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du Judaïsme

**René
Goscinny**
**Beyond
laughter**

**27 september 2017
— 4 march 2018**

The Goscinny phenomenon

During a career unique in the history of the illustrated press, René Goscinny created a cultural revolution by dissolving the divide between learned and popular culture. What is so striking about this frenetic creator is the gulf between his origins, profoundly marked by Jewish cosmopolitanism and his family's diasporic existence, and an oeuvre so absolutely secular that some have regarded it as a contemporary "place of memory." Indeed, there is nothing "Jewish" to be found in the work of the creator of *Asterix* and *Le Petit Nicolas*, the scriptwriter of *Lucky Luke* and the editor of *Pilote* magazine. Steeped at school in the history manuals of Malet and Isaac, Goscinny made this heritage his own by integrating an archipelago of influences gleaned in South and North America.

The Beresniaks and the Goscinnys

René Goscinny was born in 1926. His mother, Anna Beresniak, was born in Ukraine in 1889. In Paris in 1912, his grandfather Abraham founded the Beresniak printing works, whose catalogue comprised publications in Yiddish, Hebrew, French, Russian and Polish, and philosophical, literary and political texts. René's father, Stanislas Goscinny, was born in Warsaw in 1887. In 1906 he emigrated to Paris to study chemistry. There, he married Anna Beresniak and Claude and René were born. Stanislas and Anna were naturalised as French citizens in 1926.

Childhood and adolescence in Argentina (1928-1940)

In 1927 Stanislas Goscinny was sent to Buenos Aires by the Jewish Colonisation Association

(JCA), a philanthropic institution founded in 1891. Anna and their two sons joined him there the following year. René was educated at the French College and frequented the Jewish immigrant community, characterised by its cultural and political activism. Enjoying both drawing and writing and an avid cinemagoer, he read the French classics and the adventures of Patoruzú, the Patagonian Indian hero created by the comics artist Dante Quinterno.

Echoes of war (1940-1944)

In August 1940, Stanislas joined the De Gaulle Committee in Buenos Aires. René filled his sketchbooks with caricatures of political figures in the news. We know nothing of the fate of the Goscinnys who remained in Poland. Abraham Beresniak died in France's Free zone in 1942. His son Serge escaped deportation but Léon, Maurice and Volodya were deported and murdered at Auschwitz in 1942. In 1943, Stanislas's sudden death pitched the family into a precarious situation. René worked as an accountant in a tyre factory then as an artist in an advertising agency.

Survival in New York (1945-1951)

In 1945, René and Anna left for New York, where René hoped to forge a career as a cartoonist in animated films. In 1946, although he could have obtained American citizenship by serving as a GI, he chose to remain French and did his military service in France. On his return to New York in 1947, he struggled to earn a living as an illustrator. He met Harvey Kurtzman, future creator of *Mad* magazine, with whom he illustrated children's books. Will Elder, John Severin and Jack Davis initiated him in the art of comic book production. Goscinny also met Jijé, the mainstay of the Franco-Belgian weekly magazine *Spirou*, and the young Belgian cartoonist Morris.

Beginnings as a scriptwriter (1951-1959)

In 1951, Goscinny left New York for Paris, where he was hired by the Belgian publisher Georges Troisfontaines, whose agency, World Press, published Editions Dupuis titles. He contributed texts and illustrations for a variety of magazines, including *Spirou*, and became friends with Jean-Michel Charlier and Albert Uderzo. For a few months in 1952-1953, Goscinny was artistic director of *TV Family*, the magazine that Dupuis wanted to establish in New York. In 1955-1956, he published *Capitaine Bibobu* and *Dick Dicks*, the last comic strips he produced single-handedly. A scriptwriter in great demand from 1953 onwards, Goscinny upheld author's rights with Charlier. He was fired for this by World Press and hired by *Tintin* magazine.

The cornerstones of an oeuvre

Goscinny's collaborations with the cartoonists Uderzo, Morris, Sempé and Tabary were hugely important in his career. With Uderzo, he explored various comics genres from 1951 to 1958 before creating *Oumpah Pah* (1958) and above all their parody of ancient French history, *Asterix* (the 24 books in the series were worldwide bestsellers from 1959 to 1977). In 1955, Morris asked Goscinny to write scripts for his comic strip *Lucky Luke*, created in 1946. Beginning with *Rails on the Prairie*, their combined skills and knowledge of North American culture immediately bore fruit. The popularity of the 41 full-length stories they published from 1955 to 1977 brought them international fame. In 1959, Goscinny and Jean-Jacques Sempé created the *Little Nicolas* stories. From 1959 to 1964, the 14 books in the series sold 15 million copies and were translated into numerous languages. Created in 1962 by Goscinny and Jean Tabary, the internationally successful *Iznogoud* series, whose vile antihero dreams of becoming "caliph instead of the caliph," ran to 14 books.

Pilote, creative laboratory and ideal magazine (1959-1974)

In 1959, François Clauteaux, Raymond Joly, Jean Hébrard, René Goscinny, Jean-Michel Charlier and Albert Uderzo created *Pilote*, a weekly magazine for young people combining news stories and comic strips such as *Asterix*, *Barbe-Rouge* and *Tanguy et Laverdure*, which would become milestones of the "ninth art." From 1963, Goscinny and Charlier, its co-editors, prioritized comic strips and opened up the magazine to a new generation of authors including Giraud, Greg, Cabu, Gotlib, Fred, Mandryka, Brétécher, Gébé, Reiser and a host of other talents. In the late 1960s, Giraud, Mandryka, Brétécher, Gotlib, Alexis and Druillet, artists who had infused *Pilote* with a new modernity, distanced themselves from the magazine to publish in new titles such as *L'Écho des savanes*, *Métal hurlant* and *Fluide glacial*. Goscinny left *Pilote* in 1974.

The *zets*er and the philosopher

In Goscinnyan comedy one can discern what the philosopher Henri Bergson considered the prerequisite of every comic effect: "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" that "addresses itself to pure intelligence." Very early on, Goscinny demonstrated his formidable mastery of the "procedures of fabrication of the comical." Delving into the mechanics of his narration and considering his intimate knowledge of printing and particularly the gestures of the typesetter (*zets*er in Yiddish), we can detect the hidden mainsprings of his inspiration, his favourite themes (history, the absurd and black humour, the childhood world, etc.) and his observation of human nature. Behind the comic author hid the soul of a moralist and the spirit of a philosopher.

Inaugural Lecture

Wednesday 18 October
19.30

Why “Goscinny is France”

By Pascal Ory

Lecture

Tuesday 7 November
19.30

The Keys on the Mantelpiece

Read by Anne Goscinny,
accompanied by
Henri Demarquette
on cello

Panel Discussions

Wednesday 6 December
19.30

René Goscinny's family History

With Aymar du Chatenet,
Anne Hélène Hoog,
Natalia Krynicka
and Yitskhok Niborski
Chaired by
Didier Pasamonik

Wednesday 10 January
19.30

René Goscinny, a revolution in comics

with Jean-Pierre Dionnet,
Philippe Druillet,
Emmanuel Guibert,
Jul, Laurent Martin,
Jean-Pierre Mercier
and Jean Solé
Chaired by
Antoine Guillot

Activities for children

Sunday 15 October
10.30

Tuesday 24 October
14.00

Wednesday 25 October
14.00

“Cinébulles” visit-workshop

Tuesday 26 December
From 10.30

“René Goscinny for all” day

Game-booklet for 5-10 year-olds
Educational space
in the exhibition

Guided visits for adults

Thursday 5 October
14.15

Wednesday 8 November
19.15

Sunday 3 December
11.15

Visits for adults and children

Sundays 22 October
and 5 November
11.15

Wednesdays 22 November,
13 December
and 10 January
15.15

Wednesday 24 January
19.15

Extramural tour

Saturday 14 October
14.00

“In René Goscinny's footsteps at Bobigny”

Exhibition at La Cinémathèque Française, Paris

4 October 2017 –
7 March 2018

Goscinny and the Cinema. Asterix, Lucky Luke & Co

Keep your *René Goscinny*.
Beyond Laughter exhibition
ticket and obtain a 50% reduction
on full-rate admission (11€)
for the Goscinny and the Cinema.
Asterix, Lucky Luke & Co
exhibition at La Cinémathèque
Française. Admission is free
for under 18s.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the exceptional loans and collaboration of the Institut René Goscinny, the invaluable collaboration of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and funding by the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah.



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