



The Black Brothers: A Novel in Pictures

By Lisa Tetzner

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

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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From [Booklist](#)

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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About the Author

Lisa Tetzner (1894-1963) was born in Germany and died in Switzerland. In 1924 she married the children's book author Kurt Kläber whose books were published under the pseudonym Kurt Held. A victim of persecution by the National Socialists, Lisa fled with her husband to Switzerland where she had family connections through her mother. She became a Swiss citizen in 1948. After moving to Switzerland, she collaborated with her husband on a number of realistic and socially-conscious novels for young people, the most widely known of which is the nine-volume work *The Children From No. 67*. This children's odyssey begins in a tenement house in Berlin in 1933 and ends in Switzerland in 1949 and is considered to be the most important German-language children's book written in exile. It depicts the end of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of National Socialism in Germany. It has been translated into eight languages and recently reissued in Germany by the German publisher, Sauerländer.

Hannes Binder was born in 1947. He studied art at a college of arts and crafts in Zurich, worked as a commercial artist in Milan, and then as an illustrator and commercial artist in Hamburg. He lives in Zurich

and works as a freelance illustrator and painter. Hannes Binder resurrected the original 500 page text and retold the story in a graphic format. His dramatic and impressive engravings turned the final product into an exciting novel in graphic book form. This “Roman in Bildern” (novel in pictures) was first published in 2002 in Germany to critical acclaim. The story is also the subject of a television series in Japanimation.

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