



# Quentin Blake in the Theatre of The Imagination: An Artist At Work

Books Reviewed:

[Quentin Blake in the Theatre of The Imagination: An Artist At Work](#) [1]

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New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

This monograph came as something of a surprise. I had expected from the title a set of acts in which we would observe the young performing artist gradually refining and expanding his capacities as illustrator from the schoolboy cartoons which were accepted by Punch to the multiple creative and collaborative books that have made him BFG (not to say top class Clown) among his contemporaries.

Such a predictable exercise is not for Ghislaine Kenyon however. Her subtitle is 'an artist at work' and by thus devoting her keen attention to the business of mark-making on paper, on visualiser screens, or on walls or even building wraps she tries to identify for us the variety of Sir Quentin's creative motives and imaginative processes. She does adopt a rough biographical chronology with regular divagations into topics that relate to the creative life. As a former teacher and then a gallery-educationist (who first worked with Quentin on the tremendous **Tell Me a Picture** show at the National Gallery) she approaches her report from a very different angle from writers on picture books in general and her investigations into such matters as making exhibitions, the significance of flying and swimming in his work, the very substantial, but here little-known, French connection are often accompanied by quotes either from the man himself or from organisers and friends. He supplies a notable paragraph (source unattributed) on a quote from Hilary Mantel on 'imagining strenuously' and in the final chapters of the book there is a revelatory account of his 'therapeutic' genius in working with the physically or socially disadvantaged. It precedes a coda where, in his eighties, he looks forward to 'something happening?' in his future projects. (It is slightly unnerving to find this final chapter initiated with a plate from the Folio Society's **Golden Ass** which reminds one as much as anything of Bewick's **Waiting for Death**.)

Full though it is with new and often perceptive insights into the theatre of Quentin's imagination, Kenyon's book is not an easy one to read. The divagations cause a loss in one's sense of direction and this is exacerbated by Bloomsbury's clumsy editing. There is no clear policy for annotating the many quotations which often cannot be found in the notes, and these are tiresomely placed between the end of the text and the Acknowledgments which are used for an, again defective, list of illustrations. You have to read the book with two fingers placed between its latter pages or else read through confronted by pictures which may not readily explain themselves.

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