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# Thomas Lavachery

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2026

Belgian French Branch of IBBY

Author Candidate

## Biography

Thomas Lavachery was born in Brussels in 1966, to a father who was a teacher and a mother who was a press cartoonist and later chose to be an antique dealer. He started out in comics, publishing his first drawings in the *Tintin* magazine at the age of 18, before adapting Roland Topor's animated series *Téléchat* (*Telecat*).

He then studied art history, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Henri Lavachery, a museum curator and archeologist.

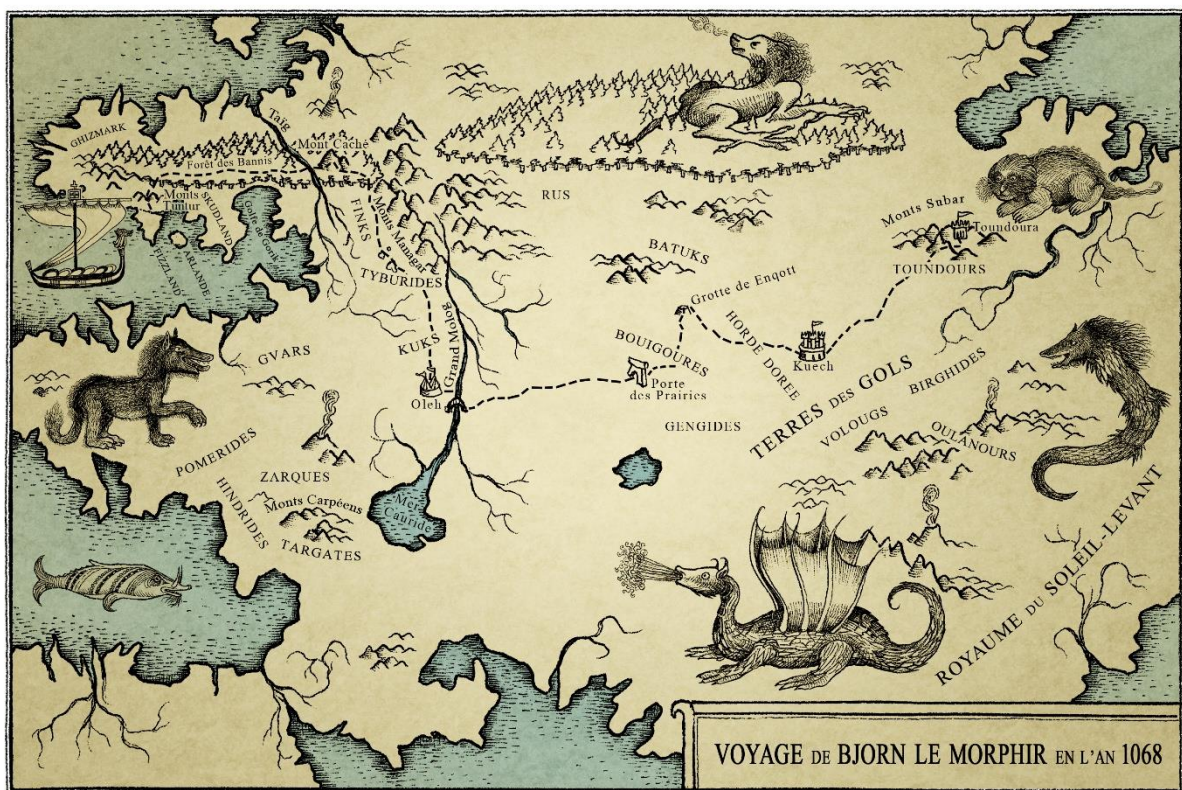
After his studies, he joined Y.C. Aligator film, a production company, as literary advisor. His main interest was documentaries, first as a script doctor and then as a director. He is the author, among others, of *Un monde sans père ni mari* (*A World Without Fathers or Husbands*), a film about the Mosuo, a Chinese ethnic group with very free sexual customs that does not practice marriage.

In 2002, he wrote *Bjorn le Morphir* (*Bjorn the Morphir*), an adventure novel based on a story he told his eldest son, Jean, published in 2004 by l'école des loisirs (Paris). The adventures of Bjorn the Viking are told in eight volumes and constitute a reference in French-speaking heroic fantasy. Since then, Thomas Lavachery has written many novels for adolescents, exploring various eras and places, from the Amazon to North America or the Pacific, and also in carefully charted imaginary lands. He illustrates his texts himself. The dangers of power, intolerance, the force of friendship, and relationships with animals are among his recurring themes.

Thomas Lavachery also writes for the youngest of readers. He has written and illustrated a series of children's albums, some of which deal with delicate subjects such remembering the dead in *Padouk s'en va* (*Padouk Is Gone*) and adoption in *Ma Famille verte* (*My Green Family*).

Since 2011, he has led a seminar at the Université Charles de Gaulle (Lille 3) on the practice of writing for young adults, as part of a master's degree devoted to professions in

children's literature. This experience and the numerous writing workshops he runs, both for adults and young people, inspired him to recently publish a substantial essay on narration: *L'Artisanat du roman. Initiation à l'écriture créative (Crafting a Novel. An Introduction to Creative Writing)*.



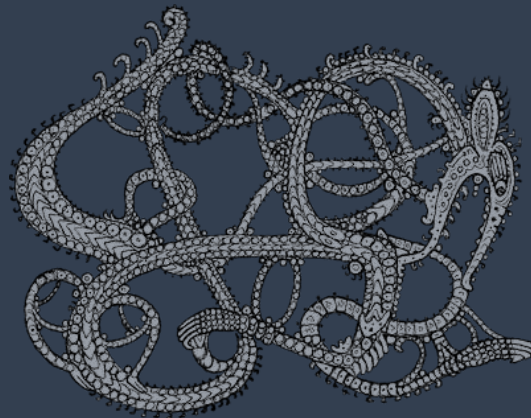
Map from the novel *Bjorn and the Armies II: Thousand Banners*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All the illustrations are by Thomas Lavachery

**I sense the importance of time in your work. Time passes, stirring up memories, but it's also a driving force for your characters. Is this conscious?**

Yes and no... My father was born in 1911; he was thirty years older than my mother, so he belonged to the same generation as my maternal grandparents. These three wonderful people used to tell me stories about a bygone era that interested me greatly. I've also done a lot of work on my paternal grandfather, Henri Lavachery, an art historian and archeologist who took part in an expedition to Easter Island in 1934. I studied his past, but also that of the Rapa Nui, the island's indigenous people, whose tragic fate haunted me for years. All this has made time, whether historical or familial, an essential factor for me. In almost all my stories, there's a "before" to which the narrator refers. Forgetting, the loss of traditions, but also the positive influence of ancestors and inspiring memories - those themes are all very present in my work.

Interview in Citrouille magazine, 2021



## Statement of contribution to literature for young people

Thomas Lavachery's works, which have won numerous prestigious awards, stand out both in terms of their originality and their diversity, although the common thread of adventure runs through them all. Albums for the youngest of readers, novels for beginners or for seasoned young adult readers: the incredible variety of formats and genres demonstrates the dexterity of this author-illustrator. He can go from heroic fantasy with *Bjorn the Morphir* (a saga in eight volumes, which has sold over 160,000 copies in France) to a realistic vein (*Henri on the Island*), not to mention fantasy with just a hint of the supernatural (*The Children of Chatom*). He takes his young readers to very different settings in space and time, such as 10th century Scandinavia, the Amazon and Oceania during the 19th century, and the United States on the cusp of the Great Depression in 1929...

## The book as an object: Paratextual materials

A literary text's threshold, or paratext<sup>2</sup>, refers to the material surrounding the text. In novels or albums by Thomas Lavachery, the story begins with the paratext, in the book's very materiality, as the author-illustrator stamps the work with his graphic signature. Then again, that is hardly surprising: for this visual writer, everything starts with images.

Some of his book covers introduce the main characters (*Tor and the Gnomes*, *My Green Family*, *Padouk Is Gone*) while others play an immersive role, such as the cover of *Rumor* and its Amazon landscape.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of "paratext" was developed by the theorist G. Genette in *Seuils* (translated as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*), published in French by Editions du Seuil.

The flyleaf and title page, which are always illustrated by Thomas Lavachery, convey narrative elements before the reader even turns to the first page. As a geographer of the imagination, this author-illustrator rethinks the world with unprecedented contours. Many of his books feature a map, either at the beginning or the end, decorated with figures and drawn with precision. The illustrations within the book are based primarily on 19th century engravings: “When I went back to visit my old friend Jules Verne, I realized just how much engravings by Ferat, Benett, Roux, and company closely match my mental images. I draw inspiration from their work in my books<sup>3</sup>,” he explains. In doing so, the author revives the tradition of illustrated young adult literature. Maps, friezes, objects, animals... Regardless of whether they’re done with a brush or a quill, in color or in black and white, his drawings punctuate his novels from start to finish, helping to “create” a whole world.

### Transformations: Geographic and symbolic thresholds

Having grown up with the story of his grandfather’s archeological expedition to Easter Island, Thomas Lavachery developed a real taste for adventure. *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, which he discovered at the age of 15, became one of his pillars and was a literary revelation for this author attached to the archetype of the lone adventurer: “For me, *Robinson* is an exultant form of happiness,<sup>4</sup>” he confesses.

This storyteller, a fervent admirer of Robert Louis Stevenson, Sigrid Undset, Joseph Conrad, and Alexandre Dumas, has given rise to many adventures and hundreds

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<sup>3</sup> “100% Belghiques,” *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 287, CNLJ.

<sup>4</sup> “Thomas Lavachery , romancier au long cours” by Sylvie Dodeller, *l’école des loisirs*.

of characters. Most of his protagonists experience a transformation. They are often dealt a tough hand in life, and reveal their true nature to themselves and others by traveling difficult, and sometimes tortuous, paths. Bjorn, “a snot-nosed, shy, and fearful boy who’s no good at wielding weapons,” is the perfect example of these evolving heroes. He would be followed by Ramulf (*Ramulf*), the village idiot with “a pathetic sense of self-esteem” and Tarir (*Rumor*), “painfully shy and quiet.” These characters, despite their many rough edges, undergo veritable metamorphoses: magical for Bjorn, and psychological for Ramulf and Tarir.

Forests, caves, lakes, and underwater worlds, which abound in Thomas Lavachery’s books, represent natural symbolic sites. They delineate the boundary between the world within and the outer world, between the familiar and the unknown, between oneself and others, and they act on the characters by transforming them. The Amazon forest described in *Rumor* becomes a character in its own right. Traveling through it is like a dive into the heart of one’s innermost self, a psychological journey. In the album *Lilly Under the Sea*, it is only after an underwater adventure, when she’s returned to the surface, that the 5-year-old girl will (finally) utter her first words. Sam and Alice’s underground excursion in *The Children of Chatom* is yet another example of the symbolic use of these secret spaces. Their discovery of a man and bear hibernating side by side is both a quasi-mystical revelation and the cement bonding the two children together. The cave, like the forest and the ocean’s depths, is simultaneously a passageway and a crucible.

## Contemporary resonance and relevance

Although Thomas Lavachery's stories are often set in distant eras, they are imbued with a powerful contemporary resonance. A writer passionate about anthropology, he depicts distant lands in order to better incite us to reflect upon ourselves. The hero of *Rumor*, Tarir, is the victim of slander that changes the course of his life. Although anchored in a traditional (and partially re-invented) Amazon society, when you read between the lines, doesn't this novel evoke the phenomenon of **fake news** and **harassment**, which has only been bolstered by the advent of social networks?

Alongside the male characters, the female characters, who are portrayed as powerful and strong-willed, offer up representations in tune with our era and the fight for **images of emancipated and non-stereotypical women**: the daring Alice; Mrs. Ruffo, the atypical pipe-smoking teacher (*The Children of Chatom*); the courageous Captain Lee Bullitt and her daughter Lilly, a future zoologist (*Lilly Under the Sea*); Gugule Guduk, an adopted girl who, when she grows up, heads off to study at the maritime university (*My Green Family*), and the list goes on.

**Our relationship to the living world** is also at the heart of numerous novels and albums, and nature is omnipresent. In *Tor and the Gnomes*, the farfajoll, a lake gnome, finds himself in danger on land. He will be saved by Tor, a little boy, who befriends the supernatural creatures that inhabit bodies of water, forests, volcanoes, seashores, and even chimneys. In *Henri on the Island*, the protagonist, a shipwreck survivor, discovers his vulnerability in a wild natural habitat, with limited resources and a great many storms. He will be saved by a singular relationship with a pig, the Friday of this original



robinsonade. In *Bjorn and the Armies*, Bjorn and his brother are not welcome in a forest that they must learn to respect and honor like the traditional peoples. Their change in attitude will reverse the Forest of the Banished One's hostility toward them.

The question of **otherness** weaves through several books, such as *My Green Family*. The story is narrated from the perspective of Gugule Guduk, who left behind her planet, Earth, only to find herself in a family of aliens with four arms and bright green skin. Lilly, in *Lilly Under the Sea*, is described as a daydreaming little girl, who still doesn't speak, although she's 5 years old. The heroine of *Roussette and Ze Hideous*, a lesser-known album, is persecuted because she has red hair.

**Power** is another recurrent theme in Thomas Lavachery's works. It is present in all three volumes of *Bjorn and the Armies*. The tyrant Batachikhan exerts it with infinite perversion, which fascinates Gunnar, Bjorn's brother. Meanwhile, Bjorn, who's a leader despite himself, senses its many potential dangers. Giving orders is not in his nature and he struggles to assume this role.

The novel *The Children of Chatom* paints the portrait of a town in which Sam, Alice, and Thomas, three united and complementary teenagers, grow up. **Creating community**, another contemporary subject, finds a very pertinent echo there.

Reading and re-reading the greats contributed to molding Thomas Lavachery's imagination. Having worked with comics and film – “a writing school,” he declares<sup>5</sup> – this author-illustrator excels in the art of forging varied and constantly re-invented worlds. A storyteller with an inexhaustible well of inventiveness, he has managed to become a voice in the landscape of young adult literature

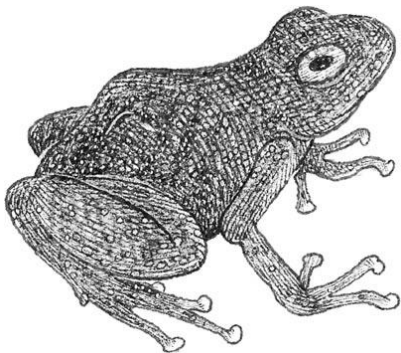
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<sup>5</sup> He has directed two documentaries: *A World Without Fathers or Husbands*, about the Mosuo, and *The Easter Man*, which retraces the scientific expedition led by his grandfather to Easter Island in 1934.

through his distinctive trademark: graphic craftsmanship; a fluid and efficient style; and demanding language for resilient texts, respectful of his young readers and their ability to read the world. Through his novels and books, Thomas Lavachery continues to sculpt a corpus of works that is truly universal in scope. Is that not the very definition of talent?

Alexia Psarolis

Journalist and critic specializing in young adult literature



## Order and disorder

For a novel to exert its full appeal, the reader must finish with the feeling that he or she has been led somewhere. The author, like a hidden god, was in control from start to finish. If the final story doesn't convey this sense of mastery, of accomplishment, then the enterprise has failed. But in order to be complete, this mastery must incorporate elements that contradict it at first glance: moments of hesitation; detours in the story; unusual, seemingly unnecessary scenes; oblique, improbable dialogues... To be credible, a novel must incorporate something of the randomness of human life. For no existence, even the wisest, is exempt from chaotic events or periods... Striking the right balance between order and disorder is one of the novelist's hallmarks. What a fascinating profession!

Text written by Thomas for the exhibition "Thomas Lavachery, la cuisine d'un auteur," 2018, Salon jeunesse du Heysel, Brussels

## Interviews & Essays

***“Offering a cleaned-up vision of stereotypes and old paternalistic reflexes was indeed one of my intentions.”***

Excerpts from a conversation with Nicolas Stetenfeld, published by La BILA, Bibliothèque des Littératures d’Aventures (the Library of Adventure Literature), 2023

**Long before the term “young adult literature” was coined, the adventure genre and its greatest representatives quickly experienced permeability between adult and youth readerships. Whether aimed primarily at children but also appealing to adults (like Verne and Stevenson) or the other way around (like Alexandre Dumas), these works have largely transcended their target audience. Even if you are primarily labeled as a “children's author,” your novels also seem to partake in this dynamic. How do you address this in your writing?**

When I write novels for the Médium collection at l'école des loisirs (ages 12-15), I make sure not to exceed certain limits. I take it easy in terms of violence, even if some adult readers might disagree. I provide a bit more explanation than in my few general literature novels. Regarding vocabulary, I keep an eye on being readable by the greatest number. That said, I set the bar as high as possible, artistically speaking. Teenagers deserve great literature, and I do everything within my power to be worthy of that. No condescension, no excessive simplification. The human being is viewed with lucidity, in both its beautiful aspects and its worst flaws. The language is accessible, as I said, but polished and refined when necessary. I am always delighted to discover that I

have surpassed my target audience when I meet an adult who reads my work for their own selfish pleasure, and not just out of professional duty. But this is a secondary joy compared to the one I feel when I captivate a young reader with my not-so-simple books.

**If entire sections of adventure literature are now considered outdated, it is partially because, beyond purely literary questions, they carry with them a paternalistic, colonialist, and frankly racist ideology. In some of your texts, such as *I Will Go See the Sioux* or *Rumor*, you confront the most connotated worlds of the genre, that of the Western frontier and the so-called “wild” jungle, to inject a more personal vision, which, without being naïve, is imbued with much more tolerance and openness. Did you have a desire to redeem these worlds, or were you simply driven by the pleasure of exploring these spaces?**

Offering a cleaned-up vision of stereotypes and old paternalistic reflexes was indeed one of my intentions. I studied art history, specializing in non-European civilizations. Anthropology classes fascinated me in particular, and shed light on a world I knew nothing about: that of traditional societies in all their complexity. Discovering Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski, Philippe Descola, Pierre Clastres, and others was a shock, one of the great initiations of my life. If I'd known anything about anthropology before beginning my studies, that is the academic direction I would have taken.

Excerpt from an interview with Marc Wilmotte published in “Le Carnet et les Instants,” number 206 (January - March 2021)

**Do you think that the novels you write for young readers can be categorized as educational novels?**

I think the novel is pedagogical in essence, insofar as it enriches our experience. Without Alexandre Dumas, Stendhal, Joseph Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sigrid Undsed, Marguerite Yourcenar, Lawrence Durrell, Malcolm Lowry, Patrick O'Brian, or Mario Vargas Llosa, I wouldn't be the man I am today. The other lives that I have known through them, and in which I have immersed myself, body and soul, have shaped me in the same way as my own existence. In fact, I don't make a true distinction between real life and life in novels. I could quote Robert Louis Stevenson when he refers to *The Vicomte of Bragelonne* by Alexandre Dumas: "I carried the thread of that epic into my slumbers, I woke with it unbroken, I rejoiced to plunge into the book again at breakfast, it was with a pang that I must lay it down and turn to my own labors; for no part of the world has ever seemed to me so charming as these pages, and not even my friends are quite so real, perhaps quite so dear, as d'Artagnan."

In my view, terms like "education novel" and "training novel" are pleonastic. Every good story teaches us to live, enriches our gaze, develops our capacity for empathy, our sense of esthetics, our lucidity, and our distrust too... But of course, the lesson only deserves to be gleaned if the author is subtle, deep, inhabited - never completely decipherable, both by others and by himself. A novel worthy of the name is subject to multiple interpretations; it cannot be akin, in any way, shape, or form, to a mathematical demonstration. If it contains a message, if it illustrates a problem, if it fights injustice or terror - such as dear Orwell - the ideas that inspire it must never be articulated. The novelist turns his magnifying glass to a situation, he places his characters under our gaze before making them live in semi-freedom. The result may surprise him. The very meaning of the book

will escape him in part, once the writing part of the adventure is over. One might think that this applies solely to adult novels and not to children's texts. That is not my opinion. Our young readers are entitled to the best literature. Polysemy and mystery should not be confiscated from them. My friend Kitty Crowther's albums are multi-faceted masterpieces. How many hours, how many days could we spend discussing *Annie du lac* (*Annie of the Lake*), *Mère Méduse* (*Mother Medusa*), or *La Visite de la Petite Mort* (*Little Death's Visit*) without unraveling all their secrets?



Article by Fanny Deschamps published in *Le Carnet et les instants*, revue des lettres francophones, number 201, (January 2019)

### **Thomas Lavachery, an adventurer of writing**

This year, the triennial “Grand Prix de Littérature de Jeunesse de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles” was awarded to author and illustrator Thomas Lavachery for the entirety of his works. Following in the footsteps of

Kitty Crowther, Rascal, Benoît Jacques, and Anne Brouillard, Thomas Lavachery is not only the fifth winner of this prize, but also the first novelist to receive it. His novels have made him a household name, especially thanks to the addictive saga of Bjorn, the young Viking warrior whose adventures have kept readers on the edge of their seats throughout all eight volumes. Since then, his repertoire has expanded to include several albums, which he also illustrated. The portrait of a versatile artist who has become an indispensable name in the literary landscape.

### From comics to archeology

An author's biography can be purely informative; sometimes even a mere overview can suffice. The story of Thomas Lavachery's childhood and youth, on the other hand, already contains the seeds of many elements of his work. He was born in Brussels in 1966 to an artist and a teacher, and grew up alongside an adopted sister from Korea. They were constantly surrounded by a happy pack of animals: dogs, cats, rabbits, goats, newts, turtles, and monkeys, all of which fascinated young Thomas. Later on, his books would always be full of animals, and he would make them characters in their own right.

His parents' encouragement of his early childhood works played a vital role in the path he chose for himself, as did the novels his mother read aloud to him (such as Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, which remained a lasting memory and inspired him to write *Tor and the Gnomes*). But Thomas Lavachery's first passion was comics. He learned to draw by showing his first pages to Albert Blesteau and Daniel Kox, illustrators who lived in his neighborhood, and by the age of eighteen, he was published in the *Tintin* magazine. At the same time,



he discovered literature and suddenly dreamed of becoming a novelist. But it was not until much later, at the age of 36, that his first novel would be published.

In the meantime, he began studying art history in the “Non-European Civilizations” section at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, following in the footsteps of Henri Lavachery, his grandfather, who was an archeologist and curator at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, and who went on an expedition to Easter Island in 1934. In 2002, Thomas Lavachery dedicated a documentary film to him, *The Easter Man*, which highlights his grandfather's scientific work and his relationship with the island's inhabitants.

After a stint directing documentary films and working as a literary consultant and script doctor for a film production company, Thomas Lavachery finally set about crafting the novel he had been dreaming of writing for eighteen years.

## Genesis of a saga

Thomas Lavachery is known - and renowned - above all for his successful Bjorn series, a saga spanning eight volumes, published by l'école des loisirs. In 2004, the first volume, *Bjorn the Morphir*, made an immediate splash as readers discovered the adventures of a young Viking in Fizzland (a Nordic country invented by the author). In this first book, the inhabitants are plagued by an evil snow that confines them to their homes for several months. The novel immediately conquered a readership that eagerly awaited the second book, *Bjorn in the Underworld I*, and all those that followed. Book after book, the adventures of this valiant young Viking take him to the heart of the Earth, and then, in *Bjorn and the Armies*, into the heart of war.

*Ramulf*, a novel set in the same world, was published in 2015.

Originally, Bjorn was a story the author told his son, Jean. “I used to tell him lots of stories, which he called 'mouth stories' and preferred to reading. His favorite hero was Bjorn. So one day, I decided to put his story down on paper.”

A fantasy land, dragons, trolls, swords: we are very clearly in a medieval fantasy, no doubt about it. However, Lavachery sets himself apart from the genre and brilliantly avoids its clichés. He had never been a great reader of this type of novel himself, so he started from new foundations, rather than posing as Tolkien’s umpteenth successor. His books are above all adventure novels, enriched by the development of his characters' psychology. They are also highly documented, nourished by the author's historical and anthropological curiosity.



Thomas's office

## Geographer, anthropologist, and zoologist

In October 2018, a fascinating exhibition dedicated to Thomas Lavachery was held at the Salon jeunesse du Heysel. Lavachery decided to focus on his approach as an author, and exhibited the working documents he creates around his novels' worlds. These pieces constitute a truly original corpus: maps of imaginary countries, building plans, classifications of the various creatures inhabiting the Underworld of Fizzland, a table listing the types of dragons present in his work and their particularities, and the list goes on. They are intended to help him find his way in the wonderful world he has created: a map will help him calculate the distances separating one place from another (and estimate how long it will take the hero to reach a destination); a building plan will help him know which room a character is passing through, and what he sees when he looks out the window. These documents ensure a high degree of precision and avoid mistakes; they are the foundation upon which the coherence of his world is built. In addition to their practical usefulness, these documents provide the writer with an opportunity to delve into his story for the first time: "Creating the map is a special, foundational, and exhilarating moment, as I dream of the novel to come." And because he will keep these documents in front of him for months on end, everything is carefully illustrated.

Over the course of his writing career, he has therefore accumulated a wealth of character sheets, notebooks, paintings, and numerous illustrations. The abundance of these exceptional materials reveals a highly accomplished narrative approach.

His method is different when it comes to historical elements. While his curiosity drives him to research or draw inspiration from history, he does not strive to be

faithful to it, instead taking as many liberties as he wishes with the real Vikings of Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. “But when it comes to the Vikings of Fizzland, I'm the world's specialist,” he laughs.

## Writing as an adventure

Thomas Lavachery is a visual artist: for this former cartoonist and documentary filmmaker, images play a key role in his imagination. The writing of his books generally begins with an unexpected vision. Little by little, a story is created around this first image as the writer constructs scenes, atmospheres, dialogues... But this first stage doesn't always result in a book: most of the time, the project doesn't enthuse him enough and falls by the wayside. When, fortunately, the project does come to life, he writes a few framework pages, which outline the story (including its ending), but leave plenty of room for improvisation, as Lavachery likes to move forward adventurously. “By writing [...] with plans that were too precise, I got into trouble, and wrote bad stories.”

Lavachery starts by transcribing the scenes that unfold in his head, leaving himself the possibility of taking the story in an unexpected direction. “As a writer, that's one of the things I'm most passionate about: crafting these evolving personalities and surprising the reader in the process.”

The risk, when writing a series of novels over the course of many years, is running out of steam. Lavachery was fortunate in that his publisher, l'école des loisirs, let him take his time between books, and didn't push him to churn out Bjorn tomes too quickly. As a result, he has alternated the writing of books in his flagship series with other, equally accomplished projects. Bjorn's adventures thus remain exciting from the first to the very last. And between two Fizz novels, younger readers had the

opportunity to discover Thomas Lavachery's albums and short novels.

### **Gugule Guduk, Tor, and A Zoo of One's Own**

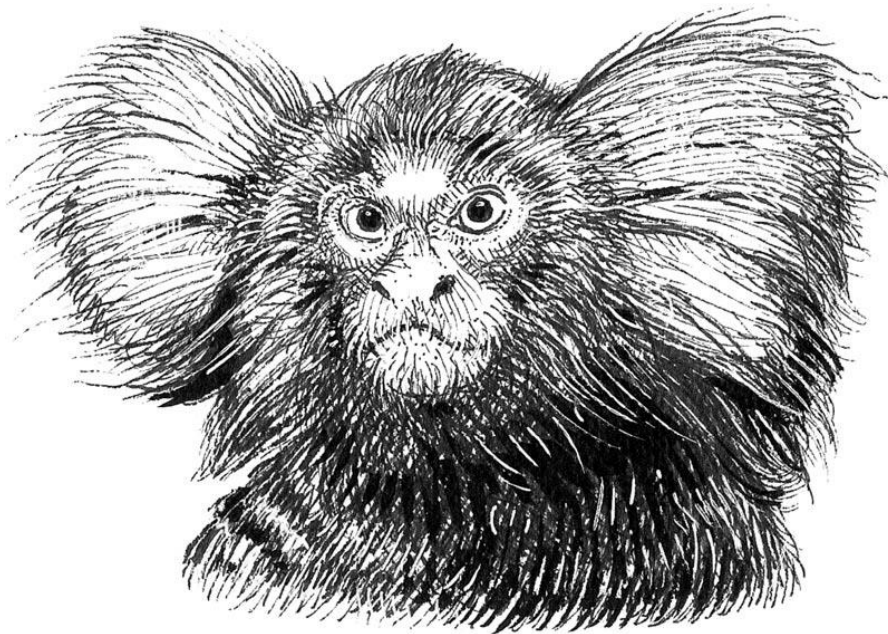
After abandoning comics in favor of novels, Thomas Lavachery returned to illustration a few years after the release of the first Bjorn book. His line drawing is directly inspired by the engravings that illustrated novels in the 19th century.

*Jojo of the Jungle*, his first children's album, was published in 2010. Others would follow: three stories dedicated to Jojo (including the touching *Padouk Is Gone*), a narrative documentary entitled *I'll Go See the Sioux*, *Roussette and Ze Hideous*, and *My Green Family*. The latter is inspired by his family's history and the adoption of his sister, who came from Korea at the age of five. Their mother used to say that, for this child, arriving in Belgium must have been like landing on Mars. Following this idea, Lavachery imagines a little human orphan arriving on another planet, where she discovers to her amazement that everyone is green. She is welcomed into an all-green family and given the sweet name of Gugule Guduk. In this tender and amusing story, the author explores disorientation, uprooting, and the feeling of being different with humor and sincerity.

For beginning readers, Lavachery started to write short illustrated novels revolving around a new character, Tor, a brave young boy with a big heart who disobeys adults to follow his sense of justice and help magical creatures that humans distrust. In the process, he earns the esteem of gnomes, trolls, and farfajolls, who take him on many exciting adventures. Since the 2015 publication of the first book in the series, *Tor and the Gnomes*, three more have followed.

His most distinctive project is the highly personal *A Zoo of One's Own*. This autobiographical bestiary pays tribute to his (more or less conventional) pets: dogs and cats, mice and chameleons, dwarf goats and ferrets, salamanders and marmosets. In this illustrated book, the author targets adults and older teenagers.

As for Bjorn, he made the transition from novel to comic strip. But to accomplish this lengthy task of adapting one medium to another, another illustrator had to be called in. The publisher suggested working with Thomas Gilbert, whose graphic style seemed to suit the book's world: neither too realistic, nor too childlike. A way for Lavachery to reconnect with his first passion, the 9th art.



**Many of your stories are set in the Middle Ages. Do you see it as a historical era or rather as a “landscape”? Like a kind of fantastical Middle Ages?**

To step outside of stereotypes, an adventure fiction writer, or even a fantasy writer, must be seriously informed. By stocking up on information about the “real” Middle Ages, we collect elements that, when used well and in the right ratio, will give the narrative an essential part of its credibility. More than a hint of realism, it is a kind of anchor... Then everyone has their own personal sources of inspiration, which contribute to enriching the “landscape.” An author’s imagination is nurtured in many ways. My studies in art history (non-European civilizations) led me to read a lot about anthropology. The ethnographic hue of Bjorn's universe is a product of that, and I think it contributes to the originality of my series - even if I'm not the only one to exploit that vein. Phillip Pullman and François Place have done that too, in other settings and with incredible talent!

Interview by Daniel Delbrassine, lecturer at the  
Université de Liège, 2019

## List of main awards and other distinctions

Thomas Lavachery received the “**Prix Littérature Jeunesse de la Scam**” (Scam Prize for Youth Literature) in 2012<sup>6</sup>.

He received the “**Grand Prix Triennal de Littérature de Jeunesse**” (Triennial Grand Prize for Young Adult Literature) from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Belgium) in 2018.



Some of his books have also received distinctions:

*Bjorn aux enfers: le prince oublié (Bjorn in the Underworld: The Forgotten Prince)*

2005: **Prix Libbylit** – Roman belge (Libbylit Prize – Belgian novel section)

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<sup>6</sup> Scam is the acronym for Société Civile des Auteurs Multimédias (Civil Society of Multimedia Authors).



*Bjorn le Morphir (Bjorn the Morphir)*

2006: **Prix Sorcières**

2015: **Prix Libbylit** – Roman belge (Libbylit Prize – Belgian novel section)

*Ramulf (Ramulf)*

2012 : **Prix de la Semaine Paul Hurtmans du livre de jeunesse**

*Tor et les gnomes (Tor and the gnomes)*

2021-2022: **Prix Janusz Korczak de Littérature Jeunesse**

*Lilly sous la mer (Lilly Under the Sea)*

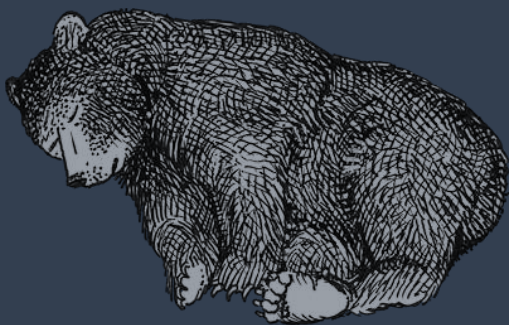
2022: **Prix Sorcières**

Thomas Lavachery has been nominated four times for the **Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award** (2020, 2021, 2022, 2025) and was a candidate for the **Hans Christian Andersen Award** in 2022.

**You teach writing workshops. What drives you to continue teaching and sharing?**

I love passing on information. I'm a passionate teacher, even if I did a bit of trial and error at the beginning with my courses at the Université Charles de Gaulle (Lille 3)... As a teacher, I share knowledge with the students, but I also learn myself as I reflect on my profession. Preparing, amending, and adding to my course from year to year forces me to take an analytical look at the work of a novelist. I'm delighted whenever I can immerse myself in writers' texts about their personal approach, their technique, and I continue to learn a lot.

Interview by Claude Burdet, "Unité de Recherche et d'Enseignement en Didactique du français de la HEP-Vaud" (Switzerland), 2019



# Complete bibliography

## Novels for children and young adults

***Bjorn le Morphir*** (*Bjorn the Morphir*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2004

***Bjorn aux enfers : Le prince oublié*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld: The Forgotten Prince*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2005

***Bjorn aux enfers II : La mort du loup*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld II: The Death of the Wolf*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2005

***Bjorn aux enfers III : Au cœur du Tanarbrok*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld III: The Tanarbrok*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2006

***Bjorn aux enfers IV : La reine bleue*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld IV: The Blue Queen*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2008

***2 pouces & demi*** (*Two Inches and a Half*),

Bayard, Paris, 2009

***La colère des MacGregor*** (*The MacGregor's Anger*),

Bayard, Paris, 2010

***C'est l'aventure !*** (*That's Adventure!*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2010 (short stories by different authors)

***Bjorn aux armées I : Le jarlal*** (*Bjorn and the Armies: The Jarlal*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2010

***Bjorn aux armées II : Les mille bannières*** (*Bjorn and the Armies II: Thousand Banners*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2012

***Ramulf*** (*Ramulf*), l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

*Tor et les gnomes* (*Tor and the Gnomes*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

**Tor et le troll** (*Tor and the Troll*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

**Tor et les garnements** (*Tor and the Little Rascals*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2017

**Bjorn aux armées III : La reconquête** (*Bjorn and the Armies III: Reconquest*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2017

**Tor et le prisonnier** (*Tor and the Prisoner*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2018

**Rumeur** (*Rumor*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

**Le voyage de Fulmir** (*Fulmir's Journey*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

**Un zoo à soi** (*A Zoo of One's Own*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2020

**Tor et le cow-boy** (*Tor and the Cowboy*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2021

**Henri dans l'île** (*Henri on the Island*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2022

**Les Enfants de Chantom** (*The Children of Chatom*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2024

## Albums for children

**Jojo de la jungle** (*Jojo of the Jungle*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2010

**J'irai voir les Sioux** (*I'll Go See the Sioux*),  
Archimède - l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2011

**Padouk s'en va** (*Padouk Is Gone*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2011

**Trois histoires de Jojo de la jungle** (*Three Stories of Jojo of the Jungle*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2013

**Roussette et les Zaffreux** (*Roussette and Ze Hideous*),  
Pastel - l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2016

**Ma famille verte** (*My Green Family*),

Pastel – l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2017

**Lilly sous la mer** (*Lilly Under the Sea*),

Pastel – l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2021

**Potomoc. Pour les artistes du coloriages** (*Potomoc: For Coloring Artists*),

Pastel – l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2024

## Novels for adults (and young adults)

**Le Cercle** (*The Club*),

Éditions Esperluète, Noville-sur-Mehaigne, 2021

**Le Netsuke** (*The Netsuke*),

Éditions Esperluète, Noville-sur-Mehaigne, 2022

## Essays

**Ile de Pâques 1935 : deux hommes pour un mystère**

(*Easter Island 1934: Two Men for One Mystery*),

Labor, Brussels, 2005

**L'Artisanat du roman. Initiation à l'écriture créative**

(*Crafting a Novel. An Introduction to Creative Writing*),

l'école des lettres, Paris, 2024

## Comics

Thomas Lavachery also collaborates on the comic books revolving around the character of Bjorn, illustrated by Thomas Gilbert.

**Bjorn le Morphir 1 : Naissance d'un morphir** (*Bjorn the Morphir: The Birth of a Morphir*),

Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2015

**Bjorn le Morphir 2 : Dans l'enfer des enfers** (*Bjorn the Morphir II: In the Heart of the Underworld*),

Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2015

**Bjorn le Morphir 3 : La reine des enfers** (*Bjorn the Morphir III: The Queen of the Underworld*),

Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2015

***Bjorn le Morphir 4 : Les armées du roi*** (*Bjorn the Morphir IV: The King's Armies*),  
Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2015

***Bjorn le Morphir 5 : Le choc des armées*** (*Bjorn the Morphir V: The Clash of the Armies*),  
Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2016

***Bjorn le Morphir 6 : L'armée des steppes*** (*Bjorn the Morphir VI: The Army of the Steppes*),  
Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2017

***Bjorn le Morphir 7 : La Revanche du Morphir*** (*Bjorn the Morphir VII: The Morphir's Revenge*),  
Rue de Sèvres, Paris, 2018







## List of translated editions, and their languages

### Chinese – Hubei Children Press

***La Colère des MacGregor*** (*The MacGregor's Anger*), 2011

### Chinese - Chang Jiang

***Bjorn le Morphir*** (*Bjorn the Morphir*), 2015

***Bjorn aux Enfers I : le prince oublié*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld: The Forgotten Prince*), 2015

***Bjorn aux Enfers II : la mort du loup*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld II: The Death of the Wolf*) 2015

***Bjorn aux Enfers III : au cœur du Tanarbrok*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld III: The Tanarbrok*), 2015

***Bjorn aux Enfers IV : la reine bleue*** (*Bjorn in the Underworld IV: The Blue Queen*), 2015

***Bjorn aux Armées I : le jarlal*** (*Bjorn and the Armies: The Jarlal*), 2017

***Bjorn aux Armées II : les mille bannières*** (*Bjorn and the Armies: Thousand Banners*), 2017

### Chinese – Orient Publishing Center

***Roussette et les Zaffreux*** (*Roussette and Ze Hideous*), 2018



Chinese – Ginko (Shanghai) Book CO., LDT

*Lilly sous la mer* (*Lilly Under the Sea*), 2023

Korean – Seedbook (South Korea)

*Ma Famille verte* (*My Green Family*), 2019

Italian – Gallucci Editore

*Bjorn le Morphir* (*Bjorn the Morphir*), 2020

*Tor et les Gnomes* (*Tor and the Gnomes*), 2020

*Tor et le Troll* (*Tor and the Troll*), 2020

*Tor et les Garnements* (*Tor and the Little Rascals*), 2020

*Tor et le Prisonnier* (*Tor and the Prisoner*), 2021

Italian – Babalibri Editore

*Lilly sous la mer* (*Lilly Under the Sea*), 2025

Polish - Gdanskie Wydawnictwo Oswiatowe

*Bjorn le Morphir* (*Bjorn the Morphir*), 2018

Russian – Samokat

*Bjorn le Morphir* (*Bjorn the Morphir*), 2024



Italian – Babalibri Editore

***Lilly sous la mer*** (*Lilly Under the Sea*), 2025

Spanish – Yermo Ediciones

***Bjorn le Morphir Vol. 1*** (*Bjorn the Morphir, Vol 1*), 2025.

Complete edition containing the following episodes:

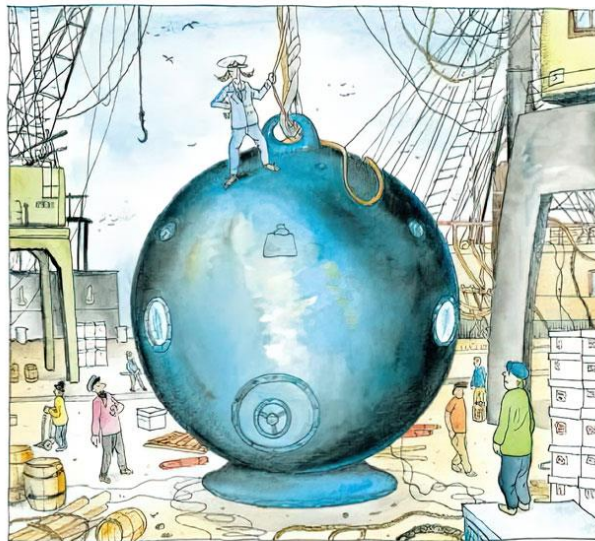
*Bjorn le Morphir 1 : Naissance d'un morphir* (*Bjorn the Morphir: The Birth of a Morphir*)

*Bjorn le Morphir 2 : Dans l'enfer des enfers* (*Bjorn the Morphir II: In the Heart of the Underworld*)

*Bjorn le Morphir 3 : La reine des enfers* (*Bjorn the Morphir III: The Queen of the Underworld*)

对科学界来说,今天是个大日子!它会深深地铭刻在人们的脑海里。李·布利特船长要深入大西洋,探索深海世界。

船长女士发明了一个钢质的大球,能下潜到海底两千米。在人类历史上,还从来没有人去过那么深的地方。



## About reading

Even today, some still see a reader's journey as an ascent, with children's books at the foot of the mountain, short illustrated novels in the foothills, then teen novels, just below young adult books. If you keep climbing, you'll reach general literature and finally, the classics at the summit.

This allegory is rooted in ideas related to performance, effort, and even competition.

Now let's replace this vertical image with that of a planisphere. We'd have continents: Novels, Essays, Comics, Illustrated Albums... And countries on each continent: the land of crime fiction, the land of adventure fiction, the land of sci-fi, the land of autobiographical fiction...

Any reader, over the course of his or her lifetime, can wander the world of books at will. Some readers will be born in the province of manga, while others will spend an entire year in the canton of vampire stories...

We muse, we zigzag, we go back and forth... We run here, we linger there. To hell with signposted routes! And to hell with hierarchies!

T. L.



## Ten of the most important titles

*Bjorn le Morphir (Bjorn the Morphir)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2004

*Padouk s'en va (Padouk Is Gone)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2011

*Ramulf (Ramulf)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

*Tor et les gnomes (Tor and the Gnomes)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

*Ma famille verte (My Green Family)*,  
Pastel, Brussels, 2017

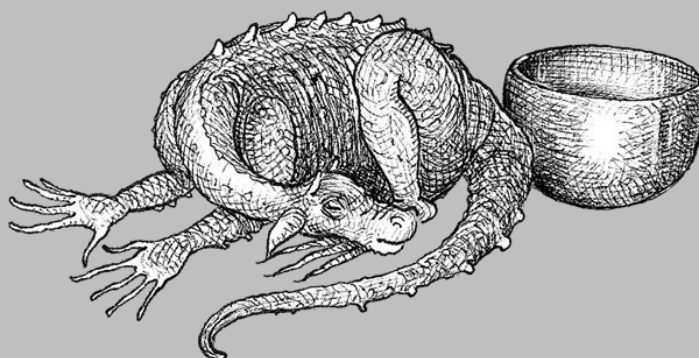
*Rumeur (Rumor)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

*Le Voyage de Fulmir (Fulmir's Journey)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

*Lilly sous la mer (Lilly Under the Sea)*,  
Pastel, Brussels, 2022

*Henri dans l'île (Henri on the Island)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2022

*Les Enfants de Chatom (The Children of Chatom)*,  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2024



# List of the five books sent to the jurors

## Novels

*Tor et les gnomes* (*Tor and the Gnomes*)

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

*Rumeur* (*Rumor*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

*Les Enfants de Chatom* (*The Children of Chatom*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2024

## Albums

*Padouk s'en va* (*Padouk Is Gone*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2011

*Ma famille verte* (*My Green Family*),

Pastel, Brussels, 2017

## About the novel Rumor

I wanted to deal with the theme of rumors and their sometimes devastating effects, but with a delicate touch. For me, it's never a question of hammering home a message. I put characters in a situation, bring them to life, and watch them struggle in the face of difficulties. Certain elements of the story are known to me from the outset, but certainly not all. My aim, as a novelist, is to show in order to incite questions and reactions in the reader - who will interpret things in his or her own way.

A word about the illustrations. In my previous novels, I classically illustrated scenes and drew character portraits. For Rumor, I experimented with atmospheric images and landscapes. My aim was no longer to illustrate a story, but to evoke its setting through drawing.

Excerpt from a reading guide published by the IPPJ  
(Public Institutions for Youth Protection, Belgium)



## Published reviews of the books submitted to the jury

### ***Tor et les gnomes*** (*Tor and the Gnomes*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2015

Published in Libbylit number 120 (May – July 2015) and in Libbylit Hors-Serie “Thomas Lavachery” (October 2019) by Isabelle Decuyper

While fishing with his father and uncle Einar, the young Tor did not catch a single fish. For his father and uncle, it must have been because of the farfajoll, a gnome who lives in lakes and rivers and enjoys keeping fish from biting. The adults want to get rid of it for good, but Tor is fascinated by this creature. He will save the gnome by organizing a real funeral, making it look like the farfajoll is dead by replacing it with a fish skeleton! To express his thanks, the farfajoll will come to Tor's aid when he needs it. This is a new writing format for Thomas Lavachery, who manages to immerse young readers in the world of gnomes, introducing these little creatures unknown to humans. He also offers up a beautiful gallery of gnomes at the end of the book, with all his talent as an illustrator. Readers also discover illustrations throughout this story dealing with difference, fear of “the Other,” and mutual aid. A little gem. For ages 8 and up.

### ***Rumeur*** (*Rumor*),

l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2019

Published on the website [ricochet-jeunesse.org](http://ricochet-jeunesse.org) by Sophie Pilaire

Tarir is a young Zapiro Indian. Because he is different, he is accused of being a capinko-eater, a fearful and whining

little animal. This supreme insult tarnishes Tarir and his family, although he still manages to get married. But the rumor goes on, and he doesn't do anything to deny it. Tarir is eventually forced to leave his village and live alone in the middle of the forest. When he falls ill, he travels to the city, to “los Blancos,” where a doctor treats and educates him. He falls in love with his daughter, and finally finds his place. But Tarir wants to return home and take revenge on his clan.

Written and illustrated by Thomas Lavachery, this novel reminded me of Jean-François Chabas’ style. We find the importance of nature, the almost imperceptible fine humor, the quest of the hero (and narrator in this case) as he sets out on his personal journey, and the profound lesson of life by example. The theme of the rumor is extremely topical, but we see here that it transcends time and space. A rumor can wreak real havoc, but it is also sometimes self-generated (see abrupt end). To be read without delay.

***Les Enfants de Chatom*** (*The Children of Chatom*),  
l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2024

Published by Raphaële Botte in the cultural weekly  
*Télérama*

The life of a village in America during the 1920s. Colorful characters and delightful language. A schoolteacher who loves the troublemakers and smokes a pipe... Just remembering this unique figure immediately brings to mind Sam, a clever teenager with red hair; Alice, who is unconditionally by his side; and Thomas, a mistreated young magician... The list could be much longer as *The Children of Chatom* is filled with vibrant, atypical, and incredibly endearing personalities. One can imagine the dusty street, the dilapidated facades, the honey on the



grocery store shelves, the women chatting in Mrs. Ruffo's garden, the teacher in all her glory... Thomas Lavachery brings the inhabitants of Chatom to life, a village in rural America at the end of the 1920s. Their story primarily revolves around the disappearance of the lumberjack every winter, the sudden arrival of a mysterious orphan, and finally, the aftermath of the terrible accident that befalls Sam. There is no fantasy to be found here (discover his *Bjorn* series, published from 2004 to 2017), as the Belgian novelist explores a realistic vein. Nevertheless, we recognize his beautiful propensity to highlight the small events in daily life that add so much depth to his plot. Thus, we dread the examinations of the so-called “doctor,” and we are appalled by the unscrupulous journalist’s manners... Lavachery’s delightful language gives voice to the characters, their silences, and their banter, while the younger ones grow under the gaze and intelligence of the remarkable Mrs. Ruffo. Although “happiness in sight can sometimes give you the jitters,” in Chatom, it hardly prevents one from achieving fulfillment...

***Padouk s’en va*** (*Padouk Is Gone*),

l’école des loisirs, Paris, 2011

Published on the website [ricochet-jeunesse.org](http://ricochet-jeunesse.org) by  
Catherine Gentile

We are reunited with Jojo of the Jungle, who first appeared in 2010 in a debut album, with his long nose and equally long limbs, and who incessantly repeats – much to the annoyance of those around him – that he is a good guy. Here, he takes a slight step back to recount the death of his friend Padouk. Too weak and too sick, Padouk has decided it’s time to go, to leave behind this world and all the friends surrounding him in his final moments. Jojo

speaks of the sadness that grips them all, of life as it slowly resumes, and of time which gradually erases the face of the departed friend in their mind's eye. Is forgetting not another form of death? How can they keep Padouk's memory alive in the collective consciousness? Jojo has an idea. A beautiful album about grief and memory. Thomas Lavachery knows how to create genuine emotion with a handful of words, and how to convey the importance of memory and shared feelings. His illustrations draw readers into a remarkable and highly expressive animal world, where there is always an unusual detail to uncover.



***Ma famille verte*** (*My Green Family*),

Pastel/l'école des loisirs, Paris, 2017

Published on the website [ricochet-jeunesse.org](http://ricochet-jeunesse.org) by  
Emmanuelle Pelot

An orphan leaves Earth to be adopted by a family. Upon arrival, she discovers gesticulating and smiling people, who are also very tall, all green, and have four arms. The drastically different appearance of her new parents disturbs the heroine. After an adjustment period, this little girl, renamed Gugule Guduk, becomes a marine specialist, falls in love, gets married, and even comes to appreciate the muddy taste of the famous puree, a traditional dish in the land of the tall green men. To better understand the true tsunami that adoption unleashes, Thomas Lavachery made his heroine travel through time and to a different planet. The dislocation is total in this new environment as the girl loses all her bearings. While this is initially painful and difficult, Gugule Guduk, who is rather "ingeniuke," manages to acclimate to her new life and even take pleasure in it. A sensitive album that addresses the issue in an original and positive way, without overlooking the difficulties

## Excerpt from *The Children of Chatom*

Thomas spent a lot of time with Sam and Alice, two years his senior. They were a friendly, laughing trio, always busy debating essential, metaphysical questions. Is God the Father really male? Could He not be female or have no defined sex? Do animals have souls? If so, what about insects and larvae? Would a larva's soul, if it existed, be as immortal as a man's? Does a soul take up space, and if so, how big is it? If elephants and whales have souls, shouldn't they be bigger? Is it possible to love two people at the same time? Does the degree of intelligence depend on the size of the brain or the number of convolutions, as some scientists claim?



