



RICHARD TULLOCH is one of Australia's leading writers of plays, screenplays and books for young audiences. His more than fifty plays include *Hansel and Gretel ... A Tale of Our Times*, *The Happy Prince*, *Carnival of the Animals*, *Stella and the Moon Man*, *Lulie the Iceberg* (all for Theatre of Image), *Year 9 are Animals*, *Hating Alison Ashley* and *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Fish* (a Sydney Festival production that also played on Broadway in New York). His plays have earned him four Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Awards. He has performed his one-man storytelling show *Storyman* thousands of times in theatres, schools and libraries around the world. He has written over 150 episodes of *Bananas in Pyjamas* and contributed scripts to numerous other television series. He has had over 35 children's books published, including *Stories from Our House*, *Danny in the Toybox*, *Beastly Tales*, *Twisted Tales* and the very popular *Weird Stuff* novels. His screenplay for the animated film *Ferngully II – The Magical Rescue* was nominated for Best Script at the US Annie Awards in 1998. He also now works as a travel writer, regularly published in the *Sun-Herald* newspaper and on his blog.

THE BOOK OF EVERYTHING

The play

Adapted by Richard Tulloch
From the novel by Guus Kuijer



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WRITER'S NOTE

I now count myself lucky to live in Amsterdam, my wife's home town, for about half of each year. I love its beauty and culture, work at learning its language and admire its long history of openness and tolerance. Shame about the weather, but you can't have everything.

I was there when Kim Carpenter, Artistic Director of Theatre of Image, emailed me and asked if I knew anything about a writer called Guus Kuijer. Kim had just read *The Book of Everything*, and loved it. Of course I knew about Guus Kuijer; he's won many Dutch literature awards, and in the Netherlands, he's familiar to everyone who has been a child since his first books about a girl called Madelief appeared in the 1970s.

When I read *The Book of Everything*, I loved it too. It is remarkable how a slim book can say so much about the difficult topics of facing fear and violence, finding strength and happiness, and questioning religious beliefs. These themes may not be the usual stuff of children's entertainment, but Kuijer never shies away from complexity. Like all the best writers for young people, he trusts them to do some thinking.

In *The Book of Everything*, Kuijer tells a story from the time of his childhood, set in Amsterdam as the city emerged from the trauma of German occupation during World War II. Amsterdam was spared the bombing which destroyed central Rotterdam, and missed the heavy fighting which left towns like Arnhem in ruins. But most of Amsterdam's large Jewish population was deported to concentration camps, while others went into hiding. Anne Frank is the most famous of these. Her family and thousands like them depended on the bravery of ordinary Dutch people like Mrs van Amersfoort in this story. I don't know the details of Kuijer's childhood, but I do know that he was born during the war, grew up in a religious family and that, like Thomas, he gradually came to question the ethics of stories in the Bible. For instance, was it fair for God to punish all the Egyptians for something their pharaoh did wrong? If God really was an all-powerful

and loving father, why did he let his son Jesus be crucified? Children do think about these things. As a child I loved animals, and wondered why God drowned most of them and only saved a few on Noah's Ark.

If it is appropriate to tell children these stories, and I'm sure it is, we should encourage them to consider when and why they were written, to question how they relate to their own lives and to form their own opinions about their meaning.

Melbourne writer John Nieuwenhuizen's excellent English translation of the novel *The Book of Everything* has been much acclaimed, but for this stage adaptation I worked from the Dutch original. I have tried to remain true to Kuijer's powerful story and elegant language, but there will be differences between the play and the novel. I hope you will want to read both.

I am very grateful to Guus Kuijer for trusting me to do a faithful adaptation, to Kim Carpenter's Theatre of Image and Company B Belvoir for commissioning the script and mounting the production, and to the cast and crew, both of this production and of a creative development workshop in 2008, who generously contributed their ideas to the final draft.

I can't remember that God was ever a topic of conversation for us children. I mean in the street when there were no adults around. That is remarkable, when you consider that our lives were saturated with God ... But in the street, that whole pious world disappeared over the horizon. We were cowboys and Indians, Ivanhoe and Robin Hood, cops and robbers, but never Jesus.

My father heartily looked forward to the second coming, and prayed regularly and fervently, "Come Lord Jesus, come soon!" And I remember that as a child I thought, "Yes, but not until after my birthday."

I can't remember any child who saw anything in the afterlife, because to look forward to that is to look down on the life that we have here on earth. Our prayer was always "Stay where you are Lord, and don't move!" Children love life, you know, and so they should.

— Guus Kuijer

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

This stage adaptation was commissioned by Kim Carpenter's Theatre of Image.

The script was further developed in a workshop in 2008 under the direction of Neil Armfield, with designer Kim Carpenter, composer Iain Grandage and actors Sacha Horler, Deborah Kennedy, Russell Kiefel, Odile le Clezio, Rebecca Massey, Kate Mulvany, Matthew Whittet and Dan Wyllie.

The cast and crew of the first production also contributed to this script. Thank you all for your enthusiasm, generosity and valuable input.

This adaptation of *The Book of Everything* was first produced by Company B Belvoir and Kim Carpenter's Theatre of Image at Belvoir St Upstairs Theatre, Sydney, on 2 January 2010, with the following cast:

MARGOT	Alison Bell
FATHER / BUMBITER	Peter Carroll
MRS VAN AMERSFOORT	Julie Forsyth
MUSICIAN	Iain Grandage
MOTHER	Claire Jones
AUNTY PIE	Deborah Kennedy
JESUS	John Leary
ELIZA	Yael Stone
THOMAS	Matthew Whittet

Director, Neil Armfield
Set & Costume Designer, Kim Carpenter
Composer, Iain Grandage
Lighting Designer, Nigel Levings
Choreographer, Julia Cotton
Sound Designer, Steve Francis
Assistant Director, Eamon Flack
Stage Manager, Mark Lowrey
Assistant Stage Manager, Sophie Baker

CHARACTERS

THOMAS KLOPPER, aged 9, nearly 10

MARGOT KLOPPER, aged 16

ELIZA WITH THE LEATHER LEG, aged 16

MOTHER

FATHER

BUMBITER

MRS VAN AMERSFOORT

AUNTIE PIE

JESUS

And also:

CHILDREN, CHURCH CONGREGATION, READING OUT LOUD CLUB

GUESTS

SETTING

Amsterdam, summer, 1951.

The house of the Klopper family in the ‘Old South’ area of the city. It is a middle-class area with rows of red brick apartments. The apartment is austere, with little decoration other than a tropical fish tank and a painting of Jesus.

Next door is the apartment of Mrs van Amersfoort, lined with books and cluttered with magical knick-knacks.

Other locations are the streets of Amsterdam and a church service house.

STYLE

This is an ensemble piece; actors not involved in particular scenes sometimes remain on stage, observing, commenting on the action and supplying sound effects and props as required.

Kim Carpenter’s design for the original production featured a large copy of Thomas’s book, *The Book of Everything*, standing upstage centre. Pages were turned during the performance to reveal naively painted representations of each of the different locations.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

Cheerful music, suggesting a Dutch street organ.

THOMAS *sits by a window, writing on the cover of a new exercise book.*

THOMAS: *The Book of Everything*, by Thomas Klopper, aged nine...
[*crossing it out and writing again*] nearly ten. Address: Breughelstreet 3,
Amsterdam, Holland, Europe, Northern Hemisphere, Earth, Solar
System, Galaxy, Universe, Space. Year: 1951.

Cheerful music.

My family. There are four people in my family. Me, Thomas Klopper,
aged nearly ten, Pappa, who is my father. His name is Mr Abel
Klopper.

FATHER *enters the acting area, strides stiffly across it and leaves.*

My mother is called Mamma, Mrs Klopper and Jannie. She is very
kind to everybody.

MOTHER *crosses the stage, pausing to give a small present to
someone in the audience.*

My sister is Margot and she is sixteen.

MARGOT *flounces across the acting area.*

Margot is stupid.

MARGOT *stops and turns on THOMAS, threatening him, then exits.*

My neighbours.

AUNTIE PIE *wobbles on, riding a bicycle.*

Auntie Pie always rides a bike, even in the rain. She has been riding
for forty-eight years, but she is not very good at it.

AUNTIE PIE *and her bike wobble off. The sound of a crash
offstage.*

Next door to us lives a witch. Her name is Mrs van Amersfoort and
she always wears black dresses.

MRS VAN AMERSFOORT *crosses. She is dressed in black and a little eccentric, muttering to herself as she walks.*

Mrs van Amersfoort gets teased a lot, because she is a witch.

Two children enter and start teasing her, walking behind her and imitating her gait. MRS VAN AMERSFOORT exits too.

The scariest thing in our neighbourhood is the Bumbiter.

The BUMBITER, a large vicious dog, springs into the acting area.

He's a dog that dashes down our street, big and wild and mean. Nobody knows where he comes from—he's just there. And he bites you on the bottom!

The BUMBITER, played by the actor playing FATHER, runs around snarling, trying to bite the bottoms of the children, played by the rest of the cast. They scatter in terror, hands covering their backsides.

The BUMBITER snarls, lost and alone in the space, then he too exits.

SCENE ONE

THOMAS: *[to the audience]* I don't know why, but I see things that nobody else can see. I write them all down in my book, *The Book of Everything*. Like today, when I saw a terrible hailstorm in Jan van Eyckstreet. In the middle of summer!

There is a crash of thunder and a violent hailstorm starts.

Watching actors make the storm with a series of hand slaps, a gathering crescendo alarming THOMAS.

Mamma! Mamma!

He puts his hands over his ears. He runs home as MOTHER enters.

MOTHER: What is it, Thomas?

THOMAS: Winter's here!

MOTHER: Really? How did you get that idea?

THOMAS: I saw it, a big hailstorm. The leaves were blasted off the trees.

MOTHER: Thomas, look—the trees are all still green.

THOMAS: The trees here are green. But round the corner in the Jan van Eyckstreet all the leaves have been ripped off. The whole street is covered in them!

MOTHER *is a little concerned.*

MOTHER: If you say so, Thomas.

She ruffles his hair and leaves.

THOMAS: Mamma doesn't believe I saw it, but I know I did! Now, where was I? [*He writes in his book again.*] My favourite colour is blue. My favourite food is apple tart. My favourite animals are guppies, which are fish...es. When I grow up, I'm going to be a...

FATHER *enters.*

FATHER: I'm home.

FATHER *is home from the office. He sets down his briefcase and removes his coat, hanging it on a coat hanger. Everything he does is precise, following a stiff, strict routine.*

MOTHER *quickly scurries to set a place at the table for him.*

MOTHER: Thomas, Margot, Pappa's home!

THOMAS: I still don't know what my book's going to be about.

FATHER *sits at the dining table.*

MARGOT *passes, on her way to the living room.*

MARGOT: [*imitating MOTHER*] Thomas, Margot, Pappa's home!

THOMAS: What are books about, Margot?

She won't allow herself to get into a philosophical discussion with him.

MARGOT: Thomas—you're such a nine-year-old!

THOMAS: Nearly ten.

MARGOT: You can't even read long words.

THOMAS: I love long words, especially if I don't know what they mean.

MARGOT: Yes, like 'ignoramus'!

THOMAS: You think just because you're my big sister, you know everything. Just because you're sixteen you think you're a genius! You are so dumb, Margot!

MARGOT: Dutch language—nine, Maths—ten, English—eight, Geography—nine, History—ten.

THOMAS: [*to the audience*] It's amazing that Margot can get good school reports and still be as dumb as an onion!

They move towards the dining table.

MARGOT: Anyway, all the really good books are about love, and you're too young to know about things like that.

They sit at the table as FATHER says grace.

FATHER: Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which of Thy bounty we are about to receive. Amen. [*He sets a Bible firmly on the table.*] All the important books are about God. All the important stories are here in the Bible.

MOTHER: [*trying to keep the peace*] Books can be about love and God.

But FATHER must have the last word.

FATHER: Oh? Who reads the books in this house, you or me?

MOTHER: You do.

FATHER: So who knows about books?

MOTHER: [*meekly*] You do.

FATHER: Then I'll thank you not to contradict me when you don't know what you're talking about.

There is a tense silence. MARGOT stifles a giggle.

THOMAS: It hailed really hard in the Jan van Eyckstreet today, Pappa. The leaves were blasted right off the trees.

MOTHER reaches out to him.

FATHER: It's a sin to tell lies, Thomas. 'Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.' Psalm 34.

THOMAS: But I saw it, I really—

FATHER: Thomas!

THOMAS: Sorry, Pappa.

MARGOT: Psychologically defective.

MOTHER: Thomas is alright.

All eat in awkward silence.

FATHER takes the Bible.

FATHER: Today we are reading from the Book of Exodus, chapter five. [*Reading*] Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

As he reads, THOMAS's attention wanders. He distracts himself (and the audience!) by playing games with his bowl and cutlery. FATHER closes the Bible.

Tomorrow we shall read further, about how God punished the pharaoh for disobeying His will.

MOTHER *hustles THOMAS out of the room.*

MOTHER: Bedtime, Thomas.

She ruffles THOMAS's hair.

You do have some funny stuff in there, don't you, my little dreamer? Sometimes I wonder what's going on with you.

THOMAS: Do you think I'm a little bit nice, Mamma?

MOTHER: I think you're very, very, very, very 'a little bit nice'! You're the sweetest boy in the whole world.

She hugs him, trying to hide her tears, then leaves him.

THOMAS: I hate it when Mamma is sad. [*He writes in the book again.*] When I grow up, I'm going to be... happy.

SCENE TWO

Church bells ring.

THOMAS and MARGOT *walk in the street. MARGOT wears a headscarf covering her hair.*

JESUS ACTOR: That summer in Amsterdam it was boiling hot for a whole week.

AUNTIE PIE ACTOR: So hot that bicycle tyres melted on the bitumen.

THOMAS *spots something in the (imaginary) canal and dawdles to examine it.*

THOMAS: So hot that tropical fish were swimming in the canal. I saw them with my own eyes. Dozens of them. They were guppies, like the ones in our fish tank at home. But nobody would believe that I saw them in the canal. Hey, look Margot—guppies!

MARGOT: Thomas, we don't have time for these aquatic apparitions!

ELIZA *enters. She has a 'leather leg', an artificial limb that creaks as she walks. She carries a beach towel, and waves to MARGOT, a school friend.*

ELIZA: Hey, Margot!

MARGOT: Hi, Eliza. Where are you going?

ELIZA: Where else on a hot Sunday? Zandvoort Beach. How about you?

MARGOT: [*indicating her headscarf*] We're walking to church.

ELIZA: Oh. Which church do you go to?

MARGOT: It's not even a real church. We go to someone's house in Amsterdam West. Pappa's leading the service today. You wouldn't believe how boring it is. [*Calling*] Thomas!

ELIZA: You're walking to Amsterdam West in this heat? Why don't you catch the tram?

MARGOT: [*with irony*] God wouldn't like it. God doesn't want the trams to run on Sundays.

ELIZA: God doesn't like trams?

MARGOT: Not on Sundays, that's what Pappa says. Apparently, the two worst things in the world are being a traitor in the War, and riding in a tram on Sunday. [*Calling*] Thomas!

THOMAS *leaves the canal and runs to catch up with MARGOT.*

THOMAS: They're swimming in the canal, Margot. I can see them! Fantail guppies and spike swordtails and—

He stops short when he sees ELIZA.

ELIZA: Who's this?

MARGOT: It's my brother Thomas. Ignore him. He suffers from infantile hallucinations.

ELIZA: Hello, Thomas. I'm Eliza.

It is a magic moment.

THOMAS *is smitten, and unable to meet ELIZA's eye. But dropping his gaze means he's looking at her leg.*

MARGOT: It's rude to stare at people, Thomas! Don't you know anything?

ELIZA: It's fine, Margot. I'm used to it. See, Thomas, it's just my leather leg. It creaks when I walk. [*She creaks around on it, jokingly using it to squeak out a little rhythm.*] You want to touch it?

She offers it to him. THOMAS reaches out to touch it, but when he gets closer he is too shy and withdraws his hand.

THOMAS: No, thank you.