

PRIMO LEVI AND SCIENCE FICTION

18 MAY 2022
ITALIAN CULTURAL
INSTITUTE OF LONDON

A one-day conference about Levi's contributions to science fiction, the genre's place within Italian Studies, and Levi's own perception of it



ORGANISED BY

Eleonora Lima (Trinity College Dublin)

Michele Maiolani (University of Cambridge)

Marco Malvestio (University of Padua / University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

THE EVENT WILL BE IN ENGLISH AND IN PERSON

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

The Society for Italian Studies • The Cambridge-Intesa Sanpaolo Fund • Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Londra
European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant agreement no. 890656) •
Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari, Università di Padova



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EVENT OVERVIEW

While Primo Levi is mainly known mainly for his painstaking and harsh books about his imprisonment in Auschwitz, he also wrote two collections of short stories that can be labelled as science fiction: *Storie naturali* (1966) and *Vizio di forma* (1971). A chemist by training, Levi wrote these stories at a time when science fiction was still perceived as unworthy of attention by Italian intellectuals—to the extent that *Storie naturali* was initially published under a pseudonym. In both books, Levi uses science fiction to investigate the ethical implications of technological progress and probe its hidden and inherent flaws while adopting a tone that was only apparently light. The eerie effect reached by many of these short stories is due to a strong clash: the literary genre was considered superficial and disengaged by the vast majority of Levi's contemporaries, and yet the writer addresses crucial existential questions in his narrations of clones, intelligent technologies, mutant animals.



Primo Levi in the quantitative analysis lab at the Institute of Chemistry, University of Turin, February 1940. Property of the Levi family. Courtesy of the Centro Internazionale di Studi Primo Levi.

By drawing attention to Levi's contributions in science fiction, this one-day conference aims to contribute to reshaping the scholarly reputation of this genre within Italian Studies and to question Levi's perception *vis-à-vis* his position within the hierarchy of genres.

This event brings together some of the most renowned scholars who have explored the intersections between his work and science fiction. The speakers will dialogue with early-career researchers and established Levi scholars to foster the debate on this new area of research and explore it from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

9:30 Eleonora Lima (Trinity College Dublin)
Michele Maiolani (University of Cambridge)
Marco Malvestio (Università di Padova/University
of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
Opening remarks

10:00 Charlotte Ross (University of Birmingham)
***Locked out or locked in? Gender,
embodiment and agency in science fiction***

Respondent: Marzia Beltrami (University of Tartu)

11:30 Florian Mussnug (University College of London)
***Primo Levi's Fictional Cosmopolitics:
Posthuman Ethics in the Pluriverse***

Respondent: Pierpaolo Antonello (University of
Cambridge)

13:00 LUNCH BREAK

14:30 Francesco Cassata (Università di Genova)
***'Fare i conti planetari': Ecology and Science
Fiction in Primo Levi's Vizio di forma***

Respondent: Robert Gordon (University of
Cambridge)

16:30 Michele Maiolani (University of Cambridge)
***Cultural and Ecological Extinction in Primo
Levi's Science-Fiction***

Respondent: Emiliano Guaraldo (Ca' Foscari
University of Venice)

CONTACT

For tickets: The Italian Cultural Institute of London

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