



# Editorial ? March 1981

Article Author:

[Pat Triggs](#) [1]

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News and comment from the Editor.

You'd think producing an issue of the magazine on the theme of humour would be one long laugh. I should have known - they say humour is a serious business. We've hovered between disaster and farce (more about the farce later); but as in all good stories it all came right in the end, and here's **Books for Keeps No. 7** with lots of ideas, information and comment.

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## Seriously though?

What about comics? Have you noticed that children invariably read them with dead pan faces? Not a smile in sight. Adults still get steamed up about them. Only a few weeks ago a contributor to the Sunday Times suggested that the glorification of naughtiness and anti-social behaviour in comics was having a bad effect on kids. We asked Nicholas Tucker what he thinks. (See page 20)

Still contemplating comics we discovered that Uderzo, the man who draws Asterix, was making a rare visit to this country. We despatched Tony Bradman, who claims to speak fluent French (Is there no limit to the man's talents?) to interview him. (See page 13).

Asterix has millions of fans, not least of which, we hear, was the late President De Gaulle. He enjoyed Asterix so much that at one cabinet meeting in the Elysee Palace he called the register of ministers (something he did at every meeting; they had to say 'present') using the names of characters from the Asterix books. Uderzo says a minister who was present told him the story. I've been wondering how they worked out who he thought was which!

One person who has no trouble with language is Anthea Bell. I've long admired her translations and was delighted when she agreed to write about Translating Goscinny. (Page 12) Unfortunately there wasn't space to include anything about Nicholas, a Goscinny character who never fails to make me laugh.

It says for 7-10 year olds on the books; but that didn't seem to stop 150 parents and teachers appreciating the jokes in **Dad Makes the Decisions** (the first chapter of **Nicholas on Holiday**) when I read it to them recently. There's also **Nicholas and the Gang** and **Nicholas and the Gang Again** - all from Beaver.

## A Family Favourite

Going to meet the author of a favourite book is always a little worrying. What if he or she turns out to be everything you hate? Wouldn't it be better not to know?

When the author is someone who has united your whole family in helpless laughter there is somehow more at risk; so my feelings about meeting Beverly Cleary were certainly mixed. I needn't have worried. She was delightful. (How

could I have imagined the creator of Ramona would be anything else?)

Full of humour, she is also perceptive and thoughtful, especially about children and what we are doing to them. She talked about a recent visit to New Zealand. 'I left there feeling that we don't do well by children in the USA. In New Zealand they were such good listeners. When I talk with children at home they are so busy thinking about themselves and their questions that they don't listen to the answers.' That sounded all too familiar. Then there was her story of meeting children fishing for minnows by the Thames. When asked what they were doing, the boys were friendly and forthcoming, keen to explain; the girls' response was, 'We're not doing anything wrong, Miss.' Food for thought? Beverly Cleary wrote the Henry Huggins books in the Fifties but they have only recently been available here. In April Hamish Hamilton publish a third title, **Henry in the Clubhouse**, and Fontana Lions promise **Henry and Beezus** in the autumn. There's also a new Ramona book on the way.

### **New in this issue**

**Opinion** (page 24) is a new feature which we intend to run regularly. Space to blow your top is what we offer. We shall be inviting people to contribute but if you have something to say just sharpen your pencil (or your stiletto) and get writing. Who better to start us off than Steve Bowles?

### **Getting started... Keeping going**

New too, and now available is the completely re-designed and re-written SBA Handbook, **How to Set Up and Run a School Bookshop**. We think it's pretty good (well, really fantastic actually) and we know it's full of good, practical ideas because we got them from people who have made them work. Every bookshop should have one. (For details see page 28) Coming soon for those just getting going, **Starter Lists** with suggestions for your opening stock.

### **Never the twain shall meet?**

Or so it seemed when I spent the best part of a week in February not meeting Roger McGough. (I said we'd get to the farce later.) The first time there was I ringing the bell of his flat in the Fulham Road; there was he sitting around at Penguin hoping someone would tell him what he was there for. The second time he was in his flat; but I was stuck at the printers - and so it went on. In the end he went to Australia. But he did send a letter 'I must oil my digeridoo and put on my kangaroo repellent lotion', and promised to write for us later in the year. So watch out.

We wanted to talk to him about **You Tell Me** (page 26) and also his smashing new anthology of poetry **Strictly Private** (Kestrel, 0 7221 5697, £4.95) which he hopes will speak 'to the ninety-nine percent of kids who do not come top in English'. It's certainly worth a try.

### **Available in hardback**

Ann Thwaite wrote to us about another anthology, her own **All Sorts of Poems**, recommended in the Magnet paperback edition in **Books for Keeps 6**. 'I think I should point out, in justice to the publisher who took on the book in the first place, and to help any school librarian who can actually afford hardbacks, that it is also available in a rather, sumptuous edition with sepia illustrations from Angus and Robertson at £3.95.'

In the same article Bill Boyle also mentioned **Hist Whist!**, out of print in Piccolo but still available in hardback from Evans.

### **In our next issue**

All of which brings me very neatly to the next issue which is about Poetry and Picture Books. Michael Rosen, Quentin Blake, Eleanor Farjeon, David McKee are just a few of the people featured. To whet your appetites three first-class picture books are published this month. **The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Counting Book** (Kestrel, £4.50) is Robert Crowther's follow-up to his Alphabet book, and is, if possible even more inventive. In the same pop-up, move-around

style is Eric Carle's **The Honey Bee and the Robber** (Julia MacRae, £4.50), a story/information book in the same tradition as his **Very Hungry Caterpillar**. The extra large pages of Peter Spier's **People** (Worlds Work, £4.95) are literally crammed with all sorts and conditions of people. A super book which celebrates the sheer variety of human kind.

Happy Easter

**Pat**

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