

Is Anyone Sitting Here?: Joshua Giraldo will have a hard time losing his bid for the House District 56 seat

The surprise resignation of Representative Shelby Maldonado (Democrat-C, District 56, Central Falls) puts an important General Assembly seat into play, but the election for the open seat has just one declared candidate, Joshua Giraldo, who currently serves as Central Falls Mayor James Diossa's chief of staff.

As a result, Giraldo is almost guaranteed to be sworn in to the General Assembly in March, where he will serve for about three months before having to run for the same office again in November. Although most of the important votes taken by the General Assembly happen later in the session, Giraldo will be weighing in on some important legislation and the 2021 budget.

Giraldo was the campaign manager for James Diossa's successful city council and mayoral campaigns in Central Falls. A former schoolteacher at Blackstone Valley Prep, Giraldo left teaching to be Diossa's director of Parks and Recreation before becoming the mayor's chief of staff in 2015.

Under Diossa, Central Falls has been recovering from its bankruptcy, and the schools in the city, still under state control, are seriously underfunded. Central Falls is the only majority-minority city in Rhode Island, with more than 60% identifying as hispanic/Latino per the 2010 census. A recent survey by the Rhode Island Immigrant Coalition indicated that more than half the population lives in fear of ICE. These include not only undocumented people, but people from mixed status families. Nearly 30% of those surveyed said that they cannot receive public services because of this fear.

Central Falls is also the location of the controversial Wyatt Detention Facility, which houses ICE detainees. More than 98% of Central Falls residents surveyed had negative comments on the prison and its contract with ICE.

"When Mayor Diossa and Shelby suggested that I run, I gave them the usual answer... which is, no way, that sort of thing is not for me," said Giraldo to a room full of supporters at a fundraiser held at La Casona Restaurant in Central Falls late in December.

"But after a while, I committed to thinking about it. I told them I'd think about it because I knew that

when I got home and spoke to my wife, Maite, that she was going to advise against it, considering we were looking to purchase a new home, I was supposed to finish getting my master's and we have a ton of other life plans in the works. And to be honest, I was looking forward to her telling me that I was crazy and that this was too much, too quick. But when I spoke to her about it, her response caught me by surprise. It was short, simple and blunt," continued Giraldo.

"She said, 'Yes, of course you should do it.'"

Giraldo not only has Mayor Diossa's support, he has the support of most of the Central Falls City Council. In addition to Diossa, Giraldo's fundraiser host committee consisted of six of the seven sitting members of the city council and Central Falls State Senator Elizabeth Crowley (Democrat-Conservative, District 16).

Crowley enthusiastically sang Giraldo's praises in a press release announcing her support.

The person Giraldo seeks to replace, Shelby Maldonado, was a close ally to the conservative Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello (Democrat-Conservative, District 15, Cranston). Senator Crowley is an equally close ally to the conservative Senate President Dominick Ruggerio (Democrat-Conservative, District 4, Providence). But complicating Giraldo's political support are city councilors Jonathon Acosta (Ward 1) and Jessica Vega (Ward 5), who are part of the Rhode Island Political Cooperative, a group of progressive Democrats. Acosta has announced plans to challenge Crowley for her Senate seat in November.

Also making appearances at the fundraiser were state representatives Jean Philippe Barros (Democrat-Conservative, District 59, Pawtucket) and Raymond Johnston (Democrat-Conservative, District 61, Pawtucket), as well as former Burrillville representative Cale Keable. Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza attended, as did Heiny Maldonado, executive director of Fuerza Laboral, a workers' rights organization in Central Falls.

Giraldo spent few words at his fundraiser talking about his positions on policy, and has so far declined an interview with *Motif*.

"As a former teacher, I know the importance of a good education and will fight for more youth opportunities and fair funding and resources for our schools," said Giraldo to supporters. "As the former director of Parks and Rec, I led the fight to grow youth sports and to build brand new parks all over the city and will continue to advocate for a high quality of life for our children, our families and our seniors. And as Mayor Diossa's chief of staff, I understand the importance of state support and will be a strong

voice at the State House for lower taxes and increased economic development.”

With no opponents declared in the race, Giraldo and Central Falls voters will skip a primary and proceed to the March 3 special election.

[The RI Political Cooperative Is a New Effort to Redefine State Politics](#)

The Rhode Island Political Cooperative (RIPC) is a new statewide political initiative with a progressive agenda, dedicated to challenging the political establishment and forming a new governing majority that will make government work for the people of Rhode Island — not for corporations or the connected. RIPC plans to put forward a slate of 25 or more like-minded Democratic candidates to run for office in 2020 and provide them with the support they need to win.

Matt Brown, Jeanine Calkin and Jennifer Rourke are the co-chairs of the RIPC. Matt Brown served as secretary of state in Rhode Island from 2003 to 2007. Jeanine Calkin served as a state senator serving District 30. Jennifer Rourke has run for state senate in District 29. Both Rourke and Calkin are running for senate under the RIDP banner this year.

I spoke with Brown, Calkin and Rourke by phone for this interview.

Steve Ahlquist: Why this early announcement?

Matt Brown: Because we want to win all these races, and it takes a lot of work, challenging the establishment and all its corporate money, so one of the ways to win in that case is a lot of hard work. The sooner you start the better.

SA: How big are you hoping to get?

MB: Massive. We want to win all these races. We want to get a governing majority with these candidates, and that's going to take a big grass roots mobilization. We want to build the biggest grassroots mobilization in the history of the state.

Jeanine Calkin: We want to make sure that every one of our candidates has enough resources to win. As far as volunteers go, we're running 25 races, we want to make sure that we have enough volunteers that are going to be able to help support each one of the candidates. We don't want to have any one of our candidates struggling because they don't have volunteers. So if you know anybody who wants to come on board and volunteer with some really great candidates, we want to know about them.

SA: Are you going to be involved in the 2019 Monica Huertas election at all?

JC: We had not planned on a race in 2019. Because we still are a newer organization, our full capacity is something we're going to be building up over the next year or so.

Jennifer Rourke: Her election was actually a surprise for us. But though we were preparing for 2020, we're doing all we can for Monica to ensure she wins.

SA: You're mostly running against incumbent Democrats. Can you speak to that?

MB: We have this political establishment that's been running things a long time, people still don't have a living wage, we still haven't done a Green New Deal, we still lack affordable housing, and so we need to replace the government with new people who are going to fight for those things.

JC: Under our current system, we're lucky to get even the most minimal of incremental change, and that's not enough. The people of Rhode Island really need our governing leaders to really step things up, and that's what we're hoping to do. We have some great candidates that are really going to push hard for some real bold change. Including things like a livable wage, fair pay and pushing good environmental legislation.

MB: Some of these candidates you've probably not come across before and they're just total knockouts. They're going to shake this place up.

JC: We are still developing our policy positions, a year out from the election. These are things the candidates all believe in, and that we're all going to be fighting for. These will be made available on our website and during future press conferences and releases.

SA: What is the Rhode Island Political Cooperatives' plans regarding the convention you've announced for later in the fall?

MB: The idea is to have at that point all or most of our candidates on board, with grassroots members, volunteers, campaign managers — the whole group — and have a big event where we'll put out our policies, we'll talk about organizing and really get ready for the 2020 campaigns.

SA: Have you spoken with members of progressive and lefty groups like the Working Families Party and the Rhode Island Progressive Democrats about aligning your goals?

MB: Yes, we've talked to some groups and we'll be talking to them all over the coming days and weeks.

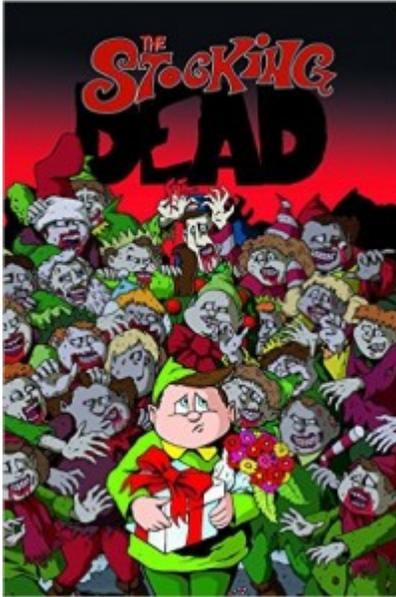
JC: While other groups do stuff like endorsements and trainings and things like that, we are really working together to not only get everyone elected and make sure they have the resources that they need to run and win, but also to be a support system, so once they get elected, they can work together to get good legislation passed, and potentially kill bad legislation.

But it's also to get a governing majority up at the State House, to potentially make some real changes up there so that the bills that we all believe in have a chance of actually going through.

The 15 candidates announced so far includes Melanie DuPont for Senate District 22, Jeanine Calkin for Senate District 30, Jennifer Rourke for Senate District 29, Cynthia Mendes for Senate District 18, Kendra Anderson for Senate District 31, Jennifer Douglas for Senate District 34, Maggie Kain for Senate District 37, Nicholas Delmenico for House District 27, Zach Colón Warwick City Council Ward 9, Michelle McGaw for House District 71, Tiara Mack for Senate District 6, Monica Huertas for Providence City Council Ward 10, Jonathon Acosta for Senate District 16, Alex Hoffman for Senate District 1 and Jessica Vega for Central Falls City Council Ward 5.

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[Book Review: Stocking Dead](#)



What if you took all those animated Christmas specials we all loved growing up, complete with toy making elves, Santa preparing for his yearly visit, a romantic subplot with a nerdy elf and an animated snowman narrator (as in 1964's *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*) and added a zombie invasion? You don't have to wonder because Dean Calusdian has brought us *The Stocking Dead*, a pun filled gore fest that pays homage to pretty much every Christmas special you ever loved as a child, and gruesomely dispatches them.

After Mr. Floppington, a cartoon rabbit, falls into a vat of radioactive goo recklessly left in the arctic tundra not too far from Santa's Workshop, he becomes an undead killer bunny that proceeds to infect all the elves of Christmasville. Our hero is Wendell, a misfit nerd elf with a penchant for invention and a crush on Noelle, a freckle faced elf girl. Wendell thinks he doesn't have a chance with Noelle because Dirk, an alpha elf with "the physique of Legolas and the talent of a Keebler" is in the way. But we know that Dirk is really a loser and Wendell is really a hero, don't we? I won't give away the ending, but Calusdian takes the book in an unexpected direction.

The plot is non-stop zombie madness, as Wendell tries to save Christmas, save the world, and get the girl. Along the way we are treated to parodies of the aforementioned *Rudolph*, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, *A Christmas Carol*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Charlie Brown's Christmas*, and many, many more.

Writer/Artist Calusdian fills the book with puns, such as when a chainsaw wielding Santa (channeling Ash from *Evil Dead*) dispatches zombies screaming "Let the slay bells ring!" and "Sleep in heavenly pieces!" The book also plays with the fourth wall. The narrating snowman exists both in and out of the panels, speaking to us as a first person omniscient one moment and accidentally interfering with the action the next. It makes for some wild, Looney Tunes inspired action sequences.

Genre mashing like this succeeds only when both genres are fully respected and Calusdian seems to have a love for both. Zombie movie and Christmas special tropes are very different, and it takes just the right kind of art to blend the two. Here Calusdian makes some wise choices. The book is printed in full color on shiny pages, so it feels like Christmas, even as the cover, featuring Wendell, shows him surrounded by ghoulish zombies. His art is cartoonish, evoking both the stop motion models of *Rudolph* and the flat cartoonishness of specials like *Frosty the Snowman*. Add in the *Mad Magazine*/underground comic aesthetic of over-the-top violence, and you've found the perfect tone.

The book is for older readers but really, (and I probably shouldn't say this) the right 12-year-old would

love to find this in his stocking. (The 12-year-old's mom will hate it.) It will freak little kids out, so it's not for them. It's the perfect gift for someone who doesn't love Christmas but used to, and it's also perfect for that someone in your life who loves Christmas a little too much and needs to take it down a notch.

As an added bonus, Dean Calusdian lives right here in Rhode Island, so you'll be supporting a local artist. Check it out.

[Alan Moore's Providence Explores the Horror of Reality](#)



As Providence gears up for NecronomiCon, a semi-annual gathering to celebrate the life and work of one of Rhode Island's most influential, revered and let's face it, controversial writers of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft, an overview of a new comic series from comics legend Alan Moore titled, appropriately enough, *Providence*, seems in order. Alan Moore's *Providence*, from publisher Avatar Comics, acts as a prequel to his earlier comic work, *Neonomicon*, possibly Moore's darkest and most explicit work. The idea behind *Neonomicon* was, in Moore's words, to "put back some of the objectionable elements that Lovecraft himself censored ... Like the racism, the anti-Semitism, the sexism, the sexual phobias that are kind of apparent in all of Lovecraft's slimy, phallic or vaginal monsters [Moore, in an interview with Bram Gieben]." Moore received some criticism for *Neonomicon*, and many felt the explicit sex, gore and rape went too far. Moore has taken some hits in the comics world for what many perceive to be his over reliance on rape as a trope. Moore famously conducted a long interview with Pádraig Ó Méalóid in which he both defended his work and announced he was quitting comics. Since then, of course, *Providence* has hit the shelves, so make of Moore's resignation what you will, and though I don't really want to rehash all of the drama here, I felt it needed to be acknowledged.

Only three of the planned 12 issues of *Providence* have hit store shelves as of this writing. The new series avoids the excesses of *Neonomicon* (so far) and does so while being much more deft in terms of characterization and plotting. *Neonomicon*, to its credit or detriment, was a work of crass, pop excess. *Providence* is a work much more in the Lovecraftian tradition, the underlying horror of reality being revealed subtly, with occasional bursts of terror.

Providence is set in 1919, but is not set in Providence, the city. The first two issues take place in New York City, where Lovecraft lived for a time. Of course, this being a work in the Lovecraftian vein, the work is filled with allusions to Lovecraft's life and fiction, as well as allusions to other writers of weird fiction, like Robert Chambers and Edgar Allan Poe. A website, "[Facts in the Case of Alan Moore's Providence](#)" has sprung up to annotate these allusions.

The central protagonist of *Providence* is Robert Black, a reporter who begins his investigations into the occult because he sees the secretive ways of occult practitioners as a possible metaphor for writing about his own outsider status as a gay man and a Jew. In an [interview with Hannah Means Stanton](#), Moore said, "I decided that I wanted somebody who provided an example of the 'new American man' around about 1919. I wanted somebody who was young, who had a sense of purpose, but who was an outsider. Somebody who was not related to the mainstream of American society, whatever that was. I chose some parts of Robert's character specifically because they resonated interestingly with some of Lovecraft's prejudices."

Issue one relies heavily on Lovecraft's story "Cool Air" about a scientist who keeps himself alive, (in a sense) through refrigeration. The issue also borrows heavily from Robert Chambers' book *The King in Yellow*, which was corralled into the Lovecraftian Mythos by Lovecraft and others. Chambers' mythology was referenced extensively in season one of the HBO series "True Detective," which has led to a revival of interest in Chambers' work.

We open in the offices of the New York Herald, where Robert Black works as a reporter. With half a page to fill in the newspaper due to the last minute withdrawal of an advertisement, Black decides to investigate a book that, "sent everybody crazy," a reference to Chambers' *The King in Yellow*, about a play that drives anyone who reads it mad. Meanwhile, Black's lover, Jonathan Russell, visits an "exit garden," a government sponsored Lethal Chamber, to commit suicide. Lethal Chambers are mentioned in another Robert Chambers' short story, "The Repairer of Reputations."

The relationship between Black and Russell, which had to remain closeted and secretive due to societal prejudice against homosexuality in 1919, is told in flashbacks. Black, in his writing, refers to Jonathan as Lillian, and is cautious in his use of pronouns to avoid writing about his secret life as a gay man. In the most heartbreaking sequence in the book, Black learns of his lover's death as his co-workers gossip about the motives for Russell suicide, unaware of the relationship.

Black's reaction, which he must hide from his co-workers lest they somehow ferret out his truth, is understated and painful. The horror isn't Lovecraftian, and the reasons for Russell's death aren't supernatural. Instead we are subjected to the everyday horrors of life as a closeted and persecuted minority in all its mundane banality.

Issue two takes as its inspiration the Lovecraft short story "The Horror of Red Hook," also set in New York. The protagonist of Lovecraft's story, an Irish policeman named Tom Malone, is revealed to be gay in this issue, and he and Robert Black flirt a bit. The secret world and codes of the closeted homosexual are explored. Neither Black nor Malone is free to announce their interest or orientation openly, so there

is a dance of words and glances. When Malone touches Black's hand in the diner, the moment is allowed to linger, and fill with meaning and import, before Black leaves to pursue his investigation.

Of course, to Lovecraft, the real horror of Red Hook, a section of Brooklyn, is, as he puts it in a letter, the "gangs of young loafers and herds of evil-looking foreigners that one sees everywhere in New York." Prejudice and xenophobia is a recurring theme or subtext in Lovecraft's work, one Moore explores in this issue and the next.

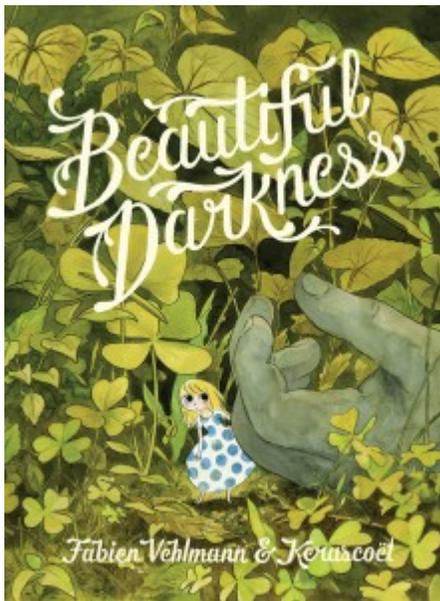
In issue three, Robert Black journeys to Salem, Massachusetts. In Lovecraft's work, Salem is called Innsmouth. Moore introduces Black to several characters who have what Lovecraft called the "Innsmouth look." In general, the inhabitants look like what happens when people breed with fish, an overtly racist metaphor for miscegenation. In Moore's hands, Lovecraft's story becomes the basis for more humor than horror, though there is a general tenor of unease throughout the issue. One disturbing sequence is Black's dream, in which the Lethal Chambers from issue one have become the Nazi gas chambers of the not-too-distant future.

Three issues in, Alan Moore's *Providence* still hasn't ventured into the city that gives this comic its name. There are allusions to the city: in issue one Black says he may one day write a novel "If Providence allows," and issue two ends in mid-sentence, just before the word Providence would be written. In Moore's handling, Providence seems an inevitable destination on a road paved with the best of intentions. But Providence has other meanings. It means the protective care of God, (perhaps even dark Gods) and the timely preparation for future eventualities. I suspect Moore is exploring the word in all its various meanings.

I can't leave off before saying a word about the art. It is the best art of Jacen Burrows' career, and perfectly suited to the story. Barnaby Evans, creator of *Waterfire*, put a great deal of effort into wooing Avatar, the publisher of *Providence*, to showcase some of the art from the series at this year's NecronomiCon and to Jacen Burrows to speak at the event. Alas, the publisher was too swamped by the regular comic convention schedule to squeeze us in this year. That's not to say that a local event cannot be organized for the artist and the series in the future, as an event separate from NecronomiCon Providence.

[Horror and Beauty Contrasted in Beautiful Darkness](#)

Graphic novel released in English



Beautiful Darkness, a 2009 graphic novel released in English for the first time this year by Drawn & Quarterly, is a study in contrasts. The book begins as a Disney-esque fairy tale in which the dashing Prince Hector comes to visit the lovely Aurora for tea. Chivalry and romance are in the offing until the world comes literally crashing down around our characters in the form of jelly-like organic droplets. Aurora, separated from her Prince and faithful servant, narrowly escapes drowning in a flood of viscous goo, only to emerge, along with a host of other characters from her fairy tale, out of the body of a giant girl who lays in the woods, freshly murdered.

It is hard to know what the tiny characters emerging from the giant girl are thinking. Most are caricatures without depth, their one defining feature instantly recognizable as genre tropes. There's a selfish Princess, a scheming servant, a fearfully shy wallflower, and characters who exist only for comedic relief. Detached from the mind of the giant dead girl, these characters are also cut adrift from the fairy tale narrative, free to exercise their virtues (of which they have few) and their faults (of which they have many) without fear of literary comeuppance.

The characters attempt to live in the woods around the body of the girl, but the local fauna, the bugs and the birds, and the natural elements, are not from the idyllic fantasy land they are used to. Unspeakable horrors befall the characters. When Aurora attempts to befriend the woodland creatures as might Snow White, she is instead greeted by feral, unintelligent and dangerous beasts. In her anger she is as cruel to the animals as the animals are to her people.

Slowly, the body of the girl begins to rot away. No one comes looking for the girl, save for a man who may or may not be the girl's father, murderer or both. As the body of the girl fades away, as the real world ravages her youth and beauty, so too are the characters who formed the foundation of her fantasy life destroyed. The effect is terrifying, stomach churning, yet arresting and impossible to put down.

The art in this book is beautiful, delicate line work and watercolors that somehow blends the cartoonishness of the escaping fairy tale characters with the realistic depictions of insect, animal and plant life seamlessly. Each page is a miniature comic masterpiece, beautiful art that contrasts the horrific story being told. The artist, Kerascoët, (a pen name of Marie Pommeuy and Sébastien Cosset) maintains a website at kerascoet.fr, and there seem to be many more comic and illustration projects here that might be worthy of translation for a North American audience.

This is the story of innocence lost. Whatever happened to the giant girl is never really explained. There are hints and suggestions throughout the book, but the fairy tale characters, through whom the story is told, seem to have limited awareness. They do not always seem to understand the implications of their plight and seem to actively ignore the implications of what they do understand. They are forced into a fight for survival, and though some seem able to find a way to survive in this world, their small-mindedness makes them a terrible danger to each other.

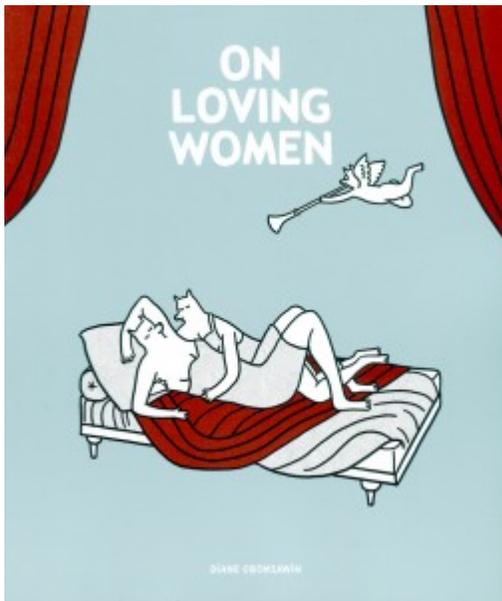
On the back of the book other reviewers compare the work to *Alice in Wonderland* or Tove Jansson's *Moomin* work, but neither comparison seems adequate to my mind. I would instead compare this work to the comics of Alan Moore, whose early work eagerly reinvented simple character in a modern, complex and psychological fashion, as in his *Swamp Thing* or *Watchmen*. But *Beautiful Darkness* goes deeper and darker than any of the work it's compared to.

It seems an entirely unique creation.

This book is open to several different interpretations. At one point I suspected that the characters all represented various facets of the dead giant girl's personality, and as the characters died, so did the girl's presence fade from the world. On a second reading I began to suspect that the characters were more representative of the giant girl's inner world. Again there is a contrast: narrative simplicity meets interpretative complexity.

This is a book of love, fear and transformation of character through horror. This is not normally my kind of book, and in lesser hands it would have been a chore to read. But the story by Fabien Velhman, based on an idea by Marie Pommepuy, held my fascination despite its existential bleakness, and as usual the publisher, Drawn & Quarterly, did a marvelous job putting the book together.

Graphic Novel Review: On Loving Women



On Loving Women is a collection of 10 lesbian coming out stories from artist and animator Diane Obomsawin. Each story is simply titled as in, “Mathilde’s Story” or “Charlotte’s Story,” and told in a very simple set of declarative sentences, such as, “In high school I dated guys because that’s what everybody did,” and, “She was furious. She yelled at me in the hall.” The simplified narrative style helps bridge the gap between reader and storyteller, allowing direct access to the various stories of sexual awakening and coming out as a lesbian.

Obomsawin’s art is at turns both rough and elegant, but always simple and expressive. I was reminded at times of Matt Groening’s early *Life in Hell* work, before he hit it big with “The Simpsons.” However, this comparison might be misleading, because Obomsawin’s simple art style serves to impart a poetic cadence to her work, and she eschews cheap laughs for emotional truths.

The characters in the book are drawn as anthropomorphic animals, the comic artist’s trick for instantly connecting to her audience, because it bypasses our prejudices and preconceptions. Obomsawin uses this technique to excellent effect in the very first story, when her subject Mathilde confesses that she has always been attracted to women with horse faces, and the artist obliges by characterizing the objects of her infatuation and love as anthropomorphic horses.

This is a book for adults; Obomsawin does not shy away from nudity, profanity or depictions of sex when the story calls for it. However, her simple style works to prevent a casual prurience when reading, so even when the scenes become charged with eroticism and sexuality, we see the characters as persons rather than objects. The range of sexual expression and contact depicted runs from innocent, accidental contact in the hallways of middle school to a raucous lesbian three way in which the storyteller falls out of bed.

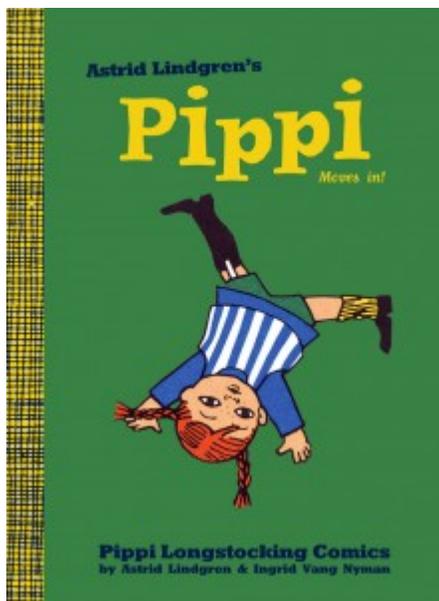
The author was born in Montreal, but spent her first 20 years living in France. This French/Canadian perspective lends Obomsawin’s world a pleasing alienness to my American, New England eyes. Most of her previous work as a comic artist and animator has been in French. Only this and her previous work, *Kaspar*, about the life of mysterious orphan Kaspar Houser, are available in English. (*Kaspar*, incidentally, is also a 2012 animated movie by Obomsawin that is well worth a look. You can find it online by searching for “Kaspar” and “Obomsawin”).

Obomsawin’s work demonstrates an intuitive ability to convey the interior world of her subjects. The

work I've seen of hers has all been biographical in nature, but the grounding of her biographies is in the psychological rather than historical realm. In part, she foregrounds the psychological by obscuring the history. For instance, the stories in *On Loving Women* feel contemporary, but interior clues show that they take place all through the late 20th century. Kaspar tells the true story of a man who lived in 1828, but is contemporized with odd, anachronistic details such as automobiles.

As with the simplicity of her artwork, Obomsawin's erasure of historical detail and her insistence on immediacy serve to connect us with her characters and generate understanding of her subjects as persons. This is the purpose, after all, of literature, to expand our empathy for others and to learn something of what it means to live another life. *On Loving Women* is a set of simple, beautiful stories, at turns sad and inspiring, banal and fantastic, designed to teach us about each other. Highly recommended.

[Pippi Appears in Comics!](#)



Pippi Longstocking is a children's book character every bit as compelling and important as the classic big three girl heroines Dorothy, Wendy and Alice. Though she came almost half a century later, and was originally published in Sweden, the unmannered little girl with the shocking red pigtailed and the desire to be a pirate instantly established herself as a classic and original children's character when she first saw print in 1945. In all, Pippi's creator, Astrid Lindgren, wrote nine books and two short stories worth of Pippi Longstocking adventures, and there have been more than a few movie and television adaptations, but until recently, Pippi's comic adventures were virtually unknown in the states.

That all changed a few years ago when Drawn & Quarterly publishing's creative and acquiring director Tom Devlin discovered the comics at the Helsinki Comics Festival a few years ago. The comics are written by Astrid Lindgren, retelling stories from the first three Pippi books, but it is the art, by Ingrid

Vang Nyman, that really makes these books sparkle.

Vang Nyman is the original illustrator of the earliest Pippi Longstocking chapter books, but her work was overshadowed by later Lindgrin collaborators such as Ilon Wikland or Björn Berg. Vang Nyman's comic work allowed her the opportunity to simplify her line work and at the same time, pop her art through the use of color. The talented artist kept up-to-date on the latest printing techniques and did the color separations for her art herself, creating comics that feel almost contemporary. Vang Nyman is credited with bringing a modernist, "flatness" to children's illustration and it has been speculated that this was because she had vision in only one eye, having injured the other in an accident as a child.

Though Vang Nyman is being rediscovered today, in her own time she was underappreciated as an artist and late in life dealt with serious depression, which ultimately resulted in the taking of her own life in 1959. The Millesgården Museum in Sweden held a retrospective of her art, including some of her Pippi Longstocking comics pages, last year, which along with this new reprinting of her Pippi Longstocking comics, serves as a partial corrective to her forgotten place in children's illustration history.

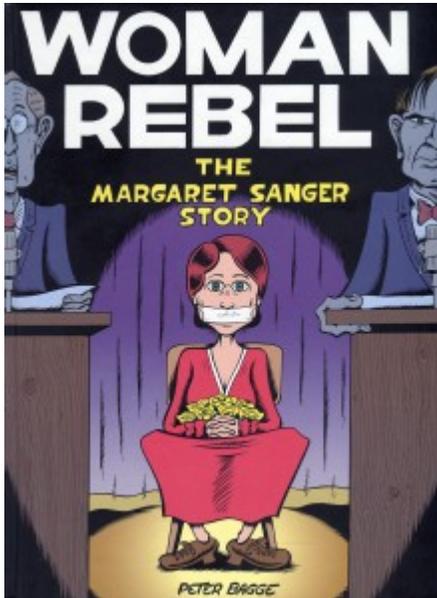
Drawn & Quarterly dedicated itself to reprinting all of Lindgrin and Vang Nyman's Pippi Longstocking comics in a series of three volumes, to be released annually. So far, the first two, *Pippi Moves In* and *Pippi Fixes Everything* are available, with the third volume due out by next year. D&Q has done an exquisite job with the production of the volumes, releasing them as high quality children's books at \$14.95 each. The covers are tough and durable and the pages should resist the pawing of tiny hands eager to see the next page. I can imagine these books becoming the favorites of many children and becoming well worn and well loved with age.

The content of the books may worry some parents concerned with exposing their young children to images that might tweak our modern sensibilities. People sensitive to depictions of tobacco use might be put off by Pippi's father, Captain Ephraim Longstocking, who is seldom pictured without his pipe. At one point, Captain Longstocking dresses in South Seas attire, as befits a man who has become king of a savage South Seas island nation, but by today's standards such depictions of indigenous people is not considered politically correct.

These complaints are a far cry from the criticisms brought against the Pippi Longstocking books when they were first published. Children loved Pippi because she was ill-mannered, rude to adults and lived as she wanted. Parents were sometimes outraged by the little girl with super strength who beat up school bullies, evaded the police and openly mocked the need to be educated in schools on such unimportant subjects as math and grammar. However, Pippi Longstocking has oodles of positive qualities for children to learn from. Pippi radiates confidence and optimism, sticks up for her friends, loves animals, fights for the weak and speaks truth to power. Pippi Longstocking is a superhero, but she's also a very real little girl and that's why she's one of the most iconic literary creations of the 20th century.

Your local bookstore would be happy to order *Pippi Moves In* and *Pippi Fixes Everything* from Drawn & Quarterly books for you, hopefully just in time for the holidays.

[Book Review: Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story](#)



Bagge seeks to illuminate the life of a woman who was neither saint nor devil, but a human being with qualities both heroic and vainglorious.

Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, staunch advocate for women's reproductive rights and whose tireless efforts led to the financing of research that ultimately introduced the birth control pill, is arguably one of the most polarizing historical figures of the 20th century. Sanger spent her life actively working to bring common sense advice on birth control, a term she coined, long before women in the United States were recognized as having the right to vote. Accurate biographical information on Sanger can be difficult to come by due to a long established effort among certain dishonest and radical parts of the pro-life, anti-abortion movement to demonize her through distortions, lies, quote mining and even Photoshopped images.

To unwind this confusion of facts, fiction, hero worship and character assassination, cartoonist Peter Bagge put together an excellent book-length comic biography titled *Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story*. Bagge seeks to illuminate the life of a woman who was neither saint nor devil, but a human being with qualities both heroic and vainglorious. Ironically, in making Sanger into a cartoon character, Bagge made her more real and accessible than ever before.

Peter Bagge is just the cartoonist to make this happen. I've been following his work since the mid-1980s, beginning with *Neat Stuff* and continuing through his nearly two decades of *Hate* (both series published by Fantagraphics). My daughters loved the short-lived comic series comic *Yeah!*, about the adventures of an all-girl rock band that Bagge did in collaboration with Gilbert Hernandez. Bagge's style is fluid and extremely comic; characters might react to outrageous comments by literally being knocked off their feet, and anger might cause steam to shoot out their ears.

In Bagge's hands, Sanger seems like a grown-up Little Lulu, whose passion for adventure and strong sense of justice often leads her to act before she thinks. Like Lulu, Sanger also can be cunning and clever, and has a knack for getting things to go just the way she wants, even if it does not seem possible for her to have planned it that way. Despite my comparison, Bagge's work is not for children, but a very compelling, humorous and dramatic biography, full of details both important and salacious.

Sanger was an advocate, at least privately, of free love, meaning that despite her marriages and her children, throughout her life she had sexual relations with men as it pleased her and without guilt. One of her many lovers was science fiction writer and socialist H.G. Wells, who was positively gaga over her. Another was Havelock Ellis, the pioneering sex researcher whose unusual sexual fetish (which I won't detail here, you'll have to read it yourself) Sanger apparently had no problems with satisfying.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the book is Bagge's relentless depiction of the truth behind various smears that have been thrown at Sanger over the years, and the detailing of her non-stop battles with the Catholic church, which had no problem pulling the strings of local law enforcement to satisfy its sense of moral justice, the law be damned. Bagge deals with the accusation that Sanger was a eugenicist interested in wiping out non-white races of people by pointing out that Sanger was adamantly against defining one group of people as "superior" to another. Indeed, leaders in the black community sought Sanger out for help, and Martin Luther King was proud to receive an award named in her honor.

Bagge also details Sanger's involvement with the Ku Klux Klan, which concerned her speaking to a KKK woman's auxiliary group to explain birth control. Sanger called this "one of the weirdest experiences I had in lecturing" and added that she had to use "the most elementary terms, as though I were trying to make children understand." Sanger was committed to the idea that all women should have access to the basic knowledge of birth control, but even so, the experience of speaking to the Klan was weird enough that she only did so once. (Pictures of Sanger at a Klan rally are Photoshopped fakes, as even a cursory web search will show.)

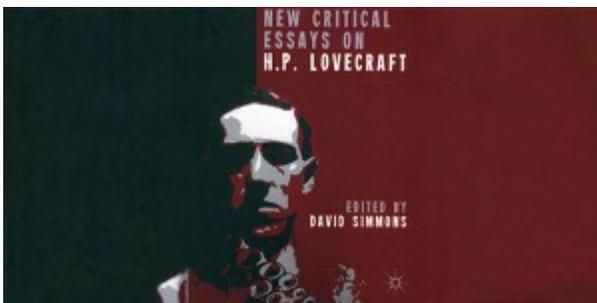
Ironies abound in Sanger's worldview. She was all for birth control, family planning and child spacing, but was against abortion. She believed in and practiced free love but was "against" masturbation. Sanger put no stock in conventional religion, but was a deeply spiritual woman who believed her hunches and premonitions were in some way supernatural. Sanger held séances, through which she contacted her daughter Peggy, who had died as a young girl, but who now, Sanger believed, lives as an adult in a "parallel world."

Bagge's Sanger is human, with all that entails, good and bad. She is passionate, maybe even a little crazy about her cause, and not immune to the call of fame and fortune. She's a bit of a narcissist and perhaps not always the best mother, spouse, sister or daughter, but then, when are any of us perfect? Sanger's vision and accomplishments changed the world, inarguably for the better. Her efforts rescued millions of women and men from the confines of their biology, freeing us and expanding the definition of

what can be accomplished in our lifetimes.

Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story is gripping subject matter told by a comic artist at the top of his game. The book retails for \$21.95 and is published by Drawn & Quarterly. Get your local bookshop to order it for you.

[Book Review: New Critical Essays On H. P. Lovecraft](#)



The content of the introduction to this new scholarly tome of Lovecraftian criticism should be familiar to all who attended the 2013 NecronomiCon as the author, S.T. Joshi, used much of this material in his opening address held at the First Baptist Church in Providence. In the forward, Joshi describes the singular rise of Providence author H.P. Lovecraft's literary reputation from nearly forgotten 1930s pulp writer to a secure place in America's literary pantheon, alongside such luminaries as Poe and Hawthorne.

With Lovecraft's reputation secure, says Joshi, all that is left is "the continued evaluation of his entire work... And the placing of that work in the context of [Lovecraft's] times and in the overall history of weird and mainstream literature." *New Critical Essays On H. P. Lovecraft* is an important, erudite, yet readable collection of essays that might be seen as the beginning of Joshi's call for a new era of such scholarship.

Published by Palgrave Macmillan at a list price of \$85, this is not a book for the casual Lovecraft reader, but a book aimed at hard core fans and college libraries. The seriousness with which the subject is approached does not mean that the book lacks a sense of fun. An entire chapter is dedicated to Lovecraft's influence on comics (with ample illustrations) and another chapter explores Lovecraft's influence on "extreme" heavy metal music.

As is often the case with scholarly work, the various authors sometimes delve into literary minutia to make their cases. The second and third chapters focus on Lovecraft's short story "Dreams in the Witch House," which has never been considered one of the writer's stronger entries and was once referred to as "Lovecraft's magnificent failure" by critic Steven Mariconda. Still, this story features one of Lovecraft's strongest woman characters, even if she is an ugly, evil, dimension-hopping witch. This focus on odd characters in obscure stories is necessary because many critics want to engage with

Lovecraft's depiction of women, such as it is. As it stands, Lovecraft has written very little about women, and almost nothing about sexual relations, unless one is willing to read between the lines.

The strength of the first three chapters is that they do not turn a blind eye toward or try to explain away Lovecraft's overt racism and (presumably unconscious) misogyny. Instead, the essays explore the ways Lovecraft's attitudes flavored and informed his brand of weird fiction, which stressed the horrors of otherness, miscegenation, race and sex. Chapter four deals with Lovecraft's relationship with modernism, while chapters five and six deal with aspects of two of Lovecraft's most famous stories, "At the Mountains of Madness" and "The Dunwich Horror."

The first half of the book concerns itself with Lovecraft and his fiction, but the last six chapters deal with Lovecraft's place in modern pop culture. Here the book really shines in my opinion. Chapter seven details the ways in which Lovecraft's work was interpreted and warped by August Derleth, the man who, along with Donald Wandrei, kept Lovecraft's work in print until his literary worth was secured, but not without Derleth's rather odd reinterpretation of Lovecraft's ideas. Chapter eight talks about Lovecraft's literary ascension, and his inclusion in the Library of America.

My favorite chapter, nine, was titled "Co(s)mic Horror," and was a fairly complete introduction to the exploration of Lovecraft's influence on comics and a history of the comic adaptations his work inspired. There is an irony in Lovecraft being adapted into comics (or movies for that matter) since much of what Lovecraft wrote about he described as being "indescribable." This presents a challenge to artists eager to interpret his work.

Chapter ten covered Lovecraft's influence on heavy metal music, while chapter eleven compared Lovecraft with the weird fiction author China Miéville, who admits Lovecraft as an influence on his work. The final chapter could almost have worked better as the first chapter, since it attempts to be a summary of Lovecraft's impact on popular culture covering everything from literature, movies, comics and role playing games.

This anthology works as a photograph of the current state of Lovecraftian scholarship, outlining in broad strokes many different directions of inquiry. The work is of course not complete - there is plenty of scholarly work yet to be done.

Lovecraft was once "owned" by his fans, who kept his work and legacy alive when no one took him seriously. Now that academia is becoming interested, fans will find that they will have to share their favorite author with scholars. Far from being put off by this, interested fans should find their experience of Lovecraft's work enhanced and enriched.