



INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**iBBY**  
AUSTRALIA

**NOMINATION  
IBBY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS  
2022**

**COUNTRY OF NOMINATION: AUSTRALIA**

**ILLUSTRATOR CANDIDATE: TOHBY RIDDLE**

**DOSSIER**



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CULTURAL FUND

## Acknowledgements

Dossier compiled by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright on behalf of IBBY Australia, December 2020

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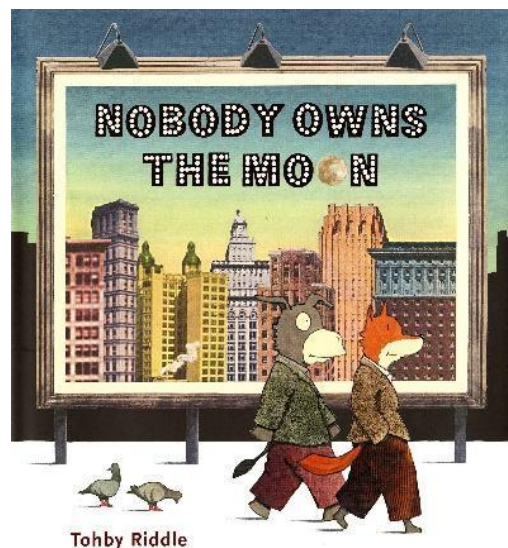
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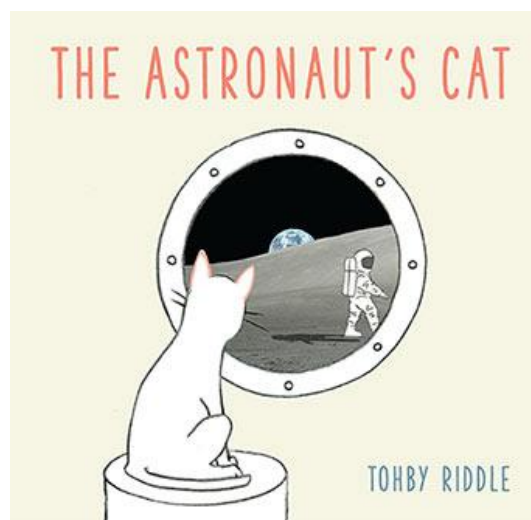
Some of the information contained in the dossier has also been supplied by Tohby Riddle, and has been drawn from his website: [www.tohby.com](http://www.tohby.com) and blog: [tohbyriddle.wordpress.com](http://tohbyriddle.wordpress.com) and from other bibliographical sources.

Contents of the dossier may be viewed by interested researchers and IBBY members, and is posted (in part) on the IBBY website. However, due to copyright restrictions on the **reviews and articles** by individual contributors, these are not included in the online document and cannot be copied or transmitted electronically.



## CONTENTS

1. Biographical Information on the Candidate
  2. Portrait Photograph of the Candidate
  3. Statement of Candidate's Contribution to Literature for Children and Young People
  4. List of Essays, Interviews or Articles
  5. List of Awards and other Distinctions
  6. Complete Bibliography of the Books for Children and Young People by the Candidate
  7. List of Translated Editions, and their Languages
  8. Ten of the Most Important titles by the candidate (even if out of print)
  9. List of the Five Books submitted to the Jury
  10. List of Published Reviews of the Books Submitted to the Jury
  11. Reproductions of Book Covers and Illustrations
- Appendix A. Articles
- Appendix B. Reviews
- Appendix C. USB



## 1. Biographical Information on the Candidate

**Tohby Riddle (1965-)** was raised in Sydney, and his early years were spent at a Steiner school. After school he completed a BA in Visual Arts at the Sydney College of the Arts (1985) and then worked as a mailing clerk (1986–7) at what was then Pan Books Australia. After leaving that job, and creating his first picture book, he then studied architecture from 1989–91, attaining a Bachelor of Science, Architecture, at the University of Sydney (1991). In 1989 Riddle began writing and illustrating picture books, which have since been published in several countries.

Riddle has also contributed cartoons to *Good Weekend* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. A selection of his cartoons was published in *What's the Big Idea?* (Penguin Viking, 2003). Riddle's articles, illustrations and various writings have appeared in the *NSW School Magazine*, where he has been an occasional member of the editorial staff, and was also editor for a time.

He has visited schools to talk about his work, and has expressed a belief that the picture book medium offers great opportunities for storytelling aimed at people of all ages. Riddle has also made appearances at several events including the Melbourne and Sydney Writers' Festivals.

His works include award-winning picture books, non-fiction and fiction for junior readers, television adaptations and a YA novel. His short stories have been anthologised in a number of collections.

He has won and been shortlisted for many awards including: 1996 Winner of the IBBY Australia) Ena Noël Award for *The Tip at the End of the Street* (1996); 2001 Joint Winner of the Wilderness Society of Australia Environment Award (Picture Books Category) for *The Singing Hat* (2000); 2009 Winner Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Picture Book Award for *Nobody Owns the Moon* (2008); 2009 Winner NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature for *The Word Spy* (with Ursula Dubosarsky) (2008); and 2011 Winner Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Older Readers Award for *The Return of the Word Spy* (with Ursula Dubosarsky) (2010). In 2016, *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* was shortlisted for a Prime Minister's Literary Award (Children's Fiction) and was included on the International Youth Library's White Ravens list.

His work on Ursula Dubosarsky's award-winning titles resulted in his being one of the two illustrators of the calendar poster and materials celebrating her term as Australian Children's Laureate (2020–21).

Tohby Riddle is a consummate artist. His unequivocal achievement is to expect nothing less than the very best from both himself and from his readers. His intertextual art is complex, engrossing and highly literate.

He is an outstanding nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022.

[See also **5. Awards and Other Distinctions, p 11.**]

## 2. Portrait Photograph of the Candidate

[See copy in **Appendix C. USB** contained in dossier.]



### 3. Statement of Candidate's Contribution

*'Great picture books are rare. For good reason. To define their qualities, perhaps one could start with what they are not. They are not fashionable, because, while fashions come and go, their appeal remains constant. They are not imitative. They are not literal or prosaic. They are not cynical or clever. Their precise meanings are not easily grasped, but they are always meaningful. They are not easily forgotten.'* (Riddle in Paterson, Allison 'Ten years on Allison Paterson Revisits a Modern Classic Nobody Owns the Moon' *Magpies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, May 2019, p 8.)

Tohby Riddle's extraordinary work is distinguished by a number of features:

- **Integrity as a fine artist in the picture book format:**

'A decade has passed since the acclaimed picture book **Nobody Owns the Moon** burst into the universe of children's literature and rapidly became a star. Widely recognised as being one of Australia's most valued and important titles, author and illustrator Tohby Riddle successfully held fast to his own definition of what a great picture book is not, to create an artful, thought-provoking and memorable title.' (Paterson 2019, p 8.) "*Nobody Owns the Moon* is a standout classic for all ages, a masterly tale of friendship and dignity that fits perfectly into any hand, paw or hoof." (Shaun Tan, quoted Berbay Publishing <<https://www.berbaybooks.com/product/nobody-owns-the-moon>>)

- **Ambitious artistic aims:**

'While maintaining simplicity, I like to be ambitious with meaning. I seek to write stories that don't so much state a meaning but rather attract meanings – that can flutter and wheel around the story like moths around a lamp.' (Riddle, Tohby 'Background to ... *The Great Escape from City Zoo*' *Magpies*, Vol 12, No 3, July 1997, pp 22–23.)

- **Metafiction, postmodernism and intertextuality are evident in his body of work:**

Ideas stemming from everyday inspiration spin out into a complex revisioning of the world around us. 'In *The Great Escape* devices such as *mise en abyme* (Ed. a mirroring device), intertextuality, challenging the authorial role, parodic and ironic forms, indeterminacy and indefinite closure are used as a combination of expressive techniques that in sum playfully expose the socio-cultural construction of reality.' (McMillan, Cheryl 'Metafiction and Humour in *The Great Escape from City Zoo*' *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, Vol 10, No 2, August 2000, p 7) Riddle enjoys making 'gentle mockery of the authorial role' (McMillan 2000, p 9) in this text as well.

- **A sense of 'iconoclasm':** (Macintyre, Pam 'The Tightrope of Ambiguity: a Conversation with Tohby Riddle' *Viewpoint*, Vol 9, No 1, Autumn 2001, p 23) is also evident in his intellectually challenging works:

He challenges the received notions that we've come to accept about aspects of our lives.

- **Cartoon and parodic humour as political and social commentary:**

His works are, like the best of cartoons, embedded with both overt and obscure meanings.

- **Observation of popular culture and the eccentricities of the world are expressed in his quirky visual texts using interesting artefacts:**

*'... popular culture is so persuasive and all around us that I wanted to play on those images, to use legendary images that lend a quality to Great Escape from City Zoo. And I like to*

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

*make connections with the past. There are a lot of good things about the past that get jettisoned in the rush for the novel.*’ (Riddle in Macintyre 2001, p 23.)

- **Philosophical sophistication in concepts:**

On *Unforgotten*, it has been written that ‘This extraordinary illustrated work is about not forgetting — about being aware of others, and ensuring that they are noticed and remembered, either in our own time, or in the eras which come after us. It contains a never-ending and cyclical story of falling and rising, destruction and rebuilding, loss and renewal. It’s about opposites – dark and light, despair and hope, doubt and faith, compassion and alienation. It’s about the ties that bind us to each other. Tohby Riddle has created a visual feast that depicts the awesome chaos of the universe and a panorama of city life which is gritty and unforgiving, but also mesmerising and strangely beautiful. Using photographic collage and his skilful drawing, he imagines a landscape of both immense beauty and potential destruction ... Communication, or a lack of communication or engagement with others, lies at the heart of this work.’ (Sheahan-Bright, Robyn ‘Teachers Notes’ Allen & Unwin, 2012.)

- **‘Disguise and things not being as they seem is a central idea in his work.’ (Macintyre 2001, p 23):**

Like his character, Irving, he is a magician who, with sleight of hand, often tricks his readers, and invites them into complex guessing games.

- **His achievements include not only creating iconic picture books but also inventive non-fiction for older readers:**

*The Word Spy* (2008) and *The Return of the Word Spy* (2010), written by Ursula Dubosarsky, were immediate classics as was *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* (2015). They introduce readers to grammar in a thoroughly engrossing and stimulatingly visual way.

- **He has the ability to really speak to, and for, children:**

‘My concerns as a picture book creator are based on the premise that one can never overestimate the natural intelligence of children. I target this intelligence with ideas that I hope neither patronize nor moralize, but stimulate the child’s mind. In *Careful with That Ball, Eugene!*, I was drawing very much on my own childhood experiences. My friend next door and I used to spend endless days playing games that involved kicking or throwing a ball and inevitably the ball would get out of control. I particularly remember how scary my friend’s father was and seriously thought that if he ever caught us breaking something with the ball an inconceivably horrible fate would await us. Such childhood fears are incredibly real in a child’s rich, unfettered imagination, and in a sense, this book pays homage to those fears.’ <<https://biography.jrank.org/pages/605/Riddle-Tohby-1965.html#ixzz6aEuyF08V>>

**Conclusion:** What Tohby Riddle brings to his uniquely layered and perfectly calibrated illustrative art is utter integrity, brilliant wit, complex ideas, intellectual rigour and an ability to witness the world with a willingness to question and to challenge orthodoxies.

#### 4. Essays, Interviews or Articles:

This dossier **contains copies** of the following **two articles** in **Appendix A**:

Roy, James ‘Know the Author/Illustrator: Tohby Riddle’ *Magpies*, Vol 24, No 4, September 2009, pp 8–11.

Hurst, Miriam ‘Tohby Riddle: The Moon, Donkeys & Hairy Men’ *The Sapling*, April 2, 2019.

<<https://www.thesapling.co.nz/single-post/2019/04/02/Tohby-Riddle-Moons-Donkeys-Australian-Legends>>

#### **Other Biographical and Critical Sources Include:**

‘Behind the Studio Door: Tohby Riddle’ *Books Illustrated*

<<https://mailchi.mp/booksillustrated/behind-the-studio-door-patricia-mullins-792081?e=2f40f0668e&fbclid=IwAR3jWxqIGop9Je-LlsbeBuepLpuWasYvMhXJH4iugw0ziJdyqQGnBcpyHo>>

‘Children’s Author and Illustrator Tohby Riddle: The Writers Studio’ *Tristan Bancks*

<<https://www.tristanbancks.com/2011/09/childrens-author-illustrator-tohby.html>>

Entry in *1001 Children’s Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up* General Editor: Julia Eccleshare. Preface by Quentin Blake Sydney: ABC Books 2009; Cassell Illustrated, London, 2009, p 361 (featuring *The Great Escape from City Zoo*).

Entry in O’Conor, Juliet *Bottersnikes and Other Lost Things: a Celebration of Australian Illustrated Children’s Books* Carlton, Vic: The Meigunyah Press (imprint of Melbourne University Press), published in association with State Library of Victoria, 2009, pp 164–165 (featuring *The Great Escape from City Zoo*).

Entry in *Symbols of Australia: Uncovering the Stories Behind Australia’s Best-Loved Symbols* edited by Melissa Harper and Richard White. National Museum of Australia Press, 2010, p ?

Lowe, Virginia ‘Things That Just Don’t Belong : ‘The Singing Hat’ and ‘The Lost Thing’’ *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults*, Vol 8, No 4, Summer 2000, pp 22–23.

Macintyre, Pam ‘The Tightrope of Ambiguity: a Conversation with Tohby Riddle’ *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults*, Vol 9, No 1, Autumn 2001, p 23.

Mallan, Kerry ‘Trash Aesthetics and Utopian Memory: The Tip at the End of the Street and The Lost Thing’ *Bookbird*, Vol 43, No 1, 2005, pp 28–34.

Morris, Linda ‘Tohby Riddle’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8–9 January 2011, pp 30–31.

McMillan, Cheryl ‘Metafiction and Humour in *The Great Escape from City Zoo Papers* : *Explorations into Children’s Literature*, Vol 10, No 2, August 2000, pp 5–11.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle



Robinson, Nicola 'Anxious Freedoms' *Australian Book Review*, No 193, August 1997, pp 62–63. [Review of *The Two Bullies* Isao Morimoto (translator) and *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Tohby Riddle.]

Sheahan-Bright, Robyn 'Teachers Notes on *Unforgotten*' Allen & Unwin, 2012.  
<<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/picture-books/Unforgotten-Tohby-Riddle-9781742379722>>

Steger, Jason 'Bookmarks: Tohby Riddle and the Murakami mystery' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 15, 2019.  
<<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/bookmarks-tohby-riddle-and-the-murakami-mystery-20190115-h1a2o9.html>>

Steger, Jason 'Every Picture Tells a Story' *The Sunday Age*, 3 December 2000, p 10.

'Tohby Riddle (1965-)' *Biography JRank.org*.  
<<https://biography.jrank.org/pages/605/Riddle-Tohby-1965.html>>

'Tohby Riddle' Chapter 13 in Rafidi, Mark *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Insights from Australia's great picture book authors and illustrators* Ulladulla, NSW: Shore Drift, 2013, pp 107–115.

Tohby Riddle website  
<<http://www.tohby.com/>>

'Tohby Riddle' *Wikipedia*  
<<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>>

'Tohby Riddle' *AustLit*  
<<https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/A41510>>

### **Reviews:**

Coates, Bronte 'Tohby Riddle's Yahoo Creek' *Books and Publishing* 30 October 2018.  
<<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2018/10/30/118021/yahoo-creek-tohby-riddle-au/Yahoo-Creek>>

Mayor-Cox, Sarah '[Review] *Unforgotten*' *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults*, Vol 20, No 4, Summer 2012, pp 16–17.

McCartney, Tania 'Review: *Unforgotten*' *Kids Book Review*, 10 September 2012  
<<http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2012/09/review-unforgotten.html>>

'Review: *The Great Escape from City Zoo*' *Publishers Weekly*, September 20, 1999, p 87.  
<<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780374327767>>

Linning, Lyn '[Review]: Dubosarsky, Ursula: *The Word Spy* Ill. Tohby Riddle' *Magpies*, Vol 23, No1, March 2008, p 34.

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‘Review: *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar*, by Tohby Riddle.’ *JCU Library News*, January 13, 2016.

<<https://jculibrarynews.blogspot.com/2016/01/book-review-greatest-gatsby-by-tohby.html?m=0>>

Steinberger, Kevin ‘Review: Dubosarsky, Ursula: *The Return of the Word Spy* Ill. Tohby Riddle’ *Magpies*, Vol 25, No 2, May 2010, p 23.

Steinberger, Kevin ‘Review: Riddle, Tohby *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar*’ *Magpies*, Vol 30, No 2, May 2015, p 22.

Steinberger, Kevin ‘Cover Book *The Tip at the End of the Street* by Tohby Riddle’ *Magpies*, Vol 11, No 3, July 1996, p 8.

Steinberger, Kevin ‘(Takes a look at... Tohby Riddle’s *The Singing Hat*)’ *Magpies*, Vol 15, No 5, November 2000, p 20.

‘Yahoo Creek’ Liz Derouet

<<https://lizderouet.wordpress.com/2019/03/28/yahoo-creek/>>

[See also list of reviews of 5 books submitted, p 24.]

### **Articles by:**

Riddle, Tohby ‘Background to ... *The Great Escape from City Zoo*’ *Magpies*, Vol 12, No 3, July 1997, pp 22–23.

Riddle, Tohby ‘Colour Story’ *The Age* 15/8/1998.

Riddle, Tohby ‘My Bedside Table: Tohby Riddle’ *The Age*, September 2005, p 6.

Riddle, Tohby ‘Up Front: Tohby Riddle, Author and Illustrator’ *Good Weekend*, 9 October 2010, p 9.

Riddle, Tohby ‘Books That Changed Me: Tohby Riddle’ *The Sun-Herald*, 26 August 2012, p 14.

### **Online:**

‘Learn with Tohby Riddle’ *YouTube* April 2, 2020

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQsnpnFcZqE>>

‘Learn to Draw the Astronaut’s Cat’ *YouTube* June 14, 2020

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN5kSkH4I-E>>

## 5. Awards and other Distinctions

### INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

#### **International Awards Arranged per Award Category:**

##### **International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY Australia) Ena Noël Award:**

- **1996 Winner** *The Tip at the End of the Street* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1996.

##### **IYL White Ravens:**

- **2016** *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.

### AUSTRALIA

#### **AWARDS FOR PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Four Australia Council for the Arts grants for New Work:

- 1997 Grants to Picture Book Illustrators (Australia Council) for *Irving the Magician*
- 1999 Individual Picture Book Illustrators' Grant (Australia Council) for *The Singing Hat*
- 2007 New Work – Established Writers – Children's Literature (Australia Council) for *Nobody Owns the Moon*
- 2014 Children's Picture Book Illustrators' Initiative (Australia Council) (then administered by the Australian Society of Authors) for *Yahoo Creek*

### AUSTRALIA

#### **CHILDREN'S & YA BOOK AWARDS**

#### **Australian Awards Arranged per Award Category:**

##### **Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction — Best Illustrated Book / Graphic Novel:**

- **2019 Shortlisted** *Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2019.

##### **Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Children's Cover Category:**

- **2000 Winner** *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood: Penguin, 2000.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

**Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Children's Non-Fiction Illustrated Book Category:**

- **2020 Longlisted** *Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019. (Designed by Joanna Hunt.)

**Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Jacket of the Year Category:**

- **2000 Commended** *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 2000.

**Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Illustrated Book Category:**

- **2003 Highly Commended** *What's the Big Idea?* Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin, 2006, 2003.
- **2000 Highly Commended** *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood: Penguin, 2000.

**Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Picture Book:**

- **2009 Winner** *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East: Berbay, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

**Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award:**

- **2011 Honour Book** *My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.
- **2009 Shortlisted** *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East: Berbay, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.
- **2006 Shortlisted** *Irving the Magician* Melbourne: Penguin, 2005.
- **2001 Honour Book** *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood: Penguin, 2000.
- **1998 Shortlisted** *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.

**Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Early Childhood Award:**

- **2019 Honour Book** *Here Comes Stinkbug!* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2018.

**Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Older Readers Award:**

- **2011 Winner** *The Return of the Word Spy* (with Ursula Dubosarsky) Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin, 2013; Melbourne: Viking, 2010.
- **2009 Honour Book** *The Word Spy* (with Ursula Dubosarsky). Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Books, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Viking, 2008.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

**Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Eve Pownall Award:**

- **2020 Shortlisted** *Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery Crows Nest*: Allen & Unwin, 2019.

**Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Book:**

- **2020** *Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery Crows Nest*, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019.
- **2019** *Here Comes Stinkbug!* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2018.
- **2017** *Milo: A Moving Story* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2016.
- **2017** *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.
- **1997** *The Tip at the End of the Street* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1996.

**NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children’s Literature:**

- **2016 Shortlisted** *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.
- **2009 Shortlisted** *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East: Berbay, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.
- **2009 Winner** *The Word Spy* (with Ursula Dubosarsky). Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Viking, 2008.
- **1999 Shortlisted** *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.

**NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, Ethel Turner Prize for Young People’s Literature:**

- **2013 Shortlisted** *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.

**Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards Best Children’s Book:**

- **2006 Shortlisted** *Irving the Magician* Melbourne: Penguin, 2005.

**Prime Minister’s Literary Award for Children’s Fiction:**

- **2016 Shortlisted** *The Greatest Gatsby: a Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.

**Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards (8 to 10 years):**

- **2019 Shortlisted** *Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery Crows Nest*, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019.

**Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards — Best Language Development Book for Lower Primary Children (2003-2013):**

- **2006 Nominated** *Irving the Magician* Melbourne: Penguin, 2005.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

**Western Australian Premier's Book Awards — Premier's Prize for Writing for Children:**

- **2008 Shortlisted** *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

**Wilderness Society of Australia Environment Award (Picture Books Category):**

- **2001 Joint Winner** *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood: Penguin, 2000.

**International and Australian Awards Arranged per Book Title:**

***The Tip at the End of the Street* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1996.**

- **1997 Notable Book** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA)
- **1998 Winner** IBBY Australia Ena Noël Award

***The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.**

- **1999 Shortlisted** NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature
- **1998 Shortlisted** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award

***The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 2000.**

- **2000 Winner** Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Children's Cover Category
- **2001 Joint Winner** Wilderness Society of Australia Environment Award (Picture Books Category)
- **2001 Honour Book** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award

***What's the Big Idea?* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2006, 2003.**

- **2003 Highly Commended** Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Illustrated Book Category

***Irving the Magician* Melbourne: Penguin, 2005.**

- **2006 Shortlisted** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award
- **2006 Shortlisted** Queensland Premier's Literary Awards — Best Children's Book
- **2006 Nominated** Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards — Best Language Development Book for Lower Primary Children (2003–2013)

***Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.**

- **2009 Shortlisted** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award
- **2009 Shortlisted** NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature:
- **2008 Shortlisted** Western Australian Premier's Book Awards — Premier's Prize for Writing for Children
- **2009 Winner** Australian Publishers Association Design Awards Best Designed Picture Book

***My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic.: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.**

- **2011 Honour Book** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award

***Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.**

- **2013 Shortlisted** NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's
- **2013 Notable Book** CBCA Book of the Year Award — Picture Book of the Year
- **2013 Shortlisted** Australian Publishers Association Awards — APA Book Design Awards
- **2013 Shortlisted** Indie Awards — Children's

***Milo: A Moving Story* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2016.**

- **2017 Notable Book** CBCA Book of the Year Awards

***Here Comes Stinkbug!* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2018.**

- **2019 Honour Book** CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Early Childhood
- **2019 Notable Book** CBCA Book of the Year Awards

***Yahoo Creek: An Australian Mystery* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019.**

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

- **2020 Shortlisted** CBCA Book of the Year Award — Eve Pownall Award for Information Books
- **2020 Notable Book** CBCA Book of the Year Award
- **2020 Longlisted** APA Book Design Awards — Best Designed Children's Non-Fiction Illustrated Book designed by Joanna Hunt.
- **2019 Shortlisted** Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction — Best Illustrated Book / Graphic Novel
- **2019 Shortlisted** Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards — Eight to 10 Years

### **NON-FICTION:**

**Riddle, Tohby** *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.

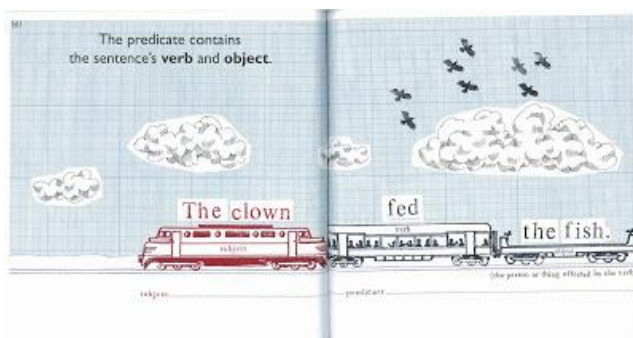
- **2016 IYL** White Ravens
- **2016 Shortlisted** Prime Minister's Literary Award for Children's Fiction
- **2016 Shortlisted** NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature
- **2017 Notable Book** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Award

**Dubosarsky, Ursula** *The Return of the Word Spy* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Camberwell, Vic Penguin, 2013; Melbourne: Viking, 2010.

- **2011 Winner** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Older Readers Award

**Dubosarsky, Ursula** *The Word Spy* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Viking, 2008.

- **2009 Honour Book** Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Older Readers Award
- **2009 Winner** NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature



From: *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015, p 90.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle



## 6. Complete Bibliography

### PICTURE BOOKS:

- Riddle, Tohby *Careful With that Ball, Eugene!* Sydney: Pan Books, 1989.
- Riddle, Tohby *A Most Unusual Dog* South Melbourne: Macmillan Australia, 1992.
- Riddle, Tohby *Arnold Z Jones Could Really Play the Trumpet* Ringwood, Vic: Puffin, 2000; Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993.
- Riddle, Tohby *The Royal Guest* Melbourne: Puffin, 2008; Hawthorn, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993.
- Riddle, Tohby *50 Fairies You Ought to Know About* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1995.
- Riddle, Tohby *The Tip at the End of the Street* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1996.
- Riddle, Tohby *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.
- Riddle, Tohby *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 2000.
- Riddle, Tohby *What's the Big Idea?* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2006, 2003.
- Riddle, Tohby *Irving the Magician* Melbourne: Penguin, 2005.
- Riddle, Tohby *Dog and Bird See the Moon* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007.
- Riddle, Tohby *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.
- Riddle, Tohby *Dog and Bird Water the Garden* Melbourne: Puffin Books, 2009.
- Riddle, Tohby *Dog and Bird Follow a Butterfly* Melbourne: Puffin Books, 2009.
- Riddle, Tohby *Dog and Bird and the Caterpillar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2010.
- Riddle, Tohby *My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic.: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.
- Riddle, Tohby *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.
- Riddle, Tohby *Milo: A Moving Story* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2016.
- Riddle, Tohby *Here Comes Stinkbug!* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2018.
- Riddle, Tohby *Yahoo Creek: an Australian Mystery* (with Peter Williams). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019.
- Riddle, Tohby *The Astronaut's Cat* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020.

### JUNIOR NOVELS:

- Little Memphis PTD; and Wandering Star* (novelisation of cartoon series by Tohby Riddle) Pymble, NSW: Harper Collins, 1998.
- Caught in a Trap: Boggled* retold by Tohby Riddle and Michael Verde. Illustrated by Peter Viska. Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 1998. [Novelisation of cartoon television series Li'l Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers.]
- Loves, June *My Guardian Angel*. (Young Bluegum) Illustrations by Tohby Riddle. Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 1997.

Wild, Margaret *Pat the Cat and Sailor Sam* (SOLO Books) Norwood, SA: Omnibus Books: 2003.

### **NON-FICTION:**

Dubosarsky, Ursula *The Return of the Word Spy* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2013; Melbourne: Viking, 2010.

Dubosarsky, Ursula *The Word Spy* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Viking, 2008.

Riddle, Tohby *Captain James Cook: the adventures of the Endeavour* Warriewood, NSW: Weldon Kids, 1996.

Riddle, Tohby *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.

Young, Leonie and Janks, Avril *I wish I'd flown the Atlantic with Amelia Earhart* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Willoughby, NSW: Weldon Kids Pty Ltd, 1994.

Young, Leonie and Janks, Avril *I Wish I'd Sailed with Captain Cook* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Willoughby, NSW: Weldon Kids, 1993.

### **YA NOVELS:**

Riddle, Tohby *The Lucky Ones* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2009.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANTHOLOGIES**

'The Elephant Bird' in *The Hush Treasure Book* Sydney, edited by Karen Tayleur. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2015, pp 8–9.

Entry in *Dust* edited by Colin Thompson. Sydney: HarperCollins, 2014, 2007, pp ?.

'Life's About...' in *Kids' Night In* Camberwell: Puffin, 2003, p 621.

'Stark's Statues' in *Things a Map Won't Show You: Stories from Australia and Beyond* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, pp 141–152.

'Octopus in Boots' in *Kids' Night In 3: A Sea of Stories and Oceans of Other Stuff* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2009, p 385.

'My Watch' in *Kids' Night In 2: A Feast of Stories* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin, 2005, pp 393–394.

Tohby Riddle illustrated 'Harry Seidler' (pp 92–3), 'Bob Brown' (pp 36–7) and 'Deng Thiak Adut' (pp 64–5) in *High Five to the Boys: A Celebration of Ace Australian Men* North Sydney: Penguin Random House Australia, 2018.

'The Baby Bunch' in *When We Were Young: true stories from your favourite Australian authors* edited by Dmetri Kakmi, Penguin, Camberwell, 2007, pp 189–193.

## 7. Translated Editions

### 1. Penguin Random House Australia Translations:

Dubosarsky, Ursula *The Word Spy* Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Viking, 2008.

#### *Japanese Edition:*

*The Word Spy* Yōngō ka shwiwōjinūn Alp'abet misūt'ōri / Urūjulla Tyubosasūk'i kŭl ; T'obi Ridŭl kŭrim ; Kim Myōng-suk, Mun An-na omgim 영어 가 쉬워지는 알파벳 미스터리 / 우르줄라 듀보사스키 글 ; 토비 리들 그림 ; 김 명숙, 문 안나 옮김 Uniform title: Word spy. Korean by Dubosarsky, Ursula, 1961- Sōul-si : Hyōnamsa, 2010 서울시 : 현암사, 2010

#### *US Edition:*

Dubosarsky, Ursula *The Word Snoop*. Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. NY: Dial Books, 2009.

Riddle, Tohby *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood: Penguin, 2000.

#### *Other Editions:*

US, 2001

China, 2011

Riddle, Tohby *My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic.: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.

#### *Japanese Edition:*

*My Uncle's Donkey* Watashi no ojisan no roba / Tobī Ridoru ; Murakami Haruki yaku わたしのおじさんのロバ / トビー・リドル ; 村上春樹訳 Uniform title: My uncle's donkey. Japanese by Riddle, Tohby Tōkyō: Asunaro Shobō, 2018 東京 : あすなろ書房, 2018.



## **2. Allen & Unwin Translations:**

Riddle, Tohby *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.

### *Other Editions:*

Nth Am Eng (InkLit/Penguin)

Russian (Livebook) through agent

Korean through agent

Spanish, through agent

German, through agent

Danish, through agent

## **3. Pan Macmillan and Macmillan Translations:**

Riddle, Tohby *Careful With that Ball, Eugene!* Sydney: Pan Books, 1989.

### *Other Editions:*

US, 1991

UK, 1991

Riddle, Tohby *A Most Unusual Dog* South Melbourne: Macmillan Australia, 1992.

### *Other Editions:*

US, 1993

## **4. HarperCollins Translations:**

Riddle, Tohby *50 Fairies You Ought to Know About Pymble*, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1995.

### *Other Editions:*

Germany, 2004

Riddle, Tohby *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.

### *Other Editions:*

US, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999

Korea, Marubol Publications, 2008

China, 2010

Feature film rights were also optioned by Paramount Pictures in 2000, but not renewed.

## 5. Berbay Publishing Translations:

Riddle, Tohby *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

### Other Editions:

China, Love Reading Books, forthcoming

Italy, Babalibri, 2020

Spain, Babulinka Books, a Spanish and a Catalan edition, 2020

Korea, Bear Books Inc, forthcoming, 2022



## BEHIND TOHBY RIDDLE'S Book Illustrations

As told by a bird in a fedora ...

1 After the initial inspiration, some **THINKING** must be done. Clear expression comes from clear thinking.

2 Think about the **IDEA** behind the illustration. Then think about the illustration **TECHNIQUE** that will best serve that idea.

3 These are good things to ponder. Also ponder: What does it mean? Is it beautiful? **WHAT IS BEAUTY?!**

4 Tohby Riddle's illustration technique differs from book to book because the ideas differ.

5 Look at *The Great Escape from City Zoo*.

6 Or his new book, *My Uncle's Donkey*.

7 A more complicated illustration technique was used for *Nobody Owns the Moon*.

8 Let's take a look...

9 So next time you look at some artwork, try and work out how it was done. This will also improve your looking skills.

IDEA: An epic story with a 1930s-40s setting and a film-noirish narration and atmosphere. **TECHNIQUE:** silver screen black and white (using washes and brush lines of Indian ink).

IDEA: A simple character-driven narrative about a donkey. **TECHNIQUE:** Minimal composition, focused on the character - with an equally minimal colour scheme of (mostly) black and white and red (using pencils, ink washes and paint).

IDEA: The location in this book was as important as the characters; it needed to feel real and habitable to the reader. **TECHNIQUE:** Multimedia, collage - anything goes, so long as it works - (papers, paint, photos, pen, pencil, acrylic, stamps, gouache etc) to represent the multimedia, collage-like nature of cities (brick, steel, paint, timber, concrete, glass etc).

Signs, lights, billboards etc painted or stuck onto collaged cityscape

Characters cut from photo of cardboard

Character drawn, painted and collaged on another piece of paper, then cut out and stuck on

Sponged-on paint for clouds

paper moon stuck on

p.7

blue coloured paper background for sky (paint washes to make it dark at the top and light at the bottom)

buildings collaged from all kinds of old sources (usually digitally altered in Photoshop) then cut out and stuck on

the two buildings (left) come from the single building in this old postcard

Character's shadow and street surface cut from coloured paper

More at [www.tohby.com](http://www.tohby.com)

Created by Tohby Riddle © Tohby Riddle 2010

## 8. Ten Most Important Books by the Candidate

Riddle, Tohby *The Tip at the End of the Street* Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1996.

Riddle, Tohby *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.

Riddle, Tohby *The Singing Hat* Camberwell, Vic: Puffin Books, 2002; Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 2000.

Riddle, Tohby *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

Riddle, Tohby *My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.

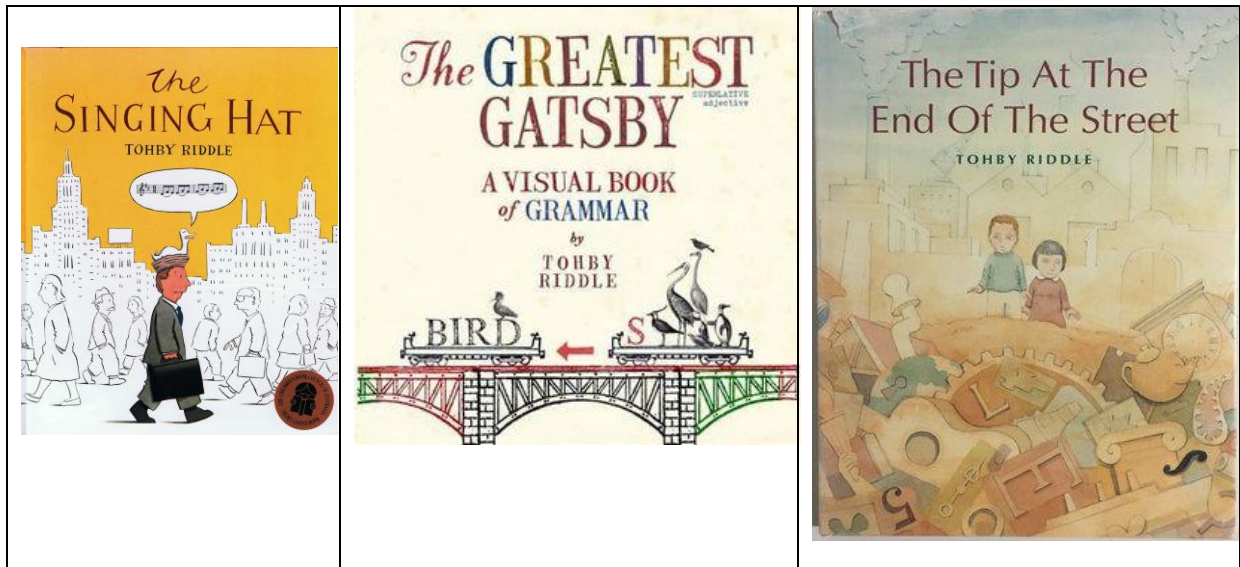
Riddle, Tohby *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.

Riddle, Tohby *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar* Melbourne: Penguin, 2015.

Riddle, Tohby *Milo: A Moving Story* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2016.

Riddle, Tohby *Yahoo Creek: an Australian Mystery* (with Peter Williams). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019.

Riddle, Tohby *The Astronaut's Cat* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020.



## 9. List of Five Books Sent to Jurors

Riddle, Tohby *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.

Riddle, Tohby *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

Riddle, Tohby *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.

Riddle, Tohby *My Uncle's Donkey* Camberwell, Vic: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.

Riddle, Tohby *The Astronaut's Cat* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020.



## 10. Published Reviews of Works:

The following is a list of **ten reviews**, two of each of five books, copies of which are contained in this dossier in **Appendix B**:

**Riddle, Tohby *The Great Escape from City Zoo* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2007; Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 1998, 1997.**

Jameyson, Karen ‘News from Down Under Turning Heads’ *The Horn Book Magazine*, March/April 1998, pp 243–6.

Steinberger, Kevin ‘Ambitious With Meaning While Maintaining Simplicity’ Kevin Steinberger looks at the work of Tohby Riddle and how to read his works visually. [Titles used are – *The Singing Hat, the Tip at the End of the Street, The Great Escape from City Zoo, and, Arnold Z Jones Could Really Play the Trumpet!*] *The Literature Base*, Vol 12, No 2, May 2001, pp 4–9.

**Riddle, Tohby *Nobody Owns the Moon* Kew East, Vic: Berbay Publishing, 2019 (10th anniversary reissue); Camberwell, Vic: Penguin/Viking, 2008.**

Paterson, Allison ‘Ten years on Allison Paterson Revisits a Modern Classic Nobody Owns the Moon’ *Magpies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, May 2019, pp 8–9.

Knight, Fran ‘Review: Nobody Owns the Moon’ *Read Plus* April 5, 2019  
<[https://www.readplus.com.au/blog\\_detail.php?id=9712](https://www.readplus.com.au/blog_detail.php?id=9712)>

**Riddle, Tohby *Unforgotten* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012.**

England, Katharine ‘(Tohby Riddle’s Unforgotten)’ *Magpies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, September 2012, p 6.

Barnes, Clive ‘Review: Unforgotten’ *Books for Keeps*, Issue 210, January 2015.  
<<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/210/childrens-books/reviews/unforgotten>>

**Riddle, Tohby *My Uncle’s Donkey* Camberwell, Vic: Picture Puffin, 2012; Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2012, 2010.**

Fulcher, Kim ‘funny situations can lead to complex reasoning in a non-confrontational way’ *Where the Books Are* <<https://www.wherethebooksare.com/blog-1/review-my-uncles-donkey>>

Lavi, Tali ‘[Review: *My Uncle’s Donkey*]’ *Magpies*, Vol 25, No 4, September 2010, p 30.

**Riddle, Tohby *The Astronaut’s Cat* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020.**

Knight, Fran ‘[Review: *The Astronaut’s Cat*]’ *ReadPlus* April 3 2020.

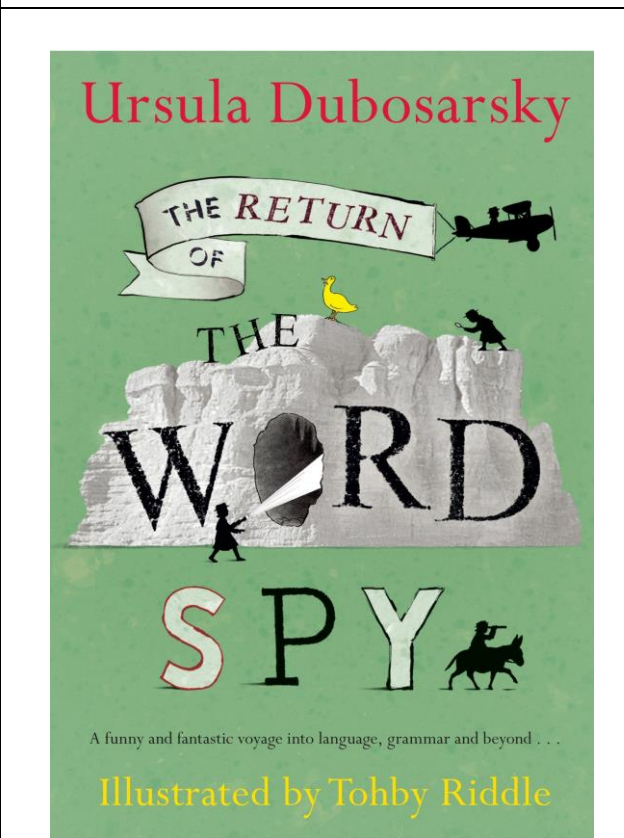
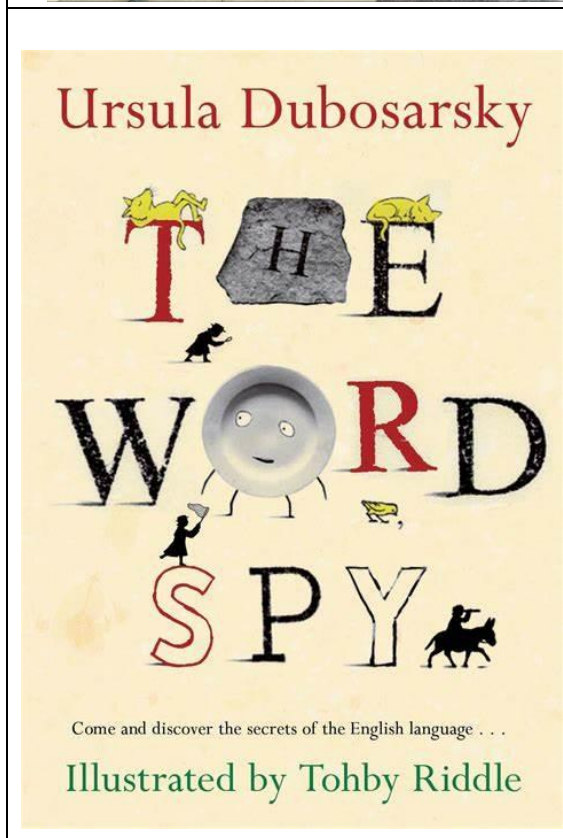
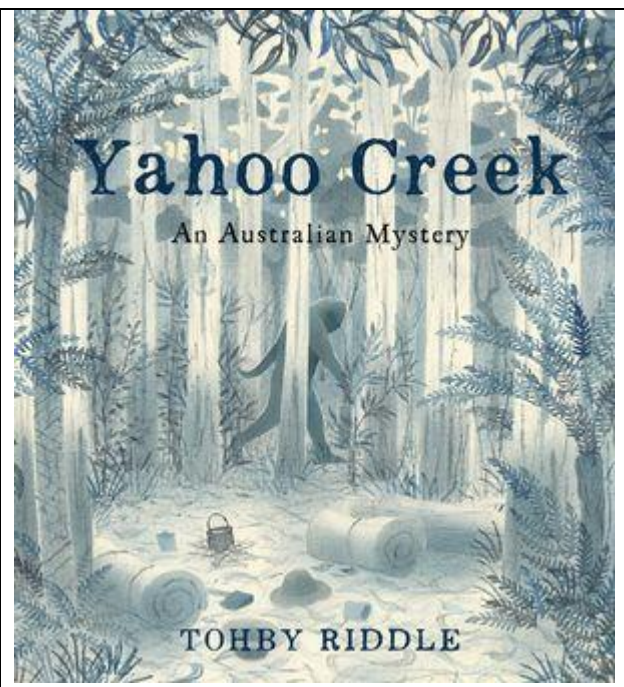
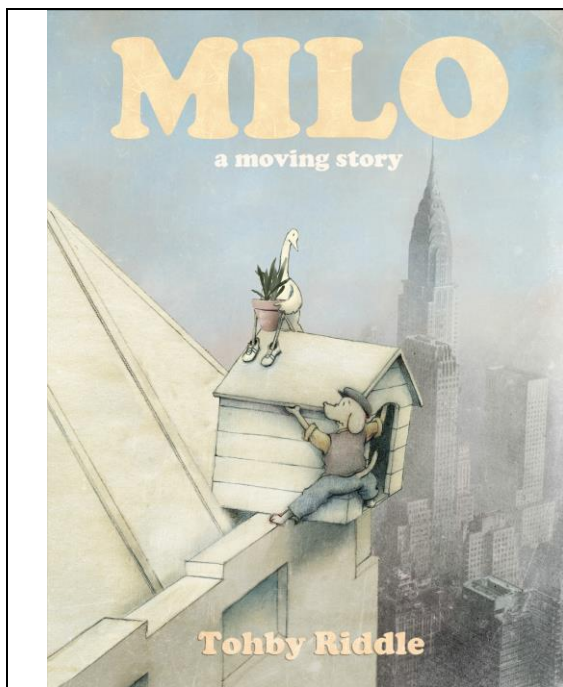
<[https://www.readplus.com.au/blog\\_detail.php?id=10764](https://www.readplus.com.au/blog_detail.php?id=10764)>

‘The Astronaut’s Cat Review’ *Noveltea Corner Thoughts from a bookish mind* April 7, 2020.

<<https://novelteacorner.com/2020/04/07/the-astronauts-cat-review/>>



## 11. Reproductions of Book Covers and Illustrations



11. Reproductions of Book Covers and Illustrations (Cont.)



## Appendix A. Articles

Roy, James 'Know the Author/Illustrator: Tohby Riddle' *Magpies*, Vol. 24, No.4, September 2009, pp 8–11.

KNOW THE AUTHOR KNOW THE AUTHOR KNOW THE AUTHOR KNOW THE AUTHOR KNOW THE AUTHOR

MAGPIES VOLUME TWENTY-FOUR

An enigma wrapped in a riddle

Know the Author/Illustrator:

# Tohby Riddle

by James Roy

*It's a rare talent that can cross media and disciplines with as much confidence and assuredness as Tohby Riddle. An art school graduate with an interest in architecture who became a cartoonist, picture book illustrator, picture book writer, and now a young-adult novelist, you could say that Riddle is in many ways the complete creator of books for young people.*

Perhaps the key word here is *discipline*. When Riddle speaks of his ten years of weekly cartooning for the *Good Weekend* magazine, he uses words that evoke that idea of knuckling down, meeting deadlines, scratching around for ideas, then expressing them: words like drill, and pressure, and workout.

*What that type of pressure does is really drill you in having to come up with ideas and then work out how on earth you're going to show them in a cartoon format. So, that was a really good ongoing kind of training and workout for doing picture books, too.*

He talks about the need to find fresh ideas for those hundreds of cartoons, week after week.

*That weekly pressure made me develop various techniques for getting ideas. Looking back, when I got that very first idea, I was amazed that it actually seemed to look like a cartoon, would pass for a cartoon, that I wasn't sure I'd ever think of another one. But you have to keep coming up with more ideas and often to deadlines and that can get pretty scary. So I just got into the habit of looking for ideas and generating them through different ways of thinking. And in*



*time, you become confident that there's actually millions of ideas out there, and that the more you look for them, the more you find them.*

Despite his laid-back demeanour and quiet wit, Riddle seems determined to challenge various conventions. This isn't a new thing. He looks back at the wonderfully dry **The Great Escape from City Zoo**, and speaks of the potentially disastrous decision to create it in black-and-white.

*My perception was that publishers felt that if picture books weren't brightly coloured, that might be a problem. But I had a really strong feeling that book needed to be in black-and-white, because I wanted it to look like stills from movies, from that era when black-and-white was really a lovely medium in itself, so it was like an album of stills, and the text became captions to*

*those pictures. That to me seemed like a strong concept, and I wanted to pursue that, but when I did, the first publisher I showed it to went a bit cool on that idea. I had some trouble finding anyone else for a while.*

It's now history that **The Great Escape from City Zoo** was shortlisted for the CBCA awards in 1998—clearly black-and-white wasn't at all disastrous.

I ask Tohby what he thinks about the picture books that have challenged in various ways, such as in the themes they cover, and the age of their intended audience. Of course I'm referring to picture book creators such as Gary Crew, Steven Woolman, and more recently Shaun Tan and Matt Ottley; Riddle is considered in his response.

*I don't know where this trend will ultimately go, but the thing about picture*

EIGHT

books is that they're just a format and a medium; they're not a genre. I think if you confuse those things, and start to approach picture books as a genre of literature, it just gets too unwieldy to think about. I think what people are finding is that they're a fantastic way of expressing ideas, in the same way that movies work really well, using pictures and words. You can do anything with them — it's just whether publishers will take a punt on them, and how they'll be received. And it's how they're received that will determine where they go, and who they'll be read by.

But what of the books that are ostensibly for the pre-schooler or young primary-aged child, and yet start off using language that many might see as not so much inappropriate, as difficult. The example I'm thinking of is Riddle's most recent picture book, **Nobody Owns the Moon**, which begins with these lines:

**The fox is one of the only wild creatures in the world that can successfully make a life for itself in cities.**

**This is because it is quick-witted ... and able to eat a variety of foods.**

**Other creatures can live in cities but often with limited success — especially when compared with the fox.**

**One fox who lives successfully in the city is Clive Prendergast.**

Clive Prendergast from Nobody Owns the Moon



What was Riddle thinking, starting a picture book for young children with such dry, 'factual' language? I can imagine a young reader not quite 'getting it' at the outset, but persisting nonetheless, perhaps with assistance from the adult reading it with or to them. Is that what he imagined as well?

*First and foremost, at the point where you're writing those words, you're not thinking of anything but this idea that's amusing you and intriguing you, and you're just trying to get that down, and make it work, and*

*maybe later you'll reflect on how it'll be received. But having said that, I'm wary of under-estimating the native intelligence of children. I think they can surprise you. Thinking about the relationship between the adult reader and the child: in a good reading situation all sorts of things can be shared between them, and their respective perceptions can be shared, and the adult gains insights as well as the child.*

Perhaps the shared perceptions and concepts of Riddle's work aren't all that removed from some of the decisions he's made in his adult life. A couple of years ago, Riddle and his young family moved from the eastern suburbs of Sydney to the Blue Mountains. In addition to his writing, illustrating and cartooning, he was working as the editor of *The School Magazine*. He describes his moment of epiphany.

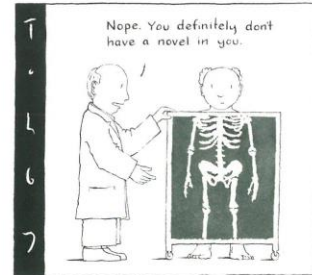
*While I knew that what I was doing for a job was valuable, I also realised that I had all these ideas I wanted to explore, but I didn't have time to do that because I was signing off on staff leave sheets and approving payments. So we needed to find a way to live that was more financially viable. Besides which, I think better in the cold.*

So like the animals in one of his picture books, he escaped the city. And yet it seems that in his mind, he hasn't really left. Cityscapes, buildings, alleys, architecture — cities form a common link in much of his work. Because yes, despite no longer living in one, Tohby Riddle loves cities.

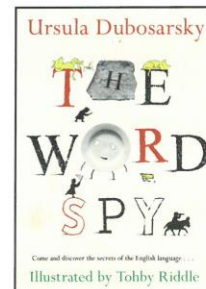
*It comes from a fascination with urbanism which I developed from the age of twelve or thirteen, when we moved closer to the city from a fairly bushy area north of Sydney Harbour. Sometimes I'd catch the bus into the city, and just explore, and I found it endlessly fascinating, wondering what's down that alleyway, and what's up those stairs? When we were a little older, we'd explore the vast tunnel system under the city, and go to railyards and hang around in those deserted, rarified environments.*

After attending a Rudolf Steiner school at Middle Cove for his primary years, Riddle attended Sydney Grammar School for his secondary years:

*I think I changed quite a bit. I went from a gregarious ringleader to someone who was, I suppose, quite overawed. The Steiner school was leafy and in a very natural environment, and the Grammar School was in the city, and quite imposing, and hadn't changed in decades. There were all these teachers wearing black sweeping robes and calling you 'boy', and it was*



A Tohby Riddle cartoon for *Good Weekend*



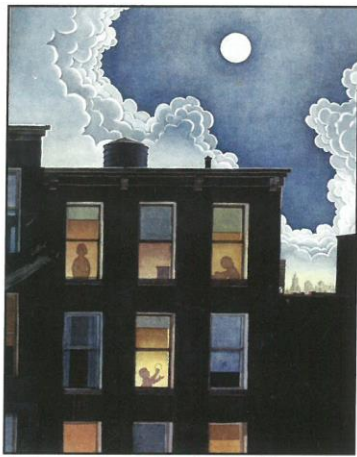
*The Word Spy* (2008) Ursula Dubosarsky, ill. Tohby Riddle, Viking, 978 0 670 07227 9 Hb

Honour Book: CBCA Eve Pownall Award 2009  
Winner: NSW Premier's Literary Awards Patricia Wrightson Award 2009

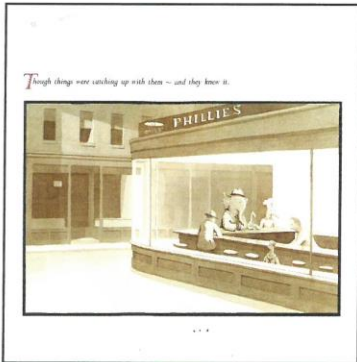
*very, very different. And I think that my intense feelings about that time in my life come in large measure from that dramatic contrast.*

Perhaps that intensity of experience is what led him to a love of the urban landscape, so much so that his second career choice, after becoming an artist, was architecture.

But I point out to him that despite where he grew up, Riddle's cities don't look very much like Sydney. With their stepped skylines and greystone facades, they look like ... somewhere else altogether.



A cityscape from *Irving the Magician*: Irving can be seen practising his magic tricks.



From *The Great Escape from City Zoo* based on Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* which has now, says Tohby, become a meme—a cultural symbol

Well, if you love cities, eventually you become interested in the archetypal metropolis — early- to mid-twentieth century New York — which is beautifully captured in old movies and pictures. In *The Great Escape from City Zoo* there's an image of the ant eater working as a construction worker on a skyscraper, which is based on a well-known Lewis Hines photo of a rigger on the Empire State Building. It's an aesthetic thing more than anything, this love of cities. I mean, I don't get too specifically New York about it, though, with landmarks and so on — I want it to be this great metropolis of the popular culture mind.

And while he isn't so pointed as to be critical of the dark and unnerving depictions of cities in the work of some of his contemporaries, he does make the observation that he wants his urban environments to

have a certain lightness and joy. Riddle's cities aren't concrete jungles. They are light, inviting, and yet mysterious. And it is in the cityscapes that his interests in architecture and art come together. It's no accident that one of the pictures in *The Great Escape From City Zoo* bears a strong resemblance to the iconic painting *Night Hawks*, by Edward Hopper, which depicts the art-deco chic of large American cities like Chicago and New York.

Riddle has visited New York, and compares it to meeting a life-long hero, and being disappointed in the experience.

*The New York I had in my mind was such a fantasy that when I got there I was a bit surprised that it was block after block of grimy old streets. But there are parts that are quite beautiful, too. That stepped shaped of the early skyscrapers in New York meets the sky very nicely, whereas later buildings often don't.*

*But after a week or two, after being overwhelmed, I have to confess I found the place had become rather overwhelming, as a visitor. I think you need to live there, and experience the seasons, and learn how to get around and just feel familiar. But if you're just roaming around, parts of it tower over you, and there are those vast, straight, huge blocks... Around here you get used to natural forms, and an horizon, but in cities like New York the sun sets behind the buildings, and you find yourself quite disconnected from natural rhythms. Compare it to Australian cities, where you can still find natural forms, like a weathered rock in a park, but in New York, it seems like everything's been built upon. Cities like Sydney tend to look outward, whereas New York looks inward.*

This brings us back to the cities in which he sets his picture books, and latterly his foray into writing for young adults. Where is the fear, foreboding and 'overwhelmingness' of his experience of his 'archetypal metropolis'?

*I want my cities to appear as places where so many things are going on at once, rather than some type of dystopian nightmare. But they're just different approaches to the setting, and what we're trying to do with it, and what we're trying to say with that. I like to give that aspect of my pictures and my writing a meaningful ambiguity: you don't fix the meanings down, and it's not ambiguous because you've expressed it too vaguely, but in a way you're just showing aspects of life to kids, without having to overlay that with your own personal statements. You just show it to them, and reality is ambiguous and random and chaotic, and if you can just get a nice, authentic slice of that into a book,*

*then it bears repeated readings, repeated discussions about the possibilities of the meanings, and you can read it at different ages — you can grow up with a book, which is something I liked about some of the picture books I had when I was a kid: *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak always amazes me, and I ended up with about sixty of those little A-format paperbacks of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*.*

Thinking about this multi-layered, multi-satisfying approach that is in some ways reminiscent of Roald Dahl, I ask Riddle about this line in *Nobody Owns the Moon*, where he describes the job of the fox, Clive Prendergast:

**By day, Clive works in a factory. He doesn't know what is made there; he just puts the same two parts together — over and over.**

When I mention this line, Riddle reminds me that in the accompanying picture the fox is smiling. Unlike many, who would be rendered empty by banality of such a job, Clive Prendergast wears a small, satisfied, enigmatic smile. It's quite whimsical, and isn't dissimilar to Riddle's own. *Really, the fox is just happy to have a job, which allows him to live in this place*, he explains.

And not a leave form or an invoice in sight.

*That's right. He's quite content, without needing to know the higher purpose beyond what he does. His life isn't consumed by his work, so he's allowed to enjoy it.*

Now, no longer content with using the visual shorthand of cartoons and images and sparse text, Riddle has turned his hand to writing for older readers. His young adult novel *The Lucky Ones* is a paean to cities, to the eighties, and to youth and the uncertainties of adolescence. Tellingly, it is slow-paced, considered, reflective and philosophical. And like many of his books, it remains rather open-ended.

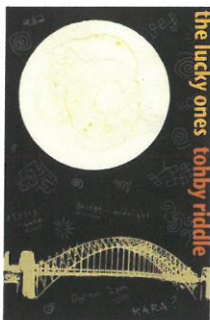
*I think that most of my books end without a clear conclusion, or a clear take-home point. They do sort of sound off at a certain point, and leave the reader to reflect somewhat. I do tend to believe that humans instinctively want to create narration, because it helps them make sense of reality. But I think there's a risk there of overdoing that in literature, and in the way we look at the world — trying to turn everything into a story. I would much prefer to recapture the world in a way that just reveals it. Then it's up to the reader to take the experiences of the characters, whether they fail or succeed, and to ponder on them, and to hopefully relate in some way.*

Like all good writers for young adults, Riddle has drawn on his own experiences from that time in his life. In an interview on the Aussie YA Alliance blog\*, he says:

*I started this book before I did many of the other things. It got put in a bottom drawer for a while then I came back to it. The thing that never went away was the voice and a very strong feeling for that time of life and the kinds of friendships you make and the thoughts you have and the sheer intensity of it... I could relate to [the main character's] excruciating social ineptitude, and other struggles — and also the wonder and lust for adventure of some kind — it really did come from a strong feeling for the subject.*

Yes, there does seem to be a lot of Tohby Riddle in the character of Tom. The place in which he lives, the way he seems to sit back and observe, the quietly-spoken, thoughtful school-leaver heading off to Art School. So is it him?

*Certainly there are elements of me in Tom, but really, he is who he needs to be to make the story work. But if you say that's me, that's incorrect. What you do is you simplify certain aspects of who you are and*



*amplify others to serve a developing narrative. So if you focus on one side, you're going to leave others out. So yes, he's partly me, but partly who he needed to be as well.*

What of the future for Tohby Riddle? What's next, up in the cool, clear thinking-air of Katoomba?

*Oh, here are always ideas swirling around, even if I don't quite know what they are yet,* he says, with his enigmatic, satisfied Clive Prendergast smile.

Our thanks to Penguin Australia for permission to reproduce the illustrations from Tohby's books

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\* YA AUSSIE ALLIANCE -

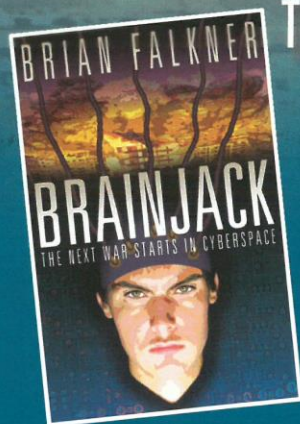
<http://aussieya.blogspot.com/2009/04/interview-tohby-riddle.html>

# BRIAN FALKNER BRAINJACK

THE NEXT WAR BEGINS IN CYBERSPACE

"Fast-paced  
and exciting"

Kirkus on *The Tomorrow Code*

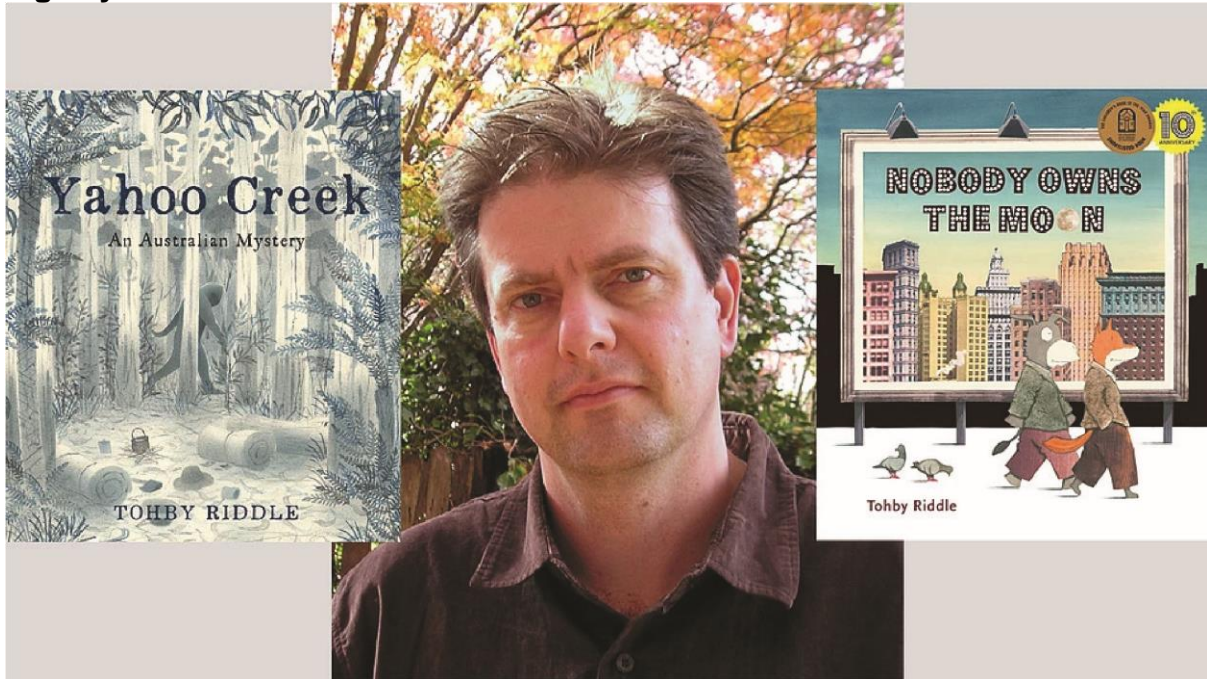


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Hurst, Miriam 'Tohby Riddle: The Moon, Donkeys & Hairy Men' *The Sapling*, April 2, 2019

<<https://www.thesapling.co.nz/single-post/2019/04/02/Tohby-Riddle-Moons-Donkeys-Australian-Legends>>

What connects the mysterious hairy man of the Australian bush, the Japanese author Haruki Murakami, and a struggling donkey just trying to get by in the big city?



I loved Tohby Riddle's 2009 picture book *Nobody Owns the Moon* from the first page. 'The fox,' it observes drily, 'is one of the only wild creatures in the world that can successfully make a life for itself in cities', and the corresponding illustration shows one particular fox, Clive Prendergast ('his real name can only be pronounced by foxes'), relaxing in a comfortable chair with his feet up, a cityscape out the window, a Van Gogh print on the wall and a stack of books beside him. This opening is Riddle's books in microcosm; a gift for the unexpected, a depth of feeling for character, and a playful art style with references for the observant. I talked to him on the eve of publication of his latest book, *Yahoo Creek*.

**Miriam: What do you like best about creating books for children?**

**Tohby:** It's a two-fold answer for me, because you do have your audience, but it's a personal thing as well - the pleasure in creating art and writing. For me, first and foremost I love ideas, and then I like to try and capture those in words and pictures,

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

and my ideas tend to suit children's literature and the formats children's books are published in. The picture book especially.

When I pursue the idea I tap into a strong feeling, which might also be a childhood memory, remembering what it felt like to see the world from a child's point of view. Towards the end of the process I'm mindful of the fact that it will have largely a child audience, and so I make sure that no matter the idea it's presented so simply that a child can understand it. As well as adults - hopefully anyone reading it connects with it somehow.

**Miriam: You have a wide range of skills to draw on - illustration, writing, collage, design. Does each idea come with its own format?**

TR: Because I've also worked as a cartoonist I've trained my mind to wander and make unusual connections between things. I keep a notebook and I scribble things down, and every now and then something in particular has a kind of thrill, and you go oh, what's that about. So from that I start exploring. I never know where it's going to lead; I need to write the story to find out about that idea and what's going to happen, and then it tends to sort of unfurl and I end up with the basic manuscript.

The better you get to know the idea the better you get to know how to present it, and I find each idea has its own needs in terms of how you express it. It might be a different narrative voice or an art style that just seems to suit that content. Design and layout and all those things. You hope that every part of the book has the DNA of the idea in it.

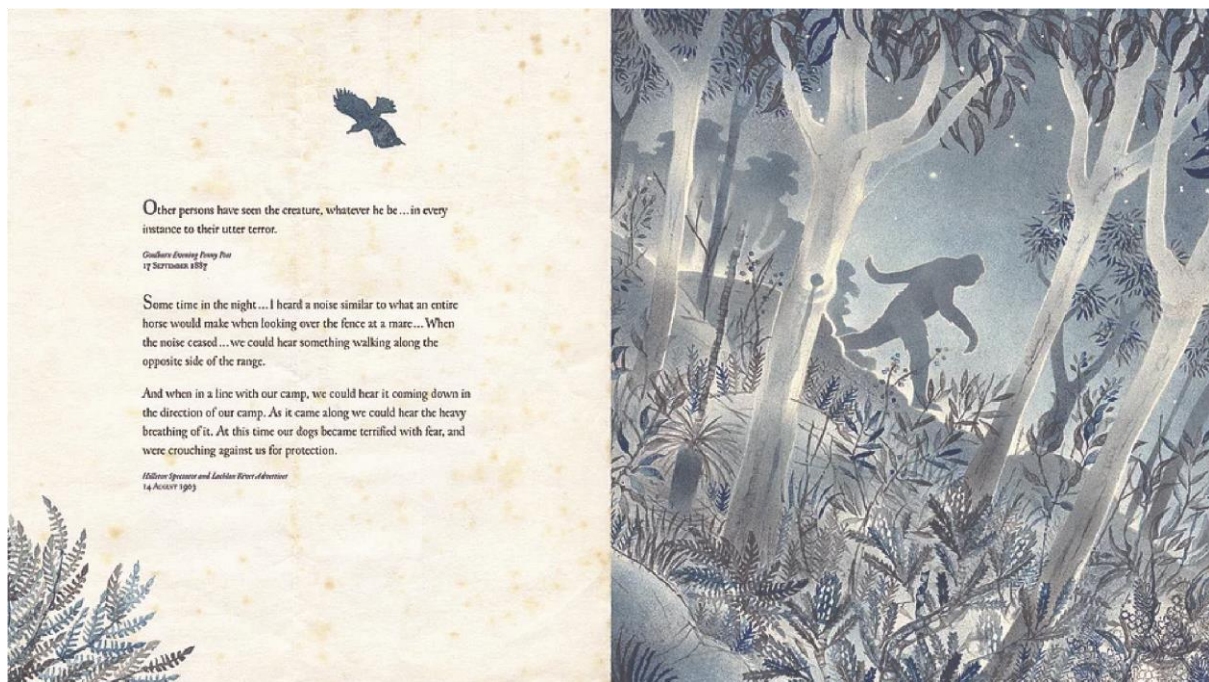
*The better you get to know the idea the better you get to know how to present it, and I find each idea has its own needs in terms of how you express it.*

**MH: So it's a process of discovery?**

TR: I think that's the excitement of it in a way, that something's seemingly constructed out of nothing. One moment you don't have a book idea and the next minute there's this story, and it seems to have real characters in it, who think and do things that surprise you as well. That's a really great part of the process and I think



it's the one that keeps me coming up with new books because it's a real thrill when that happens; when something comes alive.



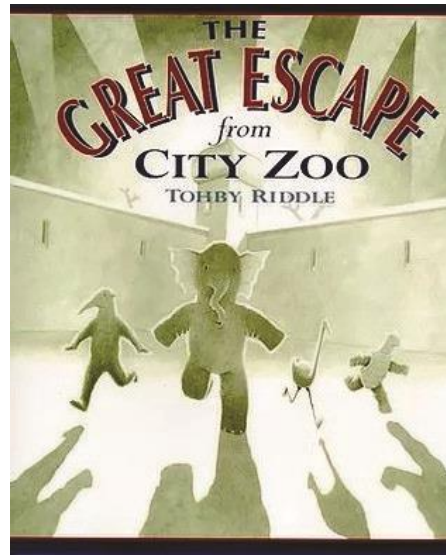
A spread from *Yahoo Creek*, written and illustrated by Tohby Riddle

**MH:** There are often what I can only describe as Easter eggs in your books, such as the Portland Vase being juggled (unsuccessfully) by My Uncle's Donkey and the call-backs to classic images such as Edward Hopper's Nighthawks painting in *The Great Escape from City Zoo*. Do you plan these, or do you seize on inspiration?

**TR:** They crop up. *The Great Escape from City Zoo* was called a post-modern picture book because it was appropriating other images from popular culture, but I wasn't thinking in that way. I think what happened there was because I went to art school and studied fine art, I look at lots of art and notice things in movies. And when you start constructing images you start to realise that there are precedents for those images.

In *The Great Escape from City Zoo* especially it seemed like a classic old black and white movie, and all those images I drew upon gave it that feel. I had fun with that and it can extend the reader's experience when they find out more about what's going on in the image and it leads them to other art.

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**MH:** You've written a number of books set in cities, but your latest, *Yahoo Creek*, is set in the bush - very specifically, the Great Dividing Range of Australia. Was it hard to make that shift?

**TR:** It was actually a joy to do that. Until the age of thirteen, before our family moved into Sydney, I'd grown up on the edge of a large national park bushland and so the bush was a big part of my childhood. I was the youngest and had two much older sisters and I spent a lot of time just roaming around the bushland – little caves and creeks and mangrove swamps and that sort of thing. More recently I've moved up to the Blue Mountains just out of Sydney, which is surrounded by vast areas of bush and I've been reconnecting with the bush again.

*Yahoo Creek* is partly a long overdue response to having grown up in the bush: it's a tribute to the Australian landscape.

**MH:** Could you talk about the process of making *Yahoo Creek* and your collaboration with Peter Williams [a Ngiyampaa Elder]. How did it all come about?

**TR:** It started when I moved to the Blue Mountains and started hearing stories of hairy man encounters in the bushlands around the Blue Mountains and then beyond, up and down the Great Dividing Range. Something about them seemed possibly

meaningful, a way of engaging with the landscape. I began researching more and more and then I found that the National Library of Australia has an online database where you can go through digitised early newspapers going back to the beginning of the colony. So I spent a lot of time searching those and finding all these colonial newspaper reports that were also of encounters with large hairy hominid creatures. I found so many of them, close to a hundred articles so far, and I was really interested in the stories amid all these reports and also the voice of the reporters, and I started to think you could construct a narrative by carefully arranging extracts from these, and build up a picture of what was possibly happening.

I got to that point and then I was also aware that Aboriginal people have beliefs about the hairy man as well, which I think made it even more interesting because Aboriginal people and European settlers were both independently experiencing this strange phenomenon. And that's where my publisher said, maybe we need to consult someone senior or with authority who might be able to offer a perspective on what we're doing.

*I was also aware that Aboriginal people have beliefs about the hairy man as well, which I think made it even more interesting because Aboriginal people and European settlers were both independently experiencing this strange phenomenon.*

I'd met Uncle Pete by chance - a friend of mine knew of him - and he was very keen to meet up and share knowledge. He was based in the Blue Mountains too, so we met up and we had a long chat and I wrote down a lot of notes. As I was writing up the notes I found them really interesting as an extra voice alongside all the colonial voices and so almost in a playful way I thought what would it be like if I placed his words at certain points in the narrative, so I tried that and it seemed to do something quite meaningful. I think because here's this history, and then here's someone saying what that mystery is, is this. He was very matter-of-fact about what was going on and it wasn't news to him at all.

So I showed the publisher and she said, wow, that's really interesting. I then showed it to Uncle Pete and he really liked it too. The Aboriginal point of view is as varied as there are over a thousand tribes of Aboriginal people and you can't say this is the

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Aboriginal point of view, but certainly in his case he was interested in sharing knowledge. He has a feeling that it's important to share knowledge or else no-one will know it outside of a few people, so that was his attitude to those words being in print. He really liked what it was doing in the book and was very happy for it to be used that way. As it got closer to final draft I just kept showing it to him to make sure he was happy with it and right before it went to print, I showed it to him again and he made a few last minute changes.



*A spread from Yahoo Creek, used with permission*

**MH: You end the book with his statement about these stories being not mine or yours, but ours.**

**TR:** His attitude was that these stories need to be shared and that they're all our stories and that idea that anyone born in Australia (he says) is born to the lore of this land. Which is very powerful because it's saying not just that they are your stories but it comes with a responsibility too, because the lore is about looking after the land. So it's a command as well. He's a wise fellow, Peter Williams.

**MH: It sounds like a really powerful experience.**

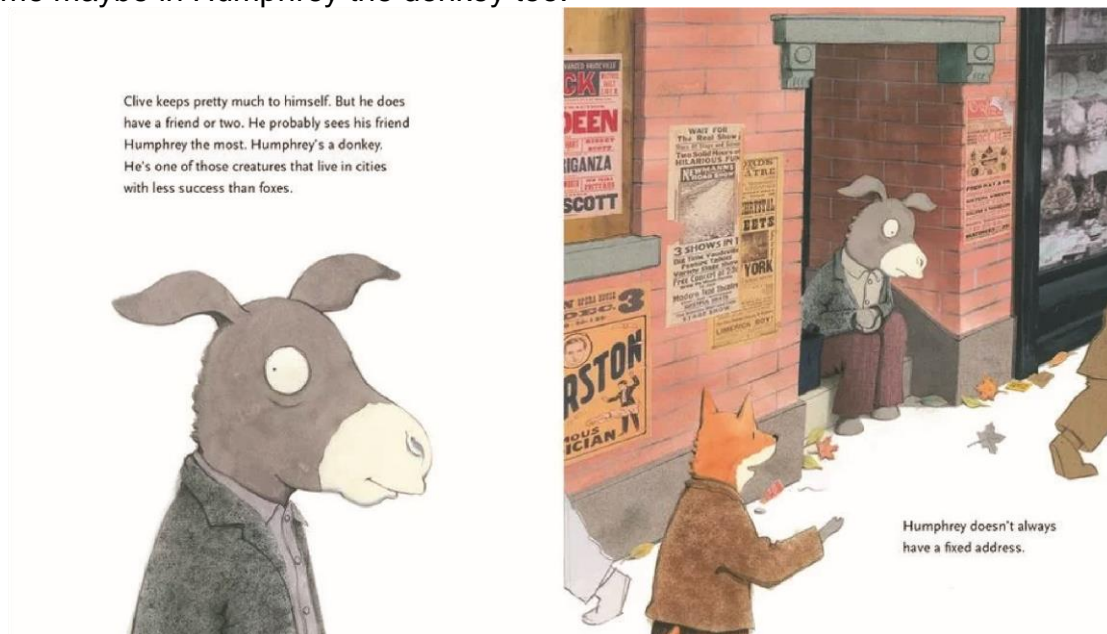
**BM:** It was quite a journey putting that book together. It's interesting how the experience of making some books can be transforming. We've kept in touch, and we still meet for coffee and have a chat about a few things. He invited me to a big corroboree up in the bush late last year, which was terrific.

*It was quite a journey putting that book together. It's interesting how the experience of making some books can be transforming.*

**MH:** One theme that crops up in many of your books, especially *Nobody Owns the Moon* and *Milo*, is friendship, and how this relationship can be tested. Is that something you're particularly interested in?

**R:** I guess I must be! If I were to psychoanalyse myself it would appear that friendship, and how friendships form and how they play out is a preoccupation or an interest. Certainly in the books if I look at them carefully they probably reflect experiences of friendship.

In *Nobody Owns the Moon* more and more I start to see that Humphrey's a combination of a couple of my old friends, and there's bits of me in Clive and bits of me maybe in Humphrey the donkey too.



*A spread from Nobody Owns the Moon, written and illustrated by Tohby Riddle, recently republished by Berbay Publishing*

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I've had friends who've struggled like Humphrey has, really big-hearted good people who still have struggles, and so I kind of know those characters. There's a sympathy and a fondness for Humphrey that comes through. I always feel it's a good sign when writing that you have this strong feeling come through, it can be humour or even a little lump in your throat. You realise it moves you, it touches on something inside you, and I think that's probably a good sign because if you're putting that much feeling into it then hopefully readers will get some feeling from it.

*I always feel it's a good sign when writing that you have this strong feeling come through, it can be humour or even a little lump in your throat.*

**MH: Speaking of donkeys. Your book *My Uncle's Donkey* was translated into Japanese by Haruki Murakami, of all people?**

**TR:** I didn't realise what was happening until the book came out. I later found out that he had been in Australia - I think he was writing an article for Japan Airlines or something like that, not here for a writers' festival – he was in Melbourne and he was meeting with people at the state library down there, and then he went to a bookshop and he bought a few books including *My Uncle's Donkey*, so it must have caught his eye somehow. He decided he wanted to translate it for the Japanese edition, so when I got an offer came from a Japanese publisher via my agent and all they mentioned was that they had an enthusiastic translator on board. I later found that he was the enthusiastic translator.

And it's come out in Japan and has his name on the cover as well. It's such a random story, but I really like it because it's not the way things usually happen in publishing. He's circumvented all that by going, 'I like this book I want to see it published in Japan so I'll just go and make it happen'. He wouldn't be thinking like a publisher, and so it came more from an artistic perspective than a market or strategic publishing perspective, which is a nice thing.

**MH: You've worked as an illustrator in the past – is there a writer you'd like to work with, or a project you've wanted to work on?**

**TR:** Probably not specifically - I think it's more, are there ideas I want to work on, and that inevitably comes back to the things I'm into. If I'm reading a lot about something I might try and work out how I can do a book on what I'm interested in, so it does tend to come back to my own thoughts and ideas. Having said that, I worked closely with [Ursula Dubosarsky](#) on the *Word Spy* books and we're good friends and I could imagine working with her very easily. I love her writing and the way she thinks, so if there were a writer I'd like to work with I'd happily work with Ursula. Otherwise, I have my own strange ideas that keep me pretty busy for the moment.

*If I'm reading a lot about something I might try and work out how I can do a book on what I'm interested in, so it does tend to come back to my own thoughts and ideas.*

**MH: As New Zealanders, we sometimes don't pay enough attention to Australian artists. Are there authors/illustrators of picture books we should be looking out for?**

**TR:** Certainly if I look around there's some good books being made, good quality, handsomely produced good-looking books.

The last book I've looked at in depth was Shaun Tan's *Cicada*. He wrote a nice comment for the new edition of *Nobody Owns the Moon* and so I emailed him to thank him and we ended up swapping books, *Cicada* with *Stinkbug*.

So *Cicada* arrived yesterday in the post and I just really studied it and read it with my fifteen-year-old daughter. In terms of books I've looked at in recent years that one has a level of enchantment to it and it's got very real worlds that live on inside the book. I was really impressed with what he'd done there. I asked my daughter about it, what do you think it means and she had meanings that I hadn't thought of and I had my own reading of it and then I realised you could read it all sorts of ways.

**MH: There's a lot going on there.**

**TR:** One of the things I've realised making picture books is that they are really hard to make work really well. It's like building a finely made machine, all the parts work and it purrs away. It strikes me is that he's just got all the parts right and they're all in the right place and the whole thing just hums along. That's a sign of someone who's really on top of his game.



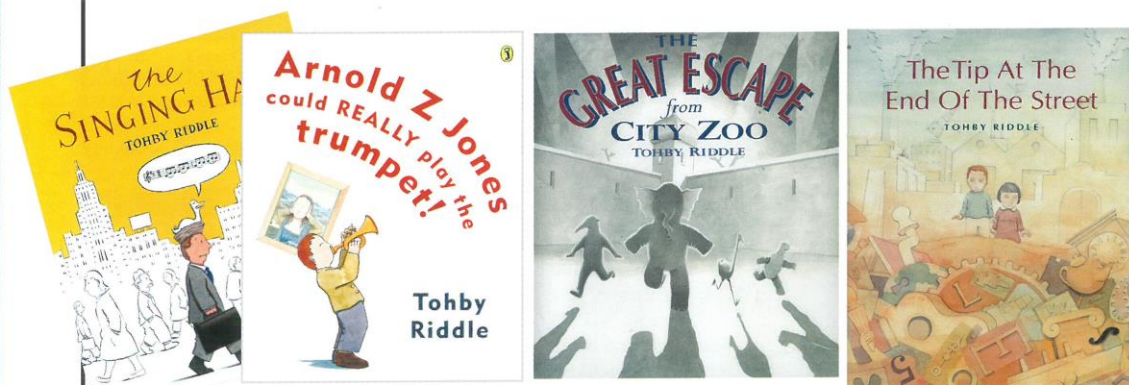
## Appendix B. Reviews

Steinberger looks at the work of Tohby Riddle and how to read his works visually.' *The Literature Base*, Vol. 12, No. 2, May 2001, pp 4–9.

The  
Literature  
Base

# Ambitious With Meaning While Maintaining Simplicity

*Kevin Steinberger looks at Tohby Riddle's more recent work and suggests approaches to sharing his visual imagery with students*



Author/illustrators are usually distinguished by a signature medium, style, theme, genre, even a particular readership. The infant reader of Dick Bruna, Bob Graham's families, the collage constructions in Jeannie Baker's picture books, the highly stylised East End streetscapes of Charles Keeping, Pat Hutchins' exploration of mathematical concepts or Pamela Allen's dynamic texts.

Not Tohby Riddle. The work of the Sydney-based picture book creator defies neat categorisation and is not even recognisably Australian. Each of his eight picture books to date is quite unlike the other in its format, execution, theme and audience. Some, like *Careful With That Ball, Eugene!* are patently written to entertain young children whilst other titles like *The Royal Guest* speak to much older, knowing readers who have the cultural experience to appreciate their parody or allusion. Whoever the intended audience is, Riddle's books have found very receptive readers in all age groups, locally and overseas, especially in the United States. As the reader brings more knowledge and experience to the reading, the books yield commensurately more satisfaction and meaning. The stories can be read at different levels. That is the delight of Tohby Riddle's books, there is much to search for in his texts but especially his pictures. Classroom readings of his picture books, in my experience, inevitably lead to much enthusiastic dis-

cussion about meaning and significance of images. But there are always children who have difficulty diverging from the literal path of the primary textual narrative.

How to peel away the superficial fabric of the story and discover the layers of meaning? The answer lies in a close reading of the pictures. The reader needs to enter the realm of visual literacy and all that that implies. Riddle's books repay many readings; it seems there is always some detail previously overlooked that is indeed significant to the implied multiple narratives. Each subsequent discovery adds to the nuances of meaning that resonate throughout his books. Equipped with strategies of critical viewing, the reader will, like Carl and Minnie in *The Tip At The End Of The Street*, uncover insight into other worlds and realities.

Robyn Sheahan notes that such skill *needs to be cultivated by application to the reading of such visual texts.* (1995 p.16) She suggests that we understand text through our facility with reading and writing but our ability to read pictures is limited by, for many of us, lack of experience at creating pictures. Once the mechanics of visual communication are learned, visual texts will be better understood, the total reading experience enhanced. The dissimilarity of Riddle's picture books and their multiple planes of narrative and artistic approach make them a tantalising choice for such an exercise.

Colin's humanity is underscored by foregrounding him against the hard, geometric edge of the city skyline. The absence of detail aids that contrast and gives him a forbidding anonymity to the forces of the city machine.

The City has won. It powers on without regard to individuals.

**They didn't seem to assist him in any way at all. Without work, Colin Jenkins could no longer afford to keep his home. His landlord, who he'd hoped might be more understanding of people with birds' nests on their heads, wasn't.**

The characters are placed squarely in the centre of the picture with Colin and his 'singing hat' clearly framed by the towering buildings. They are the focus.

The characters are in close proximity to each other; they are suffering together.

The characters are walking away from the source of light; they are entering a dark phase in their lives. They are also walking contrary to the direction of the story; there is ostensibly no further role for them.

Colin's slouched attitude highlights his despondency. The dark shadow beneath him adds emotional weight to the image.

Illustration from **The Singing Hat** reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Australia.

## —Tohby Riddle's Amazing Picture Books—

Michele Anstey (1996) has identified two common approaches to critical viewing of illustration in picture books. The aesthetic approach draws from traditional art appreciation whereby the pictures are *aesthetically scanned* in terms of properties of design, composition, media and technique. The critical literacy approach is based on the premise that communication is a social act and consequently carries cultural ramifications. Thus a complete reading of a picture book necessarily embraces the social and cultural dimensions of the text and pictures while considering the method of their presentation. Jon Callow (1999 p.2) refers to this background behind the pictures when he writes that *all visual texts are influenced by the cultures, values, ideologies and world views in and through which they are created and consumed*. The space between this cultural veneer and the pictures is where the meaning lies, waiting to be discovered by astute readers who can read the signs of ambiguity, irony, parody, incongruity or metaphor and make an informed and satisfying interpretation of the story from their unique perspective.

Riddle's texts are characteristically brief and linguistically plain. While the prose achieves potency through its deliberate understatement and unfolding of plot, it sets up a greater role for the pictures in revealing meaning. **The Singing Hat** best illustrates this nexus. Immediately from the cover it establishes an incongruity that must be resolved — an office worker is walking along a footpath bearing a bird in a nest upon his head. He is rendered in coloured collage among colourless line-drawn pedestrians backgrounded by a colour-leached cityscape. Who is this man? Why is the bird upon his head? Similarly, questions spring to mind from the covers of the other books. Look at the back-lit dramatic perspective of the animals escaping from the city zoo, so reminiscent of the movie, *The Great Escape*. Carl and Minnie foregrounded by a cornucopia of discarded artefacts, backgrounded by a juggernaut industrial cityscape. And the Mona Lisa covering her ears against Arnold's trumpet din flags cultural allusions within.

Colour is a chief tool used to suggest ways of interpretation. **The Tip At The End Of The Street** is Riddle's homage to the past:

*I like to make connections with the past. There are a lot of good things about the past that get jettisoned in the rush for the novel.*

(Macintyre, op.cit.)

Carl and Minnie, habitual scavengers at the local tip, one day find an old man there, bring him home and install him in their scavenged railway carriage where he regales them with stories from the past. Who is he? What does he represent? All the pictures are ren-

dered in warm colours and bathed in autumnal light. The light softens the detail of the pictures and the tone of the colour aptly creating a faded yellow atmosphere of nostalgia and misty memories. In such a context, the author can easily and subtly shift his characters from one time to another and blur the boundaries between different realities. Like an old man trying to call up long ago images, the reader has to look hard to discern the detail in the montage of his memories. As he mysteriously disappears, so too the colour drains from the pictures.

**The Great Escape from City Zoo** is also a paean to the past, especially to the popular culture of the post-World War II era. As such it is rendered as a walk through a gallery of contemporary images: appropriations from black and white movie stills, art photographs from the likes of Ansel Adams, paintings and press photographs. It is the very absence of colour that reinforces the effect of a contemporary recount; the monochromatic novelty suggests a particular time, mood and way of reading the story.

That Colin Jenkins, the man with the singing hat, is rare individual in a big city that has long stifled humanity to mindless conformity and economic drudgery is highlighted by the way Riddle has judiciously used colour in that book. This time there is a wider tonal range. Stronger colour assists in setting up the dichotomy between the big, unforgiving city and the meek, little individual protagonist. In the all-colour scenes, Colin is dressed in soft grey while those about him are in intimidatingly stronger, brighter tones. But in the blink of an eye, a quick page turning, Riddle reverses that use of colour and renders the ordinary hero in strong colour against a colourless metropolis once he appreciates his singular gift.

Angle, space and line are other elements of illustration that add to the complexity of the visual code and which need to be considered in constructing meaning. Lines, integral to the drawing of a scene, can subtly draw the viewer's eye to an important pictorial element, such as a character or a piece of action. It is an illustrative contrivance but, well done, is imperceptible to the casual viewer. Space can be manipulated for the same purpose. For example, in **The Tip At The End Of The Street**, in order to emphasise the extent to which we have discarded the past to embrace the novelty of the present, Riddle has Carl and Minnie at the foreground of the page, with a vast stark sea of refuse stretching infinitely away from them over the page. There is no doubting the magnitude of the waste and the loss of humanity and memory with it. And there is emotional space, the

Arnold's parents are placed in the centre of the picture and form a triangular composition to gain the viewer's focus.

The background characters provide amusement for culturally aware viewers; they are Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein and Queen Elizabeth (see Riddle's previous book, *The Royal Guest*.)

The incongruity of an old man holding balloons is a frivolous counterpoint to the serious intent of the parent's shopping trip, a visual joke.



The parents solemnly carry boxes of ear plugs while some space away a little girl happily carries a new trumpet, literally and figuratively a generation gap.

Then one day, while returning from a day's shopping in town, his parents noticed something as they approached the house.

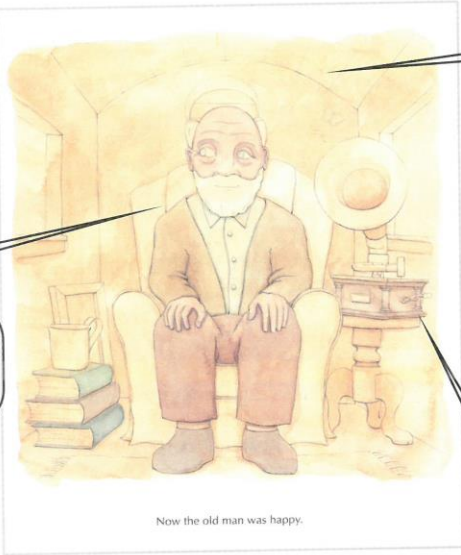
Illustration from *Arnold Z Jones Could Really Play the Trumpet!* reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Australia.

The old man is Riddle's signature motif, he appears in every book, often several times. Note that in *The Singing Hat* the old man plays a much more significant role and in *The Tip At The End Of The Street*, a leading role.

The bulk and shape of the man is echoed in the armchair. His head shape is repeated in an offset outline behind him. A halo? Was the chair a visual cue for for the children to imagine an old man? There is a tension of possibilities here.

The viewer is subtly led to the subject by lines of perspective tracing the ceiling and walls.

The picture is composed in the classic triangular format to draw the eye to the subject's face.



The warm tones both invite the viewer and suggest the faded memories of the past.

The scavenged accoutrements of the past are arranged to give weight to the picture. They share the same deeper tones of the man's suit suggesting that he is palpably mortal rather than a spirit.

The subject looks in the direction of the viewer, inviting participation in the story.

Illustration from *The Tip At The End Of The Street* reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Australia.

## —Tohby Riddle's Amazing Picture Books—

reader. As Arnold's parents tread homewards along the pavement, the crowd includes some notable figures. And there is also Riddle's pet motif who pops up in all his books, at large and obscure — his Everyman, a mysterious anonymous old man. Look for the bald head, glasses and long white beard. Riddle suggests that his books are very much open to interpretation when he identifies the *function* (of the old man) *is to raise questions*. (Macintyre, op.cit.) I've seen little readers purposefully hunt through Tohby Riddle's books for the old man in *Where's Wally* fashion.

And that's not all. Look at the relationship between the old man and the bird in *The Tip At The End Of The Street* and in *The Singing Hat*. In both cases the man and the bird are connected by a sense of wonder.

The open-ended nature of Tohby Riddle's stories begs reflection. The reader's interest is piqued at the end of the readings as much as the opening of the tantalising front covers. There is obviously a wider, deeper story than that implied by the brief prosaic narrative. *The Singing Hat*, *The Tip At The End Of The Street* and *The Great Escape from City Zoo* are fables. What existential comment do they deliver? There is but one thing to do: go back and re-read the stories more closely, look for visual clues that might accord with or disprove your interpretations. What better means or promoting reading pleasure and developing visual literacy in your students?

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## The Source Update

**In March this year Magpies online subject guide to children's books and poetry was updated with the inclusion of:**

- More user friendly software making it easier to move around the site.
- The ability to refine searches by reading age levels.
- An upload of another 800 full text poems making the total number of poems with their full text 3000. Another 9000 are indexed by subject and referenced to anthologies
- The addition of a database of over 40 major children's book awards from Australia and around the world searchable by author, title, award.

Of course, additions and updates of new titles and biographical information on authors and illustrators continues on a daily basis.

If you wish to trial *The Source* email [james@magpies.net.au](mailto:james@magpies.net.au) for a free two week password. *The Source* is hosted on the Magpies Website at [www.magpies.net.au](http://www.magpies.net.au)



Jameyson, Karen 'News from Down Under Turning Heads' *Horn Book Magazine* March/April 1998, pp 243–6. [This review of three Australian works includes pp 244–246 on this title.]

### Paperies and Trash Cans



I love paper. It doesn't matter where it comes from as long as I can touch it. This causes my boyfriend no end of consternation. "Don't touch that!" he'll screech as I spot something sticking out of somebody's trash container. "You don't know where it's been!" For me, it doesn't matter where it's been, as long as it inspires me.

My love for paper started when my mother, who was a secretary at Ford Motor Company, "borrowed" some letterhead paper for me to draw on, since sketchpads were beyond her financial means. I was thrilled, and the paper seemed extra special since it was stolen. I pictured the Big Ford Bosses somewhere, happily assured that their employees were using the paper for official use. Meanwhile, I sketched, cut, and folded my way into other worlds with it.

Now I make most of my own paper. But I still need inspiration. So I go to places like Kate's Paperie in New York City, where I live. Kate's is one of those *very* fancy-schmancy downtown stores that charges you twice as much so you can tell people you shopped at a "paperie." All the paper samples are large sheets draped over wooden dowels, lining the walls like huge squares of toilet paper for dignitaries. Once I made the mistake of walking up to one of these samples to feel the paper's texture. A chorus of frowns was hurled at me from my fellow shoppers. Apparently, I was supposed to merely *contemplate* the paper from a distance, like Martha Stewart contemplating a new color of paint meant to enrich the lives of Kmart shoppers.

When I feel like being totally bohemian, I go to Pearl Paint in Chinatown. Pearl Paint is the largest discount art supply store in the country. It's like a six-story rat's nest painted like a barbershop pole. The paper floor is crowded and claustrophobic. The help behind the counter seems to have every area of soft tissue on their heads pierced and adorned with rings. But Pearl Paint is like Kate's Paperie in one



very special way: nobody really wants to help you at either place (at Kate's I'm not rich enough; at Pearl I'm not grungy enough).

But it doesn't matter where I am at or what I'm doing or who I'm doing it with, interesting paper (even from a trash can) makes me want to sing! (Although you don't want to hear my singing. Trust me.)

—Robert Sabuda

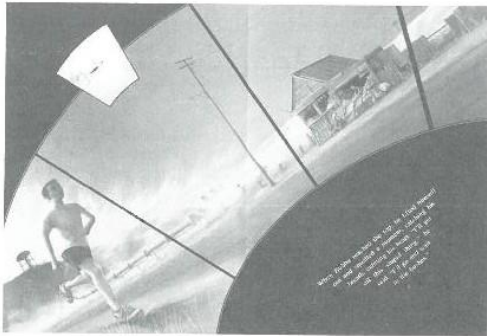
### News from Down Under Turning Heads

BY KAREN JAMEYSON

Picture books for older readers. The topic is a hot one in Australia, particularly in regard to the Book of the Year Awards. Should this art form be judged shoulder to shoulder with the more traditional picture book for a very young child? Who reads these books, anyway? As the controversy whirls on, however, the books in question continue to be published in greater numbers, with a range of results.

Mixed public reactions frequently accompany award decisions. But when a picture book for older readers was named the 1995 Picture Book of the Year by the Australian Children's Book Council, there was, according to one critic, downright "hostility." That book, however, *The Watertower*, written by Gary Crew and illustrated by Steven Woolman, continues to attract interest—and readers. Crew, a prestidigitator of words, has managed to work his magic successfully on a variety of reading levels, with a number of his books receiving widespread critical acclaim (his novel *Strange Objects*, for instance, was the Australian Children's Book of the Year in 1991 as well as an Edgar Allan Poe Award for Mystery Fiction nominee in the U.S.). *The Watertower* turned heads from the moment it was published—literally as well as figuratively. That's because, to begin with, the reader must actually turn the book on its side to read it and then continue to turn it as the story progresses (or doesn't, depending on your interpretation). According to one advocate, a high school English teacher, this actual turning/handling—along with the tantalizing clues to the story—is what hooks her student readers, particularly the less enthusiastic ones.

Both Crew and Woolman like to make their readers work. They understand precisely how much explanation their audience needs, and *The Watertower* strains readers' abilities nearly to the breaking point. So this story of the boys Spike and Bubba going for a



secret swim in the rusty old watertower in their outback town has another strand of plot looped around it, one that is related somehow to the watertower, what goes on there, and the fascination it holds for the townspeople. But author and artist provide no definitive information—only enigmatic visual and textual clues. Although the illustrations do depict the startling blue of the outback sky and the characteristic dusty red of the soil, the general darkness of the pages—black is the predominant color—underlines a malevolence seemingly at work, somewhere, somehow. And an incomplete circle placed at the top of the watertower appears repeatedly in the illustrations: in eyes, on hats, on glasses, in windows, in the shape of the paintings, in the design of the book overall. Just one piece missing, the creators seem to be taunting over and over. Just one more bit of information and you'd understand. But, as it is, unanswered questions hover in the air, leaving readers to argue, debate, muse, and ultimately reach their own verdicts about what happens. And now that Crocodile Press is publishing an edition in the northern hemisphere, American readers can make up their own minds. (Although the cover—which portrays the watertower at the center of pulsating waves, lit up with an eerie green light that highlights its flying saucer-like shape—gives readers a pretty good hint. Think Tripods.)

Among other recent picture book titles more appropriate for, if not aimed specifically at, older readers than the traditional audience is Tonby Riddle's *Great Escape from City Zoo*. The book nudges

Illustration by Steven Woolman from *The Watertower*. © Era Publications 1994, 1998.

its way through age barriers as nimbly as its escape-artist characters scale the walls of the zoo. The basic story of the "extraordinary events" surrounding the getaway of an anteater, an elephant, a turtle, and a flamingo from the City Zoo can be followed by a young reader without difficulty. After their escape, the foursome get themselves some disguises—the turtle cuts a fetching figure in his sailor suit—and begin to make their way in what is essentially a larger zoo: the world of human beings. In the meantime, the real zookeepers stay "hot on their trail." Any slip-up means it's back behind bars (where, incidentally, any recaptured animal is greeted as a celebrity by the other inmates).

This fundamental story inspires smiles of satisfaction in its own right. But other forces are at work. It's not just the understated, wry humor that the more mature reader will respond to, although that offers plenty of appeal (the anteater fainting outside a taxidermist's window with its "You snuff 'em—We stuff 'em" sign; the elephant succumbing to the lure of a public fountain). The book's most obvious visual distinction is its black-and-white art-

work: a "silver screen treatment," says the author-artist, in keeping with his desire to give the title the appearance of a 1930s adventure film. Armed with a bottle of India ink and three brushes, he went to work, watering down the ink to achieve the subtlety of different shades. From those shades and from his restrained lines ingeniously emerge a bounty of visual references to twentieth-century popular culture. In one illustration, for instance, the four escapees stride across a road in a formation instantly recognizable to fans of the Beatles and the *Abbey Road* album in particular. Another portrait is strongly reminiscent of a moment from the 1930s film version of *The Grapes of Wrath*. With an Anno-lik sense of the world and its



Illustration from *The Great Escape from City Zoo*. © Tonby Riddle 1997.

picturesque components, Riddle has tucked in many other sights as well, including King Kong, the Loch Ness monster, and Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, along with what are perhaps less familiar references, such as Bugsy Seigel's Pink Flamingo Casino and paintings by Magritte, Mondrian, and de Chirico.

"It is not intended," comments Riddle "that the story rely upon people being able to spot the references." But he hopes that the allusions imbue the work with a "larger-than-life quality," shaping it into a "twentieth-century legend." And, obviously, the more recognition, the more surprised moments of enjoyment. Riddle—a successful cartoonist as well as an author-artist—has stated emphatically that he writes for "the fun of it" rather than for a specific audience. If that narrows his readership, well, so be it.

But it doesn't!

When he fastens his subtle visual panorama of popular culture references onto the wings of a disarmingly simple text and plot, the result soars straight and true right across age barriers. So while the book is not intended for fledgling readers, they're bound to appreciate its story on the simplest level. It's not a book strictly for older readers the way *The Watertower* seems to be. *The Great Escape from City Zoo* is a book that just is—gently clever, exquisitely designed, rich with allusion. It also seems likely to find itself a devoted audience. And among the lucky ones are bound to be a dedicated cache of older readers.

Critic and reviewer Karen Jameyson is currently on the editorial staff of the *New South Wales School Magazine*.

## Erasing Pictures



I was asked recently to describe the way I paint pictures for picture books. I was very surprised by this request because I thought that by now every soul in America had either read about, heard, or seen me and my amazing little art demonstration, in which I show exactly how I make the pictures for my books. I think it much better to see me do this first-hand, but welcome the opportunity to offer a brief description of this highly unusual way of making pictures! You must first understand that I don't actually paint the images for a picture book. The images are made with an eraser. Yes, a magical little piece of kneaded rubber is my tool of choice. After coating the paper, board, or canvas with a "wash" of very thin oil paint or chalk to make a background, the picture is created by erasing the shapes of the lighter areas of the subject or image I wish to make. It is fascinating to watch the images emerge from the background as I work the eraser across the surface of the canvas until what appears is a completely rendered picture in black and white, lacking only color. Colors are then applied by "rubbing" various media (acrylics, watercolors, pastels, or oils) onto the erased image. The process is evolving, as I try to do something different with each new story or project.

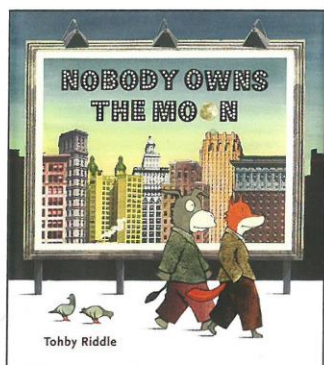
—Floyd Cooper





Paterson, Allison 'Ten years on Allison Paterson Revisits a Modern Classic Nobody Owns the Moon' *Magpies*, Volume 34, Issue 2, May 2019, pp 8–9.

MAGPIES VOLUME THIRTY-FOUR



**Nobody Owns the Moon** (2011/2019)  
Toby Riddle, Berbay Publishing, 32pp.  
978 0 994384 19 5 Hb

*Great picture books are rare. For good reason. To define their qualities, perhaps one could start with what they are not. They are not fashionable, because, while fashions come and go, their appeal remains constant. They are not imitative. They are not literal or prosaic. They are not cynical or clever. Their precise meanings are not easily grasped, but they are always meaningful. They are not easily forgotten.* (Toby Riddle, 2019)

A decade has passed since the acclaimed picture book **Nobody Owns the Moon** burst into the universe of children's literature and rapidly became a star. Widely recognised as being one of Australia's most valued and important titles, author and illustrator Toby Riddle successfully held fast to his own definition of what a great picture book is not, to create an artful, thought-provoking and memorable title. Shortlisted in the CBCA Awards and sold internationally, the ten-year anniversary of **Nobody Owns the Moon** could not go unrecognised by the team at Berbay Publishing. There was no better way to celebrate than negotiating publication rights and re-releasing this modern classic in a purposeful acknowledgement of Toby Riddle and his remarkable contribution to children's literature.

In the middle of a very busy city lives Clive Prendergast, an anthropomorphised fox who has the skills to survive in the bustling metropolis. He works in a mundane job but retreats to his comfortable apartment in a busy part of town. Though not appearing happy in his world, at night he gets up to more foxy things. His friend, Humphrey the donkey, is usually of no fixed address, surviving with little food and sleep while negotiating the

city with his possessions tucked in an old tote bag. Humphrey's struggle to belong reflects on the risk of loneliness in urban and industrialised communities. It is also a stark reminder that homelessness can have many causes. With empathy and kindness, Clive brings smiles to both himself and Humphrey. The delightful ending is the most memorable of events, being one that truly touches the heart of the reader. Can it be over ten years since Clive and Humphrey opened a lost and very special-looking blue envelope?

Toby Riddle reveals that he always knew that Clive and Humphrey had made a lot of friends since being introduced to the world in 2008. He always suspected, like himself, that Humphrey might have moved out of the city by now. Maybe even Clive too. But, according to Toby, that was just speculation. He need not wonder any further ... Berbay Publishing went in search and brought two of our favourite characters back to the city!

Do you recall the initial impulse to write **Nobody Owns the Moon**?

*I guess before the impulse there was a spark: a rather nondescript sentence about the fox's ability to live in cities, that I'd read somewhere. From this sentence, I pictured Clive the fox, which, in turn, triggered thoughts about how people negotiate inner city life. The story rapidly unfolded, though I didn't realise at the time how much I was drawing on my own experiences. I should also add that I love cities — and it always seemed to me back then that Australians had a residual suspicion of cities that led to dystopian depictions of them in children's literature—if they were depicted at all. (In fact, only in the last 25 years have large populations started actually living in our city centres—not just working in them during the day before returning to the suburbs.) So, In the City is celebrated for its enchantments and possibilities as much as for its challenges. It is many things and it is everyone's. I do hope this is still true enough of cities.*

The themes of inequality and living on the margins seems to have only increased in the

ten years since **Nobody Owns the Moon** first appeared. Do you think the book speaks even more clearly to readers today?

*Though I never set out to write a book about this in particular, such themes naturally emerged as the characters developed. My impression is that, ten years on, there may be a greater level of disenfranchisement in our society. And maybe **Nobody Owns the Moon** offers an illustration of this. Putting mental health issues aside, the most visible of the disenfranchised, homeless people, only had to lose a job or lack the right skills—by having hoofs for hands or something to that effect—to end up in that position, briefly or otherwise.*

Did you ever imagine that **Nobody Owns the Moon** might be re-released on its 10th Anniversary and, even though it was an award-winning title, were you tempted to tinker?

*I'm thrilled about the new edition! Berbay have done a lovely job with it. That book has always been very close to my heart, and during the brief period when it was out of print, I really mourned its absence. As for tinkering, I sometimes see things in my books that I think I could have done differently, but in the end, I have this very strong feeling that after a work goes out into the world, it is no longer mine, it's the world's. And that is that. Perhaps this has something to do with an idea in Indian classical art that the audience completes the work. So, to go back and fiddle with a work years later, seems to be in defiance of some natural law.*

How does your own life experience shape your memorable characters and your creativity?

*Whether I knew it or not at the time, **Nobody Owns the Moon** drew on my own experiences of early 1980s Sydney — amid all the randomness and serendipity that is a feature of complex urban environments. As teenagers, my friends and I literally did end up at special events and parties — as complete ring-ins — because we were keen explorers, curious about what was happening*

*in this building or that building or up that set of stairs. And wherever we ended up, we always just pretended we were meant to be there! This even included a quiet, end-of-tour party for David Bowie in the Presidential Suite of the now-demolished Sebel Townhouse! We just wandered in like we were meant to be there. We were offered drinks and introduced to people — and we stayed for hours! (Then, rather like Clive and Humphrey, we wandered back to our respective little teen bedrooms and our ordinary teen lives). So, in **Nobody Owns the Moon** the idea of the found invitation — and its transporting powers — was all quite plausible to me. As for the characters, after I'd finished writing the story, I realised they were largely amalgams of myself and my friends. By now, we were in our thirties and some had endured more than their share of tough times and hard knocks — even if their spirits were undimmed. I now see that Humphrey was a kind of tribute to them.*

You have had a long involvement with **The School Magazine**, including a time as editor. Did this experience shape your journey to being a successful author and illustrator of children's books? *I really loved working as an editor but I found it was a parallel pursuit to being an author. It was the other side of the publishing coin. And eventually, to do the*

*books I wanted to do, I had to get back to being primarily an author. For me it's a different way of thinking. Having said that, my time at **The School Magazine** was an experience I absolutely treasure. I was surrounded by incredible colleagues, including inspirational fellow authors. It was fun and creative. **The Word Spy** books came out of working with Ursula Dubosarsky when she was there, which was a pleasing legacy of our time at the magazine.*

Since Tohby's first picture book **The Great Escape from City Zoo** was released in 2005 his stories have continued to intrigue and receive acclaim. **My Uncle's Donkey** was one of those, being awarded the CBCA Book of the Year in 2011. Last year, in a moment of charming serendipity, it also intrigued award-winning and acclaimed Japanese writer Haruki Murakami.

**Tohby, who was not surprised My Uncle's Donkey might appeal to Japanese sensitivities, relates the story:**

*Strangely, I've only been able to piece it together after the event, but the basic facts are that **My Uncle's Donkey** was found in a Melbourne bookshop last year by Japanese author Haruki Murakami who took it back to Japan and translated it for a Japanese edition. Within months it was released by Asunaro Shobo. When you consider the*

*enormous stature of Mr Murakami, it becomes a unusual and surprising story. And it's a pleasing publishing story because things didn't happen in the usual ways.*

You are one of Australia's most enduring creators of children's literature. How did it all begin and what's next from Tohby Riddle?

*It started when, as a mailing clerk in a publishing house (not long after I'd graduated from art school), I decided to try writing a picture book. As a new face and a nobody in publishing, I figured the only way I'd get to illustrate a picture book was if I wrote the story too. The plan worked. Then I actually enrolled in an architecture degree. But after a few years, I started getting more book ideas and wanted to try them out. I realised that I really loved books!*

My new book is **Yahoo Creek: an Australian mystery**. Years in the making, this ambitious picture book presents the curiously persistent phenomenon of hairy man or yowie encounters through numerous extracts from reports in colonial newspapers, and through the words of an Aboriginal Elder. I'm hoping that when children get their hands on the book, it will, in the words of a colleague, *supercharge their imaginations*.

**Knight, Fran 'Review: Nobody Owns the Moon' *Read Plus April 5, 2019***

**<[https://www.readplus.com.au/blog\\_detail.php?id=9712](https://www.readplus.com.au/blog_detail.php?id=9712)>**

## Review Blog

**Apr 05 2019**

### **Nobody owns the moon by Tohby Riddle**



Berbay Publishing, 2019. ISBN: 9780994384195.

(Age: 4+) Recommended. Themes: Friendship, Cities, Adaptation.

The quick witted fox has adapted well to life in the city. He has changed his name to Clive Prendergast, and has learnt to eat a variety of foods, living in a one roomed apartment in a busy part of the town. He works by day in a factory putting things together, and at night goes out into the streets to look at the sights. He seeks out his friend, Humphrey and finds him sitting disconsolately in a doorway. Humphrey is a donkey and has not adapted as well as Clive to life in the city. He has tried several jobs, but as readers will be able to see, these positions have not proven to be successful. They sit together in the park and Clive notices that Humphrey has a blue envelope in his bag. Opening it he realises that it is an invitation to an exclusive theatre opening night. They attend and are treated to drinks and nibbles beforehand, and find themselves in the most luxurious of seats to watch the play, *Nobody Owns the Moon*. They laugh and cry during the performance and again find themselves treated to coffee and cake afterwards. Returning home,

they are ecstatic about their town and hug each other before going their separate ways. First published in 2008, this is a wonderful treatise on friendship - of being together, the illustrations detailing the life led by the two animals in the city. The background will delight the readers, and they will be concerned for Humphrey as he does not quite fit in as Clive does. From this readers will perhaps ponder the move to the city by the world's population, looking at how we adapt to life in the city and the problem of homelessness which has followed. Quirky, endlessly fascinating, Riddle always presents a challenge to his readers, making them think outside the box, muse on what makes us human, and look at one of the basic tenets of our existence, the companionship of others.

Fran Knight

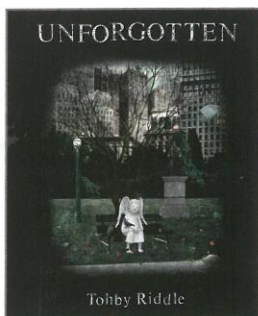
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MAGPIES VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN

**UNFORGOTTEN** (2012)

Tohby Riddle, Allen & Unwin, 128pp.  
978 1 74237 972 2 \$35.00 hb

Reviewed by Katharine England



Double-page spread from *Unforgotten*.

Similar to Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* in size, format and serious intent, Tohby Riddle's new picture book can be similarly productively pored over by anyone from eight to 80. Baldly put, it is a book about angels—*impossible birds / of the big sky*—who descend to the earth *to watch over / and to warm / and to mend*. Their work, in a world where so many are isolated and wars rage is not easy and one falls to the ground where it perches, spent, on a park bench, invisible to many as first autumn leaves cover it and then snow. Treated as a misplaced statue it is set permanently upon a plinth in the park, but those who have eyes to see it are watching out for it — a sad kelpie, a snowbound bird — until at last a little band of familiar Tohby Riddle characters — clown, donkey, dog, duck and a trio of pencilled children — come to its rescue to warm it and mend it in turn with tenderness and simple music until it is strong enough to go back, soaring to its place somewhere high above the earth.

I was reminded throughout of the biblical injunction to show hospitality to strangers, *for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*, and of the practice of mindfulness that seeks to ensure that no one is permanently forgotten, no one completely erased from society. The ramifications of the enigmatic title are extensive: the world is not forgotten by its guardian angels, a fallen angel is nurtured by its innocent familiars, but everywhere there are further unfolding instances of things unforgotten: a reflection of a bygone building takes the place of the modern one that actually leans over the water; ancient statues populate the streets along with women in sweeping Victorian dresses, peasants from every country under the sun, and business-suited men furnished with masks or

helmets or weather-worn sculpted heads that one can sometimes put names to.

The streetscapes are rich with heterogeneous references: the Parthenon is dwarfed on its rocky prominence by old skyscrapers and a concrete flyover; a scabby Sydney Tangara train passes on a rusty viaduct high over the columned portico of a reduced art gallery. Shopfront and building signs are in a plethora of languages and alphabets, a cross-cultural conversation writ large. Huge old city tower blocks with fire-escapes fringe something that might be Central Park and all the busy, blank-faced, crowding pedestrians look as if they've been plucked from different artworks and Lonely Planet Guides. Every page is a treasure-trove of memories and references that might give rise to a thousand human stories.

Riddle acknowledges a range of archival collections of photographs from the US

Library of Congress among his sources, while the initial angel perspective on the human world is represented by the NASA Earth at Night 2001 images of Europe seen from space, its outlines blocked in by its lit up cities. Other intriguing sources include an apocalyptic Wollongong sunrise and a collection of slides of a 1955 crossing of the Sahara taken by the author's late father. Several series of sequential rectangles suggest stilled cine film, and sure enough, on the YouTube trailer for the book the rectangles scroll and the little angel flies.

*Unforgotten* is a unique experience, a marvelously moving and thought-provoking spur to the consideration of history, geography, ethics, religion and the human art of story. It could well form the basis of an entire year's lower-secondary curriculum or simply warm the cockles of a single heart.

~ *The Inspiration for Unforgotten* ~



Usually I can pretty much trace where I got an idea from for a given book—a newspaper article, a conversation, a joke—but *Unforgotten* was different! It seemed to rise slowly from the sea like a new island. Scribbles to do with angels are scattered through my notebooks going back to the 90s, but more recently, strong haunting feelings—sparked by mesmeris-

ing images—came to me like dreams. There were a series of false starts on a story—but its structure and form eluded me. The breakthrough came in 2010 when I saw people crowding around a white cockatoo outside shops in Leura, in the Blue Mountains. I thought about this encounter between humans and a white-winged creature from the skies. What would happen if an angel were sitting on a public bench? How would people respond? Why would the angel be there? Elements of a story formed as I pondered these questions. Soon after, I wrote down the words, *Nobody knows where they come from. But they come, and I was away...*

Tohby Riddle

**Barnes, Clive 'Review: Unforgotten' *Books for Keeps*, Issue 210, January 2015.**  
<<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/210/childrens-books/reviews/unforgotten>>



This is one of those picturebooks whose ambition goes far beyond telling a simple tale for young children; and which not only assumes a developed sense of pictorial narrative but seeks to touch on the fundamental questions of who we are and how we live. If that kind of description warns you of pretentiousness in either artist or reviewer, then I should add that it also a book whose illustrations are beautiful, fascinating and strange, whose story is quietly and mysteriously engrossing, and whose images linger long after you put the book aside. Angels with children's faces, identified by the text only as 'impossible birds', descend from Space towards a benighted and light speckled earth. White cut-out figures from a Renaissance painting or a Christmas card, they drift down into a dark, hard-edged cityscape of towering buildings, mist, smoke and grime. Downcast stone headed people, jumbled from different times and cultures, perhaps pasted in from monochrome photographs, walk the streets and ride the subways beside the artist's own pale and withdrawn characters. The 'impossible birds' are on a mission of compassion to these disheartened people; they seek to 'watch over, to warm and to mend', but their work is hard and draining. One angel, weakened, falls to earth among the pale crowds, and, eventually, turning to stone, becomes a statue in a park, only to be rescued by a merciful motley gang of a boy and girl, a dog, a clown, a duck and (probably) a pantomime horse, who, themselves, watch over, warm and mend and, eventually, release the bird back to the sky. It's a poem told in pictures (and the text is written out as a poem towards the end of the book). The images appear like a stuttering lantern show, variations of light and dark, inviting the reader's imagination to sense something that remains tantalisingly out of reach, like the presence of the birds themselves. At its heart there is a double page spread of eighteen frames of the changing shape of a drifting cloud expressing the idea of 'a thought hard to hold'. All told, it's a remarkable, mesmerising book that seeks to put into pictures yearnings that escape words.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

**Fulcher, Kim ‘funny situations can lead to complex reasoning in a non-confrontational way’ *Where the Books Are***

**<<https://www.wherethebooksare.com/blog-1/review-my-uncles-donkey>>**

“My uncle’s donkey is toilet trained ... luckily.”

The thing I really love about *My Uncle’s Donkey* is that it’s a complex story that leads to complex thoughts.

It’s widely agreed that life is complex and so the ability to notice complexities can be a tremendous boost to self-confidence, resilience and skilled decision making.

When children begin to recognise that there are often competing interests to be balanced and that there will often be more than one right answer (and more than one wrong answer) they are better equipped to be compassionate and caring towards others.

This world could sure use more of that!

A book as simple and funny as *My Uncle’s Donkey* is ideal, because it presents the child with two familiar ideas and then sets those ideas outside of the everyday. Most children have an uncle and most children are familiar with the idea of having a pet. But a donkey falls outside of the norm—and leads to all sorts of possible thoughts like:

*Does my uncle have a pet?*

How does he treat the pet?

*What are the rules about pets?*

Is there any chance that *I* could have a donkey for a pet? Would it be allowed inside?

*Is having a donkey in the house shocking or cosy?*

Can someone else have a whole different set of standards for how pets are treated?

*Would I even want a donkey in the house?*

The donkey does seem to get in the way sometimes.

Once a child has settled on the idea that someone else can act differently and that can be fun but not necessarily something the child might want to do, they’re on their way to being able to think in similar ways about a whole lot of other more important issues. So... this is a great book for raising complex issues in a simple non-confrontational way.

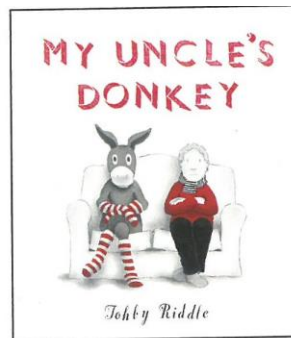
Plus, it’s heaps of fun to read—and that’s the key. Pretty much everyone likes to think and to wonder and to share a joke.

There are a whole bunch of little gags throughout the book, like: ‘*My uncle’s donkey is toilet trained ... luckily.*’ Visual gags too, like a donkey in striped socks. The last page is the clincher though: ‘*I wonder if my uncle’s donkey would be allowed in our house?*’


There’s no answer—not even implied. The perfect ending.

This is a simply-told story with few words and clear pictures, making it ideal for younger children—but older kids will still find it funny and could use it as a conversation starter or to springboard ideas for writing.

One last thing: *My Uncle’s Donkey* works beautifully as a starting point for gender conversations. The donkey is never assigned a gender, but most children tend to assume it must be a boy—there’s a good conversation to be had here about why that is.



**My Uncle's Donkey** (2010)  
*Tohby Riddle*, Viking, 36p.  
978 0 670 04033 9 \$24.95 Hb

Tohby Riddle's picture books  not only anthropomorphise animals; they ensoul them. The donkey of **My Uncle's Donkey** is most part larrikin (he does hoofstands in the kitchen and cartwheels in the living room), and miniscule part gentleman, as when we witness him in silent raptures listening to the uncle of the title play classical music on piano.

The young narrator's delight with this farcical scenario is communicated by the prosaic text. For not only does the child's uncle have a donkey, it actually lives in his house. And whilst the text by itself would be underwhelming, it serves as a mostly comic counterpoint to the illustrations which are populated with whimsy, cultural references and complexity and yet simultaneously visually uncomplicated for the child. This simplicity is evoked by the use of bold, mostly three colour illustrations surrounded by lots of white space.

The book contains physical comedy and juvenile humour for young children to enjoy and some open questions for the adults.

The uncle himself is a solitary bookish writer and whilst the donkey is always in the room with him, they never truly interact.

Has the narrator invented this highly unlikely housemate, so different from their uncle, in order to gift him with a companion out of sympathy for his perceived sense of aloneness? But this is not a question for the child to consider. He or she will be too busy being charmed by the anarchical donkey.

Reading this book comes with a warning: it will most likely engender a Christmas request from the reader for their very own dancing, juggling, flower eating donkey.

*Tali Lavi*

**Knight, Fran** '[Review: The Astronaut's Cat]' *ReadPlus* April 3 2020.  
<[https://www.readplus.com.au/blog\\_detail.php?id=10764](https://www.readplus.com.au/blog_detail.php?id=10764)>

### The astronaut's cat by Tohby Riddle



Allen and Unwin, 2020. ISBN: 9781760524944. 32pp.  
(Age: 4+) Highly recommended. The image of a cat peering out of the space lab's porthole is mesmerising: at once preposterous and curiously entrancing, it will impel younger readers to wonder about the story inside.

This cat is an inside cat: she spends her time sleeping and eating and playing with her musical ball which looks like Earth. She likes to look out of the window at the astronaut at work, or just look at the rocks. She knows that it will be too hot for her outside during the day and freezing at night and there is air inside the space lab and none outside, and there is some sound inside but not outside, but still she wonders what it would be like. She dreams of being out there, bouncing in the dust, leaping and twirling, higher than ever before. She dreams she sees her ball in the ink black sky and dreams she is on it with its millions of shapes and forms, colours

and things to wonder at.

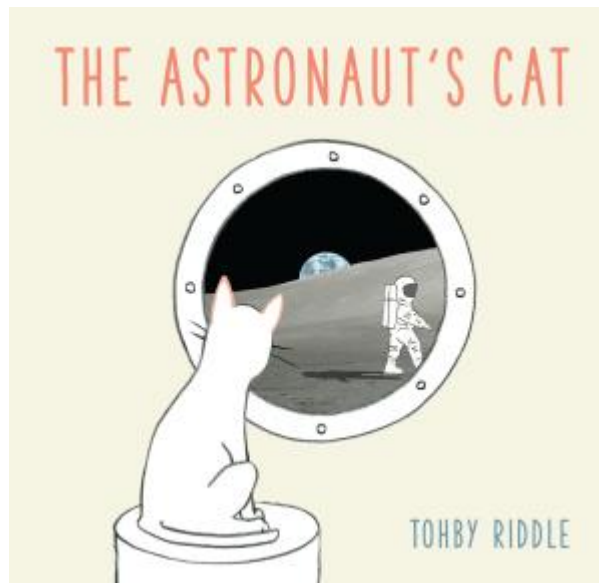
The curious cat reveals the world as she can see it from space: beautiful, colourful, scenic and pristine. But readers will know that it needs care to remain this way. A testament to the fragility of the Earth, Riddle's work is always quirky and mischievous. We can rely on him to produce a story that has layers of meaning and intent, and is deeply satisfying.

His quirky premise that a cat can live in a space lab will quicken readers' imaginations, provoke them to dream themselves of what it would be like for a cat on the moon and initiate thoughts about what it would be like for them to be on the moon. And within Riddle's sparse poetic lines they will pick up much information about the moon and its treasures.

With his illustrations reflecting an interest with mixed media and collage, readers again will be intrigued, looking for examples of paper cut out, collage, antique engravings and watercolour illustrations of flora and fauna. His mix of techniques adds yet another level of interest to a book which is already endlessly fascinating. Teacher tips and notes on making the book are [available](#). Themes: Cats, Astronauts, Moon, Space travel, Companionship.  
Fran Knight



**‘The Astronaut’s Cat Review’ *Noveltea Corner Thoughts from a bookish mind* April 7, 2020. <<https://novelteacorner.com/2020/04/07/the-astronauts-cat-review/>>**



## Synopsis

A delightful story that celebrates the wonders of the Moon, the curiosity of cats and the precious beauty of Earth.

*The astronaut's cat is an inside cat.*

*And she likes it like that.*

The astronaut's cat is an inside cat – on the Moon! But she dreams about the strange outside world – and the mysterious blue ball that rises into the ink-black sky . . .

A wonderfully whimsical, funny and surprising story of a very unusual ‘inside cat’ – by one of Australia’s finest picture-book creators. Perfect for readers who are intrigued or inspired by the landscapes of the Moon and the Earth – or fascinated by the inner life of cats.

## Review

*The Astronaut's Cat* is a beautiful story about an indoor cat who watches an astronaut, through a round window, explore the moon outside. The cat is happy being an inside cat, but as she watches, she dreams about what it might be like to go outside and have her own adventures.

Initially, I requested to review *The Astronaut's Cat* because I love cats and I love space and this seemed like a beautiful collision of the two. And it is. Tohby Riddle's gentle, lyrical storytelling style, introduces us to the cat and her life and her dreams. His narrative weaves facts about space into the story that will delight any young space fans.

What surprised me most, and this was purely incidental as the book was in production long before the current events, was how topical this book is, and how it's a nice way to talk to younger children who are currently stuck inside due to the pandemic. The cat in the story cannot physically go outside – there's no air, the temperatures are not conducive, etc – a bit like the children who have to spend their time at home now. The cat dreams of her adventures, but knows that it's okay that she's an inside cat for now, and I think that this book has the potential to provide some support for children to begin to understand that for themselves.

As always, Tohby Riddle's gorgeous illustrations provide the backbone for this book. Using a combination of hand-drawn/painted illustrations as well as photography of the moon's surface and the Earth, it's just enough whimsy and reality to be perfectly enchanting. I did see that the publisher's had shared a video of [Riddle talking through some of his favourite spreads in the book](#), which may interest people, and definitely added to my own reading experience.

This is a perfectly charming book that children will love.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2022: Tohby Riddle

**Appendix C. USB**

[Contains photo of author, electronic copies of books, and an electronic copy of the dossier.]