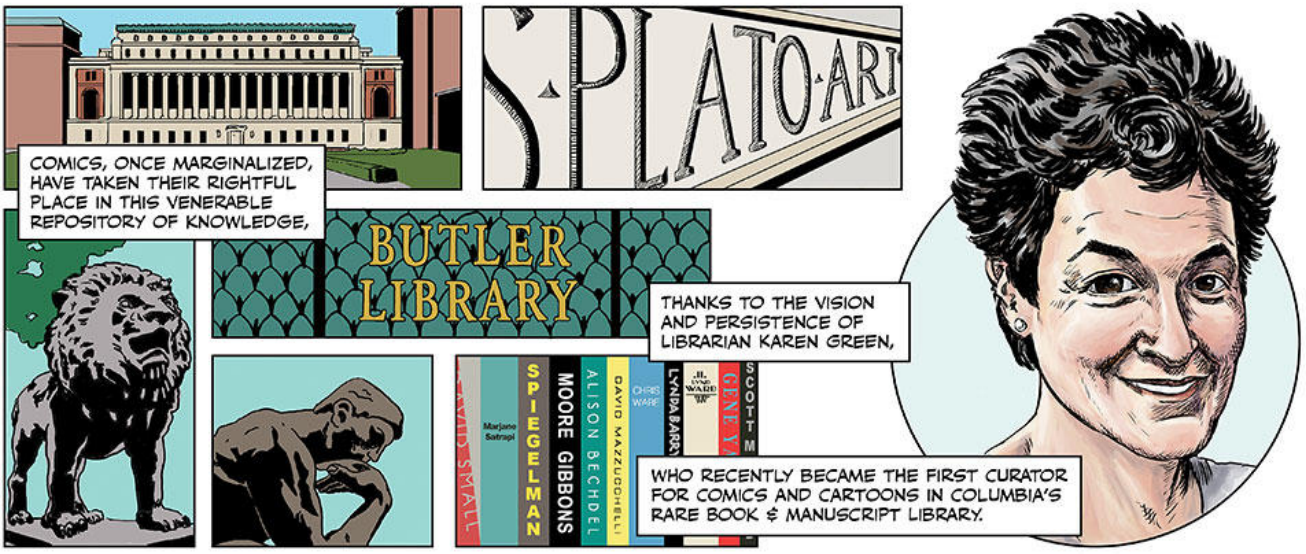
Arts & Humanities

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
|
Summer 2017



A LIFE IN COMICS

The Graphic Adventures of Karen Green '97GSAS

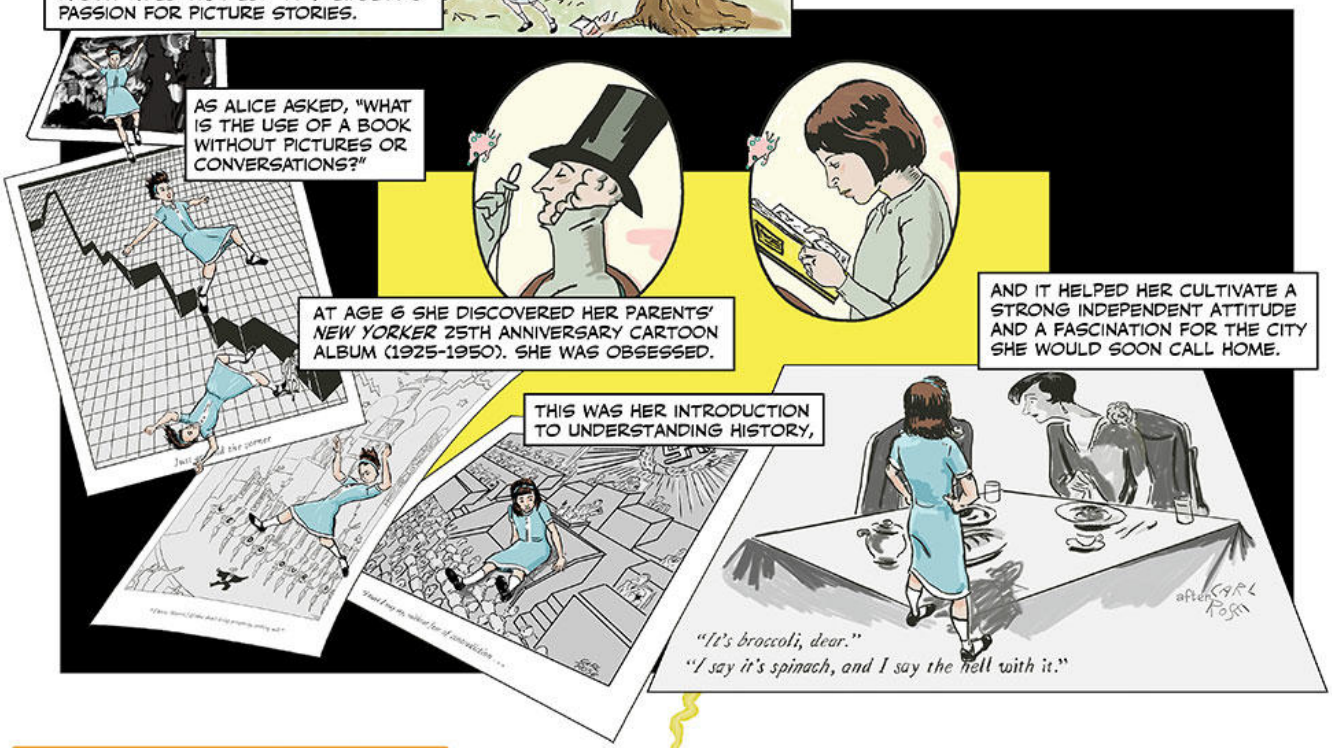
How a Butler Librarian Became Columbia's First Curator for Comics and Cartoons

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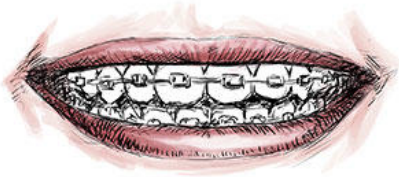


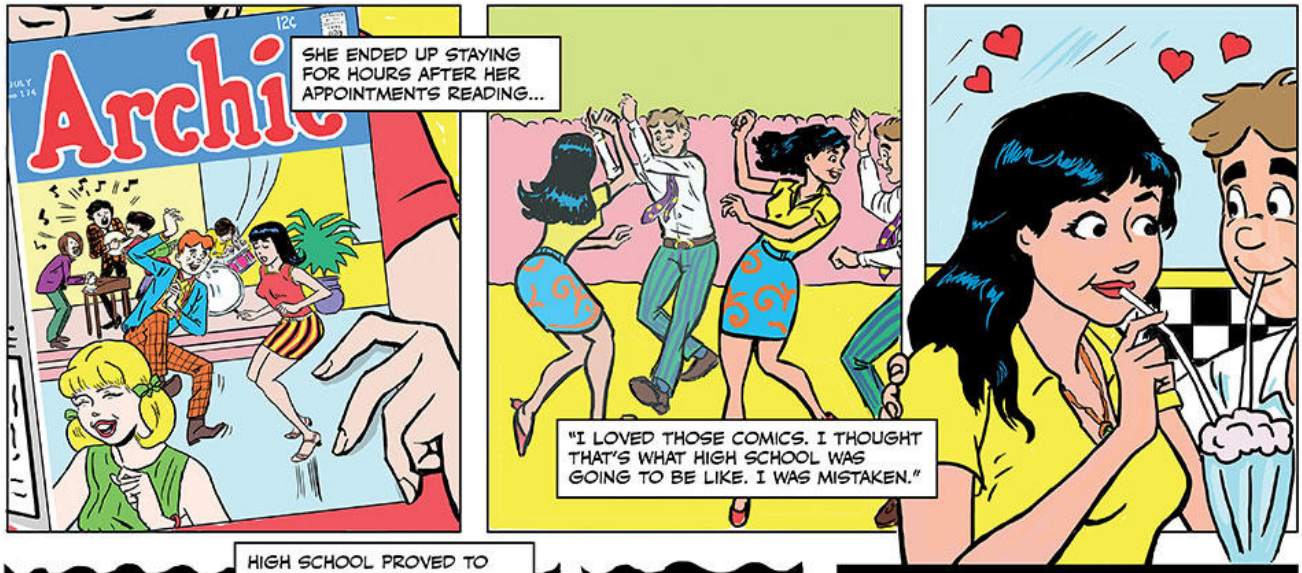




COMICS SEEMED TO FOLLOW HER EVERYWHERE.

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











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 CONSIDERED COMICS."

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.

GOLEM

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.

BAMF

OTHERS FOLLOWED.

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

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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