

TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE



HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARD 2026
WRITING

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BIOGRAPHY

Timothée de Fombelle was born in the heart of Paris in 1973, but often accompanied his father, an architect, on his travels to Africa. He spent part of his childhood in Morocco and the Ivory Coast. Each summer his family left for the countryside (the west of France), where the five brothers and sisters lived like wild horses, making huts in the trees, playing in the river and losing themselves in the woods. In the evening, they performed plays for their parents and devoured the books in the library. Childhood remains for him the lost paradise which he re-discovers through writing.



After becoming a literature teacher, Timothée taught in Paris and Vietnam before choosing the bohemian life of the theatre. *Le phare* (The Lighthouse), a play he wrote with the actor Clément Sibony, has been translated and produced in Russia, Lithuania, Poland and Canada. He received the « Prix du Souffleur » in 2002 for this play. Many of his plays, such as *Je danse toujours*, centre on loss and fragility, but he sometimes writes comedies, such as *Rose Cats*. *Je danse toujours* was read at the opening of the Festival d'Avignon, a major arts festival held annually in the city of Avignon (France).

Passionate about books and theatre, Timothée has been writing since he was young. The stage has been his testing ground but it is life, with its joys and trials, which inspires his work. A great traveller, Timothée recognizes that the writing of *Tobie Lolness* (Toby Alone) has been his best journey so far. Published by Gallimard Jeunesse in 2006, the book won several awards and has been an international success, translated into 30 languages. Its film rights have been bought by Amber Entertainment (Great Britain, USA). In this book, Timothée de Fombelle tells the adventures of Tobie and his kin, all creatures measuring a millimetre and a half, living in a tree world.

Since then, Timothée de Fombelle has written a series of novels for young people, taking readers of all ages on great adventures, giving pride of place to imagination, emotion and poetry, and expressing the omnipotence of childhood. Timothée de Fombelle is a marvellous storyteller and a very skilful writer. He embarks the reader on journeys to imaginary worlds that become very real, very familiar. His characters are multi-layered, complex, and very humane. His style is beautiful, fluent, elegant, yet accessible to all. Reading Timothée de Fombelle's novels is a thrilling experience for the mind and the soul.

Timothée de Fombelle varies genres and collaborates extensively, creating albums, a musical tale, a comic book... all of which make up a body of work whose richness and grace have established him as one of the most influential writers of his generation.



NOMINATING TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE: THE REASONS BEHIND THE CHOICE

The publication of Timothée de Fombelle's *Tobie Lolness: la vie suspendue* [Toby Alone] by Gallimard Jeunesse in 2006 rocked the world of children's book publishing in France, and it echoed around the world. Readers and critics were, for once, unanimous: this was a major work by a great writer. "Contains all the ingredients to become a real classic", wrote De Morgen (Belgium), "There is so much to commend this book that it is difficult to know where to begin... It lingers in the mind long after the story is finished", wrote Carousel (United Kingdom).

This was definitely not a one-shot success: all the books written by Timothée de Fombelle are outstanding works.



1. Creating original universes

Timothée de Fombelle is a master in creating original, unique universes and in making the readers believe in their existence. This great storyteller has a subtle way of making his worlds real for all. He writes "Tobie was just one and a half millimetres tall, not exactly big for a boy of his age" and we can picture Tobie, running for his life in the great oak tree, hiding from his pursuers, fighting spiders (giant beasts, considering his size)... All the details needed to make this miniature world authentic to the reader are present in the story. When, in *Le livre de Perle* (The Book of Perle), Timothée de Fombelle tells the story of two worlds, our own and the one of the fairies, with passages in between, and places all this in the context of World War II, the reader doesn't even question the existence of these two worlds. He reads... and he believes. "**I look for the magic of reality**"¹, the writer says.

Timothée de Fombelle's work is very visual. He's a creator of images; he makes his movie in the mind of the reader. As he says: "**You have to create cinema in the reader's head. I don't have to say if Vango flies or if he runs. I say it's as if he was running and everyone creates the images he wants.**"²

¹ « Timothée de Fombelle : « Je cherche la magie du réel », in *Virgule* n° 89, October 2011, pp. 11-17.

² « Timothée de Fombelle, prestidigitateur heureux », by Silvia Galli, in *Citrouille*, June 2010, pp. 9-14.

2. Seeing the world with enchanted eyes

Timothée de Fombelle sees the world as an enchanted place, especially when it comes to forests, rivers, and nature as a whole. This enchantment is passed on to his readers, making them see the world with fresh eyes: **“The blasé society (...) is my number one target. I taught for a few years in difficult neighbourhoods. I dreamt of taking the children to the forest so that they could get lost for a few days. It wasn’t to play the bad father in *Tom Thumb*. I simply believe it’s the most wonderful school. To measure one’s tininess, to disconnect, to find yourself”**.³ After reading *Tobie Lolness* or *Le livre de Perle*, one is bound to look at a tree differently...



3. Building genuine characters

Characters in danger, fighting for justice, resisting the tyranny of a dictator, searching for the truth, trying to take control of their lives... Timothée de Fombelle’s characters are real and humane, they evolve during the timeframe of the novel. They’re authentic. Timothée de Fombelle believes that there should be something not quite right with the characters, something that will make them go forward and “live” in the story. He is a great character builder; he seems to hold the secret to creating, in a few brush strokes, a hero, but also secondary characters that could become primary characters later on in the story. There’s richness in his multi-dimensional characters, a promise of evolution, and a very human potential. But it’s the reader’s job to take hold of these characters and to make their images complete in his mind. De Fombelle says: **“I don’t describe my characters very much. For me, it’s a victory of some sort to see how the reader can take ownership of the characters’ personalities”**⁴.

4. Constructing a breath-taking novel

Timothée de Fombelle knows how to build up the suspense to catch the reader’s attention and never let it go. In an era of fastness, of video games and instant chats, he manages to create a fast rhythm in his chapters, in a way that doesn’t allow the reader to put the book down. He sometimes uses flashbacks that enlighten different moments of the story, creating a sort of expectation. **“I believe there’s an interest in writing beautiful things, important things, strong things, only if the reader is with us if we have taken him with us. The construction, the rhythm, and the speed are the keys, in my opinion, to getting there. Because the young reader has a thousand other exciting temptations, like friends, the Internet... Suddenly, we tell him that the book can do better**

³ « Timothée de Fombelle : « Je cherche la magie du réel », Op. Cit.

⁴ « Timothée de Fombelle, prestidigitateur heureux », Op. Cit.

than that, it can lead him further ahead, that the book is an ultra-modern thing, powerful and of a strength unequalled by any electronic technique.”⁵

The writer wants to “be able to tell long and nourishing stories”, and there’s also the pleasure of “the unfinished”. De Fombelle loves making somewhat crazy promises and being obliged to keep them: at the end of the first volume of *Vango*, the reader still doesn’t know who Vango is and why he’s being followed; the mystery of each character is protected. But the reader has clues to keep him hooked... And he is taken by the intrigue.



5. Dealing with strong issues

Struggling for freedom, standing up to tyrants, building up the courage to face difficult situations, trying to put the pieces of one’s life together in a merciless world, demanding justice, fighting for love... Timothée de Fombelle’s characters believe in certain values and they fight for what they believe in. But the writer isn’t there to pass on a message, to tell the readers what to do: **“The only message I try to transmit to the young readers is the search for poetry, independence of mind, a certain courage. Maybe draw them to some greatness, elevation...”** ⁶ It’s a subtle form of resistance.

Timothée de Fombelle deals with all these issues in a natural way, as part of the intrigue. The voices of his characters are strong and powerful.

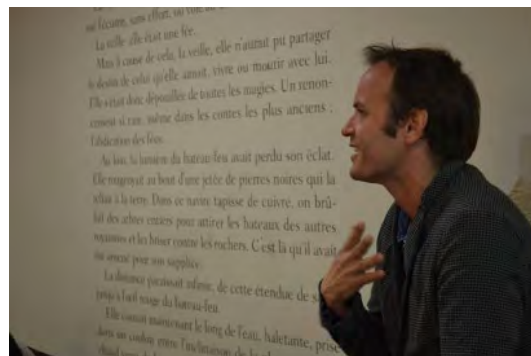


⁵ Idem.

⁶ « Timothée de Fombelle : « Je cherche la magie du réel », Op. Cit.

6. Love for the written word

Reading Timothée de Fombelle's books is a pure pleasure for those who thrill from brightly written texts. His love for words is palpable in each sentence, each wordplay. A former teacher of French literature, de Fombelle isn't afraid of being "too literary"; in a time when writers tend to use the "dialect" of teenagers, believing it will make them popular among young adults, Timothée de Fombelle doesn't make easy concessions. He enjoys the music of the words and knows how to transmit it to his readers. Every word is at the right place, every sentence is built, to be as fluent and as beautiful as possible. Timothée de Fombelle is very demanding with himself and with his readers. He doesn't overproduce: he gives every work the time it needs to be at its best, beautifully written, in an elegant and accessible style.



Timothée de Fombelle also loves playing with words, expressions, and sayings. In *Tobie Lolness*, he invents new explanations for sayings that are used in French. Creating new images by twisting some of the well-known sayings in French: another way of creating new surprising images in the mind of the readers...

7. Faith in the reader

Timothée de Fombelle respects his readers and has faith in their capacities to navigate through his books. He doesn't belittle them or embark on long explanations to help them figure out a complex situation. He knows that the readers can understand. And his readers approve entirely, they feel the authenticity of this approach. His works of high literary value are read widely by young adults who speak passionately about "Timothée's work".

"We write with everything we are", says Timothée de Fombelle. This highly generous, magnificent writer, confesses that one thing is more important than everything else: **"Giving the pleasure of reading is, for me, the most important thing"**.



Je me suis 'couché' sans lire.

Timothée de Fombelle, ill. Irène Bonacina : *Esther Andersen*, ©Gallimard Jeunesse, 2021

INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

TOBIE LOLNESS: A CLASSIC IS BORN!⁷

In the profusion of books for children, a few jewels appear. They're often translations from English (Stroud, DiCamillo, Pullman, Opper and so many others!) but also from languages more seldom translated: among others I can think of the German Moers. Texts in French seem to be less frequent. *La vie suspendue : Tobie Lolness 1* is one of those stories that marks the imagination of the reader with an indelible stamp, a major work in French children's literature. A text that belongs to Literature, the literature that is the realm of scholars: a depth in the feelings, three-dimensional characters vibrating with emotions, a narrative structure with a masterful rhythm that holds the reader out of breath until the end. A balanced complexity that keeps him/her hungry without getting him/her lost in a labyrinth of feelings. In short, a perfect combination. No surprise to see the many translation projects for *Tobie Lolness*, this two-part epoch. « I am not set off for an endless saga », says the author, Timothée de Fombelle.

How was this remarkable adventure born?

I wrote this novel independently without having been asked by any publisher, thus without knowing what would become of it. I had been thinking of it for a long time. But I had never been able to find time for it, to simply stop everything else and devote myself to it for a few months. Indeed, I can't regret what I did.

For the greatest pleasure of the reader, I can tell you. Whilst reading your novel and from the encounter with Tobie, true authenticity and many emotions radiate, which in my opinion is due to the density of the characters. Were you aware of the extent of the whole thing before you started writing?

First of all and very simply, I am in search of a density and of a truth that can be acknowledged without effort. I had a concern for the requirements of writing for young readers, for rigour in front of truth. I do not have a great knowledge of children's literature and I chose to remain in this ignorance to bring in what I am, to not fit into already existing boxes.

I started this project as a fable, as a world that would be linked to the natural world, too. I wanted another world, because, for me, the greatest freedom lies in the worlds you invent and create from scratch. At the same time, I wanted a world that could exist at the end of the garden, with its own truth. I have always felt in symbiosis with nature. I feel as if I had grown up immersed in plants and barks. I wanted this world, this idea, and I also had in my mind a time trial. The characters then came to life little by little, as real beings, not at all as puppets without any reality.

I started this book as an « exercise of style », as a « great adventure in the heart of nature ». Suddenly it became the most personal text I had ever written. Yes, that's true; nothing could let me think it was going to be of that importance. For me, it has really been a search for people I had loved, for emotions I had lived. At certain moments, I felt that the things that happened to Tobie once happened very close to me, in my own life, whilst I had thrown myself into a novel, into an incredible adventure.



⁷ Interview of Timothée de Fombelle by Brigitte Moreau, translated by Anne Bouteloup, www.lelibraire.org, a French-Canadian book portal, December 17, 2006.

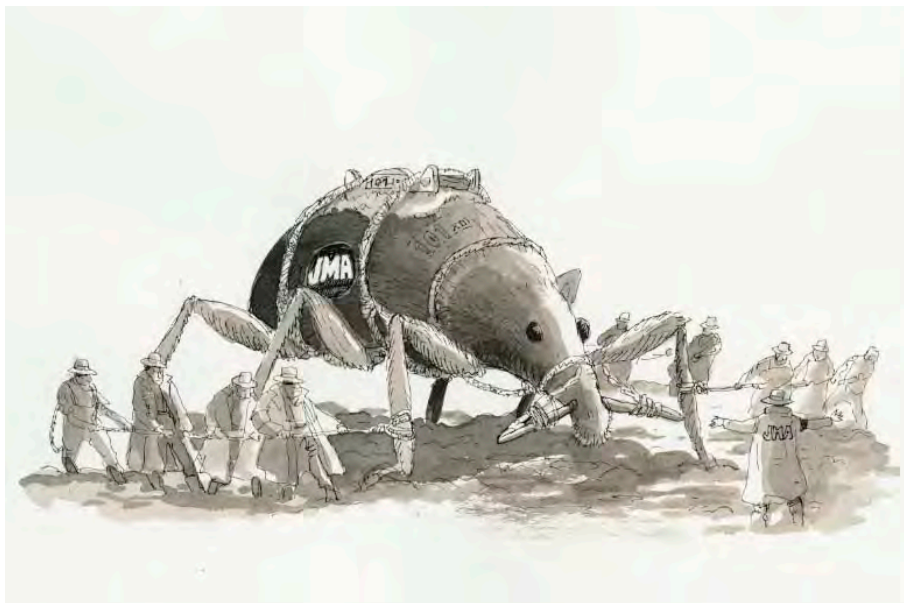
A novel maybe, but still very rooted in real life. I'd like to get back to the density of your characters because even the secondary characters have their own story on their back.

I do not build my characters in the way of the Actors Studio, they impose themselves upon me, and they're actually made of flesh and life. Today I am immersed in writing the second part, and it's just unbelievable: there are so many characters, initially meant to be secondary, who suddenly shout at me that they do exist and want to be the hero! Yet, I was once a literature teacher and fought in front of my students against the idea that some characters can start living by themselves under an author's pen. I must confess I found myself trapped because I was in front of characters that were driving me, even whilst building the intrigue. It is true that some characters have had an influence on the evolution of the story and that some of them could not just be passing by. Being able to give them a destiny in the second part was a true pleasure.

My true fight was - a rather difficult exercise in this genre - to avoid clichés, to rather play with them derisively because I like laughing. I wanted a book that would also be funny.

True, humour is very present... Think of this character, the "baddy" of the baddies, this fat and obese monster, in a way, he is ridiculous.

Completely ridiculous. You know, I have experienced an extraordinary reception by the critics, a great fortune if you think that so few people really care for children's literature. The simple fact that there is a review is pleasant in itself and came as a great surprise to me. However, one sentence, in all the reviews I had the opportunity to read, irritated me. It goes more or less like this: « Sometimes, we can regret a few baddies somewhat caricatured ». This is actually more than deliberate. The baddies are cartoon characters. Here we are, I wanted tragedy at some point, but I also wanted comics, « bande dessinée », at some other points.



As for me, I found each character stands in his right place. Even more, the fact of being able to laugh at this fat baddy makes the final stroke still more invigorating, when you discover that the real baddy of the baddies will finally be Tobie's best friend. What a twist!

That's true and brings about something else. What I want to outline, among other things, is that the most idiotic ones are not compulsorily the baddies and that the smart ones are not compulsorily the goodies. I deliberately wanted a smart baddy, with strong roots, even unhappy ones, who is going to choose to be bad. The challenge in the sequel is to have a baddy who was Tobie's best friend and who also is extremely clever and extremely seductive.

As a result, on the level of emotions, the reader gets value for money, because the fact of having been Tobie's best friend makes this reality still more heart-breaking.

Yes, this heart-breaking feeling was part of my initial project: the idea for the young reader of a sort of initiation to a form of complexity in literature, not only in the style but also in the main themes. I wanted a bit of Romeo, of Giulietta, of Cyrano or Lorenzaccio to be there, I wanted all the great tensions of drama and comedy to be there. This is probably what was one of the most ambitious goals in my programme.

A goal you completed. Would you have a scoop for us? For instance, which secondary character is going to take more importance in the second volume?

One character is going to take more importance. I announced it in a short sentence lost in the first volume. This is Nils, the son of the woodcutter who disappears after his heroic act, whilst we follow Tobie in his adventure. I wrote in the first volume that this day, the day Nils saves Tobie would be very important and that Nils' role in his community would become essential. And actually, we are going to find Nils as the leader of the woodcutters. These people have acquired a certain form of independence concerning the wrong powers that reign in the Tree. Thanks to the act of Nils, but also because of all the events that have happened in the Tree and have made the job of woodcutter a vital one. Yes indeed, the woodcutters become extremely important, especially because of the new invasion of lichen and moss that weakens the Tree. Nils therefore becomes a key character, thanks to this power, but also because Tobie is going to entrust him with a mission.

Several questions jostle each other, among other things regarding the deterioration of the Tree and notably because of the piercing work by the weevils. I remember having felt a great sorrow thinking the Tree was doomed to death sooner or later.

Yes, the Tree is endangered, and the big question in the sequel is: is there still time to reverse the course of things?

And this is a direct allusion to our planet!

I read everything I can; I really try to have a good knowledge of the trees and the planet at the same time. I am pretty concerned, but still full of hope from the moment awareness will happen. The metaphor indeed sounds right, because the frailty of the Tree and the frailty of the world build a parallel that struck me whilst I was working.

In the beginning, I had rather thought of a world in two dimensions, just at the top of the Tree. It was a kind of flat planet, and suddenly the green globe of the Tree appeared to me. It became obvious that a complete world was needed, a world with a Southern hemisphere and a Northern one. I created tiny creatures because I wanted this world to be on scale, I wanted the Tree to allow for a travel of several days for instance.

I then discovered an extraordinary number that revealed to me I could have imagined them a bit bigger. I read that the surface of the leaves and branches on a tree is equivalent to 200 hectares, considering the underside of the leaves, the branches, and the hollows of the bark. For an average tree, that's absolutely enormous! Now if you imagine a huge tree, three times the average size, you find an incredible surface, on which you can build adventures infinitely, it's a true world.

Your subtitle, « Suspended life » is fascinating too. It refers to several things: to our place in the universe, to our environment which we endanger, but also to Tobie's actions; he can put his own life on a precarious balance to save others' lives. He becomes a hero despite himself but fully assumes it.

Yes, exactly. He first is a hero to save his own life, then to save his parents then, finally taken into the whirl, to maybe save the whole Tree. Actually, this subtitle, « Suspended life », says a lot even though it is not very

present in the book as an object. It evokes an interrupted life, an interrupted happiness, and the unconcern of childhood. I lost my father when I was still young, and I think there are many resurgences of those moments in the novel, which are very intimate. From this unconsciousness suddenly arises the frailty of life, the impression of not having heard of diseases during my childhood. I have the impression of having discovered much at once and of having had this feeling of a suspended life, or of this lost paradise, childhood. This is also the reason why I fed the memory of Tobie and Elisha with happy moments because I think that's what fuels life.

Which makes their separation all the more tragic.

Well, it also shows the reader exactly what the characters experience, torn apart between their past happiness and the harshness of the present.

Yes, and it is precisely the harshness of the present that will make Tobie give up everything when he does not simply choose to become integrated into the People of the Grass, but to let himself become assimilated: he chooses to forget his world completely.

Exactly. He has to choose: either he keeps turning over his past and his present is unbearable, or he throws everything away. The main idea is that sooner or later, he will have to reconcile life in the branches with life in the grass. Hence his awareness at the end of the book, when, suddenly, memory re-emerges and imposes itself on him.



And this memory comes back through the voice of a writer who never talks... I will go over these sublime moments when you can feel the intimate relationship between the written words and the spoken words, between the act of reading and apprenticeship, between text and wisdom. I am changing the subject matter, but I want to come back to the structure of your book, which literally filled me with happiness. The extraordinary cutting of the narration, smartly modelled, all these jumps backwards that reveal just small pieces of the past, but that keep us out of breath: they hook the reader into the story, all the time, and give a strong envy to go ahead.

When working with Gallimard, the idea was that I should try to put things in a simpler chronological order. After taking a look at the text word by word to try and re-construct, I found what I knew from the start: the spirit of the text precisely lies there. From the start, I wanted the pieces to come little by little. If you explain immediately who is chasing Tobie, what the dangers are, what are the reasons behind all this, and what is at stake in the story, you find yourself in a very linear narration. What interested me was to have a cycle effect, to give a bit of information, then another bit of information, again and again, and by the way that was the big challenge.

And this is precisely what puts your book in the literary field.

Yes, I believe literature starts with a bit of complexity. I do not mean it has to be difficult, it can be read in a very fluent way, the way it has to be. I think children's books give us a lesson of clarity and that the rules of literature meant for a young readership should be extended to any kind of literature. They are the basis of writing.

Yes, and it is true that sometimes, too many books in this children's literature are linear and hence, lack a certain form of authenticity. I have the impression that too many authors do not trust young readers and confine them, unconsciously maybe, in a sphere of idiotic naivety. Whereas when one reads your novel, one truly has the feeling it is not the case, that the young readers are respected as such.

What is really incredible is that on the one hand, some adults tell me « I really loved it, but as to my kids, I will wait a little before making them read it, because I think they're not going to enjoy everything, etc... » and on the other hand, the exact opposite. Last weekend I attended a book fair. A 9-year-old girl had been waiting for me since 9:00 and I arrived at 11:00. She had read the book four times, and knew every detail of it. This is weird; everyone thinks one's neighbour is not able to read it whereas people of all ages enjoy it.

There's no age to be a reader, you become a real reader only by reading and it's by loving what you read that you enjoy reading.

I fully agree, one can reach a maturity in reading that is not defined by age.

One thing I really enjoyed in your style among other things and which I realized sort of late in my reading, is how you evoke moments sometimes cruel and intense without falling into an unhealthy description. You give free rein to the reader's imagination and his/her freedom of interpretation. This is an amazing feat.

Well, there's no bloody or sensational aspect, no blood and thunder. In difficult moments, I'd rather go through the characters' feelings, through their facial expression. That's the best resonance chamber since when difficult moments occur without witnesses or victims, they barely exist. In the end, what is really impressive is to see it happen in the eyes of a character.

For instance, there's a sentence that tears me apart when I read it again: « Never let a child see his father in the act of betrayal », and actually, seeing Tobie discover his father collapsing in front of the worst barbarity is something terrible, it means that all at once, all Tobie's references are collapsing, there's nothing left. That's why very quickly, at the beginning of the next chapter, I start unveiling the trickery, because I find it too tough to let the reader too long with the idea that Sim Lolness is a traitor...

I'd like to tell you a thousand thanks for this fabulous saga, and for the final twist that gives us an appetite to discover the sequel to this marvellous adventure. Congratulations!

Thanks for spreading the words of Tobie, I have the feeling he is finding his way.



TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE: “CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IS THE PLACE WHERE I FOUND MY FREEDOM”⁸



You may not know him, but you have heard about his books for children. *Tobie Lolness*, for example, is the story of a teenager, a millimetre and a half tall, who lives in a tree world. An immense success in bookshops, translated into 28 languages, being adapted for the cinema. Or *Vango*, an adventure novel in the interwar period, a chase from the parvise of Notre Dame to the Aeolian islands, by boat, train and even by zeppelin! On the occasion of the Montreuil Children’s Book Fair and the publication of his new novel *Victoria rêve* (Victoria Dreams), by Gallimard, Timothée de Fombelle, 39 years old, who started by the theatre and didn’t renounce it, is putting himself on the front of the stage for once.

What is children’s literature?

It’s the place where I found my freedom. I reached it like the American pioneers reached the grand prairies, I saw fertile soil, more prey than you’ll know what to do with, space, timber, water... And I settled down. Then I was trapped! Trapped by a place where I feel fine. Writing for children is a

hideout, a shack, a place linked to children. A refuge where pressure is less important: I studied literature and I felt very quickly what was “serious literature”, I admire it, but it paralyzes me. A novel for children allows me to “make literature” by surprise, without realizing it.

What is the link to childhood?

The novel for children is a prolongation of the childhood spirit. Not in the childish sense: I never feel obliged to mumble to be understood. Children are familiar with complex universes, and the Media they use are complex as well, the video games also. They master the world. The link to childhood, it’s the spirit of freedom, the one I tried to nurture in my 7-year-old daughter, before the constraints of adult life. I went through some rough events, the untimely death of my father in particular, and I have the feeling that the earth split, one day. I found myself on the wrong side, that of adult age. I did not stay on the edge, I continued my way, but I wanted to preserve the memory of what I had left behind me. I spoke of a shack: for me, books are shacks, a little away from the world. I escape into the imagination where I can tinker. I like tinkering, this craft dimension, I like making things, and the book is one among many. I remember the boats I used to build as a child, with a piece of tree bark and a toothpick; I put all my faith in it. I want to keep that in what I write. At no time do I ask myself: “What will I write for these kids?” I write for me as I am today, as I was yesterday, as I will be tomorrow; what resembles me.

⁸ Interview of Timothée de Fombelle by Michel Abescat, translated by Hasmig Chahinian, published in the weekly magazine *Télérama*. [Available online](#). Published on 1 December 2012. Updated on 1 April 2014.

Vango, your hero, is nostalgic for a lost paradise. Does he resemble you?

Yes. Nostalgia is an extraordinary subject and I amuse myself in writing in the tradition of the serials authors, like Dumas for example, but I'm just an heir who lives in his own time. My heroes all have a lost paradise, but also a quest: they look for an opening, the hole in the fence to continue. For me, to stay "at the page of childhood" is not a combat, it's natural and it doesn't hinder me. I finished my first novel, *Tobie Lolness*, the very night when my daughter was born.

What kind of family do you come from?

A large family, we are four brothers and a little sister. My father was an architect, my mother more turned towards psychology, a family based in Paris but travelling a lot according to my father's work. Therefore, I'm a Parisian, but with parenthesis. I lived in Morocco and the Ivory Coast very intense moments that have been multipliers of life and that gave me a particular sensitivity to exile, and uprooting. In this family, there is also a long tradition of theatre, but that is restricted to the private circle. For generations, we disguised ourselves, we played, we wrote plays. I saw my grandfather, a former ambassador, in unimaginable costumes! I received the tradition of playing as a heritage, but we are very far from unconsciousness. On the contrary, my family is marked by a form of tragic conscience; we lived healthily through many losses... And with some hope too. Black humour is part of our education.

How old were you when your father passed away?

I wasn't 20 years old yet, but I accompanied him through the long years of his sickness, a cancer that made him suffer a lot. I left everything to be able to do that, I was the only one who could do it, it was just a matter of postponing a BA degree for a year. And I felt what was essential. Today, I know that none of my books would have been written as they have been if I hadn't lived this experience. God knows I only felt torn up by this disappearance, and yet it has been fertile. The absence of this father is mysterious. He did not occupy the space. And yet an airflow was created at his death, his children found their roles, and he left some space. Without that, maybe I would have taken less responsibility; maybe I would not have broken that tradition that said that everyone wrote in this family, the grandfather, and the grandmother, but without ever publishing anything, without exposing themselves in bookshops.

Was it at the death of your father that you felt you were an adult?

When I was speaking of a fracture, of this sudden feeling of finding myself on the other side, I was thinking about that event. My father's death happened at a moment when I was capable of living this passage. I would have lived the separation of my parents differently, for example. But death has something inexorable, against which we can't fight, and that meets that tragic consciousness I was talking about. Death and panache, for me, are not incompatible. I evidently see injustice in physical suffering, I found it unjust to see my father crawl in the living room, but it was a struggle for life.

Is that what he passed on to you?

Yes; moreover, two days before his death, he told me: "What an idiot I have been not to have created more". He was an architect and he did nothing but create! It's a form of passport for creation that he gave me. Today I spend my time creating objects.

And you're settled in a workshop...

I've been working on it for a year now; I'm putting in an old parquet floor of the XIXth century, a stairway in scrap iron that has lived two or three lives before. And I write in the workshop. It's also a hideout, a shack, the den and the point of reference. I alternate between writing and manual work. I write during the craftsmen's work hours, never at night by the candlelight. Before that, I worked at the libraries' rhythm for

years. The National Library [of France] is a bunker, you feel protected there, you arrive at 9h, at the opening, and you're thrown out at 20h. I have also spent a lot of time at the Mazarine Library. A phone rings, and all the readers get all worked up, you have to be disconnected from the rest of the world. I love libraries and the forests of books that surround me there. I do not open one, because I gather a lot of information before writing, but never while I'm writing.

Faithful to the family tradition, you have started with theatre.

I wrote short plays very early. With my brothers and cousins. During the summer, we went to the village to inform them of our shows. The roles were given naturally. I was in charge of the writing. When I was 12-13 years old, I started understanding the plastic dimension of language, the material to sculpt. And suddenly words have become my country. Language has become my weapon.

Your weapon? Why this metaphor?

I want to write strong things that catch the reader by the neck. And writing is a weapon for me to manage in life; it's the machete I use to clear the road. In the beginning, I didn't think of writing as a profession, of course. After my literary studies, I was a teacher in a school, at the Courneuve and Gonesse. But I already had the feeling that the beating heart of my work was on a theatre stage where, at nightfall, I told my stories. It became a profession from the exterior, thanks to people who spotted what I did. I was 26 years old when one of my texts, *Le Phare* (The Lighthouse), was staged for the first time by a professional who had seen it when I had played it with my little brother in a crypt under Paris. Years later, it was played at the Théâtre du Marais by the actor Clément Sibony. In the same way, it's thanks to someone who talked to Hubert Nyssen, the publisher of Actes Sud, that my play *Je danse toujours* (I always dance) was published in 2003. Then read in Avignon.

What made you publish, at 33, your first novel, *Tobie Lolness*?

It was a very ripe fruit when I started writing. I kept this story of the people of the tree since I was 12 years old, I have told it to some people. But it didn't fit on the theatre stage where I suddenly felt constrained. So I started, without really realizing it. I wrote "Tobie was just one and a half millimetres tall, not exactly big for a boy of his age", and it started. I guessed it would be a novel for children, but I didn't constrain myself in any way. I even sent my manuscript to the two addresses of Gallimard, at the youth literature address and the NRF address, from the post office nearby. A month later, Gallimard Jeunesse called me. But I like nothing more than to create a surprise among the adults that break into my books. I remember that scene from *Babette's Dinner*, by Karen Blixen, of this general that arrives in a fjord lost somewhere in Norway, sits at the table of this small traditional community where they usually eat dried fish and who suddenly realizes he's drinking Veuve Clicquot 1860 and tasting "Babette's Cailles en Sarcophagi". It's this miracle that I dream of provoking for the adult reader who adventures, after passing many obstacles, in this natural reserve of children's literature. And when I see, on the occasion of a meeting in a bookshop, generations mixing around *Vango*, my second saga situated in the interwar period, my happiness, as an author, is complete!

What do you seek to transmit?

Let us not be mistaken, it's the spirit of adventure that transports the reader. One should beware of "messages". But if



I transmit something, it's the idea of the fragility of beings and the world. The only true responsibility I give myself is to pass on the taste of reading, to provide an experience of the pleasure of reading. And its modernity. The book is an incomparable object in its capacity to get the human brain moving. No drug, no electronic material, and no video game can print itself so differently in each brain, each memory, create sparkles and rebounds with memories that are different for each person.

Your latest book, *Victoria rêve* (Victoria Dreams), is also a hymn to the imagination...

Unfortunately, imagination is often linked to boredom. It's an accident in the rhythm of life. I remember these endless journeys in the car when I was a child. A continuous line on the highway was, for me, a take-off runway to dream. The book is not accidental; it is there for that precisely, to make imagination live. It's a bubble of freedom, a lung that allows resisting the grip of consumption, of multi-connection. Imagination is a stop in time, the possibility to master it, to slow it down. It's a vital respiration. But for my heroine, Victoria, imagination is also a hideout, the place where she evades from life. I wanted reality to enter her existence disguised as imagination. And that she would become an adult by discovering that reality can be even more surprising than a dream. The magic of love, for me, is the surprise of reality.



Has the success of your books for children taken you away from the theatre?

No, like novels for children, theatre is for me a natural reserve. It is enough to have some pieces of twine and two or three actors. There is even no need to speak, the text can change every night, and it's incredibly alive, a theatre. But it's a reserve full of Indians not always welcoming. Unlike the writing of a novel, you need a lot of authorisations, the crush of a theatre director, a stage director. At the moment, I'm writing texts for people who asked for them. For the choreograph Valérie Rivière, for example. For the National Orchestra of Ile-de-France, who ordered an adaptation of one of my novels, *Céleste, ma planète*, which will become an opera in 2014. And I have some plays in my pocket that, I'm sure, will see the light of day. Theatre requests an everyday presence, and novels monopolize me.

Writing a novel for adults doesn't tempt you?

I don't exclude it, but the projects are king. They are vital for me; they often spurt out of childhood. They are the ones deciding where they will be more at ease, theatre play, scenario, adult novel or children's novel. The next book will be about tales, I hope it will be relevant for readers from 7 to 107 years old. But this one will be a book for children. I can't help it.

TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE, THE WRITER WHO GETS TEENAGERS READING⁹

The author has completed *Alma*, an ambitious trilogy that takes young readers on a journey through the history of revolutions, from France to Saint-Domingue. We take a look back at a project he has been working on since he was 13.

By Françoise Dargent. Published on June 8, 2024



The day before our interview, Timothée de Fombelle was meeting pupils at a secondary school in Savoie. Together, they had planted a tree in the schoolyard *'in homage to Tobie'*. Tobie, whose life in literature began with this marvellous opening line: *'Tobie was a millimetre and a half long, which wasn't very big for his age'*. That was 18 years ago, a majority, and an eternity in the world of children's literature, where readers are, by nature, fickle. But the publication of *Tobie Lolness* by Gallimard was an event: the remarkable return of the French adventure novel in a sector monopolised by the all-powerful Anglo-Saxon fantasy and its king Harry Potter.

18 years later, with 1.8 million copies of his various books sold, Timothée de Fombelle persists and signs the 3rd volume of *Alma*, a 1,400-page historical saga that covers subjects rarely told in books for teenagers, such as the slave trade and the French Revolution. The novelist and playwright is no stranger to rave reviews, but he doesn't take them for granted. *'The fear that the reader will fall asleep never leaves me,'* he says. *'I'm addressing a fickle readership with a thousand reasons not to read. You have to find a way to captivate them, to hypnotise them.'*

His approach is based on a solid storyline, tried and tested natural ingredients such as piracy for *Alma* and the idea that you are never as interesting as you are when you are 13, the age at which his heroes begin their adventures.

'I wouldn't give up on them for the world, because they're at that age when a book can be an encounter. This fragility is so stimulating. I have to use all the weapons of literature to hold them.' *'The minimum elegance is to reach out to them, especially when tackling a subject that carries a certain gravity'*, he also said about *Alma*. Dozens of times he has recounted the genesis of this trilogy about an African sibling uprooted from his homeland at the end of the 18th century, a story that began in his mind when he was 13, visiting Ghana with his family and discovering an abandoned fortress where the slaves were kept before

⁹ Translated from: « Timothée de Fombelle, l'écrivain qui fait lire les ados », interview by Françoise Dargent, in *Le Figaro*, 8 June 2024.

being deported. *'I was already writing and I swore to myself, in front of the labyrinth of this white prison, facing the sea, that one day I would tell the story of this crime of slavery.'*

Thierry Laroche, Editorial Director at Gallimard Jeunesse, followed the author's writing process. *'A project like this has come a long way and has taken a long time to mature. Timothée has been talking to me about it for several years, and over time I've seen him become an expert on the subject. It's even impressive.'* In the former Parisian studio that serves as the author's office, piles of books bear witness to this. For a long time, the walls were covered with plans of the *Aurore*, the 18th-century ship that served as a model for his "Douce Amélie", the map of the town of Cap-Français in Saint-Domingue where his saga ends, and the map of Paris in 1789, used to define the timing of the movements of his characters as they embarked on the storming of the Bastille. Timothée de Fombelle explains that he drew up a business plan to get as close as possible to the economy of the plantations, which he brings to life in the mansions and huts of the slaves. In the end, he picked up a large notebook, his '*bible*', in which he traced the lives of his many characters, colour-coded '*so as not to leave anyone behind*'. *'I had to cross-reference my readings and sources,'* he explains. *'The mass gives me a vision that allows me to move around in this era. I'm like a blind man who knows the house. At the same time, books and more books appeared that interested me. Most of these sources are less than 5 years old.'*



'Every novelist has the right to tell whatever he wants'

Behind the fluidity of the narrative lies an extremely well-constructed work, making it a cornerstone in the work of a writer who does not shy away from challenges in this generally highly formatted and sometimes timid field for young people. Four years ago, when the first volume of *Alma* came out, *Tobie Alone's* English publisher refused to publish it on the grounds that a white writer was taking on a story that was not his own. At the time, the author himself said: *'I often deny that I am a committed writer or one who reflects society in the present. But this coincidence reinforces my idea that novelists are porous to the world.'* He pointed out that almost nothing had been written on the subject. Another English publisher has since published it.

For Thierry Laroche, *'Timothée is so inhabited by the responsibility that is his, he is so authentic and sincere in his approach that he fears nothing. His response to criticism is this marvellous work. I believe that all writers have the right to tell their own stories, and here Timothée is reaffirming the power of fiction. This book had to exist. It has no equivalent.'* For the author himself, writing *Alma* was a challenge. *'It has nothing to do with my other books. It was in my draft from the start: to promise a little too much. I remember in the first volume how impossible it seemed. There was an imbalance in the way I wrote. Tackling three continents, developing three central characters, Alma, Amélie the planter's daughter and*

Joseph, who comes into all this just as the reader comes into the story. I wanted to trap my readers in the faith and trust they have in my previous novels, to talk to them about something serious,' he admits.

This is evident in the breadth of this fresco and in a thousand details that show a desire to take his young readers into more difficult territory, such as the financial issues of the time or social inequalities. Eloquent details such as when he writes that one of his characters, an elegant nobleman, uses a pound of flour to powder his face every day. Nothing is left to chance: *'One of the rules I set myself was to write in the present tense to avoid dustiness. At the same time, I had to re-enchant this time, because it can be icy. It took me 6 months to find the right tone.'*

A tone that retains the imprint of a novelist with a swirling and serious pen, writing about slaves: *'In these nineteen months, beautifully recounted like the round of the seasons by the registers of the Terres Rouges, in this ballet of work and days, one or two details are missing. The men and women who die on the job, the autumn epidemics, the early-morning stomach aches, the skin that becomes infected after a beating, the despair of a few newcomers who are bought in Port-au-Prince to replace those who have disappeared, the nightmares in the middle of the night, the children who will not be born, the cries, the silences, and the fever of the sick, uprooted men and women who are rushed to the hold of a ship at the time of the first coffee harvest'.*

Playing down the act of writing

He returns to the idea of freedom that motivates each of his fiction characters. He finds his own freedom in children's literature, it allows him to move forward at his own pace. *'I don't sign contracts until I've finished writing. Each book has to be sponsored by the previous one. I owe this freedom to my readers,'* says the author, who is no stranger to drawing his stories from the wellspring of childhood. He recounts this in the only book he has written for adults, *Neverland* (L'Iconoclaste), recalling in particular a grandfather who gave him his first taste of writing.

'I was given the role of public writer in the family. I used to write wedding speeches and notes. It's a kind of polygraph that has strengthened my writing. I didn't realise until very recently that I had a form of skill. When I'm opposite François Place, who draws, you can see his science. Writing, on the other hand, is a soft science. It's something risky that requires you to go beyond your natural gifts.'

Like all writers, he has his habits. He has set up his office in a workshop to *'play down the act of writing'*. The place suits this born handyman, who uses the vocabulary of a craftsman to talk about his literary enterprise as well as his work, for the staircase he will soon be building to access the floor above, and for the book, which requires *'more than just lining up signs'*. His mantra is *'Make is stand upright'*. You can count on the foundations, they are solid.



Timothee de Fombelle: Marsh Award Winner 2009

Timothee de Fombelle and Sarah Ardizzone arrive at the offices of Walker Books straight off the train from Cornwall, where they had led a translation workshop at the Eden Project based on de Fombelle's Marsh Award-winning novel, *Toby Alone*.



Timothee de Fombelle

The setting for the workshop was an appropriate one, for *Toby Alone* and its sequel *Toby and the Secrets of the Tree* have strong environmental themes running through them. 13-year-old Toby is one and a half millimetres tall. His scientist father, Sim, proves that the tree that is their world is alive, but his groundbreaking discovery puts him in conflict with the despotic property developer Joe Mitch, who seeks to exploit the tree for his own gain regardless of the cost.

Toby's parents are imprisoned but the boy escapes, and the two books recount Toby's years as a fugitive in and around the tree, and his struggle to rescue his parents and the tree before both are destroyed.

Toby Alone has already been translated into 24 languages and de Fombelle is in discussions with two producers about possible film adaptations.

Both author and translator have a background in the theatre, which has undoubtedly contributed to the book's strong dialogue and the ease with which the transition to film can be imagined.

Although he is surprised by the success of his debut novel, which has been described as a cross between *The Borrowers* and *Animal Farm*, de Fombelle confesses that he secretly had high hopes for it.

“I was really alone, with no publishing house. I had this story to tell. But writing the story I knew that there was something a little classic in this story. I decided to protect this classic thing in the book.”

‘Sometimes I wanted to make little winks to actual things, like reality TV. But I told myself: “No. Reality TV will be dead in 10 years, but your book must stay longer.” So perhaps sometimes I was attentive to have something that lasted. I don't like books that are like handkerchiefs, you can throw them out. In France we think about sustainable development. Sustainable literature is what I want to write and it's what I want people to read.’

As a child, the author spent many happy hours exploring the outdoors and he knew instinctively that his first book would be set in a tree. ‘I wanted a real place – a place that I love and that I know,’ he explains. ‘First came the place, then the big rules of the story: having small characters to make nature magic.’ He immersed himself in the setting while writing the book.

A lot of chapters were written under a tree in the south of France or the west of France. I would put my nose on the trunk of the tree to see the canyons.

In order to keep track of the huge cast of characters and the multiple plot threads, he literally mapped out the links between characters and settings, but he left space in the writing process for his creations to surprise him.

'I didn't have a psychological profile of each character. I wanted to discover them during the action. I didn't want to limit it. When I write plays I always have a little thing, which is not to forget the character in the corner – every character has their part to play. It was the same here. I didn't want to forget one character. Everyone has a destiny.'

For translator Sarah Ardizzone, the fact that *Toby Alone* is a work of fantasy removed some of the hurdles that often occur when translating a work set in another culture. 'We didn't have to deal with many issues about France in this because it's set in a tree, so it could be anywhere. But we had a very distinctive author's voice with a real, infectious enthusiasm for these characters, and there was a real dynamism coming from that. My job was to keep that going.'

It's Timothee's voice, but in a different culture and a different language. I needed to keep the author's voice and ensure that for a British audience it's still a fast, compelling read. It's got this big sweep of epic, but it's a very easy read in the sense that it's not overly dense.

'There are time lag issues, but it flows. So I needed to recreate that experience. What I'm most proud of is that it's a story that's really alive and really compelling and is true to Timothee, but it's completely open to a UK readership and they wouldn't have been able to read it otherwise.'

'I needed to keep the author's voice and ensure that for a British audience it's still a fast, compelling read'

Ardizzone worked with the book's editor at Walker, Jane Winterbotham, and her assistant editor Helen Thomas, on details of wording as well as larger structural issues. 'There were aspects where we felt that for a British readership it would be more of a cliffhanger if we ended it there or started it here. Our sense of dramatic timing might be slightly different from the French, so we might want to shunt it slightly.'

At some level, translation is a collaborative art, so particularly on something like this that needs a lot of help with story boarding and keeping it on track, it works very well in a group situation - being precious about it in the right way, holding onto the stuff that's very dear to you and at the same time being very open about seeing how you can get the best book out of it.

One significant change made to the British version was the title. The French original is called *Tobie Lolness* and the sequel *Elisha's Eyes*. De Fombelle has mixed feelings about the alterations, particularly to the second book – Elisha is the name of his young daughter – but accepts the reasons the changes were necessary for a British readership.

'For us, Lolness is a fantastic name, but it's a fantastical name,' explains Ardizzone. 'Nobody knows Timothee to begin with, nobody knows the Toby character to begin with, so you want something that's going to be memorable and that's going to draw you in.'

'For the second book, we had worked hard to get an audience for Toby so we wanted to keep Toby, but show that it was heading off in a different direction. You have to get this character on people's radar.'

Although the book tackles serious issues such as racism and environmental destruction, de Fombelle keeps the tone light and avoids burdening readers with too many weighty messages.

'I wanted to take my reader with me,' he says. 'A suitcase mustn't be too heavy to come with me. Young readers have a lot of temptations. They are very busy with their lives, with TV and video games and all that. So because I wanted them to come with me through the story it was really natural for me to be light, light. So the main thing was my story and the destiny of my characters.'

If de Fombelle has an obvious attachment to his characters, this is in large part because many of them are based on himself and his family.

'I put a lot of personal things in this book', he admits. 'In your first novel you write about your problems, your loves, and here I wanted something very generous and very far from my life, but there's a lot of my life in this book. There are a lot of escapes from prison. My grandfather was in jails in Germany during the war.'

Ever since I was three or four he told me about his escapes in the car when we went to the countryside. He told me, "When you are in prison your mission is to escape." I thought I would be in prison one day! When you are six that's really something.

'Yesterday I talked with Sarah about my sister, who was adopted. She is Indian and she's French. When I invented the character of Mano, who has problems with his family, it was exactly when my sister has problems with us.'

'Four brothers and one sister, and her fight is to say "I'm different from you, and I want to be different." So she made everything different, so there were problems. When I reread my book, it's full of personal things...Democracy too.'

There were a lot of things in France – Le Pen and the extreme right – when I was writing my book. I wrote very personal plays – very dense and very intimate – but they're less intimate than the book.

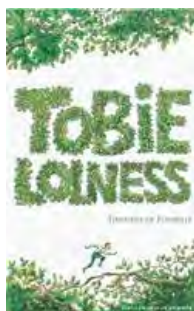
Although some French critics felt that the ending was too optimistic, the author is unapologetic. 'I wanted something soft, gentle, and I wanted windows open about hope. When I invented the main characters I first wrote "T", like Timothee, then Tobie. I wanted to recognise myself in this character. I wanted him to be happy at the end, as I wanted to be happy.'

Source:

<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/children/authors/100>

AWARDS LIST

MAIN AWARDS



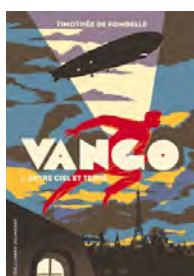
TOBIE LOLNESS

French National Awards

Prix 12/17, Brive-la-Gaillarde 2006. Prize 12-14-year-olds
Prix Saint-Exupéry 2006, Novel category
Grand Prix de l'imaginaire 2007. Children's novel category
Prix Lire au collège 2006
Prix Tam Tam Je bouquine 2006
Prix Sorcières 2007
Grand prix des jeunes lecteurs Solidarité 2007
Prix Ardep [Association régionale des documentalistes de l'enseignement privé d'Île-de-France] 2007
Prix Millepages Jeunesse 2007
Prix Ogre, second place ex-aequo, 2007
Prix Gayant-Lecture 2008
Prix Page à page 2008

International Awards

IBBY Honour list 200. Best French Children's Novel
Prix Libbylit 2006. Best Francophone Novel. Belgium
Premio Andersen 9-12. Italy
Premio Giovanni Arpino. City of Bra, Italy
Prix Versele 2008. Belgium
Prize Zilveren Griffel 2008. The Netherlands
Premio "Guy Taché, l'Amico dei Bambini" 2008. Italy
Premio "Io.Premio" Biblioteche di Roma" 2008. Rome, Italy
Palmarès des Jeunes. Cantons of Neufchatel, Jura and Bern. Switzerland
2009 Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation. UK
Selected as the "best young adult book of the year 2008" by *The China Times*. Taiwan
IBBY Zlata Stuha (Golden Ribbon) 2008. Czech Republic
Shortlist of the UK Literacy Association Award 2009. UK
Best Book of the Month, March 2009. Amazon.com. USA



VANGO

French National Awards

Prix des Mordus du polar [Bibliothèques de la Ville de Paris], 2011
Prix Livrentête, Romans juniors, ex-aequo, 2011

International Awards

Prix Jeunesse des Libraires du Québec, 2011. Canada

IBBY Honour list 2012. Best French Children's Novel

Prix Ado lisant 2012. Belgium

English Pen Award, 2013

Selected by *The Independent* as one of ten best 2013 Children's titles. UK

Selected by *The Guardian* as one of the best YA fiction titles for Christmas, 2013. UK

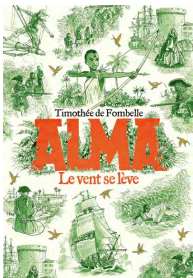
Selected by *The Junior Library Guild*, 2014. USA



PERLE

French National Awards

Pépite du roman ado européen, [Salon du livre et de la presse pour la jeunesse de Montreuil], 2014



ALMA. LIVRE I. LE VENT SE LÈVE

French National Awards

Prix Gulli-du-roman, 2021

Prix France Télévisions, 2021

Prix Sorcières, catégorie Carrément Passionnant, univers Maxi

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Gallimard Jeunesse, 2010. 393 p., in the series « Folio Junior, 1528 »

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New edition:

Gallimard Jeunesse, 2010. 425 p., in the series « Folio Junior, 1551 »

Tobie Lolness, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2008. 660 p., in the series « Hors série littérature »

La vie suspendue [Toby Alone] and *Les yeux d'Elisha* [Toby and the Secrets of the Tree] in a single volume.

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New editions:

Ill. Julie Ricossé, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2009, 91 p., in the series « Folio junior, 1495 »

Interpreted by the National Orchestra of Ile-de-France, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2014. 96 p. + 1 CD audio, in the series « Folio junior »

2008

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Le jour où je serai grande : une histoire de Poucette [The day I grow up: a Thumbelina story]. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2019. 20 p.

Quelqu'un m'attend derrière la neige [Someone is waiting for me behind the snow]; ill. Thomas Campi. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2019

2020

Alma ; Livre I. Le vent se lève [Alma; Book I. The wind rises]; ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2020. 388 p.

Read by Gaël Kamilindi, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2021, 1 CD MP3, in the series « Ecoutez lire »

2021

Alma : Livre II. L'enchanteuse [Alma: Book II. The Enchantress]; ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard

jeunesse, 2021. 416 p

Read by Gaël Kamilindi, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2023, 1 CD MP3, in the series « Ecoutez lire »

Esther Andersen; ill. Irène Bonacina. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2021. 68 p.

Le livre bleu [The blue book]. Paris: Belin jeunesse, 2021

2022

101 façons de lire tout le temps [101 Ways of Reading all the Time]; ill. Benjamin Chaud. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2022. [116] p.

2024

Alma : Livre III. La liberté [Alma: Book III. Freedom]; ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2024. 468 p

PREFACE WRITER

2012 *Le Petit Prince* [The little prince], Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, pref. Timothée de Fombelle. Paris, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2012. 124 p. (Bibliothèque Gallimard jeunesse)

2016 *Ça peut pas faire de mal : la littérature jeunesse : Joseph Kessel, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Michel Tournier* [It can't hurt: children's literature: Joseph Kessel, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Michel Tournier]; in collaboration with Estelle Gapp and Judith Soussan ; pref. Timothée de Fombelle ; read by Guillaume Gallienne ; Philippe Dubosson. Paris: Gallimard: France Inter, 2016. 224 p. + 2 CD

Republished in 2024

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTIONS

2000 Screenplay for *Tobie Lolness*, the movie, Amber Entertainment & Angel & Fine Productions.

2015 Adapting *The Little Prince* for a cartoon series, Gallimard, 2015.

Participating in the screenplay of *Les grandes vacances* [The Summer holidays], a cartoon series. Paris, France Télévisions Distribution, 2015. <http://www.ludo.fr/heros/les-grandes-grandes-vacances> [À revoir sur Ludo.fr](#)

ADULTS' LITERATURE

AUTHOR

2003 *Je danse toujours* [I always dance]. Arles, Actes Sud, 2003. 38 p. (Un endroit où aller, 114)

2017 *Neverland*. Paris: l'Iconoclaste, 2017. 116 p.

TRANSLATOR

2004 Przemyslaw Nowakowski, *Trois femmes autour de mon lit* [Three women around my bed], translated. from Polish by Joanna Warsza and Timothée de Fombelle. Paris, Aux nouvelles écritures théâtrales, 2004.

COLLECTIVE WORKS

La Grande guerre : histoires inspirées par des objets emblématiques de 1914-1918 [The Great War: stories inspired by emblematic objects from 1914-1918]. David Almond, John Boyce, Tracy Chevalier... et al. ; ill. Jim Kay ; translated from English (USA) by Michel Laporte. Vanves : Hachette, 2015. 313 p.

New edition:

Vanves : le Livre de poche, 2017. 313 p. (Le livre de poche. Jeunesse)

Paysages nomades ; #3. T'es qui toi ? : création à seize mains [Nomadic landscapes; #3. Who are you? a sixteen-hand creation]. Bordeaux : les Éditions Moires, 2015. 67 p. (Clotho). Le Glob théâtre

Si on chantait ! [Let's sing!]. Susie Morgenstern, Timothée de Fombelle, Clémentine Beauvais... et al. Paris: Pocket jeunesse-PKJ, 2020. 228 p.

PLAYS

CHOREOGRAPHIC PLAYS

2008 In collaboration with Compagnie « Paul les oiseaux » and the choreograph Valérie Rivière. *Chambres d'hôtels* [Hotel rooms] (Chambre 26 ; Chambre 360 et Chambre 4). Ocean Air. 2008

THEATRE

La baignoire et les deux chaises, feuilleton théâtral [The bath and the two chairs, theatrical serial], based on Jean-Michel Ribes' idea, co-written by 15 writers: Pierre Bénézit, Timothée de Fombelle, Jean-Paul Farré... [et al.]. Paris, Théâtre du Rond-Point, 2005

Le déjeuner sur l'herbe [Lunch on the grass]. For the « Troupe des Bords de Scène »

Les enfants sauvages [Wild children].

Theatre for children written with the actress Betty Heurtebise and « La Petite fabrique », 2009

Grand bal et Petits artifices [Grand ball and fireworks] For the « Troupe des Bords de Scène »

Jazz Boxe, avec Freddy Saïd Skouma. Musical show. Aubervilliers, Théâtre Zingaro, 2008

Octobre en bruine [October in drizzle]. For the « Troupe des Bords de Scène »

Le phare [The lighthouse]. Created in Paris, Théâtre du Marais, 2001

La robe des choses [The dress of things]. Paris, Théâtrales l'association, 2001. Edited in Actes Sud, 2003 under the title *Je danse toujours* [I always dance]..

Rose Cats. Created in Paris, Théâtre du Renard, 2004

Saint-Pierre sous terre [Saint-Peter underground] the Comedy created in Paris, Théâtre du Rond-Point, 2005

FESTIVAL

Festival Le Mois Molière. Versailles, 2003

RADIO

Je sais tout. France-Culture, 2006

La mouche du Pharaon. France-Culture, 2003

Le phare. France-Culture, 2002

MORE INFORMATION

ARTICLES ABOUT TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE

Timothée de Fombelle. La Revue des livres pour enfants n°320, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France / Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse, September 2021.

Timothée de Fombelle : entretien inédit avec l'auteur, extraits et conseils de lecture, activités pédagogiques [Timothée de Fombelle: previously unpublished interview with the author, extracts and reading advice, educational activities]. Paris : Cercle Gallimard de l'enseignement, 2015. 60 p.

« Timothée de Fombelle : L'écriture au millimètre », in *Secrets d'auteurs*, Hors-série n°2 de *La Revue des livres pour enfants*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France / Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse, 2015, pp. 66-71.

Beaude, Pierre-Marie

« Tobie Lolness, de Timothée de Fombelle ». *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 2007, n° 235, p. 139-142
Online at: <http://lajoieparleslivres.bnf.fr>

Bocquet, Vincent

« Prix Lire au collègue : Tobie Lolness de Timothée de Fombelle ». *Lire au collège*, 2007, n° 76, p. 16-21

Ganiayre, Claude

« Un héros minuscule ». *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 2008, n° 241, p. 103-107
Online at: <http://lajoieparleslivres.bnf.fr>

Galli, Silvia ; Tapinos, Ariane

« Timothée, prestidigitateur heureux : deux rencontres avec Timothée de Fombelle, à propos de *Vango* et de *Les enfants sauvages* ». *Citrouille*, 2010, n° 56, p. 9-16

Neeman, Sylvie

« Timothée de Fombelle, la source d'un motif », *Parole*, 2011, n°2, pp. 12-13
« Timothée de Fombelle : "Je cherche la magie du réel" », *Virgule*, 2011, n°89, pp. 12-17

SEMINARS

Rencontres européennes de la littérature pour la jeunesse. 3 : colloque du vendredi 30 novembre 2012

Jacques Vidal-Naquet, Nathalie Beau ; Timothée de Fombelle, Anaïs Gonzalez-Suescun, Marie-Pierre Litaudon... [et al.], aut. du texte ; Timothée de Fombelle, Anaïs Gonzalez-Suescun, Marie-Pierre Litaudon... [et al.], participants. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2012.

3 videos (1 h 40 min, 1 h 47 min, 4 h 09 min) (French National Library's Conferences)

Soulé, Véronique (interview)

« Timothée de Fombelle : conférence du 20 janvier 2011 » [Audio recording]. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2011.

2 audio files (French National Library's Conferences, Les visiteurs du soir)

ONLINE RESOURCES

A SELECTION OF ARTICLES AND ONLINE INTERVIEWS

Michel Abescat

« [Entretien : Timothée de Fombelle : "La littérature jeunesse est le lieu où j'ai trouvé ma liberté"](#) », 1 December 2012. In « *Télérama* ».

Stéphane Bataillon and Stéphane Dreyfus

« Pour que les enfants lisent, à nous d'écrire des livres irrésistibles », 29 May 2024 in *La Croix*

Françoise Dargent

« Timothée de Fombelle : l'aventure enchantée », 13 June 2024 in *Le Figaro*

Virginie Jacobberger-Lavoué

« [Timothée de Fombelle, metteur en scène des mots](#) », 14 mars 2013. In « *Valeurs actuelles* ».

WEBSITES AND BLOGS

« [Timothée de Fombelle](#) ». [Online]. In: <https://www.gallimard-jeunesse.fr/Auteur/Timothee-de-Fombelle>

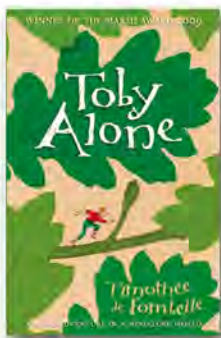
« [Timothée de Fombelle](#) ». [Online]. In <http://timotheedefombelle.weebly.com/>

DOSSIER TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE

What about abroad?

BY ANNE BLANCHARD

Publishers also measure an author's success by the number of translations it generates. One of Anne Bouteloup's greatest professional successes, as head of foreign rights at Gallimard Jeunesse until 2020, is *Tobie Lolness*, or *Toby Alone* in English.



↑
In English.



↑
In Hebrew.



↓
In Japanese

TOBIE THE INTERNATIONAL

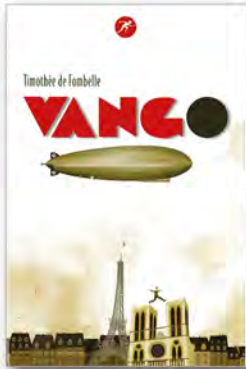
Who on this planet doesn't love trees? Who remains indifferent to the fight between Good and Evil when it is well told? What culture does not have, in one form or another, its folklore of 'minuscules', thieves and other 'borrowers'? Add to this the feeling that professional readers, such as publishers, have had of witnessing the birth of a writer, playing with the same dexterity with the codes of adventure as with universal values: *Tobie Lolness* had a lot going for it to be a 'best seller' abroad.

Anne Bouteloup still remembers the 2006 Bologna Fair, where translation rights for children's books are sold. During the night, a Brazilian woman read one of the 25 copies of the translated manuscript brought by Gallimard Jeunesse, and came back in the morning with an offer in hand. Two rival Italian publishers and a German who had heard the news followed her, and for the first time in the history of French children's fiction, six Anglo-Saxon publishers outbid her. It was the US filiale of Walker Books that - bingo! - the winner. The result: more than 90,000 copies in English sold by 2021.

The number of sales of foreign translations of the novel is impressive: 24 in 2009 with 19 publishers, still very faithful in 2021. Very good sales, often proportional to the size of the language area, are accompanied by more modest print-runs, but still impressive performances: 4,000 copies in Vietnamese, 5,000 in Turkish, 7,500 in Hungarian and Czech.

All sizes and styles of house are represented. Several major independent publishers quickly acquired the rights: the German Gerstenberg, the Dutch Querido. But there is also a state publishing house in China (New Buds), an Italian religious publisher (San Paolo, now with Mondadori) and a big name in the Japanese children's sector, Iwasaki, which is publishing *Tobie Lolness* in 4 volumes (to date the only title by the author to have been translated).

One mystery remains: in Spanish, *Tobie* never really 'took'. No one can explain why. Yet the book is published by Salamandra, the local publisher of *The Little Prince* and *Harry Potter*. Each of *Timothée de Fombelle's* other titles was then sold by Spanish publishers, which perhaps explains why it hasn't really been a success in Spain (either in Castilian or Catalan) or in Latin America. Portugal, too, remains rather cold.



↑
In Italian



↑
In Turkish

LOYALTY, 'LIKE A FAMILY OF PUBLISHERS'.

While Tobie is the Timothée de Fombelle hero who will have travelled the furthest with the transfer of foreign rights, *Vango*, *Victoria rêve* and *Perle* are not to be outdone, with 17, 3 and 11 transfers respectively. Gerstenberg, the German faithful publisher, acquired the rights to *Vango*, *Victoria rêve*, *Le Livre de Perle* and the album *Quelqu'un m'attend derrière la neige*. Alma was then sold to Hanser, a leading German publisher in the humanities and social sciences, Gerstenberg not wishing, at the time of the negotiations - during the confinement - to commit to a trilogy. Walker Books/Candlewick, the English-language publisher, responded to each new release, until the fear of a negative reception for the story of a black slave told by a white man made it back down. There was one fortunate outcome: Europa Editions, a New York publisher specialising in foreign literature (with Christelle Dabos, Anna Gavaldà, Muriel Barbery and Elena Ferrante in its catalogue, for example). Enfin, let's mention the Czech Baobab, unconditional fan of 'Timothée'! ●

François Place's illustrations, which give the characters a strong visual identity, have certainly played a major role, since all the foreign publishers have decided to publish them, something we didn't expect them to do,' comments Anne Bouteloup.

↓

Illustration by François Place for the Italian edition of *Alma*, t. 1, *Le vent se lève*.

Top-sales of Tobie Lolness abroad (in number of copies in 2015)
Chinese: 156,000
English: 90,000
Italian: 50,000
German: 45,000
Japanese: 22,000
Dutch: 20,000

In France, Tobie Lolness, published in 2006 and 2007, sold over 560,000 copies (2021).

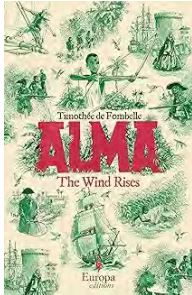


TRANSLATIONS OF MAJOR WORKS



101 FAÇONS DE LIRE TOUT LE TEMPS [101 WAYS OF READING ALL THE TIME]

Catalan, Chinese (Simplified), English (World), German, Italian, Korean, Spanish (World).



ALMA

Catalan, Chinese Simplified, Czech, Dutch, English UK/USA, Italian, Russian, Turkish.



LA BULLE [THE BUBBLE]

Chinese (Simplified), Russian, Turkish.



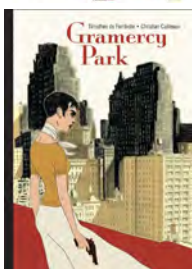
CÉLESTE MA PLANÈTE [CELESTE MY PLANET]

Albanian, English UK/USA, Italian, Portuguese (BR), Russian, Turkish.



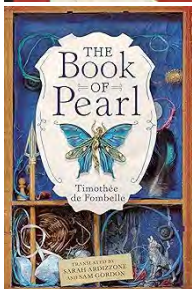
ESTHER ANDERSEN

Italian, Korean, Turkish.



GRAMERCY PARK

Croatian, English, Russian.



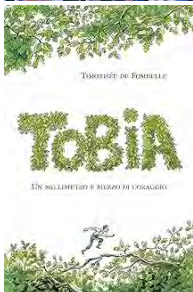
LE LIVRE DE PERLE [THE BOOK OF PEARL]

Czech, Dutch, English UK/USA, Estonian, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese (BR).



QUELQU'UN M'ATTEND DERRIÈRE LA NEIGE [SOMEONE IS WAITING FOR ME BEHIND THE SNOW]

Arabic, Czech, Dutch, English UK/USA, German, Italian, Portuguese (BR).



TOBIE LOLNESS [TOBY ALONE]

Albanian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese (Complex), Chinese (Simplified), Czech, Dutch, English UK/USA, Finnish, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Iranian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese (BR), Portuguese (Port), Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese.



VANGO

Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese Complex, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, English UK/USA, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese (BR), Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Spanish Latin America, Turkish, Vietnamese



VICTORIA RÊVE [VICTORIA DREAMS]

Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Portuguese (BR), Spanish, Turkish.

TOP TEN BOOKS

101 FAÇONS DE LIRE TOUT LE TEMPS [101 WAYS OF READING ALL THE TIME]

Ill. Benjamin Chaud. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2022.

After observing what children do with their bodies 'when they tip over into the imaginary', the author and illustrator present us with a series of portraits that communicate with each other: that of the absentee who dozes off while reading, and that of the Resistance fighter who reads, whatever the cost, despite children clinging to her back, at her heels; that of the horsewoman bent over her book astride a barricade, and that of the cowboy toppled over in his chair. The elasticity of the bodies, the blankets and the bedspreads make this tipping point into the imaginary graphically tender and fascinating, literally jubilant.



ALMA : LIVRE I. LE VENT SE LÈVE [ALMA; BOOK I. THE WIND RISES]

Ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2020.

Cut off from the world, hidden away in the heart of a protected valley in Africa, the man and woman had slowly relearned how to live. They had been able to start a family and hoped to be safe. Until a horse from nowhere and their children's curiosity about this other world threw them all out of the Garden of Eden... in 1786, at the heart of the slave trade and the triangular trade between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. A wide-ranging subject for an unforgettable adventure story that is ambitious, sincere, sensitive and nuanced.



ALMA : LIVRE II. L'ENCHANTEUSE [ALMA: BOOK II. THE ENCHANTRESS]

Ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2021

ALMA : LIVRE III. LA LIBERTÉ [ALMA: BOOK III. FREEDOM]

Ill. François Place. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2024.

CAPITAINE ROSALIE [CAPTAIN ROSALIE]

Ill. Isabelle Arsenault. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2018.

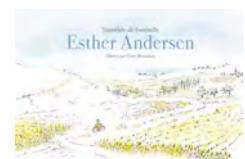
1917. Rosalie was only 5 years old, but here she was, dropped like a bundle at the back of the boys' class. Daddy is at war and Mummy is working. Silent, the little girl is on the lookout, trying with all her being to understand this world that doesn't turn round. Everything changes when Mum receives a blue letter that upsets her. Rosalie wants to know, and will find out, what this fateful letter says. A magnificent text to which the illustration adds a restrained grace. Previously published in: 'La Grande guerre: histoires inspirées par des objets emblématiques de 1914-1918' (Hachette, 2015).



ESTHER ANDERSEN

Ill. Irène Bonacina. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2021.

A little boy goes to live with his uncle in the country, to have the best holiday of his life. One day, when he gets lost on his bike, he discovers... the sea. On the shore, an even bigger wave awaits him, in the presence of a little girl, Esther Andersen, accompanied by her dog Boogie. The Italian-style illustrations in this magnificent album are splendidly timeless, the elegance and finesse of the illustrations blending perfectly with the delicate melancholy of the text. An instant classic!



GRAMERCY PARK

Ill. Christian Cailleaux. Paris: Gallimard bande dessinée, 2018.

Timothée de Fombelle brings all the grace of his writing to this magnificent comic strip, which is both a heart-rending love story and a crime thriller. The story is told in flashbacks, mixing different eras (from 1930s Paris to 1950s New York) and references to dance, jazz and film noir, in a supple, elegant drawing with carefully crafted colours. This is a deeply moving account of a life scuttled by history, misfortune and grief, and the extraordinary destiny of a melancholy and singular heroine.



LE LIVRE DE PERLE [THE BOOK OF PEARL]

Paris, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2014.

At the heart of this novel is the passionate love between Ilián, a young prince in decline, and Oliá, a magical fairy who will always be fifteen. Separated and exiled in our world during the 1940s, the prince becomes Joshua Perle, a confectioner and Resistance fighter, desperately seeking proof of passages to the fairytale world he longs to return to. Meanwhile, Oliá watches over Joshua as a benevolent shadow, unable to reveal herself.

To reunite these hunted lovers, the novelist must embrace belief in magic himself. Timothée de Fombelle crafts a rich, imaginative narrative—a delicate, romantic epic that explores the profound mystery of love between two worlds, wrapped in fine white silk paper that highlights the story's tenderness.



QUELQU'UN M'ATTEND DERRIÈRE LA NEIGE [SOMEONE IS WAITING FOR ME BEHIND THE SNOW]

Ill. Thomas Campi. Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2019.

A swallow flies backwards into winter. Its path northwards crosses that of Freddy, an ice-cream deliveryman also on the wrong side of time, lonely and downtrodden. The bird gets sucked into the ventilation system of his little lorry and blocks the mechanism. Then the third character in the story, the heart of the story, appears: a refugee who has hidden in the van. There is a great deal of tenderness and restraint in this story, which leaves it to the illustrations to depict the refugees' boats in the storm. Much more than a Christmas story.



TOBIE LOLNESS: 1, LA VIE SUSPENDUE [TOBY ALONE], ill. François Place. Paris, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2006. (Hors série littérature)

Tobie, a tiny hero at just one and a half millimeters tall, finds himself wounded and alone in a hole in a tree bark, driven by the love of the beautiful Elisha and a crucial mission. The story unfolds through flashbacks, immersing the reader in the vibrant world of the great tree, where Tobie's family lives happily in the upper branches until his scientist father refuses to share a dangerous invention, leading to their exile to the lower branches. This new life brings discoveries and challenges, blending humour with a relevant commentary on today's world. The young author masterfully contributes to the tradition of creating miniature universes with this epic tale.



TOBIE LOLNESS: 2, LES YEUX D'ELISHA [TOBY LOLNESS: 2, ELISHA'S EYES]
Ill François Place. Paris, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2007. (Hors série littérature)

VANGO, 1: ENTRE CIEL ET TERRE [VANGO, 1: BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH]

Paris, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2010.

1933: Nineteen-year-old Vango has grown up on a Sicilian island where he was found at the age of three with his amnesiac governess. He knows he is being hunted, but by whom? A great mystery surrounds him and, in his quest for his identity, he's in for a series of exciting adventures, from one country to another, from a hidden monastery to a zeppelin. He is surrounded by a gallery of colourful and/or very endearing characters. In this flashback narrative (the author remains true to himself!), the storylines intersect and, although we guessed part of what was at stake towards the end of volume 1, the volume ends at the height of the suspense. This novel will delight fans of intense adventure and romance, but if the setting is the 1930s, it's best not to look too hard for historical truth, which is rather hazy... And thanks to the talented pen of the author of the magnificent *Tobie Lolness*, you will be carried away by the powerful breath of adventure.



VANGO, 2: UN PRINCE SANS ROYAUME [VANGO, 2: A PRINCE WITHOUT A KINGDOM]

Gallimard Jeunesse, 2011.

VICTORIA RÊVE [VICTORIA DREAMS]

Ill. François Place, Gallimard Jeunesse, 2012.

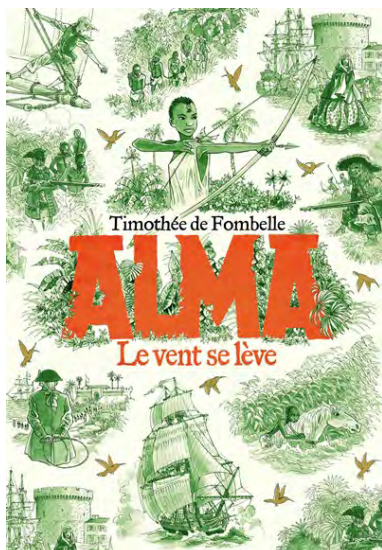
"Victoria wanted a life of adventure, a life bigger than herself." This little heroine, an avid reader, escapes her gloomy existence: parents absorbed in their own problems, an exasperating older sister, conflicts at school... But little by little, her imagination invades reality: her father hangs out with a gang of cowboys, furniture flies out of their house, and the reader himself doesn't know what to believe! This new novel by Timothée de Fombelle, full of humour and tenderness, is aimed at younger readers. And it offers us a lovely lesson in life. It is published in a beautiful edition, which opens with a panoramic cover by François Place.



BOOKS SENT TO THE JURORS

Alma. Le vent se lève [Alma. The Wind Rises]

GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, 2020



Cut off from the world, but first and foremost from the madness of man, in this protected valley hidden in the heart of Africa, the man and woman had slowly relearned how to live. They had created a family, a fragile cocoon, and hoped to be safe, out of reach. Until a horse from nowhere and their children's curiosity about this other world threw them all out of the Garden of Eden... in 1786, at the heart of the slave trade and the triangular trade between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. It's a great and risky subject, so much so that it resonates with a current situation that is still painful and unbearable, that of our real world, in which there is still so much to be done. But writer Timothée de Fombelle is doing his job as an ambitious, sincere, sensitive and nuanced writer. He weaves an unforgettable tale of adventure that moves, revolts and questions, because, for him, every voice matters and carries far. At once on the edge of the world and the edge of intimacy.

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Alma #1
The Wind Rises
Timothée de Fombelle, Holly James (Translator), François Place (Illustrator)

★★★★☆ 4.29 1,070 ratings · 132 reviews

From Europe to Africa to the Caribbean, this first installment in the Alma trilogy tells a gripping story of hope, perseverance, and love that readers will not soon forget.

1786. Isolated from the rest of the world, thirteen-year-old Alma lives with her family in a lush African valley. She spends her days exploring their blissful homeland. But everything changes when her little brother finds a secret way out of the valley.

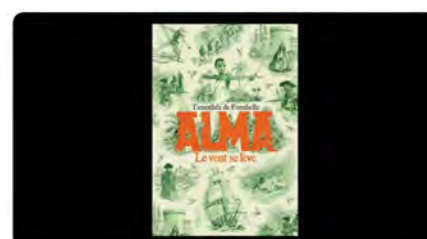
Alma sets out to find him, but she soon must face terrible dangers in a continent ravaged by the slave trade. The journey to bring her brother home becomes a harrowing adventure to save herself, her family, and the memory of her people.

Meanwhile, in Lisbon, Joseph Mars, an orphan turned petty thief devises a great plan to land himself aboard a slave ship, *The Sweet Amelie*, on the ultimate quest—to find a pirate's treasure in the far reaches of the Caribbean. But as time passes, he learns he is not alone in his hunger for the treasure, which forces Joseph to rethink the true purpose of his presence aboard *The Sweet Amelie*.

The destinies of a large cast of characters, including Alma and Joseph, become intertwined both on land and at sea in this unforgettable adventure of resilience and compassion as de Fombelle quietly elucidates the slave trade and the infamous Middle Passage for middle grade and YA readers.

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/61189747-the-wind-rises>

TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE - ALMA. VOLUME 1, LE VENT SE LÈVE





ALMA

LÈ VENT SE LÈVE

ROMAN + 11 ANS

TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE

Premier tome d'une trilogie à venir sur la traite négrière vue à hauteur d'adolescente. Un éblouissement.

À la fin de la deuxième partie, il y a ce moment-clé où Alma franchit la vague. Il est minuit, ce premier jour de janvier 1787, l'adolescente est seule dans sa pirogue qui s'envole au-dessus des rouleaux, droit sur le navire négrier où elle imagine que son frère est prisonnier. À ce moment du livre, Alma en devient l'héroïne, elle n'est pas traînée sur le bateau, elle a choisi d'y embarquer. Elle est libre, elle porte la mémoire de son peuple que la traite a décimé. C'est une résistante. L'auteur est avec elle, Alma incarne le très ancien désir de Timothée de Fombelle de raconter par le roman d'aventures, où il excelle, la catastrophe et la barba-

rie de la traite négrière. Ces millions de personnes arrachées à leur terre, déportées, réduites en esclavage.

Des ports de La Rochelle et de Lisbonne aux grandes forteresses posées sur la côte africaine où les captifs étaient entassés avant d'être embarqués, d'une vallée d'Afrique préservée, paradis d'enfance d'Alma, au dédale d'un grand navire à voiles aux cales remplies de prisonniers, le roman se déploie. Récit documentaire précis et incarné, conte à la limite parfois du fantastique, roman d'aventures avec pirates, trésor et jeune marin courageux, *Alma. Le vent se lève* entraîne magnifiquement le lecteur. Tout y est. La puissance et le souffle, la beauté des images, la poésie et les fulgurances, la densité des personnages. Premier tome d'une trilogie dont on mesure très vite l'ambition, ce livre est la promesse d'un chef-d'œuvre du genre.

— Michel Abescat

Illustrations de François Place,

éd. Gallimard Jeunesse, 400 p., 18€.

LIRE notre rencontre avec Timothée de Fombelle dans le précédent numéro, p. 22.

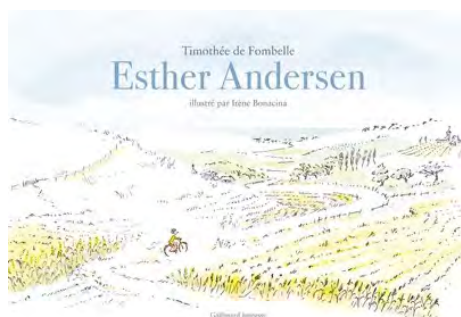


1^{er} janvier 1787. Seule, Alma affronte une mer déchainée pour rejoindre son petit frère, qu'elle pense capturé par les négriers.

Sur Télérama.fr
Toute notre
sélection dans
la RUBRIQUE
ENFANTS

ESTHER ANDERSEN

ILL. IRÈNE BONACINA. GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, 2020



As he does every year, a little boy goes to his Uncle Angelo's house in the country to enjoy the most wonderful holiday of his life. One day, as he pedals for two extra hours to make sure he's lost ('Over time, the bike had become almost my size'), he discovers... the sea. 'It was there and I'd never known it'. While the shock was immense, an even bigger wave awaited him on the shore, in the presence of a little English girl, Esther Andersen, accompanied by her dog Boogie. The Italian-style plates in this magnificent album, with their captioned full-page illustrations and series of vignettes, are splendidly timeless. The elegance and finesse of Irène Bonacina's illustrations

blend perfectly with the author's delicate, melancholy text, and the album is an instant classic, to be placed somewhere between Catherine Certitude, by the duo Modiano/Sempé, and the meeting of little Marcel and Isabelle, in Pagnol's childhood memories. A must-have!

Le Monde

Date : 30 juillet 2021

Page de l'article : p.21

Journaliste : RAPHAËLE BOTTE

JEUNESSE

Au milieu des maïs

UN TRAIT VIF, des couleurs légères et aquarellées... On entre dans le nouvel album de Timothée de Fombelle à pleine vitesse, à bord d'un train, dans le compartiment du jeune narrateur. « *C'était les vacances.* »

Le romancier, que l'on connaît pour sa capacité à emporter ses lecteurs dans de vastes romans d'aventures, propose ici une variation, à mi-chemin entre le regard nostalgique sur l'enfance et le délicat récit d'un premier émoi. Le format paysage, l'épaisseur du papier, l'élégante mise en page font de cet album un objet précieux.

L'illustratrice Irène Bonacina offre à ce jeune héros une allure malicieuse tout en épousant cette poésie du quotidien que Timothée de Fombelle restitue avec humour. A l'arrivée, les vacances

ressemblent à des jours qui s'étirent au milieu des maïs chez un oncle que l'on imagine aimant, fantaisiste, bourru et merveilleux. Ici, il y a des bons petits plats, des nuits à dévorer des histoires, un grand vélo rouge. « *Et la vie pouvait repartir pour une deuxième moitié d'éternité.* » Voici l'été de l'immensité, celui où un jeune garçon se perd pour découvrir l'horizon d'une vaste plage, et surtout Esther Andersen. Ce prénom, ce nom et un accent romanesques ancrent déjà un souvenir fondateur. Réapparaîtra-t-elle ? Timothée de Fombelle allie humour et poésie pour raconter un été. Pas n'importe lequel... ■

RAPHAËLE BOTTE

► *Esther Andersen*, de Timothée de Fombelle et Irène Bonacina, Gallimard Jeunesse, 72 p., 24,90 €. Dès 7 ans.

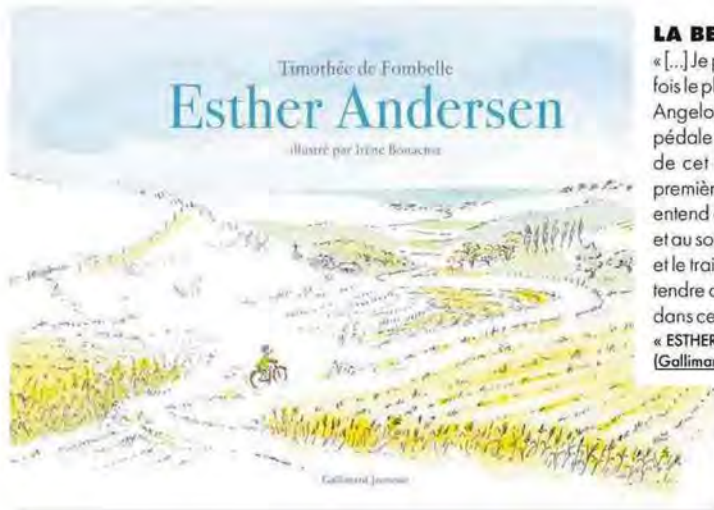


L'été à vélo. TIMOTHÉE DE FOMBELLE ET IRÈNE BONACINA/GALLIMARD JEUNESSE



CHOUETTES VACANCES

QUATRE ALBUMS ET UN ROMAN, TOUS SURVITAMINÉS, CÉLÈBRENT AVEC VIRTUOSITÉ
CETTE PARENTHÈSE ENCHANTÉE QU'EST L'ENFANCE EN ÉTÉ. PAR SANDRINE MARIETTE



LA BELLE ÉVASION

« [...] Je prenais le train tout seul avec ma valise. C'était chaque fois le plus beau jour de ma vie. » À peine arrivé chez son oncle Angelo, un homme doux et fantasque, il monte sur un vélo et pédale à toute allure, ivre de cette liberté qui s'étale devant lui, de cet horizon retrouvé. Quand apparaît la mer pour la première fois. Il avance dans son immensité charnelle lorsqu'il entend crier : « Esther Andersen ». Dans cet album à l'italienne et au souffle estival, la délicatesse des aquarelles couleur mais et le trait léger façon Sempé s'unissent parfaitement à la prose tendre de l'écrivain. On ne rêve que d'une seule chose : entrer dans ce livre... C'est l'éternité retrouvée.

« ESTHER ANDERSEN », de Timothée de Fombelle et Irène Bonacina (Gallimard Jeunesse). Dès 7 ans.

GRAMERCY PARK

ILL. CHRISTIAN CAILLEUX. GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, 2018

CASEMATE

Pays : France
Périodicité : Mensuel



Date : AVRIL 18
Page de l'article : p.161,163,...,16
Journaliste : Jean-Pierre FUERI



Page 1/5

Case à case



Lassé des fusillades en pleine ville ? Envie d'un polar romantique où une belle et un méchant s'observent par-delà le précipice d'une rue de Manhattan ? Où la mort rôde sans bruits, sans cris ? Alors, plongez dans *Gramercy Park*, du ténor du roman d'aventures Timothée de Fombelle et du dessinateur délicat Christian Cailleux.

La danseuse, le mafieux et l'abeille



Pourquoi commencer une histoire se déroulant en partie sur un toit de New York par une séquence sur celui de l'Opéra de Paris ?

Timothée de Fombelle : Une de mes obsessions tourne autour de l'exil, du déracinement. Je voulais donner des racines aériennes à mon héroïne. Être en équilibre sur ce toit lui confère une fragilité incroyable. Surprenantes, vos abeilles sur les toits de Paris et de New York. Il y a des ruches sur l'Opéra de Paris où les traitements agricoles sont bien moindres

qu'à la campagne. Le miel de l'Opéra est très coté. J'en achète régulièrement. L'opéra, c'est la danse, un univers qui me touche. J'écris régulièrement pour la compagnie de danse Paul Les Oiseaux.

Un polar new-yorkais sans fureur ni coups de feu, mais haletant, statique, c'est donc possible ? La preuve ! Le début ressemble à une sim-

« M. Day, gangster des années cinquante, en impose par les mots, non par la violence, comme Al Capone »

Timothée DE FOMBELLE

ple histoire d'amour entre un GI et une Parisienne qui abandonne la danse pour le suivre en Amérique. Le théâtre du drame (j'écris aussi pour le théâtre) sera un précipice entre deux immeubles. Au final, tout se dénouera en quelques heures. Pas de cris, mais la voix basse de l'homme que Madeleine observe de l'immeuble d'en face est coupante comme une lame.

Ce gangster des années cinquante en impose par les mots, non par la violence. Je ne voulais pas d'un personnage à la Al Capone comme dans les *Incorruptibles* où De Niro massacre un type à la batte de baseball. Mais un mafieux aux mains propres. Sa seule arme de mort sera une abeille. Qu'est-ce qui rapproche ces deux personnages, de chaque côté de la rue ? Madeleine veut venger la mort d'un être aimé. Je parlerai moins de vengeance que de consolation. Nous sommes tous à la recherche d'une consolation. En face, M. Day a le sentiment, malgré sa puissance, d'avoir raté sa vie. Et cherche une consolation auprès de sa petite fille qui le rejette. Faire du seul Noir de cette histoire le méchant n'est pas très pensée correcte. Des Noirs dirigeaient des gangs dans les années cinquante. En revanche, pas sûr que, comme ici, ils aient eu une majorité de Blancs à leur service. Si on m'en fait la remarque, je répondrai travailler sur un livre mettant en scène les navires négriers à la





fin du XVIII^e siècle

Le Gramercy Park existe-t-il ?

Bien sûr, il porte le nom de son premier propriétaire. Il est clos, privé, et les clés, une quinzaine, sont à l'hôtel Gramercy, en face. Je l'ai découvert en 2012 lors de l'énorme panne d'électricité liée à l'ouragan Sandy. Dans le noir total, ce petit parc se détachait, éclairé par des becs de gaz datant des années vingt. Ce jour-là, j'ai décidé d'écrire une histoire autour de lui. Vous cassez l'image du bon GI venu sauver la France.

Beaucoup de jeunes Américains dans la débîne ont participé aux combats en Europe. Je montre simplement qu'une fois rentrés au pays, les diverses primes dépen-sées, certains sont redevenus ce qu'ils étaient avant-guerre. Triste, mais vrai. Les crapauds sont rares dans les polars, surtout ceux avec des ailes.

Des ailes de papier que lui a collé Billie, fille de M. Day. L'enfant veut que le parc lui appartienne. Donc elle le privatise en enterrant une à une les clés qu'elle trouve à l'hôtel. Il y avait dans ma famille un chien qui enfouissait toutes sortes de choses qu'on ne retrouvait jamais. Mon crapaud, c'est l'enfance. Le déposer au coin d'un couloir répond à une envie d'étrangeté, mais d'étrangeté réaliste.

Madeline aura sa vengeance, sans utiliser une arme. Du coup, la couverture la montrant revolver en main n'est-elle pas un poil voleuse ?

Vrai. J'aurais préféré qu'on en reste au premier projet. L'arme posée sur le rebord du mur.

Pourquoi Christian Cailleaux pour votre première BD ?
Je connaissais ses ouvrages, en particulier ses livres de voyage. Mais avait-il envie de raconter une sorte de polar sentimental, poétique, mais polar quand même ? C'est aussi un voyage, mais en grande part immobile, sur un toit.

Une sorte de huis clos en plein ciel. Avec des abeilles. Je ne sais s'il y avait dans les années cinquante des ruches à Manhattan. Mais j'aime tisser le fil du réel avec le fil de l'imaginaire. Dans un de mes romans qui démarre en 1934, j'avais besoin d'un sonneur de cloches de Notre-Dame. Or, ces cloches sont mécanisées depuis 1930. Tant pis, on viole un peu le réel pour que l'histoire fonctionne. Dumas et d'autres se sont permis ces petites licences poétiques bien avant moi. Êtes-vous un amateur de BD ? Depuis mon enfance. Mon amour de l'aventure vient de la lecture de Tintin et aussi des albums de Jacobs, surtout



« J'ai découvert le Gramercy Park en 2012, lors de l'énorme panne d'électricité due à l'ouragan Sandy »

Timothée DE FOMBELLE



pour leur langue. On en trouve trace dans mon livre Vango, se déroulant en Angleterre dans les années trente, quarante. Je me souviens de Johan et Pirlouit que je lisais à haute voix avec mon frère. Une page chacun. Un personnage s'appelait Messire Hugues. Je prononçais « Ugu ». C'est incroyable l'empreinte que laissent en nous des albums relus dix, vingt fois.

Et dans le genre plus récent ? Je suis tout ce que publie Clément Oubrière, dont évidemment Aya, j'ai vécu en Côte d'Ivoire. Ses Pablo. J'aime Le Chat du Rabbî de Sfar. Problème, j'adore me plonger pendant des jours, des semaines dans des univers qui s'étalent sur dix, quinze titres. C'est de plus en plus rare en BD. Ah, j'ai aussi été très impressionné par les albums de François Bourgeon. Mon travail sur la traite négrière est dû en partie à mes visites, à 12-13 ans, des fortresses du Ghana où on traitait les esclaves, mais la lecture des Passagers du vent m'a aussi marqué à jamais. Vos romans d'aventures ou fantastiques sont très visuels. Pourraient-ils

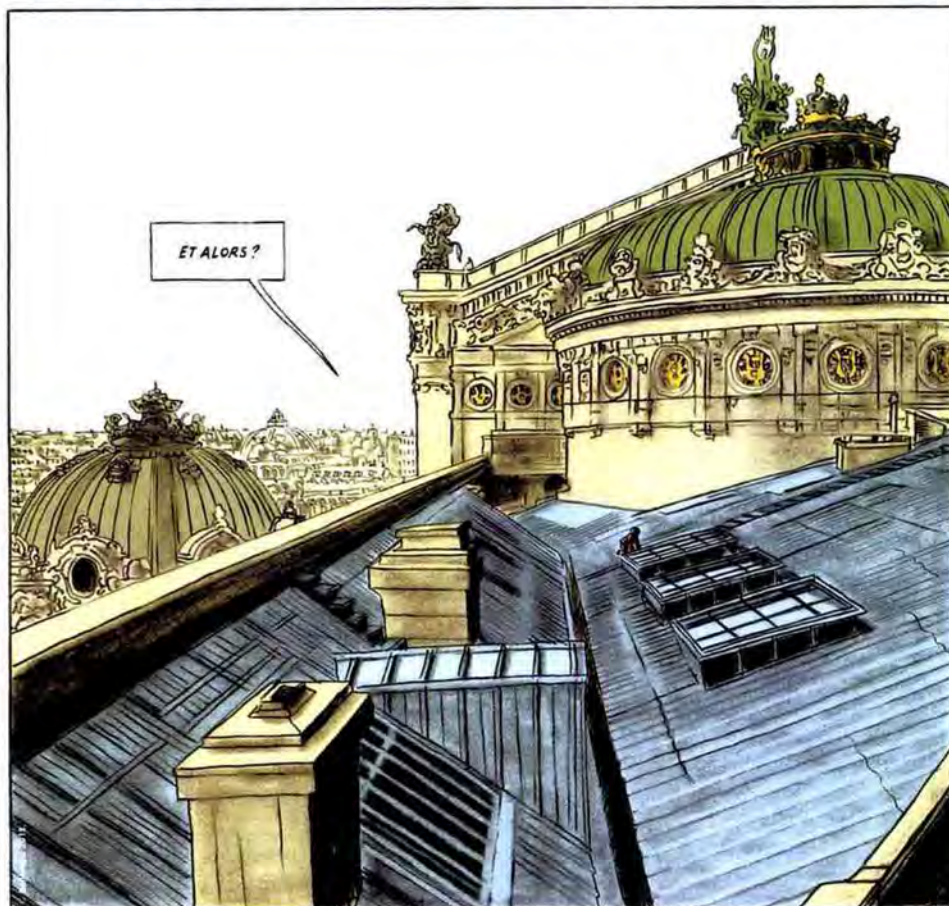
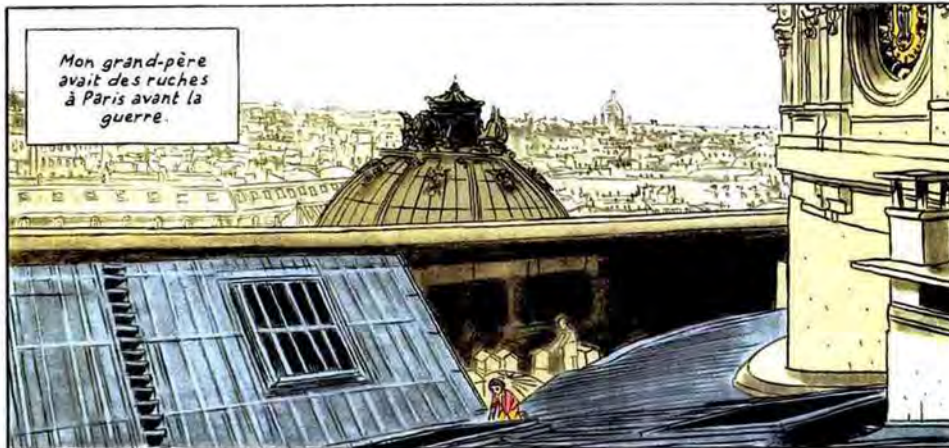
devenir des bandes dessinées ?

Pourquoi pas ? Tobie LoIness est en cours d'adaptation pour France Télévisions. La productrice Delphine Maury met en chantier 26 épisodes animés de 26 minutes. Les Kerascoët réalisent la charte graphique de ce monde dont les habitants, de quelques millimètres de hauteur, vivent dans un grand chène. La taille des personnages rend tout démesuré, la mousse devient forêt, les écorces canyons. Le rapport à la pesanteur change tout, y compris la manière de se déplacer. Percer une goutte d'eau est toute une histoire. Bien sûr, j'ai évoqué ces problèmes dans mon roman, mais lorsqu'on veut transcrire cela en images, tout se corse. La réalisation de la série prendra trois, quatre ans. Peut-être effectivement est-ce le moment de mettre une BD en chantier ! Je ne vais pas lâcher la bande dessinée.

Et peut-être continuer avec Christian Cailleaux ?

Nous rêvassons de retravailler ensemble. Je suis fasciné par la façon dont il a mis son empreinte sur mon histoire, avec un respect total du scénario, sans toucher un mot de ce que j'avais écrit. Le cinéma n'en parlons pas, mais même le théâtre n'offre pas la liberté qu'on trouve en bande dessinée. Je rêve d'une histoire qui me permettait, au fil des années, de suivre mes héros au long cours.

Propos recueillis par Jean-Pierre FUERI



TIMOTHÉE QUI ?

Christian Cailleaux : J'avoue, je ne connaissais pas Timothée de Fombelle, poids lourd de la littérature jeunesse, même si Tobie Lainess, son personnage d'un millimètre et demi vivant dans les arbres, me disait quelque chose. Donc j'ai posé un regard tout neuf et sans a priori sur son scénario. Son ambiance très particulière m'a surpris. En découvrant une évocation nostalgique des années cinquante, soixante, période que j'aime beaucoup et qui se retrouve dans mon travail, j'ai compris pourquoi Gallimard me proposait d'adapter ce scénario original.

SUGGÉRER

SANS ASSÉNER

Ce récit évoquait pour moi, fan absolu du cinéma d'après-guerre, les thrillers et mélodrames tournés par Douglas Sirk. J'ai aimé que Timothée de Fombelle suggère les choses sans les asséner. Et senti que je pouvais offrir un grand plaisir de dessinateur. L'écriture de Timothée est parfaite, son récit est une succession de scènes brièvement décrites, avec des dialogues concis, travaillés. Également homme de théâtre, ce romancier a de sérieuses notions de mise en espace. J'ai assuré le découpage, décidé du nombre de planches.

C'EST BEAU LE ZINC BLEU

Vivant maintenant en province, je ne suis pas monté sur les toits de l'Opéra. Et donc travaille d'après photos, doutant que cela ne représente que quelques images de l'album. J'ai traité ce panorama à ma sauce. Je sais, le zinc qui recouvre ces toits est plus gris que bleuâtre, mais je me préoccupe surtout de la lisibilité de l'image. Avec un gris réaliste, j'aurais eu moins de contraste avec l'arrière. De même, le ciel bleu clair, ici, vire au jaune dans la suivante. Juste pour la lisibilité de l'ensemble.



RIEN À L'ENCRE

Christian Cailleaux : D'accord, j'y vais un peu fort, même sous les toits de l'Opéra, les danseuses n'évoluent pas dans une pièce aussi sombre, surtout sous une grande fenêtre à lucarne. Je joue sur les contrastes entre intérieur et extérieur. On comprend tout de suite la situation. Rien à l'encre dans cet album. J'ai travaillé à la mine, au fusain, à l'estompe et au crayon noir. Et tout en traditionnel, sur du A5, sauf la couleur, à l'ordi. On me dit que de jeunes dessinateurs passent de l'ordinateur au papier. Tant mieux !

VANEL, PEUT-ÊTRE

Dessiner des vieux mest facile. Traits, pmmettes, nez, tout chez eux est plus prononcé, la peau plus usée, plus souple. L'essentiel passe par les yeux, souvent tristes. Ce grand-père mest venu comme ça. Peut-être ai-je pensé à des acteurs des années trente, quarante du cinéma français, tel Charles Vanel. Mon personnage doit inspirer quelque chose de doux, d'apaisé, dégager une force tranquille. Évidemment, il n'est pas bleu, mais encore une fois, couleurs et dessins sont des éléments narratifs qui ne s'encombrent pas forcément de réalisme, mais doivent simplement suggérer des choses.

DE TOIT EN TOIT

Je savais que des ruches étaient installées sur le toit de l'Opéra, mais j'ignorais qu'il y en eut également sur ceux de New York. Ce phénomène est à la mode, pas mal d'apiculteurs se réinstallent sur les toits parisiens, donc finalement pas tant peillés que cela ! Le travail avec Timothée fut un bonheur du début à la fin. On s'entend bien, et je pense que nous pourrions remettre cela. Même si à ce jour il n'y a encore rien de concret.





Gramercy Park, page 14



ÉLÉGANCE NATURELLE

Christian Cailleaux
Changement d'époque et même de continent. Une grosse rupture colorée - on passe de la lumière à l'ombre - permet d'oublier tout texte explicatif. Dès que se lève la voix off de Madeleine, le rythme devient lent et pose. Mon découpage joue sur un zoom lent jusqu'au gros plan sur son visage. Timothée parle simplement d'une ancienne danseuse d'une trentaine d'années, donc de silhouette fine. Ne précisant même pas si elle est blonde ou brune. C'est le seul personnage pour qui je me suis inspiré volontairement d'un personnage réel. Audrey Hepburn m'est venue tout naturellement, petite frimousse, nez relevé, brune avec frange. Une élégance naturelle plus européenne que typiquement américaine. Cette actrice britannique, d'origine belge, se destinait au départ à la danse.

PAS MA PLACE

Je connais New York, mais pas le Gramercy Park, situé au nord de Manhattan dans des quartiers cossus où le simple touriste que j'étais n'allait pas se promener. Il a l'air tout à fait charmant. Merci Google Maps ! On trouve d'autres petits coins comme celui-ci, très chouettes, dans New York.

CONTRASTES FORTS

Je voulais un contraste entre ces deux pages. D'un côté, Madeleine sur son toit, en plein ciel, montrée dans de grandes cases. En pendant, de l'autre côté de la rue, le repaire de M. Day, mafieux enfermé dans ses appartements. J'ai décidé de montrer toujours Madeleine en trois strips aérés. Et M. Day en quatre, dans une suite de petites cases étriquées. J'ai d'abord découpé tout l'album pour savoir si c'était réalisable. Ça tombait pile-poil. Un bon moyen d'être immédiatement dans des ambiances différentes sans recourir à des textes off.

QUELQU'UN M'ATTEND DERRIÈRE LA NEIGE
[SOMEONE IS WAITING FOR ME BEHIND THE SNOW]
ILL. THOMAS CAMPI. PARIS: GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, 2019

La plupart des hirondelles ne connaissent rien d'autre de l'humanité, de ses tragédies et de sa beauté, que ces silhouettes minuscules tout en bas qui se croient grandes sur la terre mais ne dépassent pas le plus petit de leurs arbres.

Car il ne faut pas idéaliser les oiseaux. En dehors de la passion du vol qui fait leur âme et leur poésie, les hirondelles ne s'occupent que d'elles. Elles n'ont que trois points cardinaux dans le triangle minuscule de leur tête: le nid, les petits, la survie.

Gloria, elle, n'avait rien de cela.

Elle n'avait jamais fait de nid, jamais eu de petits.

Elle se moquait un peu de survivre: elle vivait.

Alors pourquoi, un matin de décembre, volait-elle à contre-courant dans le ciel?



A swallow version of Jonathan Livingstone? We're a long way from the quest for solitary performance. A Christmas tale, as the publisher claims? Much more so. A swallow, an enigmatic angel who once spent time with humans - and kept the name Gloria - flies off into the depths of winter. Only she knows why. Her path northwards, increasingly icy, crosses that of Freddy's lorry, an ice-cream deliveryman who is also on the wrong side of time, lonely and out of his depth. The bird gets sucked into the ventilation system of the small delivery truck and blocks the mechanism. And so, the third character in the story, the heart of the story, appears: a refugee who has hidden in Freddy's van: "For the first time, he felt tears welling up in his eyes. The certainty that what he had been waiting for was finally happening: lives intersecting and rubbing up against each other right next to him. Something was happening. Something." Gloria's first port of call could have been the church and its great organs, but the bird is wary of its sharp stained glass windows and the story will be resolved elsewhere, because elsewhere is humanity. In the warmth of Freddy's kitchen, where a mediocre battery-operated tape recorder plays Sinatra for this essential trio. There's a lot of generosity, but also restraint, in this tale, which leaves it to the illustrations to tell the story of the refugees' boats in the storm that Gloria flies over, a stranger to the borders and suffering that we little humans have invented. So much more than a Christmas story...



ELLE LIVRES



Timothée de Fombelle

LE JOUR DES MIRACLES

POUR FINIR L'ANNÉE EN BONTÉ, UN CONTE
DE NOËL D'AUJOURD'HUI SIGNÉ TIMOTHÉE DE
FOMBELLE : À PLEURER DE BEAUTÉ. PAR OLIVIA DE LAMBERTERIE

Il était une fois une hirondelle qui n'en faisait qu'à ses ailes.

En ce jour de Noël, elle filait vers le nord, à contre-courant des migrations de son espèce. Ses sœurs avaient trois préoccupations dans leur minuscule tête d'oiseau : leur nid, leurs petits, leur survie. Mais Gloria était différente. Lorsqu'elle avait 3 ans, un accident avait transformé son existence. Cette étourdie n'avait pas vu les carreaux d'une église de brousse, s'était retrouvée en sang sur le sol de terre battue, et n'avait dû sa survie qu'à un petit d'homme, qui l'avait consolée, soignée, choyée dans un lit de fortune, une boîte de lait Gloria à laquelle elle devait son nom. Il avait 10 ans et une seule main. Depuis, l'hirondelle se souciait des hommes, de leurs joies et de leurs chagrins.

Il était une autre fois un chauffeur de camion frigorifique qui roulait aussi vers le nord avec sa cargaison de gelati. Parti de Gênes, il atteindrait bientôt Calais, puis l'Angleterre. Freddy d'Angelo avait compté : depuis cent jours, personne ne lui avait adressé la parole, autrement que pour lui dire « bonjour » ou « bonsoir ». Alors, Freddy s'était inventé un ami imaginaire à qui faire la conversation. Même si son passager invisible n'était pas très bavard, il avait ainsi une petite compagnie.

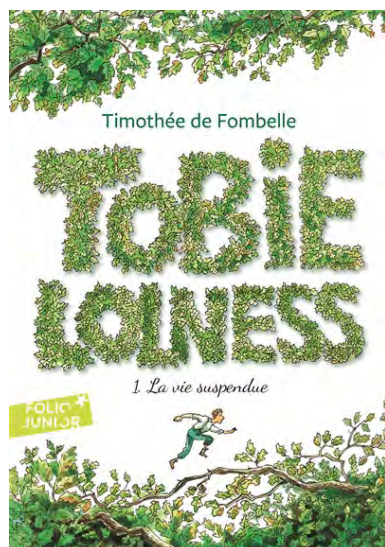
Ce qui est merveilleux dans les contes de Noël, c'est qu'ils autorisent les miracles. Un invité surprise va surgir du camion glacé. Il n'a qu'un bras... Timothée de Fombelle raconte le monde d'aujourd'hui avec une délicatesse inouïe en n'oubliant pas de frotter une allumette pour l'éclairer et le réchauffer. La vie n'est certes pas un champ de roses, mais pas non plus un champ d'orties si l'on sait accueillir l'autre. « L'espérance vertueuse va vite : elle a les ailes de l'hirondelle », écrivait Shakespeare. ■

« QUELQU'UN M'ATTEND
DERRIÈRE LA NEIGE »,
de Timothée de Fombelle,
illustré par Thomas
Campi (Gallimard
Jeunesse, 54 p.).



PRESSE | LEA CIESPI/PASCO

TOBIE LOLNESS [TOBY ALONE] GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, PARIS, 2008



“Tobie was just one and a half millimetres tall, not exactly big for a boy of his age”. This is how we meet the hero, hidden in a hole of the tree bark, wounded, alone, helpless, but fully aware of the importance of what he has to accomplish. His family, who happily in the light of the upper branches, is now in great danger: his father, a scientific genius, made a ground-breaking discovery, but realized that exploiting it could damage their world. Refusing to reveal his secret, he is imprisoned with his wife. Tobie manages to escape, but becomes the most wanted person in his world. His love for Elisha helps him to face the harshness of everyday life among the People of the Grass, who have taken him in and given him refuge after his flee from the upper branches. But when Tobie hears that Elisha is in danger and that his parents have received a death sentence, he has no other choice but to go back to the upper branches and face the tyrants...

This story, made of flash-backs that enlighten the different moments of the story, takes the reader into the very visual world of the big tree: we climb on the twigs, we tremble in fear of the monstrous spider, and we contemplate the lake at sundown. Beautifully written, in an elegant and accessible style, this book has already become a classic in Children’s literature in France. Timothée de Fombelle, a great storyteller, has a unique ability to make us believe in this tree world, full of creatures that are only a few millimetres tall. His characters are multi-dimensional, well built, so incredibly human... The reader is bound to immerse himself totally in the story, live within the tree, have a racing heartbeat at crucial moments, get angry, feel the tears build up in his throat... And, upon closing the book, take a deep breath before returning to everyday life.

Еще пять книг для детей, которые стоит прочесть взрослым



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Тоби Лолнесс. На волосок от гибели

Автор: **Тимоте де Фомбель**
Издатель: **КомпасГид**

Первый том из толстого двухтомника детского фэнтези, невероятно популярного во Франции пару лет назад. Маленький герой (действительно маленький — люди выше нескольких сантиметров роста в мире Лолнесса считаются великанами), как ему и положено по жанру, спасается от смертельной опасности, убегая от врагов и заодно пытаясь спасти своих захваченных в плен, если вообще живых, родителей. Как и положено образцовой детской сказке, главной фишкой этой истории становится совсем не сюжет, а, например, экологический посыл — маленький народец из сказки живет на высоком дереве, и отец мальчика, великий ученый, становится отверженным, когда начинает проповедовать, что если дерево не начать оберегать, оно рухнет. Или посыл социальный — здесь, прямо как в историях нашего детства, миром заправляет жадный толстосум, уничтожая все живое ради собственной выгоды. В общем, нет никакого сомнения, что детям все это будет невероятно интересно — но взрослым еще и понятно.



Сказка на Рождество

PRESS REVIEWS

"To take one Tree as emblematic and bring it alive in great detail is imaginatively rich and great fun... The narratives thread like a spider web across time and space, revealing hidden secrets at just the right moment."

The Guardian, UK

"When you've read [Toby Alone] you'll never look at a tree in the same way again... An unprecedented success."

Le Figaro, France

"A great adventure story that will stay with readers because of its quality and style, but more particularly because of the originality of the universe brought alive for us."

Tribune de Geneva, Switzerland

"France's enchanting answer to Harry Potter." *Die Zeit, Germany*

"There is so much to commend this book that it is difficult to know where to begin ... It lingers in the mind long after the story is finished." *Carousel, UK*

"A brilliant debut fantasy."

Le Monde, France

"Adventure, friendship and love seen through tiny people fighting against a dictatorship in a novel translated throughout the world."

La Repubblica, Italy

"Toby is the tiny hero everyone would like to be."

L'Avvenire, Italy

"Anyone, child or parent, could find in the events/story of Toby whatever he/she is looking for at a given moment."

Leggere tutti, Italy

"Contains all the ingredients to become a real classic."

De Morgen, Belgium

"At long last a good fantasy"

FAZ

"Thanks to Timothée de Fombelle's exceptional gift as a narrator, with this "miniaturised model of our society" he has created a world full of adventure into which he draws his readers" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

"The 7 best books for young readers A tremendous tale of adventure"

Deutschlandfunk/Focus

"Environmental awareness wrapped up in an intoxicating adventure story"

Focus Schule

"Toby Alone shows children's fiction still holds strong as a subversive subgenre in which terrible truths are told"

The Irish Times

"Witty, original and devastatingly entertaining"

Kirkus Review

July 2, 2014

Book Review Series: *Toby Alone* by Timothée de Fombelle

The NCRCL Book Review Series is a monthly series written by NCRCL students and published on the first Wednesday of every month. The aim of this series is to reflect the diverse research areas of NCRCL's students and open a dialogue about particular texts, themes, and traditions.

Review of *Toby Alone* by Timothée de Fombelle, translated from the French by Sarah Ardizzone

By Eleanor Hamblen

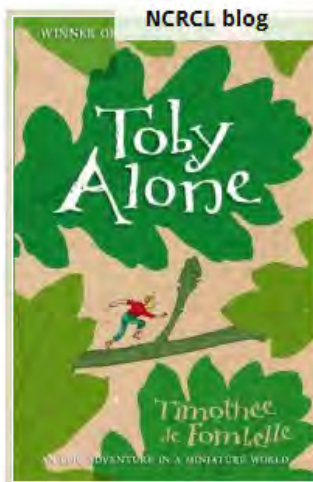


Table Lolness, the eponymous hero of Timothée de Fombelle's *Toby Alone*, is just one and a half millimetres tall and on a mission to save his parents along with the tree in which they live. This thoroughly enjoyable debut novel is an action-packed adventure story with emotional depth and an ecological message at its core.

The narrative begins in medias res as Toby lies injured and hunted, a fugitive from the miniature community which populate the tree. This exhilarating opening anticipates the pace of the narrative, bounding from episode to episode and interspersed with flashbacks. We learn that Toby's current predicament is the result of his father's discovery of a process which harnesses the tree's energy. Professor Sim Lolness refuses to share the secret of his findings for fear of their potentially devastating effect. This enrages Jo

Mitch, the greedy industrialist and dictator, who first banishes the Lolness family to the lower branches and then imprisons them. Having escaped, Toby must act quickly to divert both personal and environmental catastrophe.

In his contribution to the well-established miniature tradition within children's fantasy Fombelle creates an immersive alternative world which readjusts the reader's perspective. The tree represents the entire universe of the characters and thus the weevil, previously nothing more than a minor pest in eyes of the reader, is transformed into a monstrous creature which is capable of large-scale environmental destruction. Toby inherits his father's deep admiration for the tree and a desire to preserve its life-giving force at all costs. Fombelle's ecological agenda is clear and yet his didactic intentions do not detract from the imaginative delight of the story. *Toby Alone* strikes a balance between suspenseful action, relieving humour and compelling characterisation. Admittedly some characters, particularly Toby's enemies, are rather two-dimensional which simplifies Fombelle's otherwise powerful message. The novel is littered with lyrical descriptions all of which are beautifully rendered in English by Sarah Ardizzone's skilful translation. The text is accompanied by François Place's pen and ink illustrations which reinforce the reader's impression of Fombelle's intricate world and his use of scale.

Toby Alone speaks not only of ecological awareness but also of love, friendship and courage. The miniature hero's coming of age is accelerated as he is forced to take on considerable responsibility. The novel ends by reopening the adventure, leaving the reader impatient to turn to its sequel *Toby and the Secrets of the Tree*. Fombelle's work has received several awards in France including the 2007 *Prix Sorcières* in the *Romans Juniors* category while Ardizzone's translation was awarded the 2009 *Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation*. One would hope that success stories such as this will help to encourage a higher level of translation in children's publishing in the UK, thus giving young readers access to the literary output of other cultures.