dire, strumenti di lotta, di svelamento del reale dominato dalla polarità negativa già definita nella Meditazione milanese. Infine, nelle opere più tarde, almeno come data di pubblicazione, quali *Eros e Priapo* e *Il primo libro delle favole*, le pulsioni ancora in qualche modo controllate nelle opere maggiori, esplodono in un profluvio di ingiurie, invettive, urlata scatologia; ben noto è il colorito arazzo di insulti rivolto a Mussolini, vera bestia nera di Gadda, dopo una simpatia iniziale. Nella sua ricerca di fili 'maccheronici', Sbragia riallaccia questa vena alla più antica tradizione italiana – il titolo del capitolo in questione è "Satura tota nostra est" – ma giudica comunque "incredibilmente puerile" il parossistico accumularsi di parolacce e maledizioni.

Raccogliendo e consolidando alcuni dei temi fondanti della critica gaddiana e svolgendoli alla luce di un attento esame dei testi, Sbragia ci dà un lavoro utile e ben documentato, che potrà, lo speriamo, contribuire a quanto si augura S. E. Gontarski (curatore della collana *Crosscurrents*, di cui il volume fa parte) nella prefazione: una migliore conoscenza, nel continente americano, delle tormentate delizie progettate dall'Ingegnere Carlo Emilio Gadda.

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Mirna Cicioni. *Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995. Pp. xv, 222.

In the final chapter of *If This Is a Man*, Primo Levi recounts the burying of a comrade in Auschwitz as the camp was liberated, "The Russians arrived as Charles and I were carrying Semogyi not far from our barracks. He was very light. We overturned the stretcher onto the grey snow. Charles took off his cap. I regretted that I did not have a cap" (38). Notwithstanding his ineffable experience at the hands of the Germans,¹ Levi remained a fair man whose spirit the Germans were unable to corrupt.

Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge is timely and indispensable. It is at once a constructive review of his writing and a thoroughly readable biography, modestly described by its author as an attempt to "provide a general introduction to Primo Levi for English speaking readers" (xii). In preparing this study, Mirna Cicioni's main concern was 'popularizing' Levi; through a comprehensive exposition of his writing Cicioni attempts in five chapters to place his work in the broader literary canon of western letters where, due to its classification among titles of Holocaust testimony and history, his work has been largely neglected. In opposition to such a limited reading of his work she claims that, "Levi's writings have become central texts not only for anyone reflecting on the Holocaust, but also for anyone interested in secular European Jewish culture and literary representation of the intellectual and moral lessons of science, art and the ethics of work" (xi). The first chapter couples basic biographical information with a series of historical coordinates, notably King Charles Albert's emancipation of the Jews in 1858, the imposition in 1938 of the Italian racial laws and finally, between October 1943 and December 1944, the deportation of Italian Jews to German death camps. Referring to short stories drawn from *The Periodic Table* and *A Search for Roots*, Cicioni uses Levi's work to account for the marginalization of Italian Jews, and

their particular history as the most assimilated community in the Diaspora. In so doing she furnishes useful demographic and political information as well as vignettes from Levi's early years. We are reminded that, in spite of their traditional sympathy for the left, Italian Jews were among the founding members of Mussolini's first national organization, the *Fasci di Combattimento*. Cicioni also notes that Levi's father was, albeit begrudgingly, a member of the Fascist Party while Primo served as a member of both the *balilla* and the *avanguardisti* – the fascist equivalents of cubs and boy scouts.

This chapter also deals with Levi's changing identity, as the experiences of his youth and those of his people unfolded against the backdrop of the post-emancipation period. From *The Periodic Table*, Cicioni highlights "Argon", wherein Levi speaks to Jewish tradition and family history; "Hydrogen", in which Levi's adolescent persona and social integration are presented; "Zinc", where Levi is confronted with, and comes to terms, with his "otherness," as a Jew in a gentile society; and "Gold", wherein we read of Primo's political and paramilitary associations, first with the underground party *Giustizia e Libertà* and then in the resistance.

The first chapter gives notice of what is to remain the strength of this work; namely, the wedding of Cicioni's narrative with that of Levi. With familiarity and deference to Levi's texts, Cicioni selects apposite passages which are carefully placed, always in the service of Levi and critical study. The following, deftly chosen passages mark the central component of Cicioni's first chapter, namely, the dramatic interior transformation that was to accompany Levi to Auschwitz. Speaking first to the ambivalent Jewishness of Levi and Turin Jews, in the introduction to *The Truce*, Levi writes the following in response to the question of his Jewishness: "It meant a quiet awareness of the very ancient history of my people, a sort of benevolent attitude of disbelief toward religion, a definite tendency toward the world of books and abstract discussion. In everything else, I did not feel I was any different from my Christian friends and fellow students, and I felt at ease in their company" (9). In "Zinc," in light of the increasing anti-Semitism, Levi reaches the following conclusion: "I am the impurity which makes the zinc react, I am the grain of salt and mustard. Impurity, indeed: because in those very months *La Difesa della Razza* was beginning to appear, and a great deal said about purity, and I was beginning to be proud of being impure" (9). "174517," the number scratched into Levi's forearm, is the title of the second chapter. Here Cicioni focuses on the singular place of Auschwitz in establishing Levi's literary career. Like many Jews who survived the death camps, Levi's return to a 'normal life' was complicated by a mixture of anger, despair and guilt.² With the world's apparent indifference to survivors and the all-consuming preoccupation with post-war reconstruction, these emotions soon gave way to Levi's "urgent need to communicate" (23).

Levi resolved shortly after his repatriation to spend a good deal of his time in the service of those whose voice Hitler had silenced. Whether through his writing, public lectures or interviews, he scrupulously sought out every occasion to testify. In this respect Levi was not alone.³ But at that fledgling stage of Holocaust testimonials, Levi distinguished himself in approach. Like others, Levi sought to ensure that no one forget the injury committed by the Germans against humanity. However, he refused "to formulate new accusations," choosing instead "to somehow provide evidence for a dispassionate study of some aspects of the human mind." Cicioni aptly captures the spirit of Levi's work, stating: "Levi's words address humankind at large rather than only the people of Israel, and to command them to meditate on the fate of human

beings rather than to believe in God and love him and to pass on their knowledge to future generations" (27). Levi's rememberings were not motivated by one people nor were they written in the service of one people. His testimony was written for humanity in its entirety.

In the second chapter, Cicioni begins her review of Levi's better known works, *The Drowned and the Saved*, *If This Is a Man*, and *The Periodic Tables*, in addition to the more obscure collections, *Other People's Trades*, *Natural Stories*, and *Structural Details*. Cicioni's brief and instructive reviews demonstrate Levi's versatility not only in terms of narrative testimony but also in science fiction, *letteratura industria*, the picaresque novel, the short story and poetry.

The third chapter deals with Levi's difficult departure from Holocaust narrative to experimental fiction and to his concerns about science and its place in a changing world. Following *The Truce*, Levi published his first fiction – a collection of short stories – using the pen name Damiano Malabaila. Years later he explained that his decision to adopt a pseudonym was motivated by an overwhelming sense of responsibility, "I felt uneasy and almost frightened at the thought of coming before my expatriate friends in another guise. I felt a little, how shall I put it, as a deserter. [...] They wanted me to remain duty-bound to themes connected with the camps; they thought I could not write about anything else; they said that they had even felt angry at me, because they (correctly) considered my books as joint efforts, as their books" (61). "Malabaila" allowed Levi the latitude to indulge his creative imagination and to embark upon a literary journey that, in its early days, saw him return to his first love: science and technology. His science fiction, collected in *Natural Stories* and *Structural Defect*, does not, however, deal with fantastic voyages or mad experiments. Rather, it serves as a foil to warn of the dehumanizing elements associated with progress and to comment on the pernicious influence of political and economic lobbies determined to make scientific activity profitable for individuals rather than communities. Anticipating contemporary concerns, Levi cautions against environmental abuse and reminds man of his responsibility in a delicately balanced system. Cicioni closes this chapter with a solid discussion of *The Wrench*, a text only recently translated into English and as yet untried by critical study. This piece, a foray into the world of *letteratura industria*, allowed Levi to contemplate the notion of work and its importance in defining and ennobling man. Here, work serves as a metaphor Levi uses to instruct the reader to live life through work. He emphasizes responsibility, patience, creative resolution of problems, and love as integral components of both life and work.

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of Levi's response to the revisionist historians Louis Darquier de Pellepoix and Robert Fourisson. Levi was among the first to respond eloquently and sharply to the spurious histories of these and others whose misreadings threatened to legitimize the fringe. Cicioni, reiterating the place of responsibility in Levi's fight to preserve the memory of the German death camps, quotes Levi, who on this question claimed that the only option available to the survivors was to "continue to repeat our testimony over decades and generations, as long as we have voice left to do so" (102).⁴

In this chapter Cicioni also introduces Levi's little-known autobiographical project: *A Search for Roots*. Essentially a volume profiling the authors and works that had the greatest impact on Levi, it also presents the reader with the four pillars upon which Levi's philosophy and literary consciousness rested. He divided the text into these

four representative sections: 'salvation through suffering,' 'man suffering unjustly,' 'the stature of man,' and 'salvation through understanding.' The chapter ends with a discussion of the two themes that were to preoccupy Levi through the late 1970's and early 1980's. These are his, as Cicioni says, 'problematization' of Ostjudentum and his indictment of Israel's politics and tactics following the invasion of Lebanon. Indeed, Jewish identity and the question of Israel were to remain for Levi challenging matters that brought him as much criticism as they did favour. Given the length and aim of Cicioni's study, she understandably dwells little on the criticism directed at Levi. However, she furnishes thorough notes at the end of each chapter and a balanced bibliography to direct the reader.

The final chapter introduces the Levi of the 1980's: a successful international writer whose books, finally translated into English in Great Britain and America, placed him at the centre of Holocaust debates. Levi assumed this new challenge with seriousness and earnest. However, it was during this period that Levi began to break. Haunted by a recurring sense of failure and what Cicioni vaguely calls 'personal difficulties' he fell into a depression which many claim pushed him to his suicide in 1987.⁵ Rather than speculating on this matter, Cicioni continues her exposition of his later publications – primarily the poems collected in *At an Uncertain Hour*, *Other People's Trades*, and Levi's last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*. From this, his most compelling work, Cicioni quotes three critical passages. Turning once again to the camps, Levi continued to exemplify the spirit and thematic coherence that characterized his first work, produced thirty years before. The quoted passages are as follows: "One can and must communicate [...]. To deny that communicating is possible is false: it is always possible. To refuse to communicate is a crime" (159); "It was my responsibility to understand, to understand them [the Germans]" (158); "The history of the camps has been written almost exclusively by those who, like myself, did not fathom its full depths. Those who did so, did not return" (157). Indefatigable humanity remains one of the most powerful legacies of Primo Levi. The responsibility to be human even in the most inhumane conditions – his regret at not having a cap to remove in respect for his dead comrade – this responsibility to maintaining humanity engendered Levi's art. We are indebted to Mirna Cicioni for her admirable maintenance of Levi's project. With an accessible and informative work she removes her cap for this passed spirit, and in doing so she, and subsequent readers, perpetuate Levi's humanity – humanity that neither the death camps nor even death itself could destroy.

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NOTES

- 1 In the introduction to *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Knopf, 1996) Daniel Jonah Goldhagen discusses the use of the word 'Germans,' rather than 'Nazis.' He states: "These people were overwhelmingly and most importantly Germans. While members of other national groups aided the Germans in their slaughter of Jews, commission of the Holocaust was primarily a German undertaking.... The first task in restoring the perpetrators to the center of our understanding of the Holocaust is to restore to them their identities...by eschewing convenient, yet often inappropriate and obfuscating labels, like 'Nazis' and 'SS men,' and calling them what they were, 'Germans'" (6-7). Cicioni for her part cites Cynthia Ozick saying that, "Levi frequently chooses the

- general term 'Germans' over the more polite, because narrower, 'Nazis'" (157).
- 2 Typical of this unflagging sense of responsibility to the dead are the works of Yiddish poet, and Vilna Ghetto survivor, Abraham Sutzkever. In his poem "Under the Earth," he imagines that the dead are still alive, under the earth: "Are there birds twittering under the earth, / choking back / their holy tears in their thin necks, / or is that throbbing under the earth once-used words that seem invisible birds / / And I dig with my hands—bony spades, / down to where the black / palaces burst, / where words throb / hidden in violins" (in Ruth Whitman, ed. *An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Poetry*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995).
 - 3 There is a voluminous amount of survivor testimony. A central element of many of these works is an obligation to remember. In his *Memoirs* (New York: Knopf, 1994), Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel states: "I thought about it with apprehension day and night: the duty to testify, to offer depositions for history, to serve memory. What would man be without his capacity to remember? Memory is a passion no less powerful or pervasive than love. What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it. It is to revive fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings, to cast harsh light on faces and events, to drive back the sands that cover the surface of things, to combat oblivion and to reject death" (150).
 - 4 The question of forgetting with regard to the Holocaust is discussed by Vladimir Jankélévitch in his little-known essay "Pardonner," which appears in *L'imprescriptible* (Paris: Seuil, 1986. 17-63). Jankélévitch discusses the impossibility of forgiveness with respect to those who perpetrated the Holocaust. He writes of the timelessness of crimes against humanity "les crimes contre l'humanité sont imprescriptibles, c'est-à-dire ne peuvent pas être prescrits; le temps n'a pas de prise sur eux" (26). He adds, "oublier ce crime gigantesque contre l'humanité serait un nouveau crime contre le genre humain" (25). With reference to forgetting, he states: "Il n'y a rien de nouveau à dire sur Auschwitz. Si ce n'est que l'on se sent tenu de témoigner" (28).
 - 5 See "Toaff: Primo Levi mi annunciò il suicidio" (*Corriere della Sera*, April 12, 1997: 14). This is an article in which the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Elio Toaff, announces that ten minutes prior to his fall Levi had telephoned the rabbi in Rome to communicate that he could no longer tolerate living ("io non sopporto più questa vita") and that he felt crushed by immense suffering ("immane sofferenza"). Perhaps this will be the final word on this matter.

Rocco Capozzi ed. *Reading Eco. An Anthology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. Pp. xxv, 476.

Umberto Eco has not only been a prolific writer, he has also generated countless monographs, articles, commentaries, and reviews of his theoretical works and of his fiction. In 1985, Renato Giovannoli edited a volume of essays on Eco's first novel (*Saggi sul Nome della rosa*. Milano, Bompiani). Rocco Capozzi's exceptional anthology follows suit, but surpasses the Giovannoli text in scope, in coherence and in the general quality of the essays. The cohesiveness of *Reading Eco* derives from the editor's clearly stated objective which is: "to examine some of Eco's writings together with secondary sources (with his critics) in order to arrive at a more comprehensive critique of his literary theories and of his notions of general semiotics as a cognitive social/cultural practice" (xviii). As Capozzi himself informs us, the essays are original compositions or revised versions of papers presented and of articles previously published. They are divided into three parts: "Reading Eco" comprises 5 essays by the semiotician himself; "Readings on Eco" consists of 12 articles on the theoretical writings; and in "Reading Eco's Possible Worlds" we find 10 studies of the novels. A