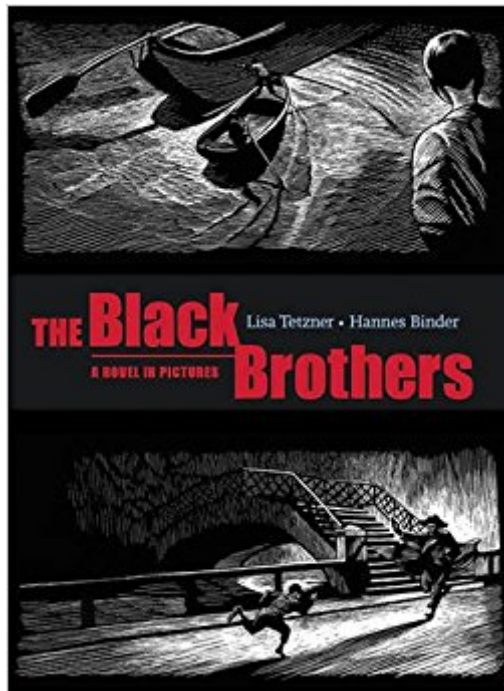




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The Black Brothers: A Novel In Pictures



Synopsis

In the middle of the 19th century, many young men were sent to Milan to work as slaves. Their lives were extremely difficult and many died from the harsh conditions. But Giorgio was able to survive because of the friendship and solidarity he experienced with a secret band known as "the black brothers." Some 100 years later, Lisa Tetzner and her husband Kurt Held wrote about Giorgio's experiences and adventures, and recently the accomplished artist Hannes Binder resurrected the text and added dramatic and impressive engravings, turning the final product into this exciting graphic novel.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 9 - 12

Customer Reviews

Grade 4-7 Set in 19th-century Italy, this first English translation of a book originally published in Germany in 1941 is the story of 13-year-old Giorgio. His desperately poor parents have no choice but to sell him into servitude as a chimney sweep to pay for his mother's medical bills. On his journey to his new life, Giorgio and about a dozen other boys are mistreated by their guide. Milan does not prove to be any less harsh. Not only does the boy face the daily dangers of the chimneys but also cruel treatment in his master's home and gang fights on the streets. Through all of this, he is able to remain friends with Alfredo, who has become the leader of the secret society,

The Black Brothers. Ultimately, it is Giorgio's involvement in it that saves his life and helps him to find a new, loving home. This edition includes a copious number of illustrations that gives the novel its subtitle. The large, black-and-white pictures with deep lines and fine-grained detail reinforce the somber tone of the simple, straightforward prose. Many of the images are full page and have the text overlaid, which moves the story along swiftly while adding depth and meaning to the characters and actions. This unique combination of text and artwork sets this title apart in the expansive world of juvenile historical fiction. — Karen T. Bilton, Somerset County Library, Bridgewater, NJ
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Gr. 6-9. This book has a complicated history. Tetzner and her Jewish husband, Kurt Held, who could not be credited as decreed by the Nazi regime, published it in Germany more than 60 years ago. Neumeyer's translation is new, as are the woodcut-style images, some of which merely illustrate, while others carry a narrative load between paragraphs of text. The story, set in Switzerland and Italy during the nineteenth century, concerns the difficult life of a young chimney sweep. As much social commentary as drama, it can be read satisfyingly at several levels: as historical fiction, as allegory, and as a rendering of human experience that words alone cannot convey. The rich, evocative artwork stands in sharp contrast to a narrative voice that is understated and sometimes careless in its arrangement of information. This won't attract a wide audience, but it has much to offer readers interested in how a writer uses fiction to increase social awareness and an artist uses image as narrative. Francisca Goldsmith
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Was looking for a more adult's historical read. Good for kids.

This book has had rave reviews. It has been made into a movie, but is not yet available in the USA.

This long-forgotten masterpiece of Lisa Tetzner (originally entitled in German as "Die Schwarzen Bruder" and later became better known as "Fratelli Neri") published sometime in the 50's deserves a place among the successors of Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" as one of the finest masterpieces of humanism, in spite of its relative brevity. I became acquainted with this rare literary work some 7 or 8 years way back in high school when I first succumbed to its profound and realistic description of suffering and struggle through the eyes of the young. Tetzner vividly depicts life in mid-19th century Milan, where young men from impoverished families in the countryside are

sold for contractual work as chimney sweepers in what was then a dangerous city, teeming with rogues and cutthroats. It tells the story of a boy's journey from his village to the place of his destination where he is to work for a specific period of time. Along the way, he meets others of his kind and then begins their odyssey to a life of hard and often unrewarding forced labor, starvation, deprivation, oppression. The list of what awaits these fragile beings is endless, and one way to cope with their inevitable situation is to band together for survival and mutual benefit, thus came into being the "fratelli neri" (black brothers). Together they intend to help each other overcome oppression, wholesale physical and spiritual torment even death itself. It came together both as a surprise and a relief that at last, the first ever authoritative English translation of this long-forgotten novel will bring back to life what may be called an "unknown classic". For the first time, the majority of the English-speaking readers will have access to this novel. Even my knowledge of this literary piece is accidental, as narrated by an acquaintance with whom I luckily bumped with in the library. The old 8vo volume in German he always read caught my curiosity and I prevailed upon him to narrate it to me in English as my command of the language is very poor. Although I became acquainted with the contents only in a rushed English rendition (and no doubt abridged for convenience), it became one of my favorites of all time, and I never forgot it since then. Its melodramatic tinge didn't make me feel sissy and annoyed, and as I'm no lover of mills & boons and nonsense melodramatic themes, I'll gladly give this book 5 stars even before I read this first-ever English translation! Well, that is for the simple reason that it continues to fascinate even when the story is sad or in other words, it never ceases to stimulate the mind even as it touches the emotions.

Black and white graphic novels are not typical publications for teens, but Lisa Tetzner's *The Black Brothers* will surprise you: it most definitely is for this younger audience, revolving around the story of 13-year-old Giorgio who is sold to a chimney sweep in the city by a desperately poor father. Giorgio has a secret society and a survival plan in this historical story of the 19th century, when poor farmers sold their children across the Swiss-Italian border to work as sweeps.

I had the opportunity to read this book when I was 13 years old and it remains one of my favorites now that I am 33...but I read a full version and even though I enjoy the artwork on this edition I think it loses much of the original story....for what I can tell about 30% of the original story is gone....still a wonderful read for kids and adults alike.

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