



The Search For Roots: A Personal Anthology

Primo Levi

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The Search for Roots is a collection of writings that Primo Levi considered to be essential reading. Beginning with the Book of Job, that drama of the just oppressed by injustice, these thirty pieces, with introductions by Levi, reflect his profound knowledge of science and deep passion for literature, and his survival of Auschwitz—making it an anthology that is both universal and poignantly autobiographical. Levi suggests four routes through these writings, four ways of understanding the human predicament and of achieving partial salvation in an apparently indifferent universe: through laughter, through knowledge, and through understanding the injustice of suffering and the stature of man. With this in mind, he presents familiar voices: Swift, Conrad, T. S. Eliot, and Arthur C. Clarke, for example, and introduces us to less familiar ones: Lucretius, Giuseppe Belli, Fredric Brown, Stefano D'Arrigo, and Hermann Langbein. Most of the pieces, as Levi comments, reflect the fundamental dichotomies that face us all: “falsehood/truth, laughter/tears, judgment/folly, hope/despair, triumph/disaster.” As Peter Forbes writes in his Introduction, “In the context of the twenty-first century, all of Levi’s choices are striking”; they exhibit “a kind of chastened curiosity rare in our time, and an undiminished sense of wonder and horror at a universe that has such things in it.”

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