Professor David Peimer | Holocaust Literature Primo Levi's If This is a Man

- [Speaker] You've gone live. Hi, David. David.

- [Speaker] David, you're on mute, David, you're on mute. There we go, you're back.

- Okay, Hi, Wendy. Hi. How are you?

- [Wendy] I am good, thanks. It's a beautiful day in New York, but it is freezing.

- Ah.

- [Wendy] So I met my son for a walk. We went for a walk and my friend Andrea Kersner, we went for a walk in Central Park around the reservoir. And it's the most beautiful day, but it is super, super chilly.

- Lovely. Well, it's pretty cold here in Liverpool land. And, but my team won in their last match, so I'm happy.

- [Wendy] Mazel tov. I know that my dad was watching the rugby today.

- Liverpool beat the Spurs, which is an important occasion.

- [Wendy] So that's soccer, right, the football?

- Of course.

- [Wendy] I know Liverpool was our second team. Arsenal was the first one.

- Oh my God.

- [Wendy] Has has Judy led people... Okay, I see that we've gone live. Okay. Oh, sorry. Where are we? Seem to have lost you.

- [Speaker] Well, we can still hear you, Wen, we just don't have your picture. There we go. We're back. We have you back.

- [Wendy] Okay, ah, you can hear you York, can't you? There we go.

- I'm not sure why I can't... Oh there we go,

- [Speaker] David

- [Wendy] Well, okay, fantastic. It's lovely to be back with you today. We are doing Primo Levi. I'm excited about this presentation, and so it's been a fabulous week, hasn't it been.

- Very powerful, very important.

- [Wendy] Powerful, important, impactful, meaningful, and yes, very heartfelt. So thank you to all our presenters for this week. Thank you Judy again. And David, thanks to you. So I'm going to hand over to you now for another, what I'm sure will be a wonderful presentation. I will be on my headphones and walking.

- Thank you so much.

- Thank you, Wendy, thank you so much, and thanks very much to Judy as always, and Judy, and just to say that... okay, this is on, I just want to make sure has something happened here? Is that on Judy?

- [Judy] Yes, David, yes, You are screen sharing.

Slides are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Okay. No, just a sign came up that wasn't responding. Okay, thank you. So just to say hi to everybody and hope everyone is well and keeping safe and sane. So as we move to the end of the commemorating of Holocaust Week in effect, I wanted to look at the work of Primo Levi, briefly, his life, and in particular, his one book, "If This is a Man". For me, one of the most extraordinary writers and artists and human beings of the century. And one of the most incredible writers actually, when I looked at him as a writer and combining experience and witness and the most extremely horrific experience imaginable or beyond imagination that he, and of course millions and millions of others tragically went through. And then how he... what I want to try and do to be honest to him, is to just bear simple witness to himself and his writing. I want you to focus more on his writing and what comes out of his books. I think many people know about his life and some of the details of his time, obviously in Auschwitz. And what I think would be, what I hope would strike a chord would be how does he try and deal with it through his writing and what kind of writing is it that has made it so evocative and resonant globally, not only in the western world, but globally.

And I would say I dunno if admired is the word, but incredibly respected as a writer, as a writer with a mission to bear witness throughout the world. And that's what I want to focus on today. We've looked at Elie Wiesel, and I'm sure we'll be looking at Wiesel again. And then of course, there are others, Victor Frankl and many others who obviously wrote about their times. And I'm sure you know, in time over the next months, have a chance to look at some of them in some depth, starting with Primo Levi. So everyone knows he's born in Italy, 1919, and he dies at the age of 67. He dies in 1987. These are some of the images of Primo. And if I'm going to often call him by his first name, because there is something unbelievably endearing when you write about

him, and when you read about his life, Philip Roth said he was an enchanting seducer as a storyteller. And I feel that he enchantingly seduces one in with his life, his experience and his sure ability to write and storytell. So, some of the images, the images that are not known so much. This is the young one at the top. That's a first looking, you know, this is around the time when he was a partisan. He was a member of the Italian anti-fascist partisan group. In fact, that's how, as I'm sure you know, he was arrested and then sent to Auschwitz.

This is a young primo in 1936. The one on the bottom left, the one on the top, on the top in the middle, slightly on the left, we'll say the younger man, that's taken in the very early 1940s when he is part of the partisan. And then these others are obviously later in his life. But I don't think what comes across is not so reticent and detached and circumspect as the image that is often received about him. What I think these images capture, there's a life, there's a vitality, there's a serious energy inside the man. You know, he isn't this perfect sort of saintly scientist writer, if you like. So that's what I wanted to try and capture. He's human. He's full of the emotion. He's engaged in life, in human beings, in his own experience and others obviously and obviously his wit and humour. And, you know, there's a full life going on here. I don't want only... I want to counter. They often received purely a ascetic saintly image.

Okay, for me, one of the greatest phrases that any artist or writer could ever come up with as to the meaning of art and why write Is this phrase for me of Levi's. "One must bear witness to the inhuman in the human." Our humanity in some sense depends on this. This is, if you like, my theme for today, I want to explore what an earth does he mean. "One must bear witness." That's pretty clear. "To the inhuman in the human." And our humanity in some sense depends on this. So it's not about writing all about humanity, but bear witnessed, not just write about, but bear witness, be real, be honest, be ruthless, be be clear about the inhumanity in every human, in every society, community over history, and obviously over the period of the Holocaust, in particular, in his case. And our humanity, ironically, it's the great irony of literature and art. I always believe great literature, great art, great writing, needs irony. And the irony is that the humanity depends on that, depends on an understanding and insight of the depths and the most extreme inhuman act and thought imaginable of the human race. And obviously, we can link it to the Holocaust and his experiences here.

And I have enormous, endless admiration and respect for that definition for himself as a writer, as an artist, and as a human being, taking some responsibility and trying to make sense of his own life, his own era, and trying to suggest something for us, I think. Okay, to move on, the main book I'm going to focus on is "If This Is a Man", which is his main book about his experience in the camp. He calls it the Lager, And he calls it the camp. And I will, out of respect to his writing, I'm going to use those two words quite often. The first, the main body of the book is "If This Is a Man", which is about his arrest as a partisan, an anti Mussolini fascist, an anti-fascist fighting in Italy, fighting, arrested, separated out, Jews and Christians amongst the partisan group. Thinking that the partisans will all be shot anyway, he hears that they're going to be taken to some place called Auschwitz. He has no clue, obviously, but he thinks he might actually survive longer because he'll be at least taken somewhere.

Whereas they all fear as partisans, they're going to be shot by the Nazis anyway. And obviously he has no clue. He's never heard of it, Auschwitz. He doesn't have a clue, obviously, where he's going. He's in his very early twenties, young. The book begins with that. The truth is the part of his journey after the Russians have come across Auschwitz and after he's able to leave. And then it's about, you know, the months of his journey going back to Italy. I would hesitate to use the word recovery. I would say that rather, it's a chronicle of his journey back. And I want you just mention one word, if I may, which is the word liberate. And Joanna, has pointed out to me, and I'm so grateful that in her phrase, it's that the Russians, or, you know, in terms of Auschwitz or in terms of the other camps, it might have been the Americans or the British, came across the camps.

I don't believe in the word liberate, and I'm thankful to Joanna for pointing that out to me, because I think it's spot on. They didn't go intentionally to liberate. They came across and then, you know, the inmates who had survived were able to continue, were able to hopefully survive in somewhere afterwards and live and recapture some life. So I'm focusing primarily on his book, "If This Os a Man". And there are others which I'll briefly mention as we go through. A couple of the key phrases from the book. What's fascinating in the book is that he combines an almost scientific observation, a chronicle of what happens. He just tells the story of this happened, this happened, this happened. Almost like a scientific detached, scientist describing the facts of the events. And the story evolves out of that. Of course, there's emotion. Of course there's outrage and fury, but it's an extremely controlled outrage, a controlled fury inside the writing. It's not as if it's emotionless. It's highly emotional, but it's a highly effective way. And it's ironic that in that he has to detach as a writer, be more slightly removed in order to evoke a much more emotional response in the reader, I think.

And I'm reminded of Hemingway's definition of writing for him, "Write the dramatic sequence of events that produce the emotional effect on the reader." And that was Hemingway's motto, or mantra if you like, for writing. And I think that Primo found through his training as a chemist, his training as a scientist in Turin, that in order to cope somehow being in the camp and in order to write afterwards, he was drawn to this approach to writing. Elie Weisel is much more emotional. It's full with huge emotions, rage and anger and other things, equally powerful. There's no wrong or right. They're both equally powerful in my mind as Victor Frankl and many others. Depends on, I think, the individual's disposition entirely. But what's powerful for me in that he's able to almost list the facts of what he's going through, the experience, but he then includes insights. He's an observer. He's not a moralist, and he's not a judge as a writer. He's an observer who is emotionally completely engaged, but able to bring his mind, his intelligence to bear on it and to almost to control and guide that emotion.

And I like the idea of him being more of an observer and a not a moralist in the same way as Weisel and Frankl. And the others are observers. Even though Weisel is more emotional, doesn't matter, They are not standing in judgement , really. They allow that for us, the reader. And in that way, I'll go back to Hemingway. To produce the emotional effect you want from the

reader. So the reader is invited to become the judge, to become the person who experiences huge emotion in reading this. Now that's really hard to achieve in any writing, but the writing of the most extreme experience imaginable is obviously a million times harder. And there's obvious links to the Claude Lanzmann approach. Antony Sher spoke about it when he did his own production of Primo, which I'm going to show a few clips of as well, that he felt he could never act Auschwitz. Antony Sher said that he wanted to go the approach of the Claude Lanzmann "Shoah" films where, you know, it's basically, it's storytelling at an older age and memory of looking back. And in that way trying to evoke emotion.

Okay, what do we make of man's presumption of himself? These are questions and thoughts that Primo throws into the book all the time as we are going through the journey of his factual experience in the camp. This is Philip Roth, who became his great friend and who visited him quite often in Turin. He was a magically endearing man, the most delicately, forceful enchanter I had ever met. The most delicately forceful enchanter. It's a fascinating phrase for me of Philip Roth. And the more I read of his work and the more I come return to read his, his books again and again, I can begin to understand what Roth means. 'Cause it's a mix of words here. It's forceful, it's not just delicate. That's what I like about Roth. There's a toughness, a incredible toughness. I'm constantly amazed by man's inhumanity to man. Then the story from what happened on his first night in the camp.

So after the selection etc, on the tracks, he's in the barracks, and there's a little bit of an icicle that's dripping outside, and he tries to grab it 'cause he's craving some water, he's thirsty, going crazy with it. And he tries to, and then there's a Kapo walking outside the barrack, and he kicks the icicle off. So the Kapo denies him even just a tiny drip of ice water from an icicle dripping from a little, what one might call, you know, a window from the barracks. And he looks at him and he says, "Warum?" you know, 'cause he can speak a bit of German. 'Cause some of his studies in Turin were German textbooks of chemistry. He says, "Why?" And the Kapo answers "Why? Here, there is no why." And Levi comes back to this phrase quite often in his life. Why? Here, there is no why. In other words, what do you think he's getting at? Is all the rationality, all the ways of understanding the world as we perceive it to be, goes out the window completely in this kind of extreme situation.

Here there is no why. Everything you have learned, everything you have studied and understood to try and deal with life, to not only deal with life, but to whether succeed or just enjoy or whether just get through, survive life, whatever. None of the rules work. There is no why that you know it. It's a totally different why and you better figure it out very fast or else you have no chance whatsoever, even if you have less than 0.0001 of surviving. So, and he mentions it a couple of times, and it's important because he has to figure out why. He has to figure out how to survive all the new things to learn and fast. To link it to the quote at the top, this links to his very close friend Alberto. Alberto was the first to understand. Existence in this place is war. So flip being a student, flip being a partisan, flip even being Jewish in Turin and the anti-Jewish stuff happening with the Mussolini, the fascism in the late in the 30s and so on. Flip everything from Italy, Turin, the background, upbringing, whatever, university.

War, and think of it immediately, if you have any tiny sliver of survival and hope it's war. But for Primo, he hasn't been trained. He was fighting as a partisan but hasn't been trained in warfare as a soldier in war, in the military, in battle and the most extreme experiences there. And certainly not for something like this. And I think, and he speaks about that. He set himself the task of, to try and understand why all the different rules, the different ways that might give a chance, even if it's the tiniest chance possible of survival. "I consider a country civilised, if its laws hinder a powerful man becoming too powerful." I think that speaks for itself in contemporary times. But it's an interesting way of putting the words together and that's what is so appealing. It's thoughtful and it provokes emotion and thought in us, the reader. "We can understand from where fascism springs and we must be on our guard because what happened can happen again. Conscience can be seduced again." And then he goes on in the book, and I'm going to read the section later about the charismatic leader and how conscience is what is seduced ultimately.

And where there's... people talk about empathy today. Well it's empathy, but it's also conscience. It's also self-awareness and how to behave in a certain way to not be seduced. Whether it's the great lies that are being told in not only in the Trump era, you know, with the election and the rigged and so on, but you know, in many, many countries around the world and through history. Okay, just to mention that he wrote it, and he finished it in 1947. It was published in a small publishing company in Italy, 2,500 copies, that's it. And then in 1958, in the UK came the first English translation. And from there, the book spread in the English speaking world. And of course as often happens back to Italy and Europe and elsewhere, globally after that. But it took that to amount of time, and I don't want to get into the reasons why, but you know, just give you a sense of the book. Okay, it has been voted one of the top books, not only of the century, but one of the top 100 books ever written in the world. This together with "The Periodic Table" of Primo Levi. Depends on different places where you go to see where the voting happened. This is the series of chapters. And what's interesting to me is that there's the journey.

There's on the bottom Initiation, Ka-Be That was one of the names 'cause he was an IG Farban... He worked in the IG Farben chemical plant, which was trying to make synthetic rubber. Huge, huge industrial factory of IG Farben. Going back to what Joanna was saying on Thursday, of course everybody knew, I mean, IG Farben, one of the biggest industrial companies in the world, not only Germany at the time, you know, thousands, hundreds of thousands. So many people working there, of course. And they're setting up this huge factory in Auschwitz, factories in Germany, all over Poland. linked to the camps, the slave labour, the concentration campS. I mean, you know who, if I may paraphrase Brett, you know, who designs the factory who works out the roll call. Who works out, who's going to work in what? Where's the rubber come from? And the questions go on and on. You know, this whole idea of a few small people knew, large people didn't is obviously nonsense. Our Nights, The Work, A Good Day. Interesting phrase for a chapter heading.

This Side of Good and Evil, obviously referencing Nietzsche and trying to understand what is good and evil in the camp. The Drowned and the Saved. The word is drowned and saved. These are endlessly fascinating and emotionally resonant words, but also resonate intellectually. The chemistry examination, which was this insane, absurd chemist, it was a selection we had to run past, you know, naked, had to run past the SS doctors, as you know. And there was a guy, Pannwitz, who was a chemist and said that he was looking for a few chemists, and he had to run past and then afterwards naked to see if he was so-called fit enough. And then sit a chemistry exam in German in the middle of Auschwitz, sit a chemistry exam in German. And if he passes, he might have a chance to work in an enclosed structure, not outside in the freezing cold, the snow, backbreaking, killing work but inside with some insane chemical experiments with this SS chemist Pannwitz if he passes the examination. Be passes it in German, and he goes to work there.

The cantor of Ulysses, I think is hugely influenced in his writing, and his thinking, obviously he's Italian, by Dante. There's many references to Dante and the "Inferno" and the Paradiso and the events of the summer, which is, you know, moving towards the end when the Russians come across the camp. So the on the bottom by the way, the journey is the journey to the camp on the bottom is on the bottom of man, where his phrase was the demolition of man, not only the reducing of man, but the demolition of humanity, of man, humanity, of individuality. It combines his factual writing with this, trying to think and understand, I wouldn't say philosophical, trying to think and understand what is this inhumanity, what is the structures, the bureaucracy, what is the thinking that is going on that enables people to create it and be, you know, as Joanna reminded us on Thursday and to be proud of what they've created, these Germans. So he's trying to understand it while he's in the camp. And then of course when he is writing it afterwards. Okay, to give you a short biography, he's born in Turin. He got his PhD in chemistry at the University of Turin.

Then he was part of, as I said, the Italian anti-fascist resistance, arrested 1943, sent to Auschwitz in the beginning of 1944. So he there for 11 months. And then after the war, he returned to Turin, and he managed a paint factory working in vanishing and many other things where his training as a chemist came into play. He worked for nearly 30 years, and he was writing all the time. So he only when he became famous and was earning enough money from his writing, could he give up being a chemist. So for 30 years is when he wrote most of his books. And in the first year in 1946 is when he writes, "If This is a Man" and "the Truce". He doesn't... He's short of money, so he goes and lives in the factory dormitory, which is outside of Turin. This is in 1946. And he stays there every night, and that's when he's doing most of the writing. And he only goes back to Turin on weekends. And once he's married in 1947, he goes to see his wife Lucua there and comes back every week and stays there in the factory compound to work. He's born into a Jewish family.

But I guess what's maybe, I don't know, fairly similar to many, they fairly well integrated in Turin into the Italian society, especially of Turin, which has its, you know, culture of of its own. Like we all know, I mean, Jewish culture of Johannesburg, of Durban, of London, of Manchester, New

York, LA, wherever we are in the world is obviously, you know, how we experience it is different. But he's well integrated into Italian society and culture. That's important. He's very integrated. He knows his Dante. He studies with Italian kids. He's brought up mostly in a secular way, but he keeps his affiliation with the city's Jewish community in Turin. They celebrate a few of the Jewish holidays. A few of the rituals were maintained, but like many Italian Jews of that generation, they were not religiously observant. He had some Hebrew schooling. He had a bar mitzvah. But as he says, he was never religious, and his Jewish identity was marginal to his life until he was on that train and until...

That's when it really became obviously totally central. Before that, his awakening, as he called it, was in fascist Italy and the race laws. And in particular in 1938, he says, "Everything changed for me. The race laws stamped me like you stamp sheet metal, I am a Jew. They've sewn the star of David on me. And not only on my clothes. in Auschwitz, I became a Jew, a full Jew. The consciousness of feeling different was forced upon me. Someone for no reason in the world decided that I was different and inferior. My natural reaction in those years was that, yes, I do feel different now, but strangely I feel superior to them." I leave that as it is. He loved hiking in the mountains. And this image of him being this highly neurotic, scared, you know, bony little Kafka sort of wandering around Turin or in Auschwitz or wherever, I don't think it's entirely true. He went mountain hiking, and he could out hike some of his friends. Of course, he wasn't nearly as physically fit and physically active, and he had, he felt physically insecure.

But that's not the same as this sort of cliched stereotype image of the highly neurotic, you know, freaked out, terrified, non-physical, purely cerebral intellectual. I don't believe it, you know, and that it was with the partisans. And when you read his last book, which is about, you know, which you know, "If Not Now, When?", which is about partisans fighting in the forest, fighting in the mountains of Italy, you know, fighting the Germans and fighting the Italian fascists. So I think we have to see from my personal opinion, there's another side to the man Because of the new race laws, this is, of course in the end of the 1930s, Levi had difficulty finding a supervisor for his PhD thesis. And that was on the Walden inversion, which is a study of the asymmetry of the carbon atom, doing PhD in Turin, one the top universities of Europe on the asymmetry of the carbon atom. This is where his mind is at, hugely. So from that and secularity in Jewishness, hiking mountains with his close friends, insecure about girls, yes, insecure about his physicality, yes.

But being an active, you know, kid, highly intelligent, I want to try and draw this picture of him, then thrown into a world at the age of 22 here, why? There is no why here. The inhumanity, the extreme and the intensity of such an extreme of the camp. Okay, as I said, afterwards, he worked as a chemist in Turin, and with his wife Lucia, and she died in the same year as he did in the end, and they had three children and so on. Okay. What I want to do is I want to show a couple of slides, sorry, a couple of of clips from Antony Sher, did a really interesting, and in some ways profoundly powerful, quite remarkable adaptation where he took, he took from "If This Is a Man" and from some of the other writings of Levi, but primarily from the book that I'll be focusing on today. And he turned it into a one hour, one man performance, and he called it

Primo. I'm sure some people may have have seen it, but for those who haven't, he does it as an older man, a man in his, in his early 50s, late 40s.

Look, he does it with a double sense of time where he's looking back with memory on that period of being in the camp, but he's also trying to capture something about the present. So he's trying to act between memory and being in the moment in the present. And it's extraordinary difficult to act that. And, you know, it's an amazing way of Antony Sher. Showing us how a fantastic actor can achieve that. And he's trying to find rhythms in the speaking, as you'll see. And most of this is taken literally from the book. This is from an interview that Antony Sher did with Charlie Rose. So please, I have to just find the exact moments in here.

- Please don't think that this is a minor matter here in the Lager. The camp death begins with your shoes, your wooden soled shoes. At first, they're like instruments of torture. After a few hours marching, you already have painful sores. These quickly become infected, and then you're forced to walk with a kind of shuffle as if dragging a convict's change.

- Okay, I'm pleased to welcome Sir Antony Sher.

- The next clip. Anyone wants, this is on YouTube. It's a very, it's a fantastic interview with Antony Sher. Okay.

Video clip plays.

- [Charlie Rose] Take a look at this.

- Here I am now on the bottom. The days are all alike. It's hard to keep track. I push waggons, I work with a shovel. I shiver in the wind, I turn rotten in the rain. And then there is the Auschwitz hunger. It's unknown to free men. It makes you dream cruel dreams at night and settles in all your limbs by day. You and hunger become the same thing. Already, my body is no longer mine. My belly is swollen, my limbs emaciated, my face hollow. Some of us have yellow skin, some grey. When we don't meet for a few days, we hardly recognise one another. Someone that I seek out constantly is Alberto. We're about the same age. We're both chemists. We have the same build. We even look alike. In fact, people get us confused and we're just known as the two Italians. But I'm not adapting as well as Alberto. No one is. He entered the Largo with his head high and lives in here unscathed, somehow. He understood before any of us that existence in this place is war. He fights for his life, yet he makes no enemies. He knows who to avoid, who to cultivate, who to corrupt. But, and this is what makes his memory still so dear to me. He himself never became corrupt. I always saw and still see in him the rare figure of the strong yet peace-loving man against whom the weapons of night are blunted.

- Okay?

Video clip ends.

- What I love about that in part was just-

- Just want to mention here that Antony, again, he's trying to really capture memory and being in the present and an incredible achievement for an actor to try and do. And very powerful to try and capture something of Primo Levi's way of writing with memory and present, which is so hard 'cause usually it's either/or, obviously. And he's trying to capture a certain rhythm which he's imagining, you know, the mind of Primo Levi. working in those moments and trying to turn it into a kind of bizarre curiosity, if you like, an observing curiosity rather than, and in that way cope with rage. I want to show two other clips from Antony Sher's performance.

Video clip plays.

- The living are demanding, the dead can wait, It's midday when we finally carry him out to the common grave. He's very light. And since the pit is full, we overturn the stretcher onto the defiled snow. Charles takes off his Beret. I regret not having one. And while we're standing here, the Russians arrive, four soldiers on horseback, slowly appearing between the grey of the snow and the grey of the sky. Four men armed, but not against us four messengers of peace. They're very young, with rough boyish faces under heavy fur hats perched on their enormous horses. They don't greet us, they don't smile.

They seem overwhelmed, not just by compassion, but something else. Something that seals their lips and keeps their eyes fixed to the scene around them. It's shame. We know the shame. It's the shame that swamped us after the selections. And every time we had to watch or submit to some outrage. It's the shame which the just man feels at another man's crime, a feeling of guilt that such a thing even exists. This is why fewer of us ran to greet our saviours.

- What I really like is besides obviously the simplicity of the performance and the music and the grey and the lighting. That sense when he starts to talk about what they are, he's imagining, what these young Russian 19 year old soldiers are seeing, but the shame and there's a force in him, the forceful quality that Philip Roth mentions. There's a determination, for me, there's a controlled outrage. Okay? And this is the last clip I want to show from. Sher's performance.

- Only a high number could be so stupid. They count us. We wait. They make us undress. They take our shoes, we shower, we wait. An SS man walks past doing a brief survey. They count us again. We shower again. We wait. We wait. To judge by the sun, it's now about 2:00 PM We've been on our feet for 10 hours, naked for six.

Video clip ends.

- What's so powerful for me is that he's not scared as a performer to take his time and try and let us absorb what's going on and come into the world that he's creating by one actor dressed in contemporary clothes, trying to create an unimagination if it's possible, through words and a

performance, one of the most evil and most horrific imagined events and reality events ever. So the irony is that the more simple, the more evocative, the more simple, the more profoundly moving from my point of view. Also, for me, it's testament to what I always believe art, theatre, literature, painting, music, whatever can achieve. It can create such an emotional effect in us. It can move us profoundly in emotion and in intelligence. And if something for me, like this doesn't move anybody, I dunno what will. And he's also trying to be influenced by the called Claude Lanzmann approach I mentioned, trying to show memories and the present just dressed as an ordinary man today. The only resemblance is the similar beard and the haircut that Primo Levi had. He's trying to show vaguely, you know, clothing of Primo Levi of the time in Turin. But for the rest, that's it.

This was a BBC... If anyone wants, this is a BBC film of the play that Sher did. And it's one of the, for me, one of the most powerful moving pieces of theatre that I've ever seen. Not only because I'm Jewish, but as an attempt, as a theatre artist and drawing on Levi as a writer to try and give us some sense of how to move us today in our cynical contemporary, you know, post-truth times, how to actually still try and grab us by the guts. And as Kafka said, "Take an axe to the frozen exterior of the heart." Okay, so a couple of phrases which I want to go on with from the book. And this, this is, I'm just reading from the book here to share. This is primo writing himself. Then for the first time we became, and as one reads it, one has to read it with a pause with thought. In a way the thought surfs the the wave of emotion. "Then for the first time, we became aware that our language lacked words to express the offence. What is the offence? The demolition of a man. In a moment, with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us. We had reached the bottom. It is not possible to sink lower than this. Nothing belongs to us anymore. They have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair. If we speak, they will not listen to us.

And if we listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name. And if we want to keep it, we would have to find in ourselves the strength to do so. So that behind our name, something of us, of us as we were, will remain. It is lucky that it is not windy today. Strange how? In some ways, one always has the impression of being fortunate how some chance happening, however, infinitesimal stops us crossing the threshold of despair and allows us to live. It is raining, but it is not windy. It is your turn for the supplement of soup. So that even today you find the strength to reach the evening. Conscience can be seduced again. Everybody must know or remember that when Hitler or Mussolini spoke in public. They were believed, applauded, admired, adored like Gods. They were charismatic leaders. They possessed a secret power of seduction, of women and men that did not proceed from the soundness of what they said, but from the suggestive way in which they said them, their eloquence, the histrionic art, the ideas they proclaimed were not always the same, had nothing really to do with truth. And were in general ridiculous, abhorrent, or even cruel.

And yet they were acclaimed with hosannas and followed to the death by millions and millions and millions of the faithful. We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to death. But we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our

strength. Well, this is it, the power to refuse our consent. We must walk erect without dragging our feet. Not in homage to Prussian discipline, but to remain alive, not to begin to die Even though I myself often do not feel alive enough how to kill myself even if I wanted to. Since it is difficult to distinguish true prophets from false, it is as well to regard all prophets with suspicion." So I just wanted to share some phrases together with what we what we watched of Antony Sher to give us a sense of his writing, how to approach it.

As I said, this sort of fairly detached, removed, observant, scientific eye of the chemist. But there is so much controlled outrage, controlled rage and emotion inside. But ironically, he allows us to feel it by him, not overtly showing it himself. And that's the power of art and a lot of theatre, I think. A lot of references in the play, in the book to logic and trying to make sense of, you know, a totally different kind of perverse, insane logic of the camp. There's an interlude where he talks to a prisoner about Dante's "Inferno". You know, he finds another Italian he can talk to about it. There are moments throughout the book, moments of reprieve, moments of sanity of you know, of a hint of insanity, a hint of humanity that he can find by just having a brief conversation about Dante, which he remembers and becomes very important in the book. Italo Calvino and Philip Roth and Saul Bellow all spoke about, especially Roth, meeting him and reading the books and Bellow. There's an exceptional intensity and that was their word.

And Primo Levi used it about Alberto and Lorenzo, two of his close friends I'm going to mention shortly, an exceptional intensity to try and understand everything and quickly in order to perhaps increase the odds of surviving by point 0.001% And he understands at the beginning that for Alberto, understood immediately that existence in that place meant understanding that existence is war. So, you know, moving to that way of thinking, immediately, He knew a little bit of German from reading some German publications and chemistries while studying. And he mentioned how important language was, 'cause of course, for many others who didn't understand, you'd be shot, you'd be killed even if you survived their first selection. You know, just from the language, and often overlooked, I think, you know that in the camps, obviously so many languages, cultures, everything. But if you don't understand the German and the orders, who knows, you know, end of life in a second. And how he quickly worked to orient himself with Alberto in the camp. He used bread to pay. He used bread to pay a more experienced Italian prisoner for German lessons to improve his German.

This is what he did in the camp. And he asked this Italian prisoner to teach him how to survive more in Auschwitz. As he did with Alberto, his close friend. He asked Alberto and the others to teach him how to steal, how to get things, how to put the buttons on his jacket, how to make sure his jacket was kept clean, in inverted commas, in a certain way for the Germans. How to make sure that those wooden shoes were kept in a certain... How he had to prepare his bed in the morning for inspection, if you call it a bed. How he had to only go and shower on the certain times when they were screamed at. Only go to the latrine at certain times. So much learning with Alberto and quickly as fast as possible in the camp, how to wait, although you're starving, wait at the end of the queue for a bit of soup because hopefully there'll be a few little vegetables or bits of meat, maybe at the bottom of the vat of soup.

Control and wait to the end, not rush to the front because it'll be more water effectively. So all these things he talks about in the book learning through Alberto. And then of course the great friendship with Lorenzo. Lorenzo, was an Italian, was not Jewish, was a Christian Italian bricklayer who was in a separate section in the camp, not in the extermination part for the Jews, but they met by chance, became friendly. And Lorenzo gave him a ration, a piece of bread every day. And sometimes, you know, a bit of a carrot, or a bit of a potato or bit of meat, whatever, something. And the two friendships of Lorenzo and Alberto, which he said happened to him by luck, may have been luck, who knows, were what he said helped him to survive. And the one hand get a bit of food and the other hand learned fast how to change the mindset completely in that camp. But it's not only a book about survival for me, it's a book about what... He was 22, let's not forget.

What he did to find a way, as I said, to increase his odds, even if it's so slight. And then, and how later he connected with Lorenzo and Alberto is fascinating as well. Alberto, by the way, should mention, died on the death march. Lorenzo got back to Italy, and he went to see Lorenzo much later in his life, and Lorenzo had become an alcoholic, and Primo tried to rescue him in the same way, and he used the word rescue, as the way he felt he'd been rescued with a piece of bread every day from Lorenzo. But Lorenzo had become an alcoholic. And he said to him, "You know, I've had enough. The horrors he had seen, the extremes, everything of life, everything of humanity. And he died of alcoholism in the early 1950s, even though Primo made grants him to try and help him every way that he could. And remember Primo's, he's just working in a paint factory. He's not famous, he hasn't made extra money. He's barely got enough money for his wife and his mother who's living in the house with them and the children. So he's trying his best, but he can't.

He makes a thing out of telling how Alberto taught him how to steal, you know? And it's not as simple as one imagines, especially in a place like Auschwitz, as one can imagine it. Then at the end, he has this chemical exam by this insane SS, doctor, Pannwitz He passes the chemistry exam. He's sent into the infirmary. He's sent into the, the chemistry plant, the chemistry section rather. So he's indoors, and it's freezing cold in November of 1944 for those couple of months before late January when the Russians come across the camp. The terrible irony is at the end, there were about, I think he says about 7500, who were in the infirmary and elsewhere left in Auschwitz. And all the rest as everybody knows, are taken on the death march, including Alberto who dies on the death march or is killed. And they all think obviously that they're going to be killed. There in the infirmary, he's got scarlet fever, and they think the SS of course are going to come and shoot the lot of them.

And those on on the march, of course think it's, the Germans call it an evacuation march, obviously. But ironically, whether the essays don't have time or they're not... They forget or they don't have interest, who knows, they leave. And these few thousand prisoners in the infirmary are the ones who, ironically, survive. Primo's, one of them. He then goes back, and as I've said, he worked and he tried to get his book published. It was published in Italy, which had a small

readership then at the time then, then, and I have to mention this because it's important to know, even though 2500 copies were printed, it got out to America and to England in the late 40s, in the early 50s on the advice of a certain rabbi, Joshua Leibman, little Brown and company were advised not to publish the book, and in the opinion of many of his friends and other survivors and writers who knew him quite well, and the biographer of him, Carole Angier, it's a super biography called "The Double Bond". It's unbelievably thick. It's this thick, but it's brilliant. That led to the neglect of his work and his life for many decades and had quite a strong effect on him. Okay, so what I want to get at is, why is it that if we understand something of the inhumanity of human, it can help perhaps humanity survive or become more aware of it. To go back to the quote of Levi's at the beginning.

And I think by knowing the extreme of horror, of hell, of the inferno, of Auschwitz, of anything else related to the Holocaust and other terrible experiences over history and in life, we expand our horizons, rather than eclipse our horizons. And I think that ironically, again, reinforces our desire to live. I think it's a truth of human nature in my opinion. Levi offers no explanation. He offers, I think, a way to try and find a world to live. He doesn't credit his own survival with courage, more with luck. But I think personally and many of the others, Roth and Bellow and others talk, you know, and his friends and Antony Sher talk about a combination of these things. I don't think it's pure luck, although obviously one can argue it's 99.99% pure luck. And I'm the last one to say, which it is or isn't. He talks about in a beautiful phrase, he talks about the facts will speak for themselves. I want the reader to draw his own conclusion. I furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind.

And what I want to investigate is the saying that every stranger is an enemy. And this core thought of every stranger is an enemy is exactly what we understand. We talked a lot this last week and before that of the self and other, superior, you know, one group, Nazis, the Aryan is superior. The Jew is the inferior, the white is superior, the black is inferior, the coloniser is superior, the colonised black or Indian or whatever is inferior. There's this constant setup of the superior and the inferior, the need for the binary, the self and other. And then to demonise the other. And he comes on the phrase, every stranger is an enemy. And if we have that in mind, we are going to inevitably play out versions of this kind of brutality, not necessarily as extreme, obviously, as the Holocaust, but of other kinds of murders and killings. I wanted to then mention, he also talks about in the book, on their arrival in Auschwitz, that they're approached by one of the German guards who didn't shout threats of damnation, but courteously asked him if they had money or valuables. First question to be asked before any selection, obviously.

Okay, I've mentioned also his friends who he regarded as vital to his survival, Lorenzo the bricklayer. And Alberto, who he spoke about in that one speech of Antony Sher's. And the last one I'd like to briefly mention is Mordo Nahum. And Mordo is the guy that goes with him on the train back to Italy, you know, helps him recover some health, helps him. They're go into villages and places to get food. And Mordo is the one who is physically active and gets the food, you know, gets from the farmers, from elsewhere, gets them onto trains, gets them into different situations to try and get back somehow to Italy. But Mordo has this thing, and this is Primo

writing. "He despised me. He was angry with me, rather, because I was not able to manage. I had just come out of the infirmary. I had no shoes.

He told me, remember when there is war, the first thing is shoes, the second is eating. Because if you have shoes then you can run and steal, but you must have shoes. 'Yes.' I told him, 'You are right, but there's not war anymore.' We are out of the camp. And Mordo looked at me and said, 'Primo, there is always war.'" Okay, these are the three great friends that he speaks about in the book, Mordo, Alberto and Lorenzo. And his capacity to have generated and engaged with such people, I think is remarkable. And to have had such friendships, which he talks about so much in the book. All right, I want you to then just share very quickly, this is the, the poem 'cause Prima obviously wrote some poems as well. "Ye who live safe in your warm houses, You who find warm food and friendly faces when you return home, Consider if this is a man who works in mud, who knows no peace, who fights for a crust of bread, who dies by yes or no, consider if this is a woman without hair, without name, without a strength to remember, empty are her eyes, cold her womb.

Never forget this has happened. Remember these words. Engrave them in your heart when at home or in the street when lying down, when getting up, repeat them to your children. Or may your houses be destroyed. May illness strike you down. May your children turn their faces from you." This to me, and obviously, you know, there's echoes of biblical phrasing at the end. You know, "I curse you if you don't remember it." It's what he's saying in this poem of his, I curse myself if I don't remember it. I, as primo and I curse you, reader. If you don't. "Remember these words." At the end of Hamlet, one of his final lines, once he's dying, he's been poisoned. You know, "Remember my story. Go forth in this harsh world and remember my story, Horatio. Tell my stories." Tell the story again and again. Find all new ways of telling it. As societies evolve and change, you know, and children and different generations come and go. all different ways of telling the stories so they don't become cliched, silly little fables of, you know, celebrated in vacuous empty rituals.

I remember the past service, you know, the thing for me was totally empty ritual, but I didn't think it was slaves and Egypt and what it really meant for a second. What does that really mean? I didn't think for a second. Just time to have fun and laugh and joke and whatever. This, I think for us, reminds us why on earth we have spent the last week as we have what he's saying here. And if I may, right at the end, I don't know why, but instinctively I wanted to show, this is the commander, the last commander of Auschwitz. As everybody knows, Rudolph Höss. In 1947, he'd been captured before. He gave some evidence at the Nuremberg trials and then sent back to Poland. And in the site of Auschwitz, he was hung by Polish people. This is the guy that was the last commandant, and I leave it for your own imagination and for us to find possible links, resonances rather. This guy and Levi. I go back to Primo. That's not a look of a defeated man in my mind. Obviously he's freaked. He's terrified.

There's so many things going on, obviously. But to write what he did, to keep writing, to go through the camp and what he did to keep writing, to have a family to bring up the family, to not

stop the writing, to be engaged. He gave talks at many, many places. He wasn't over seduced by prizes and everything which came later in his life, you know, to stay with his friends, to go out to meet not only Roth and Bellow and others, you know, writers coming from the west to meet him. This is a tough... There's a, you know, toughness. Two phrases. "I cannot tolerate that a man be judged not for what he is, but for the group into which he happens to belong. That every stranger is an enemy." And I remember Joanna saying to me that the obvious uniqueness of the Holocaust judged not for what he is or what a woman is or a man, but for the group in which he happens to belong or born, a Jew. And every Jew must be killed. It is irrelevant. Anything else is utterly irrelevant. Nothing to do with character, personality, anything of the so-called obvious logic of crime or anything. And I think this is a profound thing for me of Primo Levi's. He captures it in every way in three lines.

And that phrase, when I start to imagine strangers threatened and intimidated, that phrase comes back to me always. And for me, the role of the writer, so often, certainly in his situation, one must bear witness to the inhuman in the human. Our humanity in some sense depends on this. I would love that to be... That is, in a way, imprinted in my mind forever, ever since I first read it. Lastly, here are the other books which are remarkable of Primo Levi's, which I'm sure people know, "Periodic Table", everybody knows only too well. "Moments of Reprieve" is an incredible book, and that phrase is incredible. Just there are moments, like moments of Lorenzo bringing him a piece of bread, Alberto teaching him how to steal, how to button up his jacket, how to find buttons as he's walking in the ash, because it's the ash that is falling from the chimneys in Auschwitz, walking through and find still a button for his jacket. Because otherwise he can be beaten if he doesn't have it, or killed. "The Drowned and the Saved", his poems. And then the last book, "If Not Now, When", which is the song of the Partisans, which is working and fighting with the partisans in Italy. before he was... They were betrayed, his partisan group were betrayed. And that's how they ended up in the Italian camp, and then later taken over by the Germans and sent to Auschwitz. Thanks very much everybody.

- Thank you David.

- [Judy] David, do you have any time for questions? I know we're quite tight for time, but do you have time to go some of the questions?

- Thank you. Yep, absolutely.

- [Judy] Would you want to stop your screen share, and then we can have you up on the screen.

- Okay.

- [Judy] And then you can see the questions.

- Stop the screen share. Stop share.

- [Judy] There we go. And then if you could go through some of the questions.

Q&A and Comments:

- Okay, thank you so much. From Monty, Don't forget, he was also a scientist. Absolutely. Thank you. Spot on.

David, did he write in Italian? Yes.

From Lynn, In Canada and maybe elsewhere, this book is called "Survival in Auschwitz" an amazing heart-wrenching and hopeful book. Absolutely, that was, some of the English language publishers wanted to use that as the title. They felt it would sell more. So that was one of the original titles, "Survival in Auschwitz" Before "If This is a Man", I've read the English, but now speak Italian. Thank you Rochelle. Then from 621862.

Q: He would not forgive the Nazi that he worked for who asked for pardon years later. How do you relate to this?

A: Fantastic question. Thank you. You are right. He wasn't really interested in forgiveness, he was interested. I think more in understanding how this could happen. In the book "Moments of Reprieve", there's a fascinating character. Fritz, I forget his name. I need to check it. And they start a correspondence as scientists, and this is in the early 50s. And because he is working for a scientist for DuPont in outside Turin. And they start with this guy working for Siemens in Germany. And they're talking about varnish and paint and chemistry and so on. And they have this sort of scientific correspondence about what the Turin factory needs. And it dawns on him. He remembers the guy's name and the way of writing. And he writes to him and he's... And to cut a long story short, he discovers this guy was a scientist in the IG Farben plant in Auschwitz. He was an SS scientist, and now he's a German scientist corresponding with him. And the chapter, please read it in "Moments of Reprieve". And Primo then confronts him about this. And it's all by letters and correspondence. Going back to your question, it's not about forgiveness, it's about trying to understand, I think.

Jocelyn, if I was to read only one book by him, what should it be? "If This is a Man". From Romaine, his objective and forceful genius as a writer and his storytelling, his sense of knowing and defining evil so well may have failed him as an older man. Did he not commit suicide? Thank you, Romaine. I know that that's... I purposely avoided that question, was it suicide or accident. One of his great writers, two of the great writers, Italo Calvino and one of the others who were his great friends. And they posed the question, they said, If he had committed suicide, why would he throw himself off a bunch of stairs? He was a chemist, a scientist. If he'd just fallen, if he'd threw himself downstairs, he could have been paralysed. He could have been in terrible agony and pain for years. He might not have died at all.

But being a chemist, he would've known ways to kill himself in five minutes or in 30 seconds

with so many possibilities. It's also documented that he had the serious dizziness that he had been speaking to a doctor about in that week, in those couple of weeks before. I know the whole story of depression and Auschwitz obviously, etc, etc. It's 50/50 in the end. My personal opinion, I don't believe it was suicide. I go along with Calvino and some of the others of his close friends in Italy As a scientist and a chemist, however depressed or ever freaked or whatever he was at the time. If he was, he knew ways to kill himself. Okay. Rachel. Of course, most Germans knew. They were Hitler's willing executioners. Absolutely. From Yolandi. Whose picture's on the book cover? Very good question, Yolandi.

I don't know. from Natasha. Why do you think he committed suicide? I've tried to respond to that. Then from Romaine. Was he a man of faith? I don't think he was religious. I think he felt as he says that it was stamped on him, like stamping on sheet metal. Not only on his clothes, you know, in him. I don't think he was a man of faith in the religious sense, perhaps spiritual. I think he was more interested in investigating, trying to understand this whole thing, why, with a scientific questioning. Okay, did he comment on Schindler? No, he died before, Roberto. Sorry, I think you are right about his not being physically inferior. Remember, Turin is very close to the Alps. Most Turinese hiked a lot. Think of Natalia Ginzburg's family in which he describes how they have family hikes. Spend summers in the Alps near Turin. Thank you Roberto. It's a really important point. Turin is so close to the Alps, and they all would go out in the summer and hike. Six months of the year, if not more, they would hike and walk in the mountains. And Natalia Ginzburg is close friend, definitely.

Thank you Esby for your kind comments. For sure, the Russians weren't liberators, they mostly went in and raped the woman. Yeah. Okay. I saw it at the Baxter, Hilda. Great, that was Antony Sher's performance. From Sue, how do you spell the actor's last name? S H E R. From Anna, my response to the other question, when I taught public high school and presented history lectures, students often asked if I would forgive Hitler and the Nazis. I didn't have to think for more than a second. No, I would not. The Nazis and collaborators murdered more than 95% of my survivor parents, family members in Ukraine. I do not forgive, I educate and so on. Okay, thanks for that Anna. Karen. The driving force of theatre is empathy. That doesn't require costumes or set. This performance proves it. Absolutely, Karen.

The empty space, as Peter Brook called it, Judith, "My good fortune...", the opening line of his book. Thank you for reminding us Judith. The opening line of his book, which is one of the most powerful opening lines of any book. And I'll just read it as Judith has quoted it. "It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944." Everything hinges on that one word "only". And "good fortune". He had a way of putting together words and thinking. I think there's a huge influence of Kafka here. It's rational and it's completely irrational at the same... It's mad and it's rational at the same time. Okay, thank you Judith. The play was amazing. Thank you Ruth. Absolutely. Then Jocelyn, the name of the play again please. It's called "Primo" and Antony Sher wrote a book about it called "Primo Time", his experience. Please tell us the title of the BBC play. That's it, Hazel. From Sorel. Sorel, did I know you're in Durban? if I did forgive me. I'm sorry. I just realised now. I dunno if it's the same Sorel. I think that the cut...

Please be in contact. The cut you played when the Russians came justifies gratitude to the Russians. Whether they came by or Stalin opposed Hitler and thus saved the defeated Hitler. Millions of Russians died as well. Absolutely. And many Jews were saved, extraordinary. Antony Sher makes us proud to be South African. Thank you. And Judy and Wendy, thank you so much Sorel. And my apologies if I didn't recognise your name earlier. Okay, Bonnie, thank you for this. Okay. From Primo Levi, what gave him the world to live. Do we have another 10 hours? Bonnie, he says his friends Lorenzo, Alberto, perhaps something of his scientific training as a chemist, luck, aspect of courage, moments of reprieve, you know, can talk about other things in the camp. We need another 10 hours for that.

Okay, then Seymour. Levi learned and spoke Yiddish in the camp and wrote a phrase in Yiddish in "The Periodic Table." And "If This is a Man". Absolutely Seymour, thanks for reminding. Okay, and the phrase was "Overcome troubles are good to tell" Okay, I'm not going to try and do the Yiddish. That's it, thank you. You found the Charlie Rose interview, great. Thank you for the full name. Why did the rabbi advise that the book should not be printed? That's from Suzanne. That's a separate thing to research. I'd rather not get into that now, but it's a complicated response, and I was pretty angry about it when I read it.

- [Wendy] David, sorry. I think we should hold that, make a note. Under different circumstances after the Holocaust. It's going to be dealing with all the different communities and dealing with Judaism and dealing with identity. And I think it's really very interesting. I think it'll be a very interesting presentation for you and for Trudy and for Denis to talk about that.

- Absolutely.

- [Wendy] And the South African Jews, we were very lucky. We had a very lucky escape because we grew up with a very, very strong identity and feeling proud of our Judaism.

- Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I mean I remember reading it as a book in Durban. 'Cause my mother was a history teacher but there I was, you know, reading it as a kid in Durban, I mean, yeah. Okay, so do you want me to hold on the questions now?

- [Wendy] How are we doing for time? Yeah, you know what, I think you've been going for an hour and 15 minutes. I'm sure you're tired.

- Up to you, up to everybody. I'm happy. I'm fine.

- [Wendy] Are you happy? Judy?

- This is one of the great writers of all term.

- [Wendy] It's true. Judy, I'm going to have to jump off.

- [Judy] That's fine. I'm still here, but you know, we have nearly a hundred questions. I don't think David's able to get through all of them today, but let's carry on for a few more minutes, David. Happy to do so. David, we'll we'll meet for breakfast tomorrow. I'll zoom on on tomorrow morning for breakfast and you can be finishing off your questions.

- [Wendy] All right, I'm going to love and leave you., I'm sorry, I've got another... I have to jump on another call now. David, thank you for an excellent presentation. I'm going to leave it to you and to Judy.

- Thank you so much. You take care. Stay safe, stay sane, stay smiling, Wendy.

- [Wendy] Thank you. Lots of love to you and to everybody else.

- Okay, take care

- [Wendy] Bye.

- Okay, ciao, take care. Okay, this is a really interesting question. Thank you Barry. Other than the obvious connection to Rudolph Höss being hanged outside of Auschwitz, can you talk more about what you're inferring with that slide? Barry, I just wanted to just be instinctive to be honest. I thought this guy had so much power and murdered so many and organised the bureaucratic and cruel murdering of so many. And here's this other 22 year old chemistry student from Turin who was there. You look at this guy, he's just a guy being hung, and I wanted to just show him as a pathetically ordinary human being and that extreme inhumanity that he exhibited and lived, not with his family and other Germans, very nice to his children and to his wife and his family and all the rest of it. And that's split between if you like, the way of exalting an individual and then just all pedestal gone, just cut them to earth, you know, seeing them as they really are. There's something when Primo Levy talks about, you know, that he's sceptical of anybody who people admire and have admiration for. Well, you know, in Nazi Germany, this guy would've been close to the top of the tree in terms of the Nazis and many, many Germans, let's be honest. Take the pedestal away, or as Shakespeare says, you know, dressed in a little bit of authority, take the authority away.

What do we have? Or is Bob Dylan sings, even the president of the United States, they sometimes have to stand naked. So take away all the crap, all the exterior status and privilege and power accorded, and you have, you know, an unbelievably cruel evil and ultimately pathetic creature. And I guess I just instinctively just wanted to show that compared to Levi. There's another phrase from Kafka, if I may. I dunno, Primo Levi just inspires so many other things in me when I read this guy. Kafka talks about when you crucify a man, you have to raise him up and look up at him. And when you crucify the Jew, when you kill, when you murder and slaughter in this way just because of birth, how does not only how does that person survive in a way, if they survive, but come out later, not be the victim. You have to look up at them in some way. And you

look down at the crucifier, at the killer, you know, the Roman knocking the nail in, or you know, I'm really not trying to make any analogy between that and the Holocaust at all, but how our perceptions change as time changes and the perception of looking at Höss being hung in the ordinary clothes in the field of Auschwitz itself. There it is. I'm just trying to make these kind of connections, but they're intuitive. They're not rational, Barry. It's a great question. Challenge me more please. How do you spell his third friend's name? Mordo Nachum M O R D O N A C H U M. Thanks Maria. Okay, then a couple other questions from webinar 8973. What about Celan, Paul Celan, "Death Fugue" Jerzy Kosinski, many others. Okay, incredible. In that they committed suicide after the age of 60, which would be an amazing conversation to have and speculate and try and find out whatever information one can. And I know Celan, extraordinary poet, Kosinski, writers so many of the others, I agree, but I'd be hesitant to maybe put them all together in one group. I'm hesitant to stereotype that again.

That'd be my personal response. I think that's much more individual. From 795, do you think he wrote the books for his own sanity or to explain to the world the horrors or perhaps a bit of both. From Francois. I think a bit of both, to be honest. And he spoke about himself. He used the word interior liberation. It's not a great translation from the Italian, but that was his phrase as well. Can you name the name of the actor, from Norma. Antony Sher. From Itomar? Did he have a Jewish burial? Very good question. Great. I imagine so. I don't know. I have to find out. From Lawrence, although a chronic depressive Auschwitz was a time when he claimed he was never depressed. Perhaps too busy surviving. Lawrence asks, it's a lovely question again, if we have another 10 hours, we could look at it. It's so complicated. From Susan, but he knew the Shema, and the wording of his poem is very suggestive of parts of the real Shema adapted to the context of what he's writing, suggests he knew Jewish prayers.

Absolutely Susan. And he spoke about afterwards researching and reading much more of Jewish culture, Jewish religious and Jewish history. Okay, thank you for your kind compliment there from Lee and from others. Then from Heather, we've spent Shabbat at the synagogue in Turin. Name of the street leading to the shul is Primo Levi. I didn't know that. Thank you Heather. From Anna, the BBC, the link to the Charlie Rose clip. If you YouTube, if you google YouTube and Charlie Rose, you'll get the 18 minute interview that he did with Sher and the whole BBC play, one has to look for it. Yeah, it's called "Primo", but the BBC did a filmed TV adaptation of the stage play. So that's why you get the lighting and the camera moving in and out in one or two of those clips that I showed you. That's from not the stage performance, that's the BBC film of the stage performance. But either way, very powerful. Okay, from Lawrence. Of course, students are thinking of whether or not they could forgive. The question to be turned back to them to give them opportunity for silent private reflection. Okay, thanks so much Lawrence. It's a very interesting thought. From Hillary, he did commit suicide, do you think the Germans did win in the end?

No, I don't think he did commit suicide, and I don't think the Germans won in the end. Obviously, you know, they succeeded in murdering millions and millions and millions. So there's a question, what do you mean by win? Win morally? Win in terms of history? Win in terms of culture,

Jewishness, human nature. No. From Hilda. I also wanted to ask to know why the book was not published perhaps 'cause of antisemitism. Well, he tried to publish it in the early 50s after the war. But in American and England, they refused based on that rabbi's advice. So you ask, Hilda, was it anti-Semitism? You know, it's a very profound question, but it's too long to answer now. Don't think so.

- [Judy] David, I don't think we're going to get through all these questions today. So let's end it there. Thank you so much. It was wonderful.

- Thank you so much, Judy. I really appreciate your help earlier and yesterday. Thank you so much.

- [Judy] You're always welcome. And thank you again David, and thank you to everybody who tuned in today, and we'll see you all tomorrow. Take care.

- Take care. Thank you, ciao.

- [Judy] Thank you, bye-bye.

- Bye.