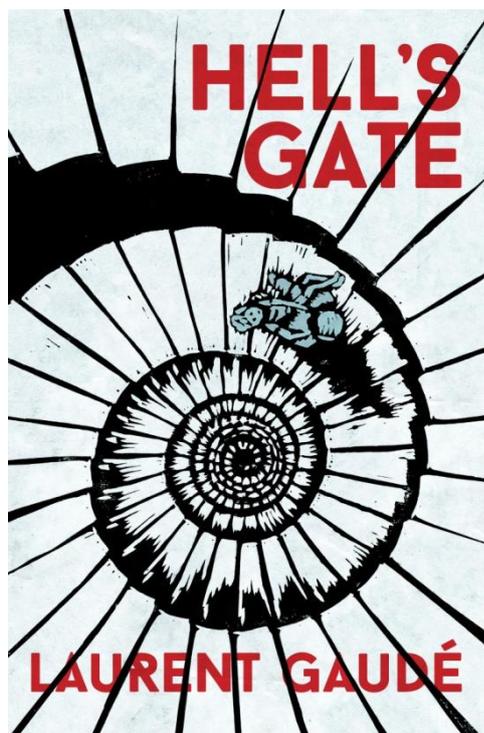


Reading Group Guide to *Hell's Gate* by Laurent Gaudé



What if death was not the end? A thrilling story of love, loss, revenge and redemption in Naples and beyond.

When his son is killed by gangsters' crossfire on his way to school, Neapolitan taxi driver Matteo is consumed by despair. But just when he feels life has lost all meaning, he encounters a man who claims the living can find ways into the afterlife. And legend says that there's an entrance to the underworld beneath Naples.

What if Matteo had a chance of bringing Pippo back from the dead?

Praise for Laurent Gaudé

'Gaudé writes ... with an elegiac, almost hypnotic rhythm'
Sunday Telegraph

'A mesmerising, haunting book' *L'Express*

'Laurent Gaudé, the master craftsman, keeps us in

suspense all the way through.' *Le Monde*

About the author

Born in 1972, Laurent Gaudé is one of France's most highly respected playwrights and novelists. He has won many prizes including the Goncourt in 2004 for *The Scortas' Sun*, published in 34 countries. In a survey by leading French trade magazine *Livres Hebdo*, *Hell's Gate* was chosen by booksellers as the highlight of 676 books published in the 2008 rentrée season.

Discussion points

- How does *Hell's Gate* compare with other books which weave supernatural elements into a realistic narrative, such as *The Lovely Bones* or *The Time Traveller's Wife*?
- Laurent Gaudé has written several plays and has studied classics. To what extent does his novel incorporate theatrical elements? How might Gaudé's writing be influenced by Greek tragedy or melodrama?
- There is a long tradition of writers imagining the descent to the underworld, from the *Odyssey* to the *Aeneid* to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and beyond. How does Gaudé build on his literary forebears and present a different view of the afterlife?
- To what extent does Gaudé use the descent to the underworld as a metaphor through which to explore familial love, the relationship between living and dead, and the effects of grief?
- What is the effect of the author switching between the two time periods and points of view?
- Is Giuliana the central character in the book?
- 'For once, and with due respect to Dante, those entering a novel that will take them to Hell are not compelled to "abandon all hope"' wrote French literary magazine *Livres Hebdo*. Despite its hard-hitting subject, is the novel ultimately uplifting? To what extent can it be described as having a happy ending?