



The Why of Things

Julio Donoso

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The outstanding feature of Julio Donoso's long life is its dazzling variety. From five-star hotels and high society venues, meeting the likes of Ava Gardner and Marlene Dietrich, he moves to left-wing dives in the poorer parts of Santiago, Chile's capital city, to pursue his 'quest'. From luxurious seaside residences, he funds Allende's election campaign and talks poetry to Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda. Next he's on a plane to Cuba to learn about Communism in action - from the bearded man himself, Fidel Castro and his compadres Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos. Come Chile's military coup in 1973, which booted Augusto Pinochet into power, the author's leftist credentials make him public enemy number one, and his frantic efforts to evade capture form the exciting core of his wide-ranging autobiography. Exile follows, with a change of lives and a change of wives . . . but nothing deters Donoso! In Switzerland, he rediscovers his businessman's hat and does mega-deals with the Eastern Bloc countries, makes a fortune, and marries an Englishwoman. Full circle? Yes, but wealth has not spoiled him. As he revisits past happiness and earth-shaking events, he carries with him the pain of his country's poor: he has been there too. Herein lies his humanity, and here is the superbly written record of a man who investigates 'the why of things' - in his own special way.

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