



The Diary Of A Country Priest

Georges Bernanos

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In this classic Catholic novel, Bernanos movingly recounts the life of a young French country priest who grows to understand his provincial parish while learning spiritual humility himself. Awarded the Grand Prix for Literature by the Academie Francaise, The Diary of a Country Priest was adapted into an acclaimed film by Robert Bresson. "A book of the utmost sensitiveness and compassion...it is a work of deep, subtle and singularly encompassing art." — New York Times Book Review (front page)

The Diary Of A Country Priest Details

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From Reader Review *The Diary Of A Country Priest* for online ebook

Stephen Durrant says

The Parisian Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) is one of the last century's greatest Catholic novelists, and this is probably his most admired book. As the title indicates, this is a fictional "diary" of a young, very ill, priest who is trying manfully to administer well to his small countryside parish. He struggles with faith, the role of suffering, the nature of evil and almost every other major religious topic as he strives to maintain his integrity and faithful stewardship over a very problematic "flock." His relationships with several of the women in his parish are particularly challenging and force him to consider lust and the role it plays in the religious struggle. It is difficult to do justice to the seriousness and profundity of this book. I hope one day soon to attempt a short essay on Catholic fiction as exemplified by George Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest* and Francois Mauriac's *The Viper's Nest*. What I intend to argue is that the very sense of complexity, cynicism, and even darkness they are willing to portray is what Mormon literature has never dared to touch, at least so far as I know, and thus precludes the latter from ever being more than mediocre.

S. says

I thought this was one of those books that comes with a "guarantee." But of course there is no such thing. Still, I'd read only glowing reviews and boy was I ready for a "triumphant experience." But on p. 26 I couldn't make heads or tails of what I was really reading about. On p. 54 the voice of the innocent and well-meaning young priest began to irk the shit out of me. On p. 55 I skipped ahead to see if anything would ever actually happen to dilute all the fluffy introspection and it didn't look promising. On p. 64 I took the kitty to the well and drowned it.

Ach! If only I lived near a (English) library I'd run so much less risk of wasting money on books. The back cover says \$15.95! I checked my order though, and thanks to Amazon, I paid "just" \$11.48 for "The Diary of a Country Priest," so I feel a few dollars better already. Plus I ordered it along with "The Shadow of Sirius" and "Blood Meridian," both of which paid off. "Sirius" cost \$10.88 but was really worth about \$17.89, and "Blood Meridian" cost \$10.20 but was easily worth \$13.86. So actually I only lost 81 cents in this deal, making it easier to swallow.

I'm returning to this century now. Nice to see you.

Jim says

The French are in equal parts anti-clerical and devout. Georges Bernanos and Francois Mauriac are excellent examples of the latter tendency. This is the second or third time I have read *The Diary of a Country Priest* -- and each time I find it has rocked my world.

There is a kind of imaginative religious novel in which a saintly joyful figure moves from strength to strength until he or she is ascended bodily into the heavens. Bernanos is not like that. His unnamed priest, who writes in the first person, is a sickly young man of around thirty who is parish priest in a poor

agricultural parish in Northern France whose parishioners are spiteful at best.

He tries to see all his parishioners regardless of the cost to his health. During one such visit on a rainy day, he falls on the ground and vomits blood. The word goes around the parish that the priest is an alcoholic. Actually, he drinks wine in which bread is soaked (very symbolic, that) because he can't digest much of anything else.

When he sees a doctor toward the end, it is a young man who is injecting morphine into his veins so he could have the strength to see his patients -- because he himself is dying of a rare disease.

The end comes to our priest, as it does to all men. His last words are, "Does it matter? Grace is everywhere."

Diary of a Country Priest is perhaps a true study of sanctity in a hostile world. Perhaps Bernanos has given us a sense of reality in a troubled world which is more honest and true than what religious authorities would have us believe.

booklady says

Deceptively quiet book which starts off very slowly; though I knew it had to be going somewhere, it is easy to see why some readers miss its depths—I stopped and started it several times myself. And then...!

The gist of the story is an inexperienced, young priest arrives at his first parish, a little place out in the country and begins to keep a diary. We also learn he is poor, devout, idealistic and ascetic. None of these traits particularly endear him to his parishioners. He seems to have but one fellow cleric friend, a worldly priest, de Torcy, who would have him 'toughen up' and stand up for himself. Sometimes, I confess I felt a little exasperated with our curé myself. Other times, his self-effacing meekness brought out my motherly instincts and I wanted to help this young clergyman—who so many seemed to despise or take advantage of. What makes the saga so compelling is the gentle, uncomplaining way the new priest relates his many failures and humiliations. As his audience we see his kindnesses misunderstood and his simple mistakes turned against him. And yet he is determined to go out and visit all within his parish despite mounting health problems.

Most of the 'action' – if it can even be called that – in this novel occurs in the brilliantly constructed conversations between the curate and another character: a confused little girl, an atheist doctor, a long-grieving countess, her malicious teenage daughter, and a soldier of fortune to name a few. It is in these epic dialogues George Bernanos' reason for writing this testimony to faith is truly revealed.

It isn't an action book. It's much, much better than that! I can see why some – used to reading a different sort of literature – have discounted this book. It has to be read carefully, slowly and perceptively. Also, some background on the author, George Bernanos, and the French movement, positivism, would be extremely beneficial.

Highly recommended! One of the most faith-affirming books I've read this year!

Czarny Pies says

The Journal of a Country Priest is the work of the strongly Catholic writer Georges Bernanos who gives the daily drama of a priest fighting in God's army against the devil for the salvation of human souls all the intensity that it so richly deserves.

The protagonist of this novel is a young priest who demonstrates that he possesses the true vocation. Despite growing up in poverty and being afflicted with a very serious illness, He does not flinch in his efforts to save the souls whose care has been entrusted to him. As the novel concludes: Grace is everywhere.

This is must reading for Catholics who need to be reminded periodically of the exceptional courage of so many of our priests and nuns.

For readers unfamiliar with the culture context of France between the two wars, it might be helpful to first watch Robert Bresson's movie of the same name which has been hailed as a masterpiece by such diverse critics as Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard. I read the book first. After seeing the movie, I read the book a second time and got much more out of it. As Canadian and a native speaker of French, I can assure any Anglophone that the culture of France is at times very murky to the outsider who must at times go to extra efforts to fully enjoy French literature.

Lu en francais.

Alex says

This sad little book moves at the speed of human breath in repose, then spurred toward the halting gasps of mortal exertion. I can't recall ever reading a more painful, moving depiction of truly humble self-sacrifice than the eponymous priest's in Bernanos's engrossing, masterful clinic in the diaristic form of literature. I first heard of the book in an interview with Marilynne Robinson, in which it was cited (by the interviewer) as an apparent predecessor to Robinson's own brilliant and clerically ruminative novel, 'Gilead'. The two obviously belong together in some ways, though the tone and time of Catholic France is a long way from the Calvinic countryside of Iowa, and both books justify themselves apart from any attempt broadly to fit them into a genre or category that could only obscure the potent specificities that make each great. What Bernanos creates in this book is an enchanting, anti-hagiographical portrait of a living saint, in all his selfless, self-doubting glory.

Allison says

I wanted to like this book so much more than I did. I actually found it incredibly difficult to understand. Some of it, I think, was that it was poorly translated. I read a 1962 edition that doesn't even cite a translator -- so many of the sentences were so convoluted as to be utterly obtuse. Poor translation or witless reader? I never could figure out why Mlle Chantal was such an angry bitch and why she insisted on tormenting the priest. What was her secret? Was the priest an alcoholic or just terminally sick? Gay? Why did M le Comte come to hate the priest? These are just some of the basic narrative issues I couldn't figure out. Forget the whole spiritual aspect--much of what the priest mused on and felt was incomprehensible to me as he described it. I can't help wondering if I'd have understood it if I had read it in French. Or maybe I'm just so

spiritually challenged (in a God believing, Catholic way) that I can't comprehend it when it's described. All of that said, there were profoundly moving passages here and there, but over all I don't begin to know what I read. It's rather embarrassing actually--I feel so simple!

Conor Hardy says

Beautiful.

"We need more 'no name' priests." - Fr. Ron G. regarding the priest of The Diary.

°°°.°..°-°.°_· ????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος ·_·°-°.°·°°° ★··^··★ ?????? ???????
?????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

Ε?ναι πραγματικ? ενα θαυμ?σιο κομμ?τι γραφ?ς.

?να σεμιν?ριο ανθρωπι?ς. ?να ψυχογρ?φημα με ευφυστατη δομ? χτ?ζεται αργ? και σταδιακ? για την αδυναμ?α και την πενιχρ?τητα της ανθρ?πινης φ?σης.

Ο Βernanos ζωγραφ?ζει με μουντ? και σκοτειν? χρ?ματα το πορτρα?το εν?ς αν?νυμου νεαρο? εφημερ?ου κ?που στη γαλλικ? επαρχ?α εν?ς ζοφερο? κ?σμου.

Το πορτρα?το εν?ς γν?σιου Αγ?ου.

Εν?ς ταπεινο?, παθητικο? και επιθετικο? ιερ?α που γρ?φοντας την νεκρολογ?α της ζω?ς του με μορφ? ημερολογ?ου συνομιλε? με την π?στη, τον π?νο και την αγ?πη μ?σω του π?θους του, κυριολεκτικ? και εικαστικ?.

Η μορφ? αυτ?ς της γραφ?ς επιτρ?πει στον συγγραφ?α να παρουσι?σει μια σειρ? απο πολ? βαθι? και ουσι?δη θ?ματα καθ?ς και πνευματικο? προβληματισμο?ς που αποτελο?ν την διανοητικ? β?ση της ιστορ?ας.

Το παθιασμ?νο ?φος που κηρ?ττει αξ?ες και ιδανικ? με ?νθερμη πεπο?θηση αλλ? και ?ντονα συγκινητικ? ταλαιπωρ?α ε?ναι υποβλητικ? και επηρε?ζει τον αναγν?στη.

Η ψυχοθ?ρα διαδικασ?α αν?γνωσης κερδ?ζει την καταν?ηση του π?σο δ?σκολο ε?ναι να ζο?με επιφορτισμ?νοι μ?νο με αγ?πη ακ?μη και στις πιο οδυνηρ?ς αντιξο?τητες.

Το ερ?τημα που κυριαρχε? ε? αρχ?ς και διαπν?ει ?λη την επιθαν?τια εξομολ?γηση του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι το

«γιατ? να βασανιζ?μαστε καθημεριν? και ανελ?ητα απο οδυνηρ?ς αμφιβολ?ες, πλ?ξη, αντιπαλ?τητα, α?σθηση μαται?τητας, απελπισ?α και αδι?γνωστες κακο?θειες σε κ?θε μορφ?».

Η απ?ντηση δεν ?ρχεται ποτ?. ?σως συμπερασματικ? να προκ?πτουν απαντ?σεις καθαρ? υποκειμενικ?ς.

Η αν?γνωση του ?διου του βιβλ?ου αναπ?φευκτα περιβ?λλεται απο μια ζοφερ? ατμ?σφαιρα που ταυτ?ζεται με τον εφημ?ριο.

Ε?ναι μια πηγ? ?μπνευσης, προβληματισμο? και εμπειρ?ας. ?μωσ η δι?θεση καταθλιπτικ? και σπαρακτικ? αλλ?ζει μ?νο με την καταν?ηση και τη σταδιακ? συνειδητοπο?ηση πως ?λα οδηγο?ν

σε ?να συμπ?ρασμα εκπληκτικ?.

Ως ανθρ?πινη μαρτυρ?α ε?ναι ?να αξεπ?ραστο γραπτ?, στην ευα?σθητη και εξαγριωμ?νη απεικ?νιση του, μ?σα στο κεν? και τον αλαζονικ? ενθουσιασμ? της σ?γχρονης ζω?ς ?που η ουσ?α της Χ?ριτος=ανιδιοτελο?ς αγ?πης, λειτουργε? και κυριαρχε? συνεχ?μενα.

Τα επαναλαμβαν?μενα στοιχε?α π?στης και θρησκευτικ?τητας ενισχ?ουν την πνευματικ? αναζ?τηση και απ?χουν τελε?ως απο κ?θε μορφ? δογματισμο?.

Θα το χαρακτ?ριζα δ?σκολο αν?γνωσμα που απαιτε? υπομον? και ικαν?τητα να ακο?σεις την επιρρο? του που δεν ε?ναι καθ?λου επιφανειακ?.

Η φων? του ε?ναι εσωτερικ? και βαθι? σπαρακτικ? με μια προσπ?θεια μετ?βασης στην επιτυχημ?νη ευτυχ?α της ανθρωπ?τητας.

Οι τελευτα?ες 50 σελ?δες αυτο? του ?ργου ε?ναι ?να αριστο?ρηγμα πνευματικ?ς κληρονομι?ς του 20ου αι?να για κ?θε «πιστ?» αναγν?στη.

Καλ? αν?γνωση.

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς.

Jim B says

I am convinced that the translation of this book (translator: Pamela Morris) is a great barrier to the enjoyment of the book. It is apparent that the translator was unable to bring out the flow of the thought because sometimes the wrong word was used. Also, her choice of dialects was terrible (French peasants who speak like Irish or Cockneys!) From what I've read from other readers, the Diary is difficult enough to get through without this poor translation of it. Please, someone, come up with a new translation!

Essential to my staying with the book was the 2002 introduction in my edition by Remy Rougeau. I read it before and after reading the book and without it, I would not have appreciated anything but the end of the book.

I rated this book so low because 1) the poor translation, and 2) I couldn't follow the priest's conversations, and 3) until near the end I couldn't relate to the young priest's descriptions. On the other hand, a Goodreads reviewer called "booklady" gave such an excellent review that captured why the book is important, that I have copied and pasted it here:

booklady: "Deceptively quiet book which starts off very slowly; though I knew it had to be going somewhere, it is easy to see why some readers miss its depths—I stopped and started it several times myself. And then...!

"The gist of the story is an inexperienced, young priest arrives at his first parish, a little place out in the country and begins to keep a diary. We also learn he is poor, devout, idealistic and ascetic. None of these traits particularly endear him to his parishioners. He seems to have but one fellow cleric friend, a worldly priest, de Torcy, who would have him 'toughen up' and stand up for himself. Sometimes, I confess I felt a

little exasperated with our curé myself. Other times, his self-effacing meekness brought out my motherly instincts and I wanted to help this young clergyman—who so many seemed to despise or take advantage of. What makes the saga so compelling is the gentle, uncomplaining way the new priest relates his many failures and humiliations. As his audience we see his kindnesses misunderstood and his simple mistakes turned against him. And yet he is determined to go out and visit all within his parish despite mounting health problems.

"Most of the 'action' – if it can even be called that – in this novel occurs in the brilliantly constructed conversations between the curate and another character: a confused little girl, an atheist doctor, a long-grieving countess, her malicious teenage daughter, and a soldier of fortune to name a few. It is in these epic dialogues George Bernanos' reason for writing this testimony to faith is truly revealed.

"It isn't an action book. It's much, much better than that! I can see why some – used to reading a different sort of literature – have discounted this book. It has to be read carefully, slowly and perceptively. Also, some background on the author, George Bernanos, and the French movement, positivism, would be extremely beneficial.

Highly recommended! One of the most faith-affirming books I've read this year!" (review in full by Goodreads participant "booklady")

I would have liked to have made more marks in the book to go back and reread. However, I bought this book used, I think I may have to return it to a church library in the area (it may have been mixed into someone's books and sold). I did like these statements:

"Satan is too hard a master. He would never command as did the Other with divine simplicity: 'Do likewise.' The devil will have no victims resemble him. He permits only a rough caricature, impotent, abject, which has to serve as food for eternal irony, the mordant irony of the depths."

"Our habits are our friends. Even our bad habits."

Karna Swanson says

I was expecting great things, but I couldn't even get through half of it. Hard to follow, boring, lots of long discourses that didn't have a point. I don't know, didn't get it. I have a copy of it if you'd like to give it a whirl.

Dhanaraj Rajan says

Spiritual Classic. Catholic Classic. Very Sublime.

Will try to write a lengthy review later.

An Attempt at a Lengthy Review:

I titled it as an attempt, because I am very much certain that I will not be able to express what transpired in

me as I read this novel.

I agree with my Goodreads Friend, Cathy in defining this novel as a 'deceptively quiet book' and that seems to be in fact very apt.

On the surface, it looks like a simple tale of an ordinary young Catholic priest and his priestly mission in a parish in the rural France. But that is only the deception. What is behind this simple tale is a narration of many spiritual struggles. It is here Bernanos proves to be more than a simple story teller.

Few of the spiritual struggles/theological questions analysed are:

1. What is Prayer? Is it possible to pray at all times with full faith?
2. What is the meaning of life/eternal Life in front of death?
3. What are the meanings of theological virtues - Faith, Hope and Charity?
4. Is God always present in our lives? Or do we find grace everywhere and every time?
5. The question of loneliness and priests; the question of celibacy and priests; priest's devotion to Our Lady; etc.

All these issues/struggles/doubts are analysed in a sublime way as only a great writer/spiritual guide/theologian who is illuminated by Divine wisdom can.

Bernanos was a devout Catholic and he wanted to be a priest. Thankfully, after a short period of time in seminary, he thought it was not his calling and so came out of seminary. He remained a devout Catholic and became a great writer. Surely, God knew what Bernanos was called for and Bernanos responded to that call. I am very much grateful to God and to Bernanos.

P.S. I have a tendency to collect some books as my 'death bed companions'- the books of my last days. Till now I have decided on one (Death Comes for the Archbishop) and now this will be added to that list.

FotisK says

Κε?μενο μεστ?, βρ?θον θεολογικ?ν αναφορ?ν, πλ?ρες νοημ?των. Η δομ? το? ημερολογ?ου εξυπηρετε? την παρ?θεση μεταφυσικ?ς φ?σης ερωταπαντ?σεων, ανησυχι?ν και συλλογισμ?ν του καθολικο? Μπερναν?ς. Στη λογικ? αυτ?, καθ?σταται ξεκ?θαρος ο συμβολισμ?ς: Ο εφημ?ριος ακολουθε? τα β?ματα του Ιησο? προς το μαρτ?ριο και τη λ?τρωση, εν μ?σω εν?ς απ?ντος ποιμν?ου, μια ?μπλης πλ?ξης κοιν?τητας. Εκε? που ?νας αμ?τοχος μεταφυσικ?ν αναζητ?σεων αναγν?στης (?πως εγ?) και λ?τρης της λογοτεχν?ας στοχ?ζεται περ? της μαται?τητας, ?νας πιστ?ς (ομο? με τον συγγραφ?α) ανακαλ?πτει τη Θε?α Χ?ρη.

Το?του δοθ?ντος, το ?ργο αδικε?ται -κατ? την ?ποψ? μου- απ? πλευρ?ς μορφ?ς και ?χι περιεχομ?νου. Συγκεκριμ?να, π?σχει απ? το "προπατορικ? αμ?ρτημα" των γαλλικ?ν γραμμ?των και τ?χνης εν γ?νει: φλυαρ?α, στ?μφος, πληθ?ρα αφορισμ?ν και ?ρωες που ομιλο?ν την ?δια "γλ?σσα" ως φορε?ς ιδε?ν. Οι δι?λογοι συχν? ηχο?ν ψε?τικοι, μια αλληλουχ?α απ? "ατ?κες", σ?γουρα πνευματ?δεις, φιλοσοφημ?νοι και εμβριθε?ς, αλλ? για τον λ?γο αυτ? κ?ποιες στιγμ?ς παρ?ταιροι και εν?οτε κουραστικο?.

Το "Ημερολ?γιο" συχν? δ?νει την εντ?πωση πως "πν?γεται" απ? το υπερχε?λισμα των ιδε?ν του, ασφυκτι? υπ? το β?ρος της επαγγελ?ας του, "στομ?νει" απ? τη ορμ? του διαπρ?σιου λ?γου του. Προφαν?ς, τα προηγηθ?ντα ε?ναι απλ? προσωπικ?ς και υπερβολικ? αυστηρ?ς απ?ψεις - ?λλοι αναγν?στες θα τα προσπερ?σουν ως υπερβολ?ς (και καλ? θα κ?νουν!). Ο "Εφημ?ριος", εν τ?λει,

παραμ?νει ?να εξαιρετικ? αν?γνωσμα με ποι?τητες και β?θος που ελ?χιστα σ?γχρονα ?ργα
μπορο?ν να προσφ?ρουν.

Rozzer says

I read this while alone in Tokyo in November, 1975. Brrrr. The book sets forth in living black-and-white an aspect of France that many disregard: the terribly self-punishing, rigid, miserable, very November (of one's soul, so to speak) French Catholicism of times not all that very much gone by. I've never got it straight. Is THIS the Jansenist strain, Port-Royal and all that, or the other, more papistical orthodoxy? Shared with all too many Irish. Something severe, drizzling, gray, wintery, absolutely self-denying if not self-torturing. Something that makes all the seventeenth century French Jesuit martyrs more comprehensible, as they continued to celebrate mass with all or perhaps just eight or nine of their fingers having been hilariously amputated by the Hurons or the Iroquois. Something you can feel sweating coldly from the walls of the narrow streets of Lourdes even at the best, freshest, most lovely time of the year.

Saw the movie on Turner Classics quite recently. Not a patch on the book. Bresson tried hard, but he just didn't make it. How would one transfer Bernanos in this book to film? A film is by its nature anchored in the fleshiness of the realest possible life. And this work demonstrates how that fleshiness can be and is refused and rejected. In favor of a complete identification with what is, after all, a God whose essence appears to be very human suffering. I'm saddened. I too believe in God. But by no means the God of Bernanos. No. Not the God of so many French Catholics. This strain, this slice of French being is essential for knowing and feeling France and its peoples. It's been around a long time. But the French over the past fifty years have been voting with their feet. And they have decisively voted against this aspect of their history.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

Before his death on April 4th, 1947, Georges Bernanos gave a lecture in Tunisia entitled "Our Friends the Saints" which can teach us to say to the Lord, Lord, your love is infinite; I can't fathom it and it is sufficient for me, to which the Lord might answer us as he answered the mother who lost her little one, { there is a mother who is hiding her face for the last time against the little heart that no longer throbs, a mother, close to her dead child, offering God the moaning of an exhausted resignation, as if the Voice that threw the suns into the great void the way a hand disperses grain, the Voice that makes the earth tremble, had just sweetly whispered in her ear: "Forgive Me. One day you will know, you will understand, you will thank Me. But now, what I await from you is your pardon. Forgive Me." Those people—the harassed women, that poor man—are at the heart of the mystery, at the core of the universal creation and even inside the secret of God Himself. What can I say of this? Language is at the service of intelligence. But what these people have grasped, they have understood by a faculty superior to the intelligence, though not at all in conflict with it, or rather by a profound and irresistible impulse of the soul which engages all the faculties at the same time, which thoroughly absorbs all that is natural in them. . . . }

Such a woman, once made aware of God's love for her, she becomes, as it were, another christ. In a word, she is a saint. To surrender to God's will is not easy. Therefore, we don't offer our sufferings up to God, but rather we offer what we might become as a result of suffering. We should go with our sufferings to the maximum degrees of love, to the highest peak of love. Then, our sufferings become for us salvific sufferings,

which means in the course of God's dealing with us, we have to genuinely convinced of the prayer which taught us, "Lord, Your will be done".
