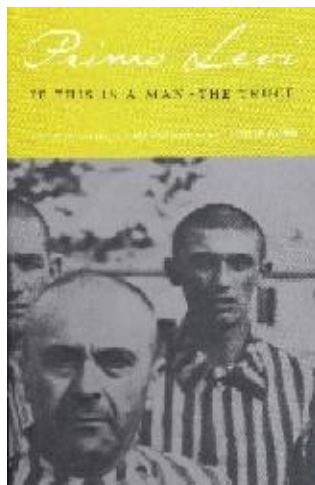


Primo Levi - If This Is a Man

By : hopefortomorrow

Book report on Primo Levi's account of the nazi camps (image is of the version i currently own for page reference etc.)



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Primo Levi - If This Is a Man

Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*, is the autobiography of an Italian Jew's experience living in the concentration camps of Auschwitz. It brings light to an ordeal many people cannot even imagine. To an outsider the camps were full of imprisoned Jews, forced to work for no pay and killed mercilessly. *If This is a Man* takes what little knowledge we have on the subjects and shamefully buries it deep within the truth. From the great underworld of thieving to survive and sell, using their own daily rations as currency, to the great pecking order between the men in the camps. Who would think that a man with no hope of survival or freedom would start a business of his own telling stories to others in the hope of some food, or that a prison full of wasted souls would have an infirmary as well as a brothel?

There is a whole section within the book where Levi is reciting a poem to a messenger-clerk, Jean. This part of the book is among the stronger sections as while you progress through the pages, seeing him as a prisoner of war, these moments drag you back to the realisation that he is in fact a normal person. He tells Jean the poem and tries his best to translate the piece for the man and explain to him what it means. It seems almost absurd for a man with no hope and no chance of freedom to do but it fits in perfectly with the rest of the memoir and stays with the reader through the rest of the book.

Primo Levi has the air of an intelligent and educated man within his writing. He speaks of his time spent in the camps almost as if from a professional looking in, a spectator. The writing is detached and the author himself appears cold and disgusted at what he has to say. This formal way of telling his story makes the reader understand what Levi felt about being in the camps.

The writing repeatedly switches from past to present, a fantastic technique that keeps the audience hooked emotionally. Instead of writing as though he is just telling a story, he almost relives it. This way of writing draws the reader into the story as though almost living the experience themselves.

“There have been no air raids for several weeks; the November rain has turned to snow, and the snow has covered the ruins.” (Pg. 142)

This kind of writing implies that he is there living it and not just accounting how it once snowed in November. In contrast to this, the book switches suddenly to the past, where Primo Levi is telling the story. One example of this is when he talks of the “Chemical Kommando” and the Kapo, Alex.

“The day on which its formation was officially announced a meagre group of 15 Häftlinge gathered in the grey of dawn around the new Kapo in the roll-call square.” (Pg. 107)

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