

# A Life in Comics: The Graphic Adventures of Karen Green

How a Butler librarian became Columbia's first curator for comics and cartoons.

By

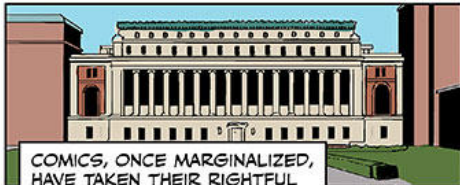
Nick Sousanis '14TC

|  
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COMICS, ONCE MARGINALIZED, HAVE TAKEN THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THIS VENERABLE REPOSITORY OF KNOWLEDGE,



THANKS TO THE VISION AND PERSISTENCE OF LIBRARIAN KAREN GREEN,



WHO RECENTLY BECAME THE FIRST CURATOR FOR COMICS AND CARTOONS IN COLUMBIA'S RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY.

# A LIFE IN COMICS

The Graphic Adventures of Karen Green '97GSAS  
How a Butler Librarian Became Columbia's First Curator for Comics and Cartoons  
by Nick Sousanis '14TC



GREEN, WHO GREW UP IN MICHIGAN, WAS A SOLITARY KID WHO LOVED BOOKS.

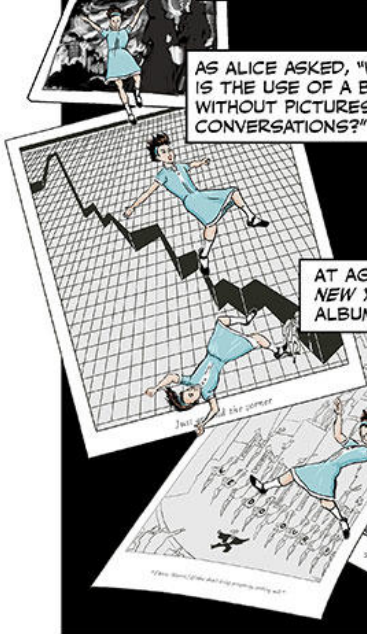


HER PARENTS TRIED TO GET HER TO PLAY OUTSIDE,

BUT SHE'D TAKE HER BOOK AND KEEP READING.



ONE BOOK, ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND, SENT HER DOWN A RABBIT HOLE THAT LED TO A LIFELONG PASSION FOR PICTURE STORIES.



AS ALICE ASKED, "WHAT IS THE USE OF A BOOK WITHOUT PICTURES OR CONVERSATIONS?"



AT AGE 6 SHE DISCOVERED HER PARENTS' NEW YORKER 25TH ANNIVERSARY CARTOON ALBUM (1925-1950). SHE WAS OBSESSED.

AND IT HELPED HER CULTIVATE A STRONG INDEPENDENT ATTITUDE AND A FASCINATION FOR THE CITY SHE WOULD SOON CALL HOME.



THIS WAS HER INTRODUCTION TO UNDERSTANDING HISTORY,



"It's broccoli, dear."  
"I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it."



WHEN GREEN WAS TEN, HER MOM ANNOUNCED:





COMICS SEEMED TO FOLLOW HER EVERYWHERE.

BACK WHEN GREEN WAS 11 SHE GOT BRACES. TO HER DELIGHT, HER ORTHODONTIST HAD STACKS OF ARCHIE COMICS.



SHE ENDED UP STAYING FOR HOURS AFTER HER APPOINTMENTS READING...



"I LOVED THOSE COMICS. I THOUGHT THAT'S WHAT HIGH SCHOOL WAS GOING TO BE LIKE. I WAS MISTAKEN."



HIGH SCHOOL PROVED TO BE A DIFFICULT AND TROUBLED TIME FOR GREEN.

IT'S THERE SHE DISCOVERED UNDERGROUND COMICS AND THE COMICS MAGAZINE

**HEAVY METAL**



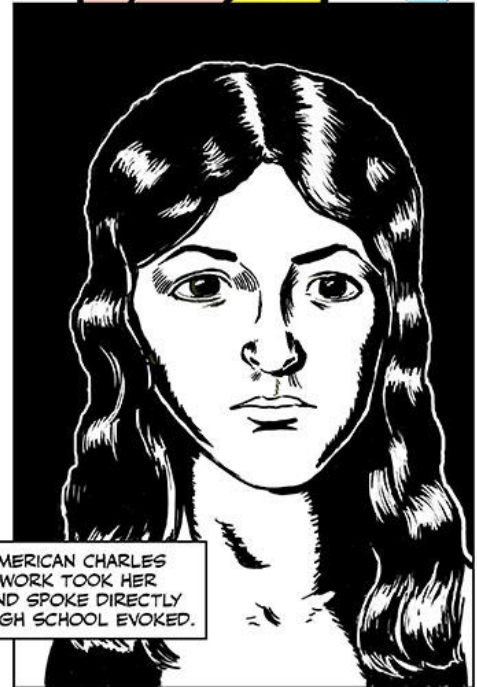
- WHICH BLEW HER MIND WITH ITS SLATE OF EUROPEAN CARTOONISTS

after Jim Cherry



- AS WELL AS AMERICAN CHARLES BURNS, WHOSE WORK TOOK HER BREATH AWAY AND SPOKE DIRECTLY TO FEELINGS HIGH SCHOOL EVOKED.

after C. Burns



SHE MADE IT TO COLLEGE IN 1978, BUT DROPPED OUT AFTER ONE SEMESTER AND STARTED BARTENDING, WHICH SHE WOULD DO FOR THE NEXT 15 YEARS.



BARTENDING TAUGHT HER HOW TO WORK WITH AND TALK TO DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND GRIN LIKE A CHESHIRE CAT WHEN SHE WASN'T "FEELING SMILEY."

DURING THIS TIME, GREEN CHASED MANY DIFFERENT DREAMS TRYING TO FIND HER WAY.



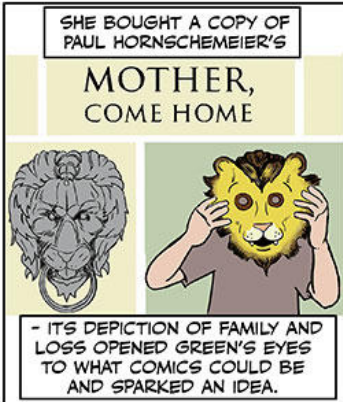
IN 1989 SHE WENT TO MASSAGE THERAPY SCHOOL.





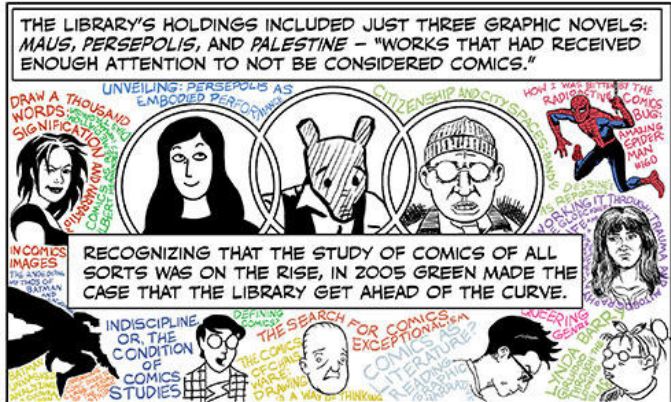


AS GREEN SETTLED IN AT COLUMBIA, SHE WONDERED WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN COMICS.



SHE BOUGHT A COPY OF PAUL HORNSCHEMEIER'S **MOTHER, COME HOME**

- ITS DEPICTION OF FAMILY AND LOSS OPENED GREEN'S EYES TO WHAT COMICS COULD BE AND SPARKED AN IDEA.

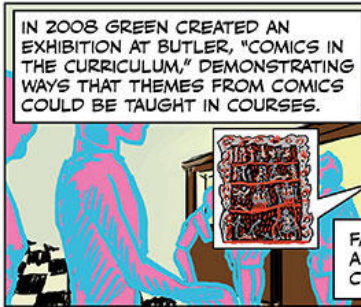


THE LIBRARY'S HOLDINGS INCLUDED JUST THREE GRAPHIC NOVELS: MAUS, PERSEPOLIS, AND PALESTINE - "WORKS THAT HAD RECEIVED ENOUGH ATTENTION TO NOT BE CENSORED."

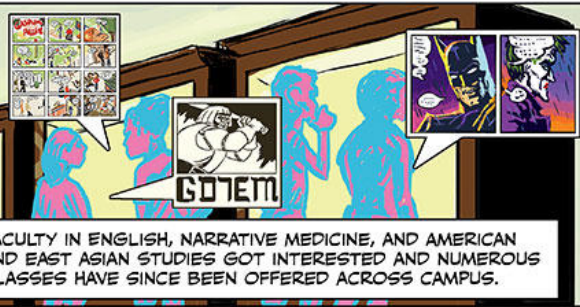
RECOGNIZING THAT THE STUDY OF COMICS OF ALL SORTS WAS ON THE RISE, IN 2005 GREEN MADE THE CASE THAT THE LIBRARY GET AHEAD OF THE CURVE.



AND FROM THERE, SHE BEGAN BUILDING A COLLECTION.



IN 2008 GREEN CREATED AN EXHIBITION AT BUTLER, "COMICS IN THE CURRICULUM," DEMONSTRATING WAYS THAT THEMES FROM COMICS COULD BE TAUGHT IN COURSES.



FACULTY IN ENGLISH, NARRATIVE MEDICINE, AND AMERICAN AND EAST ASIAN STUDIES GOT INTERESTED AND NUMEROUS CLASSES HAVE SINCE BEEN OFFERED ACROSS CAMPUS.



Author's note: This is the year I came to Columbia as a doctoral student and first met Karen.



THE COLLECTION STARTED TO TAKE SHAPE.

THEN, IN 2010, OUT OF THE BLUE, LEGENDARY X-MEN AUTHOR CHRIS CLAREMONT CONTACTED GREEN TO OFFER UP HIS ARCHIVES.

**BAM!**

OTHERS FOLLOWED.

THIS BURGEONING CATALOGUE INCLUDES MANUSCRIPTS, SKETCHES, ORIGINAL ART, CORRESPONDENCE, CONTRACTS, AND OTHER MATERIALS.



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AND THAT COLLECTION OF THREE? NOW OVER 14,000 VOLUMES!

FROM COMICS ICONS LIKE MAD'S AL JAFFEE; HOWARD CRUSE, THE FATHER OF GAY COMICS; EARLY BATMAN CONTRIBUTOR JERRY ROBINSON; ELFQUEST CREATORS WENDY AND RICHARD PINI; KITCHEN SINK PRESS; AND CARTOONIST MORT GERBERG.

WHAT LESSON CAN WE DRAW FROM KAREN'S ADVENTURES?

HERE WE GO WITH AN HOMAGE TO AL JAFFEE'S **MAD FOLD-IN**  
 Help Karen navigate the twists and turns of her seemingly chaotic path by folding the page.



FOLD PAGE OVER LIKE THIS

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