

It is forty years since I was first commissioned to illustrate a book for The Folio Society. It was a centenary edition of *The Hunting of the Snark*, to appear in 1976. It was unusual for a Folio book, in that there were illustrations on every page and the text flowed through them. The normal procedure at that time required about ten pages of illustration, often full pages, and this was the pattern followed by the next four books I illustrated between 1976 and 1990 – *Cold Comfort Farm*, *Scoop*, *Black Mischief* and *Animal Farm*.

Looking back now, I can see that the way to everything that I have done since opened when I made a suggestion of my own to the Society. It was *Voyages to the Sun and the Moon* by Cyrano de Bergerac. I came upon the book first as a French paperback and it attracted me by an engraving on the cover of Cyrano rising into the air. The book anticipates *Gulliver's Travels* in fantasy, change of scale, and its satire, but what adds to its fascination is that Cyrano was genuinely interested in the scientific ideas, as well as the manners and customs of his time, and engages with them in a provocative and dynamic way.

There were so many things I was eager to draw that I came to a special arrangement with The Folio Society, which was that they would pay me the best version of the fee available for such a book, and I would be allowed to do as many drawings (within reason) as I liked. There are just over one hundred. I was on my way.

Encouraged by the acceptance of Cyrano, I next went to The Folio Society with the anonymous Spanish tale *The Life of Lázaro de Tormès*. The Folio reaction was: "If we are to do a Spanish book, it must be the big Spanish book," and so I found myself face to face with Cervantes and *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. It was something of a daunting prospect, both because of the length of the book and my sense of the artists who had gone before me. Though he never settled down to illustrate the book, there are haunting images of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in the paintings of Daumier; and the prolific energy and imagination of

Gustave Doré seemed to have activated him to illustrate every incident of the narrative (I am tempted to say “and more”) in his extraordinarily rich version. There was no prospect of my vying with that achievement; we settled on sixteen drawings and a frontispiece, as well as vignettes at the head of each new book. The immediate problem was the choice of suitable moments. Some almost chose themselves, such as Don Quixote tilting at windmills, but there were others that had their own appeal – such as Don Quixote cavorting in nothing but his shirt and, not least, Sancho Panza tossed in a blanket. I have drawn characters launched into mid-air on several occasions. The special interest for me, I suppose, is that this is something that only illustration can do. Any other form has some narrative sequence, but if in revisiting the book we go back to Sancho, he is still there, in the air, in effect for ever. The most evocative image, however, is the one that I had the advantage of using both as the frontispiece and the final vignette of the book – Don Quixote and Sancho riding off forever into their place in European literature. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* followed, and offered other possibilities for the grotesque and the dramatic.

It may be helpful if I put in here, as a kind of entre’acte between those three books and four more recent ones in this exhibition, some notes on the way that they were produced in the studio – a procedure that has not changed for me, at least as far as books are concerned, for many years. While reading the book, I make marks in the margins where there are possibilities for illustration, or information about the characters that might be useful later; and they may be accompanied by visual notes as well. Before I begin work on the final drawings, I will have made rough drawings of every illustration in the book. These roughs are made swiftly and they suggest the general disposition of the page; the expressions and gestures of those taking part. It’s a way of visualising a *mise-en-scène*, and of starting to live the parts. It’s possible, on revisiting these roughs at the stage of the final drawings, to discover that there are nuances of posture and expression that you hadn’t even been conscious of at the time.

I use an old fashioned wooden penholder, (short and cylindrical in shape, not long and tapering) and dip into a bottle of India ink alongside. All the drawings discussed here were done with something called a Waverly nib, no doubt originally used for cursive writing, except for the Cyrano drawings, done with a slightly harder nib (perhaps one called a J nib), giving an effect which is slightly more staccato. The Waverly nib is the one that I most frequently use because it is very

responsive and can handle any necessary detail, but in other situations I also use watercolour crayons, china markers, reed pens and quills, as described later here.

*Candide*, the first of the deluxe editions on show in this exhibition, came into view by an indirect route. I was reminded of it by an article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, illustrated by a memorable 18th-century engraving by Moreau le Jeune, but my immediate use for it was ephemeral. There was to be a fundraising evening at the Royal College of Art for House of Illustration, the new museum and centre for the art of illustration which I helped to open in King's Cross in 2014. I was to carry out instant illustrations to a reading by the actor Peter Capaldi, and I could see that Chapter One and the Tunter-ten-Tronckh family would provide irresistible material. It was subsequent to that occasion that Joe Whitlock Blundell, one of the directors of The Folio Society, proposed that we might take the matter further. We quickly decided, however, that the tipped-in plates and decorative borders of the conventional deluxe edition were not right for Voltaire, but our more restrained approach nevertheless allowed the book to be bound in leather with a handwritten title in gold.

The main sequence of illustrations was to be full-page and in colour. There were fifteen of them, with accompanying vignettes in black and white, which meant that they established quite a strong visual presence in what is a relatively short book. There was no shortage of incident to be depicted, and one can almost have some sense of the illustrations keeping pace with the work's brisk and diagrammatic narrative. What was particularly of interest to me was the marriage of the style and tone of the drawings to that of Voltaire's caricatural approach. At the time of its first publication such images would not have been felt appropriate, but now, with a different set of assumptions, I hoped that some sort of match was being made.

Happily, the thousand copies of *Candide* sold out within two or three weeks, with the result that I was approached to see if I was able to propose a similar venture by way of a sequel. In one sense I already had La Fontaine in mind, since, a few years previously, I had discussed the possibility of a set of illustrations with my editor at Gallimard Jeunesse. However, that version would have been for children and I was unable to resist the offer to undertake a similar project for adults. We decided on fifty fables and my final list included as many fables about humans as about animals; I hoped to make the Folio readers aware that this selection was for them. So there were, among others, 'The Middle-Aged

Man and his Two Mistresses’, ‘The Young Widow’, ‘The Cat Metamorphosed into a Woman’, as well as ‘Death and the Woodsman’. Nevertheless, though for adults, what resulted was in effect a picture book, with frequent and full-page illustrations opposite each poem. For *Candide*, as for *Don Quixote*, we had been fortunate in being able to use the 18th-century translations of Smollett – real language, with no awkwardness about it. For La Fontaine the problem was more difficult – even the best modern translations can be a little stiff in attempting to be faithful to the original – and La Fontaine in the original has no hint of that. We were fortunate to come across, and be able to use, the modern translation of the American academic Norman Shapiro. This isn’t a word-for-word translation, but it’s fluent, relaxed, and at ease with itself. I could set about work with Shapiro’s version in one hand, so to speak, and the French in the other.

The Folio volume is tall enough in format to accept the shorter fables in their entirety and, as a consequence, I decided to make use of a tall rectangle, hand-drawn, in which to dispose the elements of the drawing; disposing them appropriately was one of the interests of the task. To lend variety, and to accommodate certain longer poems, some of the drawings are vignettes, and some of those flow over two pages. Since one is constantly in the presence of illustrations, I decided that, though everything is printed in full colour, what was needed was a restrained colour range that varies from picture to picture. I hoped, as I came to the end of my fifty fables, that I had produced illustrations that, to some extent, matched both the lightness and seriousness that La Fontaine claimed for himself.

The La Fontaine was also successful enough for The Folio Society to want to look about for a work to follow it. A friend suggested to me that the story of Cupid and Psyche might lend itself to my sort of drawing. Exploring the possibilities, I discovered the story in the midst of that extraordinary agglomeration of tales that was brought together by Lucius Apuleius under the inspired title of *The Golden Ass*. Not the least fascinating aspect was the contrast between the lyrical mood of the Cupid and Psyche story and the other down-to-earth and explicit encounters of other characters, including Lucius himself, now transformed into the Ass.

None of these books could have given me the slightest hint of the one that was to follow. I had worked with Russell Hoban on a number of picture books for children during his lifetime. The first was the extraordinary *How Tom Beat Captain Najork and his Hired Sportsmen* and

there were others I particularly valued, such as *The Rain Door*, in which it is wonderful to see Hoban inventing a sort of contemporary mythology, and *Rosie's Magic Horse*, which he wrote just before the end of his life. *Riddley Walker* is altogether a different order of thing, but still from that remarkable imagination.

I had read the book when it first came out and a sense of it had remained in my mind so that, a few years later, I had the notion of producing a set of prints in relation to it; I had a mental vision of the darkness and the dogs. So, when Joe Whitlock Blundell discovered the book for himself and decided to publish it as a Folio Society limited edition and came to me with the proposition, I had no hesitation in accepting. It occurs to me now that it was fortunate that we had already worked together, as there might well be other publishers who would not think of me as the obvious choice. Any sense of *joie de vivre* might seem to be quite inappropriate.

The invitation, it seemed to me, was to create drawings that on the one hand were evidently mine, but on the other would be near to the language of *Riddley's* primitive text. The illustrations are drawn with a quill – or rather a handful of quills, in various stages of deterioration. The idea of such ancient implements making their marks reproduced by the most sophisticated contemporary printing techniques is one that appeals to me – you feel you are taking part in the history of the craft – but more important is the character of the marks they make. They can be coarse, as appropriate to *Riddley's* narrative language, but also quite precise in detail of gesture and expression. And, of course, if those effects seem to be accidental, so much the better.

Two aspects of the visual presentation of the book were of special interest. One was that this product of post-nuclear desolation was somehow to be presented as a desirable deluxe edition. The solution I offered was to make a blotched pattern for the cover and slipcase, which I hoped was decorative, as well as being, perhaps, interestingly infected. The other aspect is in the layout of the book. I am never quite happy unless I know where the illustrations are going to fall in relation to text. That is so here, but, at the same time, I have tried to make the visual suggestion that, in their clumsy way, each illustration might not quite be able to respect the space allotted to it. Nevertheless, the drawings do appear where they are supposed to, and I was particularly grateful when a sympathetic editorial eye gave the whole of two final pages to the last sentence in the book, so that we are left with *Riddley* setting off with determination on to the track of his future.