

University of Notre Dame | Department of Romance Languages and Literatures
ROIT 40914 – Primo Levi: Literature and Life
Spring 2020

Professor (nome cognome) | 120 Decio Hall | 574-631-9302 | (email)

Meeting Times

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00pm – 3:15pm, DeBartolo Hall, Room 302

Office Hours

My office (120 Decio) is always open for you to stop by and ask questions. I am also readily available via email (cleavitt@nd.edu). My regularly scheduled office hours are Tuesdays from 9:30 – 10:30am and Thursdays from 3:30 – 4:30pm. Please send me an email if you are unable make either of the listed appointments and we can find another time to meet. Impromptu meetings can also often be arranged before or after class.

Description

Primo Levi has been called “a major, universally recognized, icon in Holocaust literature” (Geerts), indeed “*the witness-writer par excellence*,” because “his narrative, poetry and essays about his time in Auschwitz are among the most widely read and most widely lauded of all writings on the Holocaust” (Gordon). Levi was this and more: witness and storyteller, scientist and writer, he was among the greatest authors and moral authorities of the twentieth century. In this course, taught in Italian, we will read Levi’s first and most famous work, *Se questo è un uomo* (If This is a Man, 1947), a masterpiece and milestone in the Italian tradition, in which Levi recounts his internment in Auschwitz. With Levi, we will ask what it means to live, what it means to be human, in and after the Nazi death camps. With Levi, too, we will broaden our exploration to address vital questions of faith, identity, meaning, truth, responsibility, love, friendship, freedom, diversity, survival, science, and salvation as we read selections from such fundamental works as *La tregua* (The Truce, 1963); *Il sistema periodico* (The Periodic Table, 1975); *Lilì e altri racconti* (Moments of Reprieve, 1978); and *I sommersi e i salvati* (The Drowned and the Saved, 1986). Throughout the course we will also make use of materials from the Primo Levi Collection of Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Library, one of the world’s foremost collections dedicated to the study of Primo Levi.

Learning Goals

After successful completion of this course you will be able to:

- Analyze, in their historical context, the major literary texts of Primo Levi, who worked across genres, producing poetry, prose narrative, essays, testimonials, letters, interviews, and orations of lasting literary value.
- Interpret and appreciate literature with greater insight and attentiveness, developing the critical skills and theoretical framework necessary to perform a close analysis of the structural components of a literary text, as well as to experience and to evaluate literature’s distinct ways of knowing and representing reality.
- Develop the analytical tools to recognize and describe the formal dimensions and the ideas of Primo Levi’s major literary texts, and to explore the complex interaction—and fundamental inseparability—of form and content.
- Reflect with appropriate care and precision on how the ethics and aesthetics of Primo Levi’s literary project shaped and were shaped by the central issues and events of the twentieth century, and how they can help you to define yourself and your world in the twenty-first century.
- Appreciate and express insights into Italian culture, reflecting a deeper understanding of its characteristic beliefs, traditions, and cultural patterns.

- Recognize and respect cultural, religious, and linguistic difference, as reflected in Primo Levi's texts and contexts, in order to engage the perspectives of others and to understand better and to reflect critically on the diversity of human cultures.
- Demonstrate expanded proficiency, confidence, and accuracy in the comprehension and production of Italian, both written and spoken, analyzing, interpreting, and thinking creatively about complex texts and ideas within a broader historical and cultural context.
- Plan, draft, revise, edit, and proofread a rigorous argument in Italian.

Required Texts

Many of the assigned texts for this class will be available electronically through Hesburgh Library Reserves (reserves.library.nd.edu). For reasons of length, however, a few of the texts cannot be supplied electronically, and these will be made available on physical reserve in the lower level at the Hesburgh Library. If, alternatively, you should wish to purchase these longer items, they are:

- Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Einaudi)
- Primo Levi, *Il sistema periodico* (Einaudi)
- Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Einaudi)

Class Requirements

Attendance: Regular attendance is required and you are expected to arrive at seminar on time. More than three absences will result in a lower grade for the course. If you have to miss a class for some reason (such as participation in an athletic event or illness), please email me before class.

Participation in class: This course is a seminar, which means that classes will largely be devoted to conversations, not lectures. Contribution to discussion is an integral part of the course experience, and participation will make up 20% of your final grade. For the seminars to be productive learning experiences, your informed participation is of the utmost importance. To be informed, you must have studied with care the material assigned for the day, and you must be prepared to engage with that material critically and discursively. To be a participant, you must regularly volunteer for seminar discussions, whether that means offering your analysis of the material under examination or raising questions on any issues that remain unclear. Because academic discussions often involve critical debate, classroom etiquette is vital. You are expected to show respect for diverse opinions at all times. Please strive to make comments in ways that demonstrate respect and invite discussion, and please listen carefully when your colleagues are speaking. If you do not follow these guidelines, your participation grade will be adversely affected. If you ever feel that your viewpoint is not receiving due respect, or if you are ever offended by something that is said in class, please speak to me. If, at any point during the semester, you are finding it hard to participate in the seminar discussions and to get the most out of your course experience, please come talk to me. There are solutions and I am here to help you succeed.

Presentations: You are required to give one presentation, which will be worth 10% of your final grade. You will be invited to choose which day—and thus which text, and which topic—you will present. Working in pairs, you will take responsibility for introducing the day's themes and setting out the points for class discussion, which you will lead in Italian. The introduction and discussion should cover the assigned reading for the day, but can also take on different points of emphasis and additional subjects to the extent that you wish. Presentations should do more than summarize the set texts. They should demonstrate your critical engagement with and informed analysis of the topics you have prepared, and they should strive to inspire further engagement and analysis from the other members of the class. They need not be formal, but they should be well prepared, effectively structured, and clearly delivered. The best presentations will synthesize and build on the themes developed over the course of the semester while also introducing new topics, issues, and questions.

Examinations: You are required to sit one midterm examination, which will be held Thursday, March 5th during our normal class session. The examination will test your comprehension and critical analysis of the texts and themes discussed during the seminar. In response to a series of questions and short-essay prompts, you will write critical reflections and analyses, in Italian, that demonstrate your engagement with and relative mastery of the works of Primo Levi, as well as your understanding of the experiences and events that have shaped Levi's literary production and critical reception.

Written Essays: You are required to submit one written essays (due Friday, May 8th) and two response papers (due Thursday, February 20th and Thursday, April 9th), all in Italian, which together will be worth 45% of your final grade (the response papers, 500-words each, will be worth 10% combined; the final essay, ten pages in length, will be worth 35%). The response papers are intended to be reflective, first attempts to gather your thoughts and to begin to formulate an argument. The written essay is an argumentative (thesis-based) paper focusing on one or more of the texts and themes discussed during the seminar. Please type all written work using Times New Roman 12-point font, double-space the text, and leave a one-inch margin on all sides. Submit your papers by email to cleavitt@nd.edu. All written work is due by 2:00 pm on the due date. Late papers will be marked down 1/3 grade per day late or part thereof (so, even if it's only one hour late, it's still considered a day late).

Final Grade Breakdown

Participation in class	20%
Presentation	10%
Response papers	10%
Midterm examination	25%
Final (10-page) research paper	35%

Grading Standards

A (96-100). Truly exceptional = work meets or exceeds the highest expectations for the course.

A- (90-95.9). Outstanding = superior work in *all* areas of the course

B+ (87-89.9). Very good = superior work in *most* areas of the course

B (84-86.9). Good = solid work across the board

B- (80-83.9). More than acceptable... = ...but falls short of solid work

C+ (77-79.9). Acceptable: meets all the basic requirements and standards for the course

C (74-76.9). Acceptable: meets most basic requirements and standards in several areas

C- (70-73.9). Acceptable: falls short of meeting basic standards in several areas

D (60-69.9). Minimally passing = work just over the threshold of acceptability

F (59.9-0). Failing = Unacceptable performance

(These classifications reflect the official grading policy of the University of Notre Dame's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures)

University of Notre Dame Honor Code

As members of an academic and spiritual community, students, faculty, and staff at the University of Notre Dame are engaged in a collaborative educational endeavor. Therefore, all members of the University community are expected to embrace and adhere to the following pledge:

"As a member of the Notre Dame community, I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to learn and abide by principles of intellectual honesty and academic integrity, and therefore I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty."

Together, we share responsibility for developing and maintaining a culture of integrity that infuses all aspects of undergraduate life.

In addition to the general principles laid down in the Honor Code (<https://honorcode.nd.edu>), you are also responsible, in this class, for abiding by the disciplinary conventions appropriate to the study of

languages and literatures. On the issues of plagiarism and academic honesty, I strongly advise you to adhere to the recommendations of the Modern Language Association (<https://style.mla.org/plagiarism-and-academic-dishonesty/>), which stipulates that:

“Avoiding plagiarism begins with being scrupulous in your research and note-taking. Keep a complete and thorough list of all the sources that you discover during your research and wish to use, linking each source to the information you glean from it, so that you can double-check that your work acknowledges it. Take care in your notes to distinguish between what is not yours and what is yours, identifying ideas and phrases copied from sources you consult, summaries of your sources, and your own original ideas. As you write, carefully identify all borrowed material, including quoted words and phrases, paraphrased ideas, summarized arguments, and facts and other information.”

If you have any questions about best academic practices, please raise them directly with me (cleavitt@nd.edu). Please also feel free to consult with the University’s Subject Librarian for Italian Studies, Tracy Bergstrom, (tbergstr@nd.edu), who is available for consultation on conducting research in Italian, as well as on questions of citation and proper attribution.

Course Schedule

1.	Mar	14 gen.	In classe: Introduzione al corso – Perché leggere Primo Levi? Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , Prefazione e 1. Il viaggio
2.	Gio	16 gen.	In classe (102 Hesburgh Library): Discussione – “Meditate che questo è stato” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 2. Sul fondo
3.	Mar	21 gen.	In classe: Discussione – “Giacere sul fondo” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 3. Iniziazione e 4. Ka-Be
4.	Gio	23 gen.	In classe: Discussione – “Nessuno deve uscire di qui” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 5. Le nostre notti e 6. Il lavoro
5.	Mar	28 gen.	In classe: Discussione – “La legge del luogo” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 7. Una buona giornata e 8. Al di qua del bene e del male
6.	Gio	30 gen.	In classe: Discussione – “Il nostro comune mondo morale” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 9. I sommersi e i salvati e 10. Esame di chimica
7.	Mar	4 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “La lotta per sopravvivere” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 11. Il canto di Ulisse
8.	Gio	6 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “L’intuizione di un attimo” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 12. I fatti dell’estate, 13. Ottobre 1944 e 14. Kraus

9.	Mar	11 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “Non dimenticare di essere io stesso un uomo” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 15. Die drei Leute vom Labor e 16. L’ultimo
10.	Gio	13 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “Distuggere l’uomo è difficile” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> , 17. Storia di dieci giorni
11.	Mar	18 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “L’ultima traccia di civiltà” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Scrivi</u> una riflessione (500 parole) su <i>Se questo è un uomo</i> di Primo Levi
12.	Gio	20 feb.	In classe (102 Hesburgh Library): Lezione – L’uomo dopo la Shoah Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>La tregua</i> , Il disgelo e Il Campo Grande (su e-Reserves)
13.	Mar	25 feb.	In classe (102 Hesburgh Library): Discussione – “La porta della schiavitù” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>La tregua</i> , Da Staryje Doroghi a Iasi (su e-Reserves)
14.	Gio	27 feb.	In classe: Discussione – “Attraverso la città spenta” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>La tregua</i> , Da Iasi alla Linea e Il risveglio (su e-Reserves)
15.	Mar	3 mar.	In classe: Discussione – “Un sogno entro un altro sogno” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Studia</u> per il Midterm
16.	Mar	6 mar.	In classe: Midterm Examination Compiti per martedì 17 marzo: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Il sistema periodico</i> , Argon e Idrogeno
<u>Vacanze primaverili</u>			
17.	Mar	17 mar.	In classe (102 Hesburgh Library): Discussione – “Il poco che so dei miei antenati” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Il sistema periodico</i> , Zinco e Potassio
18.	Gio	19 mar.	In classe: Discussione – “Un’audacia senza pari” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Il sistema periodico</i> , Oro e Cerio
19.	Mar	24 mar.	In classe: Discussione – “Un nuovo capitolo di schiavitù” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Il sistema periodico</i> , Cromo
20.	Gio	26 mar.	In classe: Discussione – “Nessuno sa più perché” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Il sistema periodico</i> , Vanadio e Carbonio

21.	Mar	31 mar.	In classe: Discussione – “Un gigantesco minuscolo gioco” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Storie naturali</i> , Trattamento di quiescenza (su e-Reserves)
22.	Gio	2 apr.	In classe (<u>102 Hesburgh Library</u>): Discussione – “S’avvia verso la morte” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>La ricerca delle radici</i> , Il giusto oppresso dall’ingiustizia, e <i>Ad ora incerta</i> , Pasqua (ambidue su E-Reserves)
23.	Mar	7 apr.	In classe (<u>102 Hesburgh Library</u>): Lezione – Vittorio Montemaggi: Levi e Dio Compiti per giovedì: <u>Scrivi</u> una riflessione (500 parole) su <i>Il sistema periodico</i> di Primo Levi
24.	Gio	9 apr.	In classe (<u>102 Hesburgh Library</u>): Lezione – Valentina Geri: Levi il Centauro? Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>Lilít e altri racconti</i> , Lilít e Breve sogno (su e-Reserves)
<u>Vacanze di pasqua</u>			
25.	Mar	14 apr.	In classe (<u>102 Hesburgh Library</u>): Discussione – “Figli d’uomo” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>I sommersi e i salvati</i> , Prefazione e La memoria dell’offesa
26.	Gio	16 apr.	In classe (<u>102 Hesburgh Library</u>): Discussione – “Intriso di memoria” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>I sommersi e i salvati</i> , La zona grigia
27.	Mar	21 apr.	In classe: Discussione – “I signori della morte” Compiti per giovedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>I sommersi e i salvati</i> , La vergogna
28.	Gio	23 apr.	In classe: Discussione – “La vergogna del mondo” Compiti per martedì: <u>Leggi</u> <i>I sommersi e i salvati</i> , Comunicare
29.	Mar	28 apr.	In classe: Conclusione del corso Compiti per venerdì 8 maggio: <u>Scrivi</u> il saggio finale (~10 pagine) su un argomento a scelta, da discutere con me, e da consegnare entro le 14 (2:00pm) venerdì 8 maggio.
***	Ven	8 mag.	Consegnare il saggio finale