

Telling Your Troubles: the Yiddish Epigraph of Primo Levi's "Periodic Table"

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An Italian Jew, Primo Levi did not speak Yiddish, and in Auschwitz he was told that since he didn't know Yiddish, he wasn't Jewish. Nevertheless, Levi chose to begin *The Periodic Table* (1975) with a Yiddish proverb: "Iber gekumene tsores iz gut tzu dertseylin—Troubles overcome are good to tell." My paper explores his reasons for making this choice. Does the process of telling allow respite from the traumatic memory of the Lager? Are "troubles overcome" good to tell, and can "troubles" related to life under the Fascist regime, deportation, and survival in Auschwitz ever be overcome? How might Levi adapt a voice—one conversant in Yiddish—in order to tell of his troubles? This paper explores how Levi's decision to begin his collection of autobiographical episodes with a Yiddish proverb might inform his coming-of-age story as a chemist and a Jew, as well as the narrative strategy he employs to tell it.