



Book Review: *Vango: Between Sky and Earth*
Written by Timothee de Fombelle
Translated from French by Sarah Ardizzone
Walker Books, 2014, 432 pp.
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Like *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, this book brings a feeling of complete immersion into adventure. This intricate story of a young orphan boy Vango moves constantly between many times and spaces, from Paris to a remote island in Sicily and then to Moscow, a castle in Scotland, New York, and the belly of the German Zeppelin in the sky. We watch how the powerful forces of European politics rule the fate of ordinary people—and learn about rising Fascism and the horrors of Stalinism. We watch a small group of people, who met in the trenches of the Great War, supposedly the last war and who swear to fight these who sell armaments and promote war. We see a boy and a girl who fall in love and stay faithful to their choice even though they do not see each other for many years.

As is often the case for the adventure novel, this volume is full of implausible coincidences and impossible meetings, horrible betrayals and heroic deeds. We follow the book's protagonists to the roofs of Paris, to a tiny island with an invisible monastery, and to the secret premises of the Stalin's dacha, searching for deep family secrets and for hidden royal treasures. Readers, of course, need to suspend belief and hold their breath, trying to guess whether Vango will ever again see the love of this life, Ethel. Will he be able to reunite with the mysterious Mademoiselle who raised him, an orphan after the tragic death, or rather the murder, of his parents? Who is his father, and why does the mighty Russian dictator wants him dead?

Vango has too many enemies, and not only in Russia. But he also has a lot of friends—a monk-hermit Zepiro, who abandoned his monastic vacation and sets out to kill for the sake of peace, a German commander who flies a powerful Zeppelin and secretly transports the enemies of the Third Reich out of harm, and even a simple-minded fisherman who is partially responsible for Vango's being an orphan. The mixture of historical and fictional characters, as in the novels of Alexandre Dumas, give the story of Vango, a new d'Artagnan, a strong feeling of reality in spite of the phantasmagoric elements of the narrative and make the book a page turner with a strong antiwar message.

The book is full of adventures, but they are not the most important and interesting part. Love and compassion and small ordinary people who try to fight forces of the powerful and the rich entice readers to dream about a second volume a minute after finishing the first. Originally written in French, the second book, *A Prince without a Kingdom* (2015),

just came out in English translation. In this volume readers travel with Vango to New York and witness the struggles of the French resistance in Paris occupied by the Nazis.

Timothee de Fombelle is a French writer and a playwright. He is best known for his young adult novels about Vango and novels about a miniature (a millimeter and a half tall) boy Toby, *Toby Alone* (2010) and its sequel, *Toby and the Secret of the Tree* (2010) both translated by Sarah Ardizzone. *Toby Alone* won numerous awards and was translated into many languages.

Sarah Ardizzone is a translator, critic and journalist from France who has published over 40 translations for adults and children. She received the Scott-Moncrieff Prize for translation and was awarded the Marsh Prize for Children's Literature in Translation in 2005 and 2009.

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