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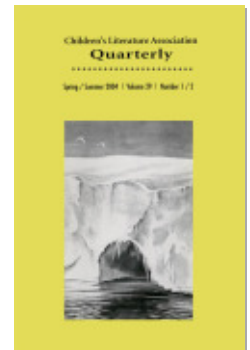
Magic Pencil: Children's Book Illustration Today (review)

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Magic Pencil: Children's Book Illustration Today
Ed. Quentin Blake
London: British Council and the
British Library, 2003

Reviewed by Megan Lambert

The British Council's art exhibition *Magic Pencil: Children's Book Illustration Today* opened in Britain at the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne in May 2002 and is currently on tour throughout Europe. The UK's first Children's Laureate, Quentin Blake, selected the art for the exhibition, which includes his own original work and art by the following contemporary British children's book illustrators: Angela Barrett, Patrick Benson, Stephen Biesty, Raymond Briggs, John Burningham, Emma Chichester Clark, Lauren Child, Sarah Fanelli, Michael Foreman, Tony Ross, Posy Simmonds, and Charlotte Voake. The show was such a success that its organizers produced a facsimile exhibition of a selection of its illustrations that is now available in 30 countries (visit <http://magicpencil.britishcouncil.org> for more details). To top it all off is the British Library and British Council's joint publication of the book version of *Magic Pencil*, which provides a neat symmetry for the *Magic Pencil's* journey: art created for books is exhibited, and then it inspires a book created for an exhibition.

This symmetry actually ends up producing a rather tricky irony for the book *Magic Pencil*: its very publication places the original art back into a mass-printed book format, even as the exhibition's goal is to celebrate the

rich opportunity to view the original art. Indeed, in his introduction to the book Blake writes that a central aim of this exhibition is to demonstrate that "these *originals* repay inspection in their own right, and contemplating them brings its own pleasures as well as enlarging our sense of how illustration works (emphasis mine)" (10). Beyond articulating the place and importance of this exhibition and others like it in the world of visual arts, this statement underscores the point that the book *Magic Pencil* is meant to accompany the exhibition. Andrea Rose of the British Council writes in her foreword to the book,

[S]eeing the originals, as opposed to the printed books, is rather like being in a room with someone as distinct from having their photograph in front of you. You become aware of subtleties and observations that go into the making of each page, and of the character that lies behind the images—the touch of John Burningham's pencil, for example, as he draws Aldo, the companion to a lonely child, or the astonishing focus of Stephen Biesty's cross-section drawings, so detailed they feel like virtual reality. (7)

All of this is to say that the point of the exhibition *Magic Pencil* was to bring the original art to light for admirers and aficionados of children's book illustration. The book *Magic Pencil* necessarily brings the art back to a book format in which the reader sees printed reproductions. Furthermore, in this exhibition-driven book not only is the viewer removed from the experience of seeing the art in person, she is also unable to see the art within its intended format: the children's books for which it was

originally made. The book *Magic Pencil* is therefore best appreciated and enjoyed in concert with one's viewing of the exhibition of the original art.

This is not to say that the book *Magic Pencil* has no value outside of its intended linkage with the exhibition that inspired it. For those of us who might not ever get to see the exhibition in person, the book's reproductions of art from the show can and do entertain, inspire, and delight. They were selected as the best representations of what Andrea Rose refers to in the foreword as "a second golden age of British illustration" (7). Furthermore, the collection of the illustrations in this volume provides an important documentation of the strengthening international movement afoot to value, preserve, exhibit, and honor children's book illustration. The book also includes statements from and photographs of the contributing artists, and many of the artists' statements move beyond autobiographical commentary and offer insights into the artistic process as well as into the challenges and opportunities that the picture book and illustrated book forms present to them as artists.

Readers of *Magic Pencil* are also treated to Blake's aforementioned lively and enthusiastic introduction and to an insightful critical essay by scholar Joanna Carey that links the Magic Pencil exhibition and its artists with the long and accomplished history of British children's book illustration from earlier eras. Entitled "A Certain Magic," Carey's commentary offers a simultaneously exhaus-

sive and succinct history of British children's book illustration, celebrates the contemporary artistry represented in *Magic Pencil*, and looks ahead to possibilities for future achievements and successes. Most important, Carey's essay allows the book to take on a broader scope of British children's book illustration than an art exhibit ever could. As Blake writes of the exhibition,

[W]e have tried to reflect . . . diversity in the age and gender of the participants, and in the way they handle their materials and the way they respond to life. Impossible, in a traveling exhibition, to include more than a dozen or so artists if there is to be enough of the work of each to give the spectator a true sense of the individual, so that the painful part of the selection was the hard necessity to leave out many artists we admire, many artists who the informed visitor might reasonably expect to encounter. (10)

Carey's essay does fill in some of the blanks unavoidably left by the exhibition, and the blanks themselves might prompt future exhibition organizers to showcase the work of other illustrators not represented in the Magic Pencil show. In the end (or rather the beginning?), perhaps the greatest contribution of this successful exhibition and its accompanying book will be to work some magic in furthering the drive to exhibit, recognize, preserve, celebrate, and engage with children's book art as art deserving of critical and serious attention in the visual arts world.

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Quentin Blake organized by Joanna Carey. Megan also teaches as an adjunct lecturer at The Center for the Study of Children's Literature at Simmons College and at Bay Path College. Her writing on children's literature has appeared in *The Five Owls*, *The Riverbank Review*, *Bookbird*, and in the Australian journal *CREArTA*.



*Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators:
Collaborations and Correspondence,
1865–1898*

Ed. Morton N. Cohen and Edward Wakeling
Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003

Reviewed by Marah Gubar

This handsome volume contains more than two hundred letters that Lewis Carroll wrote to his illustrators, only forty of which have previously appeared in print. Making such material available seems like a wonderful idea, given the key role that pictures play in Carroll's books, as well as the astonishing extent to which the author involved himself in the production of these illustrations. But the appeal of *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators* is limited by the fact that virtually nothing remains of the correspondence between Carroll and his most famous partner, John Tenniel. For hard-core Carroll scholars, however, these meticulously annotated letters do provide a wealth of information regarding his lesser-known texts and his prickly relationships with various other artists.

Above all, these letters vividly convey just how difficult and demanding a collaborator Carroll was. As Morton Cohen and Edward Wakeling note in

their introduction, Carroll bombarded illustrators with suggestions and advice, sending them long lists of possible subjects for illustration, as well as detailed sketches aimed at communicating more clearly "my own ideas" about what the finished products should look like (110). Then, after viewing the artist's rendering, Carroll would provide copious feedback about the composition and placement of the pictures, frequently demanding extensive alterations. He paid especially obsessive attention to the representation of the faces and bodies of his child characters, as indicated by his response to one of E. Gertrude Thomson's drawings of a young girl:

The *face* I will be content with, though it is still a *leetle* too old for her size. Surely the *further* arm ought not be thicker than the *nearer* one? What I chiefly demur to is her *right thigh*, the one which supports all her weight [. . .]. Its *diameter* seems to be too great. I *think* its upper edge is too high up, and should be visible below the point where her left elbow crosses the edge of the body. But it is the *lower* edge which seems to me all wrong. [. . .] (262)

In the process of criticizing his artists' efforts, Carroll often makes comments that shed valuable light on his own writing process and authorial intentions. For example, his letters to Harry Furniss, who illustrated the *Sylvie and Bruno* books, reveal which characters function as doubles for which other characters in this famously confounding text. Reading the previously unpublished correspondence between these two also solves another little mystery. A number of critics have noted that the narrator of the *Sylvie and Bruno* books