

# Primo levi

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Primo Levi: the Survivor and his Work Essay Title: "Il compito dell'uomo giusto fare guerra ad ogni privilegio non meritato, ma non si deve dimenticare che questa è una guerra senza fine". [I sommersi e salvati, Page 29] Discuss why the theme of privilege is so significant in *Se questo è un uomo* and *I sommersi e salvati*. Lecturer: Date of Submission: word count: 2928 Primo Levi was a young chemist from Turin. At the end of the year of 1943 he was captured by the Germans and sent to a detention camp at Fossoli.

On the 21st of February 1944 everyone in Fossoli were told they were departing to an unknown location: Auschwitz. 650 people were taken and transported in goods wagons that day, and only three people ever travelled home. Primo Levi was one of them. Primo Levi was a Holocaust survivor. He reconstructs through the medium of his novels what it was like to live through and experience such a totally incomprehensible and unimaginable time to his readers. Primo Levi conveys these events to us with such vivid and gentle words.

After his return home an older and religious friend came to visit him, 'he told me that my having survived could not be the work of chance, of accumulation of fortunate circumstances (as I maintained and still maintain) but rather of Providence'. One has to believe that after reading Primo Levi's novels that there is truth in this statement, he had to write and tell the tragic and unbelievable stories of the concentration camps with his extraordinary talent and grace with words. It was the objective of the Germans with the concentration camps to leave no survivors, no witnesses and no story to be told of what had happened.

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Primo felt the need to tell the untold stories of others and in turn spread awareness of what had occurred, in many hopes that history would not repeat itself. There are many themes and underlying characteristics portrayed in 'If This Is a Man' and 'The Drowned and the Saved'. Throughout this essay I will examine and evaluate the theme of privilege in detail. Only a few short months out of imprisonment from the concentration camp Primo began writing his very first novel 'If This Is a Man'. It is an objective story told in a detached tone using scientific language, which sometimes makes this book not a confession but an analysis. Regardless, distant tone and unemotional language bring the horrifying message across with even greater impact on readers. 'The definition of privilege is special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group'<sup>2</sup> this is shown to the utmost in what was considered privileged in Auschwitz. In 'If This Is a Man' one is brought on a journey of what it was like physically and mentally to endure time in Auschwitz.

Everybody has heard about the horrendous and horrible occurrence that was the Holocaust, however, Primo Levi is one of the very few survivors that had the ability to methodically remember and describe the German hell on earth. He attempts to express what one had to do to pass from one day to the next in order to live. After reading these novels one can interpret a whole new level of the meaning of privilege. In the very beginning of the novel in the chapter 'The Journey' we are told that Primo was "privileged" to have been traveling with a lady who was pregnant and had brought a chamber pot in the goods wagon.

That chamber pot was apparently the object of life and death for many. This is completely absurd to attempt to understand and fathom that having a chamber pot in these goods wagons meant that this particular goods wagon of people were privileged and that it saved their lives. This is just one of the many examples which one is shown in these novels but this was considered a huge advantage, a matter of life or death, and this was only the beginning. These leverages are outlined in detail in these novels and everyone attempted to obtain any sort of edge to oppress their exhaustion, hunger and never ending turmoil. One had to fight against the current; to battle every day and every hour against exhaustion, hunger, old and the resulting inertia; to resist enemies and have no pity for rival's; to sharpen one's wits, build one's patience, strengthen one's will power" 3 We are brought on a Journey and almost can imagine what the prisoners of Auschwitz experienced. In the novel 'If this is a man' the name already creates an unnerving image in our minds. If this is a man? How can one not be a man? The co-man: the human being of flesh and blood standing before us, within the reach of our providentially myopic senses'4 this captures the essence of what the men were made feel like, not even a human being.