



Five Years: Thoughts during a useless time

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Paul Goodman published his most famous book *Growing Up Absurd*, in 1960. Still, in the 1950s he considered himself a failure. He kept a diary from 1955 to 1960 and published it later as *Five Years: Thoughts during a useless time*. It may be his best book, a talented crank's highly articulate complaint about the world's outrageous failure to appreciate him. The unsold books, the unproduced plays and the unpraised poetry had created a kind of depression; he envied the success of others.

Five Years attracted even more attention for the account of his sexuality. He had a wife, two daughters and a son, but he also pursued a vigorous homosexual life, mostly through anonymous encounters. He thought his bisexuality the most normal sort of male life but it clearly failed to make him happy. "I cruise for sex," he wrote, "then, when the bout is over and gone, I lust."

Five Years: Thoughts during a useless time Details

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Author : Paul Goodman

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Chris says

I'm not yet a Paul Goodman fan, at least from this, the first book of his I have read. Quite hard to classify, it's somewhat a diary, but it's also full of aphorisms and multi-paragraph socio-philosophical discourses. The organization is by years and each item is set off from each other with no transitional text. It doesn't gel at all, and is damaged by his persistent complaining about his publishers' lack of appreciation for his writing, and his subsequent failure to get published.

Among the now mostly irrelevant political commentary, and his uninteresting publication drama, there is the more exciting [leave that *bon mot* stand, ed.] thread of his sexual encounters with young men, in their teens and twenties, when he was nearing fifty. His public openness was groundbreaking for 1966 and did get him *really* noticed perhaps for the first time. And he predates and anticipates Renaud Camus' far more extensively detailed—yet somehow similar—sexual diaries in *Tricks: 25 Encounters*. But unfortunately Goodman's encounters sometimes project an unwelcome feeling of guilt: he was married with several children at the time, and he tried to pass it all off as normal sexual release, not worthy of untoward comment. From the perspective of half a century later, it doesn't quite ring true.

Maybe I should try *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, his most famous book. After all, it was recently republished by NYRB Classics, whatever that may mean about greatness.

Jeff says

Paul Goodman wrote these entries over five years, between 1955-1960, and we find him wondering about Wordsworthian syntax, about Zombie formalism and the death of Jackson Pollock, conceptual patches and the "progress" of science and art, and many more. The intellect is endless, and writing its life. Here he's also on trial with himself viz. his erotic attraction toward black men, young boys, and his self-infatuation, too. On a personal level it's not a pretty picture, this life of the mind. The candor I find scary -- I think that's how it's intended to come off. He was brave to publish it even six years after it had been finished. We ought to have all of Goodman's diaries and notebooks available, but his was a messy life, and his literary estate has been rough and tumble. So returning to these I find myself grateful for the opportunity for a peek.
