I knew them. Having gone farther along the road that ends with a leap into the void, I know now that very different words are needed, different echoes from the past, different conceptions of their character. In short, they need to be expressed as myths. (Pavese 1969, 218-219)

In his path towards myth, in which Pavese will write *Dialoghi con Leucò* and further develop this theory on several occasions, landscape appears to be central. The language of myth, in fact, is not only capable of translating the feeling mentioned above, but also of giving life to all those elements of landscape which he sees as the most intimate part of his experience. In other words, he feels himself deeply connected to the places of his childhood and this sensation urges him to find a way to express it. Therefore, myth becomes the only poetical tool able to deprive the landscape of his real factuality and to make it absolute:

> Such places, such crags and ravines, trees and vines are as much alive as people are, each with its own personality. They are mythical. That great hill, shaped like a woman's breast, is the very body of the goddess to whom, on St John's night, the traditional bonfires of stubble will rise. […] The issue is not to remake greek myths, rather to follow their fantastical approach. Now at last I understand the *Georgics*.
>
> Which are beautiful not because they sentimentally describe life in the fields […], but, rather, because they make the whole countryside rich of mythical secret realities. (Pavese 1969, 218-219)

Mythical communication, as Pavese sees it, constitutes the ability to represent real data, such as parts of the natural world, animated by other presences, which form a sort of second level of reality, deeper and more authentic than the first one. But this formulation, though being quite clear, is a paradox too: if myth is so intimate and so related to the personal landscape of the author, why choosing the Greek myth to express what he felt among *his* hills? How can such a foreign poetical language, so far in time and space, be the right one to poetically render the absoluteness felt in Santo Stefano Belbo? Why the rewriting of mythical stories of ancient Greece emerges as the best way to express a condition so deeply intertwined with Pavese's life, time, and space?

The riddle appears even more unsolvable if we think of how Pavese reacts to the landscape of Calabria. When sent to the south-Italy region by the fascist government between 1935 and 1936, he reads the nature around him from a specific literary point of view (Teti 2011). In fact, while he translates from

ancient Greek, he writes that "nothing is more Greek than those abandoned places," and he adds: "tonight, under the red moony rocks, I was thinking of how a great poetry would show the god embodied in this place, with all the allusions and images that such poetry would allow" (Pavese 1966a, 489-490). And yet, regardless of the literary decoding of Calabrian landscape and its deep relation to ancient Greece, he feels that, as a poet, he is not able to render the god incarnated in that place, since it has nothing to do with him: "Why cannot I address the red moony rocks? Because they do not have anything mine but a weak turmoil of landscape, which could never justify poetry. If these rocks were in Piedmont, I would certainly know how to absorb them in an image and give them sense" (Pavese 1966a, 489-490). The nature of the paradox is now clearer. In front of a landscape so linked with Greek myth and explicitly read through Greek literature (Cavallini 2014a), Pavese thinks he cannot render it poetically, since it is not related to his childhood and, therefore, to his deeper self. At the same time, when a few years later he feels the need to literary express his more personal places, he goes back exactly to that Greek myth which seemed to be too different from his own experience. Why is that? The paradox, as I will show in the last paragraph, is just apparent. The key to deciphering it lies in Pavese's own words: "Follow their fantastical approach." In fact, I will argue that the writer chooses to use ancient myth precisely because, as critics have not yet noted, he understands the important relation between myth and landscape, as it particularly emerges in the Greek context. Before coming to this, however, I will focus on *Le muse* and *Gli dèi*, two dialogues which will provide another insight on the topic.

3. Hesiod and men

Throughout *Dialoghi con Leucò*, landscape is a continuously present, as it is influenced by several sources. First, many ethnological texts from which Pavese rewrites some myths are characterized by a strong emphasis on landscape and, especially, on its power to be animated by mythical presences. For example, in *Il lago*, a dialogue between Virbius and Diana, the mythical rework is clearly based on James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) and, in particular, on his famous description of the surroundings of Nemi, near Rome; in *Le cavalle*, which focuses on Coronide's death by the hand of Apollo, the grid of spatial references relies heavily on two essays by Paula Philippson, such as *Thessalische Mythologie* (1944) and *Untersuchungen über den griechischen Mythos* (1944); in *La belva*, the setting behind the encounter between Selene and Endymion clearly refers to Walter Otto's *Die Götter Griechenlands* (1934). Primary sources are important too. In the most Ovidian dialogues, for instance, metamorphoses appear to be strictly linked to landscape, as it is typical in *Metamorphoses*: in *L'uomo-lupo*, nature emerges as the place in which the

result of a metamorphosis can hide, a feature that recalls the Ovidian landscape, described as a "symbol" (Segal 1969), since, as it has been noted, "in the world of *Metamorphoses*, the setting is always potentially more than just a setting: any water, tree or bloom may not only simbolize or memorialize erotic victimhood, but actually embody a victim him-or herself" (Hinds 2002, 134).

In this context, *Le Muse* and *Gli dèi* are of particular significance since they are characterized by a strong meta-poetic meditation. In fact, in these dialogues, Pavese reflects about the meaning of myth and about his mythical rewriting, while he creates an implicit dialogue with his own theory of myth. Through the revisitation of the Hesiodic poetic investiture told in the *Theogony* (and rewritten in *Le Muse*, in which Hesiod dialogues with Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses) and through the dialogue between two contemporary men in *Gli dèi*, the reader is confronted with a thematization of what literature and myth can express. Hence, for this reason, it is remarkably important to analyse the role of landscape within these compositions, since landscape, as it will be shown, lies at the core of this theorization.

As mentioned, in *Le Muse* Hesiod talks with Mnemosyne, who explains to him how to find poetry in everyday life. The poet, who at this moment is just a farmer, admires Mnemosyne's ability to express the real world in an absolute manner, i. e. without the un-poetry that characterizes the life of every common man. But Mnemosyne tells him about a particular kind of epiphanic moment, namely the one in which the world appears deeper and more intense than usual. Consequently, Hesiod feels the need to grasp it and express it, exactly as did Pavese in Santo Stefano Belbo:

> HESIOD: It was only an instant, Melete. How could I grasp it?
>
> MNEMOSYNE: Have you ever asked yourself why an instant can suddenly make you happy, happy as a god? You are looking, say, at the olive tree, the olive tree on the path you have taken every day for years, and suddenly there comes a day when the sense of staleness leaves you, and you caress the gnarled trunk with a look, as though you had recognized an old friend, and it spoke to you precisely the one word your heart was hoping for. At times it's the glance of a man passing in the street. Sometimes the rain that drives down for days on end. Or the hoarse cry of a bird. Or a cloud you think you've somewhere seen before. For an instant time stops, and you experience the trivial event as though before and after had no existence. Have you ever asked yourself why this should be?

> HESIOD: It's you who say why. That instant has made the event a memory, a model. (Pavese 1965, 158-163)

The passage is dense and important. Through the poetic mask of Hesiod, Pavese emphasizes that poetry can become mythical (and, therefore, universal) when it is able to express a particular feeling. And this feeling, as it is fundamental to stress, is caused by the landscape and deeply intertwined with it. For it is landscape, suddenly seen as removed from his natural state, which is the origin of the feeling of absoluteness. Therefore, the ecstatic moment, that lies at the heart of poetical inspiration, depends on the place in which landscape emerges, and this perception of landscape is in turn the deepest reason for the possibility of mythical poetry, as Pavese had already stressed in *La vigna*, the last part of *Feria d'agosto*:

> A valley in the middle of hills, with lawns and trees with different layers and crossed by large clearings, in a morning of September, when a touch of mist makes them fly from the earth, captures your interest because of the manifest feature of sacred place which it had in the past. In the clearings, feasts flowers sacrifices on the edge of the mystery that appear and threat through woodland shadows. There, on the boundary between sky and trunk, the god could appear. Now, I believe that not poetry's feature, but rather mythical fable's one is the consecration of *unique places*, linked to a fact, a gesture, an event. Between various meanings, an absolute sense is given to a place, which becomes isolated in the world. In this way sanctuaries have emerged. In this way childhood places come to mind to everyone; in them have happened things which made them unique, so that they are separated from the rest of the world with this mythical seal. (Pavese 1971, 155)

Gli dèi, which not coincidentally was first titled *I luoghi*, plays a key part in the overall project of *Dialoghi con Leucò*. His uniqueness is marked by different aspects: not only is it the only dialogue between characters who do not belong to the classical world, but it is also the only dialogue carried by two anonymous protagonists and, moreover, it is the only one written in italics. From a poetical point of view, it represents an overall commentary about what preceded it. The two men, in fact, discuss in modern times which was the meaning of myth, why ancient people told those stories and what could be their meaning today. Therefore, it can be read as the continuation of the meta-poetic reflection of *Le Muse*, whose emphasis on the real meaning of poetry is further investigated.

The dialogue is based on a profound conflict: one man is convinced of the poetical power of ancient myth, as he deeply believes in the meaning of these plots and, especially, in their power to be significant even in the modern world.

PAGES MISSING

FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

Contributors

Antonio Garrasi currently holds a clarinet position with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and collaborates regularly with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He briefly attended the University of Catania, studying Foreign Languages and Literatures, before dedicating himself to music, but never abandoned his passion for the written arts. Upon completing his bachelor's degree, Antonio moved to the United States, graduating with his Professional Diploma in Orchestral Studies from Roosevelt University (Chicago) in 2018. Then, in 2020, he graduated with a Master of Arts in Music Performance from Northwestern University (Chicago) and continued his education at Northwestern University with a post-baccalaureate in Pre-Medicine. He has recently submitted a medical case report, Arthroscopic Excision of the Pigmented Villonodular Synovitis (PVNS) of the Trochanteric Bursitis of the Hip, which has been approved for publication in the Sports Medicine Journal – Orthopedics.

Carlo Tirinanzi De Medici is fixed-term researcher in Literary Criticism and Comparative Literature at Pisa University. He has worked at Brown University, Malta University, Trento University, Turin University and at Venice-based Fondazione Cini. He is co-director of journal "Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione" and of the poetry series "Gli Albatri", and takes part to the SEMPER - Seminario permanente di poesia and SIT - Seminario d'interpretazione testuale. He wrote a book on realism in contemporary Western novels (*Il vero e il convenzionale*, 2012) and one on Italian novels of the last 40 years (*Il romanzo italiano contemporaneo. Dalla fine degli anni Settanta a oggi*, 2018, third-place at the Edinburgh Gadda Prize).

Francesco Chianese is Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow (2020-23) at Cardiff University and California State University, Long Beach. At CSULB, he was also a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence (2018-19) and taught Italian and Italian American culture. He was awarded a John F. Kennedy Institute Library Grant (2019), a DAAD Short Research Grant (2015), and an EAAS Travel Grant (2014), all spent at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität, Berlin. In 2018, he published the book *"Mio padre si sta facendo un individuo problematico": Padri e figli nell'ultimo Pasolini (1966-75)*. His articles and essays have been published in the journals "Women Language Literature in Italy / Donne Lingua Letteratura in Italia" (2022), "Translation and Interpreting Studies" (2022), "Diacritica" (2022), "Ticontre" (2020), "Italian Studies" (2018), "Between" (2015, 2016), and "Iperstoria" (2015), as well as in the volumes *La*

lezione di Pasolini (2020), *Italian Americans on Screen* (2020) and *Harbors, Flows and Migrations: The USA in/and the World* (2017).

Iuri Moscardi is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center of the City University di New York, and teaches Italian language and literature at Hunter College and Fordham University. He studied Cesare Pavese at the University of Milan: his Bachelor's degree thesis focused on the end of the American myth in *The Moon and the Bonfires* and his Master's degree thesis, awarded with Premio Pavese, proved the participation of Pavese in Pivano's first Italian translation of *Spoon River Anthology*. In 2016 he received a MA in Italian from Indiana University, Bloomington. His dissertation focuses on Italian authors (among which Pavese), Digital Humanities, and the reception theory. He has published articles and essays on Pavese, in Italian and English, and edited the new, complete English translation of Pavese's diary. He collaborates with Fondazione Pavese: he is studying the books donated by the Molina family to Fondazione Pavese.

Kim Grego is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Milan, where she teaches English Language and Linguistics. Her interests include Translation Studies, ESP (scientific, medical and political discourse), Critical Genre Analysis and Critical Discourse Studies applied to ethically debatable issues.

Maria Concetta Trovato currently collaborates with the University of Catania as a subject expert in Italian contemporary literature and works as a tenured teacher of Literary Disciplines in Modica (Ragusa). In 2012, after graduating with honors in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Catania, she started a PhD in Modern Philology: her research project consisted of a critical edition of Cesare Pavese's *Dialoghi con Leucò* (*Dialogues with Leucò*) and is currently under publication. In 2014 and in 2016 she was awarded the Pavese Giovani Prize for two essays, the first of which exploring the echoes of Dante in Pavese's literary works. In 2018, she graduated for the second time in Modern Philology and in 2021 she contributed to the publication of Cesare Pavese's complete poetic oeuvre (*L'opera poetica,* Mondadori, 2021).

Mark Pietralunga is a professor of Italian Studies and former chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at Florida State University (Tallahassee, Florida). He has a degree in English literature from UCLA and a Ph.D. in Italian literature from the University of California, Berkeley. He has published various books and numerous articles on Italian literature and culture of the 20th century and Italian American literature and culture. His books include *Beppe Fenoglio and English Literature: A Study of the Writer as Translator*

(University of California Press 1987); *Prometeo slegato: Pavese traduttore di P. B. Shelley* (Einaudi 1997); *Beppe Fenoglio: Quaderno di Traduzioni* (Einaudi, 2000); *Cesare Pavese and Anthony Chiuminatto: Their Correspondence* (University of Toronto Press 2007); *Cesare Pavese's Long Journey: A Critical-Analytical Study by Giose Rimanelli* (Bordighera Press, 2019), and *Italians in America by Amerigo Ruggiero* (Bordighera Press, 2020).

Monica Lanzillotta is Associate Professor of Contemporary Italian Literature at the Department of Culture, Education and Society of the University of Calabria. Her research interest lies in different areas of investigation: the persistence of the classical tradition in twentieth-century Italy, fantastic literature, theatre literature, the relationship between literature and music and between literature and medicine. He has published numerous articles and books on Pavese, including the most recent: *Cesare Pavese una vita tra Dioniso e Edipo*, published by Carocci in 2022.

Salvatore Renna studied Classical Philology at the University of Turin (B.A., M.A.). He received a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Bologna and L'Aquila and he has been a Post-Doc Researcher at the Freie Universität in Berlin. He has published, with Enrico Mattioda, a new edition of Cesare Pavese's *Mestiere di vivere* (BUR 2021) and, among the others, he has published articles about Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, and Pier Vittorio Tondelli. His research interests include modern and contemporary reception of classical culture, literary theory, and the relationship between city and literary expression.

Index

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

R

S

T

U

V

W

Y