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The Young Inferno

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

The Young Inferno is a brilliant illustrated re-telling of **Dante's Inferno** for the 21st century. The partnership of poet John Agard and illustrator Satoshi Kitamura goes from strength to strength in this ambitious re-take on a 13th-century classic. Instead of the poet Virgil as a guide, Agard has chosen Aesop as the hooded teenager's guide through the nine circles of hell. There are echoes of Dante's original language and his passion and humour, and like Dante, Agard and Kitamura have made the journey relevant to contemporary life and to world issues. Dante's opening lines 'Midway through the journey of my life I woke to find myself in a dark wood, Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.' translate to: 'In the middle of my childhood wonder/I woke to find myself in a forest/that was ? how shall I put it ? wild and sombre.'

On first entering hell the boy hears thousands of people wailing. Aesop tells him 'These are the people who sat on the fence/they cared neither for good nor for evil/Theirs was the sin of indifference?.'

As he journeys through the circles of hell he meets many familiar figures. Frankenstein is the bouncer at one of the doors of hell. Einstein, Homer and Hitler make appearances along the way. The sins that Dante wrote about are intertwined with Aesop's fables and our own issues such as famine, war, fraudsters, drink driving and pollution. Kitamura's illustrations (sometimes reminiscent of Leonard Baskin's powerful illustrations for Ted Hughes' poems) beautifully and darkly match the journey with bold almost geometric images, silhouettes and scenes which bring an extra intensity and relevance to the words.

The journey ends with the teenager meeting his Beatrice in the local library and the final image is of a mobile phone with Aesop as the screensaver.

A wonderful book and it inspired a return to reading those 13th-century cantos again.

Running Order:

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