N.C.A.D.

Faculty of Design

Department of Visual Communications

Quentin Blake

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Introduction

There has certainly been a revolution in the industry of children's book illustration. Quentin Blake stands out from many considerably, with his unmistakable style. Over the past twenty years he has continued to astound his followers, producing glorious accompaniments for texts from varying authors. His delightful illustrations have withstood the passing of time, still looking as fresh and contemporary today as they did when he first began work as an illustrator two decades ago.

On researching Quentin Blake, I was surprised by the vast body of work that he has completed. I was not aware that much of this existed, having only been familiar with the work he had done for Roald Dahl. What was strange, however, was how little was actually written about him considering the amount of work he has completed to date. There were lots of snippets; he got a mention in almost every dictionary of illustrators though nothing of much substance. So what I intend to do is to tie together all the diverse material to form what I hope will be an interesting, informative account of his life and work.

After visiting numerous children's libraries, I was finally equipped with a substantial amount of primary resources, books that Blake had illustrated, to embark on my study. Therefore the illustrations which I will discuss are ones chosen by me, from these books. These, I feel, help to best promote the points that I wish to make. I did send a letter to Quentin Blake, with a list of questions which I hoped would give me a further insight into his way of working. Unfortunately the letter was returned to me as the address was no longer his. I also wrote to Dan Fern, head of illustration in the RCA, a position which Blake once held. He referred me to Chris Beetles. Beetles apparently frequently exhibits Blake's work. Beetles obviously forwarded a letter to Blake, so as a result I received a letter and two articles. I was also fortunate to speak with two of his past students, who are currently illustration tutors. They sufficed it to say that he was an extremely encouraging tutor and also "a very nice man!"

So aided with the information that was sent to me I was able to gather enough information through references in dictionaries, and a few informative articles, to form a good understanding of his work. The aspects of his work that I will examine are his style, and its appropriateness to the text, his way of working, the influences of others on

his work and *his* influences on others. I will also consider how his work compares with that of his contemporaries. Then I will examine how he adapts his style to suit the work of different authors who have commissioned him as an illustrator. I will also look at his own books, those where he has both illustrated and written the text. I will begin by giving a brief autobiography.

Born in Sidcup, Kent in 1932, he was the son of a civil servant. Though there was little in his background to suggest that illustration was the path that he would follow or determine that this would be where his career lay, he did show signs of possessing artistic qualities from an early age. Blake stated in an interview that he can remember starting to draw in school at the age of five or six. (An interview with Quentin Blake, supplied by the artist).

> *"The cheerfulness began very early, when young Quentin Blake was at school and was encouraged by a teacher to submit cartoons to Punch. This proved to be an amusing and lucrative side line during Blake's years as a schoolboy."*
>
> (Alderson, 1995, p. 562)

He was educated at Chiselhurst and Sidcup Grammar School; Downing College, Cambridge and the University of London. It was actually in English that Blake got his degree. How apt, and what good training for a man who would eventually become the creator of his own material for illustration.

At the age of 16 he donated his first cartoon to *Punch* magazine, an incredible achievement to have it accepted and published at such a young age. In the interview I previously mentioned, he noted that this was one of the most important moments for him as an illustrator. From this time he became a regular contributor to the magazine. He followed this by contributing work to *Spectator* magazine, *The New Statesman*, *The New Yorker*, and *Readers Digest*.

His art training consisted of life drawing classes and painting in Camberwell School of Art. This was invaluable training as he did not really feel that he knew anything about drawing while he was contributing drawings to these magazines:

"You can get by for just so long. I had to know what these bodies were doing and where the knees came." (Marantz, 1992, p. 38)

He stated that life drawing is the basis for illustration, so he did not feel bothered that he never had an formal training as an artist. (An interview with Quentin Blake, supplied by the artist).

During his National Service he taught English part time at the Lycee Francais, London and he eventually became a tutor ('65-'78) then head of the Department of Illustration at the Royal College of Art ('78-'86) succeeding Brian Robb, who had brought Blake there as a tutor, having tutored him in Chelsea Art College.

After his false start in teaching English Blake eventually realised that it was in drawing that he had something to say and was eager to make his profession. When he realised that doing graphic work for journals was not the career he wished to undertake in drawing in 1960 he took the decisive step into book illustration. Blake has by now completed an astounding number of works, over the two hundred mark, though most of his work is for children. Blake said himself:

"Once the children's bandwagon starts rolling, nobody really believes you can do anything else." (Martin, 1989, p. 246)

Blake has said that he would like to illustrate more books for adults, though he has relatively limited access to these. Most modern publishing policies have made this so, presumably because of his recognised association with children's books. Any work that he has done in this line has been for the Folio Society. This is a company which produces limited editions of high quality printed books. He responded favourably to the challenge of demanding text and the beauty of the quality finish.

In his career Blake has received remarkable, though not remotely unjustified recognition for his talents including the Kate Greenaway Medal (one of the most prestigious awards bestowed unto an illustrator for excellence), The New York Times Best Illustrated Book Award (1976), The Federation of Children's Book Award (1981 and 1982). He was elected Royal Designer for Industry (1980) and was awarded an OBE in the New Years Honours List in 1988. One of his more recent achievements for

his " endearing masterpiece" *Clown*, was the Bologna Ragazzi Award in 1996. These are only a few of many.

Over the past two decades the number of books for children has radically increased and the attitude towards illustration has changed. It has continued to thrive and expand so that now it is an established art form. According to Quentin Blake, many artists who started out as painters, found that they were not really making any money, and so changed their focus to illustration:

> *"A lot of illustrators started out as painters but found that they weren't making any money. But we found we were interested in books. The emphasis has shifted, not in the attitude toward books but in the attitude toward illustration."*
>
> (Marantz, 1992, p.36)

Chapter 1

The Cursive Quality of Blake's Work

"The school of scrawlers and scribblers is headed most notably by Quentin Blake. He employs the cartoon technique to create a loose, casual style that has an uncanny knack for commenting aptly on a text." (Whalley, 1988, p.224)

Having read various accounts of Blake's work, the adjectives most frequently mentioned to describe it were those like *scratchy, zany, spontaneous, witty, recognisable, unmistakable* and *cursive*. Certainly each of these words is apt, and even at a quick glance one could find each of these equally fitting to his work. Indeed, his drawings possess a remarkable quality that gives a great air of spontaneity, yet these are all carefully planned in order to produce the most suitable result possible. So while his drawings are seemingly spontaneous, they have actually been designed accurately. This will be explained and discussed in a later chapter.

Numerous references were made to the fact that his scratchy style is rather like his handwriting. Certainly his lines are freeflowing in a way that handwriting would be. In his early work as a cartoonist Blake developed a mode of drawing which may have been thought of as calligraphic. This has now developed into a smoother style and, with the insertion of brightly coloured washes, an altogether gentler feel comes across.

"It works like handwriting through a combination of lines, dots and squiggles with the bodying out of features, accomplished through rudimentary shading, which itself may be just be squiggles or blotches. This simple but adaptable technique underlies most of his work in monochrome and when he turns to colour it is again through broad and sketchy washes (allied to a marvellous feeling for the juxtaposition of hues) that he builds on his linear foundation." (Alderson, 1995, p.568)

In figures 1 to 5 I have chosen drawings from different books which Blake has illustrated, which I feel represent the point that his illustrations possess similar qualities to his handwriting, and figure 6 is just an example of his handwriting in order to clarify the point.

Figure 1 is from Michael Rosen's *Mind your own business*(1974), an illustration for the poem "The sleepy baby-sitter's curse." This clearly shows Blake's method of using a sequence of lines, dots and squiggles joining together to form a picture. There is no shading, it is essentially linear, and in just a few strokes he has perfectly captured the

anxious baby-sitter trying to tame the giddy child, who is trying to escape his clutch. Some of the lines are heavier than others, giving the impression of shading, whereas some lines are barely visible at all, like the baby-sitter's right arm.

The eyes of both characters are depicted by just two dots, and there is a stray dot by the head of the baby-sitter. The inside leg of the baby is made up of just three short lines; the one just beside his stomach is a small curved line that appears almost like the letter "C." His hands are small enclosed shapes which, viewed out of context, would look more like letters from the alphabet than hands! Their hair is composed by the joining of a few lines, some which appear like the letter "l", and the small round circle on the child's pyjamas is also reminiscent of the letter "o".

Figure 2 is from *Rhyme Stew* (1988) by Roald Dahl, a poem called "The Dentist and the Crocodile". This shares the same similarity to handwriting-the crocodile's teeth appear like a series of "v"s and the crocodile's back is created using a long, cursive line. The dentist himself is composed of a few "squiggly" lines. The dentist's chair is instantly recognisable and yet at an analytical examination it is completed using just a few, quick, jagged lines. The dentist's paraphernalia in the background, taken out of context, and without the chest of drawers, would not necessarily even be recognisable as objects; once again they are more like letters.

Figure 3 is from *The Hermit and the Bear* (1984) by John Yeoman. Here there is much more of an attempt at shading. It is made up almost entirely of broken lines. These lines serve to represent the falling of dusk, and this is achieved very effectively in this manner. The bear is drawn using similar lines, simple straight strokes to suggest his fur and any details and the basic shape of the figures are made up of the amalgamation of "curly" lines.

Figure 4 is from the same book and it portrays the scene in a similar fashion. The leaves in the background are created by shapes that appear like the letter "n". The figures are not actually made up of any enclosed shapes at all, apart from maybe an ear or a shirt

Figure 1

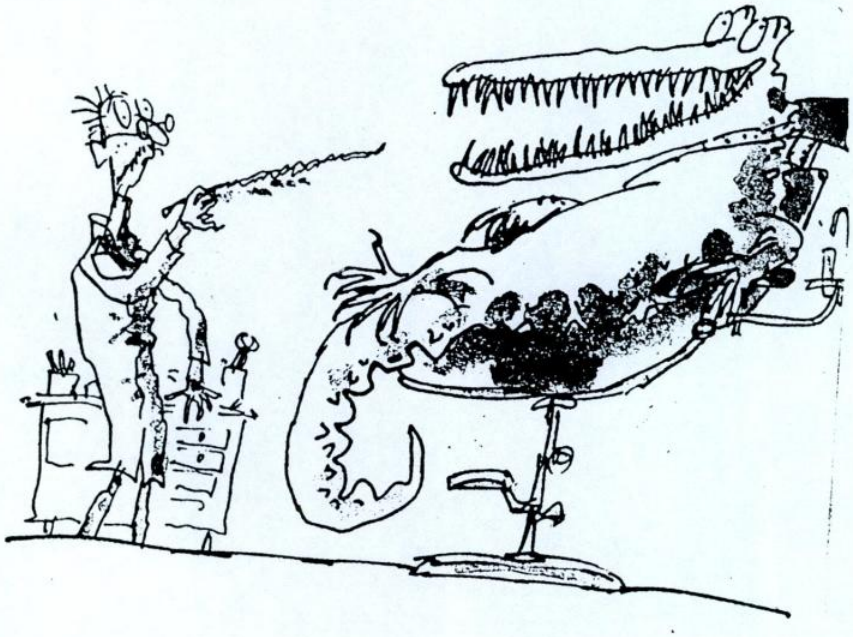


Figure 2

Figure 3

collar. This conveys so aptly the notion of Blake's drawings being approached as handwriting.

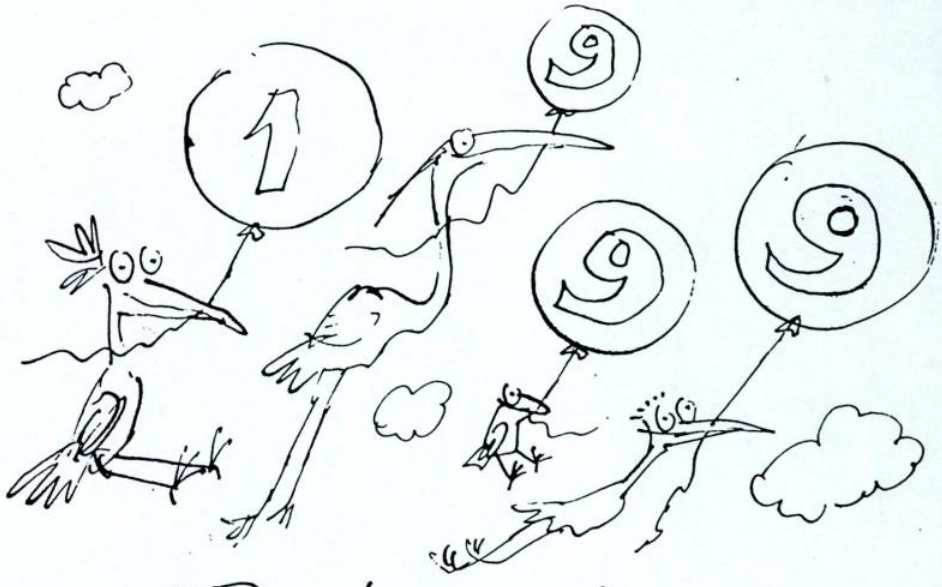
Figure 5, an illustration also taken from *Rhyme Stew*, is a hilarious depiction of a lady who has just been shot in the bottom, and it has hence exploded. The bits of "flesh" flying through the air are just portrayed by small black dots, yet is still completely obvious what they are supposed to be.

Figure 6 is a sample of Blake's handwriting. This is actually a copy of the letter that was sent to me. I think that this succeeds in clarifying the point and highlights how his drawing runs parallel to his writing. The examples of the drawings that I used are only five of possibly any of his drawings that I could have chosen to reinforce the point that the drawings have a feeling of handwriting. Quentin Blake also acknowledges this attribute in his own work:

> *"Everything depends on the quality of the marks that are made-if these are not good the drawing will not work. I have to do it in a way that is in some respects similar to handwriting because these give me the accents and it is not possible to put these in consciously. I've been told and recognise that there are resemblances to my actual handwriting-it skips about and makes the same sort of mark."* (Martin, 1989, p.247)

Figure 4

Figure 5



Thank you!
for writing to me. I'm glad that you like my illustrations and I hope you find lots more books with them in. I'm at work on several more at the moment — so hard at work in fact that I'm afraid that I can't reply personally to all the fascinating letters that arrive through my letterbox. So I hope that you'll accept this letter — which is printed, all except the signature — instead, with my best wishes for lots more reading and writing and looking at pictures (and perhaps sometimes drawing them...)

from

Figure 6

Chapter 2

Blake's Expressive Line Work

Probably the most memorable feature of Blake's work is his endearing line which he has by now completely personalised. His lines are described as spindly and eccentric by Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, witty and sparkling by Douglas Martin in *The Telling Line*, sparse in an article by Brian Alderson, and gay and witty in *Graphis Illustration Annual*. The following are illustrations are ones where I think that the line work is exceptionally special, where Blake utilises his expertise with line to its maximum potential.

Figure 7 is from *Quentin Blake's Book of Nonsense Verse* a selection of witty rhymes by different poets. The illustration is from a poem called "When I went out for a walk one day," (anon.) an amusing ditty about somebody who went out for a walk one day and left their feet in bed. The lines of the bedpost could surely be described in the words of Humphry Carpenter as "spindly." They are clearly drawn, with a remarkable confidence and it is at the points where the line strays ever so slightly from its path that the overall "spindly charm" radiates.

Figure 8 is from the same book for a poem titled "Chortling and Gallumping." These two bizarre looking characters are maximised in their absurdity by the use of spindly lines, their coat-tails flying behind them, their scraggy noses, their uneven fingers. The taller character certainly looks lankier and more eccentric than he would were he depicted using a smooth flowing line. Their huge grins appear goofier and their movement more ecstatic and jovial. Figure 8(b) is a little experiment that I did regarding this. I traced over figure 8, this time using a smooth, unbroken line, omitting the spindly one, used to suggest shading. I think that the result is remarkable. While the wobbly, "untutored" line maybe looks unsophisticated, it certainly ads so much character to the work and serves as Blake's personal trademark. Notice how much vibrancy the picture has lost with the "replacement" line. The men look two dimensional and stagnant. Granted, they still look happy but not delirious. They appear frozen in time, whereas the original drawing is serving to capture a split second in their frisky movements.

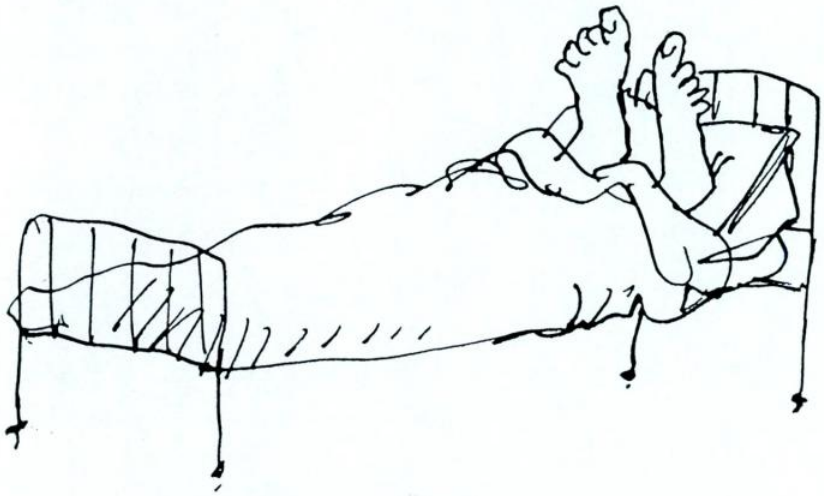


Figure 7

Figure 8

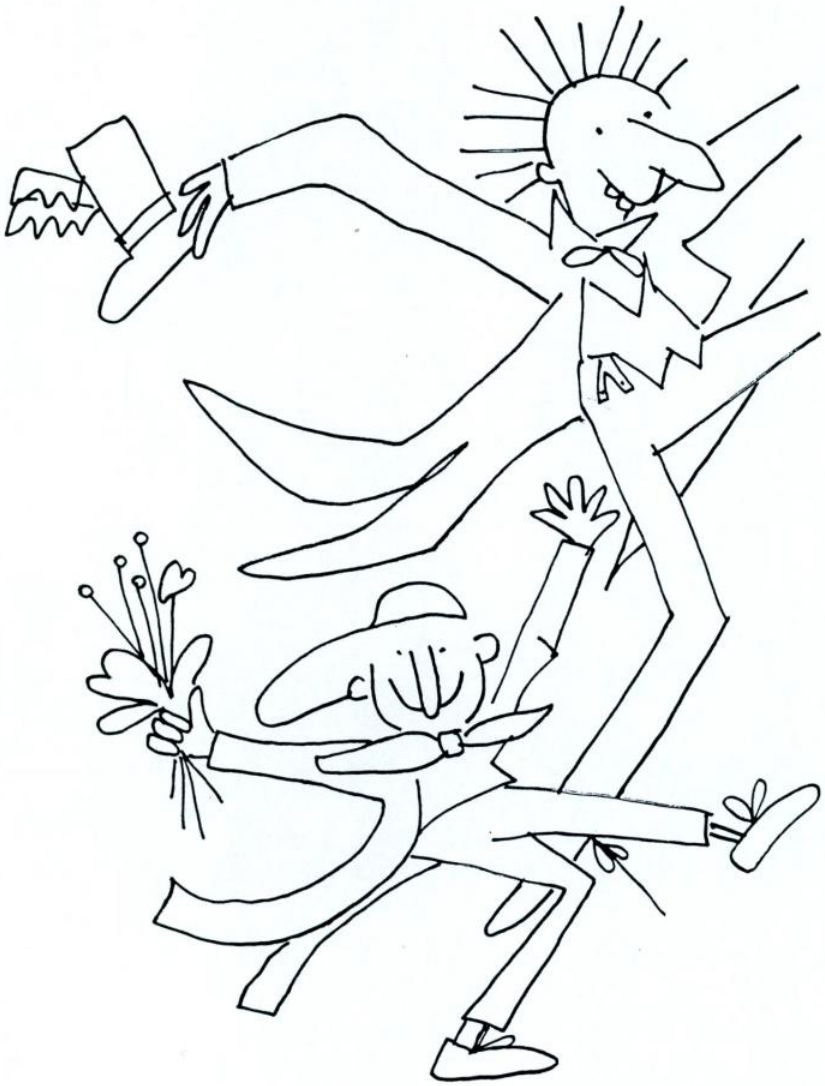


Figure 8b

The eccentricity and wit of line is clear in figure 9 in "Uptown, Downtown" from the same book. The picture shows two characters turned upside-down and suspended in mid- air. Blake shows no hesitation in exaggerating their movements by drawing in a delightfully witty manner, bending their legs at impossible angles, as though they were made from rubber; their arms stretch across their bodies as if elastic. He captures the essential gesture, distils it and then exaggerates it. The most witty and clever character is the little mouse, whose feet are stuck out at bizarre angles, with its tail forming a beautiful curve into the sky.

Figure 10 is from *Dirty Beasts* (1984) by Roald Dahl. The line used to describe the old lady is perfect for capturing her withering little body. Her wobbly legs appear as though they would scarcely hold her up, so she is forced to lean her declining posture over her umbrella, allowing the illustration to come across rather wittily!

Figure 11, from *The Witches* (1983) also a Dahl story, is so simple, yet so clever. Out of the frying pan dozens of mice tails are falling. They are depicted purely by a squiggly little line. Here the temptation easily could have been to labour the drawing by trying to make clear that they are in fact *tails,* because they are shown out of context. However Blake makes, what I think is rather a brave decision, and trusts his skill at conveying them cleverly with a minimalist approach.

These are again just a few of many examples I could have chosen to illuminate my point, a selection of some of my favourites. However every piece of work that Blake has done gives scope for analysing his line work and what makes it so expressive.

Margaret Clark has described Blake's drawings as exuberant, joyous, individual, unique and child-like (Clark, 1996, p. 28). She described how his characters race, fall, win, lose, suffer and enjoy across his pages, creating an unspoken anarchy of childhood. A review in the *Guardian* of his book *Clown* said that this "Master of graphic eloquence" produces works that are as satisfying as the endlessly complicated games of childhood. I was certainly struck by a child-like quality in his work, and was delighted when I came across drawings by an eleven year old autistic boy, Stephen Wilkshire. There are

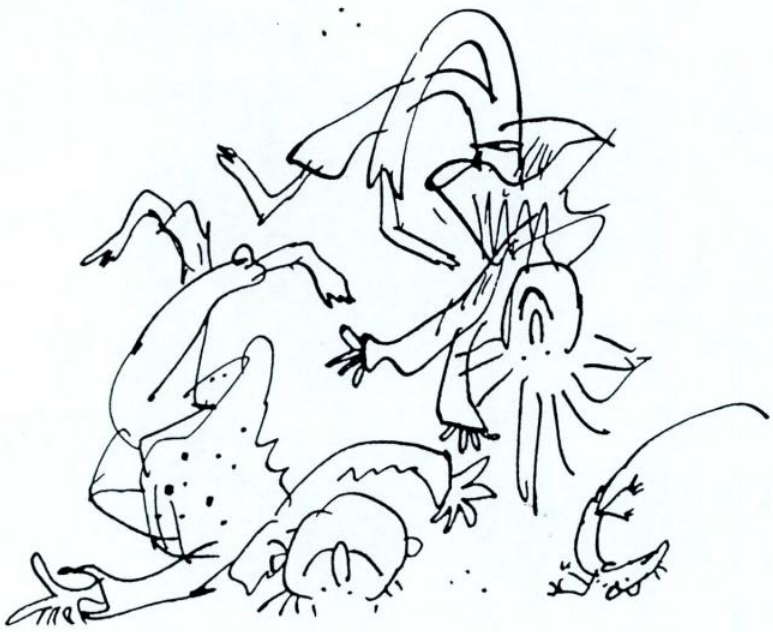


Figure 9

Figure 10

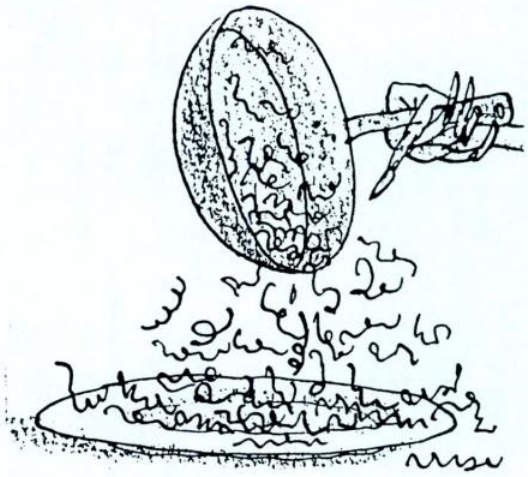


Figure 11

definite similarities between the drawings of Blake and these wonderfully sophisticated and beautiful drawings of a child. Figures 12(a-d) are examples of Stephen's drawings. While is subject matter is very obviously different than that of Blake's, there are certain attributes that are indeed similar. The young boy uses a scratchy line, just like Blake's which gives them enormous character. Also his ability to suggest something so well with so few lines puts him on the same wavelength as Blake (see how the cars, boat and bus are drawn in figures 12 a, c and d respectively).

Blake's drawings are ever full of humour and hilarity, enthusiasm and ecstasy, bliss and buoyancy. They are rather cartoon-like, but always so credible and convincing. Douglas Martin notes that although Blake's illustration is characterised by an abundance of humour and vitality, lightness of handling should not be equated with slightness of substance. His technical means are always adequate for what he has to say and however much this may astonish us in terms of range, dexterity and unpredictability, it is invariably pertinent to the text.

He manages to capture essential character and movement in just a few deft strokes, always so convincingly. Catling wrote that his drawings were "loose yet accurate, light yet spiky……whimsical rather than satirical" and yet she notes that the spontaneity is a deliberately drawn artistic device. Not only are they deliberately drawn, but they are also deliberately placed. He has a remarkable gift for capturing a wealth of gesture and expression in just a few strokes, but still carefully considers their exact placing in relation to the text. The following figures convey his ability in capturing expressions, both facial and gestural, in just a few strokes.

Figure 13 is from *Mind Your Own Business* (1974) a charming depiction of three young boys freezing their noses against the window, and watching while a fly comes to warm his feet, where their noses have been. Blake has captured the expressions so touchingly, the curiosity in their faces as they glance upwards, and the confused look of the middle boy. The way in which Blake has captured this is by the nonchalant way that he is looking, pulling back his head and leaning slightly back from the window. This puzzlement is mastered by the combination of his thick glasses, his eyes not visible

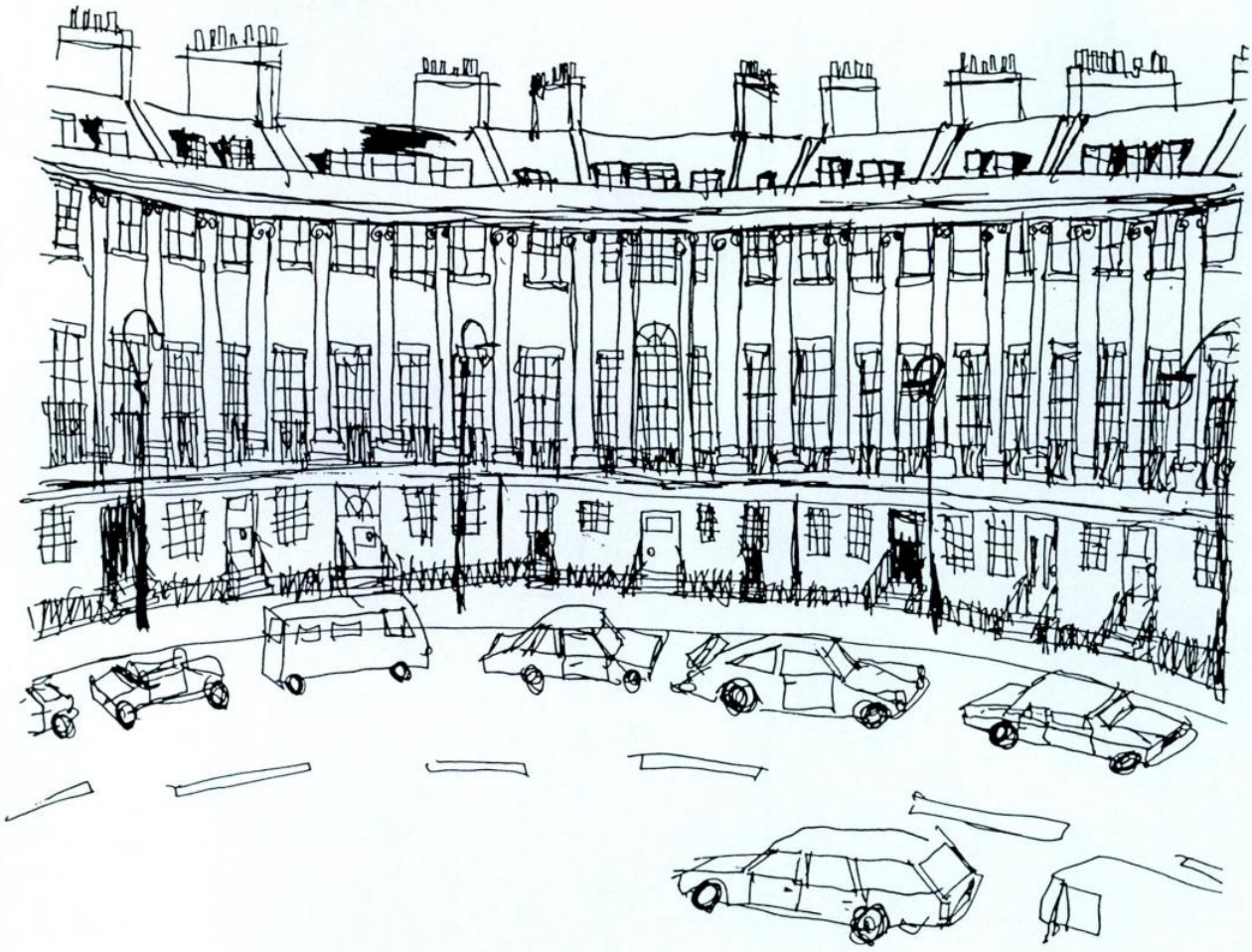


Figure 12a

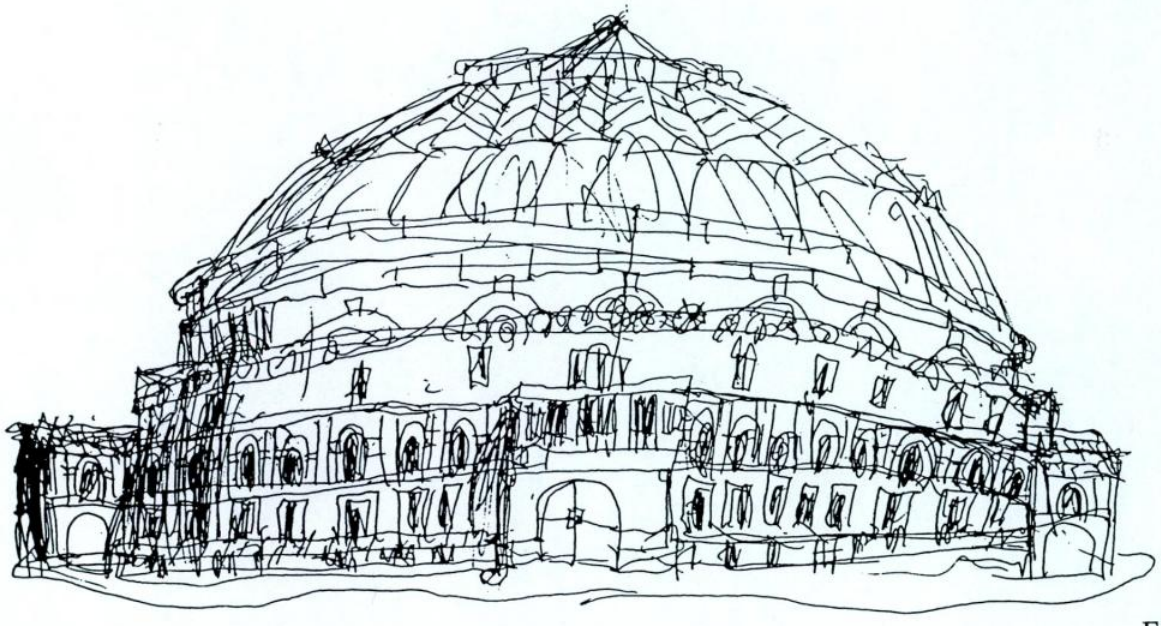


Figure 12b

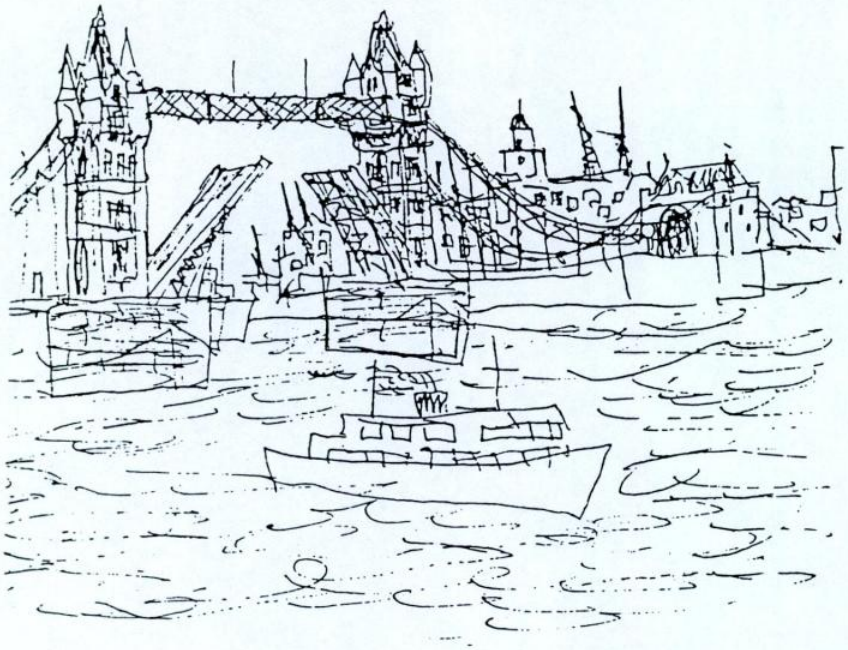
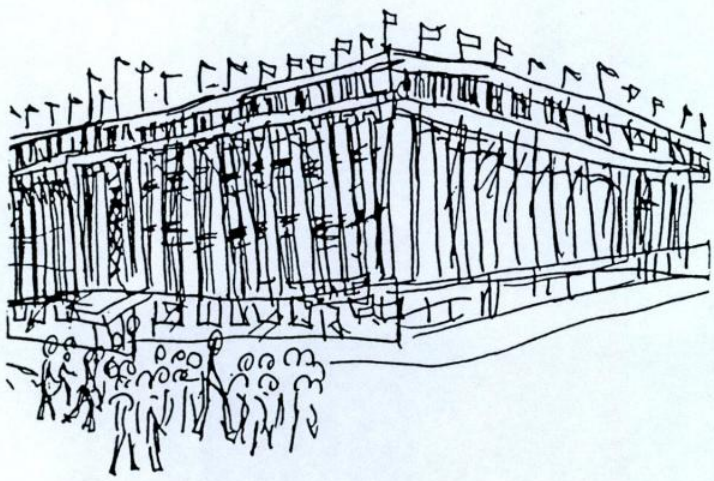


Figure 12c

Figure 12d



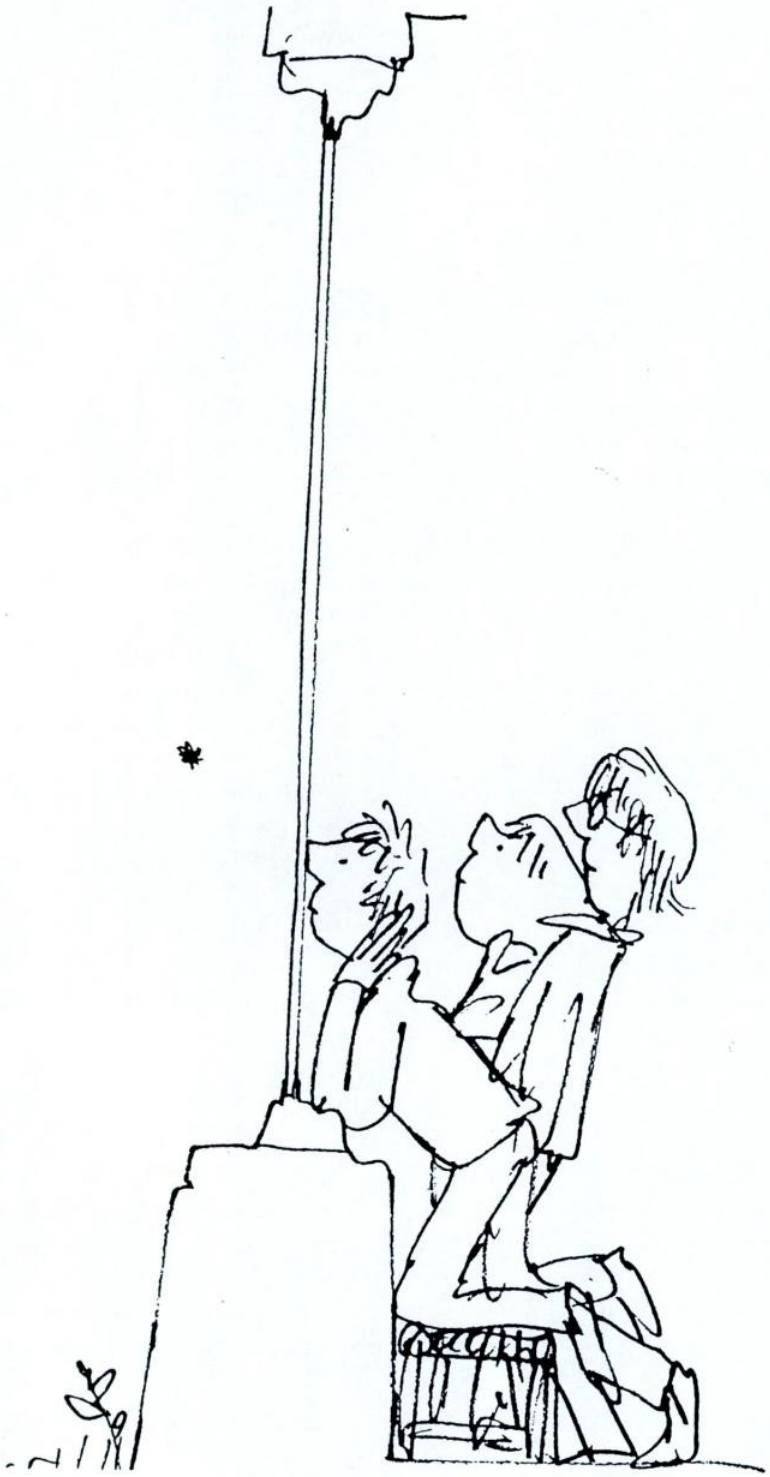


Figure 13

through them, and his overgrown shaggy hairstyle. The distinction between the outside and the inside of the house is made clear by the inclusion of a little flower at the outside of the window.

Figure 14 shows a wealth of gesture and expression. This illustration is also from *Mind Your Own Business*. The kids are playing and Blake has seized their playfulness tenderly and intuitively. They are caught just a moment before, inevitably two or all of them will fall. Their untidy clothes, their rolled down socks and their messy hair, suggest the frolicking that they've engaged in. This is drawn without an abundance of line; no shading is required, and yet he gets across such a feeling of childhood mischief.

Figure 15 is on a similar theme of such childhood antics, from the same book. The action here is remarkable; the picture is so busy, and yet again is captured in a modest amount of lines. This drawing is particularly curvilinear. A clothes fight is a typical childhood game and the essence of the boys' glee is captured by their open-mouthed smiles and their flamboyant positions. Evidently the fight has just broken out, judging from the random objects lying on the floor, as though they have just been thrown. Also notice the pair of trousers sailing through the air giving so much energy to the scene.

The drawings in figure 16 are also from *Mind Your Own Business*. Once again these are on the same theme as the previous examples. These illustrations use a particularly limited number of lines and capture the action of the two brothers so deft in their apparent movement. In 16a, b and c it is so obvious what is happening, a battle with kitchen implements: a wooden spoon, a knife, a grater, a frying pan, a tea-towel; the two appear to be fencing. Clearly it is "friendly war-fare" though the essence of their determination is evident through their swift movements, their slightly crooked smiles and the introduction of eyebrows in figure 16c. Their positions are accurate, yet somewhat exaggerated.

The whole way through the sequence, the dark-haired boy seems to have the upperhand, insinuated by his clever defence with the frying pan and his higher stature with the

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 16a

Figure 16b

Figure 16c

Figure 16d

Figure 16e

grater. Then, finally, comes the momentous finale`: The conclusion, where the winner takes his stance of glory upon his defeated victim and holds up his "trophy."

Figure 17 is from *Quentin Blake's Book Of Nonsense Verse* (1994) from a poem called "Portraits from life". It captures the admiration and adoration that the young lady has for the artist. It is her eyes, depicted, not as usual by little dots, this time with the introduction of surrounding circles, which make her appear so wide-eyed, besotted and almost in a trance. She holds a flower on her knee; obviously this has just been bestowed upon her by the painter. A few bits on the ground, a tube of paint, a paintbrush, a piece of chalk add to the air of productivity and concentration of the artist.

Finally an example of Blake's ability to convey so much with so little is taken from *Matilda* (1988) by Roald Dahl. The lady has just got a terrible shock and has dropped her breakfast plate in disbelief. The moment is executed perfectly. Obviously she has just cooked it judging from the fact that she is wearing an apron, probably for her husband. It was clearly a breakfast and not another meal; notice the fried eggs, the little toast triangles etc. Her sheer horror is delivered through her wide eyes, her lop-sided open mouth and the positioning of her hand, her fingers arranged as though she were still clutching the plate (fig 18).

The next point to note about Blake's style is its versatility. While still retaining the same basic scratchy style, he has adapted it so well, bringing it from twenty years ago right up to the present day, keeping it visibly fresh and contemporary, without making too many radical changes, or much modification. Merely by changing the thickness of his lines, the insertion of a delicate coloured wash, maybe just the use of pen and black ink or perhaps dabs of charcoal, these small adjustments change the whole feel of a drawing, giving it a distinct character, while still retaining a recognisable quality.

Figures 19-20 are examples I've chosen to demonstrate this point. While in one sense the three pictures look very different, it is clear to any beholder that they were done by the same artist as they posses a distinct sameness. Figure 19 is composed using pen and ink. The dark ink is suitable in expressing the busy street, the smoke and dirt from the

Figure 17

Figure 18

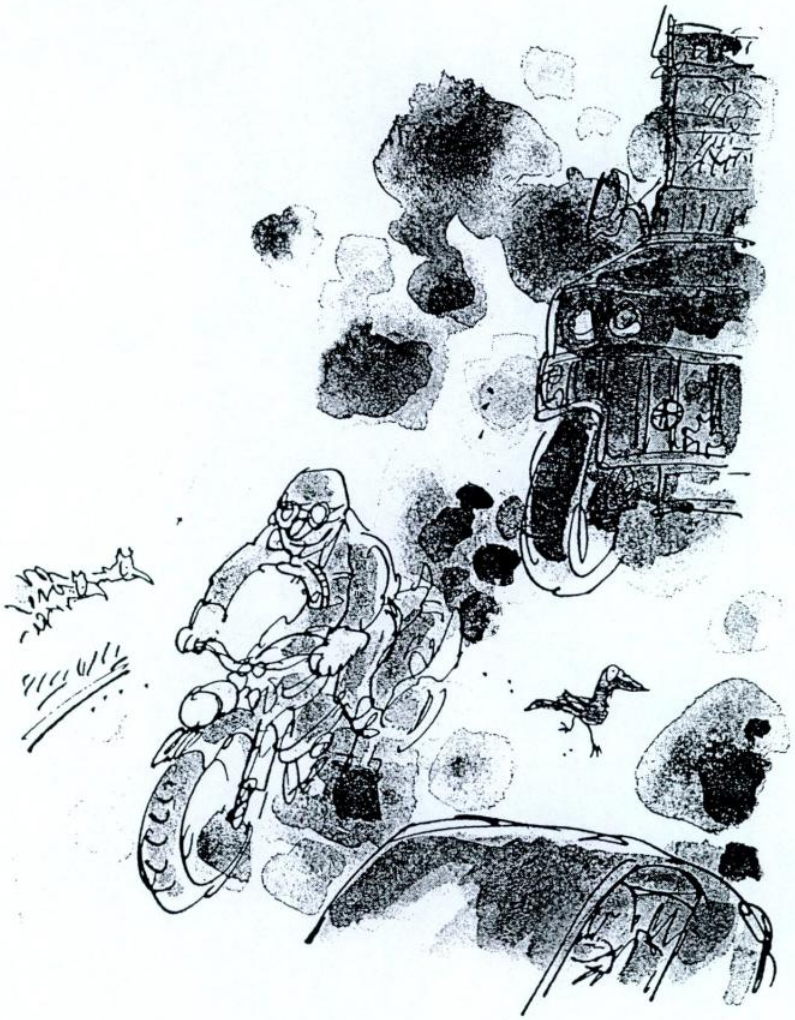


Figure 19

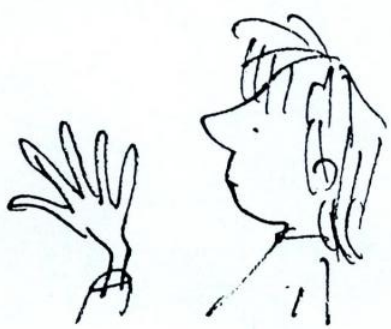
Figure 20

car exhaust. Still, though, the lines are clearly Quentanian! Figure 20 is quite a complex drawing, with the pantry, all the different sized bottles and cans. There is no 'shading' or large blocks of colour as such, but the emphasis is much more on the linear qualities of the drawing. Look at the heavy shading and the simplicity of the drawing in Figure 21 and compare it with the intricate display of line in Figure 22. The horse is laden with objects and these are delicately portrayed, the lamp, the flysquatter, saucepan, etc. purely using line, with no shading whatsoever.

Brian Alderson describes Blake as 'unashamed accompanist.' His drawings only prove to flatter the text but never overpower. He is a gentle and reflective illustrator. See in Figure 23 the simplicity with which he has approached the illustration for this poem. He allows the poem to speak for itself, and this addition just amuses and brings life to it.

Figure 21

Figure 22



This is the hand
that touched the frost
that froze my tongue
and made it numb

this is the hand
that cracked the nut
that went in my mouth
and never came out

this is the hand
that slid round the bath
to find the soap
that wouldn't float

this is the hand
on the hot water bottle
meant to warm my bed
that got lost instead

this is the hand
that held the bottle
that let go of the soap
that cracked the nut
that touched the frost
this is the hand
that never gets lost.

Figure 23a

Chapter 3

Work Method and Attitude to Work

"Perhaps more than any other artist, Blake enjoys the deadly seriousness of larking about." (Carter, 1998, p. 5)

In this chapter I will discuss Blake's work method and also, his attitude to his work. I think that Margaret Carter explains it perfectly - while his drawings are fun and a delight to the beholder, he still obviously works with a substantial amount of seriousness - how else would he succeed in such successful drawings to comment on his texts?

He told Douglas Martin in an interview that he believes that an artist learns through practice to cope with his own psychology and to respect how the subconscious operates creatively and still keep a work discipline going. With this in mind he is able to "draw more cheerfully than I[he] feel[s]." He has likened the illustrator to the actor and I suppose what he means is that he has got a character to play - he must deliver his drawings cheerfully and spontaneously at all times and also the way in which he has to adapt his style, and control it so it is in fitting with the book. (I'll be discussing his adaptations to different authors, later in the chapter.) In *The Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Literature* Blake writes in the forward that what writers write and what artists draw is even more interesting than they are themselves; the accounts that they offer us in their works are even more extraordinary. (Blake, 1995, p. 11)

Not only does he draw this comparison with the illustrator and actor, but also notes how the book is like the painters canvas, and the placing on the page is as important as timing is to verbal delivery. His actual work methods were explained in an interview in *Artists of the page.* Blake claims that he likes to work in a lot of rapid bursts with much sitting about in between. He reads and re-reads, marking passages, and then he likes to leave things in a 'creative marinade' for a few days. This proves that the thought process is vital in his work, and that while his drawings appear spontaneous, they are, in fact, carefully worked out.

At the rough stages he produces a number of quick, sequential drawings, where he picks out the most important moment by instinct. He says that most of these will survive in

essence to the finished article and yet problems of scale, sequence and breakdown into spreads and layout are more or less solved.

He works as quickly as possible at the preliminary stages, not because he is in a hurry to get the job done, but because he wants to get down as instinctively as possible his response to each incident and the way a sequence of them follows through a book.("Voices of the creators", supplied by the artist)

To ensure the spontaneity of line, which, as I've discussed, is a fundamentally important part of his work, when he is undertaking the final drawing, he places one of his original roughs beneath his paper on a lightbox - this avoids any problems with compositional placing and context.

> *"First, last and all the time Quentin Blake is an artist. He thinks in visual terms of line and tone. While he is highly sensitive to the importance of words, their meaning and their music, they are for him a stimulus to design."* (Crouche, 1995, p. 106)

As I mentioned in my first chapter, Blake has illustrated over 200 books, so obviously with Crouche's view in mind that 'words are a stimulus to design', when he has no text at hand to encourage his creativity, he writes his own books. The books that he writes generally involve audience participation and really need to be 'performed'. His books include *Quentin Blake's ABC, All Join in, Mrs. Armitage on wheels and Mr. Magnolia.* These books amount to a substantial nursery library that any child would wish to see. (Figures 23 b,c,d) In these books Blake knows where a verbal phrase or description is needed and where a picture will do the job more effectively, and the integration of verbal, narrative and graphic ideas is as fluid as his drawings are. They exist as an original interplay between words, ideas and images.

"I don't think of stories for myself - they really start from pictures - it's like organising a series of images." (An interview with Quentin Blake, supplied by the artist)

Blake finds that one of the worst things about book illustration is that each time he starts a new book he thinks how bad the drawings were to begin with. Its as though he

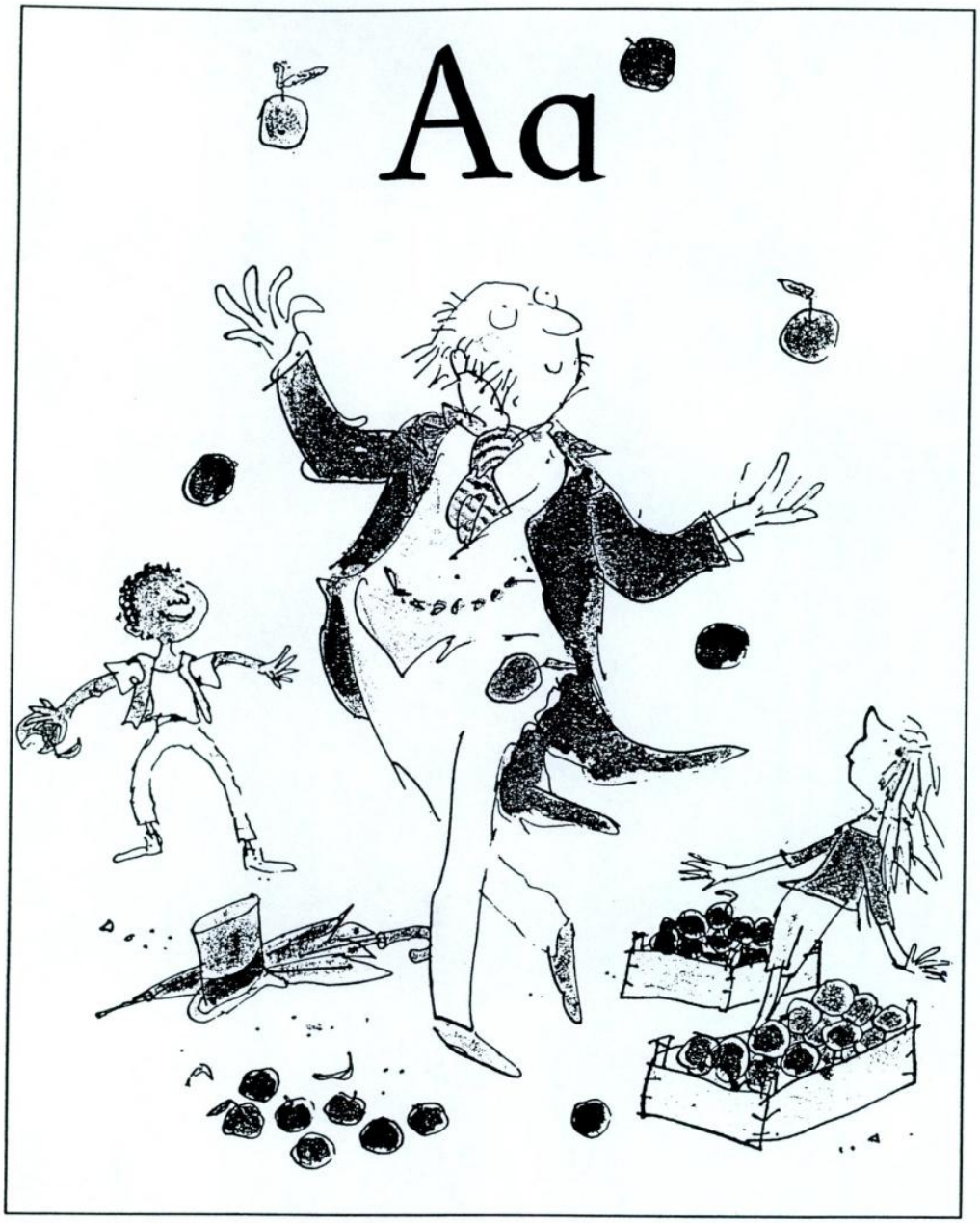


Figure 23b

Figure 23c

Figure 23d

goes back several stages in his development, while he finds out what the book is all about. Once he does this, however, the rest comes naturally e.g. where the illustrations best occur in the story. He manages to pack so much energy and movement into his figures in one still frame, and we can see how wit and invention are always sparkling in his drawings.

See Figure 24. The movement is captured remarkably here. Blake uses a clever composition of the beaten down car, with no wheels, the rope, acting as a swing hanging from the tree which is bending with the weight of its inhabitants.

An interesting thing to note is how Blake's work adjusts in order to fit in with the writing of the authors for whom he works. In this chapter I will explore how these subtleties were executed. While still looking completely ' Quentanian', small alterations have been made in the illustrations to keep them fitting with the text.

The main authors which I will make reference to are Roald Dahl, Michael Rosen , John Yeoman and Joan Aiken. These are the most individualistic authors for whom he has illustrated. In the forward that Blake wrote for *The Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Literature*, he refers fondly to the time he spent working with these authors. He describes his meetings in Dahl's home, "Gypsy House", sitting among Dahl's family, eating dinner, with Dahl sitting at the head of the table teasing all his guests! He also mentions the time spent with Joan Aiken in her apartment in New York, going up five flights of stairs, and then eating chicken pie. He explains how Russell Hoban sits in his writing room which is almost cave-like and full of books, maps, puppets, pictures and modern electric equipment. Amongst it all, Hoban looks like some kind of 21st century wizard.

According to Douglas Martin he actually enjoys illustrating other people's works and finds in them a potent stimulus to his way of working. Blake stated that he enjoys working with other peoples words and ideas as much as his own. He says it is like being given a ticket to visit someone elses imagination and "you never quite know what you'll find there." ("Voices of the creators", supplied by the artist)

Figure 24

"Quentin Blake's emergence onto these sunny uplands of creative fulfilment is remarkable in part for the extent of its collaborative ventures - such rich justification for the illustrator as "unashamed accompanist" - and this role was to be nowhere more celebrated than in his illustrations for the books of Roald Dahl."
(Alderson, 1995, p. 566)

Blake has illustrated a number of books for Roald Dahl and his unmistakable artwork truly compliments Dahl's writing. Dahl's books often contain expansive language and Blake's economical and amiable style helps to balance this out. See the examples, Figure 25. This is from *The B.F.G.* Dahl is describing a "brilliant" moonbeam shining into a little girl's room. He creates an eerie scene using sentences like "nobody was walking on the pavement outside", "Sophie had never known such silence", and then goes on to discuss how this could be described as "witching hour." As can be seen by the illustration, Blake, instead of trying to recreate these scenes as eerily and as complex as Dahl, simply opts for an illustration of the little girl in bed done in pen and ink. A simple stripe is left without ink to suggest the 'brilliant moonbeam.'

Figure 26 is from the same book. Dahl presents a frightening description of a huge arm entering the little girl's room using words like "flashing black eyes", "scream", " pale wrinkly face", "blood froze", these words could conjure up grotesque images but Blake opts for a subtle and economic approach - just an illustration of a hand, still very effective with a very dark wash.

Sometimes Dahl uses gloriously grotesque language in order to describe something, and this could conjure up horrific images in a child's mind but Blake portrays them in a quirky manner, maybe sometimes somewhat gruesome, though always in a milder, softer tone than Dahl. A very funny example of Blake's interpretations of one of Dahl's accounts is from *The Witches* (1983).

Figure 27 is the accompanying drawing to a text where Dahl has been describing the witches, "scratching away like mad at their hair". He contemplates whether it could be nits and describes how once a boy in school had his head stuck in turpentine to kill the

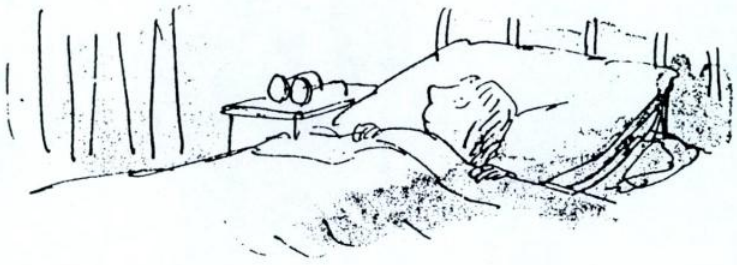


Figure 25

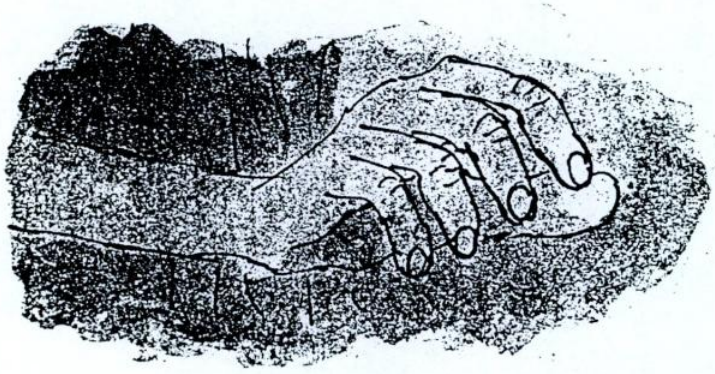


Figure 26

Figure 27

nits and half the skin fell off his scalp. Blake has portrayed this simply by a bunch of women, looking slightly irritated, all with their hands on the backs of their necks.

Figure 28 is when the ladies finally unmask themselves in order to let their true selves out . Without this drawing Dahl's description of "spotty scalps, dried and itchy", phrases like "scabby, bald heads", words such as monstrous, grotesque, and childkillers would be rather terrifying. However, Blake's depiction of the witches almost gives them a "cute" appeal, with their goofy expressions, their wide eyes and their silly grins.

My favourite of these examples is figure 29. Dahl is describing how the little boy is being turned into a mouse, potentially a petrifying experience. A rhyme the witch chants :

"This smelly brrrrrat, this filthy scum
This horrid little louse
Vill very soon become
A lovely little mouse!"

It's clear from the illustration how Blake has captured this so perfectly. It is a hilarious depiction, yet it is also sufficiently convincing.

Figure 30 is a similar illustration, where this time the witches are turning into mice. Dahl describes how they are growing fur on their faces, and how suddenly the room is swarming with brown mice. Once again Blake has succeeded in capturing the essence of the complete mayhem that has erupted, without allowing his drawings to appear too gruesome or frightening. The collaboration between the two is certainly a successful one and has helped Dahl in his sale of books, increasing their popularity.
Blake has a special talent for picking out subtleties in the story and interpreting them in an amusing manner.

Figure 31 is also from *The Witches*. Just as an accessory to the story Dahl tells the tale of a little boy who turned into granite and became an umbrella stand and another little boy who turned into a chicken. Blake has chosen these two, relatively unimportant

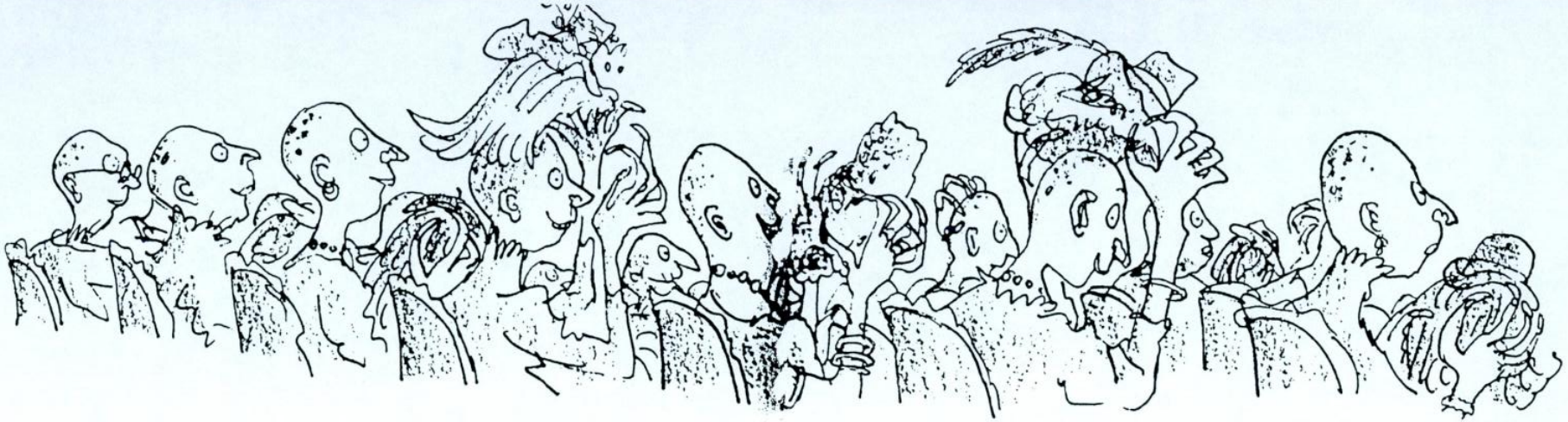


Figure 28

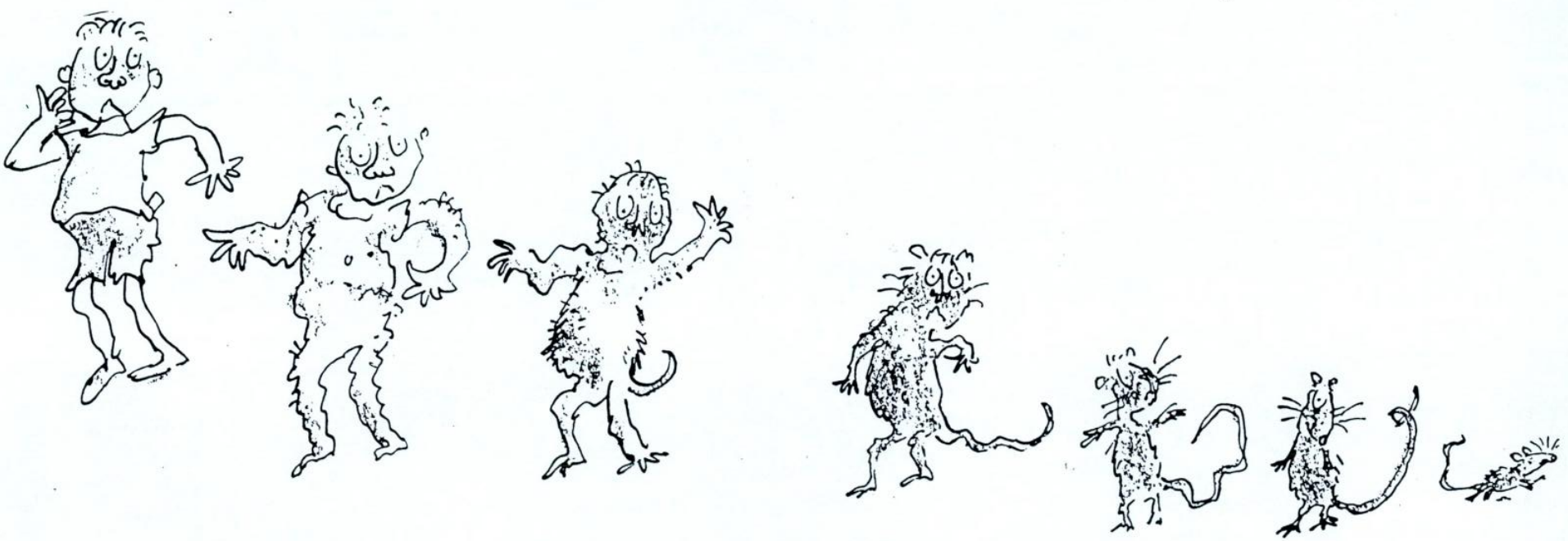


Figure 29

Figure 30

incidents, and in depicting them literally has produced amusing results. Notice the surprised look of disbelief on the boys' faces.

Also figure 32 shows his ability in picking out subtleties in the story. Dahl happened to mention in the course of the story that the granny liked to smoke cigars, so Blake has chosen to show a scene where the grandmother is talking to her grandson, huge cigar included!

In an interview in *Artists of the page*, Blake says ;

> *"One of the nice things about the Dahl books is that although there is a strong element of humour in them that I respond to, they're not all quite the same, you don't actually know what he's going to do next. It calls for a shift of approach."*
> (Marantz, 1992, p. 40)

So while he adapts his work to suit varying authors, he also adapts his style within the work he does for Dahl. For *The Witches* he uses charcoal dabbed drawings (figure 33), line and wash for *The B.F.G.* (figure 34). Blake said that for *The Twits* (1980), he had to use a coarse pen-nib and a rough angular way of drawing in order to show their deplorable antics and also to suggest the crazy atmosphere they live in. ("Voices of the creators", supplied by the artist) (see figure 34b).Though he still keeps a certain consistency even for the likes of *Rhyme Stew,* which is aimed at older children, or *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978)aimed at children much younger. In figure 35a from *Rhyme Stew,* a poem about a schoolboy being seduced by his PE teacher, obviously a more adult theme, Blake does not stray from the same basic style that he uses for all of Dahl's books, including *The Enormous Crocodile*, (see figure 35b).

The next author to look at is John Yeoman. He is closest of all to Blake. They studied together at Cambridge University and there is a two way collaboration into which the author and the artist urge each other into higher reaches of absurdity, but always with their feet planted in a recognisable world. (Crouche, 1995, p. 107) Looking at the books which they have produced together e.g. *The Hermit and The Bear* (1984), there seems to be a close affinity with style and intention. Brian Alderson says that his rough and ready cartoonist's hand is very suitable for Yeoman's offbeat texts.

Figure 31

Figure 32

Figure 33

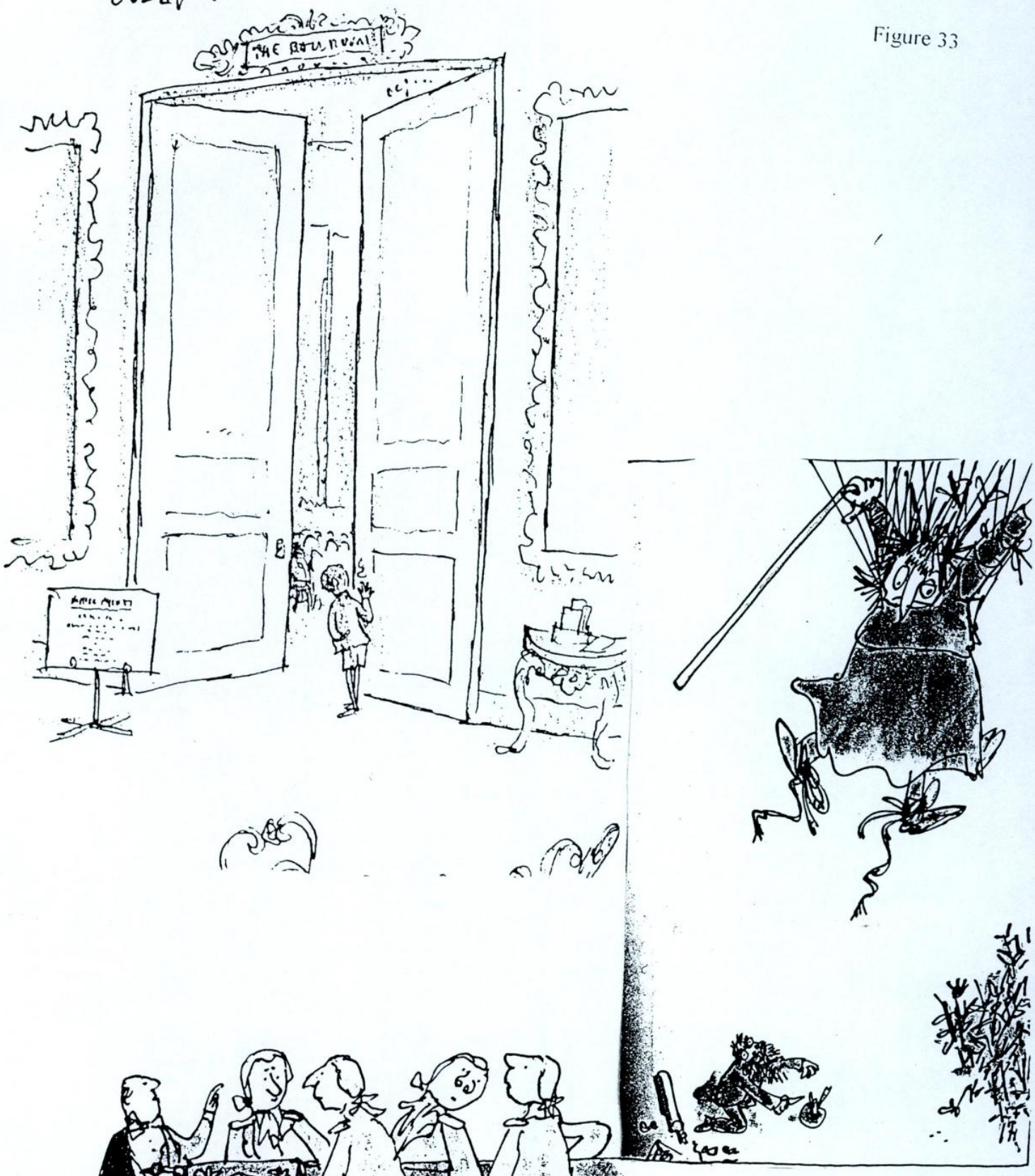


Figure 34

Figure 35a

Figure 35

Figure 35b

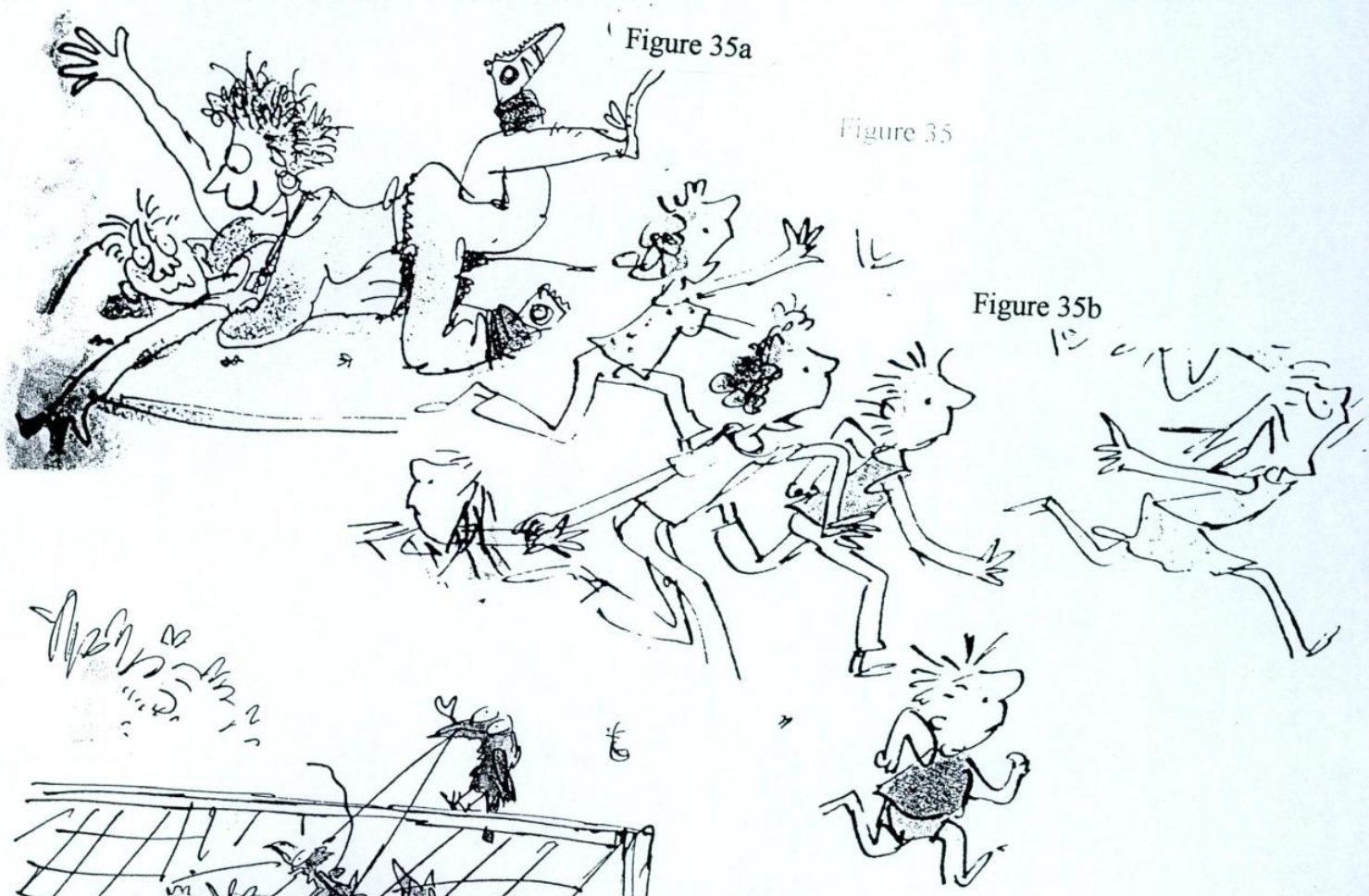


Figure 36a

In figure 36a the images of the two chickens stuck, first in the net of the goalposts, and then in the shopping trolley are rather bizarre and very amusing. Figure 36(b) is a depiction of the bear signing, or rather "making his mark" on the paper. I think that it is a very quirky and funny image, the way that the bear has knocked over the jar of ink in order to access its contents, and how his hands are far too oversized and clumsy for the little piece of paper on which he is trying to "write." Figure 36c is from *The Wild Washerwomen* (1979) another of Yeoman's books. Blake gives an apt depiction for the unusualy named Dottie, Lottie, Molly, Dolly, Winnie, Minnie and Ernestine. The ladies look equally as bizarre as their names.

Michael Rosen is another author whose style of writing is somewhat alternative, and is aimed at slightly older children. His eccentric poetry in *Mind Your Own Business* is the perfect basis on which Blake can base his zany illustrations. Ironically though his style surfaces here as being a little more realistic and everyday for this absurd poetry. The figures are far more in proportion, the scenes are portrayed more literally. What is important though is that this book was published in 1974, and his earlier work does seem to have more definite linework, than his later drawings which seem to have a more hesitant linear quality.

Look at figures 37a and b. Both these illustrations are of a child looking up at a "grownup", yet in the one taken from *Matilda* (b) the ogreness of the grownup is intensified and also the proportion of the little person to the big person is much exaggerated in comparison to the illustration from *Mind Your Own Business* (a) where the proportions are far more realistic. Figure 37c is from Michael Rosen's *Don't Put Mustard in the Custard,* again a picture of a child looking up at a grownup. This too, has far more realistic proportions.

In *The History of Children's Book Illustration* the author claims that Blake has an uncanny knack for commenting aptly on a text and his drawings are best fitted to Michael Rosen's poetry as in *Mind Your Own Business.* Figure 38 is an example that

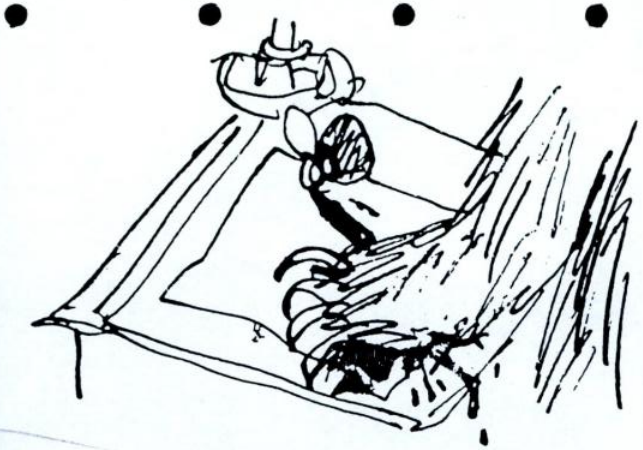


Figure 36b

Figure 36c

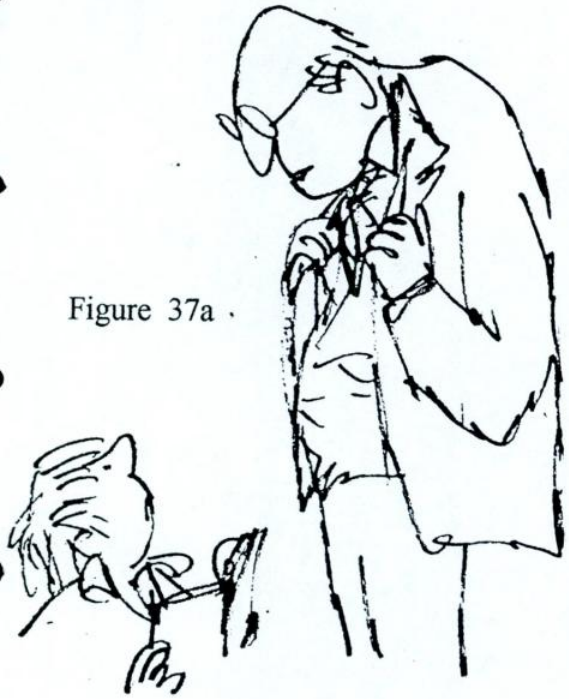


Figure 37a

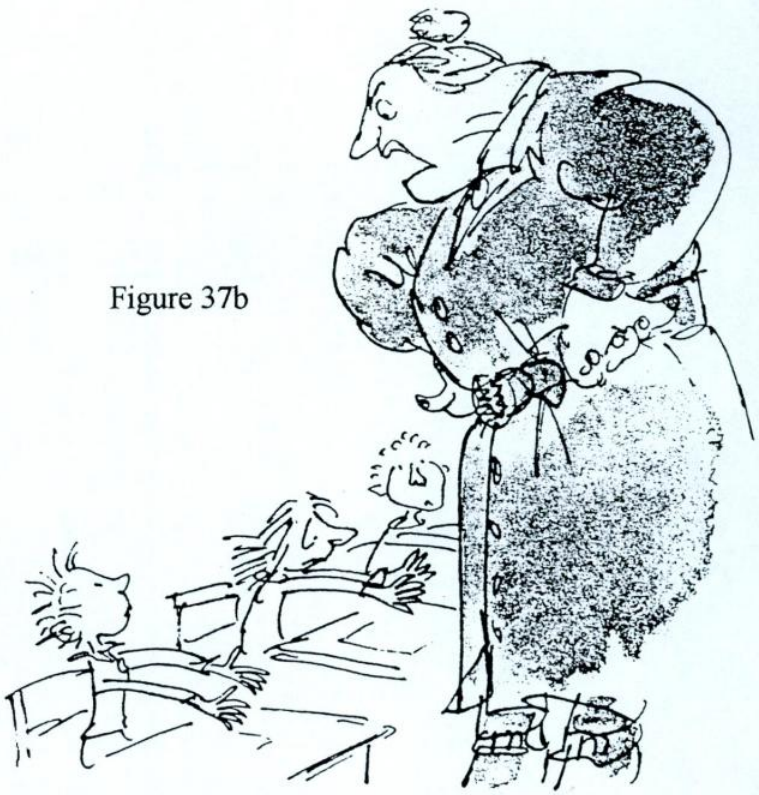
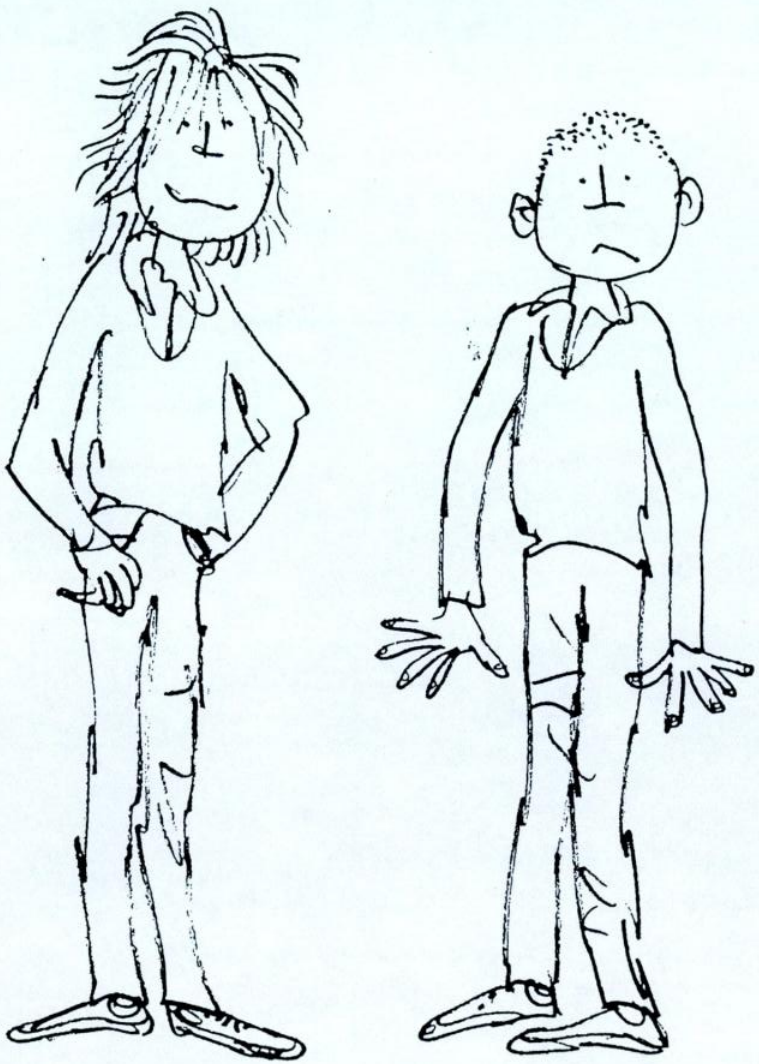


Figure 37b

Figure 37c



Every few weeks someone looks at me and says:
my you've grown
and then every few weeks someone says:
they've grown too long

and silver scissors come out of the drawer
and chip at my toes and run through my hair.

Now I don't like this one little bit
I won't grow if I'm going to be chopped
what's me is mine and I want to keep it
so either the scissors or my nails had better stop.

Figure 38a

backs up this point, where Blake's witty drawing suits the poem so well. I have included the poem itself to demonstrate this.

Other authors that he has worked extensively with include Joan Aiken and Russell Hoban. Russell Hoban's book *A Near Thing For Captain Najork* (figure 38b) illustrated by Blake was listed by *The New York Times* as one of the best illustrated books of that year(1976) Douglas Martin believes that he triumphs in the work that he did for Russell Hoban. While *The History of Children's Books* maintains that his work is most suited to that of Michael Rosen, Marcus Crouch reckons that Blake is singularly in harmony with Russell Hoban. In *The Dictionary Of Children's Book Illustration*, the author notes on his illustrations for Hoban's *Rain Door*:

> *"His illustrations are effective sketchy lines; the rain itself is brilliantly suggested."*
> (Peppin and Micklethwait, 1983, p. 44)

Brian Alderson refers to this work, saying that what Blake does is not so much to augment this in visual terms as to set down what was present in Hoban's own imagination when he wrote it. He notes that such a perfect symbiosis of talent is all too rare in picture books. This is indeed the perfect combination; to create a picture book which is stimulating both mentally and visually for the child and for the two to work so well in conjunction with one another is surely a bonus.

Joan Aiken is another author with whom Blake has worked. Some of her stories were written for children's television, for which Blake produced brilliantly successful caption drawings. Figure 38c is from Aiken's *Mortimer's Cross* (1983), an amusing portrayal of the raven being ducked in a bath, excluding large splashes of water, while the child looks on innocent and frightened. Marcus Crouch says of his work with Aiken;

> *"When he is completely at ease with the author a true co-operation emerges. His work with Joan Aiken in a series of Mortimer stories is of this kind. Aiken's grotesque humour stimulates Blake to diverting excesses of fantasy, as raven and child pursue their adventures, verbal and visual caricatures working as one."*
> (Crouche, 1995, p. 107)

Working for different authors, as opposed to illustrating his own texts, certainly does not make Blake a less creative illustrator. His adaptations to a pre-existing text can lift

Figure 38b

Figure 38c

them onto altogether higher planes. On this note I will now refer to the books which he has both written and illustrated.

> *"Quentin Blake is oddly diffident about the books for which he has supplied his own texts, although these clearly demanded a lot of careful work. Most began with an idea that generated a visual narrative to which he later added words."*
>
> (Martin, 1989, p.253)

While this may be the case with almost all of his work, one of his more recent books *Clown*, exists purely as a sequence of pictures. This book was inspired by the mime of the classic film *Les Enfants du Paradis*. It's the story of a voiceless clown's quest to rescue his friends who have been abandoned in a dustbin. Blake has captured his leading character perfectly, and lets him come to life completely bounding and jumping across the pages. This book was winner of "The Bologna Ragazzi Award" in 1996. Margaret Carter from *Books For Keeps* describes it as "an astonishing tour de force." Figure 39 is a page from the book. See how the little clown busily moves and even with the absence of words, his motions are entirely clear.

Another one of his more recent ventures is *The Green Ship*. He spoke to Margaret Carter about this in *Carousel* magazine. The story is about two children, who a little bored with their holiday, climb into the garden next door. They push through the branches and come across an amazing sight, a ship cut out from bushes and trees, a wheelhouse made from a shed, and they begin on an adventure where day by day they sail the seas of imagination. Blake tells Carter that he revised the text several times to make it " as serene and paced as the story." Figure 40 is an illustration from this book.

His books posses a charming quality, in that they all behold a wealth of imagination. *Mrs. Armitage And The Big Wave* is a masterpiece. As Margaret Carter put it, there seems to be a cock-eyed logic there, how this lady and her dog waiting for the big wave, keep rushing back to shore for some comforts during their wait.

Figure 41 is from this book. This is the final page of the book, the climax of the story. The big wave has come and Mrs. Armitage and her dog are ready, equipped with everything that they could possibly desire. There are no words, the picture says all that

Figure 39

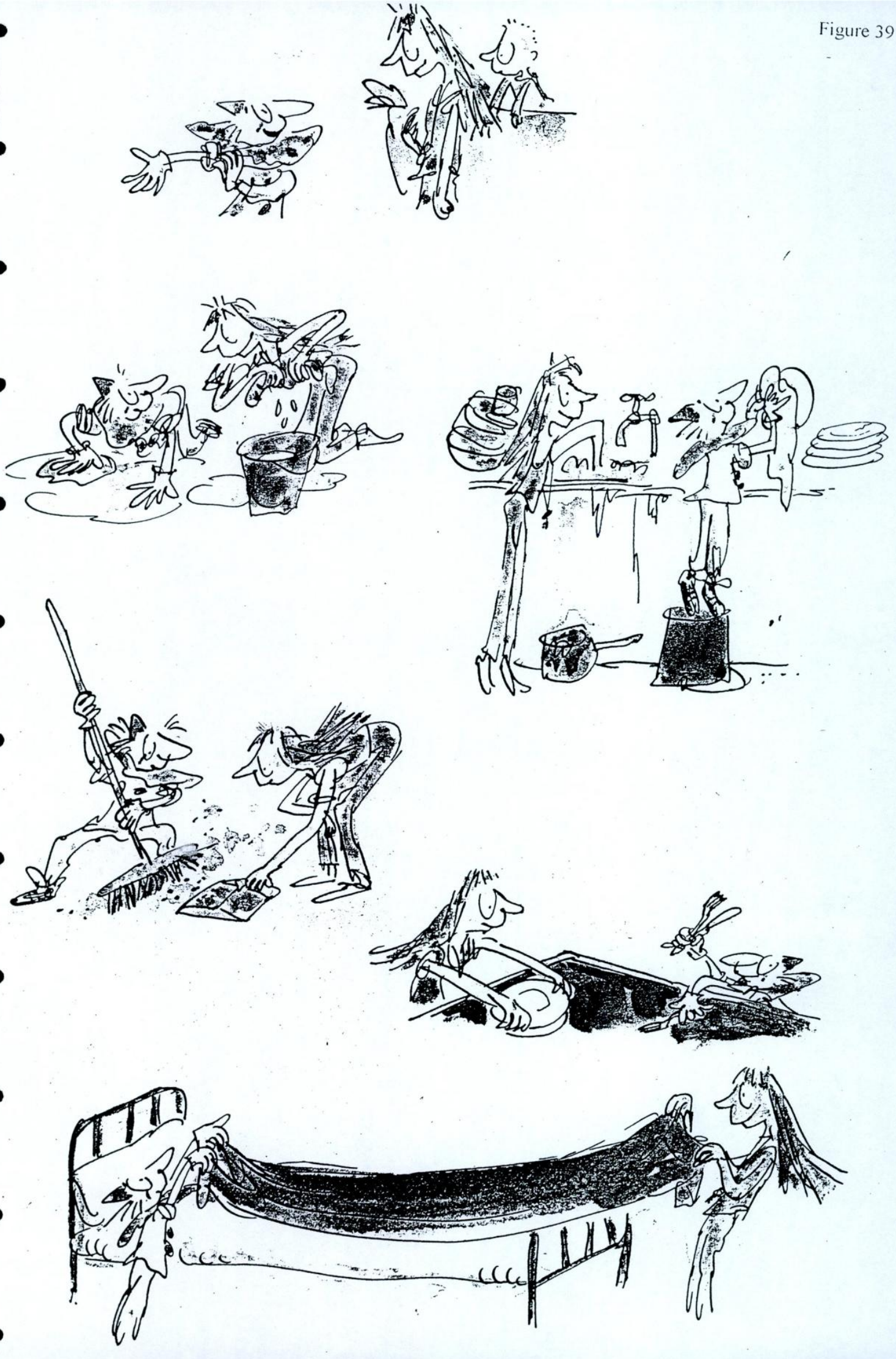


Figure 40

Figure 41

needs to be said. This book is a truly delightful adventure, beautifully drawn and also beautifully coloured with pure, bright washes. The drawings here, however, are remarkably more realistic and detailed compared with other works.(See figure 42).

Another book similar to this one is *Mrs. Armitage On Wheels*, which also uses the time honoured device of cumulative additions. This helps the reader to join in moving back and forth with what is happening at each stage and what has gone before. *Mr. Magnolia* is of a similar quality and Quentin Blake ties them together by saying;

> *"One area of common interest to Mrs. Armitage On Wheels, and Mr. Magnolia is that of orchestrating the reader wants to go on turning the pages to find out what happens; so that although the drawings have an air of spontaneity, the design and sequence of the pages is very carefully planned in advance. A fluid method of colouring adds to the line without interfering with it and contributes (I hope) to a sense of movement."*
>
> (Blake, The Dictionary of 20th century illustrators)

All of these books *do* have a very generous quality in that they include the reader in the telling of the story. In Blake and Yeoman's *The Improbable Book Of Records* there is an insertion at the front of the book which reads; "Did you know that .....while at work on this book, the compilers ate 4,978 bacon sandwiches and drank 9,938 mugs of cocoa." Straight away the reader has been addressed personally and thus included in the story. In the contents page of Blake's *All Join In* there is an important message, which reads; "Important Message: You can join in too!" This is surely a welcoming to enjoy the book.

These later arrivals have been more successful than Blake's earlier picture books, the first one being *Patrick* (1968). However this was more successful than its immediate successors *Jack and Nancy* (1969) and *Snuff* (1973). Brian Alderson notes that while they are satisfying examples of picture-book narrative, they seem arbitrary. As stories they just happened along; they weren't out there demanding to be told.

In 1980 Blake was awarded the "Kate Greenaway Medal" for *Mister Magnolia* and this recognised his distinctive contribution through his own picture books, and his subsequent publishings show an augmentation of his inventiveness and his way of

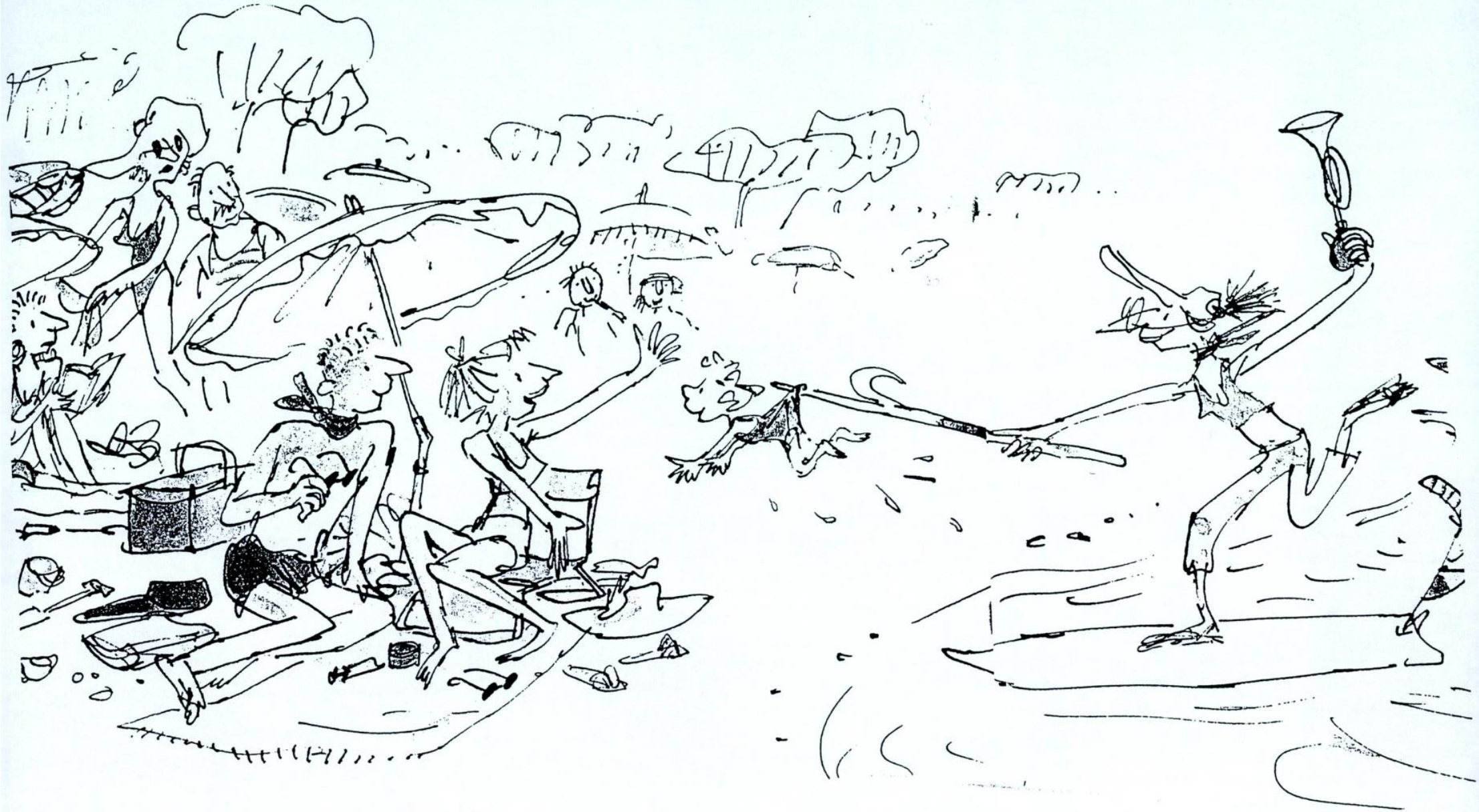


Figure 42

developing stories where their pace and energy runs with such momentum that the story flows smoothly from beginning to end.

Chapter 4

A Look at Influences and Contemporaries

The next point to discuss regarding the work of Blake are his influences from other artists. While Blake possesses a truly original style, certain aspects of his work can be traced back to others who preceded him. Of course an obvious candidate for this would have been his tutor at Chelsea art College, Brian Robb. Blake studied life drawing under him and seemed to have rather a similar history to him. Robb was born in 1913 and he, too had studied at Chelsea Art School before tutoring there, and also contributed cartoons to *Punch* and *Spectator* magazines. He, too became head of illustration in the Royal College of Art. And like Blake, he also worked frequently in pen and ink. Quentin Blake wrote of Robb's "irrepressible quirkiness of drawing and outlook that seemed to express instinctively the comedy of human dilemmas." He also commented that the diversity of his activities and his deep-seated modesty about his work, meant that as an artist he never became celebrated or continuously commercially successful. Figures 43a and b are examples of Robb's work.

In an interview, when asked whom or what was the most important influence on his work, he reckoned that it would have to be the French nineteenth century illustrator Honore Daumier. ("An Interview with Quentin Blake", supplied by the artist.)

> *"Honore Daumier, the French illustrator and cartoonist who drew for humorous newspapers in Paris nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, has always been one of my heroes. One of the first books that I ever wrote was about Daumier. That was about forty five years ago, and it cost two guineas (two pounds, two shillings), which seemed a tremendous amount to me as a schoolboy, though I've probably never spent money better. I still look at that book now."*
>
> ("Voices of the Creators", Quentin Blake, supplied by the artist)

Daumier was born in Marseilles, France on February 20th, 1808. His first original drawings appeared in 1822, and by 1830 he was already publishing lithographs in *La Silhoutte.* Daumier's fame grew slowly after his death in 1879. He now rests on a lofty pedestal as the patron Saint of cartooning. (Horn, 1980, p. 187) See an example of his work in figure 43c. He works in the same spontaneous way as Blake, the linework is expressive and the fundamental part of the drawing. Daumier also uses the same device as Blake with regard to shading, the use of close running, paralell lines. There is a quirkiness present there too, that surely Blake was influenced by and hence expressed in his work.

Figure 43a

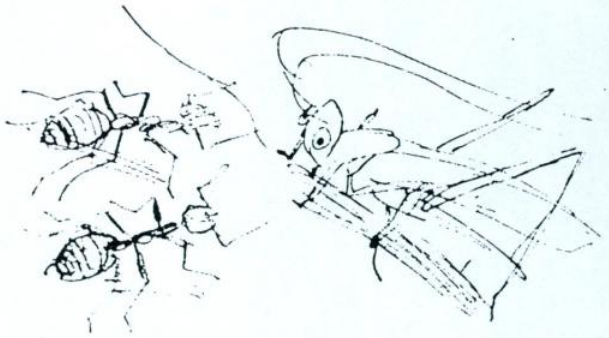


Figure 43b

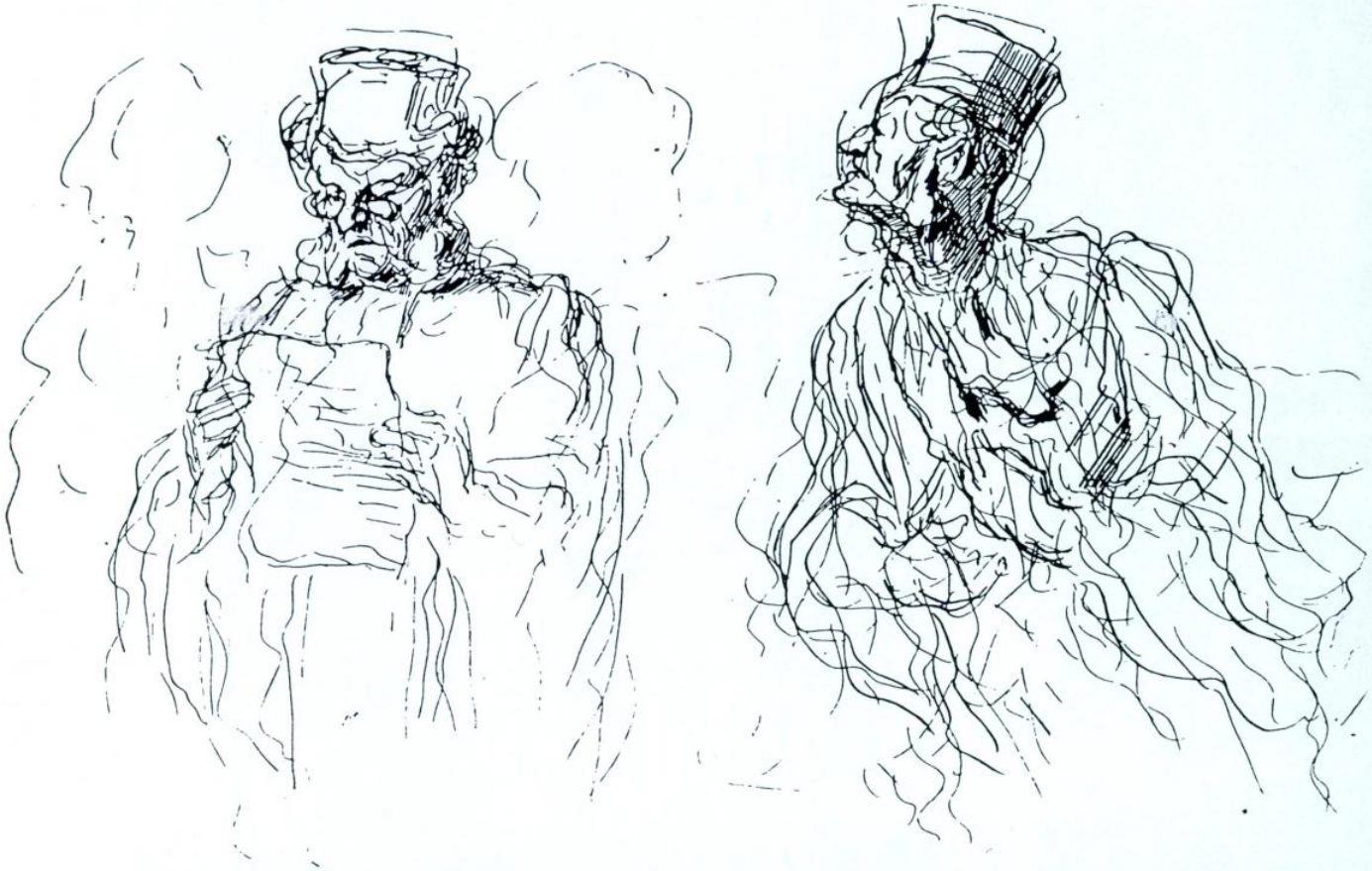


Figure43c

One artist, or cartoonist to whom Blake is frequently compared is Andre Francois (originally Andre Farkas), a man who Blake greatly admires. He believes that there are far too many influences on his own work to result in an individual synthesis, but he does acknowledge the considerable impression made by the achievement of this man at the time he set out in his own career. Blake said of Francois' work;

> *"I didn't actually want to make my drawing look like his. It was his way of drawing - free, energetic, scratchy and inventive - made me realise how exciting drawing could be; and because a drawing was going to be printed it didn't necessarily mean that it had to be well-behaved."*
>
> ("Voices of the Creators", Quentin Blake, supplied by the artist)

Francois was born in 1915, a French cartoonist, poster artist, set designer and painter. He contributed cartoons to *Punch* regularly, among other magazines, as did Blake. His cartoons are cruel yet tender and certainly ingenious. This is perhaps what likens him to Blake, the softer side to his ridiculing! He draws in pen and ink, in a rather scratchy style also not unlike Blake's. Francois has been compared with Ronald Searle, an artist to whom I will later be comparing Blake. Figure 44 is a cartoon done by Francois which appeared in *Punch* magazine.

Another artist with whom Blake has often been associated is Edward Lear. Lear was born in 1812 and had his first book published at the age of 19. He is renowned for his *Book Of Nonsense* (1846) and I feel that this runs along a similar vein to *Quentin Blake's Book of Nonsense Verse* (in fact, this book contains a rhyme written by Edward Lear). There is an affinity with the two artists which falls outside the accustomed pattern of stylistic similarities or influences, but more so that they share a sense of the absurd and an instinct for timing and most importantly that they share a mastery of the spontaneity and sparkle of their line.(Martin, 1989, p. 254). Blake is more like Lear in the sense that their humour has a gentler, softer character than the likes of Gerald Scarfe or Ralph Steadman.

Figure 45 is an example of Lear's work, notice the cat with only a stump of a tail. This is the type of bizarre imagery that we are accustomed to seeing from Blake. Also the

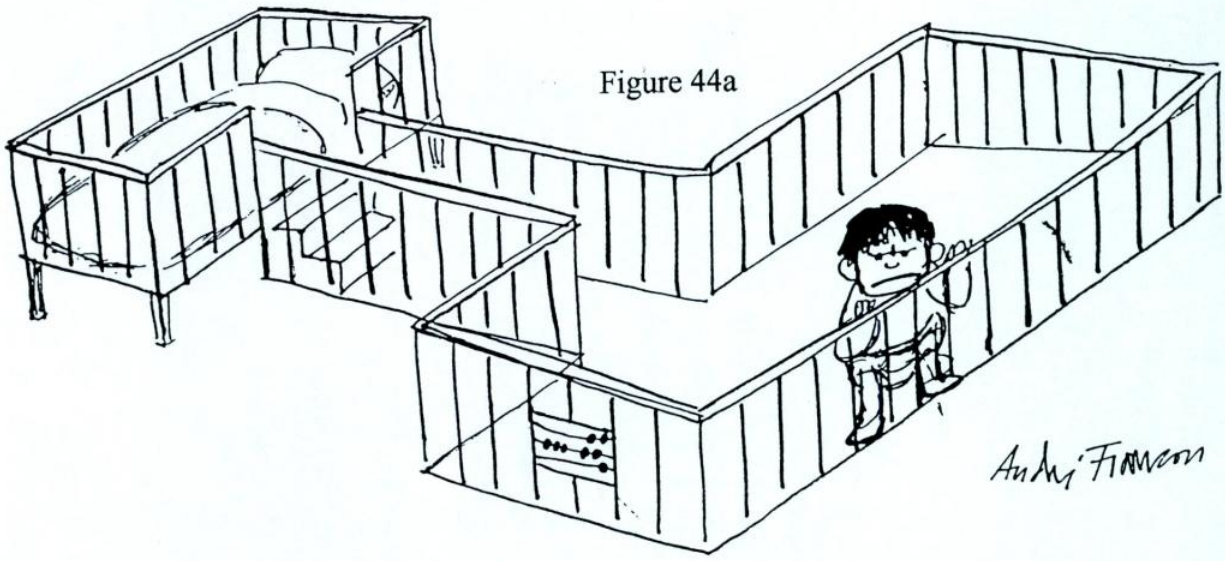


Figure 44a

Figure 44b

hand writing beneath it is reminiscent of the sample of the hand writing that Blake did for Roald Dahl's *Boy* (fig. 45b). Figures 46a and b, also by Lear, show the type of spontaneity associated with Blake's work; the unselfconscious manner in which their movements are executed; free-flowing and full of life.

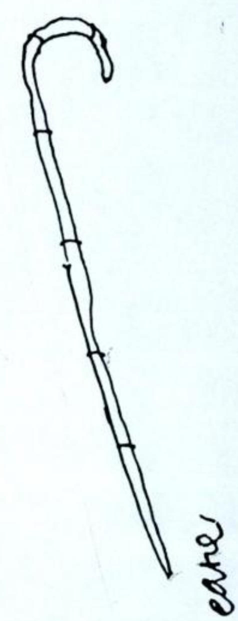
Among the illustrators that Blake has been linked with is Edward Ardizzone. Ardizzone has a style that like Blake's is instantly recognisable and can give distinctive character to individual books. He was born in 1900 and his first job was to illustrate Walter De La Mare's *Peacock Pie*, done in line drawing and wash. This was followed by his most major work to date- the making of 125 drawings for the Faber edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*. He also, like Blake, contributed drawings to periodicals and magazines, including the *Radio Times*. Brian Alderson notes that both artists have found in their work that "cheerfulness was always breaking in." It was also noted by Brian Alderson that Blake's *Jack and Nancy* bears a passing resemblance to Ardizzone's *Tim and Lucy*. One of the differences, however, between the two artists is that while Ardizzone thought highly of his skill with words, Blake makes no special claims for his own stories and rhymes.(Crouche, 1995, p. 106)

Ardizzone, like Blake, has also won "The Kate Greenaway Medal." He won it in 1956 for *Tim, All Alone*, and as Blake's illustrations for *Captain Najork* were listed as some of the best of that year, Ardizzone's illustrations for *The Island of Fish in the Trees* by Eva-Lis Wuorio achieved the same merit. Figure 47 a and b are examples of his work. These are in pen and ink, which are more similar to the work of Blake than his line drawings that appear like etchings, as demonstrated in figure 48.

His illustrations are generally concerned with contemporary life, untouched by political, religious or ideological conflicts. His approach is not satiric or moralistic, but autobiographical, and his drawings are representational and humorous and demonstrate his affections for people. This account could also be applied to much of Blake's work. This point also ties Blake with John Lawrence, who is also an observer of character without recourse to the cutting edge of satirical caricature like Scarfe and Steadman.

Figure 45a

Figure 45b



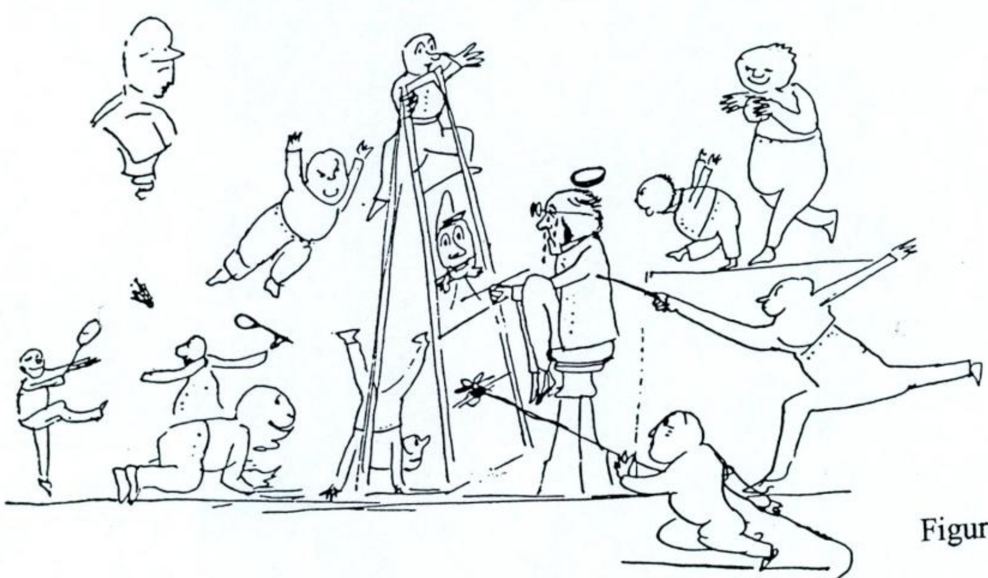


Figure 46a

Figure 46b

Figure 47a

Figure 47b

Figure 48a

The Public Bar at the George

Figure 48b

These have been traced back to Gilray, but there is also a gentler stream which links the likes of John Lawrence and Quentin Blake back to Rowlandson. (Martin, 1989, p. 248) This type of comedy is recognised as having a particularly English emphasis on humour, and has an impressive ancestry in the work of Rowlandson, Hogarth, Cruikshank or Lear. However caricature cartoon or satire is only a success when allied to a strong, linear technique.

In an interview with Artists of the Page Blake said;

> *"I guess I'm a twentieth century Rowlandson rather than Cruikshank, who became more of a chronicle in later life. I like aspects of both of them."*
>
> (Marantz, 1992, p. 43)

Figures 49 to 52 are a few examples of Rowlandson's work, taken from the "Paul Mellon Collection." The association between the work of his and Blake's is obvious by merely looking at these drawings: the same quality of line, capturing so much with so little and the magical air of spontaneity. In figure 49 notice how the wheels of the cart are portrayed so gracefully. In a few strokes Rowlandson has captured their roundness in a manner not unlike the way Blake is accustomed to working. In figure 51 the linework is varied and interesting like that of Blake. The lines appear thicker and darker at some points and have the same curvilinear feel as much of Blake's work. Also compare the use of lines here to suggest shading and compare it to the shading Blake uses in figure 3.

John Lawrence was born in 1933 and served time as a lecturer in college. In an article about him in *The Telling Line* Douglas Martin mentions that Lawrence is the Rowlandson of the twentieth century. He also notes the very "Englishness" of Lawrence's work. Figures 53 to 55 are examples of some of Lawrence's works. Note the quality of line in figure 53, very similar to Blake's use of an often "scratchy" line, though that of Lawrence's is far more realistic. The movement captured in figure 54 of the little children running through the snow is glorious. The children have the same spindly quality as many of Blake's characters and they appear so full of life, a trait in all of Blake's work. In figure 55 he captures the gestures and expressions quickly and

Figure 49

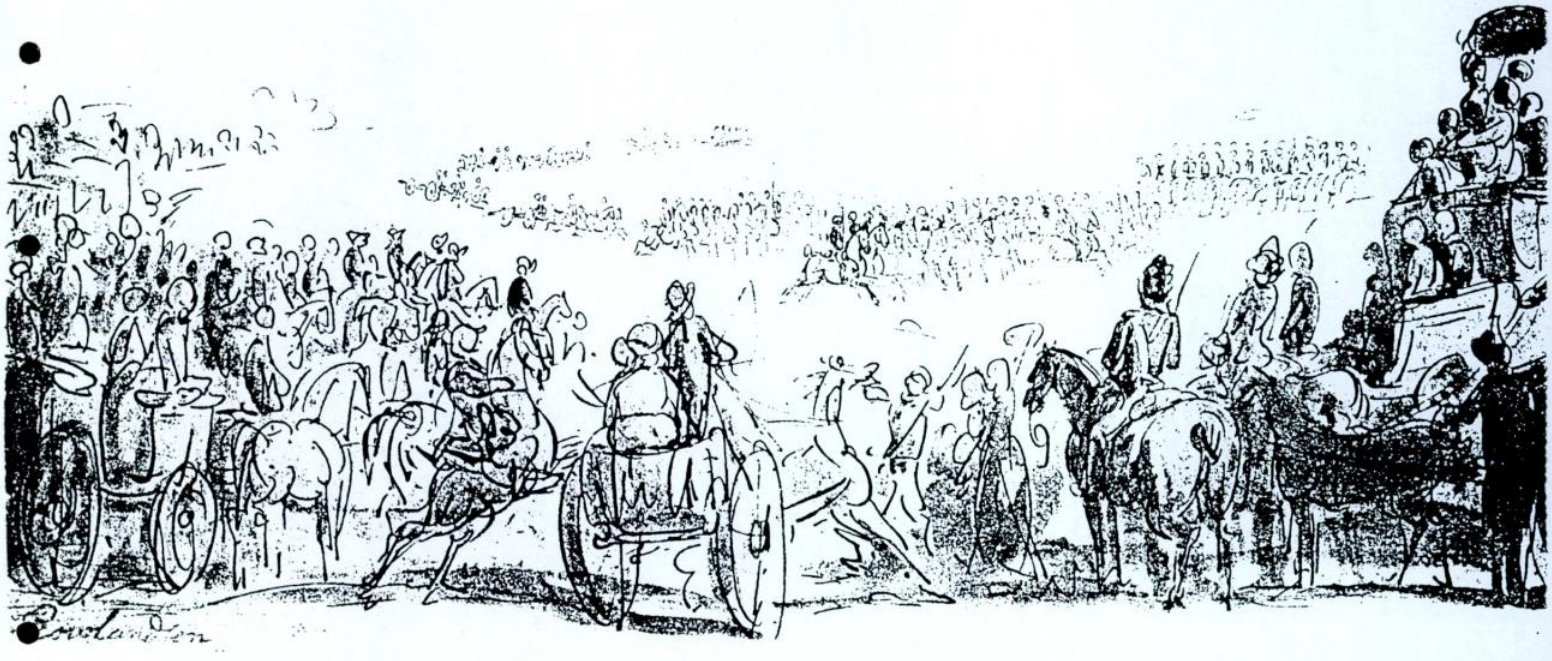


Figure 50

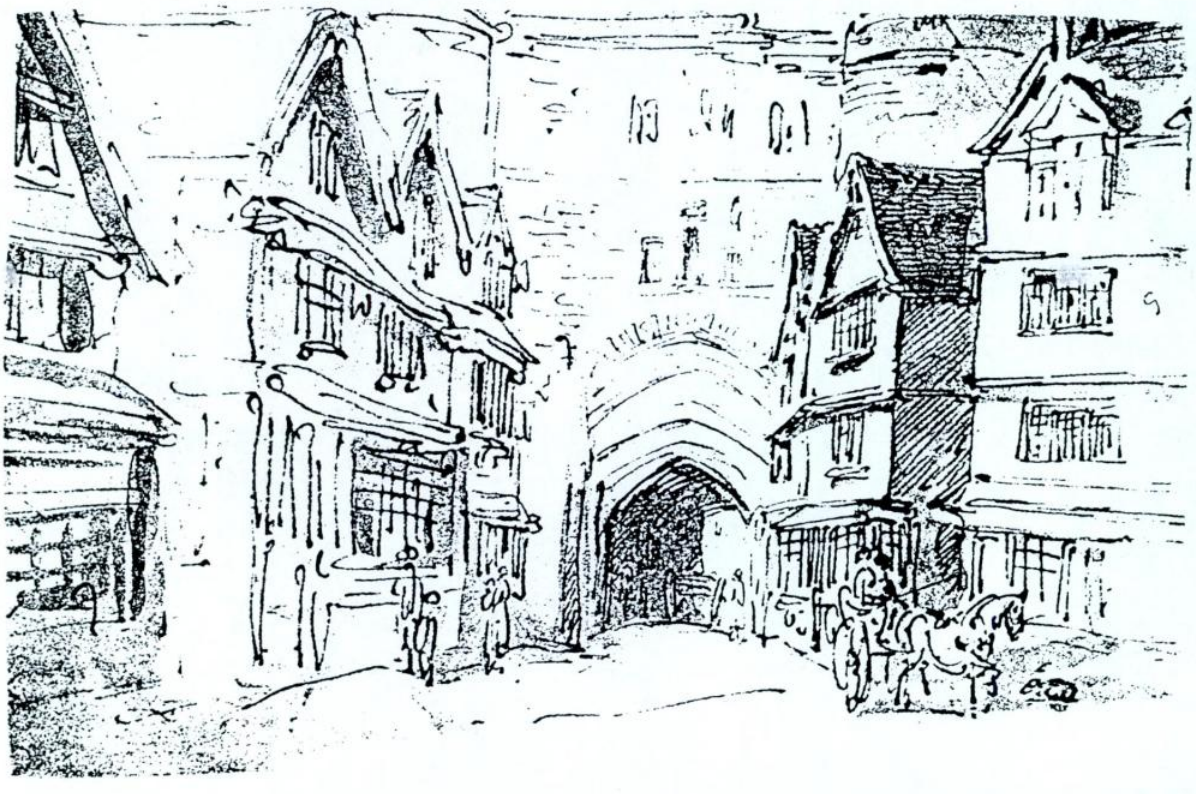


Figure 51

Figure 52

Figure 53

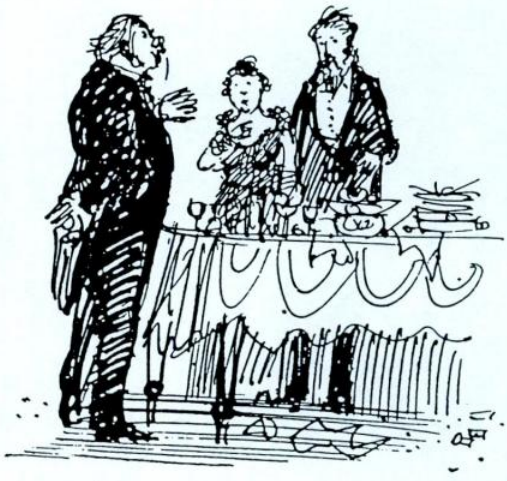
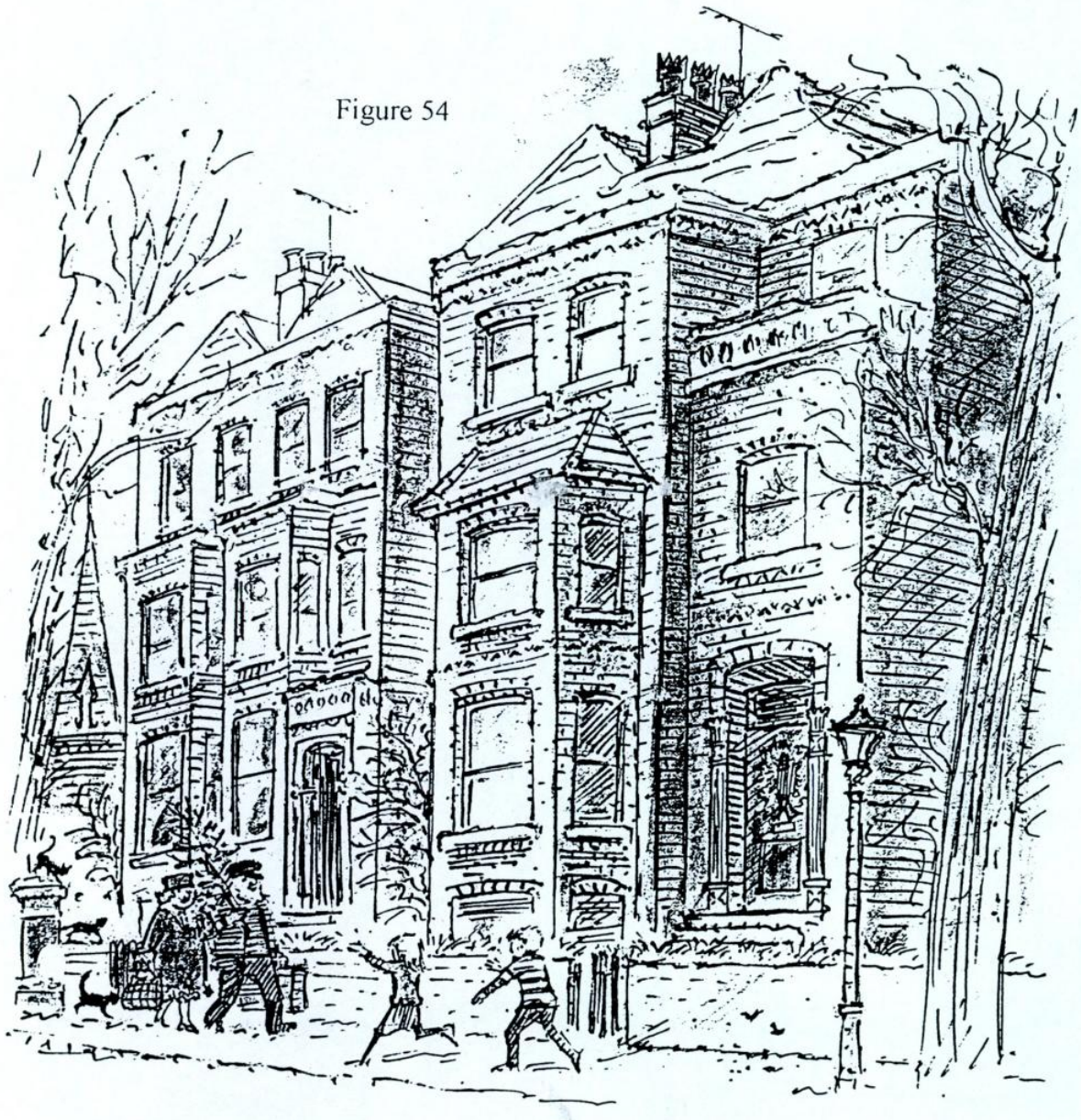


Figure 55

Figure 54



freely as does Quentin Blake. He uses the same style of using dots to suggest eyes and he, too makes use of linear shading.

Having compared Blake to these artists, I will now look at him with respect to his contemporaries e.g. Searle, Steadman and Scarfe. The first time that I looked at the work of Searle, I was quite taken aback by its similarities to Blake's work, his whole use of line, and his occasional charcoal dabs or ink wash to introduce shading. Look at figures 56 and 57. Figure 56 is done by Ronald Searle. Notice the books lying on the floor and then compare them with the books done by Blake in figure57. Notice the zany looking, running character in figure 58 (done by Searle, from *Slightly Foxed - But Still Desirable*). He is reminiscent of Blake's characters in the illustration for "Chortling and Gallumping" from *Quentin Blake's Book of Nonsense Verse* in figure 8. The hands in figure 59 (done by Searle) are not unlike the hands of *The BFG* in figure 26 (done by Blake).

Scarfe and Steadman are along the same vein as Searle. In one respect their work is entirely different from Blake's. As I've mentioned before their work is far more satirical, but again both artists use the pen and ink device to create rugged, scraggy lines. See figures 60a and b, both by Scarfe and figures 61a and b, both by Steadman. Strangely I actually think that figure 61a is quite like the cartoon done by Andre Francois in figure 44.

It is still probably too early to be able to pick out illustrators who have been influenced by Blake but I was rather surprised by a book, *Leon and Bob* by Simon James(1997). His style of illustration is very similar to Blake's in the use of his colour washes and his scratchy line, although I think his figure drawing lacks the spontaneity of Blake's. (See figures 62a and 62b). Notice how the paraphernalia in the bedroom is suggested in figure 62a. They are represented in a similar fashion to the way that Blake suggests objects, in just a few deft strokes.

I was also excited by the similarity between Lisbeth Zwerger's "selfish giant",(figure 63) and Blake's BFG, (figure64). Both giants have the same big noses, the same

Figure 56

Figure 57

Figure 58

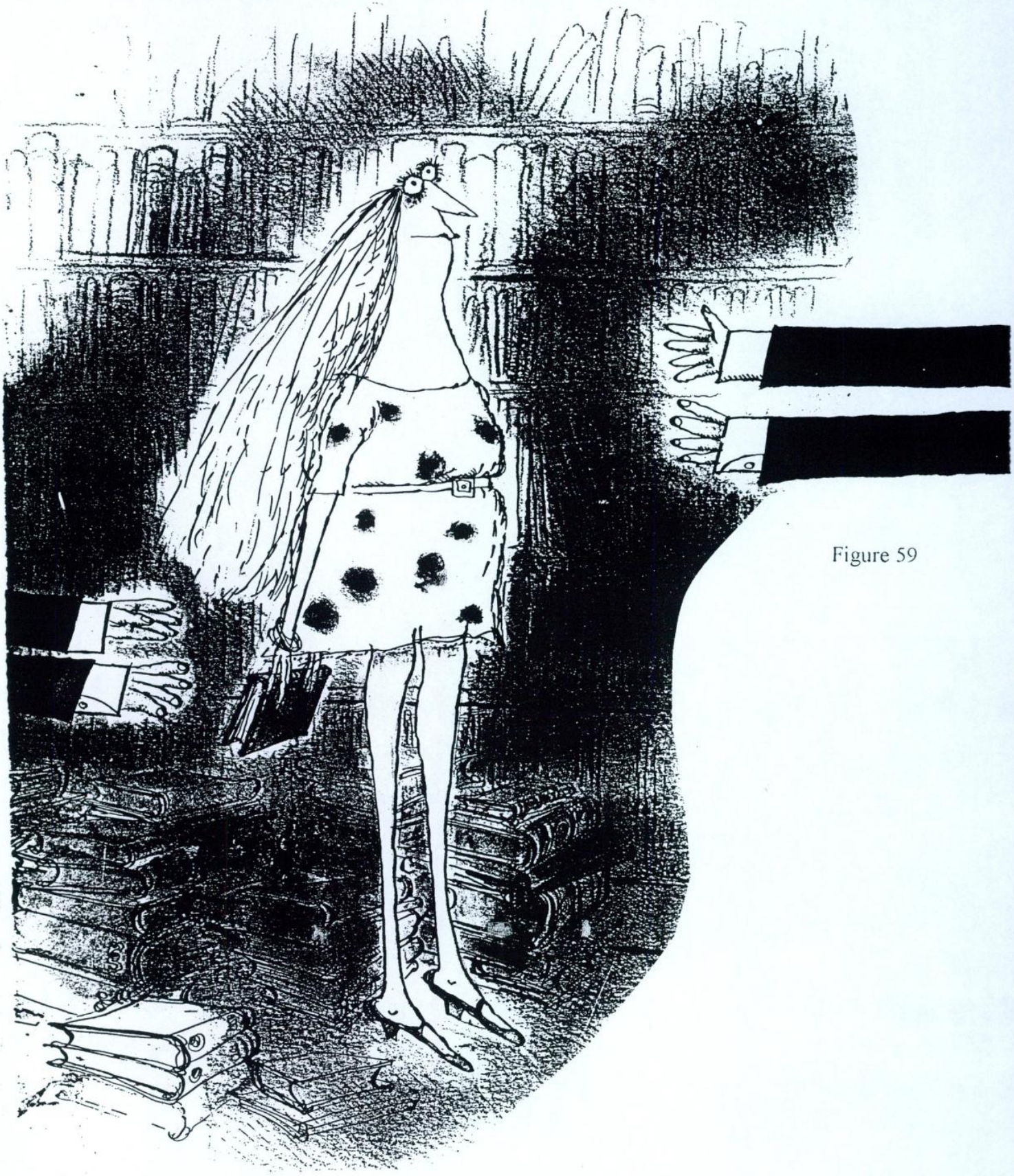


Figure 59

Figure 60a

Figure 60b

Figure 61a

Figure 61b

Figure 62a

Figure 62b

straight, serious mouths with a strong line running across their faces to suggest a wrinkle, created by an eternally grim face. Also both giants are wrapped in long cloaks and are set against bleak backgrounds. Viewed out of context I think that the giant in figure 63 could be a close-up of the giant in figure 64.

Blake's pen and ink style has survived right through the decades, this way of working still an acceptable one for more recent illustrators. Take for example the illustrations that Dave McKean did for Neil Gaiman's book, *The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish* (1997) See figure 65. Certainly at first glance this illustration looks entirely different from those done by Quentin Blake, however at a closer look the actual line-drawing, omitting the strong colours and the use of collage the drawing is surprisingly like that of Blake. Figure 66 a, b and c are taken from Dahl's *Revolting Recipes* (1997). I was delighted to come across these illustrations by Quentin Blake which employ this technique used by McKean; the integration of illustration and photography. I find that both artists produced equally successful results in this method of working.

The most uncanny similarity to Blake's work, however, is that of Terence Blacker, author and illustrator of the Ms. Wiz series. Figures 67 a, b and c are illustrations taken from *You're Kidding Ms. Wiz,* by Blacker. Notice the mouse in figure 67a and compare it to those done by Blake in figure 30. They could easily have been done by the same artist. The same applies to the figures. They posses a remarkable similarity to those of Blake, the hands, the eyes, the noses. He employs the same scratchy line as Blake and he, too, works in pen and ink. The quality of line used by Blacker is more reminiscent of Blake's earlier work, like those examples given earlier from Michael Rosen's *Mind Your Own Business.*

Figure 63

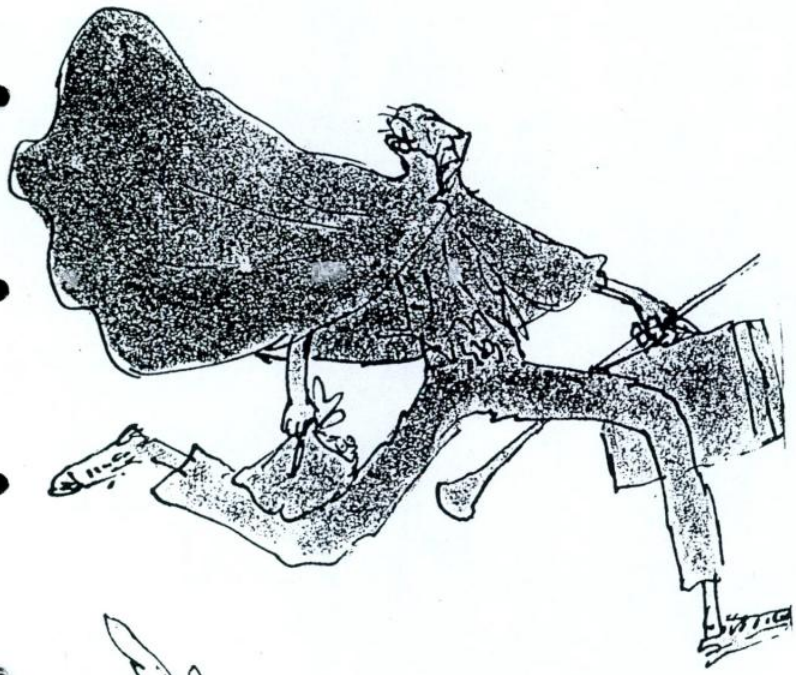
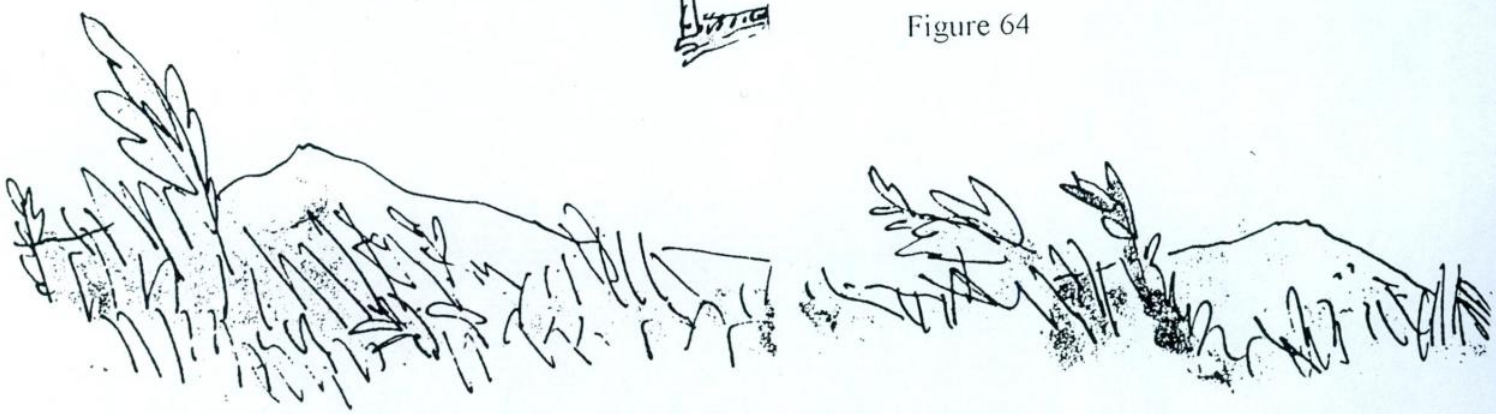


Figure 64




Sincerely,
La.
he shouted up
the stairs. She
cked on the door
the bathroom.
e called out into
the garden. My
ther didn't reply.
That's very odd
said my mother.

Figure 65

Figure 66a

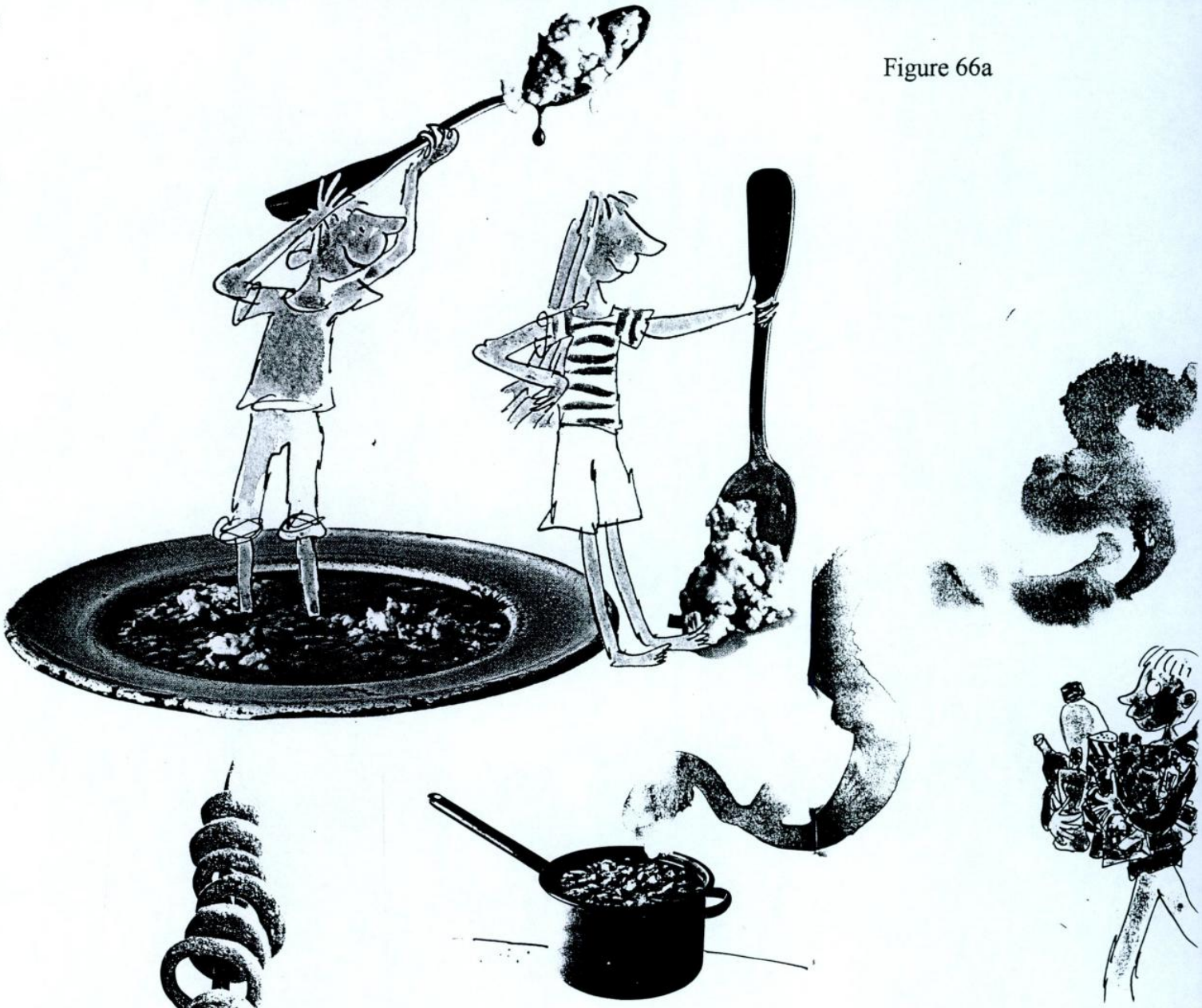


Figure 66b

Figure 66c

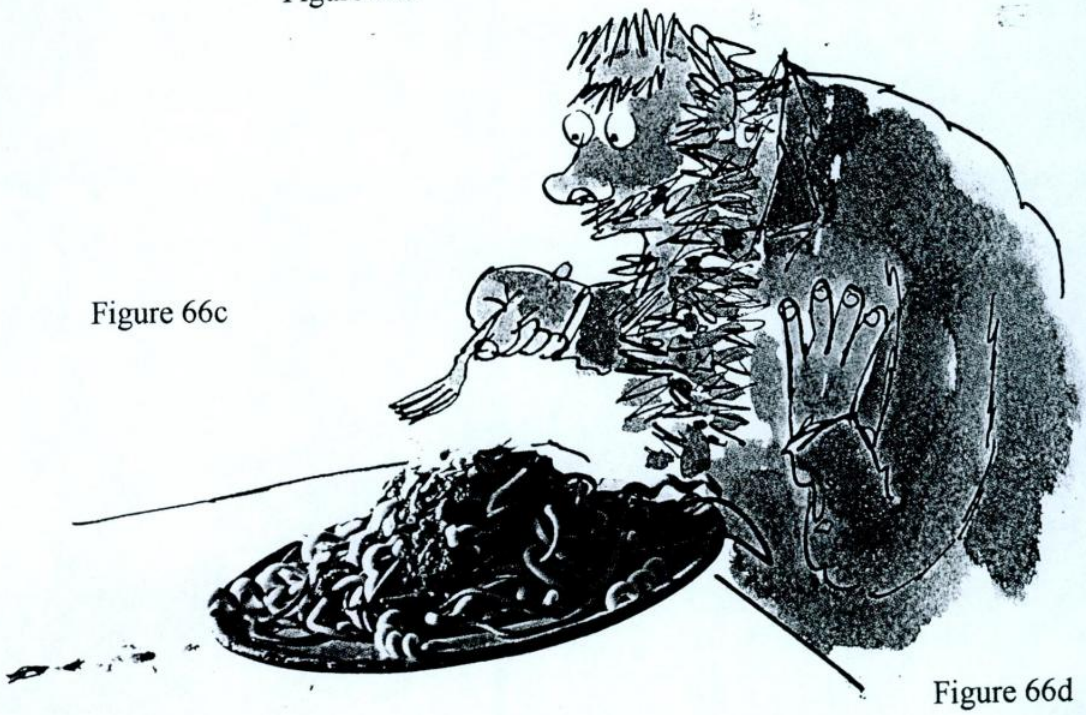


Figure 66d

Figure 67a

Figure 67b

Figure 67c

Conclusion

Having examined Blake's work so closely, I have found that while his illustration is always recognisable, it is quite diverse. While Blake almost always illustrates children's books, he has covered a vast range of subject matter; books about children, about witches, all kinds of animals, twits, clowns, monsters, birds, food, illustrations for poems, the list could go on and on!

Despite the illustrators that I mentioned, e.g. Terence Blacker, who seem to be drawing in a similar manner to Blake, I believe that he still stands far ahead of the rest. He possesses a rare and magical talent and has a truly personal way of portraying incidents and feelings with such integrity. Each of his illustrations is as sincere as the next, overflowing with humour and vitality.

I hope I have succeeded in illuminating that while Blake's drawings are seemingly spontaneous, they are all carefully planned in order to produce the highest possible result and to give each their own special quality.

Douglas Martin quoted Blake as having said in an earlier interview:

"If they like it, I'll do it. If they don't, I'll give up." (Martin, 1989, p. 254)

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