

**Deloitte.**The Cambridge Union Society
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Cambridge, CB2 1UBEmail : pressofficer@cus.org**PRESS RELEASE - 25.02.15****Sir Quentin Blake**

On the 25th February 2015, a packed chamber of students welcomed Sir Quentin Blake, the illustrator, cartoonist and children's author best known for his illustrations of the works of Roald Dahl. He read English Literature at Downing College, Cambridge from 1953 to 1956, and remains the patron of the Blake Society, Downing College's arts and humanities society.

Sir Quentin began his presentation with slides depicting illustrations from 'The Twits', one of Roald Dahl's most popular children's novels. He spoke about his working relationship with Dahl, in which the exaggerated nature of Dahl's work often lent itself to an interestingly "exaggerated style". "It's a bit like performing a piece of music, or acting in a play," Sir Quentin said of illustrating Dahl's work, in the sense that the words of the typed manuscript would guide the early stages of his illustration.

'The BFG' was the first time, Sir Quentin said, that he saw Dahl's interest in the process of illustrations. He approved the half a dozen drawings Sir Quentin first submitted, but was told before the book went to print that Dahl was "not happy", and wanted more drawings. This happened a second time before Sir Quentin began talking in more detail with Dahl about what he wanted in the illustrations themselves. He revealed that there is a "full set of illustrations" to the novel that no one has ever seen.

Sir Quentin spoke about his enjoyment in adapting his illustrative style and interpretation to a diversity of texts, calling it a "form of theatre, in which you get to do the scenery and the characters as well", enabling him to imagine himself within the world of the book itself.

His public exhibition in 2000 at the National enabled Sir Quentin to combine old Masters, new illustrations and old illustrations together in one area; he remembered a conversation with the director of the exhibition about which artist would feature under each letter of the alphabet, in which he asked "under 'B', is it me or Botticelli?" Sir Quentin would end up drawing along the walls of the exhibition, with little gaggles of children leading the visitor through the exhibition, often displaying the theme of the next cluster of paintings through their clothes or posture.

In 2007, Sir Quentin also designed a mural on fabric, which was suspended over an eyesore building opposite the entrance to St Pancras railway station and comprised a "welcoming committee" of people whom you might meet in London. He also designed drawings for "book buses" which tour through Zambia, Malawi and Ecuador, and created a series of illustrations to decorate the mental wards of various institutions; he said that the bespoke element of the drawings helped to create a positive atmosphere both for patients and staff.

Sir Quentin has illustrated prolifically for hospitals; he showed one large illustration, "Welcome to Planet Zog", which was designed for the children's waiting area in a hospital; Sir Quentin said he deliberately chose an alien planet to mirror the strangeness of a hospital waiting area.

Similarly, he drew more domestic and less zany scenes to decorate an eating disorders unit, claiming that the otherworldly aspect was not needed as the patients "were already there". The latter drawings were drawn with a quill and coloured with watercolours to create a slightly blurred and unfinished effect. Sir Quentin said one patient, a former artist, had told him the drawings had the sense of being non-judgemental.

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A canvas of his illustrations was also displayed outside King's College to celebrate the 800th birthday of the University of Cambridge; Sir Quentin talked about his initial intentions of a "rather grandiose Bayeux tapestry of the history of Cambridge", before settling upon drawings of famous alumni, such as Charles Darwin riding a Galapagos tortoise. The original drawings eventually found a home in Addenbrooke's Hospital: Sir Quentin described the whole experience as a "privilege".

In the student Q&A that followed, Sir Quentin was asked if his working relationship with Dahl was different to other authors. He replied that the diversity of Dahl's books provided more scope for his creativity, whilst they had a "pattern of discussion" which helped develop the sense and style of the illustrations. His close relationship with Dahl also assisted his re-illustration of the Penguin reprints of the novels after Dahl's death, as he "knew what the boss would like".

One student asked whether he draws an image more than once; Sir Quentin said that he "rehearses" the image, places it upon a lightbox and can then see the rough lines of the drawing before completing it. "Sometimes" he said this approach can work on the first attempt "sometimes" he gives up halfway through, and "sometimes" he completes two versions of the same image.

Sir Quentin was also asked whether he has ever been tempted to try different media, such as sculpture or animation. He said that he had tried sculpture, which he found "fascinating" and said he wished he had done more, but described himself as "not enthusiastic" about animation; Sir Quentin said, however, that he has been described as a "frustrated thespian" due to the element of theatricality in his drawings.

Finally, one member asked if Sir Quentin had ever tried to express his own feelings about a personal event through his illustrations in a sort of pictorial diary. Sir Quentin replied that he had done many illustrations which were not expressly linked to a narrative but had some elements of a story within them, and some "imaginary" portraits, but said that he didn't think he had drawn any "dramatic moments" in his life, quipping "not that I think there have been any".

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